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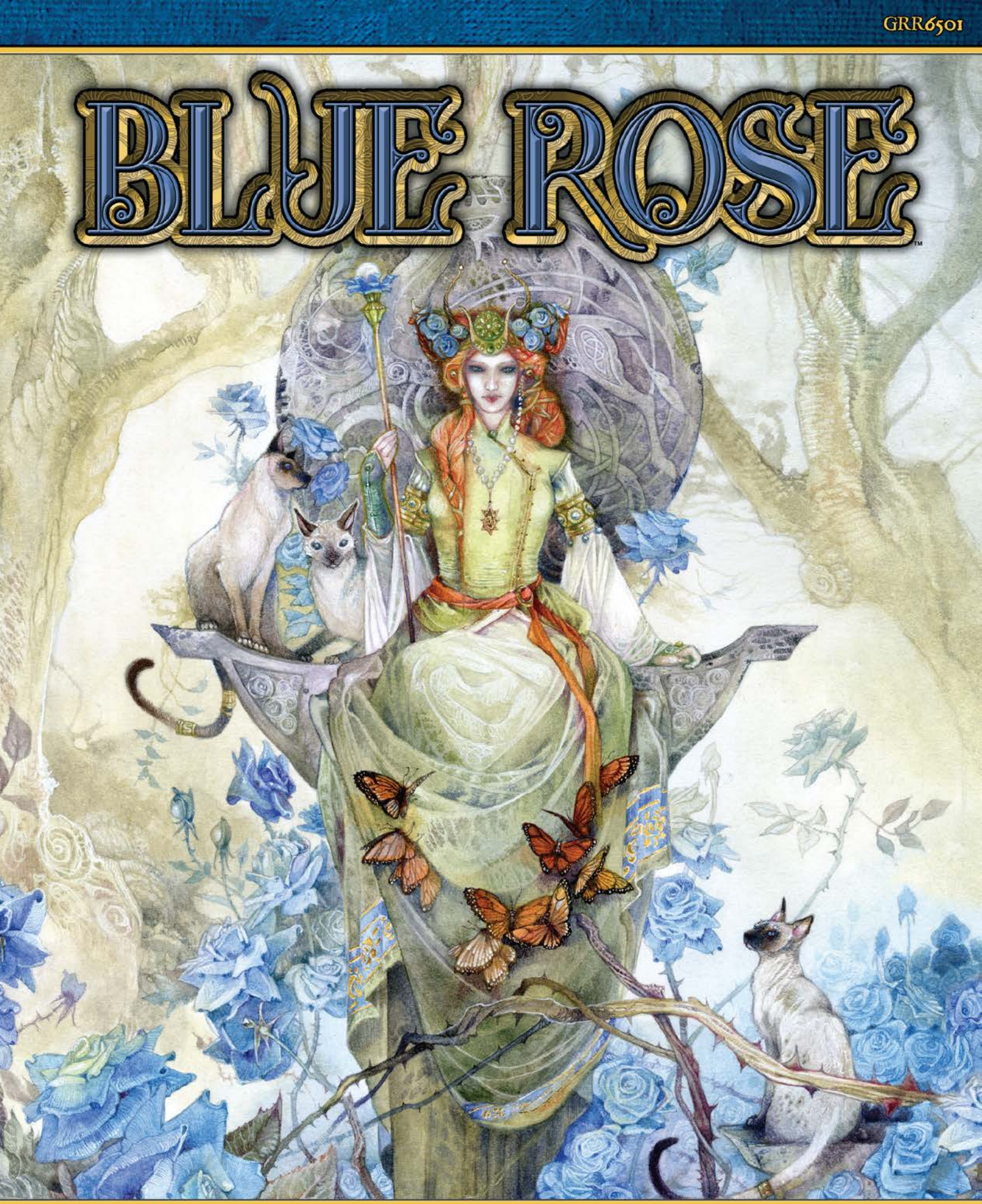
BLUE ROSE™



THE *AGE* ROLEPLAYING GAME OF ROMANTIC FANTASY

BLUE ROSE

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the world of *Blue Rose*, a fantastic realm where brave heroes, gifted with arcane powers, live and work side-by-side with intelligent animal companions. The heroes of the peaceful Kingdom of Aldis strive to uphold the ideals of fairness, justice, and equality, while protecting their homeland against its aggressive neighbors, including the fundamentalist Theocracy of Jarzon and the dark land of Kern with its monstrous rulers.

Blue Rose is a roleplaying game of romantic fantasy, where you and your friends take on the roles of the main characters in this fantastic world, creating your own stories about the heroes of Aldis, their triumphs and their tragedies—like writing your own fantasy novel but where *you* play the heroes! You may have played other roleplaying games, or this may be your introduction to new worlds of adventure. Either way—welcome, friends, to the world of *Blue Rose*.

For Aldis, and the Queen!

What Is Roleplaying?

If *Blue Rose* is your introduction to the world of fantasy roleplaying games (RPGs for short), then you might be wondering, "What is all this roleplaying stuff about?"

Essentially, in a roleplaying game, you and a group of friends (the players) take on the roles of fictional characters (also known as heroes) in a world of your imagination. One player in the group, the Narrator, acts like the narrator of a story or the director of a play or movie. The Narrator (sometimes referred to as a Game Master in other systems) sets the scene and describes what happens in the world around your characters. Then the other players decide what their heroes do in response. The Narrator describes the outcome of those actions, and on you go, spinning your own fantasy story.

Roleplaying is much like cooperative fan fiction or simulation gaming, where a group of people work together to build a fun and exciting story. Although it's the Narrator's job to portray the various antagonists in the story, as well as the heroes' allies, the Narrator isn't playing against everyone else. In fact, it's the Narrator's job to help ensure everyone has fun and that the group tells an enjoyable story.

Think of a roleplaying game like an extended version of the various games of make believe we all played as children, only with rules to help guide the story and a central Narrator to set the stage and keep things moving along.

What is Romantic Fantasy?

Blue Rose is a roleplaying game about *romantic fantasy*, but what is that, exactly? In the high fantasy quests of authors like J. R. R. Tolkien, or the larger-than-life swords and sorcery of Robert E. Howard, Fritz Leiber, and others, heroic loners or small groups of rebels, outcasts, or eccentrics perform great deeds and go on quests to obtain power and glory or to protect the world from some dire threat.

In the mid-1980s, a generation of new fantasy authors—Diane Duane, Mercedes Lackey, Tamora Pierce, and many others—wrote fantasy novels different from any that had come before. The main characters in their novels occasionally started out as loners and outcasts before finding their place in society, generally as members of some prominent group or official organization that goes on exciting adventures to protect ordinary people from danger. Developing a sense of belonging and finding comrades are central features of these stories. Most of these novels are in series, and by the end of the first book, the main character has usually discovered a community where they belong. Many of the character's subsequent adventures involve either becoming a more fully integrated member of this group or protecting the group from harm.

Few of these novels contain elves, dwarves, or similar fantasy races, and many contain few or no other humanoid species at all. Instead, humans share their world with one or more types of intelligent or semi-intelligent animals, sometimes with a few magical human subspecies. Some of the intelligent animals are simply bright psychic pets, while others are free-willed, powerful spirits with animal bodies.

Romantic fantasy novels are often set in highly egalitarian societies, where people's occupations and aspirations are not limited by fixed gender roles. In these books, cultures and individuals that are sexist or homophobic are either ignorant and see the error of their ways somewhere in the series, or they are enemies who are eventually vanquished.

The heroes of romantic fantasy novels are usually environmentally conscious. Protecting wilderness areas and animals from depredation is a common plot element. In all romantic fantasy worlds, nature is a positive magical force, and anyone who protects it is on the side of good.

Attitudes about magic also differ from other fantasy novels. Instead of the scholastic magic of some stories—magic as a rare and powerful discipline involving complex rituals and arcane lore—many characters have innate

psychic or arcane powers as natural to them as sight and hearing. Heroic characters can often manipulate the natural elements and use their powers with nothing more than concentration and intent. These powers are seen as both an innate and positive part of someone's nature, and are only feared by the ignorant or evil.

More traditional magic does occasionally appear in these novels, but it's usually only practiced by villains to bind others to their will, or to summon horrific creatures and spirits from other planes of existence. The only motives given for performing such magic are a hunger for power or a desire for revenge. This type of magic is unnatural, dangerous, and often corrupting.

Blue Rose takes these elements of romantic fantasy to create a world of adventure, where you can build your own heroes and forge your own stories.

Getting Started

The first thing you need is a group of friends to play with, and one of you must take on the role of Narrator. While you can play with as small a group as one player and a Narrator, the game works best with a Narrator and three to six players. It is possible to play with more players, but that can slow down the pace of the game. The Narrator has a key position, so try to make sure that they really want the job! Running a game is fun, but it's a different experience than playing. **Chapter 8** explains the Narrator's role in detail.

Once you've settled on a Narrator, everyone else needs to make characters, also known as player characters (PCs) or heroes. Your character is your primary responsibility as a player in a roleplaying game. This is your alter ego in the fantasy world of Aldea, where your adventures take place. Over the course of many such adventures, your character will grow and change, but every hero needs a starting point. That is exactly what **Chapter 2: Character Creation** provides, giving you not only game stats—the abilities and corresponding numbers that tell you what your character is good at—but also a character concept, starting goals, and relationships with other characters. Once play begins, the portrayal and development of your character is all up to you. Playing your hero, achieving goals, and navigating the challenges and perils of a fantasy world—this is the fun of taking part in a roleplaying game.

Playing Your Character

"What do you do?"

When playing a roleplaying game, that's the question you must ask yourself all the time. The Narrator describes a situation, framing a scene for the heroes. It is then up to you to decide what your character does and why. You tell the Narrator what you want to do, as do the other players, and then you all work out what happens. Sometimes, you use dice to resolve actions in a specific order. At other times, you simply interact with the other players and the characters portrayed by the Narrator, who are known as non-player characters, or NPCs.

"Who are you?"

This is the question to keep in mind when making decisions. When you create your hero, you choose things like their goals and strong and weak personality traits. You can then flesh your character out further. There are two basic approaches to this: The first is to paint your hero in a few broad strokes and then jump right in to playing. The intention here is to come up with details about your character during play, often using the springboard of the current story to create connections to their past. This is a common storytelling technique and a perfectly valid approach if you don't want to spend a lot of time working on your hero before starting play. The second approach is to come up with a lot of details and roleplaying ideas before the first game session. If you can come to the table with a good idea of who your character is before the first dice are even rolled, that can help get the game going.

However you approach your character, playing the game will help you refine your ideas. After you have played your hero for a while, you should have a strong sense of their personality and an intuitive sense of what they would do in a particular situation. Of course, not all situations present easy choices, and it is from difficult decisions that tension and drama emerge.

Adventure, Series, and Setting

An adventure is a discrete story and scenario in a roleplaying game. Think of it as a single novel or an episode of a TV show. There may be several plot threads, but in the end it tells one tale. The difference between a roleplaying adventure and a book or show is that you have authorship. The decisions taken by you and your fellow players drive the story to its conclusion.

A series is made up of interlinked adventures. If an adventure is a novel or TV show, a series is a season of a show, or a complete set of seasons or novels. Some adventures may have self-contained plots, while others tie together to tell a larger story. During a series the characters advance, improve, and change. Over time they gain more powers and abilities, face greater challenges, and perhaps gain renown for their deeds. A full *Blue Rose* series can take characters from levels 1 through 20, and provide hundreds of hours of entertainment.

All of these stories take place in the setting of *Blue Rose*, the fantasy world of Aldea, particularly the region centered around Aldis, the Kingdom of the Blue Rose. The first three chapters of this book detail the history, geography, and cultures of that world. The setting of individual adventures can be anywhere within the context of the nations and regions described in **Chapters 2** and **3**.

The Group Dynamic

Much of this book is focused on teaching you the rules and how to make a character. It is important to remember that roleplaying is a social activity. There are two aspects to this: the adventuring group and the player group.

Your hero is one member of an adventuring group (also known as a party). Each character in the group has individual goals, but there are also larger group goals. The characters may have their disagreements and even conflicts, but for the game to go on they must remain together. The adventures themselves often assure this by their plot and structure, but a good group dynamic can help. This can start during character creation when everyone is settling on what they want to play. It's a smart idea, for example, to make sure you have at least one character of each class in the group. When working out Goals and Relationships, you can build in reasons for the characters to work together.

The people gaming with you make up the player group, and that, too, has a dynamic. You and your friends are going to be spending a lot of time together, so you want a group of people who fundamentally get along. Roleplaying is meant to be fun for everyone, so be aware of tension around the table. Some players try to make the game all about them, hogging the spotlight and attempting to insert themselves into every scene. Don't act that way—it just makes the other players frustrated. Everyone deserves a chance to shine, so be ready to take a step back when someone has a good idea or is pursuing something important for their character. Likewise, some players may make others uncomfortable with inappropriate behavior. When this happens, it is important for the group as a whole to make it clear such behavior won't be tolerated—the game is about everyone having fun, and that can't happen unless everyone also feels comfortable and at ease.

If a game session didn't go well for some reason, talk about it afterwards. It won't do any good if everyone goes home to stew. Try to figure out where things went wrong and see if you can come up with solutions so it doesn't happen again. If players have concerns, encourage them to bring them up for discussion.

A common problem is a player who is unhappy with their character. Maybe the character doesn't fit into the group well, or perhaps the player finds another class preferable after some play experience. This doesn't have to be an issue. It's perfectly fine for a player to make a new hero of the same level and retire the old one. It's preferable to do that than to make a player continue playing a character they aren't enjoying.

Basic Game Concepts

Before you dive into the rest of the book, here's a brief overview of the basic concepts of the game. You'll learn more about all of these things as you read on.

Dice

Blue Rose uses six-sided dice, abbreviated as "d6." This is the most common type of die, and they can be found in many classic boardgames if you need to scrounge for some. In general, dice are rolled four different ways in *Blue Rose*:

- **1d3:** Sometimes you need to generate a number from 1-3. In this case you roll a d6 but halve the result, so a roll of 1-2 = 1, a roll of 3-4 = 2, and a roll of 5-6 = 3.
- **1d6:** You roll a single die and simply read the result. Sometimes there is a modifier attached, for example 1d6+3. In that case, just add the modifier to the die roll. If you rolled a 2, for example, you'd add the modifier of 3 to get a result of 5.
- **2d6:** As above, but you roll two dice and add them together. If you rolled a 3 and a 6, for example, your result would be 9.
- **3d6:** As above, but you roll three dice and add them together. If you are making an ability test, you must ensure that two of the dice are one color and the third a different color. That third die is known as the Drama Die, and it's important. The result of the Drama Die can determine your level of success and allow you to perform stunts.

Characters

To play *Blue Rose* you create a character. You can play a human, one of several humanoid races, or a rhydan (an intelligent, psychic animal). You then pick one of three classes: adept, expert, or warrior. Your class defines the core of your character and determines the powers at your command in play. Your character begins at level 1 as a novice hero. By surviving encounters and overcoming challenges, they gradually gain experience and increase in level (commonly called "leveling-up"). Your character may eventually make it to level 20 and become one of the mightiest heroes of the world.

Tests

Your character has nine abilities, such as Intelligence and Strength, and each one has a numeric rating, with 1 being average. When your character wants to do something, the Narrator may call for an ability test. This is a dice roll to determine success or failure, and it's the most common roll in the game. To make an ability test, you simply roll three six-sided dice (3d6), add the results together, and add the appropriate ability. This generates a test result, which you want to be as high as possible.

Test result = 3d6 + ability

You may have to apply other bonuses or penalties, most commonly ability focuses that represent areas of special expertise. Once you determine your test result, the Narrator will let you know if it's a success or a failure and what happens.

Stunts

In combat your character can perform stunts. When doubles are rolled on a test, this generates "stunt points." You can then use these points to pull off a number of special effects or maneuvers. Stunts help to keep game play dynamic and fun and ensure characters get opportunities to do the kinds of amazing and impressive things heroes do.

The World of Aldea

Blue Rose is set in the enchanted world of Aldea, which—in the language of the Old Kingdom—means "the lands" and is how modern folk refer to the world. The lands presented in Blue Rose are just a fraction of the greater world, a region encompassing five nations and the surrounding territory, but still well over a thousand miles across, centered on the city and nation of Aldis ("this land" or "the land"), the center of the Old Kingdom and the new.

Aldis, Kingdom of the Blue Rose

The great city of Aldis, in the midst of a vast and fertile stretch of land along the Western Ocean, was once the heart of the Old Kingdom, which rose to greatness long ago. The Old Kingdom fell into corruption, however, overthrown by the vile Sorcerer Kings, who established their Empire of Thorns and spread shadow across the known world. In time, a Great Rebellion arose to overthrow the Sorcerer Kings, aided by the rhydan—thinking animals with arcane powers—and the mystical Golden Hart. Virtually all of the sorcerers were defeated and Aldis and the surrounding lands were free from their dominion.

In the centuries since, Aldis has rebuilt itself as a society devoted to justice and peace for its people. Its governing nobles are selected through a rigorous series of tests, the last of which is the touch of the legendary Blue Rose Scepter, which reads the heart and spirit to determine if the subject is truly worthy and well-intentioned. The sovereign of the nation is likewise not determined by birth or conquest but selected by the Golden Hart, the embodiment of the collective will—and wisdom—of the people. For generations, the Kingdom of the Blue Rose, as it is also known, has restored and rebuilt much of what was lost during the Shadow Wars and protected itself and its people from its enemies, while seeking to build peace and understanding between all peoples.

The Adventure Game Engine

The rules system that powers *Blue Rose* is known as the *Adventure Game Engine* (or *AGE*) *System*. It was originally designed for the *Dragon Age RPG*, also by Green Ronin Publishing. It was later published in a stand-alone book, the *Fantasy AGE Basic Rulebook*, as well as being used to create the *Titansgrave: Ashes of Valkana* setting and adventures, seen on the online series *Tabletop*. If you learn *Blue Rose*, you can easily pick up other *AGE System* games. Although they are not identical, their basic structure and rules are, and you should find them easy to learn. If you enjoy playing in the world of *Blue Rose* with the *AGE System*, you may want to explore the family of other worlds and games from Green Ronin Publishing based on it.

The Theocracy of Jarzon

To Aldis's east lies the Theocracy of Jarzon, once a part of the vast Old Kingdom, now an independent nation, governed by the priests of the Church of Pure Light. These priests led the dangerous rebellion against the forces of Shadow and are now determined their land and people will never again fall under its yoke, no matter the cost. Jarzon is a land of harsh realities where devotion to faith and a demanding creed have allowed people to survive and prosper. They are suspicious of outsiders, including the people of Aldis, who seem to embrace many of the liberties the Purists believe led to Old Kingdom to ruin. Some Jarzoni are intrigued by foreign ways while others would like nothing more than to impose discipline and sense upon their neighbors to avert disaster.

Jarzon knows full well what is at stake, for to the south and east of their lands lie the Shadow Barrens, a vast wasteland devastated by the rise of the Sorcerer Kings and the Shadow Wars that followed. Once the beautiful land of Faernaria, it is now inhabited only by darkfiends, twisted shadowspawn, and the tormented souls of the unliving. Faernaria's remaining people have become the Roamers, vagabonds without a homeland, who travel the roads of Aldea in their small bands.

The Plains of Rezea

To the west of Aldis stretch the great Plains of Rezea, home to clans of nomadic people who follow the migration and lead of their beloved horses across the grasslands from foaling to wintering grounds. The Rezeans are a fierce and free people, not always friends of their Aldin neighbors

to the east, but the envoys of the crown seek to maintain good relationships with the various clans. Rezeans trade their goods and horses and some of them serve as mercenaries—or raiders—in the nearby lands.

The Kingdom of Kern

North of the vast forest of the Pavin Weald and the sentinel peaks of the Ice-Binder Mountains lies the dark Kingdom of Kern, the last remnant of the domains of the Sorcerer Kings. It is a bleak land where slaves work the mines and smelting furnaces and common people scratch out a rough existence through subsistence farming or working in the slums or wealthy houses of the great city of Sarn. The evil Lich-King Jarek once ruled Kern, but was destroyed in conflict with Aldis and its Queen. Now Jarek's closest lieutenants—the so-called "Shadowed Seven"—vie for power and control within the kingdom while maintaining a fragile alliance against outside forces that would see Kern wiped from the face of the world, given the opportunity. Sooner or later, a new ruler will seize power in Kern, and the dark kingdom may threaten the world once more.

The Matriarchy of Lar'tya

Sail from the southern shores of Aldis, past the islands of the Scatterstar Archipelago, to the south and west and you will reach the isles of the Matriarchy of Lar'tya, a tropical paradise where the local people took in refugees from the Shadow Wars of the mainland long ago. The Matriarchy has a strict caste system ruled by women, who are considered the most fit to rule and manage society's affairs. After the Great Rebellion, Lar'tya reestablished ties with the mainland nations, becoming a trading partner to many, but remaining carefully neutral in all other matters. Still, the influence of outsiders has begun to change Lar'tyan culture—and not for the better according to some.

A World of Arcane Adventure

In some regards, Aldea is not unlike our own world during the Renaissance and the great "Age of Sail," a pre-industrial civilization where rigged ships and spyglasses and astrolabes are among the most advanced technologies. In other ways, Aldea is a very different world, indeed, a world of arcane and spiritual powers that have shaped civilization and the destinies of its people.

Arcana

Nowhere is the nature of Aldea more clear than in the existence of arcana: supernatural powers wielded by certain people. Those with the right talents can learn how to sense beyond the five physical senses, to exert control over their own physiology and that of others to heal or harm, and to shape and influence the physical world in a wide number of ways. While powerful master adepts who wield many arcana are relatively rare, some degree of talent is found

among many people, and some of the races of Aldea possess innate arcane potential.

Although arcana are primarily the tools of a living mind and will, arcane energies can infuse inanimate objects, enchanting them towards particular purposes. The existence of arcana and arcane items in Aldea means the "technology" available to some nations, like Aldis, is far in advance of the bygone eras of our own world, comparable—or even greater—than the modern world, in some regards. For example, arcane items provide light, heat, and clean water in the great cities of Aldis without the need for machines or fuel. The ministrations of arcane healers and their arts reduce incidences of disease and allow people to recover from more serious injuries. Plant-shapers improve the growth and yield of crops while earth-, stone-, and water-shapers can build more delicately than even the most modern tools. Even warfare is influenced, with arcane crystalline wands known as crystons replacing the existence of gunpowder weapons, save that these enchanted devices cannot kill, merely stun.

The power of arcana infuses society as well. Truth-readers ensure oaths and testimonies are honest to the best of the teller's ability and psychics can aid in the treatment of maladies of the mind and spirit. In Aldis, those who would serve the people as their noble leaders must truly be noble, passing the test of the enchanted Blue Rose Scepter, which glows only from the touch of a noble heart.

Sorcery

There is a dark side to the arcane arts, however. Arcana is power, and power can be misused towards selfish, cruel, and destructive ends. The shadowy arts of sorcery involve the application of power without regard for consent, compassion, kindness, or the natural order of things, and the rush of power and control that comes with them is both addictive and seductive. The misuse of arcana led to the rise of the Sorcerer Kings in the Old Kingdom, adepts who cared about no one and nothing more than themselves, who willingly bartered their hearts and souls to Shadow for greater power and control.

Although the united forces of Light overcame the Shadow and overthrew the Sorcerer Kings, the temptations of sorcery still exist, and all wielders of the arcane arts must be on guard against them. Giving in to a momentary weakness to use their great power irresponsibly can lead the gifted down a terrible path, allying them with sinister forces. The people and nations of Aldea remain vigilant against threats like the Sorcerer Kings ever arising again, some by teaching understanding and control and constantly remaining accountable for their actions, others by seeking to ban or destroy all forbidden knowledge to place it beyond the reach of those who might be tempted by it.

The Peoples of Aldea

Although humans make up the vast majority of people in Aldea—in all the dazzling varieties found in our world—the term "person" is broader here, meaning any thinking being of free will, for there are peoples other than humans in the world.

The sea-folk are much like humans, but adapted to life both in and out of the waters that are their home: sleek-bodied swimmers with a bluish or greenish tint to their skin and hair. The vata are half-human descendants of the ancient and venerated vatazin, who were wiped out by the Sorcerer Kings. Their descendants include the vata'an, milk white of hair and skin, and the vata'sha, with white hair but skin as black as night. The vata all possess a measure of the arcane potential of their ancestors. The night people are also arcane in nature, but descendants of a slave race flesh-crafted by the Sorcerer Kings. Their ancestors won their freedom and now the night people seek to make a place for themselves in a world that sometimes still fears and misunderstands them.

The remaining people of Aldea are the most unusual, the rhydan, awakened beasts possessing intelligence, will, and psychic potential. The rhydan arise from many different species of animals, particularly great cats, wolves, horses, dolphins, and bears. They stand between the wild world of nature and civilization, and are staunch allies of the Light and people of good intent. Rhydan honor the great griffons and unicorns of the sylvan and wild places of the world as their nobility and revered leaders, and many rhydan establish a deep friendship and connection—the rhy-bond—with representatives of the other peoples.

Where Next?

If you are a player, **Chapters 1-7** are for you. They provide the key information you need to know about the world of *Blue Rose* and how to play the game. When you are ready to make a character, go to **Chapter 2: Character Creation**. It explains the process to get you going.

If you are the Narrator, you should familiarize yourself with **Chapters 1–7**, as they contain the core of the setting and the game. You should then move on to **Chapters 8–12**. They explain your important role in a tabletop roleplaying game, as well as giving you valuable advice and resources. When you're fully acquainted with the game and setting, there's an introductory adventure, "Shadows of Tanglewood," in the back of the book to help launch your new *Blue Rose* series and start your characters off on their exciting adventures.

You are now ready to enter the world of *Blue Rose*. May the Light guide your heroes to achieve their destiny!

PLAYER'S SECTION

Blue Rose uses a number of simple, straightforward rules to drive play, and those rules are what this chapter is all about. First, it gives some practical advice on being a player. Then, it follows that up with the basic rules of play, giving you what you need to know when you sit down at the gaming table. Here you will find rules for ability tests, narrative and action time, combat, stunts, and healing.

If you feel a bit overwhelmed after reading this chapter, don't worry. You don't need to memorize all this to play. The Narrator is there to help adjudicate the rules, and you'll pick things up as you go. And while reading the rules is important, nothing is a substitute for play. It is during a live game that you'll really see how it all fits and works together.

Player Basics

As you've surely noticed by now, this book contains a fair amount of rules material. The nuts and bolts of the game system are explained in the next few chapters, along with plenty of examples to make everything clear. If you've never played a roleplaying game before, though, you may still be wondering what it means to be a player. Before getting into the nitty-gritty of ability tests and running combats, it's worth taking a step back and reviewing a few basics.

Your character sheet is a good place to start. You'll find one at the back of the book and you can photocopy this as needed (or download a PDF version from *www.greenronin.com*). The character sheet is the cornerstone of your player character. Make sure you bring it to each game session, as playing without it is difficult. Some players leave their character sheets with, or make copies for, the Narrator to make sure this isn't a problem.

You should also ensure your character sheet is up to date. It's up to you to track Health, ability increases, talents, specializations, and other details. When you show up at a session, your character should be ready to go. Health is going to change the most, going up and down as your hero gets into fights and heals up. You may want to track this on scratch paper so you don't have to constantly erase your sheet during play. If your character is wounded at the end of a session, be sure to note current Health so you have it ready for next time.

You'll also want to bring dice (at least 3d6, with a different color for the Drama Die), a pencil, some scratch paper for notes, and any drinks and snacks you might want during play. You may also need to bring one or more miniatures if you are using battle maps (see the **Using Battle Maps** sidebar in this chapter).

Playing Adventures

During a session you will play your character through an adventure. It's the Narrator's job to present the adventure and yours to play a leading role. An adventure is

played out in a series of scenes known as encounters. Each encounter builds on the last and ultimately leads to a climax and a conclusion.

There are three basic types of encounters in *Blue Rose:*

- **Combat Encounters:** These are the classic action scenes that pit the adventuring group against one or more foes.
- **Exploration Encounters:** These scenes are about delving into the environment, and include such challenges as finding clues, overcoming natural hazards, avoiding traps, and solving puzzles.
- **Roleplaying Encounters:** These scenes are for conversation, intrigue, and investigation. This also covers many scenes where a hero's relationships are developed, and times when a character tries to recover from the effects of Corruption and other noncombat threats.

Each type of encounter has different challenges and rewards. Some require a lot of dice rolling and others none at all. Different players around the table may prefer different types of encounters. One may live for the thrill of combat, another for the challenge of problem solving, yet another for the immersion of roleplaying. A good adventure will use all three types of encounters to mix things up and provide something for everyone.

Ability Tests

During a game session, the Narrator sets the scene, then the players decide how their characters act and what they do. As a player, you narrate the actions of your character. You might say, "I search the library for a tome about the Lich King." The Narrator tells you the results of your action, and may introduce new elements into the scene. For example: "You search for ten minutes but, before you find what you are looking for, an angry scholar bursts into the library and confronts you."

When your character is taking everyday actions that do not have a significant chance of failure, no dice need to be rolled. It's enough to say that you are walking to the tavern or buying a dagger from the local weaponsmith. When you want your character to do something that requires risk or has a real chance of failure, that's when the dice come out.

To resolve actions you must roll an ability test. These tests are the heart of the *Adventure Game Engine* (or *AGE*) and you'll make many in each game session. Ability tests are easy to learn and quick to resolve, so the game can keep moving at a good pace.

To make an ability test, first pick up three six-sided dice (3d6). Two of the dice should be one color and the third a different color. The off-color die is known as the Drama Die (see **The Drama Die** sidebar). Roll all three dice and add the results together; you want to roll high. You then add the ability you're testing and another +2 if you have an applicable ability focus. The final number is your test result.

The Drama Die

You always roll three dice when making an ability test: two dice of one color and one die of another. The off-colored die is known as the Drama Die and it has several uses in the game system. It is used to generate stunt points (abbreviated as SP), measure degrees of success, and to break ties. When you see a reference to the Drama Die, just remember it's the off-colored die from ability tests.

Test Result = 3d6 + Ability + Focus

Even if you have several focuses that could apply, you can only use one on a given test. You can never gain the benefits of more than one focus on an ability test.

Example

Aldin spy Salima is trying to vault over a low wall while on the run. The Narrator decides this is a Dexterity test. Salima's player rolls 3d6 and gets a 10 (3 + 3 + 4). She then adds her character's Dexterity of 3 and another 2 because she has an applicable focus (Acrobatics). Salima's final test result is 15 (10 + 3 + 2).

When ability tests are referred to in *Blue Rose*, they use the following format: Ability (Focus). Intelligence (Historical Lore) and Constitution (Swimming) are examples of this format. In most cases, it does not matter if you have the listed focus—you can still attempt the test, you just won't get the bonus a focus provides. However, some tests do demand specialized skills or knowledge, and those require you to have the focus to even attempt the test. If you don't have the required focus, you automatically fail. These tests note that the focus is required by using this format: Intelligence (Navigation required).

Example

Aldin noble Bellian and the spy Salima find a message written in a coded cipher. Naturally, they try to decipher it. The Narrator tells the players that the test will be Intelligence (Cryptography required). Salima has the Cryptography focus so she is able to make a test and read the message. Bellian does not have the focus, so he has no hope of deciphering what's written. It's gibberish to him. Thus should Salima be unable to decode the message, the heroes will need to find someone who can.

Stunt Points

Doubles rolled on certain types of tests generate stunt points. You can then use these points to pull off various

special maneuvers. You might be able to do more damage in combat, make an especially cutting remark in a social situation, invoke magic in an especially powerful way, or a whole range of other effects. As a general rule, only tests for actions generate stunt points; tests to avoid or resist things do not. See **Combat Encounters** and **Non-Combat Encounters** later in this chapter for details on stunts.

Types of Tests

Now that you have the final result of the ability test, you need to compare it against another number to determine the outcome of the attempted action. There are two common types of test, basic and opposed, and you resolve each in a different way.

Making a Basic Test

This is the most common sort of test. In a basic test, you are rolling against a fixed target number (abbreviated TN) determined by the Narrator.

1. You tell the Narrator what you are trying to do.
2. The Narrator determines the ability to be used and the applicable focus (if any), then assigns a target number to the task based on its difficulty and the prevailing circumstances.
3. You make an ability test and figure out your test result.
4. If your test result is equal to or greater than the target number, you have successfully passed the test and completed the action.

Basic Test Difficulty

A character taking a basic test must roll vs. a target number picked by the Narrator. The Narrator determines the target number based on an assessment of the test's difficulty. The Narrator should take all relevant factors into account, including terrain, weather, equipment, assistance, and so on. The following table provides benchmarks for basic test difficulty.

Basic Test Difficulty

Target Number	Test Difficulty
7	Routine
9	Easy
11	Average
13	Challenging
15	Hard
17	Formidable
19	Imposing
21	Nigh Impossible

Example

The spy Salima is trying to climb a building in the dark of night. The Narrator decides this is a Strength test and Climbing is the obvious focus. The wall has many handholds but it is dark, so the Narrator decides the target number is 13. Salima's player rolls and her test result is a 14. Despite the darkness, she skillfully climbs the wall.

Making an Opposed Test

When your character is competing with another character directly, you must make an opposed test to see what happens. In this type of test, both characters get to roll and the results are compared. Another way to think about it is that your target number is determined by your opponent's test result.

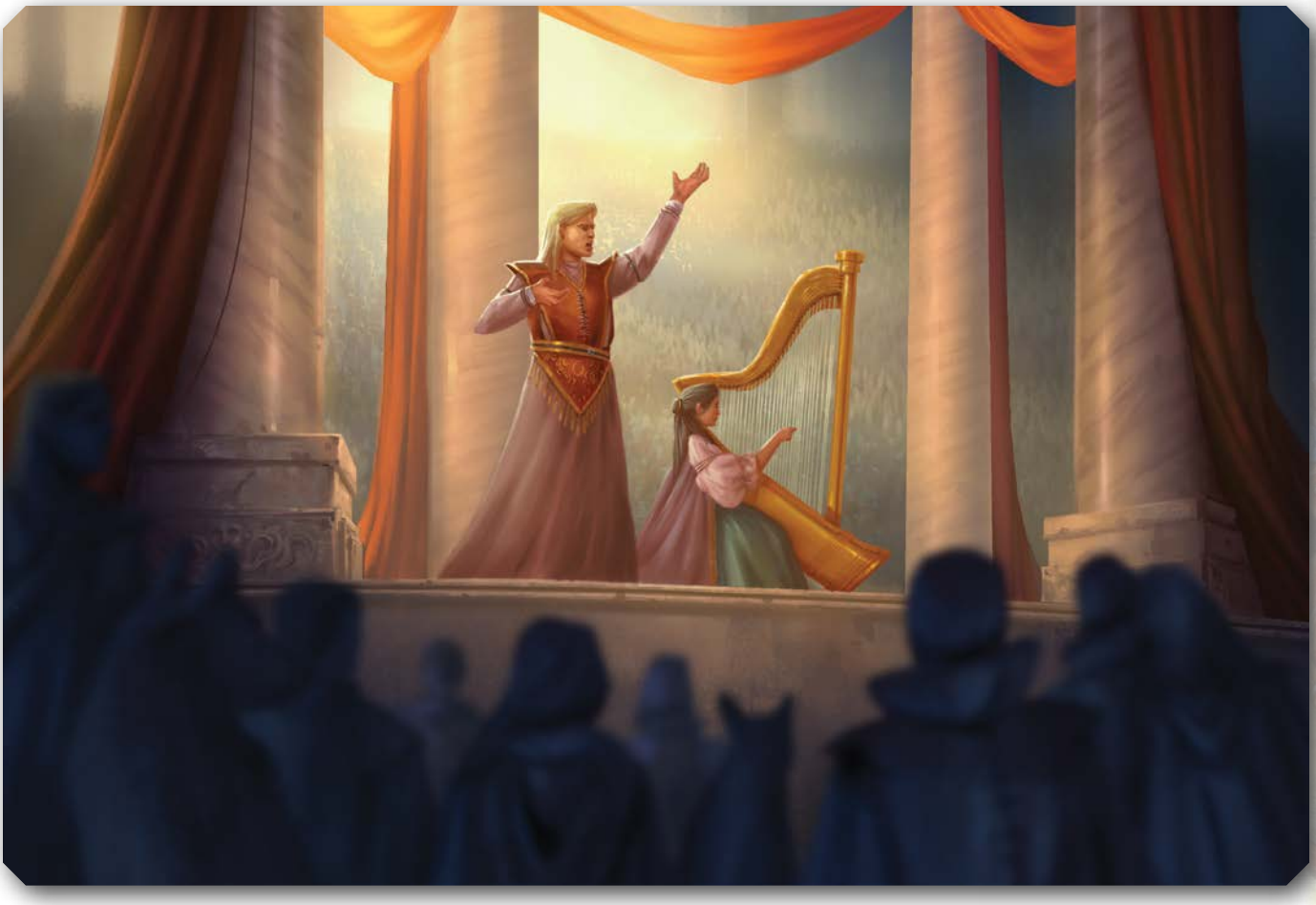
1. You tell the Narrator what you are trying to do.
2. The Narrator determines the ability and applicable focus (if any) to be used by you and your opponent. The Narrator may then assign bonuses or penalties to the ability tests to either of you that take any prevailing circumstances into account.
3. You and your opponent both make ability tests and figure out the test results.
4. Compare the test results. If you beat your opponent's test result, you win. If there's a tie, whoever rolled higher on the Drama Die wins. If it's still a tie, whoever has the higher ability wins.

This same process can be used when more than two characters are competing. In such cases, everyone makes an ability test and all results are compared. The highest test result is the winner, with ties broken as in step 4.

Also note that that it isn't necessarily the case that all characters will be using the same ability. That would make sense in an arm wrestling bout, for example, with both characters making Strength tests. Other situations may require pitting one ability against a completely different one. A bodyguard trying to penetrate a spy's disguise, for example, would take a Perception (Seeing) test and their opponent a Communication (Disguise) test.

Example

Salima has made her climb, but she notices a woman is taking in the night air on the opposite side of the roof. She wants to quietly sneak by and slip into the building without the woman noticing. The Narrator decides this is an opposed test of Salima's Dexterity (Stealth) vs. the woman's Perception (Hearing). Salima's player rolls a 10 and the Narrator rolls a 12 for the woman. The Narrator relates that Salima was approaching the trapdoor when she kicked a potted plant she hadn't seen in the dark. At the sound, the woman whips around and sees her. Now the spy may be in trouble.



Tests & Time

The Narrator determines how much time each test takes. This can vary from just a couple of seconds to an hour or more, depending on what you are attempting. Sliding a dagger up your sleeve without anyone seeing would be a minor action taking but a moment, while asking around town about a specific person might take two hours.

While you most commonly take tests when you initiate an action, sometimes you take them as a reaction or to resist something or someone. If pushed to the edge of a cliff, for example, you might have to pass a Dexterity test to avoid falling. Or if someone uses mind-altering arcana on you, you might have to make a Willpower test to resist the effects. These sorts of reaction tests usually happen on another character's turn and taking them is considered to take no time. When it comes around to your turn again, you get your two actions as usual.

Degrees of Success

Most of the time, you only need to know if you succeeded in your ability test. Sometimes, however, it's important to know how well you succeeded. This is one of the uses of the Drama Die. Check the dice on your ability test and note the number on the Drama Die. If you are level 6 or higher, you can add the test's focus to the Drama Die, if you have it. The higher the number, the more impressive your success. A 1 on your Drama Die means you barely pulled it off, while a 6 or better means you did it flawlessly. Note that if you failed the test, the result of the Drama Die is irrelevant.

Your Narrator will tell you when the result of your Drama Die is important.

Example

The spy Salima, forced to flee the scene when discovered, wants to stash her gear in a stables while she hides in plain sight at a tavern. Guards will be searching for clues so the Narrator wants to know how good a job Salima did hiding her gear. Salima's player rolls a successful Dexterity (Legerdemain) test and gets a 5 on her Drama Die. That means the gear is very well hidden indeed. When guards search the stable, the Narrator reflects that by adding 2 to the test's target number. With the added difficulty, none of the guards find anything and Salima enjoys her drink in peace.

Outcome

For some tests, it matters how well you succeed in relationship to how difficult the test was in the first place. This is called the Outcome of the test. Outcome is simply the

difference in value between the test result (the total of the numbers rolled on the dice plus your ability and focus) and the target number. A successful test has an Outcome of at least 0 (where the test result is equal to the TN), and different amounts of Outcome may influence the overall effect of a successful test.

Your Narrator will tell you when the Outcome of a test is important and ask you what it is.

Conviction

Whether it's luck, talent, a blessing from the gods, or sheer determination, heroes have something setting them apart from everyone else, allowing them to perform amazing deeds under the most difficult circumstances. In *Blue Rose* that something is Conviction. Spending a Conviction point can make the difference between success and failure. When you're entrusted with the safety of the kingdom, that means a lot!

Gaining Conviction

Player characters have Conviction based on their level, starting out with 3 points of Conviction at level 1 and gaining an additional point every two levels thereafter (3rd, 5th, and so on). Non-player characters (NPCs) and creatures do not have or use Conviction.

Using Conviction

Unless otherwise noted, spending a Conviction point is a free action, taking no time, and can be done at any moment you require. You may only spend one Conviction point per round for any given benefit, however. So you can spend a point of Conviction to dodge and another to recover, but you cannot recover twice, or gain any benefit of Conviction twice in the same round. You can spend Conviction for any of the following effects.

Reroll

One Conviction point allows you to reroll any one roll of the dice you make, keeping the second result. This generally means rerolling a failed test in the hope of success, although you can also reroll damage rolls. You cannot spend a Conviction point to reroll die rolls made by the Narrator or other players, including tests made in secret for your character. Use the second roll to determine if a test generates any stunt points.

Dodge

You can spend a Conviction point to gain the benefit of a Defend action (+2 to your Defense for the round) without expending an action to do so.

Surge

Spending a Conviction point can give you an additional major or minor action during the round. Using this extra action does not change your place in the initiative order.

Recover

You can spend a Conviction point to immediately regain 1d6 + Constitution + level in Health as a free action. At the Narrator's discretion, you can likewise spend a Conviction point to immediately shake off some debilitating or limiting effect, such as being temporarily blinded, stunned, or in pain.

Survive

Spending a Conviction point automatically stabilizes a dying character at 0 Health. That character will not die unless an enemy deliberately takes a major action to deliver a killing blow. The stabilized character can recover Health normally.

Redemption

Conviction can also be used to counteract the accumulation of Corruption points (see **Chapter 2** for further details).

Regaining Conviction

Heroes regain expended Conviction by doing something in accordance with their Destiny or Fate that furthers their Goals (see **Destiny and Fate** in **Chapter 2**). When this happens, the character regains a point of Conviction up to their starting amount based on level. The Narrator decides when an action is appropriate to gain the Conviction point, although players can suggest appropriate moments in accordance with their characters' personas.

Note that heroes can follow either their Destiny or Fate to regain Conviction, and the Narrator may occasionally use this to put temptation in a character's way. Someone with a Greedy Fate might have the opportunity to further their Calling (and regain Conviction) through theft, for example. If the character steals to further their Goal, they get a point of Conviction, but also have to deal with the consequences of their action.

The Narrator can also award characters Conviction for a particularly impressive success or achievement in the adventure that renews their confidence and faith. Overcoming a difficult challenge or solving a complex puzzle might give the heroes a burst of inspiration in the form of renewed Conviction. The same may be true for the guidance, advice, or comfort offered by important NPCs, such as an encounter with a unicorn that fills the characters' hearts with hope. The Narrator chooses when to do this, but it should only happen once or twice in an adventure, and may not occur at all in some adventures.

Time-Keeping

It is the Narrator's job to track time in the game. It is divided into two types: narrative time and action time.

Narrative Time

For much of play, time tracking will be rough. It isn't important to track things to the minute in most circumstances. If you tell the Narrator you want to climb a ridge to get a view of the surrounding countryside, the response might be, "It takes you about an hour to make the climb." Long distance travel is usually handled this way. A Narrator might say, "Three days later you ride into town." This sort of loose tracking is narrative time. A typical game will have sections of narrative time interspersed with action time. When the Narrator says, "Roll for initiative," that's the signal the game is switching into action time.

Action Time

When things get tense and it starts to matter who does what and in which order, narrative time ends and action time begins. Action time is most commonly used to handle combat, but it has other uses as well. Anything that would be considered an action scene in a movie can be handled with action time.

While narrative time is loose, action time is more tightly defined. Once it begins, the Narrator tracks time in 15-second increments called rounds (so there are 4 rounds in a minute). During each round, every character or creature in the encounter gets an opportunity to act (called a turn). Once everyone has taken a turn, the round ends and a new one begins.

When action time begins, the following procedure is used.

1. The Narrator says, "Roll for initiative." Action time is now in effect.
2. Each player makes an initiative roll. This is a Dexterity (Initiative) ability test. The Narrator rolls initiative for each major NPC and each group of minor NPCs. (Major NPCs act individually, while minor NPCs act together in groups.)
3. The Narrator compares the test results of all the characters and arranges them from highest to lowest into an initiative list. This is the order characters will take their turns in each round of the current combat. If there's a tie, whoever rolled higher on the Drama Die wins. If it's still a tie, whoever has the higher ability wins.
4. The character at the top of the initiative list takes a turn; this might be an NPC (or group of them) or a player character. On a turn, a character can take a major action and a minor action, or two minor actions. Once the actions are resolved, this character's turn is over.
5. The next character on the initiative list takes a turn.
6. Repeat step 5 until each character has taken a turn.
7. Once each character has taken a turn, the round ends and a new one begins. Continue steps 4-7 each round. Initiative does not need to be rolled again—the order remains set for the duration of the encounter. If new characters join the encounter, they roll initiative at the start of the round they appear and are added to the initiative list.
8. When the encounter is finished, the Narrator declares that action time is over. Narrative time now resumes.

Example:

The spy Salima, the knight Brigitte, and the noble Bellian are investigating an ancient ruin when four cultists attack them. The players each roll for initiative and the Narrator rolls once for the cultists (as a group—they will act at the same time on the initiative list). Putting the test results in order, the Narrator writes down the initiative list: Brigitte 14, Salima 12, Cultists 9, and Bellian 8. Brigitte takes her turn first, followed by Salima, the cultists, then Bellian. Then a new round begins with Brigitte taking another turn, and so on.

Taking Actions

When it's your turn in a round, you tell the Narrator what you want to do. On your turn you can take a major action and a minor action, or two minor actions. You can take these in any order, and can even take fewer actions if you like. You can talk while taking your actions, but since a round is only 15 seconds long, what you can say is limited.

A list of the most common major and minor actions follows. You are not limited to these actions. If you want to do something else, just say so and the Narrator will adjudicate it. The Narrator may require you to roll an ability test depending on what you are trying to do.

There are two additional actions of importance: Concentrate and Reload. Concentrate is used to wield the power of arcana and reload is used with missile weapons. Depending on the arcanum, weapon, and related talents, Concentrate and Reload can be major actions, minor actions, or free actions.

Some actions take a negligible amount of time. They are known as free actions and they don't count toward your usual limitation on actions. The rules note when something is a free action.

Major Actions

Aid Ally

You can use your own action to aid an ally. Your ally must be within a number of yards equal to your Communication × 4 (minimum 2 yards for characters with Communication 0 or under). The ally gains a bonus minor action and a +2 bonus on the next test of their choice for one round after your turn. Rhy-bonded characters can always aid each other if in the same scene, regardless of distance.

All-Out Attack

You attack one adjacent enemy in hand-to-hand combat, throwing the full weight of your Strength behind the attack, even though your ability to react to counterattacks will suffer. If you hit, you do +1 damage, but whether or not this attack hits, you suffer –1 to your Defense until your next turn.

Charge

You move up to half your Speed (rounded down) in yards and then make a melee attack against an adjacent enemy. You gain a +1 bonus on your attack roll.

Defend

You focus on defending yourself this round. Until the beginning of your next turn, you gain a +2 bonus to your Defense. If you wish, you may give this Defense bonus to an adjacent ally (within 2 yards) instead.

Heal

You provide some quick first aid to an injured ally. You must be adjacent to your ally and you must have bandages ready. This is a TN 11 Intelligence (Healing) test. If you are successful, your ally gets back an amount of Health equal to the Drama Die + your Intelligence. A character cannot benefit from another Heal action until additional damage is taken.

Melee Attack

You attack one adjacent enemy in hand-to-hand combat. An enemy within 2 yards of you is considered adjacent.

Ranged Attack

You fire or throw a missile weapon at one visible enemy within range.

Run

You can move up to double your Speed in yards. You cannot take this action if you are prone (you'd need to use the Move action to stand up first).

Minor Actions

Activate

This action allows you to start using certain abilities or items, such as fighting styles and potions.

Aim

You take the measure of your opponent and plan your next strike. If your next action is a melee attack or ranged attack, you gain a +1 bonus on your attack roll.

Guard Up

You shift some of your attention to defense. Add +1 or +2 (your choice) to your Defense until the end of this round. However, you suffer the amount you choose as a penalty to all tests you make, even opposed tests, for the remainder of the current round as well. (This is a key difference between the Guard Up and Defend actions. Guard Up only lasts until the end of the round, whereas Defend lasts until the beginning of your next turn.) If you choose this minor action, you must do it before any major action you take this turn. You can combine this action with Defend, but remember the penalty applies to all tests made for the rest of the round.

Maintain

You spend some of your focus on maintaining an effect, typically arcana (see **Chapter 4: Arcana** for examples), although other effects may require you to maintain them on subsequent rounds.

Move

You can move up to your Speed in yards. You can also go prone, stand up, or mount a horse or vehicle, but if you do so you can only move at half Speed (rounded down).

Prepare

You pick one major action that you prepare to execute and then end your turn. Any time until your next turn, you can interrupt another character and take your prepared action immediately. If you don't use it by your next turn, the action is lost. You cannot take the prepared action if you've already taken a major action on your turn.

Press the Attack

You stand ready to pursue an enemy if they should fall back or flee your blows. Declare an adjacent enemy combatant when you take this action. Until the beginning of your next turn, if that enemy moves away from you, you may immediately move up to your Speed in yards in direct pursuit of that enemy at no additional cost in

actions. This occurs immediately after your foe's movement, before they can do anything else. However, you can only use this minor action on an enemy you have already successfully struck in melee combat this turn (whether you inflicted damage or not). When you make your move, it need not bring you adjacent to that enemy if you can't go that fast. In that case, you simply move as far as you can before stopping. You are free to forego some or all of the movement this action allows when your enemy triggers it, if you wish.

Ready

You can unsheathe a weapon, pull out a potion, or otherwise ready an item that is stowed. As part of this action, you can put away something already in hand. You could thus put away your bow and a draw a sword, for example.

Stand Firm

You lower your weight and prepare to resist any and all efforts to move you from the place where you stand. Until the beginning of your next turn, any enemy who uses the Skirmish or Knock Prone combat stunts to move you or knock you to the ground must succeed in an opposed test pitting their Strength (Might) vs. your choice of your own Strength (Might) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) in order to move you or knock you prone. This test can only be attempted after your opponent spends the relevant stunt points, which are nevertheless expended to no effect if you win the test. An opponent who attempts to Skirmish you more than once as part of a single attack (to move you more than 2 yards) only makes a single opposed test against you, with all the skirmishing movement hanging in the balance.

Variable Actions

Concentrate

You focus your mind and spirit to use an arcanum (see **Chapter 4: Arcana**), which may require a test. Concentrate may be a major action, minor action, or free action depending on the arcanum used. Some other abilities may also require a minor action devoted to concentrating enough to maintain their effects.

Reload

You reload a missile weapon. This may be a major action, minor action, or free action depending on the weapon, your talents, and the stunts used.

Combat Encounters

Sometimes words are not enough. Sometimes conflict can only be settled through combat. Novice adventurers sometimes seek out such trials in the quest for honor and glory; veterans know that any fight you walk away from is a good one. Few are ready for the overpowering din of battle. Arrows hiss through the air, steel clashes with steel, arcane fire explodes, and the injured and dying cry for aid.

Combat is the major feature of action time. Like everything else in *Blue Rose*, the core of combat is the ability test. Since lives are on the line, however, some additional rules are required. Specifically, you need to know how attacks are made, how damage is inflicted, and what it takes to kill a character.

Making Attacks

There are two basic types of attack: melee and ranged (attacks using arcana are covered in **Chapter 4: Arcana**). Both are handled the same way.

1. You start by picking a target. To make a melee attack, you must be adjacent to your opponent. Adjacent means within 2 yards of your target. To make a missile attack, you must be able to see your target and be within range. See the **Weapons** section in **Chapter 2** for more information about weapon ranges and any associated penalties.
2. You make an attack roll. This is an ability test based on the weapons group of the weapon you are using to attack with (Fighting for Heavy Blades, for example, or Accuracy for Bows). This is modified by a focus, if applicable, and any other relevant bonuses (such as aiming, charging, arcane items, talents, etc.).
3. Your attack roll is a basic ability test. Your target number is your opponent's Defense.
4. If your test result is equal to or greater than your opponent's Defense, your attack has hit.

Example

It's the warrior Brigitte's turn. She sees a cultist 3 yards away and uses the Charge action to close the distance and make an attack. Brigitte's player makes an attack roll. Brigitte is using a longsword, so this is a Fighting (Heavy Blades) ability test. The roll is a 9, and she gets +3 for her Fighting ability, +2 because she has the Heavy Blades focus, and another +1 for charging. Her test result for the attack roll is thus 15 (9 + 3 + 2 + 1). This beats the cultist's Defense, so Brigitte hits him with her longsword.

Inflicting Damage

Once you've hit an opponent, you then inflict damage. Your damage roll determines if you struck a telling blow or one that was glancing and ineffectual. Armor is important here, as it protects the wearer from a certain amount of damage. The procedure for calculating damage follows:

1. Roll your weapon's damage and add your Strength ability and any other relevant modifiers (such as talents and arcana). You can find the damage for each weapon in the Weapons section in **Chapter 2**. For certain weapons (such as bows), you add Perception instead of Strength to the weapon's damage.
2. Subtract the armor rating of your opponent's armor (unless it's penetrating damage, in which case skip this step).
3. The result of steps 1 and 2 is your damage total. You inflict this amount of Health damage on your opponent. Note that if your opponent is well armored, you may hit but inflict no damage at all.

Example

The warrior Brigitte has just hit a cultist with a longsword. The longsword's damage is 2d6, so Brigitte's player rolls 2d6 and gets an 8. She adds Brigitte's Strength of 3, and then subtracts the cultist's armor rating of 2. The damage total is 9 (8 + 3 – 2), so the Narrator deducts 9 from the cultist's Health.

Killing Characters

As characters lose Health, they get closer to death. Player characters whose Health reaches 0 are dying. They will die after a number of rounds equal to 2 + their Constitution unless they receive healing. Dying characters can talk but can't take any other actions. They die at the start of their turn on their final round, so allies have until then to save them.

Most NPCs simply die when their Health reaches 0. However, Narrators may choose to apply the player character rules to major NPCs as well.

Note that Health never goes below 0 (there is no negative Health).

Example

The spy Salima tries to escape from a Kernish patrol. She takes a wrong turn down a dead end street and is cornered. She defends herself for 2 rounds, but a blow from a Kernish soldier reduces her to 0 Health and Salima collapses. Since her Constitution is 2, Salima will die at the start of her turn 4 rounds from now. She had better hope her friends show up or the patrol has orders to bring her in alive.

Incapacitating

Sometimes characters want to incapacitate their opponents instead of killing them. When a blow is struck that would otherwise slay a target, the attacker can choose to incapacitate instead. This leaves the target unconscious with 1 Health. The incapacitated character regains consciousness in 2d6 minutes unless circumstances dictate otherwise.

Delivering a Coup de Grace

A dying or unconscious character can be killed by a coup de grace. Any adjacent enemy can perform a coup de grace as a major action, and this automatically kills the target. A ranged attack can be used to deliver a coup de grace if the attacker makes a successful attack roll vs. Defense 10.

Combat Stunts

Combat is more than just two warriors taking turns whacking each other with swords. A good fight should be dynamic and feature a lot of movement and action. The rules described so far create a good framework but the game adds stunts to mix things up and make fighting a little more unpredictable.

The combat stunt system is simple. If you make a successful attack roll and get doubles on any of the dice, you can perform one or more stunts in addition to dealing your normal damage. You receive a number of stunt points (SP) equal to the value shown on the Drama Die and must use them right away to perform stunts. Initially, all characters choose from the same list of stunts, but as characters gain levels they may get access to new stunts or get to use standard ones for fewer stunts points. These details can be found in each class description.

Combat Stunts

SP Cost	Stunt
1+	**Skirmish:** You can move yourself or the target of your attack 2 yards in any direction for each 1 SP you spend.
1	**Rapid Reload:** You can immediately reload a missile weapon.
1	**Stay Aware:** You take a moment to make sure you're mindful of everything that's happening around you. Make a TN 11 Perception test with the focus of your choice. If you succeed, the Narrator may either make you aware of some battlefield situation that has so far escaped your notice, or give you a +1 bonus to the next test you make. This bonus can never stack with any other test bonus other than that from a focus. It must be used on the very next test you make (even if you're the defender in an opposed test), and expires at the end of your next turn even if you haven't used it by then.
2	**Knock Prone:** You knock your enemy prone. Any character making a melee attack against a prone foe gains a +1 bonus on their attack roll.
2	**Defensive Stance:** Your attack sets you up for defense. You gain a +2 bonus to Defense until the beginning of your next turn.
2	**Disarm:** You attempt to disarm the target with your melee attack. You and your opponent must make an opposed attack roll. If you win the test, you knock your enemy's weapon 1d6 + Strength yards away in a direction you nominate.
2	**Mighty Blow:** You inflict an extra 1d6 damage on your attack.
2	**Pierce Armor:** You find a chink in your enemy's armor. The target's armor rating is halved (rounded down) vs. this attack.
2	**Taunt:** You insult or distract one opponent of your choice within 10 yards of you. You must make an opposed test of your Communication (Deception) vs. the target's Willpower (Self-Discipline). If you win, the target suffers a –1 penalty on attack and arcana rolls on their next turn.
2	**Threaten:** You strike a threatening pose, challenging an opponent of your choice within 10 yards of you. You must make an opposed test of your Strength (Intimidate) vs. the target's Willpower (Self-Discipline). If you win, they must attack you in some way (melee, missile, arcana, etc.) on their next turn.
3	**Lightning Attack:** You can make a second attack against the same enemy or a different one within range and sight. You must have a loaded missile weapon to make a ranged attack. If you roll doubles on this second attack roll, you do not gain any additional stunt points.
3	**Set Up:** You create an opening an ally can exploit. Pick an ally. On their next turn, the ally receives a +2 bonus on the ability test of their choice. This decision must be made before the dice are rolled.
4	**Dual Strike:** Your attack is so strong it affects two targets. First, pick a secondary target. This target must be adjacent to you if you are using a melee weapon or within 6 yards of your primary target if you are using a missile weapon. Apply the test result of your original attack roll to the secondary target (in other words, you only make one attack roll and apply it to both opponents). If you hit the secondary target, inflict your normal damage on them.
4	**Seize the Initiative:** Your attack changes the tempo of the battle. You move to the top of the initiative order. This means you may get to take another turn before some of the combatants get to act again. You remain at the top of the order until someone else seizes the initiative.
5	**Lethal Blow:** You inflict an extra 2d6 damage on your attack.

You can only perform a given stunt once in a round. The only exception to this rule is the Skirmish stunt, which can be used multiple times as long as you have enough stunt points.

Once you have decided on what stunts you want to use, you can narrate how your character pulled them off. You can perform the stunts in any order you choose.

Example

Brigitte is trying to fight her way through the patrol to rescue Salima before she dies. She attacks a soldier on the outside of the formation. Her attack roll is a 16 in total and her dice read 3, 5, and 5, with one of the 5s being her Drama Die. This beats her foe's Defense so Brigitte hits. Since she also rolled doubles, she receives a number of stunt points equal to her Drama Die (5 in this case). In order to break through the patrol, Brigitte decides to perform three stunts. She spends 1 stunt point to use Skirmish on the target of her attack, moving him 2 yards to the side. He also takes normal damage from the attack. Then Brigitte spends a second stunt point to use Skirmish on herself to step into the spot recently vacated by her opponent. Lastly, she spends her remaining 3 stunt points to make a Lightning Attack. Since she is still adjacent to her original target, she could attack him, but chooses to attack a new opponent: the Kernish woman now in front of her. She rolls another successful hit and gets doubles again. She does not, however, get any more stunt points (this is spelled out in the Lightning Attack combat stunt description). Brigitte's player describes how she barrels into the crowd shouting her war cry, smashing the patrol aside and pushing forward to rescue her comrade.

Mounts & Combat

Combatants can ride horses and other mounts. Accounting for that requires a few special rules.

You can mount an animal as part of a Move action. If you do so, you can only move half your Speed in yards. (A Move action normally lets you move your Speed in yards.)

Once you are mounted, you use Move and Run actions as normal, but you use the Speed of the mount instead of your own.

When engaging in melee combat, you get a +1 bonus on attack rolls vs. opponents on foot. The Narrator may rule this does not apply vs. particularly large monsters.

Many mounts do not have attacks of their own (they aren't trained for fighting). Those that do take their attacks on your turn in a round. You don't need to roll initiative separately for the mount.

Enemies can choose to attack you or your mount. You must keep track of your mount's Health.

Opponents can use the Knock Prone combat stunt to try to dismount you. This is more difficult than overbearing someone on foot, though, so you get a chance to resist it. If you make a successful Dexterity (Riding) test, you remain mounted. The target number for this test is equal to 10 + your opponent's Strength. If you fail, you are knocked to the ground, take 1d6 penetrating damage, and are now prone. The Narrator controls the actions of the mount until you remount or the encounter ends.

Passengers do not have to use Move and Run actions, as they are simply carried along. They take actions as normal but the Narrator should bear their situation in mind.

These rules also apply when driving a vehicle like a cart or wagon, but you use Strength (Driving) for tests instead. If Knock Prone is used against a passenger of a vehicle, Dexterity (Acrobatics) is used to resist it.

Flying Combatants

Some combatants have the ability to fly. These are mostly monsters, but heroes may get access to arcana that let them fly and certain rhydan are capable of flight, so the rules are included here for your reference. You can skip this section when you are just learning to play unless you have characters that can fly in your early adventures.

Flight is indicated parenthetically after the character's Speed. A character with Speed 6 (Flying 12), for example, moves at 6 on the ground, but 12 when flying. *Blue Rose* handles fliers with the use of special actions available only to them. When flying, a character must use one of the following actions each turn: Circle, Dive, Fly, or Fly High. A character who fails to do so for any reason is subject to falling damage (see **Handling Hazards** in **Chapter 10: Running the Game**). Only one of these four actions can be used on a turn. A character could not, for example, Dive and then Circle. Flying characters cannot take the Charge, Move, or Run actions until back on the ground.

For the most part, stunts affect fliers the same as other characters. The exception is the Knock Prone combat stunt. If used, this reduces the character's Flying Speed by 3 until the end of their next turn instead.

Major Actions

Dive

A character that was circling or flying high the previous round can dive this round. A character that was circling can move a number of yards equal to their Flying Speed and make a melee attack against an opponent on the ground. A character who was flying high can move a number of yards equal to double their Flying Speed and make a melee attack against an opponent circling or on the ground. In either case, the attack can take place at any point in the character's movement and receives +1 bonus on the melee attack roll and damage roll. At the end of the dive, the character is roughly 3 yards off the ground, just as if they had taken the Fly action.

Using Battle Maps

Many game groups play through combat encounters without the use of props. Actions are described, and the Narrator keeps a mental picture of the battlefield and adjudicates distances and relative position on the fly. This keeps combat loose and doesn't bog the game down in tactical details. Other groups find they like to use a battle map and miniatures or other tokens to handle combat encounters because it makes it easier to see what's going on in the fight. And miniatures—particularly painted ones—look great and add a nice visual element to the game.

If your group is going to use battle maps, you'll need a miniature or token for each character. You have many choices here. The most popular miniatures are sized at 28mm and are made of either pewter or plastic. These days there are several pre-painted lines, though many gamers prefer to paint their own. There are also some cheaper options than miniatures, such as 2D tokens and cardboard stand-ups. Several companies make these in PDF format, so you can print out what you need when you need it. If all else fails, you can always use coins, colored stones, or even dice to represent characters on the map. If you do use dice, make sure no one scoops them up to make a roll!

You will also, of course, need battle maps. These come in a variety of sizes and formats. A popular option is the vinyl battle map overlaid with either squares or hexes. These can be drawn on with wet-erase markers, so terrain can be sketched out and then wiped away when the encounter is over. Dungeon walls, pits, water features, and even furniture can be quickly sketched in for all to see. Wet-erase markers come in different colors, allowing scenes to use blue for water, black for buildings, green for vegetation, and brown for relative altitudes of terrain, for example. The height of objects can be written next to them, allowing players to quickly distinguish the 10-yard wall from the 20-yard tower.

Some companies make pre-printed maps of common locations like inns, shrines, dungeons, and so on. These have the advantage of looking great, but they must be used as is. Another option is map tiles, which are smaller areas that can be built out into a larger map. You can get printed sets of such tiles, or PDFs that you can print out as needed. There are also some computer programs that let you design your own maps and then print them.

Using miniatures and battle maps in *Blue Rose* is easy. Two yards in the rules translates into 1 square or hex on the map. Round down if needed. So a character with Speed 9 would move 4 squares or hexes on a battle map with a Move action. A short bow with a range of 32 yards can shoot up to 16 squares or hexes on a battle map.

A final option is to use miniatures with 3D terrain instead of a map. Some gamers, particularly those who regularly play miniatures games, have a ready supply of 3D terrain, such as hills, buildings, ruins, and so on. A table with built-out terrain is a beautiful thing. A cheaper option is again provided by PDF products. You can find fold-up terrain that you can print out and assemble as needed.

If you go with 3D terrain, there are no squares or hexes to regulate movement. Instead, simply use a ruler or tape measure with each 2 yards of distance in the rules translating to 1" on the tabletop (and again, round down). So a throwing axe with a range of 8 yards could be thrown 4" on the tabletop.

Fly High

The character can move a number of yards equal to their Flying Speed while climbing far above the battlefield. While flying high, the character can neither attack nor be attacked (even by other characters flying high). A character must start their turn circling to Fly High.

Minor Actions

Circle

The flying character circles above the battlefield at a low altitude, moving a number of yards equal to their Flying Speed. Ranged attacks from the ground add 20 yards to the horizontal distance from the shooter to the target to represent the height of the flier. A circling character can attack other circling characters at no penalty. A character must start their turn flying to circle.

Fly

The character moves a distance equal to their Flying Speed. The character is roughly 3 yards off the ground and can be attacked in melee by opponents on the ground. The character's own melee attack rolls receive a +1 bonus vs. opponents on the ground due to their height advantage. A character can choose to land after flying, in which case the normal rules for combat once again apply. Prone characters cannot fly until they take a Move action to stand up first.

Example

An Aldin ranger dispatches a raven to deliver a vital message. The raven takes to the air on its turn with the Fly action. A Kernish spy sees the raven and fires off a quick shot. No penalties apply, but the shot still misses. Next, the raven takes the Circle action and continues to move away. The scout takes another shot, determined to bring the bird down. The horizontal distance to the raven is 20 yards, but since it's circling another 20 yards is added to that to determine range. This makes it 40 yards, which is long range for a longbow. The scout thus incurs a –2 penalty and misses again. On its third turn, the raven flies high. The spy curses as the raven streaks skyward and out of range.

Non-Combat Encounters

There is far more to storytelling in *Blue Rose* than just combats, of course. Heroes spend a great deal of time traveling and visiting potentially dangerous locales: exploring the wilderness or the ruins of an Old Kingdom city, for example, or slipping through the high passes of the Ice-Binder Mountains, or across the Veran Marsh. These sorts of experiences are exploration encounters, where the challenges often come from the environment and the characters' ability to discern what is around them, rather than a direct threat from any particular creature or foe. The goal of an exploration encounter may be to find something (or someone), to get from place to place, or even to simply survive the hazards of the wilderness. See **Handling Hazards** in **Chapter 10** for game system details on this.

Characters likewise encounter and interact with a great variety of people, from the ordinary citizens of their homeland to peers or rivals, potential enemies, or family and loved ones. These interactions form the basis for roleplaying encounters, where the focus is on the players roleplaying their characters interacting with each other and any supporting characters run by the Narrator. Here the challenges often involve finding agreement or settling disputes, or pursuing personal agendas or goals involving other people. This can range from convincing a bandit lord to release hostages unharmed to mediating a dispute between hostile factions, or wooing a potential romantic interest at a grand masquerade.

Exploration Stunts

SP Cost	Stunt
1	**Advantageous Positioning:** You make your discovery from an advantageous position of your choice, up to 2 yards away from the place that would normally lead to your discovery with respect to the object of your test. You may wait until the Narrator describes what you've found, if relevant, before you choose your position. This stunt can be used multiple times on the same test if you have enough stunt points.
2	**Efficient Search:** If resources of any kind are typically consumed in the course of your test, you use only half as much as you would normally.
2	**Speedy Search:** You complete your test in half the time it would otherwise take.
2	**The Right Tools:** You have, find, or improvise a piece of equipment you need to attempt an action more effectively. This stunt counteracts any situational penalties for not having appropriate equipment.
3	**That Makes Me Wonder:** You may immediately make another Perception test, at no additional cost in time or resources, to discover more information about your surroundings, or the object of your test. This bonus test must use a different focus from the first test, however, and doubles on this bonus test do not give rise to stunt points. The two tests are assumed to transpire simultaneously, not one after the other. If there is nothing additional to discover the stunt is wasted, but the Narrator will not prevent you from choosing this stunt even when there is nothing additional to learn.
3	**The Object of Your Attention:** You receive a +1 bonus to further tests to examine or perceive additional aspects of the object of your test until the time or venue changes.
4	**The Upper Hand:** If your discoveries lead to combat within a moment or two, you receive a +3 bonus on your initiative roll.
4	**Resources at Hand:** Choose a focus you don't have that falls under the same ability as the test you're making. You are considered to have that focus until the time or venue changes. The Narrator may require you to explain how this bonus arises from the environment and deny it if you can't make a reasonable suggestion.
4	**With a Flourish:** The manner of your success is impressive to those who are nearby to watch you. You have a +1 bonus to opposed tests against them until the time or venue changes.

Exploration & Roleplaying Stunts

Just as with combat encounters, characters can perform stunts related to exploration and roleplaying encounters. The basic system for generating and using stunt points for exploration and roleplaying stunts is the same as it is for combat stunts. Whenever you are successful at a test and roll doubles on two of your dice, you can perform one or more stunts in addition to reaping the benefits of success on the test. You receive a number of stunt points equal to the result on the test's Drama Die, and must use them right away to perform stunts. You can perform the stunts in any order you choose, then narrate how your character pulls them off. As with combat stunts, except where noted in a particular stunt's description, you can only perform the same stunt once with the stunt points from a single test.

The exploration and roleplaying stunts available to everyone are listed in the **Exploration Stunts** and **Roleplaying Stunts** tables. As with combat stunts, encounter-, monster-, and class-specific exploration and roleplaying stunts are also presented in the appropriate contexts.

Roleplaying stunts must be delivered along with a description of the interaction you're engaged in, and must be consistent with the description you give. You can't have your character deliver a scathing dressing-down via a Strength (Intimidation) test and then say that it turns out to be funny (using the Jest roleplaying stunt). Or, at the very least, you'd have to propose a really clever justification for why that would be the case.

Narrators should be aware that, in general, exploration and roleplaying stunts call for more on-the-fly decision

Roleplaying Stunts	
SP Cost	**Stunt**
1	**Bon Mot:** You tag the perfect witty remark onto the end of your action, affecting all those who hear it that much more deeply. If you can't think of one, the rest of the players and Narrator quickly brainstorm options, and you choose among them. Word of your wit is likely to spread, for good or ill.
1+	**Passionate Inspiration:** Your emotions flare and you're inspired to a brief act of daring or greatness. Gain a +1 bonus to your next action, with a further +1 for every 2 additional SP spent.
2	**And Another Thing:** You manage to weave a second thrust of conversation into the primary interaction that called for the test, if your description supports it. If relevant, you may make an additional test as part of your action, before anyone else has a chance to respond or make any tests or arguments of their own.
2	**Sway the Crowd:** Your interpersonal efforts are so effective they spill over onto others in the area, and you affect one additional person of your choice past the original target. You may use this stunt multiple times on the same roll. However, if the test that gave rise to this stunt was an opposed test you may not expand the effect to anyone who has a higher ability + focus total than the original target.
3	**New Friends:** Your action impresses, charms, or otherwise makes an NPC in the encounter think better of you. Choose one character who's present—that character now admires you or thinks of you as a friend. If they're an enemy or dislike you already, make an opposed Communications (Persuasion) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline) test. If you win, that character feels more positively about you and may aid you in small ways. This stunt can set up a future relationship if interactions continue and remain positive…
3+	**New Enemies:** You gain the upper hand on your opponent, but in doing so draw their ire. You may select any stunt or stunts worth 1 more total SP than the amount you spend on this stunt. However, an NPC in the encounter now dislikes you and considers you a rival, threat, or enemy. This NPC doesn't have to be the target of your action, just someone who it makes sense would now be upset with you. This stunt can set up future relationships if interactions continue along these lines…
3	**Stunned Silence:** You are so impressive that you leave all those who witness your display completely dumbfounded and unable to speak for at least a full round. Outside combat this lasts, at the very least, long enough for your character to begin doing something else.
3	**Jest:** You turn a phrase, twist your expression, or make some other comic motion that leads those nearby to laugh, or at least stifle their snorts. Anyone nearby who wishes to avoid laughing must make a successful TN 11 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test, with the exception—at the Narrator's discretion—of whomever you've made the butt of your joke.
4	**Exciting Opportunities:** You action impresses or inspires an NPC in the encounter, or some dignitary who could logically hear about your actions. While there is no immediate effect, this may lead to some important group or character offering you future patronage, membership of an exclusive organization, an invitation to a restricted event, or some other significant future opportunity.
4	**Flirt:** Choose one character who is present and immediately make an opposed Communications (Romance) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline) test. If you win, that character becomes enamored with yours. What exactly this means in the moment and how it might play out (or fall apart) in the long run are up to the Narrator, and depend on how you continue to act. But, if you're successful, you've created an opening for romantic opportunities.
4	**Tower of Will:** Your success gives you a sense of your own brilliance and strength of character. For the rest of the current roleplaying exchange you gain a +1 bonus to any opposed tests where an opponent tries to put you at an emotional disadvantage, such as by intimidating you, impressing you, bargaining with you, and so on.
5	**Enrage:** You twist the knife, delivering a provocation or insult in such a way that a single target you designate must choose between either attacking you or storming away from the scene. If they choose to attack, the assault need not be deadly, although that option is open to the enraged character. A slap or the throwing of the gauntlet may stand in as an "attack" just as well.

making than combat stunts. This is because of the simple fact that, outside combat, there are fewer hard-and-fast rules and statistics to govern what characters can do, how they might feel or react to provocations, where they're standing, and so on. In this way, exploration stunts and roleplaying stunts aren't any different than exploration and roleplaying in the game overall—they're a little more flexible and open than situations where life and death hang in the balance, and so they require the Narrator's flexibility and interpretation.

To avoid bogging the game down with the need for Narrators to make lots of minor, on-the-fly decisions about noncombat stunts, they can always decide that any particular noncombat test can't generate stunt points, for any reason or no reason at all. They can also rule that stunt points generated from a particular combat test can't be spent on exploration stunts or roleplaying stunts (see **Which Stunts Can I Use?).** They can even make either of those decisions *after* a test has been made. (Although a good Narrator will only very rarely "take away" stunt points that have already been rolled. It's usually better to let the players have their fun.)

Finally, Narrators should be clear that the effects of exploration stunts, especially, do not call for them to invent new elements that weren't there before to add to the situation at hand. For example, if there isn't already something present in the encounter for a character who chooses the That Makes Me Wonder stunt to learn, the Narrator isn't obligated to make something up just to satisfy the effects of the stunt.

Arcana in Encounters

Characters—particularly adepts—with access to the various arcana described in **Chapter 4** may use them in any type of encounter. Arcana are useful in all kinds of situations: combat, exploration, and in roleplaying. The use and effects of the arcana themselves are governed by the rules found in **Chapter 4**.

Arcane Stunts

SP Cost	Stunt
1+	**Powerful Channeling:** Increase the Outcome of your arcanum by 1 per SP spent, to a maximum of 4.
2	**Skillful Channeling:** Reduce the fatigue target number (TN) for the arcanum by 2.
2	**Mighty Arcana:** If the arcanum does damage, one target of your choice takes an extra 1d6 damage.
3	**Lasting Arcana:** If an arcanum has a duration beyond instantaneous, it remains in effect for twice as long. Arcana that last until the end of the encounter are extended by 1d6 minutes instead.
3	**Arcane Shield:** You use the residual arcanum energy to set up a temporary protective shield. You gain a +2 bonus to Defense until the beginning of your next turn.
4	**Fast Casting:** After you resolve this arcanum, you can immediately use another. The second arcanum must take either a major action or a minor action to perform. The test for the second arcanum does not generate stunt points.
4	**Imposing Arcana:** The effect of the arcanum is much more dramatic than usual. Until the beginning of your next turn, anyone attempting to make a melee attack against you must make a successful Willpower (Courage) test. The target number is 10 + your Willpower ability. Those who fail must take a Move or Defend action instead.
4	**Split Arcana:** If the arcanum affects only one target, you can have it affect two, so long as the second target is within the arcanum's range and no more than 6 yards from the original target. Targets test against the arcanum effects separately.
5	**Disrupt Arcana:** In addition to its normal effects, your arcanum is so powerful it may disrupt another arcane effect on the target. Roll an immediate test of your Intelligence (Arcane Lore) vs. the arcane test total of any one arcanum on the target. Success removes the effect. Doubles on the test do not generate stunt points.
5	**Lethal Arcana:** If the arcanum does damage, one target of the spell takes an extra 2d6 damage. Alternately, all targets of the arcanum take an additional 1d6 damage.
6	**Effortless Arcana:** You automatically pass any fatigue test associated with using this arcanum.

Example

Gremfing is a rhy-wolf who is working as a scout for the Sovereign's Finest in the Pavin Weald. He is investigating reports of darkfiend activity in the area and is tracking a group of ettercaps who attacked a forest folk hunting party recently. Gremfing hopes to track the shadowspawn to their lair so he may call in reinforcements to deal with the threat. The Narrator assigns a target number of 14 to a Perception (Tracking) test and Gremfing not only succeeds but his roll generates a whopping 6 stunt points.

Gremfing has a lot of options here, but he decides to spend his stunt points on Speedy Search (2 SP) and The Upper Hand (4 SP) exploration stunts. This will allow him to locate the ettercaps quickly and track them back to their lair with speed, so he can rush back to get reinforcements to take down the monsters. Should he end up running afoul of the ettercaps before that, or assuming they're still present when he returns, he will gain a +3 to any Dexterity (Initiative) tests involving the ettercaps and their lair.

Arcane Stunts

Characters using arcana can generate stunt points on any required test, and may spend those stunt points on arcane stunts. These are similar to other types of stunts, but apply to the uses and effects of arcana. The arcane stunts described here are available to any character or creature able to wield arcana. Adepts gain certain class powers modifying their arcane stunts, usually allowing them to perform them at a reduced cost. As with other stunts, specific exceptions are noted in situations where they apply. Not every arcane stunt is appropriate for every arcanum or use. For example, if an arcanum does not inflict damage then it cannot benefit from a Mighty Arcana stunt.

Which Stunts Can I Use?

As a general rule—and always subject to the Narrator's judgment—you can use stunt points from any test to generate any kind of stunt. Although you will most frequently want to use exploration stunts when doing investigation and roleplaying stunts when interacting with other characters because those stunts make the most sense and are the most useful, you're not restricted that way.

You can even use exploration and roleplaying stunts during combat, or use combat stunts outside a fracas. After all, if a fight breaks out during a roleplaying encounter, you'll want to use combat stunts right away! If you're in the middle of an exploration encounter and manage to find a hidden character, a roleplaying stunt might be just the thing to cajole them out of their hiding place. Simi-

larly, since you might use arcana in any type of encounter, you can perform arcane stunts in any encounter. If the rule worked any other way, it would be very important for the Narrator to demarcate the beginnings and ends of scenes with a precision that would gum up the whole flow of the adventure.

Stunt Notes & Test Restrictions

You only roll a test when the Narrator calls for one. With the potential for great success in some of the new stunts, it will sometimes be tempting to roll for anything and everything in the hope of generating stunt points to provide broader-than-normal effects, enduring bonuses, and so forth. In cases where you're clearly "fishing" for stunt points—especially when you're attempting tasks at which you'd obviously succeed—the Narrator is well within their rights to disallow a test, and simply say that you've succeeded at your task.

Some stunt descriptions mention an "object of your test." This refers broadly to an item or person being searched for, a character with whom a hero is interacting, or something similar. If an opposed test is being made, the object of the test is always the other party to the test. It will almost always be obvious what the object of a given test is, but whenever it's not, the Narrator is the final arbiter. And keep in mind the object of a test may be obvious to the Narrator but not the player. Most Perception tests are examples of this.

Several stunt descriptions say that an effect lasts "until the time or venue changes." This means the effect keeps going until the focus of play jumps forward in time by any significant amount, or the focus of play changes to some other place. This phrase is meant to approximate to the duration of a single encounter but be a little clearer to players (since the Narrator is usually the only one who worries about when encounters begin and end). However, note that when the Narrator is jumping back and forth between two different groups of heroes who're doing different things in different places in order to create drama and excitement, the change of the game table's focus between one subgroup of the party and the other doesn't count as a change of time or venue. It's just clever technique.

Remember: all stunts are available to the NPCs, too. Turnabout is fair play, after all. This can be awkward, however, when roleplaying stunts seem to take away the players' freedom to choose how their characters behave. The Narrator should be circumspect in such cases, while players should also embrace the idea that good fun can arise from the adversity of their heroes being psychologically and emotionally affected by the characters they interact with, even in ways they wouldn't necessarily choose themselves. As always, the Narrator is the final arbiter of how things play out in whatever situations arise.

Health & Healing

Health measures a character's fitness and wellbeing. A character with full Health is vigorous and ready for action. A character with less than full Health is battered or injured. A character reduced to 0 Health is dying. Unless healing is received in 2 + Constitution rounds, the character dies (unless they are an NPC, at which point they usually die immediately).

Health is fairly abstract by design, as is the nature of the damage received. When a character takes damage from a sword hit, for example, it can represent bruising, loss of breath, or actual wounds. It would be tedious to track each cut or broken bone, so the rules sacrifice realism for the sake of playability. The exact nature of the damage isn't important. You just need to watch your hero's Health and be careful when it gets close to 0.

When your character is wounded, there are several ways to heal:

- Another character can aid you with a Heal action, as described previously in this chapter. You can't benefit from another Heal action until you take more damage (there is only so much benefit you can gain from first aid).
- You can take a breather after a combat encounter. This is a 5-minute rest that lets you catch your breath, tend to minor cuts and abrasions, drink some water, and so on. After a breather, you get back 5 + Constitution + level in Health. You can only take one breather after an encounter. If you were at 0 Health when the combat encounter ended, you cannot take a breather at all.
- You can get some sleep. If you can get at least 6 hours of restful sleep, you gain 10 + Constitution + level in Health.
- You can receive arcane healing. This would most commonly be the Cure arcanum (see **Chapter 4: Arcana**).

Example

Brigitte drives off the Kernish troops before Salima dies, and the combat encounter ends. Salima is still at 0 Health and dying, so Brigitte tries to save her with a Heal action. She makes an Intelligence (Healing) test, which is not her strong suit. However, she gets an 11 and just manages to save Salima's life. She rolled a 10 (3 + 3 + 4) and then added her Intelligence of 1 for a total of 11. Salima gets back 5 Health (the Drama Die result of 4 plus 1 for Brigitte's Intelligence). Not much, but better than dying. With Salima saved, Brigitte can relax a bit and take a breather. She rests for 5 minutes. She is a level 2 warrior with a Constitution of 2, so she gets back 9 Health (5 + 2 + 2). Since Salima had 0 Health when the combat encounter ended, she cannot take a breather.

Fatigue & Resting

Characters in *Blue Rose* can suffer from fatigue as well as damage to their health. Fatigue usually results from strenuous tasks requiring great effort, such as a forced march, exertion in difficult environments, and wielding arcana. Such conditions usually call for a test to avoid or stave off fatigue. If the test fails, the character acquires one (or even more) levels of fatigue. The four levels of fatigue are as follows.

Level 1 - Winded

The character has a –1 penalty to all tests and cannot Run or Charge.

Level 2 - Fatigued

The character has a –2 penalty to all tests, cannot Run or Charge, and moves at half normal Speed.

Level 3 - Exhausted

The character is nearly spent. Exhausted characters have a –3 penalty to all tests, move at half their normal Speed, and cannot Run or Charge. Additionally, if the character loses more than half their Health, they become unconscious for 1d6 hours, or until restored to greater than half their maximum Health. After regaining consciousness, they regain 10 + Constitution + level in Health.

Level 4 - Dying

The character's Health drops to 0 and the character begins dying (see **Health and Healing**, previously). If restored to at least 1 Health, the character becomes unconscious but stable, regaining consciousness in 1d6 hours at level 3 fatigue.

Recovering Fatigue

The main way that characters can recover from fatigue is by resting. Brief, extended and full periods of rest restore fatigue as follows:

- Taking a 5-minute breather is enough to recover from being Winded. You gain this benefit in addition to the normal amount of Health you recover from a breather.
- Resting for at least four hours, with only light activity (talking, reading, etc., but not standing or riding) allows you to recover from being Fatigued, so long as you also eat and drink something during that time.
- Sleeping for at least six hours allows you to recover from being Exhausted, in addition to the Health benefits of such rest.

To play in a *Blue Rose* game, you must first make a character, also known as a hero. This is your alter ego in the game, the persona you portray as you experience exciting and perilous adventures. Since your character is the focus of your play experience, making the right one for you is important. If you end up with a hero you find unappealing or who isn't fun to play, your enjoyment of the game is lessened. So don't be afraid to take some time and put some thought into creating your character. This chapter explains the process and provides examples so you can see how it's done. When you are finished, you'll have a *Blue Rose* hero ready to play.

Before you start making a character, you will need a character sheet or a piece of paper to make notes. This is a record of your hero and you use it to keep track of your various abilities and powers. You'll find a blank character sheet in the back of this book. You can also download a printable electronic version of the character sheet from *greenronin.com*.

Making a Character in 10 Easy Steps

Making a *Blue Rose* character is a process you can complete in ten easy steps. The steps are listed here, and the rest of the chapter covers each one in greater detail.

Character Creation Sequence

1. Come up with a character concept. This is a rough idea of the sort of hero you'd like to play.
2. Determine abilities. These are your character's core physical and mental attributes.
3. Choose a race. Your character can be a human, night person, sea-folk, vata (either the "light" vata'an or "dark" vata'sha), or one of the rhydan (intelligent, awakened animals).
4. Determine background. Your background is where your hero came from and what influenced their early learning experiences.
5. Choose a class. This is your character's calling in life. You can choose adept, expert, or warrior.
6. Pick your character's important equipment.
7. Calculate Defense and Speed. Both are important in combat encounters.
8. Pick a name. Every hero needs a good name!
9. Choose your character's Goals and persona. They help give your character personality.
10. Determine your hero's Relationships. These are important connections to other characters and groups which motivate and inspire your character.

Character Concept

Before you sit down to make a character, you should learn a little about the setting you'll be playing in. You may want to read **Chapters 1–3** to get a feel for the world of Aldea and the kinds of characters and stories found there. You can also ask your Narrator and fellow players for possible character concepts, particularly if they know the kinds of protagonists you like to play. Once you have a basic grasp of the setting, you can start thinking about what kind of character you want to develop. You'll make the three most important choices—race, background, and class—in steps 3 to 5 of character creation, but before you get there, it's a good idea to come up with a basic concept. This can be quite broad to start with; the process of character creation will help you focus and refine it.

When coming up with a character concept, remember one of the conceits of the game is your character begins as a relatively unknown adventurer. You don't get to start play as the ruler of a nation or a master adept. You have to earn your honors with deeds, and you can be sure there will be a price. So start thinking about who your hero is and how they became an adventurer. Here are some example character concepts:

- Urchin raised on the streets who'll do anything to survive.
- Free spirit who fled from a life dominated by family or professional pressures for a life of adventure.
- Young farmer who wants to travel and see the world.
- Child of a disgraced knight who wants to return honor to the family name.
- Cynical mercenary who trusts little but coin.
- A seeker of forbidden knowledge who often acts before thinking.
- An artist seeking inspiration in dark and dangerous places.
- A refugee whose village was sacked and destroyed.
- A child of the forest more comfortable around animals than people.
- Scion of a merchant family who wants more from life than ledger books and counting coins.

Example

Nicole and her friends are starting a Blue Rose campaign, so she needs to make a character. After talking over the setting with the group, Nicole decides the Lich King of Kern executed her character's parents as part of a political purge prior to his own downfall. Her character lived as a fugitive and refugee for years and now yearns for justice and vengeance in equal measure against the dark powers of Kern.

Abilities

Your character is defined by nine abilities: **Accuracy**, **Communication**, **Constitution**, **Dexterity**, **Fighting**, **Intelligence**, **Perception**, **Strength**, and **Willpower**. Taken together, these abilities map out your character's strengths and weaknesses. You determine your abilities randomly by rolling dice, giving each one a numeric rating ranging from –2 to 4. A –2 is quite poor, while a 4 is outstanding; 1 is an average rating. The higher the ability, the better. During play, your abilities can increase as you gain experience and learn how to better harness your natural aptitudes.

Abilities are a key component of the game and you'll be using them frequently. You'll find it useful to understand the nature of each ability, so descriptions of them follow:

- **Accuracy** represents your character's physical precision and skill with finesse and ranged weapons, such as rapiers and bows.
- **Communication** covers your character's social skills, personal interactions, and ability to deal with others.
- **Constitution** is your character's overall health, fortitude, and resistance to harm.
- **Dexterity** encompasses your character's agility, coordination, and quickness.
- **Fighting** is your skill at combat with heavier weapons, such as axes and spears.
- **Intelligence** is a measure of your character's smarts, knowledge, and education.
- **Perception** covers all the senses and the ability to notice and interpret things.
- **Strength** is your character's sheer muscle power and the ability to apply it.
- **Willpower** encompasses mental toughness, discipline, and confidence.

Determining Abilities

You roll three 6-sided dice to determine your starting abilities. Roll all three and add them together to get a result. If you roll 3, 4, and 6, for example, your result would be 13 (3 + 4 + 6 = 13).

On your character sheet, you'll notice a list of abilities. Starting at the top, make a dice roll for each one, and consult the **Determining Abilities** table to figure out your starting ability. A roll of 11 on the chart, for example, means the ability's starting score is 1. Continue this process until all nine abilities have starting scores.

When you are done, you may swap any two abilities. This gives you a chance to customize your character a little bit.

Ability Options

The character creation rules were designed with the beginner in mind. Random elements make the process easier and faster because they cut down on decision making. If you have some experience with roleplaying games, or just want more control when determining your abilities, you can use one of the following two options for determining abilities, with the Narrator's consent.

Option 1: Arranging Abilities

You roll your abilities randomly, as described. However, you can assign the results as you wish, so you can pick which rating goes with which ability. Instead of rolling in the ability order of the character sheet, you simply roll nine times on the Determining Abilities table and note the results on a piece of scratch paper. Then you assign each rating to the ability of your choice.

Option 2: Buying Abilities

Option 1 provides you with more power over your character's starting abilities, but some players want total control. In this option, your character's abilities start at 0 and you get twelve advancements to increase them. Each advancement you spend raises an ability by +1, but no ability can be greater than 3. You must spend all twelve advancements. Races and backgrounds then modify these starting ratings as normal. Note that this option does not allow you to make some abilities worse so you have more advancements to spend on others. Characters using this option have no abilities below 0, the default starting value.

Determining Abilities

3d6 Roll	Starting Ability	3d6 Roll	Starting Ability	3d6 Roll	Starting Ability
3	–2	8	0	14	2
4	–1	9	1	15	3
5	–1	10	1	16	3
6	0	11	1	17	3
7	0	12	2	18	4
		13	2		

Example

Nicole rolls for her character's abilities. She rolls 3d6 and gets a 10. Looking at the character sheet, Nicole sees this gives her character a starting score of 1 on her first ability (Accuracy). She makes 8 more dice rolls, getting 7, 13, 10, 13, 8, 14, 13, and 16. Her character's starting abilities are thus Accuracy 1, Communication 0, Constitution 2, Dexterity 1, Fighting 2, Intelligence 0, Perception 2, Strength 2, and Willpower 3. She then has the option of switching two of her scores. Nicole decides to swap Strength and Willpower, so she ends up with a Strength 3 and Willpower 2.

Ability Focuses

A focus is an area of expertise within a larger ability. While Intelligence as a whole determines how smart your character is, for example, the Heraldry focus indicates a special knowledge of coats of arms and the nobility. In game system terms, if you have a focus, your ability is effectively +2 greater than normal when working within that specialty. This is explained in greater detail in **Chapter 1: Gameplay Basics**.

Ability focuses (or just focuses for short) are one of the ways to make your character unique. There may be another warrior in your group, but your focuses can be completely different. You don't need to worry about choosing focuses now; that happens later in the character creation process. Your character will get access to focuses through backgrounds, classes, and talents. For more information about ability focuses, see **Chapter 3: Focuses, Talents, and Specializations**.

Characters & Race

In both the *Blue Rose* game and in the world of Aldea the term "race" is essentially the same as "species," referring to whether someone is human, vata, rhydan, and so forth. Cosmetic differences in appearance like skin color, facial features, hair and eye color, and so forth tend to be unnoteworthy. The Great Kingdom was tremendously cosmopolitan, bringing together people from all over the world, and the Empire of Thorns that succeeded it often forced people together out of need, as well as capturing and forcibly relocating them, such that matters of mere appearance are unimportant for most modern people in Aldis and the surrounding lands.

As such, your character can have virtually any appearance or features you want. The various cultural backgrounds describe what humans native to that region commonly look like, but there is no requirement to abide by this, nor is it particularly remarkable to the people living there.

Mixed Heritage Characters

The humanoid peoples of Aldea are capable of having offspring together, and such mixed heritage characters use the following rule: Choose one race that is dominant. The character gains all the benefits and modifiers of that race, but rather than rolling twice on the dominant race's Benefits table, roll once on that table and once on the Benefits table for the character's other race.

Example

Steve wants to play a character who is the child of human and sea-folk parents. He decides that human is the character's dominant race, and applies the human modifiers, but he only rolls once on the Human Benefits table, rolling the character's other benefit on the Sea-Folk Benefits table.

Race

You can choose from one of five races of people for *Blue Rose* characters: human, night person, rhydan, sea-folk, or vata. Your choice of race modifies one or more of your abilities, gives you one or more focuses, determines the languages your character can speak and write, and possibly provides other modifiers as well. Certain modifiers apply generically to all characters of a particular race, plus you also generate two more modifiers by rolling on a random table.

Example

Nicole considers the various races, but decides to stick with human for her first character. She can add +1 to any one of her character's abilities and then choose between two focuses: Dexterity (Riding) or Constitution (Swimming). She decides on Swimming, and considers that maybe her character lived on the coast or the islands.

Human

Humans are the most common people on Aldea, even in cosmopolitan Aldis. Human adaptability has allowed them to spread far and wide across the world, inhabiting lands alongside all the other peoples and making new homes for themselves in the harshest environments. Because they are so widespread, humans also have the most diverse range of cultures, with the other peoples managing to maintain a degree of sameness in their communities due to their smaller and more tight-knit nature. The major lands and cultures of Aldea described in *Blue Rose* include the following.

Aldis, Kingdom of the Blue Rose

The people of Aldis, the Kingdom of the Blue Rose, are the most diverse, accepting, and well-educated in all the known lands, and have worked hard to achieve all of these things. Their ancestors overthrew the tyrannical rule of the Sorcerer Kings with the aid of the rhydan and the spirit known as the Golden Hart. Now a sovereign chosen by the Golden Hart rules over Aldis with the aid of nobles selected by rigorous testing and arcane proof of their goodwill using the legendary Blue Rose Scepter.

Aldins tend to have dark, often wavy or curly, hair and brown eyes. Hazel, green, gray, and golden eyes are common, especially among those with arcane talents. These are generalizations, since the population of the Aldin heartland is so diverse that someone born and raised there could have almost any appearance.

Choose to play an Aldin if you're looking for a good and noble character who believes in fairness and compassion.

The Forest Folk of the Pavin Weald

The forest folk of northern Aldis learned to survive in the vast woodland of the Pavin Weald and its surrounding

lands from their allies, the rhy-wolves. The forest folk have keen senses and a way with animals. A talent for animism arcana is also common among them. They tend to have blond or reddish hair and fair complexions. Their men are often heavily bearded and have abundant body hair. Brown, blue, and golden eyes are the most common, with the latter being seen as a sign of "wolf-kin," who usually have the Animism talent.

Choose to play one of the Forest Folk for wilderness skills, kinship with animals, and fierce survival instincts.

Islanders of the Southern Shores

Living on the southern shores and islands of Aldis and the Scatterstar Archipelago, islanders often learn to swim before they can walk, and are adept at avoiding hazards and making do with the resources available to them. They tend to be a bit stockier and darker skinned than other Aldins, tanned and often weathered by a life on the water. Blue, green, or blue-green eyes are common, and some islanders have bluish, greenish, or golden tints to their hair or skin from a trace of sea-folk heritage.

Choose to play an islander for familiarity with swimming and sailing, and the combination of a strong work ethic along with an ability to have fun.

The Theocracy of Jarzon

Citizens or refugees of a rigid theocracy, Jarzoni quickly learn to control their outward emotions so as not to slight Purist priests, who teach their doctrine to every Jarzoni child. Jarzoni are generally light skinned and sometimes freckled. Brown, blond, and red hair are common, and redheaded Jarzoni often possess arcane talents (making it a mark of pride or shame, depending on one's perspective). Brown, blue, green, and gray eyes are common. Albinos are slightly more common in Jarzon than elsewhere, perhaps tied to some distant vata ancestry. Such pure white coloration is considered auspicious by Purist priests. Since albinos usually have arcane talent, they are often inducted into the priesthood.

Choose to play a character from Jarzon for a zealous crusader for the light, someone especially devoted to family, or a rebel against the doctrines of the strict Theocracy of the Purist Church.

The Kingdom of Kern

The humans of Kern learned the necessities of survival under the cruel yoke and lash of the Lich King. They understand the value of subtlety and cooperation, and those who survive past childhood are toughened by their hard life. Kerns descend from a hardy mountain stock, so they tend to be tough and wiry. Dark hair and eyes are common, as is pale skin—or at least a pallor compared to normal skin tone, since many Kerns live and work at night and rarely see the sun even during the day, given the almost continuous pall hanging over their homeland.

Sex, Gender & Orientation

Consider the sex, gender, and sexual or romantic orientation of your character: relationships of all kinds play important roles in *Blue Rose*, so these are things you'll want to know about your character. People in Aldea are quite diverse, just as they are in the real world, and your character is not limited to the same sex, gender, or orientation as you. Indeed, roleplaying is a great opportunity to vicariously experience what it's like to be someone else!

You can find much more information about matters of sex, gender, love, romance, and relationships in Aldis and the rest of Aldea in the setting chapters of this book, including the *laevvel*—people of non-binary gender, *caria daunen*—attracted primarily to people of the same sex—and *cepia luath*—people attracted primarily to people of a different sex. Note than in Aldis in particular, people who are attracted to only one perceived sex or gender are an accepted minority.

Choose the play a character from Kern for a tough hero who has seen and survived some terrible things, and knows full well the value of peace, prosperity, and freedom, but may also bit a bit bitter or scarred by life.

The Matriarchy of Lar'tya

Some distance from the shores of Aldis lie the tropical volcanic islands of the Matriarchy of Lar'tya. The people of the Matriarchy are divided into strict cultural castes. Some of the middle caste look much like the Aldin refugees from which they are descended, while the upper and lower castes, descendants of the native inhabitants of the islands, have dark brown skin, kinked or curly black hair, and brown or golden eyes.

Although on friendly terms with Aldis, Lar'tyans are sometimes baffled by the Blue Rose Kingdom's egalitarian attitudes, and have their own cultural notions about people's proper roles in life, based on their status at birth.

Play someone from the Matriarchy if you want an explorer or merchant far from home, someone confused or fascinated by the foreign ways of people in Aldis and the surrounding lands.

The Riders of Rezea

The proud people of the plains of Rezea are born to the saddle and learn to live off the land that is their birthright. Their tempers are as infamous as their skill at arms is legendary. Their hawk-like profiles add to their fierce reputation. They hold horses sacred and breed the finest in all the land. The rhy-horses are their allies, and the bond-mates of the greatest riders.

Most Rezeans are deeply bronzed by their outdoor life, and they tend to have straight black hair, worn long and occasionally braided. They typically have dark eyes, although some mixing with other peoples, particularly along the Aldin borderlands, has led to lighter eyes and hair in some Rezean people.

Play a Rezean if you want a character who is an excellent rider and good with horses, or an adept who is one of the witches of the Rezean clans.

The Roamers

Wandering in their brightly painted wagons, Roamers are a rootless, free-spirited folk, known for their love of life, dance, and sometimes mischief. Their ancient homeland was devastated by the rise and fall of the Empire of Thorns, so now the roads and their caravans are their homes. They are expert traders and can charm many folk out of a few coins. The gift of visions and second sight is common among them.

Roamers tend to be slighter than Aldins, with similar olive skin but curlier hair. Black or chestnut hair are most common, along with black or brown eyes, although hazel and green eyes are known, particularly among Roamers with the Visionary talent, or "the Sight," as they call it. However, given their tendency to occasionally adopt outsiders into their caravans, a Roamer may have almost any appearance.

Play a Roamer if you want a widely-traveled hero with a roguish reputation, particularly someone agile or quick, or an adept gifted with visionary arcana.

Playing a Human

If you choose to play a human, modify your character as follows:

- Add +1 to one ability of your choice.
- Pick one of the following ability focuses: Dexterity (Riding) or Constitution (Swimming).
- Your Speed is equal to 10 + Dexterity (minus armor penalty, if applicable).
- Roll twice on the **Human Benefits** table for two additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, reroll until you get something different.

Human Benefits

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Intelligence
3-4	Focus: Constitution (Stamina)
5	Focus: Perception (Searching)
6	Focus: Communication (Persuasion)
7-8	+1 Constitution
9	Focus: Communication (Deception)
10-11	Focus: Accuracy (Brawling)
12	+1 Strength

Night People

Night people were originally creations of the Sorcerer Kings. They were made, like all shadowspawn, as a slave race. Their masters made them brutishly strong, but not overly bright. For generations, they worked primarily as laborers and soldiers for the Sorcerer Kings, knowing no other life.

During the Great Rebellion, many night people were slain or driven out of the newly liberated lands. Since then, night people are found in Kern—where they are subjects of its dark Regents, much like their ancestors—or less often in Aldis, where some night people sought asylum and freedom. Night people are largely accepted in Aldin society—proof of the kingdom's legendary tolerance. Night people nonetheless suffer some prejudice there and elsewhere because of their origins. Although some believe night people are inherently corrupt, that is not the case, and they are capable of choosing between their Destiny and their Fate like anyone else, which actually leaves some hope for other shadowspawn twisted by the Sorcerer Kings.

Their creators cared little about aesthetics when they made the night people, who are like monsters from a children's tale. They are taller than humans, with stocky, muscular builds; sloped foreheads; and beady, yellow eyes. Their skin is ashen gray, and their hair black and coarse. Small tusks jut from their lower jaw, and they prefer a diet of meat. Rumors of them eating the flesh of people are not true—that is a taste night people do not share with other shadowspawn.

Play a night person if you want a straightforward, tough, strong character who tends to be handy in a fight. Although night people have a reputation as brutes—and warriors—they can belong to any class.

Playing a Night Person

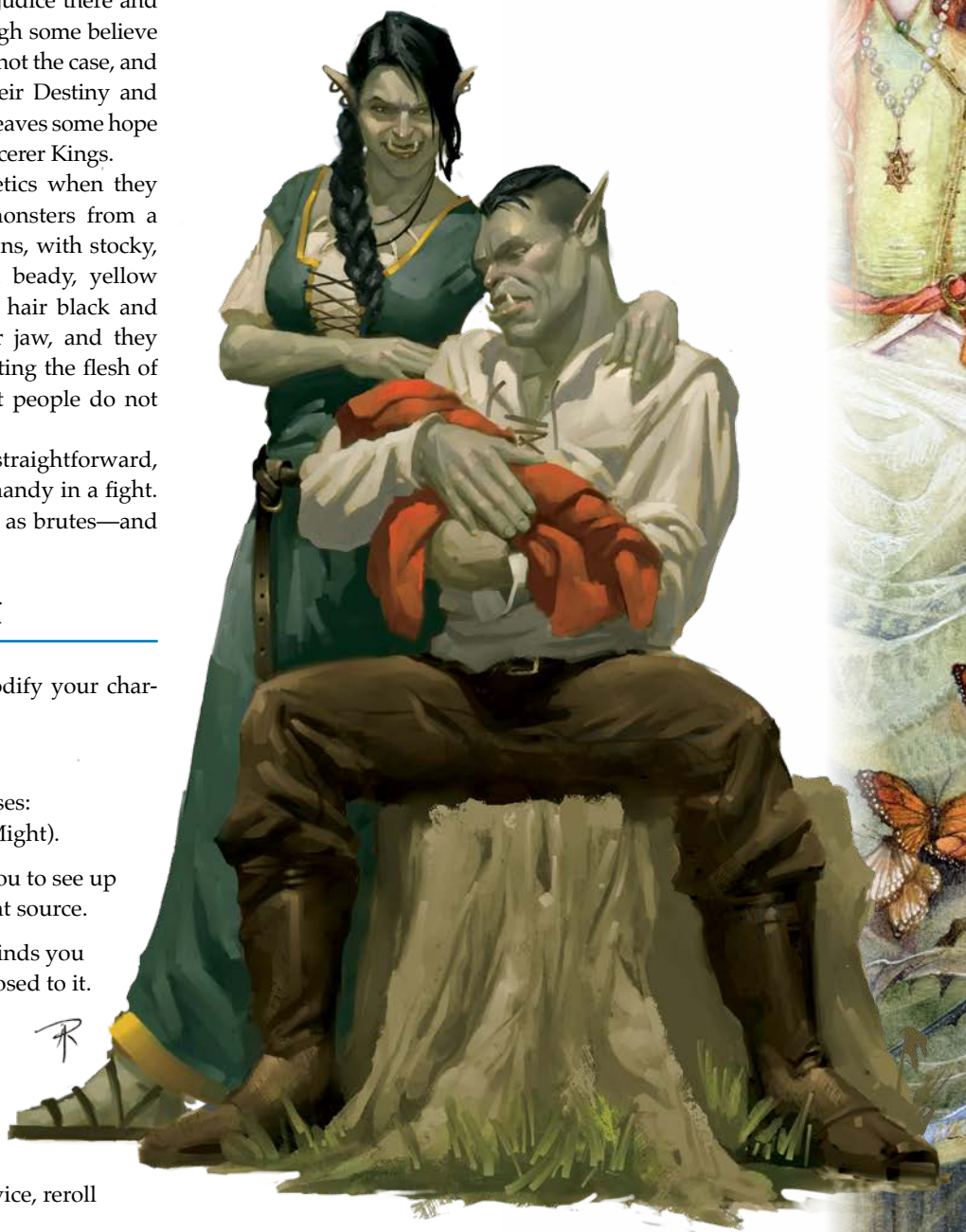
If you choose to play a night person, modify your character as follows:

- Add +1 to your Strength ability.
- Pick one of the following ability focuses: Constitution (Stamina) or Strength (Might).
- You have Dark Sight, which allows you to see up to 30 yards in darkness without a light source.
- Bright light (equal to full daylight) blinds you for one round when you are first exposed to it.
- Your Speed is equal to 10 + Dexterity (minus armor penalty, if applicable).
- Roll twice on the **Night Person Benefits** table for two additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, reroll until you get something different.

Night Person Benefits

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Constitution
3-4	Focus: Perception (Smelling)
5	Focus: Dexterity (Stealth)
6	Focus: Strength (Intimidation)
7-8	+1 Fighting
9	Weapons Group: Bludgeons*
10-11	Focus: Accuracy (Brawling)
12	+1 Willpower

* If the class you choose provides this already, you can take the focus Fighting (Bludgeons) instead.



Rhydan

The most unusual people of Aldea, rhydan are animals gifted with intelligence and arcane abilities. Indeed, their collective name is from two ancient Aldin root words meaning "thinking animal." Rhydan "awaken" from otherwise ordinary beasts of the wild, gaining intelligence, awareness, and arcane talents—all the gifts of possessing a soul from the Eternal Dance. Some of them are quite fond of humans, others more wary, but in general, rhydan are cautious in their dealings with the "two-legged peoples" (including vata, although the sea-folk are close allies of rhy-fen).

Rhydan are close to nature and its cycles. Since they are relatively few in number and scattered across different species of animals, rhydan do not have the kind of civilizations or communities other people do. Some continue to dwell largely in the wilderness, while others come together in small groups, or choose to dwell in the settlements of other peoples, particularly in Aldis.

The "nobility" of the rhydan are the fierce griffons and the graceful and wise unicorns, which do not arise from the ranks of common animals, but breed true amongst their own. Reclusive, they are not suitable as characters.

Rhydan awaken from a number of different animal species, but the most common of them known in Aldis and the surrounding lands include the following:

Rhy-bears

Rhy-bears tend to be relatively small bears with black, brown, or golden fur, most common in the mountainous regions of Aldea and places like the woodlands of the Pavin Weald. They tend to be thoughtful dreamers and loners, although willing to communicate and even bond with humanoids.

Rhy-cats

Rhy-cats are the size of leopards, with coloring and temperaments similar to those of Siamese cats. They are the most common rhydan in Aldis, and the most closely associated with humanoids, although rhy-cats have a reputation as both aloof and potentially dangerous when encountered in the wild.

Rhy-fen

Rhy-fen are awakened dolphins, with a long history of friendship and cooperation with sea-folk and islanders. Both people consider rhy-fen their peers and allies; harming or killing any dolphin is just as serious a crime as attacking a member of their own communities. Sea-folk in particular often live together with pods of dolphins and rhy-fen and have bonded companions among them.

Rhy-horses

Masters of the plains, rhy-horses look much like unawakened horses and have the same ranges of coloration, although pale and dappled hides, star-shaped markings, and blue eyes are more common for them. Rhy-horses are fiercely independent; they allow no one except a bonded companion to ride them on a regular basis. Rhy-horses are most common on the plains of Rezea. They are long-time allies of the Rezean people, who revere the "lords of the plains" and help protect them from harm.

Rhydan on the Road

Rhydan on the road, or swimming through the oceans, face untold dangers as they seek out their purpose or when about on a task. Rhydan characters, unlike humanoid heroes, have the problem of being considered "other" because of their inherent arcane nature. In many parts of Aldea, rhydan are thought of just like any member of the community, afforded all the protections and respect due any person. Still, in places like Kern or Jarzon, a rhydan who awakens to their full psychic abilities can find their lives in danger. These rhydan must often undertake the grueling journey across the Ice-Binder Mountains or the Veran Marsh to escape. It's during these harrowing crossings that a rhydan's wisdom, wit, power, and determination are tested as they evade Jarzoni Purists, Kern sorcerers, or simply the arcanely-twisted denizens of these regions.

Even the lands that respect their citizenship harbor danger from unscrupulous people, or just the hazards nature can present. During those times, the combined force of a company of rhydan together may help weather whatever troubles present themselves. But in some places, the larger the company of rhydan, the more trouble they attract. Though some rhydan can be mistaken for ordinary animals, nobody mistakes a griffon, drake, or unicorn as anything but what they are. It's during these times that rhydan may overcome their natural shyness and wariness of the two-legged races to seek aid along the way. That can lead to amazing friendships, as well as the most important connection between a rhydan and a two-legged: the rhy-bond (see **Rhy-Bonding** in the **Relationships** section of this chapter for more information).

Rhy-wolves

The most reclusive of the rhydan, rhy-wolves are usually found in the woods of the Pavin Weald. They live in tight-knit packs, and a friend of theirs is a friend for life, so they do not bond easily. They can be found in the company of forest folk in the Pavin Weald, and some packs have adopted whole forest folk communities and live together with them. Rhy-wolves are eminently practical, sometimes ruthless, but also proud and honorable.

Playing a Rhydan

Playing a rhydan character can be a challenge, but is a great opportunity if you like a challenge, or are interested in playing a totally different kind of hero. Rhydan have psychic gifts, and animal senses and abilities, but are also caught between their animal and intelligent natures, no longer entirely belonging to either. They tend to form very close bonds with those people they do trust, sometimes even a strong psychic connection known as the rhy-bond. See **Rhy-Bonding** in the **Relationships** section of this chapter for details about it.

Although rhydan make good adepts because of their psychic talent, they can belong to any class.

If you choose to play a rhydan, develop your character as follows:

- Pick the basic animal type your hero awakened from using the Rhydan Type table. This provides modifiers to certain statistics, base Speed, natural attacks, and special powers your character will have access to.
- You gain your choice of the Intelligence (Natural Lore) focus or any one Perception focus.
- You are trained in the Natural Weapons group. This allows you to use any natural attacks you have without penalty. Any rhydan without natural attacks uses the Brawling weapons group like non-rhydan characters. The exception to this is the rare primate rhydan, who gains Brawling and normal unarmed attacks, but must have any weapons it wields specially made or it suffers a –1 penalty to attack rolls.
- You do not begin with, but now have special access to, focuses relating to your natural attacks. Each attack has its own focus, so a bear with Claw and Bite natural attacks may select a Fighting (Claw) and an Accuracy (Bite) focus when the time comes.
- You gain the Novice degree of the Psychic talent, but must choose Psychic Contact as your third arcanum (along with Psychic Shield and Second Sight). You may improve the talent normally.
- You do not choose a background (see **Background**, following) as rhydan do not mature in humanoid society.

The Rhydan Perspective

Rhydan characters see the world in a different way from two-legged heroes. For one thing, all rhydan are psychic by nature, which gives them a more insightful and potentially understanding nature. Though they must abide by the rules of ethics and civility when it comes to the privacy of others, rhydan are inherently more attuned to the thoughts and feelings of those around them. Additionally, their Psychic Contact ability permits them to communicate across long distances, allowing them to find solace and support no matter where they are, even if they appear to be alone.

Rhydan are also born with an understanding of their place in the world and the responsibility to guard it against Shadow. They find they must sometimes come between the natural world and that of humanoid civilization, which can become divorced from the world's cycles. It is a particular misfortune, then, when a rhydan falls victim to their Fate and turns to Shadow, which does happen sometimes.

Rhydan Type

Rhydan Type	Ability Bonuses	Base Speed	Natural Attacks*	Special Powers
Ape	+1 Con, +1 Dex, +2 Str	10	Unarmed as human	Hands
Badger	+2 Con, +1 Per, +1 Str	8	Bite 1d6+1, Claw 1d6	Tough (AR 1)
Bear	+3 Con, +3 Str	10	Bite 1d6+1, Claw 2d6	None
Boar	+2 Con, +2 Str	11	Gore 2d6	None
Cat	+2 Dex, +1 Per	12	Bite 1d6+1, Claw 1d6	Nightvision
Crocodile	+2 Con, +2 Str	8 (10 Swimming)	Bite 2d6	Tough Hide (AR 2)
Dog	+2 Con, +1 Dex	12	Bite 1d6+1	None
Dolphin	+1 Con, +1 Dex, +1 Str	10 (Swimming)	Slam 1d6	Echolocation, Hold Breath for Con × 10 minutes
Hawk/Owl	+2 Dex, +1 Per, –1 Str	14 (Flying)	Bite 1d6, Claw 1d6	Nightvision
Horse	+2 Con, +2 Str	14	Kick 1d6	None
Lizard	+2 Con, +1 Str	10	Bite 2d6	Nightvision
Raccoon	+2 Dex, +1 Per, –2 Str	10	Bite 1d6, Claw 1d3	Nightvision
Raven	+3 Dex, +1 Per, –2 Str	12 (Flying)	Bite 1d6, Claw 1d6	Nightvision, can speak
Snake	+2 Dex, +1 Per, +1 Str	8	Bite 1d6+1	Nightvision
Weasel	+3 Dex, +1 Per, –1 Str	10	Bite 1d6	Nightvision
Wolf	+1 Con, +1 Dex, +1 Per, +1 Str	12	Bite 1d6+1	Nightvision

*Bite, Slam, and Kick attacks use Accuracy to attack; Gore and Claw attacks use Fighting to attack

Note: Rhy-snakes are non-venomous, midsize constrictors; rhy-lizards are larger komodo-like creatures; and rhy-bears are smaller examples of their species with coloration that ranges from black to golden.

Other Rhydan

While the rhydan character options have expanded from the original *Blue Rose*, players may still desire to play other awakened animals not detailed here. In this case, consult the animal entries in **Chapter 12: Adversaries** and work with your Narrator to create a new rhydan template to make the character. Each rhydan type should have ability modifiers, base Speed, natural attacks, and special powers of their own—though not every animal will have notable ratings in all these areas.

- You are limited to performing the kinds of physical manipulations an animal of your type can achieve. This usually means grabbing things with your mouth and pushing or knocking them over with your body or limbs, but no fine manipulation requiring fingers or an opposable thumb.
- Your size—large or small—and your animal shape limits your movement and actions in logical ways. Larger rhydan cannot ride horses, travel in carriages, or even fit through some doors and windows. Smaller rhydan lack the size and leverage to push open heavy gates or carry large objects, regardless of their comparative physical abilities. The Narrator may modify the target number of tests where your size or shape is a great hindrance or help.
- You can only vocalize sounds an animal of your type can, which means you cannot speak out loud, although you can communicate through Psychic Contact. You can still understand spoken languages you hear normally.
- You are considered skilled in the Brawling weapons group and in the use of your natural weapons (claws, teeth, hooves, etc.) but gain no training in other weapons groups, regardless of your chosen class.
- Roll twice on the **Rhydan Benefits** table for two additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, reroll until you get something different.

Rhydan Benefits

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Dexterity
3-4	Focus: Perception (Smelling)
5	Focus: Dexterity (Stealth)
6	Focus: Strength (Intimidation)
7-8	+1 Perception
9	Focus: Perception (Psychic)
10-11	Focus: Accuracy (Natural Weapon, pick one)
12	+1 Willpower

Sea-Folk

Sea-folk are at home on both land and in the water, particularly saltwater. Looking like androgynous, sleek-bodied humans, sea-folk have a greenish or bluish tint to their skin, which tends to be tanned and varies in hue, particularly if they have human ancestry. Hair color is typically green, blue, golden blond, or occasionally black or silver, while eye color is green, blue, gray, gold, or black.

Sea-folk can interbreed with humans, and their offspring are either human or sea-folk (see the **Mixed Heritage Characters** sidebar, previously). Humans with sea-folk ancestry, which describes many islanders, sometimes have sea-folk children as well, and although it is rare for sea-folk with some measure of human ancestry to have a fully human child, it does happen.

Choose to play a sea-folk character if you want someone who is quick, perceptive, and completely at home in the water. Sea-folk make excellent swashbucklers, spirit dancers, and water shaping adepts.

Playing a Sea-Folk

If you choose to play a sea-folk, modify your character as follows:

- Add +1 to your Constitution ability and add the Constitution (Swimming) focus.
- You can swim at your Speed as a minor action (twice your Speed as a major action) without the need for an ability test, unless you are swimming in rough water, against a strong current, or in other difficult conditions.
- You have Dark Sight, meaning you are able to see up to 20 yards in darkness (including deep under water) without a light source.
- You can hold your breath for 60 rounds, plus 6 rounds x your Constitution ability.
- Sea-folk dehydrate more easily than land-dwellers. You must be immersed in water once per day or consume twice as much water as a normal human. A sea-folk with no immersion and who is limited to normal human water consumption or less gains a level of fatigue each day and cannot recover from fatigue until they are properly hydrated (see **Fatigue and Resting** in **Chapter 1**).
- Your Speed is equal to 10 + Dexterity (minus armor penalty, if applicable).
- Roll twice on the **Sea-Folk Benefits** table for two additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, reroll until you get something different.

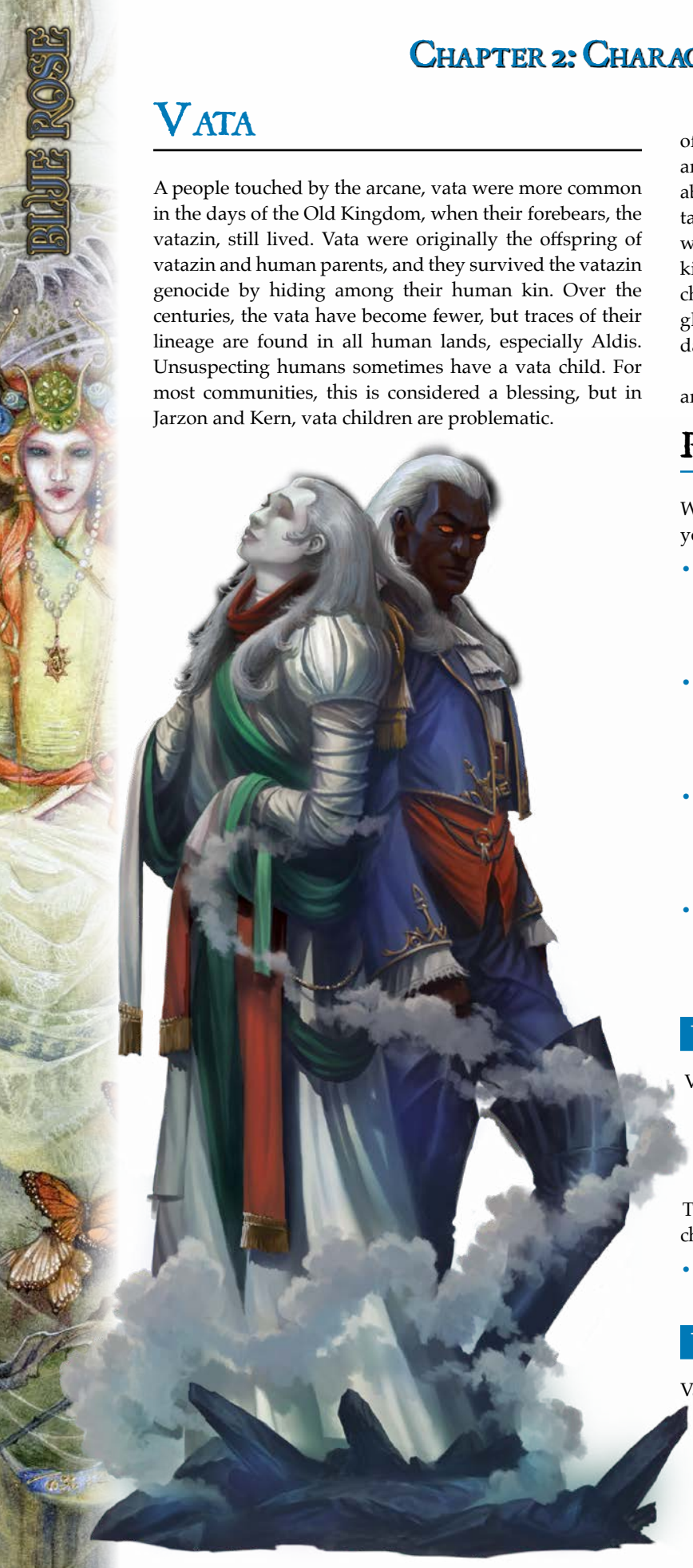
Sea-Folk Benefits

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Accuracy
3-4	Focus: Intelligence (Natural Lore)
5	Focus: Perception (Hearing)
6	Weapons Group: Polearms*
7-8	+1 Dexterity
9	Focus: Intelligence (Historical Lore)
10-11	Focus: Dexterity (Acrobatics)
12	+1 Perception

* If the class you choose provides this already, you can take the focus Fighting (Polearms) instead.

Vata

A people touched by the arcane, vata were more common in the days of the Old Kingdom, when their forebears, the vatazin, still lived. Vata were originally the offspring of vatazin and human parents, and they survived the vatazin genocide by hiding among their human kin. Over the centuries, the vata have become fewer, but traces of their lineage are found in all human lands, especially Aldis. Unsuspecting humans sometimes have a vata child. For most communities, this is considered a blessing, but in Jarzon and Kern, vata children are problematic.



The Jarzoni accept vata'an children, but Purist priests often treat them harshly if they use their arcane gifts and are not preparing for the priesthood. Vata'sha are simply abused—if not immolated—for they are considered tainted by Shadow. In Kern, vata'an are killed outright, while vata'sha are taken to be raised in the service of the kingdom. Some Kernish parents manage to hide their vata children, but rarely for long. Vata are sometimes smuggled out of Kern with the help of Aldin envoys, but it is a dangerous and difficult undertaking.

Choose to play a vata if you want a hero with natural arcane potential, perhaps somewhat misunderstood.

Playing a Vata

Whether you choose to play a vata'an or vata'sha, modify your character as follows:

- You gain the Novice degree in one arcane talent of your choice: Animism, Healing, Meditative, Psychic, Shaping, or Visionary. See **Chapter 3: Focuses, Talents & Specializations** for further details.
- Your Constitution ability is considered 2 points higher for any of the recovery formulas given under **Health and Healing** in **Chapter 1**, meaning you more quickly recover from loss of Health.
- Vata mature at the same rate as humans and other humanoids, but age at about one-third the rate of humans after reaching maturity, meaning venerable vata can easily live over two centuries.
- Roll twice on the **Vata Benefits** table for two additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, reroll until you get something different.

Vata'an

Vata'an, or "true vata," have silvery white hair and violet, pale blue, or pale green eyes. They tend to have slim builds and a couple of inches of height over the average human. Vata'an, both male and female, tend to wear their straight hair long, at least down to their shoulders. They typically dress in the styles of their homeland. If you choose to play a vata'an, modify your character as follows:

- You have Dark Sight, and are able to see up to 20 yards in darkness without a light source.

Vata'sha

Vata'sha, or "dark vata," appeared as a result of the Sorcerer Kings' experiments on vata'an. They look much like vata'an, except their skin is night-black. Some people have taken this as evidence the vata'sha are tainted by Shadow. Despite their sorcerous origin, there is no innate corruption within them. If you choose to play a vata'sha, modify your character as follows:

- You have Dark Sight, which permits you to see up to 30 yards in darkness without a light source.
- Bright light (equal to full daylight) blinds you for one round when you are first exposed to it.

Vata Benefits

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Communication
3-4	**Focus:** Intelligence (Cultural Lore)
5	**Focus:** Perception (Seeing)*
6	**Weapons Group:** Light Blades**
7-8	+1 Accuracy
9	**Focus:** Intelligence (Historical Lore)
10-11	**Focus:** Communication (Persuasion)
12	+1 Perception

*If you chose Psychic as your arcane talent, you can make this Perception (Psychic) instead.

** If the class you choose provides this already, you can take the focus Accuracy (Light Blades) instead.

Background

Your character did not spring from nothing. Just like real life, upbringing and circumstances shape personality and abilities. This is represented by backgrounds in *Blue Rose*. They determine where your character came from. Your character receives one focus chosen from those available to the background, and background also determines the languages your character understands. But just as importantly, the background and choice of focus should serve as inspiration for your character's history and personality.

Backgrounds in *Blue Rose* are divided by nationality or culture. This represents the primary culture or locale that shaped the hero's life before play begins. In the case of a character whose history spans multiple cultures or nations, pick one that best defines the character.

Example

Nicole is playing a Kernish refugee who has spent the last several years on the coast of Aldis. She could take an Aldin background, but she decides her character is still deeply affected by her character's Kernish upbringing and chooses a Kernish background instead.

Example

Jon is playing a Roamer adept whose family decided to break from tradition and settle in a small town in Aldis years ago. While his character still respects and embraces many Roamer customs, he has a stronger connection to Aldis and its culture and selects that as his adept's background.

Background Descriptions

The following descriptions give an overview of each background and which focuses and languages are attached to each. Choose one of these focuses as part of character creation. You can find more information about the nations and cultures mentioned here in later chapters.

Aldin

A meritocratic monarchy with a long and storied history, Aldis treasures freedom, education, and diversity. While far from free of strife or corruption, citizens are taught and socialized to be accepting and altruistic. Unfortunately, in rare cases this permissive environment can make it easier for harmful elements such as cults and sorcerers to hide within the nation's borders. To be Aldin is to be learned, passionate, and accepting—but at some risk.

- **Focuses:** Communication (Persuasion), Dexterity (Artisan), Intelligence (Cultural Lore), or Intelligence (Historical Lore)
- **Languages:** Aldin and one other of your choice.

Forest Folk

Whether dwelling deep in the Pavin Weald or hailing from some distant forest or jungle, forest folk maintain a constant juggling act in order to balance and safeguard their lives within the forest. They must learn to use their surroundings to build, expand, and survive. However, they also risk death or loss from the beasts and dangers of their land more than most. A forest fire or wounded creature is a grave threat in ways a city-dweller or sailor can never understand. To be a forest folk is to live in harmony with nature, but also to be hardened by the reality of life with the wild always outside your front door.

- **Focuses:** Constitution (Running), Dexterity (Crafting), Intelligence (Natural Lore), or Perception (Tracking)
- **Languages:** Aldin and one other of your choice.

Jarzoni

Known for theocratic strictness and religious-based integrity, Jarzoni culture can be hard for others to accept. Jarzonis take their faith and the stability of their nation very seriously, and most are raised to believe that the abuse of arcane powers can lead to great suffering. Jarzon tends to deal with nature, arcana, and other potentially useful yet dangerous concepts by fighting to dominate or resist them. This method keeps them safe, but makes them

Changing Focus

The focuses provided by backgrounds are suggestions and guidelines, not hard-and-fast requirements. As such they *always* bow to a good concept. A Kernish warrior who spent years as a warrior-slave in the Lich King's army might have picked up Intelligence (Military Lore) instead of the listed focuses for Kernish characters. The only general guideline is that arcana and weapons-based focuses are usually not part of a background. However, even this isn't set in stone. An Aldin child of master healers may learn Intelligence (Healer) as their background focus instead of one from the provided list, and the daughter of Jarzon's greatest sword-fighter may have picked up the Fighting (Heavy Blades) focus about the time she could walk—but remember, it will only be useful to her generally if she also has the Heavy Blades weapons group as well.

vulnerable to both stagnation and inflexible thinking. To be Jarzoni is to be strong and devoted, if sometimes uncompromising.

- **Focuses:** Communication (Etiquette), Intelligence (Historical Lore), Intelligence (Religious Lore), or Willpower (Faith)
- **Languages:** Aldin and one other of your choice.

Kernish

Living under the yoke of the Lich King and, later, his Regents, Kerns of all types are survivors. The poor must dodge work gangs, monsters, and the abusive upper classes just to stay alive. The wealthy and influential have it better, but they are nevertheless surrounded by rivals and inhuman creatures who seek their downfall. To be Kernish is to endure a land of death, treachery, darkness, and oppression by any means necessary.

- **Focuses:** Communication (Deception), Constitution (Stamina), Perception (Searching), or Strength (Intimidation)
- **Languages:** Aldin and one other of your choice.

Lar'tyan

Hailing from the caste-dominated matriarchy of Lar'tya, Lar'tyans are used to everything having its own purpose and place. The castes work together to make their nation strong and safe, but mobility and freedom are hindered by this tradition—something that grates on the more independent and egalitarian among them. These individuals often travel beyond Lar'tya, but their habits and traditions often come with them whether they like it or not. To be a Lar'tyan is to take strength from stability and tradition, but also to occasionally struggle with equality.

- **Focuses:** Communication (Etiquette), Dexterity (Crafting), Intelligence (Heraldry), or Willpower (Self-Discipline)
- **Languages:** Aldin and Lar'tyan.

Mariner

While most commonly representing the islanders of the Scatterstar Archipelago, this background can also be used for those who live on and by the sea, whether the port is in Jarzon, Aldis, or halfway around the world. Those raised to the life of a mariner develop their own subculture. Ships, taverns, and ports become more important than nations and land, with their own rules, customs, and laws. Mariners don't worry much about politics, though trade is their lifeblood and matters dearly to them. To be a mariner means the freedom of the sea, but also to be somewhat rootless.

- **Focuses:** Communication (Bargaining), Constitution (Swimming), Dexterity (Sailing), or Intelligence (Nautical Lore)
- **Languages:** Aldin and one other of your choice.

Outcast

Some do not fit in. Living outside other nations or cultures, they survive as hermits, refugees, or pariahs. Most outcasts are mistrusted by, or isolated from, their neighbors. Some outcasts deserve their status, having dabbled in sorcery or committed some crime. Others were cast out by fear and intolerance. In both cases, outcasts need to learn to live without the aid or responsibilities of a larger community. To be an outcast is to be alone and unbeholden to others, for good or ill.

- **Focuses:** Communication (Gambling), Dexterity (Stealth), Intelligence (Navigation), or Willpower (Courage)
- **Languages:** Aldin and one other of your choice.

Rezean

From a land of riders, hunters, and nomads, Rezeans seek to live in harmony with the natural world as both individuals and clans of strength and independence. There are few things as important to a Rezean as their clan, and even those who have left their home take the lessons, memories, and history of their people with them. These bonds give them strength, but they sometimes make their dealings with others about clan interests over personal goals somewhat fraught. To be Rezean is to be bold and daring, but also pragmatic and, at times, mercenary.

- **Focuses:** Constitution (Stamina), Dexterity (Riding), Intelligence (Navigation), or Willpower (Courage)
- **Languages:** Rezean and Aldin.

Roamer

A people lacking a homeland, the Roamers have made the roads of Aldea their homes. Nomads and wanderers, they live as merchants and entertainers. Roamers rarely stay in one place for long, instead preferring to travel from settlement to settlement in their wagons, only stopping to trade, rest, or out of necessity. To be a Roamer is to know a life of constant travel and adventure, but also to never have a solitary place to put down roots and call home.

- **Focuses:** Communication (Bargaining), Communication (Performance), Dexterity (Crafting), or Perception (Empathy)
- **Languages:** Faento (known colloquially as "Roamer") and Aldin.

Classes

If background is where you came from, then class is the path you are following. Classes are both heroic archetypes and frameworks for your character's advancement. You have your choice of three: adept, expert, and warrior. If you want a hero who can wield arcana, play an adept. If you want a character who is skilled or clever, play an expert. If you want one who can fight well, play a warrior.

Classes are quite broad by design. An expert could equally represent a thief with a penchant for burglary, a scout in a mercenary company, or a scholar serving as a diplomat and spy, to name but a few. Your class helps define what your character can do, but it's up to you to interpret how those capabilities fit with and reflect your character concept.

Example

Nicole decides she wants her character to be a warrior, someone who learned to fight and now uses those skills to protect friends and allies. She consults the warrior class entry and records her starting weapons groups and talents. She also rolls for her Health and adds her Constitution score, ending up with 35 (30 base plus Constitution of 2 and a 1d6 roll of 3). She gets to select two talents from the warrior talent list. She elects to take Weapon and Shield Style and Arcane Potential, making her exceptionally skilled at using a sword and shield in battle, as well as giving her a touch of arcana she can use to help herself and others in a pinch.

Your character starts at level 1, which means they are a novice adventurer. As characters complete adventures, they go up in level and gain access to new powers. There are a total of 20 levels in the game, with 1-5 roughly being "beginner" levels, 6-12 "middle" levels, 13 and above being "high" level, all the way up to the "epic" levels of 18 and beyond.

Other Backgrounds

Players and Narrators should feel free to create other backgrounds to suit their character concepts and the needs of the game. A background is really nothing more than a choice of ability focuses and two languages, usually including Aldin as the "common tongue" of the region of Aldea *Blue Rose* centers upon. You can easily invent backgrounds for subcultures or new lands or peoples introduced in your own series, or substitute any of the backgrounds from the *Fantasy AGE Basic Rulebook* for the cultural ones given in this chapter, if you wish.

Class Descriptions

Each class determines certain key features of your character. A class description includes the following elements:

Primary Abilities: A class has four primary abilities. These are the abilities most important to the class and the ones used most often.

Secondary Abilities: A class has five secondary abilities. These abilities are not as important to the class as the primary abilities, but all can be very useful.

Starting Health: Health is a measure of your character's fitness and well-being. Class choice determines starting Health.

Weapons Groups: Weapons are divided into groups and this entry tells you which ones your character is trained in wielding. For more information on weapons see the **Equipment** section of this chapter.

Class Powers: A class provides your character with a variety of special powers, such as ability focuses and talents. These powers are listed by level in each class description.

Gaining Levels

Characters gain levels in *Blue Rose* when they are awarded a level advancement after a major milestone or series event is reached, such as the end of an adventure or plot arc (see **Chapter 11**). However, sometimes advancement can occur during a session, especially if there is a lot of in-game downtime. When your character gains a level, four things happen immediately:

- Your character's Health increases. You gain 1d6 + Constitution at levels 1-10, and just your Constitution ability at levels 11-20.
- You get one advancement to spend on one ability (see **Ability Advancement**, following). When you gain an even-numbered level, you must spend it on a primary ability. When you gain an odd-numbered level, you must spend it on a secondary ability.
- You gain the class powers for your new level. You can find them listed in the class description.

- You can add one new ability focus. When you gain an even-numbered level, you must choose a focus from one of your primary abilities. When you gain an odd-numbered level, you must choose a focus from one of your secondary abilities. Starting at level 11, you can select a focus you already have and increase your bonus with that focus from +2 to +3.

When you go up a level, you may also want to review your Goals. Have any of them been achieved? Based on the events of the campaign, do you have any new ones? You can do this any time, of course, but leveling up is a convenient time to check in and reassess.

Example:

After her first adventure, Nicole's warrior advances a level. She gains another 1d6 + Constitution of Health, in this case 5 points. She can also increase one of her primary abilities. She chooses to increase her Fighting from 2 to 3. In addition, she receives an ability focus for one of her primary abilities, which she uses to add Fighting (Heavy Blades) to her character. As a second level warrior she also gains an additional ability focus taken from the list detailed in the warrior entry. She selects Intelligence (Military Lore) to reflect her character's growing knowledge of battle and tactics. Now leveled up, her warrior is ready to continue adventuring!

Ability Advancement

When characters gain a level, they get an ability advancement. For lower ranked abilities, this translates into a direct 1-to-1 increase, but as a character grows in ability, it becomes more costly to increase them. The exact number of advancements required to "bump" your ability rating up to the next number depends on the new rating you're trying to obtain. For abilities up to 5, it costs a single advancement. For abilities from 6 to 8, it costs two advancements. For abilities from 9 to 12, it costs three advancements. This is summarized in the accompanying table. You get no benefit from advancements spent until you've gained the new rating. You should obviously keep track of any advancements spent that have not yet increased the relevant ability rating.

Ability Advancements

New Ability Rating	Advancements Required
1 to 5	1
6 to 8	2
9 to 12	3

Note that some rhydan characters start with ability bonuses that may allow them to reach 6 and above in ability scores at character creation. They still must spend additional advancements to increase these abilities—they just get to those levels faster.

Adept

An adept is a wielder of arcane power, able to use arcana more easily and effectively than others. As an adept, you should stay away from close combat fighting unless otherwise specially trained—let the warriors handle that—and use your arcana to help your allies and hinder your enemies. The adept's focus on arcana means your martial training is limited, making it unusual for you to wear heavy armor or carry most weapons—though staves and other armaments useful in self-defense are common. Your access to arcana makes up for this, and a master adept is a powerful individual with a wide range of powers.

While adepts only start with a few arcana, they gain more over time. These ever-increasing options require some decision-making in play, as overuse of arcana can lead to fatigue. Furthermore, the risk of corruption through sorcery or other acts of corruption is greater with adepts than any other class. If you've never played a roleplaying game before, you might want to consider that before choosing this class. Whatever your experience, you'll want to read **Chapter 4: Arcana** to learn more about the rules and terms involving arcana.

Adepts gain specializations as they level up. These are detailed in **Chapter 3**.

Primary Abilities: Accuracy, Intelligence, Perception, and Willpower
Secondary Abilities: Communication, Constitution, Dexterity, Fighting, and Strength
Starting Health: 20 + Constitution + 1d6
Weapons Groups: Brawling and Staves

Class Powers

Adepts gain the following powers at the specified level:

Level 1

Arcane Training: You begin with two arcane talents at Novice rank. Arcane talents include: Animism, Arcane Training, Healing, Meditative, Shaping, Psychic, Visionary, or Wild Arcane.

Arcane Channeling: You may use the Skillful Channeling arcane stunt for 1 SP instead of its usual cost of 2, and when using the Powerful Channeling arcane stunt you treat the result as if you've spent +1 SP on it—although you must spend at least 1 SP to gain this bonus.

Starting Talent: You become a Novice in one of the following talents of your choice: Linguistics, Lore, Medicine, or Observation. See **Chapter 3** for more information.

Level 2

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Level 3

New Arcane Talent: You become a Novice in an arcane talent, or gain a degree in one you already have.

Level 4

New Specialization: You may choose a specialization for your class. You gain the Novice degree of its specialization talent. See **Chapter 3** for details on specializations.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 1, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Level 5

New Arcane Talent: You become a Novice in an arcane talent, or gain a degree in one you already have.

Level 6

New Specialization Talent: You gain the Journeyman degree in the specialization talent you gained at level 4.

Arcane Stunt Aptitude: Select an arcane stunt. You may now perform that stunt for 1 SP less than its normal cost (minimum 0)

Level 7

New Arcane Talent: You become a Novice in an arcane talent, or gain a degree in one you already have.

Level 8

Arcane Power: You may add your Willpower to the damage done by any arcanum that does damage to a target.

New Specialization Talent: You gain the Master degree in the specialization talent you gained at level 4.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 2, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Level 9

New Arcane Talent: You become a Novice in an arcane talent, or gain a degree in one you already have.

Level 10

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Attune Arcana: Reduce the familiarity modifier on any appropriate arcana rolls by –2. See **Familiarity** in **Chapter 4** for more details.

Level 11

New Arcane Talent: You become a Novice in an arcane talent, or gain a degree in one you already have.

Level 12

New Specialization: You may choose one new specialization for your class. You gain the Novice degree of its specialization talent.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 3, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Level 13

New Arcane Talent: You become a Novice in an arcane talent, or gain a degree in one you already have.

Arcane Stunt Aptitude: Select an arcane stunt. You may now perform that stunt for 1 SP less than its normal cost (minimum 0).

Level 14

New Specialization Talent: You gain the Journeyman degree in the specialization talent you gained at level 12.

Level 15

New Arcane Talent: You become a Novice in an arcane talent, or gain a degree in one you already have.

Level 16

New Specialization Talent: You gain the Master degree in the specialization talent you gained at level 12.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 4, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Level 17

New Arcane Talent: You become a Novice in an arcane talent, or gain a degree in one you already have.

Level 18

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Level 19

New Arcane Talent: You become a Novice in an arcane talent, or gain a degree in one you already have.

Level 20

Epic Adept: Pick one type of stunt (arcane, combat, exploration, or roleplaying). You gain a +1 bonus when generating stunt points of that type.

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 5, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Expert

The expert class represents the classic trickster, spy, scholar, or negotiator. You can use it to represent a thief, scout, courier, diplomat, or spy, to name but a few. While a warrior gets by on brute strength and an adept on arcane power, an expert relies on quickness, charm, and cleverness. Whether engaging in witty repartee or slipping a dagger between an enemy's ribs, an expert must be artful to win the day.

Experts favor light weapons and armor when needed—nothing too obvious or overt. They are usually fine in a fight, but they often need warriors to take the blows and adepts to deal with serious arcane threats. The expert is the most open-ended of the classes. If you aren't sure where you want to go with your character, expert is a good choice, as the class provides the flexibility to develop in many directions.

Note that while an expert can technically be any scholar, physician, or courtier—including those pretty much useless in a physical confrontation—the presumption for expert characters is they are all capable combatants. They may perform better or worse in battle based on their other abilities, talents, and focuses, but expert heroes are never considered to be merely noncombatant artisans or academics.

Like adepts, experts gain specializations as they level up. These are detailed in **Chapter 3**.

Primary Abilities: Accuracy, Communication, Dexterity, and Perception
Secondary Abilities: Constitution, Fighting, Intelligence, Strength, and Willpower
Starting Health: 25 + Constitution + 1d6
Weapons Groups: Bows, Brawling, Light Blades, and Staves

Class Powers

Experts gain the following powers at the specified level:

Level 1

Pinpoint Attack: Once per round, you can add 1d6 damage to a successful attack if your Dexterity is greater than that of the target of the attack.

Expert's Armor: You are at home in Light Armor and considered trained in its use without the need of the Armor Training talent.

Starting Talents: You become a Novice in one of the following talents: Animal Training, Arcane Potential, Carousing, Contacts, Intrigue, Linguistics, Medicine, Oratory, Performance, Scouting, or Thievery. See **Chapter 3** for more information.

Level 2

Stunt Bonus: You become more adept at finding the weak spots in your opponents' armor, physically and

otherwise. You can perform the Pierce Armor or Taunt combat stunts for 1 SP instead of the usual 2.

Level 3

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Level 4

New Specialization: You may choose one specialization for your class. You gain the Novice degree of its specialization talent. See **Chapter 3**.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 1, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Level 5

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Take Aim: When you take the Aim action, you gain +2 on the attack roll instead of the normal +1.

Level 6

New Specialization Talent: You gain the Journeyman degree in the specialization talent you gained at level 4.

Stunt Bonus: You become adept at noticing the many dimensions of a tricky situation. You can perform the That Makes Me Wonder exploration stunt for 2 SP instead of the usual 3.

Level 7

You gain one of the following powers:

Stunning Attack: You can daze opponents with sharp blows to vulnerable areas. To make a stunning attack, use the Aim action and then make a melee or a ranged attack. If successful, you inflict no damage but your opponent must make a successful TN 15 Constitution (Stamina) test or become stunned. Stunned opponents can attempt the test again at the start of their turn, and if successful can act normally. Otherwise, stunned characters can only take a single Move action on their turn. While your opponent is stunned, you can use pinpoint attacks against them with no regard for Dexterity. Stunts are possible on your initial attack roll, so you could stun your opponent and then use Lightning Attack for an immediate Pinpoint Attack, for example.

Stunning Repartee: You can daze or distract opponents with carefully chosen and timed words to anyone within earshot. To use this power, take a major action and defeat the target in an opposed Communication (Deception or Persuasion) test vs. their Willpower (Self-Discipline). If successful, the target can only take a single Move action on their next turn. You also may now use the Stunned Silence roleplaying stunt and Taunt combat stunt for 1 SP less than their usual cost.

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Level 8

New Specialization Talent: You gain the Master degree in the specialization talent you gained at level 4.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 2, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Level 9

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Level 10

Lethality: You use your wits to hit enemies where it hurts. You can add your Intelligence to your damage when making attacks.

Level 11

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Level 12

New Specialization: You may choose one new specialization for your class. You gain the Novice degree of its specialization talent.

Slippery: You are hard to pin down, both in the heat of combat, and in the complexity of social situations. Opponents do not gain an attack bonus for outnumbering you in melee combat. Normally, attackers can gain up to a +2 bonus in such circumstances. If you also have the Master degree in Single Weapon Style, your Defense bonus increases to +3 when fighting in that style. In addition, you cannot be targeted by a Sway the Crowd roleplaying stunt unless the stunt's user pays an additional 1 SP to include you.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 3, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Level 13

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Stunt Bonus: You know how to act with style and grace. You can perform the With a Flourish exploration stunt for 3 SP instead of the usual 4.

Level 14

New Specialization Talent: You gain the Journeyman degree in the specialization talent you gained at level 12.

Level 15

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Perforate: You know how to take advantage of an enemy whose guard is down. Perforate is a special stunt you can perform for 2 SP if you've just hit an opponent with Pinpoint Attack. You can make a second Pinpoint Attack against the same opponent; this second attack does not generate stunt points.

Level 16

New Specialization Talent: You gain the Master degree in the specialization talent you gained at level 12.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 4, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Level 18

You gain one of the following powers:

Quick Shot: You can make a ranged attack vs. a visible opponent within range as a minor action. The attack roll and damage of the quick shot suffer a –2 penalty. You cannot combine Quick Shot with other powers such as Pinpoint Attack or Stunning Attack.

Exploit Relationship: You've learned how to use relations with others to your advantage. You may spend an Activate action and select a target you may freely communicate with, including yourself. For the rest of the encounter, they treat each Relationship as if it is one higher or one lower in Intensity than its actual rating. You may affect each rating separately and may use this to give a target a temporary Intensity 1 Relationship. If a target is unwilling to have their Relationships altered by your machinations, you must defeat them in an opposed Communication (Deception or Persuasion) test vs. their Willpower (Self-Discipline). If you fail this test, you cannot affect their Relationships and cannot use this power on them for the rest of the encounter.

Level 19

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Level 20

Epic Expert: Pick one type of stunt (combat, exploration, or roleplaying). You gain a +1 bonus when generating stunt points of that type.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 5, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Warrior

The warrior is the classic fighter. You can use this class to represent any kind of martial character, such as a soldier, mercenary, militiaman, or a former blacksmith turned adventurer. A warrior may fight for honor, revenge, justice, money, or a better tomorrow. Some members of the warrior class have received formal combat training, while others fight by instinct and sheer talent alone. All can handle themselves in a scrap.

As a warrior, you'll usually find yourself in the thick of combat. You have trained to wear heavier armor and use more weapons than members of any other class, and you can dish out and take a lot of damage. It is often up to you to engage the hardest-hitting enemies, so the experts and adepts of the group have the breathing room to use their abilities.

Like adepts and experts, warriors gain specializations as they level up. These are detailed in **Chapter 3**.

If you've never played a tabletop roleplaying game before, the warrior is a good class to start with, since powers are straightforward and you have plenty to do in any combat encounter.

Primary Abilities: Constitution, Dexterity, Fighting, and Strength

Secondary Abilities: Accuracy, Communication, Intelligence, Perception, and Willpower

Starting Health: 30 + Constitution + 1d6

Weapons Groups: Brawling, plus any three of the following: Axes, Bludgeons, Bows, Heavy Blades, Light Blades, Polearms, or Staves.

Class Powers

Warriors gain the following powers at the specified level:

Level 1

Starting Talents: You become a Novice in two of the following talents: Arcane Potential, Archery Style, Carousing, Dual Weapon Style, Quick Reflexes, Single Weapon Style, Thrown Weapon Style, Tooth and Claw (if rhydan), Two-Handed Style, Unarmed Style, or Weapon and Shield Style. You also start as a Novice in Armor Training. It is often preferable for a warrior to start with at least one Style talent.

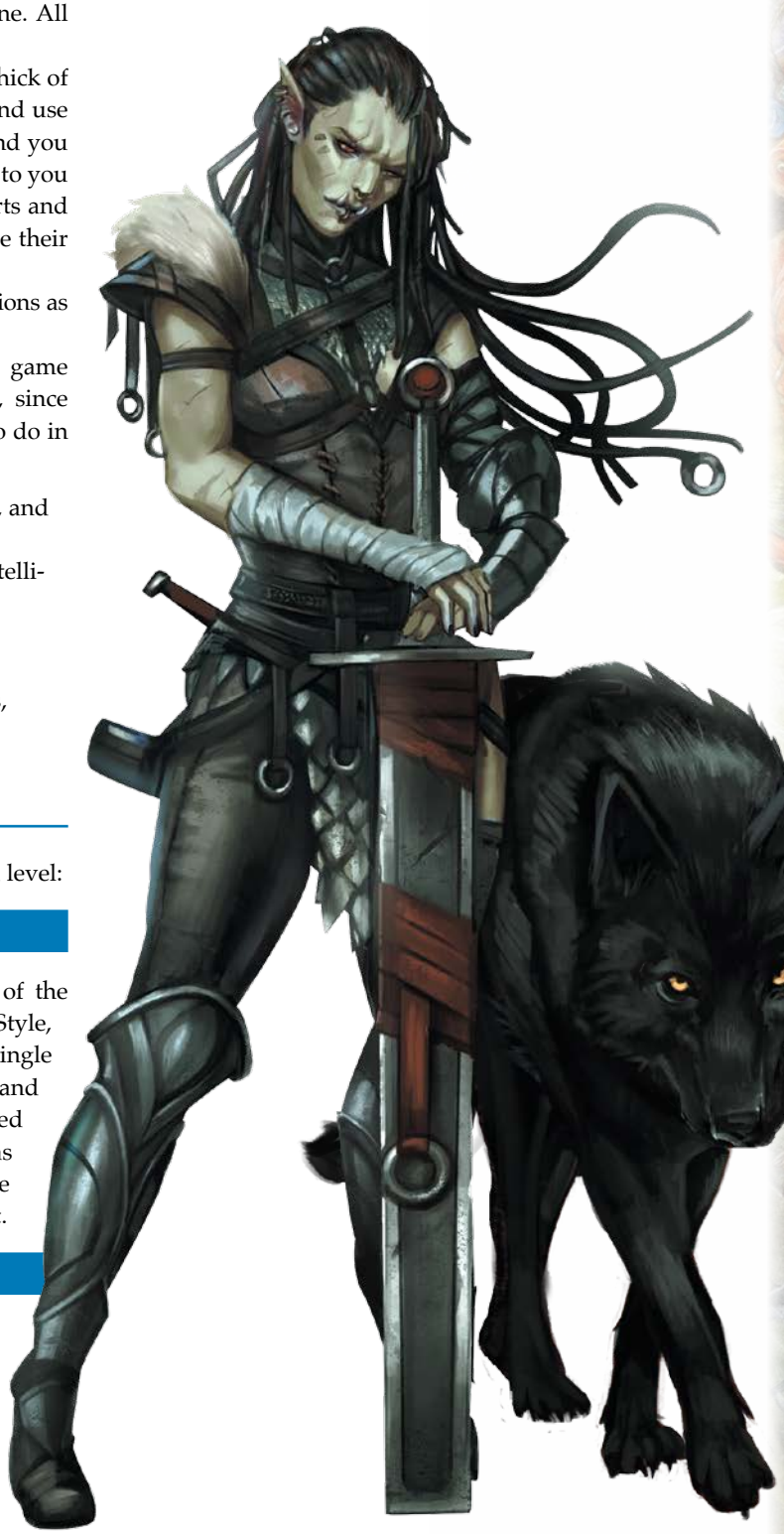
Level 2

New Ability Focus: You gain one of the following ability focuses: Dexterity (Riding), Intelligence (Military Lore), or Strength (Climbing). Rhydan warriors may select Constitution (Running), Constitution (Swimming), or Dexterity (Acrobatics) instead of Dexterity (Riding), based on their primary form of natural movement.

Level 3

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 1, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.



Level 4

New Specialization: You may choose one specialization for your class. You gain the Novice degree of its specialization talent. See **Chapter 3** for details on specializations.

New Weapons Group: You learn a new weapons group of your choice.

Level 5

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Stunt Bonus: You can strike so fast in combat your weapons are a blur. You can perform the Dual Strike combat stunt for 3 SP instead of the usual 4.

Level 6

New Specialization Talent: You gain the Journeyman degree in the specialization talent you gained at level 4.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 2, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Level 7

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Stunt Bonus: You know how to unhinge your opponents. You can perform the Threaten combat stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2.

Level 8

New Specialization Talent: You gain the Master degree in the specialization talent you gained at level 4.

New Weapons Group: You learn a new weapons group of your choice.

Level 9

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 3, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Level 10

Expert Strike: You know when to strike with precision and when to strike with power. When you make an attack, you can take up to a –3 penalty on your attack roll to receive a corresponding bonus to your damage roll. For example, you can take a –2 penalty on your attack roll to get a +2 bonus on your damage roll. Alternately, you can receive up to a +3 bonus on your attack roll if you take a corresponding penalty on your damage roll.

Level 11

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Level 12

New Specialization: You may choose one new specialization for your class. You gain the Novice degree of its specialization talent.

Veteran: Persevering through long hours of practice and many bloody encounters has made you a fearsome combatant. When you inflict damage with an attack, you can add your focus bonus to your damage total if you have an applicable weapons group focus. The focus must match the weapons group of the weapon you attack with. For example, if you attack with a battle axe, you must have the Fighting (Axes) focus to get the +2 bonus damage of this power. If you have the same focus twice, the damage bonus increases to +3.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 4, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Level 13

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

New Weapons Group: You learn a new weapons group of your choice.

Level 14

New Specialization Talent: You gain the Journeyman degree in the specialization talent you previously gained at level 12.

Level 15

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Quick Strike: You can make a melee attack vs. an adjacent opponent as a minor action. The attack roll and damage roll of this Quick Strike suffer a –2 penalty. This action cannot be combined with Expert Strike.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 5, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Currency in Aldea

The major nations of Aldea mint their own coins, yet there is some amount of currency exchange between nations. You don't have to worry about the particulars of how much currency characters have or in exactly what denominations. The information here is presented primarily for flavor.

Aldis mints the silver *sovereign*, with the image of the current ruler on one side and the royal palace on the other. Older sovereigns still in circulation bear the images of previous rulers of Aldis. Gold *harts*, worth ten sovereigns, bear an image of a stag's head, while copper *roses* (also known as petals or simply coppers), worth a tenth of a sovereign, have an open rose blossom.

Jarzon uses the silver *lunar*, the gold *solar*, and the copper *flame*, worth roughly the same as Aldin coinage. Some Jarzoni merchants insist on local currency, but most don't care so long as the coins are good. Most merchants keep scales on hand to weigh coins and make sure they're not debased.

Kern turns out golden *crowns* and silver *thorns*, largely based on Old Kingdom currency, which is still in use there. The rare Kernish merchant uses pure metals, trade goods, and shas crystals abroad, given the mistrust others have of accepting and holding on to Kernish coins.

Rezeans likewise trade mainly in goods. What money they have comes from other nations or is from the time of the Old Kingdom. The same is true of Roamers and islanders, who typically use Aldin coins, although some Faenari coins remain as heirlooms.

Sea-folk sometimes have access to Old Kingdom coins from sunken vessels, but likewise trade primarily in Aldin currency.

The prices of day-to-day common goods are in coppers while modest purchases are made in silver. Gold is for significant purchases and trade; many earn no more than a handful of gold coins in a year's work.

Level 16

New Specialization Talent: You gain the Master degree in the specialization talent you gained at level 12.

Level 17

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Level 18

Stunt Bonus: Your highly developed combat skills allow you to make sweeping attacks on opponents before you. When you perform the Dual Strike combat stunt with a melee attack, you can hit two secondary targets instead of one. All three of your targets (the original target and the two secondary targets) must be adjacent to you either when you first make the attack or after you've used the Skirmish combat stunt to move next to them.

Heroes' Armor: You are considered to have an armor rating of 6, or the rating of the armor you are wearing—whichever is better—even if you are not wearing armor at all.

Level 19

New Talent: You become a Novice in a new talent, or gain a degree in a talent you already have.

Level 20

Epic Warrior: Pick one type of stunt (combat, exploration, or roleplaying). You gain a +1 bonus when generating stunt points of that type.

Equipment

Unlike some fantasy games—including the *Fantasy AGE Basic Rulebook—Blue Rose* doesn't worry too much about some of the particular differences between various types of weapons, armor, and equipment characters use. Huge equipment lists and differentiating mechanically between longswords, bastard swords, and falchions isn't what the swashbuckling action and romance of *Blue Rose* is about. Instead, characters have weapons, armor, and equipment that fit into broader categories that can be customized or defined as players and Narrators desire. This section examines the way weapons, armor, and other equipment are treated in *Blue Rose*.

Weapons

Weapons are divided up into weapons groups. A character who knows how to use a weapons group can wield any of the weapons that fit into that group. These weapons all have similar statistics in play, but they can be defined as players and Narrators desire. For example, a knightly warrior who knows how to use the Heavy Blades group might define his weapon as a longsword. His Rezean companion might also use a Heavy Blade, but hers is a cavalry saber. Some categories of weapon have subcategories: Heavy Blades have standard one-handed versions and two-handed variants, for example. These variants have minor but important differences: some may not be used mounted, while others cannot be used with a shield or off-hand weapon, and so on.

All weapons groups rely on either Accuracy or Fighting to attack. Weapons other than the Bows group add a wielder's Strength ability to their base damage. Bows add Perception instead.

Weapons Groups & Variants		
Type/Variant	**Damage**	**Special**
Axes (Fighting)		
Standard	2d6	None
Throwing	1d6+2	Ranged (Short 4 yds, Long 8 yds)
Two-Handed	3d6	No shield, can't be used mounted
Bludgeons (Fighting)		
Flail	1d6+3	Reduce shield bonus of defender by 2 (min 0)
Standard	2d6	None
Two-Handed	2d6+3	No shield, can't be used mounted
Bow (Accuracy)		
Crossbow	2d6	Ranged (Short 30 yds, Long 60 yds), Reload (major action)
Longbow	1d6+3	Can't be used mounted, Ranged (Short 30 yds, Long 60 yds), Reload (minor action)
Standard/Sling	1d6+1	Ranged (Short 16 yds, Long 32 yds), Reload (minor action)
Brawling (Accuracy)		
Handy Object	1d6	Breaks if stunt points generated on roll
Standard	1d3	None
Heavy Blades (Fighting)		
Standard	2d6	None
Two-Handed	3d6	No shield, can't be used mounted
Lances (Fighting)		
Light	1d6+3	None
Standard	2d6+1	–2 penalty if used unmounted
Light Blades (Accuracy)		
Standard	1d6+1	None
Thrown	1d6	Ranged (Short 6 yds, Long 12 yds), Reload (minor action)
Polearms (Fighting)		
Standard/Thrown	1d6+3	Ranged (Short 8 yds, Long 16 yds), Reload (minor action)
Two-Handed	2d6+2	–2 penalty when used mounted, no shield
Staves (Accuracy)		
Standard	1d6+1	None
Two-Handed	1d6+3	No shield

Weapon Groups

Axes Group: Axes are a bladed edge on the end of a haft. They come in two-handed, one-handed, and throwable variants. Axes use Fighting, even the thrown versions. Types of axe include the two-handed war axe, the battle axe, various hatchets, and even some picks.

Bludgeons Group: Hafts with heavy weights on one end that add power to blows, bludgeons come in two-handed, one-handed, and flail varieties.

Bows Group: These missile weapons are great for delivering damage over long range. Bows use Accuracy and come in long, normal, and crossbow variants. A more primitive missile weapon, the sling, also fits into this group and is considered to use the same statistics as a short bow. Bows generally take an action to reload, though some stunts and talents can change this.

Brawling Group: Not a type of traditional weapon, but more a catch-all for unarmed combat. Brawling can represent a kick, headbutt, or punch. It can also reflect smashing any handy object into a target that would do damage but isn't really a weapon—like a heavy bottle, vase, or chair. Such weapons tend to break easily, and always break if their attack roll generates stunt points.

Heavy Blades Group: These are sword and sword-like blades of large size and considerable heft compared to daggers, knives, and lighter-bladed weapons. They use a character's Fighting to attack and come in two-handed and one-handed variants. Some examples of Heavy Blades are two-handed swords, longswords, falchions, heavy sabers, and larger scimitars.

Lances Group: Lances are mounted weapons designed to thrust, usually using the mount's power to lend force to the blow. They use Fighting to attack, and include the large knightly lances to the lighter skirmishers' lances popular in Rezea.

Light Blades Group: The smaller, faster cousins of the Heavy Blades, Light Blades use Accuracy to attack and include normal close quarters and throwable versions. Light Blades include various knives, daggers, dirks, short swords, and lighter long blades like rapiers and fencing sabers.

Natural Weapons Group: Creatures like rhydan have claws, sharp teeth, hooves, horns, and other natural weapons they wield. Beasts and rhydan are considered automatically trained in using their natural weapons. See the rhydan race description for examples of natural weapons and their effects, which are based on creature type rather than the type of the weapon.

Polearms Group: Polearms are a large category of weapons that consist of a blade or sharpened point on a long pole, allowing an attack to have both reach and power. Spears are classic polearms, but halberds, glaives, pikes, and numerous other versions exist. Polearms use Fighting to

attack and come in normal one-handed versions as well as longer two-handed variants. The normal one-handed polearm can be thrown.

Staves Group: Sturdy, easy to find, and cheap to produce, Staves include any length of wood, bone, or other substance designed to strike and block. These weapons tend to be fast and maneuverable, using Accuracy to attack. Staves include batons, canes, quarterstaves, and numerous other short clubs and staves.

Ranged Weapons: Weapons listed as Ranged can be used to make attacks at a distance. If a target is within the weapon's listed Short Range, the attack test is made with no modifier. If the target is beyond Short Range, but within the weapon's listed Long Range, the attack test is made with a –2 penalty. Ranged weapons cannot attack a target beyond their listed Long Range.

Reloading

After you use a ranged weapon, if it lists a reload time, you must expend that action in order to reload the weapon and use it again. For example, a crossbow has a Reload of a major action, so it requires the expenditure of a major action to reload a crossbow for firing again (and another major action to make a new ranged attack with it, once reloaded). Some class powers and talents affect weapons' reload times; these are given in their individual descriptions.

Untrained Use

Using a weapon without being trained in its associated weapons group imposes a –2 penalty to hit, and it only does half damage (after adding any bonuses).

Starting Weapons

A *Blue Rose* character who is not a rhydan can start with weapons from groups in which they are trained. Adepts begin with one weapon; experts, two; and warriors, three. If a character chooses a ranged weapon, they are considered to have sufficient ammunition to use their weapon in a combat encounter, though prolonged battles or multiple encounters without an opportunity to retrieve or replenish their ammo may result in a hero running out, at the Narrator's discretion. Rhydan don't begin with any weapons other than their natural ones.

Armor

Armor in *Blue Rose* comes in many forms, from the hide and leather armor favored by scouts, rangers, and barbarians to the metal plate and chain of knights and other heavily armored warriors. Armor can afford great protection, especially to those trained in its use. However, it can also hinder the wearer, especially those not accustomed to it.

Armor comes in three broad categories: Light, Medium, and Heavy. These armors can be described and defined by players and Narrators in any way that makes sense for an armor of its type. For example, Heavy Armor might be heavy, thickened hide armor reinforced with bone, or it might be ornate metal plate. Light Armor could be heavy cloth or light sturdy leather. Medium may be chain mail, heavier leather, or a combination of metal plates over vital areas mixed with lighter materials overall.

All armor has two statistics: armor rating (AR) and armor penalty (AP). The armor rating deducts from damage taken when the character is attacked. The armor penalty is deducted from a wearer's Speed and any Dexterity tests, unless the character is trained in its use—then it only reduces the wearer's Speed.

Blue Rose characters can begin with any armor they are trained to wear.

Armor		
Armor Type	Armor Rating	Armor Penalty
Light	3	0
Medium	5	–2
Heavy	8	–4

Shields

Shields are a special form of protection, used to deflect attacks rather than reduce damage as armor does. Shields have three types: Light, Medium, and Heavy—much like armor—and a shield provides a bonus to Defense based on its type, as shown on the Shields table. However, you need proper training to get the most out of a shield. If you do not have the Weapon and Shield Style talent, the maximum Defense bonus you receive from a shield is +1. In other words, you must have the talent to get any benefit from using a Medium or Heavy Shield.

Shields	
Shield	Defense Bonus
Light	+1
Medium	+2
Heavy	+3

Other Equipment

Blue Rose doesn't worry too much about detailing the specific equipment characters carry with them. Most heroes are presumed to have access to the tools necessary to perform tasks they are trained in, as defined by their class, talents, and focuses. If they are unable to access appropriate tools temporarily, the Narrator may apply a penalty to certain tests. For example, a healer who loses his medical pouches, herbs, and poultices will have to make do with makeshift bandages, common herbs, and any other useful things that come to hand. This may result in a penalty to Intelligence (Healing) tests until replacements become available.

Mundane equipment and its accessibility is a common sense affair based on a character's situation and background. An expert acrobat likely has access to ropes, grappling hooks, and other such items. So does a thief, mountaineer, and anyone expecting to have to climb with the time and opportunity to find and purchase such goods. Likewise, few adventurers undertake a journey without suitable clothes, food, water, and other basic supplies. *Blue Rose* is a game about romance and drama, not resource management. If it's dramatic and appropriate to have some tool or item, the heroes likely do. If it's more interesting that they do not, then they may not, at the Narrator's discretion.

Players wanting to be less subject to the Narrator's discretion should make note of The Right Tools exploration stunt. The Resources at Hand exploration stunt may also provide access to useful equipment, and it includes a temporary focus to provide additional bonuses as well.

Example

Aldin Ranger Pell needs to scale the side of a Kernish watchtower. Pell's player believes he should have a grappling hook and sufficient rope for the job, but the Narrator states Pell lost that gear when his horse was devoured by white howlers earlier in the adventure. Because of this, the target number for Pell to scale the tower will be considerably higher. However, while sneaking up to the tower, Pell managed to generate 2 stunt points on a Dexterity (Stealth) roll. While it's not enough to use the Resources at Hand exploration stunt, it is sufficient to use The Right Tools, which allows Pell to have or improvise appropriate tools for a task. Pell explains he grabs some rope and fashions a makeshift grapple from some tools he finds in the watchtower stable while sneaking in. The Narrator accepts this explanation, and adjusts the target number for Pell's climb.

On the other hand, expensive or hard to find equipment is restricted to those with the resources and need, even in places such as Aldis. These can also be supplied at dramatically appropriate times with stunts, but otherwise they need to be clearly justified through game play and character concept. Justifications and access can differ widely between characters, creating interesting challenges and roleplaying opportunities.

Example

Pell needs a special diplomatic pass to gain access to a party at the new Aldin embassy in Kern. He could have likely asked for this pass from his superiors before leaving on his mission if he'd known he'd need it. Unfortunately, he didn't and hasn't had any dramatically appropriate opportunity to use stunt points to locate one. He will have to beg, borrow, or steal a pass. Pell's friend Venna is a diplomat and young noble who is visiting the new embassy as well. As a noble and trained diplomat who knew she would be in the area, she and the Narrator agree she would have the necessary passes and papers all ready to attend embassy functions.

Arcane Items

Either as artifacts of bygone ages or created by skilled arcane craftsmen, some items are infused with arcane power that gives them special properties. Three types of arcane items are commonly made in lands such as Aldis by sufficiently skilled adepts and crafters. These are arcane elixirs, arcane stones, and arcane weapons. Additionally, there are various artifacts from the Old Kingdom and the Empire of Thorns still lingering in modern Aldea, which may possess arcane properties beyond the current understanding of crafters. These arcane items tend to be unique—and usually dangerous—especially those related to the time of the Sorcerer Kings, and often created by them or their underlings. Arcane items are described in more detail in **Chapter 11**.

Characters do not begin the game with access to arcane items. This is acquired during play, both as characters develop their abilities (including the ability to craft such items) and earn them as the spoils of their adventures and the rewards of their successes.

Defense

There is one final number you need to calculate for your character: Defense.

Defense measures how difficult it is to hit your character in combat. The higher the Defense, the better. You calculate Defense as follows:

Defense = 10 + Dexterity + shield bonus (if applicable)

Shield bonuses are explained under **Equipment**, previously.

Example

Nicole now calculates her warrior's Defense. With her Dexterity of 1, her Defense is 11 (10+1). Since her primary weapon is the two-handed axe, she can't improve that by using a shield.

Name

What is a hero and potential legend without a name? Although this step is towards the end of the character creation process, it should not be an afterthought. The right name can be that little something that sums up who the character is or wants to be. There are thousands of names from dozens of cultures—historical and fictional—that you can choose from. Making up your own is also, of course, an option.

Example:

Nicole needs to name her warrior. She looks through some historical name lists and settles on Brigitte.

Goals & Persona

Just as abilities, focuses, and class help to describe the quantitative aspects of your hero, a *Blue Rose* character has various qualitative traits—different aspects of the character's persona, the fictional personality you portray in the context of the game. Persona traits are just as important to game play as abilities—perhaps even more so, since abilities and powers describe *how* your character does things, but persona helps to describe *why*.

This sections describes the different qualities of the persona you assign your character, including Calling, Destiny, Fate, Goals, and Relationships.

The Royal Road

The Roamers are longtime students of destiny and fate. They have studied the vicissitudes of life, with its happiness and hardship, and recorded their findings in the Royal Road, a deck of seventy-eight cards (like our Earthly tarot). Roamers use the deck for fortunetelling and to meditate on the passage of life, and Roamer seers sometimes use it as a focus for their arcana. Roamer caravans take pride in creating their own versions of the deck, attempting to outdo the artistry of others.

Each card bears an image and often its name and number. The cards are divided into the twenty-two Major Arcana—symbols of the milestones a person passes on the way toward the Eternal Dance—and the fifty-six Minor Arcana—symbols of everyday events, people, and moods. The four suits of the Minor Arcana are associated with the Primordials: swords with Selene, chalices with Braniel, rods with Maurenna, and pentacles with Anwaren. The seven gods of Light and seven exarchs of Shadow are said to govern the Light and Shadow aspects of the Major Arcana, and some of them are depicted directly in the cards. For instance, Athne appears on the Major Arcana card Temperance, Gaelenir appears as the Hermit, and Aulora as Justice.

Calling

Your hero's Calling is their place in the world, their role in the grand story of life. A Calling is broader and more overarching than simple Goals (following), involving lifelong drives and motivations. Some characters are devoted to their calling with an intense zeal, while others struggle to discover or understand it. Some even actively deny it and try to follow a different one, leading to frustration and sometimes tragedy. Heroes gain Conviction for pursing their chosen Calling (see **Conviction** in **Chapter 1** for more information on this).

There are as many ways to follow a calling as there are people called. For example, two individuals might be called to temporal power (The Emperor). One might be generous and merciful, seeking power for the benefit of others, while the other is cruel and lusts for power for its own sake. The other aspects of a character's persona influence how they approach their Calling. The Calling is an objective, while a character's Destiny and Fate represent two broad paths towards it, with Goals as stops along the way.

Among the cards of the Royal Road, the Roamers identify twenty-two primary callings in life, each associated with one of the Major Arcana. See the **Callings** table for a list of these and their associated cards. When creating your character, you can choose from this list, draw a card from the Major Arcana and allow it to determine your character's Calling, or come up with a different one based on your own reading of one of the cards.

Destiny & Fate

A person's Destiny is their best self and highest potential—what some Aldean adepts call the "star-self," closest to the divine nobility of the souls of the Eternal Dance.

A person's Fate is their worst and most corrupt self, what Aldean adepts call the "shadow-self." It is the rejection of one's divine nature in favor of the often cruel impulses caused by dwelling in the world and the terrible draw of Shadow.

Destiny and Fate are each defined by a particular characteristic or trait, and associated with a card of the Minor Arcana of the Royal Road, as shown on the Destiny and Fate table. As with Calling, you can choose your character's Destiny and Fate, or draw cards from the Minor Arcana to determine them. Because of the hubris of Anwaren and the actions of the Primordials, all people have a Destiny and a Fate, and exist in the space between them.

Characters gain Conviction by pursuing their Calling in accordance with *either* their Destiny or their Fate. The Narrator decides when an action is an appropriate fulfillment of these requirements, and awards the player a Conviction point, although players can and should point out actions they believe merit a Conviction award for their characters.

Callings

Card	Calling	Card	Calling
The Fool	Adventure and excitement	Justice	Justice
The Adept	Mastery of the arcane	The Hanged Man	Inner peace
The Priestess	Oneness with spirit	Death	Creating change
The Empress	Protection of nature	Temperance	Mediation of extremes
The Emperor	Temporal power	The Exarch	Trickery or uncovering the same
The Hierophant	Spiritual or religious power	The Tower	Lowering the lofty
The Lovers	True love	The Star	Artistic mastery
The Chariot	Mastery of the martial arts	The Moon	Discovering and learning secrets
Strength	Physical perfection	The Sun	Championing the everyday
The Hermit	Transmission of knowledge	Judgment	Atonement
The Wheel	Wealth	The World	Exploration and discovery

Destiny & Fate

Minor Arcana Card	Destiny	Fate	Minor Arcana Card	Destiny	Fate
Ace of Swords	Courageous	Cowardly	Ace of Rods	Enthusiastic	Overzealous
Two of Swords	Compromising	Indecisive	Two of Rods	Conciliatory	Pugnacious
Three of Swords	Stalwart	Treacherous	Three of Rods	Industrious	Slothful
Four of Swords	Calm	Agitated	Four of Rods	Merry	Dour
Five of Swords	Humble	Cruel	Five of Rods	Competitive	Complacent
Six of Swords	Optimistic	Pessimistic	Six of Rods	Confident	Apprehensive
Seven of Swords	Careful	Careless	Seven of Rods	Adventurous	Reckless
Eight of Swords	Free-spirited	Stagnant	Eight of Rods	Witty	Sluggish
Nine of Swords	Compassionate	Despondent	Nine of Rods	Diplomatic	Domineering
Ten of Swords	Dispassionate	Cold	Ten of Rods	Moderate	Obsessive
Page of Swords	Perceptive	Insensitive	Page of Rods	Hardworking	Idle
Knight of Swords	Bold	Boastful	Knight of Rods	Resolute	Cynical
Queen of Swords	Exacting	Petty	Queen of Rods	Curious	Jaded
King of Swords	Logical	Arbitrary	King of Rods	Honest	Self-righteous
Ace of Chalices	Emotional	Hysterical	Ace of Pentacles	Generous	Greedy
Two of Chalices	Affable	Standoffish	Two of Pentacles	Judicious	Narrow-minded
Three of Chalices	Gregarious	Inhibited	Three of Pentacles	Meticulous	Sloppy
Four of Chalices	Ambitious	Apathetic	Four of Pentacles	Forward-thinking	Miserly
Five of Chalices	Hopeful	Remorseful	Five of Pentacles	Hopeful	Hopeless
Six of Chalices	Reflective	Excessively nostalgic	Six of Pentacles	Magnanimous	Envious
Seven of Chalices	Practical	Deluded	Seven of Pentacles	Patient	Impatient
Eight of Chalices	Daring	Stubborn	Eight of Pentacles	Dedicated	Mercenary
Nine of Chalices	Carefree	Peevish	Nine of Pentacles	Appreciative	Fearful
Ten of Chalices	Joyful	Depressed	Ten of Pentacles	Open-minded	Intolerant
Page of Chalices	Expressive	Deceptive	Page of Pentacles	Inquisitive	Wasteful
Knight of Chalices	Charismatic	Manipulative	Knight of Pentacles	Determined	Hasty
Queen of Chalices	Devoted	Capricious	Queen of Pentacles	Nurturing	Suspicious
King of Chalices	Thoughtful	Reactionary	King of Pentacles	Resourceful	Sneaky

Corruption

All people in the world walk a path between their Destiny and their Fate towards their Calling, but some are driven by truly terrible acts. These push them towards corruption and the influence of Shadow. Characters become corrupt in two ways: by using sorcery (see the **Arcana** chapter) and by acting in accordance with their Fate in a corrupt place or while in contact with a corrupt item.

- **Corrupt Places:** Places can become tainted with corruption over time. This is particularly true of former strongholds of the Sorcerer Kings, the lairs of shadow cults, and similar locales. A corrupt place can spread its evil to those spending time there. A person who dies in a corrupt place arises the following night as one of the unliving, unless the corpse is consumed by fire or some other utterly destructive means. A creature conceived or born in a corrupt place may be born as shadowspawn (see the **Adversaries** chapter).
- **Corrupt Items:** A corrupt item is much like a corrupt place, except it only affects individuals in contact with the item, and can also move from place to place and person to person. Anyone carrying a corrupt item is subject to Corruption tests, and an adept experiences a strengthening of sorcery and a weakening of other arcana unless the adept embraces the item's corruption (risking greater personal corruption into the bargain). A corrupt item also has the same effect on its bearer as a corrupt place with regard to death, conception, and birth.

When a character risks corruption, make a Willpower (Self-Discipline) test. The target number is determined in one of two ways: If the Corruption test is triggered by the use of sorcerous arcana, then the target number is equal to the base TN of the sorcerous arcanum in question. If it is triggered by any acts of Fate performed in a corrupt place or when in contact with a corrupt item, the target number is set by the Narrator based on the nature of the act (see the **Corrupt Acts** table for guidelines).

Corrupt Acts

TN	Corrupt Act
11	Minor transgression (lying, petty theft)
13	Significant transgression (deliberately hurtful actions)
17	Major transgression (murder)
19	Grave transgression (complete betrayal of a bonded companion, murdering a unicorn)

A successful test means there is no effect (save for the consequences of the character's actions). A failed test means the character acquires 1 point of Corruption.

Effects of Corruption

A character's Corruption score applies as a penalty to that character's Constitution and Willpower abilities. This means a character with Constitution 2, Willpower 1, and 2 points of Corruption has an effective Constitution 0 and Willpower –1.

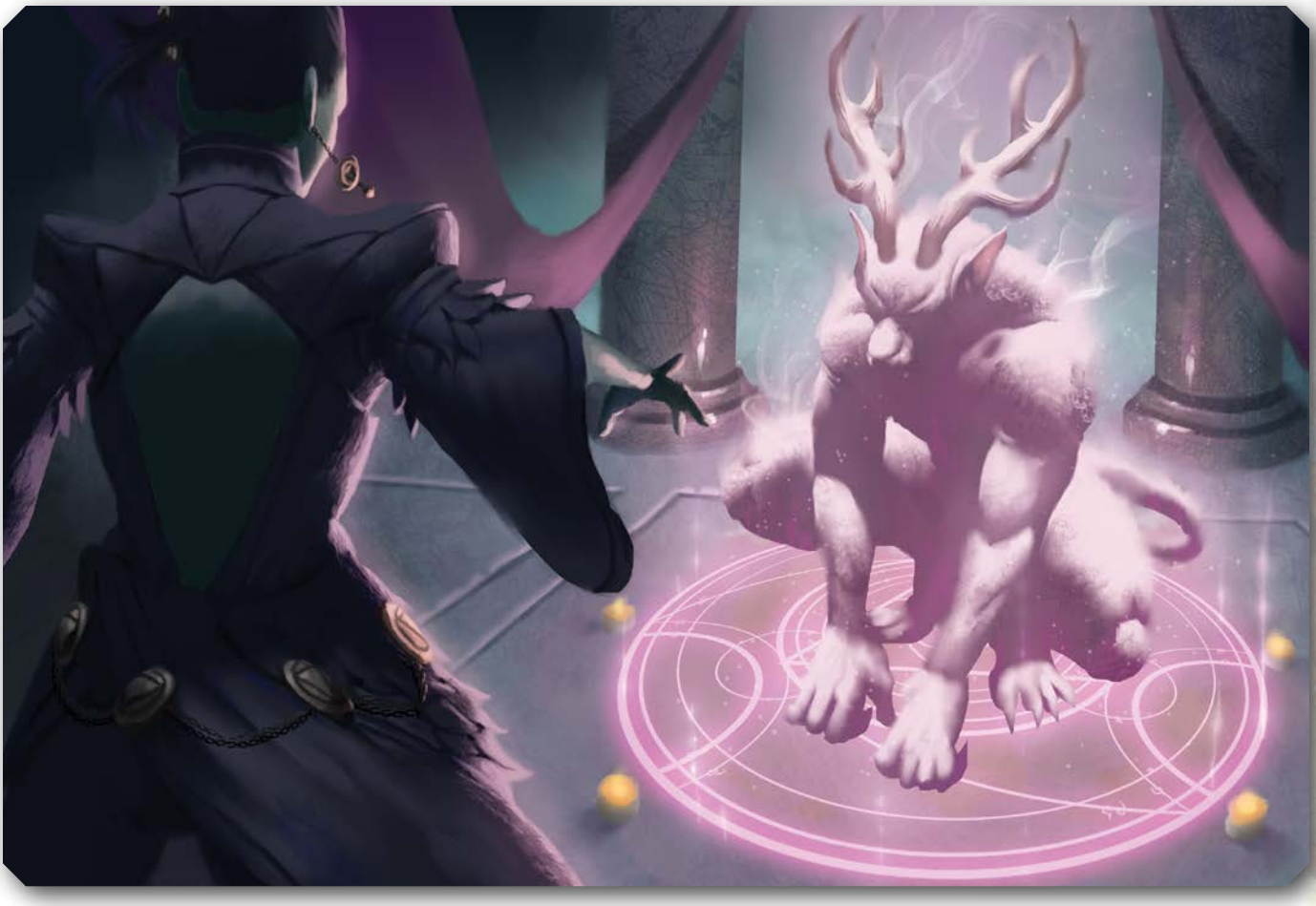
Victims of corruption experience these penalties as physical and mental symptoms. Physically they suffer fatigue, weakness, nausea, weight loss, and a gnawing hunger that is never satisfied. Psychologically they feel growing fear, anger, paranoia, and mistrust. When presented with an opportunity to regain Conviction by acting in accordance with their Fate, corrupt characters must succeed on a TN 11 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test to resist. Otherwise, they give in and follow their Fate for the scene. Characters can spend a point of Conviction to automatically resist this urge.

Corrupt characters whose Willpower drops below –5 go mad in accordance with their Fate, completely consumed by it. Corrupt characters whose Constitution drops below –5 die. The following night, the dead character becomes an unliving shadow (see the **Shadow** description in **Chapter 12: Adversaries**).

Embracing Corruption

At any point, corrupt characters can stop struggling against their corruption and embrace it, giving themselves over to Shadow. This must be a conscious choice; it cannot be forced or coerced in any way. Embracing corruption has the following effects:

- The character can only regain Conviction by acting in accordance with their Fate, not their Destiny.
- The character no longer suffers any Constitution or Willpower penalties from accumulated Corruption.
- The character cannot benefit from the Cure arcanum when it is used by a non-corrupt character. The arcanum simply has no effect. Characters who have embraced corruption can use Cure on other corrupt characters, including themselves.
- Corrupt adepts who have embraced corruption change the test abilities of all their arcana to their Corruption score. This means sorcerers who have embraced corruption often wield considerable power.
- The corrupt character no longer gains Corruption from their actions (including sorcery) but can advance Corruption like any other primary ability score.
- A deceased corrupt character cannot be restored to life using arcana. Three nights after death, a deceased corrupt character rises as a vampire (or a ghost, if the character's material body was destroyed



by anything other than fire). A corrupt adept with a Corruption score of 6 or greater rises as a lich instead. See the **Adversaries** chapter for further details. Only complete destruction of the corpse by fire prevents this from occurring. Some corrupt characters deliberately cause their own deaths once they have embraced corruption to achieve one of these unliving states.

Redemption

Eliminating the influence of corruption is a long and difficult road, so it is little wonder that many victims choose to embrace it, or simply struggle feebly until death and unlife claim them.

Characters with 1 or more points of Corruption can attempt to eliminate them by acting solely in accordance with their Destiny. Each time characters perform an act following their Destiny that would grant Conviction, they may choose to forego the Conviction point and apply it towards reducing Corruption instead. For every 10 such Conviction points applied in this way, the character sheds 1 point of Corruption.

Note that characters can still gain Corruption while working toward eliminating it, so it is often a struggle to stay ahead of the character's darker impulses. Characters may also find themselves in need of additional Conviction on occasion, taking an awarded Conviction point rather than applying it toward their redemption, or gaining Conviction by following their Fate. This slows, but does not end, the process.

Those who have chosen to embrace corruption can no longer gain Conviction through their Destiny, so this avenue of redemption is closed to them. It takes a significant act of contrition in accordance with the corrupt character's Destiny to start them on the road to redemption. The Narrator decides what is required and when that requirement is fulfilled, but it should be a quest of epic proportions to redeem so fallen a character. Even then, redemption is be no means assured; the character must still go through the process outlined here to eliminate the remaining Corruption score.

Goals

Calling, Destiny, and Fate help to drive characters in *Blue Rose,* while Goals describe the things they move towards on their journey. Goals are things your character wants to achieve, usually in accordance with the other qualities of the hero's persona.

When you create your character, choose at least two Goals. Ideally, consider a short-term goal—something the character can achieve relatively quickly—and a long-term goal—something that may take years, or even a lifetime to achieve. You might even want to have two short-term goals, depending on how ambitious your hero is, but try

to keep your list of Goals to no more than three at a time.

These Goals can be anything you want, from "Become a Blue Rose Knight" or "Achieve nobility in Aldis" to "Find the mysterious assassin who killed my parents" or "Discover the whereabouts of the ruined stronghold of the last of the Sorcerer Kings." Work with the Narrator to define Goals that fit into the context of the overall story and game; if your *Blue Rose* game isn't going to sea, for example, then having a Goal of becoming a ship's captain probably won't mesh too well.

While Goals do not have any mechanical effect as such, they do provide clear definition of what your character wants, which is useful information for both you and the Narrator. Your character's Goals can also be in accordance with one or more Relationships (following), which *do* have a mechanical effect. For example, if your character has a Goal of winning the love of a particular character, then a Relationship defining that love and its Intensity makes sense and can help your character in achieving that Goal.

As your character achieves Goals over the course of the game, replace them with new Goals that help to drive your character's story forward. When all of the player characters in your game have achieved their major Goals and new ones are not particularly forthcoming, that's a good sign it's time to consider bringing your series to an end, or at least placing it on hiatus until such a time as suitable new Goals present themselves.

Ties

While this section details the mechanical effects of the character's important Relationships, this doesn't mean you shouldn't take the time to consider how your hero feels about important characters that aren't represented by a Relationship. In many *Blue Rose* campaigns, all the heroes know each other at the start of the game, or are members of a group or nation which they surely have some connection to. Taking a moment to define these ties will help you get a grasp of your character, and such "lesser" relationships can easily grow as the campaign continues

Monstrous Bonds

Bonds usually exist between human, humanoid, and rhydan characters. This is a guideline, not a rule. It is totally acceptable to have a Bond with a creature or animal. Adepts often have a strong Bond with an animal familiar and other characters may have a Bond with an animal companion. A crusading adept might be sworn to destroy the darkfiend who killed his mentor. Likewise, an intelligent monster might develop a real grudge, love, obsession, or fascination with a particular hero. These situations can be great for roleplaying opportunities and surprises, though like group Bonds, Narrators should be careful they don't become distracting or unbalancing.

Relationships

Romance, rivalry, and others relationships are a big part of *Blue Rose*. They feature prominently in the romantic fantasy that inspires the setting and the game. They drive characters in the world of Aldea to epic heights and dastardly lows. This section provides optional systems for modeling and using character relationships in *Blue Rose*. These rules aren't meant to replace roleplaying these relationships, but to enhance and support it.

You don't need to model every single relationship between characters with these relationship rules, nor should you. The rules are for important relationships between lovers, comrades, enemies, and rivals—the sorts of things that motivate or inspire acts of exceptional heroism or villainy.

Important Relationships between characters in *Blue Rose* are defined in game terms by two things: Bond and Intensity. Bond describes the type of Relationship: Are the characters lovers? Friends? Foes? Intensity measures the strength of the Relationship.

Relationship Bond

Relationships are defined by Bond. Bond is a short description of the connection(s) between the characters, usually in the hero's own words. They can be simple or complex depending on the nature of the Relationship. Relationships may involve a mix of rivalry, romance, friendship, and hatred. Bitter enemies may have Bonds filled with nothing but aggression and enmity, while lovers or close friends will have much more positive Bonds.

Relationships can even exist with the deceased. A promise to a dead parent or lover might drive a character. However, these Relationships should have some connection to the living and the world at large or they won't mean much during play.

Changing Bonds

Bonds are changed through roleplaying and events in play. Anytime a significant event happens in a game that changes how characters feel about each other, the player or Narrator controlling the hero can rewrite their Bond to something more appropriate. Note this doesn't necessarily change the hero's Intensity in the Relationship—there is often a thin line between love and hate, after all.

Sample Bonds

The following Bonds are examples of the sorts of important Relationships that can exist between characters. These can be used directly for player characters and NPCs, if appropriate.

Bond: I love them more than my own life.

A very strong Bond. It leaves open some questions regarding the Relationship, making it a good choice for use when that's obvious (such as siblings or spouses) or when the exact nature of the association is still developing but the emotional connection is already there.

Bond: I will bathe in their heart's blood for the pain they have caused me.

Whoa! Strong and no question of the Relationship here, or how the hero feels about the subject of this Bond. The nature of this hatred isn't defined, so it could be genuinely deserved or fairly petty. Either way, this is a Bond that tells a lot about the character and how they'll interact with its subject.

Bond: We are brothers in battle. I am closer to them than my own kin.

This Bond denotes extremely close friendship between two soldiers, warriors, or other military types. It also places the subject of this Bond higher than family, which might have some interesting implications for the hero.

Bond: When we are together I feel like I can fly. They are the love of my life.

A clearly romantic Bond that implies strong intimate attachment. The initial statement is more poetic, but the follow up defines it more clearly. This is the sort of powerful cinematic romance that can inspire some interesting roleplaying and dramatic situations.

Bond: They are my liege, my friend, and while I would never tell them, the person I love most in all the world.

This is a complex, multi-tiered Bond that speaks of friendship, loyalty, and unexpressed love. It's wonderful fodder for roleplaying and shows that the character puts a lot of stock into this Relationship.

Group Bonds

Characters can also have group Bonds, describing a Relationship with an entire organization or faction, rather than just one person. However, this can become potentially unbalancing if said group is too large, providing too-frequent bonuses when dealing with something common. For a group Bond to be appropriate, it needs to relate to a definable set of people with shared backgrounds, behaviors, habits, and goals which a hero could realistically feel passionate about. Having a serious hatred for the group of bandits who killed your family is fine. Hating all bandits, or even all bandits in a given region, is too much.

Of course, groups or their leaders may have Bonds with heroes and important characters as well. Alternatively, an organization might only recruit those who have such a Bond. A queen's personal guard might require that every member have a Bond with the queen that suggests loyalty, love, or admiration.

Note that group Bonds can be trouble. If too common, they diminish the special nature of Bonds. If too focused, they never come up. Narrators should take care to look at any group Bonds a hero has and, if necessary, work with the player to fix potential problems.

NPC Relationships

There's nothing preventing a Narrator from giving NPCs defined Relationships using these rules. These can help outline the characters better and give them occasional boosts when they're involved in conflicts that involve these Relationships. This makes a villain or other NPC with "someone to fight for" even more challenging, and can add drama and roleplaying opportunities during play.

However, as cool as NPC relationships can be, there are two reasons a Narrator might not wish to do this:

The first is bookkeeping. It can be daunting tracking Relationships for numerous NPCs. Even just important characters with one or two Relationships each can quickly create a mass of paperwork to follow up on.

The second reason is player character empowerment. Even though there will be characters in the setting who are stronger, tougher, scarier, or more powerful than the heroes at various points, if they are the only characters who can draw power and inspiration from their Relationships, this gives them an edge that's appropriate to the many dashing heroes in the stories *Blue Rose* is inspired by.

The best "middle ground" option here is to only give NPCs Relationships that involve the heroes, or use this option only for the most unique and important NPCs. Whichever option a Narrator chooses is fine, just pick the one that works best for you, your style of play, and your campaign.

Relationships Between Player Characters

Relationships where the target of the Bond is another player character can be great and provide wonderful roleplaying experiences. On the other hand, they can be awkward and no fun if one or other of the players isn't interested and invested in having a special relationship between their heroes. Because of this, no player character can have a Relationship with another one without both players agreeing. You can't just decide on your own the other dwarf in the party is your brother, or that you're fiercely in love with the group's adept. The other player involved has to be okay with this. To do otherwise leads to uncomfortable, unpleasant, and possibly downright creepy situations that are anathema to fun gaming—so, please, don't do that.

This doesn't mean the *other hero* has to be okay with it, and it doesn't mean that character has to take a similar Relationship with yours. As long as the players are okay with it, one

hero might be head over heels in love with a character who hates them, or barely cares about them at all. Then again, a player character might decide that another is to blame for all the suffering in their life and swear revenge, while the target of their vengeance thinks they're best buddies. These situations can lead to fantastic roleplaying opportunities as long as everyone concerned is on board.

Relationship Intensity

In addition to Bond, Relationships have an Intensity. This shows the strength of the Relationship between the characters involved. Since these rules are only used for important relationships, even the lowest Intensity Relationship is stronger than a hero's connections to other characters. Intensity is rated between 1 and 5. Even an Intensity 1 Relationship is a powerful and important force in a character's life, but greater Intensity can inspire characters to even greater acts.

Using Intensity

Intensity isn't just a number representing how strongly a character feels for someone. It also has a mechanical effect. For each rank of Intensity, a character gets a free stunt point they can spend on actions related to their Relationship once per game session. This could be combat actions to attack a hated enemy or defend a loved one, arcane stunts to use arcana which benefit a friend or harm a rival, and various exploration and roleplaying stunts which involve situations that affect or center on a hero's Relationships. Stunt points granted from Intensity can be used on any appropriate action, not just one where doubles are rolled, though they can be combined with stunt points earned from rolling doubles if desired.

Example

Jin is a Aldin noble who has an Intensity 3 Relationship with Grenn, a night person rebel he met while on a secret mission in Kern. Later, when Grenn is captured for treason and sedition, Jin leads a mission to rescue him before he is executed. During this mission, Jin needs to locate a key to Grenn's cell hidden in a guardhouse. He succeeds in finding the key, but generates no stunt points with the roll. Concerned about the nearby guards arriving before he has completed his search—or some other equally unfortunate complication—he spends all 3 of his Intensity to generate 3 SP. He buys the Speedy Search and Advantageous Positioning exploration stunts, meaning that when the guard commander shows up early for a routine inspection, Jin has located the key and is able to slip behind the door as the commander opens it, hiding him. With thoughts of Grenn driving him to bold action, Jin slips away to rescue his lover.

Stunt points spent from Intensity normally recharge at the beginning of the next session, though in cases of game sessions that span long periods of story time, Narrators may allow Intensity stunt points to recharge during the course of a session.

Special Stunts

In addition to spending Intensity from Relationships to gain stunt points, there are special stunts involving Relationships and Intensity that can also be used. Its cost makes it impossible to invoke without spending Intensity to generate additional stunt points, and it cannot be used unless a campaign employs the Relationship mechanics. They're listed on the **Intensity Stunts** table at right.

In the case of Relationships with groups, you can select a member of the group or organization as the target for these stunts, but you still must pick only one eligible target per use.

Intensity Stunts

SP Cost	Stunt
7	**As You Wish:** Pick a task that you have promised someone you have a Relationship with you will perform. Gain a +2 bonus to tests *directly* related to completing this task until the end of the session.
7	**Prepare to Die:** Pick someone you have a negative Relationship with, or who has injured or killed someone you had or have a positive Relationship with. For the remainder of the encounter, you gain +1 to attack, +1 Defense, and +2 damage in any combat actions involving this target.

Intensity & Arcana

Intensity also makes it easier to affect others with various arcana. This can be both useful and dangerous. An adept might find it easy to locate a trapped or imprisoned lover psychically, but should they seek to change that lover's mind after a nasty fight? That's easier too. This is partially why many who fall to corruption count their loved ones as their first victims.

On the other hand, you can also more easily affect those you have an adversarial Relationship with, though using certain arcana against hated foes isn't without risks.

The Intensity of a Relationship reduces the target number modifier for familiarity by its Intensity score. This works for any sort of defined Relationship. A target might be a hated enemy, but the strong connection makes them more familiar all the same and this makes using arcana on them easier.

Example

Brecca is a Roamer adept whose Relationship with his sister Shelyra is particularly strong (Intensity 2). As his sister, Shelyra would usually be considered to be Very Familiar (+2) to Brecca. However, their special relationship strengthens this familiarity even further and reduces this modifier to 0 (+2 - Intensity 2). This means that when attempting to psychically contact, locate, or even influence his sister, Brecca has no modifier to his arcana target numbers. If his relationship was of 3 or greater Intensity, he would even reduce the normal target numbers due to his exceptional bond with his sister.

In addition, arcana users can spend Intensity for bonuses to their arcana tests instead of using them to generate stunt points when using arcana in ways that directly connect to a Relationship. This reflects how concern, love, or even hatred can channel a hero's will, though they must still take care to avoid actions that would be considered sorcery or risk Corruption as normal.

Example

Brecca's sister is about to be cut down by a bandit. He wants to use the Psychic Domination arcana to stop the bandit and have him fall upon his own sword instead. Knowing this will be tricky and fearful for Shelyra's safety, Brecca uses his Intensity 2 Relationship with his sister to give him a +2 bonus to controlling the bandit. With the bonus, he manipulates the bandit and saves his Shelyra. However, while perhaps understandable given the love he holds for his sister, his Relationship provides him with no bonus to resist corruption by using sorcery in this case.

Self-centered relationships provide no bonuses to using arcana on oneself. Relationships with groups provide a bonus with members of that group, but treat the Intensity as 1 less for the purposes of any bonuses.

Changing Intensity

Intensity increases or decreases over time. People fall deeper into or out of love, enemies reconcile, and numerous other events occur to change the Intensity of a Relationship. When a character's actions in play would change the Intensity of a Relationship, the Narrator can decide to increase or decrease it.

If the character is an NPC, this is easy. The Narrator decides the Intensity goes up or down and makes the necessary adjustment. This should only be done when something really significant happens, but it's a great way to signal that something in the setting has changed. Perhaps two important NPCs get married, creating an alliance between two groups that will change political and social power structures. Or maybe an NPC friend swears eternal friendship to a hero who saved their life, making them a more reliable or enthusiastic ally. Intensity in these cases should only increase or decrease by 1 unless truly epic events suggest a greater shift.

If the character with the Relationship is a player character, things work a bit differently. When a situation suggests a hero's Relationship could increase in Intensity, the Narrator offers the player an opportunity to do so. This can be done whenever appropriate, though Narrators may wish to limit Intensity shifts to the end of a session to keep from disrupting play. If a player accepts the increase, they increase the appropriate Relationship's Intensity by +1. At this time, the player also has the option to increase the Intensity by 2 instead, provided they reduce the Intensity of another Relationship by –1. This reflects a shift in priorities with the character's Relationships. Perhaps they are softening their desire for revenge to focus on newfound love, or are distancing themselves from a loved one to devote themselves to another person or group.

Whenever a Narrator awards an Intensity increase, they should consider if it's appropriate to award an increase to the other character in the Relationship too. Sometimes it won't be, but oftentimes when events occur in a campaign that change a Relationship, both parties are affected.

Expressing Relationships

When recording a Relationship on a character sheet or elsewhere, simply combine the name of the character the Relationship is with, the Bond, and the Intensity. You can do this narratively or more technically. So the complete Relationship record would look like either of these:

Adept Lorrus (3): He killed my father and ruined my family. I will see him hang for his crimes.

Adept Lorrus killed my father and ruined my family. I will see him hang for his crime (3)

Other variations are possible. As long as the Narrator and players can readily identify the character involved, the Bond, and the Intensity—it's all good.

Starting Relationships

Player characters can start with two Relationships if desired. One of these Relationships can be at Intensity 2, while the other starts at Intensity 1. A character might have many friendships, rivalries, or even romantic interests, but these are the only ones strong enough to grant a mechanical advantage. It's often a good idea to have at least one Relationship with another hero or regular NPC in the campaign, but it's not required.

Example

Jon's character, Pell, is an Aldin Ranger who commonly operates on the Kernish border. Jon decides his character is very loyal to Aldis, and particularly to the Rangers, who took him in and trained him from a young age. He is also fond of Meroc, a fellow hero who was a childhood friend he's reconnected with.
Jon takes the following Relationships for Pell:

Meroc is my oldest friend, even if he's different than I remember (2)

I will give my life for my brother and sister Rangers (1)

NPCs can have any number of Relationships, but more than one or two can become very confusing and difficult to track.

Rhy-Bonding

Every rhydan has an additional Intensity 2 Relationship they can generate if desired: the rhy-bond. This is a deeply intimate connection to another being, usually a human. A rhydan can only bond with one person at a time, and the bond usually lasts until the death of one or both parties. This bond is mutual; both parties gain an Intensity 2 Relationship with each other they can define and utilize.

Player character rhydan don't need to begin play bonded, but they can if they choose to. Otherwise, they can enter into the rhy-bond through roleplay. Rhy-bonds can be increased like any other Relationship, but they cannot be reduced below an Intensity of 2.

Additionally, rhy-bonded characters are able to initiate Psychic Contact between them as if they both possessed the arcanum (see **Psychic Contact** in **Chapter 4**). The Intensity of their Relationship modifies familiarity normally.

Optional: The Self-Centered Relationship

Some characters avoid forming lasting relationships. This is usually due to some past trauma or a desire to not see those they could love hurt by the dangers they face due to their careers, lifestyle, or history. However, some people are just very focused on their own advancement and well-being, or have not met the right person or group to which they feel a strong connection. This is not inherently harmful, though repeated self-serving actions under the wrong circumstances can sometimes lead to corruption (see **Corruption** previously in this chapter). Also, a self-centered character may have difficulty gaining Conviction in accordance with a Destiny which is giving or selfless, while at the same time finding it all too easy to give in to the demands of a Fate that is selfish or self-involved. Outside Relationships tend to help balance these qualities.

Self-centered individuals can elect to begin with a single Intensity 3 Relationship to themselves which reflects this. These Relationships are described in terms of why the character has formed no connections with others, and what it means to them to live emotionally closed off from those around them. They may only use their Intensity with actions that will maintain this solitary status quo.

Example

Jemelle is a refugee adept from Jarzon who enjoys a freewheeling and unrestrained lifestyle of short-term romances and business relationships. She doesn't reject the idea of falling in love or forming some other strong bond with another, but her life so far has taught her to watch out for herself and not trust others. When play begins, she has the following Relationship centered on herself:

Love 'em, leave 'em, don't trust 'em. That's how I survive (3)

Jemelle can use this Relationship to aid her in actions that protect or advance her short-term Goals, but she can't use them to help others very effectively.

Self-centered characters can change their views by adopting new Relationships over time. At the end of any session of play, the character may reduce the Intensity of their self-centered Relationship by –1 to form a new Relationship with another character, or increase an existing Relationship already formed by +1. They may do this until they have reduced their self-centered Relationship to Intensity 0. At this time, they abandon their solitary ways and grow their Relationships as normal.

A character can't increase their self-centered Relationship when they are allowed to advance a Relationship normally. A character can become self-centered, however, if they suffer a great loss or betrayal that causes them to lose an existing Relationship.

Example

Years later, Jemelle has finally found love and abandoned her self-centered Relationship for a Relationship with Ibri, an Aldin adept and scholar. Unfortunately, when Ibri is corrupted by her forbidden study and use of sorcery and tries to use her dark powers to force her lover to aid her in summoning a dangerous darkfiend, Jemelle is forced to help kill her beloved. Heartbroken and betrayed, Jemelle takes her Intensity 4 Relationship with Ibri and converts it to a self-centered Relationship, defining it as:

I should have kept to myself. Love only hurts. (4)

Jemelle still has any other Relationships that she formed over time, but they are colored by her rediscovered and now rather dark self-centered outlook.

The Rhy-Bond

No adventure about rhydan would be complete without touching more on the rhy-bond, the most powerful of relationships a rhydan can experience. Though many adventures serve to talk about the experience of a rhy-bond from the perspective of the two-legged half, exploring the rhydan half of the rhy-bond can be a powerful story all of its own. How a rhydan feels about the two-legged races will color how they approach any Relationships with human, night person, or vata heroes, and in turn can make the rhy-bond as fraught a process as any romance can be. After all, a rhydan bonding with a person is a psychic bond that lasts an entire lifetime.

Additionally, a rhydan must be careful who they bond with. Should their bonded person begin to fall to corruption, the Relationship between the two can become damaged or even dangerous to the rhydan. The influence of a rhydan to seek out the Light can be a wonderful story, but the harrowing tale of a rhydan struggling with a Shadow-touched bonded person in their life can be equally intense.

The rhy-bond speaks to the very heart of the rhydan's place in the *Blue Rose* game world. As a game where romance is such a key part of the story, the relationship between a rhydan and a person is a kind of courtship, not of marriage and physical nature but of two souls getting to know one another on a profound level. That provides the player of a rhydan character with the chance to explore the romance aspect while still playing the fantastical beasts that are the rhydan.

Expanding Relationships

The limitations on the number of Relationships a hero can have are designed to keep the concept from growing too diluted or out of control. Also, Relationships popping up nearly every encounter will mess with normal stunt point and action economy, and risks turning them into just another resource instead of a representation of strong emotions and intimate connections. Having Relationships with a dozen characters can also become hard to track, as well as being distracting. However, you know better what the Narrator and players at your table can handle. If desired, heroes can be given extra Relationships.

The best way to handle this is to start small, giving everyone an extra Relationship they can develop and seeing how this affects play. If it works well, consider stopping there, or add another if you think it will enhance play experience and fun. It's a better method than throwing four new Relationships at everyone and seeing if it breaks anything—because it might.

Self-centered Relationships are meant to provide interesting roleplaying opportunities and to allow characters to play selfish or internally-focused characters without losing out on the mechanical benefits of Relationships. They aren't meant to simply be the source of bonuses for any test or conflict a character decides they'd like to succeed at. If this option leads to a party of moody loners who can't cooperate enough to have a good time during the game, Narrators should consider disallowing this option.

Adding Relationships

At levels 4, 8, 12, and 16, heroes can add a new Intensity 1 Relationship if desired, or increase the Intensity of two existing Relationships by +1 each. This allows a character to grow socially as well as in other ways, without loading a character down with too many early on.

Example

Jon's character Pell has reached level 4. He can now either increase two Relationships by +1 each, or add a new Intensity 1 Relationship. Since Pell has begun a budding romance with Rezean scout Jhitari, he takes the following Relationship:

Jhitari means more to me than I'd care to admit. I think this might be true love (1)

Any Relationships not selected at character creation, or when a new Relationship can be added, can be chosen later. This can be really useful, as sometimes important connections and bonds between characters form during play.

Changing Relationships

Relationships change, and even end, in life. The same thing can happen in *Blue Rose*. Someone who was once very important to a character may die, leave, or perhaps the two just drift apart. Love may turn to hate, friendship to love, and so on.

To reflect this, when it seems logical that a Relationship changes, the Bond can be rewritten to reflect the new nature of the Relationship. This shouldn't happen too often or it gets tedious, but when there is a significant shift in how a character feels and relates to another, rewriting the Bond makes sense.

Example

Pell's relationship with Meroc has recently taken a turn for the worse. His old friend abandoned him during a battle and Pell nearly died. While he later learned Meroc fled so he could complete a secret mission vital to the nation, he still can't help but feel a bit betrayed. Considering the effects of these new developments, Jon rewrites Pell's Bond as:

I still love my friend Meroc, but I'm not sure I can always trust him (2)

The same principles apply if a Relationship ends. When a Relationship is over, or otherwise no longer important in play, it is removed and replaced with a new Relationship. The Intensity from the Relationship is split between existing Relationships, including any new ones, as the character reassesses their priorities and feelings about those in their life. Heroes can save some Intensity and reassign it over further adventures if that makes more sense. Sometimes it takes time to develop or strengthen other Relationships after an important one ends.

Example

Some time later, Meroc is killed by a darkfiend while he and Pell are on a mission. While the two had their rough patches, Pell mourns the loss of his friend. During his grief, he find comfort in the arms of his lover, Jhitari, and in his duty to the Rangers. He assigns 1 additional Intensity each to these Relationships, representing that he came through his loss to find new connections among the living.

Narrators might want to spread the reassignment of Intensity out over a few game sessions to be a bit more realistic. Also, just because a character dies or leaves the campaign doesn't mean a Relationship with them automatically ends. A character who loved someone who was killed by a major campaign villain might change their old Relationship to an antagonistic one with their loved one's killer. However, they might keep the Relationship to reflect that it's their strong feelings for the departed that drive their actions.

If race, class, background, and the other elements from **Chapter 2** are the basic "building blocks" of your *Blue Rose* character, then focuses, talents, and specializations are the customizations that help make your character different from others with the same essential starting point. Focuses improve your ability with certain specific tests. Talents unlock new abilities your character can perform. Specializations unlock new talents, available only to those who meet certain requirements, giving your character additional special abilities.

Your character starts with some focuses and talents through the process of character creation, and acquires more by gaining levels in play. Focuses are usually acquired through race, background, class, and talents. Talents are gained through class alone.

Focuses and talents provide game system benefits, but they also give you convenient story hooks. Let's say you take the Horsemanship talent. Well, where did your character learn to ride so well? Perhaps you learned from a friendly Rezean, or from training with a military organization. You can come up with anything you like, but answering such questions tells you more about your character.

Specializations provide a further way to customize your character but, as they represent the abilities of seasoned characters, you do not start with any at level 1. Specializations require certain talents, focuses, or other prerequisites, including class, which your character must meet before acquiring the specialization.

Ability Focuses

As noted in **Chapter 2**, a focus is an area of expertise within a larger ability. A character with Communication 3 and the Deception focus is a good communicator in general, but even better at fooling others. If you have a focus, you get a +2 bonus when making an ability test related to it. The Narrator will usually let you know which focus is relevant to each test, but if it isn't clear, don't be afraid to ask if a focus applies. The bonus for having a focus may occasionally apply to a different ability, such as using Artisan or Crafting with Dexterity to make things, but also with Intelligence to know about particular artisans, crafters, or their works. You can learn more about ability tests and how focuses apply in **Chapter 1: Gameplay Basic**s. Descriptions of the ability focuses follow:

Accuracy Focuses

Arcane: Proficiency with crystons and other arcane ranged attacks.

Bows: Proficiency with weapons from the Bows weapon group. See the **Equipment** section in **Chapter 2** for further details on this and other weapons groups.

Brawling: Proficiency with weapons from the Brawling weapon group.

Light Blades: Proficiency with weapons from the Light Blades weapon group.
Staves: Proficiency with weapons from the Staves group.

Communication Focuses

Animal Handling: Interacting with and caring for animals.
Animism: Knowledge and use of animism arcana. May also apply to Perception and/or Willpower when discerning information or attempting to enhance living creatures through some arcana.
Bargaining: Negotiating with others and making deals.
Deception: Lying to and tricking those less mentally adept than you.
Disguise: Making yourself look like someone else or a different class of person.
Etiquette: Knowing the social niceties of various cultures.
Gambling: Playing games of chance and profiting from them.
Investigation: Interviewing people for information, as well as finding and deciphering clues.
Leadership: Guiding, directing, and inspiring others.
Performance: Entertaining an audience with an artistic talent.
Persuasion: Convincing others to agree with you.
Psychic: Using psychic arcana and communication effectively. May also apply to Willpower when resisting some arcana or struggling mind-to-mind.
Romance: Navigating and succeeding at romantic encounters. Includes both long-term relationships and short-term seductions.

Constitution Focuses

Drinking: Consuming large quantities of alcohol and avoiding the aftereffects.
Rowing: Propelling a vessel with oars.
Running: Moving quickly in both short sprints and long distance hauls.
Stamina: Enduring fatigue, disease, and privation.
Swimming: Moving through the water and staying afloat.

Dexterity Focuses

Acrobatics: Executing gymnastic, balancing, and tumbling maneuvers.
Artisan: Making handcrafted works of art such as paintings, sculptures, and fine clothing.
Calligraphy: Writing with artful penmanship.
Crafting: Making practical items with manual skills, like woodworking, leather working, glassblowing, etc.
Initiative: Acting quickly in tense situations.
Legerdemain: Using sleight of hand to trick others, hide things, and pick pockets.
Lock Picking: Opening locks without using keys.
Riding: Directing a mount such as a horse or pony.
Sailing: Steering or piloting various watercraft.
Stealth: Sneaking about quietly and out of sight.
Traps: Detecting and disarming traps and other mechanical devices.

Fighting Focuses

Axes: Proficiency with weapons from the Axes weapon group.
Bludgeons: Proficiency with weapons from the Bludgeons weapon group.
Heavy Blades: Proficiency with weapons from the Heavy Blades weapon group.
Lances: Proficiency with weapons from the Lances weapon group.
Polearms: Proficiency with weapons from the Polearms weapon group.

Intelligence Focuses

Arcane Lore: Knowing about arcana and its various manifestations.
Brewing: Making beers, ales, and other concoctions.
Cartography: Making and reading maps.
Cryptography: Creating and deciphering codes and ciphers.
Cultural Lore: Knowing the traditions and beliefs of various cultures.
Engineering: Knowing the practicalities of construction, building, and invention.
Evaluation: Determining the value of goods and objets d'art.
Healing: Aiding the wounded and sick. Includes effective application of healing arcana. May also apply to Perception and/or Willpower when using certain arcana that affect the body.
Heraldry: Knowing coats of arms and royal families.
Historical Lore: Knowing important events and personalities from the past.
Military Lore: Knowing strategy, tactics, and famous applications thereof.
Musical Lore: Knowing musical traditions and songs.
Natural Lore: Knowing natural flora and fauna. May also apply to Perception when using the Nature Reading arcanum.
Nautical Lore: Knowing the sea, its creatures, ships, and sailing.
Navigation: Planning and following a route from one place to another.
Religious Lore: Knowing religious traditions and practices.
Remote Weapons: Proficiency with wielding weapons remotely using arcana (particularly Manipulate Object).
Research: Making a systematic investigation, usually using records, archives, and books.
Shaping: Knowledge and effective use of shaping arcana.
Sorcery Lore: Studying forgotten and forbidden arts of corrupt arcana.
Writing: Expressing yourself with the written word.

Perception Focuses

Empathy: Discerning the feelings and emotions of others.
Hearing: Using your auditory sense.
Psychic: Using your psychic senses, particularly psychic arcana. May also apply to Willpower when resisting some arcana or struggling mind-to-mind.
Searching: Finding things that are hidden or obscured, such as secret doors.
Seeing: Using your visual sense.
Smelling: Using your olfactory sense.
Tasting: Using your gustatory sense.
Touching: Using your tactile sense.
Tracking: Following tracks and other signs of passage.
Visionary: Interpreting and understanding dreams and visions, including effective use of the visionary arcana. May also apply to Communication, such as when "programming" certain arcane items.

Strength Focuses

Climbing: Scaling walls and other vertical obstacles.
Driving: Directing and guiding carts, carriages, and other wheeled vehicles.
Intimidation: Overawing others with physical presence and threats.
Jumping: Springing and leaping.
Might: Performing feats of raw power, such as lifting or holding up heavy objects.
Smithing: Forging items made of metal, from weapons to jewelry.

Willpower Focuses

Courage: Overcoming fear in the face of adversity.
Faith: Deriving inner strength through spiritual or moral belief.
Meditative: Ability to center, meditate, and internally focus effectively, including the use of meditative arcana.
Morale: Maintaining good spirits and confidence in yourself or your group. NPCs tend to use this focus more than player characters.
Purity: Maintaining purity of moral purpose, even in the face of corruption and temptation.
Self-Discipline: Focusing your mental energy or controlling your impulses and emotions.

Improving Focuses

Focuses grant a flat +2 bonus to your ability tests. For more powerful characters, that measure of focus is not always enough to win the day, or to set your hero apart from others with similar training. Therefore, at higher levels, characters can take a focus for a second time to further improve their bonus on those rolls. Starting at level 11, instead of gaining a new focus, you may select a focus you already have to increase your bonus with that focus to +3 (instead of the +2 it was before). Underline the focus on your character sheet to indicate you've chosen it a second time.

You must still always select a focus for a primary ability on even-numbered levels and a focus for a secondary ability on odd-numbered levels, as usual.

Optional: Trade Focuses

Blue Rose is not a game of everyday life; it's about romantic fantasy and brave adventurers facing corruption, monsters, and other grave threats in extraordinary circumstances. This is why, while there are focuses to cover trade skills, they are quite broad. There is one focus—Smithing—that covers armorers, weaponsmiths, goldsmiths, and so on. This is not an accurate simulation of the differences between artisans, nor is it meant to be. For the purposes of most *Blue Rose* games, the Smithing focus is enough.

Some players, however, may want finer distinctions than the current focus list provides. Maybe your character is from a famous family of weapon makers and it's important to you that his skills are specifically those of a weaponsmith rather than a common blacksmith. If you want to do that, and your Narrator agrees, you can take any trade you can think of and turn it into a focus. You just need to figure out the most appropriate ability to marry it with (most will likely be Dexterity, Intelligence, or Strength). These focuses will be much narrower than most in the game, but if that suits your character concept (or an NPC's nature, in the case of the Narrator), the option is open to you.

Narrators might consider giving characters with very narrow focuses a default +3 bonus instead of the normal +2. This is a good way to give some extra effect to a narrow focus, but it can become confusing if this creates too many exceptions to the normal focus rules. If you use such rules, these focuses could be increased to +4 after level 11 (see **Improving Focuses**), though such levels of skill would be quite rare in the setting.

Talents

Your character has areas of natural aptitude or special training called talents. They provide a way to customize your character that goes beyond background and class.

Each talent is divided into three degrees: Novice, Journeyman, and Master. Each degree provides a game system benefit. You have to be a novice in a talent before you can become a journeyman, and a journeyman before you can become a master.

You gain new talents and degrees through your class, which also limits the talents you have access to. Each talent lists the classes it is available to; you cannot take talents not open to your class. Most talents also have requirements, like specific focuses or weapons groups. If you don't have all the requirements, you cannot take the talent.

When talents are listed for a character, the standard format is talent first, followed by the degree achieved in parentheses. Command (Journeyman), for example, or Performance (Novice).

A catalog of the talents available follows. They use the following format:

Talent Name

Classes: Classes that can take this talent are listed here.
Requirement: You cannot take this talent unless you have the specified requirement(s).

A short description of the talent.

Novice: The benefit gained when you become a novice.

Journeyman: The benefit gained when you become a journeyman.

Master: The benefit gained when you become a master.

Talents

Animal Training

Class: Any.
Requirement: None.

You know how to train animals.

Novice: You know the basics of dealing with animals. With a week of training, you can teach an animal to follow a simple one-word command like "Heel," "Follow," or "Attack." You can teach a single animal a number of commands equal to your Communication.

Journeyman: You can train animals to follow more complex commands, like "Guard this place" or "Return to me when strangers approach." Teaching a complex command takes two weeks of training and the total number of commands a single animal can learn is equal to your Communication +2.

Master: Your training can turn animals into prime examples of their kind. With a month of training, you can increase an animal's Dexterity or Strength by +1. It also gains the Willpower (Morale) focus. An animal can only receive such training once.

Animism

Class: Adept.
Requirement: None.

You can learn and use animism arcana.

Novice: You can use the Psychic Shield and Second Sight arcana, and you gain one of: Animal Messenger, Animal Summoning, or Psychic Contact. If you already know Psychic Shield and Second Sight, you gain one other animism arcanum in their place.

Journeyman: You gain two additional Animism arcana.

Master: You gain two additional Animism arcana.

Arcane Potential

Class: Expert, Warrior.
Requirement: None.

You have the potential to develop some arcane abilities.

Novice: You gain one arcanum of your choice.

Journeyman: You gain one arcanum of your choice.

Master: You gain one arcanum of your choice.

Arcane Training

Class: Adept.
Requirement: None.

You learn to master a diverse number of arcana.

Novice: You gain two additional arcana for a talent you already possess.

Journeyman: You gain two additional arcana for a talent you already possess.

Master: You gain two additional arcana for a talent you already possess.

Armor Training

Class: Warrior.
Requirement: None.

You have learned to fight while wearing armor. You only take the armor's penalty to your Speed, while those without this talent suffer the penalty to all Dexterity-based tests and calculations (including Speed).

Novice: You can wear Light and Medium Armor without suffering a penalty to Dexterity.

Journeyman: You can wear Heavy Armor without suffering a penalty to Dexterity.

Master: You know how to get the most out of your armor. You gain the benefit of half the armor rating (rounded down) of your armor when you take penetrating damage. (Normally, armor provides no defense against penetrating damage.)

Archery Style

Classes: Expert, Warrior.
Requirement: You must be trained in the Bows weapons group.

You are experienced with bows and crossbows.

Novice: You know how to punish enemies who get too close. When shooting a bow or crossbow at an enemy within 6 yards of you, you inflict +1 damage.

Journeyman: Due to long hours of practice, you can reload faster than common bowmen. You can reload a bow as a free action, and a crossbow as a minor action.

Master: When shooting a bow or crossbow, you can perform the Lightning Attack combat stunt for 2 SP instead of the usual 3. (If you are using a crossbow you'll also need to perform a Rapid Reload combat stunt to take advantage of this benefit, since you must have a loaded weapon to use Lightning Attack.)

Artificer

Class: Adept.
Requirements: You must have Dexterity 2 or higher and the Dexterity (Artisan) and Dexterity (Crafting) focuses.

You know how to create arcane items (see **Arcane Items** in **Chapter 11**).

Novice: You learn the basics of imbuing formulas to create elixirs.

Journeyman: You learn to imbue arcane stones.

Master: You learn to imbue arcane weapons.

Carousing

Class: Any.
Requirements: You must have Communication and Constitution 1 or higher.

You take your fun seriously.

Novice: You can drink other people under the table. When making Constitution (Drinking) tests as part of an advanced test, you gain a +1 bonus to the result of each Drama Die. This allows you to reach the success threshold faster. Advanced tests are detailed in **Chapter 10: Running the Game**.

Journeyman: The tavern is your second home. Choose one of the following Communication focuses: Gambling or Romance. If you fail a Communication test with your chosen focus, you can reroll it, but you must keep the result of the second roll.

Master: When you're having a good time, you're invincible! (Or so you think.) Choose one of the following roleplaying stunts: Flirt or Tower of Will. You can perform that stunt for 3 SP instead of the usual 4, and you gain a +1 bonus to the opposed roll for that stunt. Thus, if you choose Tower of Will, your bonus on opposed tests is +2 instead of the usual +1.

Command

Classes: Adept, Warrior.
Requirement: You must have Communication 2 or higher.

You are a natural leader.

Novice: Your presence inspires your allies. If you take a major action to make a heroic gesture (raise your sword, shout a battle cry, wave a flag, etc.), your allies gain a +1 bonus to Willpower (Courage) tests for the rest of the encounter.

Journeyman: Your allies follow your lead. Any NPCs you lead gain a +1 bonus when rolling for initiative.

Master: When you stand firm, your allies stand with you. When you lead NPCs in an encounter, they do not have to take a Willpower (Morale) test until more than two-thirds of your side's combatants are out of the fight (dead or incapacitated). If you leave the fight or fall in battle, this benefit is lost.

Contacts

Class: Any.
Requirement: You must have Communication 1 or higher.

You know people, sometimes in the unlikeliest places.

Novice: You can attempt to make a contact out of an NPC with a successful Communication (Persuasion) test. The Narrator will set the target number based on the likelihood of you knowing the NPC or having mutual friends. The more distant the NPC's homeland or social class from yours, the more difficult the test will be. A contact will be friendly to you, but won't go out of their way to help you without additional motivation. You can't make a contact out of an NPC who already dislikes you or is an enemy.

Journeyman: Once you've established a contact, you can try to get a favor with another successful Communication (Persuasion) test. The target number is based on the nature of the favor, and whether it puts the contact in any danger.

Master: You can turn an acquaintance into an ally with a show of loyalty. If you do a significant favor for a contact, they will treat you as a friend when you ask them for favors. They will go out of their way to help you and will be willing to put themselves in danger for you.

Dual Weapon Style

Classes: Expert, Warrior.
Requirement: You must have Dexterity 2 or higher.

You can fight with a weapon in your main hand (your primary weapon) and another in your off hand (your secondary weapon). Neither can be a two-handed weapon. Unless otherwise stated, your attacks come from the primary weapon.

Novice: Wielding two weapons can aid you in attack or defense. If you take the Activate action, you gain either a +1 bonus on your melee attack rolls or a +1 Defense bonus vs. melee attacks until the end of the encounter. You can switch the bonus you are taking with another Activate action.

Journeyman: You can perform the Lightning Attack combat stunt for 2 SP instead of the usual 3, but the extra attack must come from your secondary weapon.

Master: You can overwhelm opponents with blows from both weapons. If you make a melee attack with your primary weapon and you are not charging, you can make another attack with your secondary weapon as a minor action. The second attack cannot generate stunt points, and you only add half your Strength (rounded down) to damage.

Healing

Class: Adept.
Requirement: None.

You can learn and use healing arcana.

Novice: You can use the Cure, Psychic Shield, and Second Sight arcana. If you already know Psychic Shield and Second Sight, you gain one other healing arcanum in their place.

Journeyman: You gain two additional Healing arcana.

Master: You gain two additional Healing arcana.

Horsemanship

Class: Any.
Requirement: You must have the Dexterity (Riding) focus.

You are a skilled rider and can handle horses and other riding beasts with ease.

Novice: You can jump into the saddle quickly. Mounting a steed is a free action for you.

Journeyman: You can ride like the wind. When you ride a mount, it gains a +2 bonus to its Speed.

Master: You were born to the saddle. You add +1 to your Defense while mounted. You may also reroll a failed Dexterity (Riding) test, but you must keep the result of the second roll.

Inspire

Class: Any.
Requirement: You must have Communication 2 or higher.

You are inspiring to others. You may be a great speaker or leader, but this talent is more about being an exemplar and source of trust, dependability, and stability than overt interaction skills.

Novice: You inspire calm and courage in your friends and allies. As long as you are conscious and they are within sight of you, any allies gain a +1 bonus to all Willpower-related tests. Any ally directly defending you from harm when you are unconscious or incapacitated receives the same bonus.

Journeyman: You can inspire greatness in others. As long as you are conscious and they are within sight of you, any ally generating stunt points generates +1 SP. Any ally directly defending you from harm when you are unconscious or incapacitated receives the same bonus.

Master: With you around, things don't seem as bad. Once per encounter, you can spend two minor actions to offer words of inspiration to your allies. All who hear these words heal 1d6 + your Communication in Health and gain a +2 bonus on their next test.

Intrigue

Class: Any.
Requirement: You must have Communication 2 or higher.

You are a master of secrets.

Novice: You know how to play the Game. Choose one of the following Communication focuses: Deception, Etiquette, or Romance. If you fail a Communication test with your chosen focus, you can reroll it, but you must keep the result of the second roll.

Journeyman: You always gain more information than you give out. You can perform the And Another Thing roleplaying stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2. In addition, you gain a +1 bonus on any further tests the stunt allows.

Master: You know how to end a conversation. You can perform the Stunned Silence roleplaying stunt for 2 SP instead of the usual 3. In addition, you have the opportunity to change this immediately into a combat encounter. If you do so, you and one ally per extra stunt point you spend can act in the first round of combat. Everyone else is surprised.

Linguistics

Class: Any.
Requirement: You must have Intelligence 1 or higher.

You can learn new languages easily. When you learn a new language, you learn to both speak and read it.

Novice: You learn an additional language from the following list: Aldin, Faento (Roamer), Lar'tyan, Rezean, Old Aldin, and Old Vatazin. People in Aldis, Jarzon, and Kern commonly speak Aldin, the modern version of the language of the Old Kingdom (Old Aldin), albeit with different accents and dialects. Old Vatazin is the ancient language of the vata, rarely seen and even more rarely heard in the modern world.

Journeyman: You learn an additional language from the previous list. You can also imitate a specific dialect with a successful Communication (Performance) test.

Master: You learn two more languages from the previous list. You can also pick any one language you know and speak it like a native—that is, without an accent.

Lore

Class: Any.
Requirement: You must have Intelligence 2 or higher.

You have an inquisitive mind and absorb facts easily.

Novice: You have studied hard. When you make a successful Intelligence test with a lore focus, the Narrator should give you an extra piece of information on the topic. A lore focus is any Intelligence focus with the word "lore" in it, such as Cultural Lore and Historical Lore. The Narrator determines the additional information, and it may or may not be pertinent to the main question at hand.

Journeyman: You are an accomplished researcher. When making Intelligence (Research) tests as part of an advanced test, you gain a +1 bonus to the result of each Drama Die. This allows you to reach the success threshold faster. Advanced tests are detailed in **Chapter 10: Running the Game**.

Master: While your knowledge is vast, you have two areas of particular specialization. Pick any two of your lore focuses. When making tests using those focuses, you can reroll a failed test but you must keep the result of the second roll.

Medicine

Class: Any.
Requirement: You must have Intelligence 1 or higher.

You can treat wounds and illnesses.

Novice: You have trained in the art of medicine, and your aid is swift and sure. Heal is a minor action for you.

Journeyman: You have the hands of a healer. When you use the Heal action, your ally gets back an amount of Health equal to (Drama Die × 2) + Intelligence.

Master: Your healing ability is legendary. When you use the Heal action, your ally gets back an amount of Health equal to (Drama Die × 3) + Intelligence.

Meditative

Class: Adept.
Requirement: None.

You can learn and use meditative arcana.

Novice: You can use the Body Control, Psychic Shield, and Second Sight arcana. If you already know Psychic Shield and Second Sight, you gain one other meditative arcanum in their place.

Journeyman: You gain two additional Meditative arcana.

Master: You gain two additional Meditative arcana.

Mounted Combat Style

Class: Warrior.
Requirements: You must have the Dexterity (Riding) focus and a humanoid-enough form to effectively ride a mount.

You are adept at fighting on horseback.

Novice: You can use the mobility of your mount to your advantage in combat. When mounted and making a Move action, you can move part of your allowed distance, then use your major action to make a melee or ranged attack, and then move the rest of your allowed distance. The total distance moved cannot be more than your mount's

Speed. Normally, you'd have to finish moving before attacking.

Journeyman: Your mounted charge is fearsome. You can move at your mount's full Speed when making a Charge action, and inflict +1 damage if your attack strikes home.

Master: You and your mount are one. The Knock Prone combat stunt cannot dismount you.

Note: Two-handed weapons and long bows cannot be used on horseback, and this applies to anyone, not just those with this talent. If you attempt to use those weapons while mounted, they count as improvised weapons.

Observation

Class: Any.
Requirement: You must have Perception 2 or higher.

You have an eye for detail.

Novice: Your keen senses notice things others do not. Choose one of the following Perception focuses: Empathy or Seeing. If you fail a Perception test with your chosen focus, you can reroll it, but you must keep the result of the second roll.

Journeyman: Analysis of your observation often leads to insight. You can perform the That Makes Me Wonder exploration stunt for –1 SP.

Master: Nothing escapes your scrutiny. You can perform The Object of Your Attention exploration stunt for –1 SP. In addition, the stunt gives you a +2 bonus instead of the usual +1.

Oratory

Class: Any.
Requirement: You must have the Communication (Persuasion) focus.

You are a skilled public speaker who can sway others with your words.

Novice: You really know how to work a crowd. If you fail a Communication (Persuasion) test when trying to convince a group of something, you can reroll the test. However, you must keep the results of the second roll. You cannot make this reroll in an intimate social setting or when trying to persuade an individual rather than a group.

Journeyman: Your words are like magic. Each time you perform the Sway the Crowd roleplaying stunt, you affect three additional people instead of one.

Master: You can agitate a crowd. If you make a successful Communication (Persuasion) test when addressing a group and the result of your Drama Die is 5 or 6, you rouse them to immediate action. You can't necessarily control what they do—though you can try with Communication (Leadership) tests—but they take your words to heart and act on them.

Performance

Class: Any.
Requirement: You must have the Communication (Performance) focus or the Intelligence (Musical Lore) focus.

You have a natural talent for music.

Novice: You know how to play an instrument, sing, and write and read music. You are also an accomplished actor and performer. In addition, you may perform one of the following roleplaying stunts for 1 SP less than its normal cost: Jest, Stunned Silence, or Sway the Crowd.

Journeyman: You can get the feel of a room and adapt accordingly. If you have 15 minutes to observe a crowd before performing or speaking in front of them, you gain a +1 bonus to any Communication-based tests to persuade or entertain them. In addition, pick another roleplaying stunt from the Novice degree of this talent to perform at 1 SP less than its normal cost.

Master: When performing, you exude confidence and style. You may perform the With a Flourish exploration stunt while entertaining an audience for 3 SP instead of its usual cost of 5, and its effects last until the end of the day.

Pole Weapon Style

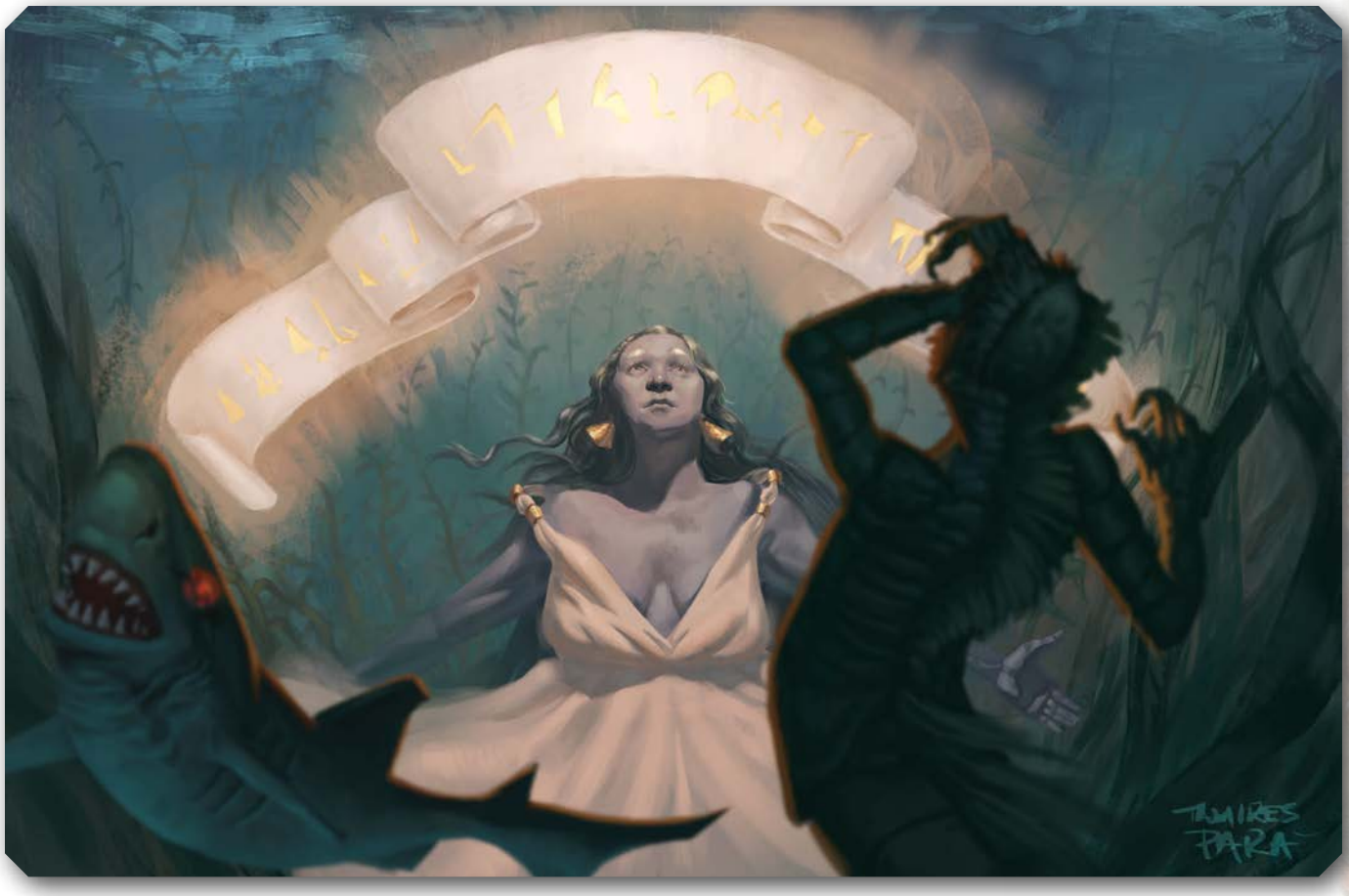
Class: Warrior.
Requirement: You must be trained in the Polearms weapons group.

Pole weapons can be cumbersome, but not in your hands. You can fight in this style with any weapon of the Polearms group.

Novice: You can use the length of your weapon to your advantage. You treat enemies up to 4 yards away as if they were adjacent to you, so you can make melee attacks against them. (They can't do the same unless they also have this talent.) If an ally is between you and your opponent, you can still attack. In fact, this is a common tactic.

Journeyman: Once prepared, you are hard to move. You can set yourself with an Activate action. Until the end of the encounter, any opponent that attempts to use the Skirmish combat stunt or the Novice degree of the Two-Handed Style against you must first make an opposed attack roll. If you win, your opponent fails to move you and wastes the stunt point(s). If your opponent wins, he may perform the Skirmish combat stunt(s).

Master: You get the most of your weapon's design features. If wielding a military fork or two-handed spear, you can perform the Pierce Armor combat stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2. If wielding a glaive or halberd, you can perform the Knock Prone combat stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2. In addition, mounted combatants do not gain the +1 bonus for fighting against an opponent on foot when attacking you.



Psychic

Class: Adept.
Requirement: None.

You can learn and use psychic arcana.

Novice: You can use the Psychic Contact, Psychic Shield, and Second Sight arcana. If you already know Psychic Shield and Second Sight, you gain one other psychic arcanum in their place.

Journeyman: You gain two additional Psychic arcana.

Master: You gain two additional Psychic arcana.

Purifying Light

Class: Any.
Requirements: You must have Willpower 2 or higher and the Willpower (Faith) focus.

You can wield the power of pure Light against the forces of Shadow. If you currently have any Corruption (see **Corruption** in **Chapter 2**) you cannot use any of these abilities. Should you ever embrace Corruption, you lose access to this talent altogether.

Novice: As a major action, you can call forth a shining light from the depths of your spirit to fill an area up to 30 feet across. Maintaining this light requires total concentration and a major action on each of your turns. Any darkfiend, unliving creature, or anyone who has embraced Corruption must make a successful Willpower (Faith or Self-Discipline) test against a TN of 12 + your Willpower in order to enter the area, and again on each of the creatures' turns to remain there. A failed test means the creature cannot enter the area and must leave it immediately if already inside.

Journeyman: You can cast bolts of arcane light as a special ranged attack. This is resolved as a normal ranged attack, and the attack roll is an Accuracy (Arcane) test. Your arcane light has a range of 16 yards and inflicts 1d6 + Willpower damage to darkfiends, unliving, and those who have embraced Corruption, but has no effect on other creatures or objects.

Master: The area of your Novice degree ability doubles to 60 feet across, while the range of your arcane light bolts increases to 24 yards and their damage increases to 2d6 + Willpower.

Quick Reflexes

Class: Any.
Requirement: You must have Dexterity 2 or higher.

You react to threats speedily and instinctually.

Novice: You are prepared for action in an instant. Once per round you can use Ready as a free action on your turn.

Journeyman: You can flip yourself up or drop down with lightning speed. You can go prone or stand up as a free action. (These normally can only be done as part of a Move action.)

Master: It is hard to get the drop on you. You may reroll your initiative roll at the start of a combat encounter, but you must keep the results of the second roll.

Scouting

Class: Expert.
Requirement: You must have Dexterity 2 or higher.

You are skilled at the art of reconnaissance.

Novice: You can use the lay of the land to your advantage. If you fail a Dexterity (Stealth) test, you can reroll it, but you must keep the results of the second roll.

Journeyman: You know how to get the drop on your enemies. You can perform the Seize the Initiative combat stunt for 2 SP instead of the usual 4.

Master: You are a skilled observer. If you fail a Perception (Seeing) test, you can reroll it, but you must keep the results of the second roll.

Shaping

Class: Adept.
Requirement: None.

You can learn and use shaping arcana.

Novice: You can use the Move Object, Psychic Shield, and Second Sight arcana. If you already know Psychic Shield and Second Sight, you gain one other shaping arcanum in their place.

Journeyman: You gain two additional Shaping arcana.

Master: You gain two additional Shaping arcana.

Single Weapon Style

Classes: Expert, Warrior.
Requirement: You must have Perception 2 or higher.

You can fight effectively wielding only a single-handed melee weapon.

Novice: Fighting with a single weapon demands increased awareness. If you take the Activate action, you gain a +1 Defense bonus until the end of the encounter while fighting in this style.

Journeyman: You can create a web of steel with but a single weapon. Your bonus to Defense increases to +2 while fighting in this style.

Master: You know how to fight several enemies at once. Opponents making melee attacks against you never gain a bonus on their attack rolls for outnumbering you.

Thievery

Class: Expert.
Requirement: You must have Dexterity 2 or higher.

What's yours is yours and what's theirs is yours too.

Novice: You don't let locks stand in your way. If you fail a Dexterity (Lock Picking) test, you can reroll it, but you must keep the results of the second roll.

Journeyman: You are familiar with many types of traps. If you fail a Dexterity (Traps) test, you can reroll it, but you must keep the results of the second roll.

Master: You know how to find what's hidden. If you fail a Perception (Searching) test, you can reroll it, but you must keep the results of the second roll.

Thrown Weapon Style

Classes: Expert, Warrior.
Requirement: You must be trained in at least one of the Axes, Light Blades, or Polearms weapons groups.

You are adept with throwing weapons.

Novice: Your accuracy is uncanny. You gain a +1 bonus on attack rolls with throwing weapons.

Journeyman: You can ready a throwing weapon in an instant. You can reload a throwing weapon as a free action instead of a minor action.

Master: You know how to bypass your enemy's armor. When you perform the Pierce Armor combat stunt with a throwing weapon, your damage is penetrating. (That stunt normally halves your opponent's armor rating but penetrating damage allows you to ignore it altogether.)

Tooth and Claw

Class: Any.
Requirements: You must be trained in the Natural Weapons group. You must have, or be able to assume, an animal form with natural weapons such as fangs or claws.

You are skilled at using your animal body and natural weapons in a fight.

Novice: Your bite is fierce and your claws are sharp. You do +2 damage with any of your natural weapons.

Journeyman: Four legs are better, and more stable, than two. You can perform the Knock Prone combat stunt for –1 SP, and those attempting to use the Knock Prone combat stunt on you must pay +1 SP over the normal cost.

Master: You waste no time putting down a vulnerable foe when necessary. You can perform the Mighty or Lethal Blow combat stunts for 1 SP less than normal against any foe who is unarmed, prone, or unaware of your presence. Foes who possess the Unarmed Style talent are not considered unarmed.

Two-Handed Style

Class: Warrior.
Requirements: You must have Strength 3 or higher and be trained in the Axes weapons group, Bludgeons weapons group, Heavy Blades weapons group, or Polearms weapons group.

You are deadly with two-handed melee weapons.

Novice: The length of your weapon and the power of your attacks forces foes to yield ground. When you hit with a melee attack with a two-handed weapon, you can move the target 2 yards in any direction.

Journeyman: You strike fearsome blows with your weapon. You can perform the Mighty Blow combat stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2 when wielding a two-handed weapon.

Master: You and your weapon are as one. When wielding a two-handed weapon, you can choose to reroll your damage, but you must keep the results of the second roll.

Unarmed Style

Class: Any.
Requirements: You must be trained in the Brawling weapons group, as well as having a humanoid form and hands.

You know a thing or two about brawling.

Novice: Your hands are as tough as iron. When you attack with your fist, you inflict 1d6 damage instead of 1d3.

Journeyman: Your punch can drop the toughest opponents. You can perform the Knock Prone combat stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2 when attacking with your fist or a gauntlet.

Master: You can't be disarmed, but the same can't be said of your opponents. When performing the Disarm combat stunt, you gain a +2 bonus to your attack roll in the opposed test.

Visionary

Class: Adept.
Requirement: None.

You can learn and use visionary arcana.

Novice: You can use the Psychic Shield, Second Sight, and Visions arcana. If you already know Psychic Shield and Second Sight, you gain one other visionary arcanum in their place.

Journeyman: You gain two additional Visionary arcana.

Master: You gain two additional Visionary arcana

Weapon and Shield Style

Class: Warrior.
Requirement: You must have Strength 2 or higher.

You've been trained to fight with a single-handed melee weapon and shield.

Novice: You can use shields of all shapes and sizes. You get a +2 Defense bonus when using a shield, instead of the usual untrained maximum of +1.

Journeyman: You know how to get the most from your shield. You can perform the Defensive Stance combat stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2.

Master: Opponents must work hard to get by your defenses. The shield Defense bonus increases to +3.

Wild Arcane

Class: Any.
Requirement: None.

You possess a wild, barely controlled gift for certain arcana (see **Chapter 4**).

Novice: Choose three arcana belonging to any talent. You may use these three arcana normally. However, whenever you are under stress—such as when you are threatened, physically or mentally damaged, or in other circumstances at the Narrator's discretion—you must make a TN 13 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test, with an additional +1 added to the target number for every previous successful Self-Discipline test when using your arcana. If you fail the test, one of your arcana (the Narrator's choice) activates randomly. The arcana has its normal effects, but the Narrator chooses its targets and parameters, if applicable. Failure also removes accumulated Self-Discipline bonuses and resets the target number back to its base of 13. You suffer normal fatigue from this uncontrolled use of arcana and cannot take any other actions on the round it occurs.

Journeyman: Choose another three arcana. They are subject to the same rules as the Novice degree.

Master: Choose another three arcana. They are subject to the same rules as the Novice degree.

If you later acquire the underlying arcane talent for any of the arcana granted by your Wild Arcane talent, you can choose to give up one choice of a new arcanum to place your wild arcana of that talent fully under your control.

Example

Ty has a Journeyman Wild Arcane talent with Cold Shaping, Fire Shaping, Move Object, Nature Reading, Sleep, and Visions. Needless to say, when Ty is under stress, he can cause some strange things to happen! With guidance and training, he later acquires a Novice Shaping talent, and gives up its choice of an arcanum to place his Cold Shaping, Fire Shaping, and Move Object arcana under his full control, along with acquiring the Novice Shaping arcana of Psychic Shield and Second Sight. Now when Ty fails a Willpower (Self-Discipline) test, only his Nature Reading, Sleep, and Visions arcana may manifest randomly, meaning much less dramatic results. If Ty later acquires the Animism, Psychic, or Visionary talents, he can bring those three arcana fully under control as well.

Specializations

A specialization is another way to customize your character and focus in on your class or role in the game. If you say your character is a warrior, that's a broad statement. If you say that your character is a knight, it says quite a bit more.

In *Blue Rose*, specializations come in two distinct flavors: those related to a single class and those usable by more than one class. Single class specializations are those which take part of a class' role or abilities and develops and enhances them. Multi-class specializations take abilities that a particular character has developed and expands them. Neither type is superior, and they can be combined when a character advances enough to gain multiple specializations.

You get access to specializations through your class. As described in **Chapter 2: Character Creation,** you can take a specialization for the first time at level 4. That grants you the Novice degree in the appropriate specialization talent (a talent unique to that specialization). You gain the Journeyman degree at level 6 and the Master degree at level 8. This is the only way to gain new degrees in specialization talents. You can take a second specialization at level 12, with further degrees at levels 14 and 16. The specializations included in this book are detailed on the following pages.

Example

Jamie's character, Lorinelle, has reached level 4 and can select her first specialization. As an Expert, Lorinelle can take any specialization open to the class whose requirements she meets. Jamie considers the Diplomat for Lorinelle, which is open to all classes. Unfortunately, Lorinelle currently lacks the Linguistics or Oratory talent requirement. Looking again, Jamie sees that the Spy specialization also matches his vision of Lorinelle quite well and she meets all of its requirements. Jamie selects the Spy specialization and records the Novice degree for the specialization on Lorinelle's character sheet.

The classes are designed so you can finish one specialization at level 8 by taking one degree of the specialization talent at each of levels 4, 6, and 8. It could be, however, that you don't want to take a specialization, or can't qualify for one. If you prefer, you can always take a degree in a regular talent instead of a specialization talent at those levels. The next time you'd get a new degree in a specialization talent, you can take a specialization at that point, or take another regular talent.

Although specialization talent slots can be used to take regular talents, if you so choose, it does not work the other way around, and characters can only take new specializations or gain new degrees in them at the levels specified in their class description.

Example

The adept Henren reaches level 4. He could take a specialization at this point but decides he'd rather take another arcane talent instead. He gains the Visionary talent instead of taking of a specialization. When he gets to level 6, he faces the same choice. This time he decides to become a Pirate, taking the Novice degree of that specialization talent. When he reaches level 8, he takes the Journeyman degree.

Accessing Specializations

The default assumption of the rules is that every specialization you meet the requirements for is open to you when you hit level 4. This gives you the broadest array of choices. However, your Narrator may require you to work to access certain specializations. If that is their decision, you can access a specialization in three ways:

- You can find a teacher. This is an NPC who already has the specialization. Teachers have motivations of their own, of course, so they may require money, favors, oaths, or actions before agreeing to teach you.
- You can go on a quest. These can vary wildly, but basically your Narrator will create a special side adventure for you, the completion of which will unlock the desired specialization. If you wanted to become an assassin, for example, you might have to go to a major city and impress its Assassins' Guild.
- You can find a tome. The knowledge of some specializations has been written down and can sometimes be learned through reading and study.

Since you know you'll be getting a specialization at level 4, it's a good idea to start thinking about what you're going to choose at that level once you hit level 3. Then discuss it with your Narrator. This will give your Narrator a chance to prepare and work your choice into the campaign. If you must find a trainer, for example, that's something you can pursue while working towards level 4. Then when you get there, you'll be ready for the specialization.

Assassin

Experts with a ruthless nature and flexible morals can use their talents to master the art of death. Assassins are never the obvious threat. They leave the blustering and the battle cries to warriors. Assassins are the shadow in the night, the knife in the back. While many assassins are professional killers for hire, others take up their vocation for another purpose, whether fanatical devotion to a death cult or a desire to eliminate certain targets from the world for the greater good. Assassins are rare in much of Aldea outside various secret cabals and guilds, but are quite common in Kern.

Assassin Talent

Class: Expert.
Requirements: You must have Dexterity and Intelligence 2 or higher.

You know how to kill quickly and efficiently.

Novice: You can assess a nearby opponent and spot weaknesses that can be exploited in combat. With an Activate action, you can mark for death a visible target within 10 yards of you. All ranged and melee attacks against a target marked for death receive a +1 damage bonus. The mark lasts until the end of the encounter, the target is slain, or you pick a new target with another Activate action. You can't maintain active marks on multiple targets at the same time. A single character cannot be marked for death more than once in the same encounter.

Journeyman: You know how to exploit your target's weaknesses. When you make a Pinpoint Attack against an opponent you have marked for death, you inflict an extra 1d6 damage.

Master: Even the most slippery targets cannot escape you. You can make pinpoint attacks against all opponents, no matter what their Dexterity is.

Bard

You may inspire others through your performance. Bards are master storytellers, musicians, poets, and actors adept at using their skills not only to entertain, but also to record great events and deeds. Many of the best bards are skilled historians or researchers as well, discovering an audience's interests and shared experiences to better move them. Bards are popular and well-regarded in Aldis, but they can be found anywhere.

Bard Talent

Class: Any.
Requirements: You must have Communication 2 or higher. You must possess the Performance talent at Novice or higher and at least one Lore-based Intelligence focus.

You can move others with song and verse.

Novice: By spending a major action and succeeding in a TN 13 Communication (Performance) test, a bard can spin a tale or sing a song to inspire an ally. This may happen before or during an encounter. An inspired ally may reroll one failed test. If not used by the next encounter, this reroll is lost. Bards may inspire multiple allies by spending additional actions or using the Sway the Crowd roleplaying stunt to affect more than one ally at a time.

Journeyman: Bards often remember stories and tales that provide useful insights. They can perform the That Makes Me Wonder exploration stunt for 2 SP instead of its usual cost of 3. Once per encounter, they can also add a +2 circumstance bonus to any Lore-based Intelligence test if they can provide a plausible explanation of how they remember a story, fable, or historical event that provides useful insight.

Master: Bards can now inspire or demoralize whole groups with their performances. The bard takes a major action and makes a TN 13 Communication (Performance) test (for allies) or an opposed Willpower (Courage or Morale) test (for enemies) targeted at any group that can hear their performance clearly. Success means the bard can apply one of the following bonuses or penalties to the group, as appropriate: +1 to attack rolls, +1 to damage, +1 to Willpower tests, –1 to attack rolls, –1 to damage, –1 to Willpower tests. Modifiers can't be stacked, but multiple actions can be taken to apply multiple modifiers to a single group. Note that what constitutes a "group" is left somewhat open to Narrator interpretation, but should always include a party of heroes or a group of adversaries of the same type (night person soldiers, mongrel raiders, etc.)

Beast Friend

You have established a bond with beasts. They generally behave amiably towards you, and at least one has become your boon companion. Many who work closely with beasts can develop this specialization. Note that rhydan are not beasts but people, and are not affected by the benefits of this talent.

Beast Friend Talent

Class: Any.

Requirements: You must have Communication 2 or higher. You must also possess the Communication (Animal Handling) focus and the Animal Training talent at Novice or higher.

You have a special bond with the animal kingdom and have a unique animal companion to aid you. Beast Friends are sometimes titled based on the beasts they take as companions, such as Bearfriend, Horselord, or Packfriend. The abilities of the specialization remain the same regardless of what they are called.

Novice: Gain an animal companion. This can be any normal animal up to and including a bear or similarly-sized large beast. This creature is exceptional, an Elite version of its type (see **Chapter 12: Adversaries** for more details on Elite creatures). This animal will fight for you and to protect you, and can perform various tricks. If your companion dies it can be replaced, but finding and training a new beast takes 1d6 – your Communication in months (minimum 1).

Journeyman: You gain a +1 bonus to Communication tests with beasts of the same general type as your companion (canines, bears, birds, etc.) and you can use the Psychic Contact arcanum, but only with your animal companion. In addition, your animal companion becomes Heroic (see **Chapter 12: Adversaries** for more details on Heroic creatures).

Master: Either your animal companion becomes Epic, or you may attract an additional Heroic beast or two additional Elite ones. Your Journeyman Communication bonus also now applies to these new animals if they are of a different type.

Berserker

All warriors fight, but not all feel the call to battle singing in their blood, or see the crimson haze of blood lust. Those who do can learn to channel that primal rage to become berserkers—fearsome foes on the battlefield, focused solely on destroying their enemies. Some revel in this power and the glory of combat, while for others it is a grim necessity, allowing them to fight and survive another battle, another day, to perhaps enjoy a time of unbroken peace where their rage will no longer be needed. Berserkers are almost unheard of in Aldis, and a life of unrestrained violence increases the risk of falling to corruption, causing many to avoid this specialization. However, Kern makes frequent use of berserkers and some—such as the night people—have found this specialization an effective and productive channel for their anger.

Berserker Talent

Class: Warrior.
Requirements: You must have Strength and Willpower 2 or higher.

You use your rage as a weapon.

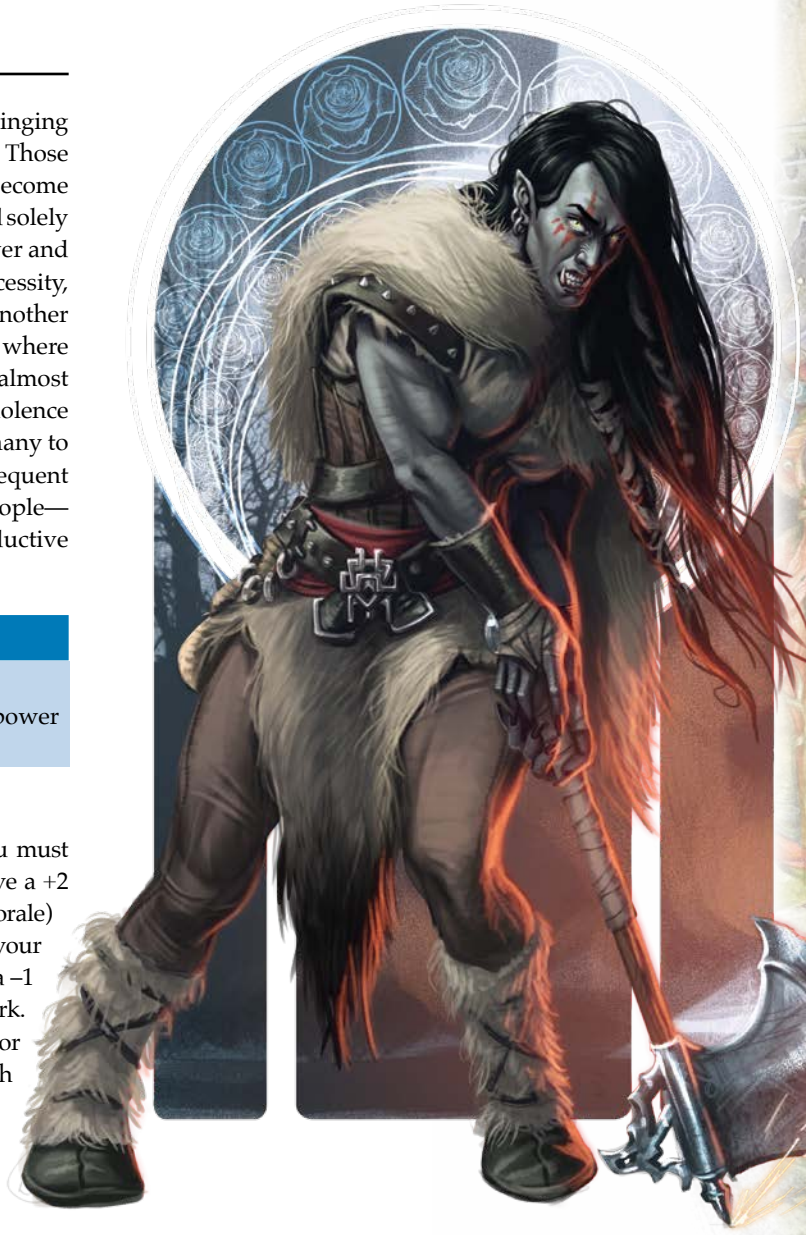
Novice: You can drive yourself into a fury. First you must expend a minor action to become Berserk. You receive a +2 bonus on Willpower (Courage) and Willpower (Morale) tests while Berserk. You also receive a +1 bonus on your damage rolls in melee combat. However, you suffer a –1 penalty to Defense and to Perception tests while Berserk. You return to normal at the end of the encounter, or if you force yourself out of your berserk state with another minor action.

Journeyman: Your rage becomes more potent. While Berserk, you gain the same bonuses and penalties as described in the Novice entry, but your damage bonus in melee combat increases to +3.

Master: Your fury is unstoppable! When Berserk, you can perform the Lethal Blow combat stunt for 4 SP instead of the usual 5.

Champion

There are many tough and capable warriors, but those that can truly inspire their allies and intimidate their enemies are few. Champions do not just fight; they are a palpable presence on the battlefield. Comrades in arms look to them for strength and courage in the chaos of battle. Foes hesitate and lose heart when facing them. Champions are not unique to any one army or organization. They can be found in all parts of the world, and smart commanders recruit as many as possible into their forces when combat approaches. Many warriors who serve as one of the Sovereign's Finest are Champions.



Champion Talent

Class: Warrior.
Requirements: You must have Communication and Strength of 2 or higher.

You are a beacon of strength on the battlefield.

Novice: Your battle roar intimidates your opponents. When you take the Charge action, you can shout a war cry that gives all enemies within 8 yards of your charge's final position a –1 penalty on attack rolls on their next turn.

Journeyman: You can lead your allies in an inspired defense. First, you must use the Activate action to enter Rally mode. Your allies within 8 yards of you gain +1 Defense and a +1 bonus on Willpower (Morale) tests while this mode is active. You can end Rally with another Activate action.

Master: Your presence on the battlefield cannot be ignored. When in Rally mode, your Journeyman effects affect allies within 12 yards of you. They also receive a +1 bonus on Willpower (Courage) tests and inflict +1 damage with melee attacks.

Commander

You are excellent at leading others in military and combat situations. Some commanders lead from the front, others from afar, but all lend their keen tactical minds and charisma to the practice of war. Commanders are usually warriors, though others sometimes command great armies as well. Not everyone who leads an army into battle has this specialization, though many of the greatest generals do.

Commander Talent

Class: Any. Also, Experts possessing this specialization can now take the Command talent if they wish.
Requirements: You must have Communication at 2 or higher, and must possess the Intelligence (Military Lore) and Communication (Leadership) focuses.

You have the training, talent, and will to lead armies into battle.

Novice: You gain a special stunt: Inspire.

SP Cost	Stunt
2	**Inspire:** Your actions encourage others to acts of heroism and greatness. All your allies within sight of you gain a +2 bonus to all Willpower (Morale) and Willpower (Courage) tests for the rest of the encounter. This bonus cannot be stacked with multiple uses of this stunt.

Journeyman: You may rally your allies with your words and actions. Once per encounter when you use the Inspire special stunt, each ally in sight of you heals 1d6 + your Communication in Health.

Master: You are skilled at creating opportunities for others. You may pass the benefits of the Set Up combat stunt to multiple allies in a fight by paying +2 SP per extra ally affected.

Diplomat

Sometimes fighting isn't the answer; other times, fighting was the answer but now you need someone to negotiate terms and treaties. In both these cases, the diplomat shines. Part negotiator, part public relations, this specialization is focused on making and keeping allies and connections while minimizing enemies and nonviolently restricting their effectiveness—especially in political arenas.

Diplomat Talent

Class: Any.
Requirements: You must have Communication 2 or higher. You must have the Linguistics or Oratory talent at Novice or higher.

You are skilled at statecraft and diplomacy.

Novice: You are adept at social graces to win friends and avoid embarrassing faux pas. Pick one of the following abilities and focuses: Communication (Etiquette), Intelligence (Cultural Lore), andor Intelligence (Heraldry). You may reroll tests involving that ability and focus, but must keep the second roll.

Journeyman: You are excellent at operating within established rules and agreements to get the job done. Any Communication tests you make that take advantage of an established custom, treaty, contract, or agreement gain a +1 bonus and generate +1 SP if doubles are rolled. In addition, you can use your Novice degree with a second ability and focus from the choices for that degree.

Master: The easily swayed cannot sway others. You may perform the Tower of Will roleplaying stunt for 2 SP instead of the usual 4. In addition, you can use your Novice degree with a third ability and focus from the choices for that degree.

Duelist

Heavily armed and armored warriors may dominate the battlefield, but duelists rule the streets and alleys of Aldea's cities. In such conditions, the quick blades and wits of duelists count for more than raw strength. They eschew cumbersome shields and fight with a weapon in each hand instead. They have even developed a weapon set customized for their style of fighting. The classic duelist fights with a light blade—such as a rapier or saber—and either a dagger, small shield, or cloak in their off-hand, though some pride themselves on fighting with two rapiers, dual sabers, or more unusual weapon combinations.

Duelist Talent

Class: Expert.
Requirements: You must have Accuracy and Dexterity 2 or higher, and Dual Weapon Style (Novice).

You are a master of speed and precision on the battlefield.

Novice: When fighting in the Dual Weapon Style and using a melee weapon that uses Accuracy, you gain both +1 on your attack rolls and +1 Defense vs. melee attacks. (Normally when fighting in that style, you must choose between these benefits.)

Journeyman: Your precise attacks hit opponents where it hurts. While fighting in the Dual Weapon Style, you inflict +1 damage with melee attacks.

Master: Your pinpoint accuracy can find the gaps in your opponents' armor. When you perform the Pierce Armor combat stunt with a melee attack, your damage is penetrating. (That stunt normally halves your opponent's armor rating, but penetrating damage allows you to ignore it altogether.)

Guardian

Many warriors fight for personal glory—not so guardians. They are trained to consider not just their own position on the battlefield, but also that of their allies. They can assess who needs protection and when, and their timely intervention often prevents situations from escalating out of control. Since shielding others is their first priority, guardians often leave themselves vulnerable to make sure they block attacks on their comrades. Those of long service have many scars as badges of their sacrifice. Guardians naturally make excellent bodyguards and are often employed as such. Adepts, politicians, clergy, nobles, and diplomats—often vulnerable in hand-to-hand combat—particularly value guardians.

Guardian Talent

Class: Warrior.
Requirements: You must have Constitution and Dexterity 2 or higher, and Weapon and Shield Style (Novice).

You know how to protect others.

Novice: You can protect an ally with the tactical use of your body and shield. Choose an ally and enter Guardian mode with an Activate action. When this ally is adjacent to you, they gain a +2 bonus to their armor rating. However, each time your ally takes damage, you take 2 points of penetrating damage. You can choose to switch your protection to a different ally with a free action. You can leave Guardian mode with a free action.

Journeyman: Once you brace yourself to protect another in combat, you cannot be moved. While in Guardian mode, the Skirmish and Knock Prone combat stunts have no effect on you.

Master: Those who dare to attack the one you guard suffer the consequences. When you are in Guardian mode and an opponent successfully hits or damages your protected ally, you can immediately attack that opponent (moving up to 2 yards to get adjacent if necessary) as a free action, generating stunt points as usual. You may only do this once per round. After the attack, the normal initiative order resumes. This retaliation does not count as your turn.

Healer

Healers are adepts who have taken the healing arts to a whole new level. They have discovered how to expand and focus healing arcana to new applications, as well as being able to more easily use the commonest techniques with great effectiveness. Healers are prized everywhere, though the Kernish dedication to power through oppression and suffering makes them at times unwilling targets and scapegoats should they give succor to the "weak and unworthy."

Healer Talent

Classes: Adept.
Requirements: You must have Intelligence of 2 or higher, the Healing talent at least at Novice rank, and the Intelligence (Healing) focus.

You have mastered the healing arts as few others have.

Novice: Your curative powers are exceptionally potent. When you use the Cure arcanum or Medicine talent to restore lost Health points, you heal an additional 1d6 Health.

Journeyman: You can neutralize the effects of poisons and cure deadly diseases in others using the Cure arcanum, although you do not restore lost Health—that requires a separate use of Cure. For particularly virulent and lethal diseases and toxins, the Narrator may require a target number greater than 11 for the Intelligence (Healing) test to succeed.

Master: You have the ability to heal terrible wounds and bring people back from the brink of death, even reviving those thought dead for a short period of time! When you successfully use the Cure arcanum, you can restore or reattach a crippled or severed organ or body part. With a successful TN 13 Intelligence (Healing) test, you can restore a dead character to 1 Health, after which the character recovers normally. The target number increases by 1 for every 10 minutes the character has been dead. Reviving someone who has been dead for more than an hour or so is virtually impossible.

Hunter

While most experts are skilled stalkers, the hunter is an artist of trailing a target unseen. They learn both how to relentlessly track their prey and how to quickly bring them down once they catch up to them. Most hunters specialize in a particular type of creature they prefer to use their skills to catch or kill, but the general abilities learned by this specialization are widely applicable. Hunters are common in Rezea and among the rangers of Aldis.

Hunter Talent

Class: Expert.
Requirements: You must have Perception 2 or higher and the Perception (Tracking) focus.

You are a master tracker and a skilled hunter of people, monsters, and beasts.

Novice: You can follow trails others miss and pick up lost trails with ease. If you fail a Perception (Tracking) test, you can reroll it, but you must keep the results of the second roll.

Journeyman: You can mark a target as your chosen prey. The prey doesn't have to be present for you to mark it, but you must have its trail or something that belongs to it. Spend a minor action and declare a target marked. You gain a +1 bonus to Perception (Tracking) and Dexterity (Stealth) tests against this target. You may also do +1 damage against this target in combat. You may only have one target marked at a time, but may switch to a new target with a minor action.

Master: You are adept at picking up details and exploiting opportunities while you're on the hunt. Any exploration stunts involving a target you have marked can be performed for –1 SP.

Knight

In Aldea, despite the presence of arcana, an armored and mounted knight is still one of the greatest forces on the battlefield. Knights are most often sworn to serve a particular sovereign, nation, or cause and operate as part of a larger mounted unit, while the rare, romantic knight-errant type wanders the land, righting wrongs and giving aid to those in need.

Knight Talent

Class: Warrior.
Requirements: You must have Strength and Dexterity 2 or higher, and Mounted Combat Style at Novice or higher.

You are the elite of mounted warriors.

Novice: You learn the Lances weapons group if you don't already know it. You also learn to unnerve your enemies and goad them into battle by challenging them. You can perform the Threaten combat stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2. You may substitute Communication (Etiquette) when making the stunt's opposed test if you prefer. This represents an honorable challenge to a worthy opponent.

Journeyman: Your lance hits with the strength of an ogre. When making a mounted charge, you can add 1d6 to your damage if you are wielding a weapon from the Lances groupgroup. If wielding any other melee weapon, you inflict +1 damage instead.

Master: You get the most from your steed. While mounted, you can use Run as a minor action and add +1 to your Defense when you do so.

Martial Artist

You are highly trained in an esoteric fighting art that uses both unarmed combat and specialized weapons. In Aldea, some martial artists are spirit dancers, though the dancers have their own specialization and many martial

artists are simply highly-trained fighters. In many areas, tournaments and competitions between unarmed fighters are popular entertainment. Most martial artists fight for fulfillment and self-defense, but there are aggressive or violent killers who pursue this specialization as well.

Martial Artist Talent

Class: Expert.
Requirements: You must have Accuracy 2 or higher, and the Unarmed Style talent at Novice or higher.

You are highly skilled in fighting with or without weapons.

Novice: You now know the Martial Arts Weapons group if you didn't previously, and add +1 damage to attacks using these weapons or when fighting unarmed. Also, when unarmed or using martial arts weapons, you gain a +1 bonus to your Defense.

Journeyman: You are adept at protecting yourself while delivering punishing blows to your opponent. You can perform the Defensive Stance combat stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual cost of 2. You also gain +1 to your Defense if you are wearing no armor.

Master: You are skilled at using positioning and training to eliminate your opponent's advantages and set them up for painful strikes. You can add your Perception to unarmed and martial arts weapon damage.

Noble

Nobles are leaders, managers, and administrators of the various realms. The most famous are the nobles of Aldis, selected by rigorous examinations and vetted by the test of the Blue Rose Scepter. However, any nation with an aristocratic or ruling class may have nobles, and even some large organizations may have those who serve in a similar capacity.

Noble Talent

Class: Any.
Requirements: You must be chosen or born into a ruling or leadership class in a group or organization.

You lead and inspire through skill, charisma, or birthright.

Novice: You learn how to share and augment the skills and training of those around you. You may perform the Resources at Hand exploration stunt for 3 SP instead of its usual cost of 4, and may give the benefit of this stunt to any ally within 10 yards. Only one character may benefit from this stunt at a time, though you may reassign the stunt bonus with a minor action.

Journeyman: Your side in a conflict (martial or otherwise) benefits from your leadership or acumen. All allies within 20 yards of you in the conflict gain a +1 bonus to all Dexterity (Initiative) and Willpower (Morale) tests.

Martial Arts Weapons

This new weapons group includes a number of Accuracy-based melee weapons commonly used in various martial arts. These weapons are meant to be representative of many fighting styles and variants, but Narrators may add to this list if desired.

Martial Arts Weapons

Weapon	Damage
Standard	1d6+1
Two-Handed	1d6+3

Two-handed martial arts weapons include staves, three-sectional staffs, chain whips, and other weapons requiring both hands to use. Standard weapons includes numerous mundane implements that have been turned into weapons, fighting batons, two-sectional staffs (nunchaku), and other similar armaments.

Master: You have a remarkable ability to deal with conflict of all stripes. If you perform the Stunned Silence roleplaying stunt, you hold the attention of those who witnessed your display until you choose to stop speaking. This includes bringing any combat or disagreement to a halt, as well as allowing you enough time for a dramatic or persuasive speech and an associated Communication test.

Outrider

You are a skilled rider known for speed and fast attacks. In contrast to the Knight, you favor practicality, speed, and unity with your mount over armored charges and glory. Outriders make excellent scouts and skirmishers, and some armies employ whole units of them as fast-moving shock troops. Rezea has some of the most skilled Outriders in the world.

Outrider Talent

Class: Warrior.
Requirements: You must have Dexterity of 2 or higher, and the Horsemanship talent at Novice or higher.

You are one with your steed and together you can outrace the wind.

Novice: You and your mount move so well together you seem as one creature. Your Defense while mounted for both you and your mount is equal to the highest of your two Defense ratings.

Journeyman: You strike and retreat with alarming alacrity. When using the Skirmish combat stunt to move yourself while mounted, you may move 4 yards per stunt point instead of the usual 2.

Master: When someone attacks you while you are mounted, you (not your attacker) decides if you or your mount takes the damage. You cannot split the damage from a single attack, but you may assign the effects of a Lightning Attack or Dual Strike as desired.

Pirate

You seek fortune and adventure on the high seas and, moreover, you're quite good at it. While this specialization isn't required to be a pirate or privateer, many of the most famous pirates have it. Many smugglers, and some sailors and ship's officers who regularly engage in covert marine activities, are also considered members of this specialization. All pirates are able to sail and fight competently, though their exact role in a pirate crew is likely to be determined by their class, focuses, and other aptitudes.

Pirate Talent

Class: Any.
Requirements: You must have Fighting or Accuracy 2 or higher, and the Dexterity (Sailing) focus.

You are a skilled raider and pirate, adept at marine battles and sea-craft.

Novice: Your sea legs and awareness of marine combat make you even more effective on the water than on land. You gain +1 Defense and +1 damage to attacks when fighting on a ship.

Journeyman: Years spent on the water make sailing a boat or ship second nature to you. You may reroll any Dexterity (Sailing) test, but you must keep the second result.

Master: You've fully internalized the pirate battle ethos of "There's no such thing as a fair fight." If attacking a foe who is prone, disarmed, or otherwise distracted or impaired (this is determined at the Narrator's discretion), you may perform the Lethal Blow, Lightning Attack, or Mighty Blow combat stunts for 1 SP less than their normal cost.

Sacred Warrior

Fighters devoted to a holy or higher cause, a sacred warrior can be a paragon of virtue or the iron fist of an oppressive theology. Heavily-armored, battle-ready, and imbued with arcane power, this specialization requires a warrior to maintain strong convictions and hold their sacred oaths (whether good or evil) sacrosanct. Most sacred warriors favor heavy armor and weapons, but this isn't a requirement. Sacred warriors are common in Jarzon among the Knights of Purity, but are known in cultures all across Aldea.

Sacred Warrior Talent

Class: Warrior.
Requirements: You must have Fighting of 2 or higher and the Willpower (Faith) focus.

You are a sacred warrior for a some form of higher power or cause.

Novice: You may channel the force of your faith into powerful attacks to strike down your enemies. When performing a Lethal or Mighty Blow combat stunt against an enemy of your faith, add your Willpower (Faith) to the total damage done.

Journeyman: Your faith helps safeguard you from Corruption. You may always use Willpower (Faith) against attempts to sway you from your duties or which cause you to act against your convictions, regardless of what ability and focus is normally used to defend against such attempts.

Master: You can keep others alive by channeling divine energies. Touch a target who is dying as a minor action. The target automatically stabilizes and is out of mortal danger. You also have a chance to save the recently deceased. If a target has died, you may expend a major action and attempt a Willpower (Faith) test with a target number of 13 + the number of rounds since the target died. Success means the target is restored to life with 1 Health. Any stunt points generated by this test are granted to the target as additional Health. If you fail to restore a particular deceased character, they remain dead and you cannot attempt to restore them again.

Seer

You have learned how to see the future, read portents, and influence coming events in small ways. Many seers are not adventurers, though those who are find the chaotic life makes their powers valuable but not always reliable. Seers often use various tools and methods to divine the future, but the true power lies within them. This specialization may be taught, or could represent an inherent awakening of mystical abilities based on the campaign and setting, but it functions the same way mechanically in either case.

Seer Talent

Class: Adept.
Requirements: You must have Perception 2 or higher, and the Visionary talent at Novice or higher.

You can are adept at seeing the future and manipulating fate with your insights.

Novice: Sometimes a fortuitous event doesn't pay dividends until later. You have access to the following unique stunt: Foretell.

SP Cost	Stunt
2+	**Foretell:** Your actions trigger a chain of events that will affect future outcomes. Select an ally (including yourself). Once before the end of the encounter when that ally generates stunt points, they gain +1 SP for every 2 SP you spent on this stunt.

Journeyman: You can read the signs to gain insight to help avoid costly errors. Name a particular ability and focus. For the rest of the encounter you may reroll your tests of that type, making a TN 11 test against fatigue for each reroll. You must keep the results of the second roll and cannot reroll any test more than once—you can only push fate so far.

Master: You learn to advise others more effectively with your powers. You may use your Journeyman degree on any ally you can freely communicate with during an encounter.

Shaper

Some arcana users find that in addition to a talent with shaping, they also have a talent with a particular element: fire, water, earth, air, or plants. Shapers learn to channel and use their chosen element in new and potent ways that escape their fellow adepts. Talented shapers can always find work or a place in various groups, as skilled stone-shapers or wind-shapers are popular with builders or sailors; fire-shapers are beloved by smiths and as performers and combat adepts; and plant-shapers make excellent scouts and naturalists. While adepts become shapers most easily and frequently, any character with the proper affinity and talent for an element may do so.

Shaper Talent

Class: Any.
Requirements: You must have Intelligence 2 or higher, and the shaping arcanum of your favored element.

You have a gift for shaping a particular element.

Novice: You can expend a minor action to generate an elemental field around your weapon, or that of an ally, by touch. This gives the weapon a +2 damage bonus and turns the damage into a type matching your shaping element (fire, water, etc.).

Journeyman: You gain a +2 bonus to fatigue tests when using shaping arcana matching your chosen element. Also, pick one arcane stunt. You may use it with arcana matching your chosen element for –1 SP.

Master: You add 2 to the Outcome of any successful use of shaping matching your chosen element. You may also pick another arcane stunt to use at –1 SP with these arcana.

Shapeshifter

The level of devotion and skill to quickly change one's shape into a fully functioning beast or creature indistinguishable from any other animal requires both training and focus, which is beyond many adepts. Shapeshifters learn methods of even expanding or contracting themselves to duplicate creatures of smaller or larger mass, though huge disparities are not possible. Shapeshifters typically learn only one animal form, as the concentration and sense of identity required to maintain each form is intense. Some rhydan use this specialization to assume human forms, though many find doing so uncomfortable or awkward.

Shapeshifter Talent

Class: Any.
Requirements: You must have Willpower 2 or higher, and the Flesh Shaping and Nature Reading arcana.

You are adept at changing flesh, especially your own.

Novice: You have learned to turn parts of your body into animalistic forms. As an Activate action, you may make a TN 11 Intelligence (Healing) test using your Flesh Shaping

arcanum to quickly assume animal traits. If successful, you may gain the Perception (Smelling, Hearing, or Seeing—pick one) focus and increase your unarmed damage to 1d6 for the rest of the encounter. Your unarmed attacks are treated as natural weapons for the purposes of the Tooth and Claw talent, if applicable. Using this power causes fatigue that is applied after the effect ends, with a target number equal to the original test.

Journeyman: You can shift your physical form to adopt an imperfect but bestial appearance. Choose an animal. As a major action, you may make a TN 13 Intelligence (Healing) test using your Flesh Shaping arcanum to adopt a single quality, combat rating, or ability score of the selected animal. This ability lasts for an hour, during which you take on some physical traits of the chosen animal. Using this power causes fatigue that is applied after the effect ends, with a target number equal to the original test.

Master: You have learned how to assume an animal form that is closest to your spirit and nature. Select an animal. By taking 1 minute and making a successful TN 15 Intelligence (Healing) test, you may assume this form. You keep your Intelligence, Communication, Willpower, Health, and focuses but adopt the other abilities and qualities of the animal. At every sunrise and sunset you must make another Intelligence (Healing) test to remain in your changed form. Staying in this form too long can have negative affects, at the Narrator's discretion. Using this power causes fatigue that is applied after the effect ends, with a target number equal to the original test.

Sharpshooter

Sharpshooters are crack shots who can take down enemies at a distance. Other than their extraordinary skill with missile weapons, most sharpshooters have little in common. Some are soldiers, others mercenaries for hire, and others wanderers trying to win prize money in shooting competitions. While sharpshooters are deadly with any ranged weapon, each has a favorite type and often a signature example they have customized to their liking. To steal such a weapon is to ask for a terrible retribution. Many of Aldis' rangers and a number of the Sovereign's Finest are sharpshooters, protecting the people, the lands, and its rulers with their skills.

Sharpshooter Talent

Class: Expert.
Requirements: You must have Dexterity and Perception 2 or higher, and either Archery Style (Novice) or Thrown Weapon Style (Novice).

You are an expert shot.

Novice: Your missile attacks are so powerful they can fling opponents back and knock them off their feet. You can perform the Knock Prone combat stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2 when making ranged attacks. Additionally, you may push the target directly away from you 2 yards before applying the knockdown. (This is similar to the Skirmish combat stunt but more limited).

Journeyman: You can unleash a storm of missiles on your opponents. You can perform the Volley special stunt for 5 SP. This allows you to make two more ranged attacks at the same target, or at others in sight and within 10 yards. You must have a loaded missile weapon to make a ranged attack, so the use of up to two Rapid Reload combat stunts may be required to use Volley. If you roll doubles on either of these attack rolls, you do not generate additional stunt points.

Master: You can find the vulnerable spot on any opponent. When you perform the Pierce Armor combat stunt with a ranged attack, your damage is penetrating. (That stunt normally halves your opponent's armor rating, but penetrating damage allows you to ignore it altogether.)

Slayer

All warriors learn to fight. Most learn to kill. Slayers learn to kill a certain type of foe very effectively. Slayers may be driven by vengeance, chosen by fate, or driven by the necessity of battling a particular enemy. Slayers often make a living killing their chosen foes for bounties, or as assassins. Depending on the creature and the slayer, they may be heralded as heroes or reviled as villains.

Slayer Talent

Class: Warrior.
Requirements: You must have Fighting 2 or higher and Willpower of 2 or higher.

You have devoted yourself to the destruction of a foe and honed your skills in fighting them.

Novice: Pick a category of creature you have chosen to slay. You do +1 damage and gain +1 Defense when battling creatures of that type. Some basic categories are: beasts, darkfiends, shadowspawn, spirits, and unliving. You can work with the Narrator to expand or refine these categories to suit your character and the series, as needed.

Journeyman: You may use the Lethal Blow combat stunt against the type of creature you have chosen to slay for 3 SP instead of the usual 5. You also gain a +1 bonus to Dexterity (Initiative) tests in combat against such creatures.

Master: Treat a combat style (Single or Dual Weapon, etc.) as if it was one degree higher when fighting the type of creature you have chosen to slay. If you already have the style you are using in combat at Master degree, then increase your Novice degree damage and Defense bonus to +2 instead.

Spirit Dancer

Spirit dancers learn to focus their arcana inwardly, using their meditative powers and special physical conditioning to push their bodies' capabilities to human limits and beyond. Spirit dancers are highly regarded in Aldis, whereas their corrupt counterparts the shadow dancers are not, though their skills are respected (if not feared) by all who encounter them. Most spirit dancers also learn the Martial Artist specialization at some point, but different schools focus on different combat techniques—many of which are designed more to help the dancer develop their control and conditioning than to train for active combat.

Spirit Dancer Talent

Classes: Any.
Requirements: You must have Dexterity 2 or higher, the Dexterity (Acrobatics) focus, and the Body Control arcanum.

You have devoted yourself to preserving the legacy of and mastering the art of the sacred Dance.

Novice: You learn the secrets of the Dance. As a minor action, you can go into Battle Dance mode, gaining +2 to your Defense, so long as you are not wearing Medium or Heavy Armor. You can choose to sacrifice 1 or 2 points of your Defense bonus to gain an equal bonus to your attacks until the start of your next turn. You can end Battle Dance mode as a free action.

Journeyman: Your bonus from Battle Dance increases to +3. Additionally, while in Battle Dance mode, you can use Run as a minor action and use Move to stand up (only) as a free action.

Master: You have near-complete mastery over your body. Your bonus from Battle Dance increases to +4. You are immune to mundane diseases and poisons, and have a +2 bonus on Constitution tests against arcane ones. By taking a level of fatigue, you can run at ten times your normal Speed for one round and, when you do so, you can move up to twice your normal Speed across any surface without falling, sinking, or leaving tracks, including sand, snow, ice, delicate tree limbs, or even up walls or across water.

Spy

Anyone can be a spy, that's part of the effectiveness of the trade. However, you are a master of intrigue and espionage. Spies may work freelance, or be employed by a particular organization or kingdom. In any event, they are often the unsung heroes and villains of many crises and events. Without spies, nations would face far more advanced threats without proper preparation. Kern is famed for its spies and infiltrators, but in truth every nation and many organizations use special agents trained in espionage and spycraft.

Spy Talent

Class: Any.
Requirements: You must have Perception and Communication 2 or higher. You must also possess the Intrigue talent or the Observation talent at Novice or higher.

You are skilled at secrets, lies, and spycraft.

Novice: You are adept at assuming identities and impersonating others. You may reroll any Communication (Disguise) tests, but must keep the second roll. You also learn a new language, one useful to your trade.

Journeyman: You are trained to gather information quickly and accurately without being discovered. You may perform the Efficient and Speedy Search exploration stunts for 1 SP each instead of their normal costs of 2 each.

Master: You are incredibly hard to capture and keep imprisoned. You gain a +1 bonus to any tests that involve evading capture or escaping imprisonment.

Swashbuckler

It's a life of adventure for you! While many face great risk seeking great rewards, for some the risks *are* rewards in and of themselves. These swashbucklers like nothing more than an opportunity to laugh in the face of danger and to show off their ability to handle it—not just with skill, but with *style*. Swashbucklers are the dashing rogues who swing from the rigging of pirate ships and leap from one careening wagon or horse to another, their tongues and their wits often as sharp as their blades.

Swashbuckler Talent

Classes: Expert, Warrior.
Requirements: You must have Dexterity 2 or higher and the Dexterity (Acrobatics) focus.

You know how to fight with panache.

Novice: Nothing gets in your way. If you fail a Dexterity (Acrobatics) test, you can reroll it, but must keep the results of the second roll. You can also perform the Taunt combat stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2.

Journeyman: You and your weapon are never parted. You cannot be disarmed; stunt points spent trying to separate you from your weapon are wasted.

Master: You are a blur in combat. You can perform the Lighting Attack combat stunt for –1 SP (1 minimum).

The world of *Blue Rose* is one of wonder, and those wonders include the arcane arts or *arcana*. Arcana are divided into different talents or disciplines. Within each of these talents are individual arcana, applications of the essential discipline.

The shadow side of arcana is *sorcery*. Sorcery promises power but at the price of corruption. The abuse of sorcery led to the rise of the Sorcerer Kings centuries ago, and no one has forgotten their terrible rule, or sorcery's terrible potential.

Learning & Using Arcana

Arcana are primarily the purview of the adept class. Adepts acquire arcane talents and learn different arcana. To learn specific arcana, an adept must have the appropriate arcane talent. There are six such talents: Animism, Healing, Meditative, Psychic, Shaping, and Visionary. The Arcane Training talent grants access to additional arcana. Non-adepts can acquire some arcana through specific talents—including the Wild Arcane talent—and specializations which include access to certain arcana.

Whether an arcana user is an adept or not, the rules for using arcana are the same. In the following sections, "adept" or "user" refers to any arcana user, regardless of role.

Action

Rooted in the power of the psyche, wielding arcana is primarily an act of will. Adepts often gesture, speak, or otherwise perform when using their arcana, but this is not required. An adept can use arcana with nothing more than focused concentration.

Using an arcanum takes a particular amount of time, given in the arcanum's description. Most arcana require a major or minor action to implement. Other uses may take longer. Arcana are subject to the normal rules regarding actions (primarily the Activate and Concentrate actions; see **Chapter 1**).

Arcane Tests

Some arcana call for a test using the ability associated with the arcanum. This is the same as any other test: a 3d6 roll plus the ability's modifier and the appropriate focus for the arcanum (if any). The test result or Outcome often determines the effectiveness of the arcanum. Some arcana do not require tests; they operate automatically.

- **Attack Rolls:** Some arcana require an attack roll to affect a target, particularly in the midst of combat. This is a normal attack roll, generally involving Accuracy (Arcane), but specified in the arcanum's description. Any arcanum requiring an attack roll also

takes at least a major action and counts as the adept's attack for that round, unless specified otherwise.

- **Resistance Tests:** Arcana that affect other creatures allow some sort of resistance. The target number for resistance is usually the adept's test result. Subjects of arcana can choose not to resist, accepting the arcana's effects. This choice is made *before* the subject knows what the effect is! Thus it's wise to be careful about allowing people to use arcana on you, unless you know and trust them.

Range

Specific limitations on the range of an arcanum are noted in its description. If an arcanum's description doesn't specify a range, assume it is line of sight.

Some arcana transcend space, and even time: they can affect targets anywhere, or perceive the past or future. However, using arcana against targets out of sight and unfamiliar to the adept is difficult and often fatiguing, limiting the range of most arcana to somewhat familiar targets or things in the adept's line of sight.

Familiarity

An important factor for some arcana is how familiar the subject is to the adept. Psychic arcana in particular are more effective on subjects the adept knows well. In arcana descriptions that mention a familiarity modifier, determine the relationship between the adept and the target on the **Familiarity** table and apply the appropriate modifier to the target number of the arcane test. For example, using Psychic Contact on a somewhat familiar target increases the target number by +6.

Familiarity

Familiarity	Modifier	Definition
Present	+0	A subject visible to the naked eye or in physical or psychic contact with the adept.
Very Familiar	+2	A subject currently seen or sensed through another arcanum, a close friend or relative, an item made by the adept or owned and used for at least a year, a place where the adept spent at least a year.
Familiar	+4	A subject the adept has been acquainted with for at least three months, a casual friend.
Somewhat Familiar	+6	A subject the adept has been acquainted with for at least a week, reading someone else's memory of a familiar subject.
Casually Familiar	+8	A subject the adept has been acquainted with only briefly, reading someone else's memory of a somewhat familiar subject.
Slightly Familiar	+10	A subject the adept has only seen briefly or had described in detail.
Unfamiliar	—	A subject totally unfamiliar and unknown to the adept and out of the adept's line of sight or physical contact. Arcana cannot be used on unfamiliar subjects.

Psychic Contact

Some arcana refer to the adept being in "psychic contact" with the subject. This involves the use of the Psychic Contact arcanum, allowing the adept to "touch" another character's mind. Subjects in psychic contact are considered present to the adept in terms of familiarity, regardless of the physical distance between them. Psychic contact does not count as line of sight for arcana requiring it, however. For example, many Shaping arcana require line of sight and therefore can't be used solely through psychic contact.

Subjects

Arcana generally affect a particular type of subject, specified in their descriptions. Common subjects include creatures, people, animals, objects or elements, and the user of the arcanum. If any arcanum specifies a general "subject" or "target" that is not one of these specific categories, assume it works on any of them.

- Creatures are all living, corporeal beings, excluding the unliving, spirits, and darkfiends, but including all people and animals.
- People are creatures possessing a soul from the Eternal Dance, essentially sentient, aware beings capable of moral choices. Humans, night people, sea-folk, vata, and rhydan are all people.
- Animals are creatures that do not possess an individual soul from the Eternal Dance, being part of the *anima mundi*, or world-soul, instead. A prime difference between awakened rhydan and their unawakened kin is that rhydan are people and other beasts are animals.
- Objects are unliving, inanimate materials or sometimes forces, such as the elements. Many shaping arcana focus on influencing and controlling objects.
- Self refers to the body, mind, and soul of the adept, often considered as a whole.

Arcana Summary Table

Name	Talent	Time	Target #	Test	Resistance	Fatigue
Animal Messenger	Animism	Major Action	None	None	None	None
Animal Summoning	Animism	Major Action	11	Communication (Animism)	None	TN 11
Arcane Strike	Meditative or Shaping	None	None	None	None	None
Arcane Weapon	Meditative or Shaping	None	None	None	None	None
Body Control	Animism, Healing, or Meditative	Major Action	Varies	Perception (Animism or Healing) or Willpower (Meditative)	None	None
Calm	Animism or Psychic	Major Action	Opposed	Communication (Animism or Psychic)	Willpower (Self-Discipline)	None
Cold Shaping	Shaping	Major Action	11	Intelligence (Shaping)	None	Test result
Cure	Healing or Meditative	Major Action	11	Intelligence (Healing) or Willpower (Meditative)	None	TN 11
Draw Vitality	Healing	Major Action	Opposed	Intelligence (Healing)	Willpower (Courage or Self-Discipline)	None
Earth Shaping	Shaping	Major Action	Varies	Intelligence (Shaping)	None	Test TN
Enhancement	Animism, Healing, or Meditative	Major Action	13	Willpower (Animism, Healing, or Meditative)	None	Test result
Fire Shaping	Shaping	Varies	Varies	Intelligence (Shaping)	None	Test TN
Flesh Shaping	Healing	Varies	Varies	Intelligence (Healing)	None	Test TN
Heart Reading	Animism or Psychic	Major Action	Opposed	Perception (Animism or Psychic)	Willpower (Self-Discipline)	None
Illusion	Psychic	Major Action	Varies	Communication (Deception or Psychic)	Perception (any focus)	Test TN
Light Shaping	Shaping	Major Action	Varies	Intelligence (Shaping)	None	Test TN
Manipulate Object	Shaping	Minor Action	11+	Intelligence (Shaping)	None	Test TN

Multiple Subjects

Although it is easiest to use an arcanum on a single subject at a time, an adept can affect multiple subjects of the same type with the same arcanum at once: lifting multiple objects, making psychic contact with multiple minds, and so forth. This requires time, skill, and effort to achieve.

A character attempting to use an arcanum on more than one subject at once increases the arcane and fatigue test target numbers by +1 for every additional target. So affecting three subjects at once is +2 TN on both the arcane and fatigue tests. Using an arcanum in this manner is a more longer task, as well. An additional Activate action from the adept is required before the arcanum's use because of the added concentration needed.

The subjects must all be within range. If the arcanum requires psychic contact, then the user must be in psychic contact with all of the subjects. The Narrator has the final say on whether an arcanum can affect more than one subject at a time and, if so, how many in a given situation.

Fatigue

The use of some arcana is tiring, putting a strain on the adept's mind and body. When an adept uses a fatiguing arcanum, make a fatigue resistance test. This is a Willpower (Self-Discipline) test against a target number listed in the arcanum's description. A successful fatigue test results in no ill effect on the adept. A failed test means the adept suffers a level of fatigue (see **Fatigue and Resting** in **Chapter 1**).

More rapid use of arcana in a short period of time makes it harder to overcome fatigue. Every time an adept uses a fatiguing arcanum in the same encounter, the target number of any successive fatigue test increases by +1. For example, an adept uses a fatiguing arcanum, making a fatigue test against the normal target number. A minute later, the adept uses another fatiguing arcanum. This time the target number of the fatigue test is +1 higher. Use of certain arcana in rapid succession can exhaust even the most powerful adepts. To eliminate the cumulative fatigue test modifier, an adept must take a breather, resetting the fatigue test modifier to 0 after it is complete.

Arcana Summary Table

Name	Talent	Time	Target #	Test	Resistance	Fatigue
Mind Delving	Animism or Psychic	Major Action	Opposed	Communication (Animism or Psychic)	Willpower (Self-Discipline)	Opposed test result
Mind Reading	Animism or Psychic	Major Action	Opposed	Communication (Animism or Psychic)	Willpower (Self-Discipline)	Opposed test result
Mind Shaping	Psychic	Varies	Opposed	Communication (Psychic)	Willpower (Self-Discipline)	Test TN
Move Object	Shaping	Minor Action	Varies	Intelligence (Shaping)	Varies	Test TN
Nature Reading	Animism or Visionary	Varies	Varies	Perception (Animism or Natural Lore)	None	None
Object Reading	Visionary	Major Action	Varies	Perception (Visionary)	None	Test result (Active Reading only)
Plant Shaping	Animism or Shaping	Major Action	Varies	Intelligence (Shaping) or Perception (Animism)	None	TN 11
Psychic Contact	Animism or Psychic	Minor Action	7 + familiarity	Communication (Animism or Psychic)	Psychic Shield or Willpower (Self-Discipline)	None
Psychic Shield	Any	Free Action	None	Willpower (Psychic)	None	None
Psychic Weapon	Psychic	Minor Action	None	None	None	TN 12
Scrying	Visionary	Major Action	11 + familiarity	Perception (Visionary)	None	Test TN
Second Sight	Any	Varies	Varies	Perception (Psychic or Visionary)	None	None (TN 13 Read Arcane Signature)
Sense Minds	Psychic	Minor Action	11+	Perception (Psychic)	Psychic Shield	None
Sleep	Healing or Psychic	Major Action	Opposed	Communication (Psychic) or Intelligence (Healing)	Willpower (Self-Discipline)	Opposed test result
Summon Spirit	Shaping or Visionary	1 minute	Varies	Intelligence (Shaping)	Willpower (Courage or Self-Discipline)	Test TN or opposed test result
Visions	Visionary	Major Action	Varies	Perception (Visionary)	None	None
Ward	Any	Minor Action	Varies	Willpower (Psychic)	None	Test result
Water Shaping	Shaping	Major Action	Varies	Intelligence (Shaping)	None	Test TN
Weather Shaping	Shaping	Major Action	None	None	None	TN 15
Wind Shaping	Shaping	Major Action	Varies	Intelligence (Shaping)	None	Test result
Wind Walking	Shaping	Minor Action	None	None	None	TN 17
Sorcerous Arcana						
Harm	Healing	Major Action	Defense	Accuracy (Brawling)	None	TN 11
Heart Shaping	Animism or Psychic	Major Action	Opposed	Communication (Animism or Psychic)	Willpower (Self-Discipline)	Opposed test result
Imbue Unlife	Healing or Shaping	1 minute	Varies	Intelligence (Healing or Shaping)	None	Test TN
Psychic Blast	Psychic	Major Action	11	Communication (Psychic)	Willpower (Courage, Faith, or Self-Discipline)	Opposed test result
Psychic Domination	Animism or Psychic	Major Action	Opposed	Communication (Animism or Psychic)	Willpower (Courage, Faith, or Self-Discipline)	Opposed test result
Sorcerer's Grip	Shaping	Major Action	11	Intelligence (Shaping)	Constitution (Stamina)	TN 11
Suggestion	Psychic	Major Action	9 + familiarity	Communication (Psychic)	Willpower (Self-Discipline)	Opposed test result
Torment	Healing or Psychic	Major Action	Opposed	Communication (Psychic) or Intelligence (Healing)	Willpower (Courage, Faith, or Self-Discipline)	Opposed test result

Maintaining Arcana

Some arcana can be maintained; that is, their effects can continue at the same outcome achieved by the initial use. This requires at least a modicum of concentration on the adept's part. Maintaining arcana requires a Concentrate minor action each turn.

- **Distractions:** An adept maintaining one or more arcana who is distracted must make a Willpower (Self-Discipline) test against TN 9 + 1 per arcanum the adept is maintaining. A failed test means the adept stops maintaining all arcana, the effects of which end. Optionally, the Narrator may rule that the adept stops maintaining one arcanum for every point the test misses the target number. An adept unable to take a minor action to concentrate cannot maintain arcana.
- **Total Concentration:** Some arcana require *total concentration* to maintain. The adept must devote a major action each round to maintain the arcanum. Concentration tests and target numbers for distractions remain the same.

Sorcery

Some arcana draw on fear, rage, and hate, or seek to impose the wielder's will on another. These powers—and the state of mind required to use them—open the adept up to the influence of Shadow.

Any arcanum listed as sorcery in its description requires the user to make a Corruption test whenever the arcanum is used (see **Corruption** in **Chapter 2**). Simply *knowing* sorcery does not cause corruption, but using it may. Some arcana have both sorcerous and nonsorcerous uses. Some adepts learn and use sorcery sparingly for what they consider good causes, but they still risk falling into Shadow for doing so.

Arcana Descriptions

The following are descriptions of individual arcana and their game effects. Each arcanum is preceded by a listing of the talent(s) providing access, the time to use the arcanum, the target number for use, the test ability for the arcanum, and the resistance ability for resistance tests against the arcanum.

Talent

All arcana require an underlying talent for use (see **Chapter 3**). Some arcana belong to multiple talents, most to only one. In a few cases, which underlying talent is used to acquire the arcanum affects its use, given in the arcanum's description.

Time

The time needed to use the arcanum is listed here. Most arcana require only a minor or major action to use. Some arcana require different times, or differing times for different applications, as noted in their descriptions.

Target Number (TN)

This is the base target number for tests to use the arcanum. Some arcana have the base target number modified by familiarity (see **Familiarity**, previously) or based on the particular task attempted, as given in the arcanum's description. In cases where the target number is set by the resistance test of the arcanum's subject, this line says "Opposed." If no test is required, this line says "None."

Test

If the arcanum requires a test, this lists the appropriate ability modifier to apply to the dice roll for the test. Each arcane talent has its own focus, which applies to any test for arcana of that talent, regardless of ability. The six arcane talents are generally associated with the mental abilities as follows: Animism and Visionary with Perception, Healing and Shaping with Intelligence, Psychic with Communication and Perception, and Meditative with Willpower. If no test is required, this line says "None."

Resistance

If the arcanum allows a resistance test, this lists the appropriate ability modifier and focus (if any) to apply to the dice roll for the test. If no resistance test is allowed or required, this line says "None."

Fatigue

If using the arcanum is potentially fatiguing, this line lists the target number for the Willpower test to overcome the fatigue. "Test TN" means the target number is equal to that of the arcane test. A numerical value means there is a set target number. If the arcanum is not fatiguing, this line says "None."

Animal Messenger

Talent: Animism **Time:** Major Action
TN: None **Test:** None
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** None

You encourage a small animal to go somewhere carrying a message for you. The animal cannot be one tamed or trained by someone else unless it is also friendly towards you or trained to obey you (see the Animal Training talent in **Chapter 3**).

Choose an animal in your line of sight. It advances and awaits your bidding. You can psychically impress upon the animal a person or place known to you or an obvious landmark. You can also attach some small item or note to the messenger. The animal then goes to the designated location as quickly as possible under its own power and waits there for up to one day.

While waiting, the messenger allows others to approach it and remove any scroll or token it carries. The intended recipient gains no special ability to communicate with the animal or read any attached message.

The Six Disciplines

Arcana in Aldea are divided into six distinct talents—sometimes also called gifts or disciplines—each focused on a particular area of ability:

- **Animism** interacts with animals, plants, and the natural world, from communicating with animals to encouraging the growth of plants.
- **Healing** affects living things to restore their health and well-being, although it also includes the potential to cause harm in equal measure.
- **Meditative** arcana involve discipline of body and mind and enhancing one's own abilities to their limits.
- **Psychic** arcana reach from mind to mind to communicate, sense, and even influence, although usurping the free will of another is sorcery.
- **Shaping** is among the broadest talents, exerting influence over the material and forces of the world, from air, earth, fire, and water to the weather.
- **Visionary** abilities grant insight beyond the physical senses, from reading psychic impressions to foreseeing the future as it may be.

Animal Summoning

Talent: Animism **Time:** Major Action
TN: 11 **Test:** Communication (Animism)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** TN 11

You can send out a psychic call to summon a nearby animal or animals. A successful arcane test means the animals hear your call from up to your level in miles away and come to you as quickly as they can under their own power. Summoned animals are not under your control in any way and behave according to their nature when they arrive. You can use other arcana to communicate with and convince the animals to aid you or perform certain tasks.

You can choose to limit your summons to a particular type of animal (only eagles, horses, or wolves, for example) or even to a particular animal known to you. In the latter case, the test target number is 7 + a familiarity modifier and the range is unlimited (although it may take the animal some time to arrive).

Arcane Strike

Talent: Meditative or Shaping **Time:** None
TN: None **Test:** None
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** None

Your unarmed attacks are considered arcane weapons for overcoming the defenses of creatures vulnerable to such weaponry.

Arcane Weapon

Talent: Meditative or Shaping **Time:** None
TN: None **Test:** None
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** None

You can imbue a melee weapon you wield with arcane power. The weapon is considered an arcane weapon for overcoming the defenses of creatures vulnerable to such weaponry. You must personally wield the weapon for it to gain this benefit.

Body Control

Talent: Animism, Healing, or Meditative
Time: Major Action **TN:** Varies (see description)
Test: Perception (Animism or Healing)
or Willpower (Meditative)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** None

You can exercise psychic control over the body's involuntary functions. With Animism, you can affect the bodies of willing animals you touch. With Healing you can affect the bodies of willing people you touch, and with Meditative, you can affect your own body. You can make a Body Control test for a number of different effects, which last as long as you concentrate.

Body Control

Target Number	Task
7	Sleep normally despite distractions
9	Sleep normally despite difficult distractions
9	Slow breathing to half normal rate
11	Ignore pain or injury
11	Body awareness
11	Resist fear
11	Speed recovery
13	Slow breathing to one-quarter normal rate
13	Feign death
Disease's TN	Overcome disease
Poison's TN	Overcome poison

Sleeping

A successful Body Control test allows the subject to sleep and rest normally despite distractions or difficult conditions, including bad weather, noise, buzzing insects, and so forth.

Slow Breathing

You can deliberately slow the subject's rate of breathing to consume less air, vital in situations where there is a limited amount of breathable air available.

Ignore Pain or Injury

The subject can ignore the effects of pain or injury while awake or asleep.

Body Awareness

The subject remains aware of their body while asleep or concentrating on something else, including other arcana.

Resist Fear

You override the subject's body's natural response to fear. With a successful arcane test, the subject gains a new resistance test against any fear effect, with a +2 bonus.

Speed Recovery

You speed up the subject's natural healing process. If the arcane test is successful, the subject regains 15 + Constitution + (level × 2) in Health from at least 6 hours of restful sleep (which can also be aided by this arcanum).

Feign Death

You place the subject in a deep trance almost indistinguishable from death. An opposed test of Perception (any focus) against your arcane test result is required to detect signs of life. Arcana that detect life still work on the subject. The deathlike trance also suspends the effects of any disease or poison in the subject's system for the duration of the trance.

Overcome Disease or Poison

Substitute your arcane test result for the result of the subject's next resistance test against a disease or poison. This usually means you can only use this against the secondary effects of a disease or poison, unless it is slow-acting and you are forewarned soon enough to use Body Control to help resist the initial effects.

Calm

Talent: Animism or Psychic
Time: Major Action **TN:** Opposed
Test: Communication (Animism or Psychic)
Resistance: Willpower (Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: None

You clear a subject's mind of intense emotion, creating a state of calm and clarity. You must be in psychic contact with the subject. An unwilling subject makes a resistance test against your test result. A subject under the effects of Calm is free of any intense emotion and incapable of aggressive or violent action for as long as you concentrate. Any aggressive action against the subject ends the effect. Calm can also counteract any emotion-affecting arcana, such as Heart Shaping, with a successful opposed Calm test against the target arcanum's test result.

Cold Shaping

Talent: Shaping **Time:** Major Action
TN: 11 **Test:** Intelligence (Shaping)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** None

You can rapidly cool and freeze things.

Frostbite

With a successful TN 11 test, you can lower the temperature of an area a foot across intensely enough to deal 1d6 penetrating damage from the cold. Every 2 points of Outcome increases the damage by 1d6, to a maximum of 6d6.

Freeze Water

You can freeze roughly a gallon of water into solid ice in one round. For every point of Outcome, you affect an additional cubic foot (or gallon of liquid).

Reduce Fire

You can decrease the size of a fire by 1 square foot, with every additional point of Outcome affecting another square foot. A fire reduced entirely goes out permanently. Otherwise, the reduction in size requires concentration to maintain, and the fire resumes its previous size when the effect ends.

Cure

Talent: Healing or Meditative
Time: Major Action **TN:** 11
Test: Intelligence (Healing) or Willpower (Meditative)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** TN 11

You can heal injuries to living creatures by touch. When you use the Heal action with this arcanum, your subject regains Health equal to the Drama Die + your Intelligence + Healing focus (if any) + your level. The subject can't benefit from Cure again until at least taking a breather to recover naturally.

Cure Self

You can use Cure on yourself, so long as you are able. If you have this arcanum through the Meditative talent, you can *only* use it on yourself.

Draw Vitality

Talent: Healing **Time:** Major Action
TN: Opposed **Test:** Intelligence (Healing)
Resistance: Willpower (Courage or Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: None

You can draw upon someone else's vital energy by touch. If the subject is unwilling or unaware, make an opposed arcane test. If you win, the target suffers a level of fatigue,

while you regain a level of fatigue (see **Fatigue and Resting** in **Chapter 1**). You cannot drain subjects once they are unconscious from fatigue.

In times of need, volunteers agree to serve as donors for adepts to allow them to perform sustained arcana, such as battlefield healing work. Sorcerers are known to use captives and slaves as living batteries to fuel their own powers.

Sorcery

Using Draw Vitality on an unwilling or unaware subject is sorcery and requires a Corruption test.

Earth Shaping

Talent: Shaping **Time:** Major Action
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Intelligence (Shaping)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** Test TN

You can shape and move earth and stone. Earth Shaping can have one of the following effects when used:

Shift Earth — TN 9

You move dirt (soil, clay, loam, sand), possibly collapsing embankments, moving hillocks, shifting sand dunes, and so forth. However, in no event can rock formations be collapsed or moved. With a successful arcane test, you can move a 150-foot square area up to 10 feet deep in the space of 10 minutes. Each additional 150-foot square area you want to move at once increases the target number by +2, up to 900 feet by 900 feet at TN 21.

Earth Shaping does not violently break the surface of the ground. Instead, it creates wavelike crests and troughs, with the earth reacting with glacier-like fluidity until the desired result is achieved. Trees, structures, rock formations, and such are mostly unaffected except for changes in elevation and topography. This effect cannot be used for tunneling and is too slow to trap or bury creatures unless they are helpless the entire time the earth is moving.

Soften Earth — TN 9

All natural, undressed earth or stone in the affected area softens. Wet earth becomes thick mud, dry earth becomes loose sand or dirt, and stone becomes soft clay that is easily molded. You affect a 10-foot square area to a depth of 1 to 4 feet, depending on the toughness or resilience of the ground at that spot. Each +2 increase in target number affects another 10-foot square. Dressed or worked stone cannot be affected. Earth and stone creatures are not affected either.

A creature in deep mud must succeed on a TN 13 Dexterity test or be caught helpless for one round. A creature that succeeds on the test can move through the mud at half Speed. Loose dirt is not as troublesome as mud, but all creatures in the area move at only half their normal Speed. Stone softened into clay does not hinder movement, but does allow characters to cut, shape, or excavate areas they may not have been able to affect before.

While this arcanum does not affect dressed or worked stone, cavern ceilings or vertical surfaces such as cliff faces can be affected. Usually, this causes a collapse or landslide as the loosened material peels away from the face of the wall or roof and falls.

A moderate amount of damage can be dealt to a structure by softening the ground beneath it, causing it to settle. However, most well-built structures are only damaged by this, not destroyed.

Craft Stone — TN 9

You can mold stone into any shape you wish. You can affect 10 cubic feet of stone, plus an additional 2 cubic feet per point of Outcome from your arcane test (so 30 cubic feet with a test result of 20, for example). The Narrator may require an ability test (Dexterity or Intelligence) to achieve precise results. You perform stone crafts in roughly a number of minutes equal to the number of hours the project would take by mundane means. So you could complete 40 hours of stonework in under an hour (40 minutes).

Earthquake — TN 17

An intense but highly localized tremor rips the ground. The shock knocks creatures down, collapses structures, opens cracks in the ground, and more. The effect lasts until the beginning of your next turn, during which time creatures on the ground can't move or attack. The earthquake affects all terrain, vegetation, structures, and creatures in an area with a radius of your level × 10 feet. Caverns, cliffs, tunnels, and structures crumble and collapse, inflicting 12d6 damage to any creature caught in the collapse. A successful TN 13 Dexterity test halves the damage. Creatures standing in the open must make a successful TN 13 Dexterity test to avoid being knocked prone. Anyone knocked prone must make an additional TN 11 Dexterity test to avoid having a fissure open in the earth beneath them and swallow them up, grinding closed at the end of the following round for 12d6 damage and burying the creature under tons of earth.

Enhancement

Talent: Animism, Healing, or Meditative
Time: Major Action **TN:** 13
Test: Willpower (Animism, Healing, or Meditative)
Resistance: None
Fatigue: Test result (see description)

You can enhance a willing subject's Strength, Dexterity, or both. If you use the Animism talent, you enhance an animal by touch. If you use Healing, you enhance a person by touch. If you use the Meditative talent, you enhance yourself. The result of your Enhancement test (plus your applicable arcane focus) determines the total amount of the bonus, as shown on the table. You can divide the bonus between Strength and

Dexterity. You can choose to apply a lesser bonus in order to reduce the chance of fatigue occurring.

Enhancement	
Test Result	Total Bonus
13	+1
15	+2
17	+3
19	+4
21	+5

The bonus lasts for 10 rounds and then disappears at the start of your turn. When this happens, the subject of the Enhancement must make a Constitution (Stamina) test against the applicable arcane test result (initial or chosen). Failure means the subject acquires a level of fatigue due to the strain on the body. If you're using Enhancement on yourself, you can make a Constitution (Stamina) or Willpower (Self-Discipline) test, whichever has the higher bonus.

Fire Shaping

Talent: Shaping **Time:** Varies (see description)
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Intelligence (Shaping) **Resistance:** None
Fatigue: Test TN (see description)

You can start and control fires. You can make a Fire Shaping test to ignite a fire, increase the size of an existing fire (including one of your creation), or to create light but not heat.

Ignite Fire

As a major action, you can set any flammable object in your line of sight on fire with a successful TN 13 Fire Shaping test. Targets must make a TN 13 Dexterity resistance test. A successful resistance test means the fire goes out, whereas a failed test results in 2d6 fire damage. The target remains on fire, making a new resistance test at the start of their next turn. A character on fire can automatically extinguish the flames by dousing themselves in water. Spending a full round rolling on the ground grants a +2 bonus on the resistance test. In addition to using it as an attack, you can use Ignite Fire to light candles (up to a dozen in your line of sight with a single use), torches, hearth fires, and so forth. At the Narrator's discretion, lighting small fires, like candles, is not fatiguing.

Increase Fire

You can increase the size and intensity of a fire. The target number is 10 + 1 per square foot of increase. Every two square feet increases the fire's damage potential by 1d6. The fire maintains its increased size and damage as long as you concentrate, and can even burn in the absence of fuel, but not air; smothering still puts it out. While you maintain an increased flame, an on-fire victim does not get a Dexterity resistance test to put the fire out (although it can still be extinguished by smothering and/or dousing with water), and the fire does additional damage based on your Fire Shaping test result. So, an adept who makes a TN 16 Fire Shaping test can spread a fire over an additional 6 square feet and it does +3d6 damage.

Light

With a minor action you can create a glowing spot of arcane fire that sheds light but no heat, illuminating a 20-foot radius. Every 2 points of Outcome on the test allows you to increase the radius of the illumination by 10 feet. The point of light moves where you direct it within your line of sight as a minor action. Creating light is not fatiguing.

Flesh Shaping

Talent: Healing **Time:** Varies (see description)
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Intelligence (Healing)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** Test TN

You can shape and mold the flesh of living creatures as if it were clay in your hands. The subject must either be willing or helpless for the entire duration of your work (you cannot use Flesh Shaping on yourself). You make an arcane test to alter a subject's physical features. You cannot change body mass or size, other than a few feet more or less in height by resizing the subject's bones. You can otherwise sculpt physical features largely at will.

Among other things, Flesh Shaping can provide alterations in eye, hair, and skin color, even to the point of tattoo-like patterns. It can change the subject's sex and greatly enhance or diminish physical appearance. For duplicating features, treat your test result as the target number for Perception tests to notice flaws or imperfections. Any alterations are permanent, unless reversed through this arcanum or the Cure arcanum, either of which must exceed the original test result. The target number and time required for alterations is shown in the table.

Flesh Shaping

TN	Time	Task
11	1 minute	Alter facial features or other minor cosmetic features
13	10-30 minutes	Alter extensive cosmetic features or overall shape
15	1 hour or more	Extensive alterations to shape, duplicating exact appearance

Sorcery

Flesh Shaping an unwilling subject is sorcery and requires a Corruption test. Scholars believe the Sorcerer Kings used advanced Flesh Shaping arts to create the various shadowspawn races, inducing transformations affecting not only the subject but their offspring as well. Fortunately, these secrets appear to have been lost since the Sorcerer Kings were overthrown.

Heart Reading

Talent: Animism or Psychic **Time:** Major Action
TN: Opposed **Test:** Perception (Animism or Psychic)
Resistance: Willpower (Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: None

You can sense the emotions of animals (Animism) or people (Psychic) in your line of sight or through psychic contact. Whether you succeed or fail on the opposed arcane test, the subject does not know you are Heart Reading.

If you win the test, you get a general idea of your subject's emotions and mood. This grants you a +1 bonus on the next interaction test you make against the subject within the next minute, with an additional +1 bonus per 2 points of Outcome (to a maximum of +5).

Emotional Atmosphere

With a successful TN 11 arcane test, you can pick up on the emotional atmosphere of a place, such as a party, conference chamber, concert, or other gathering of people. You sense the overall mood rather than any individual and may pick up on subtle indications of tension or unhappiness, for example. You get a +1 bonus for your next interaction test with the group as a whole within the next minute, with an additional +1 bonus per 2 points of Outcome (to a maximum of +3, as dealing with groups is less precise).

Truth Reading

Additionally, if you are Heart Reading a person, the Narrator makes a secret opposed Perception (Psychic) test against the person's Communication (Deception) test if they lie to you. If you win the test, you sense they are lying. Half-truths and omissions do not count as lies for Truth Reading, although you might Heart Read that a subject is nervous or otherwise in an agitated emotional state.

Illusion

Talent: Psychic **Time:** Major Action
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Communication (Deception or Psychic)
Resistance: Perception (any focus) **Fatigue:** Test TN

You can fool the senses of others. You must be in psychic contact with the subject. Make an Illusion test with a target number based on the complexity of the illusion, consulting the table. If successful, the illusion appears to the subject, requiring total concentration to maintain. The illusion exists solely in the subject's mind, so it can be of any apparent size; creating the illusion of something small is just as easy as creating the illusion of something huge.

Illusion

TN	Complexity
11	Illusion affects a single sense
13	Illusion affects two senses
15	Illusion affects all senses
+0	Simple (random noise, static image, and the like)
+2	Complex (coherent sound, moving images, and the like)
+4	Very Complex (multiple overlapping sounds or images)

Since the illusion isn't real, it cannot produce any real effects. It cannot cause damage, support weight, provide nutrition, illuminate darkness, or provide protection from the elements. Thus, characters fall through an illusory bridge or floor if they try to walk on it, and although they can appear to eat—and even smell and taste—illusory food, it has no nutritional value and does not satisfy hunger.

Characters encountering an illusion do not get a resistance test until they study it carefully or interact with it in some fashion. For example, if characters encounter a section of illusory floor, they would receive a resistance test if they stopped and examined the floor, poked at it, and so forth. Likewise, if an illusory monster attacks the characters, they get a resistance test because they are interacting with the illusion.

A successful Perception test against an illusion reveals it to be false, but a translucent afterimage remains in the character's perception. For example, a character successfully resisting an illusory section of floor knows the floor isn't real and isn't safe to walk on, and can see what lies below it, but can still note where the illusion is.

A failed resistance test means the character doesn't notice anything untoward. A character faced with incontrovertible proof that an illusion isn't real needs no test. Someone who falls through an illusory floor knows something is amiss, for example. A character who communicates this information to others gives them a +2 bonus on resistance tests against the illusion.

Light Shaping

Talent: Shaping **Time:** Major Action
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Intelligence (Shaping) **Resistance:** None
Fatigue: Test TN (see description)

You can mentally control and shape light. You can create light effects anywhere in your line of sight, and they last as long as you maintain them. Creating multiple effects at once (such as becoming invisible while also creating the image you are elsewhere) counts as maintaining multiple arcana.

Light Shaping

TN	Task
7 (+2 per additional 10-foot radius)	Illumination
9 (+2 per additional 10-foot radius)	Darken
11 (+2 per additional 10-foot cube)	Images
11	Invisibility

Illuminate

You can create a point of light illuminating a 20-foot radius, which you can move at will anywhere in your line of sight as a minor action. For each 10 feet you add to the radius of illumination, the target number increases by +2. Illuminate is not fatiguing.

Darken

You reduce the light level in a 20-foot radius by any amount, from dim to absolute darkness. For each 10 feet you add to the radius of the darkened area, the target number increases by +2.

Images

You can create realistic three-dimensional images of light occupying up to a 10-foot cube. Each additional 10-foot cube the image occupies increases the target number by +2. Subjects seeing the image get a Perception (Visionary) resistance test to realize it is not real if they have any reason to suspect it, such as the fact that the image makes no sound.

Invisibility

You bend light around yourself, rendering you difficult—if not impossible—to see for as long as you concentrate to maintain it. Your arcane test result becomes the target number for Perception (Seeing) tests to detect you and opponents unable to see you have a –2 penalty to their attack rolls against you (assuming they know the general direction to attack in at all), as well as a –2 penalty on their Defense against your attacks.

Manipulate Object

Talent: Shaping **Time:** Minor Action
TN: 11+ (see Move Object)
Test: Intelligence (Shaping) **Resistance:** None
Fatigue: Test TN (see description)

You can manipulate objects at distance as if with a pair of invisible, intangible hands which last as long as you concentrate. These hands have the same Accuracy and Dexterity as your own, while lifting the object has the same target number as Move Object, except you cannot increase the weight lifted by expending fatigue (Manipulate Object is fatiguing anyway due to the extra precision required). You can use your normal abilities via Manipulate Object, limited by your ability to perceive what you are manipulating.

Wielding Weapons

An adept may wield a handheld weapon using Manipulate Object. Picking up the weapon is a minor action. Attacking with it is a major action. The attacker makes a normal attack roll, but with a –2 penalty for the difficulty in controlling the weapon from afar. You can acquire the Intelligence (Remote Weapon) focus to negate this penalty. Otherwise, normal weapons groups and focuses apply. The weapon deals its normal damage with no modification for Strength. Attempts to disarm the adept are resolved normally, using Intelligence in place of the adept's Strength for the opposed test.

Mind Delving

Talent: Animism or Psychic
Time: Major Action **TN:** Opposed
Test: Communication (Animism or Psychic)
Resistance: Willpower (Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: Opposed test result

You can psychically delve into a subject's mind for information; animals with the Animism talent and people with the Psychic talent. You must be in psychic contact with the subject. If you win the opposed test, you can ask any one question and receive the answer from the target's mind. If the target doesn't know the answer, then you know that. Especially personal or guarded information grants the target a +1 to +2 bonus on the resistance test, while information the subject doesn't consciously know (because it is subconscious or forgotten due to amnesia, for example) grants a +3 to +5 bonus to resistance and the subject cannot choose not to resist.

You can continue to ask questions, one per major action, for as long as you maintain total concentration on your Mind Delving. Each question requires a new opposed test, and another fatigue test.

Sorcery

Mind Delving without a subject's consent is sorcery and requires a Corruption test.

Mind Reading

Talent: Animism or Psychic
Time: Major Action **TN:** Opposed
Test: Communication (Animism or Psychic)
Resistance: Willpower (Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: Opposed test result

You can read another creature's thoughts, "hearing" them in your own mind. You must be in psychic contact with the subject. If you win the opposed test, you can read the target's surface thoughts (whatever the target is presently thinking) for as long as you concentrate. Mind Reading transcends language; you comprehend the target's thoughts whether or not you share a common language. If you fail the test, you cannot read the target's mind. Trying again is fatiguing and gives the target a +1 bonus to their Willpower test for each new attempt.

If you can interact with your subject, a successful opposed Communication (Deception) test against the target's Willpower (Self-Discipline) causes the subject to think consciously about a particular piece of information you're looking for, such as a password or name, allowing you to pluck it from the subject's surface thoughts.

Sorcery

Deliberately reading a subject's mind without their consent is sorcery and requires a Corruption test.

Mind Shaping

Talent: Psychic **Time:** Varies (see description)
TN: Opposed **Test:** Communication (Psychic)
Resistance: Willpower (Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: Test TN

Mind Shaping allows you to remove psychic influences or alter memories and behavior. You must be in psychic contact with the subject.

Remove Psychic Influence

Make a Mind Shaping test as a major action with a target number equal to the test result of the psychic arcanum you want to remove. If you succeed, that arcanum no longer affects the subject. Note this only removes the effects of ongoing arcana, not permanent aftereffects. You can use Mind Shaping to remove an ongoing Illusion or Psychic Domination effect, for example, but not to restore Health lost to a psychic attack.

Alter Psyche

You can make changes in the subject's mind. The target number is 11 or the result of the subject's Willpower resistance test, if they resist. The time required depends on the extent of the alternations you're trying to make. If you fail the opposed test, you expend half the needed time uselessly and must wait at least 24 hours before trying again.

Mind Shaping

Alteration	Time
Alter a single unimportant fact or brief recollection, remove psychic influence	1 major action
Alter a single minor fact or an hour's worth of memory	1 minute
Alter a single significant fact, such as the name of the subject's spouse, or a day's worth of memory	10 minutes
Alter a deeply personal fact, such as the subject's own name, or a week's worth of memory	1 hour
Alter up to a month's worth of memory, or erase the subject's entire memory, causing total amnesia	6 hours
Alter up to a year's worth of memory. Give the subject an entirely new personality, complete with false memories	12 hours

False or altered memories can cause dissonance within the subject's psyche, depending on how well they fit with the subject's other memories. Noticing a conflict between the false and true memories (Narrator's discretion) grants an additional resistance test with a bonus of +1 to +4, depending on how strong the dissonance is between the two sets of memories. Success restores the subject's true memories. You can undo the effects of Mind Shaping used to alter the subject's psyche by taking time equal to the original alteration and equaling or exceeding the Mind Shaping test result used to make those alterations.

Sorcery

Alter Psyche used without a subject's consent (except to undo prior alterations) is sorcery and requires a Corruption test.

Move Object

Talent: Shaping **Time:** Minor Action
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Intelligence (Shaping)
Resistance: Varies (see description)
Fatigue: Test TN (see description)

You can move objects with your thoughts. A successful Move Object test allows you to move an object in your line of sight for as long as you concentrate. The target number of the test is based on the mass of the object you want to move and whether or not you choose to risk fatigue. A fatiguing use of Move Object can shift ten times the mass listed on the table (so 20 pounds at TN 9, up to a ton at TN 21). You can move the affected object a distance of 5 feet per minor action, plus an additional 5 feet per point of Outcome on the test, so moving a 2 lb. object with a test result of 12 lets you move the object up to 20 feet per minor action (5 ft. + an Outcome of 3).

Move Object

Target Number	Mass (lb.)
9	2
11	5
13	10
15	25
17	50
19	100
21	200

If two adepts vie for control of an object, use opposed arcane tests. The winner controls the object for that round. If a creature is holding the object, make a Move Object test opposed by the creature's Strength test.

Grabbing Creatures

You can use Move Object to grab a creature as a major action by making an attack roll using Intelligence (Shaping) against the target's Defense, then a second Intelligence (Shaping) test, this time against the target's Strength (Might), to pin them. If you successfully pin your target, you can treat them as an ordinary object for the purpose of moving them with this ability: 5 feet per minor action + 5 feet per point of Outcome.

Striking With Objects

You can hurl objects at opponents. This requires an attack roll using Intelligence (Shaping), and the object deals 1d6 damage on a successful TN 11 Move Object test, +1d6 damage per 2 Outcome (so 2d6 with a result of 13, 3d6 at 15, and so on). Since using Move Object is a minor action, you can move an object and strike with it (as a major action) on the same turn.

Moving Multiple Objects

With total concentration, you can attempt to move multiple objects at once. Use the target number of the heaviest object, then add +1 for each additional object. You cannot strike a target with multiple objects as part of the same action.

Nature Reading

Talent: Animism or Visionary
Time: Varies (see description)
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Perception (Animism or Natural Lore)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** None

You are attuned to the ebb and flow of the natural world, and therefore able to read certain signs from it. You can learn the following:

Identify

With a successful TN 9 test as a free action, you can immediately identify any animal or plant, or tell if water is safe to drink.

Predict Weather

With a minute of observation and a successful TN 13 test, you can accurately predict the weather for one day, plus an additional day for every 2 points of Outcome.

Nature Knowledge

Once per day with 10 minutes of meditation and a successful TN 11 test, you can learn any three facts about the following in a 1-mile radius: the ground or terrain, plants, minerals, bodies of water, people, general animal population, presence of animals, presence of powerful unnatural creatures, or the general state of the natural setting. This extends an additional mile in radius for ever 2 points of Outcome.

Object Reading

Talent: Visionary **Time:** Major Action
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Perception (Visionary) **Resistance:** None
Fatigue: Test result (Active Reading only)

You can read psychic impressions left on places and objects, getting images of the past, as if you were actually present at a particular past event.

Active Reading

You can attempt to see the past of a particular place or object you are touching. This requires a major action and an Object Reading test. Active Object Reading is fatiguing, with a target number equal to the test result.

Spontaneous Reading

Your ability may also spontaneously activate at the Narrator's discretion when you are in contact with an object with particularly strong psychic impressions. This still requires an Object Reading test but is not fatiguing.

The Narrator should make Object Reading tests secretly so the player doesn't necessarily know if a particular vision is accurate or not. Consult the table for the results of a vision, based on the result of the Object Reading test.

Object Reading

Target Number	Result
9	A vague vision that may not be accurate
11	A brief and accurate vision of the events
13	A longer vision of the events, encompassing everything that took place in a particular place and time
15	The ability to move the vision backward or forward in time to review the event
17	The ability to track the vision backward through time and space to trace an event to its origin
19	Near complete knowledge of a particular past event and everything involving it

Impressions read from objects generally count as slightly familiar for the purposes of determining familiarity for other arcana, possibly more if the vision was long or extremely accurate (in the Narrator's opinion). See **Familiarity** at the start of this chapter. Adepts can use Object Reading to gain enough familiarity with an otherwise unfamiliar subject to reach or affect them with other arcana.

Plant Shaping

Talent: Animism or Shaping **Time:** Major Action
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Intelligence (Shaping) or Perception (Animism)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** TN 11

You can shape living plants and, to a degree, dead wood and other plant materials.

Plant Growth

You can promote rapid growth in plants, causing an area to become filled with thick undergrowth. This affects a radius equal to your adept level × 40 feet. You can also focus the arcanum on a specific area with a 40-foot radius. Plants there become so overgrown they entangle anyone in the area, who must make a Dexterity resistance test against your test result. A failed test means the target is bound and helpless, needing a successful TN 15 Strength or Dexterity test to escape. Success means the target isn't trapped, but must still contend with the thick undergrowth created by the tangled plants. Finally, you can use plant growth to enrich an area with a radius equal to your adept level times 400 feet, increasing the yield and growth of crops there by 50% for the season.

Plant Healing

You can heal injured or diseased plants. This requires you to touch the plant and make a TN 13 Plant Shaping test. If you succeed, the plant is restored to complete health. Plants must be living and reasonably intact for this arcanum to heal them. For plant creatures with Health, this works like the Cure arcanum.

Woodcrafting

You can use Plant Shaping to shape objects out of wood. This takes minutes instead of the hours a normal craft project would. You can therefore complete a simple woodcraft project in a minute and an advanced one in about an hour.

Psychic Contact

Talent: Animism or Psychic
Time: Minor Action **TN:** 7 + familiarity
Test: Communication (Animism or Psychic)
Resistance: Psychic Shield or Willpower (Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: None

You can establish contact between your mind and that of an animal (Animism) or person (Psychic). The base target number is modified by familiarity. If the subject is unwilling or has Psychic Shield in place, you have to make separate tests to overcome their resistance. If you do not want the subject to know you are initiating psychic contact, you can make a separate opposed test against the subject's Perception (Psychic) or Psychic Shield test. If you succeed, the subject is unaware of your attempt. If you fail, the subject is aware of your attempt.

While in psychic contact with another mind, the two of you can communicate at the rate of normal speech, "hearing" each other's thoughts. You can also send a single sensory image or impression rather than speaking. Both you and the subject can choose to lie or omit information; you're "speaking" to each other psychically, not

reading each other's thoughts. Psychic contact is two-way, meaning you are in contact with the subject and they are in contact with you for the purposes of arcana.

Ejecting an Intruder

If a friendly psychic contact turns hostile, the subject can make an opposed Willpower (Self-Discipline) or Psychic Shield test against your Psychic Contact test to break contact. Once the subject has failed an attempt to eject a psychic intruder, further attempts to break contact are fatiguing. If psychic contact is broken, then other arcana reliant on psychic contact are also broken.

Rapport

Two or more people with Psychic Contact can enter *psychic rapport*, an intense state of psychic sharing. Each establishes psychic contact with the other(s), each of whom must be willing. Characters in rapport are like one mind, each instantly aware of everything the other thinks and experiences and able to share information instantly. Characters in rapport cannot deliberately lie or deceive each other, or conceal information from each other, making it a very intimate experience.

Deathcry

If someone you are in psychic contact with dies, you must make a successful TN 15 Willpower or Psychic Shield test to avoid being stunned for one round by the psychic feedback. If you are in psychic rapport with another creature that dies, and fail the Willpower or Psychic Shield test, you are reduced to 0 Health and dying as well! A creature can deliberately avoid letting out a deathcry when dying with a successful TN 15 Willpower (any focus) test.

Psychic Shield

Talent: Any **Time:** Free Action
TN: None **Test:** Willpower (Psychic)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** None

You can shield your mind from arcane influences. When you are the target of any arcana granting a Willpower resistance test, you can make an opposed Psychic Shield test first. The attacker makes an arcane test using the attacking arcanum. If you win the opposed test, the attack fails. If the attacker wins, the psychic arcanum affects you normally, but you still get a normal resistance test. Your shield doesn't block arcana requiring psychic contact, so long as the other adept remains in psychic contact with you ("inside" your shield). Your Psychic Shield is useful for blocking the initial unwanted Psychic Contact.

You may choose to voluntarily lower your Psychic Shield as a free action, and can raise it again as a free action. Otherwise, your shield is always active, even if you are unconscious or sleeping.

Shields & Maintained Arcana

Once an arcanum has overcome your Psychic Shield, it continues to affect you as long as the other adept maintains it. You are still entitled to your normal resistance

tests—if any—but your shield no longer protects you from that arcanum. Once the attacker needs to make a new arcane test, your shield comes into play again and must be overcome again with an opposed test.

Overcoming Psychic Shields

An attacker can choose to suffer a level of fatigue to automatically overcome your Psychic Shield. This is in addition to any fatigue caused by the arcanum used against you. If you also choose to suffer a level of fatigue, the attacker must still roll a normal opposed test to overcome your shield. This process takes no actual time; it happens as part of the test to overcome the Psychic Shield. An attacker trying to avoid notice (see **Psychic Contact**) cannot use this option, since it makes it immediately apparent that you are under psychic attack.

Psychic Weapon

Talent: Psychic **Time:** Minor Action
TN: None **Test:** None
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** TN 12

You can create a melee weapon out of psychic energy. Take an Activate action to create the weapon, which appears in your hand. What type of weapon it is and what it looks like are up to you; its effects are the same regardless.

You wield a psychic weapon like a normal melee weapon, except you are automatically considered trained with it, whether you have the weapons group of that mundane type of weapon or not. You wield the weapon using Accuracy (Arcane, or the appropriate focus for the weapon's type), even if it looks like a big two-handed weapon.

Your psychic weapon inflicts 2d6 penetrating damage on a hit and adds your Perception score to its damage. You can perform combat stunts with your psychic weapon and attack rolls with it can generate stunt points.

A psychic weapon is immaterial and only affects creatures. It has no effect on objects, meaning it cannot block material weapons, but two psychic weapons can block or parry each other. If your psychic weapon is somehow knocked from your grasp, it vanishes. You can summon it again with another Activate action. Your weapon also vanishes if you are stunned or unconscious.

The act of creating your psychic weapon is a fatiguing one; a TN 12 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test is required. The weapon lasts for the duration of the encounter or until you choose to dismiss it.

Scrying

Talent: Visionary **Time:** Major Action
TN: 11 + familiarity **Test:** Perception (Visionary)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** Test TN

You can sense distant events as if you were physically present. You can make a Scrying test to sense a particular place, creature, or thing known to you. The base target number is 11, modified by familiarity. If successful, you can observe the subject as if you were present. The vision lasts for as long as you concentrate, but your ordinary senses are overridden, so you are unaware of what is happening near you while you are observing events elsewhere. A subject observed via Scrying is considered present in terms of familiarity, but not in your actual line of sight.

Scrying creates an arcane disturbance, which creatures with Intelligence 1 or greater can sense. Any such creature under observation can make a Perception or Second Sight test, opposed by your Scrying test, to determine your surveillance. Creatures with no arcane abilities get the intense feeling of being watched. Those with arcane talents see a glowing or shadowy image of you. You are considered present in terms of familiarity for the purposes of arcana for any creature that senses you.

Second Sight

Talent: Any **Time:** Varies (see description)
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Perception (Psychic or Visionary)
Resistance: None
Fatigue: None (TN 13 Read Arcane Signature)

You can sense the use and lingering effects of arcana. Make a Second Sight test to detect arcana in use in your vicinity, to sense an attempt at psychic contact, or to detect and read the "signature" left behind by arcana.

Sense Arcana

The Narrator makes a Second Sight test for you in secret as a free action whenever arcana are used in your general area. The base target number is 11 or the user's Psychic Shield test result, whichever is greater, and the target number increases by +1 for every 10 feet between you and the user or subject of the arcanum (whichever is closer). A successful result means you sense an arcanum use and know which arcane talent it falls under, but not necessarily the exact arcanum. You also know the general direction and distance to the source of the effect and its target. With an Outcome of 2 or more, you know the exact arcanum used. With an Outcome of 4 or more, you recognize the arcanum user, if known to you.

Sense Psychic Contact

You make an opposed Second Sight test against the other adept's Psychic Contact test as a reaction to know when someone is trying to secretly get into psychic contact with you. If you win the test, you sense the attempt, although you might not be able to avoid it (depending on your Psychic Shield and Willpower test results).

Read Arcane Signature

If you have the Psychic and Visionary talents, you can "read" old uses of arcana in an area as a major action. The base target number is 13 to detect that arcana were used in the area in the past. With 2 points of Outcome, you determine what talent was used and roughly when. With 4 points of Outcome, you know exactly which arcanum was used and what or whom it was used on. Taking at least 10 minutes to read an area for arcane signatures gives you a +2 bonus on the test. Reading arcane signatures is fatiguing, with a resistance test TN of 13.

Second Sight

Target Number	Task
11 (+1 per 10-foot distance)	Sense Arcana
Opposed	Sense Psychic Contact
13 (+2 detect talent, +4 detect arcanum)	Detect Arcana Use

Sense Minds

Talent: Psychic **Time:** Minor Action
TN: 11+ **Test:** Perception (Psychic)
Resistance: Psychic Shield **Fatigue:** None

You can determine the presence and location of other minds. You can make a TN 11 Sense Minds test to sense the presence of any creature with within a 30-foot radius. You can focus your attempt to Sense Minds on a particular place you can see, such as a building or small island within range. Every +2 to the target number lets you extend your sensing radius by a factor of 10.

Sense Minds

Target Number	Radius (Feet)
11	30
13	300
15	3,000
17	30,000 (about 5 miles)
19	300,000 (about 50 miles)
21	3,000,000 (above 500 miles)

With a successful test, you sense the presence of other minds, their approximate number, their general type (animal, person, and so forth), and their approximate location. The larger the number of minds, the more general the information tends to be. Psychic Shield opposes Sense Minds. A Psychic Shield test greater than your Sense Minds test allows a creature to go unnoticed. A sensed mind is considered at least slightly familiar to you for the purposes of other arcana, even if you have never encountered it before.

Sleep

Talent: Healing or Psychic
Time: Major Action **TN:** Opposed
Test: Communication (Psychic) or Intelligence (Healing)
Resistance: Willpower (Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: Opposed test result

You can put a target into a deep sleep. You must be in psychic contact with the subject. If you win the opposed test, the creature falls instantly asleep and remains so for 1 minute, plus 1 minute per point of Outcome. Slapping, rough shaking, or any damage awakens them, but normal noise does not. Awakening the sleeping creature requires a major action. Creatures that do not sleep are immune to this arcanum.

Summon Spirit

Talent: Shaping or Visionary **Time:** 1 minute
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Intelligence (Shaping or Visionary)
Resistance: Willpower (Courage or Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: Test TN or opposed test result (see description)

You summon a spirit being to carry out your wishes. The basic target number is 11 plus one-tenth the spirit's Health score (rounded down). So summoning a Health 40 spirit is TN 15 (11 + [40/10]). If the test succeeds, the spirit appears. The spirit then makes a Willpower (Self-Discipline) test against your test result. If it fails, it must obey you for a number of rounds equal to your adept level or until it fulfills your last command, whichever comes first. If it succeeds on the Willpower test, it does not have to obey you, although you can interact with it and attempt to convince it otherwise.

To summon a nature spirit, you must have the appropriate shaping arcanum associated with its element, such as Wind Shaping to summon an air elemental, Plant Shaping to call a wood elemental, and so forth, as well as a substantial (person-sized) amount of the spirit's element nearby.

Sorcery

Summon Spirit can also be used to summon and bind a darkfiend, using the same guidelines. No elements or other shaping arcana are needed, but an offering of fresh blood is required, at least enough to fill the summoner's cupped hands. In addition to being quite dangerous, summoning a darkfiend is sorcery and requires a Corruption test.

Visions

Talent: Visionary **Time:** Major Action
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Perception (Visionary)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** None

You get visions of the future, as if you were actually present at a particular future event. The visions you receive are by no means assured; the future can be changed by the actions of those in the present, but your visions are the most *likely* outcomes, should no action be taken to change them. You cannot interact with your visions. You are only an observer.

Spontaneous Visions

At the Narrator's discretion, you may receive a vision of the future unbidden when you are in contact with a subject or when there is a momentous event approaching. This vision can occur while you are awake, but spontaneous visions often take the form of dreams. You know when a dream is actually a vision; although, waking or dreaming, you may not necessarily know what the vision means.

Danger Sense

Whenever you would normally be surprised in combat, you can make a TN 11 Perception (Visionary) test as a free action. If successful, you receive a split-second premonition; you are not surprised and can act normally during the surprise round.

The Narrator should make Visions tests secretly so the player doesn't know if a particular vision is accurate or not. Consult the table for the results of a vision, based on the Visions test, or choose a suitable result, based on the hero's test result and the requirements of the story. The Narrator can use spontaneous visions to foreshadow and drop hints about upcoming events in the story.

Visions

TN	Result
11	A vague vision of the future that may be accurate
13	An accurate glimpse of the future
15	Awareness of how long before a particular event occurs
17	Awareness of the people involved in a particular future event
19	Awareness of the time, subjects, and location of a future event
21	Near complete knowledge of a particular future event and everything involving it

Things seen in visions count as slightly familiar in terms of familiarity, possibly more if the vision was long or extremely accurate (in the Narrator's opinion).

Ward

Talent: Any **Time:** Minor Action
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Willpower (Psychic)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** Test result

You can create a ward that causes interference with other arcana. You affect an area around you with a radius equal to your level × 5 feet. Alternatively, you can choose to

focus your ward against a single subject in your line of sight. A ward is invisible, except to those with the Second Sight arcanum, who perceive it as a glowing aura. The ward lasts for as long as you maintain total concentration.

Any arcana use for subjects of your ward become opposed tests of the user's arcana and your ward. If you win the test, the arcana attempt fails, but any actions or fatigue are still expended. If you lose, then the arcana use happens normally. Subjects can choose to suffer an automatic level of fatigue, in addition to the normal fatigue of the arcanum used, to automatically overcome your ward. If so, you can also choose to suffer a level of fatigue to reinforce your ward, forcing the subject to make a normal test to overcome it. This takes no actual time; it happens as part of the test to overcome the ward.

Water Shaping

Talent: Shaping **Time:** Major Action
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Intelligence (Shaping)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** Test TN

You can shape and direct the flow of water and maintain any of the effects you create by concentrating.

Splash

You can cause as much as 10 gallons of water per level to leap in an arc up to 10 feet per level. Hitting a creature with this watery arc requires a ranged attack roll using the Accuracy (Arcane) focus. The creature must make a Constitution resistance test against your arcane test result or be stunned for one round. The splash also douses a 5-foot square area of flames per 10 gallons of water.

Shape Flow

You can direct the flow of water currents, increasing or decreasing the speed of water vessels by 20% with a successful TN 11 arcane test, plus 20% per 2 points of Outcome, so with a test result of 19, you can stop water vessels entirely or double their Speed.

Lower Water

Waters lower by as much as 2 feet with a successful TN 11 Water Shaping test, plus an additional foot per point of Outcome. The water lowers within an area with a 10-foot radius per level. In extremely large and deep bodies of water, such as a deep ocean, this arcanum creates a whirlpool that sweeps ships and similar craft downward, putting them at risk and making them unable to leave by normal movement for the duration.

Raise Water

Waters rise by as much as 2 feet with a successful TN 11 Water Shaping test, plus an additional foot per point of Outcome. The water rises within an area with a 10-foot radius per level. Boats raised in this way slide down the sides of the watery "hump" created. If the area includes riverbanks, a beach, or other nearby land, the water can spill over onto dry land, causing floods.

Weather Shaping

Talent: Shaping **Time:** Major Action
TN: None **Test:** None
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** TN 15

You must know the Water Shaping and Wind Shaping arcana to learn this arcanum, allowing you to combine the two and shape the complex forces of the weather. A use of Weather Shaping affects an area with a diameter in miles equal to your adept level, centered on you.

It takes 10 minutes for the effects of Weather Shaping to manifest. You can call forth weather appropriate to the climate and season of the area, including precipitation and wind (see **Wind Shaping**, following). You control the general tendencies of the weather, such as direction and intensity of the wind. You cannot control the specific effects of the weather, such as where lightning strikes or the exact path of a tornado. When you select a weather condition, the weather assumes that state 10 minutes later, building to the desired effect over that time. The weather continues as you left it for a number of hours equal to your adept level or until another use of this arcanum changes it. Weather shaping can do away with conditions (naturally occurring or otherwise) as well as creating them, such as clearing wind or storms.

Wind Shaping

Talent: Shaping **Time:** Major Action
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Intelligence (Shaping)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** Test result

You can shape and direct the wind. You can make the wind blow in a certain direction and change its speed. The new wind direction and speed last as long as you concentrate to maintain them. Changing them requires another use of this arcanum. You can affect the winds in a 40-foot radius per level. You can create an area of calm air, up to 80 feet in diameter, at the center of the winds if you wish, and you can limit the winds to an area less than the maximum possible for your level.

With a successful TN 9 Wind Shaping test, you can increase or decrease the wind's existing speed by one level, with one additional level per 2 points of Outcome:

- **Light Wind:** A gentle breeze, having no game effect.
- **Moderate Wind:** A steady wind with a 50% chance of extinguishing small, unprotected flames, such as candles (roll 3d6; such flames are extinguished on a roll of 11 or more).

- **Strong Wind:** Strong gusts which automatically extinguish unprotected flames (candles, torches, and the like). The wind imposes a –1 penalty on ranged attack tests and Perception (Hearing) tests. Flying creatures are blown backwards a short distance, akin to the Skirmish combat stunt. A strong wind can speed or slow sailing vessels by 50%.
- **Severe Wind:** In addition to automatically extinguishing any unprotected flames, severe winds have a 50% chance of extinguishing protected flames (such as those in lanterns). Ranged weapon attacks and Perception (Hearing) tests are at a –2 penalty.
- **Windstorm:** Powerful enough to bring down branches, if not whole trees, windstorms automatically extinguish unprotected flames and blow out protected ones on a 3d6 roll of 7 or more. Ranged weapon attacks are impossible, and Perception (Hearing) tests are at a –4 penalty due to the howling wind.
- **Hurricane:** All flames are extinguished. Ranged attacks are impossible, as are Perception (Hearing) tests; all anyone can hear is the roar of the wind. Hurricane-force winds often fell trees and structures.
- **Tornado:** As with a hurricane (previously), plus creatures in the affected area must make a successful TN 19 Strength test to avoid being picked up and hurled into the air, taking 10d6 damage before being violently expelled. A tornado uproots trees, destroys buildings, and causes other similar forms of devastation.

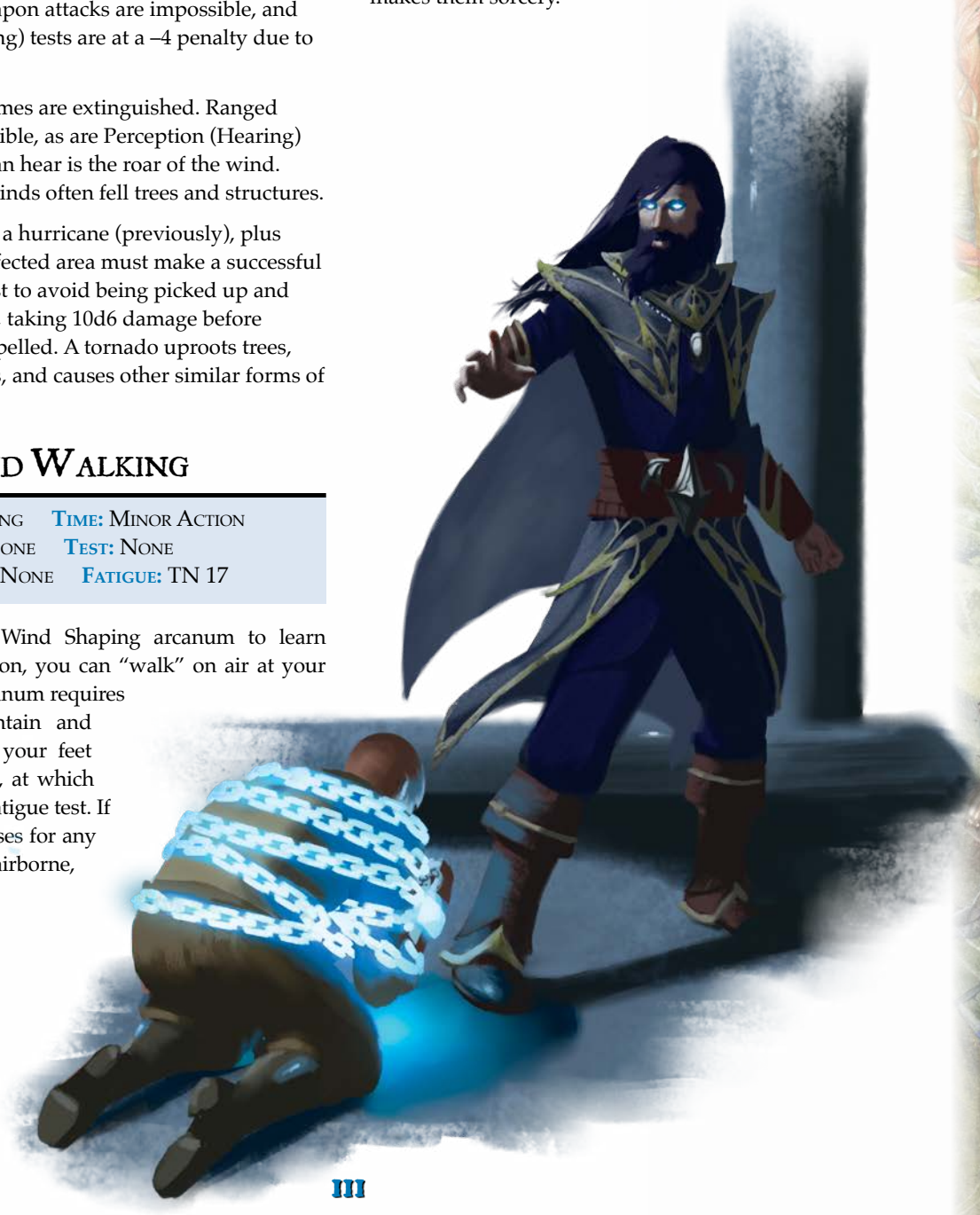
Wind Walking

Talent: Shaping **Time:** Minor Action
TN: None **Test:** None
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** TN 17

You must know the Wind Shaping arcanum to learn this. With a minor action, you can "walk" on air at your normal Speed. The arcanum requires concentration to maintain and the effect ends when your feet next touch the ground, at which point you make your fatigue test. If your concentration lapses for any reason while you are airborne, you fall.

Sorcery: The Shadow Art

Sorcery is the arcane art drawing upon the power of Shadow. While all arcane power ultimately comes from within, Shadow dwells there as well as Light, and sorcery taps into the darkest recesses of the mind and soul; into fear, hate, ignorance, pride, and selfishness. Sorcery turns these things into tools of power, but at the cost of strengthening them and corrupting the sorcerer. As learned adepts say, "Sorcery is a matter of intent." It's the mindset required to perform sorcery that corrupts the sorcerer. This is why sorcery is so dangerous and difficult to root out; only a few arcana can clearly be labeled as sorcerous. For the rest, it's not the arcana, but how they are used, that makes them sorcery.



Sorcerous Arcana

While many arcana have "gray areas" edging into corruption, some are *always* sorcery. The following arcana always require a Corruption test when used, and even having the knowledge of their use can make an adept suspect.

Harm

Talent: Healing **Time:** Major Action
TN: Defense **Test:** Accuracy (Brawling)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** TN 11

You can inflict harm on a living creature with a mere touch, disrupting the body's natural balance. You must touch the target, which requires an unarmed attack roll (an Accuracy test) against the target's Defense in close combat. If the test is successful, you inflict 2d6 + your Willpower in penetrating damage to the target and can perform a special stunt to inflict an additional +1d6 penetrating damage per 2 SP you spend.

Heart Shaping

Talent: Animism or Psychic
Time: Major Action **TN:** Opposed
Test: Communication (Animism or Psychic)
Resistance: Willpower (Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: Opposed test result

You can impose emotions on animals (Animism) or people (Psychic). You must be in psychic contact with the subject and make an opposed test. If you win the test, you can impose the chosen emotion and maintain it with total concentration. The subject acts on the emotion as if it were their own, paying attention to and being affectionate towards an object of love, for example, or furious towards an object of anger. If driven to act against their nature and goals, a subject gets a new resistance test to shake off the influence. Success ends the effect.

Imbue Unlife

Talent: Healing or Shaping **Time:** 1 minute
TN: Varies (see description)
Test: Intelligence (Healing or Shaping)
Resistance: None **Fatigue:** Test TN

Imbue Unlife is among the foulest of sorceries. You channel arcane power to lend unlife to the dead, creating a mockery of life. This arcanum can create two types of unliving: mindless and intelligent.

Creating a mindless creature turns the bones or body of a dead creature into a skeleton or walking dead, which obeys your spoken commands. You can control up to four times your adept level in mindless unliving. If you exceed this, all newly created creatures fall under your control, while excess previous creations become uncontrolled. You choose which creatures are released from your control.

Creating an intelligent creature transforms a corpse into a ghost, shadow, specter, or vampire. Intelligent unliving are free-willed and not under your control. The target number for the Intelligence (Healing or Shaping) test depends on the type of creature.

Imbue Unlife Difficulty

TN	Creature
11	Skeleton
12	Walking Dead
13	Shadow
15	Ghost
17	Specter
19	Vampire

Subtract the subject's Corruption score (if any) from the target number, as it is easier transforming the corrupt into the unliving.

Psychic Blast

Talent: Psychic **Time:** Major Action
TN: 11 **Test:** Communication (Psychic)
Resistance: Willpower (Courage, Faith, or Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: Opposed test result

You psychically assault a target's mind. You can affect any target in your line of sight or in psychic contact. If you are not in psychic contact, the target's Psychic Shield (if any) provides additional resistance (see **Psychic Shield** in this chapter). If you win the opposed test, the target takes 1d6 penetrating damage, plus 1d6 additional damage per 2 points of Outcome (to a maximum of 6d6). If you lose, the target takes no damage.

Psychic Domination

Talent: Animism or Psychic
Time: Major Action **TN:** Opposed
Test: Communication (Animism or Psychic)
Resistance: Willpower (Courage, Faith, or Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: Opposed test result

You psychically dominate the subject; an animal with the Animism talent, a person with the Psychic talent. You must be in psychic contact with the subject. If you win the opposed test, you control the target's actions for as long as you maintain total concentration. You can direct the subject to perform any action you wish, within the limits of their abilities. You are aware of what the subject experiences via your psychic connection. Subjects forced to take actions against their nature receive a new opposed test

with a bonus of +1 to +4, depending on the nature of the action. A subject who wins the test is free of your control.

Sorcerer's Grip

Talent: Shaping **Time:** Major Action
TN: 11 **Test:** Intelligence (Shaping)
Resistance: Constitution (Stamina) **Fatigue:** TN 11

You can damage living creatures internally with a crushing arcane grip. You can affect any creature in your line of sight or in psychic contact, causing 1d6 penetrating damage, plus an additional 1d6 per 2 points of Outcome (to a maximum of 6d6). The target makes a resistance test. Success halves the damage.

Suggestion

Talent: Psychic **Time:** Major Action
TN: 9 + familiarity **Test:** Communication (Psychic)
Resistance: Willpower (Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: Opposed test result

You can implant suggestions into the minds of others. The suggestion must be worded in such a manner as to make the activity sound reasonable. Asking a creature to stab itself, throw itself onto a spear, immolate itself, or carry out some other obviously harmful act automatically fails. However, a suggestion that a pool of acid is actually pure water and that a quick splash would be refreshing is another matter altogether.

If you win the opposed test, the suggested course of action is followed for up to 30 minutes, plus an additional 30 minutes per point of Outcome or until the course of action is complete, whichever comes first. You can also specify conditions that trigger a particular course of action, like a posthypnotic suggestion, in which case the duration is counted from when the triggering event occurs. An especially reasonable-sounding suggestion may grant your test a bonus of +1 or +2, at the Narrator's discretion.

Torment

Talent: Healing or Psychic
Time: Major Action **TN:** Opposed
Test: Communication (Psychic) or Intelligence (Healing)
Resistance: Willpower (Courage, Faith, or Self-Discipline)
Fatigue: Opposed test result

You can inflict terrible pain on a target by touch or psychic contact. If you win the opposed test, the target is stunned and unable to take actions due to pain. So long as you maintain total concentration, the effect continues. The victim gets a new opposed test each round at the start of their turn to overcome the pain. If the subject wins, your torment has no further effect on that subject for a day, after which time you must roll a fresh opposed test if you wish to reinstigate it.

THE WORLD OF ALDEA

Throughout Aldis and the surrounding lands, knowledge of ages past is handed down from one generation to the next. Even isolated villages have some history primers, and traveling bards and village storytellers tell tales of the origins of the world and its gods, of the glorious Old Kingdom, of the rise of the Sorcerer Kings, and of the Great Rebellion. Even though the vile Sorcerer Kings were overthrown more than 300 years ago, the people of Aldis are determined never to forget their terrible reign or the heroism that finally brought about their fall. This chapter is a summary of what most Aldins know about the history of their world.

Note that the age of the Sorcerer Kings, the terrible Shadow Wars, and the Great Rebellion that followed resulted in the destruction of many records, writings, and works of lore, often limiting knowledge of those times to hearsay, legend, and oral histories retold to later generations.

The Mythic Age

Storytellers have many, sometimes conflicting, accounts of the world's first days. Some say this race or that one is older than the others. Others give primacy to one god over another. The gods themselves have many names, and their passions and genders change from one land and story to the next. At the core of these diverse tales are figures and events common to most of the myths of the world's earliest days. The mythic history presented here is predominant in Aldis.

The Creation of Aldea

Before gods and stars, mountains and oceans, there was the Eternal Dance. Within it, the first souls gloried in infinite beauty and love, dancing as one. Outside the Dance, there was endless twilight and the Sea of Possibility, softly illuminated as if before the dawn. Desiring to share their joy and to know the satisfaction of creation, four souls emerged from the Dance. They were the first, the Primordials, the gods of Twilight and Balance. They are known by many names, but four arise most often when the gods are invoked: Selene, Braniel, Maurenna, and Anwaren, creators of the world and patrons of the seasons.

The Primordials plunged into the Sea of Possibility and drew forth matter, so spirit could take form. They divided matter into elements, one for each of them: air for Selene, water for Braniel, fire for Maurenna, and earth for Anwaren. Breathing into the elements, they created elementals, creatures of pure essence, to aid in their great endeavor.

Accompanied by the elemental host, the Primordials crafted Aldea, "the world," a jewel of spirit and matter. Anwaren pulled and pushed, molding the land. Braniel poured waters into Anwaren's gorges and raised others above the vault of the sky to fall as rain. Selene tamed Braniel's waters and called forth the winds. Laughing, Braniel spangled the sky with stars and danced upon the earth,

seeds and animals springing up in his wake. Maurenna embraced the new world, warming it with her fires, cultivating its seeds, and suckling its beasts. Life flourished in countless forms. Selene, beholding their wondrous creation, looked towards the future and saw their happiness would not endure. So she whispered forth the moon, the greatest light in the darkness. There she hid the secrets of creation so they could be called upon by adepts in the future, though many would be undone by the depths of those mysteries. This is why the moon is associated with both arcane power and madness.

Drawn by the glimmering fruit of the Primordials' labor, other souls emerged from the Eternal Dance. They descended into the world and cavorted amid its wonders. Still immortal and infinite, the souls took many forms, expressing themselves through matter for the first time. They flowed from form to form, with and without gender, with two legs and four, on land, in the sea, and in the air. They praised their siblings, and Aldea rang with the sound of their mirth. Eventually they would become the first mortals, their divinity dimmed by death.

Anwaren, adoring the work of his hands and relishing the newfound feeling of praise, grew jealous of the love and attention lavished upon his siblings. Envy festered in his heart and grew into an obsession. He knew he could not wrest dominion from the other Primordials, each as powerful as himself, and the newly arrived souls had no desire to worship him. His gaze pierced beyond Aldea and the Sea of Possibility until it found the Shadow, a darkness beyond joy and life. He gazed long into its nothingness, plumbing its depths for some secret to elevate himself above all others. Before he could withdraw, the Shadow ensnared him, and he was cast into confusion and doubt. The impossibilities of limitation and death impregnated him, and in great agony he gave birth to seven beings, the exarchs of Shadow, the Lords of Malice. The first, arch and beautiful, called himself Gravicarius before naming his six siblings and subjecting them to his will.

Embodying their creator's lust for power, the exarchs spawned lesser creatures like themselves, monsters forever heartless and soulless. Leaving Anwaren behind, stricken with his madness, the exarchs and their servants ascended to Aldea and drew a veil of Shadow over the many-formed paradise. They attacked the cavorting souls and dragged them and the world screaming towards Shadow. In fury, Selene threw herself between Aldea and nothingness. She brandished her shining sword and destroyed evils beyond number, but could not simultaneously defeat the exarchs and prevent the world from sliding into Shadow. At this Maurenna wept seven tears, and as each fell, Braniel caught it within the Chalice of Bliss. As he sang the Eternal Song over it, the chalice shone brightly, and from it stepped forth the gods of Light. Droplets of divine water falling from them formed the first unicorns and griffons.

Firstborn Hiathas, Lord of the Dance, leapt forth and called his brothers and sisters to oppose the growing Shadow. They arose and faced the exarchs, who proved no match for their unity. Each exarch was cast back into Shadow, save Tyrexxus, exarch of wrath, who fought long against Aulora, goddess of justice. As battle raged between the gods and the exarchs, Selene, Braniel, and Maurenna realized Aldea and the souls in it had come too close to nothingness and were fading into oblivion. Maurenna and Braniel began weaving bodies for the souls to anchor them in the world. With no memory of their divine origins, the souls awoke as the first people: humans, vatazin, and sea-folk, the latter retaining a vague memory of having been manifold beings, of the land and the sea, both male and female. Other souls slept in animal form, awakened by the unicorns and griffons to become rhydan, called to guard the world against Shadow.

Despite the Primordials' efforts, the world was tainted by Shadow. Refusing to allow it to claim even one soul, Selene crafted the Wheel of Rebirth and set it spinning. Though creatures would perish in the world, their souls would be caught up in the wheel and given new forms, new life, forever robbing Shadow of its prize. Upon each spoke of the wheel, Selene carved an eternal secret so souls might eventually remember their immortality and return to the Eternal Dance. As Selene finished her work, Tyrexxus glimpsed its brilliance and, casting Aulora aside, attacked Selene, intending to destroy the wheel. Tyrexxus raked the wheel with his great claws, throwing it out of balance. Selene drove him away and tried to rebalance the wheel, but the damage was done. In ages to come, sorcerers would exploit the lingering imbalance between life and death to create the first unliving creatures, forever sundered from the Wheel of Rebirth.

Marshalling her strength, Aulora chased Tyrexxus back to the other exarchs, whom Goia bound in shackles. There, too, they found Anwaren, nearly lost. Kissing his forehead, Aulora soothed his madness with order, while Goia lifted him into her arms. The two bore him to the other Primordials, turning their backs to the exarchs, who struggled against their bonds and cursed proud Gravicarius for not leading them to victory.

With the Rod of Blooms and Chalice of Bliss, Maurenna and Braniel restored the exarchs' maker. Awakening in remorse, Anwaren vowed to partner with Aulora in teaching the first mortals to oppose tyranny. So he could not be tempted again, he also ordained that he would share the fate of the souls in the world: he would diminish, perish, and then rise again. Seeing the wisdom in this, the other Primordials joined him in establishing the four seasons, and accepted Anwaren back amongst them.

To commemorate their victory over the exarchs of Shadow, and as a sign of hope for the renewed world, Hiathas placed the great light of the sun in the sky to dance forever with Selene's moon, and so was born the day and the night and the beginning of time.

The Old Kingdom

Some fifteen hundred years ago, after the mythic age gave way to history, the great city of Aldis was founded. It became a center of learning and the arcane arts. Artists, crafters, scholars, diplomats, healers, and adepts made their way there from all across the world to learn and to teach. Their skill and knowledge allowed the city to thrive.

As its influence spread, Aldis became the capital of a mighty nation, which also bore its name. This epoch is named in its honor: the Old Kingdom. The kingdom was ruled by the Council of the Wise, made up of the finest practitioners of every art, chosen in Midsummer contests by the people. They sat in judgment and dispensed justice. The sign of the Old Kingdom was a thornless red rose, with each petal representing a different craft or art treasured and studied in Aldis. Under the Council's rule, Aldis the Beautiful extended its reach across the known world, even to distant, now-forgotten lands.

The Wonders of the Old Kingdom

The adepts of the Old Kingdom worked wonders not since surpassed. They were the first to discover and use magical shas crystals, imbuing them as conduits of arcane power. They used their mastery of arcana and crystal to create ships that flew through the air, to heal any ailment, to rapidly mine, refine, and work metal, and to construct and maintain vast cities.

All of these secrets and more were lost during the Shadow Wars. Despite this, Old Kingdom artifacts can be found throughout the world, but wise people avoid them because they are often hazardous to anyone unfamiliar with their use. In Aldis, citizens are supposed to turn all such artifacts over to the crown so scholars and adepts can study them, destroying those too dangerous to use.

Shadowgates

Among the most powerful and perilous of Old Kingdom artifacts are the shadowgates. Upright rings of a black metal alloy called darksteel, each gate is approximately fifteen feet in diameter, with a single palm-sized shas crystal set at the apex. The shadowgates formed a transportation network, allowing for instantaneous travel to the distant reaches of the Old Kingdom. Messengers and supplies could cross the world as easily as crossing a room, one of the keys to the Old Kingdom's vast reach.

Unfortunately, the adepts who became the first Sorcerer Kings learned to use the shadowgates as summoning devices, opening gateways into the realm of Shadow, from which they called darkfiends to serve them. During the Shadow Wars, the gates were useless for transportation

because the Sorcerer Kings placed traps on their gates, preventing anyone from using them as a way into their domains. Sorcerer Kings who did not control a shadowgate learned to create makeshift versions for summoning, using rings of standing stones or stone archways, even more dangerous than true shadowgates.

Today, none but the most learned scholars and adepts know shadowgates had any use other than summoning darkfiends. Everyone else associates them with the evils of the Sorcerer Kings and avoids them. Many gates are inactive, and have been for centuries, but shifts in the arcane currents in the world—or a careless adept—can reactivate a shadowgate, allowing darkfiends to enter the world and corruption to spread over the area. Closing or destroying an open shadowgate is one of the most important duties of the Sovereign's Finest and the priest-adepts of Jarzon.

The Fall of the Old Kingdom

Over time, the Old Kingdom grew complacent in its peace and prosperity. Justice became lax and taxes on distant provinces increased as members of the Council of the Wise became more interested in their own pursuits than the welfare of their citizens. Matters worsened when adepts on the Council delved deeper into the arcane arts and began to study and experiment with sorcery. Such research, by those who were supposedly the wisest and most powerful, encouraged others to seek similar knowledge. Some were corrupted by their sorcerous experiments. Although many approached their studies with the best of intentions, seeking only new ways to solve difficult arcane problems or techniques for aiding their subjects, they fell to Shadow as surely as the more ambitious among them, and were often more cunning in concealing their debasement.

Corruption spread like a cancer through the heart of the Old Kingdom, with backroom deals and alliances escalating to assassinations and draconian policies. Rebellion in the outer provinces was brutally suppressed, and small incidents of dissent used as an excuse by warmongers to build up the kingdom's army and their own private militias. During these dark days, the first sorcerers learned the secret of summoning darkfiends and how to draw upon their own corruption to increase their power.

The Empire of Thorns

In the seventh century of the Old Kingdom, some eight hundred years ago, a cabal of sorcerers led by the infamous Delsha the Dark seized the throne and executed the remaining members of the Council of the Wise. Delsha declared herself Empress Delsha I, the first ruler of the new Empire of Aldis, later known as the Empire of Thorns.

Chapter 5: What Has Gone Before

An alliance of rhydan and vatazin attempted to stand against Delsha's empire, but their powers were insufficient and they paid a terrible price. One of Delsha's first decrees placed a bounty on all vatazin and rhydan. Darkfiends hunted them with the aid of corrupt humans, and were paid handsomely for every rhydan pelt and vatazin head they delivered. The vatazin were never numerous, and in less than a generation, they were no more. The only remains of that noble race are the half-breed vata, born to human families with some vatazin ancestry. Thousands of rhydan were slaughtered, but the survivors hid in the depths of the wilderness and under the sea.

Delsha ruled the empire with an iron fist. However, even her greatly extended life eventually came to an end (some say through betrayal, others through sorcerous mishap). Ambitious sorcerer lords scrambled to seize power for themselves, splitting the empire and leading to civil war. None of them had either the arcane might nor the force of personality to unite or destroy their rivals, so the empire fragmented as each sorcerer lord seized a portion of it and defended it against all challengers. Within a decade of Delsha's death, the great empire was a shattered patchwork of petty fiefdoms.

Using sorcery to prolong their lives or transform themselves into unliving monsters, the Sorcerer Kings grew increasingly contemptuous of the people they ruled, regarding them as little more than useful beasts of burden. However, they were aware even lesser beings could prove dangerous, so they ordered their servants to hunt down adepts of the various arcana and to seize every arcane device.

The lives of the general populace became increasingly brutal and impoverished. Many died of diseases unknown a generation before, and blight and famine stalked the land. Anyone attempting to learn the arcane arts to remedy these problems did so at the risk of their life and the lives of their families. Moreover, the Sorcerer Kings' arcane experiments became reckless, jeopardizing whole communities. Nowhere was this more true than the port city of Falzanoth, where the incumbent Sorcerer King accidentally triggered an earthquake, causing the entire city to crumble into the sea. This formed the Leviathan's Teeth, named for the rocky pinnacles jutting up from the water.

For the first century after the civil war, the Sorcerer Kings focused on securing their realms, subduing rebellions, experimenting with ever more powerful and dangerous arcana, and seizing all arcane power in their kingdoms. Eventually their eyes turned toward each other's domains, hungry for new lands to conquer.

The Shadow Wars

Six hundred years ago, the Shadow Wars began. The Sorcerer Kings battled against one another for more than two hundred and fifty years, each seeking dominance and, eventually, the Throne of Thorns. In their quest for power, they raised armies of the unliving. Using the flesh-shaping

arts, they produced aberrations and shadowspawn to fill their ranks. They invoked the exarchs of Shadow in the open and summoned darkfiends as soldiers, spies, assassins, and counselors. They corrupted promising new adepts, some of whom then overthrew their masters to become new Sorcerer Kings. The sorcerers crafted arcane weapons that could lay waste to entire regions and thousands died in sorcerous plagues. Many people fled to hide in the wilds between their domains.

Over the years, rebel movements gained in strength. Most started out as tiny freeholds hiding in remote areas. These settlements preserved as many of the old ways as possible, including worship of the gods and the study of the arcane arts. They plotted to overthrow the sorcerers and sent out spies and representatives to rescue and recruit those with arcane talents. Unfortunately, the power of the Sorcerer Kings was greater than most of them understood. In the end, only the sorcerers' greed, paranoia, and overconfidence allowed the rebels to defeat them.

As the Shadow Wars continued, the weakest Sorcerer Kings fell. Some of their kingdoms were conquered. Others were devastated, becoming blasted wastelands filled with ruins to this day, the Shadow Barrens being the most enduring example. The surviving Sorcerer Kings grew increasingly paranoid and summoned larger hordes of darkfiends to defend themselves. In the end, their reach exceeded their grasp.

About 350 years ago, a horde of darkfiends turned on their summoner, Rhaz Tethes, lord of what would later be known as the Veran Marsh. They attacked his citadel in the heart of the city of Veran-Tath, and he summoned all his power to defend himself. The resulting cataclysm destroyed both Tethes and the darkfiends, and transformed the region around his citadel into the vast and deadly swamp it is today.

Within days, darkfiends serving several other Sorcerer Kings rebelled. Some speculate this was a plot by the exarchs of Shadow to gain dominion over Aldea. Others believe the gods undermined the Sorcerer Kings' hold on the darkfiends, giving the creatures impetus to turn on their masters. In the end, two Sorcerer Kings were slain by their own summoned minions, and several others greatly weakened. The rebels had been waiting for just such an opportunity, and they seized it, striking at the Sorcerer Kings all across the empire.

The Great Rebellion

The Great Rebellion began as a series of attacks by a few heroic rebels, but rapidly became a mass uprising against the Sorcerer Kings. Slaves rioted and slew their overseers, and a few Sorcerer Kings were killed in their beds by previously docile servants.

The rhydan came out of hiding to aid the rebellion. Rather than cowering in fear, these proud creatures had been strengthening their numbers and seeking weaknesses in the Sorcerer Kings' arcane defenses. When the moment came, they approached the rebels and joined forces with them. The leaders of the rebellion rode griffons, unicorns, and rhy-horses into battle, followed by packs of rhy-wolves and rhy-cats. Wood elementals strode from the depths of the Pavin Weald to tear down walls and towers.

The rebels also received aid from an unexpected arrival: the mysterious Golden Hart. It appeared suddenly in the city of Aldis and bounded to the rebels' aid. This arcane being was not only immune to sorcery, but could confer its immunity upon anyone within sight of it. Under its aegis, the rebels were able to overcome the arcana of the Sorcerer Kings, but still had to battle hordes of darkfiends and the unliving. The surviving Sorcerer Kings still refused to unite even for their own protection and in many cases betrayed each other to the rebels, each thinking they could defeat the rabble after using them to destroy their rivals.

After decades of war, the rebellion overthrew and destroyed most of the Sorcerer Kings. A few annihilated

Travayn Odion, Hiathas' Own

A young man during the Great Rebellion, Travayn Odion found settling down in the new Kingdom of the Blue Rose more difficult than the struggle against the forces of the Sorcerer Kings. So, he used his skills as a warrior and the connections made during the rebellion to form a mercenary company with his lover—and, later, husband—Bennin. Called "Hiathas' Own"—or, alternatively, "The Soldiers of the Spring"—the company was noted for including many caria daunen, some of whom were lovers. They served Aldis in countless struggles against the bandit lords and other lawless elements in the early years of consolidating the new kingdom.

As forays against the bandit lords were coming to an end, Hiathas' Own pursued a retreating remnant of an enemy bandit force into the Ice-Binder Mountains, straight into an oncoming force from Kern. Rather than retreat and allow the Lich King's force to invade Aldis, the company stood their ground and held the mountain pass against them, sending a psychic call for aid to anyone loyal to the kingdom who could hear it. By the time Aldis' allies arrived, they found the Kernish force had retreated back northward, but the pass' defenders were all slain, some of them having perished side -by -side or in each other's arms, including Travayn and Bennin. Hiathas' Own were posthumously honored by the Crown for their valor in defending Aldis and, to this day, their legend inspires the kingdom's protectors—as well as deeds of heroism—particularly among caria partners in the Guard and the Sovereign's Finest.

themselves and their strongholds, rather than accept defeat, taking as many of the rebels with them as they could. Only in the northern land of Kern did one of the Sorcerer Kings manage to hold on to power, shielded by the grim Ice-Binder Mountains, which prevented the rebel army from advancing northward. Bands of rebels tried to storm Kern for years, but Jarek the Lich King maintained control over his darkfiends, and his land was rich in shas crystals used to bolster his defenses. After four defeats at the hands of the Lich King's forces, the rebels retreated, leaving Jarek in power. Although the Golden Hart led the rebels during their campaign, it vanished as suddenly as it appeared, shortly after the last assault on Kern. Its disappearance is widely seen as the end of the Great Rebellion and the reign of the Sorcerer Kings.

The people then set about the long and difficult task of rebuilding their shattered live and homelands. Many cities lay in ruins. Vast tracts of land were too tainted to farm, and the dead outnumbered the living. Reconstruction occupied most of the next century. Towns and villages slowly grew, and some ruined cities were rebuilt, including the ancient city of Aldis. In this twilight time, travel was rare, as travelers had to brave gangs of bandits, roaming monsters, and darkfiends who occasionally materialized from the remaining shadowgates. Eventually, states emerged and grew stable enough to secure their roads and borders. There were still some areas ruled by bandit lords, but traders, couriers, and envoys could travel the world again.

As isolated communities gathered into nations, different ideologies developed. The inhabitants of the newborn theocracy of Jarzon remembered how the Old Kingdom had become corrupt and tyrannical. The Jarzoni sought to create a society free from that legacy. Meanwhile, the lands around the city of Aldis were filled with people who preserved stories of the grandeur of the Old Kingdom. Many longed for those wondrous days and came to see themselves as the heirs of the Old Kingdom's traditions of justice and wisdom.

Revak the Night Walker

One tale told in both Aldis and Kern is the story of Revak the Night Walker, a night person who lived during the Great Rebellion in Aldis. After turning against the Sorcerer Kings, he swore allegiance to the new Kingdom of the Blue Rose while working to win the trust and understanding of his new homeland. His efforts were recognized when he became one of the first night person nobles of Aldis. Revak helped lead the Aldin army against the Lich King's troops though, sadly, one of his star marriage spouses was killed in battle against the forces of Kern.

Captured and taken to Sarn as a prisoner, Revak was offered the opportunity to save his life by repudiating Aldis and swearing allegiance to King Jarek. He refused, and Jarek chose to make the defiant night person the focus of his displeasure with Aldis and their rebellion. For days, the cruelest of Kern's torturers worked their skills on the helpless Revak, but when the time came for his public execution, it was announced the captive had perished under interrogation, having disavowed Aldis and its upstart Sovereign. Still, tales abounded of how Revak never broke and, in the nights that followed, a hulking, cloaked figure was sighted in the poorest wards of Sarn, defending victims of abuse at the hands of Jarek's overseers. There were also whispers regarding the sudden deaths of several of the Lich King's jailers and torturers, all quickly covered up and kept from the public.

The true cause of the incidents never became clear, but later escapees from Kern brought stories with them of "Revak the Night Walker." His heavy, hooded cloak concealing the scars inflicted by his tormentors, he reportedly struck in the night in the name of justice, and in retribution for the wrongs done by the Lich King's servants. Revak became a kind of folk hero, particularly for the night people of Aldis and Kern, who dreamed of being other than what they were made as and expected to be. Some of them may have taken up Revak's legacy and methods, further adding to his legend, or perhaps the tales are true and Revak the Night Walker (or his spirit) still haunts the towers and alleys of Sarn—even after the fall of the Lich King—and will do so until all of Kern's people are free.

The Rebirth of Aldis

Several communities in the fertile valleys around ruined Aldis were spared the worst of the devastation caused by the Shadow Wars. Theirs became one of the most prosperous areas in the post-rebellion world. Vast numbers of refugees flooded into the region in the last days of the Great Rebellion, so it was faced with the task of assimilating people with different ethnicities. Large numbers of rhydan also settled in the wilderness areas on the edges of the valleys.

Seltha, a charismatic and visionary leader in Aldis, reached out to the rhydan and earned their respect by proposing the creation of a kingdom where they would have full citizenship and their wilderness homes would be protected. In return, the rhydan presented the people of Aldis with the Blue Rose Scepter, a gift of the Golden Hart and a symbol of unity. Unicorns and griffons worked rituals to ensure Aldis would always be ruled by a fair and just Sovereign. They called the Golden Hart, who appeared again in the center of the fallen city and chose Seltha as the first Sovereign of Aldis. This happened on the first full moon after the spring equinox. Ever since, that day is celebrated in Aldis as Hart Day.

To further ensure the fledgling nation remained free from the shadow of the Old Kingdom's latter days, Queen Seltha

decreed anyone who wished to become a noble must pass the test of the Blue Rose Scepter, which would accept only the touch of someone devoted to the Light. She adopted the scepter as her badge of office, and within a decade, Aldis became widely known as the Kingdom of the Blue Rose. It became a haven for peoples of goodwill faced with hatred and persecution elsewhere. Diversity and acceptance were the founding principles of the land; even the newest immigrant could become a noble by meeting the requirements and passing the test of the Blue Rose Scepter.

Because of the city's central location and the stores of knowledge in its surviving libraries, the inhabitants of Aldis reconstructed it to serve as the new capital. The city was laid out in the pattern of a giant rose blossom, and blue tiles were used extensively in the new palace and the Azure Plaza, the open space where the Golden Hart had appeared. Much of this work was overseen by Varti the Builder, the second Queen of Aldis and a devotee of Goia.

One of Aldis' first challenges came when people living in the borderlands asked for aid against the gangs of bandits and local warlords. Troops from Aldis, aided by the rhydan, liberated their neighbors and drove the bandit warlords to the Ice-Binder Mountains. The Bandit Wars were fought over the course of more than a decade and brought more lands and people under Aldis' protection. The wars also depleted the young kingdom's resources. As a result, it was ill-prepared for the threat it faced shortly before the centennial of the Great Rebellion's end.

The Kernish Invasion

Covetous of the heart of the Old Kingdom, Jarek, the Lich King of Kern, mounted a long-planned attack on Aldis. He sent a force of living soldiers, darkfiends, and the unliving south across the Ice-Binder Mountains. While the darkfiends and unliving attacked because of Jarek's sorcery, the living troops only fought because they feared the Lich King. Anyone who deserted or refused to fight knew they and their families would suffer before being added to the ranks of the unliving.

In addition to sending troops to engage the invaders, King Karthakan, Sovereign of Aldis, sent adepts to probe for weaknesses in the Lich King's forces. When they reported the Lich King's hold over his living troops, Karthakan developed a daring plan. A force of the most skilled scouts and soldiers, carried by griffon allies, flew deep into Kern and liberated the hostages in several of the Lich King's labor camps. Because Jarek never imagined his enemies would attempt to aid their enemies, the camps were only lightly guarded.

King Karthakan's adepts contacted members of the enemy forces and placed them in psychic contact with their now-freed loved ones. As news spread through the Lich King's army, many troops deserted and joined the Aldin

forces, while others launched surprise attacks against the officers commanding them, as well as the unliving and darkfiends. Although many of those who defied the Lich King perished in the attempt, the desertion of over half the living troops spelled the end of the invasion. Aldis was weakened in the war, but the loss to Kern was greater; it took the Lich King almost a century to reestablish order and rebuild his forces.

In the end, Aldis gained several thousand loyal citizens, including a number of night people. Although many Aldins initially distrusted those shaped by sorcery, their courage and dedication in the war against the Lich King's forces impressed many others, so the night people's petition to settle in Aldis was granted.

The attack by Kern spurred Aldis to assign more scouts to watch its borders. Eventually the scouts were joined on patrol by adepts, warriors, and others concerned with the kingdom's safety. They became the model for the Sovereign's Finest, founded by Queen Allia, King Karthakan's successor. This organization grew in prominence and expanded its mandate from watching the borders and outlying settlements to keeping track of all manner of problems in the kingdom. The establishment of the Sovereign's Finest allowed Aldis to rely less on its military, so it was able to maintain a relatively small force of loyal volunteers.

The Road to Jarzon

The next major challenge to the kingdom came when Aldin diplomats met with representatives from the theocracy of Jarzon. Shortly before the Great Rebellion, the formation of the great Veran Marsh made the area virtually impassable. Eventually, the wild arcana subsided somewhat, and exploration by the Sovereign's Finest discovered safe routes through the marsh, allowing for the reestablishment of contact with people in the lands to the east.

During the initial meeting between Aldis and Jarzon, the Jarzoni were horrified by the widespread and largely unregulated use of arcana in Aldis, while the Aldins were equally concerned by the repressive nature of the theocracy. Shortly after the two nations came into contact, Jarzon attempted to invade Aldis, but most of their forces never made it past the hazards of the marsh. Aldin adepts removed or concealed routes through the mire, discovering in the process that the area reacts unpredictably, and often violently, to shaping arcana. Relations between Jarzon and Aldis remain strained, but the barrier of the marsh and delicate diplomacy have prevented all out warfare.

The Reign of King Valin

Valin the Tainted was the only Aldin Sovereign to be removed from office. His fate still serves as a warning to all rulers that carelessness and irresponsible behavior can lead to disaster. After the peaceful reign of Queen Allia, King Valin was faced with renewed attacks by bandits, darkfiends, and shadowspawn from the Ice-Binder Mountains. In addition to making full use of the resources of the envoys of the newly formed Sovereign's Finest, King Valin was relentless in his pursuit of ways to defend his kingdom. In a move that worried both his advisors and his personal guards, he occasionally went along with large parties of envoys to investigate problems near the mountains. Valin was a powerful earth-shaping adept and wanted to use his powers to aid his subjects directly.

Determined to protect Aldis, King Valin rode with a group of envoys and Rose Knights working to eliminate an infestation of darkfiends and to find the shadowgate they were coming through. They found the shadowgate guarded by dozens of well-organized darkfiends, with more emerging every few minutes. To stop the infestation, King Valin risked his life by using his arcana to destroy the shadowgate. He emerged from the explosion of uncontrolled power without a scratch, seemingly unharmed.

Everyone hailed him as a hero, but no one knew of the psychic backlash caused by the gate's destruction. A cunning and pernicious darkfiend gained access to the King's mind and spirit. It fooled King Valin into thinking its advice and temptations were simply his own passing thoughts. As problems in the kingdom continued, the darkfiend provided advice on how to deal with these troubles, suggestions both efficient and deeply flawed.

After a month of these constant whisperings helped him deal with a bandit incursion, Valin began to have similar thoughts of his own. Eventually, the darkfiend introduced itself as the King's spiritual advisor, sent by the gods to help him deal with the troubles facing Aldis. When the connection to the darkfiend began to fade, King Valin secretly gained access to the dormant shadowgate under the city of Aldis, and the darkfiend told him how to use it to establish a permanent connection between them.

For two years, King Valin became the scourge of the bandits and shadowspawn plaguing the kingdom's borders, but he accomplished this by increasingly draconian measures, including ordering his envoys to use their arcana to interrogate suspected bandits psychically and immediately executing the guilty. He later ordered these interrogations expanded; envoys were ordered to psychically question the inhabitants of border towns. After the first year of his ruthless tactics, more than half the envoys working on the northern borders had ceased following the King's orders, and the Noble Council began secretly debating the possibility of deposing their increasingly brutal and callous monarch.

Most members of the Noble Council considered open rebellion against the King as far too much like the coup that signaled the beginning of the Empire of Thorns. Instead, as reports of excesses on the borders were reported to the Council, they issued secret instructions to

regional and traveling nobles that contravened the King's orders. Nobles who received these two sets of contradictory orders were then forced to decide whom to obey. Some of them chose to obey the King and reported the Council's actions to him. Subsequently, for the next year, tensions between the King and the Council increased. The King did not want to risk the consequences of dissolving the Council, so he began working with a group of loyal nobles to discredit the councilors opposing him.

Meanwhile, the rhydan member of the Sovereign's Council also became uncomfortable with the King. Although the darkfiend's powerful magic prevented the rhy-cat representative from having any indication King Valin was tainted by Shadow, both the rhy-cat and its human companion began avoiding the King, and bonded rhy-cats throughout Aldis began counseling their companions to disobey immoral orders from their Sovereign.

Out on the borders of Aldis, nobles with differing loyalties began fighting. The conflict was on the verge of growing into a full-fledged civil war. However, slightly more than two years after the initial corruption of the King, the Golden Hart appeared in the palace during an audience between the King and representatives from the Scatterstar Archipelago. The Golden Hart kicked King Valin in the head, repudiating him. The Hart then leapt off into the palace grounds and came back accompanied by a young fisher named Rikin, marked as the next King of Aldis with the golden crescent upon his brow.

Seeing no further chance of corrupting Aldis through its King, the darkfiend broke contact with Valin, and the ex-king wept openly, confessing what had happened. Although many in the court pitied him, they were also horrified by what he had done, and he soon left the capital to live out the rest of his life as a hermit on the coast. Today, people use the story of King Valin as an example of the risks of dealing with dangerous artifacts of the Shadow Wars, and of giving in to temptation.

The Reign of King Rikin

King Rikin was one of only two rulers of Aldis who were sea-folk. He was the son of fisher folk who lived on the shore of Lake Vash and caught fish for the palace. Rikin was in the palace making a delivery when the Golden Hart approached him and guided him, still carrying his basket of freshly caught trout, into the main audience chamber, where it marked him as the next King. At first, the young fishmonger was so shocked that he was rendered speechless, but he soon resolved to honor the hart's selection by learning to become the best Sovereign he could. Relying heavily on his advisors for the first few months, Rikin learned his lessons quickly and well. He became a model ruler, a champion of peace.

His first challenge was dealing with the conflicts between the nobles who remained loyal to King Valin and those who followed the Noble Council. As soon as the truth about King Valin's corruption came out, almost all the nobles who had been loyal to him realized the error of their ways. However, a few had given into the temptations of Shadow, and others had committed a variety of terrible acts, including executing innocent farmers suspected of aiding bandits and killing the families of those suspected of banditry.

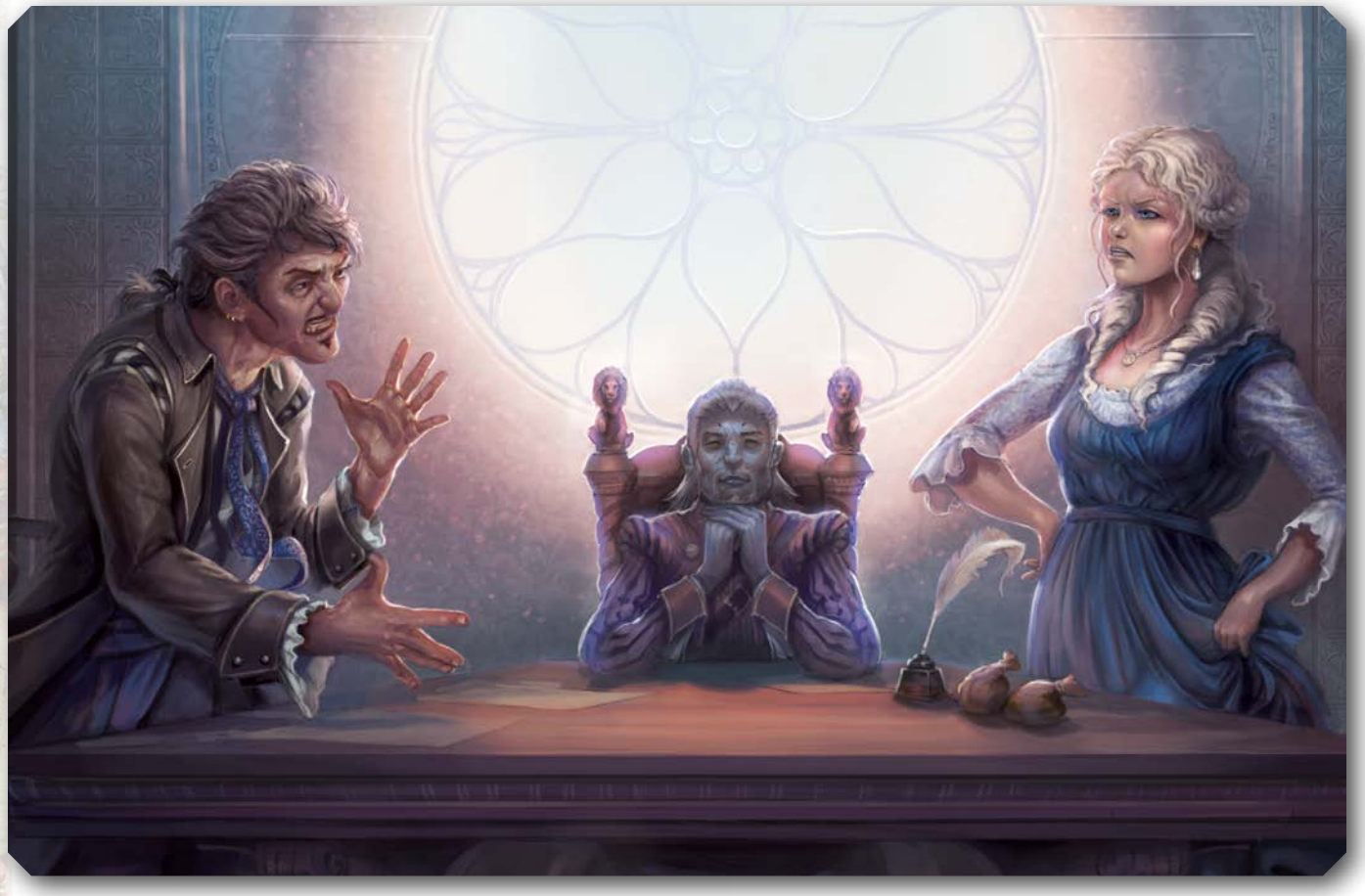
King Rikin ordered the Noble Council to investigate those who had followed Valin's orders and to have healers examine them for signs of Shadow. As a result of these careful investigations, almost two dozen Shadow-tainted nobles were stripped of their titles. Despite this, a handful of Shadow-aligned nobles were able to evade discovery and retained their positions, but they were unable to cause any large-scale trouble thereafter, with so many nobles loyal to Rikin.

After dealing with this problem, King Rikin faced complaints by merchants. Since the founding of the kingdom, the Sovereign had been advised by representatives from both the nobles and the rhydan. Although trade was a vital part of the kingdom's economy, the merchants had no official voice in the Aldin government. As the nations of the world recovered from the Shadow Wars, trade within Aldis and abroad expanded. Aldin merchants and crafters established the Guild Council to achieve greater prosperity and success. Formed during the last days of King Valin's reign, the Guild Council found Rikin a humane and reasonable King, so they asked for a larger voice in the government.

Reigns of the Sovereigns of Aldis

The Aldin calendar numbers years from the year of Queen Seltha's coronation. This list shows the reigns of Aldis' Sovereigns from that year to the present.

Years	Sovereign
1–9	Queen Seltha
9–30	Queen Varti
30–36	King Lartik
36–49	King Karthakan
49–65	Queen Allia
65–69	King Valin
69–99	King Rikin
99–122	Queen Larai
122–156	Queen Fashi
156–173	King Rannath
173–199	King Issik
199–271	Queen Hulja
271–302	King Haylin
302–present	Queen Jaellin



At first, almost all the members of the Noble Council opposed giving people who they considered to have dubious morals a say in the governance of Aldis. The noble representative to the Sovereign's Council convinced the rhydan representative of the wisdom of their position and so was able to stalemate the King's desire to grant the guilds a voice. The Guild Council consequently declared a general strike in the city of Aldis, and the leaders appealed to shopkeepers and other crafters and tradesfolk to go along with the strike. As a result, on the first day of spring, business in the capital ground to a halt. In response, the Noble Council demanded the King order the strikers to cease their action or face heavy fines.

King Rikin took three representatives from both the Guild Council and the Noble Council and brought them into the inner chambers of the palace. There, the six representatives talked for three days, while the King acted as mediator. Raised as a fishmonger, he had an empathy for those who worked with their hands, yet he also proved to have a gift for settling difficult disputes and eventually managed to get the two sides to reach an agreement. Some members of the Noble Council still distrusted the Guilds, but King Rikin taught them the necessity of listening to the people most directly responsible for the kingdom's prosperity, and so the Guild Council gained official sanction and a representative from it now sits on the Sovereign's Council. Many in Aldis hailed Rikin for settling this conflict.

King Rikin ruled for thirty years, during which he made Aldis more prosperous than it had ever been before. Although relations with Jarzon became increasingly strained, trade with Lar'tya expanded. Shipwrights in Aldis and Lar'tya shared shipbuilding secrets, enabling both nations to produce larger and faster ships.

The Reign of Queen Larai

After King Rikin died, he was replaced by Queen Larai, a noble who worked as an envoy in the Pavin Weald. Even before she became Queen, she was considered somewhat odd by most who knew her. Despite being an exceedingly charismatic speaker who could easily convince people to listen to her advice, she was also an eccentric, noted for often seeming distracted and for occasionally listening to sounds no one else could hear.

No one knows if she became more unhinged when the Golden Hart chose her as Queen, or if she simply ceased caring if anyone else knew the true extent of her foibles. In either case, shortly after she was crowned Queen, she began to talk openly to people who were not there. At first, the nobles thought she might be psychically communicating with someone, possessed, or Shadow-tainted like King Valin. However, half a dozen of the kingdom's most powerful healers and several other skilled adepts examined her, and no one could find any evidence that she was talking to anything other than figments of her imagination.

The nobles kept waiting for the Golden Hart to appear and declare her unfit to be Queen. However, that never happened. Also, the various imaginary beings she talked to all seemed to be caring, humane, and just. They never tried to convince her to perform any sort of morally questionable action. In general, they seemed to be pleasant beings.

Queen Larai was equally comfortable talking to these imaginary people and the real people in her court. Although conversations with her imaginary companions could become quite intense, she was scrupulously punctual about keeping her appointments and performed her duties exceedingly well. As time went on, she spent slightly less time socializing with other people than most monarchs, but this was solely because many people at court had trouble dealing with her eccentricities.

For much of her reign, Queen Larai was a gregarious Sovereign. If anyone asked what she was talking about with her "friends," she would happily tell them and would even include them in the conversation, relating what her imaginary companions said. The kingdom prospered under the rule of this idiosyncratic Queen, but her unusual behavior also alienated ambassadors from Rezea and Lar'tya, and the representative from Jarzon saw her madness as proof of Aldis' decadence and impending doom.

The Golden Hart did not make an appearance until the Queen was quite elderly and had begun to spend more time talking with her imaginary companions than with her subjects. It came before her, touched her brow gently with its muzzle, washed away the golden crescent with its tongue, and walked out to select the new ruler. The palace healers then kept Larai comfortable for the remaining few years of her life.

Sacre Cyrano, the Poet Knight

Sacre Cyrano was a sickly child who survived infancy only with the aid of skilled healers and "sheer stubbornness and attachment to this fascinating world," as he said in his later years. Born into a family of performers, he learned from them a love of letters, the spoken word, and an unshakable sense of the dramatic. As he aged ("Never matured," he notes), Cyrano became renowned for his skills as a poet, orator, and negotiator, able to cut to the heart of any matter with a razor-sharp wit.

Not content simply to write and perform, he devoted his skills to public service, eventually becoming a noble, after which he composed his famed "Ode to the Touch of the Blue Rose." He served during the reign of Queen Hulja, and was both a favorite at her court and—at times—a gadfly the Queen joked about binding and gagging. Sacre Cyrano was one of the finest diplomats and envoys who aided the Queen in her efforts to expand and strengthen Aldis' ties with the wider world. He won the respect of the Rezean clans and drove dour Jarzoni Keepers to distraction with his puns and word games, yet still managed to keep both at the negotiating table.

Possessed of poor eyesight since childhood—a condition healers remained unable to cure—Sacre Cyrano noted the importance and strength of his other senses, and the enjoyment he derived from them. He was a supporter and sponsor of the Quiet Knights, and arranged to leave what wealth he possessed to that Order after his passing, having no other living family and no objective greater than to cultivate "the cause of poet-knights who know the world in so many different and varied ways," as he wrote in his final testament.

The Reign of King Issik

The most curious of the kingdom's Sovereigns was King Issik. He was an excellent monarch, and under his rule trade increased. He was widely praised as a kind, just, and exceptionally wise Sovereign, but his personal life was sad and troubled. When he became King, he was a spirit dancer bonded to a rhy-cat and married to Kral, an outstanding healer.

For the first fifteen years of his rule, Issik's life was relatively idyllic. Unfortunately, when his husband and his rhy-cat companion were traveling to help with an outbreak of cholera in a large farming town on the northern edge of the central valleys, they were attacked and killed by bandits. These bandits were ordered to slay the King, and when they discovered he was not there, they instead killed the two people dearest to him.

To the disconcertion of the royal court, both victims returned as ghosts and were accepted by the King into the palace. He kept them as his companions for the rest of his life. To this day, the two ghosts are seen from time to time in the royal chambers. Since they trouble no one, no Sovereign has chosen to try to remove them, out of respect to the memory of King Issik and his loved ones.

Issik remained an excellent ruler, passionately devoted to the Light, despite his keeping company with ghosts. Since few people were comfortable with his companions and he wished to spend most of his time with them, King Issik gradually withdrew from life at court. He continued to make necessary public appearances, but he saw no one except when he was performing his official duties. King Issik seemed to age more rapidly than normal and died only eleven years after his husband and companion.

During the last decade of his reign, the kingdom lacked a strong leader and the members of the Noble, Rhydan, and Guild Councils were forced to work together to decide the course of the government. While there were persistent problems with bandits on the kingdom's northern frontier, envoys and the Aldin military were able to hunt down the majority of these bandit gangs and bring them to justice.

More than with any other Sovereign, King Issik's rule showed the court that, as long as the nation was not in crisis, Aldis could remain safe and prosperous even when the Sovereign was concerned with other matters.

The Reign of Queen Hulja

Hulja is the only Queen chosen from among the ranks of the Guild Council. When King Issik died, the Golden Hart walked into the chambers of the Guild Council and picked Hulja, its newest member, who had been appointed to it less than a year before. Like Issik, Hulja was a member of the large and prestigious Falish family that had lived in the city of Aldis since the Great Rebellion.

During the last decade of King Issik's reign, diplomatic relations with both Lar'tya and Rezea had suffered, and contact with Jarzon had been almost completely severed. Because of King Issik's association with ghosts, the Hierophant of Jarzon and most of his priests expected Issik to begin creating unliving and summoning darkfiends at any moment. Although Aldis itself was stable, even its normally close allies in Rezea were reluctant to visit the court and sleep in a haunted palace.

Queen Hulja worked hard to renew these alliances and did her best to improve trade with other nations. To help bolster the reputation of Aldis' Sovereign, she personally visited Rezea and sent a trio of exquisitely decorated ships to carry the eldest daughter of the Matriarch of Lar'tya to the city of Aldis. She also took the unprecedented step of visiting Lysana's Crossing, a town near the Veran Marsh and the first stop for all trading caravans from Jarzon. While she was there, she sent several envoys to let the Hierophant know that she wished to speak with him. The Hierophant was so impressed with her bravery that he sent Kalik Elt, the high priest in charge of the Jarzoni capital of Leogarth and the second most powerful person in Jarzon, to meet with Queen Hulja personally. Although the differences between the two nations were in no way resolved, Kalik and the Queen got along quite well, and for the duration of the Queen's long reign, the low-level hostilities that were an almost constant feature of diplomacy between Jarzon and Aldis significantly declined.

Because she was one of the long-lived vata'an, Queen Hulja ruled for more than seventy years. She was the youngest of the three vata chosen by the Golden Hart, so she became Aldis' longest ruling Sovereign, and the nation greatly prospered under her rule. She considered her greatest personal triumph financing an expedition to the far side of the Western Ocean. Although she was 122, she waited on the docks for this ship to return as soon as the adept aboard psychically announced the ship was soon to arrive at the coastal town of Elsport, before making its way to Port Garnet and from there to the capital.

The Reign of King Haylin

Another member of the Falish family, Haylin was a clerk who kept records for the Sovereign's Finest. Queen Hulja suffered a stroke and died just before Haylin and the senior clerk for the Sovereign's Finest had an appointment with her. They found her dead, and less than a minute after the two of them walked into the Azure Plaza to announce the Queen's passing, the Golden Hart stepped out of the large window and chose Haylin as the new Sovereign. Almost immediately he was known as "the Fair King" because he was already regarded as one of the most attractive men in the capital. Unlike many who possess natural beauty, Haylin was neither self-conscious nor obsessed with his own looks.

When the Golden Hart chose him, Haylin was a young widower with a six-year-old son named Sayvin, who soon became the darling of the Sovereign's Council. Haylin was beloved by the people of Aldis, and there was much speculation about him remarrying.

The kingdom remained at peace during the entirety of his thirty-one year reign. He was a graceful and careful diplomat but not a deep thinker the way Hulja had been. Aware of his deficiencies, he relied closely on the Sovereign's Council to help him deal with complex treaties.

The entire capital mourned when he was thrown from his horse while galloping along the nearby hilltops. He died instantly from the fall. Many expected Lord Sayvin to succeed his father, but the Golden Hart had other plans.

The Reign of Queen Jaellin

After King Haylin's untimely death, the guardian of Aldis chose Jaellin, a shy and academic noble from the coastal city of Garnet, as the next Sovereign. Walking right past Haylin's son, Lord Sayvin, the Golden Hart came to Jaellin, standing near the back of the assembly in the Azure Plaza. She was completely unprepared for this choice. Like everyone else, she assumed Sayvin would be Aldis' next King.

When Jaellin was made a noble, two years before her coronation, the Noble Council decided she would be more useful as a regional noble than a traveling noble, for she was clearly more at home among dusty records and ancient buildings than riding paths through the wilderness. She was assigned to govern Rosevale, a trading town on the Rose River, 200 miles northeast of the capital, which she managed with care and forethought. Near the beginning of her second year there, her directives enabled the town to survive severe spring flooding without serious damage. Although she sometimes missed her life in Garnet, Jaellin was content in Rosevale and only came to the capital to make reports to the Noble Council.

For the first months after she was chosen, Queen Jaellin remained shy and reserved. Her quick mind allowed her to make her views known in debates in the Sovereign's Council, but she made only the minimum number of public appearances. She gradually grew in confidence, and by the middle of her first year as Queen, she was a major figure in the year-end public festivals in the capital.

Even though the people mourned King Haylin, they soon learned to love their new young Queen. However, among the elite in the capital, Jaellin remained something of an outsider. Her academic bent endeared her to many of the scholars of the Royal College, and she won the trust and admiration of the Sovereign's Finest.

Although she has faced many challenges as Queen for the past eighteen years, Jaellin's greatest challenge to date came just over three years ago, when Jarek, the Lich King of Kern, launched another sneak attack against Aldis. Lord Sayvin, the son of King Haylin and a noble himself, staggered the kingdom by betraying Aldis to the Lich King's forces and misdirecting the Sovereign's Finest and other defenders, slowing the response to the invasion.

Queen Jaellin's decisive and surprising reaction was to carry the fight to Jarek himself. Using the secret shadowgate beneath the palace, the Queen and a small number of the Sovereign's Finest assaulted the Lich King's own stronghold through his personal shadowgate. At the same time, rebels within Kern, aided by Aldin advisors, launched attacks against the Lich King's remaining forces. Jaellin faced Jarek in combat and the surviving envoys of the assault still tell tales of how the Golden Hart appeared at the Queen's side as she and her allies fought the last of the Sorcerer Kings. Psychic and elemental forces howled in a storm around Jarek's citadel before its highest tower exploded, and when the smoke finally cleared, only the Queen emerged.

The destruction of the Lich King sent shockwaves through Kern and most of its forces routed, recalled by panicked lieutenants eager to shore up their own positions—preparing for further rebellion, or even an Aldin counter-attack, which never came. Instead, the Queen returned to Aldis, along with the surviving envoys and some rebel allies from Kern, including the vata'sha leader Kelyran. He and Queen Jaellin announced their betrothal during the celebrations that followed, and were married not long thereafter—at blinding speed by royal standards. The Aldin shadowgate was destroyed as it had served its purpose, and to prevent any counter-attack from Kern.

The soldiers of the Kingdom of the Blue Rose soon expelled the remaining Kernish troops in their territory. The people then began the work of repairing the damage and treating the harm done by the brief invasion, which would have been far worse, had the Queen's bold plan not succeeded. Jaellin was lauded as the hero of the land, and the people celebrated her achievement, her marriage, and her newfound happiness.

The past two years have been ones of rebuilding and repairing, and dealing with refugees trickling in across the

Ice-Binder Mountains from Kern, which remains a threat. The so-called "Shadowed Seven," Jarek's most powerful lieutenants, have seized power in various parts of the northern land, dividing it amongst themselves and consolidating their holdings. Where Aldis once faced a single terrible foe, it now faces more than a half-dozen, each with their own agendas, but all agreed that the Kingdom of the Blue Rose is a prize beyond price.

In the time since Queen Jaellin's victory, rumors spread by her political enemies have taken root, questioning the Queen's motives and wisdom in covertly hiding a shadowgate in the capital city itself, in permitting the study of sorcery in Aldis, and in taking a dark vata from the heart of enemy territory as her consort. The gossips wonder: What exactly happened on that fateful day in Kern? Is it true that the Lich King cursed the Queen and Aldis with his dying words, pronouncing a terrible doom upon them both? Some say the Golden Hart—which has not been seen since—sacrificed itself to protect Jaellin from her own foolhardiness and overreach. Others, that Aldis and its Queen are too quick to accept refugees from the lands of Kern, any of whom could be spies or corrupt sorcerers. Most pay such stories no mind, but they persist nonetheless in the shadowed corners of Aldis.

Chapter 6: Kingdom of the Blue Rose

The Kingdom of the Blue Rose has existed for over three centuries and continues its traditions of diversity and acceptance, established after throwing off the yoke of the Sorcerer Kings. As a result, life within its borders is always colorful. Its adepts excel in the arcane arts, its farmers and craftspeople produce the finest goods, and its traders travel far and wide, buying and selling all manner of items and making Aldis the most prosperous nation in the known world.

Aldis' citizenry grows more diverse with each generation. Anyone willing to swear loyalty to the Crown and Kingdom and to abide by the laws of the land is accepted as a citizen. Drawn by the promise of freedom, security, and prosperity, refugees from Kern, Jarzon, and a host of rhydan, vata, and others come to be subjects of the Blue Rose. Many immigrants integrate into Aldin culture, but numerous small, somewhat isolated communities choose not to fully assimilate. Aldis is large enough and broad-minded enough to be home to all these peoples.

The Peoples of Aldis

Aldis is one of the few places in the world where many different kinds of people live together in harmony. Humans, who are the majority, live side-by-side with rhydan, sea-folk, vata, and night people. Indeed, in Aldis, the term "person" refers to any embodied soul of the Eternal Dance: a living being capable of thought and self-awareness.

Humans

Humans make up the majority of the population of Aldis, as in most of the lands of the known world. Humans reproduce the fastest, compared to the relatively rare vata and rhydan, the reclusive sea-folk, and those created by sorcery, such as the night people.

The humans native to the lands of Aldis tend to be olive-skinned with black or brown hair and eyes, with green or gray eyes common among those with arcane talents. Centuries of immigration dating back to the height of the Old Kingdom, however, have led to a diverse range of humans living in the Kingdom of the Blue Rose, with skin tones from dark brown to fair and freckled, and a wide range of accompanying hair and eye colors. Mixed heritage is common for humans, and while some families have proud ancestries they can trace back to the Old Kingdom, much history was also obscured during the Shadow Wars. Tight-knit human ethnic communities in Aldis tend to be fairly recent immigrants.

Sea-folk

Sea-folk are an amphibious people, who can swim with great skill and hold their breath as long as a dolphin. They have green- or blue-tinted skin and hair and eyes

of a similar shade. Sea-folk are androgynous, with sleek bodies and little hair apart from on their heads, and males don't develop facial hair. Because they depend on water more than land-dwellers, sea-folk live near rivers, streams, lakes, or the sea. Most of the sea-folk in Aldis live on the southern coasts and the islands of the Scatterstar Archipelago.

Many sea-folk work as sailors or fishers. Some are divers, scouring the sea floor for shells, pearls, and lost treasures. A few have become wealthy upon finding the wreck of a ship lost during the Old Kingdom. Other sea-folk are explorers and navigators, especially devoted to the god Gaelenir, the Sea Lord. Whatever their occupations, almost all sea-folk love to sing, string together necklaces of shell and stone, and cavort in the waves with dolphins and other sea life.

Sea-folk occasionally marry humans and vata and can have children with either. The children of these couplings take after one of their parents; half are sea-folk, while the others are human (or, rarely, vata). Sea-folk/human families are particularly common among the islanders of Aldis.

Vata

Long ago, before the Sorcerer Kings and the Shadow Wars, the vatazin walked the land. Called the Children of Selene, they were wise, ageless, and filled with a profound knowledge of the natural world. They lived in secluded dells, where they honed their potent arcane arts and gazed into the night sky, seeking to unravel the hidden secrets of the moon.

Occasionally, some of them would grow curious about the outside world and wander. Some of these wayfarers never returned home, finding compelling knowledge, beauty, and even love among the shorter-lived races. The children born of unions between vatazin and humans sometimes appeared to be ordinary members of either

The Arrangement of Lore

Peppered throughout **Chapter 6** and **Chapter 7** the reader will find excerpts from *A Rose Amidst the Thorns*, written as the subjective interpretations of an Aldin scholar of pieces of folklore that survive among the people of Aldis. These tales, songs, and fables are all based on slivers of truth of what happened during the Empire of Thorns. They are deliberately vague so you can add your own spin to them in your series if you want to set it during those dark times, or use them as the basis of an adventure for heroes in contemporary Aldis, or simply as background for your own stories.

Each entry has an introduction in *italics* by Al'Haric, putting the material in the context of modern Aldis. Text in bold, either in the introduction or the tale, indicates an element that is true and did exist, such as a character, organization, or location, although Narrators should feel free to modify these as they see fit.

A Rose Amidst the Thorns

or An Incomplete Collection of Rebellious Songs and Subversive Fables During the Empire of Thorns, as Curated by Royal Bard Al'Haric the Mellifluous Chord.

Aldis was born from the crucible of the Great Rebellion, but although our forebears gained freedom, the war destroyed vast stores of knowledge and histories that could have shed light onto the tumultuous period known as the Empire of Thorns. Annals in the Royal Library record the names and atrocities of many of the Sorcerer Kings, but these tomes fail to account for the details of their reigns, or how discontent became dissidence, which became rebellion.

I have devoted my career to uncovering these lost tales, but rather than dig through Shadow-eaten ruins for lost texts, I have turned elsewhere: to the lore spread by common folk, the songs performed in festivals, the stories told to teach (and frighten) children and, ultimately, the tall tales that may—or may not—be based on hidden truths.

I give my unending gratitude to Queen Faellin, whose love for the land and its people knows no end, and who endorsed my endeavor to travel the lands of Aldis to search for lost history, the beauty that survived the times of Shadow, the rose that grew amidst the thorns.

race, but most were a new people known as the vata, who combined the natures of both. They had human curiosity mixed with the vatazin affinity for arcana and a fraction of their longevity. These vata—now called vata'an, "the old vata" or "true vata" to some—have pure-white hair and pale blue, green, gray, or amber eyes, combined with the skin tones of their human heritage.

When the Sorcerer Kings spread Shadow across the world, the vatazin emerged from seclusion to oppose them. The result was a terrible slaughter. The vatazin were wiped out, as were many vata, but enough of the latter survived among their human kin that they endured. The Sorcerer Kings' minions discovered some of the surviving vata and captured them so their masters could twist them to their own purposes. The sorcerers succeeded in creating a new type of vata: the vata'sha, or "dark vata," who have the white hair of their kin but flesh as dark as obsidian and red or amber-colored eyes. The Sorcerer Kings' experiments were aimed at making the vata'sha their thralls while awakening the innate arcana of the vatazin within them. These efforts failed, but some of the vata'sha chose to serve the sorcerers anyway, many becoming sorcerers themselves. Other vata'sha became fervent foes of Shadow.

After the Great Rebellion, vata were able to live in peace in Aldis and Rezea, where the vata'an are viewed as a remnant of the wondrous vatazin. But the vata'sha, despite being accepted, are frequently seen as reminders of the Sorcerer Kings' wickedness. In Jarzon, vata'an are accepted, but the priests claim that vata'sha are innately tainted by Shadow and apprehend them, when possible.

Night People

A shadowspawn species created by the Sorcerer Kings' flesh-shaping experiments, night people were made as brute laborers and soldiers to subjugate other races, which does little to endear them to others, particularly outside Aldis. In Kern, some night people still serve in this role, but the Sorcerer Kings made the night people intelligent and thus able to choose their own path, which has proven their salvation.

The Sorcerer Kings cared little about aesthetics when they made the night people, who look like monsters from a children's fable. They are taller than humans, with stocky, muscular builds, sloped foreheads, and beady, yellow eyes. Their skin is ashen gray, and their hair is black and coarse. Small tusks jut from their lower jaw, and they prefer a diet of meat. (Rumors of them eating the flesh of people are not true. That is a trait night people do not share with other shadowspawn.)

In Aldis, night people have shown for generations that they can be both trusted members of society and fierce warriors in service to the kingdom. Despite this, their brutish and hulking appearance frightens some, especially refugees from Kern and Jarzon. Most Aldin night people are exceptionally loyal to the kingdom, for they know no other home. In Jarzon, they are hunted and killed; in Kern, they are enslaved; and in Rezea, they are mistrusted and often driven away if they dwell too closely to the Rezeans' hunting grounds.

Rhydan

The rhydan are a people quite unlike the two-legged folk such as humans, sea-folk, and vata. They have the bodies of beasts, but possess souls of the Eternal Dance just like any other people, making them intelligent, self-aware, and gifted with arcane (particularly psychic) talents. Most rhydan arise—or "awaken," as they call it—from amongst mundane animals of their kind, and many in Aldis believe rhydan are proof of the Wheel of Rebirth: placing enlightened souls into animal forms close to nature. Rhydan share a unique bond with nature and the world of Aldea. Touched by the arcana of the unicorns of legend, they act as protectors, companions, and wise councilors for the people of Aldis.

Status and Visibility

Because Aldis accords rhydan the same status as humans, the kingdom has powerful allies in times of need. There are many varieties: unicorns, griffons, drakes, rhy-cats, rhy-fen (awakened dolphins), rhy-horses, rhy-wolves, and others. Most are shy, preferring to live alone or in isolated communities of their own kind. Rhy-cats and rhy-fen are the most likely to reach out to the land's other races. Rhy-cats generally serve as the representatives of their fellow

rhydan to the other peoples of the kingdom, and rhy-fen naturally have close relations with the sea-folk, particularly in the Scatterstar Archipelago. Rhy-horses often bond with the riders of Rezea. All rhydan, regardless of how reclusive they might be, aid lost travelers and people in need who stumble into their wilderness homes.

The Rhydan's Heart

Found in every corner of Aldea, rhydan act as caretakers and defenders of nature, advocates for the flora and fauna that can't speak for themselves. The rhydan use their psychic capabilities to speak to the two-legged races that share their world and make them understand the importance of protecting and living in harmony with nature. Unlike other beings, every rhydan that comes into the world knows that their lives, their hearts and souls, exist to help safeguard Aldea from the influence and corruption of Shadow. How they go about that mission depends largely on the rhydan themselves.

The rhydan are some of the most arcane creatures in all of Aldea. According to rhydan lore, the unicorns were the first of their kind, awakening with the god Hiathas himself. They then awoke the other rhydan, starting with the griffons. Set apart from normal animals, the rhydan are a powerful symbol of the beating arcane heart of Aldea, creatures whose very existence harkens back to a time when the Eternal Dance was not just legend but the understood reality. Though nearly wiped out by the Sorcerer Kings and purges by Jarzoni Purists, the wild spirit of the world lives on so long as the rhydan stand to protect it.

Although rhydan do not have monarchs or nobles, all of them bow to the ageless wisdom of the unicorns and the fierce power of the griffons. The most powerful unicorns and griffons can see into a person's soul and are unmatched in their defiance of Shadow. Non-rhydan who have actually befriended a unicorn or griffon sometimes wear unicorn- or griffon-shaped jewelry as a sign of their special favor.

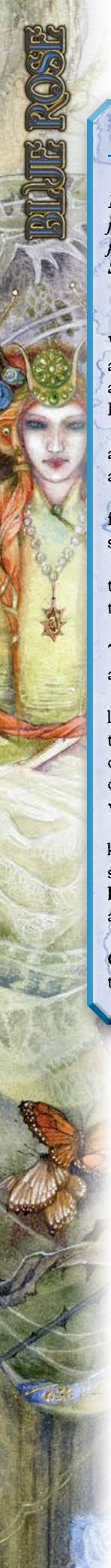
Rhydan Communities

Rhydan communities are typically located in remote wilderness areas. Most griffons live high in the Ice-Binder Mountains, while unicorns dwell in the depths of the Pavin Weald. Other rhydan tend to live in the environments preferred by the animals from which they awakened. While land rhydan require no more shelter than an overhang to keep the rain and snow off, they do enjoy some of the fruits of civilization, including reading and creating works of art with shaping arcana.

Rhydan Awakening

A rhydan is born knowing it is special. Though on the surface a rhydan may be mistaken by two-legged people as just another animal, a rhydan knows they're different from the day they are born. From a young age, a rhydan is attuned to the natural world around them. They move through their young life aware of the shifts in nature and in the hearts and minds of their fellow animals, noting even the subtle shifts in arcane energy in the land itself. It isn't until they come into their full psychic abilities that they truly understand just how different from regular animals they are.

A young rhydan can grow up in any number of different places. Many are born and raised among other rhydan in remote locations, away from cities and two-legged settlements. Often these communities can be found among groups of the animals they resemble: rhy-horses running with herds of regular horses for one example, or rhy-wolves raised among a pack of regular wolves. Rhydan are often set apart by the other animals, recognized for their innate difference and respected for their arcane nature. It is a rare rhydan that is raised by humans or any of the two-legged races, though it isn't unheard of for a lost, abandoned, or orphaned rhydan baby to be cared for by other than its



Rhy is for Rhyming

I heard this fable from a rhy-cat serving in the Sovereign's Finest. While I think he was toying with my interest, the fact that the name of Plumtail *from "Clever Cobbler Corae" is mentioned makes me believe this story comes from one of the unfortunately anonymous heroes among the rhydan during the Shadow Wars.*

Al'Haric

You know the part where all souls were a bit of everything and nothing? Well, once there was a fox that took it to heart. He fancied himself an adept, and was obsessed with finding what he called "the One Note", a part of the song that was common in two-leg speech and rhydan calls. Except his singing was terrible, and his poetry was more torture than art.

This fox—let's call him Plumtail, because he loved plums and chased after farmers' carts—well, this fox traveled far and wide, looking for anyone who could help him find his One Note.

He looked first for a rhy-wolf with the purest howl, and became friends with her. But the howl had limited notes, most of them sorrowful.

Then he sought a vatazin, who was delighted with the idea and tried to match the rhy-wolf's howl with his reed pipe tunes. They found things in common, but it still was not enough.

Plumtail found sea-folk who could sing like the dolphins and whales. Their intertwining melodies ran fuller, both low and high, mournful and happy, but still something was missing.

Finally, Plumtail went to the humans and found that, while he had looked for his One Note, the Old Kingdom was no more, and Shadow tainted everything. He almost lost hope in finding something pure to complete his grand quest, but then he found a pretty dancer girl. She could not sing at all, but her dance was raw and primal and he took her with his other friends.

The wolf howled, the vatazin—who was by then a spirit, because you know the vatazin are no more—anyway, the vatazin played, the sea-folk sang, the human danced, and Plumtail screeched horribly. But guess what? Harmony and disharmony, movement and stillness, they all came together and brought the Golden Hart into the world.

The times don't match? Who cares? The important thing is that the One Note is not one at all. It is many, and when the many join together, they bring a light into the world that no Shadow can withstand.

own kind. These rhydan can grow up more confused and lost than their wild brethren, separated from the teachings that other rhydan, or even mundane animals, can offer out in the wild.

No matter their upbringing, a rhydan exists until their age of maturity in a state of constant curiosity and learning. With their psychic connection not yet fully matured, these rhydan learn about the natural world through exploration and experience. Should they be raised near other rhydan, the youngsters will be trained and prepared for their maturation, guided by the Psychic Contact of the elders around them.

The psychic connection remains a mostly one-way street until the rhydan's age of maturation, which differs from one rhydan species to another. A unicorn matures far faster than a rhy-horse, and a rhy-whale may discover they awaken far sooner than rhy-fen. Still, once the young rhydan come into their own, their latent psychic abilities awaken. The newly adult rhydan becomes fully connected to the world around them, their senses expanding to discover the power of nature. The minds of other animals and rhydan, as well as the two-legged races, become fully accessible to them as they can send out their thoughts for the first time.

This period can be disorienting for a young rhydan, but with guidance and help from those around them, the youngster can soon find the balance they need. Moreover, a young rhydan soon discovers that, while their animal brethren may live more placid lives, their own destinies call them to serve the Light that made them.

The Call

Once a rhydan has mastered communication through their psychic abilities, they seek out the way they can contribute to the world at large. While mostly shy and reclusive, rhydan understand that guarding the world against the influence of Shadow often means braving the world at large. Rhydan who are farther away from populated areas may be drawn to seek out the two-legged races in an effort to lend their aid, or else contact other, distant rhydan to offer their assistance or seek out wisdom. These rhydan take up their migration as an adventure, with the aim of finding where their task in life may lead them, learning everything they can along the way to gather more knowledge and experience. These very first wanderings are known as "the Call", and serve almost as a rhydan rite of passage, guiding them to their future.

The Company

Often, rhydan who are heeding the Call will seek out other rhydan on the same journey. A traveling rhydan can sense another who is on the same road and come together for companionship, mentorship, or simply company as they all seek out their place in the world. In areas where rhydan are less common, it might surprise some of the two-legged races to see a group of rhy-horses calmly traveling down a road, or a small pack of rhy-wolves entering the outskirts of a city. Still stranger can be groups of different kinds of rhydan traveling together: rhy-cats, unicorns, and rhy-horses on land, or else rhy-whales and rhy-fen together by sea, all seeking their future in fellowship together. These groups of traveling rhydan are known as a company.

A company of rhydan can grow or shrink over time, as some young rhydan join an already formed company and others break off along the way. Still, thanks to their psychic abilities, the bonds created by rhydan who travel together are just a Psychic Contact away, and rhydan continue to stay in contact with fellows from their company over great distances.

A rhydan out in the world may take some time to find their way, or else fall into it simply by chance. Yet they are always led by the sure understanding that they are,

Mixed Company

It would be unusual to see a company of rhydan that includes a two-legged member. During this important time in a rhydan's life, the seeking rhydan will often want the fellowship and comfort of their own kind for a while. Still, adventures and mishaps can happen along the way, and it isn't unheard of for a company to adopt a human, vata or night person they find during their travels. This is especially possible when a young rhydan wishes to rhy-bond with someone, and that lucky rhy-bonded person is accepted into the company as an honorary member.

at their core, children of the Light, and their job is to keep Shadow at bay. Their adventures are aimed at stamping out whatever corruption they can where they find it, and supporting those who have the same goals along the way. That, in the end, is what fulfills a rhydan and helps them find their calling.

The Rhy-Bond

In Aldis, rhydan are viewed as incarnations of the power and goodness of nature, so their humanoid bond-companions are considered especially blessed. When a rhydan psychically bonds with a humanoid, the two are said to be *rhy-bonded*. This bond is deep and usually lasts a lifetime. Bond-companions often describe it as sharing a soul, as if the bond chose them. Some storytellers claim that the bond-companions were loved ones in the time before time began, when souls could take many forms and still knew the Eternal Dance. Others believe souls from the Dance actually divide, incarnating as both two-legged and four-legged beings, and the bonded pair are two halves of the same soul.

The Royal Court of Aldis

The Sovereign rules Aldis with the aid of three Councils: the Noble, Guild, and Rhydan Councils, and presides over an enlightened and honest government, thanks—in part—to the aid of the Golden Hart and the Blue Rose Scepter.

The Sovereign

Just before sunset on the day after the Sovereign's death or abdication, nobles and members of the royal family gather in the capital's Azure Plaza in front of the Royal Palace's large, stained glass window depicting the Golden Hart. As the sun sets, the Golden Hart emerges from the window and chooses a new Sovereign by touching its horns to the chosen one's forehead. This touch leaves a pale golden mark in the shape of a crescent. In cases when the Sovereign dies suddenly far from home and there is no assembly the day after, the Golden Hart still appears at sunset and goes in search of the new Sovereign, a sign of the previous Sovereign's passing.

The Secret of the Golden Hart

Although the true nature of the Golden Hart and the full extent of his powers are left in the Narrator's hands, the following is the intended history of the mysterious patron and ally of Aldis.

After the destruction of the vatazin, the rhydan and their allies gathered in secret and—led by the unicorns and griffons and guided by the Gods of Light—worked one of the greatest arcane rituals ever known. They created a vast, powerful, and subtle web of psychic connections, linking the minds and souls of all people in Aldis not touched by Shadow. This powerful working sent unseen arcane ripples through the world, which shook the power the Sorcerer Kings wielded over their darkfiends. Moreover, it called into being the Golden Hart, a manifest avatar of the arcane potential of all people of good intent, the sum totality of the will of the people of Aldis.

So it is that the Hart wields such tremendous arcane power, channelled from the hearts, minds, and souls of a nation, and why it acts in accordance with the will of the people for their greater good, whether they are consciously aware of it or not. It is also why the Golden Hart appears but rarely and always in response to a true and deep need: its presence cannot be maintained for too long, lest it drain the very life from Aldis and its people. Those of the wise who know the Hart's true nature hope one day, when all people truly embody their best nature, it will no longer be needed as a guiding light.

Sometimes the new Sovereign is a family member of the previous one, but other times the Hart chooses an unrelated noble or even an ordinary citizen. On occasion, the Hart does not choose anyone assembled in the Azure Plaza, leaving and then returning sometime later bearing the new Sovereign on its back. Rikin the Peacemaker was chosen thus. Only the individual Sovereign is invested to rule Aldis; the Sovereign's family members (including spouses, if any) are accorded respect, but wield no political power.

The Golden Hart remains by the side of the chosen heir until he or she is crowned. Anyone attempting to attack either the Hart or the Sovereign falls insensibly to the ground before harming either. The assailant does not awaken until after the coronation and is forever marked on the face with a gray hoof print. Anyone so branded is shunned and exiled from Aldis. The coronation takes place in the Azure Plaza, and the Golden Hart leaps back into the stained glass window when the ceremony is finished.

Queen Jaellin

Jaellin, the current Sovereign of Aldis, was chosen by the Golden Hart eighteen years ago, when she was but eighteen years old. She is tall and slender, with long red-blond hair and green eyes. At her coronation, Jaellin was an outsider in the royal court, and is still considered so by some of the older noble families. The four Sovereigns before her belonged to the prestigious Falish family, which has lived in the city of Aldis since the end of the Great Rebellion some three hundred years ago. In contrast, Jaellin is from the city of Garnet, near the west coast, and had only been a noble for two years before she became Queen. Further unnerving some of the more conservative members of the court, Jaellin initiated several controversial policies, including increasing the acceptance of the study, if not the use, of sorcery. That policy, in particular, has strained relations with Jarzon.

Jaellin is seen as hardworking and serious, sometimes too much so. Many nights, she stays up late negotiating with foreign dignitaries or working to settle disputes between rival nobles or merchants. She is ethical and strong-willed, sometimes stubborn, but her opinion can be swayed by sound arguments. In her rare quiet hours, she enjoys gardening and traveling into the nearby woodlands to collect rare ferns and flowers. She wishes she could make these expeditions alone, but her ministers insist she always be accompanied by guards.

In the hope of strengthening her political ties in the capital, advisors recommended Jaellin marry into one of the older noble families. She refused, however, and showed little interest in romance for quite some time, caught up in her responsibilities as Sovereign. The Kern assault changed all of that when she met the dashing vata'sha rebel leader Kelyran. It was love at first sight, and they wed after the invasion was turned back during nearly two weeks of celebration in Aldis. Although most Aldins rejoiced for the Queen's happiness, her new rough-and-tumble vata'sha husband from the lands of Aldis' most bitter enemy did little to improve her "outsider" status.

In addition to selecting the Sovereign, the Golden Hart appears in times of great danger to Aldis and its people. It approaches the Sovereign, upon whom it bestows a vision offering guidance. Such appearances are rare and of grave importance; most Sovereigns experience them no more than once. The Golden Hart also appears if a Sovereign is no longer worthy. This has happened twice in Aldis' history, when the Hart appeared and removed the golden crescent of sovereignty with its touch before choosing a successor to the throne. Valin the Tainted was deposed and exiled for his cruelty, and Larai the Mad was deposed and then cloistered to treat her illness.

The Noble Assembly

In Aldis, "noble" is an office intended to fulfill the essential meaning of the word: a selection of the best and the brightest, dedicated to the good of the people and the Kingdom of the Blue Rose. Nobles can come from any walk of life. To become a noble, one must be a citizen and pass comprehensive tests in literacy, history, philosophy, ethics, and law. The final test of nobility, however, is one for which candidates cannot study.

To confirm a noble candidate, the Sovereign holds forth the Blue Rose Scepter, which glows a soft blue in the rightful ruler's hand. A prospective noble touches the rose's flower. If the scepter continues to glow, indicating the touch of a good-hearted person who wishes to serve Aldis, the candidate is judged worthy and becomes a noble, upon reciting oaths of service and loyalty. If the scepter's glow dims and fades, the candidate is refused, for either their desire to serve is not sincere or they are not worthy.

This test is held every other year in the capital, as part of the Midsummer festival honoring the realm's nobles: the Festival of Service. All nobles are expected to attend the festival in the capital, if they are able. This is the biennial meeting of the Noble Assembly, the entire body of nobles of the Kingdom of the Blue Rose. The assembly members consult with the Sovereign and their peers, acquaint themselves with the newly confirmed nobles, and together pray to Maurenna and the other gods that they might serve their communities faithfully.

There are three types of nobles in Aldis: traveling nobles, regional nobles, and the members of the Noble Council. Most nobles begin their careers traveling before becoming regional nobles, with the wisest ending their careers as councilors. The only certainty is that nobles never govern the city or region where they grew up. To prevent favoritism and to encourage a nobility familiar with the kingdom at large, the Sovereign and the Noble Council assign new nobles to regions other than where they were raised, so accepting a vocation as a noble always means leaving home behind in the service of the nation.

Traveling Nobles

Much of Aldis is still sparsely populated, and there are areas too spread out for a single regional noble to administer effectively. Many Aldin border communities are also fiercely independent and unlikely to accept a regional noble living in their midst. In light of these facts, the Noble Council assigns many nobles to specific regions as itinerant ministers of the Crown, who report to the nearest regional noble. These traveling nobles go from village to village, staying in one place only long enough to help solve local problems and judge pending cases. In those villages, traveling nobles may be the only judges, tax collectors, mediators, or law enforcement officials the locals see.

Regional Nobles

In the more settled portions of the kingdom, the Noble Council assigns nobles to govern cities, towns, and the regions around them. These regional nobles make decisions regarding administration, help resolve disputes, judge cases involving serious crimes, and review appeals. Many nobles begin as traveling nobles and are granted regional seats when the Noble Council deems them ready. Some nobles spend their entire careers traveling, while others become regional nobles immediately after they complete their training, depending on their skills and capabilities.

The Noble Council

From among their number, the nobles of Aldis elect three dozen of the wisest and most respected to live in the capital and serve on the Noble Council. The Noble Council advises the Sovereign, votes on policy, and helps appoint new nobles, as well as administering the work of other members of the Noble Assembly. Each councilor has one vote and a majority must approve every decision. In the case of a tie, the Sovereign casts the deciding vote. Council elections are held every other year at the Festival of Service. During the festival, nobles also elect the president of the Council, who moderates the Council's debates and serves as a member of the Sovereign's Council.

The Guild Council

Aldin prosperity is strongly based on trade and skilled craft production. To better coordinate their efforts and prevent commercial feuds, most traders and craftspeople join guilds, which in turn have representation on the Guild Council for their specific interests. Like the Noble Council, the Guild Council advises the Sovereign and helps to set trade and economic policy, as well as resolving disputes among its members and ensuring various trades in the kingdom are conducted fairly, and in full accordance with the law. The guild elects new council members every four years. In this election, the guild also selects the director of the Council, who serves on the Sovereign's Council.

The Rhydan Council

Rhydan are recognized as citizens of Aldis and some choose to involve themselves in the affairs of the kingdom. Rhycats and rhy-horses make up the majority of this number. Communicating psychically, they discuss issues relating to the kingdom and the roles rhydan should take. Although humans call this "the Rhydan Council," membership is not official and it rarely meets physically. Most never even come within a day's journey of the capital, and—except for a few rhy-bonded—non-rhydan rarely see them. The only way in which the so-called Council acts like the Noble or Guild Councils is by appointing a single representative to serve on the Sovereign's Council.

Syrric the Shield

Inspired in her youth by stories such as the tale of Revak the Night Walker, Syrric made it her goal to serve the kingdom and people of Aldis and to become an example to other night people in so doing. Her strength and skill at arms helped earn her a place as an envoy of the Sovereign's Finest, but it was her wit and cunning that ensured Syrric a place of honor in the annals of its history. Syrric proved both an excellent strategic thinker and a capable diplomat, often willing and able to defuse difficult situations without violence. She also earned the nickname "the Shield" for her readiness to stand between her charges and danger when violence threatened. In one of these instances, Syrric acquired a faint white scar along the right side of her face (an injury that would have been far worse, were it not for the aid of a trained healer).

After decades of service with the Finest, Syrric retired from active work in the field to train and advise younger generations of envoys. The elder night person's advice is highly valued within the ranks of the Finest, particularly since so many of its current members have been her pupils at one point or another. Syrric still teaches diplomatic skills and strategy, and likes to spend her spare time playing strategic board games with young envoys who are willing to endure a series of sound defeats in order to learn a thing or two. It is well known that Syrric has Queen Jaellin's ear, on those rare occasions when the elder envoy requests an audience or feels strongly enough on a matter to weigh in.

The Sovereign's Council

The three members of the Sovereign's Council join the Sovereign in administering the kingdom. Each councilor has a single vote, while the Sovereign's carries the weight of two. This means the Sovereign requires only a single ally to pass a resolution, while all three Council representatives must vote unanimously to overrule the Sovereign. Owing to custom and her desire for harmony (as well as her love of a vigorous debate), Queen Jaellin attempts to pass all resolutions by consensus, or with no more than one dissenting vote.

The Sovereign's Finest

Specially trained and royally approved agents travel Aldis, frequently in the company of nobles, to provide defense, advice, and other assistance to the people. They comprise the Sovereign's Finest and are usually healers, couriers, scouts, rangers, and, occasionally, adepts and the rhy-bonded, typically working in teams of three to six. The members of the Finest are formally known as envoys and owe their allegiance to the people, the kingdom, and the Sovereign (in that order). The organization is sometimes called either the King's or the Queen's Finest, depending on the current Sovereign.

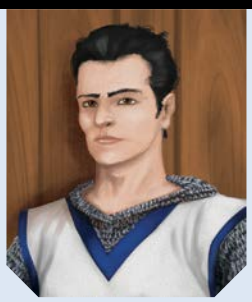
In isolated areas, Finest teams may be the locals' primary access to news, martial aid, and quality medical care. Few remote villages are able to hunt down bandit gangs on their own, much less bands of shadowspawn or darkfiends. When troubled by such problems, communities welcome aid from the Finest.

The director of the envoys assigns the most skilled teams to patrol dangerous areas like the Veran Marsh, but even newly trained envoys are considered worthy defenders of the kingdom. In troubled times, the least experienced teams may find themselves patrolling untamed portions of the frontier or searching wilderness areas for bandits and shadowgates.

While experienced envoys have impressive reputations, merely wearing the uniform and badges of the Sovereign's Finest is enough to gain an envoy respect from most people. Some jaded urbanites, merchants, and nobles regard newly recruited envoys with disinterest or even disdain, calling them the Sovereign's lap dogs. To the majority of the kingdom's citizens, however, envoys are heroes and often the only representatives of the Crown they see. Although most envoys are not nobles themselves, isolated villagers make little distinction between an envoy and an actual noble.

Envoys receive monthly wages from the director or the nearest regional noble, if their current mission has taken them far afield. In truth, envoys have little need for money; one of the ways communities pay their taxes is by providing free food and lodging to them. If, however, the locals are exceptionally poor or in the midst of recovering from some disaster, envoys are expected to pay their own way, and many do as a matter of courtesy much of the time.

Kail Spencer



Born in the northern borderlands of Aldis to the descendants of Kernish immigrants who sought refuge in the Kingdom of the Blue Rose, Kail Spencer was raised alone by his mother after his father perished in an accident when Kail was still a small child. His mother's emphasis on fairness and honorable behavior, as well as her sympathy for those in need, made a strong impression on young Kail. He eventually joined the Aldin Guard and worked towards becoming a knight out of a desire to defend his homeland and people. This proved to be a broadening experience for the young man who had never before traveled far from his home in the hinterlands, and he learned a great deal about how people in different parts of Aldis—and even beyond its borders—lived.

Not long after achieving his knighthood, Kail was part of a small detachment of the Guard aiding envoys investigating a possible Shadow cult. The cult, worshippers of Ulasta, unleashed a terrible plague on the surrounding area, and Kail, his comrades-in-arms, and most of the local people became infected. The area was quarantined as healers and other adepts worked to contain and treat the illness, but many of those affected perished. Kail was one of the few to survive, and he overcame the cult's leader in single combat, helping to break the arcane power behind the plague.

Months of living alongside and caring for the plague victims changed Kail, and he learned a great deal about the healing arts as well as combat. These days, the proud knight still carries himself like a soldier, but his brown eyes are touched with a deep compassion for the suffering of others, and he favors diplomacy over force whenever possible. While not attending to his duties and responsibilities to Aldis, Kail cares for his mother, who lives with him and is quietly and fiercely proud of the man her son has become.

The Envoys at Court

The Sovereign's Finest are administered from the Hall of Envoys, a building on the grounds of the Royal Palace. The director lives and works there, along with a staff of four assistants, all appointed by the Sovereign from among the ranks of active envoys. As well as being skilled administrators, the director and the four assistants are traditionally psychic adepts. The Hall of Envoys contains offices for them, guest quarters for some five dozen envoys, and large stables with an adjoining pasture.

Four teams of envoys are permanently attached to the court, reporting to each of the assistant directors. They scout the traveling court's routes, accompany traveling dignitaries, and address problems in and around the capital. Other teams visit the court for reviews, additional training, briefings before special missions, and official inquests. Most teams visit the court no more than once a year. Ordinary assignments and briefings are handled via psychic communication. This type of remote direction works because each team of envoys is largely self-directed. Many only receive detailed instructions when there is some form of emergency, such as being sent to aid another team in trouble or to confront some great threat.

Uniforms and Insignia

Each of the major professions employed by the Crown has its own distinctive style of clothing. Regardless of whatever else they wear, the Sovereign's Finest bear small medallions of gold with a cloisonné blue rose on one side and a golden hart on the reverse. They wear a small patch, embroidered with a golden hart, over the heart on their official uniform.

Nobles and couriers wear thigh-length military jackets while working. They have polished brass buttons, embroidered epaulets, wide cuffs, mandarin collars, and colored piping on the seams. Nobles wear black jackets with royal blue piping, while couriers wear green jackets with black piping. Nobles also wear a small patch embroidered with a blue rose, opposite a golden hart patch. Scouts, soldiers, and military rangers have similar jackets for formal occasion. Scouts wear dark red, rangers wear brown, and soldiers wear gray, all with black piping.

While independent healers, adepts, and spirit dancers wear what they please, any trained at the Royal College or employed as envoys wear uniforms. These consist of a pale-colored, close-fitting shirt under a garment halfway between a thigh-length robe and a jacket, lacking buttons, lapels and cuffs. Designed to be worn open, each profession dons a jacket of a different color. Healers wear white, with a hand-sized red ring embroidered on the upper left side of the jacket. When not attending formal functions, healers rarely wear white, but the red ring over the heart always identifies them. Adepts wear sky blue jackets with a quartered circle—representing the four elements, the Primordials, and the Wheel of Rebirth—on their right breast. Spirit dancers wear midnight blue jackets with a white outline of a hand on their breast. An envoy who does not belong to any of these professions wears a charcoal gray jacket marked only with the golden hart patch.

The Aldin Guard

The Aldin Guard is the kingdom's standing army. It is small but well-trained and disciplined. Among its soldiers are some rangers and scouts, and a few adepts. The army is capable of dealing with raiders, bandits, or bands of shadowspawn or the unliving. It is not large enough to protect the kingdom from a full-fledged invasion, however, or a large force of darkfiends.

To supplement its numbers, the Guard maintains a number of reserve forces, citizens in good health who spend at least one day a month drilling with weapons and learning woodcraft and other skills. In return for their dedication, these volunteers are given a modest reduction in their taxes and the knowledge they are ready to help protect the kingdom in times of need. Using the psychic arts, the Guard can call up the majority of the reserves quickly when required.

In addition to defending the kingdom, the Aldin Guard is responsible for aiding people during disasters and other emergencies. Soldiers stationed in the kingdom's cities are trained to fight fires. If hurricanes, floods, or other disasters strike, the army mobilizes to rescue people, provide medical care, build shelters, and help rebuild damaged buildings.

The Knights of the Blue Rose

The Knights of the Blue Rose are the elite of the Aldin Guard. Commonly known as the Rose Knights, they are the martial champions of the kingdom, at the forefront of the most dangerous military actions. They lead the rest of the army in charges and are tasked with confronting the most serious threats to the kingdom and its people. The Rose Knights also patrol the Ice-Binder Mountains and other hazardous frontier wilderness areas for bandits and other threats to peace and safety.

Only the most skilled, selfless, and devoted soldiers are permitted to join the Rose Knights. They are given special training, including knowledge of arcana useful for fighting darkfiends and other unnatural foes. Wits, virtue, and resilience are some key traits that all Rose Knights possess and learn to hone. It is these things that carry them through battle with the shadowspawn. They would die before seeing Aldis fall, and pledge themselves in devoted service to both the land and Sovereign. The most heroic knights are permitted the honor of riding griffons into combat in times of direst need.

Garen Vengar, Rose Knight

A decorated member of the Knights of the Blue Rose, Garen Vengar comes from a long line of soldiers and military minds, stretching back to the Great Rebellion and the founding of Aldis. Raised and trained to fight to protect his homeland, Garen also proved a gifted mystic, drawn to the call of the gods of Light, particularly Aulora and Goia. Were it not for his martial skills, he might well have become a priest; he still sometimes serves in that capacity, particularly for his fellow knights. Garen is best known for fighting against the forces of Kern during the Lich King's final failed attempt to invade Aldis, where his power to wield the Light against them reduced unliving soldiers to dust and drove darkfiends back into the shadows.

Decorated for valor as a result of that battle, Garen Vengar continues to serve in the Knights of the Blue Rose, while also teaching others to draw upon the kind of mystic insight and arcane power he wields in service of the Light. A humble sort, he is uncomfortable with the notion of actually acting as a prophet or speaking for the gods in any capacity other than sharing their message of hope and duty to others. Even those jealous of his fame must admit Vengar does nothing to encourage followers, and everything to inspire and create peers whenever possible—although not everyone has been able to achieve his abilities. Garen is also a highly eligible bachelor-knight, prime material for his matchmaking friends and relations looking to give him a distraction from his duties, studies, and teaching. He has certainly considered securing future generations of his family's noble lineage, but not just yet.

The Rose Hall

The Rose Knights are billeted not far from the Sovereign, symbolically as well as practically positioned near the heart of that which they protect. Their hall features beautiful rose quartz carvings, flying buttresses, and stone columns topped with knightly crests. Long, thin windows of stained glass cast rainbows of light across the stone floors. Majestic griffons and horses adorn tapestries that lie against cool walls, while secluded corners house small bookcases and window seats overlooking the rose garden courtyard on the east side, or the training yard on the west.

A communal dining hall is at the center of the structure. Sharing meals is an important part of the Rose Knights' lives; as they break bread together they strengthen their bonds of camaraderie. The barracks house three to a room, each with their own distinct sleeping spaces. The stables themselves are as well appointed as the barracks, as portions of them are home to rhy-horse knights, honored members of the order, alongside their mundane counterparts.

The training yard is where the knights spend much of their time honing their fighting skills. The three main weapons of the order are the axe, the sword, and the spear, and all feature prominently in their exercises. Rose Knights also study archery, and those with arcane training practice with crystons as well.

The Valiant Three

Three marble statues stand at the entrance to the Rose Hall, depicting knights of the order astride their steeds. To the left is Sakine, a woman atop a griffon: hair wild, eyes aflame, an axe in her hands, her griffon ready to pounce. To the right is the vata'an Li'ban: uniform neat, eyes calculating, their horse poised with precision, their mouth clenched resolutely, a spear at their side. In the center is Arastis; muscular, with intricate braids and far-gazing eyes, she brandishes a large sword pointing northward in salute.

Arastis, Sakine, and Li'ban were the three knights of the order who led the battle against the last great invasion from Kern. They were not only legendary warriors but also lovers, and it was through their intimacy and trust they stood victorious. Some modern Knights of the Blue Rose view the Valiant Three (as they are known) as ideals, up to and including the notion of forming a triad marriage with two other beloved knights. As with their other relationships, these are seen as permissible, so long as they do not interfere with a knight's responsibilities.

The Code of the Rose Knights

The sacred code of the Knights of the Blue Rose, carved into the archways of the Rose Hall, is made up of three parts:

To a valiant heart, anything is possible
Service in courage, in steadiness, in love
Virtue through wisdom and compassion

The code has been interpreted many ways over time, but speaks to the essential precepts of the order. Adherence to the code is most important in spirit and in deed rather than in its precise wording, but violations of the code are taken seriously, nonetheless. Accusations of misdeeds, particularly in violation of the code, are brought before a council of senior knights for evaluation and judgment. Although the decisions of this council may be appealed to the Sovereign, this is rarely ever the case, and their justice is both even-handed and carefully considered.

Life as a Rose Knight

Becoming a Knight of the Blue Rose requires great dedication and a willingness to live apart from the normal lives that surround them. Knightly duties consume much of their time and energy, and their connections to people outside the order, while important, are often not as close as those within its rank. Most knights have links with the outside world—family they visit, friends they care for, favorite places in the city and countryside, for example—all the things they have sworn to protect with their lives.

Much of that life is spent in the company of their comrades, however. The Rose Knights live, work, and train together. They eat meals communally and often spend their evenings with each other, enjoying or offering music or other artistic performances, or in discussion, study, or pursuit of other pleasures. The order is an extended clan or family of sorts, and sometimes has the same ups and downs as other families, but its members tend to be close, and know each other well. Knights also spend time in meditation and prayer in the beautiful temple room, whose open windows face the rose gardens, or in the privacy of their own quarters. They meditate to calm their spirits and sharpen their minds, and to feel the love and guidance of the gods.

Between life in the Rose Hall and the greater outside world lies life at court, where Knights of the Blue Rose cut dashing figures at courtly gatherings, always on-hand with a polite compliment or offer of assistance. Romantic and courtly life are important parts of the order's culture, and Rose Knights are renowned as charming companions. Courtly flirtations and assignations are common—and accepted—so long as they do not interfere with a knight's duties or dedication. Service to the Crown as either a noble, courtier, or other courtly functionary are common choices for retired knights who no longer serve in the field, given their intimate familiarity with court life.

Life at Court

In addition to members of the Noble and Guild Councils, a host of bureaucrats, visiting dignitaries, foreign and local spies, couriers awaiting assignments, and advisors live at the royal court. To keep all of these people fed, comfortable, and happy there is a large staff of servants and many of the best entertainers in the nation. Highly trained soldiers and various adepts protect the court. Every day hundreds of people mingle in a bustling, diverse, and often contentious mass.

These numbers increase dramatically every other summer during the month-long Festival of Service. Traveling nobles who are members of the Sovereign's Finest generally bring their entire retinues with them, since every member must provide reports about activities in wilderness areas and near the borders. During the festival, the population of the court rises to several thousand, and the logistics of caring for this vast influx of people become extremely complex. Songs and tales about court life focus on this dizzying whirl of masquerades, feasts, plays, and speeches, and on the elegant and romantic life of the Sovereign, nobles, and their retainers.

While many of these tales are true, there is a darker and more mysterious side to court life. Despite the fact nobles begin their careers Light-aligned and committed to using ethical means to improve the lot of everyone in Aldis, they sometimes disagree about the best methods to use. Secret deals, unstable alliances, and grudging compromises are as much a part of the court life of Aldis as they are at any other royal court. Also, while few people wish to admit it, nobles occasionally change alignment over time. Since the Blue Rose Scepter only works once on any person, there is no easy way to determine if a noble has turned away from the Light. In addition, members of the Guild Council, diplomats, visiting dignitaries, and advisors range from

good and honest people to scheming manipulators willing to use any means to advance their agendas.

The Traveling Court

One of the most tempestuous times at court is when the Sovereign decides to move it. Every three years, the Sovereign spends two months in one of the other cities of Aldis, to give citizens greater access to their ruler and, more importantly, to insure the Sovereign remains aware of the realities of life throughout the land. Additionally, when there is a serious crisis, the court moves near it so the Sovereign can more easily gain information about the problem and rapidly dispatch envoys to help solve it.

While the entire court does not go on these journeys, the Sovereign's Council, the head of the Sovereign's Finest, and all the most important royal advisors go along, as do many guards and support staff. Several dozen of the most important people in Aldis travel in a large caravan for several weeks until they reach their destination.

Every large city in Aldis contains a great hall normally used for public meetings and indoor festivals. These halls are sturdy and built with an eye to both elegance and defense. They are also capable of housing large numbers of people. When the court arrives in a city, the resident noble turns the great hall over to the Sovereign, who lives there with the royal entourage for the next several months.

Moving the court is both difficult and potentially dangerous. During their travels, these worthies are vulnerable to attack by monsters, bandits, and assassins. As a result, the process of moving the court is complex and lengthy. Before anyone in the court actually sets out on the road, a team of the Sovereign's Finest rides ahead to inspect the court's proposed route. They check for potential ambushes, interview nearby villagers and townspeople about recent troubles, and examine the condition of the roads to be used. When they reach their destination, the team reports back (usually via the psychic arts) and begins organizing locals to help prepare the hall where the court will stay.

A few days after they receive a positive report about the route, the court departs, with another team of the Sovereign's Finest riding several hours ahead to watch for potential dangers. Several times a day, this team reports back to the guards protecting the court. If all goes well, this second team helps with final preparations for the court's arrival in its temporary home.

When the court arrives, there is a large festival where the locals display their finest foods and entertainments. In addition to providing a joyous holiday for everyone and helping build ties between the court and the locals, these festivals are an ideal opportunity for talented and ambitious local crafters, cooks, and entertainers to obtain a noble patron, or possibly even gain an appointment to the court.

Aldin Life and Culture

Beyond the hustle and bustle of the royal court lies the whole city of Aldis and the expanse of the entire Kingdom of the Blue Rose, with its cities, towns, and villages. A significant part of the reason why many Aldin nobles spend so much of their time on the road is to visit these places, a regular reminder of the wonders of daily life going on in the kingdom and of the people they are sworn to serve.

Aldis is a largely agrarian culture, so many of its citizens live and work as farmers, growing crops and raising livestock. Their days are mostly taken up with the work of their farms and households, with occasional visits to central towns and villages for trade, supplies, shopping, or entertainment—particularly plays, shows, concerts, or dances. The town centers tend to be the homes and workplaces of crafters, producing goods sold to the rural homesteads, as well as traveling traders from the larger towns and cities. They're also home to local schools for teaching children from the surrounding area, as well as being the seat of the local government, most likely visited by a traveling noble on a regular basis to handle administrative matters.

In the cities there is a greater divide between highly educated professionals, well-to-do merchants, and nobles and the service industry supporting them, although Aldin laws ensure the rights of workers to a living wage and safe working conditions. The goods of outlying towns and farms support the cities, which serve as centers of governance, trade, education, and culture.

Education

The Kingdom of the Blue Rose mandates that all children receive a basic education. Children learn to read, write, and do basic arithmetic, as well as studying the fundamentals of history, philosophy, and geography. This schooling is freely available to the children of anyone living in Aldis, even residents who are not citizens. Primary schooling lasts six years, for a few hours each day, and most children begin it between the ages of six and ten. The summer season is free from schooling to allow more time to tend crops, with the new school year beginning after the harvest.

The best and most ambitious students go on to attend the prestigious Royal College, located inside the palace walls in the capital and attached to the Royal Library. Anyone can come into the college and read the books in the library, but classes are open only to enrolled students and visiting scholars. Students study history, law, medicine, philosophy, and the arcane arts. Many healers, scouts, and others receive their initial arcane training at the college, while prospective and newly appointed nobles study law and history.

Philosophy and Technology

The pursuit of understanding has been a part of embodied existence since the Mythic Age, when it is said the spirits of the Eternal Dance lost their innate knowledge of creation when they incarnated to survive the draw of Shadow. Ever since, people have sought to increase their understanding of the world and to learn the secrets the Primordials keep in trust for when they are ready. The fall of the Old Kingdom and the subsequent Shadow Wars were a setback in that quest for understanding, but the journey continues.

Both natural philosophy—the understanding of the world and its workings—and technology in Aldis are heavily influenced by the arcane arts, considered the deepest connection to the true nature of the world. Adepts and their talents have both advanced and limited Aldin technology in some regards. For example, the powers of healers have ensured an excellent degree of health-care, and healers understand a great deal about anatomy, physiology, and medicine, but surgery is only in its most rudimentary stages, and while the germ theory of disease is widely accepted and a link between cleanliness and disease prevention is emphasized, fairly little is known about disease-causing organisms.

In the Old Kingdom, the existence and use of shas crystals for arcane devices eliminated the need for many technological innovations, and modern development tends to focus on the rediscovery of those ancient techniques rather than forging ahead with new ones. In particular, shas crystal devices provide light and heat in civilized areas, and help to purify water for aquifers and plumbing. Overall, Aldin technology is fairly similar to that of 17th

On Gender and Language

This edition of *Blue Rose* is written in English, which is a gendered language, having specific masculine and feminine pronouns, for example, but no widely agreed upon gender-neutral pronoun(s) apart from "it" or the usually plural "they" used as a singular. This presents some challenges in portraying the culture of Aldis, which has a gender-neutral language and different ways of understanding and recognizing the concepts of gender, sexual and romantic orientation, and marriage, to say nothing of the concept of "personhood" outside of the human or humanoid form. We've done our best—within the limits of the English language—to portray these differences clearly.

In so doing, we've generally avoided real-world terms like heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, transgender, and polyamory (again, to name a few) since they aren't found as such in Aldea, but have somewhat equivalent concepts and words there. We've also tried, wherever possible, to use inclusive, gender-neutral language to make it clear that Aldin culture in particular (and this book in general) embraces all expressions of gender and orientation. Please ascribe any failure of the text to do so to the limits of language and our own human foibles.

Century Earth, with things like crystons taking the place of guns (an equivalent of gunpowder does not yet exist on Aldea, as far as anyone knows). This makes "firearms" comparatively rarer, given their manufacture and use.

The printing press (complete with movable type) is a well-established technology in Aldis, making books, pamphlets, and even newspapers relatively common, and most Aldins are literate and regular (even voracious) readers. By contrast, the distribution of written materials in Jarzon is regulated by the Church, primarily to prevent dangerous arcane knowledge from finding its way into the wrong hands, with a related reduction in literacy. Reading and literacy are even less common in Rezea and Kern.

The Laevvel-Focused Series

Laevvel exist among every race, and at every tier of Aldean society, and so have a place in every sort of story, from political and romantic intrigue in the capital to grim battles against unliving in the Ice-Binder Mountains. Aspects of a laevvel's experience can help to define an individual character's past, goals, and personal struggles, but some storylines or series could revolve entirely around laevvel characters and narratives.

Narrators hoping to build games around laevvel themes should pay attention not only to the characters' place in the world, but also how the heroes wish to grow and develop as individuals. A laevvel may want to uncover ancient secrets, escape oppression, or defend their kingdom, but most also hope to find ways to grow comfortable with their bodies and their place in society.

Many of a laevvel's challenges are internal: coming to understand who they are and what they need from life, as opposed to what they've been taught to want. Internal conflicts like this can be mirrored in interactions with NPCs—a romantic interest may ask questions about a laevvel's plans for the future before committing, while a rival could pick away at sore spots with probing, public questions a laevvel is already grappling with internally. On a personal scale, a laevvel's development may involve testing their relationships with family, losing peers or mentors, or seeing old friends become new love interests.

Series centered on laevvel characters may take darker turns in Aldis' neighboring nations. Many laevvel agents serve the Shadowed Seven, often reluctantly at best. These slave-soldiers must find moral compromises and perform dark deeds in ways that minimize the harm they do and the corruption they suffer, even as Kern treats them as favored pets and sees to their physical needs. How far do they allow their morals to slip to maintain their own safety and comfort? Do they aid their intended victims where they can, or plot an escape through impassable mountains to neighboring Aldis? Players may instead portray laevvel fleeing the emendating camps of Jarzon, questioning what personal sacrifices they can tolerate to maintain a low profile, or if they can hide their laevvel nature long enough to reach the northern border, all the while pursued by Purist agents—many of whom are "cured" laevvel themselves.

Gender, Romance, and Marriage

When the souls of the Eternal Dance first graced Aldea, they existed as divine beings beyond physical form, but as Aldea slipped closer to nothingness amid the gods' struggle against Shadow, the Primordials Braniel and Maurenna wove bodies for the myriad souls to give them the substance to withstand the pull of oblivion. These forms mimicked their creators, and forced the now-mortal people to come together and share their spark of divinity in order to create new bodies for wandering souls with the turning of the wheel.

Gender

While men and women are the most common genders of Aldea—mirroring the physical traits of the Primordials who created mortals so long ago—far more genders exist beyond this pair. Some children are born cast in the image of the remaining Primordials—a gift Braniel and Maurenna bestowed to honor their siblings—with bodies said to reflect Anwaren, who shared characteristics with both siblings, and Selene, who shared none. Still others are born resembling one gender, only to discover as they mature that they are truly another—the result, some say, of reading enough divine secrets from the Wheel of Rebirth to recall some spark of their divinity or previous lives. Aldeans collectively call this myriad spectrum beyond men and women the *laevvel bran'maur*—"beyond the loom of Braniel and Maurenna"—shorted to *laevvel* in common usage.

The term laevvel bran'maur covers a wide variety of gender variance, including what people in the real world call transgender and intersex. Any variation from the more common understanding of "man" and "woman"—physically or mentally—is assumed to be the handiwork of the Primordials honoring their siblings, or else a sign that a soul is especially old, observant, or stubborn. With a few exceptions, laevvel aren't viewed as especially cursed or blessed, simply different than the majority, and bearing all the usual benefits and pains that difference engenders. Individual laevvel differ greatly in their personalities and presentations. Some hew closely to the most common roles of men and women—loose as they are in much of Aldea—and a small handful simply blend in as such among non-laevvel in order to unburden their lives of the responsibilities and expectations that accompany standing out. Others revel in their status as laevvel, and advertise it by blending gendered clothing, language, or behaviors, or by obfuscating or constantly changing any gendered traits.

Laevvel, even those from drastically different cultures or races, often flock together for mutual benefit, or simply for the relief of having friends close at hand who relate to such a deeply important life experience. Some are shy, others boisterous. Still others charming or sly, and laevvel as a whole share few common traits beyond a

yen to meet others who share their experience and the companionship of spirits. This last trait—for laevvels' minds and souls stand ever so slightly apart from much of the world's population, and shine as curious beacons to unliving, elementals, fey, and some rhydan and darkfiends—leads many of their kind to develop an awareness or even control of the supernatural, as they come of age surrounded by strange forces.

Thanks to this unique relationship with spirits, many formally study arcana or associate closely with rhydan, hoping to make better sense of their supernatural visitors or else learn to control or expel them. Their uncanny talents made laevvel popular servants among the Sorcerer Kings in ages past. The arcane tyrants believed these rare individuals made for prodigious and easily-corrupted students of sorcery. Even today, laevvel discovered within Kern can enjoy lives of relative luxury as members of the Shadow-Taken, or else suffer immeasurably should they reject that honor.

Across Aldis, laevvel see a wide variety of receptions. They are relatively well known in the central valleys, though often confused with caria. Common superstitions in the city of Aldis claim that romancing laevvel brings good luck, as they attract beneficial spirits when swooning with love. The further from the capital one travels, the more often that superstition takes on ominous undertones, until the people of the east and south insist that all laevvel command an "evil eye," and can dispatch spirits of Shadow against those who anger them. This superstition, and their ancient association with the Sorcerer Kings, makes laevvel reviled in Jarzon, where Purist priests hope to "save" youths lead astray by Shadow and enforce proper gender roles at so-called emendating camps. Rezeans and Roamers more closely follow the attitudes of central Aldis, and especially respect laevvel as mediators thanks to lifetimes spent communicating between mortals and supernatural beings.

Regardless of their training, these stereotypes mean those laevvel who serve as the Sovereign's Finest most often face off against supernatural threats. Laevvel in service to the throne may investigate rumors of rediscovered arcana, halt sorcerous corruption in the hinterlands, contain threats from the shadowgates, negotiate with rhydan of the Pavin Weald, or battle with laevvel agents loyal to Kern as they compete to control the same lore and artifacts. In addition to their regular payment, service as the Sovereign's Finest includes access to whatever alchemical and arcane care a laevvel requires, and subdirector Larsen Navit, a short and handsome gentleman, serves as liaison to Her Majesty's laevvel agents and coordinates their medical provisions no matter where they travel in the kingdom.

Thanks both to the legends of their creation and the gender ambiguity of the Primordials, laevvel are strongly associated with the gods of Twilight, particularly Selene and Anwaren. Many sects of Primordial worshippers believe certain services and rituals should only be conducted by a laevvel cleric. A secret cult of Selene, the Deiolas, limits its membership entirely to laevvel, considering only their own kind worthy to inherit to the secrets concealed from the wider world by the Winter Witch. The Deiolas have risen and fallen in prominence repeatedly over the eons, at their heights developing vast intelligence networks and maintaining grand and hidden temple-libraries, only to lose both within the span of a few generations.

Unearthing The Past

The Deiolas provide ample secrets for modern laevvel to uncover, regardless of who they serve. The sect focused heavily on collecting the forbidden knowledge of the gods of Light and the exarchs of Shadow in their hidden temple-libraries, and believed only laevvel were divine enough to know and act on the universe's deepest truths. At varying times, they served as selfless and compassionate shepherds, reaching out to protect and teach their own while helping all mortals mature into their ideal selves. Under crueler influences, though, the Deiolas splintered into paranoid and power-hungry sects convinced of laevvel superiority.

Modern explorers can never be completely certain if ruins or writings belonged to a benevolent or belligerent sect of this secret society, or what dangers such treasure may contain. The Deiolas have vanished before only to return decades or centuries later, and new cults could reappear in Aldis today, either as a patron organization for adventuring laevvel hoping to recapture the sect's lost knowledge and glory, or else as aggressive opponents collecting or erasing divine writings and artifacts to bring the world to heel under their dominion.

Laevvel and Transition

Transition is the process of transformation and self-realization for laevvel, during which they unshackle themselves from often-painful roles, obligations, or bodily humors. Players may decide their laevvel characters have already completed their transition, maintaining it as a background element, while others may prefer their laevvel adventurers to transition as the series progresses, with their personal growth mirroring their advancement in level, and major points in transition becoming important character goals.

Most laevvel transition socially, during which time they change from presenting as one gender—often the one their parents assumed them to be from birth—towards a different gender more true to themselves. For some, this involves a shift between the relatively common categories of man and woman (or vice versa), while for others it involves finding a balance between the two, or defining a new gender entirely.

Social transition focuses on introspection, and often discussions with family and friends. It frequently involves selecting a new name to mark this important stage of personal growth, as well as adopting new clothing and affectations, or new interests and skills as a laevvel examines their deeper emotions rather than

relying on others' opinions. Social transition may require a few weeks or several years. Some laevvel never end this stage of their lives, and constantly explore new ways to define themselves. Social transition may require negotiating delicate social encounters through the use of Communication, Intelligence, and Willpower talents, as characters try to understand themselves, overcome internalized fears, and share their needs with those closest to them. Important stories may include laevvel seeking out mentors and role models, finding inspiration for their names, or coping with family and friends unwilling to accept their transition.

Many laevvel also transition physically. In Aldea, such individuals use herbs, alchemy, surgery, or arcana to adapt their bodies to their needs. For some, this means adopting the traits of another common gender—many laevvel transition from woman to man or vice versa—while for others it involves finding a middle ground. The ultimate goal for any laevvel is a measure of peace and comfort in their mortal flesh, which often feels ill-fitted or even painful by default.

The simplest and most common tools of physical transition are herbal tinctures and alchemical potions that ease a laevvel's mind and slowly reshape their body. Over the course of weeks (for alchemy) or months (for herbalism), a laevvel raised as a boy may take on a womanly shape as unwelcome urges and emotions quiet themselves, or a laevvel born without any distinguishable gender can develop traits of the gender (or genders) they choose. Healers of exceptional skill can also use surgery or flesh-shaping arcana to further refine a laevvel's body.

Physical transition challenges may include Constitution tests to resist early side-effects of transition tonics—which can include nausea, mood swings, pain, and a radically shifted center of gravity—as well as tests of Intelligence or Communication to manufacture or locate whatever resources they require. Important stories may revolve around acquiring rare components for transition tonics, navigating romantic and social challenges while their body changes, and discovering healers, rituals, or artifacts—or else perfecting their own skills—to move ever forward with new steps in their physical transition.

Sexuality

People who primarily fall in love with members of their own sex are known in Aldis as *caria daunen* or "lovers of the dawn," after the myths of the god Hiathas and his lover Braniel. This term is shortened to *caria* in common usage. People who primarily fall in love with members of the opposite sex are referred to as *cepia luath*, "keepers of the flame," after the god Leonoth, shortened to *cepia* in common usage. Most people in Aldis have no overriding preference; they recognize that the souls of the Eternal Dance were neither male nor female, and it is the heart and soul of a potential romantic interest that matters more than the form they currently wear.

Throughout the Kingdom of the Blue Rose, there is no cultural prejudice against people who are caria or cepia, although their friends may occasionally wonder or inquire just how dedicated they are to their particular inclination. Jarzoni immigrants and exiles sometimes share their culture's bias for cepia behavior and monogamously-coupled child-rearing, which is politely tolerated unless there's an effort to impose it on anyone else.

Marriage

Aldins recognize marriages between two or more legal adults of any sex. Aldins seem to expect everyone to marry and they tend to be hopeless romantics. Once they figure out the types of people their friends are attracted to, Aldins often become thoughtful, polite, but exceedingly determined matchmakers. They love romantic stories and songs, and art of all kinds celebrating love. While unrequited love is often seen as tragic, sustained jealousy tends to be considered immature.

Aldins sometimes refer to romantic couples as *twilights* (literally "two-lights"), associated with the balance of the sun and the moon. Eclipses (when the two heavenly bodies come together) are a common symbol of such unions, and the golden halo of an eclipse is believed to be the origin of the practice of exchanging marriage rings. *Star marriages* or *constellations* are where three or more adults form a loving family, referring to the multiplicity and arrangement of stars in the sky. Star marriages are less common in the north and east, while on the southern coast and islands the broader and more formal *hearth marriages* (or simply "hearths") are the most common star marriage arrangements. Star marriages of three people are sometimes informally known as "trilights," although the term is considered rather twee by all but the youngest generation.

Cariad ("beloved") is the most common term for a romantic partner, used as both a term of affection and an expression describing or introducing that person to others ("My cariad"). Consort or spouse are terms for a formally married partner, although both are considered formal and a bit stuffy.

The herbal preparations of Aldin healers, particularly moon-leaf tea, and the chewing of bitter anwar root can render women and men temporarily infertile, allowing people to manage conception as they choose. Young people in Aldis are taught sexual boundaries, awareness, and health by their elders as part of their transition to adulthood when they begin to sexually mature.

Crime and Justice

Aldis' justice system is primarily concerned with restoring social harmony and rehabilitating law-breakers, not with vengeance or punishment. The first step in any judicial investigation is everyone involved discussing the details of the case with a judge, either a local noble or a noble-appointed magistrate. A noble presides over trials involving murder, treason, or sorcery, while either a noble or a magistrate handles all other cases. Anyone who disputes a magistrate's ruling can appeal the decision to the local noble and, ultimately, to the Sovereign.

Upon hearing the details of a case, the judge decides if there is a need for a trial. If there is, the judge makes sure everyone involved has an advocate. During the trial, an adept truth-reads those who testify. Because a skilled adept can easily discern lies, trials are usually swift and just. If a person is convicted of a crime, the judge begins the process of determining how the victims should be compensated and how to help the criminal reform.

Almost all criminals undergo counseling with healers, who use the psychic arts to get at the root of antisocial and criminal behavior. However, psychic arcana are only used to assist in understanding the criminal's behavior and to aid in reform, and require the subject's consent. The priest-adepts of Jarzon treading the line of using the psychic arts to forcibly "reform" criminals, heretics, and dissidents is one of many sources of tension between Aldis and Jarzon.

Violent criminals are usually confined while they undergo counseling. They are only released when they have subdued their violent urges. Many criminals are required to pay fines or make other reparations. Criminals who cannot pay their fines, are repeat offenders, or have committed serious crimes are often assigned a period of community service work. This lasts for six months to three years, depending on the criminals' behavior during their service and the severity of their crimes. During this time, the Crown takes a third of the criminals' wages, keeping half this money and giving the other half in reparation to the victims. When the sentence is up, reformed criminals are free to live and work as they wish.

Offenders who consistently refuse or resist reformation are exiled, marked with a small tattoo of a cloven hoof in the inside of the wrist or forearm to proclaim their status.

The Arcane Arts

A key part of Aldis' prosperity is its use of the arcane arts. Psychics relay messages and information over great distances, shapers can perform both delicate and laborious tasks, and healers cure injuries and disease and extend life. Healers are among the most respected and revered adepts for their powers, largely regarded as inviolate, so long as they follow a healing calling and do no harm.

Psychic Ethics

The Kingdom of the Blue Rose upholds the rights and privacy of the individual. It is also a nation where approximately one person in ten can psychically sense what someone else is feeling, and a significant portion of the population can actually read minds. Despite the potential for abuse, few Aldin psychics overstep the boundaries of psychic courtesy. In part, this is because psychic etiquette is taught to all Aldins, starting at an early age, and also because violations of psychic ethics lead down the path to sorcery and corruption.

Heart Reading, the ability to sense others' feelings, is considered no different from possessing especially keen hearing or another sharp sense. The only significant consequence is the residents of Aldis are more aware of, and willing, to share their feelings than people elsewhere.

Arcana delving into or influencing a subject's mind are more invasive. These arcana are only acceptable if the psychic has the subject's permission. This includes things such as truth-reading, although parties commonly agree to be truth-read in matters of negotiation or, particularly, legal proceedings. Otherwise, it is a gross invasion of privacy. Using these arcana to gain an advantage over someone, like attempting to convince someone to buy a new saddle through arcane coercion, is a serious crime.

The punishment for such offenses is heavy fines and possible exile for repeat offenders.

Fortunately, psychic arcana require a measure of concentration. Also, anyone with a degree of arcane talent can sense if someone is using psychic arcana. Social pressure largely prevents psychics from abusing their gifts. Most deal with non-criminal abuses of arcana by avoiding the inconsiderate individual and telling everyone about their lack of courtesy.

If people seem overly persuasive, especially known psychics, they are sometimes suspected of abusing their psychic abilities. In some isolated villages and small towns, the residents occasionally worry that strangers will use psychic abilities to take advantage of them. The most common result of such worries is people with Second Sight closely watching strangers. If the strangers prove trustworthy, these worries soon abate.

Psychic Intrigue

Most Aldins are content to let the rules of courtesy and the abilities of adepts protect them from illicit psychic influence. Some, however, often feel the need for greater protection. People with arcane talent in positions of authority often learn to psychically shield themselves. Others carry shielding stones, which provide a measure of protection. Those especially concerned about the safety of their secrets might hire psychic adepts to safeguard them. They also use sensing stones, which glow when someone uses arcana in their presence.

Attempting to use an invasive psychic arcanum on a diplomat or government official without permission is a serious crime, regardless of whether the target is from Aldis or not. The government of Aldis does not want to risk a diplomatic incident because an ambitious junior official tried to snatch a foreign dignitary's secrets from her mind. The Merchant Guild has a similar rule about dealing with foreign traders. Although the guild's members would naturally love to learn the plans of their trading partners, the guild knows that doing so uninvited could result in severely strained relations or even a trade ban.

Arcane Items

Items imbued with arcane power also enhance the lives of people in Aldis. Although the greatest artifacts, like the Blue Rose Scepter, are unique and irreplaceable relics of the Old Kingdom, there are numerous lesser items still in use.

The most common of these are imbued shas crystals. The glow globes in Aldis' cities are one example, lighting streets and providing illumination and heat inside homes. They range from spheres the size of a walnut, used as portable lights by travelers, to the yard-diameter globes used to light and heat the main hall of the Royal Palace. Other items made from shas crystals move and purify water, making the cities and towns of Aldis some of the cleanest and healthiest in the known world.

Those with arcane talent can wield crystons—wands of shas crystal that project a stunning energy—to protect the kingdom and enforce the peace. These weapons give the enemies of Aldis pause when they consider their effectiveness in combat.

Familiars

Many adepts have animal companions known as familiars. Anyone with a modicum of arcane talent can psychically bond with a familiar. The problem is finding a suitable animal. The minds of the adept and the animal must share certain characteristics for a lasting bond to form. Once formed, the adept cannot bond with another familiar while the first one lives. Thankfully, familiars live at least twice as long as their mundane counterparts.

Familiars are typically as intelligent as young children and communicate with their bonded companion psychically. Most adepts regard familiars as something between a beloved pet and trusted friend. Because they are more intelligent than ordinary animals, and because their bonded companion suffers as well, injuring or killing a familiar is a serious crime in Aldis. Skilled and compassionate breeders raise various types of familiars, but the law only allows them to sell these creatures to other licensed dealers or to people with the potential to bond with them. Purist priests in Jarzon consider familiars suspect, but

elsewhere in the world, many envy the close bond between adept and familiar.

Religion

The people of Aldis honor the Primordials and the gods of Light. Unlike in Jarzon, religion does not rule the kingdom, and Aldins understand that the gods and their worship take many forms.

According to oft-repeated tales, knowledge of the gods is incomplete because Gaelenir has only been able to reveal a little of it, the rest being hoarded by Selene. As a result, there are no clear answers to certain mysteries of faith; no religious tradition is more obviously correct or incorrect than any other. People either follow the faith they were raised in or find a new one that speaks to their hearts. A few speculate that the gods don't intervene in the lives of mortals, or don't exist at all. Most people, however, believe in the gods and are convinced that divine agency is evident in the world.

The only near-universal religious affirmation in Aldea is a belief in reincarnation. In Aldis, the prevailing hope is that souls reincarnate until they find their way back to the Eternal Dance and immortality. Jarzon is the only land where reincarnation is not affirmed. The Jarzoni believe the souls of the worthy and faithful transcend material existence to join with the gods of Light, while the unworthy become victims of the exarchs of Shadow.

Everyone on Aldea knows that darkfiends come from the depths of Shadow, but almost no one believes the souls of the living are condemned to those depths, for the Primordials and the gods of Light prevent it. This means there is no hell into which souls are cast. In Aldea, hell is being trapped in everlasting unlife, wandering the world as an animated corpse or spirit, unable to move on in the cycle of rebirth. This is one reason why the unliving are viewed as abominations.

The Primordials, the Gods of Twilight

As creators of the world, the gods of Twilight are associated with nature, the elements, the seasons, and the fundamentals of existence: life, death, community, and the like. They preceded the conflict between Light and Shadow, and their aspects are more varied than the other gods. For instance, the Twilight gods appear as either gender, or without gender, more often than the gods of Light. Common symbols of the Primordials are the quartered circle, the square, or the one placed within the other. In some designs the quarters are colored white, green, gold, and red.

The Twilight gods are venerated throughout Aldea, but mortals rarely have the same affection for them as they do for the gods of Light. This does not seem to bother the Twilight gods, who are seen as having a somewhat distant, parental affection for mortals, hoping all beings will one day reawaken to the Eternal Dance.

Selene

Selene, god of winter, the moon, death, and secrets, is the Wise Woman, the Winter Witch, and Keeper of Secrets. In her primary male aspects, she is Father Frost and the Winter Wizard. She created the Wheel of Rebirth, so she is often invoked at funerals. Students of the arcane arts look to her and the moon for guidance and power. During harsh winters, people entreat her to be merciful. She is portrayed holding the Blade of Wisdom and is associated with the element of air.

Braniel

Braniel, god of spring, the stars, rain, music, animals, and plants, is the Singer in the Stars and Green Beard. In his primary female aspect, he is the Spring Princess. He is venerated in woodland shrines, on hilltops, and wherever else people are thankful for the bounty and beauty of nature. Rain rituals invoke his name, as do rituals for sexual potency. Musicians turn to him for inspiration, and the wreaths celebrated performers wear are echoes of his leafy crown. He is the lover of Hiathas and a model for passionate romance. He is portrayed holding the Chalice of Bliss and associated with the element of water.

Maurenna

Maurenna, god of summer, agriculture, and community, is the Summer Queen and the Architect of Civilization. In her primary male aspect, she is the Grain Lord. She is the mother of the gods of Light. Those who work the land and care for livestock call upon her, and many civic events and family gatherings are opened with her name. In the heat of summer, some people joke, "Maurenna is loving the world too much today." Leonoth is her consort, and together they are the model of marriage. She is portrayed holding the Rod of Blooms and associated with the element of fire.

Anwaren

Anwaren, god of autumn, the earth, mountains, strife, and sovereignty, is the Warrior King, the Red Knight, and Lord of Madness. In his primary female aspect, he is Queen of the Harvest. He is the father of the exarchs of Shadow and opposes them whenever he can. It is said Anwaren dies on the last day of autumn, when the spirits of the dead are strongest, and rises again when Braniel pours the waters of life upon him. He is invoked when people are beset by strife or madness and when they seek the riches of the earth. He is considered a model of kingship, having voluntarily diminished his own power to avoid becoming a tyrant. He is portrayed holding the Pentacle of Plenty and associated with the element of earth.

The Seven, the Gods of Light

The seven gods of Light are younger than the world, but no less venerated because of it. While the Twilight gods are associated with natural forces, the gods of Light are associated with seven virtues, and each is the patron of a core aspect of mortal culture: the hearth, dance, law, travelers, and so forth. The gods of Light, like those of Twilight, have varied aspects, but fewer variations. Because the gods of Light are the everlasting enemies of the exarchs of Shadow, those faced by vice and darkfiends frequently call on them for strength and guidance.

Hiathas

Hiathas, god of the sun, beauty, dance, and hope, is the Dawn Prince and Lord of the Dance. Many stories claim he is more beautiful than anything, save the Eternal Dance itself. Artists seek his beauty, while dancers especially long for his ways. He is the beloved of Braniel, and those who fall in love with someone of the same sex are said to be like the Singer in the Stars, caria daunen ("lovers of the dawn").

Leonoth

Leonoth, god of the hearth, family, and faithfulness, is the Faithful Husband and consort of Maurenna. He is the protector of families, home, and those who do not break faith. People who love someone of the opposite sex are said to guard the hearth fire as he does; they are cepia luath ("keepers of the flame"). In Jarzon, where rebellion against the Sorcerer Kings was exceedingly dangerous, and often deadly, the leaders of the resistance gathered their people beside hearth fires and plotted the downfall of the tyrants. Because of this association and the grievous loss of life in Jarzon, the land has become obsessed with family and procreation. There Leonoth is called the Liberator, Great Lord, and Keeper of the Holy Flame, and is the preeminent god of the Church of the Pure Light.

Felisar

Felisar, god of travelers, people in peril, the poor, the sick, and charity, is the Bringer of Miracles, the help for which the needy dare not hope. According to legend, Felisar wanders the world each winter, when the poor suffer the most and death is particularly hungry. Felisar is Selene's favorite, and he uses his influence to guard the afflicted from her chill. Travelers, the ailing, and the bereft look to him for comfort, and much charity is done in his name.

Aulora

Aulora, god of law, soldiers, and justice, is the Shield Maiden and Wise Judge. She is called on by the creators of laws and those who enforce them. The wrongfully imprisoned look to her for solace, and soldiers beg her for strength when their cause is just. When Anwaren is beset

with doubt, she calms him with reason. When he falls each year, she turns to the arms of Goia. The two goddesses are called the builders of civilization, which their mother, Maurenna, designed.

Goia

Goia, god of artisanship, commerce, and prudence, is the Smith, the Builder, and the Artisan. Merchants pray for a portion of her prudence, while artisans pray for her skill. Smiths, shipwrights, architects, mathematicians, and many others invoke her name. In tales, she loves Aulora and Anwaren in equal measure, forging a sword for one and a crown for the other. When Anwaren falters, Aulora soothes him, but it is Goia who carries him.

Gaelenir

Gaelenir, god of exploration, learning, the sea, and fortitude, is the Great Sage, Sea Lord, and Teacher. Scholars, navigators, and explorers call on him most, as do the seafolk, his special children. He dwells by the Well of Knowledge at the bottom of the sea and seeks to know all things. In legend, he withstood the temptations of the seven exarchs of Shadow so he could explore their realm. While Selene keeps secrets, Gaelenir uncovers them. Storms blowing in from the sea are said to be their arguments over how much to reveal to the world. The two gods are rumored to harbor a love that will only be consummated when all souls return to the Eternal Dance.

Athne

Athne, god of good fortune, plenty, wine, and temperance, is the Mother of Plenty and Lady of the Vine. Those who have plenty, and those who desire it, pray to her, as do vintners and many who make merry. When Gaelenir, seeking to understand each of the gods, asked her for the meaning of temperance, she laughed and said, "Enough, or too much." One of her greatest devotees, Marlicel the Winemaker said, "Lack is the greatest intemperance." Athne, in various aspects, appears in innumerable tales as an occasional lover of most of the other gods.

The Exarchs of Shadow

The spawn of the madness of Anwaren, the exarchs dwell in the depths of Shadow, plotting the fall of Aldea. They undermine the world in two ways: by sending their darkfiends as physical manifestations of Shadow to sow suffering and corruption, and by tempting mortals toward Shadow. The exarchs themselves are kept in check by the gods of Light, but their cunning is limitless and their power great, and they have all of eternity to work their schemes.

The exarchs are only worshipped by the malicious and the insane, or by secret cults proclaiming them the "true gods," older and more powerful than the gods of Light. The exarchs' worshipers give them grand, improbable titles and engage in terrible rites.

The Aldin Calendar

The historians of the Royal College of Aldis number years from the coronation of Queen Seltha, the kingdom's first Sovereign. She was crowned in 1 BR (Years of the Blue Rose). The years before that decrease in number until they reach 1 OC (Old Calendar), the year before her coronation. The current year is 320 BR. The kingdom's calendar is based on the one used by the Old Kingdom and is nearly identical to the calendar used in the surrounding lands. Each land numbers years differently and has its own holidays, but the months and days are the same.

- The year has 360 days and twelve months of 30 days each. Months have five weeks of six days each. The year begins with the winter solstice.
- The days of the week are Sun Day, Moon Day, Star Day, Vine Day, Tale Day, and Hearth Day, which is traditionally seen as a day of rest.
- The months are named Selenar, Felarion, Gaeleth, Braneth, Hiathon, Atholon, Maurenel, Leonar, Auloreth, Anwanar, Goion, and Gravihain. The first eleven months are named after the Primordials and the gods of Light, while the twelfth commemorates the defeat of the exarchs of Shadow: Gravihain, "the end of grief." Disciples of Shadow interpret Gravihain as the month of the exarchs, so they perform many dark rites in its first days.
- The Primordials are honored on the solstices and equinoxes. The winter solstice is Selenar 1, the spring equinox is Braneth 1, the summer solstice is Maurenel 1, and the autumn equinox is Anwanar 1. The feast days of the gods of Light take place on their eponymous months: Felarion 8, Gaeleth 17, Hiathon 1, Atholon 16, Leonar 6, Auloreth 13, and Goion 3.

Gravicarius

Gravicarius, the Frozen Star, Lord of the Tower, is exarch of pride; the strongest, most cunning, most beautiful and most powerful, the first-born of his kind. It is Gravicarius who united his siblings against the Primordials and sought to usurp their power, covering the whole world in Shadow, and he will not rest until his—strictly temporary—defeat at their hands is corrected. Gravicarius is primary patron of sorcery and the hubristic misuse of arcana.

Tyrexxus

Tyrexxus, the Black Horn, the Thundering Drum, is exarch of wrath and rage; the bestial overlord of bloodlust and war. Were it not for a need to ally with the other exarchs towards a common goal, Tyrexxus would almost certainly war against them as well. He is the patron of murderers, berserkers, and all driven by blind, red rage.

Ulasta

Ulasta, the Great Skull, the Green Flame, and Queen of the Burning Eyes, is exarch of envy and patron of the unliving, who crave and cling to life, even to the point of existing solely in a corrupt, pale imitation of the living. Those who secretly covet and want what others have call upon Ulasta, asking her to give them the secrets they need to attain their desire. It is said that Ulasta created the first unliving to thwart Selene's Great Wheel, and gave the secrets of lichhood to the Sorcerer Kings.

In'nassi

In'nassi, Sovereign of the Crimson Petals, is exarch of lust—not love or even desire, but a carnal hunger that cares for nothing save satisfaction. In'nassi and its fiends appear in a multitude of forms, male, female, both, and neither, all desirable and wanton. "Buried seeds of desire can blossom into crimson petals of lust," as the old saying goes. Aldins believe this means to express desire in a healthy manner. Some Purists interpret it as the need to dig out corrupt desires before they can take root.

Viasta

Viasta, the Broken Seal, the Unbalanced Scale, is exarch of sloth. Although associated with idleness, Viasta is, in truth, quite an active force, but devoted to finding short-cuts, clever cheats, and other ways of avoiding honest dealings of all kinds. He is patron of the con-artist, the unscrupulous merchant, and the thief, as well as the wastrel and the layabout.

Yungo

Yungo, the Yawning Maw, the Bottomless Pit, is exarch of gluttony; a grotesque mountain of flesh, fed by a never-ending hunger. Yungo turns the pleasures of life into curses of excess, destroying body and mind, heart and soul in the process. Its adherents often believe greater understanding and power is found through excess. The most mad cultists of the Yawning Maw believe they can receive its blessings and obtain the qualities of others by consuming their victims' flesh or organs.

Mytaxx

Mytaxx, the Golden Miser, Old Iron Grip, is exarch of greed, the force that gathers and hoards all manner of wealth and resources for no purpose other than to claim them as his own. Some stories say Mytaxx is not even the original exarch, but the greediest of the Sorcerer Kings who literally bought his way into godlike immortality with his vast wealth. Although most dismiss it as fancy, the very attractiveness of the idea is a testament to Mytaxx's power.

Holy Days

There are four great holy days in Aldis: the winter and summer solstices and the spring and fall equinoxes, each associated with one of the Primordials. Lesser sacred days fall on every full moon, of which there are thirteen each year.

Midwinter Night

Winter Solstice

The year begins on Midwinter Night, the winter solstice, when it seems the sun will never return. On that night, Aldins traditionally extinguish all fires but for one candle, until the first rays of sun break the horizon. In the Royal Palace, the candle kept alight is the massive beeswax and gold candle dedicated on Midsummer Day. From the guttering candle, the Sovereign lights a taper at dawn, which is passed through the palace, from the greatest noble to the least kitchen maid, and out into the city. This light symbolizes Selene's gift of life to the world, when she crafted the Wheel of Rebirth to save souls from everlasting death. This is celebrated with a great feast. Feast tables and

images of the gods are adorned with hothouse flowers, and imported fruits are eaten in hope of the coming spring.

The Feast of Braniel

Spring Equinox

Spring and hope are celebrated on the spring equinox, the Feast of Braniel. Great dances take place around maypoles and Green Men, arboreal figures representing Braniel as Green Beard. These figures are lovingly shaped by gardeners and shaper adepts. The dancers adorn themselves with flowers, and bards sing tales of the Singer in the Stars and his beloved, Hiathas. The school year and most theater seasons begin on this day, and minstrels depart on their travels, which stretch to the following winter. The day is considered the preeminent day of love, with many romances consummated on it.

Midsummer Day

Summer Solstice

On this day, the summer solstice, mortals honor Maurenna and her consort, Leonoth, and celebrate some of the pair's gifts: agriculture, marriage, and family. Farmers crown their cows, sheep, and other livestock with garlands and lead them between roaring bonfires. After this, farmers traditionally offer some of their best produce and livestock for a great communal feast. The meat is cooked over the bonfires, around which people sing of Maurenna's children, the gods of Light, and their virtues. Children are given toys and sweets, and the elderly sit at the feast's seats of honor. The day is considered the most auspicious for marriage. Many are wed in the morning, some are betrothed, and others renew their vows.

The Feast of Anwaren

Autumn Equinox

On the autumn equinox, when the year begins to dip toward winter, Anwaren and the dead are remembered. Most celebrate the feast with their families in the evening, eating the fruits of the harvest and recounting tales of their deceased loved ones. Using stones, corn stalks, pumpkins, and autumn leaves, people fashion figures representing Anwaren and place them at the center of their feast tables. After all have had their fill of the festal meal and the storytelling has ended, the people remove the figures from the table and bury them in a nearby garden. There the final tale of the evening is told, of how Anwaren will perish at the end of autumn but be reborn in the spring. Over the following weeks, tokens are placed on the spot where the figures were buried, in honor of Anwaren and out of affection for the dead. On the eve of the month of Gravihain, jack-o'-lanterns are set in the garden to scare off ghosts and other creatures of Shadow, for it is believed that the powers of Shadow increase at the beginning of Gravihain, the month of Anwaren's death, and then subside with Midwinter Night.

Night Tearing at My Lover's Heart

This story apparently has the same plot as "Rose and Thorn", the play about the ill-fated romance between an adept and a sorcerer succumbing to Shadow. The curious thing is I found it in a journal, rather than a work of fiction. Most of the pages were irrecoverable, but the hints about the story mirror "Rose and Thorn" so closely that it is irrelevant to reproduce them. The interesting things are the mentions of spirit dancer arts that none in the Academy were able to identify. Hopefully I can salvage more pages and thus shed more light onto these styles.

Al Haric

15th of Atholon

I saw Merisse again. She has grown tall since we last met. My master warned me not to greet her so warmly, and to avoid her if possible. When I asked why, he simply told me that he could read my heart. My training had no room for "foolish cavorts," and the Society would view two students of such different schools with suspicion.

2nd of Maurenel

I can't get her out of my mind. Her smile is burned into my heart. I missed two steps in the Dance and Master Desh gave me a dressing down that still stings. They know, and they don't like it. Master Desh warned me that Merisse's own master is teaching her a dark version of the Dance, one meant to kill.

4th of Maurenel

I don't know whether to be happy or to despair. Merisse feels as I do, and we held each other long into the night. But my Master was right, she's learning Night's Embrace, a Dance that can make blood boil and hearts burst—literally. She says that we need such arts to defeat King Hadleeth's forces, that his sorcery is too powerful, but if a Dance can skirt the edge of Shadow, its power can catch him unawares. I'm not so sure.

23rd of Selenar

I killed her... I had to. I peered into her eyes and saw only Shadow. Her hands were stained with blood. But my victory was costly. I feel my heart failing by the tainted arcana of her Shadow Dance that I so foolishly tried to match and counter.

Beware Night's Embrace. Do not seek to follow its twisting patterns. Too late I discovered the only way is to Dance in Selene's Circle, let the movement find the matching steps of its own accord, and strike fast and true, like the moon cuts through the darkness.

Priesthood

The role of priest in Aldis is held by people of nearly all races and genders, except rhydan rarely ever take up the role, as they have little use for religious ritual. Aldin priests tend to be a combination of performance artists, crafting and facilitating religious rituals for the faithful, and community counselor, offering spiritual guidance and

insight. Unlike Jarzon or Rezea, priests in Aldis have no legal authority or role in government, although nothing prevents a priest from also being a noble or other government functionary. Priesthood is seen as a service to both the gods and the community, and the ideal priest is both competent in and humble about this role.

The priesthood is also strongly connected with the role of mystics in Aldin religion, seekers after direct communion with the gods—or, at least, as direct as embodied souls are capable of having. Mystics seek this communion through ritual, prayer, meditation, dance, art, and various other techniques. Those who are successful sometimes offer their insights to the community, ranging from an inspired piece of art or ritual to a fully-formed philosophy of the nature of life, creation, or the will of the gods. This sometimes leads to small sects or followings for inspired mystics. The Aldin priesthood has little sense of orthodoxy and no concept of heresy, so diverse creeds are tolerated so long as they abide by the law and do not become harmful to their members or the community. While this has sometimes permitted shadow cults to take root in Aldis, the people prefer their spiritual freedom to the strict orthodoxy of religious communities like the Purists.

Spirit Dancers

In the Old Kingdom, spirit dancers were adepts specializing in the meditative arts, masters of mind and body. Their dance is a physical reflection of the Eternal Dance of creation, and the greatest dancers claim they touch the divine as they whirl through the dance's steps. Like most adepts of the Old Kingdom, they were all but wiped out by the Sorcerer Kings, with many of those who were left corrupted and recruited into the Sorcerer Kings' service. The survivors went underground. To pass on their lore, they disguised their disciplines as folk dances, often set to music. They formed part of the core of the resistance, teaching new spirit dancers the skills they needed to overthrow the Sorcerer Kings.

Since the Great Rebellion, spirit dancers have strongly supported the Kingdom of the Blue Rose and its Sovereign. Most of them live in special academies, where they perfect their arts. Some become wanderers, who freely give their services and teaching to any who are ready to receive them. Several of the most famous spirit dancers have joined the Sovereign's Finest, and have attracted many youths eager to become their apprentices.

Each spirit dancer teacher interprets the sacred dance in his or her own way. Spirit dancers see these different interpretations as complementary, sometimes forming different schools or lineages around the interpretations of inspired master teachers. They celebrate the diversity of their techniques and regard them all as valid ways to approach the mysteries of life.

Spirit Dancer Sects

During the Empire of Thorns, spirit dancers hid from the Sorcerer Kings and fragmented into many sects, each practicing a slightly different version of the Dance while forming the backbone of the Society of Leaves and Grass (**Chapter 3**). Some sects died out during the Great Rebellion, while others were absorbed into the Academy in Aldis once it was reestablished. Night's Embrace is one of the sects that survived in Kern, training Shadow Dancers to serve the Lich King's (and his successors') dark purposes.

Purist Sects

Various sects of Jarzon's Church of the Pure Light have taken refuge in Aldis, for they were persecuted as heretics in their homeland. The fact that Aldis safeguards these sects is a constant irritant to Jarzon's Hierophant and priests. Nobles and the Sovereign's Finest sometimes fear the Purists within their borders might immolate unbelievers and heretics in fires of purification, but the majority of Purists in Aldis are more moderate in their views than the members of their parent faith, and largely willing to obey the law of the land.

Aldin Purists mistrust rhydan and shadowspawn (including night people), as well as practitioners of the arcane arts who are not priests, healers, or trusted nobles. Most Purists treat other adepts, including members of the Sovereign's Finest, with suspicion. Tensions are heightened by a few of the less tolerant members of the Aldin Guard and the Rose Knights, who see little difference between Purist exiles and the Jarzoni who raid towns near the Veran Marsh. Some of these soldiers have a disapproving view of Purist settlements and worry the exiles might be harboring spies or raiders. As a result, interactions between Purists and the other inhabitants of Aldis can be strained.

Threats to Aldis

There are many potential threats to the peace and prosperity of Aldis. Monsters and bandits lurk in its wildernesses and on its borders, while darkfiends crawl through arcane gateways in ancient ruins, spreading their corruption. These same ruins draw power-hungry sorcerers like moths to a flame. They seek ancient knowledge to increase their power, uncovering slumbering evils that taint their souls with Shadow.

Criminals

Aldis does experience crime, in spite of the best efforts to ensure an educated, enlightened, and content citizenry. Criminals in the Kingdom of the Blue Rose also aspire to excellence in their trade; they must, if they intend to evade the authorities for long.

Corrupt Nobles

Many forget that, while all nobles must prove their worthiness when they take office, some stray from the path thereafter. These nobles are often agents of deception, division, and unrest. The Sovereign and the Noble Council can strip nobles of their titles if there is evidence they no longer act in the best interests of the kingdom. This is a rare and serious process involving a lengthy hearing.

The worst problems come from corrupt regional nobles. They can exploit the labor and goodwill of the people in their regions, and the most clever avoid the excesses that would reveal their abuses. They gradually twist and corrupt the place they rule, appointing assistants in line with their views and able to maintain a façade of honor and compassion.

Some corrupt nobles seek out sorcerous power, either out of overwhelming ambition or an unbalanced desire to protect Aldis that leads them to believe the ends justify the means, or so they tell themselves. In some cases, nobles are beguiled into Shadow by a sorcerous "advisor," arcane artifact, or contact with a darkfiend. Once the corrupting influence is removed, the noble may recover.

The Shadow Guild

While most of the kingdom's merchants are honest, some unscrupulous ones cause harm in their quest for ever-greater profits, cutting corners and negligently managing their commodities and production, leading to hazards of contamination, shoddy goods, pollution, and the like. Others mistreat their workers or employees, cheat their customers, or use underhanded methods against their competitors.

Worse still is the so-called "Shadow Guild" of merchants who not only knowingly use criminal methods to further their own greed, but cooperate with others of a like mind for mutual benefit and protection. This criminal alliance borders on becoming a syndicate, although not quite so ruthless as the Silence. Its members wear masks and use other means of concealing their identities during meetings to help prevent them from informing on each other.

Bandits, Brigands, and Pirates

Bandits are common in the lands near the Ice-Binder Mountains, where gangs lurk in the foothills. In addition to the mountains providing a multitude of hiding places, ancient ruins in the valleys and perched on cliffs offer everything from secret tunnels to powerful, if dangerous, arcane artifacts some of the more foolhardy bandits dare to use. Although few are desperate enough to stay there long, there are bandits who make a temporary home of the Veran Marsh. They know the safe paths there better than anyone else, and once they enter the marsh, they can evade most pursuers.

Regardless of where they are located, most gangs are comprised of from half a dozen to four dozen well-armed bandits with swift horses. A majority of the bandits are citizens of Aldis who reject the values of their homeland and prey upon the weak and unsuspecting. Some are soldiers, scouts, and refugees from Kern and Jarzon, or outlaws from Rezea. While there are grisly tales of bandits slaughtering villagers or selling them into slavery, such practices are, fortunately, uncommon. Bandits are primarily interested in plundering whatever food, coin, animals, and other valuables they can.

The kingdom has a wealth of seaports, but also an abundance of pirates prowling its trade routes. The ports in the Scatterstar Archipelago contend with pirates more than most. Regardless of where they attack, pirates harbor in hidden coves and inlets, where they nurse their wounds, repair their ships, and transfer their booty to small, innocuous-looking merchant vessels. Some pirate hideouts are in coves where the Ice-Binder Mountains meet the sea, between Aldis and Rezea. Others are on small islands to the west and south of the Scatterstar Archipelago. The most daring pirates hide among the jagged pinnacles and treacherous reefs of the Leviathan's Teeth, and spend as much time searching for lost treasure among the ruins of Falzanoth as they do attacking ships.

The Silence

The greatest criminal power in Aldis is the mysterious syndicate known as the Silence. Although not a direct threat to the kingdom's safety or borders, the Silence may be the greatest internal threat to Aldis' devotion to peace, justice, and the rule of law. Agents of the syndicate flout the much-vaunted justice system, and the efforts of the nobility and the Sovereign's Finest to tear out crime at its roots.

There is little criminal activity in the kingdom that the Silence does not control, although it is not particularly concerned with petty crime, other than to manage the number of cutpurses and brigands so as not to endanger its own operations. Indeed, the Silence helps keep petty crime in Aldis down because a secure and complacent populace serves its needs.

The Silence concerns itself with criminal enterprise, ranging from grand theft to smuggling, spying, information brokering, exploitation, and vice. They specialize in secrets, a valuable commodity in a society concerned with privacy. While no decent, law-abiding adept would consider using the psychic arts to violate another person's mind, adepts serving the Silence do, either because the syndicate has some hold over them or because they enjoy the opportunity. The Silence doesn't have many adepts working for it, but even its small handful are a serious threat.

True to its name, the Silence prefers low-profile activities. It stays away from assassination, except in cases where it can be carried out quietly. Stealth and poison are its weapons of choice, and the Silence is more than willing to supply would-be assassins with weapons, toxins, and everything they need to know about their targets, even if they don't carry out the actual killings themselves.

The syndicate is organized into cells, each called a Dominion. The leader of a Dominion is a Baron. Dominions tend to be small criminal gangs, with the members

The Prince

The true identity of the Prince of the Silence is left for the Narrator to decide, as suits the series. The Prince could be of any race—perhaps even a rhydan or night person—and of any gender. The Prince might be an influential merchant or noble, a professor at the Royal College, a noted artist, or a humble artisan.

You may decide the Prince is thoroughly corrupt and enthralled by an exarch of Shadow, Mytaxx being a particularly good choice, or may even be a mad priest or living avatar of an exarch. Alternatively, the Prince might be an entirely mundane threat, but no less dangerous because of it.

The Prince doesn't need to be a physical threat to the heroes, for the power of the Silence is found in secrets, influence, and behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Keep in mind the kind of resources available to envoys—particularly psychic arcana—and the fact that the Silence would not have survived as long as it has if the Prince didn't have some means of circumventing those resources.

reporting to the Baron, whose identity is concealed behind a mask. The Baron in turn reports to a Count, who oversees several Dominions. Each Baron reports to the Count individually and knows nothing of the other Barons. The Count, in turn, reports to an intermediary, whose sole job is to convey messages to the Prince, Lord of the Silence. Counts often believe their intermediary *is* the Prince, resulting in conflicting descriptions of the Silence's mysterious leader. No Count has direct contact with the Prince, spawning all manner of rumors and speculation.

This arrangement helps protect the Silence from infiltration and interrogation. Lower-ranked members have limited information about the higher ranks and generally no information about other parts of the same rank.

For a typical Silence agent, use the Rogue from the **Adversaries** chapter, using the guidelines under **Beefing Up Adversaries** for more capable and experienced agents.

Sorcery

Despite its extensive use of the arcane arts, even the Kingdom of the Blue Rose is wary of sorcery. The Shadow Art has the potential to corrupt anyone, so every adept must guard against its seductive call.

The most conspicuous forms of sorcery call directly on the powers of Shadow and the exarchs. They include the secrets of summoning darkfiends and creating the unliving. Generally, sorcerers willing to do these things have already gone over to Shadow, although there is the occasional naive adept, trying to explore the bounds of the arcane arts, certain of being the exception to the rule. Arcane masters learned long ago that trying to fight the forces of Shadow with their own weapons is a fool's errand.

More dangerous than the overt forms of sorcery are the subtle ways it creeps into the other arcana. The use of the arcane arts to alter or influence others against their will is also sorcery, and many arcana can be used in this way. Adepts may be tempted to misuse their gifts, to try to exert control over the world the way Anwaren did, and pay the same price in corruption and madness.

Almost a century ago, King Rannath ruled the study of sorcery was no longer a felony in Aldis, saying it was not sorcerous knowledge, but its use, that constituted a crime. Rannath believed a better understanding of sorcery and its risks—and how to deal with them—was ultimately necessary and beneficial to adepts and the kingdom. This decision heightened tensions between Aldis and Jarzon, which bans sorcery in any form. This point of Aldin law has occasionally allowed some sorcerers to operate in the kingdom's shadows. Some want Queen Jaellin to reverse Rannath's decision and ban even the study of the Shadow Art, saying it creates a needless danger to Aldis. The Queen is reluctant to do so, since she agrees with Rannath's view and fears the consequences of banning knowledge, making such "forbidden" lore that much more alluring. Once some knowledge is declared forbidden, what would be next? Debate on the issue remains heated.

Brana Kriss, the Nightingale

Brana's parents, Mara Shenn and Lorena Kriss, fled Jarzon while Mara was still pregnant, and Brana was born in a caravan on its way to Aldis. Not long thereafter, bandits attacked the convoy. Mara was killed and Lorena unaccounted for among the survivors, who placed Brana in the care of a priest of Braniel. She grew up under the loving care and influence of her foster guardian and the temple community, where she gained a reputation as a practical joker, as well as displaying a fierce willingness to get into scrapes standing up for herself and others. When she became older, Brana became obsessed with learning the fate of her mother Lorena. Looking into the activities of bandits and other criminals in Aldis, she discovered a shadowy underworld of which many remain unaware. Fearing the authorities might not believe her—based on her past history—and always willing to take action on her own, Brana began a personal mission against the criminals she discovered.

So began the escapades of "The Nightingale," a mysterious criminal whose mischief always involved leaving behind a lyrical clue hinting at her next caper. These often led authorities to discover far more serious criminal activities, while the Nightingale left goods liberated from her targets on the doorsteps of the needy, or the local temples. This made Brana's alter-ego something of a folk hero, which served her well when she misstepped while trying to turn the spotlight on an influential merchant name Belzen Merris. Captured by the Sovereign's Finest, Brana was to be put on trial for her crimes as the Nightingale, even as many local people protested for her release. In the end, the same envoy who helped to place the infant Brana with her temple caretakers followed the leads unearthed by the Nightingale and proved Merris guilty of involvement with slave traders and the Silence.

Brana Kriss received a royal pardon and an invitation to join the Sovereign's Finest, to truly put her talents to work for Aldis and its people. For nearly two decades, the Nightingale has served with distinction. With the aid of her fellow envoys, Brana found and rescued her mother Lorena little more than a year after joining the envoys. Brana currently lives in the city of Aldis with her husbands Thuren Bower (a scholar of the Royal Archives) and Morin Alixander (a dancer), and her wife Brittana Babini (a Roamer seer), raising their seven children together. Brana splits her time between working in the field as an envoy, and teaching and training junior envoys of the Finest that "the most direct line to justice is not always a straight or a narrow one."

Shadow Cults

Though worship of the exarchs of Shadow is forbidden in Aldis, secret shadow cults occasionally arise, flourish briefly, and then are discovered by the Sovereign's Finest and disbanded. The cults are characterized by blood sacrifices and the encouragement of the soul's darkest impulses. In Jarzon, the Purist priesthood is on constant lookout for such cults and frequently accuses Aldis of not doing enough to stamp them out. The truth is that the Sovereign's Finest are tireless in their pursuit of shadow cultists, some of whom have close ties to Kern.

The most fearsome shadow cults have members with arcane talents. They turn to sorcery, and some are capable of summoning darkfiends to do their bidding. One of the greatest concerns of the Sovereign's Finest is a shadow cult with access to a shadowgate and the sorcerous knowledge to use it.

Shadow Dancers

These foul adepts are the descendants of the spirit dancers corrupted by the Sorcerer Kings to become their personal spies and assassins. Some of the original shadow dancers were wise enough to vanish into virtual obscurity before the fall of their masters. They passed on their arts, creating a secret society of spies and killers for hire. Spirit dancers despise shadow dancers for perverting their traditions and fight them at every opportunity. Some shadow dancers work as cat's-paws for Kern, but most have their own agendas of greed, corruption, and destruction. The worst pass themselves off as spirit dancers and attempt to corrupt both students and teachers at various academies.

The Broken Circle

Found even in the civilized areas of Aldis, the cultists of the Broken Circle fear the consequences of their ill-spent lives will be visited on their next incarnations when they pass through the Wheel of Rebirth. Fearing what the next life might bring and unable to loosen their grip on their current incarnation, the followers of the Broken Circle seek to free themselves from the Wheel. Some seek immortality through alchemy or sorcery, while others seek life after death. Most such schemes end in failure, but sometimes, usually through sinister rites, members of the Broken Circle find ways to extend their lives, often with a horrible spiritual cost. Some of the cultists give up and search for fulfillment in unlife, performing the dread rituals for becoming a shadow, vampire, or lich.

Cult of the Crimson Eye

The most powerful and dangerous shadow cult in Aldis is the Cult of the Crimson Eye. Its members tend to be younger and wealthier, often the children of nobles or successful merchant families. Some members of the cult have arcane talents and delve into the practice of sorcery, seduced by its power.

The leader of the cult, Dara Kalchy, is an ambitious former agent of the Lich King. Having initially fallen under Jarek's influence, Dara's will is once again her own following his destruction. Nevertheless, she is thoroughly corrupt, and has her eye on securing greater power and wealth in Aldis. She has been using the cult's connections to find and seduce a suitable consort who can fund and cover her activities, as she considers extending her web of influence and drawing new cult members into her orbit.

Use the Adept from the **Adversaries** chapter to represent Dara Kalchy, applying both the Psychic and Shaper options. She keeps a small poisonous snake as a pet and familiar (see **Snake, Venomous**, in **Adversaries**).

Arcane Relics

Arcane relics of the Shadow Wars and the preceding ages are still found scattered across the land. A necklace a farmer uncovers in their field might be able to twist the will and poison the mind, or perhaps transform the living into zombies. While such objects do not turn up often, most people rightly fear them. Because most arcane relics bear distinguishing marks—esoteric sigils, a refinement of design impossible without arcana, and sometimes a telltale glow—people can often identify them on sight. The items made to look mundane tend to cause the most havoc. People usually rebury the obvious ones or cautiously pick them up with long tongs and store them in a strongbox until the Sovereign's Finest can take charge of them. Examining arcane relics and pronouncing them safe or carrying them to the Royal College in the capital for study and proper disposal is a regular duty for envoys.

Since many arcane relics are made from precious materials, finders are sometimes hesitant to hand them over to the Sovereign's Finest. These selfish individuals sell or wear items they find without first determining if they are safe. The Sovereign's Finest must deal with the results of such behavior. Some finders are simply unaware that they should be cautious around ancient relics. Their naiveté is occasionally rewarded by finding an amulet that causes crops to flourish or a figurine that repels vermin. Others are not so lucky.

Shadowgates

Many shadowgates survived the Shadow Wars, when the Sorcerer Kings summoned hordes of darkfiends through them. A few shadowgates have been active since their creation, while others have been dormant for centuries. The most dangerous gates open regularly or remain open, allowing darkfiends to pass through. Other gates only open when specific events, like thunderstorms or a new moon, occur. A surge of natural arcana in the land or a person nearby can even reactivate a dormant gate. When darkfiends pass through the gates, they are of various types, although some gates draw only certain kinds of fiends. Darkfiends often adopt the area around their gate as a lair, protecting it to allow others of their kind through. When these are discovered, champions are mustered to destroy them.

No one knows where all the shadowgates are located. The Sovereign's Finest are tasked with finding them, and the Sovereign offers a substantial reward to anyone who discovers one and reports it. Finding the gates is easier said than done, however. The Sorcerer Kings cloaked many with wards and illusions, and others are in remote ruins or far underground. Once a gate is identified, the Sovereign's Finest and Rose Knights are sent to destroy it. If a gate is too powerful to be destroyed or permanently sealed, guards and arcane wards are placed around it, and its location is not revealed to the populace, if possible.

Destroying Shadowgates

Destroying a shadowgate is exceedingly difficult. The gates are made of arcane-tempered metal, and have survived arcane cataclysms unleashed during the Shadow Wars and the Great Rebellion. Destroying a gate with mundane weapons and tools is nigh on impossible.

Adepts have a means of destroying a shadowgate, but it is difficult and dangerous. By pouring arcane energy into the gate, it's possible to overload its shas crystals. The gate implodes, sucked into its own vortex, which then collapses and vanishes.

Setting off a shadowgate implosion requires an advanced TN 13 Willpower test to project arcane energy into the gate; the success threshold is 25. The Shaping ability focus adds its bonus to the test. This requires line of sight to the gate and each test also requires a fatigue test (see **Chapter 4: Arcana**). Multiple adepts can cooperate on the test, adding their results together. When the success threshold is achieved, the gate begins to implode. As the arcane power builds, the gate glows and shakes with enough force to make the ground tremble. If the process stops for even a single round, the arcane energy dissipates and the adept must start over again.

Once the implosion is triggered, the shadowgate opens, and a howling vortex begins pulling in everything around it. Use the guidelines for a tornado (see **Wind Shaping, Chapter 4: Arcana**) with a 500-foot radius around the shadowgate to see what is caught up in it. Any creature that fails a TN 16 Strength (Might) test against the vortex is pulled into the shadowgate and permanently lost. Two rounds later, the gate itself is pulled into the vortex, which collapses and disappears.

In addition to the physical danger to all present, anyone pouring arcane energy into a shadowgate to overload it must make a TN 15 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test when the vortex forms. Failure means a darkfiend whisperer forges a psychic connection with the character (see **Darkfiends** in **Chapter 12**). Thereafter, the darkfiend may use its psychic arcana on the victim as if it were physically present, and the target number of resisting them increases by +2. The whisperer automatically knows the subject's Destiny and Fate and typically tries to steer a victim toward acts of Fate and, eventually, corruption. The whisperer can also communicate directly with the victim, as if using Psychic Contact, and may use interaction skills and related stunts like Entrancing Words and Taunt.

The subject cannot break the link with the darkfiend. Another person can sense the darkfiend's link using the Mind Reading arcanum by making a Perception (Psychic) test opposed by the whisperer's Communication (Deception) test. Heart Reading may also determine if someone is under the influence of a whisperer's Heart Shaping arcanum (target number equal to the darkfiend's Heart Shaping result). Removing the psychic connection requires a successful TN 18 Mind Shaping test. Legend has it that an exceptional act of Destiny on the victim's part can also break the psychic bond. This is left to the Narrator's discretion.

Except in Kern, where shadowgates are coveted, attitudes about shadowgates are the same throughout the world, even in nations as different as Aldis and Jarzon. Defeating darkfiends and destroying shadowgates are tasks that inspire rare cooperation between the Sovereign's Finest and the Purist priests of Jarzon. Some of them have learned mutual respect and even admiration after working together against Shadow.

The City of Aldis

The city of Aldis is the heart of the Kingdom of the Blue Rose, as well the largest and most splendid city in the known world. Home to the royal court, the metropolis contains a mixture of architectural styles from the realm's major cultures. While most of the city is built with the whitewashed brick and brightly painted marble used by the farmers of the central valleys, one section is built with the carefully carved wood used by the northern forest folk. In another district, gray stone and lath-and-plaster buildings are home to Jarzoni refugees who've settled in the city and brought their native architecture with them. There is a small district where Roamers have settled, and along Lake Vash and the Rose River, there are buildings with submerged levels for use by the sea-folk.

The city has a radial street plan, with concentric circular roads connecting its wide, radiating streets, which lead to the Royal Palace at the center of the city. Narrow gardens on either side of the streets are planted with cedar, olive, and almond trees, large rose bushes, and many flowers. These garden swaths are broken every few dozen feet by a brick path leading into one of the city's many shops or homes.

The palace grounds are surrounded by a marble wall with frescoes of scenes from all over the kingdom. Unlike the well-defended temple-palace of Jarzon or the fortress tower of the Lich King of Kern, the palace grounds are spacious and inviting, and the surrounding wall contains large gates, typically left open. Guards trained in psychic arcana observe everyone entering the palace grounds and use their abilities to discover if anyone filled with rage or hate is attempting to intrude. Instead of turning away such visitors, the guards speak to them, trying to ascertain if they are dangerous or merely upset over some legitimate grievance. In addition to helping identify potential threats, this allows people to have their concerns addressed quickly, since the guards refer people with the most serious grievances to the appropriate authority.

Inside the palace gates, large gardens and domed buildings surround the central edifice of the palace, a great marble structure capped by a majestic bronze dome. The smaller buildings contain the Sovereign's residence, the Aldin Museum and Royal Library, a small but well-tended park, and an open-air theater where the finest performers in the kingdom display their talents. Except for the Sovereign's residence, which is only open to nobles and intimates of the royal court, the rest of the palace is accessible to visitors. Scholars come from days away to study the ancient artifacts in the museum, and foreign dignitaries often say the plays and other performances held in the royal theater are some of the finest to be seen anywhere.

The great dome of the palace's central building is 300 feet in diameter. Beneath it, large meeting halls and judicial chambers fill the back half of the building, while the upper floors are arranged in narrow rings close to the building's circular outer wall. These rooms are normally filled with busy record keepers and bureaucrats. The front half of the building is normally left open to the public. Its walls are covered with murals of the history of Aldis and portraits of its greatest leaders. This space is also used for the large indoor festivals, masquerades, and balls which form an important part of life at the royal court.

The Wards of the City

Aldis is divided into five wards: the Outer, Lower, Middle, and High Wards, along with an additional ward along the shores of Lake Vash, known as the Lake Ward. Except for the Lake Ward, the city's wards are concentric circles, with the Outer Ward on the outer edge of the circle and the High Ward at its center.

The Outer Ward

The outermost ward of the city has hostels and inns for travelers, open-air markets, warehouses, and various restaurants, market stalls, florists, and other businesses reliant upon fresh goods from outside the city. The areas along the banks of the Rose River have the same sorts of businesses, as well as fisheries and dockside taverns.

For health considerations, all tanneries, soap-makers, and other businesses that produce noxious smells are located on the outskirts of the city. Aldis has strict regulations against pollution of the land, water, or air. The kingdom's adepts have developed alchemical methods of rendering harmful wastes into harmless byproducts. Since these alchemical methods are expensive, some businesses try to skimp on them as a cost-cutting measure. Agents of the Crown are charged with ferreting out polluters and ensuring they comply with the kingdom's laws.

The Lower Ward

Aldis' Lower Ward is home to the city's laborers; folk who work in the various shops, load and unload ships and caravans, and maintain much of the city. This area has blocks of apartments between two and four stories tall.

THE CITY OF ALDIS
ROSE RIVER
OUTER WARD
LOWER WARD
MIDDLE WARD
HIGH WARD
LAKE WARD
LAKE VASH
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
1. The Old City Wall
2. The Royal Palace
3. The Noble Assembly
4. The Royal College
5. The Royal Archive
6. The Azure Plaza
7. The Temple of Eternal Dance
8. The Academy of the Dance
W
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The ground floors of many of them have small shops and restaurants with living space above. Small townhouses inhabited by shopkeepers and hostels for out-of-town traders are common in this section of the city.

The Middle Ward

The Middle Ward holds the majority of the population. This ward is filled with small townhouses belonging to scribes, clerks, shopkeepers, local merchants, and the like. It is also the location of taverns and theaters, which are frequented by the city's occupants. The ward has public baths, gymnasiums, and sporting arenas, all popular with both residents and visitors. Since the local climate is mild in every season, outdoor entertainments remain open year-round.

The High Ward

In the center of the city is the High Ward, also called the Noble Ward. The ward houses the residences of the Noble and Guild Councils, as well as the homes of the city's wealthiest citizens. Interspersed among the luxurious townhouses and small mansions are shops selling luxury goods, including silks from across the sea, exquisite jewelry, and imported delicacies.

The Lake Ward

To many visitors, the most exotic area of the city lies along the shores of Lake Vash. In the Lake Ward, partially submerged townhouses and apartments are home to many sea-folk. The upper floors of these buildings look like any other dwellings in the city, but flooded underground channels connect the lower levels. Wide canals, navigated by narrow gondolas, replace the streets. An evening gondola ride in the Lake Ward is considered one of the most romantic outings in the city.

The Old City Wall

During the Empire of Thorns, the Sorcerer Kings surrounded the city of Aldis with a thick stone wall to protect against any who might attempt to overthrow them. During the years following the Great Rebellion, the wall served to protect the inhabitants of Aldis from the bandits, shadowspawn, and darkfiends still menacing the central valleys. However, as the nation expanded and the population of the city continued to grow, it was forced to expand beyond the confines of the wall.

Today, the remains of the Old City Wall run through the Middle Ward, and the wall's gates are left permanently open. The wall primarily serves as a reminder of the city's history and all that the people of Aldis have overcome.

The People of the City

Humans make up the majority of the city's population, but Aldis is diverse both racially and culturally. Vata make up about ten percent of the population (one-fifth of them vata'sha), with sea-folk making up about five percent, and night people about four percent, in large part because they face less prejudice here than anywhere else in Aldis. Rhydan are the rarest, making up only about one percent of the city's population.

Recent refugees from Kern sometimes have trouble dealing with night people, since they see them as the same monsters who once oppressed them. Although the wisest of the night people know only time can conquer such deep-rooted fears and prejudices, some of the more hot-tempered night people argue loudly with those who disparage their kind. Sometimes these shouting matches escalate into violence. Swift responses by the authorities have so far prevented any of these fights from becoming full-fledged riots, yet the worst have resulted in serious injuries and damage to several shops. Nobles who judge such cases are understanding about the intense feelings experienced by both groups but also make it clear to all involved that violence is not acceptable.

Most rural Aldins have some contact with rhydan, but rhydan are less common in cities. Prejudice toward rhydan is rare in the capital, especially since almost everyone born in the kingdom learns of the wisdom and courage of the rhydan and their role in the Great Rebellion. However, people born in Kern or Jarzon have less experience with rhydan, and despite what they have been taught, some natives of the city are still nervous around people who look like large predators. It's considered polite for rhydan to announce and introduce themselves psychically—or for their companions to do so verbally—to dispel any doubts they might be beasts and not people.

Because humanoids occasionally ride rhy-horses, there is a natural tendency to assume a rhy-horse mount is a mundane horse, unless shown otherwise. Because of this, Aldin rhy-horses have increasingly adopted the Rezean star badges worn by rhy-horses bonded to humanoid riders. It underlines their status and helps avoid any awkwardness.

Important Locations

Aldis is a city of wondrous architecture, bustling with people, but a few locales merit special attention as centers of activity and influence in the Kingdom of the Blue Rose.

The Palace

What most Aldins call the palace is actually a complex of buildings around the Azure Plaza at the hub of the city. It includes the Royal Palace itself, along with the Noble Assembly and various administrative buildings used

by the Noble Council, the Sovereign's Finest, and other agents of the Crown.

The palace buildings are among the oldest in Aldis, dating back to the Old Kingdom, although some façades and stonework are more recent. The Royal Palace has quarters for the Sovereign and any family members, as well as guests. There are a number of secret passages connecting the guest quarters, left over from the Empire of Thorns, some even undiscovered. The palace also has grand ballrooms and dining halls, where the Sovereign entertains and throws dances and feasts, particularly on state holidays. Queen Jaellin is not as fond of big social gatherings as her predecessor, but dutifully attends all such functions. Most often, she prefers to slip away at an opportune moment to spend time quietly chatting with friends over glasses of wine in one of the palace's drawing rooms or the great library.

The Noble Assembly

The greatest symbol of Aldin governance is the azure and gold dome of the Noble Assembly, where the Noble Council meets to debate, discuss, and decide important matters of state. The assembly chamber itself is under the center of the dome, a circular room with benches for the attending nobles, descending in rows to the sunken floor, where speakers stand to address the nobles. A seat closest to the floor is reserved for the Sovereign, who often attends assembly meetings.

The rest of the assembly building is taken up by offices used by the nobles or their administrative staff, and by the assembly archives, where legal records and commentaries and the annals of assembly meetings are held.

The Temple of the Eternal Dance

Situated on a hill above the palace is the Temple of the Eternal Dance. It is the highest point in the capital, affording a panoramic view of the city. The temple is a beautiful columned structure of marble, accented in gold leaf, a monument to the gods and the Eternal Dance.

Thousands of visitors pass through the temple to offer prayers or to see the divine reflected in the masterful statues of the Primordials and the gods of Light. Religious services are held in the temple on holy days, and the Sovereign is officially crowned here by the temple's high priest, after the ceremony of selection in the Azure Plaza.

The current temple was put back together from the original built during the Old Kingdom. That temple was all but destroyed by the Sorcerer Kings, who desecrated its icons and used it for unholy rites devoted to the exarchs of Shadow. After the Great Rebellion, the temple was painstakingly restored to its former glory and new statues commissioned from Aldis' finest artisans.

The priests of the temple, like priests at temples throughout the kingdom, are part of a loose order overseen by the Council of High Priests. The Council's membership

Professor Dorian Cal

An expert scholar on ancient artifacts and artworks of the Old Kingdom and the Empire of Thorns, Professor Dorian Cal was born and raised in a village on the outskirts of the Pavin Weald. As he came into maturity, he fell in love with Faenn, the bailiff's son. The two of them explored the Weald together and spent long days in each other's company. One day they discovered a buried and hidden chamber in the forest, and unknowingly unleashed a bound darkfiend from the days of the Empire. It sank its talons into Faenn's mind and spirit, drawing him back to the ruin to possess him before summoning lesser darkfiends to destroy the pair's village. Dorian, looking for his missing beloved, survived the attack and saw what Faenn had become. He fled, hunted by darkfiends through the forest, until Rakar the griffon came to his aid, drawn by the rising of Shadow. Together, Dorian and Rakar rallied the rhydan and forest folk to overcome the darkfiends, but it was too late to save Faenn or most of Dorian's village.

Having lost his home, Dorian went to Aldis to start anew, studying history, archeology, and the arcane lore of the past at the Royal College. Driven to prevent the kind of tragedy he suffered, he excelled, becoming one of Aldis' foremost authorities on the Empire of Thorns and its remnants. He was eventually recruited to the Sovereign's Finest after his work came to Queen Jaellin's attention. These days, Professor Cal splits his time between teaching at the Royal College, briefing envoys of the Finest about the dangers of sorcerous artifacts, and carefully exploring ancient sites to uncover and deal with those selfsame relics—sometimes with the aid of his old friend Rakar the griffon. He ended the threat of the Witches of Cuir Veld by shattering their Blood Cauldron, destroyed a shadowgate under Orta, and sent an Old Kingdom weapon in the hands of pirates to the bottom of the sea.

Dorian Cal is the subject of many a student crush at the Royal College, being a handsome man with a tanned, freckled complexion from his expeditions, wavy brown hair, and jade green eyes. He frequently sports a short beard, particularly when he has been in the field, and a pale scar runs down his left cheek to his neck, a constant reminder of his first encounter with darkfiends as a teenager.

is composed of the high priests from Aldis' main cities, and they meet annually in the capital's great temple, the high priest of which presides over the Council. The Council ensures towns and cities throughout the kingdom are supplied with priests and that priests are properly trained.

Most priests receive their religious training at a temple after completing their regular schooling (almost all high priests have studied at the Royal College and are adepts). They are taught how to perform ancient rituals from the Old Kingdom, and their doctrine focuses on people embodying the virtues of the Eternal Dance—unity, joy, and love—and on cultivating, through prayer and good deeds, friendship with the gods of Light and their forebears, the Primordials. Aldin rituals also honor the Golden Hart, considered by many to be the gods' emissary.

The Royal College

Not far from the center of Aldis stand the buildings of the Royal College. It is here where future scholars, adepts, and nobles of the kingdom are educated, and where Aldis' finest minds gather to study, discuss, and explore new ideas. The Royal College teaches all the arts and sciences known in the kingdom, including natural philosophy, astronomy, history, engineering, alchemy, medicine, herbalism, literature, the visual arts, and, of course, the arcane arts.

The cost of tuition makes an education at the Royal College available only to the wealthiest citizens, but the Crown awards many scholarships to help qualified but less fortunate students attend. This is particularly true for anyone with arcane talents, since proper training teaches responsible use of arcana and serves the public good.

Students usually attend the Royal College for two to four years, although some go on to higher levels of education and end up becoming professors themselves. The Sovereign's Finest keeps a close eye on the Royal College for potential new envoys, and many graduates go on to become junior nobles or administrators at court.

The Touchstone

The Touchstone is Aldis' greatest defense, and its greatest weapon. It is a topaz-colored shas crystal point, about a foot in diameter and three and a half feet tall, mounted on a finely wrought stand of gold, the whole thing some six feet tall. It is kept in a closely guarded chamber at the

The Collegiate Series

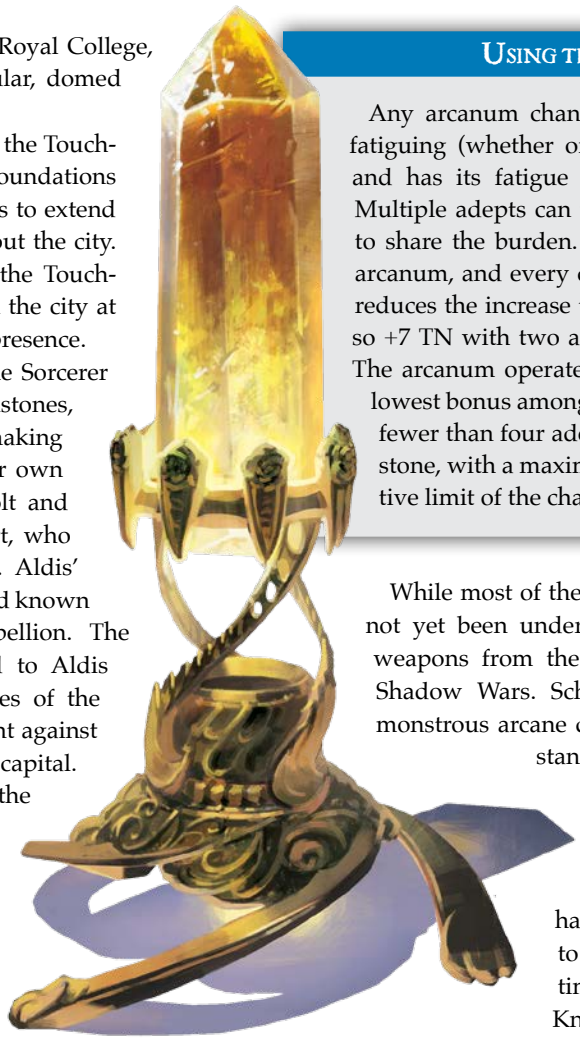
The Royal College makes a fine setting for a *Blue Rose* series, with the players taking the roles of students with varied interests but also common cause, such as the goal of joining the Finest upon graduation. You can run an entire series with students encountering mysteries, dangers from foreign spies, the results of arcane experiments gone wrong, hidden cults or sorcerers within the student body, and so forth. Each year of the students' education can frame a complete volume of your series, using the year's important events as touch-points around which you can build adventures. You can also use a story set at the Royal College as a flashback sequence in a present-day series as a look back at the heroes' school days, perhaps where and when they originally met.

top of the Tower of the Art at the Royal College, standing in the center of the circular, domed room.

When it was made centuries ago, the Touchstone was linked to the land and foundations of the city of Aldis. It allows adepts to extend the power of their arcana throughout the city. Any arcanum channeled through the Touchstone affects all potential targets in the city at once as if they were in the adept's presence.

During the Empire of Thorns, the Sorcerer Kings wielded similar Touchstones, greatly extending their reach and making them virtually unassailable in their own domains, until the darkfiend revolt and the appearance of the Golden Hart, who could block the power of arcana. Aldis' Touchstone is the only one of its kind known to have survived the Great Rebellion. The Touchstone is specifically attuned to Aldis and useless outside the boundaries of the city. It provides a powerful deterrent against those considering an assault on the capital.

Use of the Touchstone is only at the order of the Sovereign's Council, and only in times of great need. The Council is keenly aware of the potential for abuse the Touchstone represents and the danger posed by a rogue adept gaining control of it. Indeed, there has been much debate about whether or not to destroy the Touchstone, but ultimately its potential to protect Aldis has won out over the dangers it poses—for now, at least.



Using the Touchstone

Any arcanum channeled through the Touchstone is fatiguing (whether or not it normally causes fatigue) and has its fatigue target number increased by +8. Multiple adepts can use the Touchstone cooperatively to share the burden. They must all know the desired arcanum, and every doubling of the number of adepts reduces the increase to the fatigue target number by 1, so +7 TN with two adepts, +6 with four, and so forth. The arcanum operates at a bonus equal to that of the lowest bonus among the adept circle. Traditionally, no fewer than four adepts are allowed to use the Touchstone, with a maximum circle of thirty-two (the effective limit of the chamber housing it).

The Royal Archive

Inside the palace grounds, just to the east of the Royal College and the Aldin Museum, is the only building on the palace grounds more heavily guarded than the palace itself: the Royal Archive. While the Royal Library contains all the surviving books and records from both the Old Kingdom and the current era, the Royal Archive holds a large number of artifacts from the Old Kingdom and the Shadow Wars. Here, approved scholars and adepts from the Royal College can study and attempt to understand these potentially dangerous relics. The archive contains only a single door, made of thick metal, which can quickly be barred by the pair of Rose Knights who constantly guard it. In addition, the doorway is fitted with a special artifact that makes a loud noise if anyone attempts to take any enchanted items either in or out of the archive. Visitors cannot take in any such items and naturally cannot remove any of the artifacts from the archive without permission from the Sovereign's Council.

While most of the artifacts are curios that have not yet been understood, a few are dangerous weapons from the Empire of Thorns and the Shadow Wars. Scholars study even the most monstrous arcane devices in an effort to understand how to better detect and destroy them and how to protect people from their affects. Spies and puppets in the service of Kern have attempted to gain access to the Royal Archive several times, but the half-dozen Rose Knights, along with the sturdy structure and thick interior doors, have so far foiled all attempts to steal or harm the items stored therein.

The Academy of the Dance

Away from the bustle of the High Ward is the Academy of the Dance, near the shores of Lake Vash. It consists of a low hall, quarters for students and teachers, and a few support buildings, with a sizeable plot of land for a lakeshore structure.

The academy is relatively new, built only a century and a half ago. The original spirit dancer academy in Aldis was demolished by order of Delsha Artanis, the first ruler of the Empire of Thorns, after the dancers refused to acknowledge her authority. Most of the students and teachers were killed, although a few escaped. They passed on their knowledge in secret and eventually aided the rebellion against the Sorcerer Kings.

The new academy was commissioned by master spirit dancers and sponsored by the Crown. It currently draws far more applications than it can accept, and its teachers are quite selective. Unlike the Royal College, the academy's tuition fees are modest, but its entrance requirements are more strict. There is no appeal if an applicant is rejected, other than applying again some other year.

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MILES
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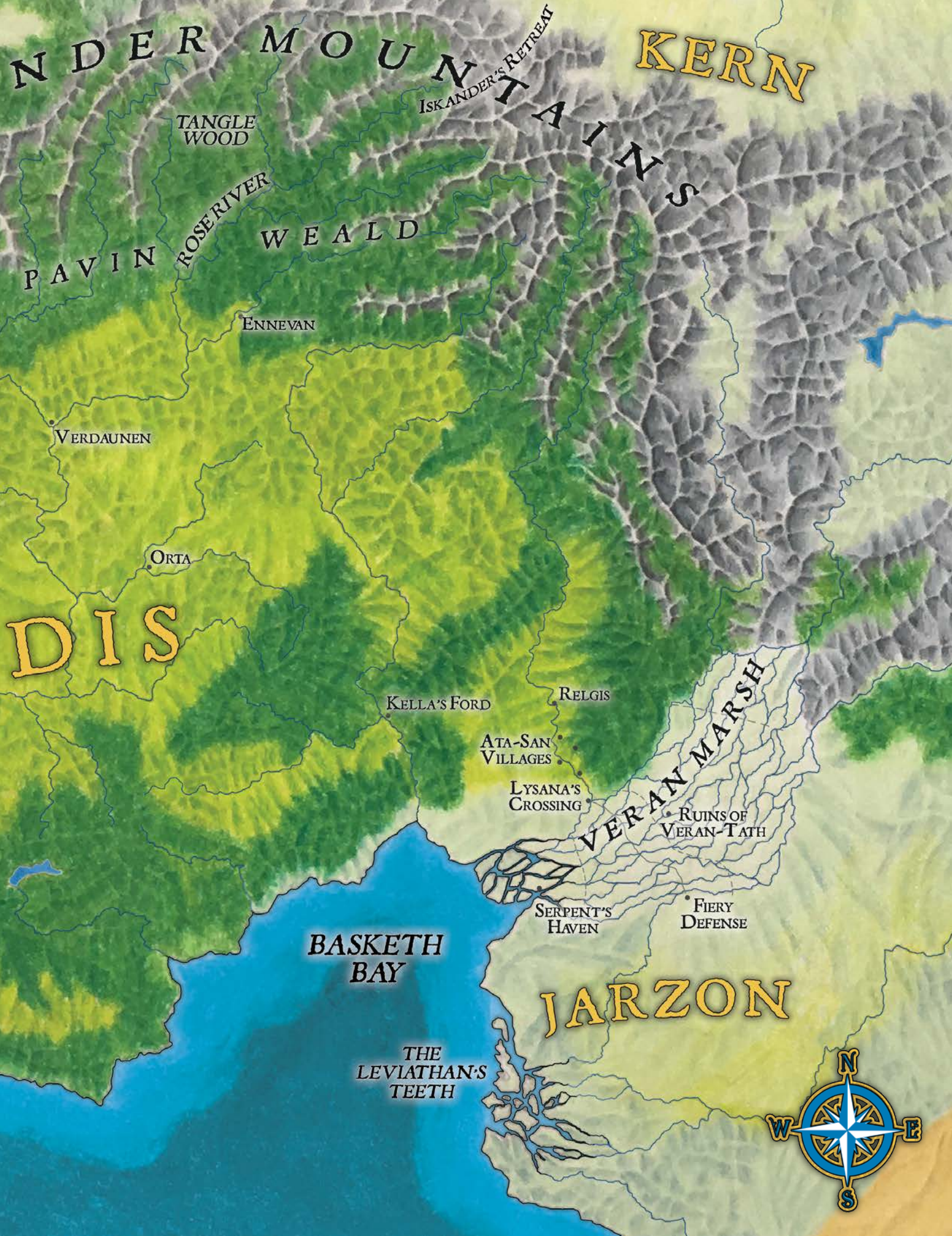
ICE-BI
TRIDENT BAY
REZEAN GULF
LATIK
AL
ALDIS
ROSE RIVER
GARNET
SHARIVEN
ELSPORT
KINGDOM OF THE BLUE ROSE


NDER MOUNTAINS
KERN
ISKANDER'S RETREAT
TANGLE WOOD
ROSE RIVER
PAVIN WEALD
ENNEVAN
VERDAUNEN
ORTA
DIS
KELLA'S FORD
RELGIS
ATA-SAN VILLAGES
LYSANA'S CROSSING
VERAN MARSH
RUINS OF VERAN-TATH
SERPENT'S HAVEN
FIERY DEFENSE
BASKETH BAY
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THE LEVIATHAN'S TEETH
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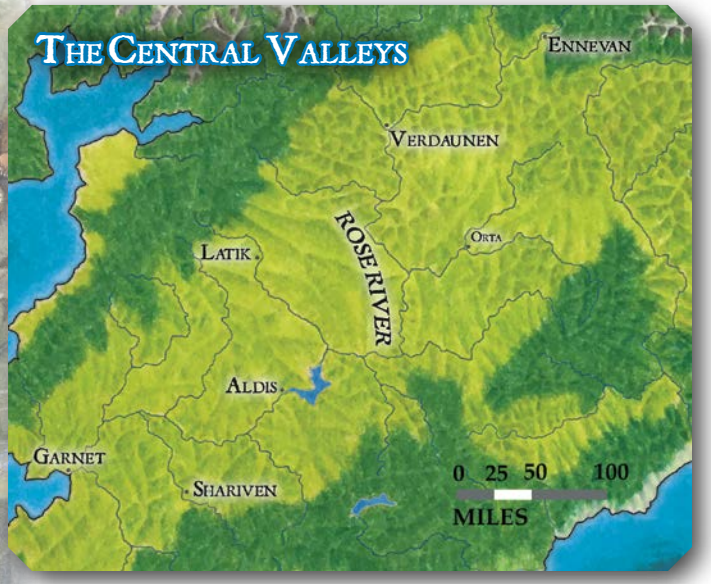
The Central Valleys

The sun-drenched valleys and rolling hills in the center of the Aldin peninsula are the heartland of the kingdom. Numerous villages and towns extend up and down the Rose River and its many tributaries, with the capital standing where the river pours out of the southwestern corner of Lake Vash. The region is the most densely populated and fertile in the kingdom. Its grain, nuts, oil, wine, and cloth are exported widely.

Broad roads, paved with large stones, crisscross the ridges of the region's hills and, combined with river travel, connect the kingdom's communities. Trees in the region mostly grow in carefully cultivated groves on hilltops, often on either side of the roads. Almond, pistachio, and olive groves are especially plentiful. The valleys are devoted to growing grapes, wheat, cotton, and flax. Locals herd goats and reddish pigs along the hillsides, while the kingdom's famous white cattle graze on fallow ground.

Using the white marble found in many low cliffs, people build gleaming white towns and cities, often painted with elaborate murals of animals, plants, and the ocean. The combination of plentiful marble, strong oxen, and the arcane arts of shaping means dwellings are often large. The houses of more prosperous residents are built around square courtyards filled with fruit trees, fountains, statuary, and simple gardens. The region's villages usually have buildings of whitewashed brick instead, roofed with terra cotta tiles. Whether a village or a city, most communities have grid plans and are located near a river or other natural source of fresh water.

Almost half the region's human residents are descendants of the original dark-haired, olive-skinned inhabitants of the central valleys, while the rest belong to a diverse range of heritages, from recent immigrants all the way back to the Old Kingdom. Most live in large extended families, which regularly tell stories about their ancestors to keep their memories alive. Their houses hold not just parents and their children, but also grandparents and unmarried siblings of the parents. The four sides of a traditional Aldin house, surrounding a central courtyard, are arranged so residents can strike a balance between close family ties and privacy.



Individual villages rarely contain more than several hundred people, but each month on the days of the full moon or the feast days of the gods, the populations of several villages gather together. After performing their public or private worship services in honor of the gods, they hold a festival, where peddlers sell goods, traveling merchants come to purchase whatever the locals have to sell, and people sing, dance, drink, gamble, tell stories, and watch visiting entertainers.

During the spring and summer, these festivals are mostly held outdoors, but during the autumn and winter, people hold these festivals in large halls. The location of these festivals rotates from village to village, so all the settlements in an area have their turn. One of the most important results of these festivals is that people have friends and acquaintances in the nearby settlements, strengthening the bonds of friendship and cooperation that are the hallmarks of life in the central valleys. The practice also celebrates freedom in the kingdom, as such gatherings were forbidden under the repressive rule of the Sorcerer Kings.

When people refer to clothing styles in Aldis, they usually mean the type worn in the central valleys. There dress is largely determined by profession and status, and largely independent of gender. Folks often wear their "festival-best" at gatherings, consisting of elaborate and flowing gowns and skirts. Festival-dress tends to be close-fitting through the body with puffy or flared sleeves and wide skirts, either pleated or simply full. Some wear long belted tunics and either close-fitting trousers or tights. Brocade or embroidered vests—buttoned, laced, or designed to be worn open—are a part of most festival garb.

Day-to-day clothing is considerably more practical and less elaborate than festival-dress. In hot weather, clothing on the upper body ranges from a simple laced or buttoned vest worn alone or over a short-sleeved or sleeveless shirt. In the winter, people wear long tunics with slashed sleeves, with strips of brightly colored cloth sewn into the diamond-shaped slashes, or vests over high-collared, long-sleeved shirts. Urban folk wear low leather shoes or elaborately-laced sandals, while nobles and travelers prefer knee-high leather boots.

In addition to being blessed by an ideal climate and fertile soil, farmers in the central valleys have additional leisure time thanks to the use of arcana. Many villages have adepts with some knowledge of the shaping arts, and there are traveling adepts who trade their expertise in return for room, board, and modest fees. In general, farms in the central valleys produce more with less time and effort than that expended in other lands.

Nobles and Envoys in the Central Valleys

In the outlying regions of Aldis, envoys ride circuit, and the distinction between regional and traveling nobles is quite clear. However, the situation is somewhat more complex in the central valleys.

The envoys and traveling nobles who patrol the small farming villages and towns have lives much like their counterparts in eastern Aldis or up near the Ice-Binder Mountains. The nobles and their companions ride circuit from town to town and investigate problems. The only significant differences are that the towns are closer together and the risks of bandits and similar dangers on the paved and well-traveled roads are few. As a result, envoys in these regions visit the towns under their jurisdiction frequently and are responsible for settling more minor disputes. In general, teams of envoys working in the central valleys are given jurisdiction over twice as many towns as envoys in other portions of Aldis, since they can travel from one town to another more easily.

Large towns and small cities are under the jurisdiction of one to three regional nobles and whatever envoys they have assisting them. In addition to those communities, there are five large cities in the central valleys: Aldis, Latik, Orta, Shariven, and Verdaunen. A mixture of regional and traveling nobles administer these metropolises. Up to half a dozen regional nobles are in charge of each city, and up to two dozen traveling nobles, working with teams of envoys, patrol the various districts of these cities. Each noble is assigned a different district. The job of these urban traveling nobles and their teams of envoys are somewhere between social workers and local police officers. Every member of the envoy team is expected to live in the district they are assigned to patrol. Also, while regional nobles typically deal with the problems of the wealthy and the powerful, traveling nobles and their allies primarily focus their efforts on the lives and problems of the various skilled and unskilled workers who live in their cities. Naturally, nobles and envoys who work in cities and large towns are assisted by clerks and bureaucrats who perform the majority of the day-to-day record-keeping a city requires.

Dangers in the Central Valleys

The central valleys are the safest, most carefully patrolled portions of the nation. Although darkfiends occasionally appear from one of the two shadowgates located in this region, this is a rare event, and teams of envoys almost never have to deal with the bandit gangs or bands of shadowspawn that plague outlying regions of Aldis.

While the residents of the central valleys are safer than the residents of the coasts or the far north, this portion of Aldis is not without its dangers. The most serious is the influence of the Silence. Although nobles and envoys investigate reports of criminal activity, if no one is willing to report them, problems can continue for months or even years. Influential Barons and Counts can intimidate or shame people into silence.

Such problems are most common within the various immigrant communities. Among these people, the barriers of language and culture can keep them in silence about internal problems like extortion. The best solution is for members of these communities to join the Sovereign's Finest and aid their fellow envoys in fighting the problems. However, some of the newer communities are wary of envoys, so a noble or envoy must work tirelessly to learn a community's language and culture to properly assist it.

Shadow Cults

The dual, and often related, problems of shadow cults and Kernish spies are a threat in the central valleys, but they are also rare. There are far more tales told about such people than there are actual cultists or spies. When they do appear, however, they can be terrifying.

On the outskirts of the kingdom, the greatest risk for corruption comes from thoughtless or greedy people handling artifacts from the Shadow Wars and being possessed or corrupted by them. In contrast, uncovering such artifacts is a rare event in the central valleys. In this populous region, the majority of artifacts from the Shadow Wars were discovered more than a century ago. However, the anonymity of the larger cities allows shadow cults to flourish or individual sorcerers to go unnoticed for a time.

Eventually, the activities of most shadow cults and sorcerers give them away. The most intelligent and careful members of shadow cults learn to use sorcery to twist the minds of anyone who discovers or opposes them. These cultists sometimes blackmail others by threatening to reveal secrets obtained through psychic arcana, or use Mind Shaping to alter people's memories and behavior. In addition to having no concern for others, many members of these cults consider most people sheep: fit only to be led, controlled, and used.

The most dangerous of these cults are headed by wealthy merchants and powerful nobles. They use their influence to gain access to arcane artifacts, and to acquire sorcerous lore and the histories of ancient cults. Some shadow cults are nothing more than excuses for the leaders, or all of the members, to satisfy their passions for dangerous intoxicants, blackmail, high-stakes gambling, or corrupting the innocent. Others are zealously devoted to the exarchs of Shadow and will not stop till the Shadow swallows the world.

Kernish Spies

Because Aldis opens its borders to refugees and peaceful visitors, a small percentage of the people coming into the country are agents of Kern or Jarzon. Jarzoni agents are mostly spies interested in uncovering secrets about Aldis' military or some other important pieces of information. In contrast, agents of Kern are far more dangerous. In addition to attempting to uncover any weaknesses in Aldis' defenses, Kernish spies also endeavor to sow fear among the populace and to corrupt people into embracing Shadow.

Although Aldis is well defended, detailed information about the movements of the Sovereign's Finest and the disposition of soldiers and their supply caravans could enable small teams of raiders to sneak past border patrols and strike deep into the heart of the kingdom. Because Aldis does not conscript soldiers into the military, there are some regions of the nation less well protected than they should be, but the military makes certain to rotate these weak points so only someone with detailed knowledge of troop movements could strike where the nation is most vulnerable. In addition, the passwords used by Rose Knights and other soldiers who guard important sites, like the Royal Archives, are carefully guarded and changed daily.

The Pavin Weald

The Pavin Weald, a dense forest of oak and maple, fills the northern reaches of Aldis. This region is the wildest and least settled portion of the kingdom, in large part because north of the forest lies the Ice-Binder Mountains, the boundary between Aldis and Kern. No one but griffons, shadowspawn, and bandits call the mountains home, but miners maintain seasonal camps here because of rich veins of silver, shas crystals, and tin. The Sovereign's Finest ride between these camps to help protect them and the miners from the mountains' dangers.

While the mountains themselves never contained any of the great strongholds of the Sorcerer Kings, they hold an unusual number of places of power, where sorcerers built isolated towers to conduct secret rites and experiments. Miners or prospectors occasionally turn up arcane relics in the ruins of those towers or when breaking into subterranean chambers or tunnels. There is also at least one shadowgate lost somewhere in the mountains. Darkfiends emerge from the gate and attack villages in the Pavin Weald every few years.

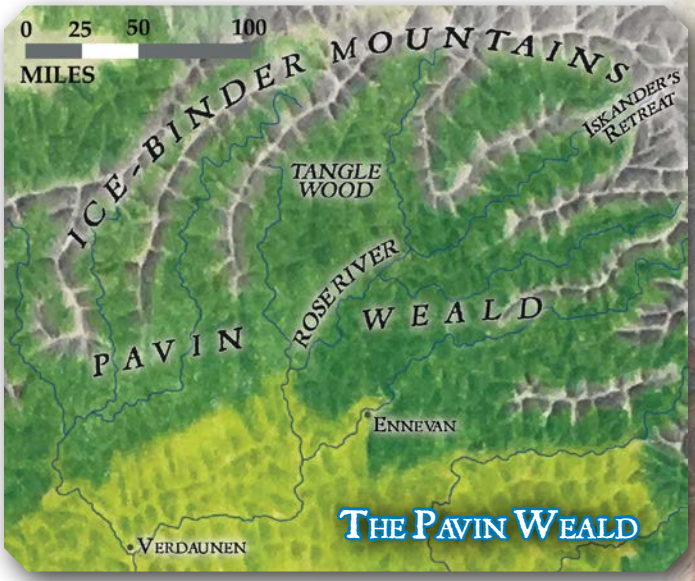
The Pavin Weald extends partway up the slopes of the mountains, further increasing the difficulty of living and working in the foothills of the mighty peaks. Visibility is low, and the dense forest significantly reduces the speed of travel. The forest also gives bandits and creatures many places to hide. Further south, where the foothills end, the forest becomes thicker.

Few humanoids have set foot in the deepest portions of the great forest, where the land itself is replete with arcana. The depths of the Pavin Weald are the only place within Aldis where tree spirits actively appear, working closely with the unicorns to protect and care for the forest. The trees in the deep forest are ancient oaks and huge cedars at least 150 feet tall, the tallest more than twice as high. In addition, most of these trees have a limited awareness, and the difference between the ancient trees and active tree spirits is sometimes unclear.

There are many small settlements on the outskirts of the Pavin Weald, and some villages within it. The unicorns allow villagers to gather fallen wood, edible fruits, acorns, and nuts, and to hunt reasonable amounts of game. Traveling merchants visit these villages to trade worked goods for furs, herbs, and wild mushrooms gathered in the forest. Deeper in the forest, a few small communities live in harmony with rhy-wolves and share their huts with them. These folk distrust strangers and are more comfortable with rhy-wolves than with other humans. Teams of the Sovereign's Finest who visit them must be careful and courteous to avoid antagonizing the forest folk and their lupine companions.

The Sorcerer Kings who ruled the region containing the Pavin Weald tried many times to extract its living and arcane wealth, but their attempts ended in failure. In addition to being a center for the world's inherent arcana, the Pavin Weald was also one of the primary refuges for the rhydan when they fled the hunting parties of the Sorcerer Kings. The presence of large numbers of rhydan combined with the forest's deep arcana prevented it from being logged or otherwise tampered with. As a result, when the Old Kingdom became corrupt and transformed into the Empire of Thorns, many fled to the Pavin Weald to escape the empire's horrors.

Refugees willing to live in harmony with the forest were relatively safe. As they came to know the forest, they also came to know the rhydan. The Pavin Weald was one of the places where the alliance between humans and rhydan was forged and formed the basis of the Great Rebellion. As a result, Aldins consider the forest a sacred place to preserve and protect.



The Forest Folk

One of the most isolated groups of people in Aldis are the mysterious forest folk. Despite the forest's forbidding nature, these people have not only made it their home, they have allied with the rhydan who guard it and become a part of the web of life in the forest. Scholars and mystics who have lived among the forest folk long enough to understand their ways and the innate power of the Pavin Weald speculate that these people are well on their way to becoming guardians of the forest, much like the rhydan.

When people fled into the Weald to escape the Sorcerer Kings, most remained on the outskirts and did their best to maintain their old way of life. They cultivated small garden patches in clearings, and while they avoided harming the forest, they also did not attempt to understand it or become part of it. A few of the refugees fell in love with the ancient wilderness and tried to understand it. These people gradually moved deeper into the forest, and while the densest portions of the forest were forbidden to them, they lived among the huge ancient oaks and the vast cedars deeper in the Weald than the birches, maples, and willows on the outskirts.

The Magic of the Weald

In addition to the devoted rhydan, the Pavin Weald has defenses of its own. Both the land and its trees have an innate resistance to arcana used to clear, thin, or harm the forest in any way. Anyone attempting to do so must expend a fatigue level, like overcoming a Ward arcanum, in addition to any fatigue the arcana normally requires.

Harm inflicted on the forest causes it to unleash a psychic cry of pain, with effects like a deathcry (see **Psychic Contact**, **Chapter 4: Arcana**). This is audible to any creature with the Animism or Psychic talent in the bounds of the forest, including all rhydan. Those hearing the forest cry out know the approximate location of its pain but not the exact cause or the extent of the harm, although they are sure to investigate.

Lastly, anyone who attempts to use arcana to harm the forest, or inflicts any physical abuse upon it (using axes, fire, and so forth), suffers a +8 increase in target numbers for tests related to survival. They find it far more difficult to gather food, find clean water, and avoid natural hazards and the effects of the elements. The forest itself seems to conspire against them, leading to tales that it is haunted by vengeful spirits. This penalty remains until the perpetrators absolve their misdeeds, often with the aid of an Animism adept.

The first forest folk learned to survive using nothing that did not come from their forest. They ate fruits, tubers, and mushrooms, as well as the small animals they hunted. They also entered into closer companionship with the rhydan there. The refugees who fled into the outskirts of the forest formed alliances with the rhydan to work together to free the surrounding lands from the rule of the Sorcerer Kings, but this agreement was only a loose affiliation. Even today, only rhy-cats tend to form close ties with the two-legged inhabitants of Aldis. In contrast, because they lived deeper in the forest than other humans and had far more regular interactions with the rhydan there, the ancestors of the forest folk formed deep friendships with the rhydan, especially rhy-wolves. A few of the forest folk even managed to become close to the mysterious unicorns.

The early forest folk were few in number. During the Great Rebellion, only a handful of them remained within the Pavin Weald. The vast majority ventured out to fight the Sorcerer Kings and to help hunt down wandering bands of darkfiends and shadowspawn. Unfortunately, most of them were killed and many survivors left the forest behind to help rebuild Aldis. For almost a century after the end of the Great Rebellion, there were only a few hundred people living within the Pavin Weald. This small community might have died out within a generation or two had not it received an influx of people from Kern. Slightly more than 200 years ago, an exceptional woman named Fallia led a group of almost a thousand refugees out of Kern and across the Ice-binder Mountains. To perform this exodus, she organized a plot that involved sabotage followed by a mass uprising that took place during the Lich King's ill-fated attack on Aldis.

Guided by a series of visions, Fallia took her followers across the Ice-Binder Mountains and into the Pavin Weald. There they met with the last remnants of the earlier forest folk, and the two groups became one people. The previous residents of the forest taught the new arrivals the secrets of survival there, and Fallia was able to negotiate an even closer alliance with the rhydan, who were impressed by the clarity and wisdom of her visions. Since that time, other refugees from Kern have been drawn to the forest, as have some people from elsewhere in Aldis. Today, there are thousands of forest folk.

Fallia and her people were human, except for a few vata who kept their existence secret from the Lich King. Like most humans in Kern, she viewed night people as agents of the Lich King and Shadow. While the descendents of her people know the night people also suffered under Jarek's yoke, the forest folk do not believe night people have suffered equally, and maintain they are more easily drawn to Shadow than other races and therefore cannot be trusted.

Despite this belief, night people are free to enter the Pavin Weald, and a few have settled there. The kingdom's laws would not permit them to be excluded, but this does not stop forest folk from behaving coldly toward them. Although most forest folk communities are unfriendly

to night people, a few have accepted them. In almost all cases, these night people are envoys who have spent years getting to know members of the community and who have distinguished themselves by performing some act of heroism in defense of the forest.

Whether they live within the forest or on the outskirts, the forest folk share much in common. Descended from refugees from Kern, the folk are generally tall and blond, with pale skin and blue eyes. Vata births are not uncommon, and the forest folk treat the vata as especially blessed. Their view of night people is not so favorable. Despite living in Aldis for almost two centuries, the forest folk annually retell stories of sorcerers and night people mistreating their ancestors. While the forest folk obey the laws of Aldis and try not to harm anyone without just cause, they do not allow night people to sleep in their villages and actively drive out any sorcerers. If night people arrive, the locals close their doors against them and no one talks to them, except for the village elder, who asks their business and urges them to be on their way. If a night person arrives in the company of the Sovereign's Finest or is a traveling noble, the forest folk talk to them and provide lodging on the outskirts of their village, but the visitors receive far less cooperation than they otherwise might.

The villages of the forest folk are usually small, between thirty and 300 people living in a loose spiral of wooden houses around a central plaza. The elder, the priest, and the healer, if a village is lucky enough to have one, live in houses facing this plaza. The elder is a village's leader, chosen by informal election. Only people who have grown children are considered mature enough to hold this position. The priest is a village's religious leader, practicing the path of Falliaism, after Fallia, the brave woman whose faith and determination led their ancestors out of Kern. Worshippers believe the god Felisar spoke to Fallia in visions and helped her succeed. They also believe Fallia now sits at the god's right hand. Felisar is considered a special patron of the forest folk. In midwinter, children believe Felisar visits each village, bringing small gifts to those who have practiced charity during the year. In the smallest villages, the priest, elder, and healer are often the same person.

The forest folk subsist on the bounty of the Pavin Weald, making certain not to take too much from it. They almost never see the secretive unicorns, but nonetheless revere them as servants of the gods and abide by their wishes. The villagers eat bread and porridge made from nut flour, a mixture of ground acorns and pine nuts. They vary their diet with fruits, game they hunt in the forest, and the large and abundant trout they catch in cold mountain streams.

The ordinary clothing of the forest folk consists of furs and elaborately tooled leather, usually tanned buckskin. This is combined with woolens woven from the fleece of swift mountain sheep and occasional pieces of heavy cotton clothing, acquired through trade. Heavy-knit sweaters decorated with complex knot patterns, similar to those of their leatherwork, are popular. They wear either high leather boots or soft leather shoes. Buckskin trousers are common among hunters and foresters. Most forest folk wear either laced buckskin shirts or leather vests with shirts of linen or wool they import from the central valleys. When traveling, they wear a calf-length duster. Split up the back for riding, these coats are one of the forest folk's more popular exports.

Tor Kiernan, the Lost Seer

A capable and noteworthy envoy of the Finest, Tor Kiernan was born near the Pavin Weald to one of the local forest folk and a traveling Roamer, who chanced to fall in love and settled there. Tor displayed arcane talents at a fairly young age—particularly spontaneous visions—leading to him being apprenticed to a skilled seer in Aldis.

Throughout his education in the capital city, Tor Kiernan refined his visionary gifts and studied history, culture, and arcane lore. He proved a distinguished scholar as well as a seer, and earned himself a place as an envoy in the Sovereign's Finest. During his service, he employed his skills to uncover, retrieve, or eliminate artifacts from the Empire of Thorns, bringing an especially large number of them safely back to the archives in Aldis to learn more about them and how to safely dispose of them. He also became noted for his expertise with shadowgates, and was personally involved in dealing with two of them.

Tor Kiernan's claim to fame, however, is based not on his distinguished service but his current absence. After his last expedition several months ago, Kiernan apparently returned to Aldis—as he usually did—to file reports and catalog his finds. Instead—and much to everyone's surprise—he suddenly resigned his position with the Finest with no explanation, and left the city alone under the cover of darkness that same night. Rumor and speculation have been rampant since Tor's abrupt disappearance, and colleagues tell conflicting stories of what he disclosed to them. A former lover says Tor informed him he was going to the Veran Marsh as a result of something he had discovered. A fellow envoy says Tor Kiernan told him he was guided by a vision to meet with rhy-wolf packs in the Pavin Weald, while a friend insists Kiernan was headed to the coast, pursuing a lead on another artifact. None of these stories have been proven, and the Sovereign's Finest are quietly investigating their colleague's sudden and uncharacteristic disappearance for evidence of any foul play or outside influence.

Wolf-Kin

More closely allied to rhydan than any other humanoids, wolf-kin are a mixture of humans and vata and are the most insular of the forest folk. In their villages, they share their huts and the hunt with rhy-wolves, and everyone

learns the Psychic Contact arcanum at a young age, allowing them to communicate with their rhydan friends. Rhy-wolf cubs and wolf-kin children play together and often form bonds of friendship like the bonds between brothers.

The few outsiders who visit wolf-kin communities are often surprised to see how close the wolves and humanoids are to one another, and how much their respective cultures blend together. In these villages, there are pairs of rhy-wolves who live together as life partners, as humanoids are accustomed to doing, and there are groups of humans who live in households structured much like wolf packs, as rhy-wolves usually do. There are even small packs that include both humanoid and rhy-wolf members. Wolf-kin society is unique in Aldis; it is the only one where humanoids and rhydan live side by side and share their daily lives with one another. Many other rhydan regard the rhy-wolves who live with the wolf-kin as eccentric, in exactly the same way many humans think the wolf-kin are exceedingly odd.

Other forest folk, traveling nobles, teams of the Sovereign's Finest, and the other rhydan of the Pavin Weald have cordial interactions with the wolf-kin. However, most wolf-kin have a mild distrust of outsiders who do not understand their ways, and outsiders find that wolf-kin can be somewhat strange to interact with because they think almost as much like rhy-wolves as they do like humans or vata. There is some evidence that the wolf-kin are in the process of being transformed by living so deeply in the forest and growing up among rhy-wolves. Wolf-kin are born with innate arcane talent, just like the vata and the rhydan.

Background: Wolf-Kin

These residents of the depths of the Pavin Weald share their communities and lives with rhy-wolves. Wolf-kin tend toward lighter hair and complexions than Aldins; blond and reddish hair are common. Men are often heavily bearded and have abundant body hair. Although some have blue eyes, the most common eye color is a brilliant gold, similar to the eyes of wolves. All have at least some talent for psychic arcana, and animism arcana are common among them. Some wolf-kin have slightly pointed ears, subtly projecting jaws, and an unusually keen sense of smell.

Wolf-kin have the same abilities as vata'an, even though they are human, and should take the Forest Folk background (see **Chapter 2** for details). They have either the Animism talent or the Psychic talent.

Rhydan

In the settlements of forest folk who are not wolf-kin, there is always a person or a family responsible for dealing with the rhydan. These rhy-speakers, as they are known, are trained in psychic arcana and spend a good portion of their time deep in the forest, communicating with and getting to know the rhydan, and acting as diplomats to the rhydan inhabitants of the forest.

The Pavin Weald is home to a number of rhy-wolves and rhy-cats, as well as unicorns. The majority of rhy-speakers confine their diplomacy to negotiations with the rhy-wolves and rhy-cats, and most are rhy-bonded themselves. The most skilled of them journey to the very heart of the forest and communicate directly with the unicorns.

Unicorns

Unicorns are the most powerful guardians of the Pavin Weald. They are drawn to the forest and willing to protect it with their lives. Like the tree spirits, unicorns dwell in the deepest and most mysterious portions of the weald. Aided by the forest's innate arcana, all the unicorns within it are in continuous psychic contact, as if in psychic rapport with one another. As a result, they can call one another for aid in an instant. While the spirits care for the trees and help deal with the results of any natural disasters, the

The Unicorn-Bonded

Rhy-bonding is rare, and bonding with a unicorn even rarer still. It is exceptional for anyone but forest folk to bond with a unicorn. Unicorns are also fiercely protective creatures and never turn their back on suffering or allow their companion to do the same. While unicorns understand discretion and are willing to wait for a good opportunity to deal with those who needlessly harm others, they will not rest until the threats they see have been dealt with, and they will expect their companion to assist them in these endeavors.

Using Relationship Intensity to rhy-bond with a unicorn is at the Narrator's discretion over the course of the game, since the character must first encounter a unicorn willing to enter into such a deep relationship. See **Relationships** in **Chapter 2**, particularly the **Rhy-Bonded** section, for additional information. An opportunity for a character to become unicorn-bonded is best handled as a substantial reward in play. See **Chapter 11** for more on rewards.

unicorns guard the forest against interference by humans, shadowspawn, darkfiends, and the unliving.

While the majority of the people in northern Aldis know that attempting to harm the Pavin Weald is foolish, darkfiends and the unliving attack it with abandon, wishing to feed on its arcana. In addition, the Pavin Weald is the portion of Aldis closest to Kern. While the dark lords of Kern do not understand the full nature of the forest's arcana, they seek to control or exploit it, sending shadowspawn and sorcerers into the forest. The unicorns do not hesitate to slay these intruders and call upon rhy-cats, rhywolves, and, through them, the forest folk to help protect the forest from the forces of Shadow.

Trade Among the Forest Folk

Before regular trade was reestablished throughout Aldis after the Great Rebellion, the lives of the forest folk were hard because they could not forge metal and were rarely able to trade for all the metal objects they needed. However, in time they learned to distill special plant resins. When wood from the trunks of fallen oaks was soaked in these resins, it became as hard and as durable as iron. The forest folk also learned that some of the great hardwoods that grow in the deepest portions of the forest are naturally as tough as metal. Their shapers use plant-shaping to make pieces of these fallen giants into useful tools and weapons. Today, these ironwood knives are popular trade items.

The restoration of long-distance trade meant the forest folk were able to acquire those goods impossible to manufacture in their forests. Today, they mostly purchase metal, cloth, and shas crystals and trade furs and a multitude of herbs, medicines, dyes, and objects made from exquisitely carved wood.

The Trebutane

Immigrants from Kern, the Trebutane live within but largely apart from the kingdom of Aldis. The Trebutane lived a precarious life under the rule of the Lich King, until their isolated communities came under attack. The surviving Trebutane fled the country, forced to abandon homes, heirlooms, and even the bodies of their dead, and sought refuge in Aldis. In the years since their arrival as refugees, their somber clothes, strangely-spiced foods, and sometimes bitter feuds have become common along the northern edge of the Kingdom of the Blue Rose.

History

Centuries ago, the Trebutane began as a group of clans in Kern, but now exist almost solely in scattered communities in northern Aldis. They follow a strict religious code and have a reputation for standoffishness and hard work. Each Trebutane community centers on a Hara, or religious scholar, who studies and interprets the collection of sacred writings that form the core of Trebutane society. Haras tend to have different interpretations, and the history of the Trebutane is full of disagreements—and sometimes violence—until the birth of the first Highblood three hundred years ago. Rellian Highblood, with her talent for peacemaking, united the quarreling factions, and her descendants acted as mediators, peacemakers, and the guides of the Trebutane subculture in Kern in those days.

The Lich King tolerated the Trebutane for many years, for they worked diligently and required little of the brutal motivation used to spur his other mortal subjects. To his perverse delight, they viewed life in Kern as a form of honorable suffering and regularly fulfilled their duties, even though they were appalled by Jarek's evil. He was happy to employ them as architects and engineers in various building projects, given their skills. He also found amusement in their theological disputes and would send covert agents to sow further discord. He was even willing to turn a blind eye toward their worship of Aulora and Goia, since the heart of their devotions belonged to Anwaren, whose worship was tolerated in the kingdom, as the "father" of the exarchs. All of this changed when Iran Highblood called upon the Trebutane to throw off the Lich King's yoke and cease abetting the tyrant's schemes through their labors.

Iran's charisma and bravery rallied the Trebutane to his cause, and they seized control of one of the Lich King's mines. Jarek was no longer amused. He ordered the extermination of the Trebutane. The Knights of the Skull rode from one community to another, slaying the people and pillaging their valuables, leaving the rest in flames. Iran, and every other remaining Highblood, was captured and executed. Many Trebutane escaped, having been psychically warned by people in communities under attack. The Trebutane who survived the difficult passage over the Ice-Binder Mountains settled in Aldis. A few remained behind in Kern. Some of those went into hiding, plotting to destroy the Lich King someday, while others offered themselves in service to him, their hearts corrupted by a desire for power.

In the years since the pogrom in Kern, peace among the squabbling Trebutane factions in Aldis has been precarious. More and more, disputes are solved with fists and bludgeons rather than words. Without some unifying element like the Highbloods, the Trebutane may fall back into their old religious feuds.

Society

Life among the Trebutane is one of close-knit family ties governed by rigorously observed customs that guide everything from food preparation to clothing styles to politics and theology.

Trebutane are almost entirely human, although to be Trebutane is a cultural and societal choice, rather than

Trebutane Characters

Trebutane characters—those raised in the culture—have their own Background, the equivalent of the Lar'tyan background from the Character Creation chapter in terms of choice of Ability Focuses. Trebutane speak Aldin and their own dialect of Aldin derived from the language of the Old Kingdom. Trebutane raised in Kern usually have the Kernish or Outcast backgrounds.

necessarily a birthright. Their communities have a small handful of vata'an and vata'sha (a legacy of their time in Kern). The status of night people is heavily debated, some Trebutane subscribing to the notion that they are innately corrupt and incapable of following the religious strictures of the Trebutane culture, others believing they are capable of finding truth and the favor of the gods through right living, if given the opportunity. Thus far, no night people have sought to join the Trebutane community. Likewise, although the Trebutane have an even more neutral view of rhydan, none of the awakened ones of the wilds have sought to become Trebutane.

Women rule the household, maintain finances, own most property, and pass their wealth and influence on to their daughters. Trebutane women tend to be architects, engineers, adepts, bankers, or artisans. The men tend to be scholars, Haras, or warriors. Many study the Trebutane religious texts, interpret their laws, and fire the religious passions dominating Trebutane politics.

Trebutane households are large, made up of extended families, and households who follow the same Hara usually gather together in the same community. Prior to the pogrom in Kern, all Trebutane in the same Kernish town and in the same family were members of the same Trebutane faction. Today, Trebutane in different factions live in the same towns in Aldis. Rubbing shoulders with different factions has increased the tensions among the Trebutane, and the feuding the Highbloods once kept in check has reappeared.

Occasionally, a Trebutane is won over by a competing faction, which is a terrible time for any Trebutane family. Arguments and fights escalate until the "disloyal" convert leaves family and home behind to seek shelter in the new faction. Such newly-converted Trebutane are often especially passionate and are used by their Haras as toughs for their faction. These converts are rarely accepted completely into their new community; having already betrayed the faction of their birth, they are viewed with some suspicion.

Trebutane homes are usually walled compounds with an open courtyard in the middle. Balconies and doors open onto the courtyard, which has a single main gate or door to the outside. Because of their long history of violence, both internally and externally, there are few openings to public streets. Every married woman has their own small apartment within the compound, and there is a scholars' wing for the Hara, if there is one in the family, and any scholars. Unmarried adult men live in the scholars' wing, while women live with their mothers until they marry. Children live with their parents but are cared for by any Trebutane adult around. All Trebutane, men and women, help raise children, and no matter how violent a feud may get, Trebutane warriors will never harm a child and go out of their way to help them, if necessary.

Trebutane scriptures provide guidance on the kinds of food that are acceptable and methods for cooking, spicing, and serving it. Most of the religious interpretations ban the eating of fish; a few extreme ones forbid the eating of any meat. Otherwise, the Trebutane prefer highly spiced foods: pungent curries, peppery stews, garlic, salt, fermented bean pastes, and the like. In many cases, men and women are not supposed to eat in one another's presence, and in all interpretations, men and women must use separate dishes and eating utensils.

This separation of the sexes is common throughout Trebutane life, although men and women are free to speak with one another. Among Trebutane youth, friendly rivalries with the opposite sex are frequent and same-sex romances are widespread, with most of the youths going on to marry a member of the opposite sex, once they're of age. Some Trebutane, with their parents' consent, instead remain with a *caria* sweetheart of their youth, but there is no marriage of *caria daunen* among the Trebutane, and same-sex relationships are viewed as youthful and immature.

Religion

The Trebutane focus their worship on a triad of gods: Anwaren, whom they call the Great Lord, and Aulora and Goia, his consorts. The Trebutane believe Anwaren oversees all spiritual and scholarly pursuits, while the two goddesses are the architects and overseers of worldly affairs. In Trebutane tales, Anwaren is the ultimate scholar, the Great Hara, and his wars are fought in court rooms, lecture halls, and temples instead of battlefields. A sharp wit and deep knowledge is valued by Anwaren, more than physical strength or weapon skills. If war is required, he sends Aulora to guide his soldiers, and when his faithful die in the tales, he gathers the wisest and most courageous among them to his side so that they may share his wisdom and companionship.

The Trebutane also believe the three gods reveal themselves to certain worshipers, the prophets of the Trebutane. Their writings constitute the Trebutane scriptures, the Har'Anwan, "the roots of the mountain." Haras spend their lives studying these scriptures and interpreting them for their people, yet all Trebutane are expected to have a basic familiarity with the scriptures. Dinner conversation often centers on discussions and teachings of the sacred texts.

Many of the scriptures contain guidelines and prohibitions about dress, food, marriage, and many other aspects of life. Some of the texts pass on knowledge through parables and hymns, while all of them are clever keys to memorization and help the Trebutane preserve their

knowledge throughout the upheavals in their lives. One of their most persistent legends is of a Lost Prophecy, a long-sought addition to the scriptures that is supposed to reveal the glorious future of the Trebutane people.

Clothing

On some things, the scriptures are clear, and all Trebutane factions demand modest dress for men and women. Generally, Trebutane wear long dark-colored robes or coats when leaving their homes. Men wear wide-brimmed hats, often decorated with silver and gold bands, gifts from a sweetheart or wife. Married men also wear rings and bangles, displaying their wife's wealth and influence. Women wear a stiff headdress with a panel in the back from which flutter many multicolored ribbons.

Even children wear little black robes, and both girls and boys wear their hair in a single long braid, which is only unwound once they marry. Traditionally, Hara wear robes of dark red, representing the blood sacrificed for faith. They shave their heads and facial hair, unlike most Trebutane men, who have both long hair and beards.

When armed, men carry slender short swords, often concealed in their robes, and daggers. Women usually carry clubs, spears, or daggers, if weapons are necessary.

At home, in private, the Trebutane wear somber colors—dark blues, reds, deep greens, and browns—but the styles are frequently more revealing; a blouse may dip to display a fair amount of cleavage, and wide, brightly woven belts, almost like corsets, reveal the shape of a woman's waist and curve of her hips. Sleeveless shirts and tights or snug trousers are common, but these garments are concealed beneath the robes worn outside of the comfort of the home.

The Southern Coasts

Toward the southern coasts of Aldis, the land rises and becomes more arid. The people living along the shore are mostly fisher folk, who also herd sheep, goats, and pigs. Their architecture is similar to that of the central valleys, and the people look much the same, except for being swarthier on average. Because of the appearance and culture they share with the inhabitants of the Scatterstar Archipelago, coastal folk are, somewhat inaccurately, called islanders by people in other parts of the kingdom. Fully a seventh of the inhabitants of the coasts are sea-folk.

Life on the southern coasts is less idyllic than in the central valleys. In the winter, there are harsh storms and the sea is treacherous enough that small boats are periodically lost. In these stormy months, many coastal people stay indoors, weaving and dyeing cloth or carving bones and shells. In response to this life, the fisher folk have evolved a social system known as the hearth. A hearth is a multi-partner marriage, like star marriages elsewhere, but often larger and with new people marrying into the hearth over time. Each hearth lives in a single rambling house.

The basic plan of these homes is four wings arranged around a central room with a large fireplace and a sturdy dining table. New wings are added when the arrival of new children or spouses requires the hearth to expand. Most hearths have between two and two dozen members. It is common for hearth members to work together, and the crews of many fishing boats are often members of a single hearth. Hearths frequently include both herders and fishers, both to minimize tragedy—a single work accident cannot orphan their children—and so problems with either their herds or fishing cannot impoverish the hearth. Members of a hearth are extremely close, and although the oldest and the youngest members of a hearth marriage may be more than thirty years apart in age, the coastal people consider them all each other's spouses. Hearths include humans, sea-folk, and, occasionally, vata.

The southern coasts and the Scatterstar islands are the harshest and most rugged portions of Aldis. Their winter storms can keep fishing boats marooned on shore for as long as a week or two, and the land is sufficiently rocky that growing crops is difficult. Only the presence of adepts who have mastered shaping earth, plants, water, and wind allows the people to live without a constant risk of starvation or death.

In addition to rocky soil, the sea just off the coast contains a multitude of rocks and is exceedingly dangerous during storms. Nevertheless, there are also excellent harbors where ships from Aldis can sail out to trade with different nations. Most of the settlements on the coast are small towns and fishing villages, which rarely contain more than a thousand inhabitants, while most have only a few hundred. However, the coast of Aldis is also home to several cities, the largest of which are the ports of Garnet and Elsport.

Garnet: The Port of Aldis

At the mouth of the Rose River lies the largest port in Aldis and the surrounding lands: Garnet, a city designed to display the kingdom's prosperity. More than half the sea

traffic in the nation stops in the city, which is one-third the size of the capital. Garnet is also a stopover between the sea and the Rose River. The river is wide and navigable all the way to the city of Aldis, but not deep enough for most seafaring vessels. When these ships dock in Garnet, their cargoes are transferred to smaller boats or flat-bottomed barges, which travel upriver and along the tributaries in the central valleys. Vessels sail from Garnet to Aldis in four to five days.

While the southern coasts have a reputation for being somewhat dour, Garnet shares none of that reputation. Its inhabitants are more open with their feelings and more accepting of strangers than people from the typical coastal settlements. The city is a bustling metropolis, filled with people from the various cultures and backgrounds living in Aldis, including Rezeans, Roamers, and even a small community of people whose ancestors fled from Jarzon. Because it is the largest Aldin port, it also contains a thriving community of people from Lar'tya. Coastal folk, living in their large hearth families, make up about a third of the city's population.

Like the cities of the central valleys, the building of Garnet are built largely of marble. All its public buildings are painted with brightly-colored murals and have long, elegant colonnades, and the streets are wide and paved. The city's overall shape is triangular. The docks and associated warehouses make up the longest side of the triangle, while the opposite point of the triangle sits on the Rose River.

From both sea and land, the city's most obvious feature is its lighthouse, the Beacon of Garnet, located on one of the breakers just off the coast. This tall, rectangular marble tower is fifty feet wide and more than 350 feet high. A large shas crystal lights it. The rotating beam from the Beacon can be seen for miles out to sea and helps guide ships to port even in the worst of storms.

Elsport: Gateway to the Sea

Elsport is a fraction of the size of Garnet, and almost its entire population was born on the coast or in the Scatterstar Archipelago. Elsport is the largest city, with the deepest natural harbor, anywhere near the archipelago and therefore the port where islanders primarily come to trade. The rest of the peninsula's coastline is jagged, at best suitable for small fishing vessels.

The hardy islanders come to the city to sell fish, pearls, and other riches of the sea, using their profits to purchase goods made on the mainland, including items made with shas crystals, fine metalwork, wood, cloth, and medicinal plants. Several of the large Aldin merchant houses have agents in Elsport to trade with the islanders. Some of islanders also come to the city to visit family; a quarter of the city's population is from the islands, and these mainland islanders maintain close ties with friends and relatives still in the archipelago.

Elsport is less than twenty miles from the nearest island in the archipelago and 250 miles away from the furthest. Sailing from Elsport to the furthest island takes just over five days in all but the worst weather. In the stormy months of autumn and winter, a large and sturdy trade ship sets out from Elsport monthly to sail from island to island.

Like most coastal settlements, Elsport is made from gray native rock and is a low, flat, rectangular city, where the buildings have thick walls, small windows, and tightly fitting doors, designed to resist heavy winds and rains. Since it is at the end of a peninsula extending into the Western Ocean, it receives the brunt of the winter's cloudbursts.

Despite these storms, the city has an excellent harbor, for a series of offshore rocks form a half-circle that shelters it. The city was built on the ruins of the Old Kingdom city of Ellendar. During that era, powerful adepts shaped the harbor rocks to form a breakwater rising twenty feet above sea level with two openings, one for ships to enter, the other for them to depart.

Elsport is less than a third the size of Ellendar, which was destroyed more than 500 years ago. Most of the old city's ruins were razed when Elsport was built, yet residents occasionally discover passages to ancient basements or catacombs, and there are ruins above ground to the north and west of the city. Envoys and scholars examined the exposed ruins long ago and scavengers picked over everything they overlooked, but once in great while, relics from the Old Kingdom are discovered in subterranean chambers and passages. There are also persistent rumors that pirates and wreckers land their boats nearby and smuggle their booty into the city via ancient tunnels stretching from hidden coves into the heart of Elsport.

The Lost Tomb of Delsha Artanis

Elsport's greatest buried secret is also its greatest threat. Delsha Artanis was the dread sorcerer who founded and then ruled the Empire of Thorns until her death hundreds of years ago. Shortly after she perished, the empire fragmented into a squabbling host of petty kingdoms. Some of Delsha's successors banded together to build her a tomb in Ellendar, but the tomb was not a memorial, rather a prison for Artanis' corrupt spirit, warded around with arcane sigils and buried, hopefully, for all time.

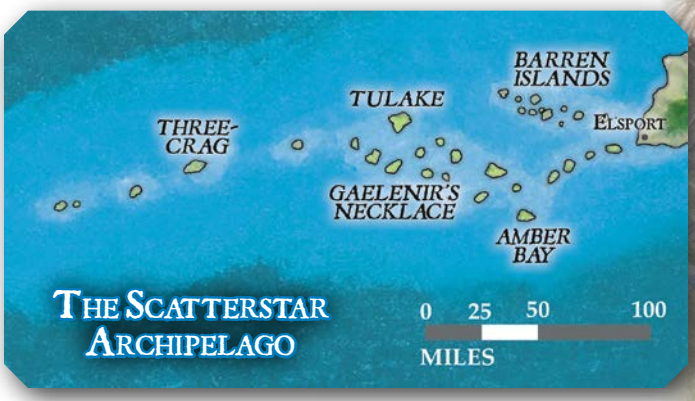
During the Shadow Wars and the Great Rebellion, the location of the tomb was lost. When the ruins of Ellendar were rebuilt as Elsport, no one suspected they were building over the final resting place of the most evil of the Sorcerer Kings. While Delsha Artanis' body was arcanely cremated, reduced to ash and confined in a crystalline urn, remnants of her power and corruption have begun to seep from the tomb like toxins leeching into the soil and water. Elsport has seen an increase in incursions of the unliving in recent years, as well as a rise in shadow cult activity and petty crime. As yet, adepts and envoys of the Crown have not determined the cause for the shadow that grows deeper in the port city. Hopefully they will do so before an ambitious sorcerer or shadow cultist discovers the hidden entrance to Artanis' tomb and the potential power lurking within, perhaps enough to start the bleak era of the Sorcerer Kings anew.

The Scatterstar Archipelago

Named for the glimmering mica in their sandy beaches, the twenty-two islands of the Scatterstar Archipelago are home to thousands of people. They extend from the southern coast of Aldis, and range between four and fifty square miles in size. The islands are rocky, but their thin soil grows excellent dates, almonds, and pistachios. The smallest islands contain five or six good-sized hearths. A fifth of the inhabitants of the archipelago are sea-folk.

During the winter, storms regularly batter the islands. Lacking breakwaters or high cliffs, the islanders have no way to retreat from the sea and must brave it to catch food. They have close ties to rhy-fen, however, and most fishing boats go out with an escort of two or three of these aquatic rhydan. Fishers and rhy-fen split the day's catch. After the rhy-fen herd a school of fish into waiting nets, the fishers let part of the school escape through a narrow opening. The rhy-fen lie in wait for the fish to emerge from the net and eat their fill. Between the sea-folk in these communities and the aid provided by rhy-fen, the islanders are quite capable of surviving the trials of the open ocean; however, storms and sea monsters are still threats, as are corrupt sea-folk and their shark allies.

Landlubbers who visit the islands must prove themselves worthy of respect because the islanders put more stock in seamanship than almost anything else. If visitors spend time assisting with a hearth's day-to-day work or learn how to fish or handle a boat, they have a chance of earning the islanders' esteem, if not their loyalty and affection. The Sovereign's Council assigns nobles and envoys to the islands who have some experience with seamanship or who could benefit from a dose of humility served by



the dour, pragmatic islanders. Those who cannot adapt are reassigned. Those who thrive often end up staying and marrying into a hearth.

On both the islands and the southern coasts, black oilskin cloaks and long coats are the fisher folk's most immediately recognizable garb. Since the weather rarely dips near freezing and swimming in shoes is more difficult, fisher folk wear sandals that are low and can be easily kicked off if the wearer needs to swim. Those working on board boats frequently go barefoot.

The fisher folk often wrap their linen or wool trousers with narrow leather straps for ease of mobility. These trousers and thigh-length tunics, belted with rope or eel leather, are the common clothes for all. In the winter, they wear long-sleeved woolen tunics or heavy woolen sweaters. In the summer, many wear belted linen vests or halters, or sleeveless or short-sleeved linen tunics.

Several types of local seashells produce dark blue and vivid teal pigments. In addition to selling this dye to traders, fisher folk dye their own clothing with it. Well-off people often wear blue tunics or trousers. For others, colored stripes around the collar and hem of their tunic, or a blue belt or scarf, must suffice.

Tulake Island

The largest and most populous of the islands in the archipelago is Tulake Island, named for the pair of large freshwater lakes in its interior. Tulake Island is nine miles long and slightly more than six miles wide at its widest point. Between the two lakes, Lake Sulafin and Emerald Hero Lake, stands the tallest mountain in the archipelago, Mount Trislan, an extinct volcano almost 2,500 feet above sea level.

Unlike most of the islands of the archipelago, Tulake Island has both large forests of hardwoods and extensive growing lands, where the inhabitants cultivate olives, almonds, dates, barley, wheat, and other crops. In addition to the rich, volcanic soil, the island's fertility is due to the presence of high, narrow coral breakwaters that encircle most of the island. These breakwaters, known locally as Gaelenir's Torc, protect Tulake Island from all but the worst storms. In addition to guarding the island from storm-driven waves, the Torc is high enough to serve as a partial windbreak for the low-lying portions of the island.

Some 2,000 people live on Tulake Island, making it a center of both commerce and culture for the archipelago. It is also the primary source of land-grown food for most of the islands, as well as the home of the largest shipyard. Nearly all of the island's hearths contain farmers, herders, sailors, and others who work in and around the ocean. Some of the inhabitants of the smaller islands consider the residents of Tulake little different from mainlanders and do not believe they are tough enough to endure life on the other islands. However, the majority of the residents of the archipelago are happy to have such a bountiful source

of food, wood, and other raw materials, and consider the people who live on Tulake to be as much a part of their culture as the residents of the smallest windswept islands.

Gaelenir's Necklace

This almost circular series of five islands, each of which is an extinct volcano, rests upon the sea like a necklace of beads, and forms a small confederation within the archipelago. Coral reefs extend around them, forming low breakwaters which join four of the five islands together. These breakwaters leave the area between the islands, a roughly circular patch of water forty miles in diameter, far calmer than the surrounding ocean. During all but the harshest weather, ships can sail easily between the five islands of the Necklace and safely fish in their waters.

None of these islands is larger than six miles in diameter. They have a total population of about 1,500 and are close enough to be able to provide swift mutual aid in times of need. Residents of the different islands regularly communicate by psychic arcana, making the inter-island communities more close-knit than outsiders might otherwise think.

The Barren Islands

The Barren Islands are a cluster of 100 rocky islets with few plants and no sources of fresh water. Since sea-folk can consume seawater without harm, the lack of fresh water here does not prohibit them from living on the islands. While some of the Barren Islands are as much as three miles in diameter, most are between a quarter mile and a mile in diameter. The islands are largely devoid of animal life, except insects and birds. Despite this, a few close-knit sea-folk communities call the islands their home.

The sea-folk of the Barren Islands feel closer to dolphins and rhy-fen than they do to land-dwellers. Although most of these communities trade with other islands and the mainland to acquire goods like cloth, pottery, and metalwork, they rarely see land-dwellers otherwise. These sea-folk are only nominally a part of Aldis, and have virtually no contact with the government. Because the islands are not habitable by other races, the only nobles and envoys who spend any time here are also sea-folk. A few members of the Barren Islands communities consider themselves guardians of sea-folk culture and some of these self-proclaimed guardians believe the sea-folk who live among land-dwellers dilute and weaken their cultural heritage.

Despite their isolation, the Barren Islands conceal many beauties beneath the surface, both natural and cultural. The islands are honeycombed with sea caves, where most of the sea-folk live. The caves open to the surface of the islands, as well as underwater. The innermost are only accessible through underwater tunnels, illuminated by shas crystal lights and carved with scenes depicting sea life and legends about Gaelenir and his companions. Many of the tunnels hold undulating kelp, which the sea-folk harvest for food. By land-dweller standards, the caves seem austere, but many contain beautiful coral and shell carvings, secluded grottos decorated with pearls, and walls engraved with each island's history. The islands' children usually learn reading, history, and religion from these carvings.

The Cult of the Jade Crown

The oldest and most secretive of the shadow cults in the Scatterstar Archipelago is the Cult of the Jade Crown. Located on Amber Bay Island, the cult has endured for generations. It consists of three large and closely associated hearth families, which intermarry and rarely have contact with outsiders. The cult members have all been told others are jealous of the "celestial beings" who favor them, so they keep their ways a secret. When nobles and the Sovereign's Finest visit, the cultists do their best to look like a humble community of fisher folk.

Not only has the cult remained secret, but most of its members have no idea they worship the exarchs of Shadow. They believe their leader, the charismatic sea-folk sorcerer Larn Andris, summons sacred beings sent by the gods of Light. In actuality, Larn summons darkfiends disguised in pleasing shapes. These darkfiends enrich the islanders by recovering lost artifacts and gold from under the ocean and use their powers to avert dangerous weather and slay pirates, whom they then devour. If pirates become scarce, the darkfiends periodically devour the hearts of peaceful traders and other visitors. Larn, like cult leaders before him, has convinced the cult's members that the darkfiends' victims are all evildoers. The darkfiends slay only solitary travelers or small groups who would not be missed. The darkfiends also avoid adepts who could use arcana to call for help. Anyone who speaks out against these practices discretely vanishes—another offering to the "celestial beings of Light."

The inner circle of cultists who knowingly serve Shadow are aware of the cult's history, that it arose when an adept discovered a jade crown in the sea and used its power to first summon darkfiends from the deep. The crown has long been lost, but the cult—and its name—endures.

The Shadowed Isles

Islander storytellers frighten audiences with tales of the so-called Shadowed Isles, which are, sadly, all too real. Occasionally, a powerful and intelligent darkfiend comes to dwell upon an island, or an islander uncovers an artifact from the era of the Sorcerer Kings. The darkfiend either gradually takes over the minds of the most susceptible inhabitants or the artifact transforms the islander into a monster, one of the unliving or a ruthless shadow cultist. Such things are rare and the results obvious and terrible; visitors to an island vanish, then the Sovereign's Finest visit, discover the horrors occurring there and end them.

The most insidious of the Shadowed Isles are those where changes are subtle and go unnoticed, at least for a time. In such cases, the inhabitants become thoroughly corrupt but also cunning enough to conceal their evil ways. When visitors occasionally vanish, they tell believable stories of their guests falling ill or sailing away never to be seen again, perhaps succumbing to pirate attacks or foul weather.

Pirates of the Isles

In addition to the winter storms that sometimes cut islands off from each other for up to a week, pirates are a major threat to islanders and the coastal regions of Aldis. They prey upon trading vessels, fishing boats, and small trawlers and traders. Pirates also occasionally raid and loot the smaller islands. They sail into harbor and take what they will, while threatening to kill anyone who opposes them. Pirates maintain secret coves and safe-harbors of their own in the archipelago. Using weather-shaping to summon fogs and storms to cover their retreat, they swiftly return to their hidden ports.

While the majority of pirates are human, some are small gangs of sea-folk who supplement their income with piracy. These rogues are not welcome among the sea-folk of the Barren Islands and inspire fear throughout the archipelago. Their attacks are swift and secret; a raiding party leaves their ship, swims underwater, and swarms up onto the deck of the ship they are attacking. When they are finished, they depart the way they came or signal their ship to come and pick them up. These pirates are especially difficult to capture, since they make their ports on the smallest islands.

While Jarzon has a small navy, inferior to that of Aldis, they supplement their forces with ruthless privateers, pirates-for-hire allowed to dock in Jarzon's ports, who in return raid ships from Aldis. Many Purist priests and most Jarzoni sailors are discomfited by the brutality and greed of privateers. However, the Hierophant continues to allow them access to Jarzoni ports in return for a portion of their spoils and a promise they prey solely on the ships of the corrupt Aldins.

Although their charters only allow them to attack Aldis' merchant ships, Jarzoni privateers also occasionally prey upon fishing vessels and isolated island or coastal settlements. Some Aldin pirates based in the Scatterstar Archipelago are crewed by people whose friends or families perished in attacks by Jarzoni privateers. They in turn make a special effort to pursue such privateers and bring them to justice. On more than one occasion, the Aldin Navy has received aid from pirates in capturing Jarzoni privateers.

The Azure Banner

Based out of the remote Three-Crag Island, the Azure Banner pirates are a close-knit group who have vowed to drive all Jarzoni ships from the Scatterstar Archipelago. Every member of the band has a personal reason to hate Jarzoni privateers; most have lost family to their depredations. Kethia Fallon, their leader, is a former member of the Sovereign's Finest who left the Queen's service after her parents' deaths at the hands of the Hierophant's corsairs. Skilled in a variety of arcana, Kethia holds her crew to a strict code and turns any who betray it over to the authorities by marooning them on a small island and sending a psychic message to one of the local Aldin nobles.

No member of the Azure Banner is allowed to harm prisoners, except in self-defense. Kethia encourages her followers to capture Jarzoni privateers instead of killing them, which is both a moral and a practical imperative, since most Jarzoni captains bring substantial bounties. The Azure Banner currently controls a pair of well-armed ships, *The Retribution* and *Aulora's Blade*, and a crew of some six dozen pirates, including four weather-shaping adepts and twenty-four sea-folk. Many of the pirates

have at least minimal training in psychic arcana so raiding parties can keep in contact with those remaining on Three-Crag Island and the crew of the other ship.

The members of the Azure Banner are extremely loyal to one another, and the crews of the two ships each make up an extended hearth family. For some of the pirates, this family is the only one they have. For the rest, their loyalty to their fellow Azure Banners is absolute. Almost all the pirates take one or more of their fellows as lovers and regard the others as chosen siblings, cousins, aunts, and uncles. The Azure Banner accepts new members, but any new recruits must willingly submit to psychic truth-reading to ensure they are not Jarzoni spies or members of the Sovereign's Finest attempting to infiltrate their ranks.

The Eastern Lands

Aldis' eastern lands are some of its harshest terrain. Monsters crawl from the Veran Marsh from time to time, and the land here is rocky, the soil thin, and the climate foggy and frequently overcast. The inhabitants of the eastern plains farm hearty crops like oats and barley and raise tough, lean cattle and goats. For Jarzoni immigrants, however, the land is not so dissimilar from Jarzon, so they often settle here.

Over the past two centuries, several communities of Jarzoni refugees have established themselves in eastern Aldis. The oldest have largely assimilated the local culture. Their communities and religion are now part of the complex tapestry of customs and beliefs in the Kingdom of the Blue Rose, aided by intermarriage between the immigrants and the local Aldin population.

More recent communities of Jarzoni settlers are still in the process of assimilating. They include the inhabitants of a cluster of villages known as Ata-San, meaning "sacred to Ata." Ata is their name for Aulora, the god of law, as experienced through the visions of their founding prophet. Other recent immigrants include the inhabitants of the town Relgis, named for their prophet, slain by Jarzon's priests for heresy. Relgis taught his people that the gods of Light speak to all people, not merely to the Hierophant and his priests. The Relgans consequently have no priests; any member of the faith can lead religious services and read from the sacred writing of Relgis.

Visiting the newest Jarzoni communities can be fraught with difficulty. The refugees are grateful to live in Aldis, but some Jarzoni traditions are difficult to relinquish, such as emphasis on cepia couplings and women being subservient, or the practice of arcana by anyone other than Purist priests. In Ata-San and Relgis, people also still have unwelcome memories of priests using the psychic arts to uncover heretics and dissidents, making them mistrustful of those arcana as well. The newcomers tread the sometimes difficult path between assimilating the culture of their new homeland and maintaining their own cultural identity and traditions.

Owing to their Jarzoni heritage, men and women in the eastern lands dress differently. Women wear long skirts or loose-flowing trousers, and almost all wear long dresses on formal occasions. Men wear close-fitting trousers, and most wear tights or skin-tight trousers on formal occasions. All of the clothing is tan, brown, or gray, but touches of color are incorporated into fancier outfits. Among the well-off, small ribbons, velvet, and narrow strips of brightly colored silk are sewn on clothing and accessories. Embroidery is used to liven up more modest garments.

Faced with the dangers of shadowspawn, bandits, and beasts, most villages and towns in the eastern lands are walled. By Aldin standards, the houses of Jarzoni immigrants are dark and uninviting, built of the dark gray stone common in the area. They are two stories tall at most and have thick walls and small windows to protect against cold, damp days in autumn and winter, as well as any possible attacks. The second story of most buildings is half-timbered lath and plaster construction, the white plaster held in place with pitch-treated wood.

All able-bodied folk are trained to wield arms in defense of their communities, and at least two armed guards protect the gateway into each village, keeping it closed at night. Despite the forbidding nature of their towns and dwellings, these people know life in Aldis is better than the one they and their ancestors knew in Jarzon, and they are generally loyal to the kingdom and the Sovereign.

The Veran Marsh

The great expanse of the Veran Marsh separates Aldis from Jarzon to the east. Stretching from the Ice-Binder Mountains in the north to Basketh Bay in the south, the marsh has been a more effective shield against invasion than any army Aldis could station at its eastern border.

Before the Shadow Wars, this area was the heart of Veran-Tath, one of the strongholds of the Sorcerer Kings. When a horde of darkfiends attacked, Veran-Tath was destroyed, and the land around brutally torn. The city's Sorcerer King used his power to divert the mighty Tath River from its banks, and after a series of terrible earthquakes, the entire region settled several yards lower down. In the aftermath of the devastation, the Tath River spread out over the landscape, forming the Veran Marsh.

The Great Westerly Road

In addition to containing many ruins, the marsh is a shifting morass of quicksand, mud, poisonous plants, and deadly animal life. There are only four known paths through it. Three are narrow, difficult, and more suitable for small groups of brave and capable travelers than caravans or troops. The only large route through the marsh is the Great Westerly Road, the last remnant of the public works of the city-state of Veran-Tath. The road is made of

Arcana in the Veran Marsh

Using shaping arcana to directly affect the water, earth, plants, and even air of the Veran Marsh triggers a side effect. Roll 3d6. Each previous shaping arcanum use in the general area within the past hour adds a cumulative +1 to the roll until an hour's time has passed with no shaping arcana use. Consult the table for the resulting side effect.

Arcana Effects in the Veran Marsh

Result	Effect
3–7	The arcanum works normally, but the earth and water of the area tremble noticeably.
8–11	The arcanum works normally, but the earth and water tremble violently for a moment. Everyone within (adept's level × 10 feet) of the arcanum's source must make a successful TN 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test to avoid falling prone.
12–15	The arcanum fails and the area within (adept's level × 10 feet) of the source is struck by an earthquake (see **Earth Shaping** in **Chapter 4**). The adept performing the arcanum can choose to suffer an automatic level of fatigue to allow the arcanum to work normally or to prevent the earthquake, or two levels of fatigue to do both.
16-19	The arcanum fails and the area within (adept's level × 20 feet) of the source is struck by an earthquake.
20+	The arcanum fails and the area within (adept's level × 30 feet) of the source is struck by an earthquake.

slimy blocks of ancient basalt. Through the ages, the arcane runes protecting the road have worn away, and there are places where it has begun to buckle or sag. In those areas, stoneworkers work hard to repair and preserve the road's structural integrity.

The arcana of the road prevents the marsh from overwhelming it and, in addition, keeps most of the foul marsh denizens from attacking travelers. This protection does not apply to anyone who leaves the road, and even overnight campgrounds are vulnerable to attack by shadowspawn that have lived in the marsh since their ancestors fled the destruction of Veran-Tath centuries ago. Because of the dangers inherent in traveling the marsh, most folk hold to a travel truce; Jarzon warrior-priests fight alongside Aldin rhy-bonded against mutual threats. Travel on the road results in unexpected friendships and unusual alliances.

Traversing the Great Westerly Road takes about five days on horseback in decent weather, ten days or more for a caravan or on foot. Travel camps—relatively safe and dry areas just off the road—are found about every fifteen miles. Standing stones with the rune for peace carved on the outward face mark these campgrounds. Unlike the road itself, the travel camps are not warded against attack. It's difficult to camp on the road itself; it is too narrow, too busy, and lacking any fresh water.

The Great Westerly Road is the only reliable way for caravans and merchants to travel between Jarzon and Aldis. Because of this, the road is busy most times of year; everyone from diplomats to Roamer caravans to Jarzon evangelists can be found sharing the road in uncomfortable companionship. It is too well guarded for either side to have any chance of sending an army across without the other noticing. Since the marsh on either side of the road is an impassible expanse, a small force can easily hold the road against a large number of invaders, especially since the invaders wouldn't find much in the way of supply or shelter in the marsh. Separated by the morass, there is no practical way for Jarzon to invade Aldis, and Aldis has no desire to invade its neighbor. The Hierophant does send raiders and spies into Aldis and hopes that another route through the mire will someday be discovered.

Lysana's Crossing

Because the Great Westerly Road is the only major passage between Jarzon and Aldis, each kingdom has an outpost stationed on its end of the road. Each is responsible for maintaining the campgrounds along its half of the thoroughfare, and keeping watch for any signs of trouble.

The outpost in Aldis is Lysana's Crossing, named for the scout who re-discovered the Great Westerly Road after the establishment of the modern kingdom. Since then, the outpost has grown into a medium-sized fortress with a small town sheltering on its western side. The fortress holds about a hundred regular troops, as well as a handful of scouts. Gerrard Hallaran, a rhy-bonded human

noble and veteran of the Sovereign's Finest, commands the outpost and administers the town, when necessary. Hallaran's rhy-cat companion, Rosh, is a rough-and-tumble sort with an adventuresome history.

Assignment to Lysana's Crossing is considered dangerous and exciting; young, eager guards compete for the opportunity, and some of them perish in the performance of their duties from time to time. The troops of Lysana's Crossing maintain the marsh campgrounds under Aldin control, monitor and patrol the Great Westerly Road, and escort caravans and important travelers through the marsh. More experienced guards also explore the marsh itself, searching out shadowspawn lairs, and playing cat-and-mouse games with the Jarzoni spies, bandits, and smugglers attempting to slip into Aldis overland.

In the town of Lysana's Crossing, Aldin merchants buy goods from Jarzoni traders, artisans sell their wares, and entertainers perform for coin and recognition. The town has eight to ten times the population of the fort, depending on the time of year and the briskness of trade. The two largest inns are The Road's End and The Traveler's Rest. The Road's End is a large inn designed to accommodate guards, merchants, cargo handlers, entertainers, and other travelers not wealthy enough to afford luxury accommodations. In contrast, the Traveler's Rest is a small, expensive inn catering to the needs of the wealthy merchants coming to Lysana's Crossing—the finest establishment in the easternmost quarter of Aldis, as they will quickly inform you.

Lysana's Crossing is also one of the primary places Jarzoni immigrants enter Aldis. Although it is difficult to cross the Great Westerly Road without being noticed, the dangers of the marsh compel most fleeing Jarzon to either sneak across during the night or travel in a caravan in disguise. As soon as the caravan guards from Jarzon surrender their weapons at Lysana's Crossing, refugees are free to declare their intention to remain in Aldis. At this point, a local noble or healer performs a truth-reading to make certain the refugees are not spies or Jarzoni agents. If they are not, they are free to remain in Aldis. Much to the displeasure of the Purist Church, the government of Aldis freely accepts all refugees and asylum seekers.

Fiery Defense

The gatekeeper of Jarzon's end of the Great Westerly Road is Fiery Defense. About a hundred well-trained warrior-priests are stationed here and patrol their section of the road. Like their Aldin counterparts, they also patrol the marsh itself, countering the Aldin scouts who try to enter Jarzon and attempting to capture heretics and others fleeing the country illegally. There is no town adjacent to Fiery Defense, and while the assignment is considered exciting, it's also a harsh post with few comforts.

The Knight-Commander of Fiery Defense is Keeper Falinur Fenirson, a lean, tall, scarred man with close-cropped gray hair and a burning gaze. He's been a warrior-priest since childhood and has several accolades to his name, including service against Kern. In spite of his combat record, Keeper Falinur was assigned to Fiery Defense as a punishment rather than a promotion. Over the years, he has won the respect of the men under his command, but it's known (if not discussed) that the Knight-Commander has little use for the priestly hierarchy of the Church, who command fighters in the field with little military experience themselves.

Ghostweed

Ghostweed grows at the edges of small ponds and still areas of marsh. The plants themselves are fairly innocuous: head-sized green bladders, streaked with red, floating on the surface of the water. In the autumn, they send up spikes with spore pods that burst and release seeds onto the wind.

Ghostweed is a nocturnal danger. By day it is easy to avoid them. At night, as the temperature cools and mist blankets the ground, ghostweed releases a bioluminescent gas from its bladders. This gas glows a cool blue-green, like a distant lamp. Lost travelers and other creatures are drawn to the light and stumble into the pond where the plant grows.

The water in a ghostweed pond is tainted with the plant's digestive acids and an anesthetic toxin. Creatures coming into contact with it must make a TN 13 Constitution (Stamina) test each round. Failure means the creature becomes paralyzed. Paralyzed victims sink into the water and may drown, a harrowing hazard that inflicts 5d6 damage per round. Characters can make an additional TN 13 Constitution (Stamina) test each round to recover and escape. The corpses of drowned victims are broken down into nutrients, absorbed by the ghostweed's root systems.

Smugglers and assassins harvest ghostweed in the spring and use it to brew a narcotic that causes immediate paralysis and unconsciousness for 1d6 hours in victims failing a TN 13 Constitution (Stamina) test.

Other Routes

There are three other known paths through the Veran Marsh. They are narrow, unpaved, dangerous tracks, used only by the desperate and the criminal. They are neither warded nor patrolled, and a shadowspawn band is as likely to use them as a stray minstrel or smuggler. The commanders of Lysana's Crossing and Fiery Defense have maps of the three paths and send out occasional patrols to monitor them. Anyone attempting to sneak from one country to the other has the best chance of doing so unnoticed by following one of these paths through the marsh.

The northernmost track runs from a ravine in Aldis and ends in Jarzon's northwestern badlands. The southern track skirts Basketh Bay for most of its route. Several pirate bands are familiar with the trail and use it to smuggle goods in and out of both nations. On either side of the marsh, the third path starts a few miles north of the

Great Westerly Road and runs roughly parallel to it. This path is the most perilous as much of it is submerged by marsh water whenever rain falls, and is the one most used by shadowspawn in the mire looking to watch or raid the Great Westerly Road.

Serpent's Haven

Because the Veran Marsh is a true no man's land, it has become a refuge for criminals from both Aldis and Jarzon. Farmsteads and the small towns near the marsh are sometimes the targets of raids by both people and shadowspawn.

The criminals of the Veran Marsh are as much at risk of monstrous attack as any caravan; all humans taste the same to shadowspawn, and most bandit gangs dwell on the outskirts of the marsh. They dart out to harry caravans or homesteads, then retreat as deep into the swamp as they dare to avoid Jarzoni and Aldin troops.

Towards the southern end of the marsh, the smugglers of Basketh Bay have a few semi-permanent settlements. They've either driven off or allied with the sentient beasts there. Pirates and smugglers use these settlements to buy and sell, to duel, and to make deals. The shifting, secret paths leading to the settlements were chosen for the quicksand and ghostweed around them to trap the unwary. The collection of moldy wooden shacks, moss-slimed plank walkways, and dim greenish lanterns look half abandoned, except for the slinking shadows and hard-eyed sailors living there.

The oldest such smuggler's refuge within the Veran Marsh is Serpent's Haven. Located between the southern track through the marsh and Basketh Bay, the shabby collection of driftwood shacks and muddy trails has been home to more murderers, bandits, and smugglers than your average prison. The haven is a prime location for any dirty dealing with pirates and smugglers. Blue trumpet-flower paste from Rezea is traded for stolen pearls from Lar'tya, and heretics from Jarzon book risky passages to freedom from unscrupulous sailors.

The vata'sha gangster Shan Serpentongue rules Serpent's Haven with an iron fist, and her gang takes a cut of every coin that crosses palms here. Shan's understanding of the marsh keeps the haven afloat in the shifting sands—both figuratively and literally. She has outwitted shadowspawn and hunted down aberrations. She can provide guides and guards for travelers along the southern trail and has spies in both Lysana's Crossing and Fiery Defense to keep her informed of nearby patrols.

Marsh Creatures

The Veran Marsh is a hard, dangerous place, full of creatures without mercy, but it is not entirely abandoned by the Light and a few rhydan make their home within it. They guard the submerged secrets of Veran-Tath against those who would

Clever Cobbler Corae

I find this tale fascinating. On the surface, it sounds like many other folk-stories that survived the Shadow Wars, where spirited commoners throw off the oppression of the Sorcerer Kings but, once again, I found subtle mentions of the Society of Leaves and Grass. *I heard this tale from a cobbler in Garnet, very proud that Corae, the protagonist, was a cobbler like himself. One of Corae's companions, the rhy-fox* Plumtail, *is the protagonist in "Rhy is for Rhyming", another story in this collection.*

Al' Haric

Clever Corae lived in a little house on the outskirts of the city, cobbling away the day, charging gold to the rich and copper to the poor, making sure no one left her workshop without a skip in their stride.

One day, a Shadow Guard came to her door, pushing past other customers and demanding Corae's services, but his broken boot was forgotten when he looked upon the cobbler and became enamored of her beauty.

"You will marry me," he said. "And you will no longer have to work for the comfort of others' feet. Refuse me, and I will cut the feet off everyone in this neighborhood."

"How could I refuse such a handsome proposal?" she answered, her sarcasm striking below the Guard's notice, who was swept up by her false acceptance. "Return tomorrow, for I must consider our wedding."

The Shadow Guard left, and Clever Corae excused herself from her workshop, her neighbors shocked and terrified on her behalf. Corae walked into the forest, where she danced with the falling leaves in quiet solitude.

A voice whispered in her mind, coming from a smirking rhy-fox hiding under a bush. "You seem distraught, dancy-dance girl. Were I to follow those steps, I would hurt my own shadow."

"I must marry an evil man, or else he will visit evil upon my neighbors," she stopped and sighed.

"Evil is indeed a poor guest," the rhydan nodded and came to her side. "My name is Plumtail and I will help you. Ask him for an impossible favor for your wedding. Say, ask of him a shas crystal large enough that you can make matching wedding gifts."

Corae returned home, feeling more at ease, but when the Shadow Guard returned the next morning, he gladly accepted, and not a fortnight passed before he delivered the purest, largest shas crystal Corae had ever seen.

"You will make boots for me, slippers for you," he declared, patting his prize. "I will return when the next full moon rises in the sky. Fail, and our wedding guests will dance with nails hammered through their feet."

Now Corae was doubly anxious. She was the best cobbler in the land, but even she could not fashion footwear out of a shas crystal. She took the rock to the forest and walked circles around it.

"Well, that certainly didn't work," the rhy-fox drawled, amused by Corae's predicament. "Let's use that angry dance of yours and shape your gifts. I will teach you."

Corae and the rhydan danced the entire night. She poured all her fear and anger into the boots for her groom, and the rhy-fox taught her how to put her hopes and dreams inside the slippers meant for her.

"What will I do with these now?" she asked, admiring her own work.

"That's up to you." The rhy-fox winked and scampered back into the woods.

Clever Corae studied the shas boots and slippers. Plumtail did not explain what arcana they held, and it took her almost a week to realize they had no magic at all but the power of her will. And then she knew what to do.

When the full moon rose, the entire neighborhood gathered, pitying Corae for her fate. The Shadow Guard arrived with four-score soldiers at his beck and call. Corae left her workshop, radiant in a dress made of supple leather and autumn leaves, a crown of grass and flowers upon her brow. She presented the boots and slippers, and how her groom did admire them, trying them on the spot.

"Let us dance, my husband-to-be," she said. "Let our steps be one."

The soldiers cleared a circle in the plaza and ordered the people to bring instruments and play.

The dance began, and at first the Guard believed he was leading, but each of his steps followed one of Corae's, her dance more powerful than his own. Indeed, so enchanting was Corae's dance, her crystal steps ringing like bells, that all gathered for the ceremony joined in the dance. They capered and spun and twirled beneath the moon and stars long, long into the night.

When the sun finally rose, the people and the Shadow Guard alike awakened from what seemed like a dream. Of Corae and the miraculous crystal shoes and slippers there was no sign, and the weapons of the Shadow Guard were gone as well. Corae's would-be husband left in anger with only a portion of his force, as others chose to stay behind, and so the people of the village evaded the retribution of the Sorcerer King's forces. As for Corae, she and Plumtail set out on the road to teach their reel in order that others could dance themselves free.

take up its dark powers. Unicorns and rhy-cats are most likely to be found within the marsh, although they are rare. On occasion, they intercede to rescue lost travelers or to save a patrol from attack by marsh monsters, but their first duty is guarding the submerged city of the Sorcerer Kings.

There is still power in the old ruins, and the rhydan hope to keep it contained. The presence of rhydan, particularly unicorns, means there are a few oases of Light within the marsh. There are occasional tales of a green refuge where a lost traveler is given aid and, even more rarely, of rhydan contacting people for aid in their duties in the marsh. Anyone seeking the stronghold of Veran-Tath must contend with the rhydan guarding it.

Troglodytes, fiendish rats, crocodiles, wisps, and poisonous snakes are all common in the marsh, as are leeches and other bloodsuckers, some of them growing to monstrous size. Merrow, ogres, and the occasional naga can be found in the deepest parts of the mire. There are also a few creatures and plants unique to the shattered swamp, such as mock hounds and ghostweed.

DRUNAC
FALLEN RIVER
REZEA
STONE FOREST
FALLEN RIVER TRADING CAMP
TRIDENT BAY
ALDIS
ROSE RIVER
REZEAN GULF
SCATTERSTAR ARCHIPELAGO
THE WORLD OF ALDEA
0 25 50 100 150 250
MILES

BITTER-FANG MOUNTAINS
BLACKWATER LAKE
SARN
KERN
YAZA RIVER
INDER MOUNTAINS
ISKANDER'S RETREAT
TANGLE WOOD
WEALD
PAVIN
GOLGAN BADLANDS
ALDIS
TATH RIVER
VER-AN MARSH
JARZON
BASKETH BAY
LEOGARTH
THE LEVIATHAN'S TEETH
SANISAN PLAIN
SANISAN RIVER
SHADOW BARRENS
THE WESTERN OCEAN
PIRATE ISLES
WYSS
UNITY
SERAL RIVER
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S

Aldis has hostile kingdoms located to the north and east but an ally to the west, and great influence over the sea to the south. The ancient sorcerer kingdom of Kern remains a threat to all free peoples, and Jarzon's self-righteous Hierophant covets Aldis' rich lands, while seeking to "purify" the souls of its people. In contrast, the Khanate of Rezea works with Aldis to help repel mutual threats.

Jarzon

The theocracy of Jarzon suffered more during the Shadow Wars and the Great Rebellion than Aldis. Much of their land is now barren, growing only scrub and a few hearty weeds, useless to any large animal except for tough goats. Jarzon also contains more dangerous magical ruins than Aldis, and the theocracy is bordered on the south by the dread Shadow Barrens. As a result, this bleak land has bred a hardy and often harsh people.

Jarzon owes much of its survival to its religion, known as the Church of the Pure Light, or the Purist faith. This religion was born in the oppression of the Shadow Wars, nurtured by believers in secret prayer gatherings around fires in caves and basements. Martyrs of the faith died at the hands of the Sorcerer Kings' minions, while heroes of the faith led the charge to overthrow them. The church grew in power and influence after the Great Rebellion and its mistrust of anything to do with sorcery or Shadow has grown into a deep-seated paranoia.

The central god of the Purist doctrine is Leonoth, who embodies Jarzoni ideals of hard work, perseverance, faith, and family. Maurenna, the Summer Queen, is relegated to a secondary role as Leonoth's consort, and generally the Primordials are considered figures of a mythic past, rather than the present. The gods of Light are their rightful successors. Like Maurenna, women have a supporting role in Jarzoni culture, which is patriarchal.

The priests who rule Jarzon consider Aldis a corrupt and misguided land. However, on more than one occasion, soldiers and adepts from Aldis and Jarzon have worked together against mutual foes, like darkfiends or the forces of Kern. Although Jarzon and Aldis are very different places, the leaders of both nations are equally determined to combat the forces of Shadow and prevent the return of the Shadow Wars. Unfortunately, to Jarzon, corruption is a matter of degree, and Aldis is viewed as an ally of necessity at best, a danger as grave as Kern at worst—perhaps even more so, given how Aldis masquerades as pure and righteous.

History

Jarzon is a deeply troubled land. The battles of the Great Rebellion continued here for more than a generation after they ended in Aldis and Rezea. The harsher climate, less fertile soil, and the dangers of the Shadow Barrens to the south, as well as other tainted lands, all combine to make

the Jarzoni less tolerant and content than Aldins, for they cannot afford to be.

The Church of the Pure Light dates from the reign of the Sorcerer Kings, when religion was an underground movement, keeping Light and hope alive in the darkness. It began with small groups devoted to the god Leonoth, and the gods of Light in general. The Purists took Leonoth as their patron because of his focus on the family, hearth, and home. In the days of the Great Rebellion, Purist sects formed the core of rebel forces in Jarzon and fought tirelessly to overthrow the wicked Sorcerer Kings.

During the rebellion, the prophet Lanis Rhon became a pivotal figure in the Purist faith. A talented adept, he received visions from Leonoth and wielded considerable skills in the arcane arts. Keeper Rhon was both a rebel leader and an inspiration to his people. When the Sorcerer Kings were finally overthrown, Rhon became the first Hierophant of Jarzon and founded the Church of the Pure Light to help guide and protect the people.

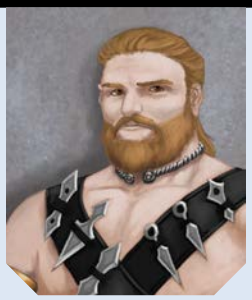
In the early days, some in Jarzon talked of rebuilding the grandeur of the Old Kingdom. While the ideal of a New Kingdom remained central to the formation of Aldis, Lanis Rhon preached in Jarzon how the Old Kingdom contained the seeds of its corruption and downfall, and how the free and unrestrained use of the arcane arts was inherently dangerous, inevitably leading to the practice of sorcery. Given ongoing threats from Shadow-tainted lands, the Purist priests placed all study and use of the arcane arts under their close personal supervision.

Jarzoni adepts are given the choice of becoming priests of the church, swearing oaths to use their arcane gifts according to the church's precepts, or exile. Many choose the priesthood; indeed, most young Jarzoni adepts are eager to do so. A minority choose exile, emigrating to Aldis for the most part, or becoming outlaws. Few Jarzoni adepts choose to forswear their gifts; to do so would be irresponsible and potentially dangerous. Better to receive proper training in the priesthood than to allow god-given talent to lie fallow, and perhaps fester into something unwholesome.

In the early years following the Great Rebellion, the Church of the Pure Light consolidated its position in Jarzon, as it guided a shattered nation of newly freed people back to the Light. Much of the church's doctrine was codified during these years, often in reaction to the long, harsh rule of the Sorcerer Kings. Restrictions on the arcane arts were just the beginning. The Jarzoni mistrust of the so-called nobility serving the Sorcerer Kings led them to place political power in the hands of the priesthood, the leaders of the rebellion. Lanis Rhon's prophesies and sermons were written down, copied, and became the basis of *The Book of the Light*, the sacred text of the new church.

The Jarzoni rolled up their sleeves and set to work rebuilding a battered and broken land. There were foundations to lay, fields to plow, roads to reconnect, and tainted lands in need of purification. Moreover, there was the wounded spirit of a nation to nurture and strengthen. The

Koros the Hunter



Life on the outskirts of the Shadow Barrens is a struggle for survival, against both sinister shadowspawn and the siren call of corruption that sounds in the night winds of that blasted land. The man known in the Northern Refuge as Koros the Hunter knows this all too well; the Barrens nearly claimed his life and soul, and already claimed the lives of his people. Koros once belonged to a small community of homesteaders that sought to settle in eastern Jarzon. Strange weather and dreams led them to stray too close to the Shadow Barrens, and disaster struck. Koros was the sole survivor, half-mad when he reached civilization. He recovered from his ordeal, but was never the same afterwards. He devoted himself to hunting and destroying shadowspawn along the borderlands, particularly the unliving creatures that had once been members of his community, never speaking of the terrible night when they perished and he survived.

People in the eastern borderlands look a bit askance at Koros, a fierce warrior so deeply touched by Shadow, but they also respect his skills and knowledge of the Barrens and its inhabitants, and no one wants to pick a fight with him. So the Hunter usually drinks alone in dark taprooms and keeps to himself, unless approached by a client looking for a tracker, guide, or someone with knowledge of things most would rather not know. Koros tends to distrust adepts, particularly psychics, and keeps his distance, although he's said to have some arcana of his own—or else his prowess is truly extraordinary. He warns the overly curious that they have no wish to experience what is in his mind or spirit. The sole exception is Roamer seers, whom Koros consults occasionally, although never the same one twice, and always when he does, the Hermit card appears in the reading without fail

church aided in this work with its emphasis on the rites of Leonoth. Family, hearth, and home were enthroned as central in Jarzoni life and faith. In particular, with the loss of so many lives in the Shadow Wars and the rebellion, the continuation of life was seen as the vital duty of every Jarzoni man and woman.

For generations, the Veran Marsh separated Jarzon and the lands to the west. When contact was finally reestablished, Jarzon was deeply concerned with what they saw of the Aldins and their ways. Aldis idealized the Old Kingdom and embraced the arcane arts with arms open and eyes closed. Its people were pampered, spoiled, and selfish, concerned only with their own liberties and freedoms. The Jarzoni were well aware of how the arrogant Aldins looked on them with pity, and wanted none of it. They did not need Aldis' compassion, or its friendship. Indeed, only the barrier of the Veran Marsh kept minor hostilities between Jarzon and Aldis from flaring into open war.

Jarzon learned to tolerate the strange and decadent ways of Aldis, if only because it was a wealthy trading partner interested in the metals, gems, and other resources Jarzon had to offer. Still, every Jarzoni child has heard what a soft and corrupt place Aldis is, and how its people are on the road to ruin. Jarzon has no intentions of tying its fate to such a nation. Many Jarzoni know that, one day, when Aldis repeats the mistakes of the past, there will be war, and on that day, Aldins will not feel pity for Jarzon, but fear.

Geography

Jarzon covers about half the territory of Aldis. Its land is less fertile, with some of it permanently tainted, so much of the population is concentrated in a relatively small area. Whereas the land within Aldis' borders is fairly safe and secure, parts of Jarzon are as dangerous now as they were during and after the Great Rebellion. In particular, the border along the Shadow Barrens is a constant source of shadowspawn and twisted monstrosities.

Leogarth

Jarzon's capital city of Leogarth is the center of the Church of the Pure Light and the greatest holy site in the nation. Leogarth is the largest city in Jarzon, although only of moderate size by Aldin standards, perhaps half the size of the great city of Aldis itself.

Leogarth, like most cities in Jarzon, is built like a fortress. A high stone wall surrounds it, with battlements and armed guards constantly on watch for signs of shadowspawn, darkfiends, and other threats. Although it has been generations since a force of any size dared attack Leogarth, the sentinels of the city have not relaxed their vigilance.

The buildings of Leogarth are constructed mostly of local granite and slate, with dark timbers and tall, thin windows, suitable for use as arrow-slits and shuttered against the bitterly cold wind in the autumn and winter. The people are likewise cloaked in gray. The most common outdoor garment in Jarzon is a practical gray woolen cloak, warm and water-resistant, but also difficult to dye and so usually left its natural slate color.

Both the buildings and people of Leogarth are quite different on the inside. While the exterior is drab, stern, and guarded, the inside of most buildings is warm and inviting. Homes, inns, and halls in Jarzon are built around a prominent hearth, which honors the god Leonoth and symbolizes the fire burning in the heart and the light nurtured and kept through the dark, cold times. Jarzoni temples are often illuminated solely by the light of sacred hearth fires, save for when hanging lanterns are lit for religious services.

Likewise, the people of Jarzon undergo a transformation inside their safe havens. Visitors are welcomed, offered food and drink, and given all the hospitality their hosts can muster. Jarzoni inns and feast halls are merry places, filled with chatter, singing, dancing, and the simple pleasures of life.

Leogarth is built on a radial plan, regular and ordered. Broad streets extend out from the center in all directions, crossed by narrower avenues in concentric circles. In the center of the city is the Plaza of the Sun, where the Great Temple, the Hierophant's Palace, and other important structures are found.

The Great Temple is a soaring building of high, peaked towers and tall, thin windows. Statues of armed and armored knights decorate the walls and look down over the plaza, ever watchful. The great double-doors are carved with the flame emblem of the Purist faith. Within, a high gallery overlooks the central hearth-fire, kept eternally burning. The interior is cavernous and dark, a reminder that the faith endured in darkness for centuries, and no darkness, no trial, is too great for it.

Alcoves in the Great Temple feature statues of the gods of Light and the Primordials, with a great statue of Leonoth standing behind the central altar. The patron of Jarzon wears a kind and fatherly expression, hands held wide to welcome and bless his children.

The Hierophant himself leads daily worship in the Great Temple, with a major ceremony during each of the solar holidays (solstices and equinoxes) and on the 6th day of Leonar, the Feast Day of Leonoth, with various ceremonies and rituals on the first five days leading up to it. Seating is always at a premium, and some guests wait hours to attend services. Places are always reserved for high-ranking and influential citizens, the remainder offered to the first to attend.

The nearby Hierophant's Palace is an ornate and ostentatious building, but smaller than the Great Temple. While the temple is open to all, the palace is only open to authorized visitors and is guarded by the Knights of Purity, who have sworn to protect the Hierophant with their lives. The patriarch of Jarzon lives well. The palace has every comfort to ease his body and mind after a day of ministering to his people. A staff of priests serves the Hierophant, and his closest advisors live in quarters in the palace.

Basketh Bay and the Coast

Basketh Bay is Jarzon's major harbor. The rest of the coastline is either too mountainous or too close to the tainted Shadow Barrens. Unfortunately, Basketh Bay has its own hazards that make Jarzon less of a seagoing power than Aldis.

For one thing, the delta of the Veran Marsh lies at the mouth of Basketh Bay. The marsh is home to a multitude of aberrations, many of them aquatic. Some make their way into the bay and grow exceedingly large in the freedom of the open ocean. Also, water from the marsh is tainted. Fish and other creatures in the mouth of Basketh Bay occasionally give birth to aberrations. Sea-folk avoid the marsh delta because of this. Giant squid and constrictor snakes occasionally attack ships in or near Basketh Bay. Jarzon loses at least one ship a year to such attacks.

The Leviathan's Teeth

At the mouth of Jarzon's largest river, the Sanisan, stand the Leviathan's Teeth, jutting from the sea and marking the location of the once-great city-state of Falzanoth. The sorceress Tanita Morag was its ruler and she spent most of her reign engaged in arcane experiments, particularly in the earth- and water-shaping arts. Surviving numerous assassination attempts, Tanita did not fall until the Faenari sorceress Feyna Drass attempted to conquer Falzanoth a few years before the Shadow Wars. Tanita was vastly outmatched by Feyna's sorcery and army. Tanita mounted a desperate and foolish sorcerous counterattack, which triggered a catastrophic earthquake, sending the city and much of the surrounding land to a watery grave.

Now the jagged Leviathan's Teeth guard the mouth of the Sanisan River. The waterway is navigable by barges and shallow draft boats all the way to Leogarth, except during the winter months, when lack of rain causes the water level to decline. Unfortunately, while river travel is easy, sailing through the treacherous Leviathan's Teeth is risky, and during the autumn and winter, no one but the most desperate or foolhardy risks the passage.

The rocks of the Leviathan's Teeth range in size from jagged peaks to barely submerged boulders. In much of this region, there is no clear path between the rocks wider than a dozen yards, and even the broadest channels are no more than 200 yards across. As a result, sailing through the passage is always dangerous and becomes nearly impossible during the winter.

Occasionally relics from the Shadow Wars wash up on the shore near the Leviathan's Teeth, and scavengers scratch out a meager living searching and diving for lost treasures. These same scavengers also strip any ships that become stuck on the rocks, and brave the shark-infested waters to dive for any wealth that went down in the holds of sunken ships. Such scavenging is illegal in Jarzon. Anyone convicted of it is punished with a fine and a whipping. Actually selling artifacts is punishable by imprisonment and years of hard labor. Nevertheless, some merchants do not care about the origins of the jewels and gold they buy and know they can get good prices from anyone selling salvage. A few of the wealthiest and most power-hungry people in Jarzon specifically seek out Old Kingdom artifacts from the Leviathan's Teeth.

The Sanisan Plains

While much of Jarzon consists of land barely good enough to support sparse herds of goats, the Sanisan Plains, bounded by Basketh Bay, the Sanisan River, and the Veran Marsh are reasonably fertile, making them the breadbasket of the nation. This low, slightly hilly region has abundant rainfall and somewhat rocky soil.

Most of the folk of the Sanisan Plains are farmers. With the dangers of the Veran Marsh and Basketh Bay not far off, the farming towns are somewhat larger than their counterparts in Aldis, and even the smallest possess sturdy wooden stockades to protect against bandits, the unliving, and shadowspawn, with enough space for all the locals to retreat to, if there is a need. Despite the risks, the inhabitants tend to be more optimistic than people elsewhere in Jarzon. Priest-adepts help ensure crop failures are almost unknown, so the inhabitants of the Sanisan Plains rarely go hungry.

Many of the priests ministering to these villages and towns are from the region and known for being more lenient than their counterparts in the rest of the theocracy. They overlook trivial infractions and mete out lesser punishments for all but the most serious crimes. In addition, priests here focus far more on the Pure Light as a faith of healing and community and talk less about its fearsome cleansing fires. More conservative priests consider the Sanisan region soft and already too influenced by the decadence and corruption of nearby Aldis.

The Sanisan Plains are the most densely populated portion of Jarzon. The land is rich enough that the towns are never more than a day's journey apart. Itinerant merchants, healers, and entertainers travel from town to town, and people from a group of nearby villages often have a weekly market day, where they gather to buy and sell their wares and purchase goods from visiting traders. Even the inhabitants of the smallest farming villages regularly meet and barter with their neighbors from other villages and towns. The insularity found in much of Jarzon is largely unknown here.

The Northern Marches

In contrast to the Sanisan Plains, the Northern Marches—bounded by the Sanisan River in the south, the Veran Marsh in the west, and the Golgan Badlands in the north—are harsh in both climate and temperament. Unlike the rolling hills and moderate rains of the southwest, the Northern Marches are dry prairie, suitable only for ranching tough Jarzoni cattle and sheep and growing hardy grains like rye and barley.

During the winter, bitter winds blow south from the Golgan Badlands. During the hot summer, rain is infrequent, and crops must be irrigated from the land's few creeks and wells. Except for the spindly saplings planted by the inhabitants, the Northern Marches are mostly devoid of trees, so winds blow unobstructed across the prairie, and late summer prairie fires are a hazard. The grasslands extend from north of Leogarth to the edge of the badlands. The locals often build houses from thick slabs of sod, using a mixture of sod, rammed earth, and rocks dug from the fields to build walls around each settlement.

Because of the poor land, the infrequent rainfall, and the necessity of building homes near the creeks and water-

ways, settlements in the Northern Marches are almost always several days' travel apart, and travelers must risk camping out in the open. As a result, the itinerant peddlers, healers, and performers who wander the Sanisan Plains are less common here and band together in small caravans with guards or soldiers to protect them from shadowspawn and bandits. The region's villagers and townsfolk rarely travel. The only fairly safe route is on barges up and down the Sanisan River. Towns within a day's travel of the river have more contact with the outside world, but even here, barges rarely arrive more often than every few weeks.

Raids by shadowspawn are a fact of life, especially for the communities near the Golgan Badlands. Every man in these settlements over the age of fifteen is expected to train with spear and bow so they can defend their homes against attack. In the southern badlands, vicious ogre tribes hold sway. Whenever there are lulls in their internecine wars, ogre raiders descend on the Northern Marches to carry off their favorite foods: cows, sheep, and children. North of the ogre lands, travelers are at risk of being attacked by crazed elementals, driven mad long ago by sorceries in the Shadow Wars. The elementals are known to occasionally wander into the Marches, sparking chaos where they pass. Air elementals tend to appear in winter, water elementals in spring, fire elementals in summer, and earth elementals in autumn.

Bandits in the Northern Marches rob travelers and extort money and goods from isolated communities. Clever bandits send a scout into a village, pretending to be a lost traveler or the sole survivor of a caravan. The scout determines the settlement's defenses and either kills the chief defenders or opens the gates to an attack. As a result, people here are wary of strangers. The priests who minister to communities in the Marches reinforce such feelings. Isolation, distrust, and constant vigilance have all contributed to making their faith rigid and intolerant.

Life in Jarzon

When most Aldins think of Jarzon, they think of a selfish Hierophant, fanatical priest-adepts, and the whipping and burning of heretics. Life in Jarzon is far more varied than that, and not always so grim.

The villages, towns, and cities of Jarzon are similar to those in less fertile regions of Aldis. Jarzoni houses are made of local gray stone, rather than white Aldin marble, but the activities going on in the shops and homes of Jarzon are much the same. The differences are in the details. Because life is harder and the church has limited tolerance for entertainments that take people's minds away from their work and their duty, most public festivals have at least some religious content and taverns do not serve alcohol on Hearth Day.

Another striking difference between the two nations is that Jarzon is far more culturally and racially homogeneous than Aldis. Jarzon never attracted large numbers of refugees from the Shadow Wars, nor immigrants afterwards. The majority of the inhabitants are the descendants of those who lived here during the Old Kingdom. Today, the combination of rigid religion and the harsh and dangerous land means refugees from Kern and some of the barren lands further east are less likely to immigrate to Jarzon. The theocracy features some traces of the Old Kingdom's diversity, but reduced by centuries of relative isolation.

Aelyth the Bookwright

In eastern Aldis, you often hear stories about Aelyth the Bookwright. A tall, thin, pale Jarzoni, with an angular face and long, black hair, clad in dark clothes reminiscent of those of a Purist priest, she describes herself solely as "a humble and lettered servant of the Light." Aelyth earned her nickname from the small portable printing press she carries, assembling and disassembling it with remarkable skill—aided by a touch of Shaping—and for her skill in bookbinding and bookmaking, which she trades for various necessities.

Born in Jarzon, Aelyth was recruited to join the priesthood when her arcane talents manifested, since at that time she presented as a boy, although she was already aware of her womanhood. Still, her love of learning and the written word made the opportunity hard to resist, until she came to the bitter understanding that she would never truly be happy living a lie. After much soul-searching, she chose exile in Aldis, fleeing Jarzon in the dead of night.

Although she left her birthplace behind, Aelyth carries her faith with her wherever she goes. She remains a devout practitioner of the Church of the Pure Light, although many of her ideas would be considered heretical by the theocracy. She spends a good deal of time writing down those ideas, particularly commentaries and notes on Lanis Rhon's *The Book of the Light*, and has even begun to share some of these in pamphlets and small chapbooks of her own making. To some of the Jarzoni communities in eastern Aldis, Aelyth the Bookwright is a welcome visitor thanks to her writings, her soft-spoken philosophy, love of learning, and willingness to use her training as a priest-adept to aid communities. Other, more conservative, Jarzoni expatriates in Aldis have no more idea what to make of the bookwright than their fellows back home. Aelyth makes a point of not staying where she is not welcome, although she is always happy to engage in spirited discussion (even if it can sometimes become heated).

Aelyth has been willing to aid envoys of the Aldin Crown with her knowledge of Jarzon and the Purist faith from time to time, although she is clear she will not compromise Jarzon—or her faith—nor has anyone from Aldis asked her to do so.

The near-universal worship of the Pure Light, combined with a degree of cultural uniformity, means most Jarzoni are more likely to experience culture shock in dealings with outsiders. The two most common assumptions in Jarzon are that outsiders either think, act, and worship like the Jarzoni or that outsiders are completely different, with all manner of unsavory habits. Traders from Aldis and other nations do their best to reinforce the first impression and often dress and speak in Jarzoni fashion to ease their way, which does little to further Jarzon's tolerance or understanding of foreign habits.

The human majority of Jarzon regards other peoples with varying degrees of prejudice. Vata'an are considered "of the Light," and some even believe they are especially blessed—influenced in no small amount by the fact the current Hierophant is vata'an. On the other hand, night people and vata'sha are considered corrupt shadow-spawn, tainted creations of sorcery, rightly shunned by civilized people, to be driven out or burned.

Sea-folk and rhydan fall somewhere between the two extremes. Neither is considered innately tied to Shadow, but neither are they completely welcomed. Although the Jarzoni acknowledge the role rhydan played in the Great Rebellion, they also consider them too different to be accepted into their society, particularly given their universal use of psychic arcana. As a result, rhydan are encouraged to live apart from humanoids, and only priests have anything but the most casual contact with them. Ordinary Jarzoni are supposed to leave them alone and to report their presence to their local priest. Some corrupt clerics attack and even kill rhydan, and few priests are inclined to investigate any such incidents. In Jarzon, almost all rhydan live in the most inaccessible wilderness areas, like the theocracy's eastern frontier or parts of the southern Golgan Badlands, and they do their best to avoid Jarzoni in general and Purist priests in particular. The rest have long been driven to more hospitable environments.

Rhy-bonded Jarzoni are a thorny problem for the Church of the Pure Light. Since most Jarzoni dealing directly with rhydan are priests, occasionally a priest becomes rhy-bonded. Rhy-bonded priests are considered suspect and are always assigned to outlying wilderness areas or to minister to the inhabitants of the harshest and most sparsely inhabited rural regions. Even there, some of these priests run into conflicts between the demands of the church and the advice of their bond-mate. Because of the enduring nature of the rhy-bond, most of these priests eventually turn their backs on the church and either flee Jarzon or become rebels or reformers, reinforcing Purist misgivings about the rhydan. The fate of lay people who are rhy-bonded is worse, as they are treated as dabbling in forbidden arcana. Knowing this, most such rhy-bonded attempt to flee Jarzon at the first opportunity.

Jarzoni consider sea-folk secretive and strange. As worshippers of light and fire, Purists are suspicious of a people so intimately tied to water and the deep. Although the inhabitants of the coast trade with sea-folk, intermarriage is frowned upon. Sea-folk are permitted to live along the coasts and rivers of Jarzon, but are expected to live in their own colonies or districts of the larger coastal communities. Sea-folk are not permitted to become priests of the Purist faith. Unsurprisingly, fewer sea-folk live in Jarzon than in Aldis.

The Jarzoni do not limit their prejudices to considerations of appearance or ancestry. The doctrines of the Church of the Pure Light also consider caria daunen and star marriages potential threats to the "proper" order of society. According to the church, the foundation of a healthy society is a male-female couple, and the purpose of sex is procreation for the expansion of the family and the continuation of life. In the writings of Lanis Rhon, carrying on the family and maintaining the nation of Jarzon are closely equated, dating back to the ancient fertility cults of Leonoth. Most Jarzoni believe encouraging "deviancy" only serves to weaken the family and thus the nation of Jarzon as a whole. As a result, only marriages between one man and one woman are legally recognized, and anyone who attempts to live in a different manner faces discrimination.

Nonconformists are expected to live apart from others so their influence will not spread. They cannot become priests and are denied membership in most professional guilds. As a result, the majority become laborers or shopkeepers. In Jarzon, deviant ways of life are not topics of polite conversation, and they are mocked and ridiculed in many plays and other popular entertainments, as well as in childish taunts and whispered gossip. In practice, discrete same-sex relations are politely overlooked, so long as they do not interfere with one's family responsibilities, and are not in any way treated as equal or legitimate. The same attitude is reserved for laevvel who do not fit into the traditional male or female gender roles in Jarzon. They are treated as outsiders with no real legitimacy unless they find ways to conform.

Church of the Pure Light

Devotion to their faith and a higher cause saved Jarzon from destruction during the Shadow Wars, and religious devotion forms the core of their modern culture. Everyone in Jarzon is expected to visit a shrine or temple shortly before noon on the last day of the week, Hearth Day. There everyone gathers for a ritual, involving chanted prayers, incense burned in the temple's sacred fire, and a sermon from the local priest. These sermons typically consist of moral homilies and inspirational speeches about following the guidance of the gods and giving thanks for the continued survival of Jarzon and its people. After the sermon, the congregation spends a few minutes in meditative silence, and the remainder of the afternoon is a time for relaxing and socializing. Friends share meals, and some neighborhoods or villages hold

communal repasts. While the Jarzoni work hard the rest of the week, after the Hearth Day service, they relax, play games, tell stories, and listen to entertainers.

Jarzoni do not confine their religious observances to the Hearth Day services. Every day at noon, everyone who is not engaged in some other activity is expected to take a few minutes the pray at a hearthside altar. In addition, every Jarzoni owns one or more religious tokens. The most common are gold or brass pendants made in the shape of a stylized flame, a common Jarzoni artistic motif.

Purist rituals for holy days and important yearly events are more elaborate. Most Purist religious rites involve fire in some form, representing the fire aspect of Leonoth and the hearth fires so central to the faith. Offerings and written prayers are burned in a central fire pit or hearth. The dead are cremated (as much to free the spirit with holy fire as to ensure the corpse does not rise as one of the unliving). Couples light a central candle or hearth flame together to signify their union. Vigils are held before candle flames, lanterns, or temple hearths. The condemned are burned in public executions.

In Jarzon, only priests interpret scripture and doctrine. The common folk discuss religious topics with their friends and families, but public preaching and attempts to interpret religious doctrine earn a visit from a priest-adept. The overly zealous are reminded that mistakes can creep into the faith if the uninitiated attempt to preach doctrine. However, if the individual shows a keen understanding of scripture, they may be recommended for priestly training or a position as a clerical assistant.

Those with unorthodox views who persist in spreading them to others face either indenture in one of the church's work brigades or having their misunderstanding corrected by a psychic priest-adept. Some cynics in Aldis claim heresy is punished so severely because the Hierophant needs a steady supply of convicts for the church-controlled mines. Convicts rend gemstones and ores from the rocky soil until they have worked off their sentence.

The Theocracy

Jarzon is a theocracy. Priests do not just dispense religious teaching, justice, and spiritual advice; they are also the rulers of the nation. The theocracy is the only legitimate authority in Jarzon, and the local high priests hold absolute power over the districts they administer. In Jarzon, secular and religious law are one and the same, and heresy is a crime. It is considered more serious than theft but less serious than murder.

The Purist priesthood is therefore more formal and hierarchical than the priesthood of the Eternal Dance in Aldis. In many ways, the Jarzoni priesthood is more akin to the Aldin nobility. In the Purist faith, the priest is a father figure and spiritual guide, like Leonoth himself. Because of this, Purist priests are always men, ideally family men who are heads of their own households. This ideal applies

more to older priests; younger initiates are expected to travel, see the world, and learn the skills they need to help guide their people, focusing their ambitions on their careers. Still, a cleric intending to advance through the ranks should be settled with a wife and children if he hopes to become a high priest.

Purist priests are addressed by the title Keeper, referring to them as keepers of the sacred fires. In the ancient past, priests of the cult of Leonoth were fire-tenders responsible for the community hearth fire. In modern Jarzon, a married layman or young novice occupies the role of hearth tender in a Purist temple, but the term has carried over. Priests with an established parish are referred to as "Keeper of . . ." followed by the place's name (such as Keeper of Fiery Defense or Keeper of Northridge). High priests are called Lord Keeper, while the Hierophant, who is the Keeper of Leogarth, is Lord High Keeper or Lord Hierophant.

Along with their religious functions, Jarzoni priests have duties similar to Aldin nobles. They dispense justice and oversee trials, attempt to resolve local disputes in a fair and impartial fashion, and make reports about these incidents to the high priests in Leogarth. In addition, like Aldin nobles, Jarzoni priests are divided into traveling and regional priests and, to prevent favoritism, are rarely assigned to the cities or towns where they were born or raised.

These similarities occur because both Aldin nobles and the Jarzoni priesthood are based on the structure of the Old Kingdom's nobility. However, while educated people in Aldis and Jarzon know of this common origin, the Jarzoni believe combining the secular duties of nobles with the religious and spiritual training and duties of the priesthood is the best way to keep Jarzon from falling prey to the corruption that overwhelmed the Old Kingdom.

All priests first serve as traveling priests, riding circuit between several villages and small towns, before they are promoted to regional priests, based in cities or moderate-

Hylan Kerris, Hierophant of Jarzon

The vata'an Hylan Kerris, Hierophant of the Church of the Pure Light, is the religious and secular ruler of Jarzon. Nearing his hundredth year (only middle-aged for a vata), Hylan joined the church at the age of fifteen. Like the majority of previous Hierophants, Hylan grew up in the Northern Marches. He began his ecclesiastical career as the apprentice to the priest of his hometown. In his early years with the church, he served as both a novice priest and as his mentor's bodyguard when he traveled to neighboring communities.

To complete his novitiate, Hylan studied for a year at the religious school in the small Northern Marches city of Yazan. During his time there, several of the priests noticed he was both an exceedingly charismatic speaker and possessed the potential to excel in the arcane arts. As a result, they recommended he attend the Mystic Academy in Leogarth. Once there, Hylan managed to exceed his teachers' expectations and completed the two-year training program a season early. He spent the season after his graduation with a band of warrior-priests and scholars, patrolling Jarzon's border with the Shadow Barrens and studying the strange plants growing near that corrupted land. There are rumors that he befriended the High Seer of the Roamers at this time, but the church hierarchy dismisses this as a nonsensical fiction.

One of the defining moments of his life came when he was assigned as the priest-adept for Grala's Rest, a town in the Northern Marches. To reach Grala's Rest, his caravan had to march for four days from where their barge docked. On the third night of this journey, a sorcery-using bandit leading a gang of ogres attacked the caravan. During the battle, half the caravan was killed, and the remainder only survived because of Hylan's heroism. During the battle, Hylan lost his left eye. His black eye-patch remains one of his most striking and distinctive features.

Losing his eye while witnessing the depredations of a sorcerer and the deaths of half a dozen of his companions changed Hylan forever. His youthful idealism was replaced by a grim determination to keep the people under his charge safe from the many threats around him, regardless of what he had to do to ensure that safety. After serving with distinction as the priest of Grala's Rest for five years, his faith, dedication, and obvious competence, combined with reports of his stirring and passionate speeches, led him to be considered for training as a high priest. After he was approved as a candidate, Hylan was assigned to assist the aging high priest of Yazan for several years. He then took over the office when the high priest finally retired.

While high priest, his skill in administration, his seemingly tireless energy, and the fact that he clearly made the safety of his people his first priority earned him further notice in Leogarth, especially after he directed the operation that led to discovery and destruction of an active shadowgate near the village of Bryce Lake. After this incident, the Keepers Council appointed him to the next vacancy among their number. He served on the council for seven years before the age and ill-health of the previous Hierophant made it clear that he would soon need a replacement. Hylan's political skill and his charisma made him the favorite choice with both the council and the aging Hierophant.

Hylan has been Hierophant for the past thirty-six years and has maintained his dedication to ensuring the safety of Jarzon at any cost. He is the only Hierophant an entire generation of Jarzoni have ever known, and most regard him as truly enlightened and blessed by the gods.

sized towns. From there, skilled regional priests who earn the favor of their superiors are promoted to become high priests. Traveling priests must obey all orders from regional and high priests, and high priests can command both other types of priest. A high priest, who serves as both regional governor and local head of the church, administers each of Jarzon's cities.

The most politically-adept high priests are then promoted to the Keepers Council in Leogarth. The councilors serve as direct advisors to the Hierophant, and a new Hierophant is always elected from among their number. Priests are administered in a far more hierarchical fashion than nobles in Aldis. Unlike Aldin nobles, who receive orders directly from the Noble Council, traveling priests are under the authority of regional priests, who in turn receive orders from high priests, who take orders from the Keepers Council.

Many traveling and regional priests are deeply spiritual men who care about the people under their charge. They work hard to bring justice and spiritual comfort to their parishioners. Unfortunately, when the Keepers Council chooses a new member, rigid orthodoxy, political efficacy, and skill at flattery, bribery, and subterfuge are considerably more important than ethics, morals, or a sincere desire to minister to the populace. While some high priests are decent and moral men, high priests who care more about their own power and position than the welfare of others outnumber them.

As a result, there are significant tensions within the Purist priesthood. This tension largely manifests as a rift between the high priests and the rank-and-file of traveling and regional priests, many of whom choose to remain in their positions because they think they can do the most good by remaining close to the common people of Jarzon. Because the Keepers Council values ambition, such priests are considered weak and short-sighted. Similarly, many ordinary priests feel the majority of high priests place their ambitions above the good of Jarzon and the church.

Such tensions lead to schisms, when rebellious priests speak out against some doctrine or church law. The Purist hierarchy is quick to stamp out schism and heresy, since they are perceived as dire threats to the nation's security. Divergent Purist sects have the difficult choice of either remaining in Jarzon, where they may be tried for heresy, or fleeing to a suspicious foreign land like Aldis, where they can worship as they see fit.

Priest-Adepts

Any priest with arcane talents can become a priest-adept, and any male citizen of Jarzon who demonstrates such talents is expected to join the priesthood or else foreswear all use of arcana. Women with arcane talents are permitted to serve as cloistered "matrons," particularly healers, but it is considered an imperfect solution, as they are expected to give up the opportunity to marry and raise children (unlike male adepts). Purist seminaries teach priest-adepts to understand and use their gifts in the service of the gods, the church, and their people, and priest-adepts advance faster and further in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Most high priests and nearly all the members of the Keepers Council are adepts of some skill.

This creates a further split in the ranks of the priesthood, since low-ranking priests tend to have fewer arcane talents, or none at all, and therefore less chance of advancement. There is also the far more serious matter of the concentration of arcane power in the hands of the highest-ranking priests.

Confessors and Sorcery

As the people of Aldis know, using psychic arcana against a subject's will is a violation of mind and spirit, a form of sorcery. This is no less true for Purist Confessors than it is for Aldin psychic adepts. So how do Confessors operate at all?

Most Confessors do not acquire considerable amounts of corruption for one reason: Jarzoni are so thoroughly indoctrinated to obey the edicts of a priest that they do not resist. They become willing subjects, even if it requires some persuasion, and so it is not sorcery. Still, Confessors inevitably encounter situations where they feel they must probe the mind of an unwilling subject, and many Confessors ignore the sometimes time-consuming process of acquiring a subject's consent. These priests do earn corruption for their deeds. Of course, they also garner a reputation for success and rise faster through the ranks of the church. Still, they play a dangerous game, should their corruption ever be uncovered.

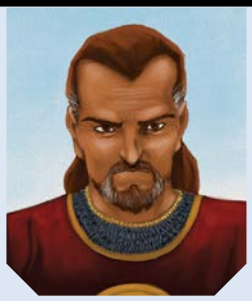
Although Confessors are trained to steel themselves against identifying too much with their charges, some come to feel a great deal of empathy toward the people they examine and treat. This leads some Confessors toward heresy, when they discover they cannot bring themselves to use their gifts as their duty requires. A rogue Confessor is one of the most dangerous heretics of all and subject to severe punishment before being handed over to a senior Confessor to help "correct" his wayward behavior.

Confessors

Priest-adepts with psychic talents are trained as Confessors, the most feared and influential of the Purist priesthood. Confessors are known for the eye-within-a-flame badge of office they wear. Everyone quickly learns to recognize the local Confessor on sight—and avoid him at all costs.

Confessors are charged with using their psychic arcana to root out heresy and help heal the faithful of illnesses of the mind and spirit. They are the moral guardians of the theocracy, watchers against the ever-present threat of Shadow. Confessors have two primary duties: seeking out

Pallak Josson, Lord General of the Western Knights



General Pallak Josson is the commander of the division of the Knights of Purity that patrols western Jarzon near Basketh Bay and the Veran Marsh. In addition to protecting Jarzon from the monsters that emerge from the marsh, he has the duty of guarding against possible Aldin incursions and Jarzoni refugees escaping westward towards Aldis.

Pallak is fifty years old, and has done his duty to his Church and nation for thirty years, systematically hunting down heretics and deviants who have attempted to flee across the Veran Marsh into Aldis. Although he is a kind-hearted man, he rationalized the fate of these people—work brigades for most and execution for unauthorized adepts—as necessary to keep Jarzon safe from dangerous foreign ideas and the threat of sorcery.

Then, some ten years ago, he discovered something that shook his belief in these practices and made him question his faith; he found his teenaged daughter Myra sneaking off to spend time with her bond-mate, a rhy-cat. He found the two of them together and asked her about the rhy-cat, who stood poised to defend her. Pallak was saddened to hear that Myra was psychic and had bonded with the rhy-cat almost a season before. She stood defiantly, waiting for him to drag her off to be judged. Instead, Pallak defied the church's teachings by explaining to her how to cross the Great Westerly Road and avoid Jarzoni patrols. He then took her home to collect the supplies she would need for the journey. Myra then made her own decision and said she was staying in Jarzon to help others like her cross the border. Pallak was initially furious, but could not fault her reasoning, as he gradually believed that she was not the only one who deserved to be spared the church's punishment.

Even now, years later, Myra helps other unauthorized adepts and rhy-bonded escape Jarzon, and Pallak turns a blind eye while directing his knights' patrols away from refugees leaving the country. He still tirelessly pursues the few actual sorcerers who attempt to flee Jarzon, as well as violent criminals. In addition, he is famously diligent in stopping monsters from the Veran Marsh and catching Aldin spies. He neither trusts nor likes most of the Aldins he has met and only helps refugees flee Jarzon because he knows that Aldins do not kill rogue adepts. However, he sometimes worries about helping people flee to a nation of heathens.

Pallak does not consider himself to be a reformer or a rebel. He is a father aiding his daughter, and others like her. He believes the church is no longer following Leonoth's true teachings and is doing his best to ensure he and the people under his command remain faithful to his vision of Leonoth's wishes. He is resolute in his beliefs and will loudly defend his choices if his actions are ever discovered, although he knows he will likely be executed for heresy.

corruption wherever it may hide and healing the darkness that festers within the mind and soul.

Toward achieving spiritual orthodoxy, a Confessor may examine the thoughts of anyone in Jarzon, or any citizen outside of Jarzon, at any time. This examination is called confession. Refusing to undergo confession is seen as a clear indication of guilt, since the innocent have nothing to hide from their spiritual counselors. Confessors are bound by strict oaths not to reveal what they find in the minds of others, except to their superiors in the church hierarchy when necessary. The process of confession is considered cleansing and offers the opportunity to uncover spiritual ills in need of treatment.

When a Confessor finds such an ill, action can be taken. Criminal and heretical deeds are dealt with according to the law, with the Confessor's testimony essential to the conviction of the criminal. Less serious transgressions—unhealthy thoughts, for example—can be treated before they lead to actions. The Confessor helps to right the patient's mind and spirit, clearing away the dark influences and restoring spiritual harmony. Resisting such treatment is considered a sign of a deep-seated imbalance. While it is not itself a crime, it is sufficient to ostracize the individual and can lead to a loss of employment, status, friends, and even family. Such unfortunates can redeem themselves if they see the error of their ways and accept spiritual guidance.

Hospitalers

The Purist priesthood is not concerned solely with the mind and spirit. Ministering to the body is a sacred duty as well and the charge of the Hospitalers. Individuals with the healing talent are as prized in Jarzon as they are in Aldis, and they are trained to use their gifts for the good of all. The church maintains hospitals in the cities of Jarzon, and Hospitalers often travel from town to town offering their services to those in need. They are recognized by the emblem of a red hand inside a golden flame and are welcomed throughout the land.

The Hospitalers are unusual for being the only sect of the Purist faith to accept and train women. These matrons still have the status of laypeople, since women cannot be priests, but they are taught to use their healing gifts, particularly as midwives and to minister to children. Female healers are respected professionals, although still subordinate to their male superiors.

Of the entire Purist religious hierarchy, the Hospitalers have the most cordial contact with foreigners. They share many of the same traditions and healing lore as healers in Aldis, and Jarzoni Hospitalers and Aldin healers usually find opportunities to compare techniques, herb lore, and similar information.

When Jarzon made contact with Aldis and Rezea after the Great Rebellion, the priests were distrustful of foreigners who studied and used arcana without having the church's strict religious training to guide them. Such people were naturally forbidden from visiting Jarzon. However, in time an exception was made for the itinerant healers common to

all nations. Healers are the only foreign adepts not shunned in Jarzon. Although the theocracy requires any adept living in Jarzon to curb their use of magic, healing is tolerated, so long as there is no hint of impropriety. There are always too few healers, so one more is always welcome—to a point.

All healers in Jarzon must be licensed by the Church, and foreign healers must swear on their Healer's Oath to abide by the laws of Jarzon and not to work against its government. Foreign healers are allowed to stay in Jarzon for no longer than a season. Any healers who break this rule are escorted out of Jarzon and forbidden from returning. Foreign healers are prohibited from training Jarzoni apprentices or teaching arcana to Jarzoni.

The Knights of Purity

The military arm of the Church of the Pure Light is the Knights of the Pure Light, or simply the Knights of Purity or Purist Knights. These warriors are priests as well as soldiers. The best knights are promoted to the rank of keeper-general. Generals decide all such promotions, but the Keepers Council must approve them. Each general is responsible for the direction of the knights who patrol a specific region of Jarzon. In addition, the generals appoint a Lord General, who serves as the Hierophant's military advisor.

The knights are trained to fight darkfiends, unliving, aberrations, and shadowspawn. However, when facing a darkfiend horde, an invasion, or a similarly large attack, the knights serve as the sergeants and officers for an army of conscripts and volunteers from among the general populace. Such armies are only mustered in times of dire need. The priests know they need as much of the populace farming Jarzon's arid land as possible, and the idea of arming the masses makes many high priests nervous.

While most of the knights fight their battles with blades and bows, almost a third have some arcane training, in part to allow them to use crystons, which work against all forms of unliving. Also, every company of between eight and twenty knights contains between three and six warrior-adepts equally at home fighting monsters with steel or arcana.

The knights are occasionally assigned to make raids into Kern, and during these raids, some end up working with the Sovereign's Finest or their Aldin counterparts, the Knights of the Blue Rose.

Arcana and Technology

Just as the arcane arts are illegal for anyone but Purist priests in Jarzon, only priest-adepts are permitted to work with and use arcane items based on shas crystals, such as crystons. While Jarzon uses devices powered by shas crystals to provide light, heat, and to move and purify water, the priests control and monitor them. Only palaces, temples, and other public buildings use shas crystals to provide light, and all water pumping and purifying mechanisms are located within temple grounds.

As a result, villages and towns too small to have a temple must make do with well water. Also, instead of using individual shas crystals to provide heat for every building, large crystals located in temples heat water piped into the dwellings of the wealthy and the middle class. In contrast with Aldis, where running water, heat, and light are available to almost everyone, in Jarzon such benefits are only obtainable by the wealthy and those who work for the church.

Printing presses in Jarzon are licensed and primarily used to produce copies of *The Book of the Light* and other Church-approved materials. The production or distribution of heretical or seditious materials is a crime, as is possession of them. Literacy rates are lower in Jarzon, with many common people unable to read or write, although all Purist

Myra Josson, Refugee Smuggler

Myra Josson found herself in a unique position to help other potential adepts and arcane talents flee Jarzon for a freer life in Aldis. As a woman in the theocracy, Myra had little opportunity to develop her own psychic talents until a rhy-cat spoke into her mind one day when she was out exploring. She and Rassa, the rhy-cat, became friends and bonded companions. Myra was prepared to flee Jarzon to protect her own life as well as Rassa's but her father's willingness to help her led to the decision to remain on the borderlands, to aid others who lacked her good fortune and family connections.

In the years since, Myra had learned some harsh lessons and gone from an idealistic young woman to an experienced smuggler who knows the ins and outs of the Veran Marsh and the borderlands by heart. She and Rassa still work to aid refugees in fleeing Jarzon for the west and Aldis, and Myra has become known as "the Wisp" and "the Lady of the Marsh." She's careful to conceal her head beneath scarves and veils and often uses face-paint as well. Many Jarzoni refugees in Aldis owe her their lives, and the Sovereign's Finest has reached out to Myra, letting it be known they are willing to offer aid from time to time, although she remains stubbornly independent.

priests are literate. Reading is an activity reserved primarily for scholars and the well-to-do and well-educated.

Trade with Aldis

Although priests rail against the corruption of Aldis, the majority of people in Jarzon give their neighbor to the west little thought. The main exceptions are merchants and traders. The Great Westerly Road crossing the Veran Marsh is regularly traversed by caravans carrying all manner of goods from one nation to the other. Many Purist priests would like to forbid such trade, but it is essential to Jarzon's economy—and often their own comfort.

Although Jarzoni law forbids their caravans from journeying more than a day's travel into Aldis—for fear the traders and merchants will be corrupted by the Aldins' immoral ways—the caravans to Aldis do provide a glimpse of Jarzon's neighbor. Because of this, most large caravans from Jarzon contain at least one espionage-trained priest disguised as a drover or cargo-handler.

Similarly, while some Aldin merchants don't care to do business with the Jarzoni, many see trade as a way to simultaneously make a profit from Jarzon's gemstones and ores while earning at least a small amount of goodwill towards Aldis. Aldin merchants trade medicinal herbs, grain, dried meat and fruit, nuts, and oils, receiving rubies, copper, iron, tin, and a wide range of mineral pigments in return.

Despite political and social tensions between the two nations, trade relations are surprisingly cordial. Most of the traders who travel the Great Westerly Road have made the journey many times and are experienced in dealing with the inhabitants of the land they are visiting. Merchants have friends among the people they sell to, and many belong to families who have been traveling the trade route for generations. Even the suspicious Jarzoni border guards have come to know and deal with traders on a friendly basis.

In part, these cordial feelings have come about because trade is profitable for both nations. Aldin foods provide a vital cushion against famine, and Aldin medicines help avert plagues. Similarly, Jarzoni gems and ores enrich the coffers of the traders who sell them and increase the productivity of Aldin jewelers and smiths. The atmosphere in both Fiery Defense and Lysana's Crossing when a caravan successfully reaches the other side of the marsh is celebratory, with the traders who braved the marsh and the merchants they are selling to sharing food, drink, and company until late into the night.

Occasionally the Jarzoni government pressures traders into carrying messages or performing some other form of espionage, just as sometimes the Aldin government asks one of theirs to perform a similar mission, usually providing cover for envoys of the Sovereign's Finest. However, both governments only ask for such assistance when necessary because they are both aware of the consequences of trade relations breaking down between the two nations.

Dangers in Jarzon

During the Shadow Wars, its Sorcerer Kings battled constantly. While two were overwhelmed by their own darkfiends during the early days of the Great Rebellion, others fortified their positions and called upon powerful sorcery to defend themselves from both the rebels and bands of rogue darkfiends and shadowspawn, allowing them to hold out for years before they were finally brought down.

As a result, the ruins and countryside in Jarzon contain far more magical traps and unstable sorcery than those in Aldis. Also, because the Sorcerer Kings had more time to fortify their positions and conceal their treasures, more shadowgates and other arcane items survived the Great Rebellion in Jarzon, just waiting to be found by the greedy or unsuspecting.

Tainted Lands

Worst of all, some areas of Jarzon were so afflicted by the sorcery used during the last days of the Great Rebellion that the land itself was tainted. People and animals dwelling there too long gave birth to shadowspawn offspring or transformed into shadowspawn themselves. During the

first century after the Great Rebellion, these regions spat out hordes of shadowspawn. Entire villages occasionally transformed into ogres and similar monsters when the currents of ancient sorcery flared after some ward or artifact was activated. Many of the ogres in the Golgan Badlands are descended from Jarzoni who were transformed thus.

Since those days, the priest-adepts of Jarzon have slowly purified the tainted regions they can. Today, no regions remain where the taint is so strong that people transform into shadowspawn overnight, and places that gradually twist their inhabitants are less common, and better known. However, there are still areas forbidden for settlement, because having children there occasionally results in the birth of shadowspawn. Signs and boundary markers are placed so no one can wander into tainted lands without warning. The signs forbid anyone to trespass on the tainted land. Harsh punishments, like a lengthy term in a work brigade, await anyone who does.

Monsters

Unfortunately, priest-adepts can do little to prevent animals from living and breeding in tainted regions, and anyone living nearby occasionally faces attacks by aberrations spawned there. All over the theocracy, the risk of attack by such creatures is greater than in Aldis. Surviving shadowgates in Jarzon allow darkfiends to enter the world more often than in Aldis. The priest-adepts have done their best to locate and destroy every shadowgate but, unfortunately, as in Aldis, some are hidden by powerful arcana no one knows how to overcome.

Because of these threats, traders carrying goods from one city to another travel in well-guarded caravans, and if possible secure the assistance of one or more priest-adepts to help protect them. The wandering minstrels common in the central valleys of Aldis are rare in Jarzon simply because of the risks of solitary travel. That all cities, towns, and villages in Jarzon are walled is not simply an expression of paranoia. Such protections are necessary, especially in areas near one of the tainted lands, where large-scale attacks by darkfiends still occur.

The Khanate of Rezea

The Khanate of Rezea stretches to the northwest of Aldis; a vast prairie, with rivers that are largely seasonal and fairly few natural resources. Its people are clans of nomadic herders and hunters, who owe allegiance to the Great Khana, a priestess they revere but who wields little actual political power. The Rezeans worship the Primordials, and the Khana is the high priestess of their faith. They consider the "young" gods of Light the patrons of soft, over-civilized people, and they revile the exarchs of Shadow as enemies of the Primordials. They respect the arcane arts, particularly animism and meditative as practiced by the clans' witches, but forbid sorcery in any form.

The population of Rezea is mostly human, with some vata amongst the clans. Rezeans honor rhydan, especially rhy-horses, viewing them as the Twilight gods' companions. They treat visiting sea-folk with respect, but they are coolly polite, at best, to night people from Aldis. They consider all other shadowspawn potential threats and allow none on their lands.

Each clan has between fifty and 500 members, who spend much of their lives on horseback. The Rezeans are the finest riders in the known world. At their yearly gathering at Midsummer, the Khana blesses their herds of horses. They train the best of the herds for riding and use the others for leather and food. Astride their mounts, the riders of Rezea hunt the herds of elk and bison that roam the great prairie. The Rezeans sell pelts, leather, meat, and carvings of bone and horn, as well as some of their horses, to traders from Aldis in return for fine cloth, medicines, fine metal tools, and shas crystals. Rezean horses are strong and swift, the finest mounts in the world, and members of the Sovereign's Finest hope to be lucky enough to earn one as a reward for their service.

Although the horses they breed are amazing creatures, the best scouts, hunters, and warriors of Rezea are bondmates with the rhy-horses who have chosen them. Since rhy-horses are exceptionally long-lived compared to their mundane counterparts, horse and rider share a bond that lasts a lifetime. Often, if either rhy-horse or bond-rider dies, the other sickens and dies or leads especially dangerous raids against bandits, shadowspawn, or darkfiends, until death finally comes. Such acts are the subject of great Rezean tragic poems and epics.

Some Rezean fighters, rangers, and scouts earn extra coin by selling their services as mercenaries. Merchants who wish to set up mines in the Ice-Binder Mountains sometimes hire Rezeans to protect their camps from ogres and bandits. Other mercenaries guard caravans or work as bodyguards for those travelers able to pay them. Rezean warriors also occasionally work with the Sovereign's Finest to strike into Kern to free slaves or destroy dangerous artifacts.

History

The Rezeans do not write their history down in books or scrolls. Stories of their origins are passed from mother to daughter and spoken or sung around campfires during the storm seasons. This is the tale they tell:

In the beginning, Rezeans were not one people but many. Before the days of the Old Kingdom, they served others, warlock lords in the rain-soaked land of Drunac, north and west of present-day Rezea. Knowing neither freedom nor joy, the first Rezeans cared for the warlocks' exotic beasts and sorcerous creatures, and fought in their blood sports. Stories about those times are full of bloodshed and families torn apart, passed from master to mistress with no

more voice in their own affairs than the beasts they tended to. Yet those who would become Rezeans refused to give in to oppression and cruelty; they never turned their anger or grief on their charges. The Primordials saw within them both strength and mercy, endurance and justice, and came to the Rezeans in visions, promising freedom.

Given the power to break their chains, misty nights to hide their flight, and the promise of the Picket Star to follow to freedom, those favored by the Primordials escaped. The Spirit Walk, the time when Rezeans were drawn together, lasted for generations. Those who were free returned to Drunac to raid camps and create secret sanctuaries and hidden trails to bring others to freedom. Though some died in the attempt, it only strengthened the spirits of those who lived. The heroes of old live on in the great banner of stars above the plains, their names and stories preserved for as long as the sun sets and the moon rises.

Then came Jessa, the great heroine of Rezea, she who is called the Mother of Mares and the Lady of Freedom. Many Rezeans believe Jessa was a daughter of Selene, sent to guard the poor and lost, like Selene's favorite, Felisar. According to legend, Jessa led her people from captivity and servitude to the safety of the great plains. What became of Drunac is uncertain. Some say it fell into ruin, a victim of the warlocks' sorceries. Others insist it was razed by the wrath of the Primordials themselves. Whatever Drunac's fate, the lands northwest of Rezea are barren and rainy moors, with treacherous sinkholes, crags with strange, monstrous shapes, and little wildlife.

Finally free, the Rezeans faced many challenges, the first being survival. With grass growing twelve feet high or more on the plains, and storms that could rise in a twinkling, it was clear the Rezeans could not survive alone, so Braniel, the Singer in the Stars, gave them their greatest gift. He called the nine bravest and strongest Rezeans out onto the plains. Under the canopy of his stars and the bright glow of Selene's moon, a mist fell upon them, transforming the nine into majestic horses, free to run through the grasslands. Rezeans cherish their horses as their family because they are; every clan can trace their lineage to one of the original nine chosen by Braniel and transformed into the ancestors of the great Rezean horses.

In the years after Jessa led them to their new home, the Rezeans adapted to the plains under her guidance. They divided into nine clans, each one associated with one of the Chosen Nine: Kamala, Duze, Rihan, Mischa, Tennirral, Winborn, Anara, Ifalla, and Firenze. They lived on the move, following the wisdom of their horses from river to oasis, from sweet summer grass to the safety of the winter hills. For many generations it was thus, long after Jessa herself was called to return to the gods' embrace.

Then, twins were born to the Kamala clan. Sitara and Tara showed great promise as horse singers but turned their gifts toward tragic ends. The twins cared more for each other than the honor of their people, more than the survival of their clan. Sitara fell in love with a Jarzoni horse-trader, and she and Tara betrayed the Kamala for his heart.

During the storm season, when the Rezean clans camp at their ancestral earthworks, the twins led Jarzoni raiders to the Kamala camp. A desperate battle broke out as the Kamala took up arms to fend off the raiders. The clan was decimated, their proud steeds led away in bondage, and Tara was slain in the battle. Sitara discovered her lover had misled them, and she found herself in bondage of a different kind, the servitude of home and hearth, bound to the deceptive horse-trader. Though the remnants of the Kamala clan raided the horse-trader's caravan and freed their horses, the clan left Sitara to the fate she had chosen.

Because of the twins' dishonor, twins are viewed as an ill omen in Rezea, and to this day, Kamala horses run wild, untouched by human hands out of respect for the clan that lost so many in defense of their herd. Rezean attitudes toward Jarzon are still bitter; some Rezean mercenaries refuse to work for Jarzon, and some clans choose not to sell horses to Jarzoni traders.

Aldis and Rezea maintain a tenuous alliance. The clans were among the first to trade openly with the new Kingdom of the Blue Rose, but the chaotic nature of the Rezeans makes a lasting alliance difficult to sustain. The Aldin Sovereign sends experienced envoys to the Fallen River Trading Camp each year to maintain ties with Rezea. The friendship between the clans and Aldis varies depending on the skill and success of those envoys. Aldis hires Rezean mercenaries for work near their borders, due in part to the familiarity the clans have with the lands beyond Aldis. The Sovereign also believes having Rezean mercenaries working with Aldin scouts and warriors helps strengthen ties of understanding and camaraderie between the two nations.

Culture

Rezeans began as a community drawn from many different peoples. Traces of ancient Jarzoni and even Kernish ancestry can be found in their weaving patterns and speech. Like their horse herds, Rezeans come in many colors of skin and hair. Most have dark hair, but there are some blonds and redheads among them. Vata are rare and frequently leave the clans of their birth to travel to Aldis or to seek out Mount Oritaun in the Shadow Barrens, while others dedicate themselves to freeing the vatazin ghosts in the haunted cliff city Cuyami.

In generations of life on the plains, Rezeans have become a loosely organized nation bound by their worship of the Primordials, shared tradition and history, and their treasured herds. They live a semi-nomadic life, crossing the vast plains most of the year, but taking refuge at their ancestral earthworks during the storm season. They follow their horse herds, allowing them to guide both the four-footed and two-legged members of the clan. Every Rezean knows that without the horses they would die out on the plains, so they cherish them. They depend on the beasts for everything from honor and wealth to food, housing, strength, and speed. From horseback, the deep grasslands are no longer a blinding maze but a sea to be sailed. The strength of mare's milk enables a woman to endure pregnancy and a child to gain adult strength. The lineage of their horses is watched more closely than the parentage of their own blood, and every adult Rezean can trace the lineage of his or her own horse back to one of the original Chosen Nine.

Rezeans measure the seasons by the stars, where Jessa and her herd of star-maned horses now run. Storytellers name the stars and have tales for each one, and witches use stars and horse bones when they cast omens for the coming year. They use the fixed Picket Star as a guide across a land with few other permanent features, and any of them can trace their way back to the plains of their birth if they can find that star.

The Rezean year begins in the storm season, just as the birth of their people began in danger and darkness. (As in Aldis, the new year arrives on the first day of Selenar.) During the storm season, great tornados and deadly flash floods make the plains dangerous, so Rezeans take refuge at their traditional campgrounds. Spring is foaling season, when the herd stallions become restless and the clans and herds return to their nomadic travels. During this time of year, foals and mares are vulnerable to wolf packs and savage bands of shadowspawn. In summer, the youths of the clan endure their adulthood rites; the witches send them on vision quests, and they chose their first horse from the tribal herds. Autumn is the season of riches; the fruits and beasts of the plains are at their peak, and everyone is occupied with preparing for the storm season and the return to the clan camps, ready for the cycle to begin again.

The Witches of Rezea

The witches of Rezea are the soothsayers, spirit guides, and historians of their people. Witches are touched by the gods and called to serve their clan and defend the plains. During their vision quests, witches are not called to the grasslands to search for their four-footed kindred; they are called to the sky where the goddess Selene waits to impart some fragment of her wisdom to the young witches. When witches awaken, they are forever marked with the crescent of Selene's moon on the brow or cheek, called a witch-mark among the Rezeans and widely respected.

Rezean witches are skilled in making potions and herbal remedies, the ability to read the future and the past in the stars, and, usually, the talent for mediating arguments between their more temperamental kindred. Witches are adepts, usually seers, healers, or animists. Rezean witches do not bond with rhy-horses, but many have winged familiars, such as griffon hawks or ravens.

When they meet Roamer seers, witches find they have much in common with them. Some witches speculate that the first Roamers, the ancient Faenari, might have been Rezeans who escaped from Drunac before the rest of their

people. Roamer seers don't put much stock in this theory, but they acknowledge the similarity of their traditions and have, at various times, allied with the witches of Rezea to investigate some mystery in the plains or battle a sorcerer or creature of Shadow.

Freedom and Loyalty

Rezeans value freedom. They never take slaves and do not permit others to do so in their lands. Every adult in the clan has an equal voice in decisions. Once a Rezean is an adult, any status or title is earned through their skills and the respect of their fellows. Debate is important to them, and while they have little use for writing and reading, they do have excellent memories and a talent for words. Many outlanders who assume Rezeans are simple savages find themselves on the wrong end of a Rezean's clever tongue. Chieftains lead through knowledge, wisdom, courage, and ability to sway their clan, and leadership of a clan can change if a chieftain loses the clan's support. Frequently, leadership is shared among more than one person—each with particular strengths—and they are obeyed in situations where their skills are strongest.

Each clan is independent and equal; there is no ruler over them all. The only person whose authority extends to every clan is the Khana, the Rezean high priestess, and her authority is that of an honored spiritual elder, not a temporal ruler. The Khana's role is frequently misunderstood by foreigners. Many Aldins and Jarzoni think the Khana rules Rezea, leading to the realm's popular misnomer abroad: the Khanate of Rezea.

Influence among the Rezean clans is maintained through a complex network of blood loyalties and feuds, the threat of honor raids, the diplomacy of the clan chieftains and the tribal witches, the size and health of a clan's herds, and the influence the rhy-horses have with their human kin. Currently, the Ifalla are the most influential clan, with an older, talented chieftain and wise witches.

Winter is the season for Rezean politics, when the clans are gathered at wintering grounds and remain relatively close to one another for several months. Marriages and feuds are begun and ended during winter. Youngsters stage honor raids and count coup, while their elders gather to argue politics and to share any important news gathered during the months wandering the plains.

Because Rezeans are so independent, they tend to find it difficult to act as a whole. People from other nations—Kerns, unscrupulous merchants, and others—have taken advantage of the Rezean tendency toward independence and manipulated shifting tribal alliances to their advantage. It is possible to find Rezean mercenaries on either side of a war; different clans are known to take contracts with opposing sides and fight each other.

Loyalty to clan is paramount for a Rezean. All other ties—blood, lovers, or mercenary contracts—may be cast aside, but no honorable Rezean abandons the clan in a time of need. Elders keep track of childbirth and parentage, but marriage is rare among the clans. The Rezeans are a passionate, temperamental people and they shape their passions with duels, season-marriages, and blood oaths. Marriage in Rezea is seldom lifelong; love rises and falls with the seasons, they say, and only the plains, the clan, and the herds are everlasting.

Honor duels among clan members are frequent but rarely to the death. There are also fights between the clans; the feud between the Rihan and the Winborn is legendary, but like honor duels within a clan, coup raids between clans are seldom lethal. Such raids are swift, their success measured by the attackers' cleverness and by the war braids they cut from their enemies' hair. Young firebrands count their coup by the number of braids dangling from their saddle. The gravest attacks likely to happen between clans are raids for horses. Such raids always bring retaliation, and when horses are stolen, lives may be lost.

Rezean Clans

The largest of the Rezean clans is the Ifalla. It has long-established ties with Aldis, which has given it primary trading rights with that kingdom. The Khana is frequently, though not always, drawn from the Ifalla clan, and its witches are the most powerful and wise. The current leader of the clan is the chieftain Yuval. He is a talented diplomat respected by all the clans, and is often called on to settle disputes between them. During the trading season, foreigners seek Yuval for advice and assistance in dealing with the clans as a whole.

The Mischa are one of the smaller clans of the Rezea. The land they traditionally wander is in the northeast, near the hill country that rises up toward the mountains that ring Kern. The Mischa nearly fell under the influence of Shadow in recent years due to the corruption of one of their witches, as the destruction of the Lich King emboldened the witch Benazir to attempt to usurp the rule of the Mischa clan chief. He failed and was exiled. The Mischa still struggle to remove the stain of Shadow from their reputation and they lack trained witches to aid them.

Childhood

Rezean children are raised by the entire clan and make independent decisions—and face their consequences—from an early age. They learn from heeding their elders and through trial and error, rather than formal schooling; the schools of other cultures bewilder Rezeans. Everyone in the clan offers something back, whether it is the simple chores of a child, the stories of an elder, or the strong arm and courage of a fighter.

There is no particular age when a Rezean becomes an adult; the spirit within a child knows when it is ready. At that time, the tribal witches initiate the youngster into the secrets and responsibilities of adulthood. Children about to undergo initiation bring an offering to the tribal witch: the toys and childish things they are ready to leave behind. Then, they are taken from their family's tent to live with the witches while they learn the horse lineage and the stories told during the transition from childhood to adulthood. The children spend up to a full year among the witches, and there are often several children being initiated at once.

In the autumn, when the young horses are ready to be called, the witches prepare a paste of blue-trumpet flower and offer it to the youngsters under their care. The sour, grainy drink brings visions, as well as dyeing teeth and lips blue for several weeks. It is the vision quest that brings a child to an adult's understanding. The children may not recall their visions, but they are moving, remembered or not. They may see themselves in the future, the faces of lovers, sometimes their own deaths. They may hear the sound of their horses' names or see what they look like, so they are prepared when they meet them. In rare cases, children see themselves as witches and return to seek to the witch's path.

Then, still under the guidance of their visions, the youths are sent into the plains with nothing but the clothes on their backs, a water skin, and a saddle. Until a youth finds a horse, he or she cannot return to the clan. Sometimes they never return, victims of starvation, wolves, or other misfortune. Strangers who wish to join a clan must also undergo time among the witches, a vision quest, and the dangerous time alone on the plains seeking a horse to become their companion.

Khana Fasha

The current Khana was born in the Anara clan, but like all Khana, neither lives with any one clan nor retains any tribal loyalties. She is a nomad among nomads. The Khana is loyal to the clans as a whole and to the Primordials she serves. She is a powerful adept and travels with her bonded rhy-horse, Nanim, from clan to clan, moved by her visions and the advice of her companion. They are accompanied by a troupe of witches and warriors.

The Khana is chosen from among the witches of Rezea during the winter months and sent to find a rhy-horse to bond with and prove her worth to the clans. Fasha has been Khana of the clans for fifteen years and is an older woman, her graying dark hair cut to a sensible length despite curling wildly. Her eyes are pale gold, with a cold, distant look as if she were seeing into the past, present, and future all at once. Her companion, Nanim, was born among the Winborn clan and is a slate-gray mare with Jessa's spotted starry blanket over her withers.

Outsiders

Some Rezeans never see outsiders. They live their lives on the plains and know nothing of strangers but what they hear from travelers' tales. Rezean stories make them wary of outsiders. From their hard beginnings in Drunac to the dark days of the Shadow Wars to the attacks of darkfiends and shadowspawn, Rezeans view strangers as treacherous, dangerous, and greedy.

In turn, few outsiders journey far into the plains. The grasslands seem empty and valueless, not worth the hardship and danger. Rezea has nothing in the way of gold or gems, no great forests of rare woods or herbs, and the suspicious clan folk show little sign of welcome.

Yuval, Chieftain of the Ifalla

Yuval is the leader of the Ifalla clan and has considerable influence over the politics of his people. Like most Rezean chieftains, he rules through diplomacy and alliance rather than might, bloodline, or god-given power. Yuval has been chieftain for some twenty years. His oldest daughter is the witch of his clan, and he has marriage alliances with the Duze and the Firenze. Yuval travels every year to the Fallen River Trading Camp to deal with the foreigners who alternately think he or the Khana have control over the clans. He does his best to keep Rezea safe from foreign influences, and to keep his temperamental people from angering strangers who don't understand the way the world works on the plains.

Yuval is an old man, with nearly seventy winters marked on his saddle, still strong in a lean, weathered way. His hair is steel gray and braided back from his face. Although his people revere and respect him, many wonder when or if the old chieftain will retire and who will succeed him. For his part, Yuval remains vital and keeps his plans (if any) to himself.

Those who travel to Rezea do so for only one thing: their incredible horses.

The usual point of contact between Rezea and the rest of the world is the Fallen River Trading Camp. It is there, just before they return to their wintering grounds, that Rezeans bring the horses they are willing to trade. Occasionally, criminals or the brave enter the plains, seeking escape or refuge, and end up at the camp. Most of these wanderers perish in the trackless grasses without ever meeting a Rezean. A few stumble across a scout and are brought back to a clan. In addition, there are wandering bands of night people—as well as the occasional darkfiend—out on the plains, which the Rezeans pursue and slay as a matter of course.

Rezeans remember their origins and are willing to adopt strangers into their clans occasionally. Adoption is not an easy process, however; a stranger must show strength, courage, mercy, and a respect for Rezean ways. An adult Rezean must stand and speak for a newcomer, who must pass the same vision quest and adulthood rites as Rezean children. Catching and taming a horse from the tribal herd is proof Jessa approves of the stranger, and it is only then they are adopted into a clan.

Clothing

Rezean clothing is made for a hard life on horseback. Summers are hot and dry, while winters are bitterly cold. Lightweight fabric is a major trade good for all the clans, and most clothing is made of horsehide and leather. Children dress in handed-down clothing, worn until it is little more than rags. Riders wear tight trousers of leather or hide, broad-brimmed woven grass hats to shade them from the sun as they watch over their herds and campgrounds, and heeled riding boots. Short fur vests keep Rezeans warm at night, and undershirts are stripped off on hot days.

Beading and embroidery are common on everything from boots to saddles, which are often lavishly decorated with coup braids, beads of semiprecious stones, and the most skilled threadwork available. Any merchant traveling to Rezea knows to bring brightly colored thread, beads, tiny bells, and fabric, for all the clans prize these.

Community

Although every clan has its own traditions, particularly patterns of embroidery or beading stitches, there are many customs and practices common to all the clans of the plains.

Rezeans are a nomadic people, so all their goods can be broken down and packed on horseback, or easily abandoned and rebuilt. They do not use wagons for transport. Everything they own must be carried by packhorses, mules, dogs, or people. Some clans keep herds of goats, driven along whenever a clan moves.

When a clan settles into a new campground, they erect their round horsehide and felt tents using the lightweight timber grass native to many areas of the plains. A family tent is about twelve feet in diameter, with a peaked roof, and can hold most families and all their goods. The inner walls are of braced timber grass. Baskets and slung nets attached to the walls hold a family's possessions. A central fire pit is dug, and a family's precious cooking pot (traded from outsiders) is set up for heat and cooking. Small oil lamps are used for light, although Rezeans usually sleep at sundown and rise with the dawn. Rezean tents are the color of the hides and felt from which they are made. Bands of embroidered cloth around the base and top of a tent tell stories of the family living inside it. The blanket covering the entrance is brightly dyed, as are the prayer flags flying from the top of most tents, asking for the Primordials' protection, luck, and good health for all who live under that roof.

At the center of a camp is a great fire pit, where the clan holds daily communal meals. The witch tent is always pitched to the north of the fire pit, its hides dyed black. Traditional runes representing the history of the clan and the maps of the foretelling stars are stitched in bone beads along the edges of the door flap and along the top of the tent. Other influential tribe members—chieftains, families with many horses, respected elders, and artisans—have their tents close to the center of camp, while poorer or younger people pitch their tents at the outer edges. Beyond the tents are areas staked out for silver smiths with their portable smithies, and other artisans. Then there are the goats and dogs, and finally the great plains as far as the eye can see.

Outriders and scouts spread out over any new area, hunting for dangers such as wolves or wandering shadowspawn, and looking for open water or promising springs. The horse herd is settled and picket guards stationed to protect them from raids and predators. Outriders also search for signs of other clans in the area and determine if nearby clans are allies or enemies. Enemy clans camped too close together spend much of their time raiding and counting coup on each other, until the lead stallion becomes restless and one or the other clan moves on.

Rezeans follow their horses. They do not guide them, believing the wisdom of the lead mare is one of Jessa's gifts to her people. Outriders and picket guards who watch the herd may slow the mare by roping it in order to make sure the clan can keep up, but otherwise the horse is free to choose whatever direction, speed, and stopping place it wishes. Because of this, a clan's path and location is rarely the same from one year to the next.

Rhydan

Rhydan hold an honorable place in Rezean culture, accepted among them when other outsiders are not. Most Rezeans treat rhydan with deep respect. The griffons have strong ties to the Tennir-al clan. They receive a tithe of horses every winter season, and Tennir-al members are often found with griffons as translators and guards.

The most common rhydan on the plains are, of course, rhy-horses. Like most of their kind, Rezean rhy-horses live with herds of mundane horses, considering them cousins of a sort. Rhy-horses are always dominant in a herd. Unlike horses, rhy-horses do not engage in the usual battles for dominance and the herds seem to accept the preeminence of the rhy-horses among them. Not all Rezeans ride rhy-horses, nor do all rhy-horses seek human companions. Those Rezeans who call a rhy-horse to their side during their adulthood vigil are considered unusually blessed; they often serve as heroic defenders of Rezea.

Aside from rhy-horses and griffons, few rhydan make a permanent home in the plains, but any rhydan who enter the region are ensured a friendly welcome by the clans and their herds.

Geography

The plains of Rezea are an expanse of unmapped wilderness. Even the Roamers do not travel far on the vast expanse they call the Sea of Grass. The plains have few trees, and the rustling grasses hide predators such as the solitary green wolf, flocks of scavenger crows, and the rare fanged great cat. The rivers are mostly seasonal, and the wildlife survives off the occasional spring hidden among the grasses, traveling from water hole to water hole. At the borders of the prairie, the grass shortens and mixes with flowering plants and bushes and the occasional stunted tree. During the winter, vast storms brew in the center of the plains. Tornados can lift entire camps from the ground and fling them miles away, leaving nothing but twisted wreckage and corpses.

Fallen River

The Fallen River Trading Camp is where Rezeans meet the outside world. Horse merchants and diplomats from foreign lands rub shoulders in the town, seeking the privilege of a Rezean horse or to hire mercenaries or scouts from the clans. There too, Rezean travelers return to their clans with news and stories of the lands they have seen and trade goods to enrich their families.

The Fallen River is seasonal. For most of its length, it is wide and shallow, but in the fifty miles before it flows into the sea, it cuts a great ravine in the plains. The trading camp is a short walk from the ocean, and

seaborne visitors drop anchor nearby and approach the camp by rowboat. The ravine's red and yellow sandstone walls tower high above the camp's cluster of corrals and semi-permanent tents. The sky is a narrow blue strip, and the camp is almost always in shadow. During the trading season, the river is little more than a muddy stream, enough to water horses but not the wild, thundering torrent it becomes during storm season.

The camp is boisterous and noisy during trading season. Horse corrals surround the merchant tents, and beyond them are Rezean campgrounds. Rezeans come into the trading town during the day but retreat to their tents at night, except for the guards watching over the horses. The few permanent buildings of yellow sandstone belong to the nations that have treaties with the Rezean clans: Aldis and Lar'tya. Fallen River is as close to a "capital" as the Rezeans have, and it is the location of the mercenary charter house, where those who wish to hire Rezean mercenaries gather. Most of the other structures in the town are tents, merchant wagons, canvas booths, and temporary structures of timber grass.

Rezeans are not inclined towards written laws or clear-cut paths of authority but have learned to make an exception for foreigners, who cannot seem to live without them. Rezeans experienced in dealing with outsiders—usually former mercenaries and scouts—act as guards and emissaries within the Fallen River Trading Camp. Foreign diplomats frequently discover, much to their dismay, that the Rezean contacts they made one year at the camp may not show up the following one.

The Rezean guards concern themselves mostly with the safety and legitimate trading of horses. They provide grudging assistance to the envoys and diplomats negotiating treaties with one clan or another and try to make sure hotheaded Rezeans looking for excitement as mercenaries aren't taken advantage of by unscrupulous outsiders looking for naive soldiers. Overall, though, the guards have little concern about who does what, so the camp has a reputation for danger and excitement; one that tends to exceed the reality. The guards do not interfere in fights among foreigners, unless they threaten the safety of the horse corrals or the Rezean camps.

Horses are the reason the camp exists, but they are far from the only items of value bought and sold during the trading season. Rezean mercenaries negotiate contracts at the Fallen River charter house, and merchants from all over come to trade dyes, weapons, and other crafted goods for exotic pets like miniature plains deer or great plains eagles, along with rawhides and intoxicating blue trumpet flower paste.

With trade money flowing freely, the camp is visited by performers of many types during trading season to encourage coin to fall into their own pockets. Thieves and other criminals also follow the money and the horses; the value of Rezean horses makes the risk of getting caught seem worthwhile. Rezeans usually drag foreign horse thieves to death behind their own steeds.

Mercenaries

Rezean mercenaries are famous for their courage, their ferocity, and their temper. Agents from other lands travel to the Fallen River Trading Camp to contract Rezean cavalry and scouts. Most Rezean mercenaries travel in small bands, several members of a single clan hiring out as a cavalry troop or corps of scouts. Foreigners find the mercenaries standoffish, easily insulted, magnificently skilled in anything to do with horse riding, and costly. All Rezean mercenaries are mounted troops with their own horses. Rhy-bonded Rezeans rarely hire out as mercenaries, yet they sometimes travel with a mercenary band.

The most famous Rezean mercenary band is the Winborn Cavalry. They've been in service to Jarzon and Aldis, and have served Rezea by fighting Kernish raiders in the northeastern plains. For Aldis, they've fought smugglers and bandits near the Veran Marsh and Basketh Bay. In Jarzon, they've hunted shadowspawn in the Northern Marches, struck at ogres in the Golgan Badlands, and fought off darkfiends along Jarzon's border with the Shadow Barrens.

When the rains start to arrive, the camp is abandoned fairly rapidly. Everyone is aware that flash floods are a risk in the deep ravine, and no one wants to linger to see them firsthand.

The Wintering Grounds

During the storm season, Rezeans abandon the unprotected plains and camp at traditional wintering grounds. According to legend, the Chosen Nine led their clans to these wintering grounds, and each clan has adopted prehistoric ruins to mark its winter territories. The ritual center of each clan's winter homeland is a great monolith.

The wintering grounds are near the center of the plains, where worn and ancient hills rise from the endless, flat horizon. Scattered about these hills are strange earthworks: spiral-shaped mounds; sun patterns of standing stones; mounds that, viewed from above, take the shape of great serpents or birds of prey. Each of the nine clans lays claim to one of these earthworks, and they spend the winter maintaining them. At the center of the monolith region is a circle of standing stones cared for by all the clans. The area around the stones is called Jessa's Ride and is used by the clans' witches for rituals and by their chieftains for rare inter-clan meetings.

Few outsiders know of the existence of the monoliths. The majority of the stones are worn to faint traces buried under stands of timber grass, and not all of the monoliths are claimed by a clan. There are a dozen or so scattered over several hundred miles, ignored and unexplored.

The greatest of the ruins is the alabaster spiral marking the Ifalla clan's wintering grounds. The spiral begins as nothing more than scattered ice-white stones buried in the grass but rises gradually in a tightening circle to the center, where the Ifalla spiral rises to twice the height of a mounted rider. The power there amplifies certain visionary arcana, even more so on Midwinter Night, a fact exploited by the clan's witches. Each Khana travels at least once to the Ifalla spiral, hoping to gain a vision of Jessa's plan for the clans.

The Tennir-al wintering grounds are marked by a huge sunburst of standing stones, each too massive for any team of horses or men to move. The tops are scored with deep claw marks, for griffons come to the Tennir-al in the winter and take their traditional tithe of horses. They roost on the standing stones during their visit. These monoliths have power over beasts; anyone within the circle of standing stones who knows the Tennir-al rituals can use the Calm arcanum on beasts as if they knew them.

The plains are slowly consuming the Kamala clan's earthworks: a serpent mound. It is a raised outline of sterile red clay that, from the sky, forms the image of a snake swallowing an egg. When the clan was largely destroyed, its mound was abandoned, and other clans have avoided the Kamala wintering grounds since then. Most believe that Kamala ghosts haunt the grounds, and the clans find it heart-wrenching to see the dwindling numbers of the Kamalan horse herds. Abandoned and ill-maintained, the mound has begun to attract the attention of creatures hoping to use the unclaimed energies for their own ends. A few shadowspawn have taken shelter at the mound, and the old Kamala horse herds, left to run wild, are being hunted and killed. The Kamalan earthwork is now tainted with Shadow and considered a corrupt place.

Malidar, Captain of the Winborn Cavalry

Malidar of the Winborn has been captain of the Winborn Cavalry mercenary company for some fifteen years, bringing considerable wealth and prestige to the clan. Every now and again she considers retiring to her tents and turning the cavalry over to her second-in-command, but it never quite seems to happen. Malidar loves her work and being at the forefront of the action too much.

She is a hard-featured, middle-aged woman with classic Rezean looks: dark hair, hawk-faced, and brown-eyed. She carries her battle scars proudly and rides a spirited black mare. Her traditional saddle is draped with captured honor braids and thickly embroidered with the blue and white spirals of the Winborn clan.

Stormpoint Refuge

For none deserve torment, and all deserve shelter.

In a land that never ceases moving, there is one fixed point, one touchstone. Surrounded by a sea of billowing grass, buffeted by every storm that rises, besieged by shadowspawn, Stormpoint Refuge clings to the foothold it has established near the wintering grounds in the shadow of the corrupted Kamala clan's earthen serpent.

This strange anomaly, a fortress in a land of nomads, is the subject of much speculation and little fact. What is known among the clans is that it is the purest expression of the deep reverence the Rezeans hold for their horses, a refuge for any four-footed creature betrayed by the two-legged, or those grieved beyond bearing by the loss of their bonded ones.

It was started, the old witches say, when a unicorn rescued three young Firenze mares from Yalisk Tarfinger, a notorious horse thief. Used to freedom and respect in their early lives, the mares had been sold to soldiers who employed any means necessary to break them. They had returned to the Firenze herds under the unicorn's protection, but found themselves unable to forget the torment visited upon them. Treli, an old rhy-horse, bonded with them and listened to stories of the other beasts they had seen abused. It was Treli's idea, prompted by their tales, to create a place of peace and sanctuary.

They left the herd, finally, with the witches' approval. Following Treli, they sought out the unicorn and told her their dream—a place of safety, free of threat, where any heartsick beast could find refuge. She gave them her blessing, but pointed out the challenges they would face. Suggesting they return to Rezea and gather other rhy-horses and humans who might help establish this refuge, she vowed to begin recruiting aid in Aldis and the Pavin Weald.

At first the four settled near Hag's Pond, but the area was vulnerable to storms and flooding, so they moved on as winter approached. Treli and her "daughters" found Stormpoint, dangerously close to the ruins of the Kamala wintering grounds, but safe enough from the majority of squalls. A pack of rhy-cats lived there, and Treli was able to establish discussions with them. They had some interaction with the Rezeans, and still passed down stories of the Kamala clan. Treli and her daughters were welcomed.

Over time, the unicorn made good on her word. She brought them two and three at a time, the war-mounts and whip-scarred cart horses, rhy-horses slaved to wealthy collectors, and more Rezean horses who had been sold or traded away into poor circumstances (for no matter how carefully traders were checked, too many horses fell through the cracks). Within three years of its founding, a small herd lived in Stormpoint, and had begun to attract the attention of the shadowspawn infesting the Kamala ruins.

Treli left the refuge and sought out the Kamala stallions, recruiting bachelor stallions who had not established their own bands. She taught them tactics and how to kill the shadowspawn, and gave them a home. Meanwhile, the unicorn had another goal—to recruit enough trustworthy humans to build a fortress in Stormpoint.

A year later, she returned with two witches and twenty Rezeans. Treli's daughters were horrified, fleeing to the plains at the height of storm season, convinced that the humans had come to take them back. Peace was soon reestablished, and the refuge began to take shape.

The rhy-horses quickly realized they needed human hands to attend to wounds, maintain the spacious shelters, and give the refuge a voice in the outside world, and so the unicorn brought them children who were unwanted by their families. Raised among the four-footed denizens of the refuge, many do not even speak in human tongues, though recently they have been encouraged by the rhy-horses to spend time among the Rezeans and Aldins to develop more resources and knowledge.

The unicorn is seen much less frequently these days. She comes occasionally to bring new charges, or news of the outside world, but the day-to-day running of the refuge is handled by the rhy-horses who have taken on its administration and management. The unicorn renews the arcana guarding the refuge whenever she is there, for it keeps the storms milder, the grass greener, and the earth unfriendly to evil feet.

The Refuge

The safe haven has come far since those early days. Stormpoint's rocky walls rise sharply from the plains, an outcropping of black stone just far enough from the mountains to be noticeable…and threatened by storms. It is distinct from everything around it, though whether it is natural or the remnant of ancient arcana is unclear. Only two paths lead up it, steep and winding, slick from the streams that course down its sides onto the plains below.

The paths terminate on a broad shelf of rich soil, nearly half a mile wide and three miles long. The cliff drops off steeply below the shelf, offering an unparalleled view of the plains, while the walls behind the shelf provide natural terraces and caves.

Over the decades, the Rezeans have planted orchards and gardens, diverted streams into pools, and converted many of the larger caves into dwellings for the humans and vata who have made their home here. The buildings are simple, and disappear easily into the side of the mountain, protected from storms and all but the most determined predators.

Another high valley nestles in the rocky crags above the shelf. More vulnerable to the weather, but protected from any interference, those rescued who cannot stand the sight or scent of humans find a safe haven, cared for by their own rhy-horses.

The nominal head of the refuge—though it is run by consensus—is Trintal, Treli's great-great granddaughter. She is lame and unable to fight, but wise and decisive enough to keep the refuge safe and manage the many conflicting needs of such a unique place. Bonded to her is Tren, a deaf girl raised at the refuge from a very early age.

Due to the size of the refuge and the special needs of its inhabitants, it cannot sustain itself. The rhy-horse Helsir and the three human children he raised spend the majority of their time away from Stormpoint, maintaining relationships with the clans, who consider the place blessed and all gifts to it as offerings to Jessa's children.

During the summer, those who are able-bodied leave the refuge, either to wander the plains or to head out of Rezea to find those in need of their aid. The refuge is most vulnerable in this season, and few non-equine creatures are allowed to enter.

The refuge is divided into various parts, with several outposts.

Benazir, Witch of the Shadows

A decade ago, Benazir was a newly initiated witch of the Mischa clan. Though Jessa touched him during his vision quest, Benazir has lost his way. At first, he was tempted by Kernish promises of aid for his clan, which has been struggling for generations in poor territory. Providing information on the movements of other clans and any foreigners on the plains seemed a small price to pay for medicinal herbs, gold to buy food, and warm clothes for the children of the clan. Over the years, however, the demands of his Kernish masters grew greater, and Benazir found himself in too deep, unable to shake off their yoke. What was worse, he'd resorted to sorcery to fulfill Kern's demands and to protect himself.

The destruction of the Lich King during the conflict with Aldis freed Benazir from his obligations, but it was too late. The witch found he enjoyed the power he wielded too much, and embraced Shadow. His attempt to seize control from his clan's chieftain failed, and he was forced to flee alone out onto the plains. Since then, Benazir has gathered sorcerous power and plotted revenge against those who exiled him. The Witch of the Shadows is a handsome man, with unusually pale hair for a Rezean. His eyes are as green as spring grass, but his charm and pleasant looks conceal a corrupt heart and spirit.

Mardha's Meadow

Mardha was the youngest of the Firenze mares who followed Treli to found the refuge, which honored her legacy by naming the main meadow after her. Mardha's Meadow is where the bulk of the refuge's operations take place.

Notable Refuge Characters

If adventurers' wanderings do somehow take them to Stormpoint Refuge, it's quite possible (although not guaranteed) that they'll encounter some of the prominent residents presented below.

Auger

Old and broken-kneed, Auger has seen his best decades come and go. The bay rhy-stallion and his bonded human, a healer of the Anara clan, are in charge of rehabilitating the newcomers to Stormpoint, and they are the best at their job. Auger mends hearts and minds while Nemma mends bodies.

Nemma

An old Anara healer, and Auger's bonded human, Nemma can mend any broken thing. Stooped and half-deaf, crabby with pain and age, Nemma is a terror to the healthy members of Stormpoint, and a refuge and healing hand to those who come to be fixed.

Trintal

The titular head of Stormpoint Refuge and Treli's descendant, Trintal is a small, cream-colored rhy-mare with bright blue eyes. Lame, and missing half an ear as the result of a shadowspawn claw, Trintal has not left the refuge since her injury. She now focuses her energy on caring for the refuge and keeping the many personalities at peace. Trintal is quiet but stern, utterly fair, and bonded firmly to Tren.

Tren

Tren was discovered by Ursin in a small village. Her story was never known, as she'd been abandoned as a toddler, but her dark skin, black hair, and bright blue eyes speak of a mixed heritage. Ursin brought her to the refuge, where Tren instantly fell in love with Trintal, who was just a filly at the time. The two became inseparable and eventually bonded, surprising no one.Tren is fully deaf, but more used to communicating with horses than humans. She is as quiet as Trintal, delicate and subtle in her movements. She handles everything Trintal needs hands for, and the two make an effective and striking pair.

Helsir

A lean, scarred, dapple grey rhy-stallion, Helsir came to the refuge when his bonded rider died after a long illness. He is dour and unforgiving, living only for his rider's son, Jassak, who is an outcast of the Duze tribe due to a severe spinal deformity that leaves him unable to ride. Jassak now lives at the refuge, while Helsir and his human associates spend the year traveling between the tribes, maintaining the alliances necessary to keep Stormpoint alive.

- **Jessa's Hand:** The heart of the refuge, Jessa's Hand is the landing place for newcomers. Run by an old bay rhy-stallion, Auger, Jessa's Hand is fully equipped with medical supplies and vata and human assistants skilled in healing. Large, comfortable shelters protect their inhabitants from the weather but do not impede movement, and it is here the refugees begin to regain their safety.
- **Gint's Hall:** Named after another of Treli's daughters, Gint's Hall is where the business of the refuge is managed. Visitors are brought here to be greeted and investigated by Hallan and Pesat, Trintal's lieutenant rhy-stallions. The two burly rhy-horses are supported by four humans trained in the use of weapons.
- **The Nursery:** A primarily human-focused set of buildings, the Nursery is where the two-legged children live with their caretakers. Sometimes sickly foals are brought in, as well.

Treli's Orchard

The roof gave in long ago on the largest cave on Stormpoint's flanks, and inside it a hidden treasure welcomes the tormented. Clover and sweet alfalfa cloak the tumbled stones, and gnarled apple trees grow around a small pool. Treli and her daughters are at rest here at last, commemorated by the sort of monument they would most have appreciated. Their bones nurture the trees, and tiny white flowers carpet the orchard in summer. The only humans allowed here are an old woman and her apprentice who care for the place, but any four-foot who desires peace and solitude may come here without hindrance.

The Highland

The only place in the refuge completely denied to human or vata eyes is the Highland, a high valley behind Stormpoint. Filled with thick grass and dotted with shelters—built by humans who have long-since died—it is isolated from all prying eyes. Three springs dot the landscape, gifts from the unicorn, and the grass is lush and sweet. This is where the creatures who cannot bear the sight or scent of man live, and those who simply wish nothing to do with those who used them so cruelly.

The Highland is administrated by four rhy-mares, who oversee the care of new herd members, mediate disputes, and keep the stallions in line. Two of them are not bothered by humans, and therefore manage the communication with the rest of the refuge to keep the Highland running.

Hag's Pond

A small, reed-shrouded lake about thirty miles from Stormpoint, Hag's Pond is the summer grazing ground for those members of the refuge who are able to travel the distance. This migration eases the strain on the refuge's resources, but leaves them more vulnerable both at home and abroad.

Old Kingdom Ruins

The Sorcerer Kings once ruled over the plains of Rezea. Their reach here was limited but fearsome, and they occupied the few Old Kingdom sites in the realm. The long years and the hard weather, as well as the ancient battles that destroyed the Sorcerer Kings, have wiped out most traces of the sorcerers and the Old Kingdom, but a few prominent ruins persist.

The Stone Forest

Deep within the plains, where no tree should grow, the Stone Forest looms up from the grass. It is not a forest of gentle breezes or cool green shade. No birds sing from its branches, and few creatures live within it. The trees of the Stone Forest are black obsidian with leaves that cut like knives and chime softly in the winter winds.

Every thinking creature of the plains shuns the Stone Forest. It sickens those who remain within its shadows for too long, and even brief travel within brings vile dreams. There is no food, and any water there is brackish and foul. The ground beneath the trees is thick shards of black glass with blue trumpet flowers, which grow in scarce patches on the rest of the plains. Their blossoms are huge—easily the size of a man's head— and the blue an indigo so dark it seems black. It is clear whatever poisons the Stone Forest has also tainted the flowers. Tribal witches shun them, except for those tempted by Shadow and seeking visions of power and death. The dreams of the Stone Forest can be fatal.

The first few days within the shadow of the Stone Forest are disturbing. Travelers hear odd noises, and the shadows of the trees seem to shift and stir restlessly in the corners of tired eyes. The more time spent within the forest, the deeper the sense of being watched and the presence of a looming evil waiting for a moment of weakness. Then, some dark night, when even the stars seem alien, the fears of the forest wake.

Very few have survived the forest's rising, and their tales of horror are hair-raising. There is no separating friend from foe when the forest stirs; travelers turn their weapons on lovers, family, and even themselves. Overwhelming fear poisons every breath. The entire forest is a corrupt place.

No one knows the cause of the Stone Forest, only that it has been there, looming in nightmares and stories, since the Shadow Wars. Some witches and Aldin adepts speculate that a shadowgate from the Old Kingdom is buried beneath the forest and was corrupted by the Sorcerer Kings. The witches believe the shadowgate, or a similar artifact, anchors the forest's evil and that, if it were destroyed, the Stone Forest would fall to the natural order of decay and rebirth. What is known is that darkfiends who make their way to the plains are drawn to the forest, and there are more than a few that have made their lairs there.

Visions of the Stone Forest

The greatest dangers in the forest are the frightening visions travelers suffer. Under the influence of the poisoned trumpet flowers, wayfarers begin to have terrible dreams which grow stronger until they cannot distinguish friend from foe. Victims feel like their most horrific nightmares have come true.

Ill dreams begin the first night in the forest. Dangerous hallucinations don't begin until the second night. On their second night in the forest, and each night thereafter, travelers, and any other creatures, must make a TN 12 Constitution (Stamina) test, with the TN increasing by +1 each subsequent night.

A failed test means the victim suffers a waking hallucination. The Narrator should link hallucinations to the character's fears or memories of past failures. Under the effects of hallucinations, the victim believes their dreams are real and should act accordingly: fighting imaginary foes, fleeing from horrors too great to face, and such like. The victim may attack or flee from companions, depending on the nature of the hallucination.

Each hallucinatory episode lasts an hour, and then the victim becomes exhausted and falls into a deep slumber for 3d6 hours minus the victim's Constitution. Because the hallucinations are caused by an airborne toxin, arcana and other effects that treat or remove poisons can aid against them.

Deep within the Stone Forest lies an oasis, a pool of still water as black as the heart of Shadow. This pool is the center of the evil the forest has hidden for generations. It poisons the ground, the plants, the animals, and the very atmosphere. This poison has affected the blue trumpet flowers growing throughout the forest, and they release their hallucinogenic fumes into the air, bringing nightmares and Shadow-touched visions of death and terror.

At the side of the black pool, a strange construction of petrified wood houses a naga called Yysaldis. Narrow and tall, a tower has begun to take shape, reaching above the treetops. The tower has unsteady, twisting stairs, and within are the bones and trophies of dead animals and the bodies of missing Rezean scouts. The naga has been gathering strength to build a stronghold in the Stone Forest and reach out for greater power and influence.

The City of the Cuyami

At the northern end of the Fallen River ravine is a strange city built into the canyon walls. Carved into the cliffs, the city climbs from the narrow river all the way to the grass waving at the top of the ravine. Rezeans call the city Cuyami after its ancient residents, noble vatazin who lived in the Old Kingdom but were destroyed during the Empire of Thorns.

Access to the city is by hand- and footholds carved into the walls, or wooden ladders. In the entire city no living voices are heard. Though the city has been empty since before the Shadow Wars, it looks as though the inhabitants left it only moments ago. Grass baskets of grain and dried fruits remain in storehouses dug deep into the canyon walls; blankets with red, white, and black stripes drape across doorways; beadwork and weaving lie abandoned in homes; and toys look recently dropped in the winding paths of the city.

When the Cuyami, like other vatazin, rose up against Empress Delsha Artanis, they were at the forefront of the resistance, far as they were from her seat of power. Seeking to make an example of them, the empress herself came to their city and wove a curse of great and terrible power, stripping the life force of every vatazin in the city. Since then, their ghosts have remained, waiting to be freed from the ancient curse, struggling to speak to the living through the veil of death.

Those with Second Sight entering Cuyami quickly become uneasy, overpowered by a sense of being watched, of whispers just beyond understanding, and of strange shadows moving all around. By day, the voices seem to carry on the normal activities of life, but at night they rise to screams of fear and desperation. The language of the Cuyami has long been lost, so no one has been able to decipher the whisperings, and no one has found a way to free the ghosts to return to the Wheel of Rebirth.

In the autumn, during the fifth week of the month Goion, the last days of Cuyami are recreated. Starting on the first day of that week, anyone in Cuyami must make a successful TN 9 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test or be drawn into a vision of the city's doom. The TN is 11 for those with the Second Sight, and each day for the rest of the week the target number increases by +1. Once drawn into the illusion, a victim's only way out is to experience the vision through to its completion at the end of the week, or for someone else to use Mind Shaping to free the victim's psyche. The target number of the Mind Shaping test is equal to the target number of the Willpower test for the current day of the vision.

It is only in the vision of the city's last days that the key to releasing the ghosts can be found. Characters can act freely within the vision. Those who are brave enough can attempt to halt the sacrifice of the city, and must do so before the end of the week. This involves somehow stopping Delsha Artanis from invoking the curse. The ghosts are aware that they can only be freed in their illusionary past, so during the autumn, it is dangerous to travel in Cuyami. Though the ghosts cannot communicate, they can move objects, block exits from their homes, and spook horses. Rezeans are well aware that horses go lame in Cuyami, sleep becomes unnaturally heavy, supplies are

stolen or tainted—anything to keep strangers in the city during the last week of Goion.

Flora and Fauna

The plains of Rezea are full of life just beneath the surface of the waving sea of grass. Bison and wolves roam the short grass prairie, poisonous serpents plague the few riverbeds, and rattlesnakes can be found along the length of the Fallen River. Bloodthirsty bats haunt the Stone Forest, and the rattlesnakes in the Cuyami lands are ghostly white. There are a few prides of wild cats who make their home in the plains, hunting wild horses, bison, and pronghorn. Herds of horses—some with rhy-horses living among them—roam the grasslands in an endless cycle of life and death. There are also creatures and plants unique to the wide plains.

Miniature Plains Deer

These knee-high creatures live deep in the plains, where the grass grows twelve or more feet in height. They are shy and fragile, with cinnamon-spotted tawny coats, liquid dark eyes, and overgrown eyeteeth they use to dig up roots and plants. The wealthy in Jarzon and Aldis sometimes keep miniature deer as pets, and Rezeans capture fawns in the spring to tame and trade.

Griffon Hawk

The griffon hawk is named after the rhydan it resembles. They are large birds of prey, with heavy beaks and powerful claws, that hunt everything from plains deer to newborn foals. Griffon hawks have brilliant gold plumage; the males a paler color than the females, which are slightly larger and are the color of autumn grass. Their territories are the canyons and riverbeds of the plains where their prey comes to drink. Rezeans catch and tame griffon hawks, and witches sometimes take them as familiars. They are aggressive creatures and require careful handling.

Blue Trumpet Flower

The blue trumpet flower is indigenous to the plains of Rezea and is an important part of the clans' ritual life. Witches administer it during the vision quests of young Rezeans, when they go through their adulthood rites, as well as ingesting it themselves to bring visions of the future to guide their clans.

The plant grows as a long, creeping vine, spreading in patches over grass and bushes and draping over everything. It's usually found near springs or rare streams but doesn't grow near larger rivers. The trumpet flower's leaves are heart-shaped, bright green, and about the size of a child's hand. It blooms all through the spring and summer. A long trumpet-shaped bud untwists at dusk, revealing a violet-blue flower with luminous white streaks. It is a night-blooming plant, and each blossom lasts only one day.

During the summer, the plains hawk-moth flies from plant to plant. Witches of the clans gather the flowers during twilight, just before the blooms begin to open. They follow the hawk-moths to patches of ready blossoms and retreat out of the range of the intoxicating flower as the sun finally falls below the horizon.

Blue trumpet flowers release an intoxicating scent at night when they open. Anyone within two feet of a flower must make a TN 9 Constitution (Stamina) test. If the test fails, the toxin takes effect within two minutes. Victims suffer from disturbing hallucinations for 3d6 × 10 minutes.

Timber Grass

In the deep plains, the grasslands reach high above a human's head. There are areas where the grass grows so heavy and high that it can be used to build homes and tools the way other people use supple wood. Some stands grow to twenty or more feet in height and are as thick around as a man's arm. The grass grows in clumps with long, sword-shaped leaves clustered at the top. In the winter, the leaves turn a brilliant crimson before dropping off in spring, when the new growth begins. Timber grass is hollow and can be formed into everything from weapons to watertight containers to the supports for Rezean tents.

The Roamers, A Nation of Roads

Named for their ceaseless wandering, the Roamers are a people without a homeland. They can be found all across Aldis, among the clans of Rezea, and in Jarzon. A few even venture into Kern, but the threat of enslavement is too great for most of them to travel far through that dread province.

Roamers once had a land of their own, a prosperous nation of mosaic-covered domes, fragrant perfumes, and long nights of dance, storytelling, and prophecy. Faenaria, as it was known, was destroyed in the Shadow Wars. Today it is called the Shadow Barrens. Roamers are the scattered descendants of the Faenarians who escaped the destruction of their homeland. They are now nomads, living in brightly painted wagons and staying in one place for no more than a week or two, and often only for a few days.

Roamers make their livings as fortunetellers, entertainers, traders, and tinkers, repairing simple household goods. If a pot or knife is beyond repair, the Roamers are ready to sell you a new one. They are renowned for their skill at music, for the cards of the Royal Road, which they use to read a person's soul and see the future, and for their intricate carvings. Many villagers in Aldis purchase Roamer pendants of polished bone and wood carved into knot patterns. These "lucky knots" are supposed to protect the wearer from curses and misfortune. Many believe in their properties because the Roamers wear them themselves and seem to have good luck.

Slender and a bit shorter than the peoples of Aldis, Roamers tend to have straight black hair and light brown skin. They are a somewhat secretive people. They keep their own language, Faento, and their own religion and do not share these with non-Roamers, except for those who wish to join their wandering life. Sometimes youths from small villages do just that. There are tales of adolescents running away to join the Roamers and other stories of Roamers kidnapping children to raise as their own. The accounts of kidnapping are untrue, but if young people are both sincere in their desire to join the Roamers and willing to help with the hard work of living on the road, they are welcome. The Roamers always return youths who cannot adapt to their way of life to their homes.

History

Roamers are descended from the Faenari, "the People of Fate," who thrived in the lands south of present-day Jarzon for nearly two millennia, before the Shadow Wars and the fall of their realm. The arid Faenari homeland, Faenaria, had mild winters and sweltering summers. Its scattered oases stayed green year-round. Rocky hills and mountains surrounded its fertile river valleys, while its southern reaches were high desert and salt flats.

The capital, Austium, grew up next to the Jornoovian River, which poured into the ocean hundreds of miles south of Falzanoth, before that city fell to become the Leviathan's Teeth. Amid the capital's towers and glittering onion domes, artisans and seers gathered, trading goods and knowledge with travelers and merchants from throughout the Old Kingdom. Some visitors came to see the storied Garden of Sighs, where the gardeners claimed to have collected every known flower in the world and whose fragrances inspired reveries and joyful tears. Others sought the Oculon, the city's greatest temple, where the arcana-shaped frescoes were said to be windows into the soul. Some visitors simply wanted pleasure, and Austium offered it in abundance. There were spiced foods and mead to please any palate, dancers whose every move evoked desire, and men and women expert in the arts of ecstasy.

The Austiar, the ruling family, governed from a resplendent palace in the capital. Overlooking barges and crocodiles in the river, the palace was filled with gardens, pools, and hideaways. Even when the Old Kingdom's power was centered in Aldis, the Austiar lived lavishly, with the trappings of kings and queens. Always clad in scarlet attire in public, they traveled with numerous attendants and comforts and, within the province, commanded more respect than any dignitary from far-off Aldis. Their libraries of scrolls and papyri contained knowledge thought lost in other lands, and their pastimes made foreigners blush.

While some were debauched, most of the Austiar loved knowledge even more than pleasure. They were cunning diplomats and brilliant storytellers. Each young noble was expected to memorize *The Riddles of the Far Road*, the epic about the world-spanning journey of the seer Lilianus and his love affair with the poet Valestian. Austiar would try to outdo one another by reciting the poem with special flare, adding a riddle here, an exotic detail there. (The poem is one of the few pieces of Faenari literature to survive the Shadow Wars. While no complete text exists, its cantos are memorized by Roamer bards and sung at campfires, and every Roamer wedding is blessed by a recitation of "The Heart Song of Valestian," the epic's most lovely canto.)

From their earliest days, the Austiar were a mix of humans and vata. When the Faenari first came to the region, they were nomads and lost their way in the desert. They sheltered in the oasis at the base of Mount Oritaun, where Selene herself was said to dwell on the winter solstice. The People of the Moon, the vatazin who lived within the peak's mystical caverns, welcomed the humans, offering them the surrounding lands as long as they made no claim to the mountain. The humans, thinking the vatazin fools, agreed to this and sealed the pact by marrying their chief's son to a mountain princess. Thereafter, the ruler of Faenaria was always expected to marry a prince or princess from Oritaun. This tradition was upheld for hundreds

of years, till Prince Ulmed ascended the throne and took a noblewoman from the north as his wife. Roamers consider the moment Gretta of the White Face became Queen as the beginning of the end for Faenaria.

The Vision

In the centuries before Ulmed and Gretta's reign, the most gifted Faenari adepts were invited to study the arcane arts at Mount Oritaun. Instructed by vatazin teachers, the students spent many years observing and interpreting the mountain's gleaming cave paintings. Not even the vatazin knew who had painted the images, but spoke of them as Gaelenir's handiwork. In their myths, the Great Sage observed Selene's dreams in the world's early days, when she would sleep during the new moon. He committed each dream to memory and painted them deep in the mountain so that the moon's light would not shine upon the paintings and reveal them to Selene.

Whatever their origins, the images were clearly the work of arcana. There were eighty in all, seventy-eight of which correspond to the Roamer cards called the Royal Road. Gazed at long enough by a seer, they revealed a possible future or an aspect of a person's soul. The vatazin permitted the Faenari to meditate on the first seventy-eight images but never let them see the final two paintings. Those were known to be in a cavern at the mountain's roots, but no Faenari could ever find them, even after several resorted to sorcery, attempting to wrest the paintings' locations from the minds of the vatazin. The vatazin referred to the images as the Shadow and the Dance, and sages whispered that these were more than images but gateways, one leading to the realm of the exarchs, the other to the Eternal Dance itself. It is said the vatazin cast the sorcerers, who wished so desperately to find the paintings, into the Shadow painting. Whether that is what happened or some less ominous fate befell them, the sorcerers were never seen again.

The Faenari, who always had a knack for visionary arcana, became masters at interpreting the paintings, even surpassing their teachers. When the Faenari first came to the land, the vatazin chuckled at their prodding of bird entrails and fire-gazing, thinking it superstition, but in time, the vatazin acknowledged that the humans' auguries were more accurate than their own and affirmed the Faenari were indeed the People of Fate. Some of the vatazin adepts speculated the Faenari were not human at all, but a race like themselves and the sea-folk, touched by arcana and remembering some of their gifts from the days before Selene crafted the Wheel of Rebirth to preserve the world from oblivion.

Eventually, interpretation of the cave paintings of Oritaun became central to Faenari divination, so the Austiar commissioned the construction of a great temple in the capital, where the nation's most skilled painters and adepts would reproduce the images for

all to see. The vatazin objected to this, but the Austiar were undeterred. After a decade of building, the Oculon became the center of Austium, a place of pilgrimage for all Faenari. The dome of the Oculon could be seen throughout Austium, and light glimmered from its oculus at night. Under the dome, the frescoes were proclaimed a wonder of the world. Seeing the humans' work, the vatazin acknowledged their students had again surpassed them, for the temple's frescoes rivaled Oritaun's paintings, in both beauty and arcane power. As a group, the frescoes were dubbed the Royal Road, each revealing a station along the road of life. Demand to see the images, and for divinations before them, swelled so much that it could not be met, and pilgrim camps sprang up around the city. The Austiar, refusing to let the city be overrun, had a pilgrim ward constructed, where seekers would sometimes wait for weeks to have their fortunes read within the Oculon.

Devotion to the images became so fervent that holidays were created for each of them, leading to the Faenari having the fullest feast calendar in the world. On each feast day, icons of the day's image would be carried at the head of great processions through the streets of Austium. Rich and poor alike took part, incense smoke filled the streets, pilgrims sang and danced, and seers shook in ecstasies. Diplomats sending reports back to the Old Kingdom's Council of the Wise were convinced the city had gone mad.

Miriana "the Mad"

In the year of Prince Ulmed's ascension, conditions in the pilgrim ward became unbearable. Some slept five to a bed, with little food and no clean water. On the feast day of the Emperor, the King and Queen, Ulmed's parents, led the procession through the city, as was customary for that feast. A riot erupted when they approached the blighted ward and refused to enter, not wanting to spoil their scarlet finery. When the dust settled, the King and Queen lay dead on the street and half the pilgrim ward was aflame. Rioting spread throughout the city. Peace was only restored weeks later when Prince Ulmed returned with warriors from an expedition in the far north. His justice was swift and brutal. Many pilgrims fell at his soldiers' swords. With him rode a pale woman with red hair, who sunk her own blade into the rioters' breasts. Days before Ulmed's coronation, he revealed that she was his wife, Gretta. Her people were the ancestors of the Jarzoni, and they had no use for Faenari visions and icons.

The King and Queen would have razed the entire pilgrim ward if not for the intercession of High Seer Miriana, the beloved of Ulmed's brother, Karshenel, an adept of some power himself. Miriana's power in visionary arcana was only matched by her mercy to the poor. Half the poor in Austium owed their sustenance to the charitable works she oversaw. Seeing the needy felled by the city's soldiers, she beseeched the King to restore order without bloodshed. At first he ignored her, but when he came to the Oculon for his weekly consultation with the temple adepts, she chastised him publicly. Knowing the love his people had for her, he bowed to her will, to Gretta's horror. From that day, she hated Miriana, the "madwoman" who bested her King.

Within two years, the city had returned to normalcy, and Miriana's influence in the city grew. The pilgrim ward became livable, the number of youths seeking to serve at the temple increased, and the city's feast calendar was restored. This peace did not last. On the feast day of the Tower, the full moon hovered directly over the temple's oculus, and Miriana was filled with a mighty vision. She saw that, hundreds of years thence, all of Faenaria would be destroyed. She glimpsed a realm of Shadow and ruin and blowing sand. The next day, she sought an audience with the King and Queen. They admitted her, but their ears were closed. She implored them to order the Faenari to prepare for the worst, to make preparations for a mass emigration. The King and Queen nodded as she spoke, but laughed at the absurdity of her vision as soon as she departed. The King would not listen to his brother either, who believed in Miriana's vision.

Determined to save the Faenari in the future, Miriana began to speak about her vision wherever she went in the city. The poor, in particular, became greatly agitated, and the Austiar feared another uprising. Dreading the approaching chaos, Gretta took matters into her own hands. Taking gold from the Austiar treasury, she paid an assassin to poison the High Seer and silence her. The assassin was proficient at his work, and in the morning Miriana lay dead in her chamber. Karshenel was the first to find her. His grief was overwhelming, but not so much that he could not deduce what had happened. He went to his brother, demanding justice, but Ulmed would not listen, glad to be rid of "that meddling woman." Karshenel turned his back on him, never to speak to him again.

The Royal Road

Returning to the Oculon, Karshenel summoned the temple's adepts, revealing to them what had happened. Together they vowed not to seek blood for blood but to exact a different sort of revenge. Their most able shapers turned their powers to the sacred frescoes of the Oculon, and while the King and Queen began to spread word that Miriana had died of a vision-induced seizure, the frescoes, the province's greatest treasure, vanished. By the following morning, Karshenel, the temple's adepts, and Miriana's body had vanished as well. A panic swept through the capital. Where had the frescoes, the adepts, and their beloved seer gone? Some thought they'd retreated to Mount Oritaun. Others speculated they had been consumed by Shadow. Still others claimed to have heard psychic whisperings from the adepts and that the King and Queen had murdered the High Seer. Again the

Leaves Fall and Grass Grows

This is by far the most interesting tale I have unearthed, a song performed in three parts by a family of Roamers, each on a different, consecutive night as they set up camp after a day's travel. They never sing it while camping near a town, and I was only allowed to hear it after winning their trust.

Found herein is the largest mention of the Society of Leaves and Grass, *a secret society of sorts I have found referred to in passing in several letters in the Royal Archive, supposedly by officers in the armies of various Sorcerer Kings. My guess would be that this song, in its original form, is a general call to arms as well as encoding directions to secret locations strategic to the efforts of early rebels, starting with a hidden path descending from the Ice-Binder Mountains down to the Pavin Weald. I believe these early rebels gave the codename "leaf" to spirit dancers and arcanists, with "grass" for warriors and militant scouts.*

On the second night, the lyrics become so specific I would need to mount a lengthy exploration of the Pavin Weald in an attempt to identify the markers, but a careful study of how names are used in the verses leads me to believe it is a list of refugee enclaves.

The final verses for the third night are much more interesting. The family elder told me that the last verse before the chorus changes depending on who leads the song, and there used to be more. It may mean the entire song on the third night hides instructions to contact rebel cells, and the changing verses could, perhaps, be passwords.

Al' Haric

Night the First

Autumn comes, from North to South,
(it comes),
Down the *Weeping Crag*, blows through
standing stones,
Over the grass the wind will run,
Up to the leaves, it stumbles none.
The roads are dark and thorns abound,
The wind shifts through the encroaching
dark.
The mighty oak, as scorched by fear,
Knows not the dance of hidden leaves.
The burning night, its pride adrift,
Knows not the grass under its feet.

(Chorus)

Chorus

The leaves a'falling, the grass
a'growing,
They meet as one within the storm.
Grass knows the leaf by open hands,
The leaf knows grass by crossed swords.

Night the Second

Autumn hides from Winter's chill,
(it comes),
Finds the Weald, still standing strong,
The crossing stones obscure the way,
A blade of leaves shall guide the stray.
The *River Three* wear treetops' crowns,
There hide the leaves of Winter's fall,
Downwind rise the *Sister Groves*,
Where grass is green and standing tall.
The tears of jade sorrow cover whole,
The *Sunward Vale* the forest stole.

(Chorus)

Night the Third

The whispers speak of coming storms,
(they come),
They find an echo in darken'd halls,
By the song of Winter's fall you'll know,
The voice that's raised against the snow.
Peals the thunder without light,
Lest darkness finds the forked path,
In alleys black with Shadow's bile,
Whisper thus of Winter's fall,
Wonder how would petals ride,
To keep apace the wind's wild stride.

(Chorus)

city fell into chaos, and tears for Miriana rained down in every district.

Soon the King and Queen's spy-adepts discovered that Karshenel and the temple adepts had snuck out of the city by river. Only months later did they discover the fugitives had the frescoes with them, but in a new form. Using arcana, the temple adepts had engraved the images on a set of silver plates, which Karshenel kept at his side. In the first weeks of their flight, he and his companions psychically hailed their allies in Austium, appealing to them to honor the vision of the High Seer by leaving Faenaria to roam as people of the road. Many answered this summons, sneaking out of the capital and nearby towns to join Karshenel's band of roamers, and they chose him as their new High Seer. They vowed to wander the earth till the doom of Faenaria had passed and the images of the Oculon could be restored. In defiance of the noble Austiar, they clad themselves in scarlet, later known as Roamer red. They proclaimed themselves a new people and adopted a new name: the *Aspaenari*, "the People of Hope."

The King and Queen were too occupied quashing riots in the capital to halt the initial emigrations, but the royal wrath was not held back for long. The capital was eventually placed under martial law, and Gretta herself led a battalion to chase down the Aspaenari. The chase lasted for months and extended from Austium to the city-state of Falzanoth, far to the northwest. The prince of Falzanoth, who had been fostered in Austium and was Karshenel's boyhood companion, granted sanctuary to the fugitives. He also offered a tomb in his family mausoleum for Miriana's body. There she was laid to rest, and many citizens came to honor her, her wisdom and charity known even in that

Secrets of the Seers

The many mysteries of Faenaria's tragic history are left as story hooks for *Blue Rose* Narrators to use as they see fit for their own series. Is the ancient stronghold of the vatazin—or some portion of it—still intact? Are stories about the secret images of the Royal Road true: Do the images of the Shadow and the Dance still exist, and what might happen if one or both of them are found? Can the Oculon be restored and the Shadow Barrens healed, or is that just a faint hope in the hearts of the Roamers? Exploring any of these possibilities could take up an entire *Blue Rose* series!

distant land. Generations later, when the glittering city fell into the sea, the tomb of Miriana remained intact, an island of peace among the Leviathan's Teeth. Sailors from many ports claim that any ill can be soothed if the ailing simply eats a freshly plucked flower from that island, and explorers tell of strange and ancient visions that come to them when they sleep beside the seer's tomb. All attempts, both arcane and mundane, to breech the tomb have failed.

The Empty City

Miriana's funereal honors were interrupted by the arrival of Gretta, who demanded Falzanoth hand over the fugitives. The prince refused, proclaiming they were under his aegis. Not wanting war with one of Faenaria's closest allies, Gretta withdrew, only to instruct her chief assassins and soldiers to steal into the city to slay Karshenel and retrieve the sacred images for the King. The assassins' search was in vain, for when they entered the fugitives' quarters, the rooms were empty. Betrayed by her captain, who revered the High Seer, Gretta's plan had been passed to Karshenel in time. In the middle of the night, the fugitives boarded a ship and sailed for Aldis, where they wandered for the rest of their days.

Gretta returned to Austium, where she and the King passed their lives in bitterness as the city declined around them. With the Oculon an empty vessel and the Austiar alliance with Mount Oritaun severed, Faenaria lost its way, both spiritually and culturally. After years of decadence, most had forgotten Miriana's prophecy of the doom to come. The few who recalled it packed their belongings and sought out the Aspaenari, joining their itinerant life, preserving the tales and songs of old Faenaria, when even the smallest village was illumined by vision and artistic beauty.

Now called Roamers by their host cultures, the Aspaenari perfected the tinker's arts, but they poured their most passionate attention into reproducing the silver plates that Karshenel bore from Austium. So they could travel lightly, the Aspaenari made the reproductions of the plates smaller and smaller, until they took the form of cards; those of the Royal Road. Upon Karshenel's death near Aldis' border with Rezea, the plates were passed to his successor and, many years later, to hers and so on, to the present day. The plates are still the sign of authority among the Roamers. Only the plates' steward can take on the mantle of High Seer, and all Roamer seers bear the plates' offspring, a deck of cards, a mix of color and symbols drawn from the dreams of Selene.

The Doom of Faernia

While their hearts turned to their homeland often and dreaded its ruin, the Roamers remained aloof, shaking their heads as one Faenari misfortune led to another. When the Sorcerer Kings came into power, the Roamers knew the hour of Faenaria's Doom was nigh. That hour came towards the end of the Great Rebellion. Despite years of treachery and battle, the sorceress Feyna Drass, who had crowned herself Empress of Faenaria, clung to her reign, even as one Sorcerer King after another fell. She had torn many of the secrets of Mount Oritaun from the minds of tortured vatazin, although she was never able to enter the mountain itself; the wards were impenetrable to her sorcery. Her madness was commensurate with her power, and both increased as she tried to recreate the images of the Oculon based on the memories she stole from the vatazin. Her efforts were in vain and, as the forces of the Great Rebellion crossed the northern border of her realm, she despaired. She sent wave upon wave of darkfiends, unliving, and shadowspawn against the invaders, but to no avail. The rebels were mighty and their cause just. So, drawing upon the power of all her shadowgates, Feyna attempted to create a sorcerous ward that would slay any who dared to enter her domain unbidden.

She did not fully understand the powers of the shadowgates, and instead of creating a deadly protective barrier, the shadowgates all erupted simultaneously. Feyna was annihilated in the purple and black explosion of Shadow, which mushroomed out until it engulfed all of Austium before continuing across the land. Villages and cities for miles around were destroyed, crumbling as if in an earthquake, burning in purple and black flames. No one escaped. The horror was compounded when, days later, the dead arose as the unliving and marched upon the more distant communities of Faenaria and the fleeing rebels. Many Faenari near the borders escaped, eventually joining their Roamer kin. In a turn of Selene's mourning moon, Faenaria was no more, as Miriana foretold. What remains is a ruined land, still bearing the scars of that fateful day and still racked by storms of Shadow.

In the many generations since the Doom befell Faernia, few people have ventured into its ruins, and fewer still have returned to tell tales of the haunted remains of a once-great land, where the Shadow and its forces reign. See **The Shadow Barrens** on page 227 for details of what remains, and the risks visitors take in going there.

Culture

The core of Roamer society is the caravan. The Roamers' ancestors came from all over Faenaria, so the Roamers have many small kin groups but no large clans. Smaller caravans tend to comprise two to five extended families, and in some cases, an entire caravan is composed of a single large family. Larger caravans sometimes contain as many as fifty families, but such groupings are usually temporary. The only caravan consistently that large is the one accompanying the High Seer.

A headman, usually the eldest person in the caravan, leads it. Sometimes this role falls to a younger Roamer who is more road-wise. If the headman is not a seer, he or she relies on a seer's counsel, and it is not uncommon for a caravan to have two leaders: a headman, tempered in the dust of the road, and a seer, wise in the ways of the Royal Road.

When the Roamers left their homeland, they were primarily concerned with preserving their traditions and carrying a bit of home with them wherever they went. They traveled far, but they remained Faenari. As the years passed and generations of Roamers were born who knew the road more than Faenaria, a distinct Roamer culture began to emerge. Like their colorful caravans—each wagon carrying spices, trinkets, and tales from many lands—Roamer culture is a great farrago of cultural elements. In each land they have traveled, the Roamers have picked up some cultural trace: a story, a craft, a dance, or a clothing style. The mixture of these traces, combined with Faenarian sensuousness and artfulness, gives the Roamers an air of the exotic wherever they go. Because of this, people who are uncomfortable with difference distrust the Roamers, while others welcome them, happy to catch a glimpse through them of the world's many facets.

With the rise of their third generation, the Roamers stopped traveling as one large band. It had become impractical, and smaller towns and villages were uncomfortable hosting a caravan with a larger population than their own. As the Roamers divided into smaller caravans, their culture became more diverse. The signature Roamer wagon arose in the initial period of dispersion and became a place of stability amid constant dramatic change. Now when one caravan meets another, they share lore, as well as objects from their wagons, further enriching Roamer culture as a whole.

Each Roamer family has a large wagon, home to parents and their children. They paint their wagons with colorful scenes, often of places and events from lost Faenaria. At the front of each wagon, the driver sits on a wide bench covered by an awning and directs the two or four horses that pull the wagon. Behind this seat, the wagon is enclosed, with either two or four windows and a door in the side. Roamers consider their wagons' interiors

Roamer Terms and Phrases

Aspaenari. The Roamer name for themselves, "the People of Hope." *Aspaenar* is the singular form.

Domnari. Non-Roamers, "the People of Houses." *Domnar* is the singular form. This term is never used for vata, who are simply called vata or the People of the Moon, out of respect.

Optari. Non-Roamers who have become Roamers, "the adopted people." *Optar* is the singular form. This term connotes some affection. A Domnar becomes an Optar by traveling with a caravan and being accepted as a Roamer at a small ceremony led by a seer or headman.

Grettari. Literally "the people of Gretta," but its idiomatic meaning is "ugly." This is a common insult, as much a statement about someone's personality as it is their appearance. It refers to Gretta of the White Face.

Stradvo. Literally "road dust," but its idiomatic meaning is "well-tested." Someone or something refined and tested by experience is *stradvo*.

Austiara. Literally "regal," but its idiomatic meaning is "shortsighted." Someone who ignores the warnings of the wise is *austiara*.

Lost on the Royal Road. Said of someone lost in introspection or visions. This can also be said of someone who is idealistic but impractical.

A few cards shy of a full deck. Said of someone with bad luck. Someone with extraordinarily bad luck is said to be a few suits shy of a full deck.

Over the hill. Said of something new and exciting. This phrase often confuses non-Roamers, who associate it with something past its prime.

Miriana's eyes. Said of someone who exhibits great foresight or mercy. Also a common oath of surprise or to ward off evil.

Seeking the Dance and the Shadow. Said of a person looking for something of utmost importance. Sometimes used ironically to refer to seeking something that cannot be found.

Valestian at Paelos. Said of a person, of either gender, who is alluring but hard to get. The phrase refers to the canto in *The Riddles of the Far Road* when the seer Lilianus first meets the poet Valestian at the Faenari port city of Paelos. The poet is described as intoxicatingly beautiful but maddeningly difficult to seduce.

A Tower day. Said of a time likely to hold disappointment or disaster, referring to the Tower card of the Royal Road.

Chasing the Moon. Said of people trying to solve a mystery. The phrase refers to the Moon card of the Royal Road, as well as to the myth that Selene hid all knowledge in the moon.

In addition to the preceding two phrases, there are others associated with the Major Arcana of the Royal Road: "She has Exarch eyes," "All he cares about is the turn of the Wheel," and so on.

private and only allow friends and relatives inside. The interiors are largely open, with trade goods and storage near the back and beds in the front. Along the walls hang all manner of necessary items, from cook pots to bows and slings for hunting and fending off bandits.

Roamer Clothing

In every land, Roamers are known for their vivid clothing, often colored with a scarlet dye they make themselves. Anyone who wears Roamer red, as it is called, is therefore either a Roamer or a friend to the Roamer people. Roamers purchase cloth dyed in colors they cannot duplicate, and shrewd traders hold back their brightest bolts of cloth to sell to them.

Except for during festivals, when the women go barefoot or wear narrow-strapped sandals, most Roamers wear calf-high leather boots, suited to life on the road. Shirts with loose or puffy sleeves are common, typically laced up along the neckline. Sleeves may be tied back or decorated with colorful ribbons, and Roamers with long hair will often fasten it back with the same ribbons or wear it under a head scarf or kerchief. A close-fitting embroidered brocade or leather vest is common outerwear. Trousers tend to be leather or heavy cloth, in black, brown, tan, or scarlet, while skirts are printed or layered with bright colors and patterns; longer for formal occasions and dancing, shorter for practical movement.

Roamer Language

The Roamers' travels have also enriched their language. Originally the Aspaenari spoke Faenarian, but the language has changed so much that it would be incomprehensible, save for a phase here and there, to the Faenari of old. Now simply called Faento—Roamer to outsiders—the language has adopted many Aldin, Jarzoni, Rezean, and Kernish words and phrases, while maintaining complex Faenarian grammar. Non-Roamers describe the language as having a sing-song quality, and those who've tried to learn it find the rapidly expanding lexicon and the intricate grammar bewildering.

Roamers are proud and protective of their language and hold poets in high regard. Rather than teach the language to outsiders, they learn their host cultures' languages; almost every adult Roamer is multilingual. To protect their language from ambitious foreign scholars, Roamers do all they can to prevent their writings from falling into non-Roamer hands, and commit information to memory, rather than parchment, whenever practical. These factors make it possible for the Roamers to communicate with others, while preserving a mode of communication outsiders do not understand. This exacerbates distrust of the Roamers, people often wondering what they are discussing in that "inscrutable" language of theirs.

Roamer Reputations

Despite the rapid evolution of Roamer culture and language, some things have stayed the same for centuries. The Roamers love dance and song as much as their Faenari ancestors did and adroitly mix traditional and new styles. They continue to refine their skills as tinkers and artisans. The arts of flirtation, seduction, and love are practiced with gusto among the caravans and are often tested on non-Roamers. Many villages have a tale of a Roamer breaking a local lad or lass' heart, or of a simple farmer leaving everything to chase after a Roamer lover. This is one stereotype the Roamers mischievously enjoy.

A stereotype they do not like is the one that paints them all as thieves, prevalent in Jarzon and eastern Aldis. Despite it being far from accurate, there are indeed thieves among the caravans. Some are mere pickpockets, while others are master burglars or swindlers. One characteristic that distinguishes them from thieves in other lands is that they almost never steal from their own people or vata, and the few who do would not dare violate another Roamer's wagon. On some level, Roamers view one another as one family and vata as distant cousins.

Petty thieves, if caught stealing from Roamers or non-Roamers alike, are reprimanded and mocked within their caravan. Burglars and swindlers, if their crimes are great enough, are banished. Roamers never hand their criminals over to the authorities of their host cultures, believing they can administer their own justice. Sometimes this takes a menacing turn when a violent criminal simply disappears, the caravan leaders and adepts grimly refusing to explain to their kith what became of the transgressor. Whatever a criminal's punishment, the Roamer appreciation for artfulness and flare is difficult to suppress, so even after railing at a criminal, a group of Roamers might recount the details of his scheme, complimenting its execution.

Walking the Royal Road

Other constants among the Roamers are their seers and the cards of the Royal Road. Not only do most caravans have at least one member skilled in the visionary arts, every Roamer knows the Royal Road from an early age, is able to make references to its symbols, and is trained to see them reflected in the world and in dreams. Roamers frequently consult their seers, particularly before new endeavors, whether of love, business, spirituality, or exploration. They ask for advice and interpretations of dreams and portents, and the like. Rarely do they ask for the kind of fortunetelling non-Roamers associate with the Royal Road. Roamers see the cards more as a device for illumination than prognostication, although they are happy to oblige a paying customer's desire for the latter.

Arcane Items Among the Roamers

As they travel the world, Roamers have many opportunities to collect rare herbs and other components used in the creation of arcane items. The larger Roamer caravans almost always have a wagon or two filled with such things. The owners of these wagons are usually herbalists and healers. Customers in search of an arcane elixir or stone—or something even rarer—are told to follow their noses, since the wagons usually give off an outlandish smell. Some of the proprietors of these wagons are charlatans, selling trinkets with no arcane power at all—"love potions" and other such rubbish—but most are honest merchants.

Lucky Charm

A common arcane item among the Roamers is the lucky charm; an arcane stone. These are usually pendants, but are sometimes worn on a bracelet. Most are set in intricately carved wood or bone. Many non-Roamers mistakenly believe all Roamer pendants are lucky charms, a misperception exploited by a number of Roamer jewelers. The real charms allow the wearer to reroll one dice roll per day and use the better of the two results.

Cards of the Royal Road

All Roamer seers use the cards of the Royal Road in their divinations. Some make their own version of the deck or receive it as a gift. The Roamers take great pride in the artistry of these decks and view them as sacred objects. They never sell or give them to non-Roamers, except for vata. Roamers who have done so have been exiled from their caravans, their names and descriptions given to as many other caravans as possible. All the decks are based, however remotely, on the silver plates borne by the High Seer.

An arcane version of the deck gives its user a +2 bonus on Object Reading, Second Sight, and Visions tests. To receive this bonus, the seer must first lay out a few cards and study them for 1 minute (4 rounds). Thereafter, the bonus is applied to the listed arcana tests, as long as the seer can see the cards and remains within arm's reach of them. Before the deck will function as an arcane item, the seer must use it extensively over the course of four days, always having it within arm's reach.

Guided by the interpretations of their seers, the Roamers view the Royal Road as the great code of existence, a way for the world to return to the Eternal Dance, if only the symbols were fully understood.

Because the gods appear in the cards alongside mortals and have no special presentation, Roamers view the gods more as noble companions on the road than as mighty beings to worship. They speak of the gods with respect and affection, but they also do not balk at lampooning one god's foolishness, pondering another's shortcomings, or composing ribald songs about one's physical

endowments. To the Roamers, all creatures, including the gods, seek their true home—the Eternal Dance—and all could use tears and laughter along the way.

Seers

Roamer seers function as an informal priesthood for their people. They defer to the High Seer in arcane and spiritual matters but otherwise have no hierarchy. They advise their caravans however they wish, but are all united by the Royal Road and confer with one another whenever their caravans cross paths. Usually a family elder presides at a Roamer wedding or funeral (the latter always involves cremation), but a seer is expected to accept when asked to preside in an elder's place. Seers who practice sorcery are considered a grave threat and are driven out when discovered.

The High Seer is responsible for protecting the silver plates of Karshenel, guiding the Roamers along the Royal Road, and arbitrating disputes between caravans. The High Seer is the leader of the largest caravan yet has no direct authority over any others, but commands great respect nonetheless. Each High Seer is a powerful adept and selects his or her own successor.

Aldis traditionally treats the High Seer as the sovereign of a foreign nation, while Rezeans liken the seer to their Khana. Jarzon has been known to allow the High Seer within its borders, particularly when the seer's caravan travels toward the Shadow Barrens. Even though Jarzoni distrust Roamers, they have compassion for their former neighbors and appreciate the current High Seer's fervor for destroying the spawn of Shadow. There are whispered rumors in Jarzon that the Hierophant himself has met with the High Seer, with wild speculation as to the reason for such a meeting.

High Seer Vestiana

Born in southern Jarzon eighty years ago, Vestiana has been High Seer for some twenty years. Her master, Raevanos, bestowed the silver plates of Karshenel upon her moments before his death, and she has served wisely ever since. She is more down-to-earth than her predecessor, less prone to days of seclusion and ranting. A pavilion is set up near her wagon whenever her caravan stops, and she insists on spending several hours each day receiving visitors, despite the protests of her Sel-Shanna guards. She does not tire of making simple readings with the Cards of the Royal Road, and many have left her dim tent with soothed hearts or bolstered resolve. Often her visitors are initially intimidated by the glow of her gray eyes, by the raven perched on her shoulder (her familiar, Alos), or by the vigor that animates her. But when she opens her mouth, the visitors are at ease, her voice a balm. Having lost her parents to darkfiends near the Shadow Barrens, Vestiana has no patience for the creatures or servants of Shadow.

Vestiana spends the little free time she has painting. She either makes decks of the Royal Road or paints wagons, covering them with images of landscapes of particular loveliness or sublimity. She is as much inspired by the everyday as by the silver plates she guards. (The plates function as arcane Cards of the Royal Road, but their bonus is +6, rather than +2.)

Except in Jarzon, few know the tales of the Hierophant and the High Seer, of how they were friends when he was a young priest and they would spend summer afternoons in the shade of an olive tree, sharing the tales of their peoples and poring over the Royal Road. Priests who ask the Hierophant about this are met with a glare, and when Vestiana is asked, she says, *"I have met many people in my time. Whether I know him or not, he is my fellow traveler, a pilgrim on the Royal Road. May the gods bless him and his people."*

The Sel-Shanna

No Roamer encampment is complete without dancing, especially around a campfire under the stars, and the finest dancers in any encampment are the *Sel-Shanna*, "moon dancers" (*Sel-Shann* is the singular). The Sel-Shanna maintain a spirit dancer tradition with its roots in old Faenaria and Mount Oritaun. The vatazin of the mountain are said to have had dances that could cut to the heart of any viewer, and while most of those are lost, the Sel-Shanna have preserved many gestures and turns from those days. The Sel-Shanna are mesmerizing, as concerned with sensuousness as they are with using their discipline to fight Shadow. The High Seer is always guarded by two of their order.

A Roamer youth who aspires to join the Sel-Shanna must request the High Seer's blessing before being fostered by a mentor of the order for several years. The aspirant is trained in traditional spirit dancer discipline and techniques, along with an array of Roamer folk dances. In the end, a Sel-Shann is a formidable warrior and a consummate entertainer. Many bandits have rued their folly of ambushing a caravan and trying to carry off the "pretty dancing girl," only to be beaten soundly by a Sel-Shann mature in her power.

City Roamers

The city of Aldis is the one place in the world where large numbers of Roamers consistently and safely congregate. Many caravans winter in the Roamer neighborhood there, and a few Roamers abide there year-round. These City Roamers, as Aldins call them, are disdained by some of their fellows, who secretly call them Domnari, "People of Houses," that is: non-Roamers. This term is neutral when directed at a non-Roamer, but an insult when directed at a

Roamer. Many Roamers appreciate the business acumen of these city dwellers, however, and show them no disrespect.

Many City Roamers are members of the Merchant Guild and have negotiated contracts to ensure the guild's members do not obstruct or object to Roamer caravans doing business in Aldis. The guild's non-Roamer members have found the relationship with the Roamers advantageous, since the Roamers are able to acquire rare items for them from far-flung settlements.

The Broken Wheel

Before the sorceress Feyna Drass went mad and destroyed Faenaria, she used her sorcery and spies to find the High Seer of the Roamers. Long obsessed with things from Faenaria's past—the Oculon, the traditions of the Austiar, Austium's old pleasure gardens—Feyna spent years studying Miriana's prophecy and convinced herself that Roamer seers would bring Faenaria's doom and end her reign. She sent agents to discover how the seers would accomplish this. She also coveted the silver plates of Karshenel and made attempts to acquire them.

As the Great Rebellion raged, the Empress' agents tracked caravans down and infiltrated them. Agents who attempted to steal Karshenel's plates were stopped by the High Seer's Sel-Shanna guardians just in time, and as the other agents secretly continued their search for the seers' "secret power," word came that all was lost; their homeland and the dread Empress were no more.

In time, the surviving agents of Feyna Drass found each other and vowed to continue their mistress' work. All of them were fanatically devoted and had joined her in pushing the Faenarian love of pleasure to obscene lengths, all for the greater glory of In'nassi, exarch of lust. They adopted the name "The Broken Wheel" and gave themselves two primary tasks: to discredit the Roamers and to reclaim the Shadow Barrens.

In the last three centuries, their numbers have grown slowly but steadily, an insidious cancer amongst the caravans. Promising riches and orgiastic rites, they have seduced more than a few Roamers into their cult. They now have their own caravans, as well as agents in many others. They commit crimes and leave evidence implicating the Roamers, and falsely accuse seers of sorcery. They lie to Jarzoni priests about Roamers performing Shadow rites and lure in victims with the promise of pleasure before sacrificing them to In'nassi. They also mount frequent expeditions into the Shadow Barrens, hoping to find some way to bind its darkfiends to their will. The High Seer is aware of the cult's existence and has commanded the Sel-Shanna to hunt them down, but they remain elusive and increasingly powerful.

The Roamers also consider the Broken Wheel a deeply personal matter. They prefer to deal with the cultists themselves and avoid discussing them with outsiders, which unfortunately tends to play into the cult's hands.

The Shadow Barrens

The Shadow Barrens are the most extensive Shadow-corrupted lands in the known world. They are a haven and spawning ground for all manner of deadly creatures. Only the bravest—or most insane—travelers dare enter the barrens. Some are treasure seekers. Others hope to find some way to purge the barrens of corruption, and a few look to bend the barrens' darkfiends and shadowspawn to their will. Many who cross the border into the barrens are never seen again, and those who do emerge usually bear some scar, whether on their bodies or souls, as a memento.

The "Shadow" in the barrens' name is not figurative. The entire realm is deeply corrupted. When Faenaria's shadowgates exploded, Shadow flooded the land and seeped into the very soil and stone, lingering in the air like a mist. This has several effects:

Corrupt Place

The entire realm is a corrupt place. This means people in the barrens risk gaining a point of Corruption any time they perform an act of Fate. Another effect of the barrens' corruption is that any creature that dies there arises the following night as a zombie or skeleton. Corrupt creatures arise as shadows. The only way to prevent this is to destroy the corpse with fire or otherwise annihilate it.

Mists of Shadow

The Shadow lingering in the air extends night and veils the middle of the day in twilight. This effectively delays dawn till midmorning and summons night mid-afternoon, leaving only four to five hours of daylight. Even when the sun is out, the light is muted and takes on strange hues, sometimes violet or a sickly green. Except when the moon is full, night is total darkness. Inhaling the mist causes sleepers to have disconcerting dreams, which often turn into nightmares.

Shadow Storms

Sandstorms are common in the barrens. They are fearsome, but nothing compared to shadow storms, which move without regard for natural weather patterns. They are great masses of violet, green, and black clouds, thundering with eerie screams and wailing. Anyone unfortunate enough to be caught in a shadow storm must succeed on a TN 11 Constitution (Stamina) or Willpower (Courage, Faith, or Self-Discipline) test every 10 minutes or gain a point of Corruption. Use the ability with the highest bonus for the test. A shadow storm also has powerful winds, which range from moderate winds to tornadoes (see

Wind Shaping in **Chapter 4** for the effects of various wind types). The inside of a storm is partial darkness during the day and total darkness at night. Darkfiends sometimes lurk within shadow storms to ambush other creatures.

Geography

A desert of howling winds and storms, the barrens have no sane humanoid inhabitants (at least, not for very long), and aside from numerous ruins, none of old Faenaria endures. Nights there are almost always cold, and days either warm or hot. There is little water, so dehydration is a constant danger. A few underground streams are accessible through natural wells, and there are scattered oases. Explorers have carefully mapped these, but no amount of mapping safeguards against the creatures that lurk in the waters, particularly naga.

Amid the barrens' seemingly endless sand dunes and rocky canyons, there are several notable locations.

The Northern Refuge

Just north of the barrens proper but outside the borders of Jarzon, the Northern Refuge is a haven for those mounting expeditions into the barrens. Set toward the back of a cul-de-sac canyon, the refuge is a small village, with sturdy beds, clean drinking water, and hot springs. Travelers soothe their bodies in the springs (which are inside a cave) before and after entering the barrens, and several Jarzoni priests counsel those tormented by Shadow. These priests report to the Hierophant, but they are on-hand to heal and soothe, not proselytize. Their role is to aid the battle against Shadow, and they often cooperate with Aldin envoys who pass through.

Roamers are frequent visitors to the Northern Refuge, and Vaenaros, the proprietor of the lone inn, The Hawk and the Serpent, is a settled Roamer. The High Seer comes every few years to oversee the preparations for an expedition into the barrens and then waits for word from the warriors and seers sent looking for Faenari artifacts or some path to Mount Oritaun. The Roamers are not, as a whole, interested in reclaiming the barrens, but they are interested in finding Mount Oritaun and the original images of the Royal Road. Many rumors state the mountain survived the destruction of Faenaria and waits for the Roamers to return.

The Northern Refuge is a grim place. The open side of the canyon is walled off, and those who venture outside the walls are often attacked by roaming shadowspawn. The village has extensive catacombs and a funereal air, but there is some merriment as well. Vaenaros makes his own delicious mead, which he calls Austiar Honey Wine, and most nights are passed under his roof with tale-telling and laughter. Many mercenaries, explorers, and adventurers say the refuge is on the edge of the world, but in the ongoing war with Shadow, it is near the center.

The Ruins of Austium

A capital of blasphemy and horror, Austium is once again a bustling city, but instead of humans and vata, its citizens are darkfiends and shadowspawn. Amid ruins and riven earth, the darkfiends unleashed upon the world by Feyna Drass have gathered into a host. They have raised towers of sundered stone, and in the center of the city, the Oculon stands once more. The Faenari ghosts haunting the city weep daily upon seeing it. The domed temple juts from the ruins, a great structure built from the bones of the city's dead. Inside, the walls are adorned with a vile mockery of the Royal Road, a series of images composed of corpses and filth. Darkfiend whisperers perform diabolical rites before the images, giving glory to the exarchs of Shadow.

The ruins are always veiled in darkness, since the mist of Shadow is thick there, and the air is filled with cackling and screeches. With twisted pleasure, the darkfiends torture one another constantly, and maim and gradually devour any mortal creature they capture. Some explorers who have seen the ruined city say they have seen the realm of Shadow itself and would gladly live in Kern if it meant never seeing the city again. As horrific as it is, Austium draws explorers who wish to find artifacts from the city's old days, to discover sorcerous scrolls from the time of the Shadow Wars, and to fight or negotiate with the city's fiendish inhabitants.

The mastermind behind the city's dark resurrection is the darkfiend called simply the Lord of Austium. A few Roamer seers have glimpsed him in their scrying crystals, only to be noticed by the fiend and then driven mad. Roamers have warned Jarzoni and Aldin authorities about the lord and his host, but they have been met with skepticism. The High Seer has at least convinced both nations

to discuss the possibility of a joint expedition into the barrens to confirm the reports. The High Seer fears the world might not have much time.

What few know is that the Lord of Austium has no current interest in the lands north of the barrens. His eyes are entirely fixed on Mount Oritaun. He desires nothing but to enter the mountain to find the Shadow and the Dance. With those two images under his sway, he believes he could summon his masters, the exarchs, into the world and then join them in entering the Eternal Dance and defeating the gods once and for all.

Mount Oritaun

When Faenaria fell, only one place withstood the devastation: Mount Oritaun, the Mountain of the Moon. Protected by ancient wards placed on the original images of the Royal Road and by the formidable arcane power of the mountain's vatazin adepts, its surface was stripped by the destructive wave that washed over the province but the mountain itself stood. The peak is now cloaked in a never-ending shadow storm and is nearly impossible to find, surrounded as it is by shifting dunes and darkness. This suits the adepts of the mountain, who spend their lives devising increasingly intricate wards to protect themselves and the sacred images.

Successful for centuries now, they are alarmed by the rise of the Lord of Austium. They have begun sending spies to the ruins of that city, hoping to uncover his plans. Most of the spies have been imprisoned, their minds plundered for the mountain's secrets. The reports of the few surviving spies have planted a growing fear among the vatazin, that their ancient arcana will not be enough to continue to protect their sanctuary. With this in mind, they are considering the unheard of: sending emissaries to the nations of the north, seeking their aid. Will their emissaries make it out of the barrens alive? Will the darkfiends of Austium apprehend them? If they succeed in reaching other lands, will the rulers of those lands listen to them? These uncertainties have made the adepts of Oritaun hesitate, but time may force their hand.

The mountain has long been the ultimate prize of treasure seekers and sages. It holds an intact vatazin society, ancient arcana unknown anywhere else, and images that might have been painted by the gods themselves—and if the Shadow and the Dance are more than a rumor, the mountain contains the gateway into paradise itself.

Denizens

The Shadow Barrens are overrun by monsters of all sorts: naga in oases; strix in caves; wisps that lure creatures over cliffs and into quicksand; ghosts, shadows, skeletons, specters, and zombies that haunt ruins; harpies and ogres in the rocky hills; and legions of darkfiends. A few animal

types endure in the barrens: bats, boars, crocodiles, hawks, and snakes, among others, most of them corrupt shadowspawn with evil natures and arcane powers, such as the reviled chaos beasts and shadow mastiffs.

The Forest Kingdom of Wyss

On the southern border of the Shadow Barrens lies the Kingdom of Wyss. This realm is a warm, subtropical rainforest primarily composed of huge lann trees, which grow up to 330 feet tall and some forty feet in diameter. The forest covers an area roughly 350 by 250 miles; the inhabitants live amidst these imposing trees and consider them sacred. Their laws forbid cutting down the trees or tilling the soil.

Inhabitants

The forest is home to humans, vata'an, and all types of land-dwelling rhydan, while sea-folk and rhy-fen live in the mighty Seral River that divides the land almost in half. Only humans, vata'an, rhy-cats, griffons, and a limited number of sea-folk and rhy-fen are considered true citizens of this land; any others are merely considered to share it with the blessing of the inhabitants of the forest kingdom. These "others" regularly trade with the forest dwellers of Wyss, but must abide by the same restrictions against cutting down lann trees or tilling the soil. Apart from that, they are free to live as they will.

The human inhabitants of the forest kingdom have roughly the same mixture of skin, hair, and eye color as found in Jarzon and Aldis. However, both the humans and vata have unusually long and dexterous toes, and wear flexible shoes with separate toes to help them climb.

Forest Kingdom Characters

Citizens of the forest kingdom can be humans, rhy-cats, vata'an, sea-folk or rhy-fen. All except rhy-fen replace one of their normal Benefits with a Strength (Climbing) Focus. Most humans and vata also learn the Tree Climbing talent, as do all forest wardens.

Tree Climbing

Class: Any.
Requirement: None, although Narrators may wish to limit this talent to Forest Kingdom characters.

You excel at climbing trees.

Novice: You can climb large trees with practiced ease. You do not need to roll to climb trees under ordinary, unhurried circumstances, and even in such circumstances you gain a +2 bonus to your Strength (Climbing) tests.

Journeyman: You can climb twice as fast as someone without this talent.

Master: Regardless of the circumstances, you never need to make Strength (Climbing) rolls when climbing trees large and sturdy enough to support your weight. You also gain +2 to all Strength (Jumping) rolls when in trees.

History

Almost two centuries before the fall of the Old Kingdom, a group of nature-loving adepts made a new life far from the many problems they saw all around them. They believed living in cities and towns built by people rather than surrounded by the grandeur of nature was a cause of increasing corruption, so they sought to create an ideal land which would support the inhabitants in comfort while protecting them from both external dangers and the threat of turning to Shadow. The adepts warded this land, known as Wyss, with powerful barriers that prevented the summoning of darkfiends or the creation of unliving. They also set up wards to prevent unliving and any other creatures of Shadow from entering the region, but these wards were more difficult to create, and less stable.

Then the adepts created their crowning achievement: the wondrous lann trees. They used their arcana to shape trees in the forest to grow taller, live longer, and develop natural hollows, which the inhabitants could use as dwellings and workshops. They also awakened the spirits of these noble trees and made them part of the protection of Wyss, allowing anyone with psychic gifts to contact the minds of these majestic entities. Their size and age gave the trees vast reserves of power, enabling the adepts to craft a ritual that lies at the heart of the land's culture—the forest communion.

The Forest Communion Ritual

To use this ritual, the petitioner psychically contacts the lann trees and makes a short request to the particular tree they are addressing. At this point, the individual sinks into a deep trance lasting between one and two full days. During the trance, the tree supports the seeker's body, so they awaken refreshed and not suffering from hunger or thirst. Throughout the ritual, the person thinks at the same speed as a tree and is only aware of the passage of an hour or two. At the end of the ritual, everyone who is either Light- or Twilight-aligned returns to consciousness revitalized and with a profound understanding of both the forest's needs and of the lann trees' power and majesty. However, the trees can sense Shadow-alignment and rebuff all such people. Shadow-aligned individuals who undergo the communion return with a blinding headache and no special knowledge beyond the tree's rejection.

The forest communion ritual remains one of the realm's primary safeguards against the Shadow and forms part

of the adulthood ritual that everyone in the Kingdom of Wyss undergoes when they turn sixteen. In addition, the Sovereign and everyone who becomes a minister or judge must undergo the ritual again before taking office. Shadow-aligned individuals are banished; a few manage to hide their pain and lack of knowledge from those who monitor the ritual, but most cannot. Everyone who succeeds—or at least appears to—is given a small tattoo of a lann tree using special, faintly luminous inks, which must be prepared by someone who has performed the ritual within the last year while free from the taint of Shadow. Attempts to duplicate this ink automatically fail. Any foreigner bearing a lann tree tattoo is free to enter the kingdom and trade with its inhabitants.

Life in the Forest Kingdom

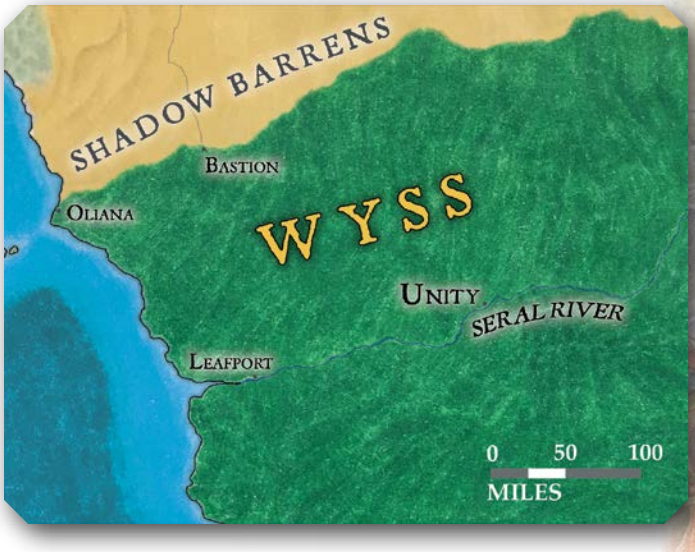
The vast lann trees dominate life in Wyss. The inhabitants make their dwellings inside the trees' natural hollows and build their towns and small cities as a series of aerial platforms that connect inhabited trees together. Special vines act as plumbing, while a combination of luminous fungi and shas crystals provide light. Crystal heaters warm the residents' homes and cook their food.

The trees, and the many vines that grow on them, provide an abundance of fruits and nuts, and the inhabitants hunt animals and fish in the vast Seral River or in one of the land's many large streams. The forest dwellers excel at carving fallen wood as well as making and dyeing cloth crafted from bark, silk, or spider silk. They also work metal and create the same types of shas crystal devices used in Aldis, but instead of using conventional mining, they use arcana to call the metal and crystals from the ground.

Wyss has a range of low, rocky hills along part of the Seral River's southern bank. Here, there are large deposits of unworked shas crystals—almost as abundant as they are in Aldis—as well as some metal ores. However, metal goods are in relatively short supply. Wood crafters know special ways of treating hard wood with plant extracts that renders it as strong and durable as bronze, but steel and good wrought iron are tougher and more useful for some purposes and, as such, are highly valued. The desire for iron ingots and well-made iron tools causes even the residents of Wyss—who are most suspicious of outsiders—to agree to limited trade.

Settlements and Government

The difference between cities and rural areas is far less distinct in Wyss. Almost all the forest's residents live in large settlements which are home to between 2,000-20,000 people. As food and useful materials are sufficiently abundant, many hunt or gather, although their lives are notably easier than those of farmers and shepherds. The towns and cities also support a wealth of crafters, scholars, and entertainers. Large tracts of relatively wild forest exist between settlements, and hardy forest wardens are tasked with keeping the ground and aerial paths between settlements open and well-marked.



In addition to being part of their custom, living up in the lann trees helps protect the inhabitants from the wolves, wood lions, and brown bears that stalk the forest floor. To preserve the forest's balance, the people of Wyss do not hunt these beasts, and the lann trees use their powers to influence these creatures' minds, causing them to avoid the local inhabitants and attack hostile intruders instead.

Forest wardens escort travelers between settlements and search for both natural and Shadow-derived threats, including forest fires, blights, or foul incursions from the Shadow Barrens. Forest wardens who are skilled adepts regularly make light mental contact with the lann trees and use this connection to sense any large or serious problems with the forest.

Settlements are governed by councils of between five and fifty Ministers, depending upon the settlement's population. Ministers are elected by the populace of the settlement for ten-year terms. Roughly a third of the seats on each council are reserved for individuals who have worked as forest wardens for at least a decade. Each council also elects a Minister to serve on the Grand Council in the city of Unity. Wyss is headed by a Sovereign who is elected by the Grand Council. They rule for twenty years before being replaced.

Geography

To outsiders, Wyss seems like a vast, trackless forest notable only for containing one of the continent's largest rivers. However, the forest is also home to hundreds of settlements, including more than a dozen cities.

Bastion

This town, located only six miles from the forest's edge, is the closest settlement to the Shadow Barrens. A third of Bastion's population of 7,000 are forest wardens and guards trained in fighting the unliving and other creatures of Shadow. Bastion has never been directly attacked, but the forest wardens and guards have ventured forth to hunt down corrupted invaders many times. Bastion also acts as one of the trading posts between Jarzon and Wyss. The partially warded Dejek Trail connects Bastion with the Northern Refuge, but only the bravest or most desperate Jarzoni traders are willing to travel through the Shadow Barrens, no matter what rewards await them at the end of their journey.

Leafport

This is the forest kingdom's primary port city and the only settlement many outsiders ever see. Both Jarzon and Aldis maintain embassies and trade depots in Leafport, although both are rather small and neither has a permanent staff of more than a dozen. The city's population of 13,000 includes 4,000 sea-folk who fish the river and its broad estuary.

The Seral River

This vast, swift-flowing river is one of the widest on the continent and is navigable for the entire length of Wyss. It is more than 2,100 feet across at Unity, and almost three times that wide at Leafport. More than a dozen sturdy rope bridges connect the two sides, and adepts long ago shaped four huge bridges from living lann trees, the most impressive being the Warden's Walk Bridge in the city of Unity.

Unity

Near the center of the forest lies the realm's largest city and capital, Unity. It sits on the Seral River and has a population of slightly more than 25,000. Barges from elsewhere in Wyss, along with a few ocean-going ships captained by locals or the most trusted outside traders, dock here, but almost all foreign vessels dock at Leafport.

Strangers in a Strange Land

The Forest Kingdom of Wyss is far enough, and isolated enough, from the rest of the lands of Aldea to make characters from this place fairly exotic, even in cosmopolitan Aldis, and to make travel to here a substantial commitment, involving either crossing the Shadow Barrens or the dangerous seas to reach the mouth of the Seral River. Narrators can therefore use Wyss as a "faraway land" for a series centered in Aldis, both in terms of visitors or a journey the heroes might undertake. A commission from the crown to establish ties between Aldis and Wyss could involve an epic journey and dealing with many threats and rival factions along the way.

Trade and the Outside World

The forest kingdom produces herbal inks, dyes, and medicines known nowhere else in Aldea, including drugs that help individuals overcome possession and medicines that allow regular users to prolong their lives by almost thirty years. And, while they never deal in lann wood, the inhabitants do sell carvings and boards of decorative, brightly colored woods from some of the smaller trees. They are eager to trade for metal, gems, jewelry, spices, and cloth made from linen, cotton, and wool.

However, trade must be conducted with care. Most residents are suspicious of outsiders, and are only willing to trade and make treaties with individuals who have proven they are not tainted by Shadow. They respect Aldin nobles and deal freely with them, but require other foreigners in positions of authority to undergo the forest communion ritual before they are willing to negotiate with them.

One of the challenges Aldin traders face is that, while some individuals and factions within Wyss favor trading with Aldis, others favor Jarzon, since Jarzon and Wyss share the common problem of the Shadow Barrens and already engage in a moderate degree of cooperation in their attempts to repel attacks from and, ultimately, cleanse this area. These individuals see Aldis as an unreliable ally simply because of the distance between the two kingdoms.

Threats

The wards around Wyss still prevent the summoning of darkfiends or the creation of unliving within the confines of the forest. However, the wards against creatures of Shadow entering the realm have weakened. Mindless unliving cannot enter on their own, and if the creature or person commanding them dies or ceases to control them, they immediately seek to leave, only attacking if someone attempts to prevent them from departing. However, they can be compelled to enter Wyss by anyone able to direct such monsters.

Sentient creatures of Shadow can freely enter Wyss. The Shadowed Seven, like the Lich King before them, know some of the details of the founding of Wyss, and now the warding is weaker, would love to take its power for their own. They believe that if their servants could kill at least a third of the lann trees, the remaining wards would fall. Powerful sorcery could then transform the remaining lann trees into horrific things of Shadow, creating a foul, nightmare forest which would serve as a near impenetrable stronghold if Kern ever falls, as well as a location from which the Seven can access the corrupt power of the Shadow Barrens and, from there, invade Jarzon.

Pirates Isles

Off the coast of the Shadow Barrens, to the southwest, lies a rocky group of islands that has become a haven for pirates. Before the fall of Faenaria, the islands were home to a few fishing villages and some sea-folk, and were known simply as the Westerly Islands or Westerlies. When the shadowgates exploded and destroyed Faenaria, refugees flooded into the islands. In the ruthless scramble for survival, many turned to piracy.

The people of the isles are a mix between the fishing families and sea-folk, the descendants of the nobles and merchants that fled to the isles when Faenaria was destroyed, the pirates that have found their way here, and those that have been taken from across Aldea against their will and brought to the isles as slaves. A few of the surviving sorcerers from Faenaria also found their way to the isles and have continued to practice the Shadow Art, and many in the isles are Shadow-tainted.

Ships from the Pirate Isles occasionally join with pirates from the Scatterstar Archipelago or Jarzoni privateers for raids or to trade. Other corsairs often come to the Pirate Isles to dispose of captives and plunder, and to repair their ships.

Geography

The isles range widely in size. But, even the largest can be walked across in a day, and many are little more than rocks. Most have wooded ridges and fresh water in their valleys; even the barest places are spotted with cacti. The best anchorages are generally on the south-southwest, or leeward, side of the islands. The hardscrabble islands have little arable land for farming, but the seas are rich in fish, and goats thrive on land. Most of the best timber is found on the mainland. Winters are mild, and the heat of summer is tempered by the sea breeze.

The waters around the islands are treacherous with reefs and rocks. The people of the isles see the hazards of sailing through the islands, even at high tide, as one of their best defenses.

In the winter, the prevailing winds blow from the north-northeast, and in the summer, the winds blow from the east-northeast. Winds coming off the Shadow Barrens grow into storms over the Gulf of Faenaria. These squalls can carry all manner of ills picked up from the barrens, as well as bringing corrupting rain. The easterly summer winds offer the easiest crossing to the coast for merchants and for pirates. The early summer is also when merchants sailing to Lar'tya pass closest to the isles.

The isles have four major townships and numerous other settlements, ranging from temporary camps and shacks to manor houses for the nobility or wealthy pirates. There are also a number of fishing villages, each home to one or more families.

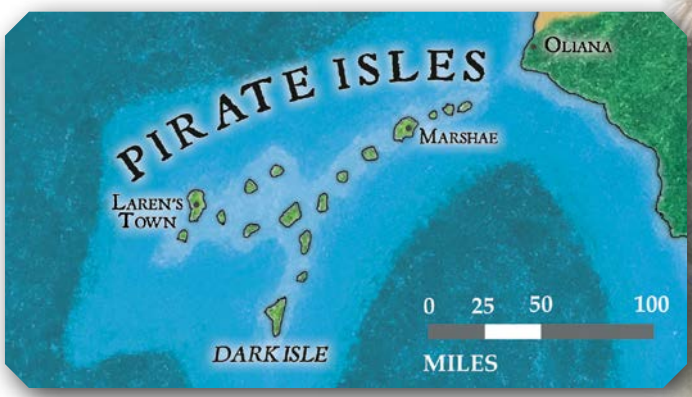
Mashae

The largest community in the isles was merely a fishing village before its population swelled with refugees from Faenaria. Now it is a town divided between sorcerers, Faenarian nobility, pirates, and ruthless merchants. Mashae, and nominally all of the isles, is governed by a council made up of representatives from the nobles, merchants, and sorcerers known as the Island Council, which meets in a hall in the center of town to set taxes and port fees, resolve disputes, maintain the harbor, and see to the security of the isles.

To that end, the council maintains a small squadron of warships that acts as the core of a fleet tasked with fending off any attack from Aldis or Jarzon. Should the island be threatened, the nobles, merchants, and pirate captains are sworn to provide the necessary ships for a full defense of the isles. The current head of the council is Ariban Patris, a Faenarian noble with extensive ties to the merchants and several pirate captains. Patris has an island a half-day's sail away and a villa in Mashae. The council, however, is not officially recognized by Aldis, Jarzon, or Lar'tya. Due to the strained relations between Aldis and the isles, the Sovereign's Finest are generally not welcome in Mashae.

The town is built around the port, and possesses fine wharves and secure warehouses. Many nobles and pirate lords maintain fortified villas within the town. Other villas lie scattered across the island and most of the other nearby ones. One of the largest residences sits on a ridge above the town and is home to the College of Arcane Arts. Much of their knowledge of arcana was lost in the destruction of Faenaria. The adepts of the College have worked to rebuild their resources in Mashae by obtaining arcane research from Aldis—both overtly and covertly—and by sending expeditions into the Shadow Barrens to recover lost tomes and artifacts, as well as to learn from what has happened since the destruction of the shadowgates. The current head of the college is Evaline Noster, a distinguished woman of more than fifty years. In recent years, she has devoted more time to administration than to arcane research but she is a still a highly skilled air adept.

Most people come to town during the day to conduct their business, and leave before nightfall. There are three markets along the harbor front: the fish market, the slave market, and



the trade market (where all other cargoes are bought and sold). A small keep protects the entrance to the harbor.

Oliana

Oliana is actually on the mainland, adjacent to the southern edge of the Shadow Barrens, a half-day's sail from Mashae. Like Mashae, before the fall of Faenaria, it was a small town known for the vacation villas of a few nobles, its fishing fleet, and the export of timber and quarried stone taken from the surrounding hills. When the shadowgates exploded, it was overwhelmed with refugees, most of whom only wanted to leave. For years after, Oliana was harassed by shadowspawn that wandered out of the Shadow Barrens. Over time, Oliana became a fortified town, and sorcerers from the isles use it as a base for expeditions into the Shadow Barrens. As such, it seems more like a military fort than a seaside town.

The coastline around Oliana is rocky and treacherous with few safe anchorages. The harbor was only made safe by Faenarian adepts through the use of powerful earth arcana to shape the shoreline and construct a breakwater. The hills around the town slope steeply up to timbered mountains. The Shadow Barrens lie to the east, and there are few sunrises in Oliana that are not tainted by the sickly colors of the barrens.

Oliana is governed by the Lord Marshall, currently Jossua Vansara, a Faenarian noble; a ruthless warrior and a capable leader. The Lord Marshall is charged with protecting Oliana from the Shadow Barrens. Over the years, a line of watchtowers connected by a low wall has been built to keep shadowspawn from coming out of the blasted wastelands to the north, or to at least provide a warning when they do. The Lord Marshall's soldiers are well equipped and trained, and they have a great deal of experience in fighting darkfiends.

Oliana built itself on the backs of slaves, and it continues to be the largest importer of slaves in all Aldea. It is said that a person in Oliana is either a soldier, a sorcerer, or a slave; that there are no free people there. In addition to doing all the labor in town, slaves are put to work quarrying stone, felling timber, and building defenses against the shadowspawn.

The Dark Isle

One of the most southwesterly islands is little more than a large rock that looks out toward the Western Ocean. Its only occupants are a sorcerous cult. It is a day's sail from Mashae, and those passing by the island report an unsettling feeling, that odd lights and sounds come from the island on some nights, and that the waters around the island have an odd sheen. Fishermen avoid it after catching sickly fish and other strange creatures when they cast their nets in the nearby waters. Few know what happens on the isle. Supplies and slaves delivered to the island are dropped off on a pier. The sorcerers and their

servants who pick up the supplies rarely utter a word to the sailors that deliver them. The sea-folk are concerned that signs of corruption from the Dark Isle are spreading through the surrounding waters.

Laren's Town

On one of the most westerly islands, less than a day's sail from Mashae, there is a community comprised of sea-folk and some of the original fishing families from the isles. Before the fall of Faenaria, the humans in the isles lived and fished peacefully with the sea-folk, intermarrying with them. That spirit lives on in Laren's Town, with the people living in tranquility. During the day, they sing songs to ease their work, and at night, they sing songs of joy and sorrow. The people of Laren's Town move effortlessly between the sea and the land.

The families of Laren's Town have no formal government. Instead they all meet in council, and allow each person an opportunity to speak before coming to a decision, preferably by consensus. The town has no elected leader, but the people often look to their most senior matriarch for guidance: Rysa Seaspray, one of the sea-folk.

The sea-folk and the families of Laren's Town do not get along well with the Faenarians that have come to dominate the isles. They are particularly uncomfortable with the practice of slavery and sorcery. Though they distrust most outsiders, they will welcome a ship who's captain and crew also abhor those practices. The town is little more than a collection of houses along the shore, but the people are always willing to pitch in to provide a ship with whatever repairs it needs in order to continue on its way.

Island Life

Life in the isles is governed by the wind and tides. Many people find themselves blown to the isles as part of a ship's crew before taking up residence as fishermen, or as one of the tradesmen that provide the ships with ropes, sails, barrels, and other necessities. If someone has trouble finding a ship or a job, they may find themselves "on the iguana," resorting to eating barbequed iguana or whatever else they can catch. The isles are also known for the potent mescal brewed from a local type of cactus. It is one of the few crops that can be reliably grown on the rocky terrain.

Piracy is a way of life in the islands. All have some involvement in it, whether noble, merchant, or commoner. Most islanders will join a pirate crew for at least one voyage as a rite of passage, with the pirates loosely organized into crews around successful captains. Each captain commands one or more ships and has a camp, stockade, or fortress somewhere in the isles. When a pirate signs on to a crew, the captain promises they will receive one share of the plunder they take. Experienced pirates and those with important skills may receive additional shares.

Ships of Aldea

From the simple canoes of the Rezeans to the elegant seagoing canoes and skiffs of the sea-folk; the dependable ships of Jarzon to the swift ships of pirates; the far-ranging traders from Lar'tya and the graceful fishing boats of Lake Vash to the keelboats of the Rose River and the many other diverse vessels that ply the bays and rivers of Aldea, ships play an important role in Aldean life.

Adventures on board ships can encompass action, exploration, and roleplaying. Action scenes can range from dramatic tests to repair a ship's rigging in a storm to keeping a ship upright in a raging river or—as you might guess—combat. Most combats will involve boarding actions and missile fire between ships, though arcana may also come into play. Before combat, the Narrator can call for one or more ability tests to determine the positioning of ships, whether a ship is able to escape detection, or whether the ship's captain chooses to avoid combat. To support adventures at sea, there is a new Intelligence focus:

Intelligence (Sailing): Handling of sail-powered vessels.

In most situations, the character in command of a ship makes a Constitution (Rowing) or Intelligence (Sailing) test for handling a ship. In certain instances, the Narrator can call for a test from an individual member of the crew, or for a test based on the average or general ability of the crew as a whole.

Ships

Ships are moved either by rowing/paddling (Constitution focus) or sailing (Intelligence focus). Most ships can be moved slowly by poling—pushing off the bottom or from the shore with one or more poles (Strength). Certain air and water arcana can also be used to improve the speed or handling of a ship.

Each of the following ships is described according to its customary use, crew needs, Speed, and cost in silver pieces (sp). The crew listing describes the minimum number of people needed to operate that type of ship. Warships and pirates will generally have far larger crews than a merchant vessel.

Canoe: An open, slender boat that can be rowed, paddled, or poled. Used widely. **Crew 1-3, Speed 14, 50 sp.**

Trade canoe: A large open boat for carrying cargo that can be rowed, paddled, or poled. A keelboat is a similar craft with an enclosed cabin that is used on rivers and lakes. Used widely. **Crew 4+, Speed 10, 125 sp.**

Skiff: A small open boat with a sail. Used widely. Crew 1-2, Speed 12, 75 sp.

Small ship: A ship with a single sail used to carry cargo over the sea. Used by Aldis, Jarzon, and pirates. **Crew 12+, Speed 20, 8,000 sp.**

Large ship: A ship with two or more sails used to carry cargo over the sea. Used by wealthy merchants, Lar'tyan traders, successful pirates, and the militaries of Aldis and Jarzon. **Crew 25+, Speed 25, 12,000 sp.**

Sailing Stunts

These revised descriptions for exploration stunts clarify and expand on how stunt points may be spent for sailing, rowing, or similar tests.

Sailing Exploration Stunts

SP Cost	Stunt
1	**Advantageous Positioning:** You make your discovery from an advantageous position of your choice up to 2 yards or 2 ship lengths away from the place that would normally lead to your discovery with respect to the object of your test. You can be upwind or have a reef or rocks between you and what you've found. You may wait until the Narrator describes what you've found, if relevant, before you choose your position. This stunt can be used multiple times on the same test if you have enough stunt points.
2	**Concealed Position:** You make your discovery from a concealed position, such as from a fog bank or from behind an island or a bend in a river.
2	**Crack Crew:** Your skill inspires the crew. They receive a +1 bonus to morale and other noncombat tests for the remainder of the encounter.

The isles are also home to a number of political refugees. Most are from Jarzon, and have taken to piracy to support themselves and to exact revenge on the theocrats that drove them from their home. Refugees from Aldis tend to be Shadow-tainted, if not actual sorcerers. If asked, they say they have fled from persecution to a place where they may openly practice the Shadow Art. These refugees add spice to the already volatile politics of the isles. Some come seeking aid from the Faenarians in support of their lost causes. Few find the rewards they seek.

One of the most celebrated customs in the isles is the "peace of the reefs." Any grievances between pirate crews are placed on hold while within the sheltered waters of the islands. There are many tales of pirates escaping an enemy by crossing the reef, making peace while in port, having an epic celebration, and then falling out again once they are back at sea. The Island Council has a standing bounty posted for anyone that comes to the isles intending to violate the peace of the reefs.

One thing that surprises many people when they first visit Mashae is how quiet it is. It has none of the boisterous drinking and celebrating that most people associate with pirates. The Faenarians have little patience for that. Instead, pirate crews hold their own parties on whichever island they are camped on. Some merchants even row out to them with barrels of mescal, musicians, and other entertainments. During pleasant summer nights, some crews take to small boats and travel from island to island in a floating revel. There are tales and songs of celebrated parties that lasted for days and that traveled round all the isles.

Kern, the Land Under Shadow

North of Aldis, across the Ice-Binder Mountains, remains the last of the ancient sorcerer kingdoms, until recently ruled by the unliving Lich King, Jarek, Grand Thaumocrat and Lord High Adept of Kern. It is a cold, inhospitable land ringed by jagged mountains, haunted by shadowspawn and darkfiends. An invading force faces great peril simply trying to breach the kingdom's borders. Even if they managed to cross the treacherous mountains, they would find a ruin of a land inhabited by brutalized slaves.

History

Kern survived the Great Rebellion relatively unchanged, although rebel forces sorely tested the Lich King's defenses. King Jarek managed to keep the invaders from doing more than attacking Kern's outermost defenses. Although a few daring raids by the rebels managed to destroy some of Jarek's most precious and dangerous arcane devices, he considered this a small price to pay for the fact the rebels also destroyed all of his rival Sorcerer Kings. After the Great Rebellion, Jarek regained control of many darkfiends and dreamed of conquering the entire continent, and potentially the entire world. He considered anyone unwilling or unable to wield sorcery a vastly inferior foe, only dangerous in large numbers. Since he was the most powerful sorcerer in the known world, Jarek was firmly convinced he would eventually subjugate all the "lesser" nations.

His one major attempt at conquest occurred eighty-six years after the end of the Great Rebellion. It was the greatest mobilization in Kern's history. During the early days of the reign of King Karthakan, Jarek ordered the majority to his unliving, shadowspawn, and darkfiends to attack Aldis. He supplemented his inhuman troops with tens of thousands of humans and night people who fought because Jarek held their families hostage in prison camps, executing anyone whose relations surrendered, deserted, or refused to fight.

Because the majority of Jarek's shadowspawn, unliving, and darkfiends took part in the attack on Aldis, and the remainder were mostly in charge of guarding the camps holding the relatives of the soldiers, the inhabitants of the cities and towns of Kern were, for the first and only time, left largely unguarded. Jarek assumed these people were cowed by his vast powers and too afraid to attempt any sort of resistance. He was mistaken. Those left behind in Kern rose up against the Lich King and his remaining followers, providing commandos from Aldis the cover they needed to free people from the prison camps.

When news reached the front lines in Aldis of revolts and escapes from the prison camps, it led to mutiny amongst the Kernish troops, some of whom turned against

the corrupt contingents of their own force, or else quit the field and fled, either to reach home or find sanctuary in Aldis. Discipline in the attacking force collapsed, and the Aldins were able to hold the line against them and begin pushing them back.

Kern's capital Sarn was largely spared attacks by rioters and rebels, for almost all the darkfiends, shadowspawn, and unliving who were not either taking part in the attack on Aldis or guarding the prison camps were patrolling the city and protecting Jarek and his stronghold. However, the damage done to the mines and the many other items and locations the Lich King used to reinforce his power was substantial. The destruction of much of Kern's arcane infrastructure was one of the reasons Jarek recalled his army. In addition to lacking the ability to resupply them with enchanted items, Jarek needed the troops to help him restore order to his embattled kingdom.

The raiders from Aldis brought word of the returning troops and evacuated the most visible of the local saboteurs. At the same time, a young woman named Fallia began to have visions of freedom and a safe path through the mountain passes. She gathered together a group of more than a thousand humans and led them safely into Aldis. The rest of the rebels simply vanished into anonymity and went back to their lives. Because so many of his people escaped or deserted, Jarek could not afford any form of large-scale retaliation against the rebels.

Lacking any other option, Jarek executed those few he knew without doubt to be rebel ringleaders. He performed these executions using a variety of horrific methods and then ordered the rest of the populace to rebuild what was destroyed. For the next decade, morale among the people of Kern was higher than it had been before or since. The populace had struck back against Jarek, many people they knew had escaped his clutches forever, and those remaining in Kern suffered little in the way of retaliation for these efforts. People there began telling stories of the new lives their friends and relatives were now living in Aldis. The Lich King settled into a waiting game to rebuild his forces and his strength. After all, did he not have all eternity in which to plot? Even so, Jarek's lieutenants were not always so patient, and everyone knew it was only a matter of time before open warfare erupted once again between Kern and the lands to the south.

That time came just a few years ago, when a bitter seed of corruption planted in Aldis finally bore poisonous fruit. Lord Sayvin betrayed his nation and his Sovereign to Kern, allowing the Lich King to launch a new offensive, but Queen Jaellin's response was far from what anyone—including Jarek—expected. The Aldin Queen personally led a force, not against the army, but to cut off the head of the serpent, by attacking Jarek in his own fortress. The daring lightning raid was a success and, when the dust settled, the top of the Ebon Tower was in ruins, and the dread Lich King of Kern was no more.

The Talons

While Jarek had numerous assassins, lieutenants, and commanders, he also understood one could rarely have too many tools. As protection against betrayal or corruption among the various individuals who served his regime, he trained and recruited a handful of secret agents, spies, and killers known only to him. These agents were referred to as Jarek's Talons, and their identities were not even known to each other.

Jarek personally chose and trained each Talon, and they are seen by the Shadowed Seven as both a potential resource and a most serious threat. All Talons have ample access to secret safe houses and resources given to them by their master, though with the Lich King gone they are also aware future aid will be hard to secure. This makes the surviving Talons quite cautious, and most act only when a matter is of personal importance to them or stands to benefit them greatly.

Jordan Goldentouch

Jordan Goldentouch has remained loyal to the Lich King even beyond Jarek's destruction. An urchin and sneak thief barely surviving in the alleys of Sarn, the boy was caught and almost executed for stealing food. It was the boy's latent talent for arcana that saved him, drawing the Lich King's attention. Jarek decided to make a "special project" of Jordan, showing him uncharacteristic tenderness and training him to use his skills and arcane abilities. Vulnerable to the Lich King's manipulation, Jordan became a secret spy and assassin for Jarek, who he came to view as a surrogate father.

When Jarek was destroyed, Jordan was devastated. He refused to believe anyone who told him that his beloved lord and master had manipulated him, and saw his Regents as undeserving imitations and pretenders. Going underground, Jordan has begun to search for any and all means of returning Jarek to unlife. So far he has found no reliable method, but he refuses to give up his search. He will see the Lich King restored, or will die trying.

Jordan is an attractive but haunted young man, whose long, thin fingers and sensitive hands earned him the name Goldentouch. He is a skilled healer, poisoner, assassin, and spy. Furthermore, his empathic abilities have been twisted and enhanced by Jarek's tutelage to allow him to temporarily "push" others to disregard or ignore his presence, and he can attune himself to a foe to feel their movements and skills, allowing him to better counter them in battle.

Jarek's panicked lieutenants quickly recalled their forces, both to shore up their own positions within Kern and fearing another Aldin trap was waiting to be sprung. Many deserted rather than go back to Kern as the impossible rumors of Jarek's destruction spread through the ranks. Since then, the so-called Shadowed Seven of Kern have struggled to maintain their hold over the land and its people, quashing rebellions and vying for power and influence among themselves. Aldis has critically injured the shadowed land of Kern, but a ravening beast is at its most dangerous when it is wounded.

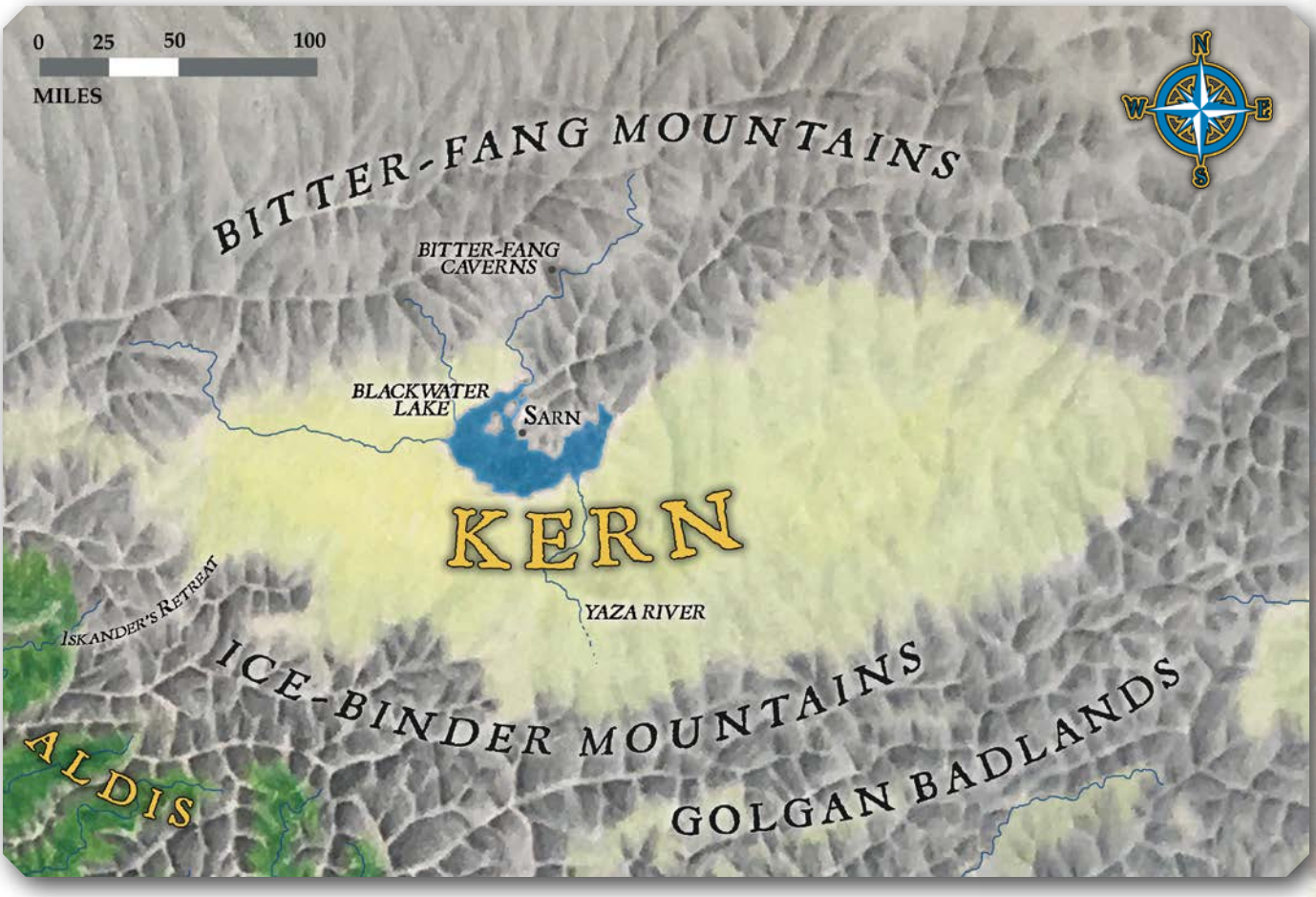
Geography

Kern is a mountainous land north of Aldis and Jarzon. Unlike the comparatively temperate climates of those lands, Kern has brutally cold winters with frequent snows. One of the primary reasons the forces of the Great Rebellion failed to liberate Kern was the harsh weather, especially in the high mountains. Attackers were forced to retreat in the face of arcanely-augmented snowstorms, avalanches, and temperatures that continually taxed their endurance, and to which the Lich King's forces were largely immune.

The Ice-Binder and Bitter-Fang Mountains

Kern is ringed by jagged and perpetually snow-capped mountains. The southern half of the ring is the Ice-Binder Mountains, and the northern half is the Bitter-Fang Mountains. These two ranges form Kern's primary line of defense, the so-called "Frozen Henge." The mountains completely surround Kern, and the only way for a force to enter the kingdom is through the four lowest and most accessible passes in the Ice-Binder Mountains; the Bitter-Fang passes are too narrow and steep for more than a small group of mountaineers, traveling single file, to traverse. Because of heavy snow beginning in the late autumn, all but one of the Ice-Binder passes close until the middle of spring. During the five long winter months, the low but narrow pass known as Iskander's Retreat (after the military leader who called off the attack on Kern and so officially ended the Great Rebellion) is the only way to enter or leave Kern, save by air.

Outside Kern, the routes leading away from this pass are regularly watched by Aldin adepts and griffins; expeditions from Kern are easily dealt with during the winter. During this season, the lands of Rezea, Aldis, and Jarzon are largely free from Kernish raids. However, this pass is also closely watched inside Kern. During the winter, people from Kern cannot flee its oppression and raiders from Aldis and the other lands cannot sneak into the country. The only other way in or out of Kern during this time is on the backs of griffins or riding one of the twisted wyverns bred by the Kernish Knights of the Skull.



During the winter, the snow in the other mountain passes is yards deep. No one can get through in either direction, and travel through Iskander's Retreat is slow and difficult. There is also the ever present threat of the pass being buried in an avalanche.

The mountains themselves are tall, rocky, and inhospitable. In the early days of the Shadow Wars, Jarek populated the peaks with ogre-like shadowspawn called white howlers, adapted to the frigid climate. These fell creatures prey on mountain goats, rabbits, cougars, and any travelers who do not carry the special ward stones used by Kernish forces. The ward stones keep white howlers from approaching within ten yards of the bearer, and a ring of similar stones, just inside the two mountain ranges' foothills, prevents the creatures from wandering into Kern. Since the white howlers are uncomfortable at temperatures much above freezing, they rarely, if ever, leave the high mountains.

The Bitter-Fang Caverns

Although no one knows exactly what lives deep in these caves, various types of shadowspawn Jarek created and discarded inhabit the upper reaches. A large community of more than a thousand vata'sha dwells in the caverns and knows almost nothing of the world beyond Kern. In their underground home, they battle ogres and other predatory shadowspawn, while the entrances to the surface are guarded by darkfiends bound to keep monsters inside the caverns from troubling Kern.

The vata'sha have built a rough civilization and engage in sporadic and furtive trade with the inhabitants of Kern whenever one of the vata'sha manages to sneak past the darkfiend guards, selling ores and medicinal fungi for wood, leather, food, and medicinal herbs. As yet, none of these vata'sha has ventured outside of Kern or even talked to anyone who has come from outside the blighted kingdom.

The Great Basin

Although the lowlands of Kern are considerably more hospitable than the mountains surrounding them, what is known as the Great Basin is still far more harsh and less fertile than Aldis or Jarzon. The surrounding mountains protect it somewhat from the bitter and almost continual northern wind that blows from the glaciers north of the Bitter-Fang Mountains. Even this protection, however, does little to alleviate the cold of winter.

Dotted with giant boulders, the Great Basin is mostly flat, with a plateau in the center. The capital city of Sarn covers the top of this plateau, and a low spur of the Bitter-Fang Mountains extends to within a few miles of it. Jarek created both the plateau and the lake stretching three-quarters of the way around it through shaping arcana long ago, although the geography of Kern has not

Caelen Burrows

A Roamer courtesan who runs a pleasure house in northern Aldis, Caelen Burrows is in fact one of Jarek's Talons. A talented assassin and spy, Burrows serves Kern reluctantly. Before his destruction, the Lich King managed to curse and ensorcel several of Burrows' loved ones so they could be targeted and killed no matter where they were hidden. A devoted husband and father, Burrows agreed to serve as Jarek's Talon rather than risk harm coming to his spouses and children. Burrows will not reveal their status as "arcane hostages" to his family, fearing they would seek to persuade him to allow them to perish to free himself—something he could never bring himself to do.

Since the destruction of the Lich King, knowledge of Burrows' family and the means to eliminate them has passed to one of Jarek's Regents. Burrows doesn't know which of the new masters of Kern now holds his strings, but he believes they will eliminate his family should he disobey.

Burrows is a handsome man with a deep, luxurious voice. He freely flirts and charms anyone who interests him, regardless of gender. He yearns to be free of Kern's influence and even occasionally sabotages his own operations as a way of striking back at his tormentors and leaking information to Kern's enemies. He is a gifted performer, charming conversationalist, skilled lover, and deadly combatant. In battle, he seeks to distract or disarm a foe before going in for the kill.

Alurah, the Mother of Whispers

Driven from a young age and trained to be a hunter of slaves and traitors to Kern, Alurah was a rhy-wolf tainted by corruption who became one of the Lich King's most effective trackers and counterspies. Alurah used her keen senses and psychic powers to root out enemies and alert Jarek to numerous dangers during her long service.

Alurah lost her left foreleg in battle against a member of the Sovereign's Finest and for the last years of her life used a special prosthetic, designed by Minister Kurgik, which restored most of her mobility. Her cunning and ruthlessness allowed her to remain active even as age and disability hindered her ability chase traitors herself, and she managed a shadow army of agents on behalf of Kern for decades.

In Jarek's Ebon Tower when it exploded during the Lich King's battle with Queen Jaellin, Alurah has not been seen since and is presumed dead. If she somehow survived, she may have been gravely injured, as a rhydan of her advanced years would have found it hard to escape the chaos of that battle unscathed.

changed significantly since the days of the Great Rebellion.

Three rivers from the Bitter-Fang Mountains feed into Blackwater Lake. The Yaza River runs out of the lake and vanishes when it comes to the Ice-Binder Mountains, where it enters a network of caverns under the southeastern portion of the mountains and flows into a small underground sea.

Because of the cold winters, the short growing season, and the poor quality of the soil, farming in Kern is onerous and often impossible. The outskirts of the basin are a mixture of loosely patrolled wilderness and large ranches where hardy sheep and goats feed on meager shrubs and sparse grass. The central part of Kern, including the land bordering Blackwater Lake, is more fertile, although still less so than even the poor soil of Jarzon. The one advantage Kern has over Jarzon is better irrigation. There is an abundance of small lakes, especially in the central portion of the basin.

During the long winter months, the snow is often more than a foot deep, and at the foot of the mountains it is more than four feet deep in bad years. Also, winter winds are painfully cold and blow the snow into blizzards. Spring and autumn in Kern are relatively cool, but the brief summers can become unpleasantly hot. During this short season, swarms of mosquitoes, black flies, and other noxious insects breed in the many lakes and make life miserable for peasants and their livestock.

Sarn

Sarn is the capital of Kern, a bleak city made from the same volcanic rock forming the plateau on which it stands. Like many of the later cities built during the Old Kingdom, almost all of the city's buildings were arcanely shaped from the local rock; most are seamless constructions of stone. However, much of the city has fallen into disrepair, so many structures are now cracked, worn, and crudely patched, if not collapsed altogether.

In the Old Kingdom, Sarn was a hub for trade with the human tribes in the far north, as well as the center for processing and shipping shas crystals from the mountains' mines. Trade with the north largely ended when the Sorcerer Kings narrowed the passes in the Bitter-Fang Mountains, and all external trade ceased during the Great Rebellion.

Today, Sarn holds perhaps 50,000 inhabitants, less than half the number it was built for, and most of the uninhabited buildings are derelict. The mining towns, farms, and herders on the outskirts of Kern send their grain, animals, metals, and shas crystals to Sarn. In return, workers in Sarn make tools, cloth, and other manufactured necessities, which go out to the hinterlands. Labor goes on twenty-four hours a day in Sarn, with laborers working in two twelve-hour shifts. As a result, the clang of hammers and the roar of the smelting and forging

furnaces never ceases. A noxious smog often hangs over the city. Workers who leave Sarn are amazed at both the silence and the clean air.

The Ebon Tower

In the center of Sarn stand the remains of the Ebon Tower, Jarek's stronghold. This square tower is thirty feet on a side and stood some 120 feet high, but the destruction of the Lich King and his stronghold caused the top of the tower to collapse, leaving it barely two-thirds its former height. The tower is shaped from black basalt and has three basement levels. The lowest was a dungeon for prized prisoners and flesh-shaping experiments not meant for the light of day, while the two above it held vaults for the Lich King's artifacts and riches, including a functioning shadowgate. The ground floor holds the grand throne chamber where the Lich King held audiences.

Since the Aldin attack on the Ebon Tower, the Shadowed Seven have plundered Jarek's stores of wealth and artifacts, occasionally squabbling over this or that piece of treasure. The shadowgate remains intact and in place in the dungeons below the tower ruins, as the Regents of Kern have not been able to agree whether to destroy it, and are loathe to give up such a potentially useful resource, even if it proves a means for Aldin raiders to attack. Human and unliving guards watch the shadowgate all hours of the day and night for any signs of trouble.

Life & Death in Kern

In addition to being one of the most Shadow-tainted regions of all the inhabited lands in the known world (only the Shadow Barrens are worse, and they are virtually abandoned because of it), Kern is also the least diverse. In keeping with the policies of the other Sorcerer Kings, Jarek ordered all vata'an in his kingdom slain on sight. Vata'sha are taken into custody, falling under Kern's laws concerning those with arcane talents, while rhydan are simply butchered. The Lich King offered a bounty for all rhydan hides, and the Shadowed Seven have maintained it.

With the exception of a few vata'an who manage to remain hidden and rhydan who avoid settled areas, the only people in Kern are humans, night people, and vata'sha. Kern's other main inhabitants are shadowspawn, unliving, and darkfiends. Skeletons and zombies perform the most basic menial labor, and darkfiends serve the Regents as personal guards and shock troops.

Unliving make up almost twenty percent of the population of Kern, and only the expendability of many of them prevents them from being even more numerous. Night people are about fifteen percent of the population, and the remaining sixty-five percent is human and vata'sha. Fortunately for both the living residents of Kern and the inhabitants of all nearby nations, even the alliance of the

Shadowed Seven can only command so many darkfiends, so these eldritch creatures are comparatively rare.

Tensions between the human inhabitants of Kern and its night people—shadowspawn creations of the Sorcerer Kings—tend to run high. Night people are overseers and guards of the work gangs, so most humans resent them and many night people hold humans in contempt in return. This mutual disdain periodically erupts into brutal incidents where bands of humans kill the more oppressive night people. In return, night people exact retribution on the humans. While the violence slightly reduces the productivity of the work gangs, it also strengthens the sense of fear in Kern and keeps people from directing their anger at the Regents. Even in Aldis, communities of human refugees from Kern frequently refuse to have any contact with night people, since they often believe they are inherently corrupt.

The most obvious thing a visitor to Kern notices is the wretched living conditions. With the exception of the Regents and their immediate sycophants and servants, everyone in Kern is deeply impoverished and lives in constant fear. Forcing the inhabitants to live on the edge of starvation keeps them from revolting or even planning an effective rebellion. Everyone is too busy struggling to survive and cowering in fear from the ever-watchful eyes of the secret police.

Every resident of Kern serves in one way or another. Their work consists of everything from mining and carving shas crystals to making weapons, constructing and repairing roads and buildings, and many similar tasks. Everyone is expected to work. The frail and the infirm are allowed to cook and carry food for laborers and perform other support tasks, such as distributing and repairing tools. Anyone unwilling or unable to work is beaten, and if this does not motivate them (or if they are physically unable to do so), they are killed. As a result, very few people in Kern live to see old age.

Most Kerns do their best to survive and avoid the attention of the secret police. The cities and towns of Kern clearly reflect the lives of their inhabitants. There are no large public buildings, except for work places and small dingy taverns where people go to drown their misery in drink, gambling, and whoring. Most other buildings are shabby homes with small gardens plots where the locals supplement the food grown in the countryside with hardy root vegetables, herbs, and eggs from scrawny hens.

There are fewer animals in Kern than elsewhere in Aldea. The Crown officially owns all horses, and no common folk have use of them. The land is too harsh and food too scarce for cattle, and few can afford to keep pets. People who have animals are most likely to have dogs, pigs, chickens, sheep, goats, and donkeys.

Taz, the Dancer in Violet

While there are many faerie nobles in the world, most avoid Kern. The Lich King and his Regents are too bloody-minded and obsessed with death to appeal to most fey. Those who embrace darker pursuits find the zombies and darkfiends of the Lich King's lands boring and drab. Not so with Taz. While it has taken him some time, he has grown to appreciate Kern's darkness and violence—he's become quite the connoisseur, in fact.

Exiled to the land of the Lich King years ago as punishment by his superiors in the faerie court, Taz tried to remain in the Kernish court for a time. Eventually the impudent fey pushed Jarek and his lieutenants too far with pranks and jests, but somehow managed to evade attempts to assassinate or imprison him. Eventually the Lich King found an effective way of controlling his antics. Discovering the faerie's existence was tied to a particular story—in this case the tale of how Taz hunts, torments, and kills a particular individual each year—Jarek used his arts to alter the narrative so he could choose the target of the tale, then used Taz to eliminate certain rivals and enemies.

Taz appears as a small sprite-like faerie with long pointed ears and butterfly wings. He favors fashionable violet garb and is never without his crochet hook, which he can use to crochet enchanted items and as a surprisingly deadly arcane weapon. Now that Jarek is gone, Taz's story is a major sticking point. He needs targets for his curse or he will cease to be. However, he is unwilling to surrender his freedom again. Instead he seeks individuals willing to give him a subject's proper and true name for his story, tormenting and destroying those named even if the name-giver later regrets their decision.

Kernish Law

The law of Kern are simple: serve or die. So long as his subjects obeyed, Jarek didn't care what they did. His successors have largely followed that same mandate. The people are free to work together to help each other survive or, if they prefer, murder one another for ragged blankets and crusts of bread. Both things occur quite regularly in Kern.

In most of Kern, communities elect judges called speakers to settle disputes, determine guilt, and assign punishments for crimes. Speakers have no rights beyond any other citizen, and the regency does not recognize their authority, but they are supported and respected by the people. Their community helps provide for them and protect them. Since prisoners cannot work and so would be killed, speakers dispense only three punishments: fines, shunning, and death.

Lesser crimes like burglary, vandalism, or minor cases of assault all require criminals to pay restitution to their victims. Since everyone in Kern is quite poor, these fines can be a heavy burden. Anyone who cannot pay can instead work for their victim as a servant, when they are not serving the kingdom.

Shunning punishes violent crimes and serious property crimes. For a period of months, or sometimes years, no one in the community speaks to the criminal, and in the more extreme cases, the convict's forehead is branded so those in other communities will recognize an outcast. Although others may be forced to speak and interact with outcasts in the work gangs, no one does so otherwise and no one offers to aid or help the outcast in any way until the sentence is up. In Kern, where people often need to work together to survive, shunning is a harsh and effective punishment.

In cases of premeditated murder, mass murder, torture, and the like, the speaker declares the criminal should die, and the sentence is usually carried out on the spot. The sentence of death is meted out so swiftly because, if such criminals escape, they can try to avoid punishment by moving up in the service to the kingdom or the Regents.

Work Gangs

One of the central features of Kernish life is the work gang. Every Kern older than thirteen reports to the local work gang for four days out of every seven. Each work gang consists of a group of between seventy and 200, guarded and directed by a tenth as many night people overseers. The night people keep track of their productivity, whip and threaten slackers, and capture or kill any who attempt to flee or rebel.

The only person with real authority in a work gang is its master. In most cases, this is an agent of the Crown, but the most important work gangs—including those mining shas crystals—are commanded by a darkfiend. Work gangs working after dark are sometimes overseen by vampires, who feed on workers who are too slow or rebellious, transforming them into their unliving thralls.

In addition, work gangs have zombies and skeletons equal to about half the number of humans, controlled by the gang's master. A few of the unliving guard the master, but most perform the truly mindless labor, such as hauling rubble or carrying ore, charcoal, and wood. Although they are incapable of actions requiring thought or care, the unliving are tireless and increase productivity. They also serve as a warning, since the masters make sure certain zombies raised from the bodies of local criminals, rebels, and troublemakers are present in the work gangs.

The humans labor under the watchful eyes of the night people (who are punished if one of the human workers escapes or productivity falls), and, in turn, the night people help pick up the slack if it looks like the gang may fall behind in its quota. Since work quotas are always set high, the night people end up spending almost as much time laboring as they do watching and guarding the workers. With only a few short breaks for food and rest, the workers toil until nightfall, at which point they stagger home and sleep until sunrise, when they must again report to their work gang.

Jarek ordered his sorcerers and darkfiends to use their formidable arcana to create the buildings and other facilities in his mines and factories. Their powers shaped earth and stone and moved objects that would otherwise require large teams of workers. As a result, while the people of Kern live in crude houses of rudely dressed logs, mortared stone, or wattle and daub, the factories and other public buildings are all well made. They are also equipped with lights, heat, and other conveniences powered by shas crystals. The mines and factories are stark, ugly, and designed without any consideration for the comfort or safety of the workers, but they are sturdier and better equipped than any of the people's dwellings.

Adepts in Kern

In Kern, all arcana and arcane devices are forbidden to anyone who does not work directly for the Crown (and therefore the Regents), and the penalty for violating this edict is death. Those with arcane talents are expected to either seek or accept a position in service to the kingdom, or to not use their abilities. This includes vata and rhydan, who all possess inherent arcana. The Regents and the Shadow-Taken are ruthless in hunting down and eliminating potential rivals through the secret police.

Nevertheless, the aid of adepts, especially healers, is so valuable that many Kerns are willing to look the other way. Some communities try to shelter potential adepts, but they

Z'aam

One of the best hidden of Jarek's Talons was Z'aam. Z'aam isn't even a name, but a title meaning "Changing One." A social chameleon with an androgynous and malleable appearance that aided their ability to blend in, this vata'sha was always content to serve Jarek as a spy, scout, and assassin.

For years, Jarek used Z'aam as a shadowy threat to those who would plot against him. While other Talons would often be employed to hunt down external threats or eliminate traitors, Z'aam's primary mission was to discover weakness among Jarek's own ranks and eliminate it.

Originally a scout hunting fugitives from Kern's work parties, Z'aam despises weakness. They served Jarek because he was strong, and they will not throw their support behind any of the Shadowed Seven without proof they are just as tough. To discern this, Z'aam has taken on jobs for each Regent under various guises, seeking which has the cunning, power, and ruthlessness to be offered true loyalty. A master of disguise and flesh-shaping, Z'aam has cover identities across Kern and beyond to further their search for a worthy master.

La'Al-Deanna

A malevolent spirit with a talent for both disguise and etiquette, La'Al Deanna has the ability to possess a target and use their body as her own. Something of a hedonist, she prefers healthy, wealthy, and attractive bodies with access to material comforts and political power in abundance. She has existed for centuries, inhabiting wealthy merchants, trusted diplomats, respected nobles, and even the occasional ruler. She displays a definite preference for possessing vata'an subjects, choosing them above others.

Regardless of whether there is truth to La'Al-Deanna's claim she was more of a partner or ally to the Lich King than a subordinate, she served as a spy and rabble-rouser for Kern for hundreds of years. Often she would stay in place as a sleeper agent for years, doing nothing to arouse suspicion. Only when the moment was perfect and her intervention vital would she act, causing chaos and disaster.

It is difficult for La'Al-Deanna to possess excessively pure or moral individuals; their inner Light wards off her dark spirit. However, those who have given in to corruption are far easier to control. She rarely jumps bodies quickly, finding the process exhausting and tedious. Instead she prefers to carefully select a target and use them for some time, from months to years if necessary.

Currently La'Al-Deanna possesses the body of a wealthy vata'an noblewoman in Aldis, respected and known for both her charity work and her status as a retired member of the Finest. Her spouse is a respected officer in the Aldin military and a skilled adept. None of her friends or subordinates suspect the possession or are able to detect La'Al-Deanna's influence. With Jarek gone, she is beginning to devise her own scheme to undermine and control Aldis from the shadows.

generally lack anyone to train them properly and, sooner or later, someone gives them up to the secret police in exchange for mercy or favors. The same is true of foreign healers and adepts who attempt to aid people in Kern: they find considerable sympathy among the populace, but run the risk of someone informing on them eventually.

The best hope for those with arcane talents in Kern is escape, making the dangerous journey across the mountains south into Aldis, where they can find safety, shelter, and even training in their gifts. The only other choice is to submit to the "guidance" of the Shadow-Taken, which some Kernish talents choose rather than risk escape.

Religion

Like people in other lands, Kerns offer prayers to the Primordials and the gods of Light, but in the Land Under the Shadow, such worship is illegal. Anyone caught performing such rites to the gods or possessing their icons is publicly whipped or beaten, the contraband icons destroyed.

The elite of Kern honor and seek to placate the exarchs of Shadow, seeing them not as vices to overcome, but strengths to emulate. Statues of the exarchs stand in the public squares of Sarn, and their symbols adorn arches and niches throughout the kingdom. A bas relief of Mytaxx, exarch of greed, appears in most mines; the Knights of the Skull bear shields emblazoned with the horns of Tyrexxus; idols of In'nassi watch over orgies among Sarn's wealthy sybarites; and so on. A shadow cultist axiom is that only the weak have desires that are impotent enough to be restrained; the desires of the mighty are untamable sources of power. The general populace of Kern does not worship the exarchs, nor are they considered worthy to do so by the elite.

The Elite of Kern

Since the fall of the Lich King, Kern has become a "regency" with a council of seven of Jarek's most influential lieutenants sharing power and control of the kingdom. The very notion of a regency is a polite fiction, since Jarek had no designated heir, nor was there any order of succession for a tyrannical and unliving monarch. Thus the "regency" is really just an acknowledgement the alliance of the so-called "Shadowed Seven" is ultimately temporary, until one of them gains the upper hand and manages to overcome or destroy the others.

The Crimson Guard

While the Kernish people fear the Shadowed Seven, their far more immediate concern is the Crimson Guard, the nation's "police" force. Most of the members of the guard are bloodthirsty and cruel. While on duty, the Crimson Guard wears their signature red leathers, which do not show blood as easily as other garb. The Crimson Guard is also known to employ informants and undercover agents, investigating crimes and keeping watch for any hints of rebellion. The most skilled agents detain people and use arcane disguises to impersonate them to gain greater access to the inner workings of a community.

The fact that anyone could be an agent of the Crimson Guard in disguise increases the paranoia of the populace and serves to restrict willingness to discuss any dissatisfaction or plans for resistance. Meanwhile, the guard waits and watches for signs of dissent. They offer substantial rewards to anyone turning in a dissident. The informant receives a month's worth of good food, better tools and clothing, and occasionally a better home or preferential treatment in a work gang. Also, retribution against an informant is punished, but only if the informant continues to prove useful. Since all their neighbors soon shun informants, most either move regularly

or look to join the ranks of the guard, many of whom started out as informants.

Some of the guard are trained in arcana, and are the only people in Kern other than the Shadow-Taken and the Knights of the Skull permitted to learn and use arcana. In addition to seeking out traitors, the Crimson Guard is empowered to judge and punish criminals, which they often do on the spot. They use sorcery to rip the truth from offenders' minds, or simply kill them and sort the bodies later.

Branding or loss of a hand punishes minor offenses, such as petty theft from one of the elite. More serious crimes, like injuring anyone in service to the kingdom, are punished by either death or becoming the subject of one of Shadow-Taken's experiments to produce new forms of unliving and shadowspawn. Those captured by the Crimson Guard prefer death. Executioners typically reanimate criminals as zombies. The walking corpses serve as vivid warnings to any who seek to resist the Seven's rule. Anyone who has been branded or lost a hand for a prior crime is executed or taken away for experiments if they are found guilty of another infraction.

The Knights of the Skull

The most feared and visible manifestations of Kern's authority are the dread Knights of the Skull. These warriors are a mixture of humans, night people, vata'sha, vampires, and a few darkfiends. The knights battle raiders and spies from other nations, as well as the most well-organized rebels in Kern. They are also sent to put down rebellions and uprisings. Unlike the secret police, Skull Knights are specially trained and equipped to battle adepts. They are instantly identifiable by their helms of enchanted silver, shaped like grinning skulls. Elite Skull Knights ride wyverns, allowing them to cross the miles, or even the harsh mountains, quickly and easily.

The vampire Lady Talis commands the Knights of the Skull. Knights normally work in pairs, but can psychi-

Silver Skulls

The skull masks worn by the Knights of the Skull are more than just terrifying headgear; they are also arcane items. Anyone wearing a silver skull gets a +3 bonus on Psychic Shield and Ward tests. Also, when the wearer causes despair or fear with Heart Shaping, the target's Willpower test TN increases by +3.

The masks provide the leader of the knights with a psychic link to the wearer. For the use of arcana, the wearer is considered very familiar to the knights' leader (Lady Talis) but not vice versa. The few times Kernish rebels have stolen a silver skull have resulted in them becoming a conduit for corruption and betrayal amongst their number.

cally call for aid if they ever come up against a threat too dangerous for a single pair to deal with. Part of the knights' effectiveness comes from the utter terror the people of Kern feel when they are present. All but the bravest and most hardened rebels either flee or cower when they face the Skull Knights. In part, this is because the knights casually kill anyone who defies them. They also publicly torture captives to death or allow their wyvern mounts to devour them. Captives likely to know valuable information are interrogated using psychic arcana and then slowly tortured to death.

Sir Alaric Xerxes, the Knight of Mercy

Once a famed Skull Knight from a powerful family, Alaric Xerxes was branded a criminal and a traitor when he aided his sister and his brother's betrothed in running off together. When his father and brother confronted Alaric, a fight broke out and he slew them both. Believed complicit in the deed, his sister and her lover were captured and all three taken before the Lich King for judgment.

Facing death, Sir Alaric pleaded for mercy, not for himself but for his sister and her lover. In an act of capricious mercy, Jarek sentenced the three to a lifetime of servitude, but allowed Alaric to serve all three sentences, transforming him into one of the unliving, a monster of great physical power but terrifying corpse-like appearance, bound to arcane armor that would return him from destruction five times. He then gave Alaric's sister and her lover each an amulet that protected them from any of the Lich King's servants.

The deal struck, Sir Alaric's sister and her lover fled to Aldis, where their family lives to this day. Xerxes rejoined the Skull Knights as an unliving soldier whose first task was to slay the remainder of his family—a task he did without passion or hesitation. He earned the cruel epithet "The Knight of Mercy" for Jarek's "kindness" and his own deeds. Later he became a commander in Jarek's legions of the unliving. He fought several battles against Kern's enemies, and was destroyed several times in the service of his master. He never wavered in his vow, too afraid of the vengeance the Lich King would unleash on his surviving kin, and the only decent thing he had ever done.

Alaric Xerxes perished once more in the Battle of the Ebon Tower, only to rise again to find the Lich King destroyed. Whether he will finally seek out his mortal kin beyond Kern's borders or one of the Shadowed Seven can secure his loyalty remains unknown at this time. It is believed he has at least one more restoration remaining from his arcane armor, and there is always a chance Jarek may have some means to make good on this debt, even from beyond death itself.

The Shadow-Taken

The Shadow-Taken are sorcerers who have embraced corruption and given themselves over to Shadow. They are the only people in Kern permitted to learn the full range of arcane arts. They are free to study summoning, all manner of psychic abilities, and any other arcana they choose. The most senior sorcerers serve as mentors, teachers, and masters of the junior sorcerers.

Some in Kern think becoming one of the Shadow-Taken is the easiest path to wealth and power, but just as the Lich King carefully managed the ranks of the Shadow-Taken to prevent any rivals to his throne, so too do the Regents, who carefully watch and prune the sorcerers' ranks. Since the Seven are unwilling to risk their own lives on dangerous and forbidden rites, the Shadow-Taken often perform these rituals for their masters, resulting in them being devoured by darkfiends, immolated by uncontrolled arcane forces, or mutated into twisted and mindless shadowspawn.

Still, there is no shortage of potential adepts either seduced into joining the Shadow-Taken, or kidnapped and ultimately forced to do so upon pain of death. Many of these sorcerers are quite ambitious and envision a return to the days of the Sorcerer Kings, when their kind were the rulers of the known world. Indeed, some of the Regents have promised the Shadow-Taken just that: when Kern surges forth to conquer the neighboring lands, they will be given dominions of their own to rule, as in the days before the Great Rebellion.

Old Kingdom Artifacts

Unlike the rest of the continent, Kern was not devastated during the Great Rebellion. As a result, some of the lost wonders of the Old Kingdom can be found here. Unfortunately, the unliving Lich King maintained a stranglehold on such artifacts for centuries and the only functional ones either directly enhance sorcery—like the shadowgates located in Sarn—or aid war, violence, and oppression. The majority of the wonders that enriched lives in the Old Kingdom have fallen into ruin or have been cannibalized for Jarek's other needs. The Lich King cared nothing for creature comforts and had no interest in providing them to his living subjects.

The destruction of Jarek further reduced Kern's access to ancient artifacts, as the Lich King guarded his knowledge and resources like a miser. His successors know even less about maintaining—much less creating—some arcane items, and are still carefully working to uncover Jarek's caches and treasure troves, which are guarded with deadly traps and wards.

The Shadowed Seven have salvaged the shadowgate in Sarn and kept it intact, in spite of the Aldins using it for their sneak attack. The gate is simply too useful in terms of summoning darkfiends, and the Regents gamble that the

Aldins won't use the same gambit twice (they're correct, as it happens). Even so, the gate is still carefully watched and guarded at all times.

Greater Crystons

Lost everywhere else in the known world, greater crystons are arcane weapons powered by large, flawless shas crystals. Due to the rarity of these crystals, Kern only possesses nine greater crystons: five arrayed around Sarn, the other four mounted on wagons kept in cities near the largest mountain passes to the south. Each greater cryston consists of a silvered barrel some eight feet long and one foot in diameter, fitted with a flawless shas crystal nearly a foot in diameter and two feet long at the end of the barrel.

Greater crystons work much like ordinary crystons. They can only be fired by someone with arcane talent. Their base range is 2,000 feet, and each point of the wielder's Willpower ability increases the weapon's range another 1,000 feet. Greater crystons do not suffer range penalties; their entire range is considered "short range." Greater crystons require one full round to ready between firings. Anyone firing a greater cryston adds their Willpower rather than their Accuracy to their attack rolls with the weapon. They also add their Willpower to the greater cryston's damage. Greater crystons inflict 4d6 + the wielder's Willpower damage against living things, darkfiends, and the unliving. They have no effect on inanimate objects.

The Shadowed Seven

Kern is ruled by monsters, some of them mortal, others not, but all worthy of the name. Since the destruction of the Lich King, his most powerful lieutenants have circled the wagons by forming a "Council of Regents" until a new Sovereign of Kern can be named. Colloquially known as the "Shadowed Seven," many of the Regents have ambitions of ascending the throne, others of at least securing their future position within the kingdom, so alliances and maneuvering for power have become commonplace. As the most ambitious Regents are also ageless unliving creatures, it may be that their struggle for power will take some time. The greatest pressure on the Shadowed Seven, other than their own rivalries, is the possibility of open rebellion in Kern, or further attacks from Aldis or Jarzon, looking to take advantage of Kern's weakness.

Although game traits are not provided here for the Shadowed Seven, the Narrator should consider them formidable foes capable of taking on powerful characters, and define them accordingly. Use the guidelines and basic creature information in the **Adversaries** chapter to detail the Regents of Kern, as needed.

Leandros Velius, the Silent Shaper

A remote manor in western Kern serves as home to Leandros Velius, one of the land's most skilled and feared experts in arcane lore, flesh-shaping, and enchantment. A clumsy and restless child, Velius was discovered by a Kernish agent working his flesh-shaping talents on small animals near his village in Jarzon. The agent recognized the boy's potential, and after a bit of coaxing, was able to convince the boy to leave his home and travel with him back to Kern. There, his talents were nurtured and refined. He was taught sorcery and enchantment by the best scholars in Kern, and given ample opportunity to refine his skills by practicing on prisoners, slaves, and servants. To date, Velius has developed many useful arcane items and created various twisted experiments with his flesh-shaping skills. However, his true goal has so far eluded him—the flawless melding of arcane weaponry with shaped flesh to create a new kind of soldier for Kern's armies.

Given an estate in the wilderness to conduct his research, Velius rarely leaves his manor. He cares little for company and tolerates no noise or speech in the upper floors where his laboratory is. When working, he is distant and unresponsive. His notes are written in a bizarre coded shorthand, and his work spaces are littered with his current projects and written musings. His lone servant and bodyguard, a young man named Kai, sees to Velius' needs, even reminding him to eat and sleep when the researcher's obsessions drive him to complete distraction. Kai is pretty and unassuming, but his outward appearance hides a deadly fighter who is utterly loyal to his master.

Velius is lithe, delicately built, and often disheveled, with long, loosely braided hair. He does not speak much, preferring sign language and the written word. When he does deign to speak, his voice is slow and methodical, with an unusual cadence and slight slur. His eyes burn with an intelligence and obsession in sharp contrast to his timid exterior. He and Kai often communicate with a mix of code phrases and hand gestures, making it easy for them to coordinate actions or share information while avoiding eavesdropping or interference.

Lady Talis

Commander of the Knights of the Skull

The leader of the Knights of the Skull was second only to Jarek as the most feared creature in Kern. Lady Talis was the hammer of Jarek's wrath and enjoyed missions which brought utter dread to the people and slaughtered Jarek's enemies in gruesome ways. A vampire, it is said she enjoyed the terror of her victims almost as much as their blood.

Lady Talis was Jarek's closest ally from the beginning of the Shadow Wars. Her only loyalties were to herself and the Lich King. She sent knights on suicide missions without a moment's remorse and met appeals for mercy with grim laughter. Her contempt for the living was legendary. One of her favorite tactics was to drink her captives' blood, turn them into her thralls, then send them against their former allies and loved ones.

Lady Talis was an early favorite to seize power following Jarek's destruction, but the vampire knight was very nearly destroyed herself. By the time she recovered and returned, Lady Talis discovered others had dug-in their positions, so she agreed to the Council of Regents as a means to buy time and assess her options. She has never quite regained the ground she lost in those first nights. General Vale hates and opposes her, and efforts to win over the fickle Kurgik or the fanatical Senira Rhal have been unsuccessful in securing Talis the arcane resources she needs.

One asset Lady Talis does have is the disgraced Lord Sayvin of Aldis, a former noble and son of the previous Sovereign, whom she keeps in thrall. Sayvin fell prey to Shadow and betrayed his homeland to the Lich King, only to see his new master destroyed at the hands of his hated rival, Queen Jaellin, the blessed chosen of the Golden Hart. Most of the Regents consider Sayvin useless now that Jarek's schemes have ended, but Talis recognizes his potential value, both as someone intimately familiar with Aldis and its court, but also as a formally-trained and fairly capable adept.

Harper

A vampire sired by Lady Talis herself, the creature known as Harper presents as a sophisticated and charming musician. Serving as the Skull Commander's personal minstrel, messenger, and sometimes assassin, Harper most often shows up where matters are of great interest to Talis.

Harper is tall and muscular and cuts a very masculine figure, a fact that stands in stark contrast to his fine delicate hands and features. The combination is striking, making him a memorable individual. His vampiric nature and natural agility give him supernatural grace. He has a great love of music and performance, having refined his skills throughout his mortal and vampiric existences. In fact, he always acts as if he's playing a role when interacting socially. He is rarely without his harp, a terrible and powerful arcane artifact which allows Harper to channel various psychic arcana through its music, amplifying their effect. Harper uses the instrument to manipulate those who interest him and destroy those who annoy him.

With the destruction of the Lich King, Harper is preparing to leave Kern on a mission for Lady Talis. The exact nature of this excursion is unknown, but it involves a plot to grow Talis' power and secure allies outside Kern's border.

Minister Kurgik

Scholar of Science and Sorcery

One of the remaining rulers of Kern makes his home in his fortress in the Bitter-Fangs. Formerly Jarek's chief of alchemy, medicine, experimentation, and arcane advancement, Kurgik is a self-aware white howler possessing incredible intellect. Whether he is a mutant, the subject of an experiment, or another consciousness inhabiting the powerful body of a white howler is unknown. Kurgik is famed for his ruthless pursuit of forbidden knowledge above all else and is known across Kern as "Jarek's monster-maker." This nickname isn't a boast or exaggeration. Many of the monsters stalking the Bitter-Fang caverns are the products of his experiments.

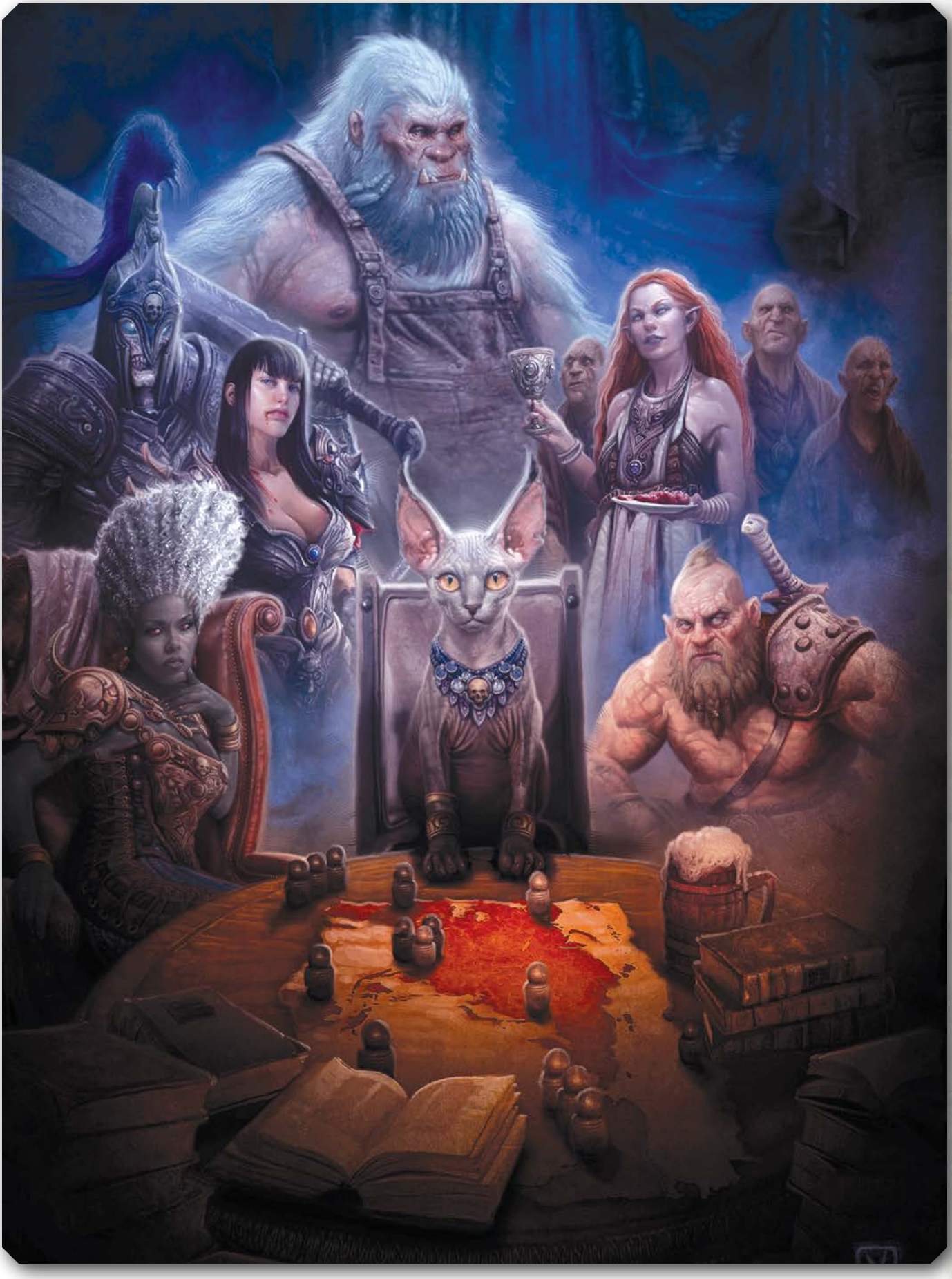
Kurgik is a distracted but dangerous Regent, and any servants, subordinates, or workers who outlive their usefulness often find themselves subjects for any number of horrifying operations or tests. Under him, Kern would become a land of surgical and sorcerous horrors. He is currently seeking alliances with one or more of the other Shadowed Seven as he has no desire to rule Kern directly, instead wishing only ample opportunities to pursue his craft. Unfortunately, Kurgik's ego is such that he wishes to be "first among equals," whose experiments and studies would take precedence over all other concerns—a fact that makes it hard for him to secure permanent allies.

Workmaster Tharg

Lord of the Brand and Lash

Head administrator of all the work gangs under Jarek, Grovan Tharg was a work ganger himself who clawed his way up to overseer and beyond by betraying, exploiting, and abusing his peers. Surprising to those ignorant of his history or disposition, Tharg is a human. Since Jarek's defeat, he has maintained control of most of the country's workforce, and all the most skilled and productive gangs and their masters serve under him. This power gives him remarkable influence, especially over Kern's infrastructure and rebuilding efforts.

Tharg still bears the scars of the whip and burns of the brand from his time in the work gangs. He wears these old wounds as a shield to criticism that he knows nothing of the pain he inflicts on Kern's slaves. The truth is Tharg knows these pains quite well—he simply doesn't care. He figures he was tough and dedicated enough to pull himself up by his own chains, and if others were so motivated they could do the same. That Jarek allowed him to advance from slavery and despair only so he could have a better tool for keeping others down is lost on him.



Karmon Aldemere, The Haunted Knight

Once an esteemed member of Jarzon's Knights of Purity, Karmon Aldemere was a devoted servant of the church, spending long months away from his wife, Denna, and their son, Leon, in pursuit of sorcerers and heretics. This changed when Karmon returned from a quest to discover his wife and teenaged son had embraced one of the heretical sects of the Purist Church. Torn between duty and love, he ordered his family to flee Jarzon and turned himself over to his superiors in their stead. Unfortunately, Karmon's family was captured and sentenced to die alongside him.

When he saw Denna and Leon sentenced to die Karmon reached out into the darkness and drew corrupt power to himself. Using sorcery, he freed himself and his family, but in the conflict and escape that followed, Denna and Leon perished. Alone and half-mad from corruption and grief, Karmon fled north to Kern, haunted by the ghosts of his loved ones.

In Kern he pledged himself to the Lich King's service in exchange for the knowledge to bind the ghosts of his wife and son more strongly to him, with the hope of restoring them to life. To "keep his family together," Karmon has remained loyal to Kern's regents, who can provide him with the necessary lore and ritual components to continue his quest. Denna and Leon continue to abide and speak with Karmon, telling him terrible secrets and encouraging him to continue to care for them, as he failed to do previously. All will be well, they say, if only he listens to them.

Once a handsome if stern-faced knight, Karmon's corruption and suffering weigh heavily on him. He is a skilled priest-adept and investigator who has long since turned these skills toward the service of the Shadowed Seven.

Senira Rhal

Speaker for the Shadow

While Jarek's relationship with the exarchs was one more of alliance than worship, he understood the value of keeping such powerful beings appeased. To this end, he allowed and even encouraged cult-like worship of the exarchs within Kern among the elites. In addition, he also kept a priestess of the exarch cults as an advisor, both as a matter of respect and pragmatism.

Senira Rhal is a fanatic, the scion of a powerful vata'sha clan of sorcerers and cultists who worshipped the exarchs with enthusiasm and devotion far in excess of most in Kern. Her loyalty to Jarek was fear-based and minimal. With his death, she sees a great opportunity to turn Kern into a glorious theocracy devoted entirely to the advancement and return of the exarchs. Senira is an adept of great power and is especially skilled at visionary arcana. She dangles the potential knowledge of her visions in front of the other Regents like a lure.

Mistress Bellin

The Mewling Darkness

Jarek's spymaster, Bellin is a rhy-cat who fell into Shadow and corruption two centuries ago. Kept alive through sorcery, she now appears as a hairless, twisted mockery of the sleek and noble creature she once was. Lamenting her lost beauty, Bellin is rarely seen in public except in disguise or behind the thick silk curtains of her palanquin. She served as Jarek's minister of information and intelligence, coordinating and commanding nearly all the Lich King's spies and assassins—save those few he kept secret even from her. She worked closely with Dame Trecel during Jarek's reign and the two share a mutual respect and appreciation, or what passes for it in Kern. The ghoul is the closest thing to a friend Bellin has.

Bellin's psychic abilities are quite strong, even for a rhydan. She is able to communicate with her operatives and allies over great distances, allowing her to maintain a network of agents and informants unrivaled in the known world. She is never without her attendants: four blind and deaf servants she treats as little more than toys or puppets, connected in a twisted perversion of the traditional rhy-bond. Bellin harbors an unwavering hatred of rhydan, seeing them as a reminder of how she once was—pathetic weaklings unwilling to impose their will on others.

Lord General Atrix Vale

High Commander of the Armies of Kern

Jarek's greatest general and warlord, Atrix Vale was the iron-shod boot to Lady Talis' bloody sword. While the vampire knight and her followers were unquestionably the elite warriors of Kern, Jarek realized long ago Talis lacked the talent or interest in large-scale strategy or soldiering. To serve these needs, Jarek appointed Vale as High Commander of his armies and used his powers to transform him from a night person into a living wraith bonded to his enchanted armor, ensuring he would serve the Lich King for as long as he wanted.

General Vale has a brilliant and ruthless military mind capable of coordinating and commanding forces that include everything from darkfiends to unliving to slaves. The only reason he hasn't conquered Kern in Jarek's absence is his inflexibly in all things non-military and the current fractured state of Kern's forces, plus his own lack of skill in the arcane arts (apart from the powers bestowed upon him by his unliving state). His fellow Regents keep him in check through a careful combination of sabotage and intrigue, making sure he has enough to defend the land and battle their enemies, but not so much that he can destroy them and claim the throne for himself.

Dame Trecel
Commissioner of Justice

Once human, Jarek transformed Dame Trecel into a flesh-eating, unaging ghoul when she was promoted to head of the Lich King's secret police. She spent nearly a hundred years feeding on the flesh of the people of Kern, both literally and figuratively, until the Lich King fell. Since Jarek's defeat, Dame Trecel finds herself a favorite target of rebels and dissidents seeking revenge. For her own protection, she resides in numerous lavish underground safe houses across Kern. She never stays in the same one for long, and is never without several bodyguards. Trecel is a master of torture, counterintelligence, and intimidation, whose ghoulish form grants her superior physical abilities and great recuperative powers. Her elite guards are lesser ghouls that share some of these powers.

Trecel considers herself a sophisticate, and even her ghoulish impulses are exercised with the trappings of high society. She maintains a private chef in her entourage and considers herself a connoisseur of cannibalistic cuisine. To Trecel, her affectations elevate her above the normal unliving and are indicative of her superiority. They are also useful tactics of terror and intimidation. She has increasingly enjoyed the rites of Yungo and In'nassi, and while not quite a fervent convert, is certainly the favored of the Cult of Yungo in Kern. An invitation to dine with the Commissioner of Justice carries a terrifying double meaning.

The Matriarchy of Lar'tya

The matriarchy of Lar'tya occupies three tropical islands some 1,400 miles southwest of Aldis. Legend says the three were once a single large island riven into three parts by Tyrexxus, exarch of wrath. The largest of the islands is roughly 200 hundred miles across, while the other two are less than half that size. Lar'tya is a prosperous land, and one of Aldis' primary trading partners.

In addition to a wealth of spices, fruits, and durable hardwoods, the islands offer medicinal herbs, excellent woodwork, the brightly-colored feathers of exotic birds, and large supplies of opals, diamonds, pearls, and gold. Ships travel regularly between Aldis and Lar'tya. The voyage takes two to four weeks, depending on weather and the ship. Aldin merchants sell silver, iron, dyes, tin, fine porcelains, and metalwork, as well as nuts, olives, cheese, and other foodstuffs. Aldis' trade with Lar'tya is also important because the islands serve as a way station for goods from distant lands across the Western Ocean. Silk, unusual arcane items, and many other curiosities make their way from the Western Lands to Lar'tya, where local merchants resell them to traders from Aldis.

Visitors from Aldis find Lar'tya exotic. Palm trees grow along the coasts, and the interiors of the three islands are covered in jungles filled with strange trees and a multitude of colorful—and occasionally venomous—wildlife. The cities consist of elaborate buildings carved and woven from wood and wicker. The roofs of the homes of the wealthy are gilded and decorated with precious shells, mother-of-pearl, and shining opal inlays.

History

Lar'tya has remained independent for its entire history. During the Old Kingdom, the islands' peaceful but primitive natives lacked both cities and writing. They traded fruits and hardwoods for metal tools and other useful products of civilization brought by merchant sailors. Although there was talk of making the islands part of the Old Kingdom because of their abundant natural resources, the islands simply were not populous enough to justify building a shadowgate there, and without a means of instantaneous transport, Lar'tya remained a somewhat primitive client state.

Changes came to Lar'tya after the rise of the Empire of Thorns. To consolidate their usurpation, Delsha Artanis and her allies had to pull back the boundaries of their empire to the continent. They abandoned settlements in the Western Lands and ceased attempts to annex the islands of Lar'tya. At the same time, refugees fleeing the growing horrors of the empire sailed across the Western Ocean. Since most were in overloaded and ill-provisioned boats, the majority were forced to land on one of the western islands in the Scatterstar Archipelago, but some managed to reach Lar'tya. During Delsha's reign, thou-

Queen Alahani Lar

Chosen as Matriarch of Lar'tya when she was sixteen, Queen Alahani Lar is now thirty and a seasoned ruler of the three prosperous islands. She also loves grand balls, foreign entertainments, and hearing tales of far-off lands and exciting adventures. She grew up admiring Aldis and invites all Aldin nobles and envoys who visit her islands to meet her and entertain her with tales from the continent. As she and Queen Jaellin are nearly of an age, and attained their thrones at close to the same time, Alahani feels they share a kinship, although the two Queens have never met in person, neither having had the opportunity to make the journey. Some of the Queen's advisors warn her that her eagerness to entertain Aldin visitors gives them too much access to her—and others believe it encourages too much interest in foreign ideas among the people.

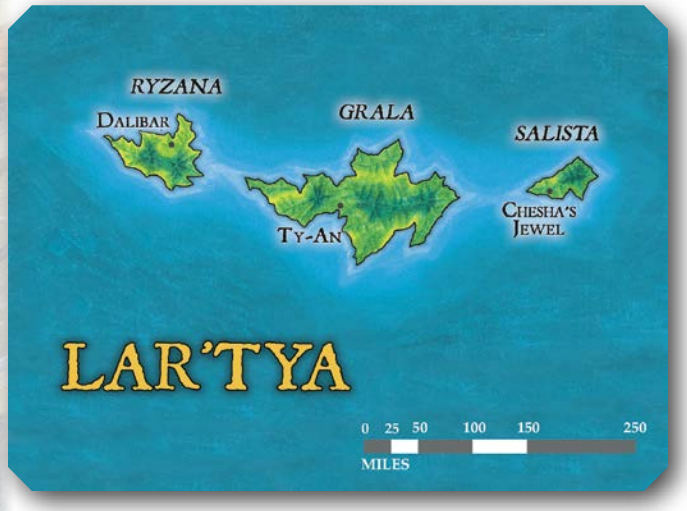
sands of people from the mainland found their way to the islands.

These refugees brought literacy, as well as knowledge of shas crystals, metalwork, and the like. Their presence gradually transformed the islands, and Lar'tya became a civilized nation in the years before the Shadow Wars, maintaining limited trade with the mainland. As refugees became more numerous and influential, trade with the empire became increasingly strained. However, the empire was concerned with maintaining order at home, rather than forcing the Lar'tyans to surrender refugees. After Delsha's death, the empire fell apart and trade with the mainland virtually ceased. A trickle of refugees continued to arrive, but the horrors of the Shadow Wars were so vast and overwhelming that few had the resources to flee across the sea.

During the Shadow Wars and the Great Rebellion, Lar'tya sympathized with people on the mainland but lacked the resources to send expeditions to aid the rebels, and Lar'tyan seers warned that such interventions would only draw the wrath of the Sorcerer Kings, to Lar'tya's ruin. As a result, Lar'tya remained largely isolated for centuries. During this time, its society changed, both from the blending of cultures and the rise of an urban civilization.

The islands already had hereditary rulers and nobles, who formed the Lar and Hagin castes. Almost a quarter of the refugees from the empire were allowed to join the Hagin. The remainder formed the majority of the Bleyn caste, while the Nuit caste consisted of non-nobles who continued their lives as farmers and laborers. The manner in which refugees were absorbed into Lar'tyan society is reflected in the appearance of the castes. Lighter skin tones, longer noses, and even brown or blond hair are occasionally seen in members of the Hagin caste and are somewhat common in the Bleyn caste, but they are unknown in the Lar and Nuit castes, where kinked, jet-black hair, dark brown skin, and dark eyes are the norm.

The long isolation of Lar'tya from the mainland ended approximately 250 years ago, when the first Lar'tyan trading vessel made a tentative voyage to the Scatterstar Archipelago. After discovering the Sorcerer Kings were no more, the Matriarch decided to resume contact with the mainland. Shortly afterward, the first trading ships from Lar'tya in centuries arrived on the shores of Aldis. Decades later, shipbuilders in Aldis constructed vessels capable of reaching Lar'tya, and trade between the two nations resumed. For the next century, trade was sporadic, since Aldis was not wealthy enough to build many ships, and coastal pirates remained a serious concern. However, for the last 150 years, piracy has reduced, both Lar'tya and Aldis have been able to build large shipping fleets, and each nation has an embassy in the other's capital.



Geography

The three islands of Lar'tya are volcanic in origin and lie in a straight line, stretching from east to west. The peaks of three large, but extinct, volcanoes dominate the central island of Grala. The easternmost island of Salista contains a central volcano that is also extinct. In contrast, the westernmost island of Ryzana has two large volcanoes, both periodically active. Seers on Ryzana can usually predict eruptions in advance, so there is little danger to the populace.

Salista

Salista is the smallest but also the richest of the three islands. As on the other two islands, jungle engulfs Salista's interior. Unlike its sisters, its mountains are riddled with diamond, gold, and opal deposits. While there are farmers, woodcutters, and similar workers, the primary industry on the island is mining. Most of the island's food is grown or caught there, with some—including the majority of the rice that is the staple of the Lar'tyan diet—imported from farms on Ryzana.

Mining on Salista involves climbing down long tunnels deep in the sides of the island's extinct volcano. While this mining is hard work, it is safer than working in the deadly crystal mines of Kern, since adepts skilled in earth- and wind-shaping ensure the tunnel walls are sturdy and the mines always have sufficient ventilation. Regular use of earth-shaping also allows adepts to open tunnels through the volcanic rock more easily than laborers with picks and shovels. As a result, miners spend more time collecting ore and raw gemstones than digging the mines themselves.

The largest city on Salista is the port of Chesha's Jewel. There the riches mined on the island are worked into jewelry and shipped to the other islands and a multitude of distant ports. As a result, although it is a relatively small city, it is both wealthy and cosmopolitan.

The three other cities on Salista—Rhasan, Graja, and Nuistan—are located in the interior, near the various mines. None of these cities has more than 20,000 inhabitants, and all of them are essentially large mining towns. In them, miners from the Nuit caste and supervisors and mining adepts of the Bleyn caste spend the money they earn in the

mines to entertain themselves in various drinking establishments, tea houses, fortunetelling huts, and gambling dens.

Members of the Lar caste control all mining in Lar'tya. The local governor employs all miners, supervisors, physicians, mining adepts, and other people working in the mines. Miners rarely become either penniless or exceedingly wealthy. However, the hard work in the mines and the delicate nature of the work means even mine laborers of the Nuit caste are well paid. Also, anyone who personally discovers a new mineral deposit is rewarded with a bonus payment. As a result, miners have a fair amount of disposable income, so the mining towns are filled with entertainers and merchants willing to relieve them of it.

Grala

The island of Grala is the largest and most populous of Lar'tya's three islands. It is more than three times the size of Salista and twice the size of Ryzana. It has the largest harbor of the three islands, in part because it is the most protected from the dangers of the tropical sea. A horseshoe-shaped reef known as "the White Crescent" surrounds much of the island, between 500 and 700 yards from the shore. The reef protects Grala's ports from all but the worst storms.

The waters inside the crescent are rich in fish and contain an abundance of oysters and other shellfish. The seafood provides most of the meat in the Lar'tyan diet, and oysters produce a wealth of pearls. Human pearl divers use meditative arcana to stay underwater for long periods of time, and sea-folk pearl divers stay underwater even longer. Divers can consequently search out the finest pearls, and they know how to place tiny beads inside oysters to culture perfectly-formed gems. Divers have cultivated oyster beds that produce rare black pearls and the unique violet pearls found nowhere else on Aldea. In addition to being popular in jewelry and religious figurines, pearls are also one of Lar'tya's largest exports.

Ryzana

The island of Ryzana has active volcanoes but also the most fertile land of the three islands. Volcanic ash enriches the soil, and most eruptions pose little danger to the inhabitants, since neither volcano explodes nor produces much dangerous gas. Instead, ash and lava flow sluggishly down the sides of the mountains closest to the sea, where the cooling lava creates more land. The inhabitants of Ryzana live on the landward side of the volcanoes, out of the path of the lava flows.

Swordfish Peak, the larger of the two volcanoes, once in a great while spews lava down its landward slope. When this happens, nearby farms and houses risk being covered by the lava flow. To prevent property damage and loss of life, adepts use arcana to warn people and animals to evacuate. Shapers who work with earth, wind, and water use their arts to bring rain to cool the lava flows and shape the ground to divert them away from inhabited areas.

Lady Kalanera Hagin-Cla

Lady Kalanera of the Hagin caste is the trade and foreign affairs minister for Lar'tya. A proud middle-aged woman, she served under the previous Queen and has had great influence over Lar'tyan foreign policy. She remains ambitious and eager to expand her nation's wealth and power. She is also deeply suspicious of foreign customs and does her best to keep her beloved islands free of outside influences. She is troubled by the spread of salons and by the Queen's fascination with Aldis, and is one of the strongest voices urging caution to Alahani.

Kalanera deals fairly and honorably with foreigners but never forgets their ways are not those of her people. She also resents attempts to go "behind her back" to deal directly with the Queen. She is loyal to Queen Alahani, but considers the younger monarch rather naive and sees herself as the Queen's protector and the island's primary defense against dangerous new ideas. Although she never spies upon important visitors' personal chambers, she regularly sends her sleek, gray cat familiar, Ossa, to listen to conversations held in public, and she has an extensive network of informants everywhere in Lar'tya.

Ryzana is the most dangerous of the islands to live on, but the concerted work of its adepts minimizes the risks. Although adepts are organized by caste, they can come from any caste, and during emergencies like eruptions or hurricanes, all end up working together. This cross-caste cooperation only lasts for the duration of the emergency, during which time everyone, even adepts who are members of the elevated Lar caste, is expected to put aside status for the greater good.

Ryzana has only one city, Dalibar, yet the island is the second most populous of the three because it is the agricultural center of Lar'tya. The majority of the nation's food grows in the terraced farms surrounding the two volcanoes. Most people live in farming towns of a few hundred people. The small farmsteads common in Aldis are virtually unknown in Lar'tya. People are far more tolerant of crowding, and the land is exceedingly fertile. Tropical rains and brilliant sunshine help crops grow rapidly and abundantly.

The inhabitants of the other two islands regard Ryzana as a rustic place of naive but hardworking farmers, and regard Dalibar as the least cosmopolitan city in the nation. Despite these views, Dalibar is a thriving port. From there, much food is shipped to the other islands. The main difference between Dalibar and cities on the other islands is that foreign ships rarely dock there, as foreign traders are more interested in hardwoods, crafted items, herbal medicines, pearls, gold, and similar goods than in rice and other foodstuffs. However, foreign-made goods are just as popular among the people of Dalibar as elsewhere in Lar'tya, so occasionally foreign merchants do drop anchor there.

Overall, Ryzana is more conservative than the rest of Lar'tya. On the island, rules of caste are strictly observed, and innovations like cross-caste salons are too new and daring for anyone but the most committed eccentrics to take part in. In addition, the island has the smallest Bleyn population. A majority of the population belongs to the Nuit caste and then the Hagin caste. Because most cultural innovations come from the Bleyn caste, change is slow on the island.

The Lar'tyan Caste System

The egalitarian ethics of Aldis are foreign to Lar'tya. Like Aldis, the matriarchy forbids slavery and generally looks after the poor, but Lar'tyan society is caste-based. Nobility is hereditary, not founded on merit, and everyone is born into one of four castes, where they remain all their lives.

According to Lar'tyan history, the caste system has always been in place, stretching back to the creation of the world. Lar'tyans particularly revere the civilization builders among the gods: Maurenna, Architect of Civilization and Summer Queen; Goia, goddess of commerce, prudence, and craft; and Aulora, goddess of law and justice. This trinity is referred to as "the Great Matriarchs," who inspired the first inhabitants of the islands.

The story of the fall of Anwaren is evidence to the Lar'tyans of the frailties of men. After all, was it not the goddesses who soothed his madness, cared for him, and ultimately restored him? In their interpretations of myth, Lar'tyans see men as unstable and emotional, women as reasonable and levelheaded.

The highest caste, the royal Lar caste, is also the smallest, consisting of one extended clan of about 200 people. While most members of the caste live near the Queen in the capital city of Ty-An, a few live in the nation's other cities. Their presence is a mark of status and prestige. The caste's members consider Maurenna their patron and model. Branches cut from flowering trees are signs of authority in the islands and are considered symbols of Maurenna's Rod of Blooms.

The Hagin caste is made up of nobles and warriors, with righteous Aulora as their patron. Merchants, artisans, many artists, and sailors occupy the Bleyn caste, blessed by Goia, and servants, laborers, and farmers fill out the Nuit caste, associated with Anwaren in his harvester and laborer aspect.

While many people follow the same profession as their parents, anyone is free to apprentice into any profession within their caste. However, inter-caste mobility is forbidden; crossing caste lines is considered deviant behavior. People who transgress caste boundaries either

undergo psychic treatment from a healer to help cure them of their antisocial tendencies or, if this proves impossible and they persist, they are exiled.

While both sexes are considered equal among the lower Bleyn and Nuit castes, women of the Hagin and Lar castes are considered wiser and better equipped to lead than men. A Queen, elected from among the members of the Lar caste by an internal vote, always rules Lar'tya. As a result, the people of Lar'tya consider women braver and more sensible than men, an attitude residents of Aldis find odd, especially when male visitors are treated in a condescending fashion.

During important negotiations between the Sovereigns of Lar'tya and Aldis, or between members of the Hagin caste and Aldin nobles, Lar'tyans tend to assume that the highest-ranking female is the leader of a foreign delegation. The ascension of Queen Jaellin to the Aldin throne has improved relations with the Lar'tyans, who approve of the Golden Hart's "sensible" choice of a queen over another king as the Sovereign of Aldis.

There is naturally friction between the matriarchy of Lar'tya and Jarzon's theocracy, which is largely patriarchal. Jarzoni priests are often scandalized by the roles assumed by Lar'tyan women, while the female members of the Hagin and Lar castes find it difficult to deal with male priests and emissaries from Jarzon without condescending to them, particularly as they're always so very overwrought and emotional—the poor dears!

Disparities in wealth are also greater in Lar'tya than Aldis. In any Lar'tyan city, the poor live in small wooden huts, while the wealthy dwell in gilded mansions and palaces. While the bounty of the land and the abundance of fishing around the coastal reefs assures everyone has sufficient food, the poor have fewer creature comforts than their counterparts in Aldis. Meanwhile, the richest members of the Hagin and Lar castes live amid a level of splendor Aldins consider excessive. Nobles and merchants from Aldis tend to be most comfortable around the merchants of the Bleyn caste, who have a standard of living similar to their own.

More disturbing to many Aldins than the differences in wealth is the deference members of the lower castes show to the higher ones. People in the Nuit and Bleyn castes prostrate themselves before members of the royal family, and members of the Nuit caste do not speak to members of the other castes unless spoken to first. Members of the Bleyn caste can openly address nobles, but must do so softly, with great respect and many honorifics (and a good deal of bowing).

Similarly, members of the Lar and Hagin castes either ignore servants and other members of the Nuit caste or speak to them in a haughty and authoritarian fashion. Nobles regularly speak to the merchants of the Bleyn caste but talk down to them, like young children. Casual conversations between members of different castes only occur in private and only on those rare occasions where members of different castes

become friends. Such friendships are frowned upon, and in public, castes maintain a strict separation.

When Aldin nobles and merchants chat with Aldin carpenters, the most traditional Lar'tyans mumble uncomfortably and pretend not to notice. This situation becomes worse if an Aldin noble attempts friendly conversation with a Lar'tyan shopkeeper or artisan. The Lar'tyan the Aldin visitor is talking to may know of the strange customs of Aldis, but even the most open-minded low-caste Lar'tyan can do little more than stammer and look away or respond with the strict and deferential politeness they use when talking to members of higher castes.

In general, the inhabitants of Aldis and Lar'tya baffle one another with their ways, but they also engage in profitable trade, and close friendships between people Lar'tyans consider to be social equals are not uncommon. Diplomats from both nations are aware the social differences would be more of a concern if the two nations shared a common border, but the distance between them makes the need for understanding less pressing.

Sea-Folk in Lar'tya

Lar'tyans were originally human. The arrival of refugees from the Empire of Thorns added vata'an to their numbers, and humans and vata'an live in harmony, with vata belonging to the Hagin and Bleyn castes. Lar'tya also has a substantial population of sea-folk. Before the arrival of the refugees, the sea-folk were treated as a foreign people on the same soil, and Lar'tyans regularly traded with them.

Since the end of the Great Rebellion, the population has grown enough that sea-folk can no longer live separate from the islands' other inhabitants. Eventually, the Lar caste decreed the sea-folk were a separate caste, the Seyn caste, allied with the Bleyn caste (in large part because so many sea-folk are sailors). Making the sea-folk a separate caste allowed them to retain their culture while remaining within the structure of greater Lar'tyan society. Although marriages between members of the Seyn and Bleyn castes are somewhat frowned upon, they are legal because the two castes are so close.

With few exceptions, the sea-folk live in separate villages and towns along the coasts or in special quarters of Lar'tyan cities. The rules of their caste allow them to work as sailors, pearl divers, and fishers, as well as artisans using products harvested from the sea. Shell and pearl jewelry made by members of the Seyn caste is in high demand in Aldis and highly regarded in Lar'tya.

Some sea-folk are displeased that they are the only people of Lar'tya limited to a single caste. There can be no Lar or Hagin sea-folk, by definition. Their peers remind them to be grateful there can also not be Nuit caste sea-folk and, besides, what do they care of the requirements of land-dwellers when they have the whole of the oceans? Still, there are rumblings of discontent amongst some of the current generation of sea-folk, who consider themselves Lar'tyan but question how the matriarchy has treated their people.

Aldis serves as a useful and humane place to exile Lar'tyans who refuse to abide by the restrictions of caste. In addition, every year dozens of Lar'tyans board ships bound for Aldis, where they seek different lives. Similar numbers of Aldins immigrate to Lar'tya, drawn by the warm, sunny climate, natural beauty, and the islands' prosperity. Aldin immigrants are typically assigned to the Bleyn caste, unless they are nobles, in which case they automatically become part of the Hagin caste, although very few nobles emigrate from Aldis.

Guilds and Societies

Lar'tyans feel a certain camaraderie with other members of their caste, but people feel greater loyalty to the various guilds and societies within their caste. Except for those in the small and elevated Lar caste, everyone belongs to either a guild based on their profession or a society organized around shared interests and hobbies. Some people belong to both—and are considered to be somewhat fickle because of it.

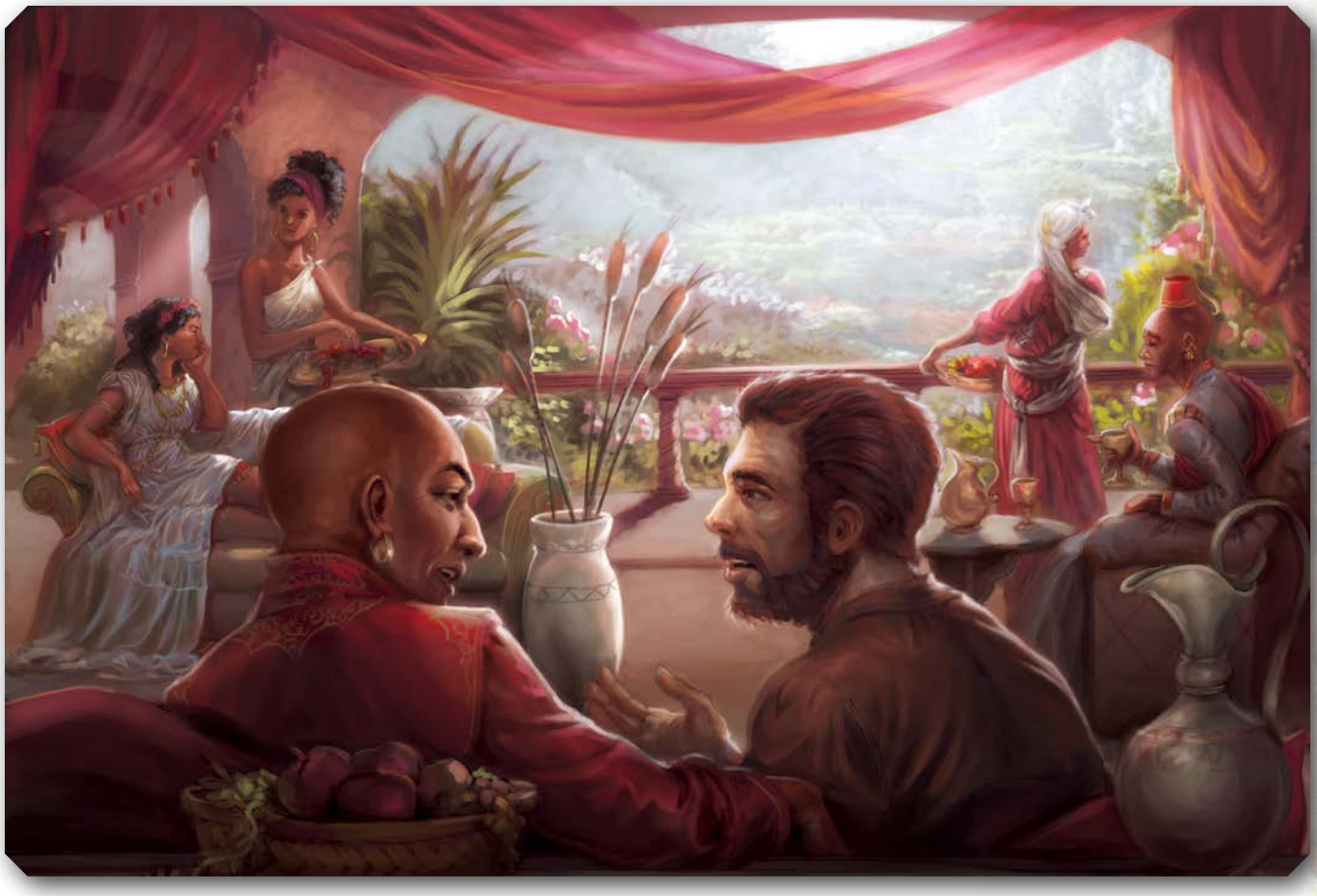
While large extended families are rare in Lar'tya, membership in a guild or society often lasts the entirety of a person's adult life. These organizations function as a sort of extended clan. Everyone contributes dues, used to help members in need. In addition, these communities serve as places where people can meet friends, lovers, and potential spouses.

Some professions do not have guilds, but most do. There are guilds for artisans, as well as sailors, soldiers, peacekeeping officers, scribes, clerks, and entertainers. Joining a guild is the most important step in a young person's life. Prospective members must petition a guild for admission when they come of age, and guild leaders question them extensively, using various tests to determine their aptitudes and potential. Those who pass are admitted and apprenticed to a particular master. Individuals are free to leave a guild at any time and may join a new one. Switching guilds is considered a lack of commitment, however, and most organizations are reluctant to accept new members older than twenty-five.

Societies are less restrictive in their membership and are open to all adults, but strictly divided by caste. For example, some members of both the Hagin and Bleyn castes are passionately interested in breeding and training various tropical birds, but the bird-breeding societies for the two castes are entirely separate.

Salons

One of the newest and most controversial types of social events in Lar'tya is the "salon," where people gather to socialize and discuss topics of interest, ranging from gardening and flower arranging to history, gossip, or news from other lands. Such discussions previously took place among members of a single caste, but salons feature a unique and daring mixture of different ones.



Originally organized by a few members of the Hagin caste, the first salons included them and the Bleyn caste. In the nearly two decades since, salons have grown to include members of the Nuit caste on occasion. The most daring salons include members of all the castes socializing and discussing issues together.

Conservative members of the Hagin and Nuit castes consider salons decadent and immoral places where people behave improperly, even arranging illegal cross-caste assignations. The reality of salons is normally far more sedate. People from various castes listen to speakers and discuss topics. While the members of the Bleyn caste socialize with members of the other castes, socialization between members of the Hagin and Nuit castes is rare in even the most open salons.

One of the major attractions of salons is the presence of scholars and speakers from Aldis. Many Aldins enjoy the notion of the salons and do what they can to promote the institution. In addition, the idea of the salons came about because a few members of the Hagin caste wished to emulate open discussions held between Aldins of different social classes. This has not been lost on the more conservative members of the various castes, who consider salons a dubious foreign innovation—even an Aldin attempt to corrupt traditional Lar'tyan ways! They believe Jarzoni preachers and salons are clear evidence that foreigners and foreign ideas should not be allowed free access to the people of Lar'tya.

Foreigners in Lar'tya

Merchants and diplomats from Aldis are not the only visitors to Lar'tya, although they are by far the most common. While the agents of Kern do not travel beyond the boundaries of the continent and would not be welcome if they did, Jarzoni occasionally visit Lar'tya. Jarzon is a minor naval power and has only a small merchant fleet, but the theocracy enjoys some of the luxuries produced in Lar'tya. The Jarzoni are rarely able to send out more than half a dozen ships a year. While the Lar, Hagin, Seyn, and Nuit castes have absolutely no interest in foreign faiths, the members of the Bleyn caste are the most widely traveled, and a few have heard the preaching of Jarzoni visitors and converted to the Church of the Pure Light.

Relations between Jarzoni and Aldin visitors are sometimes strained. Sailors and merchants tend to be more worldly than most, while Jarzoni missionaries are typically young, devout priests burning with zeal and devotion to the Purist faith. Aldin merchants regard proselytizing as uncouth, while sailors are frequently bored by it. Tensions between the Aldins and Jarzoni can occasionally run high, although some Jarzoni sailors discreetly commiserate with the Aldins, since many of them have little patience themselves with the more fervent representatives of the church. By the laws of Lar'tyan hospitality, anyone harming a visitor is immediately punished or exiled, so even the most hot-tempered sailors are wise to keep their feelings in check.

NARRATOR'S SECTION

Chapter 8: The Narrator's Art

The role of the Narrator in a *Blue Rose* game is an important and challenging job, as well as a rewarding one. The Narrator is equal parts storyteller, referee, social director, and supporting actor. This and the following chapters are designed to teach you how to run a *Blue Rose* game and support an ongoing series of adventures. Here you'll find advice followed by additional game rules, with adversaries and rewards for the heroes (and their players) in the subsequent chapters.

The Narrator's Job

While the players are responsible for keeping track of their characters and deciding on their actions, the Narrator is responsible for virtually everything else in the game. A good Narrator tries to make sure the game runs as smoothly as possible and is enjoyable for all the players. Many components go into creating a good *Blue Rose* game. The following sections give you a quick overview of the basics before we tackle them in more depth here and in **Chapter 9: The Blue Rose Series**, but experience is the best tool to help you become a better Narrator and get a feel for the job. So feel free to dive-in by learning the game rules and running the sample adventure *Shadows of Tanglewood* at the end of this book. The essential parts of narrating are: adjudicating the rules, creating adventures, running the game, and planning the series.

Adjudicating the Rules

Like all games, *Blue Rose* has rules, and those rules sometimes require some interpretation to determine an exact outcome during play. It is the Narrator's job to interpret the outcome of actions based on the rules, decide rules questions, and make decisions regarding the implementation of the rules in the game. The rules provide a framework, but they cannot cover every contingency. You must be ready to make a call when the players do the unexpected—and, trust us, they will!

That doesn't mean you have to be the most knowledgeable expert on the rules in your group. If a player knows the rules better than you do and can helpfully provide a quick answer to a question, take advantage of that. The important thing is not to allow the players to dictate how the game runs, or to get bogged down in a debate. If there's a disagreement, a quick statement from any player with an opinion is fine, but it's then your job to decide how to handle the situation and get back to the game. Even if you're wrong about how a rule is written, you're right about how it works in the game you are running.

Creating Adventures

Blue Rose focuses on the heroic adventures of the main characters, as controlled by the players. It is the Narrator's

job to create the opportunities for adventure and to "hook" the characters in, giving them a chance to meet new challenges. You can do this with prewritten adventures (such as Shadows of Tanglewood in this book), adventures of your own design, or a mix of both. Even when using a prewritten adventure, a good Narrator often customizes it to better suit their players' characters.

This is the most crucial task for the Narrator. Without the Narrator to start things off and describe how the heroes' actions impact the world around them, the players have nothing to do. While it can seem daunting, it's truly not that complex a task. You never need to have an entire series planned from the outset, just enough material to get the players through the next game session and a rough idea what end goal they are moving towards. After running a few prewritten adventures, many Narrators find adventure ideas flow naturally from the actions, goals, and relationships of their heroes.

Running the Game

The Narrator is much like the director of a play, coordinating all the various elements of the game to make it happen. So it is the Narrator's job to set up the adventure, introduce the events to the players, and narrate the story according to their decisions about their characters' actions. It is also the Narrator's job to take on the roles of the various supporting and adversarial characters, describing their actions and interactions with the heroes. All the while the Narrator must maintain the pace of the game, trying to keep things going at a good clip and moving the story forward.

In most cases, the players only know what you tell them. The Narrator serves as their eyes and ears, and must describe the world well enough for players to be able to form a mental picture of it. You don't need to go into excruciating detail, but hitting the highlights is important. You also shouldn't try to describe what a character thinks or feels. Don't tell a player, "You think the mayor is lying," unless they have an ability that actively detects lies. Instead say something like, "The mayor shuffles her feet as she speaks, and doesn't seem to be able to look you in the eye." It's up to the players to decide what's causing that behavior, and if they start looking for clues, then the adventure has begun!

Planning the Series

The Narrator plans out the overall "arc" of a series of adventures, like the chapters (or even books) of a story. Some Narrators plan out a whole series in advance, working out a set of adventures taking the heroes from one place and challenge to another, while other Narrators have a more open-ended approach, perhaps only plotting one or two adventures ahead and seeing how the story unfolds through the players' choices and the characters' actions before planning what comes next. More information to help you plan your series can be found in **Chapter 9**.

Blue Rose in a Nutshell

Although the *Adventure Gaming Engine* that "powers" *Blue Rose* has a fair number of rules—particularly when it comes to the various class powers and talents—the core of the game is quite simple: almost everything in *Blue Rose* can be handled with an ability test of 3d6 + an ability (and focus) measured against a target number.

So, when all else fails, if you need an immediate way of handling a situation and the game rules are not clear, choose an appropriate ability and focus and call for a test using them. You can base the outcome on the result of the test, or compare it against a target number using the Basic Test Difficulty table to give you an idea. Then just continue on with the game.

So long as you remember this basic rule of thumb, you can handle almost any situation likely to come up during play.

Adjudicating the Rules

The Narrator serves as referee when it comes to applying the rules of *Blue Rose* fairly and equally to help ensure everyone has fun. Part of this job involves knowing the rules. Prospective Narrators should read through this entire rulebook book carefully and have a good working knowledge of the game. The rest of the job is applying the rules to events that come up during play. This may be as simple as knowing which rule applies to a given situation and following it, or as complex as coming up with a new application of the rules on the spot or modifying an existing rule that isn't working for your group and is inhibiting everybody's fun. While **Chapters 4-7** contain the core of the game system, there is more that the Narrator needs to know. This chapter, and those that follow, cover this additional material for you.

Secret Tests

Sometimes it's a good idea to make certain tests secretly, so the players don't necessarily know the test result. This is usually the case for any sort of test where the outcome isn't obvious to a character. For example, you may want to make a Perception test secretly. If the test succeeds, the character notices something. If it fails, then the player doesn't know whether it's because the character failed to notice something or there just wasn't anything there to notice in the first place. The character has no hint they failed a test; they just don't notice anything out of the ordinary. Likewise, you might want to make a resistance test against an insidious poison secretly, since the player has no idea the character has been poisoned, and won't unless—or until—the toxin takes effect.

One easy way of making secret tests is to make a list of random dice rolls in advance. When there's a need for a secret test during the game, mark off one of the rolls

from your list and use that for the test result. This way, the players don't even know you are making a secret test for them since you don't have to roll the dice.

Narrator Fiat

On occasion, the result of a particular dice roll may result in an anticlimactic or just plain dumb outcome. In these cases, feel free to change things to make the outcome more interesting or more in line with how the game should go. This is called "Narrator fiat," since the judgment of the Narrator overrides the strict letter of the rules.

Is this cheating? Well, yes, in a manner of speaking it is, since it bypasses the rules, but it's "cheating" in order to make the game more interesting and fun for everyone involved. So long as you don't alter the outcome of dice rolls unfairly or maliciously and you do it to help ensure the game is fun, interesting, and challenging, you shouldn't have a problem. Besides, the players don't have to *know* you change the occasional dice roll behind the scenes. That's one of the reasons it's a good idea for Narrators to roll their dice out of sight of the players and then announce the results.

If you have any concerns about skewing things too much in the player's favor, or too heavily against them, keep track of how often you employ Narrator fiat, and which way you changed things. You certainly don't have to be balanced one-for-one in such decisions, but it can be useful to know if you are regularly having to make things easier or harder to keep them interesting, and to adjust your adventure design accordingly.

Creating Adventures

An adventure is a single story in an ongoing series. Think of an adventure as a single chapter in a novel, or even a single book in an epic series (for particularly long adventures). Sometimes adventures stand alone, with a clear beginning, middle, and end all in the same game session. At other times, the adventure spans several game sessions before the entire story is complete.

Creating a *Blue Rose* adventure is a fairly simple process. First, define the threat or challenge around which the adventure revolves. Then outline the overall plot, and describe the encounters the heroes are likely to have during the adventure. You'll also want to make sure you have statistics for important supporting characters and foes they're likely to meet.

Defining the Challenge

Blue Rose adventures typically focus on a particular challenge. It might be anything from an incursion of shadowspawn into a border region to a sensitive diplomatic mission to a neighboring land, or a quest for an ancient

artifact from a once great kingdom with the power to save (or destroy) the world. When the challenge presents itself, the heroes must figure out how to overcome it.

The challenge in a *Blue Rose* adventure is often a villain with a scheme the heroes must thwart. The challenge can also be achieving a goal like protecting a border region, righting a particular wrong, clearing a notorious group of bandits from the forest, or arranging an alliance, to name but a few. Fantasy novels, comics, movies, and television shows all offer plenty of inspiration for adventures, and you'll find suitable villains in the Adversaries chapter.

Outlining the Plot

Once you have an idea for a challenge in mind, give some thought to how it manifests itself. Outline a series of events surrounding that challenge. This gives you the overall plot of your adventure, a sort of roadmap you can follow while you're running the game to know what is likely to happen next.

For example, you decide the challenge in your adventure focuses on bandits attacking travelers along a major trade route. Not only are they a threat to commerce, but they have also inflamed political tensions, as there are accusations of foreign powers backing the brigands. If left unchecked, their depredations may lead to a more serious diplomatic conflict.

Now, that's what would happen if the heroes *weren't* around. Odds are the characters aren't going to just allow the bandits to get away with their crimes. They might have a friend who was the victim of a raid, or a nearby community could ask them to deal with the problem. As envoys of the Sovereign's Finest, they might be sent to investigate, or perhaps even all of the above! The heroes can begin investigating, trying to learn about the bandits, and who they are and what they'll do next. The characters might set a trap to lure the bandits into the open, try and follow them back to their hideout, or capture one for interrogation. They may discover the rumors of foreign influence are true or false. Exactly how things go depends heavily on what the players choose to do.

Try to focus your plot on the actions of the opponents, letting the players react to things as they happen. It's hard to base the plot on what the heroes will do because you don't always know what that is. By focusing on the challenge, you give the characters the freedom to do whatever they want in response, and you can then modify the antagonists' plans accordingly.

Subplots

As you gain experience as a Narrator, you may want to weave subplots into your series. They can be related or unrelated to the adventure at hand and they serve to mix things up and keep the players guessing. Subplots are also a great way to use the heroes' Goals and Relationships, and you should keep your eye out for opportunities to do so. Let's say a goal of one of the characters is to find her missing brother. When investigating the bandit menace, she discovers her brother is one of the outlaws! Worse still, he has embraced the bandit life and doesn't want to give it up. Now the group as a whole must deal with the bandits, but that player must try to figure out what to do about her hero's wayward sibling. Does she let the other characters into her confidence or try to save her brother from his just fate on her own? This makes the story more complicated and has the potential for great drama.

Encounters

Your plot outline gives you a number of potential *encounters* the heroes may have during the adventure. An encounter is a single challenge, interaction, or activity, such as a fight, the investigation of an area, a chase through a city, making it across a dangerous region, and so on. Using your outline, you can get a good idea of the possible encounters your adventure might have. In the previous example, the heroes could have encounters with the bandits on the road, at a settlement, or at their hideout. They could investigate the sites of previous bandit raids and potential connections with foreign powers, or interact with survivors who might have useful information.

Outline the possible encounters and take note of the important details in each one. For example, when and where will the bandits' next raid take place, and can the heroes figure it out in time to be there and stop it? Or will they only learn of it after the fact? Who is the target of the raid and how do they react to the characters? Where can the survivors be found and what do they think of outsiders investigating? Can word find its way back to the bandits somehow? What do they do, if and when they discover the heroes are investigating them? And so forth.

Then decide if the encounter is primarily about combat, exploration, or roleplaying, and note this accordingly. Try and set up a good mix of the three types of encounters, since they provide a variety of challenges and styles of play to keep the players involved in the game.

The Grand Finale

Then there's the big finish to the adventure: the grand finale. This is when the heroes finally confront the main challenge of the adventure and have a real chance to deal with it. It may be a final showdown with the villain, averting disaster, accusing a murderer in the throne room, or confronting an army in a climactic battle. Whatever the case, this is when events in the adventure come to a head and it's time for the heroes to step up and save the day.

The finale is the big payoff and what the players have been working towards, so you need to make it as exciting and fun as possible. That means the finale should be challenging. On the other hand, it shouldn't be so tough the

One Hundred Adventure Ideas

1. A latent adept with a wild talent is causing havoc and needs guidance.
2. A couple forbidden to be together run off to a haunted ruin.
3. The heroes must protect a noble from a shadow dancer assassin.
4. A tinkerer is selling dangerous arcane artifacts to unsuspecting buyers.
5. The popular new parties thrown by a noble are a vampire's hunting ground.
6. A shadow cult is abducting people and selling them as slaves.
7. Strange lights and sounds come from an Old Kingdom ruin.
8. A dying miner claims to have found a mother lode of shas crystals.
9. A cursed item passes from hand to hand, corrupting those it touches.
10. A ghost possesses a living person to fulfill a promise to a loved one.
11. Envoys are assigned to escort visiting ambassadors from other nations.
12. A friend of the heroes asks for help in settling a duel of honor.
13. A respected noble is accused of serious crimes. Is it a frame-up?
14. The body of a respected Rezean chief must be escorted home in honor.
15. Intrigue abounds at a seasonal festival or masque.
16. An encounter with an ancient arcane item turns the heroes into animals.
17. The heroes dream about the Old Kingdom. Are they reliving past lives?
18. There are rumors of a Sorcerer King still existing as a specter.
19. A mysterious killer stalks the nighttime streets of the city.
20. Sea-folk and islanders are in a dispute over the ownership of a sunken vessel.
21. The "secret ingredient" of a new fad food comes from the depths of the Veran Marsh.
22. A child or family is lost in the wilderness and is in need of rescue.
23. Aldis plans a raid on a valuable shipment of crystals from Kern.
24. Shadowspawn are gathering in the Ice-Binder Mountains. Why?
25. A shadowgate activates and disgorges darkfiends or other creatures.
26. A new prophet arises in Jarzon, sympathetic to Aldis. Does the kingdom aid her?
27. Rhydan call for aid against humans polluting their hunting grounds.
28. Aberrations emerge from the wilderness to attack outlying towns.
29. A young man begs the heroes to help stop a wedding because he is in love with the bride.
30. Thieves steal the Blue Rose Scepter from the palace.
31. Shadowspawn begin organizing into a mercenary company, working for the highest bidder.
32. Pirates attack merchant vessels along the coast.
33. A map to a lost artifact falls into the heroes' hands.
34. Harpies dwelling in the Veran Marsh sow dissent and misery using their arcana.
35. A darkfiend preys on dreams, twisting them into nightmares.
36. A lost storehouse of ancient lore is guarded by unliving shadows.
37. A terrible storm wracks the coast and islands.
38. A tribe of corrupt sea-folk, led by a sorcerer, raids coastal settlements.
39. A wronged noble needs a champion to fight in a duel of honor.
40. A child missing for years is seen running through the woods late one night.
41. A quake in the Veran Marsh uncovers ancient ruins of its Sorcerer King's stronghold.
42. Envoys are asked to help smuggle religious dissenters out of Jarzon.
43. The heroes must guard a caravan through dangerous territory.
44. Purist priests threaten to burn a friend at the stake as a heretic.
45. Accusations of corruption mar a deceased noble's memorial service.
46. A plague of fiendish animals strikes, caused by an ancient artifact.
47. A harsh winter leads to conflict between the forest folk and local rhy-wolves.
48. Everyone in an isolated village has disappeared without trace.
49. A fallen and dying hero seeks aid in achieving a measure of redemption and peace.
50. A daring thief steals from the wealthiest people in the city.
51. The planned site of a new settlement is plagued by shadowspawn.
52. Humans and rhydan dispute the clearing of some forest land.
53. Members of the Guild Council are targeted for assassination.
54. The Queen of Aldis must move the court to a distant city for a time.
55. The heroes are assigned as the escort of a troublesome noble.
56. Miners in the mountains uncover a lost shadowgate.
57. Bandits raid towns and villages, taking people to sell as slaves.
58. A mad adept begins organizing the shadowspawn of the Veran Marsh.
59. A shadow cult hunts and eats rhydan to gain arcane powers.
60. Rumors arise of a corrupt unicorn dwelling in the forests of Kern.
61. A faction of adepts demand representation on the Sovereign's Council.
62. An exiled Jarzoni priest whips up fervor against the arcane arts.
63. An ancient sorcerous war machine is accidentally awakened.
64. A region of the kingdom is struck by plague. The cure grows only in southern Kern.
65. A young adept is renowned for the accuracy of her prophetic visions.
66. Jarzon discovers a new route through the Veran Marsh and begins planning an invasion.
67. Foreign agents kidnap a noble's child to force cooperation.
68. The perfect peace of an Aldin town is being enforced through sorcery.
69. Conflict is brewing between the clans of Rezea.
70. Religious icons are stolen from a Purist temple and Aldis is blamed.
71. A Roamer sorcerer uses Flesh Shaping to grant unearthly beauty to anyone willing to pay for it.
72. Griffons are plagued by attacks from horrible aberrations in their nesting grounds.
73. Envoys are sent to help smuggle people out of Kern.
74. The son of a visiting Jarzoni dignitary falls in love with a young knight in Aldis.

One Hundred Adventure Ideas

75. The heirs of two feuding Rezean clans wish to marry against their families' wishes.
76. A noble is poisoned in an assassination attempt and the heroes must rush to find the cure in time.
77. Envoys must enter a dreamscape via arcane means to overcome a "sleeping curse."
78. A psychic cry for help comes from deep within the Pavin Weald.
79. A town suffering a blight claims they were cursed by Roamers.
80. A fire tears through a woodland inhabited by wood elementals and rhydan.
81. An estranged child runs off to join a Roamer band, but her parents insist she return.
82. The heroes awaken the morning after a seasonal festival with no memory of the previous three days.
83. A mysterious dancer, the toast of the theater, may be a foreign spy.
84. A rejected squire seeks to prove himself worthy of knighthood.
85. A contact claims to have information on the Prince of the Silence, then turns up dead.
86. The children of a community are abducted and replaced with shadowspawn in their forms.
87. A fiery Aldin noble agitates for a preemptive war against Jarzon to overthrow the Hierophant and liberate its people.
88. A scholar asks for aid in exploring ancient ruins.
89. A noblewoman's tell-all journal falls into the wrong hands.
90. The heroes are asked to help break off an adulterous affair without the wronged spouse finding out.
91. A Purist cult is growing in influence in Aldis, attracting radical elements.
92. Rezean riders attack Aldin settlers who inadvertently trespass on their sacred ground.
93. An emissary from Kern claims the Shadowed Seven want to establish a nonaggression treaty with Aldis. Will the Queen agree to negotiations?
94. A noble attempts a coup to become the Sovereign of Aldis.
95. A girl in Jarzon can perform miracles without arcana and receives visions from the gods, or so it seems.
96. A group of night people want a settlement solely for their kind.
97. A tribe of troglodytes claim they want to settle peacefully in Aldis. Should it be allowed?
98. A ghost ship captained by a specter preys on vessels in Aldin waters.
99. A noble widow receives advice from the ghost of her dead consort. Is it a trick or a threat?
100. A radical noble appears to have the blessing of the Golden Hart to replace Queen Jaellin. Is his claim real?

characters can't possibly win, or the adventure just ends in frustration. Give the heroes a solid challenge, but don't be afraid to tip the odds slightly in their favor by setting them up with a special resource or an "ace in the hole" during an earlier encounter.

For example, perhaps the party is dealing with a darkfiend that's about to be unleashed from a nearby ruin. They have dealt with most of the creature's cult of followers and are ready to finish off the corrupt adept who is trying to free the monster. Along the way, they have learned the darkfiend has a weakness: a particular spot where its otherwise nigh impenetrable armor does not protect it. In other words, the creature is vulnerable to the Pierce Armor combat stunt, which in this instance ignores *all* of its armor, rather than halving it! If the heroes exploit this information, it makes the fight against the creature that much easier. Note, however, they should still have a chance even without this knowledge, since you cannot count on them learning it. The players might miss a vital clue along the way, and you don't want your adventure spoiled because of it. In this case, they may even stumble upon it, if they choose to use Pierce Armor in combat with the darkfiend and happen to hit its vulnerable spot!

The Wrap-Up

The wrap-up, or epilogue, is where you finish up any outstanding business after the climax of the adventure. It's where the heroes find out any remaining information, solve the adventure's mysteries, claim their rewards, and so forth. There may still be some dangling plot threads—which you can spin out into later adventures—but generally, things should be tied up and resolved by the end, just like the ending of any satisfying story.

You can play out the wrap-up, allowing the players to describe what their characters do, or just sum things up for them in narration. For example, "After you capture the bandit chieftain, you're able to find their lair, reclaiming the stolen goods to be returned to their rightful owners. The village welcomes you back with a feast in your honor and you receive a missive from the capital praising your work in keeping the peace."

The Qualities of Blue Rose

The world of Aldea and the kingdom of Aldis, in particular, are different in some respects from the typical fantasy setting and have some qualities Narrators should take into account before creating and running their games. Familiarize yourself with the setting material in the opening chapters of this book and consider the following:

Romantic Roleplaying

Blue Rose is a game where heroes are both expected and encouraged to have significant relationships and emotional attachments. The Narrator should ask players to consider how their heroes feel about various characters and about

the situations they encounter. Narrators can encourage this sort of roleplaying by portraying the emotions of other characters in the story. If the supporting characters have strong and appropriate emotional responses—grief and shock at the death or injury of someone close to them, babbling with joy when the heroes rescue a loved one, or annoyance or anger if the heroes treat them in a callous or thoughtless manner—players may feel free to have their characters express similar responses. When portraying emotions, Narrators may find it helpful to decide in advance how various characters might react to pivotal events in an adventure. Also, for recurring NPCs, writing out a paragraph or two on those characters' emotional reactions can be useful.

Adding significant emotions to roleplaying can enhance a game and make both the characters and the world seem more real. Heroes do things because they care about some person or cause. However, emotionally-focused roleplaying can also potentially upset players. This level of emotional involvement can be both painful and frustrating if the Narrator attempts to heighten emotions by getting the heroes to care about someone then having a villain kill the character off as a way to motivate the heroes. There is a difference between a Narrator who works with the emotions of the players and the heroes and one who carelessly toys with them.

Before getting into romantic roleplaying, Narrators should talk about the use and inclusion of emotion with their players. Discussing this can help players consider how best to portray their heroes' emotions and what they are most comfortable playing. Also, if several players are dismissive of, or strongly resistant to this idea, then it is unlikely to work because the difference between the emotionally-involved heroes and the ones who aren't can be both obvious and distracting.

Narrators should also ask if there are any emotions or circumstances that are uncomfortable for the players. If a player feels strongly about their pets and about animals in general, they might object to the Narrator running situations where villains harm their character's animal companions, for example. This is even more important with deeply personal issues like sexuality, religion, and family. Narrators should always respect their players' feelings on these topics. Eliminating uncomfortable situations can limit a game, but it is far better than including story elements that will distress a player.

Reputation Precedes You

In *Blue Rose*, heroes are an integral part of the setting and the kingdom they live in. They are connected to the world and have friends, allies, and rivals. More importantly, they have responsibilities, and both their superiors and their fellow citizens judge and evaluate their actions.

These elements of the setting have several important implications. First, characters develop reputations based upon their actions. Wherever they go, people welcome heroes known to be brave and kind. Such characters have little trouble finding people to help them. In contrast, cowardly, uncaring, or greedy rogues often find village inns are mysteriously full when they ride into town, and few people offer them aid or shelter when they are in need.

Blue Rose focuses on characters' relationships as much as it does upon their heroism and martial prowess. The Narrator should keep track of how heroes deal with the people they meet and what stories people are likely to tell about them. Heroes who are boastful, foolish, or deceitful, or who care about nothing except wealth and rewards fare poorly in *Blue Rose* because stories of their words and deeds travel widely and they find few people interested in dealing with them.

Because psychic arcana are relatively common, particularly in Aldis, news can travel quickly from place to place. The story about the heroes defeating a horde of darkfiends to close an ancient shadowgate can easily travel across the known world in weeks. Stories about how the characters refused to aid a village against a band of ogres can travel just as fast.

The heroes' reputations have a real impact on their lives and their adventures. Typically, when heroes encounter a new problem, they attempt to learn more about it. Characters with good reputations find far more people willing to talk to them. In addition, a group of heroic characters should receive some accolades: a small festival thrown in their honor when they visit a town they assisted, children asking them to relate stories of their exploits, and merchants giving them small gifts or discounts on goods.

Similarly, people greet characters with poor reputations with distaste and suspicion. Innkeepers refuse to serve them, and they frequently hear people making whispered comments about them. Merchants sometimes sell them the worst goods they have on hand and may even charge them extra, or claim not to have the goods they want. Parents might pull back their children to keep them from talking with such "undesirables."

Official Status

Heroes in *Blue Rose* usually have some sort of official status—they are often nobles or members of the Sovereign's Finest, the Knights of the Blue Rose, or a similar such group. Their status provides both limitations on their behavior and significant benefits in accomplishing their goals.

Because of their official status, characters may have access to advice and assistance from more experienced members of their group and other important and knowledgeable people. This sort of assistance is invaluable if the heroes are facing powerful opponents they cannot overcome alone. Having the heroes uncover a problem and

then call in aid to deal with it is better than having them simply hand a problem they've unearthed over to more experienced characters.

When planning adventures, the Narrator should take advantage of the heroes' social positions, making those adventures richer in the process. Characters who are members of the Sovereign's Finest, or who are in any other sort of organization, can interact with that organization in a variety of ways. They can deliver updates of their activities to one or two well-developed NPCs in the organization. These characters can be the heroes' allies and mentors, or even rivals. If the players are willing, their characters may have history with their superiors, who might have been their teachers, foster parents, or former lovers. If the heroes treat a superior with respect and successfully accomplish their duties, the superior might become a friend and advocate, seeking out prestigious or interesting assignments for them and fulfilling any reasonable requests. A friendly superior can also provide both words of encouragement and unasked-for assistance if the characters need them.

A friendly superior can become a focus for adventures. This character may have difficulties with a hostile rival, for example, and ask the heroes to look into the reasons for that hostility. Alternately, a friendly and supportive superior may suddenly become unfriendly, unreasonable, or demanding. This sort of situation could be the start of an investigation. Perhaps the superior is being blackmailed and is deeply conflicted over what the blackmailers are asking them to do. Alternately, the heroes' superior may be the target of some type of arcane influence, and the characters must seek out and deal with the source of this influence. The more their superior is an individual the heroes know and respect, instead of a generic voice of authority, the faster the heroes notice when something is wrong.

Alternately, someone may try to kidnap or assassinate their superior. In this case, the heroes must either rescue them, or help keep them safe and track down the assassin. This sort of plot should not be overused or it becomes trite. However, such adventures can be gripping and emotionally charged because the heroes hopefully care about their friend and mentor.

Heroes should be able to ask their superior any reasonable questions and request advice or assistance. They can make these requests at almost any time; heroes with the Psychic Contact arcanum can communicate over long distances. If the heroes ask for too much advice or request assistance to handle minor problems, their mentor should explain they are too busy, and possibly inform them that Aldis does not possess unlimited resources. They should also reassure the characters they are all perfectly capable of handling most problems on their own. If necessary, the mentor should tell overly dependent characters their lack of initiative could hurt both their reputations and official standing. Also, unless the heroes are facing a serious

emergency, their superior may become rather annoyed if they make contact psychically at any time of the day or night. Waking a superior in the wee hours to ask a question about the best way to track lost horses will not win the heroes any points!

In contrast, if the heroes are never willing to ask for help or advice, you should occasionally encourage them to do so. If the players are completely stumped and either unused to or unwilling to ask for aid, the characters' superior should contact them and ask for an update on their progress. If necessary, their superior should simply offer them guidance. While the heroes should be able to complete many adventures without any assistance or advice, this sort of backup should be an important feature of the game, and they should be able to rely on it when they get into serious trouble. If the heroes can depend upon having a force of the Sovereign's Finest to assist them, they can take on far larger groups of opponents and be involved in more important events—like large-scale battles—than if they must fall back solely upon their own resources.

Friend and Foe

The longer heroes are in a series, the more relationships they build; these are integral to the romantic fantasy genre. The best way to encourage relationships is to use recurring NPCs. Every time the heroes travel through a particular town or village, they could encounter the same characters: an innkeeper, or the woodsman whose life they saved, amongst others. In short order, the heroes will have friendships with characters they swap jokes and stories with, or even flirt with.

To help the heroes form close connections, the players can come up with detailed information about their characters' parents, mentors, and anyone else who had a profound influence on them before they started their careers. As Narrator, you can work these background characters into your series, as well as giving the heroes opportunities to encounter interesting people in their line of work. If the heroes are members of the Sovereign's Finest, for instance, they might meet experienced envoys willing to offer valuable advice, or they might come across envoys who are their equals and wish to share information and stories, or join the heroes on some adventure. Later in their careers, experienced heroes may encounter younger and less experienced envoys, looking for guidance and a friendly word. These younger envoys might have decided to become part of the Sovereign's Finest because they heard stories of the heroes' own exploits!

Interactions with other teams of the Sovereign's Finest can become a source for close and lasting friendships. When the heroes are in trouble and ask for help, the team who comes to assist them could be characters they know. At some point, the other team might get into serious trouble and ask for help from the heroes. In this type of scenario, the NPCs can give frequent and harrowing psychic updates about their situation as the heroes rush to their aid, fighting their way through monsters, bandits, or extreme weather conditions. Regardless of the source of the danger, the mixture of the heroes' struggles, psychic reports of the NPCs' troubles, and the eventual reunion where both teams work together to vanquish their common foe, can form a deep bond between the heroes and the other team.

Of course, friends and allies are not the only people the characters might get to know. Negative social interactions can be just as interesting as positive ones. Recurring villains, whether they are Jarzoni priest-adepts, bandit warlords, Barons of the Silence, or Kernish spymasters, can make any scenario more interesting. The heroes could spend many adventures uncovering and foiling a villain's dastardly plans. However, recurring villains should not be overused. They can easily become inadvertently humorous, instead of a source of dramatic tension, if they are behind every minor problem the heroes encounter. Also, while defeating such a villain may take a dozen or more gaming sessions, he or she should eventually be vanquished. Unbeatable villains often frustrate players.

In addition to recurring villains, the heroes might face rivals. If the heroes are envoys, they could have a rivalry with another team of the Sovereign's Finest, who are either jealous of the attention the heroes receive or are more successful than the heroes and are eager to make sure everyone knows it. This conflict could even be in place before the series begins. Perhaps one or more members of the other team trained with the heroes and their rivalry developed along the way. An otherwise routine scenario could be made more interesting if the heroes had to work closely with their rivals.

Just as recurring villains are eventually defeated in most series, long-term rivalries tend to ultimately resolve into either friendship or open enmity. Good-natured rivalries can resolve into deep friendship or even love, while especially bitter rivals can reveal themselves as villains in disguise.

Pay attention to the Relationships the players choose to allocate Intensity to in the initial creation of their characters—these are the things the players want to emphasize and experience in the game, at least initially. Those Relationships can evolve and change over the course of the series, but they're an excellent starting place for interpersonal connections the characters (and, by extension, their players) care about.

Mercy and the Sword

Blue Rose emulates a genre of fantasy where violence is often *not* the best solution. Darkfiends, shadowspawn, and the unliving are all corrupt monsters the heroes must destroy to protect innocent people. However, many foes in *Blue Rose* are bandits, traitors, foreign spies, paid assassins, careless or power-mad sorcerers, and other human-

oids who might be more effectively neutralized by mercy than by the sword. Instead of killing a careless sorcerer or a cruel bandit, the heroes could capture them and bring them before a judge for a fair trial. In some cases, the villain might even have a change of heart and join the heroes' war against the Shadow.

Consider designing encounters and adventures that can be resolved without violence. The heroes could face nonviolent problems that have simply gotten out of control, or convoluted misunderstandings that look like serious crimes. Rescuing lost travelers, negotiating a peace treaty, settling a feud, or helping a village deal with some problem like a fire, flood, plague, or famine can all be exciting and satisfying without battles.

Such adventures need not be dull or slow-paced. Rescuing terrified children from a burning building involves no fighting but can be just as risky and challenging as battling a band of ogres. Protecting travelers in inclement weather may require the heroes to use a wide variety of skills under serious time pressure. Saving someone from a dire fate can involve everything from uncovering that an ambassador is actually an assassin to collecting the evidence needed to prove someone innocent of a crime. Helping a beloved NPC resolve long-standing family problems, or discovering that two powerful rivals have been manipulated into hating one another may involve no combat and no feats of physical prowess but can still be extremely enjoyable.

Destiny and Fate

The twin elements of Destiny and Fate play an important role in the lives and stories of *Blue Rose* characters. Every hero walks a path between these two powerful draws towards their goals, and circumstances may move them towards one side or the other. Again, the players' choices of Destiny and Fate for their characters tell you the sort of things they want for their characters in the game, and you should provide opportunities for both forces to work on them. If one character's Destiny is compassionate but their Fate is reckless, provide both opportunities for helping kindness as well as rushing headlong into danger. One can see how such a character could be moved by both as the same time, compassionately seeking to right a perceived wrong by recklessly taking action without considering the situation or the consequences!

You can also use the symbolism of the Royal Road associated with the various Destinies and Fates to place omens and portents in the characters' paths, especially when arcana, visions, and even readings of the cards of the Royal Road come into play. For the aforementioned compassionate character, images of a ring of swords pointing inwards or a sheathed sword coupled with a tumble of branches, staves, or rods (the Seven of Rods) might occur. A sword trapped or broken by staves might indicate recklessness overcoming compassion, whereas compassion may manage to cut through a reckless tangle of branches. You can explore real world tarot decks for imagery to use in these situations. See **Chapter 10: Running the Game** for further suggestions.

Adventures and Psychic Arcana

Arcana like Mind Delving, Mind Reading , and Object Reading allow heroes to acquire significant amounts of information with fairly little effort and could potentially remove a great deal of mystery from any situation. To avoid such problems, Narrators should use social, legal, and practical considerations to keep these abilities in check.

Mental contact, especially on the deeper levels of mind reading and mind probing, are profoundly intimate and personal. Even in Aldis where they are used casually, no one thinks it unusual for someone to refuse to undergo a Mind Delving. Indeed, Aldin law forbids things like Mind Delving unless the subject is willing, and even then the adept conducting the probe is skirting close to sorcery.

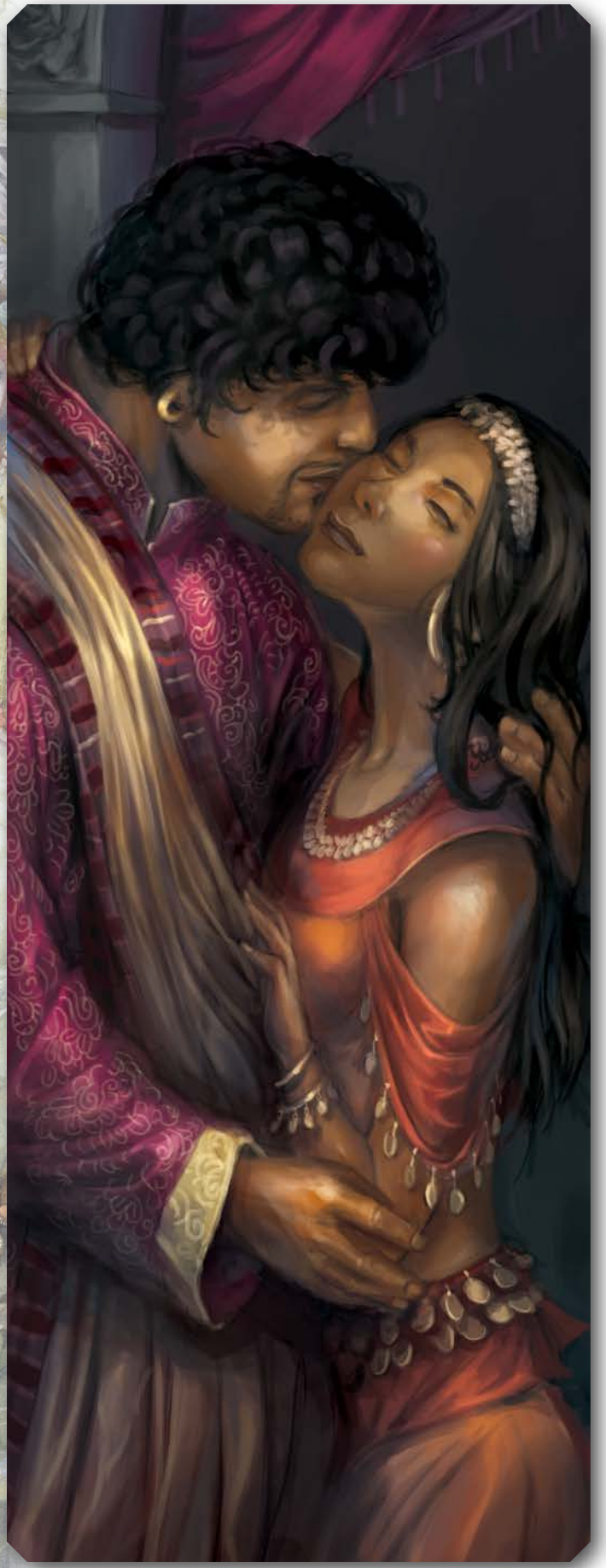
In Aldis, if heroes resort to psychically interrogating suspects or even breaking into their homes or businesses to use arcana like Object Reading, they are committing serious crimes and may face consequences as severe as those experienced by the people their evidence convicts. Also, unless the heroes use the psychic evidence they gather to uncover conventional proof of someone's illegal activities, the person they interrogated or spied upon will go free because the psychic evidence is not considered sufficient by itself. The ends do not justify the means in Aldis.

You can provide potential adversaries and suspects in adventures with psychic defenses. The Psychic Shield arcanum is not unusual among people in Aldis, and all rhydan and vata have it as part of their nature. Any adept has use of it, and many are quite skilled with it. Non-adepts also often have adepts in their employ to provide psychic shielding and warding, and to sniff out—via Second Sight—anyone attempting to use arcana covertly.

Roleplaying Romance

Romance is an important element in *Blue Rose*. While Aldea certainly has its fair share of adventure and excitement, complex interpersonal relationships are a key element. Broadly speaking, there are three kinds of romance that may occur in the game: romances between heroes, romances between heroes and NPCs, and romances between NPCs.

Falling in love can be a tumultuous experience in real life, and it should be the same for the heroes. There are no game rules for romance, and in any case, love is not



a battlefield (though it may feel like it at times!). Rolling dice to see if a kiss hits is a sure way to spoil the mood. Romance relies on roleplaying and storytelling. How large a role romance plays in a particular series is up to a Narrator and their players.

Between Heroes

In many ways, romances between heroes are the easiest for the Narrator to handle. The Narrator doesn't need to do much to make things happen or convey the illusion of a relationship. It's more or less up to the players to deal with as they see fit. Indeed, a Narrator who meddles too much in the romance of two heroes may end up spoiling it.

It's possible for the players to take up a great deal of play time with their heroes' romance. Depending on your style of play, this may or may not be a problem. If two heroes constantly engage in romantic interludes while everyone else sits quietly by, the Narrator should probably step in to nudge the focus of the game back towards the group, especially if the other players are getting bored.

If some of the *players* in the group are romantically involved with each other, running plots with romance can be tricky, particularly if one or more of the players is of a jealous disposition. Some people take all this in their stride and reason that roleplaying is roleplaying and real life is real life. In the end, some people do these things comfortably and others don't. Players can learn to deal with these things, but turning the game into a learning experience might not be too much fun. In general, if the players were prepared for and agreed on a style of play where relationships between their heroes might happen, things are more likely to go smoothly.

Between Heroes and Non-Player Characters

For many players, heroes becoming involved with NPCs is familiar ground. A hero falls in love with a villager they save, another starts a romance with the region's governing noble, while yet another has a long-standing relationship with a classmate from their youth. The possibilities are endless.

Again, the question of time management pops up. If a hero is involved in a relationship with an NPC, it could take time away from the group. You can construct your adventures to minimize this, having the NPC predominantly appear in scenes that are meaningful for the whole group.

The nature of the relationship should be defined. After all, a romance with a traveling merchant is different from the relationship a character might have with a spouse who stays home, which again is a far cry from a hidden affair with a married person. Where the focus should lie in game sessions depends on the nature of the series and what your players find interesting. Some players like in-depth

character interaction, while others are more interested in treating them in broad terms and moving on to more adventurous plot elements.

Between Non-Player Characters

It's easy to overlook this aspect of romance in the game world, for the Narrator can say two NPCs are married and leave it at that. However, as the supporting characters are bound to regularly interact with the heroes, romance allows for a great number of plot opportunities.

For example, the heroes might become involved in the machinations of somebody trying to win someone else's affection. If a hero has a favorite cousin who's been pining after a great beauty, surely it's the duty of any good relative to help him get noticed. Or perhaps, in true Shakespearean fashion, two passionate lovers are separated by their respective families and the heroes end up relaying messages and organizing secret meetings between them, while trying to maintain some semblance of neutrality. Someone else might be trying to break up a relationship out of jealousy, or to help someone escape a bad relationship. The heroes might be in a position to provide assistance or even find themselves motivated to sabotage someone's love life. Remember that people do crazy things for love. This can lead to all sorts of adventure, as described in **The Wedding Planners** in **Chapter 9**.

When designing adventures, bear in mind that romantic problems can weigh heavily on the heart and mind. As anyone who's been heartbroken knows, it's hard to concentrate on business when there's trouble in paradise. People can make awful mistakes simply because they are preoccupied by romantic difficulties. Unscrupulous adversaries are sure to use this as a weapon. Just the rumor of an affair can cause scandal and put strain on a relationship, for example. Naturally, some people are better at dealing with romantic problems than others. Some rise to the challenge and take their frustrations out on their opponents, who end up getting more than they bargained for! It takes a skilled manipulator to master others' emotions.

On the flip side, many accomplish tasks more efficiently when things are going well in their romantic lives. This, too, can be an important plot point. A ruler dependent on the efforts of a trusted lieutenant might want to keep the man happy and therefore hire or order someone to make sure he doesn't find out about the affair his wife has been having. If the heroes get entangled in something like this and the lieutenant happens to be an abusive husband while his wife's lover is a far kinder man, the heroes have a difficult choice: balancing the good of the state with their own consciences. Whether a neat solution to the problem exists is up to the Narrator. Situations like this can provide for interesting and challenging moments in the game.

Roleplaying Intrigue

When noble courts, high officials, powerful merchants, and underworld figures are mentioned, images of intrigue spring to mind. Hooded figures meeting in shadowy back alleys, documents and money changing hands in abandoned courtyards, halls of power echoing with determined, solitary footsteps in the middle of the night—the imagery is nice, but there's more to intrigue than skulking about in the shadows. There's always a point to intrigue. Those involved are trying to accomplish something specific, whether for personal reasons, in order to advance a cause, or simply to maintain the status quo. A sample series framework centering on intrigue, A Game of Thorns, can be found in **Chapter 9**.

Hatching a Plot

Forming the details of an intrigue can be intimidating, particularly if you've never done anything of the sort before. It can be quite a change of pace from adventures where things get solved with swords.

To start with, it helps to outline the structure of the society where the intrigue takes place, whether that's a city, a smaller town, or just a village. The structure doesn't have to be built around a physical location—it may be an organization, such as the Noble Council or a group of local merchants. Ask a few simple questions. Which factions or persons wield power and influence? What resources do they have at their disposal? What do they want? Who are their allies and why? Who are their opponents and why? How far are they willing to go to accomplish their goals?

There are three main things to bear in mind when mapping out any person or organization involved in intrigue: their motives, their limitations, and their resources.

Motivations are important in intrigue. Understanding why your opponent does something can be even more important than understanding what they're doing. If you know what their goals are, you can anticipate their movements or even attack them exactly where they're most vulnerable. Those well-versed in clandestine power plays often conceal their real agendas, if possible. If nothing else, it keeps their opponents guessing.

Of course, in many cases some motivations cannot be hidden. A diplomat visiting another nation has no reason to pretend they aren't there to make sure their people live long and prosperous lives, for example. This isn't to say they might not have another, less public agenda as well. In general, personal success and survival can be powerful motivations, but less selfish motivations—such as the good of the state, the success of one's employer, or the happiness of a loved one—are also common.

As for limitations, everyone has them, and in intrigue the most important limitations are often the ones we set for ourselves, whether for reasons of appearance, personal beliefs, or as a part of a bigger plan. These limitations vary from individual to individual, but it's easy to make certain assumptions. A palace guard, for example, is limited by their status and their sense of duty and will probably not do certain things, like abandon their post. Limitations are often more complex. For example, a merchant may be limited by their unwillingness to risk too much of their existing assets, which means they will not take part in risky and uncertain enterprises, even if the potential profits are great. Personal limitations can be overcome, if the right circumstances and motivations are met. In some situations, even a coward can overcome their fears.

Finally, there are available resources. Often, resources are concrete things like money, henchmen, or status within an organization, but they can also be more abstract, such as a powerful personality, a good reputation, or the willingness to do things others avoid at any cost. Resources are the extent of what one can actually do. Even if you are well motivated and have no external limitations on your actions, it's hard to realize your plans if you don't have any allies or the money to buy what you need. You should have a rough idea of the general resources available to the key figures in the plot you are creating; how much wealth they have, what kind of people they can call on for assistance, and so forth. Keep general track of them. If someone has twenty of their henchmen killed or disabled, for example, how serious a blow is that to their organization?

An intrigue should make sense. How else are the players going to unravel it? It's entirely possible they'll never manage to put all the pieces together, and often they don't even have to, but it's always much, much better if they *can*, at least in theory. If you can take the entire system apart and logically explain why and how people are doing what they are doing, you will have a much stronger plotline. You shouldn't feel compelled to explain everything, though, especially if the heroes aren't even investigating the matter in question.

Done right, this means the players are interacting with a complex and believable game world with depth and meaning, a world that doesn't exist just for them but has a life of its own. On a more practical level, it also means if the players suddenly decide to approach something from a completely surprising angle, you can easily determine what happens next. The ability to improvise is important to a Narrator, but so is the ability to maintain the world's internal consistency.

Tools of the Trade

When reduced to its most basic level, intrigue is merely people trying to convince other people to do what they want, while attempting to keep their own actions and motives hidden. Generally, as in any normal business transaction, this involves mutual benefit: "Do as I ask, keep your mouth shut, and you'll be handsomely rewarded." There is usually a certain degree of risk involved, but those caught up in these plots often hope to reap rewards great enough to make that risk worthwhile.

There is a darker side to this, though. Blackmail and outright threats can be part of the negotiation process. In many cases, law-abiding and ethical individuals, whose motivations and limitations would normally keep them from taking part in a plot, end up as integral parts of them because of a potent threat. In high-level politics, methods like this are very dangerous; political careers hinge on having a respectable public image and maintaining a degree of trust among other people of status and influence. On the other hand, the stakes are often high, and maintaining control may require more than promises of wealth and success. Fear—of exposure, pain, or dishonor—is a powerful tool, and it's used to keep underlings and co-conspirators in line.

Backstabbing is a term that comes to mind when complicated schemes are brought up. It's a well-established tactic, both figuratively and literally, though political assassinations are a terribly risky business. If an attempt is unsuccessful and the perpetrator is caught, a scheme years in the making can unravel in minutes. The biggest problem with treachery is a traitor carries the stigma with them forever. In many cases, traitors try to avoid the backlash of distrust and disrespect by representing their treachery as necessity, patriotism, the common good, or in some other more palatable guise.

In commerce, some of these darker methods are commonplace. In fact, they can even become widely accepted business practices! Powerful merchants subtly threaten to make things difficult for those who sell them goods if they don't give discounts, or if they attempt to deal with competitors. They simultaneously sweeten the deal with long-term contracts promising future business. And they don't get anything more for their trouble than a reputation as tough businessmen...

Practical Examples

A powerful merchant might be motivated to gain more wealth and power, among other things. However, they are limited by local laws and authorities—who expect them to pay taxes and declare any goods they intend to export to the area—as well as by the fact they aren't willing to take a loss or limit their income if they can help it. Thus, the merchant might very well want to employ smugglers to bring their goods in for them. To ensure this operation is a success and no embarrassing incidents occur, they make sure the right people in positions of authority have their palms greased. For the authority figures in question, this means a notable increase in resources, which is likely to fit in well with their motivations, but their own limitations (the fear of getting caught or their sense of duty) may become problematic for the scheme.

In another case, there might be an auction for something an unscrupulous nobleman wants, but they know they aren't the only person after the object. They might therefore hire suitably callous individuals to hit their prime competitor where they hurt most: their purse. Money doesn't actually need to be stolen, since a burning warehouse of goods can seriously limit the capital available to the other nobleman. Similar tactics can be equally effective with less worldly negotiations.

Because only those deemed suitable by the Blue Rose Scepter can become nobles, it is rare for an Aldin noble to become a nefarious schemer, but not impossible. For instance, it's unlikely a noble would wish to assassinate the Queen and rule with an iron fist. Still, this doesn't mean a noble cannot disagree with the Queen's decisions or engage in complex intrigue or political maneuvering. Personal success and the good of the state aren't necessarily in conflict, and some feel certain they can better serve the kingdom and its people if they are higher up in the hierarchy.

In any case, a key factor in running successful games with intrigue is involving the heroes in one way or another. For example, trade negotiations may be vital to the economy of the realm, but it may not make for interesting roleplaying, unless there's a catch. If the heroes are actually related to an influential merchant family suffering from financial troubles, the outcome of the negotiations becomes a more personal issue. The heroes might even be in charge of an entire city or region, in which case both internal and external politics suddenly become quite important to both their careers and the people depending on their wisdom and fairness.

Intrigue & Psychic Arcana

The existence of mind reading arcana would seem to make it difficult, if not impossible, for anyone on Aldea to successfully plot in secret. However, secret manipulators actually have a good chance of remaining hidden. Psychic arcana have limitations, making their surreptitious use difficult, and their most effective uses—against a subject's will—are sorcery. A conspirator must certainly be careful, but avoiding detection is by no means impossible. This has led to a natural selection process ensuring only skilled conspirators remain in the game on Aldea, and they are cunning indeed. It also makes sorcerers effective plotters, as they should be.

Further, psychic arcana are hardly the same thing as proof. Even if you manage to read someone's mind and discover a plot, what are you going to say to the authorities? That you invaded someone's thoughts without their consent and know they're up to no good? In the end, concrete proof of wrongdoing is required, complete with names, places, and dates.

If the accused is a wealthy merchant or influential noble, even relatively solid evidence suggesting they might be

About Evil

Irredeemably evil foes and their equally evil machinations are something of a staple of the fantasy genre. For many players and Narrators, foiling the plans of malevolent beings is the bread and butter of roleplaying. Some fantasy settings do away with the concepts of good and evil and replace them with endless shades of (often dirty) gray. *Blue Rose* is not one of these, unless you choose for it to be (see **Series Styles** in **Chapter 9**). In general, it's not too hard to tell the good guys from the bad.

That said, intrigue is all about motivations and plans, and pure evil is not a very good reason for any of them. There need to be other, more practical motivations, things that make sense from the game world's standpoint. Greed, hatred, and envy are all strong motivations. So are fear and personal grudges. They make for a more colorful and believable series than a bad guy who wants to do evil just for the sake of being evil.

In the same vein, it's often best to leave actual moral judgments to the heroes. A Narrator who heavy-handedly underlines the morality of everyone's actions can easily give the impression of not trusting the players to think for themselves and make their own decisions about the characters their heroes interact with. It also broadcasts the Narrator's intentions to the players and tells them instantly who the bad guys are. This is a good way to completely ruin a plot based around intrigues the heroes are attempting to figure out. After all, a great deal of the fun in an intrigue-based game comes from trying to work out who's doing what and why, who can be trusted, and who should be watched.

Even if the plot involves a relatively clear-cut villain with no redeeming features, there's no need to hand the players a moral compass with a needle that always points towards evil. Let them make their own judgment calls, even if they are wrong or—more entertainingly—particularly if they are wrong!

involved in something disreputable may get ignored, or at least buried somewhere in a bureaucracy; to make a mistake in such a situation is a guaranteed way to forfeit your political career. Then again, a poor farmer suspected of playing a part in treachery is not likely to have such courtesies extended to him, and it's not unheard of for this kind of investigation to begin with such characters. If their minds yield positive results, then moving on to bigger fish is a far safer proposition.

Running the Game

In addition to preparing the adventure before a game session, you have to prepare a real-world location in which to run the game and manage things during it. Some of these tasks can be delegated to players, but you must be aware of what's available and make sure everything gets done. These elements can be broken into three broad categories: the play environment, information management, and play styles.

The Play Environment

The success or failure of a game session can hinge on factors completely outside the scope of the game itself. When a good mood is established and players are enjoying themselves, things go more smoothly. Dodgy rules calls get ignored, poor rolls are laughed off, and conflicts between characters are viewed as heroic drama. When a bad mood is in place, the slightest setback can lead to complaints and annoyance. Similarly, a group of players may begin a game happy and excited, but become bored and disinterested before the game is over.

These are problems of environment, mood, and pacing, and are the most difficult elements to manage during a game session. A few tools can be used to encourage players to be relaxed and happy or to jog a group out of a bad mood, but for the most part the best you can do is create a good play environment and hope the players take advantage of it.

Choosing a Play Space

Where a game occurs affects its mood, and often its longevity. Roleplaying games are a leisure activity, and players are more likely to stick with a game if doing so isn't a hassle. A good gaming space should be large enough to accommodate all players comfortably (hopefully with no one having to sit on the floor—unless they want to), enough table space for books and dice rolling, a place for miniatures or maps if the group uses them, and space for you to screen things you don't want players to see. It should also be conveniently located for everyone to get to (easier if everyone is driving) and preferably have room for food and drink to be kept separate from game books and character sheets to avoid spills and stains!

While many groups don't have access to a perfect play space, some things can be done to enhance what is available. First, don't assume you must play in someone's home. Libraries, community centers, apartment clubhouses, and sometimes even utility co-ops often have rooms available, either for free or a small fee. Game stores also often offer spaces for game play, and may provide ways of recruiting interested players as well. The main limitation with such spaces is hours of operation, but a game played on a Saturday afternoon may be perfect for a public room. The things to look out for are privacy and noise restrictions. Games don't go as well if a group is constantly interrupted by passers-by, and an area with bad sound baffling can result in a noisy group of players being asked to leave.

If you do play at someone's home, consider periodically changing who hosts the game. A group of players can make quite a mess, and it's a bit much to ask one host to deal with that all the time. Even if the group does its best to clean up before it leaves (always a good idea), chairs get moved, stacks of paperwork stowed away, trash bins filled, and dishes used. A group that can share this burden is less likely to have stress or conflict over it.

Taking a Break

If a game session is going badly no matter what you try, it may be time to step back from the game for a bit. In the short term, a game session can break for everyone to stretch, get a drink, or even go get something to eat. Much like changing the focus within the game, getting everyone's attention off the game entirely can shake things up and allow a fresh start later on. Taking a break can also be an opportunity for the Narrator to regroup, particularly if the players have struck out in an especially unexpected direction, and you need a few minutes to figure out what to do next. The length of the break should be carefully considered—doing something that takes too long may result in the group losing momentum and not wanting to go back to playing the game with just a little time left.

Sometimes giving up on the game for a session is the best solution. If all other efforts to set a positive tone have failed and no one is having any fun, suggest putting the game on hold until the next scheduled session. This should not be done lightly, especially in groups that can't meet very often—many players are upset by losing out on a chance to play. Just asking if people would rather not play can sometimes change a group's dynamic enough to start having fun. Taking this step requires consideration, but if you seriously believe no one is having a good time, testing to see if they'd rather not play is worthwhile.

If a series consistently has problems with player disinterest and poor moods, it's time to discuss the matter with your players. They may be satisfied, but simply have an odd way of showing it. Other events in their lives may prevent them from enjoying the game to its fullest, and they might need to postpone gaming for a few weeks. Some specific themes of the series may bother one or more players, in which case discuss making changes.

Information Management

One of the biggest hassles Narrators face is keeping track of everything. While players must manage a single character and their relationships, you must literally keep track of a world. It's not hard to fall behind in the duties of a Narrator and discover you've lost track of treasures or accolades the heroes have won, information known by a friendly scholar, the name of a noble of a particular region, or even just whose turn it is in combat. Keeping track of things can sometimes be a chore, but it's an important one. The players depend on you to know what's going on, both on a small scale during a fight and on a larger scale with the world around them.

The most important advice for Narrators is to do as much as possible outside normal game time. In between games, you don't need to worry about keeping players entertained or hoping you'll remember to write something down at the end of a combat round. Keeping one or more notebooks with tabs for different sections of information, or using a database program you like can be extremely helpful. You can make quick notes on a pad of paper during a game and then transcribe your notes after the game is over.

Spread out the bookkeeping as much as possible, rather than trying to do it all at once. If you're writing an adventure and deciding what treasure will be found, mark that information as you come up with it. Then you can note what treasure the heroes actually claimed after the adventure runs.

Series Journal

It's a good idea to keep a "series journal" (or series log) as a record of the games you have run in the series. A good series journal should have the following information, organized so you can find it fairly easily and quickly:

A summary of each adventure: the date(s) when you ran it, and when and where it took place in the setting. It should include a brief description of the events, characters involved, and any victories or setbacks for the heroes, including experience point awards, rewards won, and so forth. It is easiest to write this summary in-between game sessions while the events are still fresh in your mind.

A list of important characters in the setting and series to date, primarily just names and brief notes, so if the players want to know the name of that bandit chief who got away a couple of adventures ago, you can find it easily. Also consider highlighting (or otherwise calling out) the names of important characters and details in your adventure summaries, so you can find them quickly.

Information about any ongoing plots, subplots, and developments in the game. With several main characters, there may be a lot going on in terms of individual stories. Keeping notes on their progress can help you keep track of them and ensure you don't lose a particular plot thread along the way.

Game Notes

In addition to your series journal, have a separate place where you can jot down notes to yourself during play. You can use these notes later when you put together a more detailed summary for your series journal. Vigilance saves

you a lot of headaches later on. Whenever anything significant happens, make a quick note about it. Don't describe the whole event—just record who, where, and what in the simplest terms. Try to jot down both the real world date and the game world date. Doing so acts as a reminder when you update your bookkeeping after the game.

It also serves to remind you what has occurred in the past, which is especially helpful if your series lasts for a while. Being able to look back and see what date a group met a pregnant character is great when you're trying to decide if she's given birth when the characters return for another visit, for example. Or that the heroes met with a guard sergeant named Harrigan and left him with a poor impression; an unplanned event that might come up later, should they happen to pass through Sergeant Harrigan's jurisdiction again.

If you have players keen on note-keeping, you can ask for copies of their notes of the adventure to add to your own. Having someone else keeping track of details during game play can be quite helpful, since you have a lot to do as Narrator already. If one or more players are willing to contribute to the work of information management for your game, by all means let them! Keep in mind that players may have an incomplete view of events, but sometimes reading an "outside" perspective can also be useful to you in getting a sense of how things look from the players' side.

Quick Reference Sheet

As Narrator, you have to reference a lot of information about different characters during play: Defense values, Health values, ability modifiers, and so forth. Rather than shuffling through papers or flipping pages in a book, it's a good idea to compile a quick reference sheet of all the essential information you need. The sheet lists characters and creatures and their important game values, allowing you to see any of them with a glance.

Make sure to update your reference sheet at the start of each new session and on any occasion when the characters' abilities or scores may have changed.

Initiative Cards

A useful piece of information to keep track of during play is initiative order. Prepare a 3″ × 5″ index card for each character, including NPCs. When a combat begins, write the current initiative for each character on the upper right hand corner of the card (ideally in pencil) and stack the cards in initiative order. Then simply start with the character on top of the stack. When that turn is done, flip to the next card, cycling through the cards until you reach the bottom of the stack and the end of the round. This can be more effective than just listing the initiative order on a sheet of paper, since you can easily change the order, if need be.

Initiative cards are also a good place to put basic character information, since you usually use this information when that character's turn comes up. Defensive information, such as Defense and Health, should be kept on the separate quick reference sheet, since it's normally used when *other* characters or creatures act, and it's best not to be shuffling through the index cards looking for a character's Defense.

The same cards can also be used to keep track of countdowns or time-sensitive hazards. If a bridge will give way

QUICK REFERENCE CARD

NAME		HEALTH
CLASS/LEVEL		

ACCURACY		
COMMUNICATION		
CONSTITUTION		
DEXTERITY		
FIGHTING		
INTELLIGENCE		
PERCEPTION		
STRENGTH		
WILLPOWER		

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE

SPEED

DEFENSE

POWERS

ARMOR

EQUIPMENT

INITIATIVE CARD

NAME		SPEED	INITIATIVE
CLASS/LEVEL			

ACCURACY	COMMUNICATION	CONSTITUTION
DEXTERITY	FIGHTING	INTELLIGENCE
PERCEPTION	STRENGTH	WILLPOWER

in five rounds, for example, you can give the bridge its own index card. Every time it comes up, mark off one round. Not only does this keep such hazards from being forgotten, it allows you to remind the players of the ever-increasing danger each round, keeping the excitement of the game high.

Stunt Sheet

Stunts are an important element of the *AGE System* for *Blue Rose,* for the heroes as well as their opponents. One way of creating memorable foes is by giving them fun and interesting stunts. Try and assign each major character or opponent in your game a unique or "signature" stunt, and make note of it so you can easily reference it during play. In the Adversaries chapter you'll note that many monsters have unique stunts. You can use these as inspiration when coming up with your own.

You may also want to have a general "cheat sheet" of different stunts with a range of point costs you can use during the game for any impromptu stunt points your NPCs may get. You tend to lose the freewheeling feel of stunts when you have to stop the game to flip through the rules looking for inspiration for how to spend an NPC's stunt points. Having a signature stunt helps alleviate this. Even if the NPC rolled more points than the stunt costs, just use it anyway; the players don't necessarily have to know a few stunt points were "wasted."

Similarly, you might want to ask players to choose a "signature" stunt for their heroes, one the character will perform by default if an idea for a better choice of stunt doesn't come up. This allows you to ask uncertain players if they want to just go with their hero's signature stunt when they're having difficulty choosing and it is slowing down game play.

You may find ideas for stunts coming up during the game. Jot them down in your notes (see **Game Notes**) and add them to your stunt sheet later on so you can use them in your next game!

White Boards

A chalkboard or dry-erase board can be an excellent way to keep track of information for everyone at the game table. The bigger the board you have room for, the better, and white dry-erase boards tend to be cheaper, easier to read, and less messy. Place the board at the side or behind the Narrator, where the most people can easily see it and the Narrator can easily reach it. When there's no fight, list all the heroes and major NPCs, along with the players running them and noteworthy features. Especially early in a series, doing so helps the players and Narrator alike keep track of who's who.

A white board can also be used to keep track of things in action scenes. Laid flat, it can have a map drawn out and miniatures or counters placed on it. If upright, you can draw out a map and mark character positions on it.

Miniatures, Maps, & Props

Roleplaying games are games of the imagination, so a "game board" is never required to play. However, having a map of a particular scene laid out, and counters or miniature figures to move around on the map, can help players visualize what is going on and track information like the relative positions of different characters, the placement of obstacles, and so forth. You'll find more information about using miniatures and other accessories in the **Using Battle Maps** sidebar in **Chapter 1: Gameplay Basics**.

Computers & Technology

One option for tracking information is to use any of the numerous software programs or websites designed to organize RPG series notes. The advantages of this kind of set-up include being able to easily show your notes (or just part of your notes) to players, ranging from email reminders to websites with personalized archives for each player. Of course, the higher levels of utility also require more work to set up, and some groups find recording and organizing the information in a format everyone can access slows gameplay and turns what is supposed to be a fun activity into something closer to homework.

Even without specialized options, a computer or mobile device can be a simple way to record notes you would otherwise jot down in a notebook. The important thing is to use what you're most comfortable with—there's no point in forcing yourself to type in series information if you're better at organizing things with index cards or a spiral notebook.

Beyond note-taking, computers, smartphones, tablets, and similar devices can be useful for showing pictures of props you don't have in person, looking up quick questions that arise during play, and playing background music. There are even companies that make soundtracks and sound effects for fantasy RPG sessions. The important thing is to make sure the addition of such technology makes the game easier for you to run, or adds to everyone's enjoyment.

Players may also want to use electronic devices to track their characters, look up rules, or take notes. If this doesn't cause any disruptions that's fine, but some groups find players with access to their social media and search engines at their fingertips are more likely to be distracted from the game. If everyone is having a good time, there's no reason to change things even if there are periodic breaks for texting and tweeting. If one or two players are using online entertainment during game time and making it more difficult for everyone else to enjoy themselves, the group should discuss it and try to find a solution that makes everyone happy. Like any other troublesome behavior, this needs to be addressed calmly and politely. The objective of playing a game is to have fun, not to police your friends' behavior.

Styles of Play

Two different *Blue Rose* series can have the same rules, adventures, and even main characters, yet entirely different play styles. How you interact with the players and how the players view each other and the game world are matters of play style. Different styles produce different kinds of games. Understanding your own play style and that of your players provides a better chance of avoiding potential problems. Some narrative tools allow you to change the feel of a game by changing how scenarios are presented to your players.

These tools and descriptions can be helpful for figuring out why a game doesn't seem to work or why certain players are causing trouble or complaining about the game. None of these styles are "right" or "wrong" in an absolute sense, but some groups—and even individual players—don't mesh well with some styles. Anything a group enjoys is a good style, and anything that causes problems needs to be examined.

Narrating Styles

Different Narrators approach their jobs differently. The following are a few common Narrator styles. Examine how and when you use these styles and how players react to them. Sometimes a game's main problem is that players don't like the way you run things, which is something only you can change.

Adversarial

The adversarial Narrator is one who tries to get the heroes into trouble...a lot. Foes act with ruthless efficiency and are often designed specifically to overcome the characters. Adversarial Narrators tend to play very much by the book. If this kind of Narrator has house rules, they're run how the Narrator interprets them, as are all core rules. Players are allowed to decide what actions their characters attempt but have little to no other input into the world. On top of all this, the Narrator specifically arranges encounters and NPCs in such a way as to put the heroes at risk and doesn't back down from killing an entire party.

The number of players who enjoy a Narrator who's actually out to get them is extremely small. Logically, there's nothing a player can do to "beat" the Narrator. No matter how tough the heroes are, a Narrator can always have them attacked by a massive horde of darkfiends or some other overwhelming threat. The idea that a Narrator would actually want to "defeat" players through any possible means is more than a little silly—the Narrator would always win, and the players would likely walk away from the table and not want to play again.

Some players, however, enjoy games in which the Narrator *appears* to be out to get them. The sense of danger and risk is increased, and therefore the feeling of accomplishment increases if the players succeed.

Adventures designed by this kind of Narrator must be within a reasonable power level of the characters. Having the heroes all poisoned by a master assassin when they're incapable of detecting or thwarting the danger is unfair, and more importantly, not at all fun. Making more dangerous adventures available is fine, but they should clearly be dangerous at the outset. The Narrator should stick to encounters that are within the group's ability to handle, or at least give the players the option to back down from or flee the ones they cannot. A party that decides to attack a massively powerful sorcerer right from the start chooses its own fate, but if an unbeatable foe simply appears out of nowhere and kills the whole group, that's just mean.

Even the best and most evenhanded adversarial Narrator can rub players up the wrong way. It's too easy for this style to seem like having fun at the players' expense, and no one likes a bully. The only legitimate use of this style is to heighten the players' excitement, and that only works if they enjoy it. Many players are more interested in telling a good story or enjoying the fruits of their labors than constantly risking the loss of their beloved characters to a never-ending gauntlet of dangers.

In most cases, the adversarial style should be reserved for only the most epic of climaxes, and then it must come with fair warning. Fudging results and saving heroes through *deus ex machina* most of the time and then throwing them to the wolves at a critical moment is unfair. If changing tone for a dramatic moment, make sure the players receive warning that this time there won't be any divine intervention, sudden changes of heart, or second chances. Then let the dice—and the characters—fall where they may.

Benevolent

The benevolent Narrator is an arbiter of the rules who's trying to make sure everything is both fun and fair. Like the adversarial Narrator, the benevolent Narrator tends to play tightly to the game rules, but not to find ways to create greater challenges for the players or to take advantage when they do something unfortunate. Game rules can be modified or even ignored if they conflict with logic, but exceptions aren't made just to help along a good story.

Done well, this style of narrating produces fun and flexible games in which everyone knows both how the world works (as there are consistent rules) and that the rules won't be used to enforce an unreasonable outcome. Benevolent Narrators often fall prey to assumption clashes (covered later in this chapter) if they bend a rule once but refuse to do so under different circumstances. These Narrators also sometimes give their players too much free reign, allowing a game to devolve into dead-end quests and aimless wandering.

Director

A director tries to get players to act as they feel is appropriate to given situations and storylines. Most adventures have a "right" course of action, and players are rewarded if they find it, but punished if they do not. This style of play often puts the needs of the story told ahead of the rules of the game.

A director who successfully guides players without limiting their (apparent) freedom of choice and opportunity to have fun can produce the memorable story arcs and dramatic moments many roleplayers love. This type of game often has a strong sense of style, setting it apart from less focused series and allowing it to recreate dramatic moments from movies and other fiction. Heroic last stands to guard bridges, redemption of foul villains, martyred heroes inspiring their comrades to success, and apparently unbeatable foes being brought low by underdogs are all easier in games in which the Narrator gives subtle hints and gentle nudges to direct the story.

On the negative side, a director can easily steamroll players who are just trying to have some fun. A director-style Narrator's biases become much more obvious and can impact reactions to the heroes' actions. Bad directors penalize players who take reasonable actions that simply don't fit into the Narrator's plans, or otherwise attempt to "railroad" the group into following a particular path, whether they want to or not.

Knowing Your Group

To create a world players enjoy exploring, you need to know your players. Understanding how they're likely to react to situations, what sorts of games they enjoy, and how they interact with one another allows you to tailor the game world and its challenges to match their preferences, giving them foes they want to seek out and causes for which they want to fight. If that sounds a lot like being a therapist, there's a reason. Knowing a group of gamers well enough to predict their reactions and build adventures they'll enjoy is both the hardest and most important part of being a Narrator. With an understanding of the players, everything else gets easier.

There are no real short cuts for getting to know a group of players. Although a few types of player personality crop up a lot, every player is an individual with their own quirks and hot-button topics. You have to spend time with players before you really get to know them, leaving you with little to go on early in a group's history. The best route is to have initial games hit on common tropes—evil foes, towns in need, apparent allies not actually having the characters' best interests at heart—and save more complex plots for when you know your players better. Engaging in non-roleplaying game social activities together, such as seeing movies or meeting up for a meal, can also be useful for getting to know your players.

Problem Player Types

The focus in the following list is on problem player types, because non-problem players are, by definition, easy to deal with. Problem players tend to fall into a few broad categories, and these categories can help you understand how to handle such players. However, this is just a starting point. Most players have a smattering of different play styles. A player may be a rules lawyer when paired with a character thespian, but become a motivator when in a larger group of hack-n-slashers. You may need to try different solutions before finding one that works with a particular person.

If one or more players are being disruptive, discuss the matter with them. You should not penalize heroes in-character for player transgressions made out-of-character. Instead, disruptive players should be talked to, possibly privately, depending on your feelings and your perception of the players' group dynamic. A player shouldn't feel ganged up on, but sometimes a group needs to discuss matters together.

Avoid bullying or intimidating a player. Outside the game world, you have no real authority. It's your job to talk to disruptive players because you're essentially the host of the game. If problems continue, involve the whole group. No one should be lied to, ostracized, or mistreated, but if a player is causing problems, the group should address them directly and maturely. Moving game nights and not telling the offending player may seem easier, but ultimately this just causes bad feelings and more problems. Some people aren't meant to play together, and a mature group is willing to say so and move on.

It's also worthwhile for you to see if *you* fall into any of these categories. Knowing your own biases and preferences can often allow you to see potential conflicts with players of other types before they even occur. A Narrator who is a hack-n-slash player can guess early on that a character thespian may be dissatisfied with the series unless the Narrator adds numerous opportunities to roleplay and act out scenes. Good Narrators find ways to accommodate player preferences without sacrificing their own gaming style.

Character Thespian

A character thespian is most interested in playing the role of their character to the hilt. They may insist on acting out their hero's actions, talking through every conversation of every day, and staying in character even when other players don't. If a character thespian isn't being disruptive, leave them alone—they're getting into the role and can add flair and detail to a game world. Sometimes, however, these players take things too far. A player who insists on responding to someone asking if the group wants pizza with an in-character query about what this mysterious "pizza" might be is being a problem. So is one who's unwilling to skip through an uneventful ten-day

trek through the woods because "something important might be discussed," and the player wants to talk through every possible conversation.

You can sometimes reach a character thespian by putting things in theatrical movie or television terms. Rather than stating a journey will not be played out, say the scene cuts to ten days later. Explain minor events must be skipped not to get to the fight, but to allow for scenes of important drama. A player who acts out everything may need boundaries about how much time is appropriate to describe a single action. Demonstrating how a fencer draws his sword with a flourish is fine, but taking two minutes to detail an attack that is not a stunt and may not even succeed is not.

Griefer

A griefer just enjoys upsetting other players and the Narrator. Thankfully, such players are rare. If you realize you have a griefer, a polite but firm talk is needed. If the griefer can moderate their ways to no longer aggravate other players, allow them to stay, but beware griefers who proclaim a willingness to change (and declare their aggravating actions are not intentional) but don't actually moderate their behavior. If a griefer can't stop being a problem, the gaming group as a whole should disinvite them from playing.

Hack-n-Slasher

The hack-n-slash player is most interested in killing things. Every challenge is likely seen in terms of what needs to be killed and how best to kill it. This player often gets bored with roleplaying and exploration encounters. The upside is the hack-n-slasher enjoys something the game naturally focuses on—fighting—and they're easy to please. The downside is they may grow disinterested with anything else, talking to and distracting other players or even complaining about any action that delays the next fight.

Sometimes the hack-n-slasher can be drawn into noncombat sequences by discovering what's important to both the player and their character. An up-front and honest conversation between Narrator and player about what sorts of noncombat events interest the player can be fruitful, as can appealing to their hero's history or having NPCs talk in terms of how great a warrior the character is. If information must be given, do it in such a way that the player pays attention—say, by having a foe slip into witty banter during a fight.

Ultimately, if nothing but fighting interests the player, simply be sure to provide plenty of fights. Most players understand the game is for the enjoyment of all, so interspersing combat encounters with other types can generally keep the hack-n-slasher from being disruptive and keep his interest level high enough to stay in touch with the series. Don't expect the hack-n-slasher to negotiate with NPCs, solve riddles, or get involved in great romances unless the player has indicated an interest in doing so. Encourage roleplaying gently, but don't try to force it.

Hanger-On

A hanger-on isn't really interested in the game; they're just there to spend time with one or more other people. Hangers-on are usually the friend or significant other of another player. As long as a hanger-on isn't disruptive, simply leaving them alone is normally best.

You may occasionally try to get a hanger-on more deeply involved with the game, but if such efforts regularly fail, there's no point in persisting. Check in with a hanger-on to be sure they're not actually a wallflower who'd *like* to be more involved; otherwise, hangers-on are beyond your ability to engage fully. Roleplaying games aren't for everyone, and some people are willing to play for convenience but just won't get deeply involved. There's no need to spend the time and energy trying to change your series to draw in these players if they just aren't interested.

Motivator

The motivator just wants to get things done. *Now.* As long as the heroes are on track to accomplish some goal, the motivator is happy, but side-treks, down time, and goofing off all annoy them. Some motivators restrict themselves to keeping the characters on track, while others want the players and Narrator to stay focused on the game as well. A motivator can be useful when a group strays too far from a game's plot (or gets distracted from gaming in general). If too demanding, however, motivators are often perceived as bossy, clashing with other players.

A bothersome motivator may be handled by scheduling some down time, both in-character and as a group of players. If you state you intend for a band of heroes to winter in a given city, the motivator knows there's no need to encourage everyone to get moving. If a group of players decides to begin actually playing within an hour of getting together, and the Narrator announces periodic breaks, the motivator may be satisfied. Failing that, make sure the motivator isn't annoying other players, and encourage them to remain polite and cordial when suggesting it's time to get a move on.

Rules Lawyer

The dreaded rules lawyer is one of the most common problem player types. The rules lawyer uses the rules of the game as a bludgeon to beat other players and even the Narrator. They abuse loopholes, design characters to take advantage of them, and correct others when they make mistakes. The rules lawyer often quotes rules and "official" interpretations of them as justification for their behavior, and argues with rules decisions they disagree with.

A player familiar with the *AGE System* rules of *Blue Rose* can be useful, helping you find relevant rules quickly and possibly even answering basic rules questions from other

players to save you time. The problem comes when a rules lawyer takes up game time arguing over implementation, abuses rules to get away with something unreasonable, or ruins the fun of playing by bickering about the quality of other players' rules knowledge.

Often, a rules lawyer's motivation is one of fairness. If a player has been in games run by a Narrator who favored one or two players, the rules lawyer may see the equal application of rules as the only way to maintain a level playing field. In this case, even-handed treatment of all players, even when deviating from the rules, is a good first step to dealing with and reassuring the rules lawyer.

Other rules lawyers see knowledge of the rules as a way to compete with the Narrator. By pointing out your mistakes, these players try to score points and control the flow of a series. A roleplaying game is a cooperative effort and you must work with players, but as the Narrator, you have final say on how the rules are interpreted. If a rules lawyer attempts to control how rules are applied, take firm actions to establish your authority without being rude or tyrannical.

The best way to do this is to establish guidelines for handling rules disagreements before they come up. Inform players you will run your game based on the rules, but not enslaved by them. A rules call should be made quickly to keep the action of a game going. Allow anyone who disagrees with a rules call a moment to explain the objection. If you agree, there's nothing wrong with changing a ruling. If not, state that the discussion is tabled, and re-examine the matter after the game. If you later decide to run the rule differently, inform the players of it at the beginning of the next session.

If a rules lawyer continues to be a problem, you are well within your rights to insist *all* questions about rules wait until the end of the session, when they can be handled without making everyone wait. The rules lawyer can write down any questions, and the two of you can hash them out on your own time.

Spotlight Hog

A spotlight hog wants to be the one doing whatever is being done. Spotlight hogs often want to play more than one character or play a hero with something that sets them apart. These players crave attention, both for themselves and for their characters. Spotlight hogs can be useful because they get excited and involved in a series, and that excitement can positively affect other players. A spotlight hog that actually manages to garner significantly more time "on-screen" may be a problem, however, preventing others from fully enjoying the game.

There's not much that can be done with a spotlight hog who's a problem other than talk to them. If necessary, you can carefully craft plots to focus on other players' characters, but doing so is fair only if the spotlight hog gets their time in the sun too. It's also worthwhile to check with other players to see if they mind the spotlight hog's actions—

a group of hack-n-slashers and wallflowers may be fine with a spotlight hog doing all the talking, for example.

Wallflower

A wallflower is the opposite of a spotlight hog. This player doesn't seem at all involved, barely speaks, and allows others to plan everything. Wallflowers are only disruptive if they stall a game's pacing by refusing to answer questions, make initiative checks, or take their turn. The most frustrating thing about such players is they often claim they greatly enjoy a series even though they hardly even seem present when it's run.

If you can discover the cause of a wallflower's silence, most wallflowers become active participants. Some wallflowers simply don't know the game rules well (especially in a game with many alternate rules). In that case, assigning another player to help the wallflower plan actions and respond to your input can be helpful (this may be a great way to harness a rules lawyer's talents). Other players of this type simply need time to become comfortable with a series or a particular group of players, while some never get more involved. Check periodically to see if wallflowers feel something is missing from a series, but failing that just leave them alone and make sure they don't slow down a game.

Assumption Clashes

One of the greatest risks any Narrator can face is an assumption clash. This happens when a player assumes one thing and you another. For example, if a Narrator notes that five tough-looking NPCs threaten a hero, the character's player may assume the NPCs are unarmed thugs—that the description "tough-looking" means they look like "tough" unarmed thugs. But maybe the Narrator actually means the NPCs look tough, as in they will be hard to defeat, and is envisioning them in heavy armor and carrying weapons. Because neither Narrator nor player realize a miscommunication has occurred, the player may make a decision about how to react that seems baffling to the Narrator and may lead to a bad game event.

The reason assumption clashes are so dangerous is they often aren't recognized until after the fact. Sometimes assumption clashes *never* get ironed out, leaving hard feelings on both sides. In the case above, if a fight doesn't break out, the player may leave the encounter without ever realizing they had misevaluated their opponents. They discover the group is part of a large cartel of thugs holding the town hostage, but continue to see the NPCs as unarmed toughs. The player convinces their adventuring group to attack the thug stronghold, since they're sure the fight is winnable. The group plans and maneuvers for three game sessions before attacking the stronghold, only to find it manned by warriors in heavy armor. The player cries foul, only to be told the gang members have always been well armed and equipped. The player feels the Narrator changed the reality of the game, and the Narrator feels the player just hasn't been paying attention.

Assumption clashes can happen on a larger scale as well. If a Narrator describes a series as "sword-and-sorcery" in style, players may envision a game in which powerful adepts are common. If you were actually thinking in terms of classic pulp fantasy stories, you may have decided adepts are actually quite rare, and many—if not most—are corrupt sorcerers. Players who have designed their characters around the idea that adepts and arcana are common may not realize their error, and be surprised and irritated when things don't fit their expectations.

There's no perfect way to avoid assumption clashes. Giving examples whenever possible and checking to see if your players understand the example helps. Also helpful is to know that assumption clashes occur and to keep a high degree of patience when a player seems to assume something other than what you meant. An occasional assumption clash can be fixed by allowing players to change past actions when a reasonable assumption is proved false. For minor issues, you can even change the game reality to match the false assumption (especially if you realize an assumption clash has occurred before the players do). If such clashes become common, find a way to communicate more clearly, possibly including using illustrations, distributing handouts, describing things in different ways, and having a recap of events at the beginning of each game session.

Dos & Don'ts

Here's some good general advice to keep in mind when it comes to being a *Blue Rose* Narrator:

Do...

...Plan Ahead

Take the time to prepare adventure notes and game materials like those in the Information Management section. Keep a series journal and take notes during the game, copying them over into your journal after the game is done. Keep track of character rewards and advancement. The better you are at preparing and organizing your information, the easier it is to run a smooth, well-paced game without the need to shuffle papers or fumble for facts that should be at your fingertips.

...Describe Things

It's your job to paint a picture of the world and the story for your players, and encourage them to do the same for each other. Your imaginations can be the best "graphics" in the world, but only if you exercise them! Use vivid language

and make your descriptions clear and evocative without getting too heavily bogged down in pointless detail.

...Challenge Your Players

Give the characters challenging, but manageable, encounters in terms of their game abilities, but also challenge your *players* with opportunities for roleplaying, intrigue, interaction, mysteries, investigations, and so forth. Keep them engaged and trying to get one step ahead to figure out what's coming next, or how they are going to overcome the latest problem you've posed for them.

...Be Flexible

There's no telling what will happen when the players encounter your plot and choose their own direction. You have to be ready and willing to improvise and to change your plans on a moment's notice to deal with an unexpected decision or idea. Try not to force the players down a path of your choosing, but instead shift to accommodate them and the direction of their characters, while still offering challenges along the way.

...Focus on the Characters

The players' characters are the main protagonists of your story, just like the central cast of a novel, film, or television series. Focus on them: their goals, their challenges, their relationships, their story, rather than making it all about the NPCs you control. The antagonists and supporting cast are there to highlight the actions of the main characters, not to overwhelm them. The story should be *about* the heroes, rather than them simply happening to be in it.

Don't...

...Make It All About Fighting

While combat encounters and action are a big part of an adventure game like *Blue Rose*, don't make *every* encounter a combat or have every interaction end in a fight—and don't let the players make it that way, either. Allow room for investigation, exploration, interaction, and some transitions between encounters to break up the action and provide players interested in other aspects of the game with something to enjoy. Allow for the possibility of avoiding some fights, or solving some problems by means other than fighting.

...Argue

You are expected to referee the game, so avoid getting into extended arguments with players over things. If there is a dispute over a rule or some other element of the game, briefly hear all sides and make a decision, telling anyone who objects that you can discuss it *after* the game, then move along. Don't bring the game to a halt just so you can argue it out there and then. It's not fair to everyone else in the group.

...Be Mean

While you should certainly challenge the players and their characters and play the roles of the most vile villains and monsters to the hilt, don't ever be mean about it. That is, don't be unfair when it comes to providing challenges, and certainly don't gloat or take personal delight in a character's failures. Don't step on the players' personal issues or bring them into the game as ways of manipulating or—worse yet—punishing them. In short, the players trust you to be in charge of the game, so don't be a jerk about it.

...Be Boring

The only exciting visuals and special effects you have for your *Blue Rose* game are what you can inspire in your players' imaginations. So try to keep your descriptions rich and your tone exciting, maintaining a brisk and enjoyable pace. Don't drone, or go on about details nobody cares about. Don't let the game get bogged down in minutiae or sidetracked into dull encounters nobody enjoys. One of the key advantages of roleplaying is your ability to edit and direct the story, so use it to keep things interesting.

...Worry About It

Lastly, and most importantly, remind yourself: "This is only a game and it is supposed to be fun." Don't worry too much about whether or not you're doing things "right," so long as everybody is enjoying themselves. If you make a mistake, fix it and resolve to do better next time. If you forgot some vital piece of information, make something up that fits and keep on going.

The key thing is that the game—like the show—must go on, so you're generally better off keeping things moving than worrying about some detail that will be forgotten during the next exciting encounter. Best of all, if you're not tense or worried about it, your players generally won't be either. Remember, it's *your* game, so have fun with it!

A series is a collection of adventures, much like an adventure is a collection of encounters. In this way, a *Blue Rose* series is much like an adventure writ large, and much of the advice on creating adventures in **Chapter 8** applies to planning and running your series as a whole. Creating a series includes some larger issues as well, which we'll touch on in this chapter. It looks at planning the type of series you're going to run, including its overall style and plot, along with a number of series frameworks that set up different concepts for series you can run in *Blue Rose* to demonstrate some of the breadth of the setting.

Planning the Series

No series for a tabletop roleplaying game goes entirely as planned, but that's a big part of the fun—you just never know exactly what will happen once the players get their hands on the storyline and begin making decisions for their characters. A good Narrator learns to work with—and often even enjoy—the unexpected decisions that their players make! That said, it still pays to have an overall plan for your series, even if you do end up modifying it along the way in accordance with events that happen during the game. A series plan helps to get you and the players on the same page as to what the series is about, what sort of style you want, the broad arc of the series, and where it is going.

Consulting the Players

The first thing to do when planning an ongoing *Blue Rose* series is to talk with your players about the sort of series that interests them. It may be a good idea to try out the game—perhaps playing through the introductory adventure in this book—and then talk about long-term plans if everybody agrees they had fun and would like to see the game continue.

What sorts of things are your players interested in? What kind of fantasy elements intrigue them? What do they like and dislike about the world of Aldea? Where do they see their characters going? The answers to these sorts of questions give you invaluable information to help ensure your series is tailored to fit the players and their characters in a way that a purely prepackaged game could never be. This is one of the great advantages of roleplaying games like *Blue Rose*, so do not pass up on the opportunity to use it.

Talk over the series styles in the following section and see which ones appeal most to the players and, for that matter, which ones they absolutely do not enjoy and wouldn't want incorporated into the game. If the players already have characters, find out more about the characters' goals and the individual stories the players would like to see for them. If they haven't created characters yet, what sorts of characters do they want to play?

Series Style

One of the questions a Narrator should determine and communicate to the players is: What kind of series are we going to run? Is it a dark game, where the best option is rarely the moral one and heroes often meet tragic ends? Is it a swashbuckling adventure, where as long as they face danger with a laugh and a quip the characters are likely to pull through? Is it high romance, where what the heroes truly care about—and what that motivates them to do—matters most? The style of a series helps determine the tone of adventures, the kinds of characters that are likely to work, and what the players' expectations are.

There are many different series styles, and *Blue Rose* can handle most of them to one degree or another. A few common and popular styles are detailed here, but don't feel limited to these. You can model a series on a favorite show or novel series, see what your players are most interested in, or strike out and create a new style of series unique to your game. While you should certainly consult the players about the series style and try to take their tastes into account, keep in mind that the style should also be something *you* enjoy as the Narrator, since you are responsible for helping drive the series. A style that doesn't interest you (or worse, that you dislike) isn't going to make for a good game.

Dark Fantasy

Dark fantasy offers a complex moral landscape, avoiding simple, black-and-white answers to complex questions, and the shades of gray it delves into are often rather dingy. This is a setting in which weaker races are oppressed and exploited by stronger ones, many groups are feared and mistrusted, and even the good guys often have some very dark secrets. The biggest threats may be disasters brought on by mortal hubris, rather than the master plan of some villainous overlord. Evil comes from the hearts of people and while it can be checked, it can never be defeated forever.

High Fantasy

In high or "light" fantasy, arcana are plentiful and often used for the greater good. Heroes ride unicorns, knights take to the air on griffons, and wise sovereigns and nobles with good hearts do what's best for their people all the time. Threats are usually forces from outside peaceful society that wish to destroy or corrupt everything that is good and pure. Often this is for no other reason than to spread the power of corruption. The evil forces are typically supernatural threats which can, with a long quest, be overcome permanently. Making the world a better place is within the reach of heroic adventurers.

Horror

A horror-themed game is designed to frighten both players and their characters. Threats are often unspeakable monsters from beyond human experience, and may well be beyond the ability of any mere mortal to overcome, except in the very short-term. The most important element is a threat that cannot be defeated, regardless of its source. Action often revolves around discovering just what the threat is and how to prevent it from coming about (since it's beyond defeat once it has fully materialized). Horror games may include gruesome details and disturbing descriptions of bloody events, or they may try to heighten fear by keeping details off-stage to allow the players' runaway imaginations to fill in the (gory) details.

Low Fantasy

In low fantasy, arcane powers are rare (though still quite real), threats are kept personal, and life is generally nasty, brutish, and short. There isn't the broad scope of fantastic creatures found in many fantasy worlds—with just a few well-known exceptions, which are often so rare they are considered myths or legends until the characters encounter them. In some low fantasy stories the stakes are kept low, focusing on a single town or the tribulations of one mercenary company, though the genre can also include events that happened in real-world history, such as crusades, plagues, and continent-sweeping religious schisms.

Swashbuckling Adventure

Swashbuckling games focus on daring deeds and dashing protagonists, often favoring bold actions over realistic consequences. These often take after the themes and tropes of pirate films and *Three Musketeers* stories, though that isn't necessary. The protagonists are either earnest and true heroes or scoundrels with hearts of gold, and the villains prone to mustache-twirling and waxing on about their schemes. The plots are as likely to center on defending a beloved tavern as on saving the honor and good name of a noble ally. The important thing is to move fast, try wild stunts, and let the witticisms fly!

High Romance

In high romance, how the characters *feel* is what matters. Not just how (and whom) they love, but who they hate, who inspires jealousy or fear or possessiveness. Characters are driven by their feelings to take action—not always wisely—and must deal with the consequences. Their relationships, including those with other characters, are vital. A high romance series can range from soap opera-style melodrama with constant twists and turns, to epic romance where true love wins out against all odds, or tragedy where otherwise good people are doomed by their own traitorous hearts. Naturally, high romance series get a lot of use out of the Relationship rules, as well as the interplay between Destiny and Fate.

Plotting the Arc

Once you have an idea of what interests you and your players, consider the broad "arc" of the series—that is, the over-arching story defining it. Is the series about a struggle against the rising darkness in the small valley the characters call home? Is it a story of heroes seeking an ancient artifact

able to bind a mighty darkfiend? Is it a tale of opening up new roads to the outside world while staving off outside threats and forging alliances against them?

Try and summarize the overall story in a few sentences, such as: "The heroes are chosen for the difficult task of winning over cautious—and sometimes even hostile—potential allies, needed in the future struggle against a rising threat that has infiltrated both sides and seeks to turn them against each other."

Outlining the Series

Once you have defined the arc of the series, start breaking it down into individual adventures, roughly game session-long segments you can plan out.

In the beginning of a series, your adventures should have more detail and offer more hooks to get characters involved. Early on, the characters are still developing their initial personalities and histories. They're not great heroes, and the players may need opportunities to "get their feet wet" and try out different things, getting a feel for the game and how it is played. It's a good idea to provide variety and try out different encounters to see what works best and provides the most fun. You may even decide to modify later parts of the series based on it.

Once you have outlined at least the first part of the series, you can start looking at planning out the first adventure in detail (see **Creating Adventures** in **Chapter 8**). Many Narrators like to use published adventures and these can save you a lot of time and prep work. Even when using published adventures, though, it's worth taking some time to customize them for your series and your group. By changing or adding even a few details, you can make these adventures better fit your planned series and the specific characters in your group.

Sketching the Ending

While a *Blue Rose* series can go on for quite some time, lasting many game sessions, all good stories eventually come to an end. It is a good idea to have at least a *general* ending in mind for the series' story arc, so you can begin moving events towards it as it becomes clear the heroes are reaching the end of their game careers, or the players are getting restive and want to wrap things up, and don't just want the game to go on hiatus for a while.

Do not become too attached to a particular ending for your series, as you might find things change quite a bit over the course of the game. One of the great things about roleplaying games is they are a co-creative process. Rather than just playing out a predetermined story, you and your players are *creating* a story about their characters together, one you'll be able to reminisce about when it's all over and done. Sometimes that story goes off in unexpected directions, so you have to remain flexible and open to the possibility of different outcomes and endings.

Note also that the ending of a series does not necessarily mean the end for a group of heroes. It is always possible to start a new *Blue Rose* series with existing characters—a further story of their adventures, with a fresh new focus and an all-new arc.

Series Frameworks

The following section is just a sampling of potential series frameworks for *Blue Rose* games, ranging from the fairly standard (the heroes as envoys of the Kingdom of the Blue Rose) to exploring strange and alien worlds through the shadowgates, or even traveling the world helping to arrange happy marriages! One of the great things about tabletop roleplaying is the possibilities are limited only by your imagination and what you and your group of players would enjoy, so feel free to borrow from some, any, or all of these ideas and to create and add in your own to plan out a series. Once you've played out that series, remember, there's always the opportunity to create another!

For Aldis and the Queen!

Aldis, the Kingdom of the Blue Rose, is a free and prosperous land, but still faces many dangers, both external and internal. Fortunately for the people of Aldis, there are the envoys of the Sovereign's Finest, champions of the ideals of the kingdom and its chosen protectors. The envoys are selected for their dedication, drive, and ability to work together in small groups. They are not soldiers, but problem-solvers, dealing with everything from mediating local disputes to investigating potentially dangerous ancient artifacts, or from hunting shadowspawn in the wilderness to performing surveillance on threats looming outside of Aldis' borders.

In short, envoys are adventurers, and a team of the Sovereign's Finest makes a perfect group of characters for the focus of a *Blue Rose* series. They travel far and wide, carrying out their duties and safeguarding their people from harm, all in service to Queen and Country.

Assembling a Team

Like a good adventuring group, a team of envoys for the Finest tends to combine various classes, talents, and abilities to cover a wide range of possibilities. Envoys can be of any race or background, Aldis being quite egalitarian, with membership in the Finest based on skill and merit. This includes rhydan, who are often valued members of the Finest and individual teams, and rhy-bonded companions are always allowed to work together as part of a team.

A mix of classes is desirable: warriors to handle combat and, often, command in the field; experts in a range of skills including diplomacy, wilderness survival, and covert operations; and adepts for their arcane talents, including Second Sight and Psychic Shield (protecting them against many arcane attacks), as well as their ability to wield crystons. Having someone on the team with the Psychic Contact arcanum is desirable, if not strictly required, due to the benefits for communicating with the envoys' superiors quickly over distance.

Story Hooks

Here are some common "story hooks" to launch a group of envoys into an adventure. These are by no means the only ones, but are the sorts of things a team of the Sovereign's Finest are expected to do on a regular basis:

Negotiation

The envoys serve as a neutral third party to negotiate a dispute, particularly if there is a noble in the team or the regional noble is not available to handle matters. Disputes may get complex, or could lead to investigations into other events. Similarly, envoys may serve as diplomats to visit foreign lands and negotiate treaties and other agreements.

Investigation

Envoys are assigned to gather information on activity along Aldis' borders, particularly the northern border with Kern and the eastern border with Jarzon. They may be asked to investigate crimes or suspicious activity, or to aid local authorities in doing so. They're also tasked with investigating arcane, and especially sorcerous, occurrences. These investigations can turn up other situations the envoys need to address.

Protection

The Sovereign's Finest sometimes serve as bodyguards to nobles and other important people, and they have a duty to safeguard all citizens of Aldis to the best of their ability, which may include fighting off bandits or marauding bands of shadowspawn, or thwarting an attempted invasion of Aldis' borders.

Rescue

Envoys are called upon to help rescue people from natural disasters, from fires to floods and more, and to aid those lost in the wilderness. Such rescues sometimes lead to other adventures, like when a missing person is actually lost due to the activity of a darkfiend or a sorcerous artifact, for example.

Transportation

Similar to their protection duties, envoys may be called upon to help transport and protect important items, such as safeguarding a vital shipment of food or medicine from bandits, or overseeing transportation of an unknown (and possibly dangerous) arcane artifact to the capital for containment and study.

The Chain of Command

Unlike most adventuring groups in fantasy roleplaying games, the Sovereign's Finest directly serve the Crown of Aldis, and are therefore answerable to it and its agents. While permitted a wide degree of discretion in carrying out their duties, envoys are still expected to report on their activities on a regular basis and receive information and instructions from the capital city. This is usually accomplished psychically, using a beacon stone (see **Arcane Items** in **Chapter 11**) to make the process easier. This provides you, the Narrator, with an ideal "mouthpiece" for both giving the heroes new adventure hooks or guidance to further the plot of the series, as well as opportunities to call the characters to account on their recent actions, as needed.

Envoys are occasionally expected to return to the city of Aldis to report on their activities in person, giving you opportunities for change-of-pace adventures taking place among the people, politics, and intrigues of the capital. Such visits can renew relationships with old friends (or foes) and may result in rewards or consequences for the characters' actions in prior adventures, or dealing with issues like reassignments, promotions or demotions—even the looming possibility of a breakup of the team!

Operating Independently

The range of their responsibilities, along with the relatively small numbers of envoys in the Sovereign's Finest, means they have a great deal of independence in how they carry out their assignments and their mandate to safeguard Aldis. Although the Finest's leadership can advise, envoys are often days or weeks from aid reaching them in person, out in the hinterlands or borders of the kingdom, or wild places like the Pavin Weald or the Veran Marsh. Occasionally they are even out of contact psychically, having to rely on their own judgment and willingness to accept responsibility for their decisions. This gives characters in the series independence, so they're not merely instruments of the Crown carrying out a set of orders. In many cases they represent the Sovereign and are invested with the power to make necessary decisions on the spot, hoping their superiors will back them up when the time comes to report in. The administration of the Finest tends to recognize the judgment of envoys in the field, but there are sometimes conflicts with "armchair administrators" who feel justified in analyzing and second-guessing their subordinates.

On the Road

The wide and wonderful world of Aldea offers many amazing sights and experiences and, while most people are homebodies who rarely go further than the neighboring town or the nearest city, some feel the call of the road to travel far and wide. Often, those who hear that call learn it is better to travel together, since Aldea offers just as many dangers and risks as it does wonders.

In this series framework, the characters are travelers, from itinerant wanderers to explorers and traders, or even a traveling troupe of performers. Their usual mode of operation is to arrive someplace new, intending to explore or quietly go about their business before becoming entangled in local events, ranging from a dispute amongst villagers to uncovering a murder mystery or the workings of a shadow cult. They may be the strangers who arrive in town just in time to defend it against an assault by shadowspawn, perhaps rallying the locals in the process.

Adventures in an *On the Road* series are often similar to those undertaken by envoys in a *For Aldis and the Queen!* series, except the characters are more independent. They don't answer to anyone (except perhaps the local authorities) and don't receive assignments or guidance from "on high." They're free to go and do as they like, although still subject to the laws of the land. They're by no means confined to the borders of Aldis either, perhaps traveling across the Plains of Rezea or following the paths through the Veran Marsh to Jarzon or beyond, although travelers may need a good reason to want to visit the bleak lands of Kern or the deadly Shadow Barrens.

This series framework is more like the "traditional" fantasy story of a group of generally do-gooding vagabonds traveling from place to place and having adventures along the way. The characters may each be driven by their own reason to take to the road, either leaving something behind them or moving towards a particular goal. They may be motivated by profit, excitement, opportunity, wanderlust, or some combination thereof. Virtually any type of character class, race, or background can fit into this framework, provided they have a reason to travel together.

Traveling the Royal Road

A common element of this series framework is setting the characters up as members of a band of Roamers, traveling from place to place as part of their wandering lifestyle. See **Chapters 2** and **3** for more about the Roamers and their history and place in Aldean life.

A Roamer band could be as small as a single family, perhaps just the characters and a supporting NPC or two. Or it could be a significant number of people, allowing the heroes to bring their own cast of supporting characters along on their travels, essentially forming a mini "village" that picks up and moves with them. You can deal with relationships and dynamics within the band as well as between the Roamers and the outside world. Some of the heroes may be Aspaenari (born Roamers), others Optari (adopted into the band and the culture), and still others Domnari outsiders who happen to be traveling the same road, not yet considered a part of the band. Rhydan may be adopted Roamers, particularly if they are bonded with humanoid Roamer characters, and there are plenty of opportunities for characters of any class, including Roamer Sel-Shanna (moon dancers), seers, healers, and other adepts.

The series can simply focus on the band's travels and the things they encounter along the way, or it could tie into the tragic history and current state of Faenaria and the Shadow Barrens as described in **Chapter 3**. Perhaps the journey of the series is that of the Royal Road itself, beginning with the seemingly footloose Fool and progressing through the stages of the Major Arcana towards the atonement of Judgment and the unity of the World—the redemption or restoration of the nation of Faenaria or the Shadow Barrens, perhaps?

Setting Sail

The concept of an *On the Road* series also works for an *On the High Seas* style *Blue Rose* series where the heroes are on board a ship rather than traveling by land. They might be the entire crew of a small vessel, save for a few supporting characters, or just part of the crew and passengers of a much larger ship, carrying their supporting cast with them, much as with *Traveling the Royal Road*. They might be the officers in command of a ship, or comparatively low-ranking crew, at least at first. Indeed, some of the characters might start out as passengers or even stowaways. As the series progresses, the heroes may advance through the ranks onboard, either recognized and promoted for their deeds or replacing NPCs who are killed off, jump ship, or otherwise leave the series.

A waterborne series can range from the adventures of a merchant ship ferrying goods between the nations of Aldea (and encountering perils and adventures along the way) to an exploration vessel setting out from Aldis to renew contact with far-flung lands and to chart the coastline and islands of the sea. The characters may crew a vessel charged with naval duties, fighting pirates, foreign vessels, and sea monsters, or they could be pirates or privateers themselves, seeking their fortune by raiding other ships, either just for profit or to further the cause of a particular nation. See the **Pirate Isles** section of **Chapter 3** for setting material useful for this sort of series.

Coming of Age

The stories and struggles of young people feature prominently in romantic fantasy literature, and *Blue Rose* can partake in that as the basis for a series. In a *Coming of Age* framework, the heroes are all young adults—teenagers — who are dealing with the usual struggles concerning their identities and futures in the world, plus they may also be dealing with unusual challenges ranging from a new and unexpected rhydan companion to family tragedy, a great destiny, or the emergence of latent arcane talents.

The classic *Coming of Age* story is about the characters leaving home for the first time to venture out into the wider world. This may be by choice, either to attend a school or academy of higher learning or running away from home to join a Roamer caravan; or by necessity, such as fleeing a home attacked and destroyed by shadowspawn, or being sent away to live with distant relations in another city—or even country—without an explanation. The characters might all arrive at the same place, giving them a reason to become friends and work together, although they could have different reasons for coming there.

The young heroes have to learn to work together and find adult role models or mentors they can trust, which can be difficult as they often have good reason *not* to trust adults—or anyone else, for that matter. This is particularly true for a series set in a place like Jarzon or Kern, where the young characters may also have to contend with societal prejudices or the dangers of living under a cruel and oppressive regime. Their journey away from home may take them towards a goal, such as a potential teacher or guide, or a lost and hidden treasure, with all manner of risks and dangers along the way.

Rhydan

Rhydan feature in *Coming of Age* series in two primary roles: as companions to young humanoid characters and, sometimes, as mentors. In the first case, the rhydan may be as relatively young as their companions, sometimes newly awakened and unfamiliar with civilization, but still fiercely loyal and protective of their bond-mates. In other stories, the rhydan may be mature enough to be a guiding force in the young characters' lives, offering advice and insight, while still somewhat puzzled by the differences between two-legged and four-legged behavior. No matter how experienced or mature the rhydan, some aspects of humanoid behavior remain a mystery. With their innate arcane talents, rhydan also serve as helpful mentors and examples for young characters dealing with budding arcane talents themselves.

Through the Shadow Cabinet

A variation on the *Coming of Age* series is to take inspiration from children's literature ranging from *Peter Pan* to *The Chronicles of Narnia* (or the *Dungeons & Dragons* animated series, for that matter) and have an ancient shadowgate on Aldea bridge the gap between worlds, allowing young people from Earth to accidentally and quite suddenly find themselves on Aldea. They could be siblings, extended family, schoolmates, or just a random group of kids who happened to find themselves in the right museum, old mansion, or ancient stone circle at the same time. Oftentimes they're a mix of outcasts, "weird" kids, and mainstream popular kids with a thing or two to learn.

Upon arriving on Aldea, the characters can quickly discover the potential for fighting, woodcraft, diplomacy, or even previously unknown arcane talents. They might meet and bond with a rhydan character, or encounter local Aldean youngsters who join their ranks. Of course, the exiles from Earth will want to find a way to get back home, but they'll also need to survive on Aldea in the meantime, perhaps trying to reach safety and civilization and people who can help them. Along

the way, they quickly progress from just kids to 1st-level *Blue Rose* characters, and from there might become experienced heroes.

There's also the question of how they ended up on Aldea in the first place. Was it an accident caused by a malfunctioning shadowgate, or could it have been deliberate and, if so, who did it and why? It might have been an experiment by a would-be sorcerer who is now obsessed with capturing the visitors to find out what is so important about them, or a desperate move by an adept or group looking to fulfill some ancient prophecy about saviors "from beyond." If you prefer, higher forces could be at work, from hints that the Golden Hart brought the characters to Aldea to serve some purpose to the work of the gods of Light or the exarchs of Shadow.

A Game of Thorns

Even in the Kingdom of the Blue Rose, there are shadows where discontent, envy, and intrigue thrive. This series offers Narrators and players an opportunity to explore murky moralities and lethal politics in Aldis, where the sunshine of the Blue Rose Court is more façade than substance. Such a series would feature shifting alliances and NPCs with hidden motives. In *A Game of Thorns* series, a Narrator and players will likely place more emphasis on roleplaying and exploration/investigation than combat.

A game of thorns could focus on those who question Queen Jaellin's use of the shadowgate beneath Aldis and her permitting the study of sorcery. Such a series could suggest Queen Jaellin hoards additional relics she plans to use against her enemies. Those opposed to the Queen may also question her hasty courtship and marriage to Kelyran, the vata'sha leader. Popular tactics in these series include framing someone for sorcery or Kernish sympathies. In such a series, no one thinks they are the villain.

Factions

These series feature intrigues involving different factions such as:

The Bandit Lords

Some bandit lords still hold out against the Blue Rose Court. In the years after the Great Rebellion, many bandit lords ruled parts of Aldea. One of Aldis' first challenges was to consolidate its territory along the Rose River and defend against the raids of these petty kings and thieves. Over more than a decade, Aldis waged a series of Bandit Wars, eliminating many of the bandit lords and expanding its borders.

Several noble families trace back to bandit lords that bent their knee and accepted Aldis' sovereignty, but many small warlords still remain along the borders of the kingdom, particularly in the mountains north of the Veran Marshes and the coastal hills west of the Rose River. Many of them have agreed a truce with Aldis that has allowed them to maintain their independence, but some still engage in raids against the Kingdom of the Blue Rose. Others offer protection to pirates, smugglers, and those who flaunt the authority of the Queen. Most bandit lords also war against each other, competing for territory. In a game of thorns, a bandit lord could be a shifty ally or offer a safe house away from the Sovereign's Finest.

Jarzon

Though they shun the decadent ways of Aldis, many in Jarzon see that one day their countries will inevitably be at war. To prepare for that day, Jarzon has diplomats and spies in Aldis who seek to identify those who question the leadership of the Blue Rose Court and the tolerance it fosters. Many of these spies are also missionaries who come to Aldis to preach the doctrine of the Church of the Pure Light. These missionaries can often be found in the larger cities, and particularly in the lands around Lysana's Crossing and Kella's Ford. In a game of thorns, a Jarzoni agent could offer resources, or they could want to use the characters to further their own goals.

Jarzoni Refugees

The communities of Ata-San and Relgis in eastern Aldis endeavor to live in peace, but agents from Jarzon seek to infiltrate the communities to ensure they do not intend to foment rebellion in Jarzon. In a game of thorns, these refugees could be agents or pawns (or both).

Kernish Refugees

Many suspect spies and sorcerers are hidden among the newly arrived refugees from Kern. Any agents secreted among the refugees will want to build contacts within Aldis. The majority of the refugees just want to find a home, and most folk in Aldis will seek to help them. Some, though, will look to take advantage of them.

The King's Council

A secret society of nobles who admire the ruthless tactics that King Valin used to defend Aldis' northern border. It is comprised primarily of the descendants of northern nobles that had their titles stripped away by King Rikin. Some of its members include the Shadow-tainted noble families who escaped Rikin's purge. Their symbol is a mailed fist. They seek to protect and expand their holdings, and they do not care whether the Queen approves of their tactics. The members of the King's Council are experts at subtlety. They have had years to learn how to avoid investigations by the Sovereign's Finest. In a game of thorns, they could be potent allies, or they could be working quietly behind the scenes to manipulate events.

Loyal Riders

Loyalists to Lord Sayvin, who thought that he should be crowned King after the death of his father, King Haylin. They use a sigil of an empty saddle as a sign between members and to remind them of the riding mishap that resulted in King Haylin's death—an incident many of them do not believe was an accident at all. As many of them joined Lord Sayvin in aiding the Lich King's invasion, their group was dispersed, but now they seek to rebuild their numbers and strength. The Sovereign's Finest suspect that some of the surviving Loyal Riders may have ties to one or more of the Shadowed Seven that vie for control of Kern. In a game of thorns, the Loyal Riders could be dangerous allies, because they are known both for their disloyalty and their desperation to rebuild their strength—though some may see this as an opportunity to use them for other purposes.

Merchant Guild

Some among the Merchant Guild desire a freer hand in trade and business. They object to regulations on the quality of goods, wholesomeness of food, and safe working conditions as unreasonable restraints. Some merchants are even Shadow-aligned, and willing to covertly work with Kern, Jarzon, and the Pirate Isles to smuggle illicit goods, information, spies, and dangerous artifacts. Many nobles and bandit lords are in debt to merchants. A ruthless merchant may attempt to use such debt to exert control over a noble, getting the noble to look the other way, to pass on important information, or take action against a rival. In a game of thorns, a merchant could offer resources in support of a conspiracy and connections to useful people throughout the realm.

Petty Gangs

These unorganized street gangs and bandits rob and steal in the areas beyond the reach or notice of the Silence. While they are rarely interested in doing more than filling their own pockets, for that reason, they are often readily willing to serve as muscle and work for others.

Pirate Isles

The smugglers, pirates, and slavers of the Pirate Isles already oppose Aldis and may provide ready allies for those seeking to undermine its Queen. Many in the isles are openly Shadow-tainted, and sorcerers from the isles are always interested in obtaining arcane secrets. They often malign the adepts of Aldis for withholding arcane formulae and artifacts. Pirates are mercenaries at heart and skilled at smuggling. They are also useful if you want someone taken out of the country.

Shadow-tainted Nobles

Nobles under the influence of the Shadow desire greater power, and as they fall deeper into Shadow, they are willing to use increasingly ruthless means to obtain their desires. In a game of thorns, a Shadow-tainted noble can be a potent but reckless ally.

The Silence

This criminal syndicate controls most of the crime along the Rose River between Aldis and Garnet, and beyond. As such, the Silence is involved in smuggling, gambling, prostitution, extortion, and other rackets. Though the Silence generally seeks to avoid intrigues involving the Blue Rose Court, it has extensive ties to the Merchant Guild and to many nobles, and it is willing to join in a scheme as long as it gets a piece of the action.

The Republic of Klydon

Yarrion is a world similar to Aldis in both size and climate, with the vast majority of Yarrion's inhabitants living on one main continent. In the far distant past, "magic" (as they refer to arcana) was known and used widely. But with the rise of science, magic fell out of favor and the knowledge of the magical arts fell into disuse before dying out entirely some 500 years ago.

Yarrion's dominant power is the Imperial Republic of Klydon. During the Wars of Pacification, Yarrion's populace was divided into many small states, kingdoms, and principalities with an ever-shifting web of alliances. For nearly 200 years, war was nearly constant, but the rise of Klydon put an end to that.

Originally nothing more than a modestly-sized kingdom, Klydon made use of technological advancements and innovations in military strategy to expand its borders, gradually conquering its neighboring states and making them part of its growing dominion, until eventually it spanned a vast empire. The advent of the Klydon Empire brought peace and stability to a land long rent by war.

The Imperial Republic of Klydon: Present Day

One might expect a huge, domineering empire to be largely homogenous in its customs and peoples. However, part of the secret of Klydon's success is their policy of strict cultural tolerance. Even today, the governing principle of Klydon is that there is no one true way. As such, the Imperial Republic is a diverse patchwork of many different peoples, cultures, languages, and traditions. This is especially true in the capital, where representatives from every corner of the empire make their home.

Klydon is a republic, and the empire is governed by a Senate elected by the people of their home provinces. The empress (or emperor) presides over the Senate, and is elected from the ranks of the Senate by the Senators themselves, holding the post as long as they retain the confi-

From the Journal of Bejict Shurjal, Scholar of Ancient Civilizations

10 Yathra, 14th Year of the Reign of Empress Chorrus

It was supposed to have been the pinnacle of my career as a scholar of pre-Klydon civilizations. Kingdoms of the pre-Klydon era have long been thought to be uncivilized, if not downright backward. After all, not many records of that time survived the continent-wide wars that lasted for centuries. So the discovery of the portal out on the edge of the western provinces, along with the mysterious artifact that powered it... It represented a chance to rewrite much of what we know about that time in history.

...However, such thinking is useless. The damage is done and we will have to find a way to live with what has happened.

The initial discovery of the portal itself was exciting enough, but it wasn't until a week later that we unearthed the control orb. It was large—perhaps three and a half feet in diameter—and made of an unknown metal we have yet to identify; its surface covered in strange runes. I had never seen anything like it. The runes were unlike any language, current or ancient, that any of the scholars in our team were familiar with. Even more uncanny was the fact that the artifact hummed, *a noise that was more felt than heard. We were baffled. Did the artifact contain some unknown machine that was causing the humming? If so, how could it have remained operational after centuries of neglect? Because, of course, it had to be mechanical. Magic, real human-created magic, died out long, long ago. Or so we thought.*

It was after another two days of careful examination before I touched it with bare skin, laying my hand across one of the runes in an attempt to establish how they might have been used. The humming increased in pitch and intensity, and there was a bright flash of light as the portal ignited into life.

*Almost immediately, an amorphous shape came through—quicksilver and constantly changing. Before our very eyes it assumed human shape, then began to mimic each of us in turn with disturbing accuracy—when it took my face, I doubt my own mother could have told us apart. Then it spoke, and though the sounds it uttered made no sense, I could hear its words quite clearly in my mind. "*This world is ours. All worlds are ours,*" it said.*

And then...chaos. The thing howled, and more began to pour through the gate, and I ran for my life.

dence of their peers. Empress Chorrus, a canny woman of middle years, has reigned for fifteen years and has proved eminently capable in that role.

The Imperial Republic of Klydon is vast, but a sophisticated and well-maintained network of roads and railways make long-distance travel accessible to just about anyone. Personal vehicles are still exceedingly rare, however—curiosities for the wealthiest to fool around with. And while gas lighting is comparatively common, the potential applications of electricity are still being discovered.

As for Klydon society, it is largely urban and cosmopolitan. Those who live in the central provinces especially are prosperous and sheltered. Even those living on the outer edges of the empire benefit from imperial rule. Imperial border garrisons ensure peace and security, and aside from the occasional sortie against bandits, their citizens are free to live their lives without fear of war.

Of course, with the long period of peace and prosperity, Klydonites have grown complacent. The Imperial Republic maintains a large standing army, but recently it has become increasingly difficult for the average citizen to see the need for such a military force.

The Shifter Invasion and Panic

It has been a little more than a year since the discovery of the portal and the artifact that powers it, and the subsequent shifter invasion. The nearby imperial garrison was able to fight back the shifters long enough for a few brave scholars to deactivate the control orb and close the portal. But the casualties in that first battle were high—the shifters fought unlike any other enemy the imperial soldiers had ever encountered.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to know for certain how many shifters came through the portal and escaped entirely. Dozens? Hundreds? Given their facility for mimicking human form, this presents the very worrisome prospect of shifters infiltrating the upper echelons of power in Yarrion. It is a matter of quiet speculation among those in the military leadership that the shifters' obvious telepathic ability might be all they need to learn local languages and customs well enough to assimilate without being noticed. The diversity that Klydon prizes so highly can only assist them, as the inevitable differences would be put off as regional variations.

There is also justifiable concern about a repeat invasion. Neither the portal nor the control orb can be dismantled with any craft known to Klydon scholars, artisans, or engineers—though many attempts have been made. Unable to destroy it, the Imperial Republic has settled for relocating and strengthening their garrisons. The portal is kept under heavy guard at all times, in case of another attack.

Unfortunately, it would have been impossible to keep such an event secret, though the Klydon government did try. When news of the disaster at the portal leaked to the newssheets, the predictable public response was widespread panic. While some in the Senate agitated for the arrest of those responsible for the leak, Empress Chorrus has remained conspicuously silent on the matter.

Though the Klydon government has appealed to its neighbors for support in dealing with the shifter menace—arguing the shifters pose a threat to Yarrion as a whole, not just to the Imperial Republic—most of the countries adjoining Klydon have responded by closing their borders entirely and cutting off trade, not wanting to risk the infiltration of their own populations. The Klydon government is also working all out to prevent a mass panic among their own nation. As such, the Senate has implemented a set of "security measures" of dubious effectiveness for the purpose of calming a frightened populace, lest panicked citizens start accusing their neighbors of being shifters, for

that would surely lead to riots and witch hunts.

Cuckoos in the Nest

Until the shifter invasion, Empress Chorrus ruled with the full confidence of the Senate, and her reign looked as if it was going to be long and prosperous. Now, however, with trade connections severed, borders closed against them, and a nebulous and terrifyingly alien menace looming over their heads, the cracks of division are widening in the Senate, as different factions fight over the best course of action.

The pacifists are convinced that a settlement can be reached with the shifters if a channel of communication can be established, and see the military response as a failure of diplomacy. On the other side, there are those who feel the shifters must be eliminated at all costs, and anyone preaching negotiation is guilty of treason. The two factions are bitterly divided and there seems to be no means of resolving the dispute, which has crippled the Senate's ability to deal with both the shifter threat and the more day-to-day business of government.

Whispers have begun to circulate among certain groups of Senators that the widening split is a failure by Empress Chorrus to do her duty in presiding over the Senate—whispers the Empress has done her best to dispute. She and a handful of her closest advisors know the terrible truth about the source of these rumors: that at least two—and possibly more—Senators have been replaced by shifters. If she were to lose the confidence of the Senate and a new election were called, who is to say they wouldn't find themselves with a shifter as emperor, one who would deliver them all into the hands of their enemies?

Explorations Through the Portal

As the best minds in Klydon have been unable to determine a way to either destroy the portal or to reliably test whether a person is a shifter or human, Empress Chorrus reluctantly decided they should conduct their own explorations in an attempt to gain allies in other worlds who may have the necessary tools to deal with the shifter menace. After all, the shifters pose a threat to all worlds connected to the portal, not just Yarrion.

While those researching the portal have not been able to fully elucidate the control orb's workings, a sufficient understanding of its basic operation has been formed, allowing use of the portal to explore other worlds. It was the first of these expeditions that saw Klydon make its first contact with Queen Jaellin. The initial contact proved promising, and even now representatives of Aldis and Klydon are meeting to discuss possible trade arrangements.

To the Klydonite representatives, Aldis is a strange and fascinating place, full of wonders and dangers they never could have anticipated. The casual, everyday use of arcana is shocking to the sensibilities of the Klydonites. Even more shocking are the equal partnerships of nonhumans such as the rhydan. The revelation that psychic talents are common among Aldeans also came as an unpleasant surprise to the Klydonites, who are far more accustomed to viewing nonhumans as enemies than allies. There are fears that these rhydan, or the humans who communicate with them, might be shifters in disguise. However, for now they are reserving judgment, for the promise of shas crystals is too great to walk away from. If such crystals were to function on the other side of the portal, perhaps devices could be constructed that would allow for accurate detection of shifter impersonators.

The Aldeans, for their part, are intrigued by the Klydon applications of science and technology. But of more immediate interest is their mastery of the shadowgates. If such power could be harnessed reliably and safely, perhaps it might be possible to mitigate the threat posed by these dangerous relics.

Indeed, the two powers have much to gain from each other. But truly, beginnings are such fragile things...

The Orchard of Tears

Some don't notice the frayed scarf snagged on a border-tree bough. They ride past the stems of wilted honeysuckle, never glimpsing the betrothal ring stamped into the mud. Only some recognize the evening calls of whip-poor-wills where they've never sung before. But few can ignore the woods that weren't there before, the wide-spaced aspen disgorged by a thick morning mist. Some call a roaming forest a wonder. But those stung by loss know it's not a forest at all, but rather an orchard—ripe with a bounty of tears.

The Orchard of Tears is a wandering legend, one fit for inclusion in any *Blue Rose* game delving into yesterday's sorrows. Often, the history of a story proves just as important as the most current developments, but lengthy accounts of lore make the heroes mere observers to the action. The Orchard of Tears offers the Narrator a way to include the characters in a tragic historic event, whether to give them a deeper understanding of Aldea's history, to springboard into linked modern events, or to merely be a single fateful adventure. It provides a stage for a sort of ghost story—or, perhaps more accurately, stories about to become ghost stories. While the heroes won't be able to change events that have already transpired in the real world, they might be able to allay a measure of lingering despair and give those long gone a voice once more.

Entering the Orchard

The characters don't need to worry about finding the Orchard of Tears. It finds them.

None can say how the orchard came into being, what singular event—if indeed there was one—unmoored this stand of inter-rooted aspens from place and time. Regardless, the trees now drift along the eddies of existence, drawn to places of intense sadness or where tragedies once occurred. It rarely visits a place for long, usually appearing out of a morning fog and departing with the same. While this makes the orchard a legend across Aldea, it also makes it a destination sure to confound those who actively search for it. For Narrators, though, it provides a location that might appear anywhere—on a distant ridge, outside an inn's back door, or even within a larger forest.

When it appears, the Orchard of Tears takes the form of a forest of pale, near-identical aspen trees no more than roughly half a mile in diameter. Some stories tell of it being much larger, or as small as a street-side park. The trees grow to a roughly uniform height and no structures interrupt the contour of the highest branches. While the forest's sudden, supernatural appearance is likely unsettling, the façade it presents is not. Viewers often describe it as looking lonely or ghostly, but rarely threatening.

No trails lead into the orchard, the trees' loose spacing precluding that need. But that, combined with the thin fog that endlessly winds amid the trunks, makes it a simple matter to get lost among the identical spaces within. None who find themselves disoriented by the innocuous labyrinth stay lost for long, though. Portentous trail markers—a bloody handprint here, a torn scrap of dress there—eventually come to suggest a path that opens into a hidden grove that's anything but empty.

Within the Orchard

Another world and time lie within the Orchard of Tears. Those who enter the orchard eventually find the grove at its center. In defiance of natural law, the aspens hedge a space that might cover hundreds of miles, or perhaps merely an area the size of a manor's grounds. In any case, the land within is far from empty, populated with the people, creatures, and structures of a place that once existed, but is long gone.

The specifics of what the heroes find upon this island within the Orchard of Tears is up to the Narrator, but one element is always the same: it's a place on the cusp of tragedy. Although the characters might not be aware of it, the grove is a memory carried by the orchard and born through Aldea's history. It's an event that happened and changed lives forever. It might be a few passionate days of romance between the scions of enemy families, a mistake that tore a perfect relationship apart, or the event that led to a centuries-long grudge. In any case, this memory lies within the orchard—just one of many—and plays out over and over again.

The orchard is not haunted, per se. The inhabitants are not ghosts in the traditional sense, but memories that have left their mark upon the forest. Like some fragment of the mind of Aldea itself, the orchard fixates on select traumas, refusing to forget. Perhaps it moves about the world to share the tragedies it holds. Or perhaps it travels seeking to exorcise them. In either case, it's not beyond letting go.

Once the heroes enter the grove within the Orchard of Tears, they become caught up in some historic misfortune. Not distorted by stories or skewed histories, without interference the events play out exactly as they did long ago, the river of time retracing its course toward some calamitous cascade. The only difference is that now the characters are involved. Typically, they emerge from the orchard hours or days before the tragedy takes place, arriving at a point where they have enough time to learn where they are, what's happening, and personally witness events setting the stage for disaster.

All those the heroes encounter appear to be—for all intents and purposes—actual, living beings. Typically, they're people who lived in ages past, though most have been forgotten by history. Their normalcy is only called into question if the heroes attempt to make them acknowledge the Orchard of Tears. None of the grove's inhabitants can be convinced that anything strange is occurring around them, that the trees surrounding their land exist, that their home somehow exists outside time, or that the characters have information marking them as natives of another age.

If brought to the tree line, the grove's inhabitants won't perceive it—claiming to see only the familiar lands beyond and likely chiding the heroes for their strange behavior. If forced past the trees, they pass through as if they were spirits, fading out of existence as soon as they enter the woods. Typically, they emerge a few moments later, as though nothing strange had occurred. No proof, even the most undeniable, will take the grove's inhabitants' focus from the workings of their day-to-day lives.

While it might take some time for the characters to get their bearings, they should gradually come to understand they've entered the grove for a reason, usually to right some past wrong. They might learn this by watching the experience play out in a manner true to history, resulting in the tragedy. Alternatively, they might have an unignorable sense of what's happening and why they've come (see the **Mistaken Identities** sidebar). Whatever the case, the heroes should come to learn of, and aim to prevent, the misfortune playing out.

Events in the grove actively seek to transpire in a manner true to history. If a character's interference takes an event far off the rails, dramatically altering matters in a way the original participants never would have performed—such as outright murdering an antagonist or by convincing a major player to flee—the grove might leap back in time a step. This might be an hour, a day, or however long the Narrator feels appropriate, giving the heroes another chance to attempt an action or encouraging them to try something less outrageous.

If the characters' influences are more subtle, guiding rather than forcing those involved in the misfortune to new understandings, resolutions, or courses of action, catastrophe might be averted. The flow of time is difficult to change, though. Delaying a calamity is not the same as preventing it, and fate intervenes with new circumstances if the heroes attempt to prevent a misfortunate by manufacturing some technicality. For example, ambushing a messenger bearing portentous news for the queen won't prevent her from acting on that news; it will merely find her in some other manner.

Regardless of the importance of the memory unfolding within the Orchard of Tears, the Narrator should be wary of trapping the characters in a scenario they don't want to play. If the heroes consistently rebel or seek to disrupt the memory dramatically, the orchard's spirits eventually grow weary and withdraw—see **Leaving the Orchard**.

Leaving the Orchard

Every scenario within the Orchard of Tears hinges on one misfortune. The heroes' presence in that drama introduces the possibility that it might be prevented. If the characters, through learning about the history and players involved, manage to broker a happy—or, at least, less harrowing—solution, the trauma borne by the orchard fades. The actual history of the event remains unchanged, but the psychic scar left by it begins to heal.

If the heroes attempt to leave the grove before this tragedy is resolved, they find doing so next to impossible. If they reenter the woods, they quickly become lost and, over a matter of minutes or hours, find themselves back in the grove. Arcane attempts to escape fair little better, failing or having unexpected results that bring the characters back to the grove. It should swiftly become clear that the heroes are trapped within the orchard, and must meet some other condition for escape.

Once the events within the grove are resolved, the structures and people who inhabited it fade away, revealing an empty, acre-wide clearing within the woods. There is typically no evidence of the events that transpired, though it's possible the heroes might, through fate or happenstance, find some significant memento lying in the clearing. Additionally, the heroes' experiences in the Orchard might lead to new Relationships, or changes in existing Relationships. See **Adding Relationships** and **Changing and Replacing Relationships** in **Chapter 2**. The Narrator may even wish to give characters additional points of Relationship Intensity, above and beyond those they gain for their level, depending on the experience in the Orchard and its resolution.

When the characters decide to leave, they find the woods easy to navigate and free of mists, exiting easily. The Orchard of Tears typically fades away soon after—though who knows where or when it might appear next.

Example Tragedies

The Orchard of Tears bears a number of tragedies the heroes might become involved with. Here are just a few example misfortunes the Narrator might develop into an adventure waiting at the heart of the mysterious forest.

The Petrified Knight

A basilisk (a crocodile with a petrifying Arcane Gaze power, see **Chapter 12**) preys upon the northern frontier. Lord Laris sends Ser Rosaline to defeat the monster, despite knowing his son's affection for her. Rosaline defeats the basilisk, but is turned to stone in the process. Although the lord's healers could restore the knight, Ser Rosaline's squire, Debbis, lusts after Lord Laris' son, Paltric. Debbis hides Ser Rosaline's petrified body in plain sight amid the statuary of an old graveyard and returns with news of the knight's death. He takes it upon himself to console heartbroken Paltric. Soon after, though, commoners begin spreading tales of sobbing coming from the old graveyard—rumors Debbis tries to cover up. If the heroes don't intervene, following a regrettable evening with Debbis, Paltric leaves his father's lands, never to be seen again. If they intervene, the heroes can restore Ser Rosaline and reunite her with Paltric. By the end of the adventure, the heroes will learn the resting place of Paltric's body, the location of the still petrified Ser Rosaline, and might gain the knight's arcane, reptile-slaying sword.

Mistaken Identities

Rather than having the heroes enter a drama as outsiders, consider putting them center stage. A character might not be a handsome princess or delicate prince, but if all the memory's inhabitants insist they are, in a way, so they become. The hero doesn't need to look any different to themselves or the other characters, but all the occupants of the orchard call them by their new persona's name and treat them as that individual. A party of heroes might be a questing knight and their retinue returning home, or a noble and their closest friends, all with roles to play in the coming tragedy—and, perhaps, the potential to prevent it.

If a character needs guidance on how their new persona might behave, this is one of the few times the Narrator might want to nudge a hero in this direction or that, perhaps noting how a character feels or what they have a compulsion to do. The hero is still in control, but the memory of the individual they've taken the role of makes suggestions through emotions and instances of déjà vu. In the Orchard of Tears, events are familiar, scripted performances and it's up to the characters to decide what they want to go along with and what they defy in the hopes of staving off tragedy.

The Noble Aropos

Rezean legend speaks of the swift stallion Aropos, blessed by Jessa and raised by his friend and trainer Tarrin, who was forced by his mother to give up Aropos in trade to a rival clan in an effort to secure peace between them. The accord lasted until a terrible drought on the plains drove the clans into greater competition for resources, when a squabble turned into a skirmish that led to war. Tarrin was forced to face his beloved Aropos on the field of battle, and the noble stallion refused to trample his old friend when he was unhorsed, throwing his own rider instead. Their reunion was brief and bitter, however, as Aropos was gravely wounded and died soon after. Blinded by grief, Tarrin swore a blood-oath of vengeance against the rival clan that has lasted to this day. The characters might intervene by convincing Tarrin not to trade Aropos, or by seeking to head off the conflict between the clans before it erupts into open warfare. Alternatively, they could attempt to save Aropos' life on the battlefield (perhaps at the cost of Tarrin's own). Aropos might even awaken during the characters' intervention, becoming a rhy-horse, and their actions may echo in changes in the relations between the Rezeans clans.

The Gallery of Voices

The heroes arrive at the Gallery of Voices, a vast library that burned down eons ago, its loss a tragic blow to the scholars of the age. A sisterhood of librarian-nuns protect the collection, but Aizzia Coal, a laevvel woman esteemed as the Gallery's most brilliant poet, is about to announce her departure to teach the daughters of a monarch in a distant land. Two of Aizzia's current students, Jevel and Andiro, react poorly to this announcement. They ultimately have no intention of letting Aizzia leave, one acting out of distraught, youthful love, the other out of possessiveness mistaken for love. Without intervention, a series of rebuffed professions of love and escalating arguments leads to one of the two students committing a tribute suicide, lighting herself on fire and leaping from a reading room balcony—a reference to a fiery angel from one of Aizzia's poems. The resulting conflagration destroys the entire gallery. The heroes can prevent this by consoling the students and helping them come to terms with Aizzia's departure—though nothing will prevent Aizzia from leaving. If the characters succeed, they find (during or after the adventure) a book from the gallery that provides insight on a long-running quest.

The Red Land

Our story begins in the early days of the Shadow Wars, when a Sorcerer King discovered a secretive college of adepts dedicated to finding new uses for enchanted shas crystals. Desirous of their work, he dispatched an army of minions to fetch it for him. The adepts fought desperately to preserve their secrets from the enemy, but his darkfiends outnumbered and overpowered them. With no chance of escaping through conventional means, they hastily gathered their research and equipment and fled through a damaged and malfunctioning shadowgate.

They emerged in an unknown and hostile land. Assailed by bitter cold and thin, nearly unbreathable air, they would have died within minutes without arcana and crystals to provide light, air, and heat. With death held at bay by the narrowest of margins, the adepts worked together to shape four domes of crystal from the rust-red sand lying all around. Over the next few days they worked feverishly to build arcane artifacts to refresh the domes' air and to purify water so their limited supply could be reused. They even coaxed life from a pouch of seeds so they had something to eat when the food they brought with them ran out.

They survived, but not easily. Strict discipline and absolute submission to the needs of the community were required. Those who went mad due to the isolation and strangeness of the new land were put out of their misery and their substance returned to the cycle to benefit their fellow adepts.

Now, hundreds of years later, the Red Land is ruled by Gaelana, the most recent in a long line of Matriarchs. She watches her fellow citizens closely and deftly manages the affairs of the community to ensure its continued survival. Nothing is wasted, and any citizen who consistently fails to make a contribution to the community is expected to consign themselves to the nutrient vats to release the

community from the burden they impose. If they don't—or can't—go willingly, they are helped to do the right thing by the Elites, the Matriarch's chosen few.

When a new Matriarch is chosen, she permanently dons a crystal artifact that stretches from temple to temple just beneath her hairline so its primary gem rests on her forehead. This is her crown, and acts both as a symbol of her power and the burden she must carry. The crown contains a matrix of knowledge and intelligence distilled from prior Matriarchs, but which is unburdened by the qualities of sympathy, empathy, or mercy. To the crown, survival is a matter of mathematics, and it uses a complex formula called simply "the Equation" to help the Matriarch make decisions and assign risk and reward among her citizens. Only she and her successor-in-training know the variables and constants used by the Equation, but men are clearly calculated to be less vital to the community. This is accepted by most citizens as a matter of simple logic.

The Matriarchs have always done their utmost to prepare for every eventuality, and the first Matriarch collected and stored a seed of life from each citizen in the original group. Each generation has added to this library, ensuring the community can survive as long as at least one woman does.

The Matriarchs have engineered the community's population over the years so there are twice as many women as men. Their library of seeds is now quite extensive, but each must be planted in a fertile woman's womb to be brought to term. Every woman is expected to bear at least two children in her lifetime if necessary—to maintain the population level—and the Matriarch keeps careful pedigrees to prevent inbreeding.

The community has preserved well its knowledge of the arcane arts and crystal technology. However, each year more of their raw materials are used up in repairs and maintenance. With no source of replacement shas crystals, the machinery that maintains life in the community is on borrowed time. One of the four domes has already been decommissioned, its equipment cannibalized to maintain the others.

The community's domes are just a few minutes walk away from the shadowgate that brought the adepts to the Red Land, but the rest of the place is unexplored. Because of the harsh environment and the danger of lurking darkfiends, it is forbidden for anyone to go outside without the Matriarch's consent. Leaving the safety of the community requires crystal technology to provide air and heat, so this is an easy law to enforce.

Matriarch Gaelana forbids any efforts to find a way back to Aldea, as she is convinced the shadowgate would open on a ruined world ruled by the Sorcerer Kings and their darkfiend minions. Instead, she pushes her citizens to research new survival techniques to enable the community to continue even after the last of their crystal technology fails. This is a race against time which she is determined to win.

The needs of survival dominate daily life in the Red Land. Plants must be tended and nurtured; the domes, and the artifacts that make them inhabitable, must be maintained

Story Hooks

Strangers who emerge from the shadowgate must first survive the thin air and brutally low temperatures. Heavy clothes are sufficient to make the cold livable for a day or so, but without air arcana or crystal artifacts, the Red Land's atmosphere barely sustains life. Breathing is difficult and the poisons in the air cause people to cough and weaken. Strenuous effort—like fighting any prowling darkfiends—is impossible, and after twenty minutes of exposure even the hardiest of individuals succumb to the airborne toxins and fall unconscious. Fortunately, the community's domes are less than a five-minute walk from the shadowgate.

Anyone who makes it to the community is treated with the utmost suspicion by the Elites. Are these truly the first visitors from Aldis in centuries? Are they more cunning darkfiends than usual, or something even worse? Can they talk their way into the central dome, or do they have to shelter in the shattered eastern dome and make it survivable until they can make the community see reason or reopen the shadowgate?

Mara's desire to transition sets him at odds with the Equation and the Matriarch. He and his closest allies in the Elites are sympathetic to strangers who arrive with tales of a restored Aldea, but can they overcome the Matriarch and her loyalists to change the course of the community forever?

To Aldean sensibilities, the utilitarian ethics of the Red Land community are truly monstrous. Can visitors from Aldea restrain their shock and revulsion? Do they impose their morals on the community or force its citizens to return with them to Aldea to put an end to their cruel practices?

Does the arrival of outsiders force the Matriarch to escalate her plan to use the darkfiends to her own ends? Or can they can make her see reason despite her corruption and the cold, insidious logic of the Equation?

The Red Land's machinery is degrading faster than the Matriarch allows her citizens to believe, and failure is imminent. What happens if the truth is revealed?

and repaired after storms or darkfiend attacks; and the next generation must be tended to and educated. Children are raised communally, and are taught the wide variety of skills needed by the community from a very early age.

Despite the harsh requirements of life in the community, every citizen is given some time each day to indulge in romance, art, and entertainment. The Matriarchs have long understood that filling life only with work results in severe morale issues, and leisure time is an important reward variable in the Equation. Romance can be problematic, however, and each Matriarch has enforced different rules on the subject. Gaelana tolerates sentimental attachments as long as they don't interfere with her citizens' duties or result in unsanctioned reproduction.

The community doesn't have access to herbal birth control methods, but does have crystal artifacts to measure how fertile a woman is; avoiding pregnancy is thus a matter of informed timing. If a sentimental attachment results in pregnancy, the offenders are separated and forbidden from being alone together in the future. The embryo is only permitted to survive if its bloodline is sufficiently mixed, a decision ultimately made by the Equation.

Sentimental attachments between members of the same sex are tolerated—even encouraged—as long as they do not interfere with a woman's obligation to bear children.

The Red Land is a meritocracy, though for practical reasons the two most important positions can be filled only by women. Each Matriarch is guided by the Equation to find her eventual replacement within the first decade of her rule. The Matriarch Successor—usually referred to as just the Successor—is second only to the Matriarch in the community's hierarchy, and spends all her time at the Matriarch's side to learn the necessary skills and knowledge to replace her when the time comes.

Beneath the Successor are the Elites. These few citizens are handpicked by the Matriarch for their reliability, intelligence, arcane power, or other valued factors. They vary in number depending on the pool of suitable citizens in the community, and there are eleven at the present time—seven of them women.

Beneath the Elites are the rest of the citizens, who vary in value to the community according to their skills and past actions. Fertile women are automatically ranked higher than most others due to their essential role in propagating the community, but the Equation sometimes provides unintuitive results where the ranks of other citizens are concerned. Some malcontents suspect the Matriarch uses the Equation as a smokescreen to conceal her selection of arbitrary favorites, but most dismiss this idea as harmful paranoia.

Sadly, sooner or later every citizen reduces in value to the community until they become a liability. Then it is time for them to go to the vats and make room for a member of the next generation. Some become too old and infirm to continue their duties; others suffer accidents that would lead to permanent disability even if treated. The unluckiest of all are born with deleterious conditions despite the community's careful breeding program and are recycled immediately after birth.

The Domes

The community nestles against the side of a high plateau which provides shelter from the winds. It consists of four domes arranged in a T-shape and connected by short tunnels which can be sealed at each end. The largest dome is in the center of the crossbar, and serves

as the community's primary living quarters. To the west of the central dome is the enclave's combined hospital and workshop, while the dome to the south is for food production and environmental control. Citizens are brought to the southern dome when it is time for them to be consigned to the recycling vats. The eastern dome was once dedicated to arcane research, but after it was damaged in a rockslide some years ago it was stripped of its materials and permanently sealed.

The shadowgate that brought the colonists to the Red Land is a few minutes' walk to the northwest of the community, hidden from view by the northern plateau. Out of sight but not out of mind, the gate weighs heavily on the colonists' thoughts. To some, it offers fragile hope for an eventual return to Aldea, but to most it is a source of constant dread. The gate works on its own whims and regularly disgorges groups of darkfiends into the Red Land. Some disappear into the wilderness, but others attack the community, forcing citizens to leave the safety of their domes to fight them.

Matriarch Gaelana

Gaelana was chosen as the Successor later in life than most, and has been the Matriarch for fifteen of her sixty-seven years. A traditionalist who doesn't believe in extenuating circumstances, Gaelana rules the community by the dictates of the Equation without any flexibility of interpretation. An accomplished adept, Gaelana is skilled at stretching the community's resources as far as they will go. The next generation has none who can equal her, and in her darker moments she wonders what will become of her people when she is gone.

Guided by the crown and its dispassionate Equation, Gaelana has become corrupt over the years and now enjoys the power she wields over the community. At first she ruled because it was her proud duty, but later the exercise of authority became its own reward. She is conservative in her efforts to preserve the community, and is unwilling to risk resources on unproven techniques. While this helps to eke out available resources, it also stifles innovation.

However, a few years ago, the Equation offered Gaelana another solution. Since then she has made numerous secret journeys outside the domes to treat with darkfiends, who have greeted her as an honored guest. It is only logical, she rationalizes, to use the tools of the Sorcerer Kings against them. She is on the brink of raising an army of darkfiends and their spawn to take back through the gate—when the time is right—and conquer Aldis in her own name.

Matriarch Successor Mara

Mara has been the Successor for five years, and has performed admirably as the right hand of the Matriarch. What nobody but Mara and his female lover know, however, is that Mara is actually a laevvel man who wishes to physically alter his body from female to male. The community possesses the lore to enable this, but to do so is forbidden because it would make Mara infertile. Mara could live openly only as long as he maintained his ability to bear children, but he would have to give up his role as Successor. Instead, he has chosen to sacrifice the ability to live authentically so he can become the Matriarch and change the community's rules to the benefit of others who cannot be themselves because of the colony's laws.

While Gaelana is determined to prolong the community's life by repairing and maintaining its existing technology, Mara and his closest allies among the Elites doubt this is a viable long-term strategy. They have recently begun to consider alternative options, including the possibility of finding a way home to Aldea.

Mara is a skilled healer who is well-liked by both the Elites and the citizens of the community in general.

The Quiet Knights

The realm faces many challenges; some from within, some from without, and some from beasts which attack those who do not know how to protect themselves. The everyday Knights of the Realm are there to defend all who cherish their safety.

There is, however, a band of knights who are sworn to the Crown for a special purpose. They are the Quiet Knights; those who are deaf or blind, either through birth or circumstance. They are the ones who choose to fight even when they are perceived as perhaps less capable than others. The truth is, the Quiet Knights have a specific role to fulfill—to fight the beasts and enemies of the realm who cannot hurt them because of their disabilities.

The Quiet Knights fight harpies and shadow mastiffs wearing the armor of deafness. They take on shadowspawn possessed of an Arcane Gaze by dispatching blind fighters to deal with them. They send in members of their order to defend the realm not in spite of their disabilities but by using them to their best advantage.

The heroes of this adventure must join forces to take down the enemies of the Crown, either because they are underestimated or perfectly matched against their foes.

Playing Knights with Disabilities

Playing characters with disabilities is a chance to do something new with your roleplaying. It does, however, require you to figure out how to roleplay those disabilities with respect. The Quiet Knights are either blind, deaf, or both. Knights with other disabilities are able to serve with other units within the military, but the Quiet Knights have a very specific job to do.

Your knights' disabilities will come from your choices in how you play them, rather than as deductions of points from your rolls.

Playing Blind Knights

When you play a blind knight, the first thing you need to determine is how blind your character is. Are they blind in one eye? Do they only see in shadow? Do they see nothing at all? Blindness is not a static condition, so your choices are many—just remember not to fall into the trap of "He can't see anything except the souls of his enemies!" because that wouldn't be within the spirit of the Quiet Knights. Your knight may be well trained in the quarterstaff, which can also be used as a cane and mobility aid. Or perhaps they have a service beast, like a wolf. (Domesticated and trained, of course.)

Deciding how long the blindness has affected you is also important. Were you born this way? If so, you're likely quite comfortable with a sword in your hand and no sight. Did you lose your vision during your service in the regular militia? Were you ill? Remember, those in the Quiet Knights are permanently disabled—they are not the victims of temporary arcane disabilities.

When preparing to play your character, close your eyes and listen to the world around you. Feel your way around a familiar room and consider texture and scent as you think and move about your environment. Remember these sensations when it comes to game time, and use them to guide your in-character reactions.

Playing Deaf Knights

Deafness, like blindness, is a non-static condition. Characters can have partial deafness or hearing loss anywhere in the range of partial to profound.

Deaf knights are most likely going to have some kind of sign language worked out with their fellow sword-bearers, and be trained to react on the battlefield to people they cannot hear. A deaf knight might not be as stealthy as a regular knight, for example, because they have no way to modulate the sound they generate if they are fully deaf.

As with the blind knights, choosing why they are disabled is an important step in your character creation. You should consider when the deafness occurred and why—but again, bear in mind it is a permanent condition and not one borne of a passing arcane intervention.

A way to learn about how you might play your character is to put on headphones and play loud music while you watch television. It will tell you a lot about what you can't hear when people around you are speaking or interacting with the world. Consider sharpness of sight and the ability to smell or touch things as an alternative to sound when interacting with your environment.

Introduction

Once your band of Quiet Knights has been created, they are at the Sovereign's beck and call and can be sent wherever they are required. Frequently they will be summoned to a local noble's castle to be filled in on recent events. While there, they are likely to be instructed to seek out and destroy the encroaching threat of the monsters in your story.

The Quiet Knights are often the best hope for the realm to be safe from this particular threat and the only ones left to go after these creatures, because all the able-bodied knights have already tried—and failed. One flunky from the court, unaware of the Quiet Knights' reputation, may feel the need to make snide remarks to the heroes, telling them that if able-bodied knights can't fight this foe, then disabled knights certainly won't be able to win. If you've chosen a non-bestial foe, this should be doubly emphasized because the Quiet Knights are meant to be underestimated for their plan to work.

Enemies

You'll need to create a set of convincing adversaries (or just one if this is a one-shot adventure). It is important to make sure they feel like a genuine and necessary objective, not just an errand the disabled knights get sent on out of charity. Whether it's espionage against an enemy force lulled into a false sense of security because they don't believe the knights are capable of doing any real harm thanks to their disabilities, or a challenging beast with unusual powers who needs slaying for the safety of the realm, the actions taken by the Quiet Knights must be essential.

When your intrepid knights go on their search, it's important they should encounter lesser issues along the way. Whether it's bandits who see an easy mark, or a pack of wolf skeletons, it's always advisable to have a few encounters which are not specifically tailored to the knights' disabilities in order to give them the capability to interact outside of their assigned conditions.

Narrating For Disabled Knights

When you're narrating a Quiet Knights adventure, you need to consider different ways to describe your environments. A blind knight won't be able to see their foe, so instead of describing where the legs of a giant spider are landing, you might describe the way the hero feels the subtle hairy brush of a spider's leg against their back or face.

Scent and touch are your best friends when describing the environment to your players. The way people smell matters as well. Odors can tell you the difference between a healthy naga and a diseased one who reeks of sickness and pus. The latter is probably just afraid because it is in pain, whereas the former might have a much more sinister reason for attacking.

Giving your players obstacles based on their disabilities is also a valid part of play. A blind knight with no sight will have to be very clever to climb a mountain, while a deaf knight might struggle with diplomacy in the midst of hunting a dangerous foe. There are always ways around these issues, and it's up to the Narrator to encourage team work between the players to come up with creative solutions to these problems.

The Wedding Planners

This series follows a group of heroes who travel the land providing their services to perform and celebrate weddings. They do not just arrange music and entertainment, but also priests to officiate, adepts to create wondrous effects and warriors to provide security, if required. When they arrive in a village or town they seek out couples (or groups) looking to marry or reaffirm their vows, and offer their services to the families. But this troupe does more than just plan parties. They have become highly proficient at creating work when love alone is not enough. A little enlightened skullduggery might be called for if two lovebirds don't quite realize they are meant for each other.

Creating Characters

This series has some rather specific requirements for the player character group. Obviously the most important trait is that they can serve the troupe in some manner when performing and celebrating weddings. Certain abilities and skills are also essential for the group to function. For instance, the troupe may require someone who can officiate a wedding at the very least. However, like many circuses and carnival groups, even the least skilled and useful people can be found something to do until they learn the ropes. So first we'll take a look at what each class can bring to the troupe, and then investigate backgrounds that should prove useful, or even essential.

Adepts

Those skilled in arcana can be useful in innumerable ways to make the wedding that much more glamorous. Illusion spells can be used to create impressive backdrops for both the ceremony and the celebrations. But a more skilled adept might create subtler illusions that simply add a sheen of sparkle and freshness to the area. Later on, they might entertain the crowd with a display of fireworks in bright colors, or create small flames to light the area romantically as the celebrations draw to a close.

Experts

In general, expert abilities are not as useful as those gained from other backgrounds. However, their broad range of potential abilities does make them valuable members of the troupe. What makes experts really useful is when the troupe is trying to bring two people together. In such cases they will need some rather specialized skills to plant love tokens or investigate the paramours without their knowledge.

Warriors

There is always a need for fighters. Often they can be valuable security staff as weddings and parties with free flowing alcohol can sometimes bring out the worst—as

well as the best—in people. The strength of warriors also makes them very useful when it comes to heavy lifting and construction jobs. When supplies need to be moved or scenery built, the warriors are quickly called to be of service.

Focuses

Each character's focuses are even more important than their class, as they may be rather useful for activities and ability tests on behalf of the troupe. Fortunately, where the troupe may be lacking in certain focuses, they can always look to acquire additional staff when they arrive in a new area. Some particularly useful focuses from **Chapter 3** include:

- **Communication:** Bargaining for negotiating all the necessary resources and arrangements. Etiquette for handling delicate situations and proper decorum. Performance for actual rituals and celebrations, and Romance for understanding all the ins-and-outs of a truly romantic event.
- **Constitution:** Drinking and Stamina may come in quite handy for some wedding planners who also aim to be hale and hearty the morning after they've finished an event!
- **Dexterity:** Artisan for set and scene design, Calligraphy for beautiful documentation, and Crafting for much of the practical work of setting things up.
- **Intelligence:** Things like Cultural Lore and Heraldry may be important for planning, while Musical and Religious Lore and Writing are useful for the rituals and celebrations themselves.
- **Perception:** Empathy is a key focus for a wedding planner's work, but attention to detail in general always comes in handy.
- **Willpower:** Although a wedding planner might jest about the value of Morale, Faith and Self-Discipline are also useful qualities for them to have in their work.

The Bargain of Love

For the heroes, being part of the troupe is more than just a job. Each of them has caught the attention of the spirits of love. As they find matches for others, there is in turn a focus on their own love lives. So it is important that each player decides on the romantic history of their character and what has brought them to the troupe. Many of the gods have an aspect of love, and in that aspect each character has attracted their attention. They might even have been visited in dreams by a spirit they do not entirely understand. However, some of the characters might suffer the pain of a love lost or unrequited. Love is often as upsetting as it is joyful.

The romantic experience of a hero is a valuable insight into a side of themselves they rarely show. Romance and love make you vulnerable, something many see as a weakness. But those in love find strength and support from their feelings, and it can drive them to victory when all hope is lost. Here are a few suggestions for romantic backgrounds you might pick for a character; any of them apply, no matter what the gender or sexuality of the character might be.

- An apparently tough character is actually a real softy when it comes to romance. They long to be complimented and courted with flowers despite their brutish exterior.
- The character has been hurt in love, and badly. They had a deep relationship some time ago that ended terribly and broke their heart. While on one hand they crave something to fill the hole in their heart, they are terrified that if they let someone in again, they will be broken once more. Better to be alone than risk such pain.

- A flighty character that seems to love easily and quickly. They jump into relationships as effortlessly as they change clothes. But they find it hard to commit, and never risk getting too deeply involved emotionally in their relationships.
- A character who has given up on ever finding love. The people they fall for are never interested in them and they have simply stopped asking. They have concluded, after many rejections, that love simply isn't for them, and so when they come across it they may well not even notice. This might make them bitter and angry, but can also make them eager to see other people in love as they can at least be a part of their happiness.
- Two (or more) characters might already be married. Their marriage might have become stale over the years but they continue to maintain the illusion everything is fine. Another set of partners might argue and rage incessantly but be just as passionate in their love for each other.

Running the Series

As you might imagine, this series easily breaks down into an adventure of the week. The troupe arrives in a settlement and seeks out potential customers. To do this, they will have to ask around in the village, and also get the local gossip on who might be interested in who. This might not just be single people or couples but sometimes married people looking to reaffirm their vows. Once the troupe knows who might want to use their services, it is up to the characters to plan a spectacular ceremony, depending on what the participants are after.

While that sounds simple on the surface, the real adventure lies in finding the matches no one is really aware of. Many people need a helping hand in love. Some might be too timid to risk rejection; others might not understand how in love they are until someone points it out. Some might also wrestle with feelings of sexuality they don't quite understand. To find these people requires a lot more detective work. It involves more than just finding out local gossip, but also seeing how people interact and looking into all the villagers' secrets.

Luckily, the gods are on their side. There is a force leading the heroes, one that is trying to help them with their own romantic issues by understanding the problems others have. There will be clues for them to follow, omens in their dreams, and even hints and riddles from strangers. As time goes on, the characters might become more aware of this mysterious ally. Some of them may even be cynical enough to question its motives. As the adventures continue, an arc plot develops as they begin to wonder what force is behind these cryptic messages.

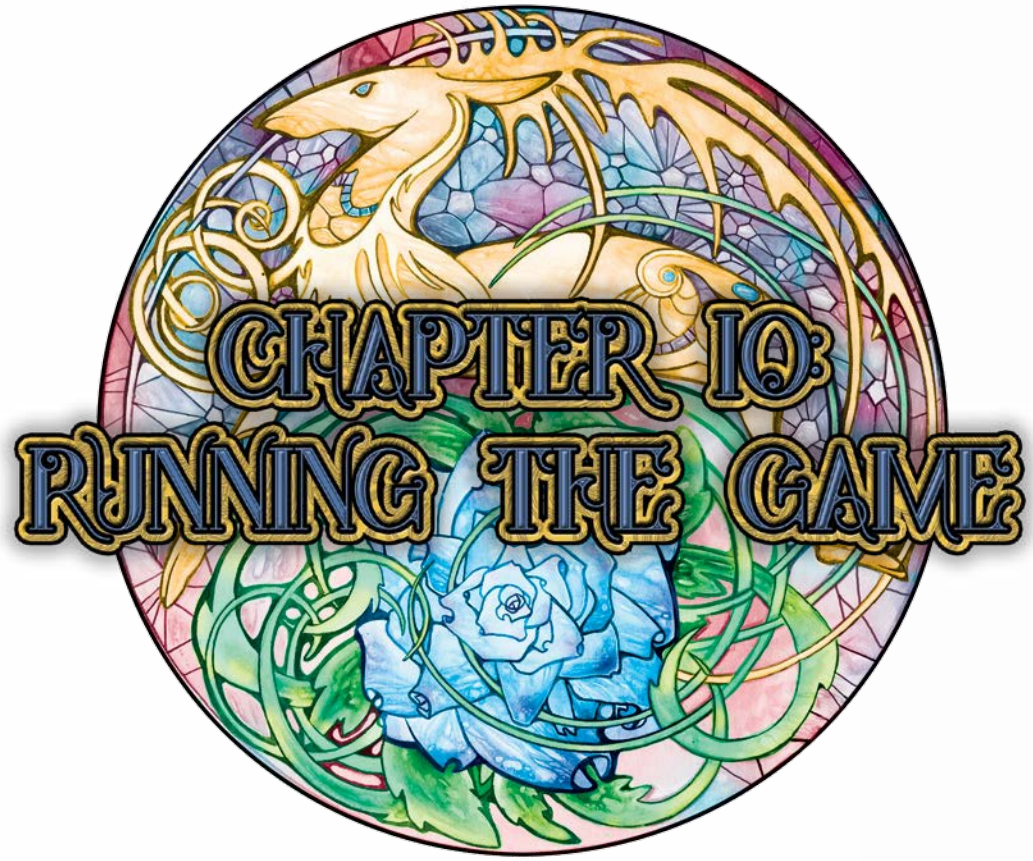
Once the potential lovers are found, the goal is to surmount whatever barrier keeps them apart. This is when the fun really begins, as it will be up to the heroes to create scenarios to bring the lovebirds together. This needs to be more than talking them into a blind date at the nearby inn. In some cases it may even be difficult to get them in the same room together (see Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* for a good example).

If one of the lovers is being undervalued or ignored, it is up to the heroes to show off their talents. If one of them is too timid, the characters might push them into becoming the hero. If a couple hasn't realized their feelings for each other, perhaps they can be put in a stressful situation to show them how much they need each other. However, this is not always going to involve a simple "Happily Ever After." Relationships are complicated and difficult and take a lot of work. Quite often, the heroes might be called upon to help a married couple who have lost the spark that keeps them together.

The important thing here is that the adventures are not about convincing people who don't really care about each other to make lifetime commitments. Conning people into love or convincing people someone else shares their feelings when they don't is pretty despicable, especially for a fast buck. It is also important to ensure neither party is likely to be horribly traumatized by the experience. The characters might engineer a kidnapping so the paramour is spurred to rescue their love. But the "victim" should be in on the plan before they are abducted and the "hero" shouldn't have to kill anyone to save them! If one of the characters becomes a rival suitor to inspire a little jealousy, they shouldn't lead anyone on or play unfairly with anyone's feelings. What the heroes get up to should be carried out with thought and discretion.

What leads the characters is not simply one god but a gestalt of all of them. This spirit, like love, can be both beautiful and capricious. Love as a force is powerful enough to transcend any single aspect of a deity, and has been trying to attain its own level of godhood. It carries the wonder of love from Hiathas, the healing power of love from Felisar, the power of love to build and create from Goia, etc. But it also carries the darker aspects of love, and the exarchs of jealousy, lust, betrayal, and many others are just as much a part of it.

This new essence of love is looking to discover what it might be and wants the heroes to show it the true meaning of its own existence. How they behave during their adventures demonstrates what love means to them and ultimately define the shape the spirit chooses as it enters the world. If the characters can overcome their own romantic troubles and create loving relationships around them, the new being will become a beacon of hope in the world and a force for good. But if they cannot find love, in themselves or others, and fall to their own hurt and jealousy, they will bring forth a being of such horror it will plague love and Aldis forever...



With a general overview of the Narrator's role covered in **Chapter 8**, it's time to look at some practical advice about using the game rules. This chapter builds on the material in **Chapter 1**, expanding it while delving more into the sorts of decisions you must make as Narrator when running a game of *Blue Rose*.

Mastering Ability Tests

Ability tests are the heart of the *AGE System*. Most dice rolls during play are ability tests, so one of your main tasks as Narrator is to adjudicate them fairly while keeping the story moving along. Rather than provide you with huge lists of approved actions and modifiers for every occasion, *Blue Rose* gives you a simple system you can use as a tool when running the game. This means you'll be making judgments frequently, but the system is flexible enough to handle most situations that come up.

You'll find a general overview of ability tests in **Chapter 1**, but to review: an ability test uses three six-sided dice (3d6). Two of the dice should be one color and the third a different color. The off-color die is known as the Drama Die. The three dice are rolled and added together, plus the score for the ability that's being tested; a further +2 is added if the character also has an appropriate focus for that test (if applicable). The final number is the test result.

Test result = 3d6 + ability + focus

The test result is compared to a target number (abbreviated TN) in the case of a basic test or the test result of another character in an opposed test. A character wins a basic test by equaling or exceeding the target number with the test result, and an opposed test by exceeding the opponent's test result. The results of the Drama Die can be used to determine the degree of success and to break ties in the case of an opposed test.

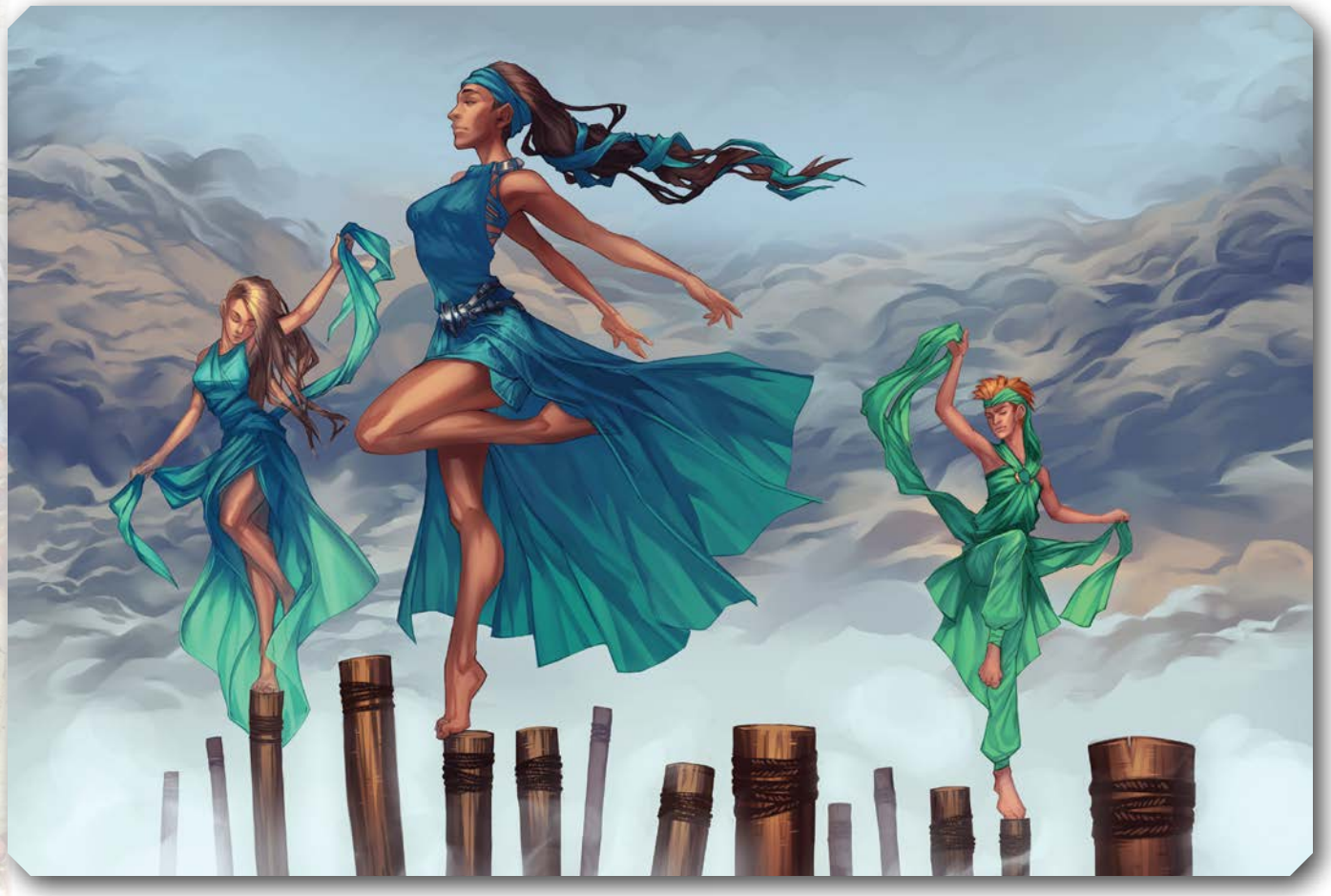
When adjudicating any ability test in *Blue Rose*, there are four key considerations:

- Which abilities and focuses apply?
- How much time does the test take?
- What are the stakes?
- What are the consequences of failure?

Let's take a look at these questions one by one.

Which Abilities and Focuses Apply?

When a character attempts something that has some chance of failure, you should call for an ability test. Everyday or extremely easy tasks (reading from a book, if literate, or walking down the street) do not require dice rolling. In cases where the outcome of the attempt is uncertain, the player should describe the attempted action. You then



have to decide what ability is relevant and what focus applies. If a character is trying to force a door open, for example, you'd call for a Strength (Might) test. There are only nine abilities, so picking the right one should be intuitive. Remember that abilities are quite broadly defined.

Picking a focus may require more thought. Sometimes it's obvious. If a character is trying to sneak through an alley, that's a Dexterity (Stealth) test. At other times, the right focus is not as clear, and indeed it may be that no focus applies. In that case, it's just a straight ability test. You should try to be open to player suggestions, however. If a player can give a credible explanation for why a particular ability or focus should apply to the test, you should allow its use.

The other important thing to remember is that sometimes characters use different abilities and focuses when making opposed tests. For example, a merchant may try to convince an envoy to spend more money than he should on a new shield. The merchant would make a Communication (Bargaining) test to be persuasive while the envoy makes a Willpower (Self-Discipline) test to remain sensible and not overspend.

Usually any character can attempt any sort of ability test. However, some tests require specialized knowledge or skills. When that's the case, you can make a specific focus a requirement to even attempt the test. You might call for an Intelligence (Arcana Arcane Lore required) test, for example. A character trying the test without the required focus automatically fails.

How Much Time Does the Test Take?

An ability test can represent mere seconds, hours, or even days depending on what the character is trying to achieve. During narrative time, the increments tend to be larger. If the characters try asking around town after a villain they are hunting, for example, you might decide that a test represents an hour of walking around and talking to different people. In action time, however, tracking time is more important. Remember, each round of action time is 15 seconds and within that time a character can take a major action and a minor action, or two minor actions. When deciding on how long a test takes during action time, you should express it in terms of these action types. A long action might take a major action and a minor action, or two of each for something stretching across two rounds.

Lastly, there are reactions. Many arcana, for examples, require their targets to make a test to resist certain effects. Such tests are considered to take no time, as they take place when it's not even the testing character's turn.

What Are the Stakes?

If the character succeeds or fails, what happens exactly? These are the stakes. Usually, the result is obvious. A character trying to jump over a chasm will either make it across or not, for example. You'll find it easiest to make many

tests binary: either a character succeeds or fails. Sometimes, however, more nuance is required and that's where the Drama Die comes in. You can use the result of the Drama Die to determine a character's degree of success. A 1 means the action was barely pulled off, while a 6 means the results were spectacular. Going back to the chasm example, you could use the Drama Die to determine how the character landed. A 1 could mean hanging from the opposite edge with the possibility of falling, while a 2-3 could mean a crash landing that leaves the character prone. A 4-5 could mean the character landed on their feet, and a 6 could mean the character jumped so skillfully they fly over the chasm and land on their feet two yards beyond the edge.

What Are the Consequences of Failure?

Bad rolls happen, and often at the most inopportune time. So when a character fails an ability test, what happens? Sometimes there are no consequences besides the obvious. A character trying to find information on an ancient king makes an Intelligence (Historical Lore) test and fails. There are no consequences other than not finding the information. A character who fails to jump across a chasm, however, will fall and take some damage. You must decide how much and whether the character can do anything to mitigate the situation. You might allow, for example, a Dexterity (Acrobatics) test to land on a nearby ledge instead of falling into the river or onto the jagged rocks far below.

You may also have to decide if characters can try failed actions again. You can say yes, yes with conditions, or no to this depending on the circumstances. If a character has time to spend and the action seems reasonable, another attempt can be made. You may say yes, but require a new approach or assistance. Or you can rule that the task is too daunting and the character cannot try again. As always, you should try to be fair, but you don't want the game to bog down into an endless series of rerolls.

Basic Tests

Basic tests are the easiest to resolve because a character is testing against a fixed target number. Unless a character is actively opposed by another character or monster, you should use basic tests. What's nice about them from the Narrator's point of view is they require only one judgment and that's an overall assessment of the action's difficulty. The Basic Tests table provides benchmarks for basic test difficulty and you'll probably consult it more than any other table in the game.

When setting the target number, you should try to take all the various circumstances into consideration. In an Intelligence (Research) test, is the library well-stocked? In a Dexterity (Stealth) test, are the floorboards squeaky? In a Strength (Climbing) test, does the wall have abundant handholds? In short, how difficult is the task at hand?

Basic Test Difficulty

Target Number	Test Difficulty
7	Routine
9	Easy
11	Average
13	Challenging
15	Hard
17	Formidable
19	Imposing
21	Nigh Impossible

You don't need to agonize over it. Make a quick assessment and then let the dice fall where they may. You can tell players what target number they are shooting for—either the actual number or a description of difficulty like "Average" or "Formidable"—or keep that information to yourself. A plus of keeping it secret is that it reduces arguments with the players. They tell you their test result and you tell them if they succeed or fail.

Opposed Tests

Opposed tests work a little differently from basic tests. A character is not trying to equal or exceed a fixed number but exceed the test result of an opposing character. This makes things a bit more complicated. First, it means there is more than one dice roll involved. Second, it means you can't distill everything in the test down to a target number. If there are circumstances that affect one or more characters involved in the test, you'll have to determine those and assign the bonuses and/or penalties that affect the final test result. Generally speaking, you should grant bonuses or impose penalties of 1 to 3 to reflect the circumstances of the test. You might, for example, give a character trying to jump in muddy ground a –2 penalty to their Strength (Jumping) test.

Factors you may consider for bonuses or penalties to opposed ability tests include equipment available, weather conditions, time constraints, distractions, assistance from others, lighting conditions, and good roleplaying, where appropriate. You should let players know any bonuses or penalties before they roll so the test result can be determined accurately.

Advanced Tests

Most tests are determined by one roll of the dice. There are times, however, when a task is complicated and resolving it with one roll is too simple. Known as advanced tests, these types of tasks take time and/or planning, such as running a long race or doing research. Advanced tests are basic or opposed tests that use what's known as a *success threshold* to track completion over time. The task is complete when the

Things to Remember About Ability Tests

- Only one focus can apply to a test.
- Leave the dice on the table after a roll because the result of the Drama Die may be important.
- The Drama Die only counts for successful tests.
- In opposed tests, ties are broken by the Drama Die, or the higher ability if those, too, are tied.
- For basic tests, assess the situation and assign a difficulty.
- For opposed tests, circumstances can be represented with bonuses and/or penalties of 1 to 3.
- Advanced tests use a success threshold to measure completion over time. Don't overuse them!

total of the Drama Dice from all successful tests is equal to or greater than the success threshold.

Example

The adept Varuker is trying to puzzle out an obscure Old Kingdom document. The Narrator decides this will be a series of Intelligence (Arcana Arcane Lore) tests with a success threshold of 15. The target number for the tests is 13 and each test (successful or not) represents an hour of time. It takes Varuker six tests altogether before he can understand the arcane theory the document outlines. The first and fifth tests are unsuccessful, so the Drama Die results for those don't count. The four successful tests have Drama Die results of 2, 5, 4, and 6. Their total of 17 is greater than the success threshold, so after the six hours of work light dawns on Varuker and the theory becomes clear.

As the example illustrates, the length of time and difficulty of each test are both important. Since the Drama Die is only counted for successful tests, the harder you make it, the more dice rolls will be required. If more than one character pitches in, this is best reflected by modifying the test difficulty or giving the testing character a bonus. This will result in more successful tests, and so the task will be completed faster.

You may sometimes want to use an advanced test to determine how much time something takes, but you can also use to it to find out who finishes first. The first character to meet or beat the success threshold is the winner. This can be used to simulate all sorts of conflicts, from debates to races.

The **Advanced Tests** table provides some basic benchmarks for success thresholds, though there is no theoretical limit on how high they can get. Practically speaking, however, you don't want players rolling dice forever, so consider carefully before setting thresholds above 25.

Advanced Tests

Task Difficulty	Success Threshold
Easy	5
Average	10
Challenging	15
Hard	20
Formidable	25

Roleplaying vs. Rules

In a session of *Blue Rose*, both you and the players will spend a lot of time talking and playing in character. This interaction is one of the key differences between roleplaying games and other sorts of games. Groups can spend hours just roleplaying and never once touch a die. There are, however, points where the roleplaying part and the gaming part of RPGs must meet. People have been arguing about exactly where they should intersect since the beginning of RPGs.

A central issue is the social skills of the player vs. the social skills of the character. When is it appropriate to roleplay an interaction out and when is it appropriate to roll dice? What if you do some roleplaying but *also* roll dice? What if a character has a lousy Communication ability but the player is glib? Or what if the player who's tongue-tied in real life wants to play a character who's a great orator?

These issues don't come up during combat or exploration encounters for the most part. No one expects a player to actually be able to fight monsters or decipher an ancient script. People are content to let dice rolling handle such things. When it comes to roleplaying, however, players can talk and interact. They're doing so in character, but it is the players using their social skills to roleplay.

So let's imagine a scene in which the envoys have to convince a local noble that a man was wrongly imprisoned. There are four ways you can run this: First, everyone can just roleplay. You play the noble and the players their characters. If their verbal arguments are convincing, you decide the noble relents and frees the man. Second, you could resolve the whole thing with ability tests, with the players making Communication (Persuasion) tests vs. the noble's Communication (Leadership) to convince him. Third, you could mix the two approaches, letting the players roleplay and then having them take tests with bonuses or penalties based on their arguments and delivery. Lastly, you could run the scene as an advanced test. You tell the players they have five minutes of game time to convince the noble and each Communication (Persuasion) test takes one minute. You then set a success threshold based on the noble's attitude towards the heroes and the prisoner. Before each test, the players can make an in–character argument. If you find it convincing, you can reduce the difficulty of that test. The players can take turns making arguments and rolling or have a spokesman with the best Communication (Persuasion) do it. The dice are the final arbiter in this approach but good roleplaying makes successful tests more likely.

None of these techniques are "wrong," although the second one (just rolling dice) does reduce the roleplaying to a minimum. You need to decide how you want to handle scenes like this in your game and it's fine to mix and match approaches. You can do a quick and straightforward ability test to cover haggling with a merchant and later roleplay out a feast with no dice rolling at all. The important thing is to discover which approach works for your group and is the most fun for everyone involved.

Combat Considerations

When the game switches from narrative time to action time, it's often time for combat. This is when *Blue Rose* is at its most rules intensive and you'll have many decisions to make in a short time. It's up to you to control all the NPCs present. You have to roll initiative for them and decide on their actions when their turns come up. You'll need to keep track of the resources of the various NPCs as well, such as Health and fatigue. The core rules for combat are in **Chapter 1**, but as the Narrator there are a few more things you need to know about adjudicating a fight. The following section provides additional advice and rules that will help you run combat encounters in *Blue Rose*.

Major & Minor NPCs

NPCs in *Blue Rose* are divided into two types: major and minor. Major NPCs are prominent in the story and often have a reoccurring role. Minor NPCs have a support role, be it as local color or spear carriers. Many minor characters won't even have names.

The rules treat major and minor characters the same way with two exceptions:

- In combat encounters, you should roll initiative for each major NPC separately. You can break minor characters up into groups by type and then make an initiative roll for each group. If you have an ogre and a group of lesser shadowspawn in a combat, for example, you'd roll initiative once for the ogre and once for all of the shadowspawn. When initiative for the shadowspawn comes up, all of them each take a turn. Each one could take different actions, but they'd all happen on the same initiative.
- You may, at your discretion, apply the rules for dying characters to major NPCs. If you do, a major character dropped to 0 Health dies after a number of rounds equal to 2 + their Constitution unless healing is received. A dying character can talk but cannot take any other actions. The character dies at the start of their turn on the final round, so allies have until then to take action. Otherwise, NPCs simply die immediately when they reach 0 Health.

Surprise

In combat, attacking first is often a considerable advantage, which is why ambush is an age-old tactic. At the start of a combat encounter, determine if one side gets the drop on the other, known as surprise in game terms. Characters who are surprised do not get a chance to act during the first round of combat. Determining surprise is a three part process:

1. **Consider the Situation:** Is one side concealed or hidden in some way? Is the other side wary or oblivious? Did both sides just blunder into one another by accident?
2. **Test or No Test:** Next, you must decide if one or both sides get a chance to detect the other before contact is made. In some situations, you may decide there is no test. In that case, one side automatically surprises the other. If you decide there is a chance of detection, you can call for Perception tests with focuses as appropriate (though Seeing is most common). This can be a basic test, in which case you assign a target number based on the circumstances, or you can make it an opposed test of Perception vs. Dexterity (Stealth). It is possible some characters are surprised while others on the same side are not.
3. **Combat Begins:** Everyone rolls for initiative as action time begins and the combat starts. Any surprised characters do not get a turn during the first round of the combat. On the second round, everyone gets to act as normal.

The easiest way to deal with surprise is with basic tests. If an enemy is trying to ambush the characters, for example, choose a target number based on the site they picked and their level of concealment, then let each player make a Perception (Seeing) test. The characters of those who fail the test are surprised; those that make it are not. If the characters are trying to ambush an enemy, roll a Perception (Seeing) test for each major NPC and group of minor characters.

Example

The warrior Brigitte, the scout Najah, and the adept Varuker prepare to ambush an ogre and three night people barbarians in a mountain pass. They have hidden themselves among the rocks at either side of the pass. The shadowspawn are not expecting trouble here, so they have no one scouting ahead. The Narrator decides it'll take a successful TN 13 Perception (Seeing) test to detect the ambush. They roll once for the ogre and once for the night people (since the three minor characters are a group). The ogre gets a 14 and the night people a 10. Now everyone rolls initiative. During the first round of combat, Brigitte, Najah, Varuker, and the surprisingly aware ogre take turns as normal, but the night people are confounded by the ambush and do not get to act at all.

Attack Rolls & Circumstance

An attack roll is the most common ability test in combat. It is a basic test, but the target number is equal to the opponent's Defense. The attack roll is modified by a focus, if applicable, and any other relevant bonuses (such as aiming, charging, talents, etc.). You can also assign bonuses and penalties to the attack roll to reflect the circumstances of the encounter, just as you do in opposed tests. In general, these bonuses and penalties should range from 1 to 3. They can take into account anything that would affect the attacker's ability to hit the target, such as lighting, terrain, tactics, and concealment. Here are some example modifiers based on common circumstances. Use them as a guideline when assigning bonuses and penalties to attack rolls.

Attack Roll Modifiers

Modifier	Circumstance
–3	Defender in heavy cover, such as a building or stone wall. Melee attacker in heavy snow.
–2	Defender in light cover, such as a hedge or the woods. Melee attacker in mud. Ranged attack vs. defender engaged in melee combat. Combat at night.
–1	Rain, mist, or smoke obscures the defender. Combat in low light conditions.
0	Normal circumstances.
+1	Attacker on higher ground. Defender is prone. Melee attacker and allies outnumber defender 2 to 1.
+2	Melee attacker and allies outnumber defender 3 to 1. Defender is drunk.
+3	Defender is unaware of the attack.

Morale

In many games, combat is an all or nothing affair. Opponents fight until one side or the other is defeated or wiped out. Battle is indeed bloody but it would be infinitely more so if it was actually prosecuted in this way. In truth, most combats end when the morale of one side breaks and its combatants flee. Now in fantasy worlds like *Blue Rose* you will, of course, find monsters that fight on regardless of circumstances, but most NPCs have some sense of self-preservation. You can simulate this with Willpower (Morale) tests when it seems appropriate. Characters fight on with a successful test or attempt to break off from combat—or even surrender—on a failed test.

When is it appropriate to test? That is for you to determine based on the circumstances of the combat and the perception of the combatants. You should consider, however, calling for a morale test under the following conditions:

- When more than half the side's combatants are out of the fight (dead or incapacitated).
- When the side's leader or champion is defeated.
- When fighting on will mean being trapped or surrounded.

You can handle this one of two ways. Your first option is to make one Willpower (Morale) test for the side using the Willpower of its leader (or best available major character if there is no clear-cut leader). This has the advantage of being simple and can end a combat with one die roll. Your other option is to roll once for each major NPC and group of minor characters. This can mean some combatants flee while others stand and fight.

In general you want to use morale tests only for NPCs. Players should have the choice as to whether their characters fight on or flee.

Example

Envoys of the Sovereign's Finest are fighting off an ambush by a gang of vicious bandits. After four rounds of combat they have killed four of the attackers, leaving a leader (a major character) and two bandit henchmen (a group of minor characters). The Narrator decides it's a good time to test morale, since over half the attackers are down. They roll once for the leader and once for the bandit henchmen, getting a 14 and an 8 respectively. The Narrator set the target number at 11, so the leader makes a successful test but the henchmen fail. The next time the bandit henchmen take a turn, they attempt to flee. The leader now has a tough decision to make: fight on alone against a group of the Finest or follow his underlings?

Handling Hazards

You should have a good handle on how to deal with combat situations now. The combat rules are the most detailed part of *Blue Rose* since the nature of action time requires a certain amount of precision. Swords and arrows are not the only threats characters face in a dangerous world, however. They must also contend with traps, falling, fire, and other perils. All of these things fall under the general header of "hazards," and this section explains how to deal with them. They are most commonly found in exploration encounters but sometimes appear in combat encounters or, more rarely, roleplaying encounters.

Rather than come up with a raft of special rules for each individual type of hazard, *Blue Rose* handles hazards with a general system to simulate everything from pit traps to

drowning. Published adventures define hazards for you, but when you need to adjudicate them on your own, consider the following questions:

- What is the nature of the hazard?
- Can it be avoided?
- How dangerous is the hazard?
- Does it have any special effects?
- How long does it last?

As we did with ability tests, let's take a look at these questions one by one.

What Is the Nature of the Hazard?

The first step is to describe the nature of the hazard in a general way. It could be a treacherous path up the side of a mountain, a raging forest fire, a blinding blizzard, or a tripwire that triggers a dart attack. You may tweak your idea as you define the hazard, but for now just broadly define the parameters.

Can It Be Avoided?

Some hazards, particularly traps, are hidden dangers. You must decide if the characters have a chance to detect them beforehand. This is usually a Perception test, with a focus appropriate for the hazard. You might use Seeing to give the characters a chance to spot a patch of disturbed earth over a pit trap, or Hearing to determine if the characters notice a telltale clicking noise. If there is a chance of detection, simply set the target number for the ability test as usual. Characters making a successful test can avoid the hazard, or at least get a clue that may help them do so. Those that fail walk right into it.

How Dangerous Is the Hazard?

Just as you assess difficulty for ability tests, so, too, must you assess the danger of hazards. Consult the **Hazard Category** table and pick the one that best suits the nature of the hazard. This determines the base damage or levels of fatigue the hazard inflicts. You might decide, for example, that falling from the top of a guard tower is a major hazard, inflicting 3d6 damage. Similarly, trudging up the frozen mountain path might be a moderate hazard that causes a level of fatigue. There can be hazards that inflict more damage than 6d6 damage, but they should be rare.

You can also allow an ability test to mitigate the hazard's effects. A good standard is that a successful test means the character only suffers half damage or fatigue (rounded down). The person falling from the tower, for example, could be given a chance to make a TN 15 Dexterity (Acro-

Things to Remember About Hazards

- They may sometimes be avoided with appropriate ability tests.
- Determine damage or fatigue using the **Hazard Category** table.
- Ability tests may allow characters to mitigate the effects. A successful test usually means half damage or fatigue (rounded down).
- Some hazards have special effects.
- Some hazards are one-offs but others reoccur.

Hazard Category

Category	Damage	Fatigue
Minor	1d6	1
Moderate	2d6	1
Major	3d6	2
Arduous	4d6	3
Harrowing	5d6	3
Murderous	6d6	4

batics) test to halve the damage. Likewise, characters hiking up the frozen mountain might make TN 13 Constitution (Stamina) tests to eliminate the fatigue (since half of 1 rounded down equals 0).

You also need to decide if armor or other measures protect against the hazard. If they don't, make the damage penetrating (and realize this makes it nastier). Common sense should dictate whether armor is a help in a given situation. You can see, for example, how armor could protect a character from a fire but not from falling. Likewise, some measures may protect against a hazard's fatigue, either entirely eliminating it or granting a bonus on the test to reduce it.

Does It Have Any Special Effects?

Some hazards cause more than just damage or fatigue. They might impose a temporary penalty to an ability or to Speed. They could reduce the number of actions a character can take in a turn. They could leave a character prone or even unconscious. Try to remember that Health and fatigue are fairly abstract in the first place, so many hazards require no special effects. When you do use a special effect, try to make it simple and sensible. It would be fair to say, for example, that the character that fell off the tower could take no actions on their next turn (presuming they survived). It makes sense that the survivor of such a fall would not leap straight up and get back into the action immediately.

How Long Does It Last?

Many hazards happen once and then end. A dart trap, for example, fires once when triggered, unless cunningly designed to reload. Other hazards are ongoing. A character running through a blazing forest, for example, may suffer damage each round, while a character exposed to the elements may risk fatigue every hour. Again, use common sense as your guide to determine whether the hazard is a single incident or recurring.

Putting It All Together

Here are some sample hazards. You'll find others in published *Blue Rose* adventures.

The Burning Inn

During the night, villains pour oil all over the lower floor of the inn where the heroes are sleeping and set the place aflame. The characters wake up to the smell of smoke as fire quickly engulfs the inn. They can try to escape down the stairs and through the common room. However, each round they take 3d6 damage (a major hazard), and their Speed is halved because the smoke makes it hard to see where to go. They could also leap from the window of their room but the distance and the fire on the lower floors makes this an arduous hazard that inflicts 4d6 penetrating damage. A successful TN 11 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test halves the damage in either case. Do the characters dash through the inn, potentially taking damage over several rounds but enjoying the protection of armor, or do they make the jump to freedom and hope the penetrating damage isn't too bad?

The Icy Mountains

The characters must make the dangerous journey through a snow-filled pass in the Ice-Binder Mountains. The arduous journey requires a successful TN 12 Constitution (Stamina) test to avoid acquiring three levels of fatigue, leaving the characters exhausted—and potentially vulnerable—on the far side. The Narrator stipulates that a TN 12 Intelligence (Natural Lore or Navigation) or Perception (Tracking) test can mitigate some of the hazard, providing a +2 bonus to the Constitution test.

Pit Trap

A section of corridor falls away when enough pressure is put upon it, dropping the unlucky victim into a pit 15 feet deep. If the triggering character makes a successful TN 12 Perception (Touching) test, they feel the floor starting to give away and can step back before falling in. Otherwise, they fall and takes 2d6 penetrating damage (a moderate

hazard). A successful TN 11 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test halves the damage.

The Rushing River

A character must swim across a rushing river to deliver a vital message. The river is swift and there are rocks beneath the surface that make the crossing more perilous. They must make an advanced test with a success threshold of 7 (see **Advanced Tests**, earlier in this chapter). Each round the character must make a TN 13 Constitution (Swimming) test. If they succeed, the result of the Drama Die counts towards the success threshold. If they fail, they take 2d6 damage from the rocks and/or inhaled water. They keep making tests until they make it across or are reduced to 0 Health.

Walking the Royal Road

The divination and spirituality of the Roamers centers on the Royal Road, a set of cards akin to the tarot. A tarot deck can be used in your *Blue Rose* games not only as a prop representing the Royal Road, but also as a storytelling tool. The following completely optional rules detail some of the ways you can use that tool as a Narrator.

For the purposes of these rules, any tarot deck will do, although choosing a deck with an art style appropriate for your campaign can enhance the game's mood. For example, the Shadowscapes Tarot fits the visual style of *Blue Rose* exactly, since it was created by Stephanie Pui-Mun Law, the artist of this book's cover. In contrast, a deck with imagery contrary to the campaign's style can be an unwelcome distraction. Ultimately, search for a deck with evocative artwork which can serve as an inspiration for the campaign's roleplaying and storytelling.

Whatever tarot cards you choose, separate the Major Arcana and the Minor Arcana into two different decks, and shuffle them both. The following rules mostly rely on the Minor Arcana deck.

> The Royal Road does not set your fate. Each of us walks that road, and if the eyes of your heart see its signs and crossroads, you choose the heading and pace of your journey. Though the destination might not be of your choosing, the manner of your arrival shall be. To the blind of heart, the road is a path of emptiness and folly. Such a person is gravel to the traveler who sees. Don't be the gravel.
>
> —A Roamer teaching.

Roleplaying Encounters

In many roleplaying encounters, no dice are rolled and no rules are used. The players describe the words and mannerisms of their characters and might even do some in-character dialog. The Narrator offers the NPCs' responses, whether positive, negative, or somewhere in between. The whole thing unfolds naturally, and the story continues. Such scenes can happen so seamlessly it's easy to miss that an encounter even took place. Looking back at the game session, a player might say, "I loved when we had that silly argument with the grumpy guard," and not consider the conversation to have been an encounter at all.

At other times, a Narrator wants a roleplaying encounter to feel like it's part of the rules—with all the game system trimmings. When the Narrator wants dice to play a part in a roleplaying encounter, the normal rules for tests can be used and the scene can involve roleplaying stunts. Moreover, if a character has a Relationship with an Intensity rating, that Relationship has the potential to generate stunt points in the scene if it is somehow relevant to a test the character makes during it.

Sometimes a Narrator wants to take a middle path in a roleplaying encounter, by mixing fluid roleplaying with a dash of rules. This optional rule provides such an approach. To use it, allow a scene to proceed with roleplaying, but pause when a player's

character does or says something remarkable—be it funny, moving, beautiful, intimidating, persuasive, or emotionally vulnerable—that you think represents a successful turning point in the scene. A turning point can include convincing an NPC to take a certain course of action, getting a belligerent person to stand down, or softening a previously hard heart. Now ask the player to draw two cards from the Minor Arcana deck, and consider whether the character's Destiny or Fate is dominant in the scene. If neither was obviously dominant, proceed as if the Destiny is dominant. If either card matches the suit of the character's Destiny/Fate—whichever one is currently dominant—the character can roll 1d6 to generate stunt points to immediately spend on stunts in the encounter.

Example

Over the course of several sessions, the character Sorsha—a capable adept—has been trying to win the favor of Eliana, an Aldin noblewoman who long ago captured Sorsha's heart. Sorsha and her companions have undertaken several missions for Lady Eliana, who has given no hint she sees Sorsha as anything other than a useful adventurer. But the Narrator knows that Eliana harbors an attraction to the adept...

Upon the completion of their latest mission, Sorsha decides to bare her heart. She and her companions enter the lady's manor, and before anyone can discuss the mission, Sorsha produces a rose from her cloak and nervously utters a poem of love to the noblewoman. The Narrator lets Sorsha's player roleplay the first part of the scene and decides it definitely constitutes a turning point. The Narrator looks at Sorsha's Destiny and Fate—humble (five of swords) and reckless (seven of rods)—and decides that her Fate is dominant in the scene, as a result of her recklessly romantic behavior. Sorsha's player then draws two cards from the Minor Arcana deck: the two of chalices and the king of rods. Because one of the cards matches the suit of Sorsha's Fate, the player can roll 1d6 to gain stunt points. The player hopes for enough points to use the Flirt roleplaying stunt!

Personalities and the Gods

Tarot Suit	God	Associations
Swords	Selene	Air, arcana, death, mercy, the moon, rebirth, secrets, winter, wisdom.
Chalices	Braniel	Animals, music, plants, rain, romance, spring, stars, water.
Rods	Maurenna	Agriculture, fire, the works of civilization, community, marriage, motherhood, plenty, summer.
Pentacles	Anwaren	Autumn, earth, fatherhood, madness, mountains, sovereignty, war.

NPC Personalities

One of the easiest ways you can make a tarot deck work for you is by using it to quickly generate personality traits for your NPCs. You can use this method during your adventure preparation or during play when the heroes meet an NPC whose personality is indistinct.

To use this approach, draw two cards from the Minor Arcana deck, and look up each card on the **Destiny and Fate** table in **Chapter 2**. The first card you draw determines the NPC's Destiny, and the second card determines the NPC's Fate. Now add the numbers on the two cards together. If the total is an even number, the Destiny dominates the NPC's personality; if the total is an odd number, the Fate is dominant.

Example

The characters meet a Jarzoni priest, and you turn to the tarot cards to help bring the priest's personality to life. You first draw a nine of swords and look up the Destiny that it corresponds to: compassionate. You then draw a two of chalices and look up the priest's Fate: standoffish. Adding the numbers on the two cards together you get eleven. Because that's an odd number, the priest's Fate is dominant. Suddenly, bits of the priest's personality come into focus: a standoffish person of faith, whose aloofness conceals a compassionate heart. Perhaps the characters will say or do something that will help bring that compassion to light...

Now examine the images on the two cards and see if anything in them inspires you to create additional details about the NPC. Perhaps the NPC looks like a person depicted on one of the cards, or maybe a card's image gives you an idea about an event in the NPC's past.

Personality and the Gods

If you want more details about an NPC you're creating, consider the suit of the two Minor Arcana cards you drew for that character. Each suit in the deck is associated with one of the Primordials, and the nature of the gods could say something about the NPC. The accompanying table summarizes some of the characteristics and interests associated with the four gods. Look up the suit, or suits, of the two cards you drew to see if something associated with it seems appropriate for the NPC.

How does using this table affect our Jarzoni priest? His dominant card is the two of chalices, the suit of Braniel, so we're going to focus on the chalices row. We know the priest is standoffish but compassionate, and he hates greed. Looking at the suit's associations, we immediately come across animals. Perhaps the priest likes to retreat from the greed of humanity by caring for hungry and ailing animals in his village. There could even be a

Story Twists

Card	Potential Twists
The Fool	A foolish person appears. A risky but alluring pleasure is here. A leap of faith beckons. The ground gives way.
The Adept (aka the Magician)	A person of great skill arrives. Only arcana can solve the problem. Sleight of hand will be necessary. One of the four elements becomes a problem.
The Priestess	A person of faith enters. Only a pure heart can prevail. Careful study can find the path. Even the foe has something to teach.
The Empress	A mother and child are here. Nature reveals a stunning beauty. Compassion will be rewarded, and the lack of it will be punished. Only with patience can they proceed.
The Emperor	An authority figure exerts power. Only the imposition of order can stop this new chaos. Time for a feat of strength! A legal tangle is here.
The Hierophant	A keeper of ancient secrets left a clue. A ritual must be performed. Their beliefs are now tested. Knowledge of religious teachings can light the way.
The Lovers	A lover pursues a beloved. A compromise is necessary. An erotic opportunity is revealed. Time for a wedding! Forbidden love is exposed.
The Chariot	A soldier intervenes. Only discipline can solve this. A strange machine is here.
Strength	A beast pounces. Raw strength is the only thing that can stop it. Their courage is tested.
The Hermit	The ascetic in the woods has the answer. They must retreat and regroup to succeed. A lost secret is found and revealed.
The Wheel	A great gain or loss of wealth is near. A major turning point in their destinies is here. They're going to get turned around.
Justice	A magistrate will hear of this! They must choose: uphold justice or let it fall. Whether they like it or not, the truth is laid bare.
The Hanged Man	An execution is near. A martyr died here. They must let go of something they love if they are to have any hope of success.
Death	Time for an undertaker! Unless they change course, they will fail. The thing lost now will grow into something new later. Unexpected illness strikes.
Temperance	The tempter is here. A revel begins! A prudish elder enters.
The Exarch (aka the Devil)	The villain appears! They feel a tyrant's reach. Slaves beg for freedom. Today evil is victorious.
The Tower	The mighty are laid low. The earth trembles. Ominous signs appear in the sky. Catastrophe!
The Star	The seer utters a mystery. An omen of hope glimmers in the heavens. Only by turning inward and seeking the gods' voices within will they understand.
The Moon	A deceitful adept arrives. It's an illusion! Fear racks the people.
The Sun	The jolly one enters. With kindness they will succeed. No deceit will work here.
Judgment	The wise man or woman sees it all for what it is. Reconciliation is finally possible! The downtrodden are raised up.
The World	A traveler from a distant land arrives. They learn they must journey far away for the answer. It all leads back to where they started.

faithful hound that is ever at his side, and villagers might say of him, "If he could, that priest would spend his days reading the teachings of the Hierophant to the birds." The same row in the table could inspire you to say the priest is a musician, or has a green thumb.

Calling or Anti-Calling

If it becomes important to know a NPC's core motivation, draw one card from the Major Arcana deck and look it up on the **Callings** table in **Chapter 2** to determine the NPC's Calling—the thing that motivates much of the NPC's actions. If the NPC's Fate is dominant, the Calling you draw can, at your discretion, be a thing the NPC despises. Think of this as the NPC's anti-Calling.

Let's return to the Jarzoni priest to see this in practice. You decide you want to know the priest's motivation, so you draw a card from the Major Arcana deck. You get the Wheel. Looking that card up on the **Callings** table, you see that it corresponds to wealth. Because the priest's Fate is dominant, you decide that wealth is the priest's anti-Calling. Driven by compassion, the priest hates how the pursuit of wealth often causes poor people to be neglected or, worse, trampled underfoot by the privileged. If the characters can help the priest oppose the forces of greed, he is likely to aid them in their endeavors.

Story Twists

When you're preparing an adventure, you might find yourself wanting inspiration for part of the story, and when running an adventure, even battles and intrigues can start to feel routine if you've done enough of them without any twists. In those situations, you can turn to the Major Arcana deck to help you add some spice to the campaign.

Flip over the top card of the deck and see if the card sparks your imagination. The **Story Twists** table gives examples of the sorts of twists that each card can inspire. They are purposefully open-ended; you decide whom or what they refer to. These twists can easily align with a character's Calling and therefore present an opportunity for the character to gain Conviction.

Heroes in *Blue Rose* brave great perils and overcome tremendous odds. While safeguarding their homes and those they love are often their primary motivations, heroes do earn various other rewards over the course of their adventures. This chapter discusses ways to reward the characters for their achievements during play. These rewards range from character advancement to accolades, honorifics, and membership in exclusive companies, as well as special items and equipment.

Heroic Advancement

As heroes go on adventures and overcome challenges, they learn from their mistakes and draw confidence from their successes. Over time, they grow and become more capable. They learn new tricks and refine old skills. *Blue Rose* reflects this development through the awarding of levels.

Essentially, after an adventure or two, whenever you, as Narrator, feel the heroes have reached a point of development in their story, you can award them an additional level. Generally, heroes should earn no more than one level from a single adventure, unless it is especially long and harrowing, consists of multiple game sessions, or the heroes achieve a truly remarkable success.

Look to find a balance that provides steady improvement. Move the characters up too quickly and they will reach the upper levels of play before they've had a chance to explore the way each level and its advancements work together to make the character unique. Progress them too slowly and things can begin to get stale and dull for the players. As a guideline, it's a good idea to advance characters a level every two or three game sessions. It's also generally a better idea to go through the first five levels faster than the later ones. These beginning levels are where characters pick up the talents, focuses, and initial specializations which set the tone for how they grow and develop over the rest of the game. You may want to advance the characters a level after each of the first two or three game sessions, so they achieve level 3 by the fourth, fifth, or sixth session. This makes for a full series stretching out over some thirty-six to forty game sessions or so.

Normally, heroes immediately gain all the benefits from their new level—improved Health, ability, focus, and class powers—as outlined under **Gaining Levels** in **Chapter 2**. However, the Narrator can require some training time or preparation before the heroes improve in level. This is particularly true for heroes adding a specialization, as detailed under **Accessing Specializations** in **Chapter 3**. This training can involve seeking out experienced teachers and learning from them, or different tests to prove a character worthy of taking on a particular specialization.

Honorifics

Another way to reward characters is with honorifics: special titles or reputations based on great deeds or important moments in the series. This can be a singular event, such as saving a village from a dire threat, or it can be a continuing responsibility, such as being recruited into the Sovereign's Finest or serving the crown in some other special capacity. A list of common titles and honorifics is included in this section, though Narrators should feel free to use these as inspiration for their own creations.

Some honorifics are simple reputations or awards, but some suggest the influence of higher powers. Mechanically there's not much difference between these two types of honorifics, but Narrators should consider the possible ramifications of a character who is beloved or feared by creatures or people versus those who have earned the attention of supernatural forces.

Certainly, players will discover their characters' reputations can open doors for them. Renowned heroes find many people want to be their friends or seek to reward them for their great deeds. Innkeepers offer them room and board (or at least a drink and a toast) on the house, while merchants offer special discounts or unique items. Artisans may want to paint characters' portraits or sculpt their likenesses, while crafters want to produce some special item for them, be it a weapon, armor, piece of jewelry, or clothing.

Bane of the Unliving

You are well-known as a tireless foe of the walking dead, vampires, specters, and other unliving threats. You gain a +2 bonus to any Willpower (Courage) tests to resist fear and intimidation from these creatures. Others sworn to fight the unliving treat you favorably, giving you a +2 bonus to any Communication tests with such individuals where their respect and admiration may be an advantage. Similar reputations exist for heroes who have shown themselves staunch foes of darkfiends, shadowspawn, or other types of creatures.

Champion of Justice

You are known to risk life and limb to mete out justice, no matter the odds arrayed against you. Criminals—and even those with a guilty conscience—pitted against you suffer a –3 penalty to Willpower (Courage or Morale) tests made in opposition to your appraisal of their moral mettle—including the use of arcana—and in opposition to your retribution.

Defender of the Weald

You are well-known as a defender of the forest folk and others dwelling in the Pavin Weald. You gain a +2 bonus to any Communication tests involving forest folk and other non-corrupt individuals who live in that region. Your time in the area also gives you a +1 bonus to all Intelligence (Cartography or Navigation) tests in the Pavin Weald. Similar honorifics may exist for other locales.

Famed Artist

You are a famous painter, writer, poet, or actor. Your craft or skill makes you a sought after guest or performer for various events, and can bring you wealth and fame. You gain a +1 bonus when displaying or performing your art for a crowd—your reputation encourages appreciation and praise. Also, you gain a +2 bonus to social tests at events or gatherings where your status and art are appreciated.

Fortune-Favored

You are blessed by good fortune or protected due to some great destiny. Once per game session you may add +1 to the result of your Drama Die if it will lead to doubles being rolled, thereby generating stunt points.

Loyalist

Pick a group, organization, or important person you have a Relationship with. You may call on that group or person for a favor once per adventure. They will do anything in their power that does not violate strongly held values or beliefs to aid you as a reward for your continued and loyal service. This honorific is often renamed to reflect the exact relationship: Ranger Loyalist, Church Loyalist, and so forth.

Master of the Blade

Wielding a sword (or some other weapon or fighting style), you have few peers and your skill is widely known and respected—even feared. You gain a +1 bonus in social tests with other masters of your chosen weapon. Those who seek to stand against you when you are armed appropriately suffer a –1 penalty to Willpower (Courage or Morale) tests.

Protected by Destiny

It seems as if a higher power protects you from mortal danger. Once per game session, a damage roll from an attack or hazard that would kill your character is avoided, reducing the character to 0 Health but leaving them alive. (In game terms, they will not die in 2 + their Constitution rounds, as is usually the case.) In battle, enemy combatants may deliver a coup de grace in later rounds normally, but an extra action is required to do so. In other situations, some contrivance or circumstance keeps your character alive; they land on a rock in the middle of a sea of lava, wash up on a deserted island, and so forth.

Pure-Hearted

You are known for tirelessly championing goodness and staying focused on righteous action even in the face of despair and temptation. You gain a +2 bonus on Willpower (Purity) tests to resist corrupting or demoralizing influences, and gain a +1 bonus on Communication (Etiquette or Persuasion) tests when dealing with those who share or admire your values.

Rebel Leader

You have grown respected and valuable to a resistance or rebel movement in Kern or some other troubled land. You are wanted or watched by the authorities, but the people love you. You have a +2 bonus to any Communication-based tests with the common folk, but suffer a similar –1 penalty on Communication tests with the powers who oppress those you would protect and aid.

Rhydan Friend

You are known as a friend and ally to the rhydan. Even great rhydan such as unicorns respect and recognize you. You may be rhy-bonded, but this isn't required to earn this reputation. You are considered to have an Intensity 1 Relationship with any non-corrupted rhydan you meet who is aware of your reputation. This Relationship can be increased by further service or interaction with the rhydan over time, and as a reward for heroic actions that benefit the rhydan.

Slayer of Darkfiends

A terror of terrifying things, you are a subject of hatred and even fear among darkfiends. You have killed enough twisted and corrupt spawn of the exarchs that even their dark hearts freeze at the sight of you. You gain a +2 bonus to Strength (Intimidation) tests against darkfiends, and once per session can add +2 damage to all of your attacks against darkfiends for an encounter.

True Romantic

You love easily, and often. Once every adventure you may generate an Intensity 2 Relationship with an NPC, defined as a temporary dalliance, powerful infatuation, reunion with a former lover, or similarly intense, but brief, connection. This Relationship lasts until the end of the adventure.

Titles

Characters may receive different titles and honorifics as a result of their deeds and achievements. Some of these are covered by goal fulfillment—for example, reaching a cherished goal like nobility or being inducted into an order of knighthood. Others may be the result of noble or royal decree, either granting a well-known award or creating some special accolade. These may vary depending on where and by whom these awards are given, with some examples provided here:

Aldis

The Crown and nobility of Aldis can and does give awards to those who have done a great service to the Kingdom of the Blue

Rose. Noble titles and responsibilities are only awarded by achievement and passing many tests, including that of the Blue Rose Scepter, but nobles can offer tokens of esteem and gratitude, such as the Seal of the Assembly and the Distinguished Service Medal. The Sovereign herself can bestow loftier awards, including Champion of the Rose, for those greatest defenders of Aldis; the Peacemaker's Ring, for diplomats and those who have helped ensure peace; the Light of Aldis, for great works of art and scholarship; and the Medal of the Golden Hart, the kingdom's highest award for valor and safeguarding the Light against the forces of Shadow.

Jarzon

While the hierarchy of the Church of the Pure Light tends to find awards and accolades showy and vain, they recognize the value of honoring those who are faithful and true in their service to the Light and the wisdom of Leonoth. Two particular awards include the Torch of Leonoth, for bravery and valor, and the Flowering Rod of Maurenna, for wisdom and excellence. Both are typically worn and displayed as small pins or brooches.

Rezea

The riders of Rezea sometimes recognize great and noteworthy deeds with "banners"—colored strips of fine cloth—which are often embroidered or decorated. These may be woven into a rider's braided hair or displayed from saddle or harness, and banners given to rhy-horses are likewise woven into mane or tail or displayed from their tack. A bearer of banners formally approaching another camp may choose to fly them from the tip of a spear or staff while mounted.

Kern

The few accolades handed out in Kern are not likely to appeal to *Blue Rose* heroes, particularly when they come from the bloodied hands of its Regents. Nevertheless, Kern is a land in need of both hope and heroes, so those who do a good turn for its people will find them grateful in their own fashion. Names and titles like "Friend of the People" or "Hidden Light of Kern" are not given lightly or often, and those who can truly inspire the downtrodden people of Kern and overcome their long-inculcated sense of suspicion have earned something truly special.

Lar'tya

The matriarchy gives accolades to those who uphold their proper place in society, regardless of caste, ensuring a peaceful, productive, and prosperous community. These honorifics often take the form of membership in some exclusive society, such as the Cornucopia of the Summer Queen or the Right Honorable Guild of Crafters, recognizing excellence and achievement among peers. The notion of some cross-caste salons awarding honorifics is considered scandalous among the more traditional segments of Lar'tyan society, and such an award may do as much to harm someone's reputation as to aid it.

Other Titles

Of course, the rulers of nations are not the only ones who might offer awards to the characters. There are also achievements like the eight-segmented Circle of the Dance—often represented by a bracelet, anklet, or necklace—awarded by the Academy of the Dance for achievements honoring and protecting the sacred spirit dance traditions. The unicorns and griffons, nobles of the rhydan, have been known to psychically "anoint" those who have performed a great deed or service, leaving a lasting "halo" in their psychic aura visible to all rhydan (and those others with Second Sight who know its signs). Similarly, nature spirits and fey may grant heroes their blessing, which can take the form of the favor of others of their kind, perhaps even a substantial boon the heroes can call upon in a time of need.

Memberships

As the saying goes, membership has its privileges. Heroes who acquit themselves well may be invited to join any number of organizations, such as the Sovereign's Finest. Chapters 2 and 3 detail various companies a character could become part of, but they all work in roughly the same way mechanically. A character who has been invited and accepted into the ranks of an organization is provided with certain perks and privileges of membership. They may call on their fellow members for aid and may be asked to support their organization on quests and missions, or help with certain events or tasks.

Membership is divided into ranks, with most organizations having three ranks that roughly correspond to recruit (rank 1), respected member (rank 2), and authority figure (rank 3). Regardless of the organization's exact resources, these ranks convey similar abilities:

Rank 1: Recruit

Those recruited into an organization receive a free Intensity 1 Relationship with that organization, its founder, its leaders, or some other group or person connected to it. If such a Relationship already exists, then it is increased by +1. In addition, the recruit has access to the basic arms, equipment, funds, and support given to all members of the group. This can vary widely based on the organization in question.

Not All Organizations Are Equal

Not every order, group, and institution are the same or provide the same resources, reputation, or support. The Sovereign's Finest in Aldis is far superior to a local militia, for example. In most cases it is far easier to join, advance, and run a small organization that a larger one and Narrators should consider what is best for their series. Should the characters climb the ranks to run a small but effective group? Or would it be better for them to earn membership in a powerful order but perhaps never rise to direct or administer it? Players likely have their own preferences in this area and Narrators should talk to them about it—it's possible none of them want to join any groups, preferring the independence and autonomy of free-spirited adventurers, free agents, or mercenaries.

Example

Kerid has been recruited into the Daughters of the Light, a resistance group in Kern. She gains an Intensity 1 Relationship with other members which she defines as "I give my life to the cause." She also has access to numerous safe houses and some basic arms and equipment, though much of it is stolen or scavenged due to the renegade status of the group.

Example

Ison is a newly recruited member of the Aldin Rangers. He gains an Intensity 1 Relationship with the Rangers defined as "We are the shadow that fights the darkness," and is supplied with a uniform, survival gear, weapons, and older members to serve as mentors and contacts. He also may stay in various locations and bases occupied or guarded by the Rangers and draws a salary for his service.

There is usually a balance between recruit resources and responsibilities. A group that provides its members with arms, funds, equipment, intelligence, and training expects more than a group that only provides a few of those things.

Rank 2: Respected Member

Those who prove themselves valuable to the organization become respected members who are seen as paragons and exemplars for others to follow. This rank conveys a +2 bonus to any tests involving other members where their respect or admiration would be a benefit, and a similar +1 bonus with any non-members whose respect and admiration for the group would also be a benefit. Respected members are able to secure more support and even recommend missions or quests to the leadership of the group. In some groups, such as small knightly orders, there are only two ranks and the most senior and famous among the respected members set policy for the whole organization.

Example

After burning down a Regent's local stronghold, Kerid becomes a respected member of the Daughters of the Light. She is now given access to more secrets and resources in the group, and her superiors are more inclined to listen to her ideas on how best to strike a blow against oppression and defeat the Lich King's Regents. She may even be given her own small resistance cell to run.

Example

Ison has been promoted within the Rangers after many successful missions. His pay and access to gear and resources increases, as does his reputation and responsibilities. Where before he was mentored and advised by veteran Rangers, now he is expected to occasionally advise, train, and aid the new blood.

This rank is often where situational access to arcane items or special resources comes in. Organizations are often reluctant to provide recruits with such equipment, but trusted members can often requisition and receive arcane weapons, elixirs, and other special gear if they can show need and promise to use it responsibly and in service to the group.

Rank 3: Authority Figure

Authority figures run the show. Those who achieve this rank may not be the sole leader of the organization, but they are among the ruling elite or chosen administrators of the group. Authority figures have the power to recruit new members and call meetings of all the membership, as well as proposing and setting policy. They are often kept quite busy by their duties, making this a sometimes difficult rank for adventuring types to maintain. A rank 3 member of an organization can call on a group of characters from the organization as needed once per adventure to aid them. The exact nature of these characters and their assistance varies with the organization.

Example

After much loyal service and evading capture, Kerid has risen to prominence in the Daughters of the Light. She, alongside her fellow resistance leaders, can guide the group to strike at their enemies. She can call on resistance agents during an adventure as well, to aid with sabotage, spying, or similar operations. She also has great discretion on how to use the group's funds and resources, though these are scattered and limited due to the nature of the Daughters.

Example

Now a captain in the Rangers, Ison is given a command of his own, with a territory and subordinates to command. He has a Ranger stronghold to use as his headquarters and has free access to its troops, weapons, and stores. He's still subject to regulations and orders from his superiors, but Ison has considerable power and autonomy, and is well known as a respected commander of an important organization.

This rank comes with a lot of power and not much oversight, but characters who achieve such rewards must take care to not destroy their organization through mismanagement or neglect. If a character leads too badly, they may also be removed from power. Each organization has their own methods of removal, ranging from votes of no confidence to outright assassination.

Companions

As your heroes continue their adventures across Aldea, they will likely make contacts and accrue allies. Some of these acquaintances might even elect to travel with the party as they embark on a new quest. These characters are called *companions* and are additional minor characters rewarded to players for their actions during play.

Perhaps they are recurring characters the heroes connected with in an earlier adventure. Others might be characters the Narrator has a specific plot-driven purpose for. Still others might be the hangers-on, subordinates, and associates the characters would have following along due to their background, group membership, or social standing. They may even be pets or other creatures that have come to follow the characters.

Example

After saving a village from an evil cult, the characters gain a companion in the form of Geval, an aging but still alarmingly spry former soldier. Geval appreciates the heroes saving his town and wants to go on one last adventure before his time is past. Geval isn't the greatest in a fight at his age, but he's experienced, willing, cooperative, and still capable enough to be of help at times.

Using Companions in Play

In general, companions are designed to support the party, but be wary of letting them steal the spotlight. It's perfectly acceptable—and sometimes dramatically interesting—to let the timid, unassuming scholar knock out the burglar attempting to steal his coin pouch. However, when it comes time to deal with the leader of the thieves' collective, it might be best to let your heroes handle the big fight, even if the dice and initiative are pointing at the last hit landing on a supporting character's turn.

Companions are usually detailed by their relevant statistics and some useful tasks they may occasionally automatically perform for the heroes, either individually or as a group. Companion actions in combat are usually narrated, though they could easily provide combat support if necessary. A companion's Health is usually equal to half that of the player character to which they are attached, or half that of the character with the second lowest Health in the case of a Companion attached to the group as a whole.

Example

Geval is a bit old to fight much, but he still has Communication 1, Fighting (Heavy Blades) 2, Perception 2, Strength 1, and Willpower (Courage) 2. His Health is 31 (half of the second lowest character's Health of 62). Perhaps most importantly, he is skilled at certain tasks due to his age and experience: timely tactical insight, standing watch, crowd control, and maintaining arms and equipment. These tasks can be triggered by the Narrator to drive play, helping set up interesting encounters. They can also be used to help the group deal with things they don't want to mess with, but that logically need to happen.

Most companions have a couple of ability scores at 2 and a few more at 1, with two to three focuses. Companions with more focuses and higher abilities are rare, and if Narrators find that companions need more than this to represent their skills and aptitudes they should consider giving them full character statistics of their own.

Companions do not just add color to a scene; they can also help bolster the heroes' advantage during combat or lend weight to the characters' arguments during a role-playing encounter. An extra person watching the party's backs is almost always welcome. In the midst of a crowded bar fight, a wiry squire might be able to slip outside and ready the heroes' horses to assist a quick getaway. A trusted advisor can whisper the right name in the character's ear or procure an invitation to dine with an influential Keeper in Jarzon. While it isn't necessary to draw up a full character sheet for every acquaintance, or to keep track of every level of advancement as one would a player character, as the heroes progress in levels, it might be worthwhile tweaking the companion's stats as well, so one blow from an angry ogre doesn't kill a companion outright in his first unlucky round.

Following are a few examples of common companions *Blue Rose* heroes might find sharing their adventures, including their relevant statistics. They can be used as examples for designing unique and memorable companions for your group's characters.

Animal Companions

Characters with the Beast Friend specialization, Animal Training talent, and any other characters who may have picked up animal companions can use the companion rules to represent these supporting characters as well. However, Narrators should make sure in the case of the Beast Friend and Animal Training talented characters that any animal companions are worth the time and talent or specialization advances spent on them. Because of this, it might be easier in some cases to give at least a player character's primary animal allies their own full statistics, especially if players are allowed to control their heroes' animal allies in combat.

Also note that companions can easily be rhydan as well as humanoids, and they follow the same rules as other companions. A rhy-bonded character may well have their rhydan bond-mate as a companion—not as capable as a player character, but still possessed of a rhydan's abilities and therefore quite a useful ally.

Bodyguard

A character's bodyguard might be a family friend, close personal friend, or hired for the specific purpose of guarding that character. Nobles and merchants often have bodyguards. The example bodyguard carries a spear, but they could be modified easily by changing their Fighting focus to a different weapon.

Bodyguard

Tasks: Spots ambushes, notices if others are armed, takes an arrow for you.

Abilities: Fighting (Polearms) 2, Perception (Searching) 2, Strength 2, Willpower (Courage) 1

Lover

Lovers are important in *Blue Rose*, often being the subject of Relationships and sometimes being central to certain adventures or series arcs. They may also decide to adventure alongside the object of their affection. This can be very entertaining and provide ample opportunity to grow and engage a hero's Relationship, but it also puts the companion in harm's way quite often.

Lover

Tasks: Provides moral support, romantic interludes, takes a blow meant for the player character and professes their love before succumbing to their wounds.

Abilities: Communication (Romance) 2, Willpower 1 (Courage), 1 additional ability at 2, 1 additional ability at 1, 1 extra focus

Squire

Knights usually need a squire or an attendant of some sort. This is true whether the knights are part of a large feudal system or hail from small order or organization. Squires aid the knight in combat, but more importantly help take care of their arms and mounts, both time-consuming processes. Squire are often young, occasionally naive, and yet at times somewhat insightful.

Squire

Tasks: Stays in the back and defends other characters; maintains arms, armor, and mounts; asks obvious questions the heroes missed.

Abilities: Constitution 2, Fighting 1, Intelligence (Heraldry) 0, Strength 1, Willpower (Courage) 2

Valet

Valets are skilled individuals who assist nobles, merchants, and other wealthy or influential characters in managing the responsibilities of their schedule and social engagements. Skilled valets are tremendously helpful when it comes to navigating social complexities and handling a variety of tasks a noble might not have time for personally.

Valet

Tasks: Picking the best outfit for an occasion, advising on the reputation and background of important people, arranging day to day obligations and engagements.

Abilities: Communication (Etiquette) 2, Intelligence 1 (Cultural Lore, Heraldry), Perception 1, Willpower (Self-Discipline) 1

Special Items and Equipment

Characters may acquire a variety of special items as rewards in the course of their adventures. There are two general types of non-arcane special items in *Blue Rose*: ceremonial and masterwork. Masterwork items are those so well-crafted they provide special mechanical bonuses when used for their regular purpose. This differs from ceremonial items, which provide social and prestige-related bonuses, regardless of an item's purpose. Thus a masterwork dagger is razor sharp and perfectly balanced, making it easy to cut, thrust, or parry with it, whereas a ceremonial dagger looks impressive and suggests the wielder is an important person. Items can be both ceremonial and masterwork.

Ceremonial Items

Ceremonial items are given by important characters or organizations in recognition of deeds and services. They include medals, badges, specially designed weapons or garb—basically anything a character can display or wear that tells onlookers they are exceptional due to some position or past service. Ceremonial items usually provide a small bonus to social interactions with a particular group of people. In this way, they are basically honorifics you can wear.

Example

After performing a great service to his Queen and his nation, Ison is awarded a ceremonial cloak by the Crown for his valiant service to the Aldin Rangers. When wearing the cloak, he may reroll the results of a social test dealing with Rangers, nobles, and others in service to Aldis, keeping the second result.

Ceremonial items don't need to be part of a formal system of rewards or accolades. A ring or sash given by a monarch or other luminary may provide the same bonuses as a nation's medal of honor, provided people understand its significance.

Normal uniforms and badges of office for elite groups are definitely special, but in most cases their importance and effects are covered by honorifics and memberships. However, many organizations have ceremonial items to reward their most valued and valiant members.

Masterwork Items

Masterwork items are mundane objects made with superior skill or materials. While mundane in nature, their exceptional construction grants bonuses or special abilities to those who wield them. Masterwork weapons do more damage or are better balanced on attack and defense. Masterwork armor is easier to wear or provides better protection. Other masterwork items provide specialized bonuses when used for their intended purposes. Masterwork items are often given names by their makers or owners.

Example

Kerid manages to acquire a masterwork dagger, dubbed "Heartseeker," that once belonged to one of Jarek's favored assassins. The blade is strong, thin, and incredibly sharp, allowing its wielder to ignore all non-arcane armor when used with the Pierce Armor combat stunt, instead of the usual halving of a target's AR.

Given the time and effort required to make them, masterwork items are usually crafted by other characters and given to the heroes as rewards or taken as trophies. However, rules for heroes attempting to make their own masterwork items are provided in this section.

Crafting Masterwork Items

Crafting masterwork items usually takes weeks—if not months—and requires an advanced test of the appropriate skill such as Strength (Smithing) or Dexterity (Artisan). The target number and success threshold to create such items are based on the bonuses they provide, while tools and material available can provide bonuses or penalties to these rolls. See **Advanced Tests** in **Chapter 1** for details on how to handle an advanced test.

For items with multiple features, use the highest target number as a base, with each additional feature adding +1 to the target number and +2 to the success threshold. Also, failing three times during this test destroys the item, forcing the crafter to start over. Because of this,

Masterwork Item Crafting

Feature	TN	Success Threshold	Bonus
Accurate	17	15	+1 to attack rolls.
Deadly	17	15	+1 to damage (may be applied twice).
Durable	13	10	Highly resistant to damage, +2 to resist attempts to damage or destroy item.
Reinforced	15	15	Increase base AR by 1 (may be applied twice).
Specialized	19	20	Pick a stunt; this stunt can be performed with this item for –1 SP.
Well-Balanced	19	20	+1 to Defense when wielded, or reduce item's Armor Penalty (if applicable) by 1.
Well-Crafted	19	20	+1 bonus to a particular Ability (Focus) test.

Crafting Bonuses and Penalties

Circumstance	Bonus/Penalty
Assistants	+1 per assistant with the focus required for the test (maximum bonus +2).
Materials	+1 bonus for exceptional materials, –1 for substandard or cheap materials.
Tools	+1 bonus for exceptional tools, –1 for cheap or missing tools.
Rare Materials	+1 for rare and valuable materials (usually requiring a quest or adventure to obtain).
Workspace	+1 bonus for spacious, clean, and well designed workspace, –1 for run down or poor workspace conditions.

only the finest crafters with the best conditions can reliably create masterwork items. This often means these items are made by NPCs with the time and skill to do so, though player character crafters may use these rules to create such items.

Each roll in the test represents a week of work. Narrators can deny certain bonuses to certain masterwork items if they don't make sense. For example, it's hard to justify making a dagger that provides its wielder with a bonus to their armor rating.

Arcane Items

Adepts skilled in the arts of enchantment can imbue various mundane items and materials with arcane power and properties. Some commonplace items in Aldis reflect this skill, including various arcane crystals used to provide light and heat, or to purify and move water as needed for communities and dwellings. The Old Kingdom had a dazzling variety of arcane devices, only a portion of which are fully understood in the modern world following the dark age of the Empire of Thorns.

The following are some common arcane items characters in *Blue Rose* may encounter and use. They can be found in most large towns or cities, particularly in Aldis, where arcane crafters do a brisk business. These items are more restricted outside Aldis, both due to rarity and the control of the authorities; the Purist Church regulates the creation, sale, and use of arcane items, and the government of Kern does so even more tightly. Characters who are highly-placed members of important groups, who are exceptionally wealthy, or who do great service to such groups or individuals will find it easier to gain access to arcane items.

Arcane Elixirs

Adepts brew a variety of arcane elixirs from herbs, roots, and other natural materials. These elixirs have various effects, described here.

Some elixir ingredients are rare. Narrators may send heroes off into the depths of the Veran Marsh or the Pavin Weald searching for a particular blossom, root, or mushroom needed to brew up a particular elixir, especially if a sudden demand for it uses up the local supply.

Enhancing Elixir

An *enhancing elixir* improves the drinker's arcana. For 10 minutes after the sweet-tasting elixir is consumed, the adept gains a +1 bonus on all arcane tests. After the elixir wears off, the drinker suffers a level of fatigue. Anyone who takes more than five doses of *enhancing elixir* within a 24-hour period must also make a TN 13 Constitution (Stamina) test, with a failed test meaning the character's Health drops immediately to 0 with the usual effects.

Healing Elixir

This sweet-tasting elixir immediately restores Health to the drinker: 1d6+2 during action time, or doubling the benefit of a breather if consumed at the end of it (see **Health and Healing** in **Chapter 1**). Only one draught of *healing elixir* per day is effective; additional doses on the same day have no benefit.

Recovery Elixir

This chalky-tasting elixir speeds the recovery of fatigue. One dose allows the drinker to recover fatigue at twice the normal rate. A second dose in the same day improves recovery rate by another 50%, but a third dose has no effect until at least 24 hours have passed after taking the initial shot of *recovery elixir*.

Stamina Elixir

For up to 8 hours after drinking this sour elixir, a character can accumulate fatigue from arcana with no ill effect. The fatigue is postponed until the elixir wears off, then the drinker suffers all the fatigue at once. If the fatigue renders the character unconscious, each additional fatigue level reduces the drinker's Health by 2d6.

Stimulation Elixir

This effervescing formula unlocks latent arcane potential in the imbiber. The drinker gains the ability to use a particular arcanum (chosen when the elixir is made) for up 10 minutes. After the elixir wears off, the drinker suffers a level of fatigue, in addition to any fatigue suffered from using the arcanum. A second dose of *stimulation elixir* within 24 hours lasts only 5 minutes and causes two levels of fatigue when it wears off. A third dose has no effect.

Suppression Elixir

This bitter-tasting formula suppresses arcane talents. It must be consumed by the target (drunk or mixed with food). Once taken, the victim makes a TN 13 Stamina (Constitution) test. A failed test results in the inability to use arcana for 1 hour. Further doses of *suppression elixir* only extend the duration for an hour from when the dose is applied.

Arcane Stones

Certain crystals and stones, like shas and viridian, have the potential to hold and channel arcane energy in various ways. Adepts often set stones into jewelry—particularly diadems, rings, and necklaces—and use them to decorate wands or staves (which are otherwise mundane). A single arcane stone may have multiple functions; each function is imbued separately.

Beacon Stone

A *beacon stone* can attune itself to the psychic impressions of its owner (requiring a major action and a successful TN 10 Communication (Psychic) test while holding the stone). Thereafter, the crystal and anything in contact with it is considered very familiar to the owner, allowing an adept to more easily use arcana to locate or contact an object or creature in touch with the stone over a distance (see **Familiarity** in **Chapter 4: Arcana**).

Meditation Stone

A *meditation stone* allows an adept to recover faster from the fatigue of wielding arcana. Meditating with the stone allows the adept to recover from fatigue caused by arcana in half the normal time, provided the stone is used to meditate the entire time.

Memory Stone

A *memory stone* can store information placed into it psychically. Storing information in the stone, or retrieving it, requires a minor action and a successful TN 10 Communication (Psychic) test while holding the stone. You can choose to encode the information stored in a *memory stone*, in which case the target number for anyone other than you (or someone you designate) to recover it is equal to your Communication (Psychic) test result when encoding the information. Anyone able to access information from a memory stone can choose to alter or delete it with another successful TN 10 Communication (Psychic) test. Discovering such tampering requires a Communication (Psychic) test that equals or exceeds the test result made when altering or deleting information.

A *memory stone* fitting easily into the palm of the hand can store information equal to a large book or about a week's worth of memories. Larger stones can store more. Each doubling in size roughly doubles the stone's storage capacity. Adepts have examined ancient and often "dense" memory stones from the time of the Old Kingdom, but sometimes find they are unintelligible or, worse, corrupted or set with psychic traps.

Pacifying Stone

A *pacifying stone*, or *stone of peace*, radiates the effects of the Calm arcanum for any creature in contact with it (see **Calm** in **Chapter 4: Arcana**). The creature gets a normal resistance test, but must make a new test each round while in contact with the stone. Once the calm effect takes hold, it persists until the stone is removed. *Pacifying stones* are sometimes incorporated into "peace torcs" in Aldis, neck rings used to help restrain the unusually violent, although only as a last resort or while they are undergoing treatment from a healer.

Scrying Stone

A *scrying stone* serves as a focus for visionary arcana, granting a +1 bonus on tests as long as the adept holds and looks into the stone and takes at least a major action to use the arcanum (even if it can normally be used with only a minor action, or none at all).

Sensing Stone

This stone has a crude form of Second Sight, making it sensitive to arcane energy. The stone glows softly whenever arcana are used within 30 feet of it. *Sensing stones* can be specifically attuned to respond to only certain arcane talents or specific arcana with a successful TN 10 Communication (Psychic or Visionary) test.

Shielding Stone

This stone protects whoever carries or wears it with the effects of a Psychic Shield, as if the bearer had the arcanum (see **Psychic Shield** in **Chapter 4: Arcana**). The bearer of the stone cannot use extra effort to augment the stone's Psychic Shield against a concerted assault, however. An attacker willing to use extra effort can overcome a shielding stone's effects. A *shielding stone* does not "stack" with an innate Psychic Shield arcanum, so those with arcane talents rarely need or use them. *Shielding stones* are relatively common among the nobility of Aldis, as well as the priests of Jarzon who are not themselves adepts.

Suppression Stone

A *suppression stone* places the effects of the Ward arcanum on any creature in contact with it. These stones are usually incorporated into manacles or other restrains for adepts, or into headbands or diadems to be placed onto the heads of bound adepts. Any adept in contact with a *suppression stone* must first win an opposed test against a target number of 3d6+2 in order to use an arcanum. If the opposed test fails, so does the attempt to use the arcanum.

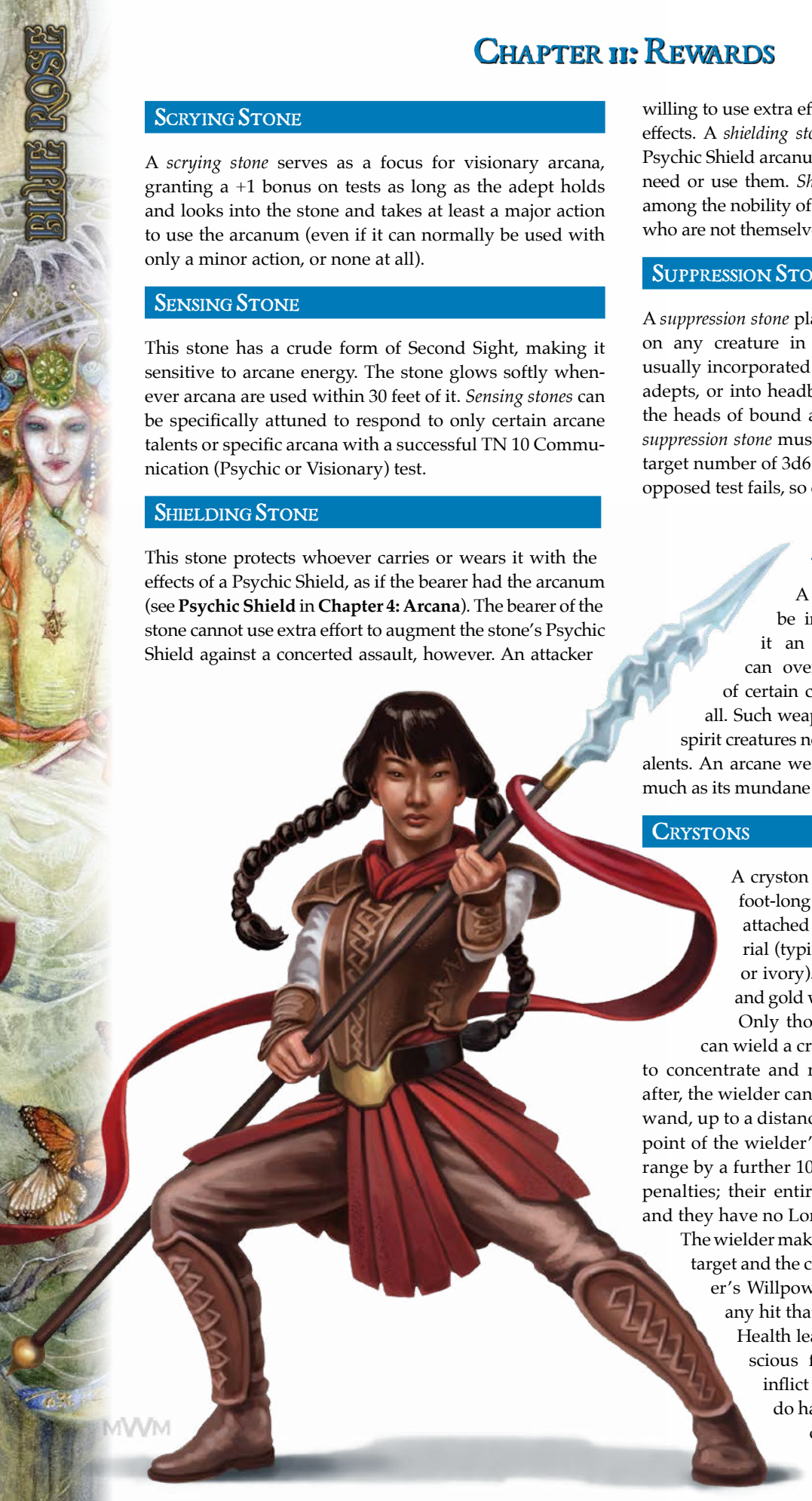
Arcane Weapons

A finely crafted mundane weapon can be imbued with arcane power, making it an arcane weapon. Arcane weapons can overcome the supernatural resistances of certain creatures, if they can be overcome at all. Such weapons can also damage incorporeal or spirit creatures normally, unlike their mundane equivalents. An arcane weapon is worth roughly five times as much as its mundane counterpart.

Crystons

A cryston is an arcane ranged weapon. It is a foot-long wand made from a shas crystal attached to a handle of some organic material (typically wood or bone, sometimes coral or ivory). The crystal is wrapped with copper and gold wire, which extends down the handle. Only those with one or more arcane talents can wield a cryston. The user takes a minor action to concentrate and ready the cryston. Any time thereafter, the wielder can fire a pulse of arcane force from the wand, up to a distance of 100 feet, as a major action. Each point of the wielder's Willpower increases the cryston's range by a further 100 feet. Crystons do not suffer range penalties; their entire range is considered Short Range and they have no Long Range.

The wielder makes an Accuracy (Arcane) test to hit the target and the cryston does 2d6 damage + the wielder's Willpower score. A cryston cannot kill, and any hit that would reduce a living creature to 0 Health leaves them with 1 Health and unconscious for 3d6 minutes instead. Crystons inflict no damage to non-living targets, but do harm darkfiends and the unliving and can destroy those targets (reducing them to 0 Health).



Once a cryston is fired, it must be readied again. A user can keep a readied cryston in that state with minimal concentration (not requiring an action each round) but must be holding the weapon and cannot concentrate on anything else, including arcana.

Unique Arcane Items

The Old Kingdom knew a variety of arcane wonders created by its master adepts and artisans. Many of these items—and the secrets of their making—were lost after the Sorcerer Kings rose to power, as well as during and after the Great Rebellion that finally overthrew them. Still, many arcane items from long ago have survived, preserved by their innate power. They are hidden away in treasure vaults or in the safekeeping of the crown; others are held as heirlooms, providing often secret advantages to their owners. Heroes may find some of these items in their travels, particularly in ancient ruins, where they lie secreted away and forgotten for centuries.

New unique items may also come into being through the providence of the gods, powerful spirits, or mysterious beings like the greatest of the rhydan, any of whom might gift heroes with things like arcane cloaks, enchanted bridles, or an entire mansion or castle able to fold up into a small box that can fit into a pack to be carried elsewhere, to name but a few.

Unique arcane items are just that: one-of-a-kind, with whatever game abilities the Narrator sees fit to allow and is willing to potentially put into the hands of the heroes. Fortunately, ancient arcana remain mysterious, and a newfound arcane item could turn out to be a powerful asset, but also a temporary one, as its enchantment is expended or it finally breaks down from extreme age. Likewise, arcane items gifted to the heroes seemingly by fate or higher powers might just as mysteriously disappear back where they came from once they have served their purpose.

Narrators should hand out such unique items sparingly and make them worthy of their unique status, but not so powerful they threaten to dominate the entire story or series with their presence. These items should be like accolades and other reflections of the heroes' achievements, providing some mechanical benefit or bonus, but primarily serving as "signature" things unique to those who carry and use them.

Corrupt Items

Unique arcane items also pose a serious risk, as some things from the time of the Old Kingdom—and especially those associated with the Empire of Thorns—may carry the taint of corruption with them, opening the user's spirit to the influence of Shadow.

A character carrying or maintaining contact with a corrupt item (such as keeping it in one's home or traveling pack) is effectively in a corrupt "area" at all times, meaning any corrupt acts run the risk of acquiring Corruption. See **Corruption** in **Chapter 2** for details of these risks.

Some particularly malevolent corrupt items actively encourage the accumulation of Corruption in two ways: First, the item may grant the ability to wield various arcana, particularly those associated with sorcery, encouraging the item's owner to misuse its powers. Second, a corrupt item may exert a willful influence over its bearer or owner, encouraging them to perform corrupt actions, particularly in alignment with the character's Fate, thereby potentially acquiring Corruption. Narrators can offer players awards of Conviction as a "temptation" for their characters to yield to their Fate as a way of simulating this effect of a corrupt item. If the player accepts the Conviction, the character is also at risk of acquiring Corruption.

Corrupt items may have other powers or properties at the Narrator's discretion. They tend to be difficult to get rid of once they have "latched on" to a character, unless a better opportunity comes along, and circumstances may seem to conspire to keep bringing a corrupt item back into the hands of someone trying to get rid of it.

Wealth

Blue Rose doesn't concern itself with strict and specific systems of accounting for wealth the way many roleplaying games do. It's generally assumed the heroes have access to resources and wealth based on their concept and background, but few adventures or roleplaying opportunities are based around the acquisition of material wealth as such, instead focusing on politics, facing supernatural threats or ideological struggles, and similar tales of romance, drama, and glory.

That doesn't mean money isn't important to characters in the world. Many people—and likely some heroes—are at least somewhat driven by the acquisition and benefits of wealth. For NPCs, this provides insight into their personality and motivations which can be understood and possibly exploited by the heroes. For the player characters, it's a potential source of both temptation and reward.

Since *Blue Rose* doesn't count each coin in terms of wealth, the best way for Narrators to use wealth as a reward is in the form of substantial payouts (often in kind) and lasting changes to a character's wealth and means. Such rewards not only excite the characters, but their players as well. An award of a few coins, even a lump sum of money, is unlikely to excite most players even if their characters would be pleased. Good examples of wealth-based rewards include houses or manors; the services of various characters, such as guards or household staff; ships or other forms of transport, including fine horses or other mounts; and sufficient wealth to purchase or maintain any of these things. In many cases, such wealth is attached to honorifics or memberships as a secondary element of those rewards.

The world of Aldea is filled with many fantastic creatures. Some, like the rhydan, are allies of Aldis. Others are creatures of the wilderness living out their natural impulses, from ordinary beasts to the fey spirits of nature. The rest are the unnatural spawn of sorcery, a dark legacy of the Empire of Thorns and the reign of the Sorcerer Kings, or else the darkfiends themselves, creatures of Shadow, offspring of divine madness and despair.

Each creature in this chapter is organized in the same general format outlined in this section. First, there is a description followed by the game stats—sometimes referred to as a "stat block" because it's a block of stat-related text. If you've read this far into the book, the stats should be fairly self-explanatory. Note that each adversary has a **Favored Stunts** entry. These are the adversary's most commonly used stunts, but don't feel compelled to use them. Favored stunts are helpful suggestions but, as always, use your best judgment. Also note that many adversaries have unique stunts to give them flavor and make fighting one enemy different than fighting another.

Some adversaries have special focuses that are not found with normal characters. For example, a fire elemental might have a **Fire** focus that allows it to direct and channel various fire-based actions. These focuses are not generally available to characters outside that type—they exist to streamline and adapt certain creatures more effectively to the *AGE* rules.

NPCs and Classes

At this point you may be wondering: Do NPCs have classes and levels? The answer is yes, they can, but they don't have to. Classes provide a framework for advancement that is necessary for the player characters, but not for NPCs. If you want to use the character creation rules to build NPCs, you certainly can, but you are equally welcome to give NPCs whatever abilities, focuses, talents, and other game traits that seem appropriate. This chapter is full of examples you can use and modify as needed.

This divide between player characters and NPCs also means that some adversaries may possess arcane talents while others simply have access to certain arcana. A creature with a talent like Shaping has been trained to develop particular arcana. By contrast, a creature with a number of arcana but no such talents can inherently channel their arcane nature into various effects. In both cases, the arcana work normally based on their description and effects.

Adversary Threat

Creatures are organized roughly into Threat categories based on the level of characters for which they present a suitable danger or challenge. Check out the Adversary Threat Level table for some guidelines.

Adversary Threat Level	
Threat Level	**PC Level Range**
Minor	Levels 1-4
Moderate	Levels 5-8
Major	Levels 9-12
Dire	Levels 13-17
Legendary	Levels 18-20

Also note that Threat is a general indicator and not a perfect measure of how dangerous a particular adversary is to all characters. For example, a heavily armored, healthy level 3 warrior might do better against a Moderate threat than an injured level 7 adept who's already fatigued. Likewise, Threat is a range, not an exact ranking. Creatures are assigned Threat based on how they generally operate. Thus rats are assumed to appear in a substantial swarm, for example, while nagas and similar creatures are assumed to appear alone or in very small numbers.

As always, Narrators should be aware of the characters' individual capabilities and any significant circumstances that might make them more or less effective against a particular adversary. Impressive arcane items, a larger than normal group, special knowledge of an adversary, and numerous other factors can cause the actual Threat to shift from its baseline—up or down.

Beefing Up Adversaries

The stats presented are average for an adversary of that type but you can change them for individual encounters. It's a simple matter to modify the weapons and armor of many adversaries to create different tactical challenges. If you want a tougher adversary, you can also modify their stats. You can change them as you like, but here are some basic guidelines for creating more challenging adversaries:

Elite: To make an adversary a bit tougher than average, add +1 to any three abilities, add two focuses, and increase Health by +5. You can also make the NPC a novice in a new talent, or add a degree to an existing one.

Heroic: To make an adversary a formidable opponent, add +2 to any two abilities and +1 to any three others, add four focuses, and increase Health by +15. You can also make the NPC a novice in two new talents, or add a total of two degrees to any existing ones (in any workable combination you like).

Epic: To make an adversary who is extremely potent, add +3 to one ability, +2 to any two other abilities, and +1 to any three others. Add five focuses, increase the adversary's Health by +20, and increase its Armor Rating (AR) by +3. You can also add a total of three degrees to new or existing talents (again, in any workable combination you like).

People

The characters will meet many people in their travels and you needn't provide full game stats for all of them. Oftentimes these people only appear in the game for a single roleplaying encounter. Many of them don't need stats at all, but it's often useful to know some basics about the character. In these cases you can use an abbreviated stat block, which simply lists important abilities and focuses.

Many other people have no particularly relevant abilities and can be assumed to have scores of 0 in all of them without any focuses, although you can assign one or two as appropriate. A farmer, for example, obviously knows some things about farming and local knowledge, while a crafter has a focus with their business, and so forth. Otherwise, assume their stats are 0—should there be a need to figure them out—and that they have a Health of 10.

For people other than baseline humans, simply apply the modifiers for the races found in **Chapter 2** to the basic stats to reflect that race's abilities.

Adept

The adept, talented and trained in a particular area, is a fairly typical wielder of arcana the characters may encounter.

Adept	
Abilities (Focuses)	
2	**Accuracy** (Arcane)
1	**Communication**
1	**Constitution**
1	**Dexterity**
0	**Fighting**
2	**Intelligence** (Arcane Lore)
1	**Perception** (Seeing)
0	**Strength**
2	**Willpower** (Self-Discipline)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
11	15	11	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Staff	+2	1d6+1

Special Qualities

Arcana: Psychic Shield, Second Sight

Favored Stunts: Powerful Channeling, Skillful Channeling

Talents: Arcane Training (Novice)

Weapons Groups: Brawling, Staves

Equipment: Staff

Threat: Minor

Rogue

Abilities (Focuses)
2 Accuracy (Light Blades)
1 Communication (Deception)
0 Constitution
2 Dexterity (Lock Picking, Stealth)
1 Fighting
1 Intelligence
2 Perception (Empathy)
1 Strength
1 Willpower (Morale)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
12	15	12	3

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Dagger	+4	1d6+2
Shortsword	+4	1d6+2

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Lightning Attack, Speedy Search

Talents: Armor Training (Novice), Scouting (Novice)

Weapons Groups: Bows, Brawling, Light Blades, and Staves

Equipment: Dagger, Shortsword, Light Leather Armor

Threat: Minor

Warrior

Abilities (Focuses)
2 Accuracy (Bows, Light Blades)
1 Communication
2 Constitution
1 Dexterity (Stealth)
2 Fighting (Heavy Blades)
0 Intelligence
2 Perception (Searching)
1 Strength (Intimidation)
1 Willpower (Morale)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
11	15	11	3

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Dagger	+4	1d6+2
Longsword	+4	2d6+1
Short Bow	+4	1d6+2

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Skirmish, Knock Prone

Talents: Armor Training (Novice), Single Weapon Style (Novice)

Weapons Groups: Bludgeons, Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, and Light Blades

Equipment: Dagger, Longsword, Short Bow, Light Leather Armor

Threat: Minor

Choose one of the following or roll a die to determine the adept's area of expertise and related abilities:

1. **Animist:** Animism talent (Novice), Communication (Animism) focus, Arcana: Animal Summoning, Plant Shaping, Psychic Contact
2. **Contemplative:** Meditative talent (Novice), Willpower (Meditative) focus, Arcana: Body Control, Cure, Enhancement
3. **Healer:** Healing talent (Novice), Intelligence (Healing) focus, Arcana: Body Control, Cure, Sleep
4. **Psychic:** Psychic talent (Novice), Communication (Psychic) focus, Arcana: Calm, Heart Reading, Psychic Contact
5. **Shaper:** Shaping talent (Novice), Intelligence (Shaping) focus, Arcana: Manipulate Object, Move Object, plus one of Earth Shaping, Fire Shaping, Water Shaping, or Wind Shaping
6. **Seer:** Visionary talent (Novice), Perception (Visionary) focus, Arcana: Object Reading, Visions, Ward

Sorcerer

For an adept who has delved into the forbidden secrets of sorcery, add together any two of the previous options, plus the Intelligence (Sorcery Lore) focus and the Psychic Blast, Sorcerer's Grip, and Torment arcana (or choose any three from the sorcerous arcana in **Chapter 4**). A sorcerer is at least a Moderate threat.

Rogue

The rogue often lives outside the law, usually by stealth and cunning rather than force of arms. These statistics suit most criminal types, as well as spies. If you replace the Dexterity focuses with additional Communication or Perception focuses, it also covers minor nobles and similar courtly types.

Warrior

The warrior is a typical person trained in arms and combat, whether using those skills as a soldier, mercenary, or bandit outlaw. The weapons and armor used by these adversaries vary more than their skills, though a unique or well-trained individual could have additional focuses, talents, and higher ability scores. Mercenary and bandit warriors are often mounted, and may have degrees in Mounted Combat Style or the Outrider talent.

Beasts

This section provides information on common kinds of beasts. These creatures operate on instinct, driven by simple needs such as food and reproduction. Most animals—even predators—do not attack unless they or their young are threatened, or they are stalking prey. Animals are not capable of reasoning although, with the Animal Training talent, it is possible to tame an animal and teach it to perform certain tricks. Animism adepts can accomplish even more using their arcana.

Bat: Bats are small, nocturnal flying mammals with leathery wings. They primarily eat insects and fruit.

Bear: Bears are found primarily in the forests and mountains of Aldea, particularly the Pavin Weald and the foothills of the Ice-Binder Mountains. Bears are forest-dwelling omnivores, and are usually not dangerous unless an interloper threatens their cubs or food. Their fur can be pure black, blond, or cinnamon in color. They can grow to a massive size, nearly 9 feet tall rearing up on their hind legs, and weighing some 1,800 pounds.

Bison: Roaming herds of bison criss-cross the plains of Rezea. Bison can be aggressive when protecting young and during the mating season, but they generally prefer running to fighting. A bison stands more than 6 feet tall at the shoulder and is 9 to 12 feet long. It weighs 1,800 to 2,400 pounds. The bison's statistics can be used for almost any similar large herd animal.

Boar: A boar is covered in coarse gray and black fur. Adult males are about 4 feet long and 3 feet high at the shoulder. Though not carnivores, wild swine are ill-tempered and usually charge anyone who disturbs them, slashing at their target with their sharp tusks.

Cat: Cats are common pets, particularly in Aldis and Jarzon. There are numerous breeds, both long- and short-haired, with various markings and coloration. Some breeds are especially prized, fetching high prices among the wealthy of different nations.

Bear

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 2 (Bite), Communication 0, Constitution 6 (Stamina), Dexterity 1, Fighting 3 (Claws), Intelligence –1, Perception 2 (Smelling, Tasting), Strength 6 (Intimidation, Might), Willpower 2

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
13	60	11	2

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+4	1d6+7
Claws	+5	2d6+6

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone (1 SP) and Quick Bite (2 SP)

Quick Bite Stunt: A bear can follow up a successful attack with its claws with a Quick Bite as a special stunt, costing 2 SP. This special bite attack must be taken against the same target as the original attack, and doubles on its attack roll don't generate additional stunt points.

Tough Hide: Bears have tough hides and thick bones that provide a natural Armor Rating of 2.

Threat: Moderate

Bison

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 0, Communication –1, Constitution 5 (Stamina), Dexterity 0, Fighting 2 (Gore), Intelligence –2, Perception 1 (Smelling), Strength 5 (Might), Willpower 1

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
13	40	10	2

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Gore	+4	2d6+5

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Mighty Blow, Skirmish

Tough Hide: Bison have tough hides and thick bones that provide a natural Armor Rating of 2.

Threat: Minor

Bat Swarm

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 3 (Bite), Communication –3, Constitution 1, Dexterity 3, Fighting 0, Intelligence –3, Perception 3 (Hearing), Strength 0, Willpower 0

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
2 (17 Fly)	20	13	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Swarm	+5	1d6

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Skirmish

Sonar: Can function normally in total darkness.

Swarm Attack: A bat swarm covers an area with a rough diameter and height of 3 yards, and can attack all creatures inside or adjacent to that area on its turn as a single major action.

Swarm Defense: A bat swarm suffers only 1 point of damage from any sort of attack that targets a single locus, save that a Mighty Blow inflicts 2 points of damage and a Lethal Blow 3 points. Only area attacks, or arcane attacks with a broad effect, inflict full damage on the swarm.

Threat: Minor

Boar

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 0, Communication –1, Constitution 3 (Stamina), Dexterity 2, Fighting 2 (Gore), Intelligence –2, Perception 1 (Smelling), Strength 3 (Might), Willpower 2

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
13	35	12	2

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Gore	+4	2d6+3

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Mighty Blow

Tough Hide: Boars have tough hides and thick bones that provide a natural Armor Rating of 2.

Threat: Minor

Cat

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 1 (Bite), Communication –1, Constitution 2, Dexterity 3 (Stealth), Fighting 1 (Claws), Intelligence –1, Perception 1 (Searching), Strength 0, Willpower 1

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
11 (13 Fly for falcats)	10	15	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+3	1d6
Claws	+3	1d3+1

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Defensive Stance, Skirmish

Nightvision: Cats can see in normal darkness without penalty.

Small Size: A cat's small size makes them harder to hit and allows them to sneak into places normal-sized beings would otherwise be unable to. This is reflected in their abilities, though they may also receive a +2 circumstance bonus when their small size would be an extra advantage, such as a Dexterity (Stealth) test involving hiding in small spaces.

Threat: Minor

There is a unique breed of cat in Aldis with feathered wings, known as a falcat. Their abilities are the same as ordinary cats, save for their flight Speed. They cannot interbreed with ordinary cats, only their own kind. They are wholly natural, although some Jarzoni priests claim falcats are creations of sorcery (making them unpopular in that nation). Falcats are common familiars for adepts in Aldis.

Crocodile: Crocodiles are aggressive predators 11 to 12 feet long. They lie mostly submerged in rivers or marshes with only their eyes and nostrils showing, waiting for prey to come within reach. Monstrous giant crocodiles are sometimes found along the seashore of the Veran Marsh, growing up to 20 feet long, but otherwise similar to their smaller cousins.

Dog: The statistics presented here describe a domestic dog of about 20 to 50 pounds in weight. They can also be used for small wild canines such as coyotes and wild dogs. Wild dogs generally hunt in packs, chasing and exhausting prey until they can drag it down.

Drake: Drakes are small, omnivorous four-legged reptiles about a foot long, with a tail that adds another foot of length, and bat-like wings. Their scales range from reddish through dull orange to vivid greens and blues, darker on their dorsal regions and lighter along the belly. Drakes tend to be shy and somewhat vain, with cat-like personalities. Some drakes bond with people, becoming familiars, while others remain in the wild, particularly in forested areas.

Crocodile

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 2 (Bite), Communication –2, Constitution 4 (Stamina, Swimming), Dexterity 0, Fighting 2, Intelligence –2, Perception 1 (Smelling), Strength 4 (Intimidation), Willpower 2

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
10 (Land/Swim)	45	10	4

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+4	2d6+4

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Mighty Blow (1 SP)

Ambush: Crocodiles are considered to have the Dexterity (Stealth) focus when submerged (partially or fully).

Powerful Jaws: Crocodiles may perform a Mighty or Lethal Blow combat stunt with their Bite attack for 1 SP less than normal.

Tough Hide: Crocodiles have tough scaly hides that provide a natural Armor Rating of 4.

Threat: Moderate

Dog

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 2 (Bite), Communication 0, Constitution 1 (Running), Dexterity 2, Fighting 2, Intelligence –2, Perception 3 (Hearing, Smelling, Tracking), Strength 1 (Jumping), Willpower 0

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
15	15	12	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+4	1d6+1

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Skirmish

Loyal: Dogs are considered to have Willpower 2 and the Willpower (Courage) focus when defending their owners, families, or loves ones.

Threat: Minor

Eagle: These majestic birds of prey inhabit nearly every terrain and climate, though they all prefer high, secluded nesting spots, making them common in mountain areas. A typical eagle is about 3 feet long and has a wingspan of about 7 feet. These statistics can describe any similar-sized bird of prey.

Hawk: Hawks are similar to eagles, but smaller: 1 to 2 feet long, with wingspans of 6 feet or less. These statistics can describe falcons and other similar-sized birds of prey.

Drake

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 1 (Bite), Communication –1, Constitution 2, Dexterity 2 (Stealth), Fighting 1 (Claws), Intelligence 0, Perception 2 (Smelling), Strength 0, Willpower 1

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
13 (Flying)	15	14	2

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+3	1d6
Claws	+3	1d3+1

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Defensive Stance, Skirmish, Defensive Stance

Scales: A drake's scaly hide gives it a natural Armor Rating of 2.

Small Size: A drake's small size makes them harder to hit and allows them to sneak into places normal-sized beings would otherwise be unable to. This is reflected in their abilities, though they may also receive a +2 circumstance bonus when their small size would be an extra advantage, such as a Dexterity (Stealth) test involving hiding in small spaces.

Threat: Minor

Hawks are common familiars in Aldis. Owls have similar stats, though with the added Special Quality of Nightvision: Can see in normal darkness as if it were daylight.

Horse: Horses are widely domesticated for riding and as beasts of burden. The statistics describe large breeds of working horses, such as Clydesdales. These animals are usually ready for heavy work by age three.

Rat: These omnivorous rodents thrive almost anywhere. Rats prefer to run away when confronted; they bite only as a last resort, usually when trapped.

Raven: These glossy black birds are about 2 feet long and have wingspans of around 4 feet. They combine both of their talons into a single racking attack. The statistics presented here can describe most non-predatory birds of a similar size. Ravens are common familiars among Kernish adepts.

Eagle

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 2 (Bite), Communication –2, Constitution 1, Dexterity 3 (Flying), Fighting 2 (Claws), Intelligence –2, Perception 3 (Seeing), Strength 0, Willpower 1

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
4 (Flying 18)	20	13	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+4	1d6
Claws	+4	1d6

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Pierce Armor, Skirmish

Threat: Minor

Horse

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 0 (Kick), Communication –3, Constitution 6 (Running, Stamina), Dexterity 0, Fighting 0, Intelligence –3, Perception 1 (Hearing), Strength 5 (Might), Willpower 1

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
18	45	10	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Kick	+2	1d6+5

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Skirmish

Threat: Minor

Hawk

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 2 (Bite), Communication –2, Constitution –1, Dexterity 4 (Flying), Fighting 1 (Claws), Intelligence –2, Perception 3 (Seeing), Strength –2, Willpower 1

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
4 (Flying 20)	10	14	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+4	1d6–2
Claws	+3	1d6–2

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Pierce Armor, Skirmish

Threat: Minor

Shark: Sharks are aggressive, carnivorous fish liable to make unprovoked attacks against anything approaching them. Medium sharks are from 5 to 8 feet long, and are not usually dangerous to creatures other than their prey,

Rat Swarm

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 3 (Bite), Communication –3, Constitution 1, Dexterity 2, Fighting 0, Intelligence –2, Perception 3 (Smelling), Strength 0 (Climbing), Willpower 0

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
12	25	12	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Swarm	+5	1d6

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Skirmish

Nightvision: Rats can see in normal darkness without penalty.

Swarm Attack: A rat swarm covers an area with a rough diameter and height of 3 yards, and can attack all creatures inside or adjacent to that area on its turn as a single major action.

Swarm Defense: A rat swarm suffers only 1 point of damage from any sort of attack that targets a single locus, save that a Mighty Blow inflicts 2 points of damage and a Lethal Blow 3 points. Only area attacks, or arcane attacks with a broad effect, inflict full damage on the swarm.

Threat: Minor

Shark

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 2 (Bite), Communication –3, Constitution 4 (Swimming) , Dexterity 2 (Stealth), Fighting 1, Intelligence –4, Perception 2 (Smelling, Tracking), Strength 4 (Intimidation, Might), Willpower 2

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
17 (Swimming)	40	12	2

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+4	2d6+5

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Mighty Blow (1 SP), Skirmish

Powerful Bite: Sharks may perform a Mighty or Lethal Blow combat stunt with their bite attack for 1 SP less than normal.

Tough Hide: A shark's thick skin and flexible body allow it to absorb impacts, giving it a natural Armor Rating of 2.

Threat: Minor

Raven

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 1 (Bite), Communication –1, Constitution –2, Dexterity 4 (Flying), Fighting 1 (Claws), Intelligence –1, Perception 2 (Seeing), Strength –3, Willpower 1

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
4 (Flying 18)	10	14	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+3	1d6–3
Claws	+3	1d6–3

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Skirmish

Threat: Minor

Snake, Constrictor

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 0, Communication –3, Constitution 3, Dexterity 1 (Stealth), Fighting 2 (Grab), Intelligence –3, Perception 1 (Smelling), Strength 3 (Might), Willpower 0

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
9	25	11	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+0	1d3+3
Constrict	+4	Special

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Lightning Attack

Constrict: A constrictor seeks to grab an opponent until it can lock on and crush the life from it with its Squeeze attack. As an attack, Constrict does no damage itself, but it renders the target unable to move or act effectively. Successful constriction restricts a target to one action (major or minor) per turn and gives them a –2 penalty to Defense, Speed, and attack rolls. However, the constrictor can only continue to attack the same target if they wish to keep the constriction effects active on them. A target can free themselves by succeeding in an opposed Strength (Might) test with the constrictor, and they may make one such attempt on each of their turns as a free action. Another successful grab against the same target restricts the target to no actions other than free actions until the constrictor releases the target. Note: Constrictors may use the Lightning Attack combat stunt to make two quick Constrict attacks or a bite and constrict attack in the same turn.

Squeeze: Once a target is constricted to the point it can make no normal actions, the constrictor can begin squeezing the life from it. This attack automatically hits each round, doing 1d6+6 damage as a major action.

Threat: Moderate

Great Beasts

The base statistics provided for beasts in this chapter are for average specimens of moderate size. Narrators desiring larger, meaner, or more formidable versions of various beasts can achieve this by applying the Elite, Heroic, or Epic modifiers from earlier in this chapter.

Generally, adding Elite to a beast and increasing its Fighting or Accuracy, Strength, and Constitution is a good way to model a larger or more fearsome breed of creature. Heroic or Epic modifiers are reserved for massive members of those breeds. So a large brown or polar bear can be modeled by applying Elite to the bear statistics. A larger and particularly awe-inspiring creature might be Heroic, and abnormally huge and formidable members of the largest breeds would be Epic.

In other words, Elite is how you turn the standard shark into a great white, tiger, or thresher shark. Heroic is how you model the biggest of these breeds. Epic is how you make *Jaws*.

Snake, Venomous

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 2 (Bite), Communication –3, Constitution 1, Dexterity 3 (Initiative, Stealth), Fighting 0, Intelligence –3, Perception 2 (Smelling), Strength –2 (Intimidation), Willpower 0

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
10	10	15	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+4	1d6–2

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Lightning Attack

Small Size: A venomous snake's small size makes them harder to hit and allows them to sneak into places normal-sized beings would otherwise be unable to. This is reflected in their abilities, though they may also receive a +2 circumstance bonus when their small size would be an extra advantage, such as a Dexterity (Stealth) test involving hiding in small spaces.

Venomous Bite Stunt: If a venomous snake's bite attack does any Health damage, it injects its venom into a target. The target must make a TN 12 Constitution (Stamina) test. Failure means the target is poisoned. Poisoned targets suffer a –1 penalty to attack rolls and their Defense rating, and take 1d6+1 damage per round (ignoring armor) for 1d6 rounds. The target, or an adjacent ally, may attempt a TN 12 **Intelligence (Healing)** test and spend two minor actions to reduce this damage by half.

Venomous Variants: Some snakes have even deadlier venom that does more damage, inflicts higher penalties, and has a higher target number to resist.

Threat: Minor (higher for more poisonous snakes)

Squid, Giant

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 1 (Bite), **Communication** –4, **Constitution** 6 (Stamina, Swimming), **Dexterity** 0 (Stealth), **Fighting** 2 (Tentacle), **Intelligence** –2, **Perception** 1, **Strength** 6 (Might), **Willpower** 2

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
15 (Swimming)	80	10	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+3	2d6+6
Tentacle	+4	1d6+8

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Dual Strike, Tentacle Grab (2 SP)

Ink Cloud: Underwater, a squid can spray an inky cloud that covers a roughly spherical area 10 yards in diameter. This cloud blinds all within it, making them unable to see clearly until it dissipates (1d3 rounds). Squids usually avoid using this ability unless they are seeking to escape an encounter.

Tentacle Grab Stunt: A giant squid can use Tentacle Grab as a special 2 SP stunt. If the giant squid wins an opposed Strength (Might) test, the target cannot move and suffers a –2 penalty to ability tests and Defense. A grabbed target can attempt to break free as a minor action. Air breathers also need to worry about drowning if they are held underwater.

Threat: Major

Weasel

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 3 (Bite), **Communication** –2, **Constitution** 0, **Dexterity** 3 (Initiative, Stealth), **Fighting** 0, **Intelligence** –2, **Perception** 2 (Seeing, Smelling), **Strength** –2, **Willpower** 1

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
13	12	15	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+4	1d6–2

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Lightning Attack

Nightvision: Weasels can see in normal darkness without penalty.

Small Size: A weasel's small size makes them harder to hit and allows them to sneak into places normal-sized beings would otherwise be unable to. This is reflected in their abilities, though they may also receive a +2 circumstance bonus when their small size would be an extra advantage, such as a Dexterity (Stealth) test involving hiding in small spaces.

Threat: Minor

smaller fish and sea mammals. Large sharks can reach around 15 feet in length and are a serious threat. Huge sharks are true monsters, like great whites, that can exceed 20 feet in length.

Snake: Various sorts of snakes are found in Aldea, particularly in the Veran Marsh, where they thrive.

- **Constrictor snakes** are usually not aggressive and flee when confronted. They hunt for food but do not attempt to make a meal out of any creature too large to constrict. Constrictor snakes hunt by grabbing prey with their mouths and then squeezing it with their powerful bodies.
- **Vipers** are not particularly aggressive, but are territorial and will often lash out with a bite attack before attempting to retreat. They rely on their venomous bite to kill prey and defend themselves.

Squid, Giant: These voracious sea creatures can have bodies more than 20 feet long, and attack almost anything they meet.

Weasel: These little mammals are aggressive predators but usually confine themselves to smaller prey. The statistics presented here can also apply to ferrets, fishers, and similar small creatures. Weasels and ferrets are sometimes found as pets or familiars.

Wolf: Wolves are pack hunters known for their persistence and cunning. A favorite wolf tactic is to send a few individuals against the foe's front while the rest of the pack circles and attacks from the flanks or rear.

Wolf

Abilities (Focuses)

Accuracy 3 (Bite), **Communication** –2, **Constitution** 3 (Running, Stamina), **Dexterity** 2, **Fighting** 1, **Intelligence** –1, **Perception** 1 (Hearing, Smelling, Tracking), **Strength** 3 (Intimidation), **Willpower** 2 (Morale)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
16	30	12	1

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+5	1d6+4

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Set Up

Nightvision: Wolves can see in normal darkness without penalty.

Pack Tactics: If a wolf is attacking with at least three other wolves, they may perform stunts for 1 SP less than normal.

Tough: A wolf's thick fur and natural toughness provide them with an Armor Rating of 1.

Threat: Moderate

Rhydan

Beasts invested with awareness and intellect, the rhydan are accorded the rights of other people in Aldis, where they are respected allies who aided the Great Rebellion in overthrowing the Sorcerer Kings. In other lands, rhydan may be treated as respected spiritual beings or suspect arcane creatures, or anywhere in between.

Most rhydan "awaken" from the ranks of otherwise mundane beasts, coming together in their own small communities or bonding with other people in their societies. They are generally referred to by adding the prefix "rhy-" to the name of their species, such as rhy-cats and rhy-wolves. A few species of rhydan are all awakened. They are often seen as the "nobles" of their kind, and are simply known by the name of their species, such as griffons.

Some example rhydan are provided here, representing typical versions of the most commonly encountered rhy-beasts. More experienced rhydan will possess various talents, additional arcana, and higher ability scores. To create other unique rhydan characters, consult the rhydan template in **Chapter 2: Character Creation**.

Rhy-cat

Rhy-cats arise from a breed of wild cat about 4 feet long and weighing 120 pounds full-grown. Their coloration and markings are similar to those of Siamese cats: a mixture of chocolate and cream color with blue, green, or amber eyes. Rhy-cats generally prefer sleeping during the day and hunting at night, although they vary their routines if living alongside human companions.

Rhy-fen

Rhy-fen are awakened dolphins, who often travel with pods of their mundane cousins. They are friendly, playful, and usually eager to help others in need. Rhy-fen are known for aiding sailors in distress and helping to drive off sharks (their mortal enemies). They are friends and allies of the sea-folk. Naturally, rhy-fen are limited in their ability to interact with land-dwellers, and most cannot leave the water, although there are rare instances of rhy-fen who have mastered a version of the Shapeshifter specialization (see p. 87) or who use other arcana to assume a sea-folk form, allowing them to walk on land for a time.

Rhy-fen

Abilities (Focuses)	
2	Accuracy (Slam)
2	Communication (Psychic)
2	Constitution (Swimming)
1	Dexterity (Acrobatics)
0	Fighting
1	Intelligence
2	Perception (Hearing)
2	Strength (Jumping)
2	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
16 (Swim)	35	11	2

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Slam	+4	1d6+2

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Mighty Blow, Skirmish, Taunt

Arcana: Manipulate Object, Move Object, Psychic Contact, Manipulate Object, Move Object, Water Shaping

Echolocation: Rhy-fen can send out sound waves underwater, allowing them to "see" objects and creatures even in absence of light.

Tough Hide: A rhy-fen's thick skin and flexible body allow it to absorb impacts, giving it a natural Armor Rating of 2.

Threat: Minor

Rhy-cat

Abilities (Focuses)
2 Accuracy (Bite)
1 Communication (Psychic)
2 Constitution
2 Dexterity (Stealth)
2 Fighting (Claws)
1 Intelligence
2 Perception (Hearing, Smelling)
1 Strength (Jumping)
2 Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
14	30	12	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+4	1d6+3
Claws	+4	1d6+1

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Defensive Stance, Lightning Attack, Skirmish

Arcana: Calm, Illusion, Psychic Contact

Nightvision: Rhy-cats can see in near darkness as if it were normal light.

Threat: Moderate

Rhy-horse

Abilities (Focuses)
1 Accuracy (Kick)
1 Communication (Psychic)
6 Constitution (Running, Stamina)
1 Dexterity
0 Fighting
0 Intelligence
1 Perception (Hearing)
5 Strength (Might)
2 Willpower (Morale)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
17	50	10	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Kick	+3	1d6+5

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Skirmish

Arcana: Body Control, Enhancement, Psychic Contact, Psychic Shield

Threat: Minor

Rhy-wolf

Abilities (Focuses)
3 Accuracy (Bite)
–2 Communication (Psychic)
3 Constitution (Stamina, Running)
2 Dexterity (Stealth)
1 Fighting
0 Intelligence
1 Perception (Hearing, Smelling, Tracking)
3 Strength (Intimidation)
2 Willpower (Morale)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
16	35	12	1

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+5	1d6+4

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Set Up

Arcana: Enhancement, Nature Reading, Psychic Contact,

Nightvision: Wolves can see in normal darkness without penalty.

Pack Tactics: If a wolf is attacking with at least three other wolves, they may perform stunts for 1 SP less than normal.

Tough: A wolf's thick fur and natural toughness provide them with an Armor Rating of 1.

Threat: Moderate

Rhy-horse

Rhy-horses often travel in the company of herds of their mundane cousins, especially in Rezea. Physically, they are indistinguishable from regular horses, although rhy-horses often have star patterns or similar dappled markings on their faces or hindquarters.

Rhy-wolf

Rhy-wolves are pack hunters like their mundane cousins. They don't often adopt humanoid companions into their packs, but they are loyal unto death when they do. Rhy-wolves are most common in the Pavin Weald and other forests of Aldea.

Griffon

Griffons are powerful, majestic creatures with the characteristics of both lions and eagles, having lion-like lower bodies with an eagle's head, forelimbs, and wings. From nose to tail, an adult griffon can measure as much

Griffon

Abilities (Focuses)
3	Accuracy (Bite)
1	Communication (Psychic)
3	Constitution (Stamina)
4	Dexterity
3	Fighting (Claws)
1	Intelligence
3	Perception (Hearing, Seeing)
5	Strength (Intimidation, Might)
4	Willpower (Courage)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
16 (Walk/Fly)	75	14	2

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+5	2d6+5
Claws	+5	1d6+5

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Defensive Stance, Dual Strike, Lethal Blow, Threaten

Arcana: Heart Reading, Psychic Contact

Flurry of Claws: The griffon may make a claw attack as a minor action.

Thick Hide: A griffon's thick muscles and tough hide give them a natural Armor Rating of 2.

Threat: Moderate

Unicorn

Abilities (Focuses)
2	Accuracy (Gore, Kick)
3	Communication (Persuasion, Psychic)
6	Constitution (Running, Stamina)
2	Dexterity
0	Fighting
2	Intelligence (Arcane Lore, Healing)
2	Perception (Searching)
5	Strength
3	Willpower (Animism, Self-Discipline)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
17	75	12	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Gore	+4	2d6+5
Kick	+4	1d6+4

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Skirmish

Arcana: Animal Messenger, Animal Summoning, Cure, Heart Reading, Nature Reading, Plant Shaping, Psychic Contact

Arcane Horn: A unicorn's horn is treated as an arcane weapon. It loses its arcane status if removed from the unicorn.

Threat: Major

as 8 feet, with a wingspan of 25 feet or more. Like other rhydan, griffons are innately psychic. Elder griffons are often talented and trained in other arcana as well. They are proud and quite stand-offish, displaying very cautious behavior around strangers. In combat, griffons prefer to pounce on their prey, either diving or leaping from above, often with a fierce, roaring shriek.

Unicorn

Unicorns are the most majestic and exalted of rhydan, similar to horses but with cloven hooves, a pure white coat, and an elegant spiral horn like mother-of-pearl. A unicorn has deep sea-blue, violet, dark amber, or fiery golden eyes. Unicorns are particularly renowned for their wisdom and insight; even the proud griffons defer to them. These elder rhydan are adept wielders of many arcana, particularly the healing and psychic arts. Unicorns normally fight only when defending themselves or their forests. They either charge, impaling foes with their horns like lances, or strike with their hooves. A unicorn's horn strikes as an arcane weapon, but its power fades if removed from the unicorn.

Nature Spirits

The natural world of Aldea is alive with spirits, which sometimes manifest in visible, or even material, form. The most essential of these spirits are known as elementals, beings of living air, earth, fire, or water. They are akin to beasts in some ways, driven largely by primal instinct, although somewhat intelligent and capable of understanding and communicating with people.

More sophisticated nature spirits are known as fey, and often manifest in forms like people, or as mixtures of people, beasts, plants, and elements. The fey tend to be playful and flighty, but also capricious and subject to sudden changes, not unlike nature itself. They are frequently tied to particular natural places or features, such as a grove (or even single tree), spring, stream, peak, or the like.

Nature spirits sometimes appear spontaneously, in response to the rise and fall of arcane forces through the land and water and the cycles of nature (the Moon and the seasons, in particular), but adepts can also summon them using the arcane arts. They are allies of those who respect and defend the natural order; enemies of those who do not.

Air Elemental

Abilities (Focuses)	
3	Accuracy (Wind)
–2	Communication
0	Constitution
6	Dexterity (Stealth)
2	Fighting (Slam)
2	Intelligence
3	Perception (Hearing)
2	Strength
2	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
16 (Flying)	25	16	3

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Slam	+4	1d6+5

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Lightning Attack, Seize the Initiative

Air Whip: Whenever the air elemental hits a creature with a Slam attack or the Wind Buffet ability, the target must succeed on a TN 12 Strength (Might) test or have their weapon pushed a number of yards in the opposite direction to that of the air elemental. The distance pushed is equal to the Drama Die from the air elemental's attack roll.

Ethereal: Air elementals are ethereal, being comprised of dense air. They ignore the effects of terrain. Normally only arcane attacks (arcana or hits from arcane weapons) can harm them; other attacks pass through their forms without effect. However, a character attacking an air elemental can perform a special stunt called Spirit Bane for 3 SP. The character then inflicts normal weapon damage, but substitutes Willpower for Strength or Perception.

Wind Buffet: As a minor action, an air elemental can create a sudden and powerful gust of wind to batter nearby creatures. Anyone within 4 yards of the elemental must succeed on a Strength (Might) test opposed by the elemental's Accuracy (Wind) rest. Those that fail their tests and have a Drama Die result of 1 or 2 are also knocked prone.

Wind Shaping: The elemental can use the Wind Shaping arcana using its Accuracy (Wind) for any necessary tests.

Threat: Moderate

Air Elemental

Air elementals manifest as swirling masses of cloud and vapor, with voices like a whispering or roaring wind. Their rapid speed makes them useful as messengers as well as allies on vast battlefields or in extended aerial combat.

Earth Elemental

Abilities (Focuses)
0 — Accuracy
–2 — Communication
4 — Constitution (Stamina)
2 — Dexterity
2 — Fighting (Slam)
–3 — Intelligence
3 — Perception (Hearing, Touching)
4 — Strength (Might)
1 — Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
10 (10 Burrow/Climb)	45	12	8

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Slam	+4	2d6+4

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Defensive Stance, Knock Prone, Mighty Blow

Blind: Earth elementals are effectively blind. They can, however, detect motion through sensing vibrations in the ground. This sense has been taken into account in the attack roll.

Earth Shaping: The elemental can use the Earth Shaping arcana, utilizing Strength (Might) for any requisite tests.

Stone Roots: Any creature that starts its turn on the ground within 2 yards of the earth elemental must make a successful TN 18 Strength (Might) test or be unable to move as the earth beneath them begins to root their feet in place.

Stoneform: Due to their rocky nature, earth elementals have a natural armor of 8.

Threat: Moderate

Earth Elemental

Earth elementals are creatures made up of the types of earth, soil, and stone found where they appear. Though an earth elemental moves slowly, it is relentless. It can travel though solid ground or stone as easily as most aquatic creatures swim. It cannot swim in water, however, and must either move around a body of water or go through the ground under it.

Fire Elemental

Fire elementals are humanoid shapes of blazing fire. A fire elemental cannot enter water or any other non-flammable liquid; a body of water is an impassable barrier unless the fire elemental can step or jump over it. A fire elemental is a fierce opponent that attacks its

Fire Elemental

Abilities (Focuses)
3 — Accuracy (Fire)
–2 — Communication
1 — Constitution
4 — Dexterity
1 — Fighting
–3 — Intelligence
3 — Perception
0 — Strength (Intimidation)
0 — Willpower (Courage)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
16	35	14	4 (8 vs. wooden weapons)

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Fire Bolt	+5	1d6+4

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Pierce Armor, Set Aflame (2 SP), Skirmish

Flame Blast: As a major action, a fire elemental can unleash a flame blast 8 yards long and 2 yards wide. Anyone in the area of the blast takes 2d6+1 damage. Targets who make a successful TN 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test take only 1d6+1 damage.

Fire Bolt: As a major action, a fire elemental can throw a bolt of fire up to 26 yards. This is a Fire Bolt ranged attack using its Accuracy (Fire) focus.

Fire Shaping: The elemental may use the Fire Shaping arcana, using the creature's Accuracy (Fire) focus for all requisite tests.

Fire Shield: The elemental's semisolid fiery form grants a base Armor Rating of 4. If attacked by wooden weapons, this Armor Rating is increased to 8. The weapons are set alight and may be damaged or destroyed if not extinguished.

Set Aflame Stunt: A fire elemental can set one or more of its targets of Fire Bolt on fire. This is a special stunt costing 2 SP per target affected, and not all targets of the attack need be affected. The target takes 1d6 penetrating damage at the start of each of their turns until they, or another character within 2 yards, can put out the fire by spending a minor action.

Threat: Moderate

Corrupt Nature Spirits

Primal beings of spirit, nature spirits are particularly subject to environmental corruption, for they are reflections of it. When a place becomes corrupt, its spirits tend to follow suit, either sickening and despairing or turning angry, cruel, and vicious. This is one reason why people care for the natural world around them and seek to live in harmony with it. Adepts in Aldis consider it their duty to help heal corrupted places, and bring peace to their spirits. In the meanwhile, they must often protect the innocent from the corrupt spirits' wrath.

Water Elemental

Abilities (Focuses)	
0	Accuracy
–2	Communication
0	Constitution
3	Dexterity (Acrobatics, Stealth)
3	Fighting
3	Intelligence (Water)
1	Perception
3	Strength
5	Willpower (Courage)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
13 (Walk/Swim)	45	13	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Water Whip	+5	1d6+5

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Mighty Blow, Skirmish

Fluid Nature: A water elemental may contort its body to fit itself through a gap of any size greater than one centimeter wide as a major action. Once on the other side, however, it must return to its natural state. If it cannot fit itself in the space, it quickly returns during the same action and reforms.

Free-Flowing: A water elemental is immune to the Skirmish and Knock Prone combat stunts.

Slippery Customer: Any enemy of the water elemental that ends their turn within 2 yards of it must make a successful TN 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test or fall prone as water pushes and pulls around their legs.

Watery: If fully submerged in water, the water elemental is invisible.

Water Shaping: The elemental can use the Water Shaping arcana, utilising Intelligence (Water) for all requisite tests.

Water Whip: The elemental can lash out with a watery tendril at any target within 3 yards, using its Intelligence (Water) to attack. This attack does 1d6+2 + Strength damage (normally 1d6+5)

Threat: Moderate

enemies directly and savagely. It takes joy in burning creatures and objects to ashes.

Water Elemental

Water elementals are vortices or swirls of water that coalesce into a vaguely humanoid shape. A water elemental can't venture out of sight of the body of water from which it arises. They prefer to fight in a large body of water where they can disappear beneath the surface and suddenly swell up behind opponents.

Wood Elemental

Abilities (Focuses)	
0	Accuracy
–2	Communication
5	Constitution (Stamina)
1	Dexterity
3	Fighting (Slam)
–2	Intelligence
3	Perception (Searching, Touching)
3	Strength (Might)
3	Willpower (Self-Discipline)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
9 (Walk/Climb/Burrow)	40	11	5

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Slam	+5	2d6+3

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Mighty Blow

Plant Shaping: The elemental can use the Plant Shaping arcana, utilising Willpower (Self-Discipline) for any requisite tests.

Roots: Any creature that starts its turn on the ground within 2 yards of the wood elemental must make a successful TN 18 Strength (Might), or be unable to move as plants shift and grow beneath them and begin to root their feet in place.

Treeform: Due to their ligneous nature, wood elementals have a natural armor of 5.

Threat: Moderate

Wood Elemental

Wood elementals form themselves from various plants, from masses of vines and brambles to trees taking on roughly humanoid shapes and movement. They are vital and growing beings, close with the fey and the beasts of the land where they arise. They possess great strength and patience, but are often frustratingly slow from the perspective of most people. To those who would despoil the wild lands and poison the earth, they can be implaccable foes.

Fey Sprite

Sprites are the most common of fey, like dancing sparks thrown from a flame. They tend to manifest in small forms, and are rarely more than a foot or two tall. They often possess qualities associated with the elements, from airy gossamer wings to broad earthy forms, leaves and blossoms, or a fiery glow.

Fey Sprite

Abilities (Focuses)	
2	Accuracy (Arcane Burst)
2	Communication (Deception)
–1	Constitution
4	Dexterity (Stealth)
–1	Fighting
1	Intelligence
1	Perception
–2	Strength
2	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
14 (Flying)	15	16	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Arcane Burst	+4	1d6+2

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Skirmish, Taunt

Arcane Burst: Sprites can hurl small bursts of elemental energy up to 6 yards away. The exact type of energy depends on the spirit, but multicolored "faerie fire" is among the most common. This attack does 1d6 + Willpower damage (usually 1d6+2).

Small Size: A fey sprite's small size makes them harder to hit and allows them to sneak into places normal-sized beings would otherwise be unable to. This is reflected in their abilities, though they may also receive a +2 circumstance bonus when their small size would be an extra advantage, such as a Dexterity (Stealth) test involving hiding in small spaces.

Threat: Minor

Fey Reveler

Revelers are more "grounded" in their experiences in the mortal world. While they enjoy the simple celebrations of the sprites, revelers tend to be more lusty, taking part in all manner of pleasures, particularly with mortal guests. From goat-footed satyrs to shy nymphs, they are drawn to the embodied souls of the Eternal Dance like moths to a flame. Such dalliances tend to be pleasant but short-lived, as the fey partake of the mortal world but are not truly of it.

Fey Noble

The fey have their own nobility of sorts; the mightiest, wisest, and most influential of their kind, the equal of mortal nobles and even sovereigns. Some are as fascinated by mortal souls as their kin, while others disdain

mortal lives as brief and no more than a passing fancy. They can be kind, but also capricious and sometimes cruel in their humor. Most are fierce defenders of the natural balance, but the corruption of a fey noble is a terrible thing and a threat approaching that of the most powerful of darkfiends.

Note that while the version of the fey noble presented here has powerful animism-based arcana, others of their kind may have equally potent powers from other arcana. The fey are nothing if not varied and unpredictable.

Fey Reveler

Abilities (Focuses)	
3	Accuracy
2	Communication (Persuasion, Romance)
1	Constitution (Drinking, Endurance)
4	Dexterity (Acrobatics, Stealth)
0	Fighting
1	Intelligence
4	Perception
1	Strength
4	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
14	40	14	3

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Fey Touch	+3	1d6+4

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Dazzling Spirit (2 SP), Lightning Attack, Taunt

Dazzling Spirit Stunt: As a special 2 SP stunt, the reveler can reveal a glimpse of the elemental spirit that is embodied in its mortal form. This glimpse is beautiful and powerful enough to disorient foes. The stunt costs 2 SP per target affected. The target must make an opposed Perception (Seeing) vs. the reveler's Willpower. Any target that fails suffers a –4 penalty to the next test they make.

Fey Touch: The reveler's arcane nature allows it to make their touch potentially deadly to foes. This effect will generally match the reveler's elemental type or specific nature, appearing as anything from physical attacks to blasts of elemental energy.

Irresistible Dance: The reveler's uncanny grace or infectious carousing is captivating and enchanting. As a major action, a reveler can attempt to enthrall mortals with their dance. They must use a major action each turn they wish to continue dancing. As long as the reveler is dancing, all targets able to see them must succeed on an opposed Willpower (Self-Discipline) test against the reveler's Communication (Romance) in order to take any major action other than dancing along with the reveler.

Fey Aura: The reveler's fey nature gives them an Armor Rating of 3. The arcane nature of this armor protects against all damage, even damage that is not normally stopped by armor.

Talents: Carousing (Journeyman)

Threat: Moderate

Fey Noble

Abilities (Focuses)	
5	Accuracy (Bows, Light Blades)
3	Communication (Persuasion, Psychic, Romance)
2	Constitution
5	Dexterity (Acrobatics)
2	Fighting
3	Intelligence (Arcane Lore, Historical Lore)
4	Perception (Empathy, Hearing, Searching, Seeing)
3	Strength
4	Willpower (Animism, Courage)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
17	95	15	4

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Fey Bow	+7	1d6+5
Fey Sword	+7	1d6+4

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Lightning Attack, Pierce Armor, Skirmish, Tower of Will

Arcana: Animal Messenger, Animal Summoning, Body Control, Enhancement, Plant Shaping, Psychic Contact, Psychic Shield, Second Sight

Inherent Power: The fey noble's weapons and unarmed attacks are considered arcane weaponry and their attacks automatically half the Armor Rating of non-arcane armor. The Pierce Armor combat stunt eliminates protection from mundane armor entirely.

Natural Supremacy: When dealing with elemental spirits, the fey, and their sworn allies, the fey noble is treated as if they have the Command (Master) and Contacts (Master) talents.

Protective Aura: The fey noble's nature gives them an Armor Rating of 4. The arcane nature of this armor protects against all damage, even damage that is not normally stopped by armor. Some fey nobles will wear arcane armor that affords higher protection (AR 8) when expecting combat.

Talents: Archery Style (Journeyman), Quick Reflexes (Journeyman), Scouting (Journeyman), Single Weapon Style (Journeyman)

Equipment: Fey Sword and Bow

Threat: Major

Shadowspawn

Shadowspawn are creatures corrupted by Shadow, either creations of the flesh-shaping arts of the Sorcerer Kings or aberrations born in Shadow-tainted lands. Once, legions of shadowspawn served as the Sorcerer Kings' armies, fighting and dying by the thousands for their foul masters. Most were wiped out in the wars of the Great Rebellion, and now the survivors are hunted and hounded outside the Kingdom of Kern. Packs of shadowspawn live in wild and forlorn lands. They raid villages and settlements, and forces like the Knights of the Blue Rose, the scouts of Aldis, the riders of Rezea, and the Purist Knights in Jarzon are often called upon to repel shadowspawn incursions.

The Sorcerer Kings experimented widely in the creation of shadowspawn, so the full range of them remains unknown. Chaos and corruption permeates their being, so shadowspawn are given to mutation and radical change from one generation to the next, meaning variations are common, ranging from two-headed ogres to white howlers with color-changing camouflage, or the near endless variety of beastfolk.

Although the term "shadowspawn" is sometimes used to refer to any creature touched by Shadow, it is truly reserved for those living creatures spawned by Shadow. It is not for the corrupt, or shadow fey, or the unliving—much less darkfiends, which are the spiritual embodiments of Shadow itself.

Beastfolk

The common ranks of shadowspawn are made up of the teeming massses of the beastfolk, savage creatures melding the traits of people and animals through the flesh-shaping arts of sorcery. Beastfolk are like the reverse of rhydan in some ways: people with the spirits of beasts, and many of their physical traits as well. Some "tribes" of beastfolk congregate based on common characteristics, but chaos is in their blood and there is no predicting the form of their offspring, especially in Shadow-tainted places. Some of the more common beastfolk include ettercaps, mongrels, and troglydytes.

Ettercaps

Also called spider-folk, ettercaps are hideous aberrations straight out of the realm of nightmares: 6-foot tall humanoid spiders, but with only four limbs instead of the expected eight. They have spider-like heads and faces, with multiple eyes. Ettercaps live in dark places such as the depths of the Pavin Weald and the Veran Marsh. Ettercaps are not brave creatures, but their cunning traps often ensure an enemy never draws a weapon. When an ettercap does engage its foes, it attacks with its keen-edged claws and venomous bite.

Ettercap

Abilities (Focuses)	
3	Accuracy (Web)
0	Communication
1	Constitution
4	Dexterity (Acrobatics, Stealth, Traps)
2	Fighting (Claws)
0	Intelligence
3	Perception (Searching, Seeing)
2	Strength
1	Willpower (Morale)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
14 (14 Climb)	25	14	2

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Claws	+4	1d6+3
Web	+5	Special

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Lightning Attack, Venomous Bite (3 SP)

Darkvision: Ettercaps can see in darkness (even supernatural darkness due to their corrupt nature) as if it were daylight.

Flurry: May make two claw attacks with one major action. Both these attacks are rolled separately and may generate stunt points.

Spiderclimb: Ettercaps can climb walls and ceilings at their normal Speed.

Venomous Bite Stunt: As a 3 SP combat stunt, an ettercap can deliver a venomous bite to any target they have successfully attacked this round that has taken at least 1 point of damage. The attack automatically hits, and the target must succeed on a TN 13 Constitution (Stamina) test or suffer 2d6 penetrating poison damage.

Web: The ettercap may shoot or hurl a glob of entangling webbing at a target up to 5 yards away. This attack does no damage, but the target must make an immediate successful TN 13 Strength (Might) test or suffer a –1 penalty to their attack rolls, their Defense, and any Strength or Dexterity tests for the rest of the encounter, or until they or an adjacent ally succeeds on a TN 13 Strength (Might) test to remove or break the webbing. This penalty can be stacked multiple times. Should it reach a total penalty equal to the higher of the target's Dexterity or Strength, they are rendered immobile and unable to act until they are freed. At the Narrator's discretion, creative uses of arcana or other abilities might substitute for a Strength (Might) test to break free.

Web Trap: Ettercaps can also use these webs to place traps in an area. Anyone who fail to notice the trap with an opposed Perception (Seeing or Searching) vs. Dexterity (Traps) test is treated as if they were immediately struck by a TN 15 Web attack for the purposes of breaking free. Setting up these traps takes 5 minutes and automatically fails if the target sees them being placed.

Threat: Minor

Mongrels

Abilities (Focuses)	
2	Accuracy (Brawling)
0	Communication
2	Constitution (Running)
3	Dexterity (Stealth)
3	Fighting (Heavy Blades, Polearms)
0	Intelligence
2	Perception (Hearing, Smelling)
2	Strength
1	Willpower (Morale)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
13	30	13 (14 with Single Weapon)	3

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Spear	+5	1d6+5
Sword	+5	2d6+2
Unarmed	+4	1d3+2

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Set Up, Skirmish

Pack Tactics: If a mongrel attacks with at least three others of its kind, they may perform stunts for 1 SP less than normal.

Talents: Scouting (Novice), Single Weapon Style (Novice)

Weapons Groups: Axes, Brawling, Heavy Blades, Polearms

Equipment: Standard Spear (Polearm), Standard Sword, Light Armor

Threat: Minor

Troglodytes

Abilities (Focuses)	
2	Accuracy (Brawling)
0	Communication
3	Constitution (Swimming)
2	Dexterity (Stealth, Traps)
2	Fighting (Axes, Bludgeons)
–1	Intelligence
1	Perception (Seeing)
3	Strength (Climbing)
1	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
12	40	12 (14 with Shield)	4

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Axe/Mace	+4	2d6+3
Unarmed	+4	1d3+3

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Mighty Blow, Threaten

Tough Skin: The troglodyte's scaly hide gives it a natural Armor Rating of 4.

Talents: Scouting (Novice), Weapon and Shield Style (Novice)

Weapons groups: Axes, Bludgeons, Brawling, Polearms, Staves

Equipment: Crude Axe or Mace, Crude Shield

Threat: Minor

Mongrels

Mongrels are tall humanoids (between 6 and 7 feet) with hyena or dog-like heads and mottled, matted fur. They have canine-like hind legs but stand erect, and have hands capable of holding and wielding weapons. They can communicate in rasping voices, peppered with whines and barks. Mongrels congregate in packs, raiding civilized settlements; some packs find work as mercenaries for employers who aren't too choosy.

Troglodytes

Troglodytes are revolting reptilian humanoids standing about 5 feet tall. Their scaled hides are mottled green and black; they have crocodile-like tails and are accompanied by a hideous and revolting stench. Troglodytes are mostly found in the Veran Marsh, where they attack travelers or raid nearby settlements. Their crude villages are partially submerged, and troglodytes are known to keep crocodiles and constrictor snakes as pets.

Chaos Beast

Horrific creations of the madness of Anwaren, chaos beasts have mutable, ever-changing forms, like amorphous masses of ever-shifting beast and humanoid parts. They slipped into Aldea when the shadowgates in Faenaria exploded and tore rifts into the realm of Shadow. The beasts serve no one and are hated even by other shadowspawn. A chaos beast's dimensions vary, but it always weighs about 200 pounds. Chaos beasts do not speak, and it is unclear if their alien minds even possess intelligence or awareness as people understand it.

Harpy

Creatures with bird-like wings and lower bodies, and the heads and upper bodies of hideous hags, harpies entrance hapless travelers, draw them close, render them helpless, then lead them to unspeakable torments. Only when a harpy has finished playing with its new toys will it release them from suffering by killing and consuming them.

Chaos Beast

Abilities (Focuses)	
3	Accuracy
0	Communication
6	Constitution (Stamina)
2	Dexterity
3	Fighting (Claws)
0	Intelligence
2	Perception (Smelling, Tasting)
4	Strength (Intimidation, Might)
3	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
12	60	12	4

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Claws	+5	2d6+5

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Corporal Instability (3 SP), Dual Strike (3 SP), Knock Prone (1 SP)

Regenerate: A chaos beast can recover Health equal to its Constitution (normally 6) by spending 2 SP, and can spend additional SP to recover more Health (6 per 2 SP spent). It cannot regenerate Health lost to arcane weapons or arcana.

Darkvision: A chaos beast can see normally in complete darkness.

Amorphous Form: A chaos beast's amorphous body gives it an Armor Rating of 4 against all weapons.

Fiendish Resistance: A chaos beast is immune to the Flesh Shaping arcanum, and to all Psychic arcana.

Corporeal Instability Stunt: A chaos beast can cause a terrible transformation to an opponent as a special 3 SP stunt. The creature must succeed on a TN 11 Constitution (Stamina) test or become a spongy, amorphous mass. Unless the victim manages to control the effect (see below), its shape melts, flows, writhes, and boils. The affected creature is unable to hold or use any item. Clothing and armor become useless. Large items worn or carried—armor, backpacks, even shirts—hamper more than help, reducing the victim's Dexterity by –2. Soft or misshapen feet and legs reduce Speed to one-quarter normal. Searing pain courses along the nerves, so strong the victim cannot act coherently. The victim cannot use arcana, and they attack blindly, unable to distinguish friend from foe (–2 penalty on attack tests). A victim can regain their own shape by taking a major action to attempt a TN 13 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test. Success reestablishes the creature's normal form for 1 minute. On a failure, the victim can repeat this test each round until successful. To fully remove corporeal instability, the Cure arcanum must be used on the victim. This requires a successful TN 13 Cure test, which is fatiguing. If a victim remains in an amorphous state for a number of minutes greater than their Willpower (minimum of 1 minute), they permanently become a chaos beast.

Threat: Moderate

Mock Hounds

These pale, feral dogs hunt in packs and are dangerous, not for their physical abilities, but their knack for trickery. Mock hounds are tainted by the sorcery infecting the Veran Marsh. They have the ability to mimic human voices, echoing cries for help and calling out the names of travelers in the dark. Their light build and swift tread allow them to run over marshy ground that traps heavier creatures. Mock hounds use their skill for mimicry to lure the unwary into the marsh, trap them in mud or quicksand, and then attack.

Naga

Nagas have long, serpentine bodies covered with glistening scales, and more or less human faces. They range in length from 10 to 20 feet. The eyes of a naga are bright and intelligent, burning with a hypnotic inner light.

Nagas favor arcana over other forms of combat. They are almost always found in the lairs they guard and know well, allowing them to set traps and use the terrain to their advantage. Nagas meet foes boldly using their arcane

Harpy

Abilities (Focuses)	
2	Accuracy
2	Communication (Performance)
2	Constitution
2	Dexterity
2	Fighting (Claws)
0	Intelligence
1	Perception (Seeing, Smelling)
3	Strength
1	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
10 (Flying 14)	40	12	2

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite / Wing Strike	+2	1d3+3
Claws	+4	1d6+4

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Disarm, Knock Prone, Lightning Attack (2 SP)

Frenzy: The harpy can use the Lightning Attack combat stunt for 2 SP instead of the usual 4.

Siren Song: The harpy can use her song to distract and entrance a target, drawing them near. The harpy takes a major action and makes a Communication (Performance) test. The result of that test forms the target number anyone hearing it must beat to resist, with stunt points generated on the initial test able to increase this target number by +1 per 2 SP spent. Failure means the target will move at their normal Speed towards the harpy as long as they continue to hear the song, and will not attack the harpy unless first attacked by her or her allies. The harpy may keep singing by spending further major actions, but the initial target number to resist the song does not change once established. Targets may make a new attempt to resist each turn.

Tough: Harpies have a natural Armor Rating of 2.

Threat: Minor

Mock Hound

Abilities (Focuses)	
2	Accuracy (Bite)
0	Communication
1	Constitution (Running)
2	Dexterity
1	Fighting
–2	Intelligence
3	Perception (Hearing, Smelling, Tracking)
1	Strength (Jumping)
0	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
15	15	12	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+4	1d6+1

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Skirmish

Light Runner: When taking the Run action, mock hounds can cross swampy or muddy ground at their normal Speed with no chance of becoming hampered or mired.

Mimic: Mock hounds can imitate human-sounding voices, even specific voices they have heard before, although they are not intelligent enough to understand language. It requires a successful TN 13 Perception (Hearing) test to distinguish a mock hound's mimicry from a real voice.

Pack Tactics: If a mock hound attacks with at least three others, they may perform combat stunts for 1 SP less than normal.

Threat: Minor

Naga

Abilities (Focuses)	
3	Accuracy (Bite)
2	Communication (Psychic)
2	Constitution
4	Dexterity (Acrobatics)
0	Fighting
4	Intelligence (Shaping, Sorcery Lore)
3	Perception (Searching, Visionary)
2	Strength
3	Willpower (Self-Discipline)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
14	50	14	4

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+5	1d6+3

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Mighty Arcana, Skirmish

Arcana: Fire Shaping, Move Object, Psychic Contact, Second Sight, Water Shaping

Scales: Naga have a natural Armor Rating of 4.

Venomous Bite Stunt: As a 2 SP stunt coupled with a bite attack that does at least 1 damage to a target, the naga may poison that target. The target must succeed at a TN 14 Constitution (Stamina) test or take 3d6 penetrating poison damage, and suffer a –1 penalty to all tests for the rest of the encounter. If they succeed, they only take 1d6 damage and suffer no penalty.

Talents: Shaping (Journeyman)

Threat: Minor

Night Person Brute

Abilities (Focuses)	
2	Accuracy (Bows)
0	Communication
3	Constitution (Drinking, Stamina)
0	Dexterity (Stealth)
2	Fighting (Axes, Bludgeons, Heavy Blades)
0	Intelligence
1	Perception
3	Strength (Intimidation)
1	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
8	30	10	3

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Axe	+4	2d6+3
Sword	+4	2d6+3

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Mighty Blow, Skirmish

Talents: Armor Training (Novice)

Weapons Group: Axes, Bludgeons, Brawling, Heavy Blades

Equipment: Standard Sword or Axe, Light Armor

Threat: Minor

Ogre

Abilities (Focuses)	
0	Accuracy (Brawling)
–1	Communication
6	Constitution
0	Dexterity
2	Fighting (Axes, Bludgeons, Heavy Blades)
–1	Intelligence
2	Perception (Smelling, Tracking)
6	Strength (Intimidation, Might)
1	Willpower (Morale)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
12	60	10	2 (7 with armor)

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Maul	+4	2d6+9
Unarmed	+2	1d6+6

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Lethal Blow (4 SP), Mighty Blow (1 SP), Threaten

Big: Knock Prone and Skirmish combat stunts used against ogres require 1 additional SP above their normal cost to work. Also, ogre-sized weapons do an additional 1d6 damage over their human-sized counterparts (their fists do 1d6 base damage).

Savage Killers: Ogres can perform the Mighty and Lethal Blow combat stunts for –1 SP. They also gain a +2 attack and damage bonus against any target that doesn't succeed in an opposed Willpower (Courage) vs. the ogre's Strength (Intimidation) test at the beginning of an encounter.

Tough Skin: Ogres have a natural Armor Rating of 2, though most wear hides, patchwork armor, and other protection that increases this to AR 7.

Weapons groups: Axes, Bludgeons, Brawling, Heavy Blades

Threat: Moderate

powers. They also quickly slither forward to use their venomous bite against enemies who resist their arcana.

Night Person

The night people are one of the pinnacles of the Sorcerer Kings' experiments in crafting shadowspawn: hulking, powerfully-muscled humanoids with great strength and endurance, far more stable than early beastfolk and more intelligent than dim ogres. The night people became a staple of the armies and workforces of the Sorcerer Kings during the Empire of Thorns. Since the Great Rebellion, many have chosen freedom and life in civilization wherever they can be accepted. This is most commonly in Aldis, which has welcomed many night people, although not without some difficulties. Other night people still dwell in primitive or savage tribes in the wilderness, or serve the sinister Regents of Kern as they did the Lich King before them.

Ogre

Ogres are hideous humanoid giants 9 to 10 feet tall. Their skin color ranges from dull yellow to dull brown or gray. Their clothing consists of poorly cured furs and hides, which add to their naturally repellent odor. Ogres are fond of eating humanoid flesh, and consider vata a particular delicacy. Bullies by nature, ogres favor overwhelming odds, sneak attacks, and ambushes over a fair fight. They are intelligent enough to use ranged weapons to soften up their foes before closing, but ogre gangs and bands rarely feature any real organization or tactics.

Merrow

Merrow are aquatic cousins of land ogres. They have greenish skin and webbed hands and feet. They can breathe both water and air, and have a land Speed of 10 and a swimming Speed of 13. Instead of great clubs, merrow prefer long spears with the same damage. They often train sharks as pets and hunting animals, and have a taste for sea-folk and dolphin flesh.

Shadow Mastiff

Abilities (Focuses)	
3	Accuracy (Bite)
–2	Communication
3	Constitution (Running, Stamina)
2	Dexterity
1	Fighting
–1	Intelligence
1	Perception (Hearing, Smelling, Tracking)
3	Strength (Intimidation)
2	Willpower (Morale)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
16	30	12	1

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+5	1d6+4

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Bay (2 SP), Knock Prone, Set Up

Darkvision: Shadow mastiffs can see in darkness without penalty.

Bay Stunt: As a 2 SP stunt, the shadow mastiff can let out a terrifying howl and bark. All creatures within a 300-foot radius able to hear the sound—except darkfiends—must succeed on a TN 11 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test or flee in fear from the mastiff for 5 rounds. Whether or not the test is successful, an affected creature is immune to the same mastiff's Bay for 24 hours.

Shadow Blend: In any condition of illumination other than full daylight, a shadow mastiff can disappear into the shadows as a minor action, effectively becoming invisible. Artificial illumination, whether from a fire or arcana, does not negate this ability, whereas a successful TN 13 Light Shaping test directed at the mastiff can. To prevent the mastiff from disappearing into shadow the next round, Light Shaping must be maintained, which requires concentration.

Tough: A shadow mastiff's hide provides it with an Armor Rating of 1.

Threat: Moderate

White Howlers

White howlers are quite similar to ogres: giant humanoids of savage temperament, but covered with a thick pelt of long, white fur that suits their home environment in the heights of the Ice-Binder Mountains. Standing between 9 and 10 feet tall, they have pale blue eyes like those of white wolves, and although their habits are foul, they take special care to keep their silky fur clean and perfectly white. They can speak both their own language and the language of Kern, but have a limited vocabulary. Susceptible to temperatures above freezing, white howlers are rarely ever seen outside the high mountains, where they were placed to guard passes into and out of Kern.

Bands of white howlers act more like animals than intelligent beings. Although they like to hurl rocks at their foes, they almost never use more sophisticated tools or weapons other than these or clubs, relying upon their strength, size, and natural camouflage (giving them a +4 bonus on tests to hide in snowy or icy terrain).

Strix Swarm

Abilities (Focuses)	
3	Accuracy (Bite)
–3	Communication
1	Constitution
2	Dexterity
0	Fighting
–3	Intelligence
3	Perception (Hearing)
1	Strength
0	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
17 (Flying)	20	12	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Swarm	+5	1d6+1

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Bleed (2 SP), Skirmish

Darkvision: Can function normally in total darkness.

Bleed Stunt: As a 2 point stunt, an individual strix can break off from the swarm and attach to anyone struck by the creatures' swarm attack that turn. This stunt may be chosen multiple times to attach multiple strixes to the same, or different, targets. Each turn a strix is attached to a target, they automatically drain the target's blood, inflicting 1d6 penetrating damage. A strix can be removed by either attacking it or prying it off. To remove the strix, a character must succeed on a TN 13 test using Strength (Might) or any melee-based attack. Success knocks or pulls the strix free; failure means it automatically does another 1d6 penetrating damage as it digs into the target to prevent separation. Characters trying to attack or pry off a strix attached to themselves increase this target number by +2.

Swarm Attack: A strix swarm covers an area with a rough diameter and height of 3 yards, and can attack all creatures inside or adjacent to that area on its turn as a single major action.

Swarm Defense: A strix swarm suffers only 1 point of damage from any sort of attack that targets a single locus, save that a Mighty Blow inflicts 2 points of damage and a Lethal Blow 3 points. Only area attacks, or arcane attacks with a broad effect, inflict full damage on the swarm.

Threat: Minor

Wisp

Abilities (Focuses)	
2	Accuracy (Arcane Burst)
2	Communication (Deception, Disguise)
–1	Constitution
4	Dexterity (Stealth)
–1	Fighting
2	Intelligence
1	Perception
–2	Strength
2	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
14 (Flying)	15	16	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Arcane Burst	+4	1d6+2

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Skirmish, Taunt

Arcane Burst: Wisps can hurl small bursts of elemental energy up to 6 yards away. The exact type of energy depends on the spirit, but multicolored "faerie fire" is among the most common. This attack does 1d6 + Willpower damage (usually 1d6+2).

Incorporeal: Wisps are incorporeal. They ignore the effects of terrain. Normally only arcane attacks can harm them; other attacks pass through their forms without effect. However, a character attacking a wisp can perform a special stunt called Wisp Bane for 3 SP. The character then inflicts normal weapon damage, but substitutes Willpower for Strength or Perception.

"What Is That?": Wisp's gain a circumstantial +2 bonus to Communication (Deception and Disguise) tests meant to lure, trick, or misdirect a target. This bonus is lost if the target discovers they are dealing with a wisp, either by getting too close or because of their own personal experience or knowledge.

Threat: Minor

White howlers use Ogre statistics, but substitute the following: Accuracy 1 (Bite), Fighting 3 (Claws), Strength (Climbing, Intimidation, Might) Speed 13, Health 70, Defense 11, Armor Rating 4 (10 vs. cold-based attacks). Weapon Groups: Bludgeons, Brawling). Their Bite doe 2d6+7 damage, and and Claws do 1d6+8 damage.

Shadow Mastiff

The hounds of the Shadow Barrens' darkfiends, shadow mastiffs have the body of a large dog, with a smooth, black coat that blends with the shadows and a mouth full of sharp teeth. A shadow mastiff is slightly more than 2 feet high at the shoulder and weighs about 200 pounds.

Wyvern

Abilities (Focuses)	
3	Accuracy (Bite, Sting)
–1	Communication
5	Constitution (Stamina)
2	Dexterity (Acrobatics)
3	Fighting (Claws)
–1	Intelligence
2	Perception (Seeing)
5	Strength (Intimidation)
2	Willpower (Courage)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
10 (Flying 14)	75	12	5

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+5	1d6+6
Claws	+5	1d6+6
Sting	+5	2d6+6

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Mighty Blow, Poison Sting (2 SP)

Poison Sting Stunt: A wyvern can inject poison as a special stunt costing 2 SP. The poison slows and partially paralyzes the victim, who suffers a –3 penalty to Dexterity, Fighting, and Accuracy until the end of the encounter,. or until they receive the Cure arcanum.

Tooth & Claw: A wyvern can make one bite and one claw attack as a single major attack action. Both of these attacks can generate stunt points.

Tough Hide: A wyvern's tough hide gives it a natural Armor Rating of 5.

Threat: Major

Strix

A strix is a hideous cross between a bat and a giant mosquito, about a foot long with a wingspan of 2 feet. Coloration ranges from rust-red to reddish-brown, with a dirty yellow underside. Its proboscis is pink at the tip, fading to gray at its base. A strix attacks by landing on a victim, latching on with its claws, and plunging its proboscis into the flesh. It then drains the prey's blood to feed. Strix usually attack in swarms and their lairs tend to attract scavengers due to the exsanguinated corpses left to rot around them.

Wisp

Wisps look like yellow, white, green, or bluish spheres of faintly glowing light. They are easily mistaken for lanterns, especially in the foggy marshes and swamps where they reside, such as the Veran Marsh. They are

fiendishly intelligent and cunning, and prefer to avoid combat. They confuse and bewilder travelers, luring them into morasses or other hazardous places where they perish. When forced to fight, wisps can loose small bursts of arcane energy to attack.

Some scholars believe wisps are properly classed as a kind of corrupt fey rather than shadowspawn, but since they discorporate upon death, it has been difficult to study them. If they are corrupt fey, they may be one of the only kind that reproduces, a matter of serious concern.

Wyvern

To deal with the threat of griffons and their riders, Jarek the Lich King created the first wyverns. Massive reptiles, they hatch from specially-treated eggs, then grow to some 15 feet in length. Their forelimbs are bat-like leathery wings with a 30-foot span, and they have powerful—if clumsy—hind legs with claws. A wyvern's long tail has a scorpion-like venomous stinger, while its jaws are lined with sharp, tearing teeth. Wyverns are deadly foes, equally adept at aerial battles with griffons and hunting refugees from the air at night.

Wyverns are voracious carnivores. Kernish farmers raise goats to feed them. In addition, wyvern riders sometimes allow their steeds to feed on a shepherd's herds, and even family, without warning or recompense, and criminals and spies are often simply devoured by wyverns shortly after their capture.

Ghost

Abilities (Focuses)
1 Accuracy
1 Communication (Psychic)
1 Constitution
2 Dexterity (Stealth)
0 Fighting
1 Intelligence (Shaping)
2 Perception
0 Strength
3 Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
12 (Flying)	20	12	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Ghostly Touch	+1	2d6+3

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Pierce Armor, Stunned Silence

Arcana: Harm, Manipulate Object, Move Object, Psychic Blast, Psychic Contact, Psychic Shield, Second Sight

Ghostly Touch: The touch of a ghost chills living things if the spirit desires it, causing 2d6 + Willpower penetrating damage (usually 2d6+3). This attack uses the Accuracy (Brawling) focus and the target's shield bonus is ignored.

Incorporeal: Ghosts are incorporeal, having a tenuous existence in the mortal world. They ignore the effects of terrain. Normally only arcane attacks can harm them; other attacks pass through their forms without effect. However, a character attacking a ghost can perform a special stunt called Spirit Bane for 3 SP. The character then inflicts normal weapon damage, but substitutes Willpower for Strength or Perception.

Threat: Minor

The Unliving

The unliving are once-living people animated by arcane forces and the power of Shadow. Sorcerers create the unliving through perversion of the healing arts, and many sorcerers seek to attain an unliving state themselves. Other unliving arise spontaneously from the deaths of the corrupted, or even otherwise innocent souls in corrupt places. The unliving are tolerated only in Shadow-touched Kern. Elsewhere, they are considered abominations to be destroyed on sight.

Unliving Beasts

While the corpses of beasts can be animated by sorcery to become unliving skeletons or walkers, only souls from the Eternal Dance can become other forms of unliving, requiring the essential corruption of an aware spirit. See the **Special Dead** sidebar on page 358 for guidelines on making unliving beasts.

Ghost

Ghosts are the unliving spirits of people who, for one reason or another, cannot move on from their living existence to their next life on the Wheel of Rebirth. A ghost greatly resembles its living form, only pale and translucent. However, in some cases the spiritual form is somewhat altered to reflect the circumstances of the ghost's death, its inner persona, or both. Unlike specters, ghosts are not necessarily motivated by corruption—some are trapped in unlife, and need aid in order to move on. Ghosts display a variety of arcane powers, particularly psychic and shaping arcana.

Ghoul

Ghouls are corporeal unliving, cursed with a gnawing hunger for the flesh of living people, which they need to sustain them. They have a feral, bestial appearance, with sharp teeth and clawed hands and feet. Their bodies tend to be lean and gaunt—sometimes with distended

Ghoul

Abilities (Focuses)
2	Accuracy (Bite)
0	Communication
4	Constitution (Stamina)
2	Dexterity (Initiative, Stealth)
3	Fighting (Claws)
0	Intelligence
1	Perception (Smelling, Tasting)
3	Strength (Climbing)
2	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
12	45	12	2

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+4	2d6+3
Claws	+5	1d6+3

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Lightning Attack, Mighty Blow

Burrowing: A ghoul can dig through earth at Speed 6.

Cannibalistic Regeneration: If a ghoul has fed in the last hour, it can regenerate lost Health each round equal to its Constitution (usually 4). If killed, the creature does not revive.

Frenzy: When attacking someone they have bitten, otherwise tasted the flesh of, or who is seriously wounded (that is, lost at least half their Health), ghouls may perform the Lightning Attack and Mighty Blow combat stunts for 1 SP less than their normal cost.

Scent of Death: A ghoul gains the Perception (Tracking) focus to follow the trail of any target that is wounded or bleeding. They may also use this power to locate and track nearby corpses.

Tough: Ghouls have a natural Armor Rating of 2.

Threat: Moderate

bellies—their skin pale or ashen, and they are usually hairless. Some ghouls manage to retain their intellect while others become little more than ravenous beasts, forever on the hunt.

Lich

A lich is a sorcerer who has become unliving by embracing the power of corruption and unlife as a means of unnaturally escaping the Wheel of Rebirth. A lich is a gaunt, skeletal humanoid with withered flesh stretched tight across horribly visible bones. Its eyes are lost to decay, but bright pinpoints of crimson light burn on in the empty sockets.

Lich

Abilities (Focuses)
1	Accuracy (Brawling)
2	Communication (Deception, Leadership)
5	Constitution (Stamina)
1	Dexterity (Legerdemain)
0	Fighting
8	Intelligence (Arcane Lore, Historical Lore, Shaping, Sorcery Lore)
1	Perception
1	Strength
8	Willpower (Self-Discipline)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
11	100	11	4

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Unarmed	+3	1d3+1

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Arcane Shield (2 SP), Fast Casting (3 SP), Powerful Channeling (1+ SP), Skillful Channeling (1 SP), Mighty Arcana (1 SP), Effortless Arcana (5 SP)

Arcana: Cold Shaping, Cure, Earth Shaping, Flesh Shaping, Harm, Manipulate Object, Mind Delving, Mind Shaping, Move Object, Psychic Contact, Psychic Domination, Psychic Blast, Psychic Shield, Scrying, Second Sight, Sense Minds, Sorcerer's Grip, Torment, Visions, Wind Shaping

Arcane Armor: The lich's unliving flesh provides an Armor Rating of 4. This is proof against all attacks—even those which are usually penetrating—save attacks which specifically do additional damage to or disrupt the unliving.

Arch-Adept: May perform any arcane stunts for –1 SP. They gain a +2 bonus to any fatigue tests and may also ignore the first failed fatigue test in an encounter.

Devastating Arcana: Any arcana the lich uses to inflict damage to a target does an additional 1d6 damage. Elite and Heroic liches inflict an additional 2d6 damage with their arcana, and Epic liches do an additional 3d6 damage.

Unliving Sorcerer: A lich does not need food, air, or water. They no longer age. Any time they are reduced to 0 Health they seemingly perish, only to reform at full Health ten sunsets later. However, should their vessel be destroyed, they will not resurrect.

Talents: Arcane Training (Master), Command (Journeyman), Healing (Novice), Lore (Master), Shaping (Master), Psychic (Master), Visionary (Novice)

Threat: Moderate

An integral part of becoming a lich is creating a vessel—a talisman in which the sorcerer stores their life force. It is typically a small item like a ring, amulet, circlet or the like, but liches are often cunning in hiding their vessels in plain

Lich Template

Not just anyone can embrace the darkness to the degree necessary to become a lich. To become a lich a character must:

- Be an adept with at least one Master-ranked arcane talent.
- Have both Intelligence and Willpower attributes of 3 or greater.
- Know at least two sorcery arcana.
- Know the Intelligence (Sorcery Lore) focus.

Liches don't necessarily need to be corrupted when they undergo the process, though they nearly always are. In any event, becoming a lich turns the adept into an unliving creature of corruption and darkness.

- All liches gain the following abilities:
- Increase Health by +20 and Constitution by +2.
- Increase Willpower and Intelligence by +2.
- Gain the Arcane Armor, Arch-Adept, Devastating Arcana, and Unliving Sorcerer special qualities (see **Lich**, above.)

sight while keeping them close at hand. As a rule, the only way to kill a lich permanently is to destroy its vessel. Unless the vessel is destroyed, a lich reappears within ten days of its apparent destruction.

Each lich is distinct, though a representative example is provided here. In addition, adept characters may be transformed into liches through dark sorcery and by applying the Lich Template to their statistics.

Shade

Shades are the spiritual remnants of those who have died in a place corrupted by Shadow, making them common in regions like Kern and the Shadow Barrens. They look like pitch-black shadows without physical bodies, gliding weightlessly across the landscape. Shades are barely intelligent and have nothing but hatred of the living to motivate them. They attack any living creature they encounter.

Specter

Specters are the restless spirits of the corrupt, denied new incarnations and trapped in unlife. A specter looks much as it did in life and is easily recognised by those who knew the living individual, but ghostly and pale. In many cases, evidence of a violent death is visible on its body. Specters attack with a deadly chilling touch and can inspire terror in mortals.

Shade

Abilities (Focuses)	
2	Accuracy (Brawling)
–1	Communication
1	Constitution
4	Dexterity (Stealth)
0	Fighting
–2	Intelligence
1	Perception
0	Strength
0	Willpower (Morale)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
14 (Fly)	25	14	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Draining Touch	+4	2d6

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Pierce Armor, Stunned Silence

Draining Touch: The touch of a shade drains the life force from any living thing, causing 2d6 + Willpower penetrating damage (usually 2d6+0). This attack uses the Accuracy (Brawling) focus and the target's shield bonus is ignored.

Incorporeal: Shades are incorporeal, having a tenuous existence in the mortal world. They ignore the effects of terrain. Normally only arcane attacks can harm them; other attacks pass through their forms without effect. However, a character attacking a shade can perform a special stunt called Spirit Bane for 3 SP. The character then inflicts normal weapon damage, but substitutes Willpower for Strength or Perception.

Shadow Meld: Shades gain a +2 circumstance bonus to Dexterity (Stealth) tests at night or in areas of heavy shadow. This is in addition to any other bonuses such favorable conditions may give.

Threat: Minor

Specter

Abilities (Focuses)	
2	Accuracy (Brawling)
1	Communication
2	Constitution
4	Dexterity (Stealth)
1	Fighting (Claws)
2	Intelligence
2	Perception
0	Strength
4	Willpower (Self-Discipline)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
14 (Fly)	35	14	0

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Chilling Touch	+4	2d6+4

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Pierce Armor, Stunned Silence

Chilling Touch: The touch of a specter drains the life force from any living thing, causing 2d6 + Willpower damage (usually 2d6+4). This attack uses the Accuracy (Brawling) focus and the target's shield bonus is ignored. Beings without a soul—such as raised corpses—take half damage from these attacks.

Incorporeal: Specters are incorporeal, having a tenuous existence in the mortal world. They ignore the effects of terrain. Normally only arcane attacks can harm them; other attacks pass through their forms without effect. However, a character attacking a specter can perform a special stunt called Spirit Bane for 3 SP. The character then inflicts normal weapon damage, but substitutes Willpower for Strength or Perception.

Terror: As an attack action, a specter can cause all targets within 30 yards to experience supernatural dread by emitting a terrifying shriek. Targets must succeed on a TN 14 Willpower (Courage) test. All targets who fail must either flee from the specter or suffer a –2 penalty to all attacks and their Defense for the rest of the encounter.

Threat: Moderate

Vampire

Vampires are lords of the unliving, second only to liches. Those seeking the "immortality" of unlife often seek to become vampires in order to retain their living appearance (and, perhaps, influence—if they can conceal their condition). Vampires appear much as they did in life, although their features are often pale, hardened, and feral, with the predatory look of wolves. Like liches, vampires embrace finery and decadence and may assume the guise of nobility (if they were not already in life). Despite their appearance, vampires can be recognised by the fact they cast no shadows and have no reflections in mirrors.

Examples of both master vampires and their thralls are presented here. Thralls lack the sorcerous powers and raw might of their masters, but are still dangerous in close combat and are often found in packs. Master vampires are too arrogant and independent to work together, except in the most profitable or dire of circumstances.

Both of the vampires presented here are only examples of their kind, which can vary widely. While they become beast-like servants of their masters, thrall vampires come from a variety of backgrounds and may be of any race, including rhydan, possibly with different abilities and focuses than those given. Likewise, master vampires have their own unique histories and may differ in terms

Thrall Vampire

Abilities (Focuses)
3	Accuracy (Bite, Brawling)
1	Communication (Deception)
4	Constitution
4	Dexterity (Stealth)
4	Fighting (Claws)
1	Intelligence
3	Perception (Hearing, Seeing, Smelling)
4	Strength (Climbing, Intimidation)
4	Willpower (Morale)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
14	75	14	4

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+5	2d6+4
Unarmed	+5	1d6+4

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone (1 SP), Seize the Initiative, Set Up, Vampire Bite (4 SP)

Dark Sight: Vampires can see up to 20 yards in darkness without a light source.

Hard to Kill: Thrall vampires cannot be reduced below 1 Health except by sunlight, fire, arcana, or the use of a Lethal Blow combat stunt, representing decapitation or destruction of their heart or brain.

Unnatural Armor: The vampire's arcane nature provides it with an Armor Rating equal to its Willpower (usually 4).

Vampire Bite Stunt: On a successful bite attack, a vampire can inflict the vampire infection on its victim. A character affected by this stunt must make a successful TN 13 Constitution (Stamina) test or become infected. If the target character is the same race as the vampire, they suffer a –2 penalty to this test. See **Porphyria** on page 357 for the effects of this infection.

Weakness to Sunlight: Sunlight burns vampires like acid, melting their flesh and causing 3d6 penetrating damage per round for partial exposure, and 6d6 penetrating damage per round for being in full sunlight.

Talents: Scouting (Novice), Unarmed Style (Master)

Threat: Major

of abilities, focuses, arcana, and even powers or weaknesses. Some vampires are arise by the influence of Shadow or some corrupt place or artifact, rather than receiving the curse from being killed by another vampire. in these cases their traits may differ as the Narrator sees fit. Foes of the unliving should be cautious in assuming anything about their nature—especially their weaknesses.

Porphyria

A vampire bite is often a death sentence. Characters infected with porphyria suffer a –1 penalty to all tests, plus an additional –1 for each week they have been infected. Once per week, the infected character may make a TN 15 Constitution (Stamina) test in order to fight off the infection. The character may make one additional test each week (for a maximum of two) if they or another character makes a successful TN 17 Intelligence (Healing) test, or provides arcane healing either through an arcanum or an elixir.

A character who fails the above Constitution (Stamina) test with a 6 on the Drama Die, or whose test penalty gets so high that succeeding becomes impossible, succumbs to the infection and dies. Upon their death, all infection-related penalties are removed, and the character makes one final TN 15 Constitution (Stamina) test. If the character is of the same race as the vampire that caused the infection, they gain a +2 bonus on this test. If successful, they are reborn as a thrall. In most cases, this means the retirement of the character, but a Narrator may allow continued play as a vampire at their discretion.

A vampire player character immediately gains one ability advancement, takes on the physical characteristics of a vampire, and gains the thrall vampire powers Dark Sight, Hard to Kill, Unnatural Armor, Vampire Bite, and Weakness to Sunlight. They can also be controlled at any time by their vampiric creator with a contested Willpower (Courage or Self-Discipline) test. This control can be attempted whenever the vampire is in contact with their creator, including psychic contact.

Master Vampire

Abilities (Focuses)	
3	**Accuracy** (Bite, Brawling)
5	**Communication** (Deception, Etiquette, Leadership, Psychic)
4	**Constitution**
2	**Dexterity** (Initiative, Riding)
3	**Fighting**
7	**Intelligence** (Shaping, Sorcery Lore)
3	**Perception** (Hearing, Seeing, Smelling)
4	**Strength** (Climbing, Intimidation)
6	**Willpower** (Animism, Courage)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
12	120	12	6

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite*	+5	2d6+4
Unarmed	+5	1d6+6

Special Qualities

Arcana: Animal Messenger, Animal Summoning, Move Object, Psychic Contact, Psychic Shield, Psychic Domination, Second Sight, Suggestion, Wind Shaping

Weakness to Sunlight: Sunlight burns vampires like acid, melting their flesh and causing 3d6 penetrating damage per round for partial exposure, and 6d6 penetrating damage per round for being in full sunlight.

Deadly Blows: The master vampire's unarmed attacks do +2 damage (in addition to the bonus from Unarmed Style) as a result of their raw power and claw-like nails. They also perform the Mighty Blow combat stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2 when using unarmed attacks.

Favored Stunts: Disarm, Enrage, Imposing Arcana, Knock Prone (1 SP), Mighty Blow (1 SP), Stunned Silence, Skirmish

Unnatural Armor: The vampire's arcane nature provides an Armor Rating equal to its Willpower (usually 6).

Extremely Hard to Kill: Master vampires cannot be reduced below 1 Health except by sunlight, fire, or the use of a Lethal Blow combat stunt or Lethal Arcana arcane stunt, representing decapitation or destruction of their heart or brain. Vampires also don't need to breathe, and are immune to most poisons and disease, save those specifically targeting their kind.

Master's Will: As a minor action, a master may siphon the energy of its thrall, as long as they are within 20 yards. The thrall suffers 1d6 + the thrall's Constitution + the master's Willpower penetrating damage (usually 1d6+10), which the master gains in Health. A thrall may not be reduced below 1 Health in this manner, and a master may not gain more Health than the thrall loses.

Nocturnal Predator: Master vampires suffer no penalties for attacking or otherwise acting in darkness, natural or supernatural.

Vampire Bite Stunt: As a 4 SP stunt, on a successful bite attack, a vampire can inflict the vampire infection on its victim. A character affected by this stunt must make a successful TN 13 Constitution (Stamina) test or become infected. If the target character is the same race as the vampire, they suffer a –2 penalty to this test. See **Porphyria**, above, for the effects of this infection. Master vampires do not use bite attacks unless they are certain they call kill their victim, or they specifically intend to turn them into a thrall.

Talents: Animism (Novice), Psychic (Journeyman), Shaping (Novice), Unarmed Style (Master)

Threat: Dire

Special Dead

Narrators may occasionally wish to have sorcerers or other dark powers create walking dead from the corpses of beasts, or more powerful or monstrous corpses such as beastfolk, ogres, or even elite warriors. When this occurs, use the living creature as a basis with the following changes:

- Change the creature's Communication, Intelligence, and Perception to that of a walking dead.
- Add +10 Health to the base creature.
- Reduce Fighting, Accuracy, and Dexterity by 1. Adjust Speed, Defense, and attack bonuses to reflect these reductions.
- Add the Deathly Fortitude and Mindless Aggression special qualities to the creature.
- Remove any special qualities which imply intelligence or sophisticated mental abilities, such as arcana and most talents.

Walking Dead

The walking dead (also known as corpse walkers, or simply "walkers") are corpses that have been animated by sorcery. Because of their utter lack of intelligence, the instructions given to a newly created walker must be very simple and specific. Walking dead do nothing except what they are ordered to do. Walkers feel no pain, fear, or other mortal concern, and are relentless, stymied only by near-total physical destruction or the power of the Light.

Some walking dead have been raised to unlife lacking any remaining flesh. These skeletal variants have the same statistics, but have 5 less Health and take only half damage from fire and piercing and cutting attacks due to their lack of organs and flesh.

Walking Dead

Abilities (Focuses)	
0	Accuracy
–2	Communication
5	Constitution
–2	Dexterity
1	Fighting
–2	Intelligence
–1	Perception
2	Strength (Intimidation)
1	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
8	25	8	4

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+0	1d6+2
Claws	+1	1d6+2

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Swarm Tactics (3 SP)

Deathly Fortitude: Walking dead have a natural Armor Rating of 4 and do not need to breathe, sleep, rest, eat, or drink normally.

Mindless Aggression: Walking dead never flee from battle unless commanded to, though they can be tricked or manipulated.

Swarm Tactics Stunt: Walking dead can perform Swarm Tactics as a special stunt costing 3 SP. This stunt allows any other walking dead adjacent to the target to make an immediate attack. Rolling doubles on these bonus attacks does not generate stunt points. Walking dead that haven't taken their turns yet this round can still take their actions as normal, even after benefiting from Swarm Tactics.

Threat: Minor

Darkfiends

The darkfiends are creatures from the depths of Shadow. The creations of the exarchs—some say their aspects, emanations, or spawn—darkfiends are embodiments of corruption and evil. Lesser darkfiends are often servants to sorcerers, while the more powerful of their kind are tempters and corruptors without equal. Ultimately all darkfiends are the slaves of the seven exarchs of Shadow, plotting to corrupt the whole of the world and plunge it into darkness forever. With the rule of the Sorcerer Kings, they nearly succeeded—and they may do so again, should the people of Aldea waver in their vigilance.

Watcher

Abilities (Focuses)	
3	Accuracy (Bite, Brawling)
5	Communication (Deception, Disguise, Psychic)
4	Constitution
4	Dexterity (Stealth)
1	Fighting (Claws)
3	Intelligence (Arcana Arcane Lore, Cultural Lore)
6	Perception (Hearing, Seeing, Searching, Tracking, Visionary)
2	Strength (Climbing)
4	Willpower (Self-Discipline)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
14	55	14	3

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+5	2d6+2
Unarmed	+5	1d6+1

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: And Another Thing, Lightning Attack, Speedy Search, The Object of Your Attention

Arcana: Heart Reading, Illusion, Object Reading, Psychic Blast, Psychic Contact, Psychic Shield, Scrying, Sense Minds, Suggestion, Visions

Flurry of Claws: The watcher can make two claw attacks with one major action.

Devilish Vision: The watcher darkfiend can see perfectly in total darkness, as well as through fog, smoke, and any other environmental obstruction.

Tough: The watcher's skin provides a natural Armor Rating of 3. Due to the arcane nature of the darkfiend, this Armor Rating protects against all damage, even that not normally effected by armor.

Talents: Scouting (Master)

Threat: Minor

Circles and Stations of Shadow

Darkfiends fall into seven circles related to their ruling exarchs, and there are four distinct stations they occupy within those circles. None of these stations—save perhaps the servitor—is ranked more importantly than another, yet every darkfiend would have mortals believe its power and authority are without equal.

Arcane scholars have identified the following stations among the darkfiends: **Watchers**, **Soldiers**, **Whisperers**, and **Servitors**.

Soldier

Abilities (Focuses)	
1	Accuracy (Bite)
0	Communication
5	Constitution (Stamina)
1	Dexterity
3	Fighting (Claws)
1	Intelligence
1	Perception
5	Strength (Intimidation)
2	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
13	40	11	5

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+3	2d6+5
Claws	+5	1d6+6

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: Dual Strike, Mighty Blow

Arcana: Psychic Contact, Psychic Shield

Armored Hide: The soldier darkfiend's hide provides a natural Armor Rating of 5. Due to the arcane nature of the darkfiend, this protects against all damage, even that not normally stopped by armor.

Darkvision: The soldier darkfiend can see perfectly in total darkness.

Poison Stunt: For 2 SP, a darkfiend can cause an additional 1d6 penetrating damage against a target who fails a TN 13 Constitution (Stamina) test. This damage continues each round until the target makes a successful test. Testing is a free action that takes place at the beginning of the character's turn. This stunt may only be used by the soldier darkfiend against a target who takes at least 1 damage from the attack that generated this stunt.

Tooth & Claw: The soldier demon can make one bite and one claw attack as a single major attack action. Each attack test is rolled separately and can generate stunt points.

Threat: Moderate

Whisperer

Abilities (Focuses)	
1	Accuracy
5	Communication (Bargaining, Deception, Disguise, Persuasion, Psychic, Romance)
4	Constitution
3	Dexterity
1	Fighting
4	Intelligence (Arcana Arcane Lore)
2	Perception
2	Strength
4	Willpower

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
13	75	13	4

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Bite	+1	1d6+3
Unarmed	+1	1d3+2

Special Qualities

Favored Stunts: And Another Thing (1 SP), Defensive Stance, Entrancing Words (2+ SP), Flirt, Stunned Silence (2 SP), Terrifying Mien (3+ SP)

Arcana: Harm, Heart Reading, Heart Shaping, Illusion, Psychic Blast, Psychic Contact, Psychic Shield, Scrying, Suggestion, Torment

Darkvision: The whisperer darkfiend can see perfectly in total darkness.

Talents: Intrigue (Master)

Tough: The whisperer's skin provides a natural Armor Rating of 4. Due to the arcane nature of the darkfiend, this Armor Rating protects against all damage, even that not normally effected by armor.

Devilish Disguise: Whisperers can change their outward appearance with a minor action, providing them a +2 circumstance bonus to any Communication (Disguise) or Communication (Deception) tests to appear as a humanoid of any desired size, shape, race, age, or gender. They often use this power to appear in as pleasing a form as possible to a target, providing a circumstantial bonus of +2 to all Communication (Romance) and Communication (Persuasion) tests when dealing with them.

Entrancing Words Stunt: For 2 SP per target affected, the demon speaks to a character or characters, attempting to distract them with honeyed words. The target must succeed on an opposed Willpower (Self-Discipline) test vs. the darkfiend's Communication (Deception). Failure means the target suffers a –3 penalty to any attacks against the darkfiend, or to any opposed rolls against the darkfiend until the end of the encounter. The whisperer can only use this ability on a target once per encounter. This can be used as either a combat or roleplaying stunt.

Terrifying Mien Stunt: For 3 SP per target, the whisperer frightens a target by revealing its true form, or projecting fearful images into a target's mind. The target must make a Willpower (Courage) test with a target number equal to the 10 + the demon's Communication ability (usually TN 15). If the target fails, they cannot attack on their next turn, instead making a Move or Defend action.

Threat: Dire

Watcher

Every person has a Fate, and that Fate falls under the watchful eye of the inhabitants of Shadow. Watchers look for the darkening of mortal shadows in their domain, seeing in them opportunities for corruption and temptation. Watchers vary greatly in form, from insect-like creatures to monstrous combinations of different loathsome forms (reptiles, insects, fish, arachnids, and so forth). Many watchers have multiple sets of eyes (like a spider), representing their duties.

Whisperer

Other fiends follow the shadows of the living and whisper to them, encouraging them to give in to their darkest impulses. Theirs are the unheard voices tempting, justifying, or exhorting people to surrender to their Fate. Watchers and whisperers both learn a great deal about what tempts mortals and how to draw them deeper into the realm of Shadow. Whisperers are often the most ephemeral and alien of darkfiends, appearing as figments out of nightmare, as wicked but alluring figures, or as fiendish versions of the foulest vermin (cockroaches, bloated and diseased rats, fiendish cats, slugs, and worse). However monstrous their appearance might be, whisperers' psychic voices are usually sweet and seductive, and that is often all their victims perceive of them before it is too late. What they lack in physical might, whisperers more than make up for in treachery and arcane power.

Soldier

Soldiers fight and serve. They protect and carry out the plans of other darkfiends, and they are the most easily summoned and bound by sorcerers to do their bidding. As they are by far the most aggressive, they are also the darkfiends most likely to violently turn on their summoners, should their control slacken even for a moment. Darkfiend soldiers will even serve other mortal masters, although the price they demand is rarely ever in silver or gold. They appear in various hideous and inhuman forms, but are typically humanoid, heavily

armored, and equipped with powerful claws, weapons, or both (often poisoned). Many darkfiend soldiers appear like humanoid insects, covered in chitinous armor, with eyes like burning coals.

Servitor

The dread servitors are the darkfiends' nobles, servants of the mighty exarchs of Shadow themselves. They are to the exarchs what the envoys are to the Sovereign of Aldis, and each servitor is a unique individual with its own proclivities and agenda. Servitors likewise appear in a wide range of forms, with many of them capable of changing appearance or shape at will. Although quite powerful (often as much as—or more so than—many sorcerers), darkfiend servitors are more limited than their lesser brethren in their ability to influence the mortal world, their very nature continually dragging them back into Shadow.

There is no one servitor stat block. Each should be designed to fit individual series or adventures. One servitor may be a seductive charmer, another a terrifying warlord, and yet another may appear as a harmless child who can turn into an inhuman terror at will. However, regardless of their other abilities, all possess powerful sorcery, have powerful attacks and Defense (physical or arcane), and are bound to serve the exarchs. Most servitors can only come to the mortal world under special circumstances, or can only remain for a short period of time.

Circle Qualities

In addition to the attributes of their station, darkfiends have qualities derived from the Circle of Shadow where they originate—that is, from the exarch they serve. So whisperers of greed are different from those of pride and lust, just as soldiers of envy differ from those of wrath or sloth. Sorcerers have devoted extensive grimoires to the attributes of the darkfiends of the various stations within each circle, although such blasphemous works can be terrible temptations to their readers.

In the case of a darkfiend gaining a focus they already possess, they instead receive +1 in the base ability for that focus.

Envy

Envy Circle darkfiends can perform the Disarm combat stunt for –1 SP and gain a +1 attack and damage bonus against any creature with at least two abilities higher than the darkfiend's owntheir base stats. They also gain the Thievery (Novice) talent, and can attempt Dexterity (Lock Picking) tests by simply touching a lock and spending a major action.

Gluttony

Gluttony Circle darkfiends can spend 2 SP to reduce a target's Armor Rating by 1 until it can be repaired or healed (in the case of natural armor). They also gain the Perception (Tasting) focus and receive a +2 circumstance bonus to Perception (Searching or Tracking) tests to locate anything or anyone they have tasted.

Greed

Greed Circle darkfiends can perform the Seize the Initiative combat stunt for –1 SP and regenerate 2 Health every time they successfully injure a target. They also gain the Communication (Bargaining) focus.

Lust

Lust Circle darkfiends can perform both the Flirt roleplaying stunt and the Taunt combat stunt for –1 SP. They also gain the Communication (Romance) focus and are able to use this on any target of lower Willpower than their Communication, regardless of their physical appearance.

Pride

Pride Circle darkfiends can perform both the Stunned Silence roleplaying stunt and the Threaten combat stunt for –1 SP. They also gain the Strength (Intimidation) focus

Wrath

Wrath Circle darkfiends gain +1 Armor Rating and +1 Strength. They may also perform the Enrage roleplaying stunt for –1 SP by awakening their target's wrathful feelings.

Sloth

Sloth Circle darkfiends may choose to go last in Initiative order. When they do this, they gain a +1 bonus to hit, damage, and any doubles they roll generate +1 SP.

Fiendish Beasts

Fiendish beasts are mortal creatures tainted by Shadow, usually the result of a darkfiend spawning with a beast or ordinary beasts spawning in a place tainted with corruption. They are more fearsome and sinister in appearance than their mundane counterparts, and far more aggressive and vicious. They often display a cruel cunning, although nothing approaching the intellect or awareness of the rhydan. Examples include:

Fiendish Horse: Sometimes known as "nightmares" or "shadow steeds," these coal black horses have burning red eyes and steely hooves that strike sparks. They are notoriously difficult to break to the bit and, even then, tolerate only the most corrupt riders without attempting to throw and trample them. The Rezeans consider nightmares abominations to be hunted and destroyed.

Fiendish Rat: These hideous creatures are as large as small dogs, with night-black fur and glowing red eyes. They are among the least of fiendish beasts but still dangerous, especially in swarms.

Fiendish Raven: These shaggy-feathered ravens with glowing red eyes are most common in Kern, where they serve as the spies and familiars of sorcerers. Fiendish ravens are excellent vocal mimics, able to trick people into following their voices, often leading them into traps.

Fiendish Shark: Sinister dark gray hunters of the deep, fiendish sharks savagely attack any prey entering their domain. They have a particular taste for the flesh of sea-folk and dolphins.

Other Fiendish Beasts

Fiendish beasts use the type of beast they are based on but add the following template:

Fiendish Template

Add the following to any beast to make it a fiendish version of its normal type:

- Increase Strength by +2, increasing all applicable damage by +2 as well.
- Increase Intelligence by +1.
- Increase Heath by +10 and add +2 to the beast's Armor Rating (minimum 2).
- Add the Deception focus if not already present. If it is, increase Communication by +1.

Special Qualities

Some creatures have variants that possess unique or strange abilities, particularly in places touched by Shadow and corruption, where unusual aberrations arise. These variations may also represent different breeds of similar creatures, some of them created by the flesh-shaping arts and experiments of the Sorcerer Kings during the Empire of Thorns. While not every option is detailed here, some special abilities are presented to customize and alter the base creatures in this chapter. For example, you can create a winged constrictor snake with Arcane Resistance, created by some sorcerer as a familiar or guardian. Note that adding qualites to a creature will likely increase its Threat category, which should be taken into account.

Agile

The creature is exceptionally agile and quick for its type. It has +2 Dexterity and can go prone or stand up as a free action.

Aquatic

The creature gains the ability to breathe underwater and can swim equal to its normal Speed. It also suffers no penalties for moving, attacking, or otherwise operating underwater.

Arcana

The creature has one or more arcana (see **Chapter 4**) which it is able to use as if it possessed the Arcane Training talent. Choose the ability and focus the creature uses for tests involving its arcana.

Arcane Gaze

The creature has a special quality inherent in its gaze. As a special stunt costing 2 SP per target, the creature can catch another's eye, requiring line of sight and a Willpower (Self-Discipline) test opposed by the creature's Perception (Seeing). If the creature wins, its Arcane Gaze can have one of the following effects (chosen when it is given this quality):

- **Charm:** The victim must resist the effect of the Psychic Domination arcanum (see **Chapter 4**). Alternately, some creatures impose the Heart Shaping arcanum to inspire love or fear for the creature in the target.
- **Pain:** The victim must resist the effect of the Torment arcanum from **Chapter 4**.
- **Petrification:** The victim suffers 4d6 penetrating damage. Any target reduced to 0 Health is turned to stone. Any target who survives this effect is partially petrified and has a –2 penalty to all tests until they can rest for at least 8 hours, as their body slowly and painfully reverses the stony stiffness of this effect.
- **Poison:** The victim suffers 3d6 penetrating damage and an additional 1d6 penetrating damage each round on the creature's turn, either until the end of the encounter or until the victim receives treatment from the Cure arcanum or the Heal action, which ends the ongoing damage automatically.

Arcane Gaze can have other effects, if the Narrator wishes, particularly any of the arcana from **Chapter 4**. A character with a mirror or other reflective surface may be able to reflect a creature's Arcane Gaze back upon it as a special stunt costing 3 SP; the gaze affects the creature as described, if it is able to do so.

Arcane Resistance

The creature gains a +2 bonus to resist arcana or other arcane effects. It possesses an Armor Rating against arcane damage equal to its Willpower + 2. Such creatures can often not be healed using arcana either.

Armored

The creature's normal Armor Rating is increased by +2.

Blending

The creature can blend into its surrounding. This gives the creature a +2 bonus to any Dexterity (Stealth) tests based on hiding or avoiding being seen.

Immunity

The creature is immune to a certain type of damage: acid, cold, fire, lightning, or water, for example. Attacks of that type inflict no damage on the creature.

Mighty

The creature is extremely strong for its type. It has +2 Strength and the Might focus. If it already has the Might focus, it now has improved Might (+3 bonus instead of the usual +2).

Regenerate

The creature can recoup Health equal to its Constitution (minimum 2) as a 2 SP stunt. This stunt may be used multiple times if enough stunt points are available, increasing the healing effect. Wounds of a certain type cannot be healed with Regenerate—this varies depending on the creature, but is typically fire- or acid-based damage.

Shadow

The creature is attuned to the forces of Shadow. It takes half damage from all non-arcane attacks and can use the Regenerate and Blending powers in dim light or darkness. In sunlight or other bright light it takes damage normally, and all light-based attacks do an extra 1d6 penetrating damage to it.

Vulnerability

This isn't a quality so much as a special weakness. When attacked with a substance or element to which it is vulnerable, the creature takes an additional 1d6 damage and its Armor Rating is halved, or completely eliminated if the attacker uses the Pierce Armor combat stunt.

Winged

The creature gains flying movement equal to its normal Speed, and can use flying actions.

In this adventure, the heroes are called upon to aid two men—one injured, the other possessed by an evil force—before the darkness they have unleashed can spread its influence and cause further harm.

Using this Adventure

Shadows of Tanglewood is an introductory adventure for a group of 4–6 1st level *Blue Rose* heroes. The adventure presumes the characters are already working together as a group, most likely as envoys of the Sovereign's Finest, but Narrators can adjust the descriptions in the text for other types of groups that might receive the psychic distress call in **A Call for Aid**.

The adventure works best for a group of heroes with a mix of classes and abilities, including arcana. Heroes with the Psychic talent (and therefore both the Psychic Contact and Second Sight arcana) are useful, but not essential, as the challenges in the adventure can be overcome through other means. If there are fewer than four heroes in the group, consider reducing the number of antagonists slightly to compensate. Likewise, if there are more than six heroes, additional antagonists may be needed to give them a suitable challenge.

The story is a fairly simple series of encounters leading to the exploration of a ruined manor and a final confrontation with the main threat of the adventure.

What Has Gone Before

Two days ago, two vata'an rangers from Aldis, Dartis and Talaith, stumbled across the remains of Ebban Manor nestled in the Tanglewood. While exploring those ruins—which date back to the Empire of Thorns—Dartis discovered the Ebban Mask.

Thadus Ebban was a kind and caring man, gifted with arcane abilities, who spent most of his life in study and contemplation. Over the years, he became fascinated with the fey of the Tanglewood. During one of his excursions into the forest, he discovered the remains of a darkfiend. He thought that if he studied them, he could find ways to help protect others against the darkfiends' corruption. He was gravely mistaken.

Even limited exposure to the corpse's essence was enough to begin twisting and perverting Ebban's mind. After a time, he crafted a mask from the darkfiend's skull, which continued to feed the corruption festering in his soul. After Ebban's death, his power and madness remained bound to the mask. As the years passed, the stain of Shadow spread throughout the area and corrupted the fey creatures of the Tanglewood as well.

When Dartis uncovered the mask, he fell victim to its malign influence and turned on his lover and partner, Talaith. Though the two fought, the injured Talaith managed to escape to seek assistance for his cariad. Once free of the ruins, he was able to send a psychic cry for help, which the heroes receive.

Tanglewood Knowledge	
TN	**Tanglewood Lore**
7	The Tanglewood is a region of the Pavin Weald near the Ice-Binder Mountains that divide Aldis from Kern.
9	There are several small villages near the borders of the Tanglewood. Their artisans make wonderful carvings and works of art from wood from the forest.
11	Wolves and other wild animals live in the Tanglewood, although they are usually only dangerous to lone travelers, or when they are starving or otherwise provoked.
13	There are also stories of active nature spirits and fey in the Tanglewood, including wood elementals, sprites, and various sorts of revelers: dryads, fauns, and the like.
15	The sorcerer Ebban controlled the region of the Tanglewood during the Empire of Thorns, but he was a reclusive sort about which little is known these days.

Introduction

A Call for Aid

To begin the adventure, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

While traveling near the northeastern border of Aldis, you receive a faint psychic call: "Please come. We are in need of aid… The darkness… I don't know how long…" You get a fleeting impression of an injured young vata'an man deep within the Tanglewood, a region of the Pavin Weald.

Work out with the players in advance who their characters are and what they are doing in the northeastern area of Aldis. Presumably, the heroes are junior members of the Sovereign's Finest, on patrol in the area or making their way between settlements and villages on the borderlands of the kingdom. If your series has a different set up for the characters to work together, adjust things accordingly. This adventure assumes the heroes are still likely to respond to an urgent call for help, regardless.

Players can make an Intelligence (Natural Lore) test to see how much their characters happen to know about the Tanglewood.

Scene One

Into the Woods

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

You arrive at Servat, a tiny border watch post between the Tanglewood and the kingdom of Kern. The post is apparently deserted and consists of nothing more than two small shelters and an observation tower. The local wildlife seems peaceful and content; deer, birds, sprites, and other small creatures wander freely through the area.

If the heroes investigate the encampment, their search leads them to conclude that three people are normally stationed here. The two shelters appear to serve as both barracks and work stations. From the state of things, it looks as if the outpost has been abandoned for at least the last few days. If a player specifically states their character is keeping an eye out for anything, have them make a TN 11 Perception (Seeing) test after leaving the second shelter. Otherwise, choose a character at random. If successful, they realize a specific sprite has been following them since they arrived. She keeps her distance unless the heroes coax her to come talk to them, although any effort to do so is successful (no test needed).

The sprite's name is Florin. Use the Fey Sprite from **Chapter 12** if her game traits become relevant. While she doesn't know either of the scouts has come to any harm, she is visibly concerned if told about the psychic cry for help. Although the scouts traveled into the Tanglewood two days ago, she didn't think anything of it, since: "Those two sneak off together all the time. They don't think the other one notices, but he does." The "other one" is Braxtin, a human ranger who is frequently away from the watch post for weeks at a time. He is currently on such a patrol and isn't due back for at least another week. (Braxtin's reconnaissance mission can easily be turned into a follow-up adventure if you wish.)

If asked, Florin knows where the rangers started their journey and offers to help guide the party. If the heroes do not enlist the sprite's help, a successful TN 11 Perception (Tracking) test uncovers the direction the rangers headed off in. Succeeding with a 15 or more reveals the scouts' exact tracks. A successful TN 13 Perception (Psychic) test allows any character with psychic arcana to sense the direction in which they will find Talaith, based on the psychic call.
Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

As you continue further into the forest, the briars and undergrowth that give the Tanglewood its name become even more of a hindrance, slowing your progress. Following the trail is difficult, as you have to fight against the forest itself to make headway.

A small pack of corrupt wolves (see page 336) is stalking the heroes. These otherwise ordinary creatures are affected by the influence of Ebban Manor, and are vicious and inclined to attack other creatures merely for sport. There is one wolf for each player character in the group, plus one.

The players should make a TN 13 Perception (Hearing or Seeing) test. Rhydan characters can also use Perception (Smelling). Success means they detect the approaching wolves before they attack and are not surprised by them. Characters failing the test are surprised as the wolves suddenly leap from the tangled undergrowth and beset them; they do not get to act during the first round of the ensuing combat. See **Surprise** in **Chapter 10** for further details.

Describe the wolves as particularly evil-looking, their fur so black it blends into the shadows, and how they slaver and snarl viciously as they attack. Florin the sprite flees when the wolves strike, and may not return for the rest of the adventure unless you feel it would be useful for her to do so—there are some suggestions to that effect later in the scenario.

Scene Two

Talaith's Fate

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

After dispatching the wolves, you make your way deeper into the Tanglewood. Up ahead you see a figure lying amongst the briars, not moving. As you approach, you realize it is a young vata'an man. His face and arms are scratched and cut, and he looks to have taken several blows that have left ugly purple bruises.

Players can make a TN 11 Intelligence (Healing) test or use the Cure arcanum to revive the young man. When he regains consciousness, Talaith tells them the story of what happened to Dartis and himself. Summarize or paraphrase the information from the start of the adventure about their discovery of the ruined manor, with Dartis finding the mysterious skull mask there then quite suddenly turning on Talaith and attacking him—both physically and psychically—using arcane power greater than any Dartis possessed before. Once he tells them what he knows, the frightened and desperate man pleads with the heroes to help save his beloved.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

"By the blessings of Hiathas, you heard my call. I wasn't sure anyone would. Please...he needs help. Something has a hold on him. It has changed him, twisted him. Please help him—before it is too late."

Talaith insists on going with the characters back to the ruins to help Dartis, if he can. If the heroes used an Intelligence (Healing) test to stabilize Talaith, he is well enough to make it back to the watch post and relative safety. However, he is not in any shape to travel further—much less fight—and would certainly slow the group down.

If the characters used the Cure arcanum, odds are Talaith is in better shape to go with them. In either case, if the heroes try to persuade him to return to Servat, he will agree, albeit reluctantly. If the heroes are on the fence about it, or they are split on the matter, he asks to come

with them but offers to stay to the back of the party if it makes them feel more comfortable. If you want, you can have the sprite Florin reappear and offer to help guide Talaith back. Her aid and powers would make his safe return more likely.

Talaith is able to give the characters directions. He can describe them, or use his Psychic Contact arcanum to impart them, showing the heroes a faint track through the Tanglewood that leads to an ancient circle of stones, and then on to the ruined manor. The undergrowth is so heavy that not following the track would take considerable extra time as they would have to clear the heavy, thorny brambles out of their way.

If Talaith does accompany the group, you can use Dartis' stats from the Adventure Adversaries section to represent him, ignoring any effects granted or caused by the Ebban Mask.

Scene Three

The Shadow Ring

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

The small and difficult trail opens up somewhat as you continue on. It winds its way up a hill before ending at a clearing at the summit. In the middle of the clearing is a ring of tall, dark standing stones. Leaning against one of the stones on the far side of the ring is a kneeling figure wearing a hooded cloak of dark green, one slim-fingered hand resting on the surface of the stone, shoulders and body shaking, wracked by soft sobs and weeping.

The figure is Nemain, a fey reveler (see **Chapter 12**) corrupted by the influence of the Ebban Mask, like her compatriot, Deradiz (see **Scene Four**). Her sorrowful weeping is one part madness and true sorrow at her afflicted condition, and one part ruse to lure the heroes in. When they approach her, she rises to her feet, throws off her hood and unleashes her Irresistible Dance against them, using any stunt points generated for a Dazzling Spirit stunt as well. She then attacks any heroes not ensnared by her enchantment with her Fey Touch, dancing and whirling amongst them, laughing madly. If slain or defeated, Nemain's physical form dissolves and vanishes like mist.

Corruption

From the point when they enter the stone circle, the heroes are in a corrupt place, which includes the whole of the ruins in Scene Four. Any corrupt act in accordance with a character's Fate in this scene or the next requires a Willpower (Self-Discipline) test to avoid acquiring Corruption. See **Corruption** in **Chapter 2** for further details and the relevant target numbers.

Scene Four

The Ruins of Ebban Manor

The heroes arrive at the ruins of Ebban Manor. While investigating and exploring them, they uncover clues about the history of the manor and the fate of Dartis. The characters enter the clearing on the eastern side of the manor house.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

Entering the clearing, you see the remains of what was once a magnificent manor house. Even though the building is in ruins, and there is at least one notable hole where a wall has collapsed, you notice most of the heavy stone walls have remained intact, thickly covered with ivy, despite untold years of neglect.

If you want to add a combat encounter outside the manor, place a corrupt wood elemental near the ruins (see **Chapter 12**). It masquerades as a dead tree until it suddenly moves to attack the characters, surprising them unless they make a successful TN 12 Perception (Seeing or Hearing) test. However, if the heroes have faced sufficient combat challenges thus far, feel free to allow them to enter the manor unchallenged, as they'll find more than enough to battle therein!

The Ruins

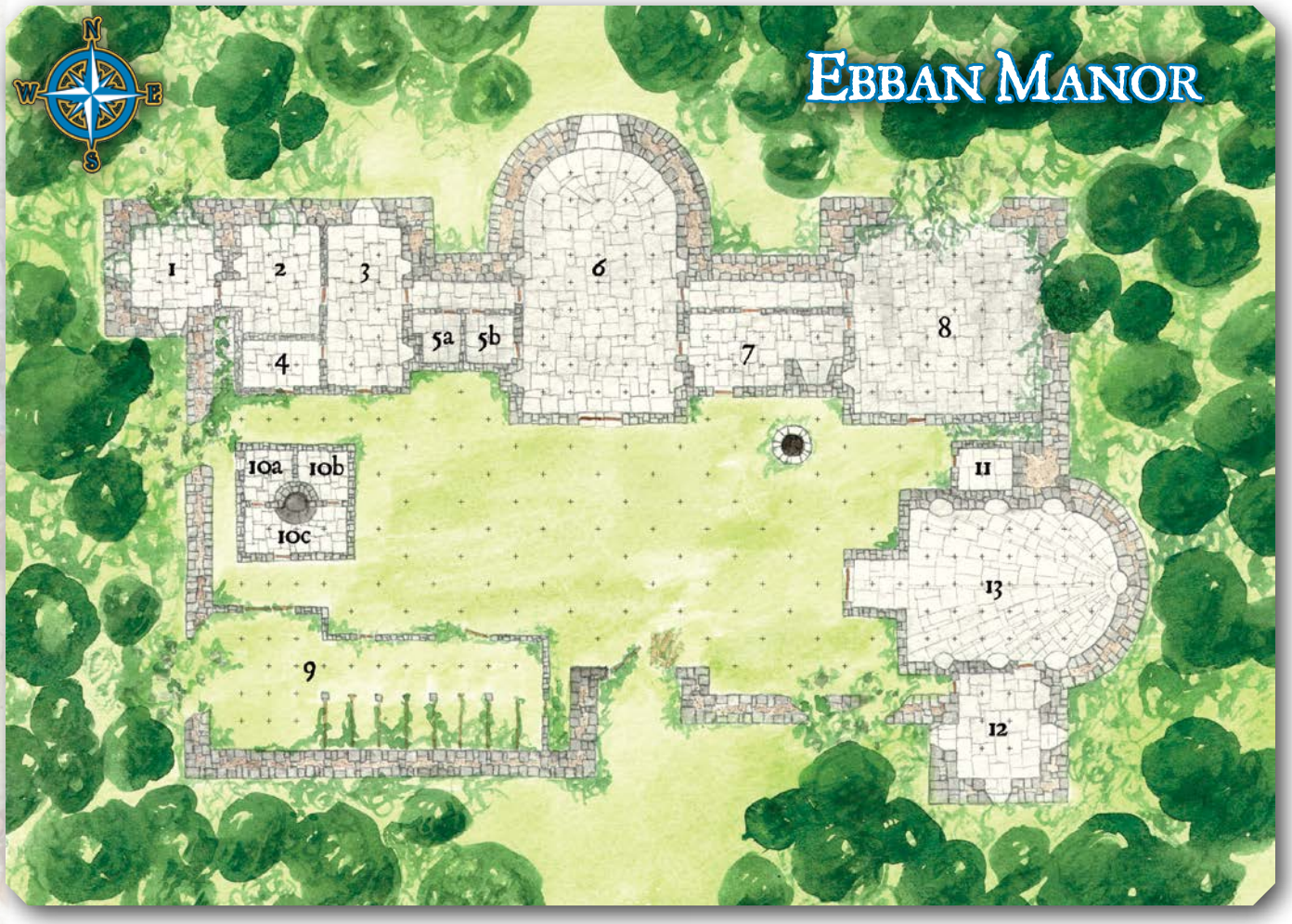
The ruined manor is surprisingly intact, given its age and weathering, as if sustained by the corruption permeating its very stones and structure. All the wood, cloth, and other organic materials in the manor are in various stages of decay, and are likely to collapse when touched or handled. The buildings' stonework remains intact, however, as do the floors, for the most part.

1. The Study

The northern wall of the manor has long since collapsed into a heap of rubble, leaving this room exposed to the elements. The study holds only a rotting desk and chair, along with the remains of what look like glass vials and beakers.

A search reveals small, diaphanous wings among the remains of the vials, and a killing jar in the desk containing the remains of a dead fey sprite, along with a page from Thadus' damaged journal. Give the players a copy of **Journal Handout #1** to read.

A successful TN 11 Perception (Searching) test also uncovers an arcane recovery elixir (see **Chapter 11**) in a stoppered, sealed, and unlabeled vial. A successful TN 11 Intelligence (Arcane Lore) test identifies what the elixir does.



2. The Bedroom

This was, at one time, the master bedchamber of Ebban Manor. Years of exposure to the weather has erased almost all traces of its former function and furnishings.

3. The Library

This once well-appointed library has clearly been destroyed by time and intruders. The rotting and moldering remains of books and bits of broken furniture are strewn about the room.

A successful TN 11 Perception (Searching) test uncovers several damaged tomes on arcane elixirs and a few volumes on fey lore. Along with those, the heroes uncover Thadus Ebban's damaged field journal. Give the players a copy of **Journal Handout #2** to read.

4. Storeroom

This room is empty and appears to have been used for storage once upon a time.

5a, 5b. Servants' Rooms

Bits and pieces of old, unremarkable furniture litter these rooms. You assume they once belonged to the manor's serving staff.

6. The Grand Hall

Fine tapestries and portraits once decorated this grand chamber, but weather and age have all but destroyed them. The dead husk of a spider the size of a large dog lies on the left side of the hall, blocking a mostly intact door. There are two more intact doors, one part way down the left-hand wall and the other directly across from it.

The door that is blocked by the dead giant spider leads to the remains of room 7, the kitchen.

7. The Kitchen

Based on the oversized hearth, old pots, and cooking utensils scattered about, this was once the manor's kitchen.

8. The Dining Hall and Barracks

Much of Ebban Manor's dining hall has succumbed to the elements due to large breaks in the northern and eastern walls. A set of stairs on the south end of the room leads up to what was once the barracks for the manor's men-at-arms.

9. Stables

The stone walls of the old stable have survived the years, but the wooden doors and stable divides have been eroded and destroyed by the elements.

With a successful TN 11 Perception (Hearing) test, the heroes can hear the clicking and whirring of the clockwork sprites located in the remains of the forge (room 10c) near the stables.

10a. The Blacksmith's Bedchamber

This small room appears to have been the bedchamber for Ebban Manor's resident smith.

10b. The Armory

A few rusted and broken swords, polearms, and pieces of armor still hang from what remains of the old armory's racks.

If the players are having a tough time and you want to give them a bit of an edge, you can place a masterwork weapon (or two) with a +1 bonus to attack test and damage rolls within the debris in this room. See **Chapter 11** for more on masterwork items.

10c. The Main Forge

As the PCs approach this chamber, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

As you move towards the freestanding stone building that was the manor's forge, a soft, metallic clicking noise grows steadily louder and louder.

Clickclack, a corrupt fey reveler (see page 344), has been building clockwork sprites to supplement the corrupt ones flocking to Deradiz' banner. Like the other corrupted fey, Clickclack is quite mad, in his case utterly obsessed with his arcane clockwork creations.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

In the far corner of the room, a fey youth is bent over a small table, tools in hand, looking not unlike a surgeon performing delicate work on a patient. In this instance, the "patient" appears to be a little metallic creature lying inert on the table. Behind the fey, a small group of what appears to be clockwork sprites are lazily wandering around in a haphazard fashion, occasionally bumping into walls and rubble before readjusting their course.

When the characters enter the area, Clickclack looks up, barely acknowledging their presence before returning to his work. He makes no threatening moves or statements and won't initiate a conversation. If the group attempts to speak with him, he won't respond with anything other than a nod or shake of his head or a shrug of his shoulders. If left undisturbed, he simply continues his repair work. If attacked or threatened, he psychically commands the clockwork sprites to attack while he flees to find Deradiz and inform him of what has happened.

There are one and a half times the heroes' number in clockwork sprites, rounded up. They have the abilities of fey sprites from the **Adversaries** chapter (see page 343), except they are whirring mechanical constructs and their Arcane Burst ability is like a powerful spark, rather than arcane fire. They block any effort to pursue Clickclack until they are destroyed.

11. Storeroom

This room is empty and appears to have once been used for storage.

12. Bedchamber

While most of the manor shows great wear and neglect, it is clear that someone—or something—has gone out of their way to fix this chamber up and make use of it. The room contains several candles which seem to have been recently lit.

13. The Shrine of Shadow

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

This spacious chamber resembles the private shrines and meditation chambers of Aldis, but dark and lit only by dimly glowing arcane lights. The seven niches—three along either side, and the seventh opposite the main door—do not represent the gods of Light, but contain the sinister sigils of the exarchs of Shadow. Before the sign of Gravicarius, the exarch of pride, stands a faun-like figure with goat legs and curling horns, bent over a man dressed as a ranger but wearing a hideous horned skull as a mask. The masked man sits cross-legged on the floor as the faun whispers in his ear.

There are two ways into the shrine. The first is the main entrance, which is barred by an arcane lock. The corrupt fey Clickclack who lives in the forge (room 10c) has the imbued key that unlocks this door. Otherwise, it must be broken down or the lock overcome with the Ward arcanum. Breaking down the door is an advanced Strength (Might) test with a target number of 13 and a success threshold of 5. Overcoming the arcane lock with Ward is an advanced Willpower (Psychic) test with a target number of 13 and a success threshold of 5.

The other way to enter the shrine is via the bedchamber connected to it (room 12).

The shrine was dedicated long ago to the exarchs of Shadow, turning the ruins of Ebban Manor into a beacon for the corrupt creatures of the Tanglewood.

Within the shrine, Deradiz—a corrupt fey reveler (see page 344) and self-proclaimed "Lord of Tanglewood"—is giving instruction to Dartis, the Ebban Mask's thrall (see **Adventure Adversaries** at the end of the scenario). If Talaith is with the group, he reacts with horror and starts moving toward his cariad to help him.

Fighting Dartis

Deradiz sees the heroes' arrival as a stroke of good fortune. His preference is not to kill them but to capture them, restrain them, and let the corrupt powers of the mask and manor turn them to his cause as well. After all, as Lord of Tanglewood, he needs subjects, servants, and others to carry out his will. His followers are under orders to merely incapacitate the heroes, nothing more (see **Incapacitating** in **Chapter 1**).

Dartis attacks primarily with Psychic Blast and Sorcerer's Grip. Due to his internal conflict, his tests against the heroes are at a –2 penalty (negating the +2 bonus he gains from the Ebban Mask).

Deradiz has a set of pipes he can play for his Irresistible Dance, and uses his Fey Touch against any foe who dares to engage him directly. At his command, a group of corrupt fey sprites (see page 343) equal in number to one and a half times the number of player characters (round up) also appears and attacks using their Arcane Burst.

During the conflict, the heroes can perform the following special stunts:

SP Cost	Stunt
2+	**Inspire Dartis (any test):** Your action helps to inspire Dartis to resist the power of the mask. Each stunt point reduces the success threshold to overcome the mask's hold by 1 and, if it is reduced to 0, Dartis is able to break the mask's hold by himself and throw it off.
3	**Remove the Mask (combat test):** Make an attack test opposed by a test of Dartis' Dexterity +2. If you win, you snatch or knock the mask off Dartis' head, freeing him from its influence.

The Ebban Mask

The Ebban Mask is made from the preserved and carved skull of a darkfiend. It is large enough to fit over a humanoid's head, covering the face and all but the lower jaw. It has curling horns and is incised with sorcerous sigils. The mask is a reservoir of corrupt sorcerous power, with the following qualities:

- Its wearer gains +10 Health and a +2 bonus to Defense.
- The wearer can use the following arcana: Enhancement, Manipulate Object, Move Object, Psychic Blast, Psychic Contact, Psychic Shield, and Sorcerer's Grip.
- The mask's wearer gains a +2 bonus to all arcane tests.
- The mask dominates its bearer. Anyone touching the mask must make a successful TN 11 Willpower (Self-Discipline) or Psychic Shield test to avoid putting it on. A new test is required with each new contact or each hour of carrying the mask, with the target number increasing by +1 until the character fails or is separated from the mask for at least 8 hours. A character wearing the mask must make a test to avoid being dominated by it each round it is worn. Once dominated, the wearer remains in the mask's thrall until it is removed or overcome psychically (see the following).
- Breaking the mask's hold over its victim requires the use of the Psychic Contact arcanum and an advanced Communication (Psychic) test with a target number of 13 and a success threshold of 10.
- The mask is a corrupt item. Any corrupt acts performed while in contact with it require a successful Willpower (Self-Discipline) test to avoid accumulating Corruption. See Corruption in **Chapter 2** for details.

Dartis

Abilities (Focuses)	
2	Accuracy (Bows, Light Blades)
2	Communication
2	Constitution (Stamina)
1	Dexterity (Stealth)
2	Fighting (Heavy Blades)
0	Intelligence (Natural Lore)
2	Perception (Tracking)
1	Strength
1	Willpower (Morale)

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
11	20/30*	11/13*	3

*While wearing the Ebban Mask.

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Dagger	+4	1d6+2
Longsword	+4	2d6+1

Special Qualities

Arcana: Psychic Contact, Psychic Shield, Second Sight

Favored Stunts: Knock Prone, Skirmish

Enhanced Arcana*: While wearing the Ebban Mask, Dartis has access to additional arcana besides those already mentioned. See the Ebban Mask's description (following) for further details.

Darkvision: Dartis can see normally in even complete darkness.

Talents: Armor Training (Novice), Psychic (Novice), Single Weapon Style (Novice)

Weapons Groups: Bludgeons, Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, Light Blades

Equipment: Dagger, Longsword, Leather Armor

Minor/Moderate*

Defeating Dartis

If Dartis is freed from the mask, he is immediately incapacitated: unconscious with 1 Health. He recovers consciousness in 2d6 minutes. At the Narrator's discretion, he may be able to perform one action before losing consciousness, especially if it is to save or aid Talaith.

If the battle turns against him, Deradiz attempts to take the Ebban Mask and flee into the Tanglewood, vowing to fight another day and to avenge himself against the heroes who have thwarted him. He could become a long-term enemy for your series, and might make an attempt to reclaim the mask from the envoys if they have taken it, or to corrupt them and draw them into his service.

Aftermath

After the final conflict, the heroes might well need to deal with the mask. It cannot be physically damaged by any means at the characters' disposal. Allow them to come up with creative ways to nullify its influence. The easiest—although by no means the least hazardous—is to wrap it up or put it in a container and to switch carriers regularly. The envoys are expected to bring corrupt artifacts back to the city of Aldis for the master adepts there to deal with, but the road back to Aldis is long and poses any number of opportunities for something to go wrong or for the mask to go missing, if you want to extend the adventure.

They heroes should also look after Dartis and Talaith, both in need of rest and recovery. Dartis also has 2 points of Corruption as a result of his trial with the Ebban Mask, and must begin the process of shedding it. His corruption might lead Dartis to try and reclaim the mask. The heroes must beware of this possibility and do their best to keep it from him. Having the two rangers accompany them on their travels back to civilization could, as a result, lead to further complications (and adventures).

Journal Handout #1

It does my heart good to know my instincts were right. Today's excursion into the Tanglewood proved the forest is home to many fey beings. I feel as though I would be happy to spend my remaining years studying these elusive creatures, but I also fear I would barely scratch the surface. The tales I heard as a child appear to be fact—some are quite friendly, while others are quite shy until they become familiar with you, at which point they can become rather inquisitive. Still others are quite mischievous, but not malicious by any means.

At one point today, when I stood up from a short rest, I fell face-first into the moss and leaves. It appears one of the fey decided to play a prank on me and tied the laces of my boots together! I'm quite sure I could tell which sprite was responsible...the same one I've caught glimpses of near the manor over the past few weeks. I should make it clear I feel the little sprite's prank was a bit of innocent fun on his part; I am not even sure the concept of malice is one they understand...

It's been a month since my little friend went missing. Though he never spoke to me, I had taken to calling him Brae, after his distinctive laughter. Of late, he had been accompanying me on my sojourns into the forest, even taken to riding along on my shoulder. Admittedly, I had become accustomed to his company, his presence. I like to think he had started to anticipate my appearance, as he was always ready to greet me within minutes of my entry into the Tanglewood. The other sprites still kept their distance, but

I believe I was genuinely making progress with them as well. I hope it is just a coincidence, but in the last few weeks, I've found contact with any of the fey has been increasingly rare, and less friendly. I worry there might be something in the forest scaring them off. A predator of some sort?

Tomorrow, I intend to go deeper into the woods than I have previously in search of answers.

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Journal Handout #2

The fey are following me from the shadows as I make my way through the deeper forest. They never show themselves to me anymore, but I can hear them, whispering and giggling in the dark. Their laughter is less comforting to me now, and I may have been hasty as I begin to suspect they might not be benevolent creatures after all.

While I know magic sustains and protects me, their once bright songs have taken on darker qualities – tinged with sorrow and promises of pain, but nevertheless eerily sweet. Have the fey changed, or are they revealing a more sinister side of themselves now I am deeper in their territory?

I found Brae today. He lay gasping on the head of a blighted toadstool, barely clinging to life. This deep into the wood, I've found the flora of this forest becomes more ragged, more susceptible to disease. There are fewer birds, yet more spiders and serpents. The fey songs fade away to silence, while the fey themselves growl and cackle in the shadows. Some of the braver ones have started making themselves visible in brief flashes, but I was too distraught by Brae's ragged breathing to pay them any mind. Despite my belief about maintaining an appropriate level of distance in my studies, I resolved to bring Brae home and try to revive him.

By the time I returned to my home, Brae was dead.

I inspected his body carefully. His wings, once shimmering pools of rainbow light, had darkened, and his silver hair was faded. While his skin had been a clear pale blue, now it was a sickly yellow, with tiny, dark spots on his face, hands, and feet. I begin to think that disease might be responsible for the changes I observed in the other fey. Are they even susceptible to diseases like other creatures?

I definitely believe the fey have become infected with something, possibly of a dark nature. The malady clearly affects their minds as well as their bodies. They become slower to disappear when I spot them in the forest. Perhaps this is an intentional trick to draw me deeper into the wood. Their laughter has changed so much now that it haunts my dreams and even my waking hours.

Yesterday, instead of my boots being tied together, I almost stepped into a patch of sharpened wooden stakes stuck into the ground. The day before, I was nearly strangled by a dangling noose of tangled vines. My hands are shaking as I write this. I feel compelled to find the source of this mad change. One thought plagues me though: if I were likewise affected, would I even know it?

There must be a way to defend myself against this. There must be a way to protect the fey. There must be a way to save them! I must—I will—find it!

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Stunt Reference

Combat Stunts

SP Cost	Stunt
1+	**Skirmish:** You can move yourself or the target of your attack 2 yards in any direction for each 1 SP you spend.
1	**Rapid Reload:** You can immediately reload a missile weapon.
1	**Stay Aware:** You take a moment to make sure you're mindful of everything that's happening around you. Make a TN 11 Perception test with the focus of your choice. If you succeed, the Narrator may either make you aware of some battlefield situation that has so far escaped your notice, or give you a +1 bonus to the next test you make. This bonus can never stack with any other test bonus other than that from a focus. It must be used on the very next test you make (even if you're the defender in an opposed test), and expires at the end of your next turn even if you haven't used it by then.
2	**Knock Prone:** You knock your enemy prone. Any character making a melee attack against a prone foe gains a +1 bonus on their attack roll.
2	**Defensive Stance:** Your attack sets you up for defense. You gain a +2 bonus to Defense until the beginning of your next turn.
2	**Disarm:** You attempt to disarm the target with your melee attack. You and your opponent must make an opposed attack roll. If you win the test, you knock your enemy's weapon 1d6 + Strength yards away in a direction you nominate.
2	**Mighty Blow:** You inflict an extra 1d6 damage on your attack.
2	**Pierce Armor:** You find a chink in your enemy's armor. The target's armor rating is halved (rounded down) vs. this attack.
2	**Taunt:** You insult or distract one opponent of your choice within 10 yards of you. You must make an opposed test of your Communication (Deception) vs. the target's Willpower (Self-Discipline). If you win, the target suffers a –1 penalty on attack and arcana rolls on their next turn.
2	**Threaten:** You strike a threatening pose, challenging an opponent of your choice within 10 yards of you. You must make an opposed test of your Strength (Intimidate) vs. the target's Willpower (Self-Discipline). If you win, they must attack you in some way (melee, missile, arcana, etc.) on their next turn.
3	**Lightning Attack:** You can make a second attack against the same enemy or a different one within range and sight. You must have a loaded missile weapon to make a ranged attack. If you roll doubles on this second attack roll, you do not gain any additional stunt points.
3	**Set Up:** You create an opening an ally can exploit. Pick an ally. On their next turn, the ally receives a +2 bonus on the ability test of their choice. This decision must be made before the dice are rolled.
4	**Dual Strike:** Your attack is so strong it affects two targets. First, pick a secondary target. This target must be adjacent to you if you are using a melee weapon or within 6 yards of your primary target if you are using a missile weapon. Apply the test result of your original attack roll to the secondary target (in other words, you only make one attack roll and apply it to both opponents). If you hit the secondary target, inflict your normal damage on them.
4	**Seize the Initiative:** Your attack changes the tempo of the battle. You move to the top of the initiative order. This means you may get to take another turn before some of the combatants get to act again. You remain at the top of the order until someone else seizes the initiative.
5	**Lethal Blow:** You inflict an extra 2d6 damage on your attack.

Standard Arcane Stunts

SP Cost	Stunt
1+	**Powerful Channeling:** Increase the Outcome of your arcanum by 1 per SP spent, to a maximum of 4.
2	**Skillful Channeling:** Reduce the fatigue target number (TN) for the arcanum by 2.
2	**Mighty Arcana:** If the arcanum does damage, one target of your choice takes an extra 1d6 damage.
3	**Lasting Arcana:** If an arcanum has a duration beyond instantaneous, it remains in effect for twice as long. Arcana that last until the end of the encounter are extended by 1d6 minutes instead.
3	**Arcane Shield:** You use the residual arcanum energy to set up a temporary protective shield. You gain a +2 bonus to Defense until the beginning of your next turn.
4	**Fast Casting:** After you resolve this arcanum, you can immediately use another. The second arcanum must take either a major action or a minor action to perform. The test for the second arcanum does not generate stunt points.
4	**Imposing Arcana:** The effect of the arcanum is much more dramatic than usual. Until the beginning of your next turn, anyone attempting to make a melee attack against you must make a successful Willpower (Courage) test. The target number is 10 + your Willpower ability. Those who fail must take a Move or Defend action instead.
4	**Split Arcana:** If the arcanum affects only one target, you can have it affect two, so long as the second target is within the arcanum's range and no more than 6 yards from the original target. Targets test against the arcanum effects separately.
5	**Disrupt Arcana:** In addition to its normal effects, your arcanum is so powerful it may disrupt another arcane effect on the target. Roll an immediate test of your Intelligence (Arcane Lore) vs. the arcane test total of any one arcanum on the target. Success removes the effect. Doubles on the test do not generate stunt points.
5	**Lethal Arcana:** If the arcanum does damage, one target of the spell takes an extra 2d6 damage. Alternately, all targets of the arcanum take an additional 1d6 damage.
6	**Effortless Arcana:** You automatically pass any fatigue test associated with using this arcanum.

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Roleplaying Stunts

SP Cost	Stunt
1	**Bon Mot:** You tag the perfect witty remark onto the end of your action, affecting all those who hear it that much more deeply. If you can't think of one, the rest of the players and Narrator quickly brainstorm options, and you choose among them. Word of your wit is likely to spread, for good or ill.
1+	**Passionate Inspiration:** Your emotions flare and you're inspired to a brief act of daring or greatness. Gain a +1 bonus to your next action, with a further +1 for every 2 additional SP spent.
2	**And Another Thing:** You manage to weave a second thrust of conversation into the primary interaction that called for the test, if your description supports it. If relevant, you may make an additional test as part of your action, before anyone else has a chance to respond or make any tests or arguments of their own.
2	**Sway the Crowd:** Your interpersonal efforts are so effective they spill over onto others in the area, and you affect one additional person of your choice past the original target. You may use this stunt multiple times on the same roll. However, if the test that gave rise to this stunt was an opposed test you may not expand the effect to anyone who has a higher ability + focus total than the original target.
3	**New Friends:** Your action impresses, charms, or otherwise makes an NPC in the encounter think better of you. Choose one character who's present—that character now admires you or thinks of you as a friend. If they're an enemy or dislike you already, make an opposed Communications (Persuasion) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline) test. If you win, that character feels more positively about you and may aid you in small ways. This stunt can set up a future relationship if interactions continue and remain positive…
3+	**New Enemies:** You gain the upper hand on your opponent, but in doing so draw their ire. You may select any stunt or stunts worth 1 more total SP than the amount you spend on this stunt. However, an NPC in the encounter now dislikes you and considers you a rival, threat, or enemy. This NPC doesn't have to be the target of your action, just someone who it makes sense would now be upset with you. This stunt can set up future relationships if interactions continue along these lines…
3	**Stunned Silence:** You are so impressive that you leave all those who witness your display completely dumbfounded and unable to speak for at least a full round. Outside combat this lasts, at the very least, long enough for your character to begin doing something else.
3	**Jest:** You turn a phrase, twist your expression, or make some other comic motion that leads those nearby to laugh, or at least stifle their snorts. Anyone nearby who wishes to avoid laughing must make a successful TN 11 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test, with the exception—at the Narrator's discretion—of whomever you've made the butt of your joke.
4	**Exciting Opportunities:** You action impresses or inspires an NPC in the encounter, or some dignitary who could logically hear about your actions. While there is no immediate effect, this may lead to some important group or character offering you future patronage, membership of an exclusive organization, an invitation to a restricted event, or some other significant future opportunity.
4	**Flirt:** Choose one character who is present and immediately make an opposed Communications (Romance) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline) test. If you win, that character becomes enamored with yours. What exactly this means in the moment and how it might play out (or fall apart) in the long run are up to the Narrator, and depend on how you continue to act. But, if you're successful, you've created an opening for romantic opportunities.
4	**Tower of Will:** Your success gives you a sense of your own brilliance and strength of character. For the rest of the current roleplaying exchange you gain a +1 bonus to any opposed tests where an opponent tries to put you at an emotional disadvantage, such as by intimidating you, impressing you, bargaining with you, and so on.
5	**Enrage:** You twist the knife, delivering a provocation or insult in such a way that a single target you designate must choose between either attacking you or storming away from the scene. If they choose to attack, the assault need not be deadly, although that option is open to the enraged character. A slap or the throwing of the gauntlet may stand in as an "attack" just as well.

Exploration Stunts

SP Cost	Stunt
1	**Advantageous Positioning:** You make your discovery from an advantageous position of your choice, up to 2 yards away from the place that would normally lead to your discovery with respect to the object of your test. You may wait until the Narrator describes what you've found, if relevant, before you choose your position. This stunt can be used multiple times on the same test if you have enough stunt points.
2	**Efficient Search:** If resources of any kind are typically consumed in the course of your test, you use only half as much as you would normally.
2	**Speedy Search:** You complete your test in half the time it would otherwise take.
2	**The Right Tools:** You have, find, or improvise a piece of equipment you need to attempt an action more effectively. This stunt counteracts any situational penalties for not having appropriate equipment.
3	**That Makes Me Wonder:** You may immediately make another Perception test, at no additional cost in time or resources, to discover more information about your surroundings, or the object of your test. This bonus test must use a different focus from the first test, however, and doubles on this bonus test do not give rise to stunt points. The two tests are assumed to transpire simultaneously, not one after the other. If there is nothing additional to discover the stunt is wasted, but the Narrator will not prevent you from choosing this stunt even when there is nothing additional to learn.
3	**The Object of Your Attention:** You receive a +1 bonus to further tests to examine or perceive additional aspects of the object of your test until the time or venue changes.
4	**The Upper Hand:** If your discoveries lead to combat within a moment or two, you receive a +3 bonus on your initiative roll.
4	**Resources at Hand:** Choose a focus you don't have that falls under the same ability as the test you're making. You are considered to have that focus until the time or venue changes. The Narrator may require you to explain how this bonus arises from the environment and deny it if you can't make a reasonable suggestion.
4	**With a Flourish:** The manner of your success is impressive to those who are nearby to watch you. You have a +1 bonus to opposed tests against them until the time or venue changes.

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Actions

Major Actions

Aid Ally

You can use your own action to aid an ally. Your ally must be within a number of yards equal to your Communication × 4 (minimum 2 yards for characters with Communication 0 or under). The ally gains a bonus minor action and a +2 bonus on the next test of their choice for one round after your turn. Rhy-bonded characters can always aid each other if in the same scene, regardless of distance.

All-Out Attack

You attack one adjacent enemy in hand-to-hand combat, throwing the full weight of your Strength behind the attack, even though your ability to react to counterattacks will suffer. If you hit, you do +1 damage, but whether or not this attack hits, you suffer –1 to your Defense until your next turn.

Charge

You move up to half your Speed (rounded down) in yards and then make a melee attack against an adjacent enemy. You gain a +1 bonus on your attack roll.

Defend

You focus on defending yourself this round. Until the beginning of your next turn, you gain a +2 bonus to your Defense. If you wish, you may give this Defense bonus to an adjacent ally (within 2 yards) instead.

Heal

You provide some quick first aid to an injured ally. You must be adjacent to your ally and you must have bandages ready. This is a TN 11 Intelligence (Healing) test. If you are successful, your ally gets back an amount of Health equal to the Drama Die + your Intelligence. A character cannot benefit from another Heal action until additional damage is taken.

Melee Attack

You attack one adjacent enemy in hand-to-hand combat. An enemy within 2 yards of you is considered adjacent.

Ranged Attack

You fire or throw a missile weapon at one visible enemy within range.

Run

You can move up to double your Speed in yards. You cannot take this action if you are prone (you'd need to use the Move action to stand up first).

Minor Actions

Activate

This action allows you to start using certain abilities or items, such as fighting styles and potions.

Aim

You take the measure of your opponent and plan your next strike. If your next action is a melee attack or ranged attack, you gain a +1 bonus on your attack roll.

Guard Up

You shift some of your attention to defense. Add +1 or +2 (your choice) to your Defense until the end of this round. However, you suffer the amount you choose as a penalty to all tests you make, even opposed tests, for the remainder of the current round as well. (This is a key difference between the Guard Up and Defend actions. Guard Up only lasts until the end of the round, whereas Defend lasts until the beginning of your next turn.) If you choose this minor action, you must do it before any major action you take this turn. You can combine this action with Defend, but remember the penalty applies to all tests made for the rest of the round.

Maintain

You spend some of your focus on maintaining an effect, typically arcana (see **Chapter 4: Arcana** for examples), although other effects may require you to maintain them on subsequent rounds.

Move

You can move up to your Speed in yards. You can also go prone, stand up, or mount a horse or vehicle, but if you do so you can only move at half Speed (rounded down).

Prepare

You pick one major action that you prepare to execute and then end your turn. Any time until your next turn, you can interrupt another character and take your prepared action immediately. If you don't use it by your next turn, the action is lost. You cannot take the prepared action if you've already taken a major action on your turn.

Press the Attack

You stand ready to pursue an enemy if they should fall back or flee your blows. Declare an adjacent enemy combatant when you take this action. Until the beginning of your next turn, if that enemy moves away from you, you may immediately move up to your Speed in yards in direct pursuit of that enemy at no additional cost in actions. This occurs immediately after your foe's movement, before they can do anything else. However, you can only use this minor action on an enemy you have already successfully struck in melee combat this turn (whether you inflicted damage or not). When you make your move, it need not bring you adjacent to that enemy if you can't go that fast. In that case, you simply move as far as you can before stopping. You are free to forego some or all of the movement this action allows when your enemy triggers it, if you wish.

Ready

You can unsheathe a weapon, pull out a potion, or otherwise ready an item that is stowed. As part of this action, you can put away something already in hand. You could thus put away your bow and a draw a sword, for example.

Stand Firm

You lower your weight and prepare to resist any and all efforts to move you from the place where you stand. Until the beginning of your next turn, any enemy who uses the Skirmish or Knock Prone combat stunts to move you or knock you to the ground must succeed in an opposed test pitting their Strength (Might) vs. your choice of your own Strength (Might) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) in order to move you or knock you prone. This test can only be attempted after your opponent spends the relevant stunt points, which are nevertheless expended to no effect if you win the test. An opponent who attempts to Skirmish you more than once as part of a single attack (to move you more than 2 yards) only makes a single opposed test against you, with all the skirmishing movement hanging in the balance.

Variable Actions

Concentrate

You focus your mind and spirit to use an arcanum which may require a test. Concentrate may be a major action, minor action, or free action depending on the arcanum used. Some other abilities may also require a minor action devoted to concentrating enough to maintain their effects.

Reload

You reload a missile weapon. This may be a major action, minor action, or free action depending on the weapon, your talents, and the stunts used.

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QUICK REFERENCE CARD

NAME

HEALTH

CLASS/LEVEL

ACCURACY		
COMMUNICATION		
CONSTITUTION		
DEXTERITY		
FIGHTING		
INTELLIGENCE		
PERCEPTION		
STRENGTH		
WILLPOWER		

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE

SPEED

DEFENSE

ARMOR

POWERS

EQUIPMENT

INITIATIVE CARD

NAME

SPEED INITIATIVE

CLASS/LEVEL

ACCURACY	COMMUNICATION	CONSTITUTION
DEXTERITY	FIGHTING	INTELLIGENCE
PERCEPTION	STRENGTH	WILLPOWER

QUICK REFERENCE CARD

NAME

HEALTH

CLASS/LEVEL

ACCURACY		
COMMUNICATION		
CONSTITUTION		
DEXTERITY		
FIGHTING		
INTELLIGENCE		
PERCEPTION		
STRENGTH		
WILLPOWER		

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE

SPEED

DEFENSE

ARMOR

POWERS

EQUIPMENT

INITIATIVE CARD

NAME

SPEED INITIATIVE

CLASS/LEVEL

ACCURACY	COMMUNICATION	CONSTITUTION
DEXTERITY	FIGHTING	INTELLIGENCE
PERCEPTION	STRENGTH	WILLPOWER

INITIATIVE CARD

NAME

SPEED INITIATIVE

CLASS/LEVEL

ACCURACY	COMMUNICATION	CONSTITUTION
DEXTERITY	FIGHTING	INTELLIGENCE
PERCEPTION	STRENGTH	WILLPOWER

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BLUE ROSE

CLASS

LEVEL

FATIGUE

NAME

RACE

BACKGROUND

SPEED	DEFENSE	ARMOR	PENALTY
		AR	

ARMOR TYPE

HEALTH

FULL HEALTH

ACCURACY	☐	Rating
COMMUNICATION	☐	Rating
CONSTITUTION	☐	Rating
DEXTERITY	☐	Rating
FIGHTING	☐	Rating
INTELLIGENCE	☐	Rating
PERCEPTION	☐	Rating
STRENGTH	☐	Rating
WILLPOWER	☐	Rating

POWERS, TALENTS, AND SPECIALIZATIONS

CONVICTION POINTS

MOVE	CHARGE	RUN
	IN YARDS	

MELEE WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE

WEAPON GROUPS & NOTES

RANGED WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	SHORT RANGE	LONG RANGE	RELOAD TIME

ARCANA

GEAR

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PERSONA

CALLING:

DESTINY:

FATE:

CORRUPTION:

GOALS:

SPECIAL AND ARCANE ITEMS

RELATIONSHIP NAME	INTENSITY	RELATIONSHIP BOND

HONORIFICS, TITLES, AND MEMBERSHIPS

CHARACTER ILLUSTRATION

CHARACTER NOTES

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BLUE ROSE

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