

CRYPTOMANCER™

A FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAME ABOUT HACKING



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/ROOT/CREDITS

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INTRODUCTION



HELLO WORLD

Cryptomancer is a tabletop role-playing game about hacking in a Tolkienesque high-fantasy setting. It is a game that provides avenues for players to play fantasy characters who attack and defend the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information systems that support kingdoms and factions. However, instead of adopting a “hacking as combat versus technology” abstraction that so many modern role-playing games adopt, Cryptomancer provides an unglamorous and unapologetic take on information security. This game’s rules and setting are informed by real-life information security principles, such as encryption and network defense, as well as intelligence community concepts, such as tradecraft and link analysis, all of which are presented in a context that makes sense for a high-fantasy setting rife with conflict and intrigue.

Throughout this book, players will be presented a number of systems that their characters will likely be tasked with either exploiting or defending at some point in their adventures. While a security background is certainly not necessary to play this game, those who do have this background (or an interest in the topic) will notice that many of the systems in this fantasy setting are modeled after real life systems (and in many cases, inheriting the same drawbacks and vulnerabilities).

This is a game for the subset of people in the world who thrive on creating and solving problems by making systems do things that the creators of those systems never imagined or anticipated. Rest assured, this is still a fantasy role-playing game. Orcs shall be slain, spells shall be cast, and loot shall be amassed. It’s just that between these quintessential gamer tasks, players might find themselves guessing passphrases, defeating cryptosystems, and feeding misdirection into networks they have exploited. And maybe, just maybe, this will be equally as fun.

Kill all the orcs, hack all the things.

OBLIGATORY RPG 101 SECTION

Cryptomancer adheres to a very traditional interpretation of tabletop role-playing games (RPGs), which this section will introduce. Even for those who are not new to the genre, this section should prove useful, as we will be defining terms used throughout the game rules and waxing philosophic about RPG fundamentals.

What is an RPG? There are a million definitions out there, but here's the one we've settled on: it's like when children play pretend, but for grown-ups, and disputes are settled by rules and dice rolls. Basically, people playing a role-playing game are contributing to a shared imaginary narrative, only it's slightly more structured than what happens on the playground.

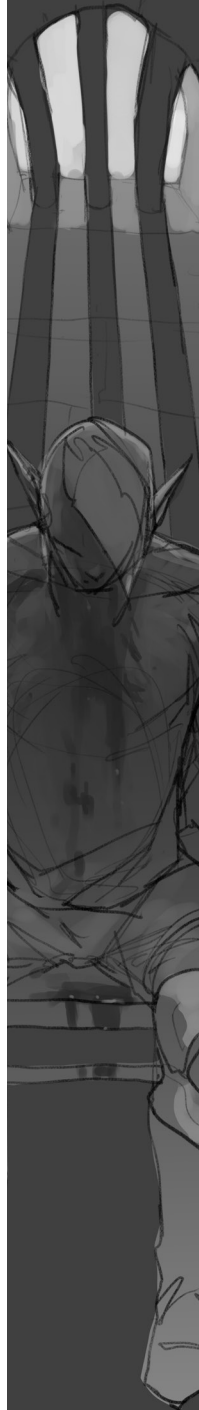
Players are the humans at the table, reading this game's rules right now. Players make decisions, roll dice, and help narrate the outcome of events.

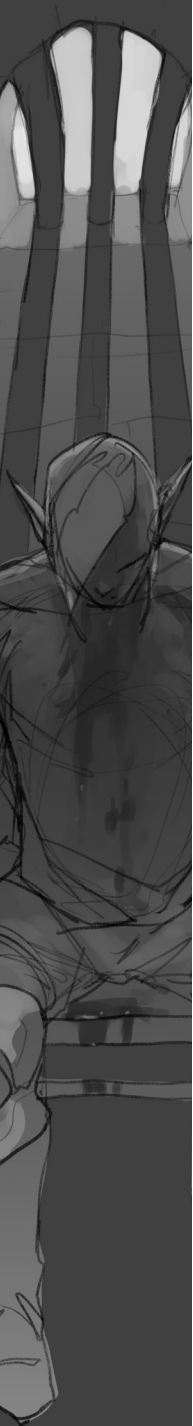
A session is where players sit down and start playing the game and tell a collaborative story. A campaign is a series of sequential sessions that tell a longer, episodic collaborative story. A scene is a contained series of events that might happen during a session, such as a specific battle, infiltration, interrogation, or exploration.

Setting or game world are used interchangeably to describe the session or campaign's imaginary universe, a consensual creative work influenced by all the players.

Characters and actors are used interchangeably to describe imaginary beings living in the setting or game world. Actor is a generic term to describe all living (or undead) things that take actions, while character is slightly more specific, referring to more sentient actors (e.g. humans, elves, dwarves, etc.). Each player dictates and narrates the thoughts, emotions, actions, health, sanity, and effort of an individual character, sometimes referred to as player character.

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ter(s). By party, we refer to the group of player characters in a session or campaign.

The Game Master (GM) is the person who prepares adventures, manages all the characters, creatures, and events in the world that aren't controlled by players, and is essentially god and creator to the game world. GM characters include all the allies, patrons, rivals, major villains, and other bit-parts that round out the story's cast. The GM is also the referee as to what is possible and what is not, as well as what the outcomes of conflict are. The GM and players should always come to some level of consensus regarding story events, but at the end of the day, the GM is the final arbiter. Why? Because she spent all that time planning the adventure. This sacrifice must be rewarded with "chief editor" rights regarding the consistency and direction of an adventure. A campaign that a GM no longer wants to run is a campaign that no one will be playing anymore. Alternatively, a campaign that does not react to and reward player choice defeats the purpose of role-playing, and all are better off playing video games. The GM must continually strike a balance between these extremes. It's a tough job.

This game's rules provide a framework for GMs to antagonize players and for players to overcome the challenges thrown at them by the GM. The primary goal of this game is to have fun, be challenged, and tell a good story.

/ROOT/INTRODUCTION/

ADVENTURE, INTRIGUE, AND HACKING THINGS

This game is designed to tell two types of stories concurrently. The first story type is a character-centric Tolkienesque dungeon-crawling romp. In this story, characters destroy monsters, gradually gain power, amass treasure, and eventually die, retire into politics, or become a lich. The second story type is a tale of tradecraft, intrigue, espionage, and information security. In this story, characters vie for political power, infiltrate factions, manipulate leaders, interro-

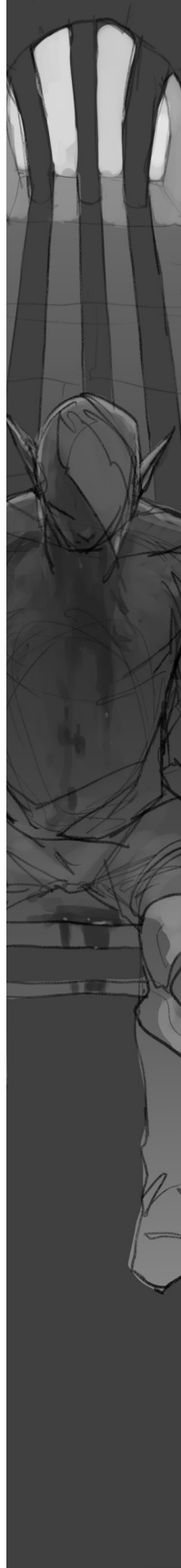
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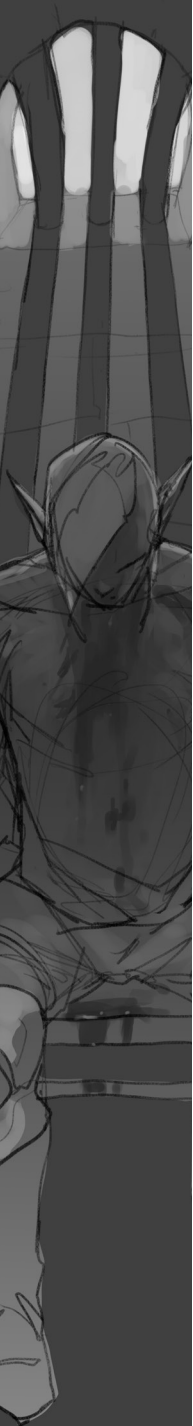
gate captives, and defeat cryptosystems, all while constantly staying one step ahead of determined assassins. Houses, factions, and cults are the primary actors here, rising and falling while individual characters are fed to the meat grinder. The skills, talents, and spells available to characters in Cryptomancer emphasize both of these stories and the most successful parties are those that embrace both stories. So how is fun achieved in these disparate stories?

Let's start with the dungeon-crawling romp. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of games that fit this mold and Cryptomancer doesn't wish to deviate much from what makes these games fun. Player satisfaction is derived when player characters kill monsters, grow more powerful, develop new skills, and amass treasure, typically in the form of new weapons, armor, and magical artifacts. GM satisfaction is derived when player characters overcome carefully constructed challenges (e.g. simple puzzles, less-than-fair fights, difficult choices, etc.) that force players to think on their feet. Both players and GMs derive satisfaction when all of this is woven into a collaborative narrative, as opposed to being presented as an imaginary obstacle course involving fairly simple math. Discovery, wonder, immersion, choice, and consequences are powerful narrative forces that keep players coming back to the game (and the tabletop genre). Enthusiastic players truly immersing themselves in their player characters and owning the narrative, instead of just being exposed to it, are what keeps GMs writing adventures.

What about that other story: the story of stealth, espionage, and perhaps most neglected in RPG gaming, information security? There are hundreds of games that emphasize stealth and espionage, but arguably very few games that represents information security as anything other than an abstract form of combat or magic that works against technology. Let's focus on the stealth and espionage themes before we jump into the information security aspect. In games with these themes, player satisfaction is derived when player characters develop plans to achieve objectives, evade detection, and overcome the unexpected by thinking fast, being creative, or resorting to violence as a last resort. Out-

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smarting, outflanking, and outmaneuvering GM characters (if not the GM) is the ultimate player high in these types of games. GM satisfaction is derived when plot twists or devious GM characters pull a fast one on unsuspecting player characters, players epically fail mundane rolls which turn smooth operations into violent comedies of error, and also when secrets are finally revealed (typically leading to more secrets). Both players and GMs derive satisfaction from the continual cycle of tension and release (e.g. secret and discovery, imprisonment and escape, stealth and detection, etc.).

This game does not insist on any particular distribution of dungeon crawl vs. spy thriller. Instead, it presents game mechanics that make it virtually impossible for any player character to be ineffective in either of these stories. Is everyone at the table up for infiltrating a secret organization or killing some monsters? Doesn't matter: every player character will have a set of skills and talents contributing to those styles of play. Every player character will be a valued member of the party.

Finally, let's figure out information security in a role-playing game context. Information security is about protecting the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information systems. Confidentiality is the concept of need-to-know: only those actors with a demonstrated need-to-know can access the information of a system. Integrity is the concept of ensuring that those with a need-to-know can trust the information of a system. That is, they can be sure that the information is accurate and not modified by malicious actors. Availability is the concept of ensuring that an information system works when it is needed. That is, the users of an information system can rely on said system to be in working order when they most need it, and not worry about critical outages at the moment of truth.

The value of information security is pretty clear in science fiction settings. Characters hack into databases to discover secrets (abusing confidentiality), trick surveillance cameras into displaying loops (abusing integrity), and deactivate automated security systems that might impede their

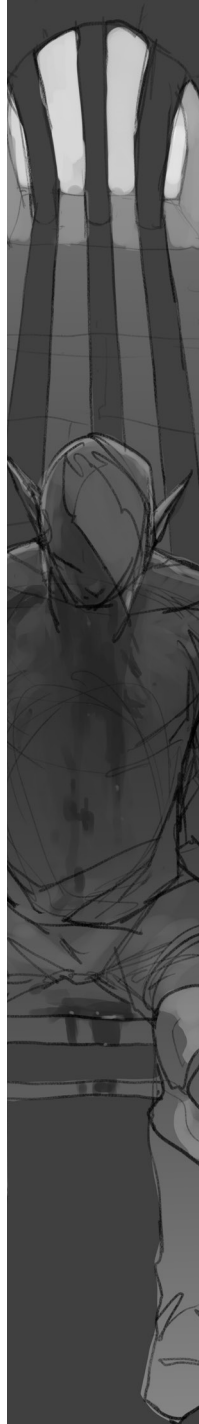
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progress (abusing availability). So how does Cryptomancer translate these concepts into a high fantasy setting?

This game presents a Tolkienesque fantasy world where long distance communication and secret communication are extremely important to the success of any group, faction, or kingdom. Multiple options for both long distance communication and secret communication are woven into the game's setting and supported by simple rules. More importantly, all of these communication methods can be attacked and defended in a number of different ways, all elaborated upon in this game's rules, and all based on actual historical information security principles, ranging from ancient Roman ciphers, to World War II counterintelligence, to the invention of public-key cryptography in 1970's.

There is no "hacking" or "information security" skill available to characters by design. That's because instead of rolling dice and saying "I hack the things," players will instead be saying "I will use the keyphrase I interrogated out of our prisoner to impersonate him and send a message to his comrades to meet at the old windmill, where our trap will be set." Or "I cast the Babel spell to encrypt my voice into meaningless babble, so that when I cast Maze to encrypt that doorway, rendering it impassible, I don't have to worry about eavesdroppers overhearing and replaying my secret keyphrase." Or "I replace the noble's cryptolocked chest with a facsimile. When he touches it and thinks the passphrase to open it, that passphrase will be transmitted to me, and I will use it to open the real chest." Or "I use the Shardscape to offer all of my wealth to anyone who responds to me using my true name, but instead provide the golem's true name. When hundreds of people reply, it should DDOS the golem and force the cryptoadmin to respond to that, making them less likely to notice the other actions I am taking on their shardnet."

Hopefully we've convinced you that this is a new kind of game about security, but if you still have doubts, jump to the "Cryptomancy" or "Cryptosystems" chapters to dig into it.



WINNING AND LOSING, BUT MOSTLY LOSING

There really isn't much use for "winning" or "losing" in a role-playing game. The goal is to have fun and tell a story, and that may involve characters succeeding at their goals or dying miserably trying. A good story doesn't always have a happy ending. Sometimes our favorite characters die and sometimes success is just out of reach. However, this only makes a story all the more satisfying when our favorite characters (what's left of them) finally triumph.

As long as a player feels as if her character's decisions and actions were meaningful, and that her character's demise had some type of forewarning (and course-correcting options), then it is OK if a player character dies. A player may opt to have her character hold the line against a wave of invaders, knowing the effort is futile and death is certain, but also knowing that is what the character would do. A player character suddenly, and without warning, catching an arrow in the throat on the way to the market is neither fair to a player nor is it good storytelling.

While on the topic of death: players and GM should come to some type of agreement as to the lethality of a campaign, or a single game session, before play begins. By lethality, we mean the likelihood that a player character will actually die during game play. Below are some examples of lethality that players and GMs can discuss and agree upon before a campaign or session begins.

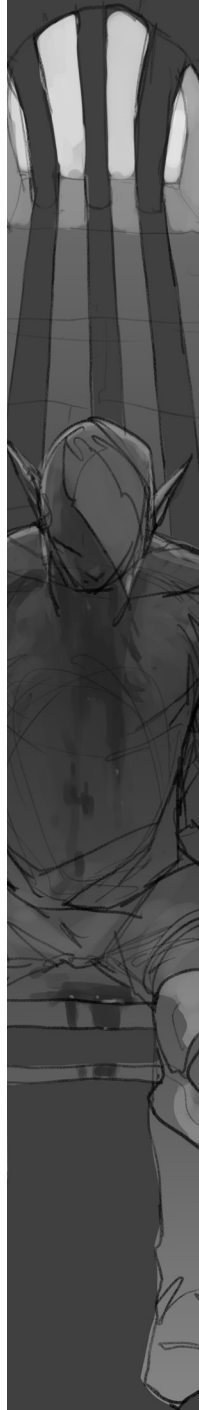
High Lethality: in this style of game, the players and GM follow a strict interpretation of the rules (which err on the side of quite lethal), and players should not expect party-saving plot twists (e.g. the cavalry has arrived) to get them out of a jam. The dreaded "total party kill," where all the player characters are wiped out, is a feasible scenario. The GM is not out to kill or punish player characters, but can be as cruel as Nature when bad decisions are made, clues

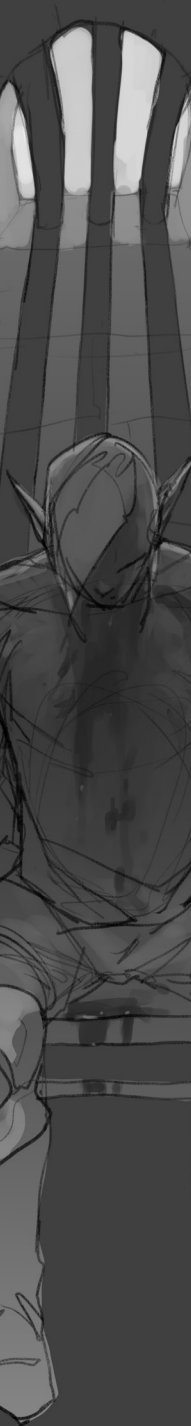
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are ignored, and omens are not taken seriously. To take the sting out of losing a character, the GM may ask the players to make a secondary character in advance: a character who is a bit-actor in the story but rises to prominence (and player control) once the primary character dies. Especially lethal and unforgiving games can be a lot of fun if everyone at the table is on board with the idea. We point to the new wave of brutal Rogue-like computer games for inspiration.

Low Lethality: in this style of game, the players still follow a strict interpretation of the rules, but the GM eases up on the challenge when the player characters are under extreme duress. Party-saving plot twists (e.g. the warlord decides to show mercy) are not a guarantee, but should be thrown the players' way if they've made an honest attempt to avoid suicide missions. When player characters are marching towards deadly situations, the GM should periodically break the fourth wall and confirm "Are you sure you want to do that? It might be very dangerous." If players persist, then they've been duly warned and understand that characters must take precautions to avoid death. These types of games tend to be more appropriate for players really into the storytelling and exploration elements of tabletop role-play.

Regardless of the agreed upon lethality, *Cryptomancer* is a pretty dark setting and includes mechanics conducive to a thematic death spiral. It's only a matter of time until the oppressive powers that be wipe the heroic player characters off the map. This is by design. *Cryptomancer* is a game about resisting and evading an omnipotent and oppressive regime of assassins, meddlers, and political puppet-masters. When it comes to the player characters' efforts against this existential threat, *Cryptomancer* takes more cues from H.P. Lovecraft and George Orwell than it does J.R.R. Tolkien.





/ROOT/INTRODUCTION/

A HEADS UP REGARDING MATURE CONTENT

It should be noted early that this game contains some themes intended for a mature audience, including fantasy violence, monster horror, body horror, bug horror, and sadistic characters and creatures that kill because they think it is fun. While this game is not meant to be a horror game, there are some tropes of fantasy role-playing, such as zombies, giant spiders, and necromancers that appear in this game and might be unsettling to folks. The intent is to create evil and awful fantasy antagonist that the players really hate, root against, and destroy, not to offend or gross out our readers.

There are also some themes regarding relations between humans, elves, and dwarves that purposely allude to real life conversations and tensions associated with race. The intent here was to be introspective about the fantasy genre's weird relationship with race and racism and The Other, as well as inject an element of tension that can manifest when things are going really badly for characters in the game. There are also themes regarding the use, abuse, and trade of a fantasy drug-equivalent called soma. This is simply to add an element of underworld drama, and is neither an endorsement for nor a rebuke of drug use of any kind.

/ROOT/INTRODUCTION/

PRONOUNS ARE HARD

We will be using feminine pronouns by default throughout this book, pivoting from the cryptomancer on the book's cover, unless specifically referencing a male character or player.

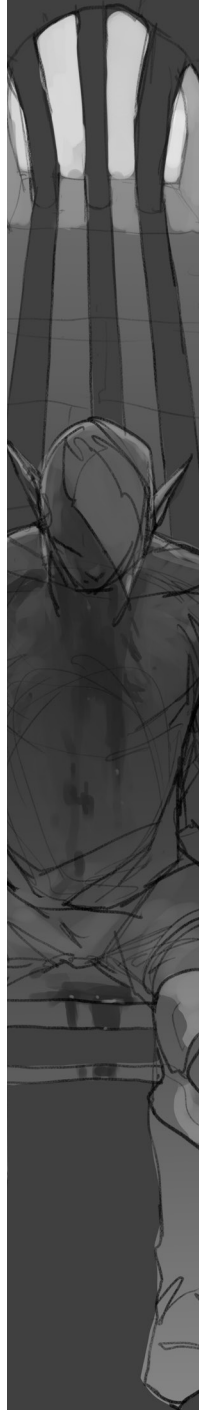
DON'T MIND US

You'll also notice that we're comfortable with a strong author's voice saying exactly how we feel about stuff. We'll do this very little during the fictional world building sections of the game, as to not break immersion. However, you'll see a lot of it during discussions of the game's mechanics and how to play Cryptomancer. When you hear the author's voice coming through, it is because we wish to articulate the intent of what we're trying to accomplish thematically and as game designers. Intent is powerful: if you understand the intent or spirit of rules, you're equipped to manage situations that inevitably arise where the rules don't exactly cover a fringe scenario that comes up during play.

TEACHING VS REFERENCE

Every once in a while, we'll allude to a rule or a concept that we haven't entirely introduced *yet*. We've endeavored to be very thoughtful regarding the order in which we introduce Cryptomancer's rules and concepts, building a strong foundation before layering on the nuances that compose any role-playing game. Sometimes, however, we have no choice but to put the cart before the horse. For example, we'll at one point reference a character talent that makes a character particularly good at casting magic spells, without first explaining how magic spells work. This was not an accident.

The challenge of writing a role-playing game is that it must simultaneously be a teaching manual as well as a reference. To maintain the reference power of this book (i.e. the ability to look up stuff quickly and easily), we've had to periodically, but rarely, *reference* rules that haven't yet been fully *taught*. When the book is consumed in its entirety, it makes perfect sense. However, we thought you deserved a warning in advance in case you hit a snag.



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SETTING OVERVIEW



BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

The Cryptomancer setting is in many ways a bog standard fantasy setting with all the usual stuff we've come to expect from the genre: medieval kingdoms, elves, dwarves, monsters, and magic. This was a specific design choice. We want players to feel comfortable with the setting and bank on typical fantasy genre expectations so they can really dig into the information security elements that actually make this game unique. That's not to say we've been slouches on the world building aspect of game design or intend our setting to be boring. We hope you agree. The remainder of this chapter gives an executive summary of the things in the Cryptomancer world that really matter, including the big meta-story that permeates all things in the setting: the Risk Eaters. We certainly elaborate more on all these things in later chapters, so treat this chapter as our pitch.

THE MYTHIC AGE IS DEAD

Throughout the rest of this book, there will be references to the Mythic Age and the Modern Age. The Mythic Age was when everything in the Cryptomancer setting conformed to fantasy genre tropes. Elves were forest-dwelling mystics, dwarves were mead-swilling warriors, wizards chucked fireballs, dragons terrorized everybody, and epic battles occurred at a regular cadence. At least that's what people think happened. The history of the Mythic Age has been rewritten and re-interpreted by so many scholars that it is hard to say what's history and what's propaganda.

The past is complicated, but not as complicated as the present, also known as the Modern Age. Things are considerably less epic and more existential than they used to be. The dwarves have become Medici-like merchants, the elves have become expansionist industrialists, and the humans struggle to maintain decaying feudal and caste systems in an era of information and social networks. The advent of

the Shardscape, the magical equivalent of the real world's Internet, has been absolutely disruptive to society. Technology, society, and identity are transforming much faster than the medieval mindsets of this game world can comfortably manage.

/ROOT/SETTING OVERVIEW/

THE THREE REALMS

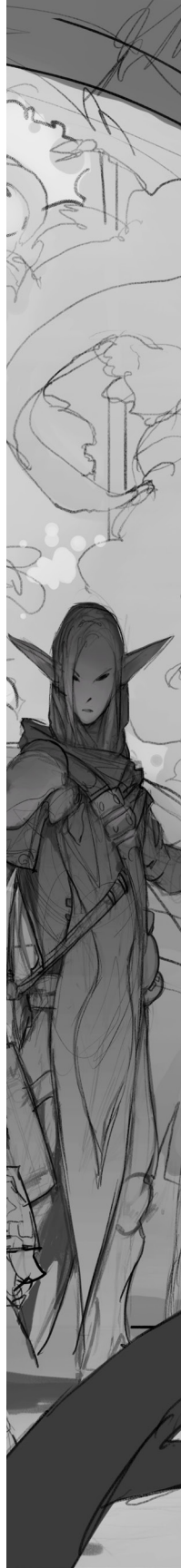
The world of Cryptomancer is divided into three distinct but overlapping realms: Subterra, Sylvetica, and Sphere.


Subterra, the realm of dwarves, is a continent underground. Dwarves and the other Subterranean races have carved vast empires out of earth and stone. Subterranean cities glimmering by gem and torchlight are separated by abyssal chasms, rivers of lava, and labyrinthine networks of bleak, black tunnels. Subterra is at once wildly magical and rigidly logical. The ruins of fallen dwarven houses are just as likely to contain cursed relics and summoning circles as they are rotting codebooks and rusty codebreaker engines.

Sylvetica, the realm of elves, is a boundless prehistoric forest creeping onto and constricting human society. Elves and other Sylvetic races have used magic and genius to warp the forest. Impossibly complex lattices of vines and helices of trees protect solemn grottoes and bustling fortresses alike. The depths of the forest are illuminated by glowing bugs, glistening moss, and rare pillars of sunlight breaking through the dense canopy above. Sylvetica is oppressively vibrant, saturating the senses with the sights, scents, and sounds of myriad forms of flora and fauna vying for survival.

Sphere, the realm of humans, is a complex and interconnected network of city-states. City-states bustle with activity and are home to many races. The booming human population is only checked by dangerous infrastructure projects and periodic warfare. Though it is primarily concentrated in coastal regions and temperate climes, Sphere's tentacles (be they alliances or supply chains) stretch deep into the

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realms of Subterra and Sylvetica. In fact, by “Sphere,” humans refer to the “global” planet, thus rejecting the ancient division of the realms that provided relative harmony for millennia.

/ROOT/SETTING OVERVIEW/

THE SHARDSCAPE

Shards are magical Subterranean crystals that allow mortals to project their thoughts over long distances to others who possess shards cut from the same crystal. It has done for the fantasy world of Cryptomancer what the telephone and Internet have done for the real world: connect disparate parties over long distances and revolutionize how things like business, relationships, identity, affiliations, politics, and warfare work. Despite its pseudo-medieval technology and trappings, the world of Cryptomancer is *connected*. Mortals communicate over vast distances and conspire in secret. Business deals are struck and alliances are forged by persons who have never met face to face. The movement of product and the movement of troops are choreographed by shardcasters sometimes thousands of miles away from the market or the battlefield.

Like today’s Internet, the Shardscape faces a number of challenges, primarily security and privacy. Communicating secret battle plans, planning coups, and outflanking business rivals via shard is all well and good until an adversary intercepts the message. This problem set led to the advent of cryptomancy: the magical application of cryptographic concepts to protect communications transmitted over potentially hostile networks. By using “keyphrases” that transmute messages into incomprehensible babble, actors could be assured that only the intended recipient who knows the keyphrase could view the message. The secure management of keyphrases and the selection of strong, unguessable keyphrases is a problem set still being figured out by cryptomancers across the world, but this discipline has generally secured communication against all but the most dedicated adversaries.

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Perhaps the most important result of shards is pervasive communication between the noble races of the three realms. Human, dwarf, and elf alike all remained relatively cloistered throughout the Mythic Age. Each culture was profoundly different and relations were necessarily strained. The Shardscape changed everything: a human in a city-state can communicate instantly with an elf deep in the forest or a dwarf deep underground. They can trade stories and information, and commiserate over common events and injustices. They can develop kinships and rivalries that transcend local politics and carry out dialogues away from the watchful eye of authorities. They can learn from each other but also discover new reasons to despise each other. What occurs in the Shardscape is as important, if not more important, than anything that is happening in the physical space.

The connectivity provided by the Shardscape may have transformed the world of Cryptomancer for the better in many ways, but has also introduced new risks that no kingdom or faction was ready for - save for the Risk Eaters.

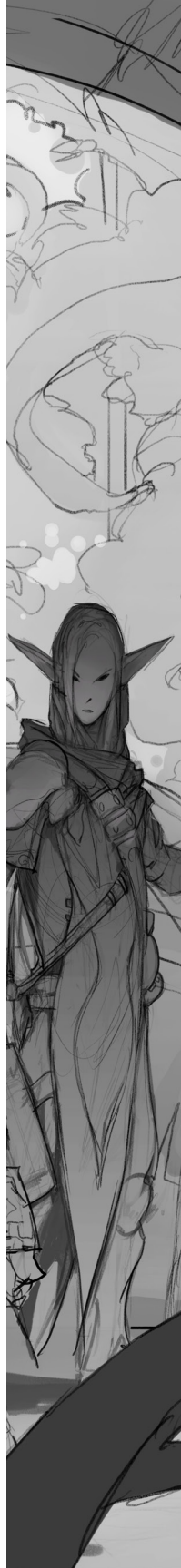
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THE RISK EATERS

Though not without their occasional catastrophe, the civilizations of Subterra and Sylvetica have proven to be enduring and sustainable. The civilization of Sphere, however, has fluctuated violently between global harmony and near extinction. Humankind's tendency for the extreme is due to its global imagination and its convergence of magic and methodologies that have remained separate since the beginning of time.

Sphere is the gateway between Subterra and Sylvetica. Humankind has been the broker of commerce and communication between these realms for centuries. This strategic position enabled humankind to adopt Subterranean and Sylvetic modes and combine them in innovative ways. Smiths schemed of products made of Sylvetic raw materials and mass produced through Subterranean manufacturing methods. Traders charted Subterranean tunnels to bypass weeks

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of toil through Sylvetic wilderness. Generals used elven agriculture to feed massive armies campaigning throughout food-scarce Subterra and used the dwarven shardnets to outflank elven warbands on their home turf in Sylvetica. The Shardscape, in particular, would be the key to a great transformation of Sphere. Humankind used this discrete martial magic for something it was never intended for: commerce.

The realm of humans was rapidly and irreversibly transformed. Once a handful of disparate kingdoms vying for power, Sphere became a vast network of city-states interconnected and tightly coupled through markets, supply chains, and complex political intrigues, all facilitated by the Shardscape. Humans, the most brutish of the great races, became just as sophisticated as the others.

Complexity had a downside, however. Local disasters became regional disasters, regional disasters became global disasters. Plagues, orcish hordes, zombie epidemics, dragon raids, and other disasters had cascading effects that reverberated throughout the three realms. Raiders, germs, and panic traveled through supply chains just as rapidly as raw materials, finished goods, and coin. Compromised shardnets resulted in market manias and lopsided wars. Frontier colonies, connected to the mainland only by shards, blinked out of existence, never to be heard again. Humankind's folly was spilling into the other realms.

Powerful human, elven, and dwarven interests began to recognize Sphere's growing instability as a threat to all three realms. From these interests, a cabal of powerful mages called the Risk Eaters deigned to be the realms' caretakers and rule from a towering monolith constructed and maintained by cryptomancers. They receive information about the world's events through a secret army of spies that, using the Shardscape, feed enormous amounts of information into ancient dwarven decision engines designed to detect and anticipate global risk. More than once, the Risk Eaters have had to alter a fate only known to them, and they have done so through assassinations, puppet regimes, secret massacres, market manipulations, and as a last resort, leveling entire city-states with chain lightning and cascading hell fire

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cast from atop their spire. Those who would dare to upset the delicate balance they have achieved chance the wrath of an all-knowing and all-seeing entity with limitless resources and unmatched aggression.

Still, some do dare to upset the delicate balance: they succeed through secrecy, deception, and most importantly, cryptomancy.

/ROOT/SETTING OVERVIEW/

ON THE RUN

The reign of the Risk Eaters is oppressive. Novel ideas are isolated and erased. Revolutionary leaders are hunted down and exterminated. However, the Risk Eaters don't reserve their intervention for current threats to the status quo: they also act aggressively against potential future threats. When those ancient dwarven decision engines forecast a future that the Risk Eaters deem undesirable, agents are dispatched to alter the course of events through any means necessary. Suddenly, strong alliances are shattered by betrayal, revered leaders are steeped in scandal, future heirs are abruptly stillborn, and seemingly unremarkable and apolitical people vanish without a trace.

For too long, the most oppressive regimes, unscrupulous merchants, and disturbing cults have endured despite popular uprisings and movements led by virtuous leaders. Just when it seems that justice and reason will prevail, the forces of change are dismantled abruptly, overcome by infighting, or decapitated through assassination, as if there is an invisible hand protecting the powers that be. It is difficult to prove that the Risk Eaters are behind such acts and even more difficult to publicly accuse them. Still, there are factions and families throughout the three realms seething with anger over these violations. Open aggression would be suicide. What these groups can do, however, is offer protection and aid to those who frighten the Risk Eaters the most.

Player characters in Cryptomancer are heroic characters who are on the run from the Risk Eaters. How and

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why they earned the wrath of the Risk Eaters can vary wildly. Perhaps they witnessed something they were not supposed to see, like a village massacre or a back room deal between a regent and a shadowy agent. Perhaps they unwittingly disrupted years of Risk Eater machinations by supporting the wrong ally or thwarting the wrong foe. Most likely, however, the player characters have no clue why they are hunted by this regime. For whatever reason, the Risk Eaters have determined they are a future threat: genocidal despots, topplers of kingdoms, inventors of disruptive technology, prophets of a rebellious religion, and so forth. The irony is that perhaps the Risk Eater's decision engines were wrong about the characters. Perhaps they were never a threat to either the Risk Eaters or that organization's preferred future. However, by lashing out against the player characters, they may have actually transformed a possible threat into a guaranteed threat.

Whatever the case, the players begin play on the run from the Risk Eaters and working for a patron who provides them protection and a private shardnet of their own. The player characters will spend much of their existence hunted by spies and skilled assassins. Between secret meetings and frantic fights for survival, the player will also be caught up in pedestrian political squabbles by powers unaware of, or in denial of, Risk Eater manipulation.

Cryptomancer reinforces this metaplot through a game mechanic called *risk*. The specifics of this game mechanic will be discussed in the game rules, but to summarize: when the player characters' actions generate enough risk, the Risk Eaters abruptly come out of the woodwork and assail them. The players do not know exactly how much risk will trigger a Risk Eater attack. What's worse: there are game options for the players that actually tempt them to generate risk (e.g. allowing a player to reverse the outcome of a failed die roll). Rest assured, this game world's scariest adversary will show up at the player characters' door, and likely at the worst possible time.

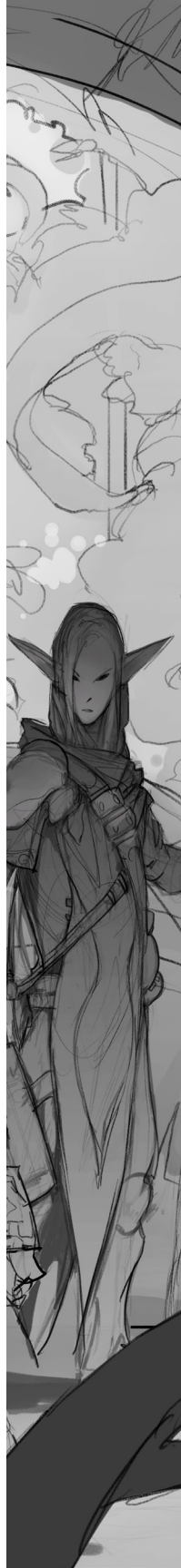
THE NETWORK IS THE NEW DUNGEON

Cryptomancer is a role-playing game about exploring networks, not just dungeons. Your characters will be discovering, exploring, and manipulating different types of networks, including social networks (e.g. guilds), information networks (e.g. private shardnets), and infrastructure networks (e.g. supply chains). The world of Cryptomancer cannot be articulated by a map. Instead, it must be thought of as a vast network of links (i.e. relationships) that connect nodes (i.e. persons, places, or things).

Networks are intuitive in life and in storytelling. The members of a dwarven noble house, for example, are linked by familial ties, secrets, and pacts. The agents of a covert cell are linked by safe houses, secret gestures, and shared keyphrases. Allied city-states are linked through roads, trade agreements, and hatred of a common foe. In any network, these links can be a source of strength or a point of vulnerability. Players will need to enumerate the links of these complex systems in order to be able to effectively attack or defend them.

Tools will be provided throughout this game to help think about fantasy gaming in this non-traditional way and even begin to map out social, information, and infrastructure networks by hand. We are convinced it will help players and GMs organize all the scheming, machinations, and betrayal we've come to expect from fantasy epics (not to mention hacker stories). That being said, this is definitely a fantasy role-playing game. Dungeons are cool, and so is killing monsters, amassing fat loot, and squealing when someone rolls a crit. We got that covered, too. Promise.

Now steel thyself for some crypto.



/ROOT/SETTING OVERVIEW/CD ..

/ROOT/CD CRYPTOMANCY

/ROOT/CRYPTOMANCY/LS

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CRYPTOMANCY



CRYPTOGRAPHY 101

The goal of this chapter is to give a brief introduction to the most fundamental concepts of cryptography. This is done to give players and GMs a foundation in cryptography so that they can see how these concepts were applied in the design of Cryptomancer, and how they apply to actually playing the game. While this section should provide players and GMs all the cryptography background they need to play this game, we definitely encourage further study on the topic, if only because we believe that cryptography is the key to individual privacy and a free society.

SYMMETRIC ENCRYPTION

A message is exactly what it sounds like: a message. For example, a message from Alice to Bob might be, “Hello, Bob! I think you’re swell.” This message is written in clear-text: that is, it is written in a way that anyone who can read English can understand. Simple enough.

But what if Alice and Bob want to communicate in secret? What if Chuck is in the room, and Alice doesn’t want Chuck to know that she thinks Bob is swell? Alice and Bob need cryptography. Alice and Bob settle on a cipher: a mathematical thingy that transforms clear-text into cipher-text. Cipher-text is basically jumbled nonsense. The cipher-text for “Hello, Bob! I think you’re swell” might look and sound like “Udheo, Peo! E nriln wty’zq oprtw,” depending on the key.

A key is a secret word or number that works in conjunction with the cipher to predictably transform specific clear-text into specific cipher-text, and vice-versa. Converting clear-text into cipher-text is known as encryption, while converting cipher-text to clear-text is known as decryption. In the most basic form of cryptography, known as symmetric encryption, a single key can be used to either encrypt

or decrypt a message. That means that Alice can encrypt a message with a key, in this case, the word “elephant,” and Bob can decrypt the message with that same key. Of course, if Chuck knew the key, he could do the same thing, but unfortunately for him, Alice and Bob agreed on the key “elephant” before he walked into the room.

If you’re getting stuck on how “elephant” transforms “Hello, Bob! I think you’re swell” into “Udheo, Peo! E nriln wty’zq oprtw,” that’s OK! You don’t have to understand the underlying mathematics behind that transformation, and for the purposes of this game, it’s irrelevant. In real life, the math behind cryptography is so complex that it may as well be magic, and that’s exactly how you should treat it for the rest of this discussion.

/ROOT/CRYPTOMANCY/

ASYMMETRIC ENCRYPTION

What if Alice and Bob forgot to agree on a key before Chuck showed up? They certainly can’t do it while he’s in the room... he’ll overhear what key they agree on and then be able to decrypt their secret messages to one another. Now what? Enter asymmetric cryptography, also known as public-key cryptography.

In asymmetric cryptography, a key is split into two parts: a public key, intended to be advertised to everybody, and a private key, meant to be kept secret. Unlike symmetric cryptography, where a single key is used for both encryption and decryption, and is known by both sender and receiver, asymmetric cryptography is a little more interesting. A message that is encrypted with a public key can only be decrypted by the associated private key. Conversely, a message that is encrypted with a private key can only be decrypted by the associated public key.

It sounds confusing at first, but it’s pretty simple. In our scenario, Bob is wearing a T-shirt that has his public key on it. That means that both Alice and Chuck can see it, but it’s not a big deal. Why? Because when Alice encrypts her

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message with Bob's public key, the only thing that can decrypt the message is Bob's private key, which he ain't sharing with anybody (not even Alice). Now Alice can send messages to Bob securely without Chuck intercepting the message, but we still have a problem: Alice forgot to wear her public key T-shirt! She can securely communicate to Bob, but how is Bob supposed to securely communicate back? If he uses his public key to encrypt the message, only he will be able to decrypt it, and not Alice. That won't work. If he uses his private key to encrypt the message, then anyone who knows his public key (which is written on his T-shirt) can decrypt it, which means Chuck will be able to intercept the message. That won't work either.

No worries: Alice is a cryptohead. Her message to Bob was "Let's bring it back to symmetric cryptography: our key will be the word 'elephant,'" and she encrypted this message using Bob's public key, so only he could decrypt the message with his private key. Bob gets the message loud and clear, and then sends back the message "Nice work, Chuck will never know," encrypted with the key "elephant." For the rest of the conversation, both Alice and Bob use "elephant" as their key, unbeknown to Chuck. What a sucker.

To summarize:

- Encryption is the process of converting clear-text to cipher-text: "Hello, Bob! I think you're swell" ---> "Udheo, Peo! E nriln wty'zq oprtw."
- Decryption is the process of converting cipher-text to clear-text: "Udheo, Peo! E nriln wty'zq oprtw" ---> "Hello, Bob! I think you're swell"
- In symmetric cryptography, one shared key does both encryption and decryption.
- In asymmetric cryptography, each key is broken into a public and private key pair. If a message is encrypted with a public key, it can only be decrypted with its associated private key. If a message is encrypted with a

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private key, it can only be decrypted with its associate-public key.

There is a LOT more to cryptography than these basics, but to ensure that Cryptomancer remains relatively accessible to all players, we developed Cryptomancer's cryptosystems to be built around these core concepts. You may see other cryptographic concepts hinted at throughout the course of this game's rules, and we certainly invite players and GMs to develop their own cryptosystems.

Lastly, you'll find that the security systems designed for this game are inherently flawed. This is both a product of design choice and as well as the reality of security design best articulated by Bruce Schneier: "Anyone, from the most clueless amateur to the best cryptographer, can create an algorithm that he himself can't break. It's not even hard. What is hard is creating an algorithm that no one else can break, even after years of analysis."¹ We encourage players and GMs to exploit and abuse the security systems discussed throughout the remainder of this game. In fact, if they don't, they might not have as much fun as we hoped they would.

/ROOT/CRYPTOMANCY/

CRYPTOMANCY 101

Now that cryptography has been introduced, it's time to discuss cryptomancy: the magic of secrets and hiding things in plain sight, the core tenet and differentiator of this role-playing game.

In the Cryptomancer setting, cryptomancy has been around as long as written languages have been around. Though the aptitude to practice this art has always existed in all sentient races, it was only when the dwarves discovered its powers and principles that it began to flourish and be utilized with regularity. We will be introducing how cryptomancy works on written language, like the kind written on a scroll with a quill and ink. After those concepts are introduced, we will provide a crash course on shards and shardnets, Cryptomancer's equivalent to computer networks, and

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¹Crypto-Gram, October 15 1998, Bruce Schneier





then delve into how cryptomancy works in this venue.

At its most basic, cryptomancy encrypts a clear-text message into cipher-text using a keyphrase, a string of actual (i.e. not made up) words from the human, dwarven, or elven languages. That cipher-text can then only be read as clear-text by those who know the keyphrase. Encryption itself is simple: an actor raises a hand towards an instance of clear-text, concentrates, and utters aloud a keyphrase. When this happens, the clear-text magically jumbles into nonsensical symbols.

Decryption is even easier: the cipher-text automatically transforms into clear-text in the eyes of anyone who knows the keyphrase used to encrypt it. There is no “act” of decryption: it’s instantaneous. In fact, one doesn’t even need to know that a specific keyphrase was used; so long as one has heard, read, or uttered the keyphrase, in its entirety, sometime during her lifetime, she will mentally decrypt the message. In the decrypter’s mind, she will see the keyphrase emerge from the jumble of nonsense in the form of magical runes, right before the message transforms into clear-text. That way, she will know what keyphrase was used to encrypt the message, and can share it with others if she is so inclined.

Any literate sentient being can perform cryptomancy at any time, but few are actually good at it. This is primarily because of the challenges of choosing the right keyphrase and protecting a keyphrase from unintended audiences.

KEYPHRASES (SYMMETRIC CRYPTOMANCY)

Any message encrypted with a keyphrase can only be decrypted by that exact keyphrase.

A keyphrase is typically a random string of words from the human, elven, or dwarven languages. Any actor who has heard, read, or uttered a keyphrase instantly decrypts any message that was encrypted with the keyphrase. Strong keyphrases are necessarily random nonsense: phrases that no one would ever use in a normal conversation. Using a keyphrase that is a common phrase allows anyone who has heard the phrase to decrypt the message. For example, “don’t look a gift-horse in the mouth” would be a weak keyphrase, because most adults have heard this phrase before. Using a keyphrase from a book allows anyone who has read that book to decrypt the message.

However, sometimes that is exactly the point. Someone might want to encrypt a message so that only certain audiences can read it. A secret message to like-minded scholars might pull a keyphrase from a book that only a select few have read in its entirety. Alternatively, a secret message to people from a specific place might pull a keyphrase from a local colloquialism unique to that place, so that anyone from that place might be able to decrypt the message (look up what a “shibboleth” is).

The risk lies in the lack of control and randomness of that keyphrase. What if an adversary also read that book or also heard that colloquialism during her travels? This is one of the many reasons the Risk Eaters send their agents far and wide throughout the realms: to absorb every tome, letter, colloquialism, and memorable speech that might serve as keyphrase material. In fact, the Risk Eaters have innumerable codebreakers whose only function is to absorb this keyphrase material, as well as compose and read random strings of words, in order to decrypt encrypted messages they en-

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counter in shardnets.

However, weak keyphrases can be used to the cryptomancer's advantage. An encrypted message asking agents to meet at a secret location might leverage a weak keyphrase purposely, knowing that an adversary is likely to decrypt this message and plan an ambush. This presents an opportunity to ambush the ambush. Unless, of course, the adversary knows that those agents generally practice better tradecraft and keyphrase discipline, in which case, the adversary might NOT show up to the meeting to give the agents the false impression that their communications remain secure, only to strike later.

Unless it is dramatically appropriate, players and GMs need not actually articulate their keyphrases. It should be assumed that unless otherwise specified, a keyphrase for a specific cryptomantic task is strong and extremely difficult to guess. Clues about a specific actor, such as where she is from, what she reads, what she does, and who she knows, can sometimes allow an attacker to guess a keyphrase that actor might use, but generally, this is a shot in the dark.

The greatest vulnerability of a keyphrase lies not in its complexity, but rather how it is handled. Keyphrases must be shared between parties, meaning that they must be short and simple in order to be manageable. Keyphrases are also uttered aloud when used to encrypt a physical message either written on parchment or carved into rock or tree. Anyone within earshot of this event can hear the keyphrase and be able to decrypt the message. Further, anyone can be compelled to give up a keyphrase against their will, either through torture, threat, or having their minds read by an agent adept in interrogation spells.

TRUE NAMES AND SOUL KEYS (ASYMMETRIC CRYPTOMANCY)

A message encrypted with a true name can only be decrypted by the soul key associated with that true name. A message encrypted with a soul key can only be decrypted by the true name associated with that soul key.

All mortals have a common name which they share freely. In addition to this, they have true names: names they only share with their closest friends, family, and allies. They also have a soul key, a word so complex and powerful that it literally stops time when it is thought of or uttered.

A true name is a perfectly unique name given to all sentient beings at birth. By forces that are beyond mortal comprehension, parents are simply incapable of giving their child a true name that has already been used. Once the true name is decided on, the child develops a corresponding soul key: a mysterious word that only that child knows. True names are typically only shared with children when they have reached a level of maturity to understand the power and responsibility that comes with a true name, but they always possess that soul key. From a cryptomantic perspective, true names are powerful keyphrases that enable perfect confidentiality: when a message is encrypted with an actor's true name, only that actor can decrypt the message with her soul key.

Soul keys are words that defy logic and nature. Actors don't exactly know their own soul keys: when they evoke them, time stops and all within earshot enter a sudden trance. No one can hear or remember a soul key when it is uttered, and no one knows why. What they do know is that they are the only ones capable of decrypting a message encrypted with their true name, and the mechanism by which this occurs is their soul key. Inversely, an actor can also evoke her soul key to encrypt a message, which can only be decrypted by those who know her true name.

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Let's take a moment to elaborate on the security that the true name / soul key combination provides. If a true name can decrypt an encrypted message, then the decrypter can be 100% confident that the message originated from the actor who possesses this true name's corresponding soul key. Alternatively, if an actor's soul key can decrypt an encrypted message, then that actor can be 100% confident that the message originated by someone who knows her true name.

Given the perfect confidentiality associated with encrypting a message with a true name, why wouldn't everyone share their true names freely? There are a number of reasons:

- True name cryptography is not very convenient, especially when multiple parties of varying levels of trust are trying to communicate with each other.
- The more people that know one's true name, the less secure and private a message is that is encrypted with one's soul key.
- Messages insist on responses. An actor is more likely to read and act on a message intended solely for her, and therefore is more easily lured into dangerous situations.
- True names provide non-repudiation. Because the security inherent to true names is absolute, someone cannot deny her true name if caught responding to a message encrypted with it.
- There are dangerous magic spells which require a caster to know a victim's true name. The fewer people who know an actor's true name, the less likely it is that the actor will be on the receiving end of such spells.

It is for these reasons that most mortals guard their true names carefully, and only share it with those they trust, or under serious circumstances that require it. Sharing someone else's true name without permission is the equivalent of sharing a friend or family member's darkest secrets.

Note: when a character dies, her true name becomes a common name and works like any old keyphrase.

ENCRYPTION VERSUS ENCODING

One last item worth mentioning: encryption in Cryptomancer only goes one layer deep. One cannot encrypt a message that is already encrypted to create multiple layers of encryption for a single message. This is a design choice erring on the side of simplicity and insecurity. We want the cryptography concepts of the game to be approachable to people new to cryptography. We also want the game to be full of cryptosystems that are strong but still exploitable by those willing to do the work.

However, one can certainly encode the payload of an encrypted message. If Alice and Bob agree that the word “horse” refers to the local regent, and the word “hay” refers to a drug called soma, then their communications might throw off an adversary that knows their encryption keyphrase but hasn’t yet figured out that the phrase “the horse eats a lot of hay” refers to the local regent’s drug problem.

SHARDS AND SHARDNETS

Shards are rare and wondrous polyhedral crystals from the deepest mines of Subterra. When one of these crystals is expertly cut into smaller shards of equal size, something incredible happens: those who clutch one of these shards can transmit their thoughts to others who clutch the other shards in the set, which is called a shardnet. Further, this magical property works regardless of the distance between each shard. A shardcaster, one who uses a shard, in a clanhall under a mountain can communicate instantly with another shardcaster in an elven village a thousand miles away. Each shardcast will echo for a set time, slowly losing clarity until it fades into background noise. This means that an individual shardcaster can “check in” periodically, and receive shardcasts sent in past tense, within certain limits. Shardcasts, also known as “echoes” last a number of hours equal to the number of shards composing a shardnet.

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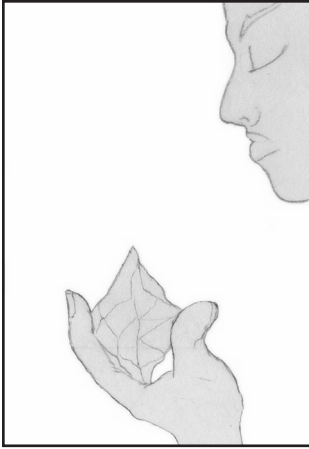
Shards were the most profound discovery since cryptomancy, but two realities have kept the expansion of shardnets for everyday purposes in check. The first reality is that the dwarves have a complete monopoly on the mining, manufacturing, and distribution of shards. They fiercely protect this commodity and only sell shards to the highest bidder (typically human nobles and merchants), knowing full well that shards are one of the last things keeping the dwindling dwarves still relevant to the modern world. The second reality is that using shards without strict cryptomantic discipline is the surest and fastest way to hemorrhage secrets to the enemy. If just one shard in a shardnet is compromised by an opposing force, be it an army or a political opponent, then the transmissions of all shardcasters in a shardnet can be intercepted.

Cryptomancy in shardnets works almost identically to using it in the corporeal world. The primary exception is that keyphrases and messages are thought instead of uttered aloud. A shardcaster can grasp a shard, concentrate, and see either all messages that were communicated in clear-text, or were encrypted with a keyphrase that the shardcaster also knows. She will also see the jumbled characters of encrypted messages to which she does not know the keyphrase for. If the shardcaster wishes to encrypt a message before sending it, she raises her other hand to the shard, which will then begin to glow, and thinks her keyphrase. Once the keyphrase has been injected, and the shardcaster lowers her hands, the shard will stop glowing, and all messages the shardcaster sends will be encrypted with that key, until she injects a new keyphrase or stops touching the shard altogether, which ends her session.

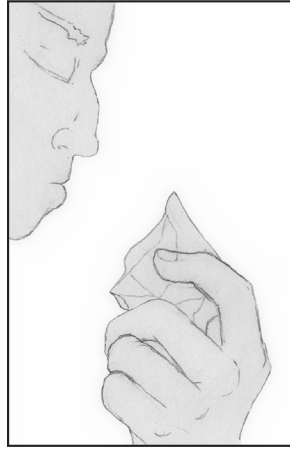
The following pages demonstrate how keyphrases, true names, and soul keys work over shardnets.

/ROOT/CRYPTOMANCY/
CLEAR-TEXT DEMO

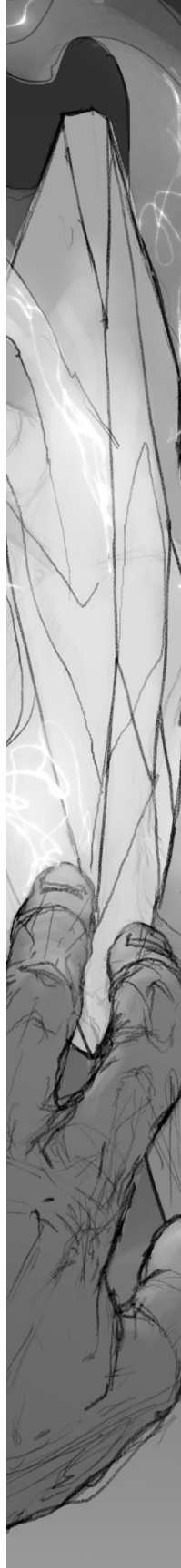
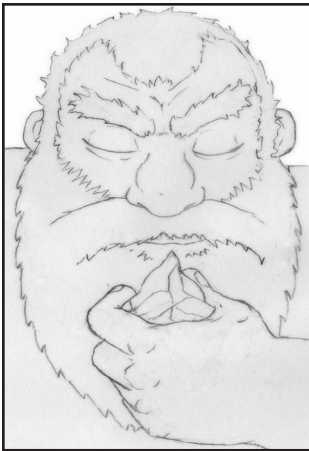
Alice holds a shard and thinks the message: "Hello, Bob."



Bob, holding a shard, sees the message: "Hello, Bob."

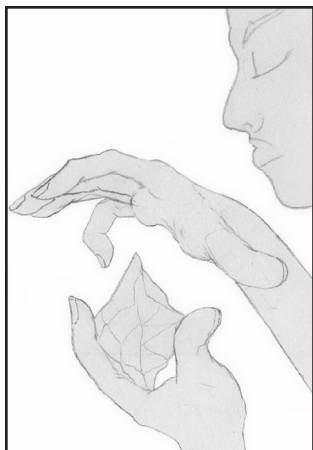


Chuck, an eavesdropper, holds a shard and sees the message: "Hello, Bob."

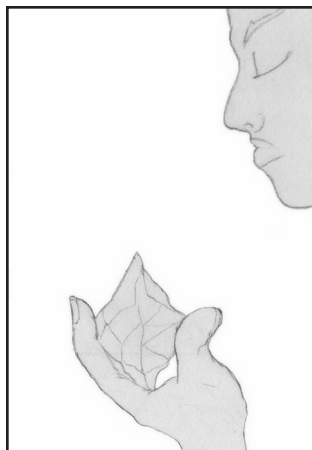


/ROOT/CRYPTOMANCY/
KEYPHRASE DEMO

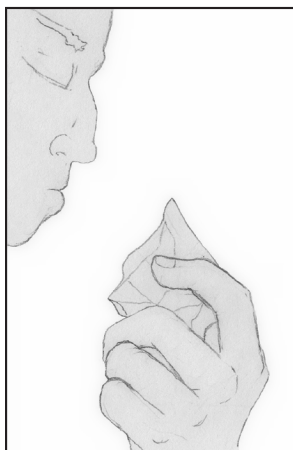
Alice holds a shard, raises her other hand, and injects the keyphrase: "Gallows Goblets Gold."



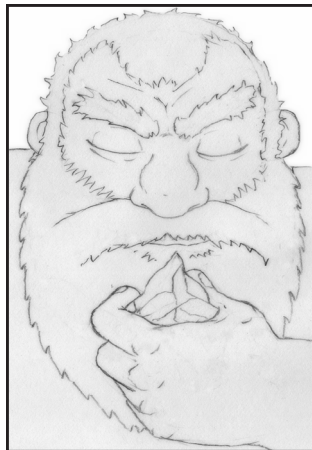
She then lowers her hand and thinks her message "Hello, Bob."



Bob, who knows the keyphrase "Gallows Goblets Gold," sees the message: "Hello, Bob."

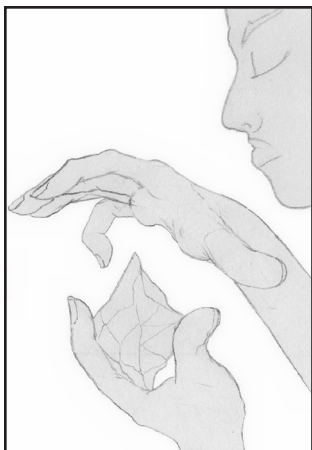


Chuck, who does not know the keyphrase "Gallows Goblets Gold," sees only jumbled cipher-text.

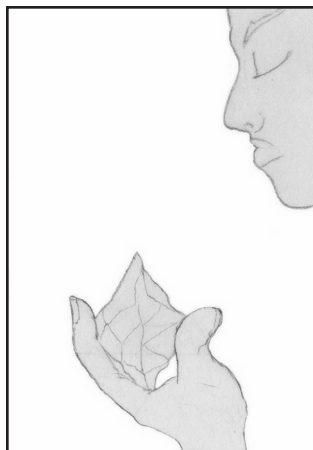


TRUE NAME DEMO

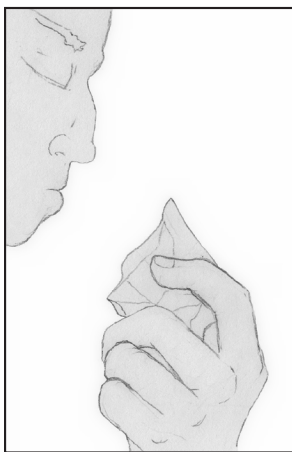
Alice holds a shard, raises her other hand, and injects the keyphrase: “Robert,” Bob’s true name.



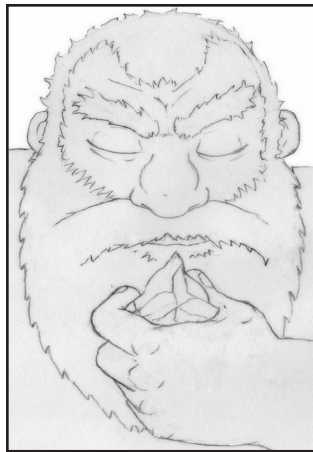
She then lowers her hand and thinks her message: “Let’s use a different keyphrase in case Gallows Goblets Gold is known by our enemies.”



Bob’s soul key decrypts the message. He will no longer use “Gallows Goblets Gold” as a keyphrase.



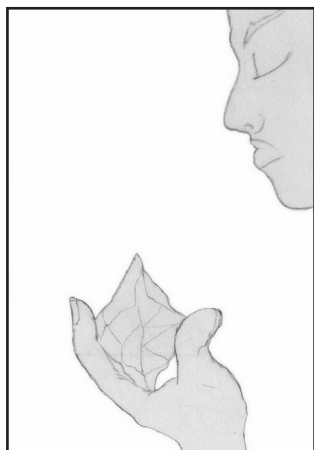
Chuck, who knows Bob’s true name, still cannot decrypt a message encrypted with it. He sees only jumbled cipher-text.



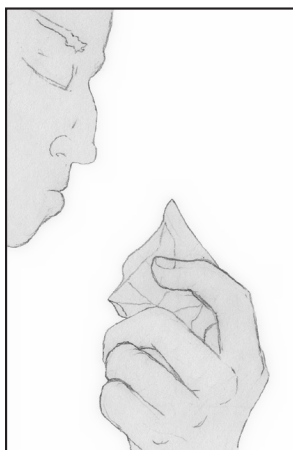
/ROOT/CRYPTOMANCY/

SOUL KEY DEMO

Alice thinks a message "How do I know it's actually you, Bob, and not a pretender?"



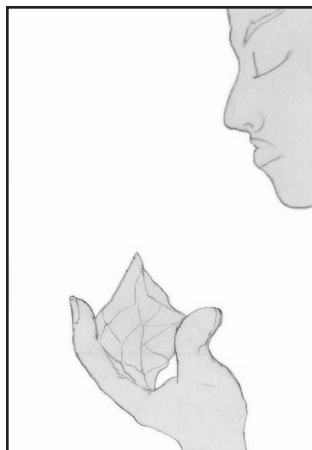
He lowers his hand and thinks the message: "It's me."



Bob raises his hand and injects his soul key, a word that only his deep subconscious knows.



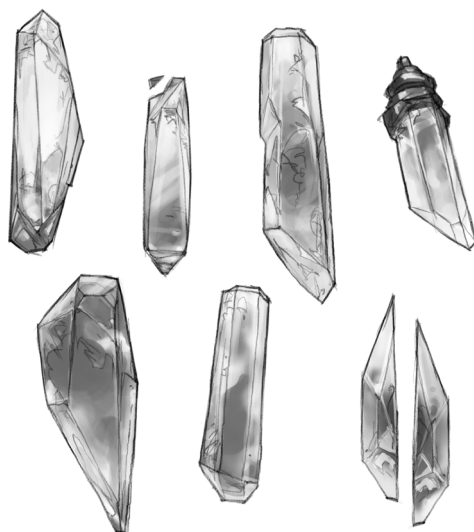
Alice, who knows Bob's true name, sees that "Robert" decrypts the message: "It's me." She can now be certain it is him.



SURFACE SCRATCHED

We've only given a taste of what's to come. Later in this book, we will be extending the idea of shards considerably, including the Shardscape (i.e. the Internet), golems (i.e. web-proxies and firewalls), and a vast array of offensive and defensive techniques. If you're reading this book primarily to see information security interpreted through a fantasy lens, you can skip ahead and jump straight to the "Cryptosystems" chapter.

We will now be introducing the four primary groups that comprise the world of Cryptomancer: the dwarves, the elves, the humans, and the Risk Eaters. Readers who would rather dive into game mechanics and return to setting materials later can proceed to the "Building the Party" chapter.



/ROOT/CRYPTOMANCY/CD ..
/ROOT/CD THE DWARVES
/ROOT/THE DWARVES/LS

-RW-RW-R-- OVERVIEW.....46
-RW-RW-R-- DWARVEN PHYSIOLOGY.....47
-RW-RW-R-- DWARVEN SOCIETY.....48
-RW-RW-R-- DWARVEN PSYCHOLOGY.....49
-RW-RW-R-- DINNER, RUINED.....50

THE DWARVES



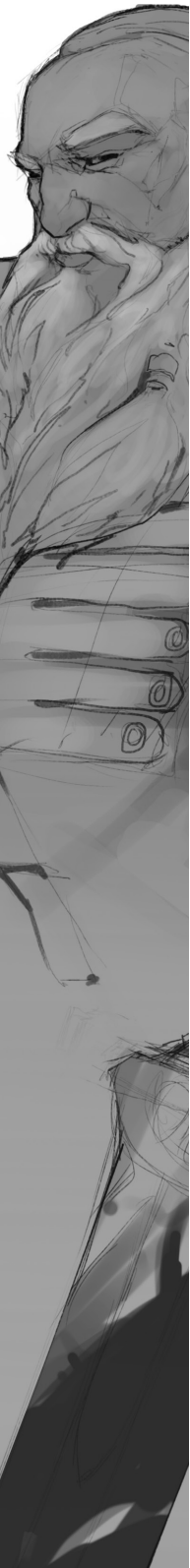
OVERVIEW

The dwarves are the geniuses of Subterra. Since the dawn of their race, dwarvenkind literally and figuratively carved expansive kingdoms out of mountains, caverns, and chasms, only leaving their Subterranean demesnes to terrorize the surface races or one another. War is in dwarves' blood, and when war changed, so did they.

The dwarves of myth were warriors whose prowess in battle was only equaled by their prowess in penning and singing epic tales of their conquests and boasting over mead in great banquet halls. Clans hated and loved their rivals in equal measure. A dwarven berserker war party was the most feared and destructive force on the planet, and when dwarven war parties faced one another, almost nothing was left in their wake. When dwarves discovered cryptomancy, however, their culture of boast and battle would be turned upside down. Suddenly, meeker clans were outflanking and outmaneuvering superior numbers by expertly distributing their units and coordinating synchronous attacks. Clans that clumsily employed cryptosystems in response were summarily infiltrated, anticipated, and decimated. Conventional might became irrelevant and staged battles ceased to occur. The dwarves stopped commemorating their victories in song and tale, because they did not want to betray their tactics to their enemies. By code, cloak, and dagger, the clan wars were settled in the shadows, and dwarvenkind entered an era where he who thinks wins.

As battle prowess and warrior poetry diminished in prominence, political plotting and intellectual pursuits took their place. Over time, the dwarves made considerable technological advances and developed a deep appreciation for academics and aesthetics. They also forsook their warrior ethic and began to become softer, petty, and conniving. Competition in battle gave way to competition in reputation, influence, and materialism. Spartan clanhalls transformed into opulent palaces. Tailors who crafted smart greatcoats and stylish dresses were more revered and bet-

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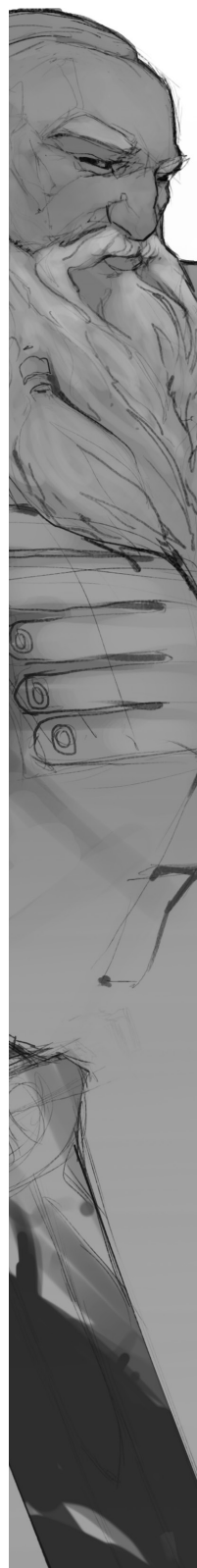
ter paid than smiths who crafted armaments or mechanical wonders. Dwarven moguls, vain beyond compare, would quell gossip with assassins. Dwarven battle prowess also changed irreversibly. The way of the berserker would be all but forgotten, replaced by the most lethal unit of the clan wars: the *cloak*. A dagger-wielding master of stealth, misdirection, and guerrilla warfare, the cloak might be the most lethal combatant of the modern age, but is too independent, specialized, and self-preserving to fight conventional battles. The dwarves became very adept at holding territory with limited numbers, but lost virtually all means of taking new territory by force. Clans that once struck fear in the hearts of the surface races resorted to becoming peddlers of rare earth, technology, finance, and espionage, with the hopes of being too valuable to destroy.

To this day, the dwarves remain relatively distracted by luxury, clan intrigue, and one-upmanship. They still enjoy a monopoly on technology and shardnets, and might be the great unknown preventing human and elven empires from waging apocalyptic war on each other. Yet, their influence continues to wane. Those rare dwarves who rise above the political squabbles and contemplate their race's place in history recognize that this is a truly dark time for the clans.

/ROOT/THE DWARVES/

DWARVEN PHYSIOLOGY

Though dwarven mannerisms and appearance have changed dramatically over time, like humans, their physiology has remained stagnant for eons. Dwarves are powerfully built humanoids that are both wider and shorter than the other races, with somewhat rounder features. Mythic tapestries depict massive beards on male dwarves, but that style has been gauche for centuries now (though some anachronists wear them proudly). Dwarves have lifespans and maturity cycles identical to humans, with the exception that dwarves maintain their physical peaks well into their 60's.



DWARVEN SOCIETY

While dwarven clans are as diverse as they are numerous, the dominant dwarven culture is based around conspicuous decadence, metallurgy, manufacture, and nearly constant espionage between the clans. Members of a dwarven clan were once united by a common bloodline, but are now disparate families held together by complex fabric woven of economic interest, political marriages, contracts, and truces. All members of a clan share a surname, usually the name of their clanhall, whether they are actually related or not. Political power in a clan resides with whomever is brutal, cunning, or enterprising enough to hold onto it, young or old, male or female. This leader is referred to as *mogul*.

Dwarven clanhalls are voluminous works of art buried deep underground. No expense is spared. Balconies, massive statues, multi-tiered fountains, constellation-sized chandeliers, and vast hydroponic gardens are typical sights in a clanhall. Even mundane items like tankards and silverware are gilded and gem-encrusted. This level of luxury is driven by both the dwarves' proximity to precious metal and their intense appreciation of the finest things. Individual estates radiating from the clanhall are considerably smaller but equally as decadent. Clanhalls may be opulent, but they are not fragile. Grinding gears, columns of steam, and founts of falling sparks are just as common as aesthetic flourishes. Dwarven industrial might is powered by smoke-spewing foundries half-submerged in lakes of lava while dwarven cryptomantic prowess is exemplified by great codebreaker engines whining and whirring their way through combinations of characters.

When the dwarves aren't scheming their next coup or arguing about literature and the arts, they are busy at work. The primary exports of dwarven clanhalls are precious metals, engineering expertise, and private shardnets. The dwarves have always been known for their mining prowess. However, even though they have built machines, assembly lines, and railworks to make the task easier, they have come

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to find the work indelicate. As such, mining is punishment for all but the most serious crimes in the clanhall. When a population of criminals cannot meet demand, dwarves will contract human and elven laborers willing to do the work.

Dwarven engineers are on the payroll of almost any political, mercantile, or military organization of note, regardless of race. While many bring the wonders of steam and automation to their clients, the most renowned of engineers are shard-splitters and golem-smiths. Shard-splitters expertly cut large shards into shardnets. They do so in front of the client, mostly as a formality, but also to ensure that the dwarves are not keeping a backdoor into the client's shardnet. Golem-smiths are the geniuses who construct and configure golems: semi-sentient mechanical crypto-creatures that profoundly change how organizations leverage shards and the Shardscape. Fiercely protective of these trade secrets, the clans are not above leveraging assassination or sabotage to ensure they keep their monopolies in tact.

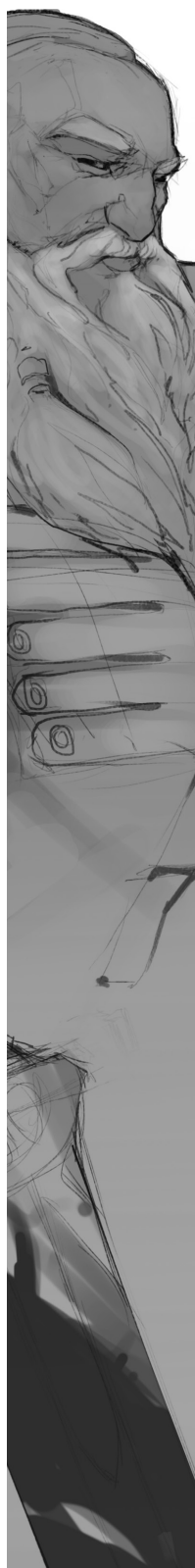
/ROOT/THE DWARVES/

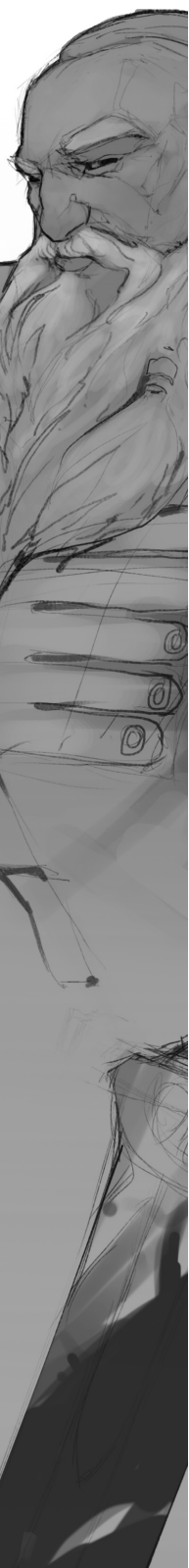
DWARVEN PSYCHOLOGY

Dwarves are sophisticated and refined creatures somewhat preoccupied with aesthetics and pleasure. The one-upmanship of the dwarven psyche plays out in all interactions, particularly with one another, but also permeates their relationship with the other races. Dwarves view humanity as a failing experiment and cautionary tale in overpopulation, but can and do develop strong (and somewhat patronizing) kinship with humans. The dwarves respect the elves' embrace of industry and skill in asymmetric warfare, but lament this race's eschewing of the arts, philosophy, beauty, and taste. Why elvenkind would ever want to be more like the crude race of simpletons that is humanity is something that baffles the dwarves. Through it all, there is still an undercurrent of brutality and superiority among this race, and they are more than willing to crush their enemies.

Many dwarves exposed to the epic sagas of the Mythic Age pine for a return to that era, and manifest this

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desire by rejecting the scheming and refinement typical of dwarven society. Immense beards are a signature of this anachronistic mindset. Generally speaking, however, the clans still clinging to the old ways are the most irrelevant to the Modern Age. They have waited centuries for a great bloody revival that is becoming less and less likely to occur with each new advance in technology and each new expanding market. Perhaps, then, it is time to stop waiting and do what the dwarves do best: *manufacturing*.

/ROOT/THE DWARVES/

DINNER, RUINED

The dinner host was perfectly still in his chair, on account of being dead. The dwarf Tayvus held a wine glass in one hand and a bloody sword in the other. Moments earlier, he was pacing behind the host, delivering a diatribe on the finer points of white wine pairings that crescendoed into madness, climaxing when he nearly took the host's head off with his blade. The servant had run down the hall shrieking. The other dwarf, Doktan, still sitting at the dinner table, was as wide-eyed as he was pale.

"This is a *disaster*," he cried.

Tayvus looked with scorn at his blood-soaked sleeve. "Indeed, this great coat is a total loss!"

Doktan was beside himself. "Has your sanity completely abandoned you!? You just killed a man!"

Tayvus frowned. "Could you hand me the salt?"

Doktan nearly erupted in profanity but caught himself. He knew better than to deny Tayvus's dalliances in these types of situations, if only to prevent them being drawn out. Exacerbated, he grabbed the salt shaker, reached over the table and slammed it down in front of Tayvus. Tayvus grabbed the salt, sprinkled a dash into his wine, and then held the glass towards the chandelier above them. Slowly, each grain of salt grew into a black, crystalline spur: the kind that shred

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internal organs and drown a man in his own blood.

Doktan's face shifted back and forth between horror and relief. "Poison? He meant to *assassinate* us? That is why you slew him?"

"No," Tayvus said casually. "The assassination attempt was irritating, to be certain, but his pairing of an 803 vintage white with beef... *beef*... was something akin to a culinary war crime. I had no choice, really."

A commotion erupted down the hall. At least a half-dozen guards clambered toward the dining hall, their chain mail jingling and their boots clomping against the stone floor. Doktan instinctively grabbed his steak knife and hopped from his chair.

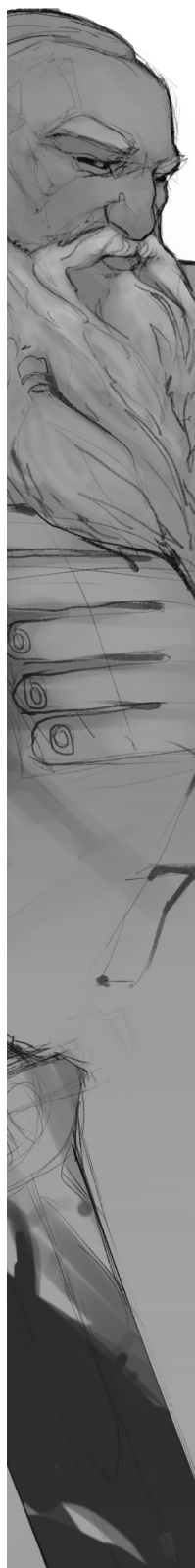
"Now his guards come to kill us. You *will* be explaining why you dragged me into this without forewarning, Tayvus. That is, after you get us out of here."

"But you *are* the superior daggerist between us, Doktan. Should you not take point?"

"Shut up and lead."

The guards spilled into the dining hall and surrounded the dwarves. They slowly crept towards them, maces and blades ready. The two dwarves dropped simultaneously to a very low stance, a lunging position just shy of a squat, both of them clutching their blades with two hands, like each was a claymore. The guards abruptly halted their advance, recognizing what they were dealing with. The dwarves shuffled two steps towards the humans, each of them awkwardly recoiling three steps back. Tayvus roared at his adversaries, all traces of sophistication utterly absent:

"YE' LEAF-EATIN' MONKEYS! YE' BRANDISH A BLADE AT TWO CLOAKS! YE' WILL LET US PASS, OR BY THE IRON SENESCHALS, WE WILL SPILL YER' ORGANS, USE YER' SKULLS AS BED-PANS, AND ATTEND YER' FUNERALS SO WE CAN ERASE YER' KIN, TOO!"



/ROOT/THE DWARVES/CD ..
/ROOT/CD THE ELVES
/ROOT/THE ELVES/LS

-RW-RW-R-- OVERVIEW.....54
-RW-RW-R-- ELVEN PHYSIOLOGY.....55
-RW-RW-R-- ELVEN SOCIETY.....56
-RW-RW-R-- ELVEN PSYCHOLOGY.....57
-RW-RW-R-- SYLVETIC LAW.....58

THE ELVES



OVERVIEW

The elves are the great parasite of Sylvetica. For millennia, elves lived in relative harmony with the forest, living as a nomadic people and erecting permanent structures only for the purposes of study, worship, and Elysian meetings between tribes. And then they discovered soma, the honeydew secreted by giant insects called gigaphids.

Sylvetic aphids are large winged insects approximately one foot long. As part of their reproductive cycle, the aphids burrow deep into the largest trees, plant their eggs, and seal the resulting hole with a viscous slime on their way back out. Larvae hatch from the eggs and subsist on the water and nutrients coursing through the tree for months, until their metamorphosis into the winged, six-limbed aphids. At that point, they burrow out of the same hole their mother left in the tree, and join the ecosystem, leaving the tree to heal itself. Somewhere throughout the course of history, one elf asked: "What if you cork the burrowed hole and don't let the aphid out of the tree?" Elven society would never be the same.

Aphids trapped in trees will quickly cannibalize one another until only one remains. This bloated and exhausted creature will then be subsumed by the tree. Over time, the aphid becomes a parasitic entity, hoarding the water and nutrients the tree gathers from its roots and leaves. The aphid continues to grow until it becomes a massive gigaphid, warping the tree trunk into a bulbous form. In order to survive this massive parasite, the tree becomes ravenous, strangling every last drop of water and every nutrient out of all other plant life within the domain of its canopy. Soon, this bulbous but otherwise vibrant tree, known as a lacuna tree, is the only living thing in the acres surrounding it.

A gigaphid that is chopped out of a lacuna tree between 5-10 years after the gigaphid's birth, then healed and reared, becomes one of the giant, intelligent, and loyal insect mounts that have given the elves air superiority while the

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other races only dream of flying machines. If a gigaphid is not liberated after 10 years, it becomes something even more valuable: a bloated, helpless, mindless fount of soma. Soma is a potent, mind-altering honeydew with innumerable uses and health benefits. Pure soma, when consumed, causes powerful hallucinations and wracks the body with pleasure. Distilled soma is an alcoholic beverage without peer and is credited with the elves' superior constitution and physical beauty. These commodities, along with more mundane uses of soma, such as food spice, tobacco additive, or healing salve, transformed the nomadic elves into a manufacturing giant. Humans, elves, and dwarves alike cannot get enough soma to satiate their desire for it, and Sylvetica is dying as a result.

Once vibrant forests are now barren deadlands spotted with distilleries and watchtowers scaffolded onto lacuna trees. Elven lore frequently sites how the forest hates the short sighted and wasteful human race. However, environmentally conscious elves have been developing and espousing a new theory: the forest's violent and steady encroachment into human settlements is nature entreating humanity to come and exterminate the elves for turning on tradition.

/ROOT/THE ELVES/

ELVEN PHYSIOLOGY

Elves are lithe, pointy-eared humanoids generally leaner than the other races, with somewhat sharper features. Elves reach physical maturity slightly later than humans and then age incredibly slowly: elderly elves having the physical traits of a human in their early forties. Old age never conquers the elven form, but the elven mind begins to atrophy after 120 years, and few elves live past 150 years.



ELVEN SOCIETY

While elven tribes are as diverse as they are numerous, the dominant elven culture is based around gigaphid husbandry, soma production and distribution, and a complex relationship with their idyllic past. Elven tribes have a leader, referred to as a speaker, who has a council of elders serving her as advisors. The speaker establishes her role and maintains power through persuasion, influence, and representing the collective best interest of the tribe. It is a truly difficult role and few are willing to bear the burden for longer than a few decades. Further, the speaker role shifts not formally but organically. One elf's influence waxes while another's wanes, and soon, the role of speaker has transitioned without contest nor ceremony. It is a power structure that baffles the other races and frustrates their attempts to infiltrate or usurp the tribes. There are young elven upstarts advocating for more rules and formality around the assumption and maintenance of power, but most elves are convinced such artifice makes for bad leaders.

Elven tribes build villages around massive lacuna trees. Most of the buildings and infrastructure in these villages are dedicated to the production, refinement, and distribution of soma, and most elven trades are dedicated to the same. Ramps, drawbridges, rope ladders, and dwarven railworks connect the buildings of elven villages, which seem to grow up rather than grow out. The buildings themselves are hollowed-out sections of the lacuna tree, hollowed-out giant mushrooms near the tree's base, or simply constructed of wood and stone using human designs.

Tribes with a big enough population to hold extensive territory practice gigaphid ranching. Networks of lacuna trees radiating around a central hub (typically a soma production facility) serve as gigaphid hatcheries. Each hatchery has barracks and battlements scaffolded onto it, making it possible for a small contingent of elves to protect this very valuable investment against a larger force. If an individual hatchery falls under attack, warriors from each node in the

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larger hatchery network come to its defense. Once a lacuna tree hatches a gigaphid, the tree dies and its lush canopy withers away. No longer hidden from the sun, the land around a dead lacuna tree will eventually become meadow, a feeding ground for gigaphids that will never again return to the forest it once was. In times of crisis or crusade, large elven federations annex lacuna trees by force and liberate young gigaphids in order to raise a flying cavalry capable of blotting the sky and raining down alchemical death on the enemies of elvenkind.

There still remain hallowed temples and massive strongholds deep in the forest untouched by gigaphid husbandry and more akin to the elves' old ways. These places serve as centers of learning, culture, magical experimentation, and tribal politics. However, these places are continually being abandoned by young and ambitious elves, and are slowly becoming irrelevant to larger elven society.

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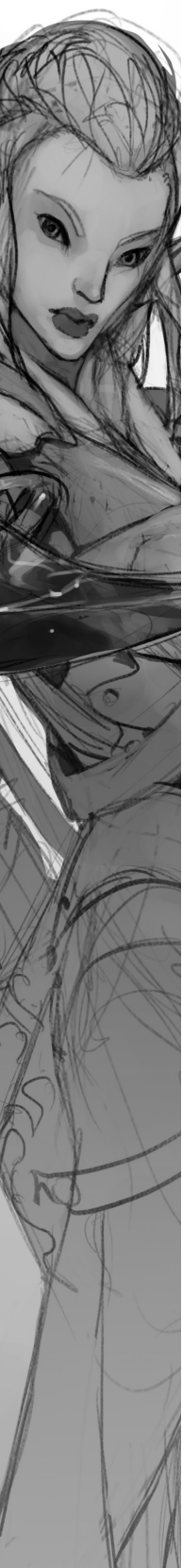
ELVEN PSYCHOLOGY

Elves are relatively humorless and calculating, and rarely exchange idle words. They can certainly feel and act on the extremes of love and hate, but are less prone to these emotions than the other races, partially due to their longevity and partially due to notions of superiority. Though territorial wars frequently mar relations between humans and elves, the elves have somewhat neutral feelings towards humans, respecting at times their industry, creativity, and passion. The dwarves, however, have devolved into something absurd. Elven myth portrays the dwarves as powerful allies or truly worthy adversaries, simple in their loyalties and resolute in their moral codes. Most elves share contempt for the effete and conniving epicureans that dwarves have become.

Elven culture was once entirely influenced by this race's near immortality. Study of celestial bodies, appreciation of natural and magical forms, and perfection of mind and body were the higher callings of the elves. Historically,

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elves have considered the other races somewhat vulgar in their ambition, shortsightedness, and pursuit of relatively mundane goals of wealth and power. Today, elves live like they were mortal. Though the elves have become less lofty and more industrious in recent history, many consider elven soma production and aerial superiority as evidence that their race will never be outdone. There is a growing tension between the new ways and the old ways, and this tension cuts across generations, political affiliations, and all levels of education and affluence.

/ROOT/THE ELVES/

SYLVETIC LAW

The men of the village had fled. A few left women and children behind. Almost all of them left their sick and elderly. It wasn't even her village. Eca cared nothing for these people. She may have even had contempt for them. The fools built their hovel on elven land. But she could not bring herself to leave. She stood with her bastard sword's blade stuck in the dirt before her as the three gnolls emerged from the windswept brush.

The lion-faced monsters were each as tall as a rearing horse and twice as heavy. They looked upon the lone elf. One cocked his head and grinned with amusement. One gave her an icy stare. The largest and oldest among them seemed to look through her.

"I know your game, beasts," she said to the them loudly but without emotion. "I challenge the weakest of you to single combat. If I prevail, you move on to another village."

The gnolls exchanged glances at each other. The grinning gnoll choked back a laughing yip, his belly shaking. Then he replied in a deep baritone hiss: "We don't play with our food."

"But you do thump your chest and sing of your battle prowess when you step on a bug," Eca retorted instantly.

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She pulled her blade out of the dirt and pointed it towards the eldest of the gnolls. “You! Old one! You are wise but meek. A burden on your pride. Let me put you out of their misery!”

The grinning gnoll leapt in place and roared, pounding his fist on the ground, plumes of dust and grass bursting into the air with each strike. The icy stare of the other gnoll turned to wide eyes bulging with hatred. The eldest of the gnolls, however, did not flinch. He spoke calmly: “You do not want to fight me, elf. I am the only one standing before you who would honor your terms.”

The formerly grinning gnoll turned to him and pleaded, “I want this one! Give me this one!” With a subtle nod from the eldest gnoll, the grinning gnoll burst towards the elf in an ape-like sprint. Eca roared and dashed straight into the charging monster, spinning out of its way and slashing her blade through its side. The gnoll’s charge sputtered into a clumsy tumble into the dirt. The elf buried her blade in the monster’s back not once, but twice, each blow met with the shriek of a thousand tortured cats.

In a frenzied thrashing about, the gnoll kicked away his opponent and flipped back into a fighting position on his hind legs. His roar splattered saliva everywhere, eyes insane with pain and violence, his blood raining on the dirt below. Eca charged again and brought her sword down against the gnoll’s thick neck. The bloody sword snapped like a twig, spiraling into the air. Undaunted, she ducked below the gnoll’s wild swings and buried the remaining stump of a sword into his gut. He dropped to the ground, writhing and yelping, covered in dirt and blood. Eca turned to face the other two.

“Impressive, little one,” said the elder gnoll, nodding in approval. “The cub will learn from this. We leave now. We gnolls are reasonable, are we not?”

“Yes,” Eca replied, “but we elves are not.” She knifed her hand in their direction. The two dozen elven rangers who heeded her shardcast were finally in position. Two dozen bowstrings twang simultaneously, and two dozen poison-tipped arrows struck their targets.



/ROOT/THE ELVES/CD ..
/ROOT/CD THE HUMANS
/ROOT/THE HUMANS/LS

-RW-RW-R-- OVERVIEW.....62
-RW-RW-R-- HUMAN PHYSIOLOGY.....63
-RW-RW-R-- HUMAN SOCIETY.....63
-RW-RW-R-- HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY.....64
-RW-RW-R-- TABLES TURNED.....66

THE HUMANS



OVERVIEW

Humans are the adaptable and numerous inheritors of Sphere. Though just as old as the other races, humanity has historically lagged behind in terms of culture, organization, technology, and military might. Humans are noticeably absent from mythic legend, only making cameos as a hoard of clever monkeys frequently dying off from plague. The earliest human kingdoms were little more than dwarven and elven proxies, propped up to outmaneuver each other or serve as a buffer against orc invasions. Neither the dwarves nor the elves anticipated that their support for this race of brutes would elevate humanity to the most powerful and influential of the great races. Indeed, historians agree that the Modern Age began when humanity eclipsed the other races and began to play the dwarves and the elves against each other.

Today, humanity is the most populous, diverse, and distributed of the races. Humans and human settlements are everywhere, in every region, so long as freedom or opportunity are possible, though these spoils are rarely distributed fairly. While the surface world is primarily great forest and mountain, there are walls, spires, castles, and colossi of human design spotting the land and towering above mountain and canopy: beacons of civilization attracting the most renowned artisans, traders, warriors, and politicians of the world. The feuds and machinations between human city-states, and between the noble houses therein, are the great stories of the Modern Age, though some would argue the powers that be are merely playing parts that were penned by the Risk Eaters.

Most city-states are heaving industrial monstrosities so overcrowded and overbuilt that the only way to expand further is up and out. Human kingdoms are racing to ensnare all satellite villages, quarries, mines, farms, deep roads, and ruins within their domain. These places often become flashpoints that inevitably pull all regional powers into proxy wars fought in the streets of Sphere, the forests of Sylvetica, the deep roads of Subterra, and the Shardscape.

HUMAN PHYSIOLOGY

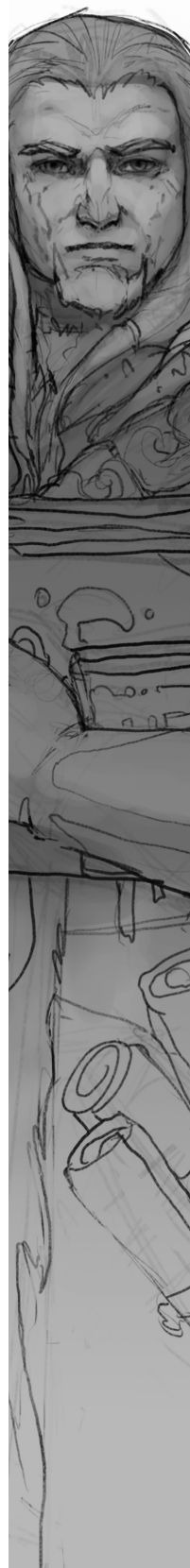
The humans of Cryptomancer are identical in physiology and diversity as the humans of Earth. Further, all human settlements, even the most rural and remote, enjoy considerable ethnic diversity. Humans are certainly prone to judging and hating other groups and cultures, but there are so many other "others" in the world (e.g. elves, dwarves, soma addicts, cultists, mages, monsters, etc.) that the type of racism we see in the real world never really took.

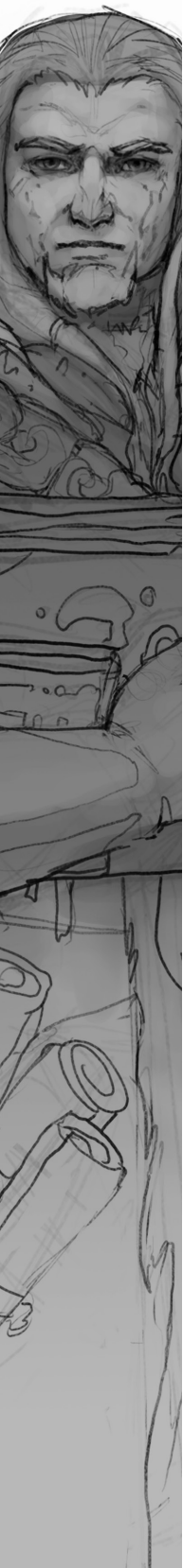
HUMAN SOCIETY

While human cultures are as varied as they are numerous, the dominant human culture is based on the agriculture, industrial development, and military might needed to support enormous city-states best described as Borgia-era Italy meets Aztec empire Mesoamerica. Nearly three quarters of humans live in massive city-states with populations so large and wily that they can only be managed by a powerful state apparatus: an army of constables, seneschals, and bureaucrats answering to a ruler whose authority is absolute. Indeed, this is one of the primary features that distinguish humanity from the other noble races: the sheer amount of effort and resources humans spend on containing and controlling each other. Enormous police forces and bureaucratic labyrinths are uniquely human phenomena, as are the notions that bloodline or divine providence translate into fitness for leadership.

The human-controlled but racially diverse city-states of Sphere are the true regional centers of power for the mortal races. The economies of city-states grow at a rate that is only outpaced by human birthrates. Advances in medicine, the adoption of dwarven technology, and the commercial use of the Shardscape have resulted in a state where life for even the poorest of humans has never been more stable, pleasant, and long lasting. That is not to say that humanity does not suffer its share of dysfunction or unrest. On

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the contrary, compared to the other noble races, life for the average human remains nasty, brutish, and short. Human longevity is kept in check by war, orc raids, and the dangers inherent when medieval modes of industry try to match the output of an industrial society. Revolts, coups, civil war, and catastrophe are nearly as common as bad weather. Despite this backdrop of death and instability, human city-states remain regional powerhouses, wielding impressive industrial bases and massive standing armies even in their weakest state.

More so than the other races, humans readily structure themselves in accordance to class or caste. Most city-states naturally adopt a hierarchy of nobility, knights, priests, and serfs, in descending order of power and wealth. Social experiments like trade guilds, political movements, and religious cults, primarily enabled by the proliferation of the Shardscape, present a serious threat to the default power structures. However, rather than ban the Shardscape (which would cause humanity at large to fall quickly behind the other races), the powers that be embrace the Shardscape and incorporate it into their operations. It remains a truly powerful method of managing populations. The regents of the Mythic Age would have been insanely jealous of the modern tyrant's ability to surveil the populace, project propaganda on a global scale, and ensnare rivals and upstarts in plots worthy of the gallows.

/ROOT/THE HUMANS/

HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY

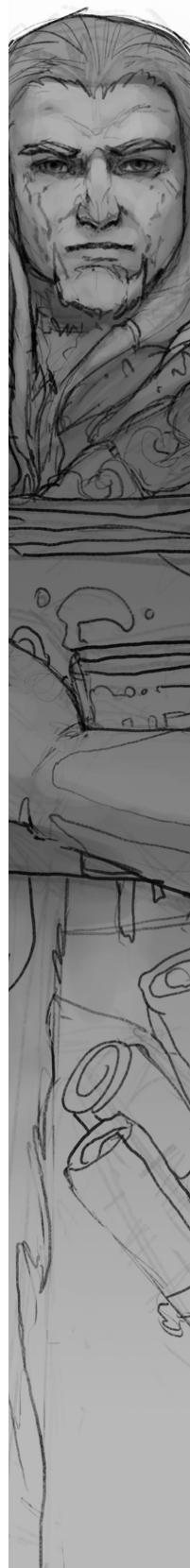
The humans of Cryptomancer are very similar in mindset and disposition to those of the real life medieval era, in that they are superstitious, relatively uneducated, prone to violence, adhere slavishly to social constructs like caste, and are willing to sacrifice greatly for causes that may or may not reflect their best interests. During the Mythic Age, humanity's tale was one of cyclical doom and near-extinction, courtesy of orcs, plagues, dragon raids, and famine. Instead of viewing this as part of the story of human perseverance, humans are easily caught up in apocalyptic fervor.

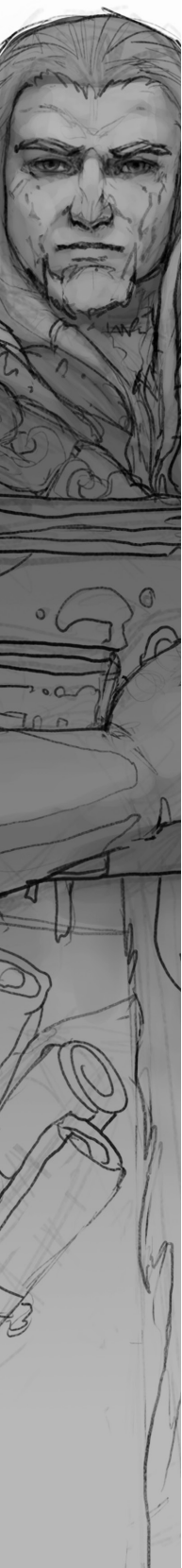
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As a result, many of the individual and societal decisions made by humans are informed by an end-of-days mentality, in which long term consequences are irrelevant.

The greatest challenge to this otherwise bleak mentality is the accidental movement referred to by historians as "The Secret." The Secret is the great hidden dialogue facilitated by cryptomancy. With cryptomancy, people were able to challenge mindsets and discuss alternative views with one another without fear of reprisal by authorities. Further, they were able to maintain communication with distant cultures, including elven and dwarven cultures. On the surface, human society remains as ignorant and authoritarian as ever. But the true human psyche is better represented in the radical, profound, and sometimes profane conversations obscured from the light of day by cryptomancy.

Humans have a somewhat complicated relationship with elves and dwarves. Humans tend to both fear and fetishize both of those races subconsciously, and though this tension is easily picked up on by elves and dwarves, it is rarely discussed. Further, human sentiment towards these races is relative to their political power. The dwindling dwarves are considered "more human" than elves, and the fashion and material excesses of the dwarves are frequently adopted by human royalty. The expansionist elves, on the other hand, are frequently viewed as emotionless automatons, despite this race's rich culture and eons of artistic expression. Humans trust dwarves (even though dwarves don't even trust dwarves), but keep elves at a distance.





TABLES TURNED

The guard opened the cell door for Constable Bryndor. A dwarf sat at a small wooden table. His arms were shackled behind him and his ankles were shackled together. Despite his state, the dwarf looked at Bryndor with sick defiance. “Good Constable,” the dwarf cheerily stated, “Welcome! Please, have a seat!”

“Hello Achrun,” Bryndor replied in a tired manner as he took a seat across the table from the dwarf. The guard shut the door behind him. Bryndor slowly procured a leather bound notebook and a heap of papers from his satchel, periodically looking up at Achrun who sported the widest grin he had ever seen. Bryndor raised an eyebrow and said “For one who’s in a dungeon for conspiracy, you seem quite content.”

“How is the *wife*, Bryndor!?” Achrun replied, nearly spitting out the word “wife.” Bryndor seemed taken aback by both this non-sequitur and the violence with which it was uttered. After a pause, he meekly replied, “She... she’s busy with the children, I assume. I haven’t seen her since yesterday. I have been too busy working your conviction.”

Achrn looked extremely pleased with himself. Bryndor continued: “We’re here to discuss the ‘accident’ in Worldtether Mine which killed 27 laborers... a mine owned by a human you had a very public dispute with. Our investigation showed-”

“Your investigation, Constable,” Achrun said before Bryndor could finish, “showed exactly what I am about to dictate to you. Grab your ink and quill.”

Bryndor, disturbed, complied and pressed his quill against his notebook. He looked to Achrun to continue.

“My investigation,” Achrun began, “was prompted by greed. The entirety of my findings were a fabrication,

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paid for by-”

Bryndor stopped and slammed the quill against the table. “Why would I write any of this nonsense?”

“Because you want to see your wife again! Now pick up the quill and draft for me, you fool,” Achrun said in an arrogant and exhausted tone.

Bryndor turned bright red, his writing hand shaking subtly. “What have you done,” he asked softly.

“*I, Constable Byrndor...*” Achrun continued, in a stern voice. “Go on...”

Byrndor, seemingly confused and nervous, began to draft his own confession of malfeasance as dictated by the criminal he sought to interrogate. Achrun relished the experience, frequently deliberating which turns of phrase best captured the fiction he was dictating. After a few moments, he noticed that Bryndor was writing much slower than Achrun was dictating. Detecting this moment, Bryndor slid his notebook across the table. He had only written a single five word keyphrase. Achrun turned deathly white.

Bryndor broke the silence, saying “Did you know, Achrun, that the agent you contracted to kidnap my wife was... my wife? Did you know the entire Constabulary knew this keyphrase you two had agreed upon? Did you know we traced your echoes to the very physical location from which you communicated with her over shard, corroborated by agents we had watching you on the ground? Do you remember when she asked you to prove that you were Achrun by encrypting a confirmation of your identity with your soul key, so that only *your* true name, ‘Solbrosikor,’ could decrypt that confirmation, assuring with *absolute certainty* that it was you offering coin to have my wife kidnapped?”

Achrun tried to speak, but couldn’t get words out. Bryndor dipped his quill in ink and readied it at his notebook. To Achrun’s stammering, Bryndor replied:

“Go on...”



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/ROOT/THE HUMANS/CD ..  
/ROOT/CD THE RISK EATERS  
NO SUCH FILE OR DIRECTORY  
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THE RISK EATERS



A CAVEAT

To maintain the eeriness and mystique of Cryptomancer's omniscient and insidious overlords, little will be said about the Risk Eaters explicitly. Instead, this section will provide vignettes to hint at the modus operandi of this organization and the psyche of its members.

THE STRANGERS

They exist on the outskirts of every city and village, squatting in caves and rotten hovels. Some watch their friends or family from a distance, hoping to be recognized, or at the very least, be acknowledged without a grimace or shudder. Most have given up, however. Better to hope and dream that their curse might one day be lifted than be tried by frontier justice for being a stalker and a monster. These mortals have had their faces and voices encrypted against their will. The keyphrases distorting their very identity are unknown to them, and for all they know, are lost forever.

There do exist hidden villages far off the beaten path where Strangers have congregated. They cannot communicate with one another intelligibly, nor can they develop strong kinship, for every time they look upon one another, they see a new and unknown entity who may very well be an agent of the very organization that cursed them. However, at the very least, they will pool resources, work on farming and construction projects together, and defend each other from brigands and thieves looking to exploit a community without rights or a means to appeal for help.

They came from all possible walks of life. The only thing they have in common is that the Risk Eaters decided to erase their identities through cryptomancy. Some were conscripted by that organization but, found wanting, were exiled without a recognizable voice or face. Some were witness to atrocities, and while their lives were spared for rea-

sons unknown, their silence would be assured. Some were offered the decrypting keyphrase in exchange for a task, but found that task so reprehensible that they refused and suffered the fate of the Strangers. Some, however, are reconsidering those offers.

/ROOT/.THE RISK EATERS/

THE CONFESSIONAL

Life is truly difficult in all the realms, but especially in the city. Endless days of toil and abuse as a laborer, servant, or guard leaves one exhausted, with head and heart full of anger, envy, and base thoughts. Not even the powerful and affluent are immune to the deleterious effects of the Modern Age. No noble house can be maintained or institution defended without necessary forays into the world of gossips, shills, spies, and assassins. The accumulated grief and guilt can destroy one's soul. Thankfully, there is the temple, a place of refuge, reflection, and most importantly, confession.

However, not even the priests, mere mortals, can be trusted with the type of secrets one must confess. There is a confessional, but no priest sits in the adjacent booth. Instead, there lies a black shard, a conduit to the Shardscape. The Shardscape allows for the anonymous and explicit confession of sins, so long as this confession is protected by the Cipher of Absolution. The Cipher of Absolution, the priests say, must be seven words long, no more and no less. They must be random words, with the exception of one: the name of the god the confessor asks to petition on her behalf before the council of gods. Any deviation from these strictures will result in the confession being unheard by the gods and become merely more noise in the Shardscape.

The Cipher of Absolution is nearly as old as the Shardscape itself, and proposed amendments to its scheme have been met with scorn and accusations of blasphemy. The security of the Cipher is absolute, the priests say, and the only beings capable of decrypting a confession are the gods themselves and agents of their will. Among institu-

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tions, none are as trustworthy as the priests of the temple. The modern confessional is a testament to this, and an answer to the humble priest's refrain, "Don't confess to me, I am but mortal, and fallible. Confess to the gods."

/ROOT/.THE RISK EATERS/

THE IRON SENESCHALS

The most hallowed places in Subterra are the shrines of the Iron Seneschals, steam-powered creatures imbued with the spirits of long-dead dwarven heroes of the Mythic Age and equipped with apparati allowing them to listen and speak. Each of the seneschals is a steamwork leviathan protruding from cave walls, eternally powered by the flux and heat of rivers of lava. Their shrines, scattered throughout the world's deep, are where dwarves and even some surfacers go to seek the wisdom of immortal, impartial sages. Each shrine is considered sacred. Even dwarven clans in the bloodiest of feuds respect this law and will come together to crush mortals or monsters who defile these places.

An Iron Seneschal will never betray the conversations it has with a mortal. They are so removed from the politics of the modern era and so beyond earthly want and desire that their motives are beyond reproach. This perfect lack of passion or vice is evident in their mannerisms. The seneschals are often cold and rigid in their syntax and response. They are also quite anachronistic in their language and ideas, evidence of their ancient heritage. They often ask their visitors to repeat themselves using different words, or moving the words in a different order, blaming their confusion on not knowing the intricacies of modern slang. They even struggle considerably when hearing certain turns of phrase, such as "me myself" or "he is what he is." When hearing such tautologies, confused seneschals respond with lists of words seemingly unrelated to the conversation at hand.

The Iron Seneschals are trusted advisors and perfect confidants, and often the only being trusted by dwarven moguls beleaguered by traitors, spies, and potential

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usurpers. Overlapping plates of impenetrable iron protect the interred body and the steamwork mechanisms powering an iron seneschal, ensuring that no mortal could ever meddle with these great engines of genius even if they wanted to. The lack of any kind of shard interface ensures that conversations cannot be eavesdropped. Who knows, then, why cloaked and dissembled surfacers seek audience with the seneschals? They couldn't possibly turn the seneschals against the moguls...

/ROOT/.THE RISK EATERS/

THE MUTABLE PAST

The stars cannot lie. Stars and celestial bodies are beyond the wildest reaches of mortal manipulation. Not even magic could ever hope to alter the machinery of the galaxy. This is why the elves have always returned to star reading to ground themselves, make sense of life in times of chaos, and appreciate how the movement of stars corresponds with the cyclical nature of history. The most important moments in elven history, good or ill, are not cataloged by the year they occurred, but instead cataloged by how celestial bodies aligned when they occurred. The sky marks moments in history, but also links the past to the now. If today's celestial pattern matches that of a significant moment in history, it is cause for reflection. When such a link manifests, elves have traditionally pondered and deliberated what lessons, if any, could be learned from this chance parallel. More mystical schools of thought even championed how the historical event might have foretold the current event's coming.

A new school of thought is transforming this philosophical and mystical dialogue. This line of thinking did not originate from elven scholars and trained star seers, but from a disorganized and grassroots collective of amateur star seers extremely vocal on the Shardscape. Their precept is simple but profound in its implications: a celestial link between today and a historical event does not tell us lessons about today, but instead, today tells us the truth about the historical event that has been hidden by time and the lies of historians. To take this notion to its logical extreme, the details of his-

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tory must be appended with details learned from today.

Elven scholars scoffed at this new philosophy, calling it “The Mutable Past.” Yet, the shrillness of its proponents and their very vocal contempt for the learned appealed to many and ensured it would become a serious part of the dialogue of stars. This philosophical debate has had serious consequences in the avenues of politics and power. Elven laws are almost universally based on historical antecedents and taught to the young through storytelling. When those historical antecedents are edited, so are the lessons and laws they reinforce. More than once, power has been seized and previous restrictions have lifted, all under the auspices of a rogue seer’s new version of history. The rogue seers are disorganized, but they are remarkably lockstep in their daily reinterpretations of history, as if echoing a single idea.

/ROOT/.THE RISK EATERS/

THE VISITOR

Lodran was trembling. For an agonizing few minutes, he could only observe with horror the frantic echoes of his comrades. They were being stalked by someone or something truly fearsome. After a dreadful period of silence, a panicked clear-text echo from Anik comes through: “He’s slain Vulkr! Tore him to pieces! Find us a temple *now*, Lodran!” Despite his anxiety, the cryptoadmin maintains discipline and encrypts his message before replying: “I will find one, hang in there. Are you safe?”

“No, we’re not safe. We chased him away from Vulkr’s body, but I think he took his shard. Find us that damned temple!”

Suddenly, Lodran senses one of his shard spikes detonate in the mind of an interloper. He had laid this trap for a very specific prey: a mind with a mental lexicon of long and complex keyphrases. The Risk Eaters have come and they were on his shardnet. He drops the shard in his trembling hands and opens his eyes, realizing again that he is in a

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dark cryptovault a hundred miles away from his endangered comrades. He then clutches a black shard, closes his eyes, and enters the Shardscape.

The torrent of echoes is nauseating for most, but not for a seasoned cryptoadmin. After orienting himself, Lodran focuses on the words “temple” and “Stonemarch,” the small village where the party’s mission had gone terribly awry. As he focuses more intently, a single thread in the raging river of echoes slows down and catches his mind’s eye. A faded echo, months old, where an anonymous someone told an anonymous someone else exactly what Lodran needs. “There is no temple in Stonemarch,” it reads, “but there is a witch in Kragston who performs miracles for coin.”

Lodran drops the black shard and his consciousness comes back into the dark cryptovault. He then grabs the shard shared with the party and closes his eyes. He doesn’t want the Risk Eaters to know where he’s about to send the party, so he injects Anik’s true name, “Hadrianikin,” into the shard, telling Anik, “There is a witch in Kragston who can help!” At that moment, the shard erupts in blinding light and Lodran is knocked off of his chair. The shard snaps and pops, spewing magical light that forms the contour of a human body.

Lodran crawls towards the wall and presses a hand against it. After thinking a magical invocation, his skin transforms, adapting the color and texture of the cryptovault’s stone walls. He looks back at the shard, and the visitor that erupted out of it: a tall, powerfully-built, and dissembled man. The features of his face and naked body crawl up and down his frame. The visitor doesn’t see through Lodran’s chameleon spell, but looks around, knowing his prey is close. Lodran watches in horror as the visitor utters something in a garbled tongue, and then reaches into a shadow on the wall, pulling a long, serrated blade out of black nether. Knowing his chameleon spell will fade soon, he prepares to run away. His heart sinks when he sees the three separate locks keeping the cryptovault’s door secure from the outside world. It’s over. He steels himself and dives for the shard. The visitor

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raises the blade and buries it in Lodran's heart but not before he gets off a final echo: "He's here."

Anik takes the message as if it punched him in the stomach. He says aloud "The gods' peace to you, friend" and throws his shard into the river. His comrades knowingly do the same.

"Let's get Vulkr to that witch."

/ROOT/.THE RISK EATERS/

THE MIRAGE

Nadyna's indigenous guides urged her not to scale the cliff. She was not having any of it. She was a master fencer of some renown in the city, yet these forest-dwelling bumpkins treated her like a dilettante. She made her way up the rock face with ease despite the slick moss. What a sight she was greeted with: miles away, across a waving green ocean of wind-swept forest canopy, a black monolith reached to the heavens; it's facade coursing with what appeared to be lightning in reverse. She stood stunned by the sight while her guides slowly made their way up.

"Magnificent! I have seen nothing like it! Who built that structure?" she asked.

The guides looked at each other. "What structure, Miss?"

"That obsidian tower, you fool," Nadyna shouted. "What else would I be speaking of?"

The guides looked far and wide, squinting and craning their necks. "I don't see it, Miss."

"It is right there! Are you blind, man! How could you not see it!" Nadyna was beside her self. "Is this some kind of jest?"

The guides looked at each other with eyes raised

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and concerned expressions. One of them offered his water skin to her. "You must be exhausted, Miss. Please, take my water."

The other guide nodded. "Yes. Maybe we should head back to the path and rest?"

Nadyna cocked her head, startled by their concern. She looked to the guides, then back to the monolith. It was still there. She rubbed her eyes. It was still there. She grabbed the water skin and drank it greedily. She looked to the monolith. It was still most certainly there.

"There is nothing that way for miles, Miss. Please, let us go back to the trail. It is almost dark."

/ROOT/.THE RISK EATERS/

THE RISK EATER'S DOGMA

"I protect nations and ensure a stable world. I battle adversaries that are serious threats to all peace- and justice-loving peoples. I am a silent, humble, unsung hero doing the hard work necessary to prevent unfathomable tragedy. The work I do is truly meaningful. I am part of something much greater than myself. I am a part of history."

"I am willing to do whatever it takes to fulfill our mission. This family is more important than my own. I sometimes do things that are unpleasant. I sometimes go to a dark place. But it takes a truly strong will and dedication to do the things I am willing to do. I am proud of the work I do, the work that must be done. I abhor the cowards who say otherwise."

"I wish evil was easy to detect, but it is not. I wish we could monitor a few and not all, but we cannot. I wish we could influence one directly instead of influencing that one indirectly through many, but we cannot. I wish the people could be trusted to make their own decisions, but they cannot."

"I wish our enemies would have never been born..."

"That, we can do."



THE FATHER OF SPACE AND TIME

Cablund was small and sunless, even by dwarven standards. He was quick with neither blade nor quip, but showed a strong affinity for clockwork. His peers quickly called him “Quartz Whisperer,” not as a compliment to his mechanical acumen, but as a comment on his social ineptitude. He had a short tenure as a cryptosystems architect at Bank of GraniteSpit Hall, but left in disgrace. Poor at cryptomancy and worse at people, his designs never passed the review board or made it into production. After a long sigh, his boss said, “Maybe you should stick with making clocks.” He was then asked to pack up his tools and never return.

The next few months were rough for Cablund. He made clockwork trinkets for the odd collector, but could not sell enough of them to support himself. He was forced to sell his tools for food. Too meek for miner’s work, he became a servant at a human noble’s estate. He was bad at this too and ultimately terminated from this job. The day this happened, he stood outside the estate and wept like a child while dozens of people passed him by.

A year later, a delirious Cablund stood in the busy town square clutching his abdomen, wondering if it would be possible to starve to death in front of this many people. He caught the gaze of an elven woman, the first mortal who had seemed to even notice him since he became a vagrant. When she called him by his name, he did not initially respond, because he had not heard it uttered once since his days as an architect. She then touched his face, which made him start and realize he was being addressed.

“I have been looking for you, Cablund. You are destined to change history... I just don’t know how, yet. Come with me, I have something to show you.”

He was led to one of the most finely equipped workshops he had ever seen. Glimmering tools, black shards, golem actuators, and piles of spare parts were every-

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where. Chains held up the husk of not one but three golems in various states of disrepair. He reached out to touch one of the husks, but quickly retracted his hand, remembering his station as a failed-servant and vagrant.

“It’s yours, Cablund. They all are. So is this entire workshop. I have a very important task for you. You will use this shard to request whatever parts you need. You have an infinite budget. However, if you speak to anyone but me about this, it will all be taken away.”

Cablund, overcome with emotion, asked her if he had actually starved to death and this was actually the afterlife. She briefly winced with pity and told him there was food in the larder.

It was the first time she had seen him since they met. It had taken Cablund eighteen months and nearly as many fortunes to solve the problem she gave him. Cablund looked animated and healthy, nearly bursting at the seams to explain to her what he had accomplished - a far cry from the destitute shell of a dwarf she originally met. The workshop was nearly empty save for a single golem quietly whirring and hissing. One of the golem’s actuators periodically scribbled something down in a tome.

“I see a single golem, Cablund. Where are the seven others you’ve built? The seven others we paid for?”

“I had them shipped to and installed in different cities, but I’ve been managing all of them from here. They are hidden, no one knows their true names except me, and their gear boxes are tamperpoof. They are only powered by wind or waterwheel, but they don’t need to do much.”

Cablund grabbed the tome out of the golem’s actuators. The golem made a pitiful attempt to hold onto the tome and shuttered with dejection once Cablund secured it. “Look at this,” he whispered, almost conspiratorially.

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She saw what appeared to be standard golem logs: a series of entries with time stamps, many of them at the same time or seconds apart. “This appears to be your golem’s logs,” she concluded. “It received one, two... seven messages at the same time, or almost, over a few seconds maybe. And it appears to be the same message, repeating.”

“That isn’t this golem’s logs; it is a single log entry from each of the other seven golems, all logging a single echo they all received at the same time, or so I thought.”

She shook her head. “I don’t understand.”

“These golems are configured to listen on the Shard-scape for a single keyphrase, known only by me. I have been using this keyphrase to send a single message on the Shard-scape, this message you see right here, encrypted with that keyphrase. All the golems log exactly when they get it, and then forward that log to this golem right here.”

“So the golems are getting the same message at different times? No, this has never been observed before. It is more likely you have their clock mechanisms misconfigured or maybe-”

Cablund interrupted her. “I thought that might be the case when I first tested this weeks ago. But that is not the case. Do you see these two log entries? They are at the same time. This golem is in Dorseford and that golem is in a windmill outside of Horsehead, both are maybe a 3 day walk from here, right? But this golem, it is off by 1 second. That golem is in Prantis, which is maybe 10 days by horseback, but 30 days on foot.”

“So some golems are faster than others?”

“No, they are the same speed. They were built to the exact same specifications. The real story here is that echoes that are the same speed. When an echo is sent from one shard to other shards, it arrives at shards physically closer to the source of that echo first, by an almost imperceptible but

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measurable amount of time.”

“That is a fascinating theory, Cablund, but what does it have to do with the task you were given? How does time allow us to trace kidnappers and terrorists communicating on the public Shardscape?”

“Don’t you see? There is only one place on the map that is 3 days from Dorseford, 3 days from Horsehead, and 30 days from Prantis. And that place is here! I sent the message from here! If I sent the message from Prantis, the times would be-”

She took a step back as if staggering from a punch. Her mind began racing, flooding with images of a triangle on a map, and the source of an echo in the center. She stammered for a second, gulped slowly, and said, “You’ve done it, Cablund. You’ve changed history. The engines were right.”

“I... it is just a proof of concept. I need to build more golems to expand the scope of-”

She wasn’t listening to him anymore. She thought of all the dwarven banks, noble houses, and elven industrial bases using golems... golems which her organization either had commandeered through deceit or coercion, or had physical access to. It might take years or even decades to orchestrate, but all of those golems would eventually form a geolocation net covering the entire world. She alternately grimaced and grinned, wide-eyed, her mind awash with images of renegades and holdouts against her order fleeing like rats from their burning hovels, shrieking on fire.

“So,” said Cablund, interrupting her reverie, “do you think we’ll be able to use this technique to find those children?”

“What children?”

“The children. The ones who were kidnapped. The whole reasons you put me up to this.”

“Oh, yes. The children. We’ll get them, too.”



/ROOT/.THE RISK EATERS/CD ..
/ROOT/CD BUILDING THE PARTY
/ROOT/BUILDING THE PARTY/LS

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BUILDING
THE PARTY

The diagram illustrates the layout of a safehouse with six rooms, each containing specific resources or functions:

- ALCHEMY LAB (2)**
 - + LIMITLESS SUPPLY OF TRIVIAL AND CHALLENGING REAGENTS
 - + ALCHEMY SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH
- CRYPTOADMIN (3)**
 - + A LOYAL CRYPTOADMIN: DISPATCHER, RESEARCHER, AND BRIDGE TO THE SHARDSCAPE
 - + ALLOWS DENIABLE CELLS
 - + REQUIRED BEFORE ACQUIRING A GOLEM
- DUNGEON (2)**
 - + SAFELY HOUSE CAPTIVES FOR INTERROGATION AND RANDOM
 - + SOCIAL SKILL CHECKS MADE AGAINST CAPTIVES OF THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH
- FORGE (2)**
 - + ALLOWS THE PRODUCTION OF
- GOLEM (4)**
 - + ALLOWS INSTANT QUERYING OF
- HEALER'S DEN (3)**
 - + REPLENISH ALL HP WHEN

LARGE, LONG-T
+ CRAFT SKILL
THE SAFEHOUSE

LIBRARY
+ ALLOWS A PL
OUT-OF-THE-BO
OR INSIGHT FR
+ QUERY SKILL
THE SAFEHOUSE

STABLE
+ SAFELY HOUS
THE PARTY'S M
+ BEAST KEN S
INVOLVING MOU
BOTCH

CELL

☐ CLOSE, 4

☐ DENIABLE

☐ CLOSE, 4

☐ DENIABLE

CAMP

RISK

THRE

NUISANCE
DISRUPTION
DESTABILIZING
EXISTENTIAL

CAVAT


APPEARANCE QUALITIES	
BUILD	
EYES	
HAIR	
SKIN	

PERSONALITY QUALITIES	
DESIRES	
FEARS	
TENDS TO	
USED TO	

[illegible]


COMMON NAME	
TRUE NAME	
SEX, AGE, RACE	
THE PARTY	

WITS



TAKE COVER
VS MISSILE

RESOLVE




RESIST
VS MAGIC

KNOWLEDGE		CUNNING	
ALCHEMY	△	DECEPTION	△
CRAFT	△	SCROUNGE	△
MEDICINE	△	TRACKING	△
QUERY	△	TRAPS	△

PRESENCE		WILLPOWER	
BEAST KEN	△	MANA POINTS	○○○○
CHARM	△		○○○○
MENACE	△		○○○○
PERFORMANCE	△		○○○○


SPEED



DODGE
VS MELEE
VS MISSILE
+ 1 DAMAGE

AGILITY	DEXTERITY
ACROBATICS ▲	FIRE MISSILE ▲
ATHLETICS ▲	LOCK PICKING ▲
ESCAPE ARTISTRY ▲	PRECISE MELEE ▲
STEALTH ▲	SLEIGHT OF HAND ▲

POWER



PARRY
VS MELEE

STRENGTH	ENDURANCE
BRUTE MELEE ▲	HEALTH POINTS
FEAT OF STRENGTH ▲	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div>○○○○○</div> <div>○○○○○</div> </div>
THROWN MISSILE▲	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div>○○○○○</div> <div>○○○○○</div> </div>
UNARMED MELEE ▲	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div>○○○○○</div> <div>○○○○○</div> </div>

<input type="radio"/> CRITICAL WOUND / WEAK POISON -1 HP IF MOVE AND ACT	<input type="radio"/> MORTAL WOUND / STRONG POISON -1 HP PER TURN
---	--

TRADEMARK	WEAPON:
RULES	
QUALITIES	

TRADEMARK OUTFIT:	
RULES	
QUALITIES	

[illegible]

CRYPTOMANCER

3

DUNGEON
 + SAFELY HOU
 INTERROGATIO
 + SOCIAL SKI
 AGAINST CAPT
 SAFEHOUSE 1G

4

HEALER'S
 + REPLENISH

COMMON NAME

TRUE NAME

SEX, AGE, RACE

THE PARTY

WITS

KNOWLEDGE ☐ CUNNING ☐
 ALCHEMY ☐ DECEP
 CRAFT ☐ SCROL
 MEDICINE ☐ TRACK
 QUERY ☐ TRAPS

SPEED

AGILITY ☐ DEX
 ACROBATICS ☐ FIRED
 ATHLETICS ☐ LOCK
 ESCAPE ARTISTRY ☐ PRECI
 STEALTH ☐ SLEIG

CRITICAL WOUND / W

-1 HP IF MOVE AN

TRADEMARK WEAPON

RULES

QUALITIES

TRADEMARK OUTFIT

RULES

QUALITIES

EQUIPM

/ROOT/BUILDING THE PARTY/

OVERVIEW

Cryptomancer uses two types of sheets to organize play: a character sheet (one for each player) and a party sheet (one for the table). You can find full-sized printable copies of both of these sheets in the back of this book as well as printable versions available for download on our website.

/ROOT/BUILDING THE PARTY/

CHARACTER SHEET

COMMON NAME

TRUE NAME

SEX, AGE, RACE

THE PARTY

WITS

KNOWLEDGE ☐ CUNNING ☐
 ALCHEMY ☐ DECEPTION ☐
 CRAFT ☐ SCROUNGE ☐
 MEDICINE ☐ TRACKING ☐
 QUERY ☐ TRAPS ☐

RESOLVE

WILLPOWER ☐ WILLPOWER ☐
 BEAST KEN ☐ MANA POINTS ☐
 CHARM ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 MENACE ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 PERFORMANCE ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SPEED

AGILITY ☐ DEXTERITY ☐
 ACROBATICS ☐ FIRED MISSILE ☐
 ATHLETICS ☐ LOCK PICKING ☐
 ESCAPE ARTISTRY ☐ PRECISE MELEE ☐
 STEALTH ☐ SLEIGHT OF HAND ☐

POWER

STRENGTH ☐ ENDURANCE ☐
 BRUTE MELEE ☐ HIT POINTS ☐
 FEAT OF STRENGTH ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 THROWN MISSILE ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 UNARMED MELEE ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

APPEARANCE QUALITIES

BUILD
 EYES
 HAIR
 SKIN

PERSONALITY QUALITIES

DESIRES
 FEARS
 TENDS TO
 USED TO

TALENTS & SPELLS

TRADEMARK WEAPON:

RULES

QUALITIES

TRADEMARK OUTFIT:

RULES

QUALITIES

EQUIPMENT, CONSUMABLES, AND LOOT

CRITICAL WOUND / WEAK POISON

-1 HP IF MOVE AND ACT

PORTAL WOUND / STRONG POISON

-1 HP PER TURN

-- MORE --

The concept of character sheets is pretty universal across the tabletop RPG genre. Each character sheet is a place where each player documents virtually everything about the character she will be playing, whether its specific game rules, neat items, health status, and interesting descriptions that make her character truly unique.

Creating a character, something each player needs to do before gameplay actually begins, is the process of transcribing an idea onto a character sheet in a manner that conforms to this game's rules and internal logic. While we will be introducing how to build a character in this chapter, actually building a character requires, at a minimum, a basic understanding of the game's core mechanics as well as access to the full text (so that the player can choose the talents, spells, and equipment that she wants her character to have). While it is generally the GM's duty to guide her players through the character-building process, there is also a full party of pre-generated characters included in the back of this book to show what completed character sheets look like as well as provide ready-to-play characters.

ENTS

30	DUNGEON + SAFELY HOUSE INTERROGATION + SOCIAL SKILL AGAINST CAPT SAFEHOUSE IG
40	HEALER'S + REPLENISH

COMMON NAME	
TRUE NAME	
SEX, AGE, RACE	
THE PARTY	

WITS	
KNOWLEDGE	△ DECEIT
ALCHEMY	△ SCROLL
CRAFT	△ TRACK
MEDICINE	△ TRAPS
QUERY	

SPEED	
AGILITY	DEXTERITY
ACROBATICS	△ FIRED
ATHLETICS	△ LOCK
ESCAPE ARTISTRY	△ PRECISION
STEALTH	△ SLEIGHT

○ CRITICAL WOUND / W
-1 HP IF MOVE AN

TRADEMARK WEAPON
RULES
QUALITIES

TRADEMARK OUTFIT
RULES
QUALITIES

EQUIPMENT

PARTY SHEET

3

DUNGEON

+ SAFELY HOUSE INTERROGATION

+ SOCIAL SKILL AGAINST CAPT SAFEHOUSE IG

4

HEALER'S

+ REPLENISH

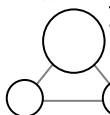
COMMON NAME

TRUE NAME

SEX, AGE, RACE

THE PARTY

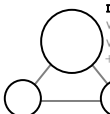
WITS



KNOWLEDGE

- ALCHEMY ☐ DECEF
- CRAFT ☐ SCROL
- MEDICINE ☐ TRACK
- QUERY ☐ TRAPS

SPEED



AGILITY

- ACROBATICS ☐ FIRED
- ATHLETICS ☐ LOCK
- ESCAPE ARTISTRY ☐ PRECI
- STEALTH ☐ SLEIG

☐ CRITICAL WOUND / W

-1 HP IF MOVE AN

TRADEMARK WEAPON

RULES

QUALITIES

TRADEMARK OUTFIT

RULES

QUALITIES

EQUIPM

SAFEHOUSE IMPROVEMENTS

ALCHEMY LAB

2

+ LIMITLESS SUPPLY OF TRIVIAL AND CHALLENGING REAGENTS

+ ALCHEMY SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

CRYPTOADMIN

3

+ A LOYAL CRYPTOADMIN: DISPATCHER, RESEARCHER, AND BRIDGE TO THE SHARDSCAPE

+ ALLONS DENTABLE CELLS

+ REQUIRED BEFORE ACQUIRING A GOLEM

DUNGEON

2

+ SAFELY HOUSE CAPTIVES FOR INTERROGATION AND RANDOM

+ SOCIAL SKILL CHECKS MADE AGAINST CAPTIVES OF THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

FORGE

2

+ ALLONS THE PRODUCTION OF LARGE, LONG-TERM PROJECTS

+ CRAFT SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

GOLEM

4

+ ALLONS INSTANT QUERYING OF THE SHARDSCAPE

+ ALLONS PRIVATE SHARDNETS TO CONNECT WITHOUT BRIDGING

HEALER'S DEN

3

+ REPLENISH ALL HP WHEN RESTING IN THE SAFEHOUSE

+ MEDICINE SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

LIBRARY

2

+ ALLONS A PLAYER TO GAIN AN OUT-OF-THE-BOX INSPIRATION OR INSIGHT FROM THE GM

+ QUERY SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

LOUNGE

2

+ SAFELY HOST AND ENTERTAIN DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

+ SOCIAL SKILL CHECKS MADE AGAINST GUESTS OF THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

RITUAL CHAMBER

3

+ REPLENISH ALL MP WHEN MEDITATING IN THE SAFEHOUSE

+ WILLPOWER SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

STABLE

3

+ SAFELY HOUSE AND SUPPORT THE PARTY'S MOUNTS

+ BEAST KEN SKILL CHECKS INVOLVING MOUNTS IGNORE 1 BOTCH

TRAINING ROOM

3

+ ALLONS A PLAYER TO TRAIN A SINGLE PHYSICAL SKILL, BANKING A SINGLE FREE RE-ROLL ON THAT SKILL, LASTING UNTIL THE RE-ROLL IS USED OR ANOTHER SKILL IS TRAINED.

TRANSFER

2

+ A ONE-TIME TRANSFER OF ALL SAFEHOUSE IMPROVEMENTS FROM ONE LOCATION TO ANOTHER

CELLS

☐ CLOSE, 4 SKILL DIE

☐ DENIABLE, 2 SKILL DIE

☐ CLOSE, 4 SKILL DIE

☐ DENIABLE, 2 SKILL DIE

☐ CLOSE, 4 SKILL DIE

☐ DENIABLE, 2 SKILL DIE

CAMPAIGN TOTALS

RISK

STRATEGIC ASSETS

TALENT POINTS

ATTRIBUTE POINTS

THREAT LEVEL

☐ NUISANCE

☐ DISRUPTION

☐ DESTABILIZER

☐ EXISTENTIAL THREAT

MOUNTS

CRYPTOMANCER

The party sheet concept is a little less common in gaming. A party sheet helps track things not specific to a single character, but instead tracks things that are important to the campaign. The party sheet in Cryptomancer has two functions. First, it is a place to document all the shared resources of the party: improvements made to their safe house, the allied cells they command, and even their steeds. Second, it tracks the progress (or rather, the death spiral) of the

--MORE--

campaign in progress. It doesn't matter who at the table fills out or manages the party sheet, but it's important to have the party sheet centrally located and accessible so everyone at the table can view it to understand exactly what resources are available to the party and how the campaign is progressing.

We will be introducing the party sheet much later in the game rules, after we have covered how to make a character and all the rules that govern how player characters interact with the world of Cryptomancer. What is important to know right now is that a party sheet is mostly blank at the beginning of a campaign. It becomes more interesting as a campaign progresses, strategic resources are acquired, and bad news starts to pile up.

/ROOT/BUILDING THE PARTY/

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

Creating a player character for this game is pretty simple once the rules are generally understood. We're going to describe the process at a high level with the expectation that the reader will likely circle back to this section once the remainder of the book is digested. So here are the basic steps to creating a player character:

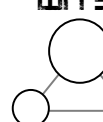
- Chose the character's common name, true name, race (e.g. elf, dwarf, or human), sex, and age.
- Assign appearance and personality qualities, both of which are optional (but fun).
- Assign core ranks.
- Assign attribute ranks and calculate HP and MP.
- Spend 10 Talent Points total, split between talents and spells any way you want.

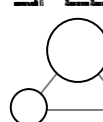
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EVENTS

30	DUNGEON + SAFELY HOUSE INTERROGATION + SOCIAL SKILL AGAINST CAPT SAFEHOUSE IG
40	HEALER'S + REPLENISH

COMMON NAME	
TRUE NAME	
SEX, AGE, RACE	
THE PARTY	

WITS	
	
KNOWLEDGE	C
ALCHEMY	△ DECEP
CRAFT	△ SCROL
MEDICINE	△ TRACK
QUERY	△ TRAPS

SPEED	
	
AGILITY	DEX
ACROBATICS	△ FIRED
ATHLETICS	△ LOCK
ESCAPE ARTISTRY	△ PRECI
STEALTH	△ SLEIGH

○ CRITICAL WOUND / W
-1 HP IF MOVE AN

TRADEMARK WEAPON
RULES
QUALITIES

TRADEMARK OUTFIT
RULES
QUALITIES

EQUIPMENT

ENTS

3

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DUNGEON
 + SAFELY HOU
 INTERROGATIO
 + SOCIAL SKI
 AGAINST CAPT
 SAFEHOUSE IG

4

HEALER'S
 + REPLENISH

COMMON NAME

TRUE NAME

SEX, AGE, RACE

THE PARTY

WITS

KNOWLEDGE ☐ CI
 ALCHEMY ☐ DECEP
 CRAFT ☐ SCROL
 MEDICINE ☐ TRACK
 QUERY ☐ TRAPS

SPEED

AGILITY ☐ DE
 ACROBATICS ☐ FIRED
 ATHLETICS ☐ LOCK
 ESCAPE ARTISTRY ☐ PRECI
 STEALTH ☐ SLEIG

☐ CRITICAL WOUND / W
 -1 HP IF MOVE AN

TRADEMARK WEAPON

RULES

QUALITIES

TRADEMARK OUTFIT

RULES

QUALITIES

EQUIPM

- Pick and define a trademark weapon and outfit (any one you want, really!). But nothing “masterwork.”
- Pick a “reasonable” amount of equipment (whatever you want, as much as can reasonably fit on your character’s person while they are on the run).

That’s pretty much it. While we’re on the topic though, here are some design decisions we made regarding character creation as well as a little advice.

Player characters can be humans, elves, or dwarves. However, there are absolutely no mechanical differences between the races. We know, it feels wrong. However, we don’t want players to get wrapped up in “optimal builds” or limit their creativity in any way. Play whatever race you want, how you want. Your dwarf can be a surly, bearded, axe-wielding mead-swiller, or a charming, beardless, dagger-wielding dilettante. We support both ideas and everything in between. You’ll eventually come to discover that any player character can learn and cast spells. Don’t worry about conforming to the tropes associated with mages and wizards (unless you want to). If you want to augment your warrior’s skillset by giving her the ability to read minds, that’s cool with us. Build around a fun idea and a unique skill set. Only conform to genre conventions if it really makes you feel good about your character.

The monetary value of most items, including weapons and armor, is listed throughout the rules, but that is for the purposes of player characters buying, stealing, pawning, and fencing stuff during gameplay. During character creation, pretend money doesn’t exist. However, keep in mind, at the beginning of play, player characters are on the run from the Risk Eaters and have abandoned most of their possessions. GMs have the right to veto inventory choices that really conflict with this idea.

While Cryptomancer is a tried-and-true fantasy game, it is also informed heavily by ideas from different genres including heist movies, spy thrillers, police dramas,

- - MORE - -

science fiction, and historical non-fiction, not to mention our own experiences with information security. So don't feel you need to limit your character idea to fantasy conventions, unless that's exactly what you want to play. Instead, play the character you want to play and just dress it up in medieval fantasy trappings if necessary.

Lastly, don't feel pressured to build a character that fills gamer-invented roles (e.g. "We need a tank, a healer, and some DPS!"). Despite its traditionalist approach, Cryptomancer wasn't designed as an obstacle course for the perfectly balanced party of dungeon crawlers. It was designed as a fantasy playground where the hacker mindset prevails.

That's a lot of freedom we're throwing at you. We do insist, however, that your character be totally cool. That is pretty much non-negotiable.

/ROOT/BUILDING THE PARTY/

APPEARANCE AND PERSONALITY QUALITIES

APPEARANCE QUALITIES	
BUILD	
EYES	
HAIR	
SKIN	

PERSONALITY QUALITIES	
DESIRES	
FEARS	
TENDS TO	
USED TO	

To continue the discussion of creating interesting and memorable characters, we refer players to *appearance* and *personality qualities* before we start diving into the game mechanics in the next chapter.

Appearance and personality qualities are keywords

- - MORE - -

ENTS

30	DUNGEON + SAFELY HOU INTERROGATION + SOCIAL SKI AGAINST CAPT SAFEHOUSE IG
40	HEALER'S + REPLENISH

COMMON NAME	
TRUE NAME	
SEX, AGE, RACE	
THE PARTY	

WITS	
KNOWLEDGE	△ DECEP
ALCHEMY	△ SCROL
CRAFT	△ TRACK
MEDICINE	△ TRAPS
QUERY	

SPEED	
AGILITY	DEX
ACROBATICS	△ FIRED
ATHLETICS	△ LOCK
ESCAPE ARTISTRY	△ PRECI
STEALTH	△ SLEIGH

○ CRITICAL WOUND / W
-1 HP IF MOVE AN

TRADEMARK WEAPON
RULES
QUALITIES

TRADEMARK OUTFIT
RULES
QUALITIES

EQUIPM

ENTS

3

DUNGEON
 + SAFETY HOU
 INTERROGATIO
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4

HEALER'S
 + REPLENISH

COMMON NAME

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SEX, AGE, RACE

THE PARTY

WITS

KNOWLEDGE
 ALCHEMY △ DECEP
 CRAFT △ SCROL
 MEDICINE △ TRACK
 QUERY △ TRAPS

SPEED

AGILITY
 ACROBATICS △ FIRED
 ATHLETICS △ LOCK
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 STEALTH △ SLEIGH

☐ CRITICAL WOUND / W
 -1 HP IF MOVE AN

TRADEMARK WEAPON

RULES

QUALITIES

TRADEMARK OUTFIT

RULES

QUALITIES

EQUIPM

that help players and GMs visualize and explain the individuality of their characters. We take our queue from the game *Dungeon World* and provide categories of qualities and then examples of qualities to make it extremely easy for players to simply select qualities and get gaming. Players are encouraged to go through each category of appearance and personality qualities and pick (or invent) one or more qualities that define their character. These keywords have no influence on the game's rules. They are strictly a narrative device that add life to characters. It's perfectly fine to leave these qualities blank, too. Lastly, none of these values need to be permanent: story events and/or player fiat may cause them to change.

Why did we pre-empt character game rules with an entirely optional set of character qualities with absolutely no mechanical significance to the game? We did it because we found this simple exercise to be the most powerful way of developing a truly interesting and unique character. It makes it easy for players to develop a mental construct of the character they are trying to build. Once this construct is established, it can serve as an anchor for the aspiring character builder who might otherwise be distracted or overwhelmed by the many mechanical options that will be presented throughout the rest of the book.

Below are two examples of characters quickly thrown together by selecting a handful of appearance and personality qualities. Qualities make it really easy to create characters with a distinctive look, demeanor, back-story, and baggage. Have fun with it!

APPEARANCE QUALITIES	
BUILD	PETITE
EYES	BLUE, LAZY-EYED
HAIR	BLONDE, BRAIDHAWK
SKIN	FAIR, FRECKLED

PERSONALITY QUALITIES	
DESIRES	WEALTH, A QUIET LIFE
FEARS	BETRAYAL
TENDS TO	WAKE UP SCREAMING
USED TO	BE DIRTY POOR

APPEARANCE QUALITIES	
BUILD	BROAD-SHOULDERED, STATUESQUE
EYES	GREEN, PIERCING
HAIR	SHAVED
SKIN	DARK, DUSTY

PERSONALITY QUALITIES	
DESIRES	MEN, JUSTICE
FEARS	CONFINEMENT
TENDS TO	LOSE HIS TEMPER
USED TO	HAVE A PARTNER

SQL>SELECT * FROM

APPEARANCE QUALITIES

Category	Examples
Hair	Bald, shaved, short, blonde, brunette, black, red, tonsure, spiky, wild, shellacked, straight, enormous mane, wavy, pony tail, braids, dreads, curly, messy, chin-length, shoulder-length, long, mohawk, half-hawk, beaded, coiled, braid-hawk, flat-top.
Eyes	Determined, brooding, deadpan, weary, bulging, fiery, wild, piercing, hypnotic, blue, brown, green, black, white, sunken, squinty, shifty, bruised, baggy, lazy-eyed, eye-patched, bloodshot, bulging, baggy, cat eyes, wide-eyed, lizard eyes, doe-eyed.
Build	Built, lithe, average, athletic, frail, bloated, gaunt, sinewy, statuesque, petite, scrawny, stocky, barrel-chested, broad-shouldered, buxom, hunch-backed, bullnecked, husky, paunchy, massive, towering, gigantic, short, diminutive, unremarkable.
Skin	Tanned, scarred, hairy, glistening, tattooed, painted, pierced, pale, fair, dark, blue, green, copper, silver, gold, scaly, veiny, weathered, silky, dirty, delicate, freckled, leathery, smooth, dusty, droopy, spotted, sweaty, scabby, shiny, taut.

SQL>SELECT * FROM

PERSONALITY QUALITIES

Category	Examples
Desires	Wealth, renown, power, experience, inner peace, forbidden lore, justice, revenge, men, women, an heir, a soul mate, a family, a glorious death, a quiet life, pleasure, competition, order, anarchy, lichdom, godhood, soma, helping the needy, healing the sick, crushing the weak, inflicting pain, spreading the faith, domination.
Fears	Dwarves, elves, humans, orcs, gnolls, giant vermin, zombies, cities, forests, caves, magic, the dark, clergy, nobility, peasants, crowds, confinement, torture, fire, ghosts, darkness, dirt, alchemy, addiction, bandits, blood, rivals, water, heights, the afterlife, losing control, revelation, betrayal, failure, obscurity, poverty, disease, old age.
Tends to	Curse, flirt, brood, lie, threaten, steal, lose one's temper, fall in love, forget, hoard, stare, avoid eye contact, drink too much, butcher names, apologize for everything, mutter under breath, mumble, judge, hog glory, talk to animals, dress inappropriately, quote proverbs, resort to violence, be clumsy, wake up screaming, trust everyone.
Used to	Be a cultist/cleric, be a soldier/mercenary, be a spy/scout, be wealthy/dirt poor, be a criminal/constable, be a hero/coward, live in forest/cave, have a partner/rival, have a business/title, be a dealer/addict, serve a different house, be someone/something else.

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DUNGEON
+ SAFELY HOU
INTERROGATION
+ SOCIAL SKI
AGAINST CAPT
SAFEHOUSE IG

40
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HEALER'S
+ REPLENISH

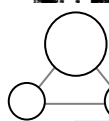
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TRUE NAME

SEX, AGE, RACE

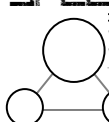
THE PARTY

WITS



KNOWLEDGE
ALCHEMY △ DECEP
CRAFT △ SCROL
MEDICINE △ TRACK
QUERY △ TRAPS

SPEED



AGILITY
ACROBATICS △ FIRED
ATHLETICS △ LOCK
ESCAPE ARTISTRY △ PRECI
STEALTH △ SLEIGH

○ CRITICAL WOUND / W
-1 HP IF MOVE AN

TRADEMARK WEAPON

RULES

QUALITIES

TRADEMARK OUTFIT

RULES

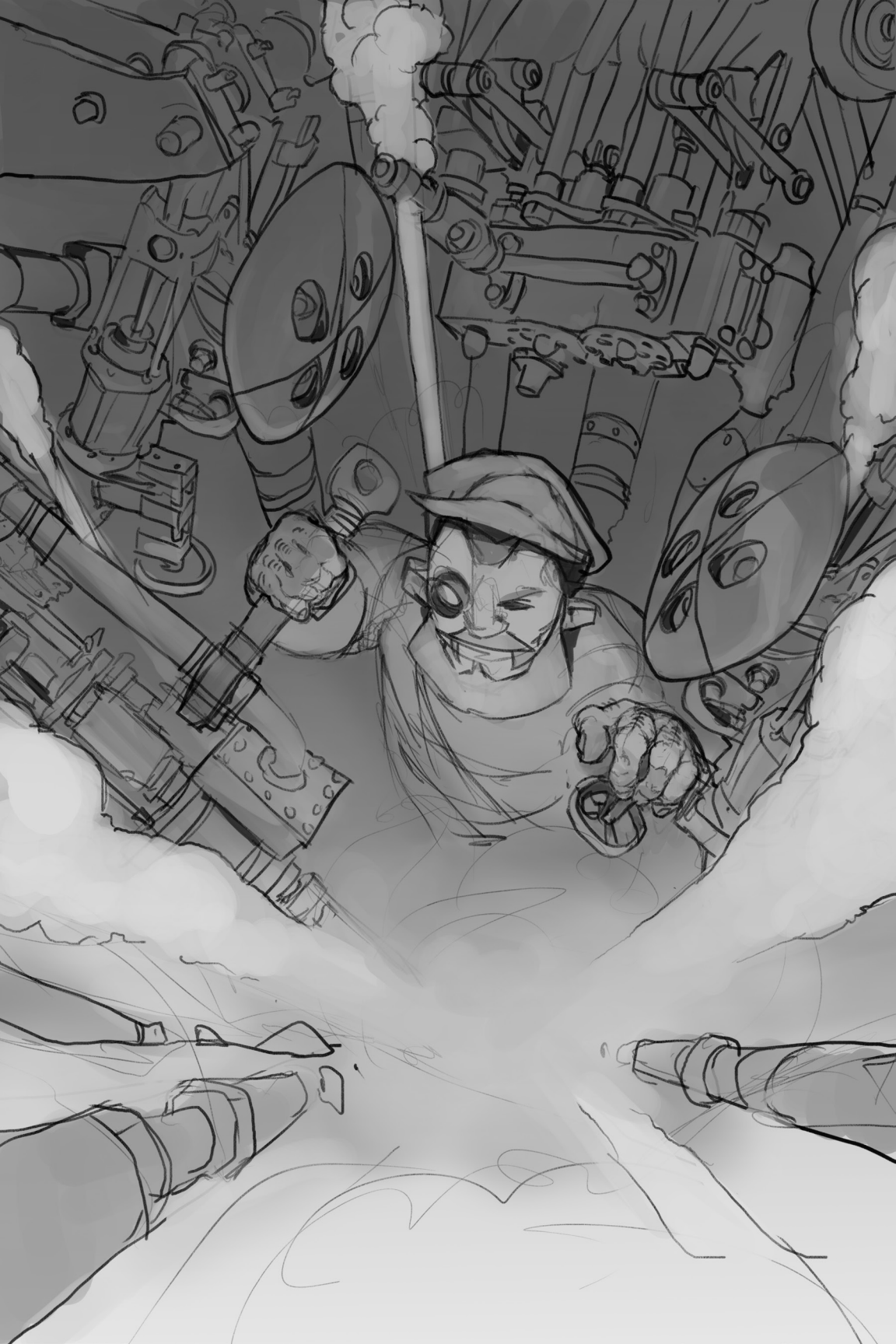
QUALITIES

EQUIPM

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/ROOT/BUILDING THE PARTY/CD ..  
/ROOT/CD CORE MECHANICS  
/ROOT/CORE MECHANICS/LS
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CORE MECHANICS



THE CORE

WITS



RESOLVE



SPEED



POWER



A character's core is a snapshot of her collective strengths and weaknesses. It is also a measure of her ability to resist forces that would do her harm: detecting lies, parrying blows, resisting spells, dodging attacks, etc. A character's core is broken up into quadrants labeled *Power*, *Speed*, *Resolve*, and *Wits*. Each of these quadrants are ranked with the descriptors *trivial*, *challenging*, or *tough*. The rank of trivial denotes that a character is particularly weak, inexperienced, and vulnerable in this area. The rank of challenging denotes that a character is neither weak nor strong in this area. The rank of tough denotes that a character is particularly strong, experienced, and resilient in this area. The individual quadrants are defined below.

Power

Power represents a character's overall level of physical strength and endurance. Characters with trivial Power are fragile and unable to withstand or deliver much physical punishment. Characters with tough Power are extremely resilient and wield considerable physical strength. Characters with challenging Power are somewhere in between.

When determining how to rank a character's Power, use the descriptors trivial, challenging, or tough to complete

-- MORE --

the following sentences:

- It is _____ to overpower this character.
- It is _____ to pierce this character's defenses.
- It is _____ to kill this character.

Speed

Speed represents a character's overall level of physical agility and dexterity. Characters with trivial Speed are clumsy and predictable in their movements. Characters with tough Speed are very agile and have cat-like reflexes. Characters with challenging Speed are somewhere in between.

When determining how to rank a character's Speed, use the descriptors trivial, challenging, or tough to complete the following sentences:

- It is _____ to catch this character.
- It is _____ to keep this character caged.
- It is _____ to strike this character.

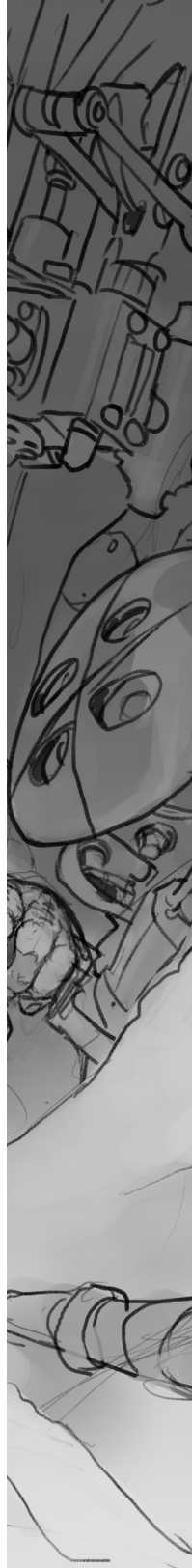
Resolve

Resolve represents a character's overall level of spirit and courage. Characters with trivial Resolve are easily frightened and persuaded, and have little aptitude for things magical. Characters with tough Resolve are unflappable in the face of duress and have the capacity to be powerful magic users. Characters with challenging Resolve are somewhere in between.

When determining how to rank a character's Resolve, use the descriptors trivial, challenging, or tough to complete the following sentences:

- It is _____ to frighten this character.
- It is _____ to cast spells on this character.
- It is _____ to impress this character.

-- MORE --



Wits

Wits represents a character's overall level of intelligence and cleverness. Characters with trivial Wits are oblivious to their surroundings and intellectually incurious. Characters with tough Wits are extremely intelligent and almost preternaturally aware. Characters with challenging Wits are somewhere in between.

When determining how to rank a character's Wits, use the descriptors trivial, challenging, or tough to complete the following sentences:

It is _____ to sneak up on this character.

It is _____ to trick this character.

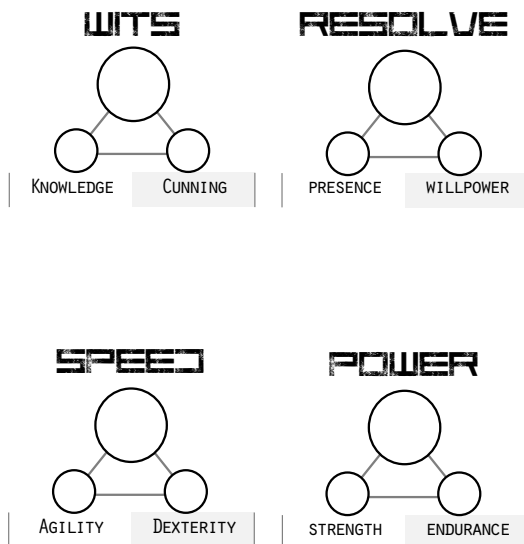
It is _____ to outsmart this character.

All new player characters begin with all four quadrants ranked as challenging. In order to upgrade one to tough, you must also downgrade another to trivial. To make gains in one area, one must sacrifice from another area. This will be the most influential decision in the formation of a new character, at least in terms of game mechanics, and should not be made lightly. Once it has been determined how the quadrants will be ranked, write down 4 for quadrants ranked as trivial, 6 for quadrants ranked as challenging, and 8 for quadrants ranked as tough. We'll call these values core ranks. The reason for this numeric abstraction will become clear as players learn more about this game's dice mechanics.

Below are a couple examples of possible core rank distributions:

WITS	RESOLVE		WITS	RESOLVE
(4)	(6)		(8)	(4)
SPEED	POWER		SPEED	POWER
(6)	(8)		(8)	(4)

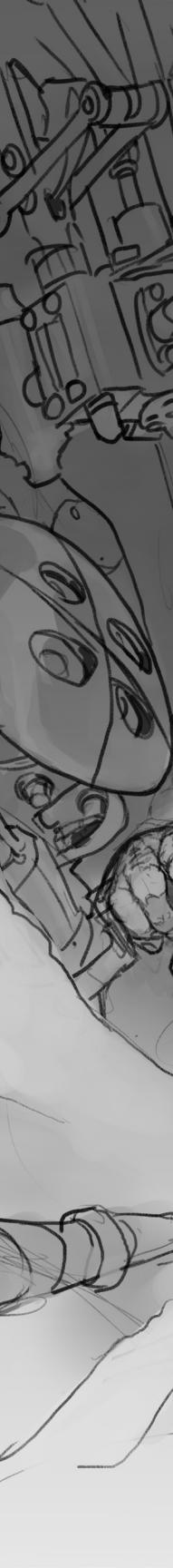
ATTRIBUTES



Whereas core ranks define a character's ability to resist the world, attributes define a character's ability to influence the world. There are 8 attributes which are derived from a character's core quadrants: *Strength* and *Endurance* (derived from Power), *Agility* and *Dexterity* (derived from Speed), *Presence* and *Willpower* (derived from Resolve), and *Knowledge* and *Cunning* (derived from Wits). Attributes define a character's skill, experience, and level of potential in different types of activities. Attributes are ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing a weakness or handicap with 5 representing maturity and mastery. We'll call this value an attribute's rank.

6 of the 8 attributes regulate a domain of skills. For example, the attribute *Agility* regulates the skills *Acrobatics*, *Athletics*, *Escape Artistry*, and *Stealth*. Players wishing to build a character that exceeds in these skills would be wise to give *Agility* a high rank. We'll dive deeper into skills later, but just understand the basic concept for now.

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Some attributes have additional mechanical properties that are described later in this game's rules, but are hinted at in the descriptions below.

Strength

Strength is derived from a character's Power rank. Strength represents one's ability to push, pull, lift, smash, and crush things. A character with a Strength of 5 is muscular while a character with a Strength of 1 is frail. Strength regulates the following skills: Brute Melee, Feat of Strength, Thrown Missile, and Unarmed Melee.

Endurance

Endurance is derived from a character's Power rank. Endurance represents one's ability to withstand punishment and stay in the fight despite injury. A character with an Endurance of 5 is healthy and vibrant while a character with an Endurance of 1 is sickly and pale. Endurance determines the number of Health Points (HP) a character has, which is a measure how many injuries a character can sustain before becoming incapacitated or dying. Endurance also determines how much armor a character can pile on before slowing down.

Agility

Agility is derived from a character's Speed rank. Agility represents a character's flexibility, quickness, and general athleticism. A character with an Agility of 5 is toned and fit while a character with an Agility of 1 is flaccid or bulky. Agility regulates the following skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Escape Artistry, and Stealth.

Dexterity

Dexterity is derived from a character's Speed rank. Dexterity represents a character's reflexes and hand-eye coordination. A character with a Dexterity of 5 is graceful while a character with a Dexterity of 1 is clumsy. Dexterity

-- MORE --

regulates the following skills: Fired Missile, Lock Picking, Precise Melee, and Sleight of Hand.

Presence

Presence is derived from a character's Resolve rank. Presence represents a character's force of personality, physical appearance, and demeanor. A character with a Presence of 5 is captivating while a character with a Presence of 1 is entirely forgettable if not downright ugly. Presence regulates the following skills: Beast Ken, Charm, Menace, and Performance.

Willpower

Willpower is derived from a character's Resolve rank. Willpower represents a character's ability to cast spells and demonstrate courage. A character with a Willpower of 5 exudes eldritch power and confidence while a character with a Willpower of 1 seems utterly mundane and cowardly. Willpower determines the number of Mana Points (MP) a character has, which is a measure of how many spells a character can cast before exhausting her abilities.

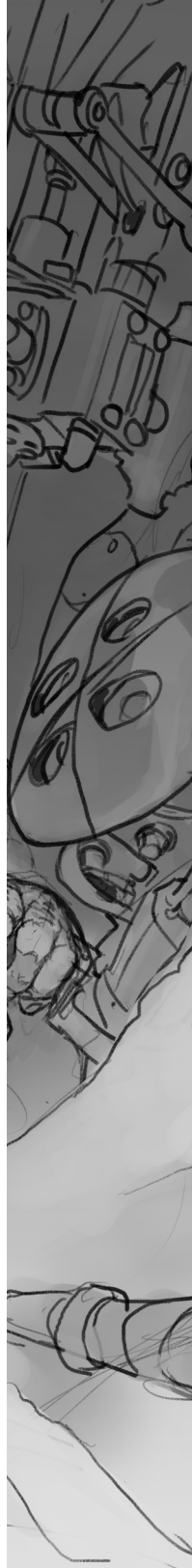
Knowledge

Knowledge is derived from a character's Wits rank. Knowledge represents a character's raw intellectual power and the ability to retain and recall information. A character with a Knowledge of 5 is erudite and learned while a character with a Knowledge of 1 seems barbaric and simple. Knowledge regulates the following skills: Alchemy, Craft, Medicine, and Query.

Cunning

Cunning is derived from a character's Wits rank. Cunning represents a character's ability to solve problems and outsmart others. A character with a Cunning of 5 is wry and devious while a character with a Cunning of 1 is gullible and naive. Cunning regulates the following skills:

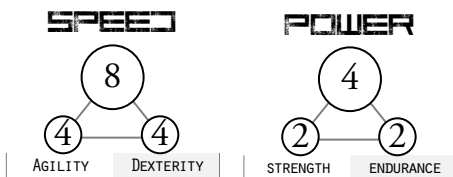
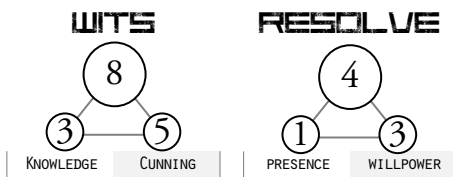
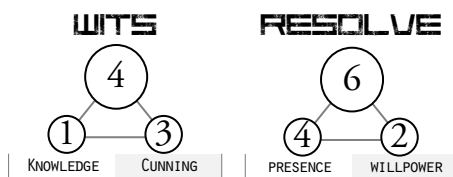
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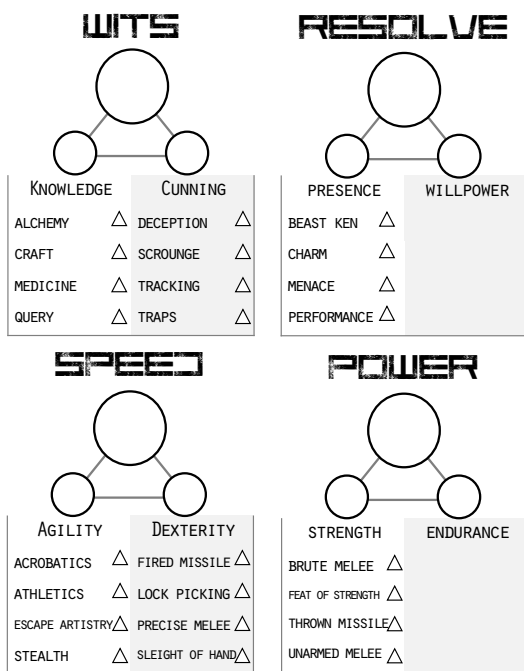
Deception, Scrounge, Tracking, and Traps.

The number of points a new player characters has to distribute among his/her attributes is equal to the core rank from which the attributes are derived. For example, Power ranked at 6 means that a player has 6 points to distribute between the derived attributes Strength and Endurance.

Below are a couple examples of attribute rank distribution. Remember, attributes are ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, and the sum of these numbers must be equal to the core rank from which they are derived.



SKILLS OVERVIEW

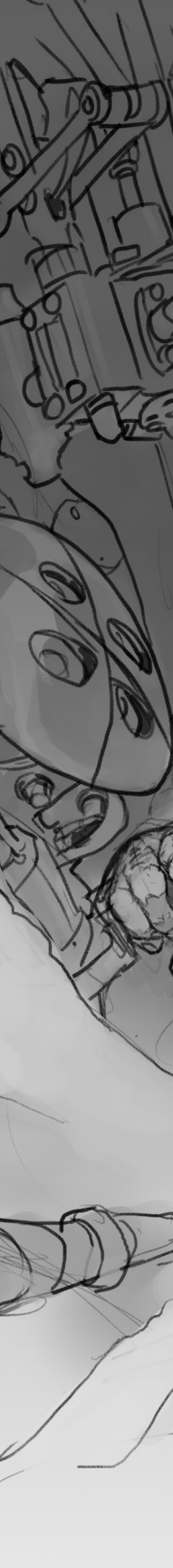


Skills are knowledge and training that a character has developed during her lifetime. They make a character unique: really good at some things and really bad at other things. A *skill check* is a dice roll that determines if a character's use of a skill is successful or not, and to what degree.

When should a player or GM make a skill check? If the outcome of a character's action matters to the story (e.g. will she escape in time?), or if a character's action is contested by another character or creature (e.g. will the guard believe the lie he was just told?), chances are good that a player (or GM) should make a skill check.

Players and GMs will organically determine the frequency at which skill checks are made during a game session, as well as organically determine who declares a skill check ought to be made. Sometimes the GM will ask players to make a skill check and sometimes players will want to

-- MORE --



make a skill check. If it's fun and feels right, go with it. If skill checks are slowing down the story, ease off on them for a bit.

As was discussed in the previous section, each attribute regulates a domain of skills. The higher an attribute rank is, the better a character is at those skills regulated by that attribute. For example, a character with a Strength of 5 is very good at the following skills: Brute Melee, Feat of Strength, Thrown Missile, and Unarmed Melee. However, the outcome of skill checks are not determined by the attribute alone: sometimes other actors or environmental factors (like gravity) will impede a character's progress. These forces determine a skill check's *difficulty*.

Difficulty is an abstraction used to describe how hard it is for a task to be accomplished and accomplished well. The difficulty of a task (and thus, a skill check) can be trivial, challenging, or tough. A trivial task is one in which most characters succeed most of the time. A challenging task is one in which half succeed and half fail most of the time. A tough task is one in which most characters fail most of the time. On a d10, think of a result of 4 or higher, or "4+," as what it takes to succeed at a trivial skill check. For a challenging skill check, 6+ is required. For a tough skill check, 8+ is required.

/ROOT/CORE MECHANICS/

SKILL CHECKS

Attribute ranks determine what dice are rolled for a skill check, while difficulty determines the outcome of that dice roll. We'll start with determining which dice are rolled during a skill check. Every time a skill check is made, 5 dice are rolled, no matter what the attribute rank is or what the difficulty is. 5 dice every time. But what 5 dice? When making skill checks, a player rolls a number of d10's equal to the attribute rank. For example, if a character picking a lock has a Dexterity rank of 3, her player would roll 3d10. We'll go ahead and call these dice *attribute dice*.

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However, in this case, that only leaves us with 3 dice rolled. How do we arrive at 5 dice? We fill in the difference with *d6*'s. In this case, the player would roll 2*d6*. We'll call these dice *fate dice*. Thus, the final roll would be 3*d10* and 2*d6*: 3 attribute dice and 2 fate dice, all rolled simultaneously in one throw. If a player is throwing 1 attribute dice, she also throws 4 fate dice. If a player is throwing 5 attribute dice, she throws 0 fate dice. 5 dice are thrown every time and attribute ranks determine the makeup of the dice thrown.

$$\textcircled{1} = 1\text{D}10 + 4\text{D}6$$

KNOWLEDGE

$$\textcircled{3} = 3\text{D}10 + 2\text{D}6$$

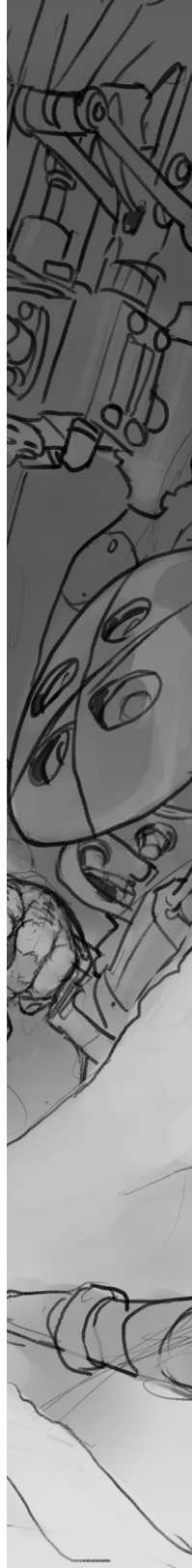
CUNNING

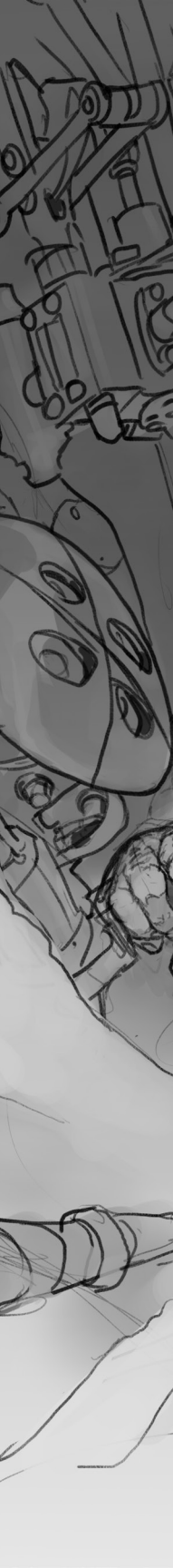
Some skill checks result in success and some result in failure. Some successes and failures are slight (e.g. she just barely succeeded) while some are dramatic (e.g. it was an epic failure with severe consequences). It all depends on the number of successes and botches rolled. Successes and botches work somewhat differently on attribute and fate dice, so we'll start with attribute dice.

On attribute dice, a success is an individual die result of a number equal to or higher than the difficulty. We already determined that a 4+ (that is, any result that is not a 1, 2, or 3) warrants 1 success for a trivial task. Assume a character making a trivial (4+) Acrobatics skill check has an Agility of 5, and her player makes a skill check, rolling 5*d10*. The dice come up as 2, 5, 7, 8, and 9. This means that the player rolled 4 successes. This would be a resounding success, but at the end of the day, a player needs to roll only 1 success to accomplish a task. Additional success just make that success more dramatic.

Botches ruin everything: any individual die result of 1 is considered a botch. Botches negate successes on a one-to-one basis. Assume the same character with an Agility

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rank of 5 rolls 5d10 and gets the following results on a trivial (4+) skill check: 1, 1, 3, 4, 7. We see that the player rolled 2 successes but also 2 botches. Considering that botches negate successes, this results in a grand total of 0 successes: the character just barely failed at the skill check.

The total number of successes (or negative successes) rolled determines how severely a character succeeds or fails at a skill check. The chart below should make clear how to translate a skill check's results into the narrative.

SQL>SELECT * FROM

RESOLVING SKILL CHECK OUTCOMES

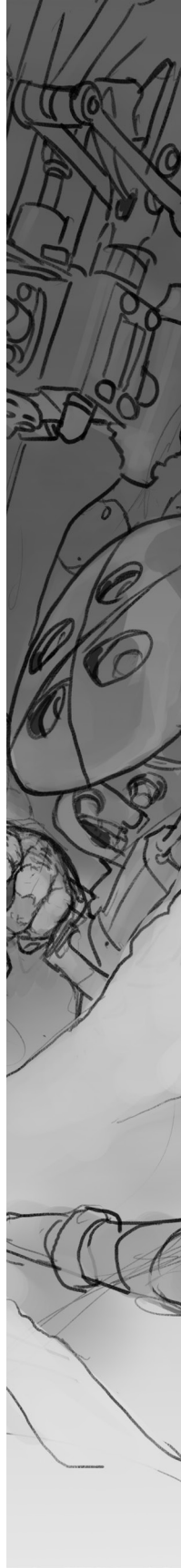
Total Successes	Results
-2 or less	The character failed dramatically at the task. Horrible things happen.
-1	The character clearly failed at the task.
0	The character just barely failed at the task. Failure with a silver lining.
1	The character just barely succeeded at the task. Success with some complication.
2	The character clearly succeeded at the task.
3 or more	The character succeeded dramatically at the task. Awesome things happen.

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Though this game's rules sometimes define what these results actually mean, more often than not things are left open to interpretation. Players and GMs should work together to decide what these results actually mean. As a general rule, the "just barely" category should usually be a failure with positive consequences or a success with negative consequences. For example, a character just barely fails to pick a lock, meaning that he/she didn't jam or destroy the lock in the process, and can try again. Alternatively, a character can just barely pick a lock, meaning he/she successfully opened a chest, but made a loud racket in the process, alarming nearby guards.

The consequences of dramatic successes and failures should severely impact the direction of a scene. In a combat scene, a dramatic success typically inflicts a very serious wound on an enemy, potentially ending the fight. Alternately, a dramatic failure might be shattering one's sword against a shield and remaining defenseless until another weapon can be found. During a scene of intrigue, a dramatic success might be that a character's disguise is so convincing that suspicion and outrage is actually cast on the real person who shows up later. Alternately, a dramatic failure might be that a character's disguise is clearly fraudulent but that character is the only one who doesn't realize it; others are playing along with the ruse just long enough to lead the character to her doom.

Finally, let's return to fate dice and discuss how they influence skill checks. Fate is wily: it can cause the unskilled to succeed where they shouldn't have and the skilled to fail where they shouldn't have. When it comes to successes, a fate dice only counts as a success if the result is 6, and that applies regardless of task difficulty (e.g. a 6 result on a fate dice is identical to an 8+ on an attribute dice). When it comes to botches, every result of 1 or 2 negates a success. Relying on fate is generally a bad idea. Fortune favors the skilled. Fate sometimes propels the unskilled to great heights, but more frequently, fate punishes hubris with epic failure. You have been warned.



OPPOSED AND UNOPPOSED SKILL CHECKS

Opposed skill checks are skill checks where an actor (be it a character or creature) is actively trying to thwart a character's progress. Attacking an actor who doesn't want to be attacked or lying to an actor that doesn't want to be lied to are examples of opposed skill checks. Unopposed skill checks are where there is no actor actively trying to thwart a character's progress. Picking a lock or jumping over a chasm are examples of unopposed skill checks.

We have already discussed how to resolve unopposed skill checks. The GM determines the difficulty of the task (trivial, challenging, or tough), which determines what dice results end up counting as successes (4+, 6+, or 8+, respectively). But what about opposed skill checks? Opposed skill checks are mechanically identical, but instead of the difficulty being determined by GM fiat, the difficulty is predetermined by the opposing actor's core ranks. We already talked about how a character's core Resolve rank makes it "trivial" to frighten her, or how a character's core Wits rank makes it "tough" to sneak up on her. It should now make sense how core ranks work. Actions taken against characters are trivial, challenging, or tough, based on their core ranks. The same exact skill check mechanics apply regardless of whether or not a skill check is opposed or unopposed.

When significant cinematic or environmental factors complicate or augment an opposed skill check (e.g. she resisted our interrogation attempts for days with her tough Resolve, but now we discovered where her family is hiding), the GM reserves the right to upgrade or downgrade the difficulty of a roll. This should be used very sparingly, however. GMs should stick using core ranks to determine difficulty, and only augment in cases where the GM and players agree that the proposed difficulty just doesn't make sense or feel fair.

OPPOSED SKILL CHECKS AGAINST GROUPS

Sometimes actors need to impact groups of targets, not just one target. In this case, a player character rolls a skill check as normal, but resolves the outcome in the following way: one or more 8+ successes means that the skill check was successful against all targets with a tough core rank or lower, or more abstractly, everyone in the group. One or more 6+ success means that the skill check was successful against all targets with a challenging core rank or lower, or more abstractly, half of the group. One or more 4+ success means that the skill check was successful against all targets with a trivial core rank, or more abstractly, less than a third of the group. Remember, a 6 rolled on a fate die is treated as a success regardless of task difficulty. For the purpose of group mechanics, consider it the same as rolling 8+ on an attribute die.

When making a skill check against a small group, it is useful to determine exactly which targets are impacted and which targets resist.

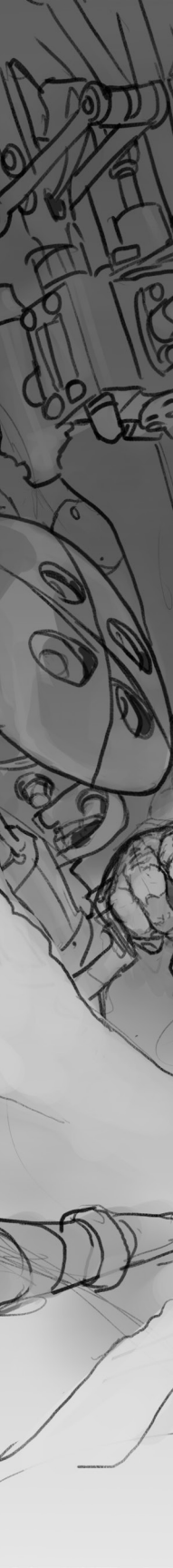
An alchemist throws a fire bomb at a group of 3 mercenaries. The alchemist's player makes an opposed Thrown Missile skill check without the GM defining the task difficulty. 2 of the mercenaries opt to dodge the attack (with their challenging Speed rank of 6+), while the remaining mercenary opts to take cover (with his tough Wits rank of 8+). The alchemist's player resolves a single roll against each target separately. Having rolled 8, 9, 7, 1, and 2, the player scores 2 successes against the targets dodging at 6+ (3 successes and 1 botch) and 1 success against the target taking cover at 8+ (2 successes and 1 botch).

When making a skill check against a large group, it is best to use the more abstract method to resolve the roll.

A fire-dancer vies for the attention of a crowd so her partner in crime can more easily pilfer the audience's coin. The

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fire-dancer's player makes an opposed Performance skill check without the GM defining the task difficulty. One or more 8+ result means that the entire crowd is mesmerized. One or more 6+ result means that over half the crowd is mesmerized, but those unflappable characters with a tough Resolve are not distracted enough to be easily pick-pocketed.

/ ROOT / CORE MECHANICS /

SIMULTANEOUS OPPOSED SKILL CHECKS

Sometimes actors are actively trying to impede one another's progress simultaneously or gain advantage in an ongoing struggle (e.g. a card game, a debate, a stare down, etc.). In this case, both actors make opposed skill checks, and whoever has the most successes (or at least the fewest botches) prevails. The difficulty of a simultaneous opposed skill check is determined the same way as normal opposed skill checks: based on the core rank of the other actor. Ties warrant another set of rolls.

Two dwarven gamblers are locked in a high stakes game of cards. Both are perfectly still, stifling any physiological clue that might betray their emotions (and thus, their cards). At the same time, they scan each other for the slightest clue, the slightest behavioral leakage that might divine what cards the other is holding. Both actors make opposed Deception skill checks simultaneously. The task difficulty for each actor is equal to the Wits rank of the other.

SIMULTANEOUS UNOPPOSED SKILL CHECKS

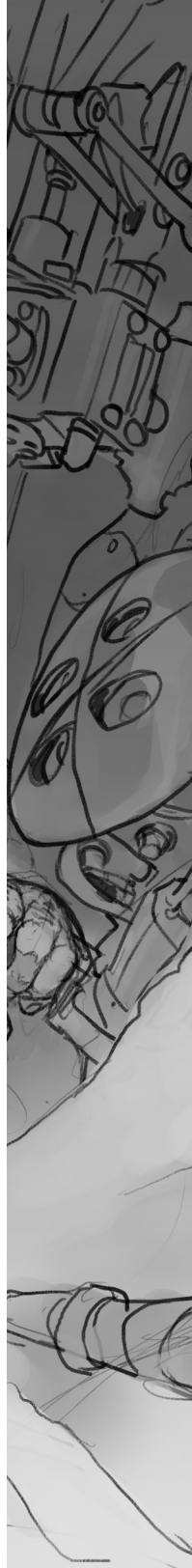
Sometimes actors aren't actively trying to impede one another's progress. They are merely trying to outdo one another. In this case, both actors make unopposed skill checks, and whoever has the most successes (or at least the fewest botches) prevails. The difficulty of a contest is determined the same way as normal unopposed skill checks. Ties warrant another contest.

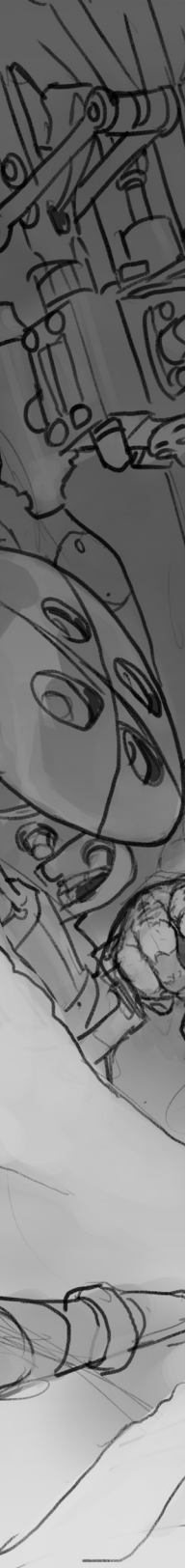
A bandit is chasing a courier through a dense forest. In this case, both actors make an unopposed Athletics skill check simultaneously. The GM has determined that running through the forest without falling down is a challenging task (6+). If the bandit has more successes than the courier, then he has caught up to and cornered the courier. If the courier has more successes than the bandit, then she has gotten away.

SECRET SKILL CHECKS

To ratchet up the tension of a scene, a GM might want to make a skill check on a player's behalf and keep the results secret, not sharing those results until a dramatically appropriate moment. Alternately, a GM character may be acting in secret against a player character, and will make a skill check against a player character's core rank, and only notify that player if the skill check is a failure. These are called secret checks.

For example, an assassin might attempt to sneak up on a player character. The GM would make a secret skill check against that player's Wits rank. If the skill check is a success, the assassin approaches the player character, who is oblivious to the threat. If the skill check is a failure, the player character hears a branch snapping underfoot and turns around to spot the approaching assassin.





As another example, a GM might not want a player to know whether or not her character's Deception skill check was successful or not. Did the guard believe the lie? Or is the guard simply waiting for more backup to arrive before confronting the lying character? In this case, the GM would ask the player what the character's Cunning attribute rank is and make the skill check on the player's behalf, but keep the results secret. Perhaps the players will discover if the lie worked, or perhaps they won't, and the tension will linger.

Secret checks are a great way for GMs to create an atmosphere of paranoia and doubt, and should be used liberally during scenes designed to draw out these feelings. However, GMs should also periodically assess the group and determine if the players are experiencing tension fatigue. Too much uncertainty, for too long, can make players feel powerless and resentful. If that becomes the case, there are a few ways to relieve this: the characters finally reach a safe haven, the shadowy figure tailing them is finally spotted, or the secret lingering over them is finally exposed.

/ROOT/CORE MECHANICS/

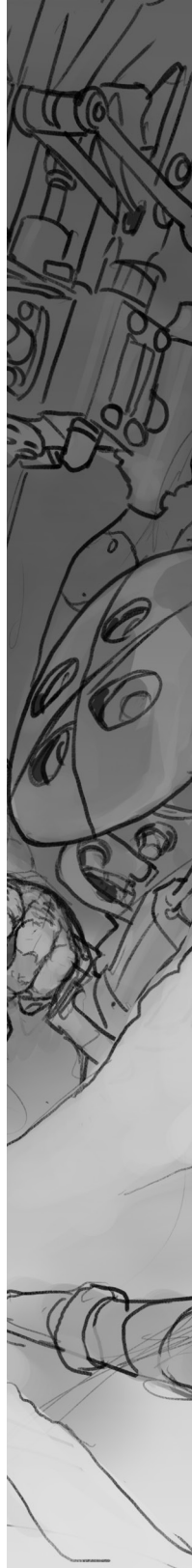
SKILL CHECKS OVER TIME

An ark isn't built in a day and a safe isn't cracked in a minute. Some things take time... sometimes hours, days, weeks, or even years. Further, sometimes a character makes progress towards a goal, while other times she faces setbacks, both of which can impact when a long term project is actually complete (or scrapped entirely). Later in the rules, we'll be discussing specific examples of things that take time (e.g. picking a complex lock, forging a new sword, sewing oneself into the cult's inner circle, etc.). However, the basic idea is simple: sometimes a character needs to accumulate a number of successes over time, over the course of multiple skill checks, to accomplish a task. She accumulates successes with each dice roll, unless she rolls botches, which subtract from the pile of successes she has accumulated.

A ranger wishes to climb a treacherous mountain,

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which is a tough task (8+), and is a task that is not easily done in a single day. The GM decides that the ranger will need to accumulate a total of 8 successes over several skill checks, each of which represents the ranger's progress (or lack thereof) over the course of an 8 hour period of time. Successes signify her progress towards the summit, while botches signify her wasting her efforts or even finding herself further from the summit than she had originally thought. It might take the ranger 2 skill checks (and 16 hours) to climb to the summit, or it might take several skill checks (assuming she has enough food and supplies to keep pushing herself), all depending on the results of her multiple skill checks.



/ROOT/CORE MECHANICS/CD ..
/ROOT/CD SKILLS
/ROOT/SKILLS/LS

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SKILLS



THE BIG SKILL LIST

This section elaborates on the 24 skills available to characters. Each skill is described and illustrated with an example of an opposed skill check and/or an unopposed skill check, where applicable. Some skills (e.g. Alchemy) have additional mechanics to consider, but such additional mechanics will be detailed more in later sections. The goal here is to inform readers on when a skill check should be made, what dice should be thrown, and how results should be mediated. What is important at the outset is the fact that any character can use any skill. There is no “choosing” skills. All skills are available to all characters. Any character can try to mix an alchemical potion, tame a wild animal, or perform a backflip, etc.

Acrobatics

This skill determines a character’s ability to jump, tumble, flip, and perform other balance-stressing acrobatic feats.

To avoid a torrent of lava flooding the dwarven crypt, Thrace attempts to jump up into the rafters. Thrace has an Agility rank of 3. The GM determines this is a challenging task (6+). Thrace’s player rolls 3 attribute dice and 2 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Evading injury, achieving a tactical advantage, or traversing an obstacle are good ways to resolve success. Losing equipment, injuring oneself, or accidentally destroying objects are good ways to resolve failure.

Athletics

This skill determines a character’s ability to climb, swim, run, and perform other stamina-intensive athletic feats.

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Moriarta runs for the exit while the temple crumbles around her. Moriarta has an Agility rank of 2. The GM determines this is a trivial task (4+). Moriarta's player rolls 2 attribute dice and 3 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Evading injury, achieving a tactical advantage, or traversing an obstacle are good ways to resolve success. Losing equipment, injuring oneself, or accidentally destroying objects are good ways to resolve failure.

Alchemy

This skill determines a character's ability to use reagents to create potions, salves, and other alchemical concoctions. It also determines a character's ability to identify concoctions and intuit their properties.

Herkin mixes reagents together to make a healing potion. Herkin has a Knowledge rank of 4. The GM determines this is a trivial task (4+). Herkin's player rolls 4 attribute dice and 1 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Successful creation/identification of a concoction, making a bigger batch, or making a more potent batch, are good ways to resolve success. Concoction side effects or lab mishaps (like explosions or poisonings) are good ways to resolve failure.

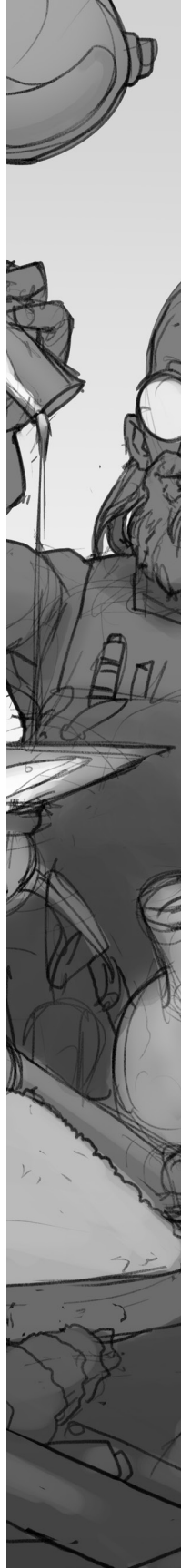
Beast Ken

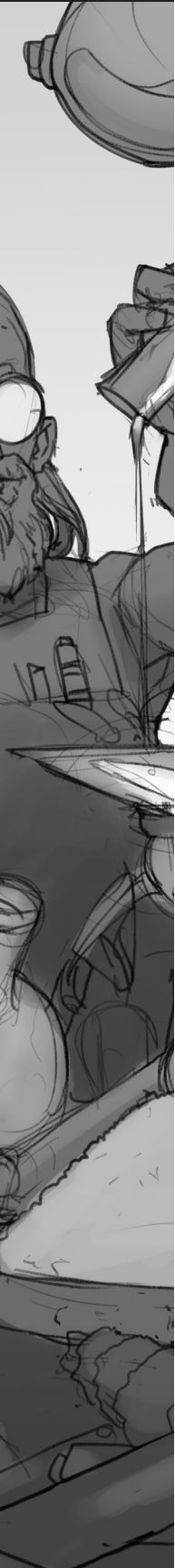
This skill determines a character's ability to tame, ride, and otherwise cooperate with creatures. It also determines a character's ability to identify creatures and intuit their behaviors and weaknesses.

Thrace attempts to hush a growling hound by giving it a treat. Thrace has a Presence rank of 1. The guard hound has challenging Resolve (6+). Thrace's player rolls 1 attribute dice and 4 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Moriarta attempts to identify an unseen creature scurrying through the shadowy corridor. Moriarta has a Presence

-- MORE --





rank of 2. The GM determines this is a challenging task (6+). Moriarta's player rolls 2 attribute dice and 3 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Having the target obey orders, become pacified, or bond with a character are good ways to resolve success. Having the target mistake a character for predator/prey, or clumsily injure her, are good ways to resolve failure.

Brute Melee

This skill determines a character's ability to wield heavy martial weapons such as swords, claymores, maces, axes, and polearms, as well as impromptu weapons such as chair legs.

Moriarta swings her mace at the skull of an assassin. Moriarta has a Strength rank of 3. The assassin has a tough Speed (8+), so he attempts to dodge the attack. Moriarta's player rolls 3 attribute dice and 2 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Successfully striking and wounding the target is a good way to resolve success. Dropped/broken weapons, missing a target, and hitting unintended targets (e.g. allies), are good ways to resolve failure.

Charm

This skill determines a character's ability to win the favor or affection of others through honeyed words, kind gestures, or seduction.

Moriarta wishes to lure the guard away from his post. Moriarta has a Presence rank of 2. The guard has trivial Resolve (4+). Moriarta's player rolls 2 attribute dice and 3 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Having the target obey orders, let their guard down, or fall in love with a character are good ways to resolve success. Repulsing the target, or having the target pretend to be charmed, or having the target see the real intent behind the

- - MORE - -

act are good ways to resolve failure.

Craft

This skill determines a character's ability to create, repair, and sabotage objects.

Thrace delicately inserts the replacement gyro into the broken down code engine. Thrace has a Knowledge rank of 2. The GM determines this is a tough task (8+). Thrace's player rolls 2 attribute dice and 3 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Successfully creating/repairing an object, or improving the object's attributes, are good ways to resolve success. Shoddy craftsmanship, failed assembly, or making a problem worse are good ways to resolve failure.

Deception

This skill determines a character's ability to act, lie, and disguise themselves.

To save his life, Herkin tries to convince the bandits that he's royalty and worth much more to them alive. Herkin has a Cunning rank of 4. The most skeptical of the bandits has challenging Wits (6+). Herkin's player rolls 4 attribute dice and 1 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

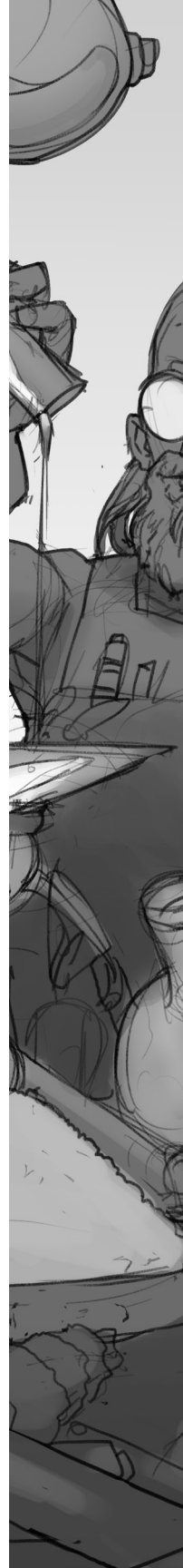
Convincing lies and disguises, and redirected attention, are good ways to resolve success. Skepticism, more probing questions, and heated accusations are good ways to resolve failure.

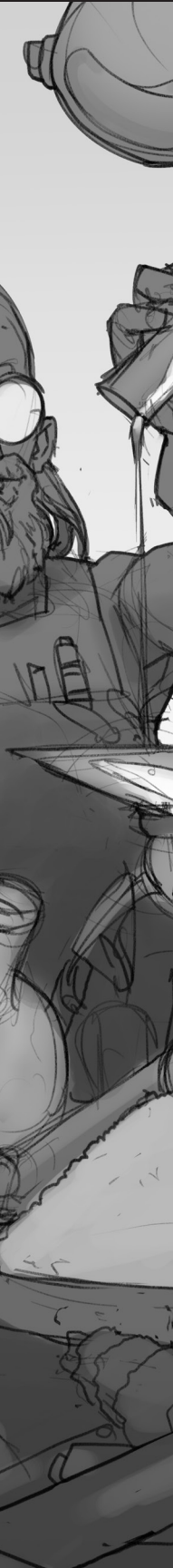
Escape Artistry

This skill determines a character's ability to break out of bonds, escape pins, and contort oneself to get into and out of tight places.

Moriarta tries to worm her way into a slender parapet

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window. Moriarta has an Agility rank of 2. The GM determines this is a tough task (8+). Moriarta's player rolls 2 attribute dice and 3 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Evading injury, achieving a tactical advantage, or traversing an obstacle are good ways to resolve success. Losing equipment, injuring oneself, or getting stuck are good ways to resolve failure.

Feat of Strength

This skill determines a character's ability to bend bars, smash through doors, lift huge objects, and crush objects with bare hands. It also determines a character's ability to push or shove someone or something.

Herkin attempts to bend the dungeon bars so Moriarta can try to slip through. Herkin has a Strength rank of 1. The GM determines this is a tough task (8+). Herkin's player rolls 1 attribute dice and 4 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Moriarta hurls herself into the orc, hoping to knock him over the edge of the cliff. Moriarta has a Strength rank of 3. The orc has challenging Power (6+). Moriarta's player rolls 3 attribute dice and 2 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Evading injury, successful manipulation of an object, or traversing an obstacle are good ways to resolve success. Injuring oneself, damaging an object beyond repair, or making a horrible racket are good ways to resolve failure.

Fired Missile

This skill determines a character's ability to use bows, crossbows, ballistae, slings, and other mechanical ranged weapons. This skill can be used to strike enemies or objects at a distance.

Thrace sees his mark and fires a poisoned bolt from his crossbow. Thrace has a Dexterity rank of 3. This target has challenging Power (6+), so he attempts to parry the attack with his shield. Thrace's player rolls 3 attribute dice and 2 fate dice,

-- MORE --

hoping to get at least 1 success.

Attempting to set the archive room ablaze, Herkin releases his sling and lobs a firebomb through the window. Herkin has a Dexterity rank of 2. The GM determines this is a challenging task (6+). Herkin's player rolls 2 attribute dice and 3 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Successfully striking and wounding the target is a good way to resolve success. Dropped/broken weapons, missing a target, and hitting unintended targets (e.g. allies), are good ways to resolve failure.

Lock Picking

This skill determines a character's ability to open locks without using their key.

Thrace picks the chest's lock so he doesn't wake the entire garrison smashing it open. Thrace has a Dexterity rank of 3. The GM determines this is a trivial task (4+). Thrace's player rolls 3 attribute dice and 2 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Unlocking an object and doing it quickly are good ways to resolve success. Jammed locks, broken picks, time wasted on failed attempts, and making a horrible racket are good ways to resolve failure.

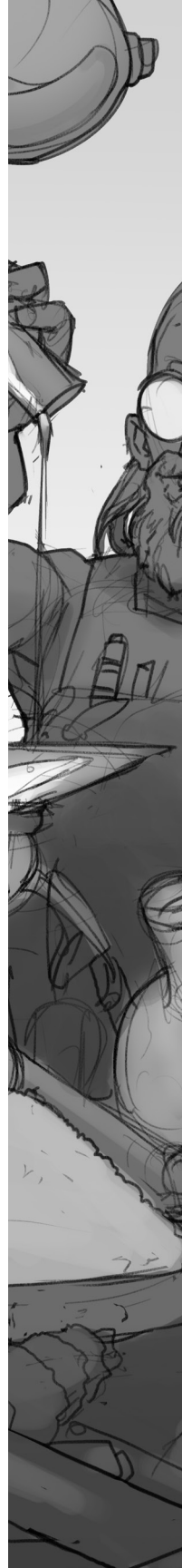
Medicine

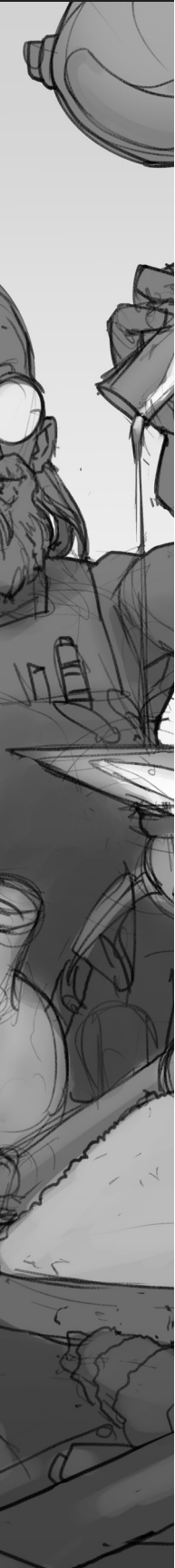
This skill determines a character's ability to heal wounds and treat sickness.

Moriarta attempts to resuscitate Thrace, who failed to mention he couldn't swim. Moriarta has a Knowledge rank of 1. The GM determines this is a tough task (8+). Moriarta's player rolls 1 attribute dice and 4 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Successful resuscitation, accurate diagnoses, and restored health are good ways to resolve success. Failed resus-

- - MORE - -





citation, wrong diagnoses, infection, and further injury are good ways to resolve failure.

Menace

This skill determines a character's ability to intimidate, interrogate, or otherwise frighten others.

Thrace holds his dagger under a flame and tells his captive that, unless she talks, she will be soon be branded and released to her people, who will be convinced she talked under torture. Thrace has a Presence rank of 1. His captive has a tough Resolve (8+). Thrace's player rolls 1 attribute dice and 4 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Having the target flee in terror, surrender, or release information during interrogation are good ways to resolve success. Having the target shake the character's confidence, or become impervious to future menace attempts, or provide bogus information, are good ways to resolve failure.

Performance

This skill determines a character's ability to sing, dance, orate, or otherwise create and execute impressive works of art, in order to move, impress, or distract an audience.

Herkin tries to captivate the court with poetry, pulling attention away from Moriarta, who is reaching for the quartermaster's keychain. Herkin has a Presence rank of 3. The most unflappable member of the court has a tough Resolve (8+). Herkin's player rolls 3 attribute dice and 2 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Enthralling/distracting an audience, bolstering a reputation, and establishing devoted fans are good ways to resolve success. Boring/annoying an audience, tarnishing a reputation, or being banned from court are good ways to resolve failure.

-- MORE --

Precise Melee

This skill determines a character's ability to wield light martial weapons such as daggers, short swords, whips, and short spears.

Thrace flashes his dagger at the gnoll, hoping to spill the contents of its belly. Thrace has a Dexterity rank of 3. The barghest has tough Power (8+) and attempts to parry the attack with its claws. Thrace's player rolls 3 attribute dice and 2 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Successfully striking and wounding the target is a good way to resolve success. Dropped/broken weapons, missing a target, and hitting unintended targets (e.g. allies), are good ways to resolve failure.

Query

This skill determines a character's ability to seek specific facts, perform research, navigate the Shardscape, carefully structure their requests to automatons, and figure out logical and mathematical puzzles.

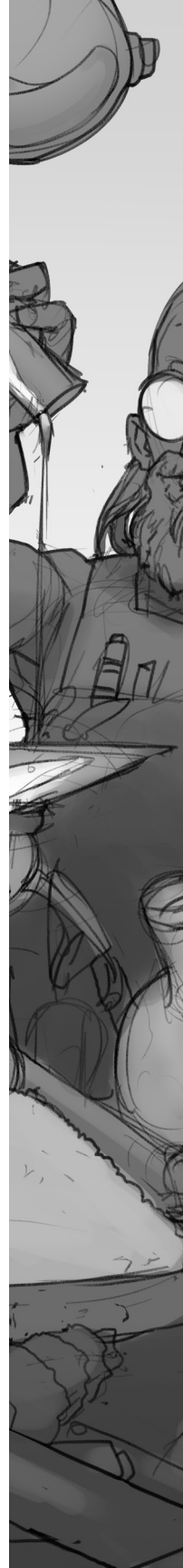
Herkin scours through a heap of ancient texts to make sense of the party's only clue: an obscure reference in a scroll stolen from the enemy. Herkin has a Knowledge of 4. The GM determines this is a trivial task (8+). Herkin's player rolls 4 attribute dice and 1 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

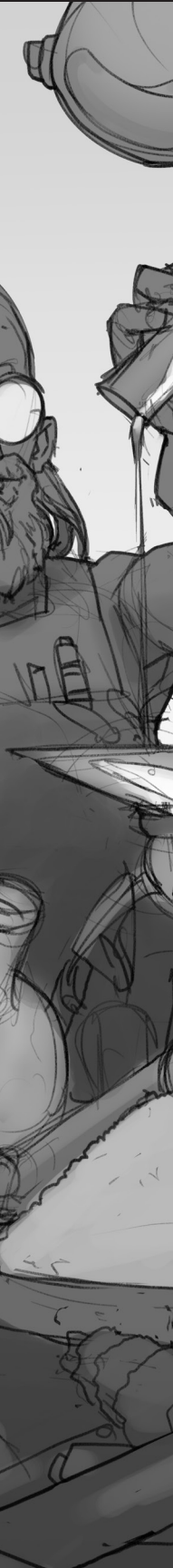
Speedy answers, accurate answers, accurate translations, and creative problem solving are good ways to resolve success. Wasted time, dead ends, embarrassing translation errors, and lost credibility are good ways to resolve failure.

Scrounge

This skill determines a character's ability to find useful tools, parts, reagents, or clues by scouring the wilderness, canvassing neighborhoods, or tossing rooms.

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Herkin has only minutes to find the stolen artifact before the guild members return to the warehouse. Herkin has a Cunning rank of 4. The GM determines this is a tough task (8+). Herkin's player rolls 4 attribute dice and 1 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Discovering an object, doing so quickly, and doing so without trashing the place or leaving a trace, are good ways to resolve success. Not finding an object, or trashing the place to do so, or making a horrible racket in the process, are good ways to resolve failure.

Sleight of Hand

This skill determines a character's ability to pick pockets, plant objects, swipe valuables, and otherwise avert attention away from her hands.

Moriarta attempts to slip a fraudulent scroll in the courier's bag without him noticing. Moriarta has a Dexterity rank of 4. The courier has challenging Wits (6+). Moriarta's player rolls 4 attribute dice and 1 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Snatching/planting objects, evading detection, and grabbing more than anticipated, are good ways of resolving success. Detection, interception, or coin bags spilling onto the ground are good ways to resolve failure.

Stealth

This skill determines a character's ability to hide, move silently, and otherwise evade detention.

Thrace attempts to sneak up on the sentry so he can swiftly dispatch him with his dagger. Thrace has an Agility rank of 3. The sentry has challenging Wits (6+). Thrace's player rolls 3 attribute dice and 2 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Hiding from enemies, silently approaching sentries, and sneaking through a locale without stirring the residents, are good ways to resolve success. Detection, dropping

- - MORE - -

equipment, getting stuck, or being spotted by someone other than the intended target, are good ways to resolve failure.

Thrown Missile

This skill determines a character's ability to throw objects such as daggers, spears, hand axes, and alchemical flasks, as well as impromptu objects like rocks. This skill can be used to strike enemies or objects at a distance.

Herkin tosses an acid flask at the armored warrior, hoping to burn through his powerful plating. Herkin has a Strength rank of 1. The armored warrior has trivial Speed (4+) and attempts to dodge the missile. Herkin's player rolls 1 attribute dice and 4 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

To win the knife throwing contest, Thrace must hurl a blade at the apple resting on Moriarta's head. Thrace has a Strength rank of 3. The GM determines this is a tough task (8+). Thrace's player rolls 3 attribute dice and 2 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Successfully striking and wounding the target is a good way to resolve success. Dropped/broken weapons, missing a target, and hitting unintended targets (e.g. allies), are good ways to resolve failure.

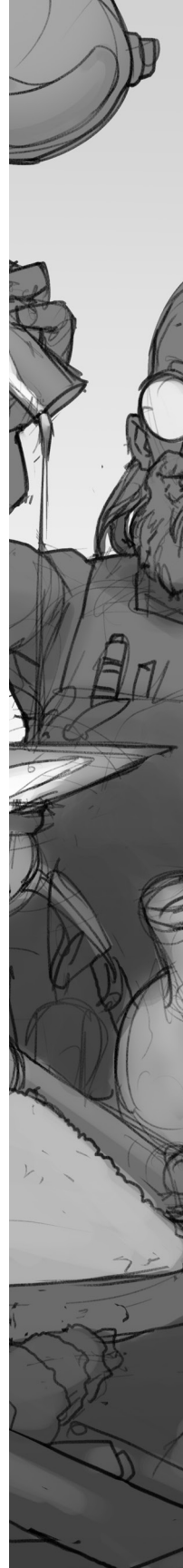
Tracking

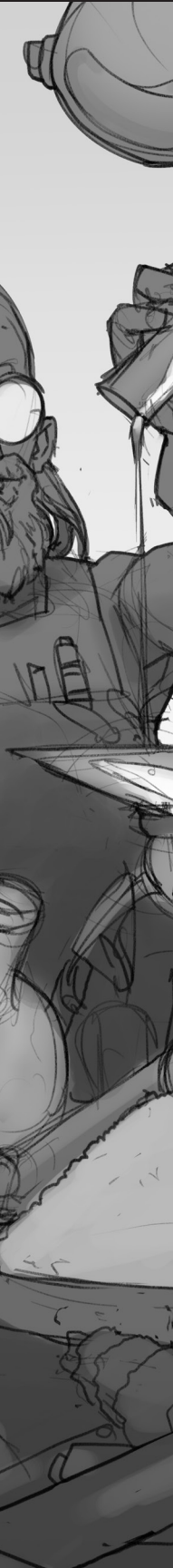
This skill determines a character's ability to track down the location of a target by following the evidence the target left behind, such as footprints, broken branches, scent, or eye witnesses. It also determines a character's ability to navigate through unknown territory.

Herkin follows a blood trail leading away from the scene of an unsuccessful assassination. Herkin has a Cunning rank of 4. The wounded assassin has trivial Wits (4+). Herkin's player rolls 4 attribute dice and 1 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Discovering the location of a mark and approaching

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the mark from an advantageous position, or safely leading the party to a destination, are good ways to resolve success. Getting thrown off the scent, getting ambushed, getting lost, or tipping off the mark that they are being tracked, are good ways to resolve failure.

Traps

This skill determines a character's ability to set traps designed to kill or ensnare targets, or sound alarms upon entry. It also determines a character's ability to dismantle traps that have been detected.

Thrace set an alarm trap at the cavern's entrance so he will be notified if someone has followed him inside. Thrace has a Cunning rank of 2. A gnoll that has been tracking him has challenging Wits (6+). Thrace's player rolls 2 attribute dice and 3 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Thrace handles a tome designed to dissolve its pages with acid if the lock over it is tampered with. Thrace has a Cunning rank of 2. The GM determines this is a tough task (8+). Thrace's player rolls 2 attribute dice and 3 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Successful injury or ensnarement of a target, or activation of an alarm, are good ways to resolve success. Trap detection, trap evasion, injury or ensnarement of the wrong target, or being injured by a trap are good ways to resolve failure.

Unarmed Melee

This skill determines a character's ability to inflict damage through strikes with their hands or feet.

Hands bound behind her back, Moriarta kicks at the constable who is leading her to the gallows by sword point. Moriarta has a Strength rank of 3. The constable has challenging Power (6+) and attempts to parry the attack. Moriarta's player rolls 3 attribute dice and 2 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

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Successfully striking and wounding a target is a good way to resolve success. Breaking fingers and toes, missing a target, and hitting unintended targets (e.g. allies), are good ways to resolve failure.

/ROOT/SKILLS/

ENDURANCE AND WILLPOWER AS SKILLS

While Endurance and Willpower are attributes not associated with any skills, they themselves can be used to make skill checks when dramatically appropriate. When environmental or situational factors put an actor under significant physical or mental duress, instead of another actor doing so, it may warrant a skill check but not necessarily make sense to do an opposed skill check. For such checks, simply treat the Endurance and Willpower as skills in their own right.

Endurance

When used as a skill, this attribute determines a character's ability to resist the effects of poisons, toxins, and physical exhaustion.

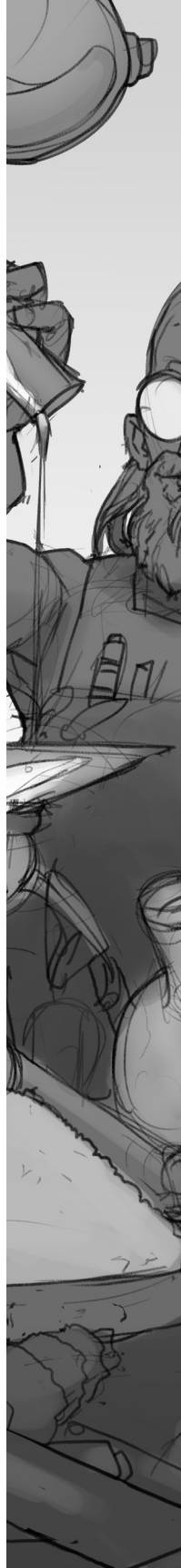
Herkin breaks into a cold sweat and realizes that the host of the gala has poisoned his wine. Herkin has an Endurance rank of 2. The poison is particularly potent: resisting its effects is a tough task (8+). Herkin's player rolls 2 attribute dice and 3 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

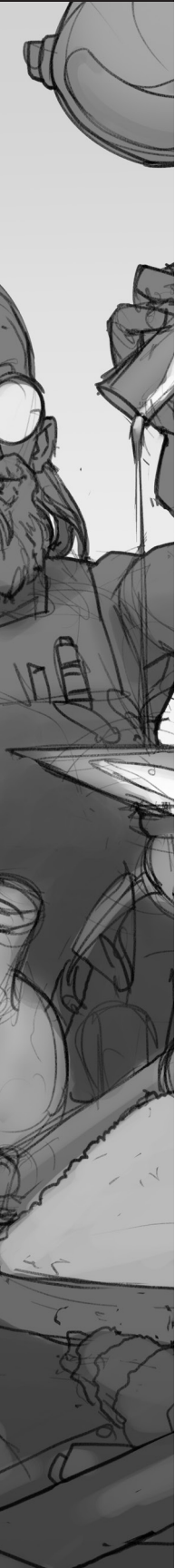
Resisting the effects of poisons and toxins, powering through a grueling physical task, and carrying on despite grievous injury are good ways to resolve success. Succumbing to poisons and toxins, or falling unconscious in the face of exhaustion, are good ways to resolve failure.

Willpower

When used as a skill, this attribute determines a

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character's ability to remain calm, resist pain and mental duress, resist temptation, and demonstrate courage in the face of danger.

Moriarta stands before the flame-engulfed manor, steeling herself to dash inside and rescue the unconscious Herkin. Moriarta has a Willpower rank of 3. The GM determines this is a challenging task (6+). Moriarta's player rolls 3 attribute dice and 2 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success.

Acting despite great personal danger, resisting a truly compelling offer/vice, and staying calm despite ongoing pain and torture are good ways to resolve success. Cowering in fear, indulging in vice, and begging for mercy are good ways to resolve failure.

/ROOT/SKILLS/

COURAGE AND FEAR

While the mechanics of courage and fear were just defined as a Willpower skill check, we thought it might be useful to elaborate a bit on these topics. Courage and fear are themes very important to role-playing games of the various horror genres but less so in the fantasy genre. As a design choice, we have included these themes in the case the GM and players wish to play up the dark, gritty, and psychological aspects of the Cryptomancer world. There are some scary creatures and scarier agendas present in this setting, after all.

However, courage and fear often present interesting problems in practice. While some players embrace the idea of role-playing characters succumbing to the panic and paralysis of fear, others get frustrated by losing agency. There can be a disconnect between what the player wants to do (stand her ground) and what her character wants to do (flee in terror). That's not always fun for some players. Thus, we introduce a compromise.

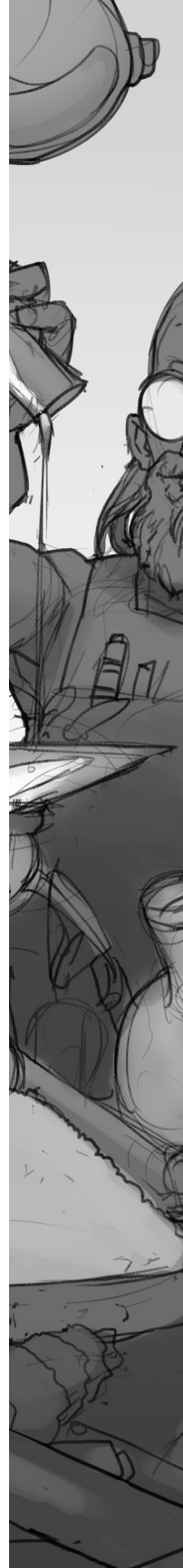
Players are fully permitted to *ignore* the outcomes of their characters failing Willpower skill checks to keep their cool, so long as they are OK with the GM downgrad-

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ing all of their failed skill checks into dramatic failures while their character is panicking. If players are not OK with this, then they will need to have their characters demonstrate an appropriate level of cowardice (e.g. flight, paralysis, fetal position, and/or comic loss of bowel control). It is a risk-based trade-off that each player will have to make when the situation arises.

Separated from his party, Thrace traipses through the forest. There is something strange about how the shadows at his feet are dancing. He looks up to see the giant, hairy thorax of a spider, nearly as big as a boar, silently dropping towards him. It's eight legs are outstretched like points on a star made of nightmares. The GM determines this horrific sight warrants a Willpower skill check of trivial difficulty (4+) if Thrace is to keep his cool. Thrace has a Willpower rank of 2. His player makes the roll but gets no successes. Thrace succumbs to his fear and begins to flee in terror... except his player doesn't like that outcome and tells the GM that he'll be ignoring it.

Instead, the player says, Thrace will brace himself, raise his short sword to the sky, and wait for the giant vermin to impale itself. The GM notifies Thrace's player that she would be granted the right to downgrade any of Thrace's failures into dramatic failures for the duration of the ensuing fight. Thrace's player considers this but gets his dice ready anyways.



/ROOT/SKILLS/CD ..
/ROOT/CD COMBAT
/ROOT/COMBAT/LS

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COMBAT



OVERVIEW

Let's face it: elves, dwarves, and orcs have been killing each other ever since Tolkein invented them. Combat is a pillar of the genre, and we embrace it. As game designers, we have endeavored to make combat extremely lethal. Toe-to-toe combat generally ends horribly for everyone involved. Battles are often decided before the first die is cast, and whoever seizes the initiative or fights from an advantageous position generally wins.

Combat occurs when actors start making opposed skill checks against one another with the intent to kill or injure. In the normal course of game sessions, the GM and players work together to narrate and adjudicate events. Sometimes the players will be asked to have their characters react to a situation presented by the GM. Sometimes the GM will have her characters react to a decision made by a player character. The logistics of who acts when, and in what order, generally don't matter and are not emphasized in skill check mechanics or the general GM advice so far. Combat is a little different in this respect. "Going first" can be a matter of life or death for characters.

Combat begins as soon as an offensive opposed skill check occurs. Combat is structured in turns. If combat was initiated by a player character, all players get to declare the actions that their characters will take and then resolve those actions. If combat was initiated by a GM character, then the GM declares the actions of those characters and then resolves those actions.

So who goes first? The players or the GM? Generally, the first person at the table who says "attack," "kill," "stab," "shoot," or some other violent verb goes first. Players and GM should come to consensus on who goes first, but the GM is the final arbiter. One word of caution for players eager to gain the initiative by interrupting the GM's narrative: if you declare your character is attacking, your character is attacking. No going back. Below are two examples of

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how to resolve the question of “who goes first?”

GM: “A figure suddenly emerges from the bush, his bow is trained on —“

Player: “I shoot him with my crossbow!”

GM: “Sure. He sees you raise your crossbow and dives for cover. This is a challenging target. Go ahead and make your skill check.”

OR

GM: “A figure emerges from the bush suddenly, his bow is trained on —“

Player: “I shoot him with my crossbow!”

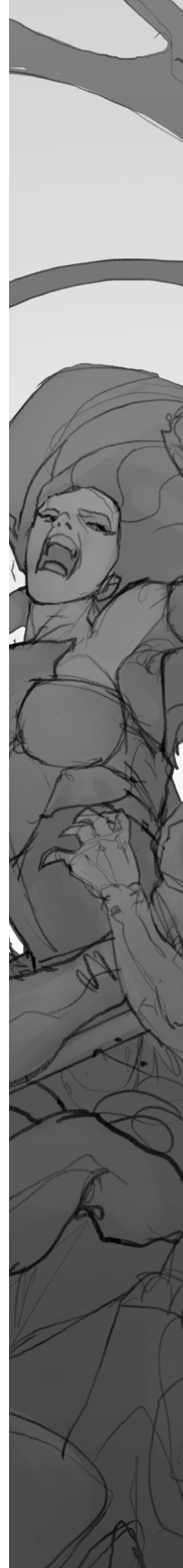
GM: “The figure from the bushes releases his bow-string and his arrow pierces the heart of a would-be assassin right behind you, who was about to plant an axe blade in the back of your skull. Go ahead and roll to determine if you’ve successfully shot your savior...”

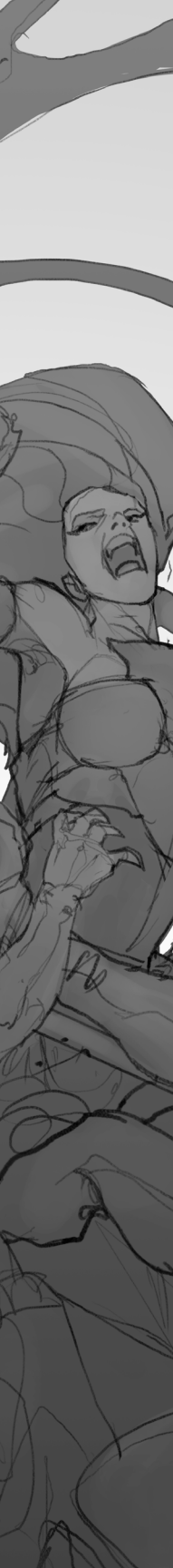
Player: “Whoops...”

Once the first “side” is done with its turn (i.e. once all GM characters have acted, or once all player characters have acted), it is time for the other side to take its turn. During the players’ turn, the order in which players act does not matter, but if disputes occur, GM fiat should prevail. This turn-based approach to the action continues until hostilities are over: when the players and the GM have stopped declaring offensive opposed skill checks, and have stopped maneuvering to set up said skill checks. Usually, this is when one side has died or fled, or some kind of parley has begun.

Time doesn’t stop during combat. A full turn, where all player characters and GM characters have acted once, lasts anywhere from a few second to a few minutes in the game world, depending on the scene. For a one-on-one duel between swordsmen, a few seconds seems about right,

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whereas for a large battle raging throughout a keep, a few minutes seems about right. It all depends on what level of granularity the folks at the table want to operate at. Below are two examples of how to narrate a player's decision to attack a target:

Player: “I wipe a hand across the blood he just drew, nod to acknowledge his swordplay, and then lunge forward, thrusting my blade towards his eye ball. Dodge or Parry?”

GM: “Parry. He tries to brush aside the attack with his buckler. He's a tough target. Roll ‘em.”

OR

Player: “I won't stop coming at him until one of us are dead or dying.”

GM: “Your swords clash repeatedly in a light show of sparks, only pausing when one of you takes or delivers a backhand to the face or a kick to the abdomen. The duel is periodically disrupted by other skirmishers, whom neither of you have trouble dispatching by cutting down or throwing off of the parapet. You finally have him cornered, and deliver a flurry of attacks, hoping to finally break through his defenses. Roll ‘em.”

MOVES, ACTIONS, AND RANGE

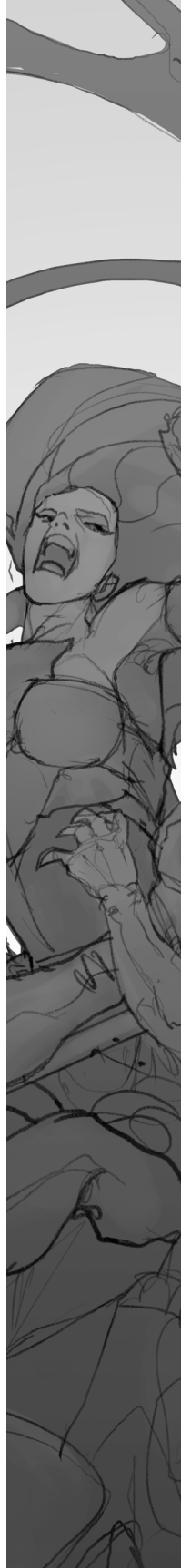
Each turn, a character has one move and one action.

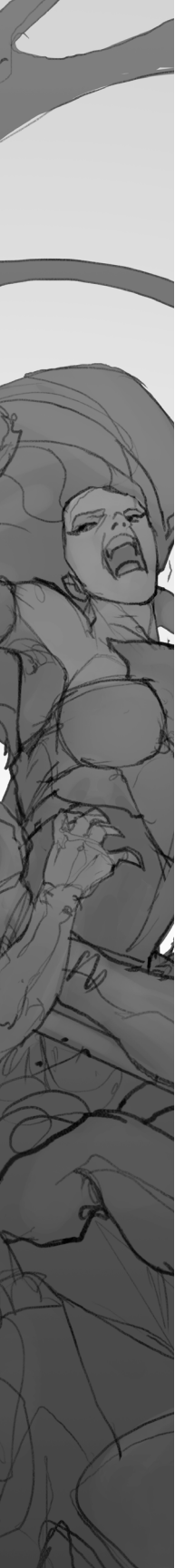
An action is anything that warrants a skill check. In combat, this is frequently an attack, but might be a different type of skill check, such as resuscitating a fallen ally, reasoning with an aggressor, or frantically picking the lock of a door too big to kick in. An action can also be something that takes up all of a character's ability or concentration, but is not necessarily a skill check, such as quaffing a potion, reloading a crossbow, etc.

A move is when a character changes her range relative other characters or objects. Range is split into five distances: close, short, medium, long, and extreme. Close range is anywhere within a few yards. Short range is everywhere outside of close range but no further than 30 yards, or roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ of a football field. Medium range is everywhere outside of short range but no further than 60 yards, or roughly $\frac{1}{2}$ of a football field. Long range is everywhere outside of medium range but no further than 120 yards, or the length of a football field. Extreme range is anything beyond that, up to a mile away. A move can be spent changing a character's range relative to a target by one level (short to medium or extreme to long, for example). A character changing range through difficult terrain (uphill, upstream, through dense forest, etc.) or climbing might have to make an Athletics skill check, while a character leaping over a chasm or jumping out of a window might have to make an Acrobatics skill check. These movement-related skill checks should not count as a character's action unless the GM has a compelling reason to mandate it.

A character may also opt to convert her action into an additional move. This is ideal for closing in on a target quickly, or creating significant distance from a threat.

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There are things that a character can do that are mostly incidental to the action, such as unsheathing a sword, opening a door, readying an arrow, yelling something, picking something up, etc. These types of mini-actions can be taken freely during a character's turn and shouldn't be tracked or restricted unless it becomes apparent that a character's number of incidental actions don't fit the established cadence of a combat turn.

/ROOT/COMBAT/

ATTACKING AND DEFENDING

Attacks are simply opposed skill checks made against one of a target's core ranks. However, which core rank, exactly, depends on the type of attack being made (melee, missile, or magical) and how the defender wishes to defend against this attack (parry, dodge, take cover, or resist). This is why actions are declared before skill check dice are thrown: the defender must have a chance to consider defensive options. Further, the defender chooses a defensive option before each attack made against her. That is to say that she may choose one defensive option against a melee attack, and then chose another option against a missile attack, all of which occurs during her enemies' turn.

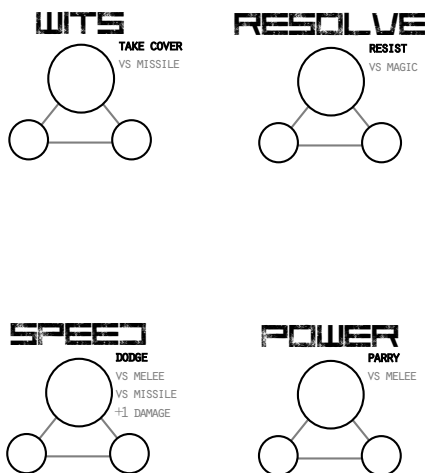
Melee attacks (all attacks made with the Brute Melee, Precise Melee, and Unarmed Melee skills) can be parried or dodged. If the target wishes to parry the attack, then the opposed skill check is resolved against the target's Power rank. If a target wishes to dodge the attack, then the opposed skill check is resolved against the target's Speed rank.

Missile attacks (all attacks made with the Fired Missile and Thrown Missile skills) can be dodged, but can only be parried if the target has a shield. The attacks are resolved as mentioned above. A target can also opt to take cover, which is having the situational awareness to stay out of the line of fire in the first place. If a target wishes to take cover, then the opposed skill check is resolved against the target's Wits rank. Area-of-effect attacks, such as exploding alchemical satchels, are considered missile attacks.

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Magical attacks don't work like conventional attacks. A defender cannot parry, dodge, or take cover against these types of attacks, and must instead simply resist them, meaning the opposed skill check is resolved against the target's Resolve rank.

This may seem like a lot of factors to consider, but each of these defenses are right next to their corresponding core rank on the character sheet.



Fast characters are inclined to evade attacks by springing out of the way, strong characters are inclined to hold their ground and block incoming attacks, and clever characters are inclined to avoid danger altogether. However, the decision of how to defend is sometimes more complicated than just going with the defense that leverages the highest core rank.

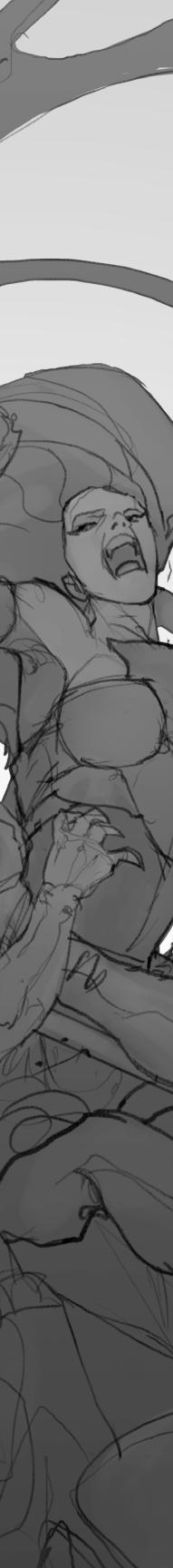
Parry

Parry is used primarily to defend against melee attacks. Parry can only defend against missile attacks if the defender has a shield. Further, some weapons have restrictions on what they can parry. For example, it's not possible to parry a claymore with your fists.

An orc warrior swings a gore-covered morning star at

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Moriarta. She raises her mace to parry the attack. Her Power is 8, meaning her Parry is 8, meaning that the GM must roll 8+ to get successes towards striking Moriarta.

Take Cover

Taking cover is the act of hitting the dirt or diving behind some type of protection to avoid missile attacks. This defense cannot be used to defend against melee attacks.

An orc suicide-sapper dashes towards Moriarta while a burning wick is an inch away from the explosive alchemical satchel he carries on his back. Sensing the imminent explosion, Moriarta dives to the ground and covers her head. Her Wits is 4, meaning her Take Cover is 4, meaning that the GM must roll 4+ to get successes towards striking Moriarta.

Dodge

Dodge is at once the most versatile and most risky defense. An actor can attempt to dodge any melee or missile attack. However, if a character is struck while attempting to dodge, she suffers an additional 1 HP damage for inadvertently diving right into the blow.

Moriarta searches the ground with her hands, looking for the mace she lost after the suicide-sapper exploded and covered the scene in dust. Too late! An orc warrior with a two-handed maul charges her. She has no shield and could not possibly parry such a weapon with her hands, so she opts to dodge the attack. Her Speed is 6, meaning her Dodge is 6, meaning that the GM must roll 6+ to get successes towards striking Moriarta. Unfortunately, the orc connects with a single success. What should have been 3 HP worth of damage is upgraded to 4 HP worth of damage.

Resist

Lastly, resist is the only defense against magical attacks.

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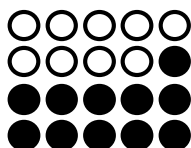
An orc shaman presses his hand against the forehead of the captured Moriarta, in an attempt to forcibly extract the location of her comrades from her mind via magic. Moriarta resists the psychic interrogation with all of her will. Her Resolve is 6, meaning her Resist is 6, meaning that the GM must roll 6+ to get successes towards extracting secrets.

/ROOT/COMBAT/

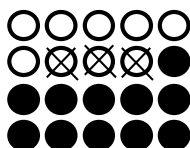
HEALTH POINTS

Defending doesn't always go exactly as planned and sometimes someone or something gets hurt.

HEALTH POINTS



HEALTH POINTS



Each actor has a number of Health Points (HP) equal to her Endurance rank + 5. The more HP an actor has, the healthier she is. Wounds reduce an actor's HP. An actor who is at 0 or less HP, regardless of how she got there, falls unconscious and begins to lose 1 HP per turn. Once an actor reaches -10 HP, she has died.

For managing a character's health, we recommend players black out the HP bubbles on the character sheet until only the character's maximum HP is reflected. Then, X out bubbles equal to damage taken and erase those X's when damage is healed.



WOUNDS

Successful attacks inflict HP loss equal to the number of successes rolled in an opposed skill check, plus or minus some small value depending on the weapon used. Any loss of HP is considered a wound. Wounds are bad and they threaten an actor's HP in two ways: by either accumulating to the point where an actor has simply lost too much blood and sustained too much trauma, or by being so severe that they incapacitate an actor outright. There are four types of wounds: flesh wounds, serious wounds, critical wounds, and mortal wounds.

Flesh Wounds

Wounds that result in 1 HP loss are flesh wounds such as surface level cuts and bruises. They will sting a bit, and likely require stitches, but otherwise have no effect on a character.

Serious Wounds

Wounds that result in 2 HP loss are serious wounds, nasty injuries that fracture bones and/or bleed all over the place. They will smart and distract an actor, and will require medical attention for days, but otherwise have no effect on a character.

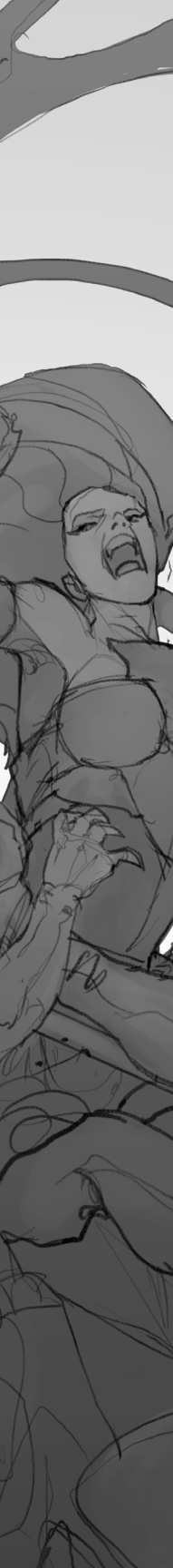
Critical Wounds

Wounds that result in 3 HP loss are critical wounds, deep, life-threatening injuries that cut to the bone or rattle organs. Critical wounds result in the loss of an additional 1 HP any time an actor both moves and acts during her turn until the wound is stabilized.

Mortal Wounds

Lastly, wounds that result in 4 or more HP loss are

-- MORE --

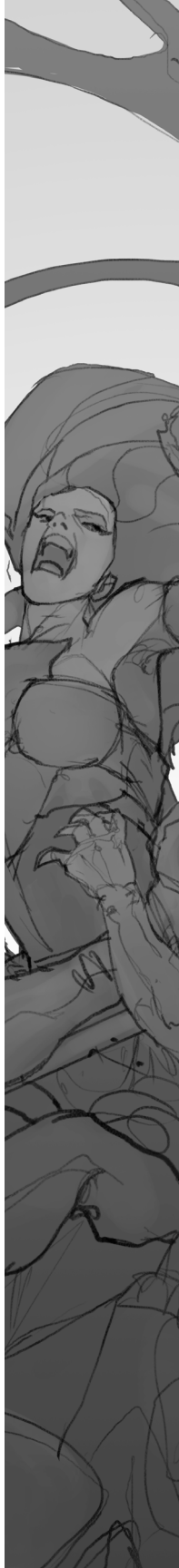


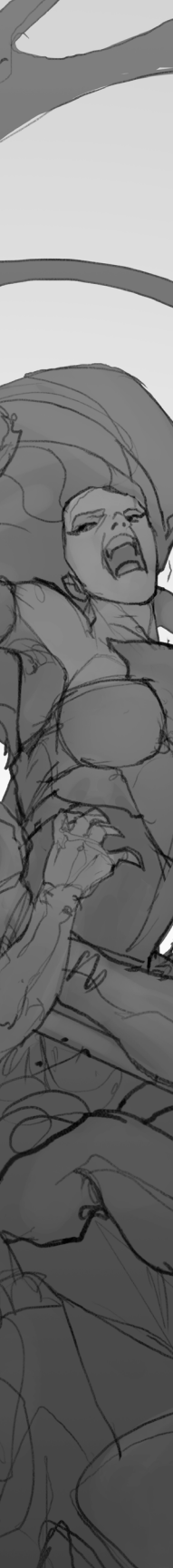
mortal wounds, shocking and violent injuries that few survive. Mortal wounds cause an actor to bleed out at a rate of 1 HP until the wound is stabilized.

<input type="radio"/> CRITICAL WOUND / WEAK POISON	<input type="radio"/> MORTAL WOUND / STRONG POISON
-1 HP IF MOVE AND ACT	-1 HP PER TURN

The effects of wounds do not stack, but 2 critical wounds do upgrade into a mortal wound.

As critical wounds and mortal wounds require a little bit of tracking, we've included them on the character sheet. Just fill in the appropriate bubble when one of this injuries are received, and erase the bubble when the wound is stabilized.





STABILIZATION

Once a wound is stabilized, it goes away. No more HP loss. Stabilizing a wound requires succeeding at an unopposed Medicine skill check. Characters can attempt to stabilize themselves if they are conscious, but are typically bad at it. The person doing the stabilizing must have medical equipment (e.g. bandages, tourniquets, etc.) or spend precious time scrounging for things that can substitute (e.g. torn linens, branches, etc.). Actors with 0 or less HP who are dying can also be stabilized so they stop losing HP (this consequently removes any critical or mortal wounds they suffered as well).

Note: a dying character must be stabilized before she is able to benefit from healing potions or healing spells.

We've made a table to summarize the difficulty of stabilizing a wound, depending on the wound severity and the circumstances.

SQL>SELECT * FROM

STABILIZATION SKILL CHECKS

Status	Healing someone else	Healing oneself
Critical Wound	Trivial	Challenging
Mortal Wound	Challenging	Tough
Dying	Tough	Impossible

HEALING HP

Healing (recovering HP) requires the injured actor to rest, doing nothing but sleeping, staying put, and having wounds redressed as necessary. For each block of 8 consecutive hours of rest (also referred to as a session of *downtime*), 1 HP is restored. This also applies to incapacitated characters who are stabilized, though they do not wake up until their HP returns to 1 or more.

GRAPPLING

Grappling a target is an opposed Unarmed Melee skill check that does no damage if successful but does ensnare both the attacker and target in violent struggle on the ground. While in a grapple, both participants forfeit their move action until they escape the grapple. Further, only unarmed attacks or small weapons (e.g. daggers) are viable options. There is simply not enough clearance or leverage to use anything bigger. To escape a grapple, an actor needs to spend her action making an opposed Escape Artistry skill check with a task difficulty equal to the other combatant's Power rank. Upon success, the actor breaks out of the grapple and may immediately use her movement to distance herself from the other actor. Upon failure, the grapple continues.

During a grapple, either combatant can attempt to put the other in a submission hold. Like a grapple, a submission hold is an opposed Unarmed Melee skill check that does no damage. However, if the attempt scores 3+ successes, the target is in a submission hold. An actor in a submission hold can take no action during her turn except try to escape the grapple (using the rules above). Further, that actor must make an opposed Endurance skill check with a task difficulty equal to her attacker's Power rank at the beginning of her every turn, in order to not pass out. Success means she stays conscious, failure means she passes out.



SNEAK ATTACKS

An actor who strikes a completely unsuspecting target typically does considerably more damage, whether it is a sucker punch, a dagger to the kidneys, or a crossbow bolt to the domepiece. A sneak attack is when an actor successfully sneaks up on a target (by succeeding at an opposed Stealth skill check), and then strikes that target (by then succeeding at an opposed offensive skill check). The attacker may add to the damage of her attack 1 HP damage per success rolled on the prior Stealth skill check against the same target, so long the attack roll scores at least 1 success. That means that if the attacker rolled 4 successes on a Stealth skill check sneaking up on a sentry, she may add 4 HP damage to her first attack against that sentry, assuming she rolls at least 1 success on her attack.

SHARDNETS DURING COMBAT

Remember, it takes at least 1 free hand to clutch a shard, allowing one to listen to the shardnet's echoes or think a clear-text echo. This is considered an incidental action. However, sending an encrypted echo does take both hands (one to clutch the shard and the other to inject the keyphrase), and requires that a player spends her action doing so. Players and GMs should be mindful of this reality during scenes of combat. If a combatant communicates over a shardnet, but does not explain how she is actually doing so, it should be assumed that the communication is clear-text, even if the party agreed upon a pre-established keyphrase for encryption.

When a player creates an echo, she does not immediately tell other players what the echo says. Instead, she waits until another player character (or GM character) specifies that they are “checking in,” at which point she may tell them what the echo says.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Fire

An actor on fire suffers from 1 HP damage per turn, ignoring armor, until that actor has both moved away from the source of the fire and spends an action extinguishing herself.

Acid

An actor struck by acid suffers from 1 HP damage per turn, ignoring armor, until that actor spends an action removing most of her outfit, or until a total of 3 HP is suffered.

Gravity

An actor suffers injury commensurate with the distance she falls. Falling a short distance (e.g. off a horse, off a one-story roof) results in a critical wound but no immediate HP damage. Falling a medium distance (e.g. off a castle wall, off a three-story roof) results in a mortal wound but no immediate HP damage. Falling a long distance (e.g. off a cliff, off a cathedral tower) results in HP being reduced to 0 and bleeding out. Falling further than that is death.

If something breaks an actor's fall (e.g. hay stack, manure pile, water, etc.), the results of the fall are typically reduced by one level of severity (e.g. from medium distance down to short). Also, a player may opt to make an unopposed Acrobatics skill check of tough difficulty in order to downgrade a fall by one level of severity, but dramatic failures tend to actually increase the severity of a fall.

Physics

Inevitably, a character will suffer some type of exotic physical trauma for which there are no rules (e.g. ran over by a horse, crushed by a portcullis, etc.). Just leverage the gravity rules creatively, and replace Acrobatics skill checks with Feat of Strength skill checks.

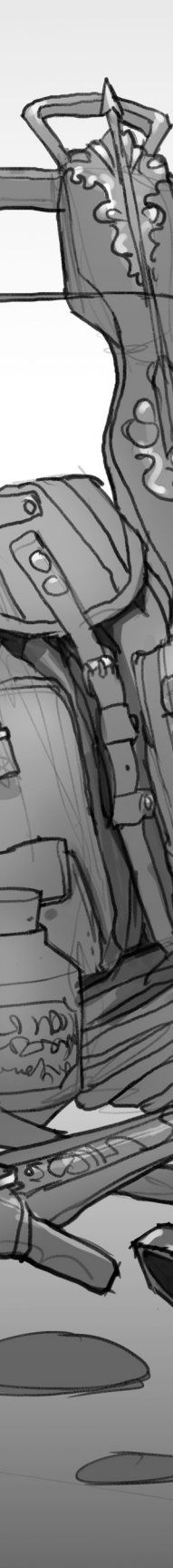


/ROOT/COMBAT/CD ..
/ROOT/CD STUFF
/ROOT/STUFF/LS

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STUFF





/ROOT/STUFF/

AN APPROACH TO STUFF

Think of your favorite fantasy character. Now think of that trademark weapon, outfit, or artifact they wouldn't be caught dead without. A character of the fantasy genre more often than not possesses a thing, things, or stuff nearly as iconic as that character's race, personality, or abilities. Fantasy role-playing really emphasized this fact from day one, and rules regarding weapons, armor, and other stuff have pretty much been part and parcel of the hobby. In this regard, Cryptomancer follows suit. However, we have attempted to strike a balance between genre conventions and those narrative qualities that make fantasy stuff so iconic and interesting.

Take this simple example: *it's not just a sword, it was your father's sword*. Even without more context, this sword suddenly symbolizes all kinds of responsibility and/or baggage its owner likely doesn't want to have to deal with. It's no longer just an implement of death, but also an exciting and personal narrative hook. You'll find that we have called out the importance of such qualities in the following sections discussing weapons and armor. Much like appearance and personality qualities introduced earlier, these qualities are totally optional, but they are a great way to differentiate characters, populate the game space with memorable artifacts, and provide the GM with narrative hooks.

TRADEMARK WEAPON:

RULES

QUALITIES

TRADEMARK OUTFIT:

RULES

QUALITIES

WEAPONS

The fantasy genre, and role-playing in general, has a medieval weaponry fetish. So do we! Many fantasy gamers expect there to be meaningful mechanical differences between, say, a dagger and a claymore. However, the veritable menagerie of weapons, each one a beautiful snowflake designed to kill in a very specific way, can be hard to manage in a rule set. We have endeavored to address this tension with weapon rules. Weapons are composed of rules, which represent their advantages, disadvantages, requirements, and limitations. We have chosen this method of presenting weapons because it is a way of introducing meaningful difference between weapons while maintaining relatively low mechanical drag and ease of reference.

We're going to be introducing all the rules in a table, and then constructing some sample weapons using those rules. First, let's walk through an example so you can grok the idea.

A dagger has the following rules: Balanced, Concealable, Dirty, Damage 0, Light, Melee, Precise Melee, Short, Thrown Missile. What does all that mean?

It means a dagger is an easily concealed melee weapon that can be used to stab folks using the Precise Melee skill, or chucked at folks within medium range using the Thrown Missile skill. It does a number of HP damage equal to however many successes are rolled during either of those aforementioned skill checks. It's small enough where it can be used lethally in a grapple, but also too small to parry larger weapons or slash someone riding by on horseback.

In short, we've jam-packed a lot of information in 9 short phrases. It may seem like a lot to remember, but rules will become second nature after a couple of uses. Best of all, it is a way of fitting a lot of fun mechanical minutiae in one small space on the character sheet.





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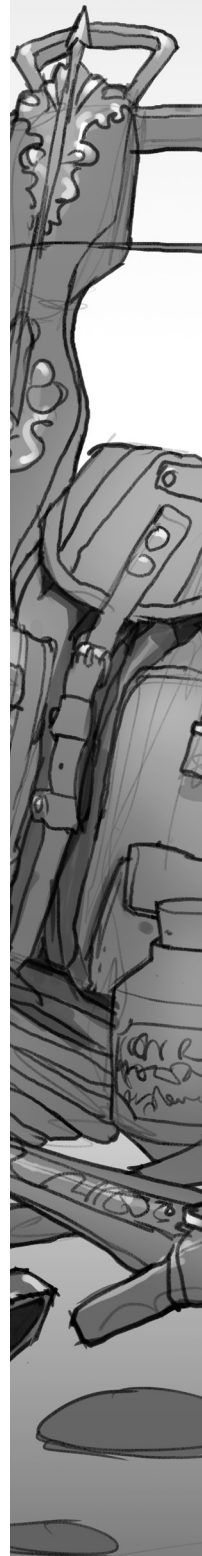
WEAPON RULES

Weapon Rule	Description
Balanced	Can be thrown at a target up to medium range.
Brute Melee	Attacks can be made using the Brute Melee skill.
Concealable	Small enough to be easily concealed on one's person.
Cumbersome	Any attack made in confined spaces (e.g. low-clearance tunnels, cramped hallways, etc.) is considered a tough task.
Dirty	May be used during a grapple.
Damage + X	The weapon does a number of HP damage equal to the successes of a skill check, plus or minus a value (e.g. 1).
Fired Missile	Attacks can be made using the Fired Missile skill.
Light	May only parry other Light weapons, nothing larger.
Melee	May only strike a target at close range.
Overwhelming	The weapon can only be parried by a target using a shield or another Overwhelming weapon.
Precise Melee	Attacks can be made using the Precise Melee skill.
Ranged	May strike a target at any range, but any attack against a target at close range is considered a tough task.
Short	Any attack against a mounted combatant is considered a tough task, unless the wielder of this weapon is also mounted.
Slow Reload	An action must be spent reloading this weapon before it can be used again.
Strength Requirement X	Requires X or more Strength (e.g. 3) to wield, otherwise the wielder suffers from an additional 1 botch every time she uses the weapon.
Thrown Missile	Attacks can be made using the Thrown Missile skill.
Two-handed	Must be gripped by both hands when used to attack targets or parry incoming blows.
Unarmed Melee	Attacks can be made using the Unarmed Melee skill.

SQL>SELECT * FROM
SAMPLE WEAPONS

Weapon	Rules	Description	Coin
Axe	Balanced, Brute Melee, Damage +1, Melee, Short, Thrown Missile	A heavy chopping tool designed to shatter shields and hook combatants to throw them off balance.	100
Bow	Damage 0, Fired Missile, Ranged, Two-handed	A wooden bow, carved from a single piece of wood, with a leather grip. Can fire an arrow pulled from a quiver in one fluid motion.	50
Claymore	Brute Melee, Cumber-some, Damage +2, Melee, Overwhelming, Strength Requirement 3, Two-handed	A heavy two-handed sword, ideal for keeping crowds at bay and breaking pole arms like twigs.	300
Club	Balanced, Brute Melee, Concealable, Dirty, Damage 0, Light, Melee, Short, Thrown Missile	A short, solid club with a weight affixed to the end, designed for bludgeoning a target into submission.	10
Crossbow	Damage +2, Fired Missile, Ranged, Slow Reload, Two-handed	A mechanical version of a bow where a bolt is primed to fire the moment its handler pulls a trigger.	300
Dagger	Balanced, Concealable, Dirty, Damage 0, Light, Melee, Precise Melee, Short, Thrown Missile	An elongated knife designed specifically for combat and assassination.	10
Halberd	Brute Melee, Cumber-some, Damage +2, Melee, Overwhelming, Strength Requirement 3, Two-handed	A sturdy two-handed pole arm with an axe blade just underneath its spear point, designed to cleave through enemies and pull mounted warriors to the ground.	300
Javelin	Balanced, Damage +1, Melee, Precise Melee, Short, Thrown Missile	A thrusting spear short enough to be held in one hand in tandem with a shield.	50
Mace	Brute Melee, Damage +1, Melee, Short	A heavy metal club, hefty enough to crush bones and cave in helmets.	100

-- MORE --





SQL>SELECT * FROM

SAMPLE WEAPONS (CONT.)

Weapon	Rules	Description	Coin
Maul	Brute Melee, Cumbersome, Damage +2, Melee, Overwhelming, Strength Requirement 3, Two-handed	A heavy two-handed mace that transfers one's entire body weight and force into a single crushing hammer head.	300
Punching Dagger	Concealable, Dirty, Damage 0, Light, Melee, Short, Unarmed Melee	A wide-bladed or multi-bladed variant of the dagger, designed to strike targets with a punching motion.	10
Quarterstaff	Cumbersome, Damage 0, Melee, Precise Melee, Two-handed	A thin shaft of hardwood, longer than its wielder is tall, that is less deadly than other two-handed weapons but considerably easier to wield.	10
Sling	Damage -1, Fired Missile, Ranged	A simple strand of leather with a pocket to stow a stone, which can be spun with a single hand to gain power before being released.	10
Spear	Balanced, Cumbersome, Damage +1, Melee, Precise Melee, Thrown Missile, Two-handed	A long two-handed spear tipped with a hardened blade that can be used for either slashing or piercing.	50
Sword	Brute Melee, Damage +1, Melee, Short	A large one handed blade, hefty enough to sever limbs and cut through armor.	100
Unarmed Attacks	Dirty, Damage -1, Light, Melee, Short, Unarmed Melee	Unarmed strikes, including but not limited to, punches, kicks, knee strikes, elbow strikes, and head butts.	N/A
Whip	Concealable, Cumbersome, Damage -1, Light, Melee, Precise Melee, Unarmed Melee	A long strand of braided leather tipped with razor-sharp barbs.	50

/ROOT/STUFF/

AMMO

Generally speaking, ammunition is not fun to track, and bolts, arrows, and stones can be recovered after battles, so it is recommended that GM's and players just trust in the universe and not bring up ammunition unless dramatically appropriate.

/ROOT/STUFF/

WEAPON QUALITIES

Lastly, all weapons have material, cosmetic, and narrative qualities that make them unique. Weapon qualities are designed to help players visualize and explain their characters as well as provide narrative hooks for GMs.

Weapon qualities have no tangible mechanical effects, but may impact the story or dialogue. Players and GMs are encouraged to evoke these details at dramatically appropriate times. Some examples: carrying a tainted weapon into a place of peace, wielding a weapon clearly stolen from a powerful foe, discovering that the encrypted etchings on a weapon are the true names of its victims, etc. Again, weapon qualities have no mechanical effect. They should be used to explain mechanical outcomes (e.g. the attack bounces off your blade's oversized hilt), but should rarely if ever influence mechanical outcomes (e.g. your weapon's oversized hilt makes it better at parrying).

Players are encouraged to select between 1-3 weapon qualities for their characters' trademark weapons, but it's entirely optional.





SQL>SELECT * FROM

WEAPON QUALITIES

Weapon Rule	Description
Distracting Feature	The weapon has a very distinct and very unnecessary feature, such as a garish counterbalance, a chain connecting it to a scabbard, massive blood grooves, or a feathered pommel.
Dwarven Make	The weapon's materials and construction indicate it is of dwarven make: heavy, geometric in shape, and cold looking, with metal components made of mythril.
Elven Make	The weapon's materials and construction indicate it is of elven make: lightweight, organic in shape, and masterfully adorned, with metal components made of carapace.
Human Make	The weapon's materials and construction indicate it is of human make: simple, balanced, and bearing the crafter's signature in style, with metal components made of steel.
Macabre	The weapon has construction or features that are somewhat disturbing, such as a skull for a hilt, meat chunks caught in its serrated teeth, or some kind of dark occult design.
Magical Effect	The weapon possesses a cosmetic magical quality, such as a flaming blade, a blinking eye carved into the hilt, or tracing light in the air for seconds after it is swung.
Message	The weapon is embroidered/etched with an encrypted message, which the owner may or may not be able to decrypt.
Mundane	The weapon is remarkably unremarkable. It couldn't be picked out of a line up. It is so mundane, in fact, it might be distracting or even tacky depending on who is wielding it.
Named	The weapon has a name. It might be named after someone or something of significance, or have a silly name, or a cool name.
Noisy	The weapon's construction, materials, and accessories make it particularly noticeable: the weapon bounces in its scabbard, slaps against armor, or drags on the ground.
Oversized	The weapon is absurdly oversized, as if designed for a creature much bigger than its wielder, and likely makes for some interesting and awkward handling techniques.
Personality	The weapon has a tendency of acting on its own: popping out of its scabbard, releasing bolts prematurely, or seeming to lean toward actors its wielder hates.
Precious	The weapon is constructed of precious materials and/or adorned with jewels, making it a public badge of affluence and likely coveted by the greedy.

-- MORE --

SQL>SELECT * FROM

WEAPON QUALITIES (CONT.)

Weapon Rule	Description
Previous Owner	The weapon once belonged to someone else of significance or maybe had many owners over time, changing hands on purpose or by accident. They might even want it back.
Reflective	The weapon's construction, materials, and polish make it particularly good at reflecting light, be it sunlight, torchlight, or magical light, unless it is sheathed in a scabbard.
Shoddy	The weapon appears to be worn down, rusted, chipped, and dull-looking, either the result of extensive use, poor maintenance, or purposeful display of humility.
Storied	The weapon has a unique back-story. It might be known only to its owner or a select group who know the story, or might be known by many people.
Striking Storage	The weapon's scabbard, sheathe, sling, or quiver is as interesting and/or useful as the weapon it holds. It might be hidden, or in an unusual spot, or used in an offhand.

/ ROOT / STUFF /

MASTERWORK WEAPONS

Not all weapons are made equal. A one-of-a-kind sword commissioned by a wealthy buyer, made by a master smith, and forged from the finest materials is going to be superior to a sword stamped out in a hurry to arm a conscripted farmer. A *masterwork weapon* has one of the following advantages, chosen by the smith who creates it:

- Add one of the following rules to the weapon: 'Balanced,' 'Concealable,' 'Dirty,' or 'Overwhelming.'
- Remove 'Cumbersome,' 'Light,' 'Short,' or 'Slow Reload' from the weapon.
- Increase the weapon's 'Damage' by 1 or reduce the weapon's 'Strength Requirement' by 1.



OUTFITS

Characters in the fantasy genre often have an iconic outfit, whether it is a tattered robe, a battle-scarred suit of armor, court finery, a patchwork of armor plates and leather, or a simple tunic and cloak.

When it comes to character outfits, we'll be taking the same exact approach that we took with weapons: introduce rules, cobble examples together with said rules, and then introduce outfit qualities. So without further ado, the armor rules.

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SQL>SELECT * FROM
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OUTFIT RULES

Outfit Rule	Description
Endurance Requirement X	Requires X or more Endurance to wear (e.g. 4), otherwise the wearer suffers from an additional 1 botch to every physical skill check (those skill checks using the Agility, Dexterity, Endurance, or Strength attributes).
Damage Reduction	Reduces the damage of any attack by 1 HP, after Light Deflection or Heavy Deflection are taken into consideration.
Heavy Deflection	Ignores all flesh wounds and serious wounds.
Innocuous	The outfit will not draw the attention of security personnel... at least, from a security risk perspective.
Light Deflection	Ignores all flesh wounds.
Max Agility X	Skill checks using the Agility attribute can throw no more than X attribute dice per skill check, even if the character's Agility rank is higher.

SQL>SELECT * FROM SAMPLE OUTFITS

Outfit	Rules	Description	Coin
Brigandine	Light Deflection	A heavy leather cuirass or corset with metal plates sewn inside the leather, with metal studs dotting the outside of the leather in a protective and decorative layout.	200
Doublet	Innocuous	A shorter but more flamboyant variant of the tunic, made of high quality fabric woven in a checkerboard, striped, or argyle pattern, with buttons down the center. Typically accompanied by tights or puffy breeches, and ruffled collar.	25
Dress	Innocuous	A bodice and accompanying skirt of varying length, worn over a gown made of soft fabric. Typically accompanied by wide sleeves, loose belts, and sandals or knee-high leather boots.	10
Great Coat	Innocuous	A heavy double-breasted coat that hangs below the knees, accented by an enormous lapel. Typically accompanied by a sash and/or tassels hanging from at least one shoulder.	25
Leather Armor	Light Deflection	A soft leather cuirass or corset with layered bolts of tough, boiled leather protecting the shins, forearms, and shoulders.	100
Mail Armor	Endurance Requirement 3, Heavy Deflection, Max Agility 3	A hauberk and coif composed of small interlocking metal rings, with heavy leather bracers, greaves, and boots protecting the limbs. A decorative surcoat hangs over the torso.	400
Plate Armor	Damage Reduction, Endurance Requirement 4, Heavy Deflection, Max Agility 2	A custom suit of metal, composed of overlapping plates, flexible joint structures, and massive shoulder pads and tassets, all molded to both fit and exaggerate the wearer's physical features. Topped with a frog helm or a gorget rising up to the eyes.	1000

-- MORE --





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SQL>SELECT * FROM
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SAMPLE OUTFITS (CONT.)

Outfit	Rules	Description	Coin
Scale Armor	Endurance Requirement 3, Heavy Deflection, Max Agility 3	A padded leather suit covered entirely with overlapping rows of metal scales, granting the wearer a lizard-like appearance. Plate metal kneepads and elbow guards protect the joints.	600
Sylvan Garb	Innocuous	The suggestion of clothing: a half-naked body accented by sporadic leather bindings, bulky necklaces and bracelets, and loincloth, and little else.	10
Tunic	Innocuous	A long garment made of heavy fabric that starts at the shoulders and hangs down to mid-thigh. Typically accompanied by belts, chest belts, breeches of a similar fabric, and knee-high leather boots.	10
Vestments	Innocuous	A loose fitting, flowing robe with wide, hanging sleeves and oversized hood hanging down the back. Typically accompanied by a mitre, vest, and a sash around the waist.	25

Just like we did with a dagger in the weapon section, let's work through an example of armor rules in action. Plate armor is defined by the following rules: Damage Reduction, Endurance Requirement 4, Heavy Deflection, and Max Agility 2. What does this mean?

It means that plate armor is really good at stopping blows. It ignores outright all flesh wounds (1 HP) and serious wounds (2 HP). Further, wounds that come in at 3 or more HP damage get reduced by 1 HP, which means that if the wearer suffers a critical wound (3 HP), it gets reduced to 2HP (which is no longer a critical wound, but a serious wound). Remember, though, Damage Reduction occurs *after* Heavy Deflection.

The awesome defensive power of plate armor comes

-- MORE --

at a steep cost. The wearer must have 4 or more Endurance or be terribly encumbered and bad at virtually all physical tasks until the armor is removed (i.e. an additional botch to all skill checks using the Agility, Dexterity, Endurance, or Strength attributes).

Further, the bulkiness of this armor makes its harder to do things like sneak around or perform athletic/acrobatic endeavors while wearing it. A character wearing this armor will be throwing no more than 2 attribute dice when making skill checks using the Agility attribute, even if her Agility rank is 3, 4, or 5.

/ROOT/STUFF/

OUTFIT QUALITIES

Just like weapons, character outfits in the fantasy genre have qualities that make them unique. Outfit qualities are designed to help players visualize and explain their characters as well as provide narrative hooks for GMs.

Outfit qualities have no tangible mechanical effects, but may impact the story or dialogue. Players and GMs are encouraged to evoke these details at dramatically appropriate times. Some examples: wearing shoddy clothing to a gala or precious jewels to a ghetto, admiring or scorning dwarven craftsmanship, having an accessory either get snagged on something or be used as a tool to save the day, etc. Again, outfit qualities have no mechanical effect. They should be used to explain mechanical outcomes (e.g. your noisy outfit betrays your stealth attempt), but should rarely if ever influence mechanical outcomes (e.g. your noisy outfit makes your stealth attempt harder).

Players are encouraged to select between 1-3 outfit qualities for their characters' trademark outfits, but it's entirely optional.





SQL>SELECT * FROM

OUTFIT QUALITIES

Outfit Quality	Description
Awkward Fit	The outfit was clearly designed for someone of a different body type, resulting in the character seemingly drowning in this outfit, or uncomfortably bulging out of it.
Distracting Feature	The outfit has a very distinct and very unnecessary feature, such as a long dress tail, a large standard rising from the wearer's back, coils of light chain, or a heavy cape.
Dwarven Make	The outfit's materials and construction indicate it is of dwarven make: smart angles, dark colors, flamboyant accents, and metal components made of mythril.
Elven Make	The outfit's materials and construction indicate it is of elven make: loose fit, bright colors, asymmetric design, and metal components made of carapace.
Headgear	The outfit is complete with some type of distinct headgear: a winged helm, a garish mask, a jewel-encrusted tiara, a buck-et-sized skullcap, massive earrings, a spooky hood, etc.
Human Make	The outfit's materials and construction indicate it is of human make: modest, functional design, multiple layers, and metal components made of steel.
Macabre	The outfit has construction or accessories that are somewhat disturbing, such as skulls, finger bones, necklaces of ears, or disturbing occult imagery.
Magical Effect	The outfit possesses a cosmetic magical quality, such as being freezing to the touch, armor scales that bristle upon contact, or floating bracelets that never touch the skin.
Message	The outfit is embroidered/etched with an encrypted message, which the owner may or may not be able to decrypt.
Mundane	The outfit is remarkably unremarkable. It couldn't be picked out of a line up. It is so mundane, in fact, it might be distracting or even tacky depending on who is wearing it.
Named	The outfit has a name. It might be named after someone or something of significance, or have a silly name, or a cool name.
Noisy	The outfit's construction, materials, and accessories make it particularly noticeable: metal plates clank, chain jingles, fabric flutters, and tassels drag against the floor.
Precious	The outfit is constructed of precious materials and/or adorned with jewelry, making it a public badge of affluence and likely coveted by the greedy.

-- MORE --

SQL>SELECT * FROM

OUTFIT QUALITIES (CONT.)

Outfit Quality	Description
Previous Owner	The outfit once belonged to someone else of significance or maybe had many owners over time, changing hands on purpose or by accident. They might even want it back.
Reflective	The outfit's construction, materials, and polish make it particularly good at reflecting light, be it sunlight, torchlight, or magical light, unless it is covered with a cloak.
Risqué	The outfit exposes an unusual amount of flesh, intended to draw attention to tattoos, piercings, battle/ritual scars, or simply the wearer's physique.
Shoddy	The outfit appears to be worn down, rusted, dirty, and in tatters, either the result of extensive use, poor maintenance, or purposeful display of humility.
Storied	The outfit has a unique back-story. It can be known to only the wearer, or a select group who know the story, or anyone who looks at it.

/ROOT/STUFF/

MASTERWORK OUTFITS

Just like weapons, not all outfits are made the same. A *masterwork outfit* has one of the following advantages, chosen by the smith who creates it:

- Add 'Light Deflection' to the outfit, or upgrade the outfit's 'Light Deflection' to 'Heavy Deflection.'
- Add 'Damage Reduction' to the outfit, so long as the outfit is not 'Innocuous'.
- Add 'Innocuous' to the outfit, so long as the outfit does not have 'Damage Reduction.'
- Increase the outfit's 'Max Agility' by 1 point, or lower the outfit's 'Endurance Requirement' by 1 point.



EQUIPMENT & CONSUMABLES

Aside from iconic weapons and outfits, fantasy characters frequently have interesting items, tools, and artifacts we'll generically refer to as *equipment* and *consumables*. Equipment and consumables help characters accomplish certain tasks, and in some cases, are required for certain tasks. For example, a character attempting to pick a lock needs a set of lock picks, otherwise the task is extremely difficult if not impossible. Equipment and consumables are basically the same thing, except consumables can only be used once and then are either consumed or discarded.

As a design choice, we assume that all player characters have all the satchels, hip bags, utility belts, and backpacks they need to cart around their stuff. As long as a player can explain where their character puts something, there should be no worries about that character being overburdened. If characters seem to be accumulating an absurd amount of personal gear, GMs are encouraged to encumber them with the same rules discussed in the outfit section.

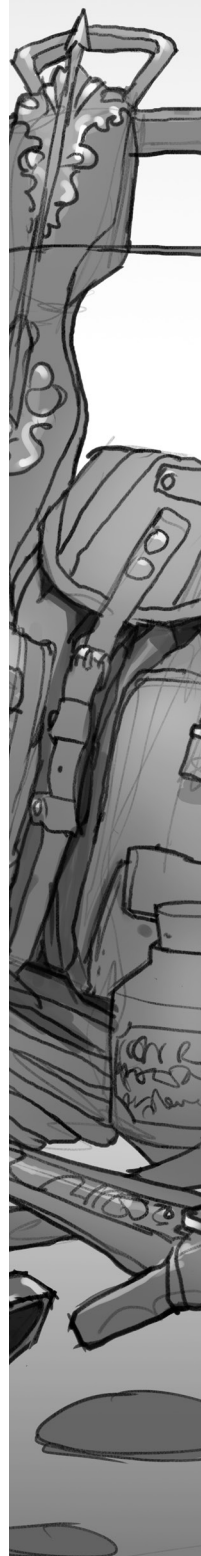
You'll also notice that much of the equipment is listed not as an individual item (e.g. a single healing salve) but as a kit (e.g. a medicine bag full of healing salves). That's because equipment is meant to represent and facilitate a character's capabilities and skills. We ought not worry about how many bandages a healer has, or how many sample jars an alchemist has, only that a character has the equipment to do things and is at a disadvantage when separated from that equipment. Players are encouraged to be creative and emphasize specific items in a kit at dramatic moments. For example, "I grab a single lock pick from my set and weave it into my hair, so I'll have it even if I'm taken prisoner," or "I use the rope in my climbing gear kit to tie the unconscious bandit to a tree." It should be assumed that characters are maintaining and resupplying these types of items "off camera" and in between scenes.

SQL>SELECT * FROM

SAMPLE EQUIPMENT

Equipment	Description	Coin
Buckler	A very small round shield, not much larger than a person's hand, made of metal. Allows an actor to parry any type of melee attack, but does not allow parrying against missile attacks.	25
Camping Gear	Enough bug nets, stakes, and tarps for the whole party to weather the elements and rest comfortably in nearly any environment. Required if the party wishes to take downtime away from civilization. Large enough where it can only be contained in a backpack.	100
Climbing Gear	Pitons, pulleys, climbing claws, grappling hooks, and enough rope to not only scale or rappel down virtually any surface, but also set up the rigging to make it possible for less athletic persons to follow. Large enough where it can only be contained in a backpack.	200
Cloak	A hooded, flowing garment meant to wear over one's outfit. A cloak protects one from the environment, helps to conceal one's identity, and looks cool.	25
Cryptomancer's Kit	All the parchment, chalk, coal, codebooks, and etching acid a cryptomancer needs to leave encrypted messages on virtually any surface or draft forged documents, all contained in a small leather pouch that can be rolled up tightly, worn across the waist, or wrapped around a thigh.	100
Infiltration Tools	A comprehensive set of lock picks and specialized mallets and tongs, designed to defeat any type of lock, all contained in a small leather pouch that can be rolled up tightly, worn across the waist, or wrapped around a thigh.	200
Kite Shield	A large kite-shaped metal shield. The shield's face is smooth and bares a crest, with a metal shield boss at the center. Equipped with a leather guige so the shield can be slung over one's back. Allows an actor to parry both melee and missile attacks. Also allows actor to parry missile attacks against allies that are in close range and behind the wielder, if this defense is better than the alternative.	200

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SQL>SELECT * FROM
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SAMPLE EQUIPMENT (CONT.)

Equipment	Description	Coin
Medicine Bag	A collection of surgical tools (e.g. scalpels, tweezers, needle and thread) and a nearly endless supply of bandages, healing salves, coagulants, and herbal remedies, contained within a backpack, shoulder-strapped bag, or multi-pocketed long coat or cloak.	200
Miscellaneous	There are plenty of things a character might possess and carry on her person that have no real gameplay effect, but might be useful or have some type of narrative purpose. This includes things like journals, changes of clothes, water skins, mead horns, knickknacks, jewelry, small idols, candles, steal and flint, etc.	Varies
Round Shield	A medium-sized round shield made of wood, reinforced with a metal ring. The shield's face is covered with rivets, with a shield boss at the center. Equipped with a leather guige so the shield can be slung over one's back. Allows an actor to parry both melee and missile attacks.	50
Spell Book	A dusty tome full of arcane sketches and esoteric passages, teaching its reader the gestures and evocations required to cast a specific spell. Cost varies depending on if it teaches a cantrip (200), basic spell (1000), or greater spell (5000).	Varies
Torch	A piece of wood with one end covered in an oil-soaked wrapping meant to be set on fire. As long as one character in the party is carrying a lit torch, the entire party can see fine in darkness.	5
Walking Lab	A rugged, portable lab containing a crucible, alembic, retort, fire-starting materials, specimen jars, and a nearly endless supply of trivial chemical reagents, all contained within a backpack, shoulder-strapped bag, or multi-pocketed long coat or cloak.	200
Walking Workshop	A set of all-purpose tools enabling a crafter to cut, carve, mold, modify, repair, or dismantle just about anything, big or small, crude or complex, all contained within a backpack, shoulder-strapped bag, or multi-pocketed long coat or cloak.	200

SQL>SELECT * FROM

SAMPLE CONSUMABLES

Consumable	Description	Coin
Acid Bomb	A bomb that erupts in a cloud of acid when thrown at a target. Does HP damage equal to Thrown Missile successes and also impacts targets within close range of original target. Use skill checks vs. groups mechanics to resolve. Refer to the “Combat” chapter for the effects of acid.	150
Elixir	A powerful potion rumored to be capable of small miracles such as resurrecting the newly dead, fighting off zombification, curing soma addiction, or beautifying the imbiber by reversing the aging process. The mechanical effects of an elixir are purposely absent: it is intended as a story device and a miracle cure.	300
Fire Bomb	A bomb that erupts in a fiery explosion when thrown at a target. Does HP damage equal to Thrown Missile successes and also impacts targets within close range of original target. Use skill checks vs. groups mechanics to resolve. Refer to the “Combat” chapter for the effects of fire.	150
Paralytic Poison	A poison that paralyzes when consumed (e.g. food or drink) or introduced into the blood stream via a poisoned weapon. When exposed, a target must succeed at a tough Endurance skill check to not become paralyzed for a scene. The effects of this lasts until cured with an antidote or spell, or when the scene ends. A poisoned weapon or quiver remains poisoned for a scene.	300
Possum Potion	A potion that slows down the imbiber’s heart rate, breathing, and metabolism so severely, she appears to be dead, complete with cold, pale skin and rigor mortis rigidity. This potion also stops all blood loss for its duration. Lasts for 24 hours.	150
Pure Soma	A small vial of vicious pure soma injected directly into the blood stream with a hollowed-out quill. Each use fully restores a character’s MP and creates a sense of euphoria and ecstasy. When exposed, a user must succeed at a tough Endurance skill check to not become addicted. An addict must succeed at a tough Willpower skill check at the beginning of each session of downtime: failure results in spending the entire time using soma or suffering (unproductive) pangs of withdrawal.	25

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SQL>SELECT * FROM
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SAMPLE CONSUMABLES (CONT.)

Consumable	Description	Coin
Sapper Satchel	A powerful bomb designed to blast tunnels and top-ple structures. Too awkward and heavy to be thrown. Must be attached to a structure or carried by a target and ignited with a fuse. Inflicts 3 HP damage per success rolled on an Alchemy skill check to a single structure or actor.	300
Sleep Rag	A rag soaked in a powerfully soporific chemical that sends mortals into deep sleep when inhaled. When exposed (typically when one's face is smothered by it via a successful Unarmed skill check), a target must succeed at a tough Endurance skill check to not fall unconscious for the duration of a scene. Victim can be startled awake by loud noises or sudden pain.	150
Smoke Bomb	A bomb that erupts in a cloud of sight-obscuring smoke. Creates artificial cover and confusion in areas where there normally might not be any (e.g. inside a human castle). Permits actors in the smoke cloud to make Stealth skill checks in plain sight.	50
Soma Leaf (x5 doses)	Tobacco leaves soaked in soma, dried, stuffed into a pipe, and smoked. Each use creates a momentary sense of euphoria and instantly restores 2 MP. May only be used during downtime. When exposed, a user must succeed at a trivial Endurance skill check to not become addicted. An addict must succeed at a trivial Willpower skill check at the beginning of each session of downtime: failure results in spending the entire time using soma or suffering (unproductive) pangs of withdrawal.	50
Soma Rock (x5 doses)	Soma and other chemicals baked into a crystalline form, then crushed into a powder that is snorted. Each use creates a momentary sense of euphoria and instantly restores 2 MP. When exposed, a user must succeed at a challenging Endurance skill check to not become addicted. An addict must succeed at a challenging Willpower skill check at the beginning of each session of downtime: failure results in spending the entire time using soma or suffering (unproductive) pangs of withdrawal.	150

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SQL>SELECT * FROM

SAMPLE CONSUMABLES (CONT.)

Consumable	Description	Coin
Strong Antidote	A potion that instantly cures weak poisons, strong poisons, and paralytic poisons when imbibed.	150
Strong Healing Potion	A potion that instantly stabilizes a critical or mortal wound when imbibed. If the imbiber is not wounded, then 4 HP are recovered instead.	150
Strong Mana Potion	A potion that instantly restores 4 MP when imbibed.	300
Strong Poison	A poison that causes organ failure when consumed (e.g. food or drink) or introduced into the blood stream via a poisoned weapon. When exposed, a target must succeed at a challenging Endurance skill check to not be affected by this poison. Does no HP damage initially, but does inflict a mortal wound on a target failing this skill check. The effects of this lasts until cured with an antidote or spell. A poisoned weapon or quiver remains poisoned for a scene.	150
Truth Serum	A poison that makes one delirious and highly impressionable when imbibed (e.g. food or drink). When exposed, a target must succeed at a challenging Endurance skill check to not be affected. Downgrades the target's Wits and Resolve ranks to 4 for the duration of a scene.	50
Weak Antidote	A potion that instantly cures weak poisons and halts the symptoms of strong poisons for 1 scene when imbibed.	50
Weak Healing Potion	A potion that instantly stabilizes a critical wound when imbibed. If the imbiber is not wounded, then 2 HP are recovered instead.	50
Weak Mana Potion	A potion that instantly restores 2 MP when imbibed.	150
Weak Poison	A poison that causes organ failure when consumed (e.g. food or drink) or introduced into the blood stream via a poisoned weapon. When exposed, a target must succeed at a trivial Endurance skill check to not be affected by this poison. Does no HP damage initially, but does inflict a critical wound on a target failing this skill check. The effects of this lasts until cured with an antidote or a purge spell. A poisoned weapon or quiver remains poisoned for a scene.	50



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/ROOT/STUFF/CD ..  
/ROOT/CD DOWNTIME  
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DOWNTIME



WHAT IS DOWNTIME?

In any game session, there are scenes of adventure, infiltration, social interaction, and combat. However, there are also scenes that traditionally happen either off-camera or during a montage: planning, healing, resting, training, preparing, researching, crafting, and setting traps. Cryptomancer supports these important but non-dramatic activities with a simple concept called *downtime*.

A session of downtime is an approximately 8 hour block of time where the characters are doing stuff (even if that stuff is just getting bed rest). Downtime can be declared by the players (e.g. “We need to prepare for tonight’s mission”) or declared by the GM (e.g. “The courier with your orders won’t arrive for another 8 hours. What are your characters doing during that time?”).

For downtime to actually be successful and productive, the party must neither be in immediate danger, exposed to hostile environmental conditions, nor subject to constant annoyance or interruption. That is to say that the party must be in a safe place, have some form of shelter, and some form of seclusion to actually get anything done during this time. Examples of locations fitting this criteria might be a room at an inn, a set camp with tents, a cleared cave, or a safe house. GMs have the right to veto a player-invoked session of downtime either outright (e.g. “this location is not conducive to downtime”) or through interruption (e.g. “just as you are about to nail the first tent stake into the dirt, you hear the rumbling of an orcish horde approaching”).

Some actions during downtime might require leaving the confines of a safe house or quiet place to get anything done. For example, social networking in order to sew oneself into an exclusive group might require a character to spend sessions of downtime carousing and interacting with GM characters. As long as the environment is “generally safe” (that is, not full of traps, monsters, and assassins), this

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is a perfectly acceptable way for a character to spend her downtime action.

Forward, we'll be discussing some of the things that characters can do during downtime to make it productive. Think of downtime as the "strategy" phase of a game session, while things like combat, infiltration, and active role-play are the "tactical" phase of a game session.

/ROOT/DOWNTIME/

HEALING HP

As was discussed in the Combat chapter, downtime can be used to recover HP at a rate of 1 per session of downtime spent resting. That includes incapacitated characters, who stop being incapacitated and wake up once their HP reaches 1.

Alternatively, a character can spend this time performing *surgery* on an incapacitated character. Surgery is an unopposed Medicine skill check of tough difficulty. However, for each success, the incapacitated actor gains 1 HP.

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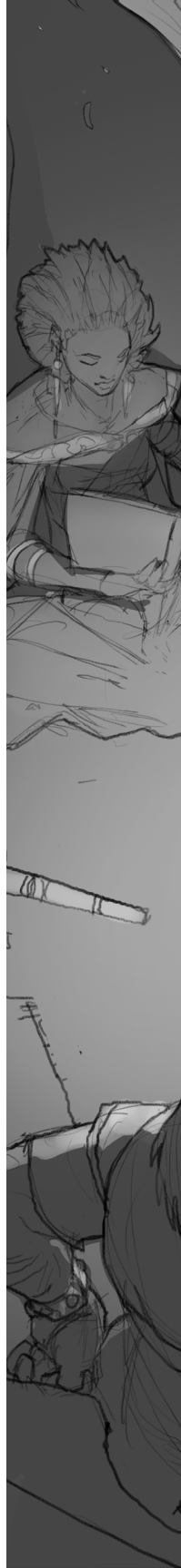
RESTORING MP

A character who spends a session of downtime in deep meditation restores a number of MP equal to her Willpower rank. Other than imbibing mana potions or using the addictive substance soma, this is the only way for a character to restore her MP.

/ROOT/DOWNTIME/

LEARNING A SPELL

A character who has access to a spell book can spend a session of downtime reading it and learning that spell. She can also learn it from a teacher who already knows the spell, but this requires that her teacher also spend downtime teaching her. The character learning the spell must also have Talent Points available to purchase it.



BREWING CONSUMABLES

The primary use of the Alchemy skill is brewing consumables: potions, poisons, and other useful concoctions. Regardless of what an alchemist is brewing, the act of alchemy takes time and concentration, and thus happens “off camera” during sessions of downtime.

Gathering reagents

All concoctions require reagents. Trivial concoctions require trivial reagents: ingredients easily found in nature or inexpensively bought at the market. Tough concoctions require tough reagents: exotic substances that are both expensive and difficult to acquire. Challenging reagents are somewhere in between.

During downtime, a character can opt to search for reagents by making an unopposed Scrounge skill check, the difficulty of which is determined by the type of reagents they seek. Upon success, the alchemist finds a number of reagents equal to the amount of successes she rolled.

Of course, some alchemists are fortunate enough to have a readily available supply of reagents at their fingertips. An alchemist equipped with a Walking Lab has a near infinite supply of trivial reagents. An alchemist who has access to an Alchemy Lab in her safe house has a near infinite supply of challenging reagents.

Performing alchemy

Generally speaking, an alchemist can brew 1 consumable per session of downtime spent performing alchemy, assuming that the alchemist has the required reagents and succeeds at an unopposed Alchemy skill, the difficulty of which is determined by the recipe’s complexity. As discussed in the Skills chapter, a dramatic success either doubles the quantity of consumables made or upgrades the consumable (e.g. a weak poison becomes a strong poison), player’s

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choice. Dramatic failures tend to result in chemical accidents, lab fires, and cool scars.

Herkin mixes reagents together to make a weak healing potion. Herkin has a Knowledge rank of 4. The difficulty of creating a weak healing potion is trivial (4+). Herkin's player rolls 4 attribute dice and 1 fate dice, hoping to get at least 1 success. His player rolls 3 successes, a dramatic success! The GM gives the player the option of granting Herkin two weak healing potions or a single strong healing potion for his efforts.

OR

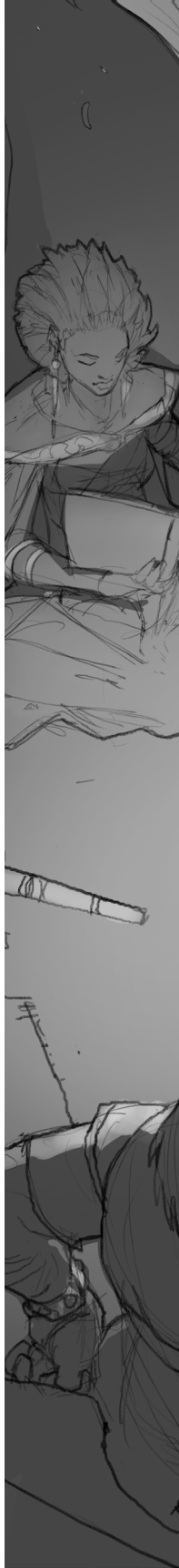
His player rolls a total of 2 botches, a dramatic failure! Herkin's alembic explodes and sets his lab on fire!

SQL>SELECT * FROM

CONCOCTION DIFFICULTY

Consumable	Difficulty	Coin
Acid Bomb	Challenging	100
Elixir	Tough	300
Fire Bomb	Challenging	150
Paralytic Poison	Tough	300
Possum Potion	Challenging	150
Sapper Satchel	Tough	300
Sleep Rag	Challenging	150
Smoke Bomb	Trivial	50

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SQL>SELECT * FROM

CONCOCTION DIFFICULTY

Consumable	Difficulty	Coin
Soma Leaf (x5 doses)	Trivial (<i>requires 1 unit of pure soma</i>)	50
Soma Rock (x5 doses)	Challenging (<i>requires 1 unit of pure soma</i>)	150
Strong Antidote	Challenging	150
Strong Healing Potion	Challenging	150
Strong Mana Potion	Tough	300
Strong Poison	Challenging	150
Truth Serum	Trivial	50
Weak Antidote	Trivial	50
Weak Healing Potion	Trivial	50
Weak Mana Potion	Challenging	150
Weak Poison	Trivial	50

CRAFTING THINGS

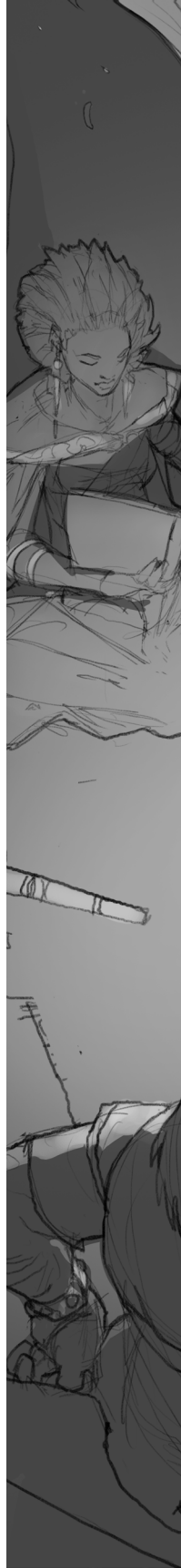
Craft is the primary skill of smiths, artisans, engineers, and problem-solvers. It governs the creation, modification, and repair of mundane things (e.g. bundles of arrows, articles of clothing, etc.) or wondrous things (e.g. dwarven steam engines, immaculate tapestries, etc.). While the Craft skill can be used acutely to solve mechanical problems (e.g. jury-rig or sabotage things), Craft is generally a skill reserved for accomplishing tasks over one or more sessions of downtime. When working on a project, big or small, there are three important factors to consider: material requirements, project complexity, and the amount of time required to complete the project.

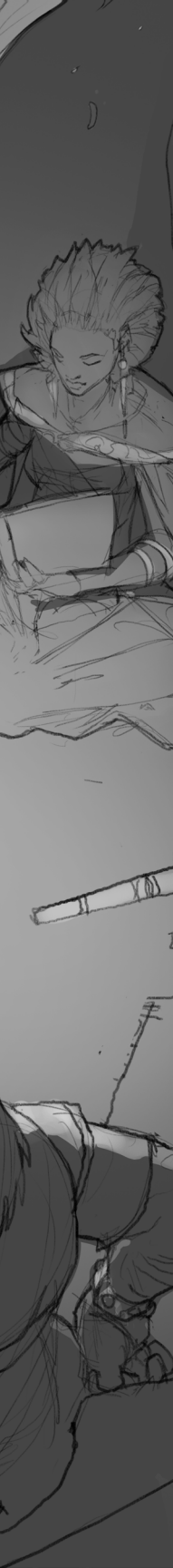
Material requirements

You can't create something from nothing. Any project requires raw materials or spare parts, not to mention the proper tools to do something with that material. Creating a log cabin, for instance, requires access to timber as well as access to tools to cut and carve that timber and nail it into place. Creating a dwarven steam engine, on the other hand, requires access to diverse parts (e.g. gears, sprockets, belts, and valves of various length and thickness) and a well-equipped workshop, to hoist, rotate, fit, and fuse parts into place.

Material requirements are a yes or no proposition. Either you have the material to work on a project or you don't. There is no middle ground. GMs should approach material narratively, instead of insisting that a player have every possible part in their inventory. For example, "access to an abandoned dwarven junkyard" should suffice as material for virtually any type of steam- or clockwork-powered device one can imagine. "A crate of fine ore," meanwhile, might include all the material required to forge a handful of weapons or a single suit of plate armor. Alternatively, a GM can decide that a project cannot begin until a single important part is obtained ("You can't construct your long-range

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crossbow scope until you find a specially crafted looking glass”).

Tools are also a yes or no proposition. While it might be possible to build, modify, or repair something without the proper tools, doing so would add so much complexity, time, and injury that it may as well be impossible as far as this game is concerned. Some projects require either no tools or a simple tool, like a carving knife. Some projects require a full tool set, such as those found in a shed, basement, or one’s walking workshop. Some projects require a full forge or workshop. Players and GMs should discuss this and come to an agreement on what degree of tools are required to do a task. As long as a player can sort of describe how they’d perform a task with the tools they have available, a GM should be inclined to agree and allow the project to move forward.

Project complexity

When determining the complexity of a crafting project, use the descriptors trivial, challenging, or tough to complete the following sentence:

Now that all the required material and tools have been procured, it will be _____ to build this thing.

Players and GMs should agree on the task difficulty of creating, modifying, or repairing an item before a project is started and resources are committed. Trivial projects include things like simple clothing, improvised weapons, arrows, simple household items (e.g. pots, specimen jars), simple adventuring gear (e.g. saddle-bags, weapon sheaths, ropes), or simple architecture (e.g. cabins, small bridges), etc. Challenging projects include all the things in the Stuff chapter, as well as elegant household items (e.g. tapestries, jewel encrusted goblets), and complex architecture (e.g. keeps, drawbridges), and simple dwarven machines (e.g. switches, clocks, ballistae). Tough projects involve advanced (read: masterwork) variants of any item listed in the Stuff chapter, plus marvelous household items (e.g. true works of

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art), exotic architectures (e.g. palaces, aqueducts), and complex dwarven machines (e.g. golems, steam engines).

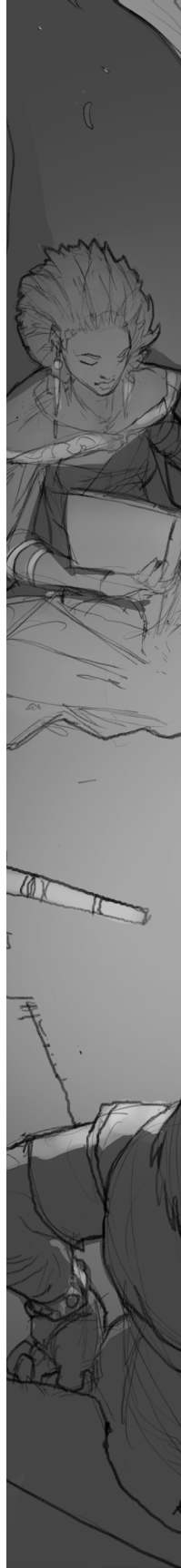
Don't get too caught up on categories; just rely on player and GM gut to determine whatever seems to make sense. Once a task difficulty is settled on, a player attempting to make progress on the project during downtime should make an unopposed Craft skill check of said difficulty. Successes result in progress toward project completion, while failures result in setbacks and accidents (potentially wasting and destroying required material).

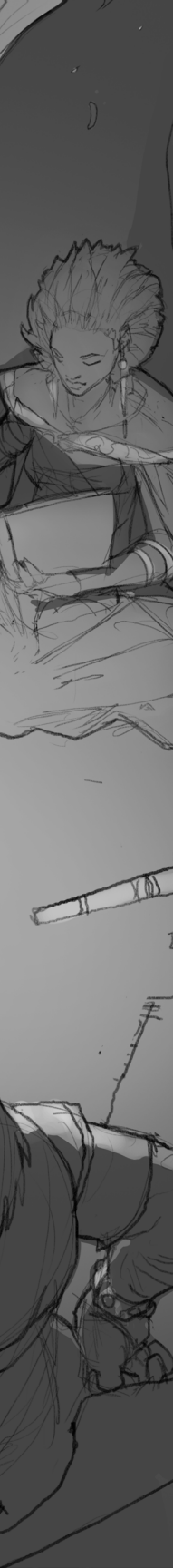
Project progress

Projects take time. A project can be completed quicker than usual if multiple people are working together to finish it. At the same time, a project can take longer than usual if there are set backs or accidents along the way. To simulate this, we introduce a simple concept of requiring X number of successes to be rolled over the course of one or more sessions of downtime for a project to be completed. How many successes depends on the project. A small project might only require 1 success over the project's life span, while a massive project might require hundreds, if not thousands, of successes (to be accumulated over a lifetime of work).

Fortunately, there is the concept of help. One or more actors can help pile on the successes to get a project done faster, so long as one actor, a project manager guiding and coordinating all the work being done, succeeds at an unopposed Craft skill check. In fact, actors helping don't even need to be skilled at craft. Whether scrambling for specific parts (Scrounge), carrying heavy stones (Feat of Strength), or getting at hard to reach places (Escape Artistry), there are lots of skills that helpers can leverage to add successes towards project completion. To make things simple, all helpers have the same task difficulty as the person making the unopposed Craft skill check. However, not only must the project manager herself succeed at a Craft skill check for any of the help to matter, but she can also only benefit from

-- MORE --





the help of a number of characters equal to the successes she rolled. If the project manager does not succeed at her Craft skill check, none of this help matters - it's all wasted effort.

Herkin and company embark on a project to restore a broken rail cart bridge connecting a mine to a local village. The GM determines that this is a challenging task that will require access to timber, steel, a tool kit, and 16 successes rolled. The party is able to scavenge all the required materials from the chasm below, where the previous bridge fell. Herkin himself never leaves home without his walking workshop: all the tools required for this project. With all requirements in place, the party takes a session of downtime to work on the project.

Herkin employs the help of his party, but decides to “manage” the project and direct the others doing the actual work. Moriarta is tasked with walking to the bottom of the chasm and carrying broken lengths of track up to the construction site: a grueling task. Her player makes a challenging unopposed Athletics roll, resulting in 2 successes. Thrace contributes in his own way and his player makes a challenging skill checks as well, resulting in 1 success. Finally, Herkin’s player makes a challenging unopposed Craft skill check. 1 success is rolled and it goes towards the 16 required to complete the bridge. However, Herkin is only able to benefit from the successes achieved by one other helper. Herkin’s player choses to add the successes rolled by Moriarta’s player, because she performed better than Thrace did. After 8 hours of work the party amasses a total of 3 successes. The party decides if they should head back to town and finish the work tomorrow, or put in another 8 hour shift.

Lastly, repairing a thing or upgrading a thing takes half as much time as it takes to create the thing from scratch. Creating a masterwork claymore from scratch requires 8 successes over multiple sessions of downtime, while reforging a standard claymore into a masterwork claymore only requires 4 successes. However, material requirements still apply.

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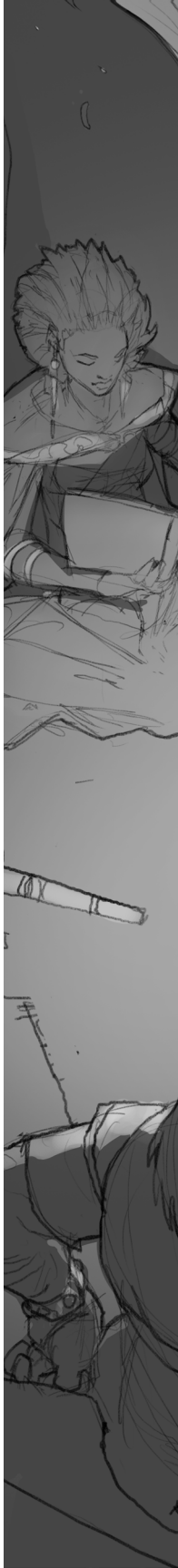
PROJECT TIME ESTIMATES

Task Difficulty	Small Thing (e.g. Weapon)	Medium Thing (e.g. Outfit)	Large Thing (e.g. Structure)
Trivial	2	4	8
Challenging	4	8	16
Tough	8	16	32+

SQL>SELECT * FROM

PROJECT EXAMPLES

Task Difficulty	Small Thing	Medium Thing	Large Thing
Trivial	Spear Dagger Crude goblet	Dress Horse Saddle Crude table	Rickety bridge Survival shelter Wooden palisade
Challenging	Crossbow Claymore Jeweled necklace	Brigandine Horse armor Fancy couch	Trebuchet Cryptovault Cabin
Tough	Cryptogear lock Masterwork weapon Infiltrator's kit	Ornate sculpture Masterwork outfit Gigaphid armor	Golem Steam engine Windmill



SETTING TRAPS

Setting traps takes time and effort, especially big or elaborate traps. While spring-action bear traps are an example of a portable trap with minimal preparation, such traps are typically difficult to carry around and aren't ideal traps for certain types of quarry (like multiple attackers). Improvised traps, like tiger-pits, swinging logs, falling rocks, tree snares, and alchemical bombs rigged to explode are far more effective in most cases. However, they take time (i.e. a scene of downtime) and tools (i.e. a walking workshop).

Traps are set during a session of downtime. An actor makes an unopposed Traps skill check of challenging difficulty. The number of successes rolled determines how many traps can be set, as well as the size and severity of those traps. A small trap costs 1 success, a medium trap costs 2 successes, and a large trap costs 3 successes. A trap-setter may pick and choose the traps she sets by paying for them with successes rolled during her initial roll.

Traps can be sprung by triggers (e.g. the chest explodes when opened) or can be activated on command (e.g. cutting a rope to release the swinging log). Both are resolved as opposed Traps skill checks versus the Wits rank of the target(s), even if the trap setter is not present on the scene. Alarm traps make a racket that everyone within long range can hear. Kill traps inflict damage on targets. Snare traps entangle targets. Escaping a snare trap requires a successful Escape Artistry skill check, the difficulty of which is determined by the trap size. Only one escape attempt may be made per scene or session of downtime. Someone outside of the trap can help someone escape by succeeding at an unopposed Traps skill check of the same difficulty.

If a trap is sprung while the trap-setter is not at the scene, the GM should roll on the trap-setter's behalf and represent her best interests. The GM need not tell the trap-setter the results of her efforts.

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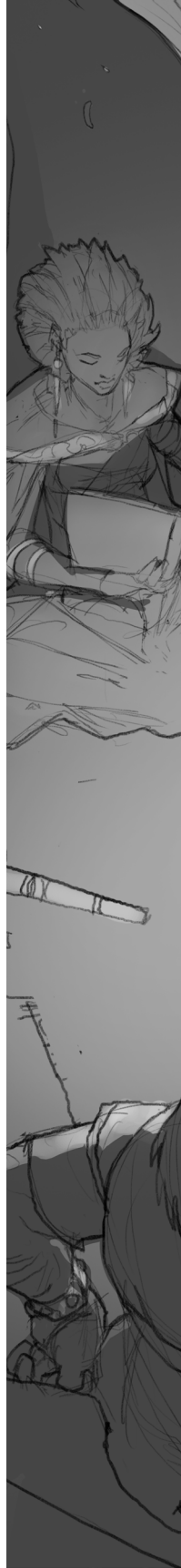
SQL>SELECT * FROM

TRAP EXAMPLES

Trap Type	Successes Required	Area of effect	Damage	Difficulty to escape
Alarm Trap	1	Single target	N/A	N/A
Large Kill Trap	3	Single target plus all targets in short range	Successes rolled + 2	N/A
Large Snare Trap	3	Single target plus all targets in short range	N/A	Tough
Medium Kill Trap	2	Single target plus all targets in close range	Successes rolled + 1	N/A
Medium Snare Trap	2	Single target plus all targets in close range	N/A	Challenging
Small Kill Trap	1	Single target	Successes rolled	N/A
Small Snare Trap	1	Single target	N/A	Trivial

Thrace is charged with defending the outpost alone, so he sets traps to increase his odds. During a session of downtime, he decides to set traps, which requires a Traps skill check of challenging difficulty. He rolls 2 successes, so he decides to build a medium kill trap. He builds a tiger pit in front of the outpost entrance, covers it with a tarp, and then covers the tarp with hay. If anyone rushes the entrance, they are in for a big surprise.

Later, bandits arrive as expected. Thrace sees them coming, insults them, and challenges them to come get him. The bandits rush toward the entrance. Thrace makes an opposed Traps skill check without the GM defining the task difficulty. 3 of the bandits have a Wits rank of 4, while their leader has a Wits rank of 6. Having rolled 9, 7, 4, 3, and 2, Thrace scores 3 successes against 3 of the bandits and 2 successes against their leader. The 3 bandits fall into the tiger pit and suffer 4 HP damage each (a medium kill trap does HP damage equal to successes rolled plus 1). Their leader suffers 3 HP damage.



SOCIAL NETWORKING

Trust doesn't come easily in the world of Cryptomancer. If one wants to join an exclusive group, she needs to do the work: show interest, demonstrate value, become accepted, demonstrate greater value, become indispensable, and eventually join the inner circle. Whether a character is infiltrating a king's court, an illicit cult, or an anonymous group of revolutionary cryptomancers, it's pretty much the same pattern. This stuff is ripe for tense and exciting role-playing, but sometimes players and GMs would prefer a "montage" version... especially in the case where most of the table would have to sit back and watch while a single player gets the limelight for a long time.

Thus, we offer social networking as a downtime activity. It's pretty simple. A character chooses a target organization, group, or clique. Then, during a session of downtime, she makes an appropriate skill check of varying difficulty. Successes go towards increasing one's social standing in that group and becoming more trusted by its members.

What skill check? That depends on the activities occurring. If a character is pretending to be something she is not, then perhaps Deception or Performance are in order. If a character is demonstrating how much of a badass she is, perhaps Menace is appropriate. If a character is smooth-talking her way into the inner circle, maybe Charm is the way to go. Finally, maybe the group needs her to demonstrate some actual acumen in a skill. For example, a guild of alchemist may need to be sure that the new initiate actually has talent in alchemy. In that case, an Alchemy skill check would make the most sense.

How about the difficulty of that skill check? This can really vary, but generally speaking, the difficulty of these tasks are equal to just how exclusive, elite, and paranoid the targeted organization is. Becoming a known entity in a city-state's tavern scene is probably a trivial task. Becoming

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a staple of court is probably a challenging task. Becoming a trusted member of a group that has been labeled “terrorists” and is constantly under the threat of infiltration by the authorities is probably a tough task.

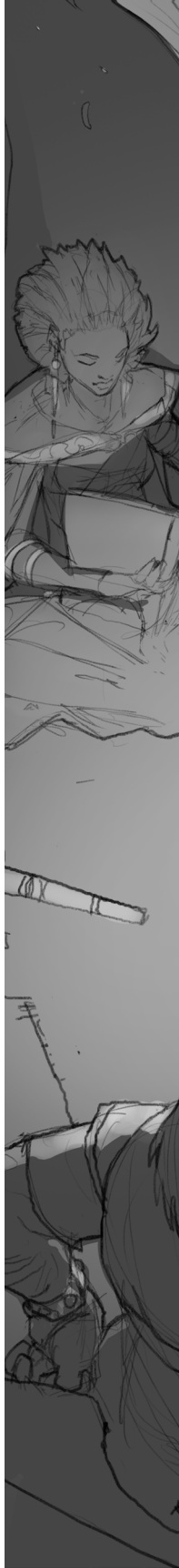
A networking player spends her successes accumulated over time to increase her own trust and renown in a group. Dramatic failures, however, tend to be bad - the character makes a faux pas or mistake that outs her as an impostor, spy, or someone no longer fit for membership.

So now that we have established the “engine” of social networking, here is a useful table that allows players to spend their successes.

SQL>SELECT * FROM

SOCIAL NETWORKING MILESTONES

Status	Total Successes	Description
Noticed	2	Someone that matters actually acknowledged your existence. You certainly aren't trusted, but you also aren't chased out of the group.
Accepted	5	If you have already been noticed, you can become accepted for an additional 3 successes. A handful of people in the group will vouch that you are either interesting, harmless, or have potential. You will be trusted with some sensitive information.
Respected	9	If you have already been accepted, you can become respected for an additional 4 successes. People in the group actually look up to you and defer to your judgment. You will be trusted with much sensitive information.
Admired	14	If you have already become respected, you can become admired for an additional 5 successes. You have become part of the inner circle and actually influence the direction of the group. You have been trusted with all sensitive information, including the group's deepest, darkest secrets.
Invite a friend	*	If you at least accepted, you can invite another actor to join the group at a level of trust one level lower than your own for 3 successes (which are not counted towards your total successes). That means if you are respected, you can invite a single actor to join the group and begin at the “accepted” level.



FOLLOWING LEADS

Sometimes a character just has to hit the books or hit the streets: scour through dusty tomes for a clue, explore the Shardscape for intelligence, probe a cryptosystem to figure out ways to break it, or canvas a neighborhood for leads. Cryptomancer sessions can and should include many opportunities to perform research and reconnaissance leading up to an actual operation. However, sometimes the party might get stuck, bored, and/or antsy. Sometimes the clues laid out by the GM don't necessarily make sense to the players. Sometimes the players are on a schedule. All of these scenarios are ripe for using the downtime rules to manage research and reconnaissance.

Following a lead is as simple as making an appropriate skill check during a session of downtime. Doing research in a library or in the Shardscape typically uses the Query skill, while physical reconnaissance typically uses the Track skill, but these are just suggestions. The GM determines not only the difficulty of the skill check, but also how many successes are required to gain a clue - an important name, a secret passage in to a location, a vulnerability in a cryptosystem, a relational link worth exploiting, etc.

Thrace is tasked with doing passive reconnaissance on the Shardscape, looking for any dirt or clues he can find on the noble family living in the manor he must infiltrate. This will take quite a while, so Thrace will perform this action during a session of downtime while the rest of the party is resting or working on other tasks. The GM determines that this is an unopposed Query skill check of tough difficulty. The family is very elusive and practices good operational security. The GM has also secretly determined that it will take 5 successes to reveal that the family has been buying elixirs from a certain apothecary, and 10 successes to reveal the name of a disgruntled cryptoadmin who used to work for the family. It's probably going to take several sessions of downtime to discover these clues.

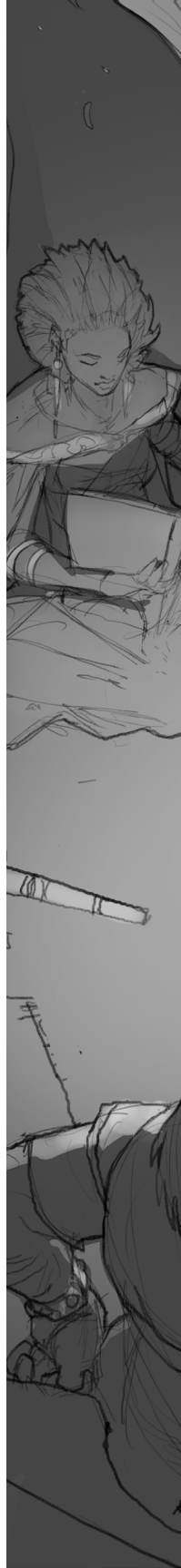
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Leads eventually hit dead ends. If there is nothing (or nothing more) to be learned from following a lead, the GM should notify players before they commit to this action.

Following a lead is a great way to direct a session back to the GM's comfort zone if and when a session seems to have lost steam or the players don't know what to do next. However, following leads also allows players to "brute force" the discovery of important plot elements. This isn't necessarily a problem. Remember, downtime is a strategic device for the party. Time spent following leads is time that is not being spent preparing for or embarking on operations. In a session with time constraints (e.g., "The party has 3 days to liberate the prisoner who is condemned to die at noon on the third day"), spending downtime to follow leads might be agonizing decision.

Multiple actors can work together to follow a lead, but it requires one actor to orchestrate the actions of the others helping her. Use the help rules discussed in the "Crafting Things" section to resolve these situations.

The party commits to spending a session of downtime canvassing a neighborhood to look for clues regarding a missing trader's whereabouts. The GM determines this is a trivial task and secretly determines that the party will need a total of 5 successes to determine his whereabouts. Thrace will be throwing his weight around, using the Menace skill. Herkin will be reviewing the Shardscape for mentions of the trader's name, using the Query skill. Moriarta is managing the team's efforts, so ultimately, she must succeed at an unopposed Query skill check of trivial difficulty for the party's accumulated successes to count.



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-RW-RW-R-- THE BIG TALENT LIST.....188

TALENTS




TALENTS: THE DIFFERENCE-MAKER

Talents are natural gifts, techniques, and expertise that make characters exceptional at certain skills, more effective in certain scenarios, and generally more “heroic” than most of the mortals inhabiting the Cryptomancer world. Talents are also the biggest mechanical differentiator of characters. Even two characters with identical core ranks, attribute ranks, and equipment can still have vastly different play-styles and problem-solving approaches based on their talents.

Talents are of variable levels of power, rated on a scale of 1 to 3. Talents with a rating of 1 are minor talents typically only useful in special circumstances. Talents with a rating of 2 are major talents, useful in many situations. Talents with a rating of 3 or more are powerful trademark abilities that a character possessing them might be known for.

New characters begin play with 10 Talent Points to spend in any way their players see fit. This reflects a considerable level of experience and giftedness compared to the average GM character populating the game world, who has 0 Talent Points.

While reviewing the available talents, keep in mind that Talent Points are also used to buy magic spells, which will be discussed in the next chapter. A player wishing to play a magical character may want to save some or all of her Talent Points to invest in magic spells.



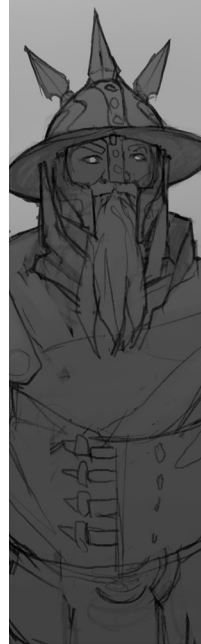
TALENT MARKERS



There is a clearly marked space on the character sheet to write down your character's talents, but you may have also noticed the little triangles next to each skill. These are talent markers, which are reminders that your character might be particularly good at a skill based on some talent they have.

If a character has a talent that affects a skill check sometimes, under some circumstances, fill in the triangle halfway. If a character has a talent that affects a skill check always, fill in the triangle completely. It's a reminder to consider what type bonuses you might have (and the constraints on those bonuses), when using these skills.

Many talents typically allow players to break the rules (e.g. ignore 1 botch for certain skill checks, under certain circumstances), but there is one rule to keep in mind: unless otherwise noted, talents do not stack. That is, if a character has two talents that augment a single skill, only the "best" of the two bonuses apply at any given time, not both.



THE BIG TALENT LIST

Adept

3 Talent Points

An actor is able to channel her magical reserves to improve her mundane abilities. May spend 2 MP, before a skill check is made, to convert a single failed die (but not a botch) into a success. May only be used once per skill check and the 2 MP is consumed even if there are no failed die to convert.

Artisan

2 Talent Points

An actor is skilled with the tools required to create objects that are useful, delightful, or both. Ignore 1 botch for all Craft skill checks. Additionally, ignore 1 botch for Performance skill checks involving the creation of physical works of art (e.g. a painting, a piece of jewelry, or a stone bust).

Assassin

1 Talent Point

An actor is versed in the creation of poisons. Ignore 1 botch for Alchemy skill checks involving the creation of weak poison, strong poison, and paralytic poison. Also ignore 1 botch for Sleight of Hand skill checks involving placing poison in food or drink.

Attractive

1 Talent Point

An actor has striking physical features. Ignore 1 botch for Charm skill checks when physical attraction (be it overt or repressed) is a factor in influencing the target's decision-making (determined by the GM).

Battle Bond

2 Talent Points

An actor is a more fearsome and effective combatant when fighting alongside a worthy companion. Any time

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two actors with the Battle Bond talent are fighting in the same combat, one can forfeit their action (but not entire turn) to the other, allowing the other to take an additional action even if they have already acted.

Bladecatcher

2 Talent Points

An actor has the coordination and conditioning to halt incoming melee attacks while unarmed. Can parry any melee attack as if carrying a shield, without actually carrying a shield. However, this only works for characters with both hands free (or only equipped with an Unarmed weapon).

Bloodletter

2 Talent Points

An actor is particularly skilled at striking vital organs and chinks in armor when equipped with piercing weapons. Ignore 1 botch for all Precise Melee skill checks.

Bonecrusher

2 Talent Points

An actor's strikes with heavy blades, hammers, and mauls are especially powerful, breaking bones and transferring kinetic energy through armor. Ignore 1 botch for all Brute Melee skill checks.

Bottled Magic

3 Talent Points

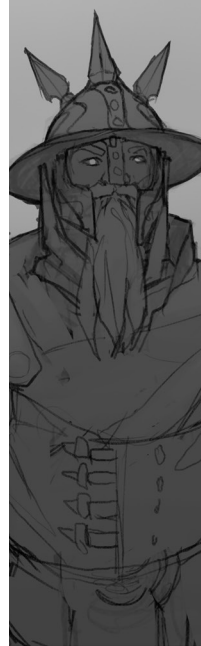
An actor casts a spell into an alchemical potion at the cost of 1 extra MP. Whoever imbibes this potion is able to cast that spell her next turn, but using the original caster's Willpower rank and without spending MP. Only the following spells can be bottled: Astral Eyes, Astral Trail, Share Sight, Chameleon, Glamour, Mana Mail, Meld, and Siege Shield. The imbiber, not the caster, suffers the consequences of dramatic failures. Note: the potion no longer maintains its original properties (e.g. it no longer cures poison).

Brawler

2 Talent Points

An actor delivers especially powerful punches, el-

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bows, hammer fists, roundhouses, knee strikes, and head butts, upgrading the damage of these attacks by 1 (even if an Unarmed weapon is equipped).

Codebreaker

2 Talent Points

An actor spends much of her spare time scouring books, scrolls, town boards, and registries for keyphrase material. There is a 1% chance that she happens to know the keyphrase for any symmetric encryption she stumbles upon. This percentage is accumulative in the case of multiple actors with this talent focusing on the same encryption.

Courageous

1 Talent Point

An actor is especially courageous in the face of danger. Any time the actor succeeds at a Willpower skill check provoked by fear, the actor gains 1 free success towards her next skill check, as long as that action involves facing danger head on, attacking, or saving others. Not compatible with Cowardly.

Cowardly

1 Talent Point

An actor is especially cowardly in the face of danger. Any time the actor fails at Willpower skill check provoked by fear, the actor gains 1 free success towards her next skill check, as long as that action involves avoiding confrontation, fleeing, or saving oneself at another's peril. Not compatible with Courageous.

Death from Above

2 Talent Points

An actor is particularly skilled at performing melee attacks that involve falling onto her prey from a height. If dropping from at least Short distance, the actor may attempt to break her fall on a target, adding successes rolled on a tough Acrobatics skill check to the damage inflicted on a subsequent melee attack. The actor still suffers from the effects of falling, however, as discussed in the Gravity section of the "Combat" chapter.

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Demolitionist

2 Talent Point

An actor can use the Traps skill to rig bombs to explode when triggered purposefully or accidentally. Rigged fire bombs, acid bombs, and sapper satchels are considered medium kill traps, and use the actor's Traps skill check successes to determine damage.

Entertainer

1 Talent Point

An actor is a gifted thespian, orator, poet, and/or performance artist. Ignore 1 botch for all Performance skill checks, so long as the skill check does not involve the creation of a physical artifact (e.g. a painting, a piece of jewelry, or a stone bust).

Grappler

2 Talent Points

An actor is skilled at grappling, controlling, and pummeling adversaries while unarmed. Ignore 1 botch for all Unarmed Melee skill checks.

Gross

1 Talent Point

An actor has an extremely high tolerance for sights, tastes, and smells that would make just about anyone else ill (e.g. raw sewage, rotting meat, etc.). She always succeeds at any Willpower skill checks involving gross-out situations.

Healer

2 Talent Points

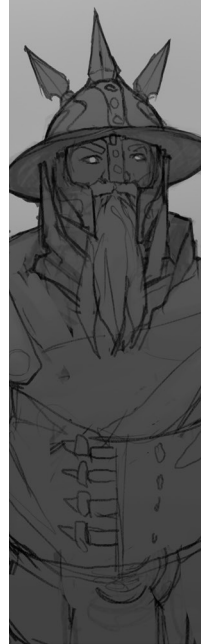
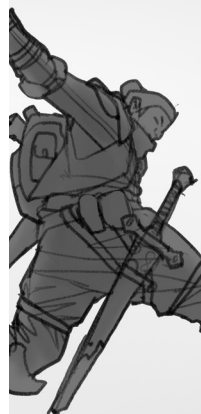
An actor is particularly adept at treating wounds. Ignore 1 botch for all Medicine skill checks as well as Alchemy skill checks involving the creation of weak healing potions, strong healing potions, weak antidotes, and strong antidotes.

Heightened Senses

2 Talent Points

An actor has keen senses and is able to hear a pin drop, see a needle in a haystack, and preternaturally detect

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trouble. Ignore 1 botch for all Scrounge and Stealth skill checks.

Hero

2 Talent Points

An actor's past heroics are so noteworthy (whether the stories are true or not) that her allies take comfort in just knowing she is on their side. All allies in the hero's presence ignore 1 botch to Willpower skill checks provoked by fear.

Highbred

1 Talent Point

An actor understands the nuances and norms of aristocracy. Any time one of the Highbred's colleagues make some type of social gaffe (i.e. fails a social skill check) during a scene of intrigue with aristocracy, she can come to the rescue, attempting the same skill check her colleague failed at. Upon success, it is as if the gaffe never happened. This talent only works once per scene of intrigue.

Hoarder

2 Talent Points

An actor is very skilled at carrying and securing loads of gear and loot. The GM will *mostly* "look the other way" when this character starts carrying too much stuff, but sanity still applies (i.e. no carrying around giant boulders).

Holy

2 Talent Points

An actor has an air of sanctity. A mortal or sentient creature wishing to do violence against such a character must succeed at a Willpower skill check of challenging difficulty. Upon failure, the aggressor simply cannot bring themselves to harm the holy one for the duration of a scene. However, that feeling is forfeit if the holy one herself acts aggressively.

Hunter

2 Talent Points

An actor is a natural predator, adept at finding and stalking prey. Ignore 1 botch for all Beast Ken and Tracking skill checks.

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Innocent**1 Talent Point**

An actor's demeanor exudes innocence and naiveté. Ignore 1 botch for all Deception and Sleight of Hand skill checks, so long as the target does not know the actor's true nature, either through reputation or experience. Not compatible with Intimidating.

Imposing Figure**2 Talent Points**

An actor has such a large and imposing physique that her size itself is enough to intimidate others. The actor may use her Strength attribute, instead of her Presence attribute, to make Menace skill checks.

Intimidating**1 Talent Point**

An actor's body language, appearance, and reputation exude overwhelming violence and malintent. Ignore 1 botch for all Menace skill checks, as long as the target has not bested the actor in battle or physical contests in the past. Not compatible with Innocent.

Likable**1 Talent Point**

An actor is especially skilled at small talk, being a good listener, and making others around her feel valued. Ignore 1 botch to any skill check made while social networking during downtime.

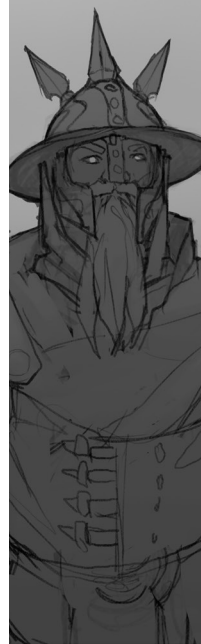
Learned**2 Talent Points**

An actor has received a formal apprenticeship or has spent years poring through books and performing experiments. Ignore 1 botch for skill checks using for all Alchemy and Query skill checks.

Liar**1 Talent Point**

An actor is capable of delivering brazen lies with a straight face. Ignore 1 botch for all Deception skill checks.

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Loathsome

2 Talent Point

An actor's behavior, appearance, background, medical condition, or reputation is so reviled by judgmental people that it frequently becomes a distraction. Whenever her loathsomeness garners suspicious and contempt, her allies ignore 1 botch to Stealth and Sleight of Hand skill checks.

Lowborn

1 Talent Point

An actor understands the slang and unwritten rules of street elements, including cartels, labor guilds, and vagrants. Any time one of the Lowborn's colleagues make some type of social gaffe (i.e. fails a social skill check) during a scene of intrigue with street elements, she can come to the rescue, attempting the same skill check her colleague failed at. Upon success, it is as if the gaffe never happened. This talent only works once per scene of intrigue.

Magus

3 Talent Points

An actor has pursued magical mastery as a professional, academic, or mystical discipline, and has become an accomplished spell caster. Ignore 1 botch for Willpower skill checks involving the casting of spells.

Martial Artist

2 Talent Points

An actor has mastered an unarmed combat technique that relies on refined movement, technical blocks, and using an aggressor's own momentum against them. The actor may use her Dexterity attribute, instead of her Strength attribute, to make unarmed attacks. Note, the martial artist's unarmed blows still benefit from other talents if she has them.

Merciless

3 Talent Point

An actor has such profound situational awareness that she can use enemy combatants as human shields. An actor may volunteer an enemy within close range to absorb the damage of any attack that would have reduced her to 0

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or less HP. This can be done after the damage for the attack is determined, but can only be done once during the enemy's turn. Obviously, a combatant cannot be made a human shield against her own attack.

Mithridatite

1 Talent Point

An actor is resilient against poisons and toxins. Ignore 1 botch for all Endurance skill checks made to resist the effects of poisons and toxins. This includes alcohol consumed during drinking contests, but not soma.

Muse

2 Talent Points

An actor is particularly engaged and inspired by other like-minded people. Any time two actors with the Muse talent are spending downtime together, one can forfeit their session to the other, allowing the other to act as if they had two sessions of downtime instead of one.

Polevaulter

1 Talent Point

An actor can use staffs and spears to leap heights and distances that others could not even attempt. Permits the actor to attempt a jump that is otherwise impossible. Requires a running start, which means the actor must use her movement first.

Powerhouse

2 Talent Points

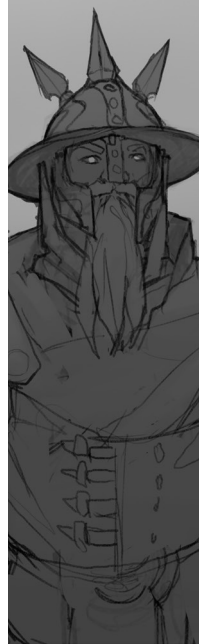
An actor is a natural athlete, whose training has resulted in peak physical prowess. Ignore 1 botch for all Feat of Strength and Athletics skill checks.

Pusher

1 Talent Point

An actor is versed in the creation of mind-altering substances. Ignore 1 botch to Alchemy skill checks involving the creation of soma leaf, soma rock, and truth serum. Also ignore 1 botch to Charm skill checks when interacting with someone under the influence of soma.

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Reaper

3 Talent Points

An actor is skilled at leveraging two-handed weapons against groups of adversaries. Can make an attack against multiple combatants in close range instead of just one. Use the opposed skill checks vs. groups mechanic to resolve. Note, this ability can strike a maximum number of targets equal to the number of attribute dice rolled.

Reckoner

3 Talent Points

An actor has acute control over her mana reserves and is able to expend the minimum possible amount needed to cast spells. May spend successes from a spell's Willpower skill check to reduce the MP required to cast a basic or greater spell, one for one, to a minimum of 1 MP (and a minimum of 1 remaining success).

Return Fire

3 Talent Points

An actor has such keen reaction time that she is able to immediately return fire against ranged enemies who miss their mark badly. She may make a free ranged attack against any opponent who rolls a dramatic failure when attacking her from a distance, so long as she has a weapon ready.

Riposte

3 Talent Points

An actor is an accomplished duelist, able to issue a sudden counterattack against enemies that overextend themselves. She may make a free melee attack against any opponent who rolls a dramatic failure when attacking her at close range.

Sanguine Rite

1 Talent Point

An actor can cut herself to harness the power of her own blood for magical inspiration. Can spend an action converting 1 HP of her own into 1 MP.

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Silver-tongued

1 Talent Point

An actor knows exactly the words to say and exactly when they should be said when it comes to changing minds and influencing people. Ignore 1 botch for all Charm skill checks where debate, contracts, letters, or shardnet echoes are the actor's communication platforms.

Smuggler

1 Talent Point

An actor is capable of hiding a single very small item (e.g. a key, a lock pick, a small vial, a shard, a shiv, etc.) on her person which cannot be found regardless of the rigor of any search made for it.

Sniper

2 Talent Points

An actor's aim with ranged weapons is especially accurate, making called shots at a target's most vulnerable points. Ignore 1 botch of all Fired Missile and Thrown Missile skill checks.

Spellbreaker

3 Talent Points

An actor leaps into action the second she sees a gesture or hears an uttered word that might manifest in a spell. As soon as a different actor in the vicinity begins to cast a spell, the Spellbreaker gains the initiative. The spell caster can only resume her action after the Spellbreaker has had a chance to act. This talent only works once per scene of battle.

Spider

2 Talent Points

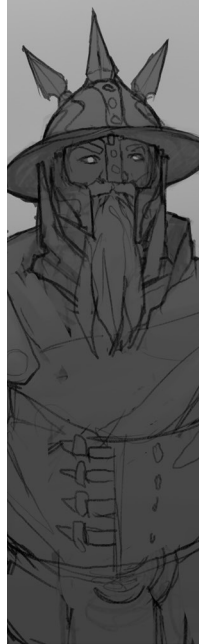
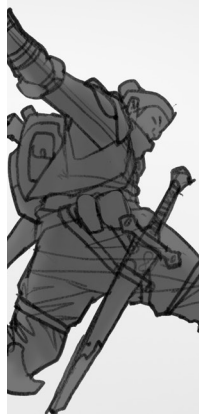
An actor has razor-sharp reflexes and can twitch out of any situation. Ignore 1 botch for all Acrobatics and Escape Artistry skill checks.

Spymaster

3 Talent Points

An actor is especially good at managing covert assets when she can avoid red tape. Any time the spymaster

- - MORE - -





assigns a task to a cell *without notifying or consulting the other characters* (or players at the table), that cell ignores 1 botch for the purposes of resolving their task. To assign tasks in secret, the spymaster's player can slip the GM a note.

Tinker

2 Talent Points

An actor is particularly skilled at both creating and solving mechanical puzzles. Ignore 1 botch for all Lock Picking and Traps skill checks.

Treacherous

1 Talent Point

An actor would rather use an ally as a shield than suffer a fatal blow. An actor may volunteer an ally within close range to absorb the damage of any attack that would have reduced her to 0 or less HP. This can be done after the damage for the attack is determined. Not compatible with Valorous.

Unflappable

2 Talent Points

An actor has unusually deep reserves of mana to power spells. +1 maximum MP. May be chosen up to 10 times.

Unkillable

2 Talent Points

An actor can take an unusual amount of punishment before becoming incapacitated. +1 maximum HP. May be chosen up to 10 times.

User

1 Talent Point

An actor is able to shrug off the effects of soma addiction. Ignore 1 botch for Willpower skill checks made to resist using soma and/or withdrawal from soma during sessions of downtime. Also ignore 1 botch to Scrounge skill checks for the purposes of finding a soma dealer.

-- MORE --



Valorous

1 Talent Point

An actor is willing to hurl herself between an ally and a fatal blow. For all allies in close range, an actor may opt to absorb the damage of any attack that would have reduced an ally to 0 or less HP. This can be done after the damage for the attack is determined. Not compatible with Treacherous.

Veteran

1 Talent Point

An actor took part in a particularly noteworthy battle or campaign, and she has the stories and artifacts (e.g. insignia, trophies) to prove it. Ignore 1 botch to Charm and Menace skill checks made against other actors who also possess the Veteran talent, regardless of what battle or campaign they were a part of.

Wardancer

2 Talent Points

An actor is a particularly mobile and acrobatic combatant. Once per the enemy's turn, the actor can make an additional movement if she attempts to dodge an attack (whether or not she is successful in doing so).

Webspinner

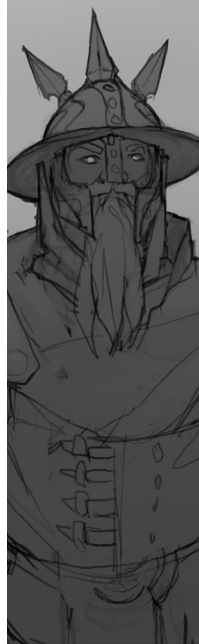
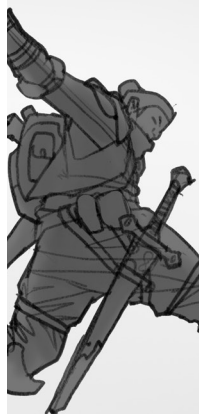
2 Talent Points

An actor is particularly skilled in the placement of traps. When spending a session of downtime setting traps, the actor gains an additional 1 success (for the purposes of "buying" traps) so long as at least 1 success is rolled.

Whisperer

3 Talent Points

An actor is capable of forging bonds with animal familiars. Acquires an animal familiar and may acquire a replacement if that familiar dies. May be chosen a second time to acquire a second familiar.



/ROOT/TALENTS/CD ..
/ROOT/CD MAGIC
/ROOT/MAGIC/LS

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MAGIC



MAGIC AND SPELLS

Magic, spells, and spell casters are a staple of the fantasy genre, especially fantasy games. There are many reasons for this, but the one we've really taken to heart is that magic presents asymmetric means of creating and solving problems. To that end, the majority of spells in *Cryptomancer* were designed to add disruption and dynamism to the game's themes of stealth, espionage, investigation, trust, and communication. Of course, we do have a few "traditional" spells, because sometimes a gamer just needs to chuck a fireball at something. We get it. So with that, let's introduce spells.

Spells are magical incantations that convert life force into otherworldly expressions of power. The ability to cast spells is inherent in all sentient species capable of language, though fewer than 1 in 50 people possess any magical acumen whatsoever. Mortals who cast spells don't have any special title or status, except by vocation. Words like mage, cleric, seer, witch, enchanter, and so forth, have more to do with one's function in society (or outside of society), and are not necessarily tied with any particular type of spellcraft. While all spells manifest in different ways, most spells involve a spell caster speaking in a forgotten tongue, gesturing symbols into the air, and emanating magical light from their eyes and hands. Generally speaking, the act of casting a spell is loud, bright, and eminently noticeable, and also requires the ability to both speak and gesture. Spell casters who are gagged, have their hands bound, or are in a grapple typically cannot cast spells.

There are two ways to learn spells: self-study and tutelage. Self-study is done by reading a spell book that guides its reader through the gestures, evocations, and principles of a spell. Tutelage requires another caster who knows a spell to teach her pupil how to use it. Both methods require one session of downtime and still require a player to spend Talent Points to acquire any spells being learned.

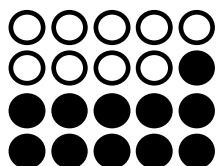
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Mana

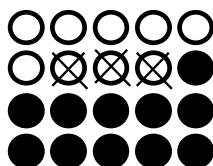
Spells are primarily fueled through one's own replenishing fount of life force, called *mana*. The power, duration, and frequency of spells that an actor can cast is in part determined by that actor's Mana Points (MP). Each actor has a number of Mana Points equal to her Willpower rank + 5.

Spells have a MP cost, typically between 1 and 5 MP, where spells costing 1 MP are minor cantrips of limited usefulness, while spells costing 5 MP are something akin to a miracle. Every time an actor casts a spell, that actor loses a number of MP equal to that cost. MP should be managed identically to HP, as show in the image below.

MANA POINTS



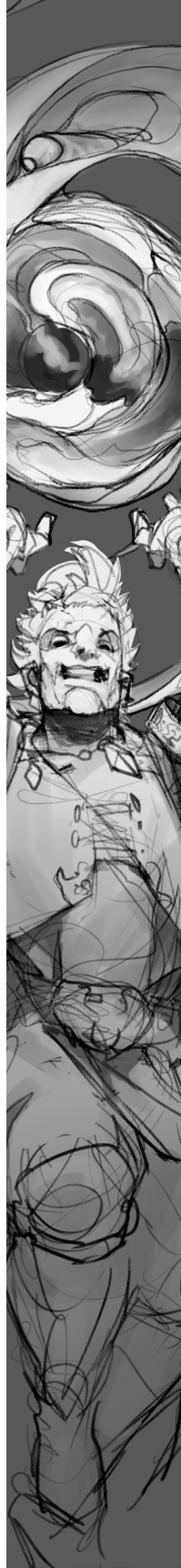
MANA POINTS

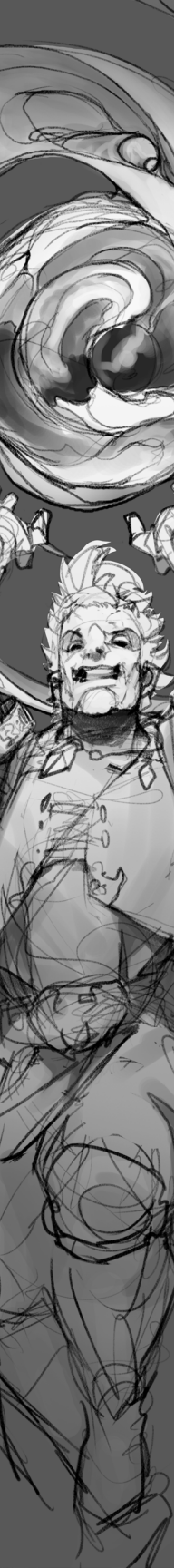


MP regenerates at a rate equal to an actor's Willpower rank per session of downtime spent meditating (not sleeping). This makes both MP and the time needed to recuperate spent MP valuable commodities. Even accomplished spell casters are only capable of casting a handful of spells before exhausting their MP reserves, so those who can cast spells rarely do so carelessly, despite the regenerating property of MP. Mana potions are quite expensive to procure, so some spell casters turn to soma to replenish their mana reserves at the risk of becoming addicted.

Now that we've covered the basics, we're ready to introduce all the spells. We have purposely abstained from putting spells into discrete schools (e.g. cleric spells, necromancer spells, etc.) for the same reasons we have abstained from assigning racial bonuses. We want players to make whatever type of character they want to play and mix and match traditionally incompatible disciplines if desired. However, all spells are bucketed into 1 of 3 categories, de-

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pending on their power: cantrips, basic spells, and greater spells. Cantrips are weak spells that cost 1 Talent Point to acquire and 1 MP to cast. Basic spells cost 2 Talent Points to acquire and 3 MP to cast. Greater spells cost 3 Talent Points to acquire and 5 MP to cast.

/ROOT/MAGIC/

CANTRIPS

Cantrips cost 1 Talent Point to acquire and 1 MP to cast. They are relatively simple spells that are typically only useful under specific circumstances. They are also remarkably predictable; they either work or they don't. Dramatic successes result in some type of beautiful or inspiring side effect while dramatic failures are simply failures with some type of annoying or frightening side effect.

Astral Eyes

A spell that causes a caster's eyes to irradiate blue light and show the caster physical evidence and traces of magic otherwise unseen by the naked eye. Caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check of challenging difficulty. 1 or more successes allows the caster to see traces of mortal interaction: finger prints, foot prints, blood stains that have been cleaned, faint aromas, and traces of magic that was (or still is) active in the vicinity. The spell lasts for the duration of a scene.

Babel

An actor touches a target's neck and utters a keyphrase, encrypting that target's verbal and written language so it comes across as inscrutable, nonsensical babble to anyone who does not know that keyphrase. Caster can use a keyphrase, her own soul key, or a true name that is not her own to encrypt the target's voice. Caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check versus the target's Resolve rank (though the task difficulty is trivial if made against oneself or a willing recipient). 1 or more successes encrypts the target's

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language. The spell lasts until the caster revokes the spell, dies, or until so many people know the keyphrase that the encryption has become meaningless (i.e. over a hundred people).

Casting Babel on oneself is a particularly useful way to be able to cast other cryptomantic spells in front of others without worrying about the keyphrase being compromised by those within earshot of the casting. While one under the influence of Babel can use gestures or pictures to crudely communicate, *any* attempt to communicate using language (e.g. pointing at letters to spell out words) will fail unless the audience knows the keyphrase used in the casting.

Bloom Blessing

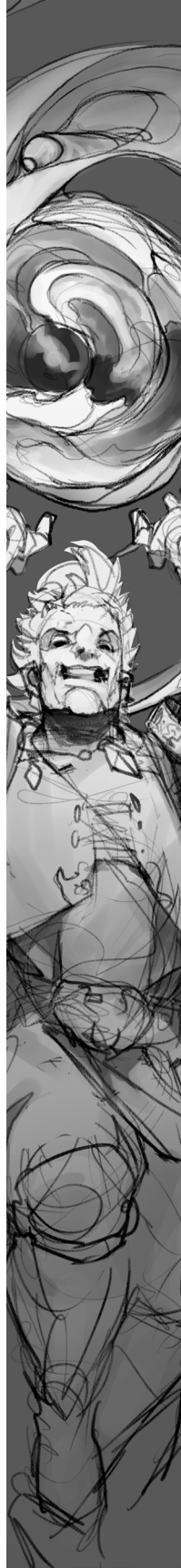
A spell that causes common types of flora to react magically and bestow tactical benefits to those nearby. Once cast, a bloom blessing permeates from the caster and impacts everything within medium range of her, following her as she moves. Caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check of challenging difficulty. Upon 1 or more successes, the spell works. The resulting effect lasts for the duration of a scene or until revoked by the caster, but the effect depends on the type of flora the caster decides to command:

Oracle Loti release hallucinogenic pollen, imbuing elves, dwarves, and humans alike with a sense of calm. All targets in the impacted area ignore 1 botch to Willpower skill checks made to resist fear.

Sunblotter Flowers eject their petals and florets with such volume and violence that a dense cloud of floral debris obscures sight. The effects are identical to that of a smoke bomb, found in the “Stuff” chapter.

Dew Roots release a mist that weighs heavy in the air, smothering small fires (e.g. torches, lanterns, and campfires) and extinguishing actors who have caught fire.

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Denier

An actor holds onto a shard and projects disruptive magical energy, making it impossible for new echoes to be created on that shardnet for a short period of time. The caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check with a task difficulty equal to the size of the shardnet: trivial for less than 6 shards, tough for more than 20 shards, and challenging for anything in between. 1 or more successes results in the effected shardnet denying the creation of new echoes for 1 turn. The denial effect begins when the spell is cast and ends at the beginning of the caster's next turn (at which point she may cast Denier again if she wishes to prolong the denial effect). This spell does work over bridges but does not work on the Shardscape or traverse golems.

Dissemble

An actor touches a target's face and utters a keyphrase, encrypting that target's face into a jumble of shifting facial features unrecognizable to anyone who does know that keyphrase. Caster can use a keyphrase, her own soul key, or a true name that is not her own to encrypt the target's face. Caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check versus the target's Resolve rank (though the task difficulty is trivial if made against oneself or a willing recipient). 1 or more successes encrypts the target's face. The spell lasts until the caster revokes the spell, dies, or until so many people know the keyphrase that the encryption has become meaningless (i.e. over a hundred people).

One under the influence of Dissemble appears as a consummate stranger to anyone who does not know the keyphrase used in the casting. Even if an actor *knows* the person who has been dissembled, or recognizes other distinguishing features (e.g. tattoos), she will still feel as if she is looking at a stranger unless she knows the keyphrase.

Messenger

A spell that summons a small and resourceful animal that will do everything in its power to deliver a small

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object, such as a shard, key, lock-pick, dagger, or scroll to any actor whose true name is known by the caster. Caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check of challenging difficulty. 1 or more successes results in the messenger arriving at its target. Messengers travel extremely fast, about the speed of a hawk, regardless of what type of animal they are or terrain they must traverse. In fact, they travel so fast they cannot be followed, which is sometimes unfortunate, because messengers seem to know where their recipients are even when the caster does not.

Messengers have little trouble making their way into secure locations and are frequently dismissed as part of the “rodent problem.” However, if someone makes a point of being on the lookout for messengers, messengers do have 5 in Agility for the purposes of Stealth skill checks. Messengers are too reckless to be used offensively (e.g. a primed fire-bomb would explode long before it reaches its recipient). However, using the Tracer spell to geolocate a Messenger-delivered shard to someone is a tried and true bounty hunter’s method.

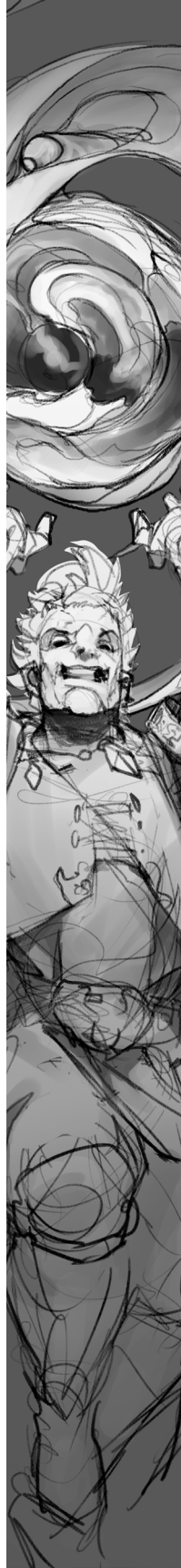
Scout Sprite

A spell that conjures a translucent, silent wisp that floats around and shares its vision with its caster. Caster makes a Willpower skill check of trivial difficulty. 1 or more successes results in the conjuration of the sprite. A sprite makes 1 move per turn which is dictated by the caster (as an incidental action). The caster sees and hears everything the scout sprite sees and hears. Sprites can be killed with the ease of killing a moth, but they tend to stay out of sight and have 5 in Agility for the purposes of Stealth skill checks. Lasts for the duration a scene.

Share Sight

A spell that allows the caster to project her vision to any actor whose true name is known by the caster, regardless of where the target is. This is a stealth spell, cast without the verbal evocation and light show associated with most spells. Caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check against the

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target's Resolve rank. 1 or more successes results in the recipient seeing what the caster sees for a few seconds. The images are in the recipient's "mind's eye" and does not overwrite or disrupt their physical sight.

Stasis

A spell that temporarily halts the effects of toxins, poisons, and parasites in the blood stream of one target. Caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check of challenging difficulty: 1 or more successes results in the equivalent of the target imbibing a weak antidote potion, as discussed in the "Stuff" chapter. Caster must touch the target.

Swarm Song

A spell that compels all local vermin to do the caster's bidding. Once cast, a swarm song permeates from the caster and impacts everything within medium range of her, following her as she moves. Caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check of challenging difficulty. Upon 1 or more successes, the spell works. The resulting effect lasts for the duration of a scene or until revoked by the caster, but the effect depends on the type of vermin the caster chooses to command:

Torchbugs gather to flutter about like a sky full of constellations, illuminating the immediate area with the intensity of daylight. Torchbugs permit a party to see in absolute darkness without the need for torches or lanterns.

Shriekers cry out cacophony of insect chirps and screeches, drowning out all other sounds (such as snapping branches or cries for help). Shriekers create a barrier of seemingly natural sound that somewhat masks the noises otherwise made by a party.

Manaeaters, drawn to magic like moths to light, swarm around mortals who are under the influence of a magic spell. Manaeaters permit the party to detect sneakier spells such as Chameleon and Glamour.

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Tracer

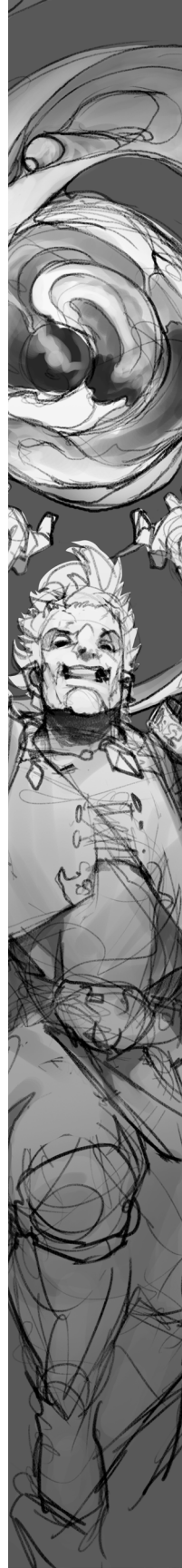
An actor holds onto a shard and projects magical energy, divining the approximate physical location of every other shard that is part of the same shardnet. The caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check with a task difficulty equal to the size of the shardnet: trivial for less than 6 shards, tough for more than 20 shards, and challenging for anything in between. 1 or more successes results in the caster intuiting each shard's current realm (e.g. Sphere, Sylvetica, or Subterra), cardinal direction and distance relative to the caster. This location snapshot is only a point of time, but does stay with the caster long enough for her to map out, write down, or communicate the results. This spell does work over bridges but does not work on the Shardscape or traverse golems.

Transmute

A spell that instantly converts an alchemical concoction into a different concoction of lesser value (value as in coin). The caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check of challenging difficulty. 1 or more success results in a successful transformation. Caster must be holding the concoction.

Warning Glyph

An actor draws an invisible magical glyph on the ground and becomes aware of any character or creature that walks upon it. The moment someone or something traverses the glyph, the caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check versus the Resolve rank of that someone or something. Upon success, the target does not notice the glyph and the caster is alerted to the event no matter where she is. Upon failure, the target notices the glyph and can bypass it safely as well as alert others to its presence. The spell lasts indefinitely, or until the caster revokes it. This spell automatically fails against targets using the Astral Eye spell.



BASIC SPELLS

Basic spells cost 2 Talent Points to acquire and 3 MP to cast. They are proper magical spells that make cantrips look like cheap parlor tricks and are especially effective when wielded by a competent spell caster. As opposed to being pass/fail like cantrips, the effects of lesser spells tend to scale with the number of successes rolled by the caster. Sadly, the opposite is also true. Dramatic failures tend to result in the spell backfiring: friendly fire, accidental boons to enemies, and or unfortunate reversals of intended effects (e.g. instead of reading a target's mind, she reads yours).

Astral Trail

A spell that allows a caster to evaluate an active spell in order to divine the approximate physical location of whomever casted it. The caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check versus the original caster's Resolve rank. For each success rolled, the caster intuits one of the following facts about her target's current location: cardinal direction, approximate distance, and realm (e.g. Sylvetica, Subterra, Sphere). The successes rolled are also added to single Tracking skill check made by the caster when and if she choses to find this target. Astral Trail can be used on the following spells, so long as the caster can physically see their effects: Babel, Dissemble, Maze, Messenger, Scout Sprite, and Warning Glyph.

Bloom Bomb

A spell that causes common types of flora to erupt and eject dangerous payloads. The spell is cast at a target, but then explodes, impacting everyone and everything within close range of that target. Caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check versus a group's Resolve ranks (use the opposed skill checks vs. groups mechanic to resolve). The result of a bloom bomb depends on the type of flora detonated:

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Death gourds burst and release a cloud of toxins attacking the nervous system of whomever is exposed. The effect is the equivalent of being exposed to poison, the severity of which is determined by the number of successes rolled: 1 = weak poison, 2 = strong poison, and 3+ = paralytic poison. Impacted targets still get to make Endurance skill checks to resist the effects of these toxins.

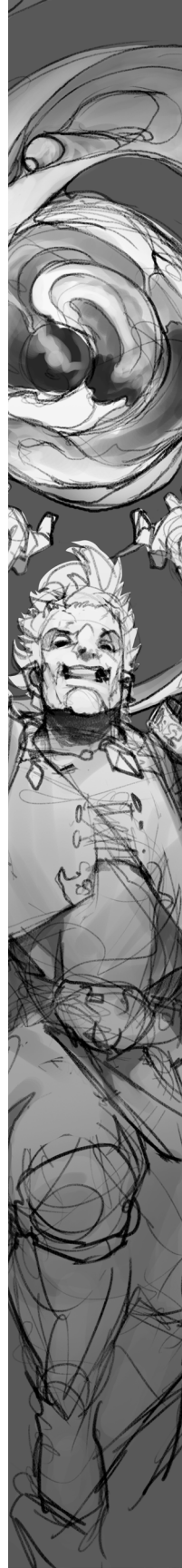
Creep vines violently swing their fibrous tendrils, ensnaring and constricting limbs. Impacted targets lose their movement until they spend an action succeeding at an unopposed Escape Artistry skill check. The difficulty of this skill check is determined by the number of successes the caster rolled against them: 1 success = trivial, 2 successes = challenging, and 3+ successes = tough.

Dragon pods burst and release a cloud of fire, which is mechanically identical to a fire bomb, found in the “Stuff” chapter, but uses the caster’s Willpower successes to determine damage instead of Thrown Missile.

Chameleon

A spell that transforms a caster’s flesh, clothing, and equipment to assume color and texture of whatever surface she presses a hand against. Chameleon is essentially a magical variant of the Stealth skill, granting the ability to vanish in plain sight, even in the midst of combat. This is a stealth spell, cast without the verbal evocation and light show associated with most spells. Caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check versus Resolve rank of whomever she is attempting to hide from (in the case of groups, use the opposed skill checks vs. groups mechanic to resolve). The caster remains virtually undetectable for 2 turns per success rolled, even in a fully illuminated environment, as long as she does not move. Further, successes rolled can be used to augment a sneak attack, just like the Stealth skill. This spell automatically fails against targets using the Astral Eye spell. Further, animals with a keen sense of smell might be immune to this effect.

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Glamour

A spell that transforms a caster's physical appearance, voice, and demeanor into some other humanoid likeness. Glamour cannot replicate the exact likeness of someone else, but can come relatively close. Caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check of challenging difficulty. Upon success, the caster transforms into someone clearly not themselves, but still maintain the same physical gender, physical size, apparent age, and race. However, per success rolled, the caster can opt to change one of the following characteristics: physical gender (e.g. male, female, in-between), physical size (e.g. child-sized, adult-sized, barbarian-sized), apparent age (e.g. young, middle-aged, elderly), and race (e.g. elf, dwarf, human, or another humanoid-shaped being). Lasts the duration of a scene. This spell automatically fails against targets using the Astral Eye spell. Further, this spell does not transform the caster's clothing or equipment.

Glamoured spies are not unheard of, so even a glamoured character should expect the occasional Performance and/or Deception skill check to avoid suspicion or detection.

Healing Hands

A spell that causes a salubrious light to emanate from the caster's hands, compelling wounds to close, broken bones to rejoin, fluids to regenerate, and organs to continue normal operation. Upon casting, caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check of challenging difficulty. 1 success is the equivalent of the target consuming a weak healing potion found in the Equipment & Consumables section of the "Stuff" chapter. 2 successes is the equivalent of the target consuming a strong healing potion. 3+ successes has the same effect as 2 successes, but the restorative effect is also granted to one non-hostile actor that is within close range of the target, chosen by the caster. Caster must touch the original target.

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Kill Bolt

A spell that projects a streaming bolt of destructive energy at a target. Caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check versus a target's Resolve rank. Each success results in 2 HP damage, ignoring all armor.

Mana Mail

A spell that causes ethereal, electrical armor to emanate from a target's flesh, deflecting and dampening incoming blows. Caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check of challenging difficulty. 1 success grants the target Light Deflection. 2 successes grants the target Heavy Deflection. 3+ successes grant the target Heavy Deflection and Damage Reduction. Mana Mail does not stack with physical armor; the target simply uses the stronger defense. A target can also forfeit her Mana Mail in order to negate the successes of a spell cast against her at a rate of 1 to 1. For example, if a caster rolled 2 successes to grant a target Mana Mail, that target can reduce the effect of a Kill Bolt successfully cast against her by 2 successes. Lasts for the duration of a scene or until forfeited to absorb a spell.

Maze

An actor utters a keyphrase and transforms a door, portal, or entrance into an unfathomable, vertigo-inducing puzzle in the eyes of anyone who does not know that keyphrase. Caster can use a keyphrase, her own soul key, or a true name that is not her own to encrypt the object. Caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check with the difficulty depending on the object's size: trivial for small objects (e.g. keyhole, window), challenging for medium objects (e.g. doors, alcoves), and tough for large objects (e.g. sinkholes, cave mouths). 1 or more successes encrypts the object. The spell lasts until the caster revokes the spell, dies, or until so many people know the keyphrase that the encryption has become meaningless (i.e. over a hundred people). Closing one's eyes does not help, but one can be led through a Maze by someone else who knows the keyphrase.

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Meld

A spell that allows a caster (and all of her equipment) to be subsumed by a physical barrier in order to traverse it. Caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check, the difficulty of which is determined by the barrier she is traversing: trivial for a porous obstacle (e.g. portcullis), challenging for a solid obstacle (e.g. a wooden floor), and tough for a solid and ultra-dense obstacle (e.g. a stone wall). Success permits the caster to move through the barrier, to a distance a short range away from her starting point, though the speed by which she does so is determined by the successes rolled. Upon 1 success, passing through the barrier takes about 1 minute or 3 turns, but it is harrowing for the caster, who suffers 3 HP damage (a critical wound), ignoring armor. Upon 2 successes, the process takes just as long but no damage is suffered. Upon 3+ successes, the caster passes through the barrier instantly and no damage is suffered.

Mind Read

A spell that allows a caster to extract the memories of a target by placing a hand on that target's head and projecting magical energy. Caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check versus the target's Resolve rank. The efficacy of the spell depends upon the number of successes. 1 success allows a caster to extract the last hour of the target's memories. 2 successes allow the caster to extract the last 24 hours of the target's memories. 3+ successes allows the caster to extract for the last week of target's memories.

Extracted memories are obscured by the filter of the target's perceptions, beliefs, and thought process during that time period. For example, a target might be convinced that she saw a certain someone leaving the scene of the crime, even if that certain someone wasn't the actual person leaving the scene. A caster extracting this memory would witness the same mistaken identity. Extracted memories are also limited by a target's attention span. Only important details, like noteworthy conversations, secret keyphrases, and emotional events, come through with any clarity.

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Psychometry

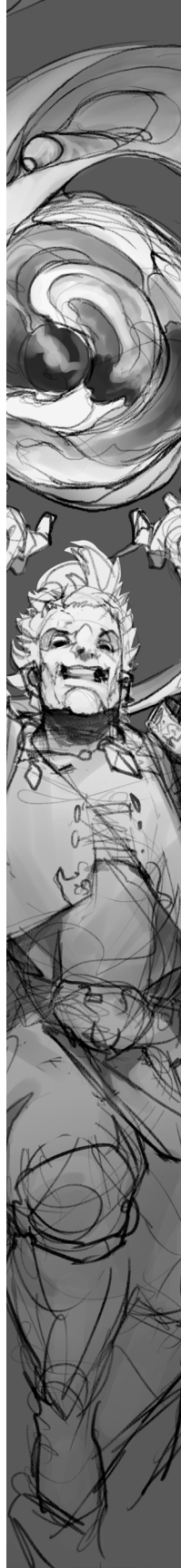
A spell that allows a caster to touch a manufactured object and receive psychic impressions of the object's history. The caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check, with the task difficulty based on how many mortals have interacted with the item: trivial for an assassin's dagger or a family heirloom few have handled, tough for a door handle or a coin many have handled. 1 success yields a fleeting memory of the last time the object was touched. 2 successes yield unstructured, chaotic episodes of the object's history, with most details being fuzzy. 3+ successes yield clear images of key actors and meaningful events in the object's lifespan. There is one important limitation to keep in mind when using this spell: it does not work on shards.

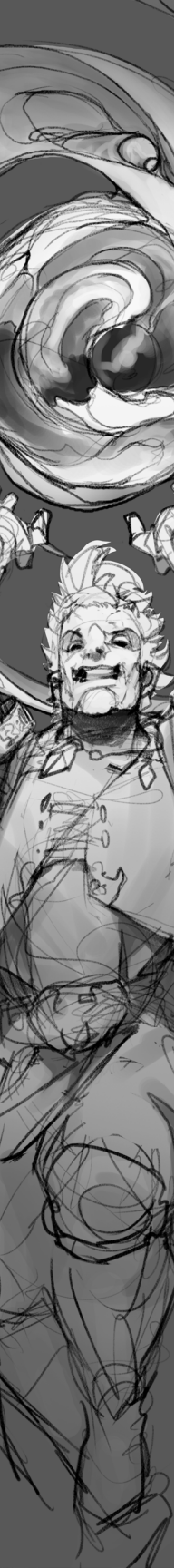
Shadow Cache

A spell that allows a caster to bury objects inside a shadow and then later recover those objects from any other shadow. The placement of objects in a shadow, then designated as her shadow cache, requires no magical effort. However, retrieving those objects from a different shadow does. Caster chooses a shadow and makes an unopposed Willpower skill check of trivial difficulty. Upon 1 success, the caster can access her shadow cache, but it takes one scene for its contents to materialize. Upon 2 successes, its contents materialize in about 1 minute or 3 turns. Upon 3+ successes, the contents materialize instantly. Both the shadow cache and retrieval shadow must originate from an object that has been stationary for at least a day (e.g. a pillar, a wagon that has not moved, etc.). Only the caster can place objects in, or retrieve objects from, her shadow cache, because the objects become immaterial, existing on a different plane.

A caster can only maintain a single shadow cache at a time, though she may place as many objects in it as she desires, so long as the objects fit within the contours of the shadow. A caster can also only maintain a single retrieval shadow at a time; creating a new one will dispel the previous one. A shadow cache lasts indefinitely, until a new shadow

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cache is created, or until the caster dies.

Shard Scry

A spell that turns a private shardnet into a scrying sensor array, allowing a caster to perceive everything that every shard in that shardnet perceives, as if they were surveillance cameras. The caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check with a task difficulty equal to the size of the shardnet: trivial for less than 6 shards, tough for more than 20 shards, and challenging for anything in between. 1 success allows the caster to see from shards that were the origin of live echoes, as long as those echoes are in clear-text or can be decrypted by the caster. 2 successes allow the caster to see from shards that were the origin of live echoes, regardless of encryption. 3+ successes allow the caster to see from every shard in the shardnet, even those that have not been the origin of live echoes. The spell lasts the duration of a scene or until the caster lets go of her shard, effectively killing her session. This spell does work over bridges but does not work on the Shardscape or traverse golems.

Shard Spike

A spell that embeds an encrypted magical trap inside a shardnet, alerting its caster when triggered. A caster holding a shard infuses the spell in the shardnet and then encrypts it, setting the trap. It appears to be just another encrypted echo. When the trap is decrypted by anyone other than the caster, it is triggered and sensed by the caster. Caster can opt for shared key or true name encryption. If the caster uses an actor's true name as the keyphrase, only that actor is vulnerable to the spell. If the caster uses her own soul key as the keyphrase, only those who know the caster's true name are vulnerable to the spell. The caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check with a task difficulty equal to the size of the shardnet: trivial for less than 6 shards, tough for more than 20 shards, and challenging for anything in between. 1 or more success creates a shard spike. 2 successes create a shard spike that also geolocates the victim, similar to the Tracer spell. 3+ successes create a shard spike that

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not only geolocates the victim but also inflicts lethal psychic backlash (4 HP damage, ignoring armor) on them. Lasts until detonated or revoked by the caster. A caster can have only one shard spike active at a time. This spell does work over bridges but does not work on the Shardscape or traverse golems.

Siege Shield

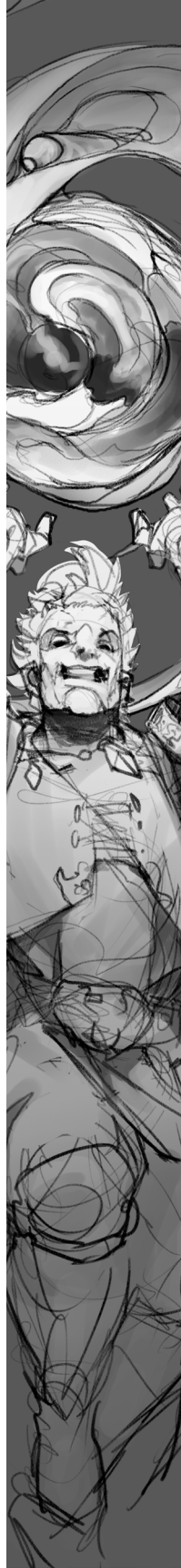
A spell that creates an ethereal, electrical barrier that emanates from the caster and moves with her, shielding the caster and nearby actors from ranged attacks. The caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check of challenging difficulty. Success results in a barrier that reduces the damage of all incoming and outgoing physical projectiles (e.g. arrows, bolts, bombs, spears, and stones) well as offensive magic spells (e.g. kill bolt, kill ball, bloom bomb, swarm strike, etc.) by 1 point of damage per success rolled. The spell protects everything within close range of the caster, following her as she moves. Lasts for the duration of a scene or until revoked by the caster.

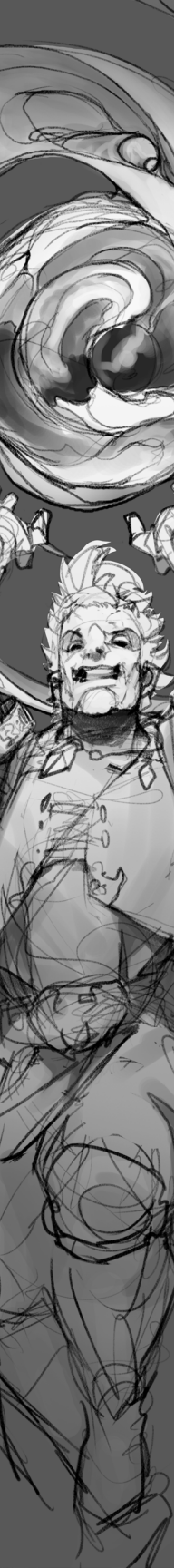
Swarm Strike

A spell that compels all local vermin to do the caster's bidding. The spell is cast at a target but also impacts everyone within close range of that target. Caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check versus a group's Resolve ranks (use the opposed skill checks vs. groups mechanic to resolve). The effect of a swarm strike depends on the type of vermin commanded:

Fuzzy horrors break loose from ceiling or canopy, creating a downward deluge of bloated, fuzzy bloodsuckers than bore through flesh and wriggle under armor. Impacted targets spend their action (but not their movement) writhing and flailing in horror until they succeed at a Willpower skill check at the beginning of their turn. The difficulty of this skill check is determined by the number of successes the caster rolled: 1 success = trivial, 2 successes = challenging, and 3+ successes = tough.

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Siege locusts form a dense column and fling themselves toward targets with the power of a charging war horse. Impacted targets suffer 1 HP damage per success rolled (this damage does not ignore armor) and are pushed back one range category away from the caster.

Smelter Flies swarm to objects made of steel, carapace, or mythrill and gyrate with such ferocity that the objects cook the hands that hold them or the torso that bears their weight. Impacted targets equipped with a weapon, shield, or outfit made mostly of metal suffer 1 HP damage (ignoring armor) at the end of their every turn, until they abandon these objects. These objects remain superheated for 2 turns per success rolled.

Terraform

A spell that warps earth and flora into semi-permanent structures, including but not limited to climbable stalks, organic cages, wooden fortresses, underground tunnels, chasm-spanning bridges, and hoard-swallowing abysses. Terraform is used to create small, medium, and large structures. Small structures are enough to support, contain, or protect one mortal. Medium structures can support, contain, or protect a small group of mortals, or a single large creature or character riding a mount. Large structures can support, contain, or protect dozens of mortals as well as their wagons and steeds. Caster makes an unopposed Will-power check, with the difficulty based on the size of the structure being formed (e.g. trivial for small, challenging for medium, and tough for large). 1 success results in the terraform occurring slowly, completing at the end of a scene. 2 successes result in the terraform occurring quickly, taking approximately 1 minute or 3 turns. 3+ successes result in the terraform completing almost instantly. Terraform only works on natural earth, stone, and flora; it does not work against materials cut or set by smiths or architects (e.g. castle walls, wooden shacks, etc.). Terraformed structures do not have a duration. They stay that way until physically or magically broken down.

GREATER SPELLS

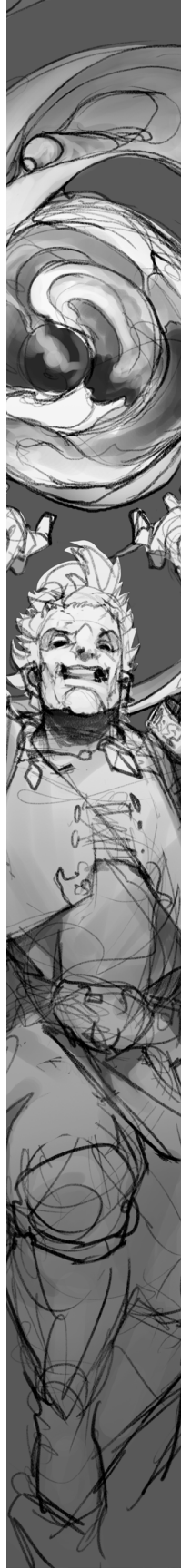
Greater spells cost 3 Talent Points to acquire and 5 MP to cast. The spells are so dangerous and coveted that their secrets are rarely shared and their use is often contracted out to the highest bidder. They are wondrous and fearsome spells that border on being miraculous, but casting them without considerable magical skill is essentially playing with fire. Like basic spells, their effects scale with successes rolled. Dramatic failures tend to be less of an “oops” moment and more like a *disaster-coaster*. To emphasize this concept, these spells include some potential outcomes for dramatic failures, but these are just suggestions and not hard rules. Note, these “big spells gone bad” suggestions can also be a source of inspiration for adventure ideas.

Dead Host

A spell that allows a caster to temporarily transfer her consciousness into a fresh (humanoid) cadaver and animate it as if it were her own body. Caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check of tough difficulty. Upon 1 success, the dead host cannot speak, cast spells, or use shards. Upon 2 successes, the dead host cannot speak or cast spells, but it can use shards. Upon 3+ success, the dead host gains its voice back and is able to freely speak or cast spells. Regardless of how many successes were rolled, a dead host maintains the same physical core and attribute ranks it had before death, while inheriting the mental core and attribute ranks of the caster.

An animated cadaver appears alive at first but is clearly dead upon closer inspection. It does not breathe or blink, and it moves as if compelled by invisible puppet strings. Cadavers must be relatively fresh, requiring some muscle and blood to “fuel” its activities. Withered husks or dusty skeletons will not do. The caster’s own body falls limp while possessing a corpse, but the caster is still somewhat aware of her own surroundings. Lasts until the caster revokes the spell or the host is destroyed.

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Possible dramatic failure outcomes: cadaver becomes a zombie (the biting, self-replicating kind), caster becomes a lich when her consciousness gets “stuck” in the cadaver, cadaver’s soul gets resurrected in the caster’s body, etc.

Kill Ball

A spell that projects a brilliant ball of destructive energy that explodes into a massive and violent magical storm upon contact. The spell is cast at a target, and then explodes, damaging everything within short range of that target. Caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check versus a group’s Resolve ranks (use the opposed skill checks vs. groups mechanic to resolve): each success results in 2 HP damage, ignoring all armor.

Possible dramatic failure outcomes: the conjured kill ball explodes before the caster gets a chance to throw it, or the kill ball misses its mark and strikes an unintended target (like a busy market), etc.

Mind Write

A spell that allows a caster to inject invented memories into a target or erase a target’s memories by placing a hand on that target’s head and projecting magical energy. Caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check versus the target’s Resolve rank. The efficacy of the spell depends upon the number of successes: 1 allows a caster to inject a small detail / passing feeling OR erase the last hour of memories, 2 allows a caster to inject a memorable encounter / strong opinion OR erase the last 24 hours of memories, and 3+ allows a caster to inject a vivid encounter / powerful emotion OR erase the last week of memories.

Targets of this spell don’t remember the moments of its casting, dismissing its effects as forgetfulness, age, or confusion. While they can take actions to reconstruct or verify events by talking to witnesses or reading a diary, nothing will “jar” the memories to return naturally. If the caster so desires, injected memories and emotions can re-

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main dormant until the target thinks about or experiences a trigger: a person, place, thing, or experience that causes the new memory or emotion to come to forefront of the target's thoughts.

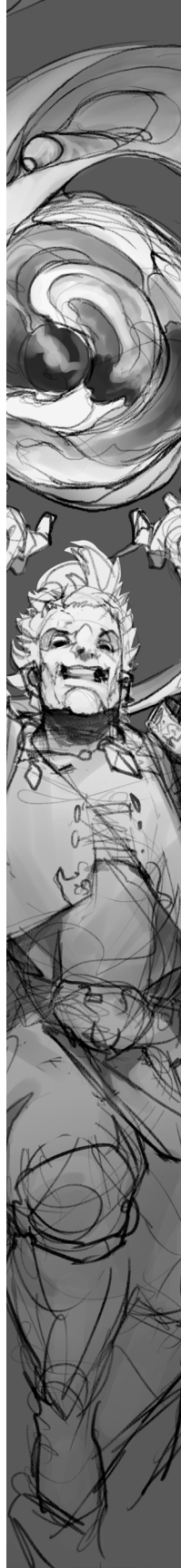
Possible dramatic failure outcomes: caster accidentally injects every true name she knows, caster accidentally injects the location of the party's safe house, caster accidentally injects a Manchurian kill-switch in herself instead of her target, etc.

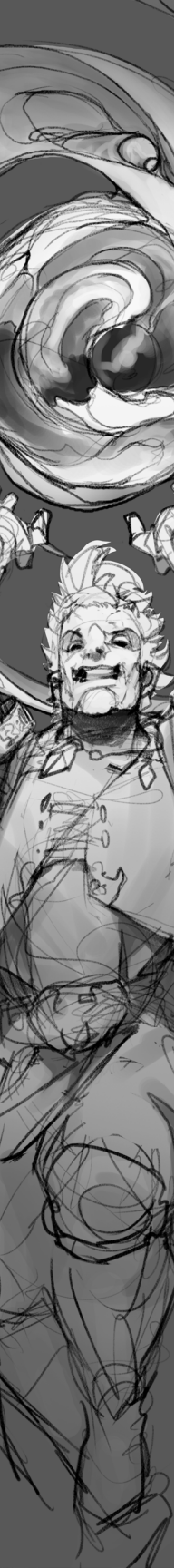
Name Wraith

A spell that conjures a shadowy spirit that will torment and deceive whoever's true name is uttered by the spell caster. The caster utters a true name, but instead of sound coming from her voice, a black mist is belched forth, forming into a ghastly wraith that will manipulate the victim on the caster's behalf. The wraith will also visit the caster in her own dreams in order to report in and accept new orders. Caster makes an opposed Willpower skill check versus the target's Resolve rank. Upon 1 success, the victim will unwittingly encrypt most of her Shardscape echoes and town board messages with a keyphrase determined by the caster. Upon 2 successes, the victim also feels urges and impulses that draw her closer to whatever location the caster desires. Such impulses can be benign (e.g. "I'd like to travel more"), base (e.g. "I need to go to the dangerous part of town to get my fix"), or spiritual (e.g. "I need to make a pilgrimage to the abandoned shrine"). Upon 3+ successes, the victim will also become suspicious and hateful of whomever the caster chooses, only able to sleep, keep food down, or be productive during downtime if she does something truly violent, cruel, or deceptive to that person.

Lasts until the caster revokes the spell, dies, or when the victim utters the caster's true name. Even if the victim suspects a name wraith or is told she is being influenced by one, she remains in absolute denial until the spell ends. More than one regent has been put to the rack in a desperate coup, hoping to compel that regent to utter the true name that will lift the curse. Can only be cast on a victim once per

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caster per campaign, for a wraith will never interfere with the scheming of another wraith.

Possible dramatic failure outcomes: wraith infects the mind of the wrong target but does not inform the caster, wraith colludes with the victim to torment and deceive the caster, etc.

Resurrection

A spell that reassembles shattered bodies and breathes life back into the newly dead. This spell restores a fallen actor who has died within the last 48 hours to 1 HP and stable, but takes an enormous toll of the caster. Upon casting, caster makes a tough Willpower skill check: 1 success resurrects the target but the caster must spend 4 sessions of downtime (not necessarily consecutive sessions) doing nothing but shaking off the effects of the casting before they can begin to recover MP again. 2 successes resurrect the target, but the caster must spend 2 sessions of downtime recovering instead of 4. 3+ successes resurrects the target with no impact to the caster. Every time a mortal is resurrected, she becomes harder to resurrect in the future, adding an additional 2 MP to the previous mana cost. Caster must touch the target, and target's head and torso must be relatively intact and available (though not necessarily still attached to one another).

Possible dramatic failure outcomes: the body returns to life but is animated by the soul and consciousness of the wrong dead person, the reassembly goes horribly wrong and the outcome is something out of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or John Carpenter's *The Thing*, the caster is tormented by ancestor ghosts angry about an attempt to deny them a reunion with their kin, etc.

Shard Warp

A spell that allows a caster to transport her corporeal being (and nothing else) through a private shardnet. The caster holds a shard, focuses on an echo that is either in clear-text or can be decrypted by the caster, and casts the

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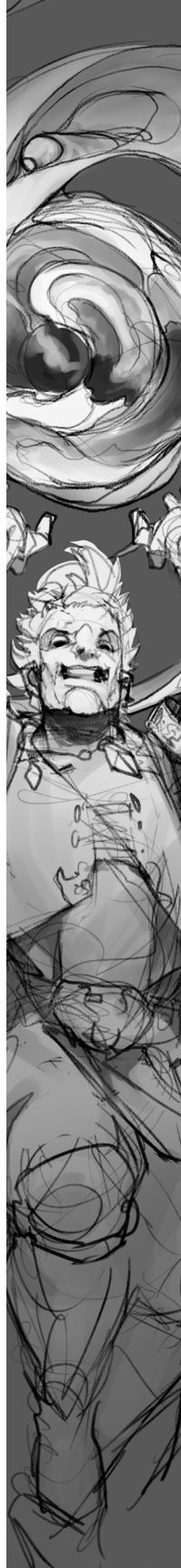
spell. Her body is then magically disassembled by the shard in her hands and then reassembled by the shard that was the origin of that echo. The caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check with a task difficulty equal to the size of the shardnet: trivial for less than 6 shards, tough for more than 20 shards, and challenging for anything in between. 1 success results in the caster arriving at her destination violently, taking 3 HP damage (a critical wound). 2 successes results in the caster arriving at her destination gently. 3+ successes, the caster is able to observe her destination before arrival, picking the exact place and position she wishes to materialize, arriving in place as if she had also rolled as many successes in a Stealth skill check. A major limitation of this otherwise extremely powerful spell is the fact that it only transports the caster's organic self. Her shard, along with her clothing and equipment (as well as anything stowed with the Smuggler talent) abruptly fall to the ground and she is dropped into a potentially dangerous situation completely and entirely naked.

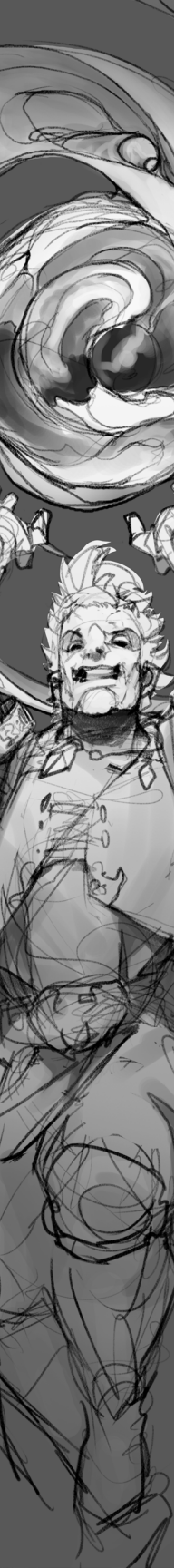
Possible dramatic failure outcomes: the caster gets “stuck” and becomes a bodiless consciousness existing in a shard (but what a cool GM character concept), caster successfully transports but forgets something really important (e.g. one of her arms), caster accidentally shardcasts a clear-text stream-of-conscious version of her plans across a hostile shardnet, etc.

Wild Recon

A spell that summons a legion of animal scouts (birds, rodents, and vermin) to whisper secrets into her ear, sharing intelligence regarding a location that would otherwise take an army of spies and scouts to obtain. The caster sets her gaze on a location she can actually see from afar: a city, a fortress, a ruin, etc. She then lets forth a deafening, polyphonic primal roar, beckoning the wild recon. Caster makes an unopposed Willpower skill check, the difficulty of which is determined by the size and complexity of the location she wishes to glean intelligence on: trivial for a small village or outpost, challenging for a large dungeon or a fortified noble house, tough for a city-state or a regional

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fortress. For each success rolled, the caster learns one of the following, chosen by her:

- Approximate troop strength (including numbers, armament, and training level).
- Strategic bent (including public sentiment, troop morale, supply levels, and intent to attack or defend).
- Detailed geography and architecture (including maps, the location of secret passages, and the approximate function of individual rooms).
- Persons of interest (including regents, commanders, important dissidents, and powerful mages).
- Objects of interest (including treasure, relics, shard fixtures, mechanical wonders, and places of magical power).

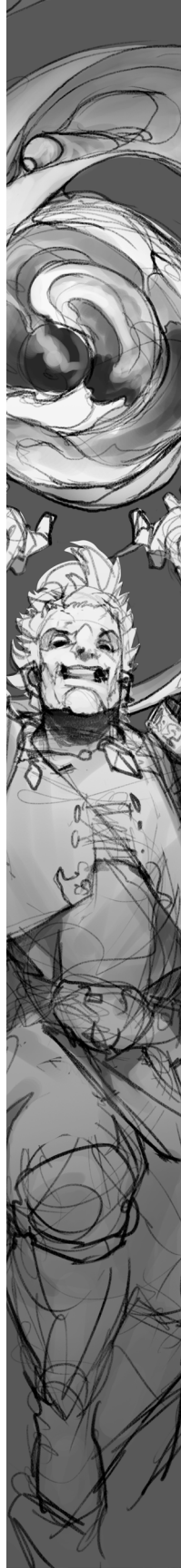
Wild recon can only be cast on a location once per caster per campaign, primarily because the fauna composing the wild recon are sharing the secrets they have gleaned passively and accidentally over the span of their lifetimes. Little if anything changes between subsequent castings.

Possible dramatic failure outcomes: the wild recon gives the caster bogus information, whispers secret knowledge to the targeted location's regent, or decides they like the targeted location so much they will defend it talon and fang against the caster's party, etc.

SQL>SELECT * FROM SPELLS SUMMARY

Spell	MP	Skill Check	Resolution	Duration
Astral Eyes	1	Challenging	Allows caster to see hard-to-spot physical evidence and traces of magic.	1 scene
Astral Trail	3	Opposed	Intuit target caster's location. Learn one fact per success rolled: cardinal direction, distance, or realm. Add successes to next Tracking skill check.	Instant
Babel	1	Opposed	Encrypts a target's voice with a keyphrase, a soul key, or someone else's true name.	Forever, sort of
Bloom Blessing	1	Challenging	Beneficial area of effect emanating from the caster (up to medium range). Calms, creates debris, or smother fires.	1 scene
Bloom Bomb	3	Opposed	Harmful area of effect emanating from a target (up to close range). Fire, entangling vines, or poison.	Instant
Chameleon	3	Challenging	Become invisible for 2 turns per success rolled, when staying still. Can add successes to a sneak attack while hidden.	Varies
Dead Host	5	Tough	Inhabit the dead. Varies with successes: 1 = cannot speak, cast spells, or use shards. 2 = cannot speak or cast spells. 3+ = no restrictions.	1 scene
Denier	1	Determined by shardnet size. Trivial: < 6 Tough: >20	Prevents the creation of new echoes for 1 turn on the shardnet being targeted.	Instant
Dissemble	1	Opposed	Encrypts a target's body with a keyphrase, a soul key, or someone else's true name.	Forever, sort of

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SQL>SELECT * FROM

SPELLS SUMMARY (CONT.)

Spell	MP	Skill Check	Resolution	Duration
Glamour	3	Challenging	Transform into someone else, plus change a number of physical characteristics equal to the successes rolled.	1 scene
Healing Hands	3	Challenging	Varies with successes: 1 = weak healing potion. 2 = strong healing potion. 3+ = strong healing potion, plus same effect on 1 other actor in close range.	Instant
Kill Ball	5	Opposed	Short range area of effect emanating from a target. Inflicts 2 HP damage per success rolled, ignoring armor.	Instant
Kill Bolt	3	Opposed	Inflicts 2 HP damage per success rolled, ignoring armor.	Instant
Mana Mail	3	Challenging	Varies with successes: 1 = light deflection. 2 = heavy deflection. 3+ = heavy deflection and damage reduction. Can spend successes to reduce the damage of one offensive spell.	1 scene
Maze	3	Varies	Encrypts a portal with a keyphrase, a soul key, or someone else's true name.	Forever, sort of.
Meld	3	Varies	Move through walls. Varies with successes: 1 = pass barrier in 3 turns, take 3 HP damage. 2 = pass barrier in 3 turns. 3 = pass barrier instantly.	
Messenger	1	Challenging	Critter delivers a small thing to a recipient (whose true name is known).	Varies

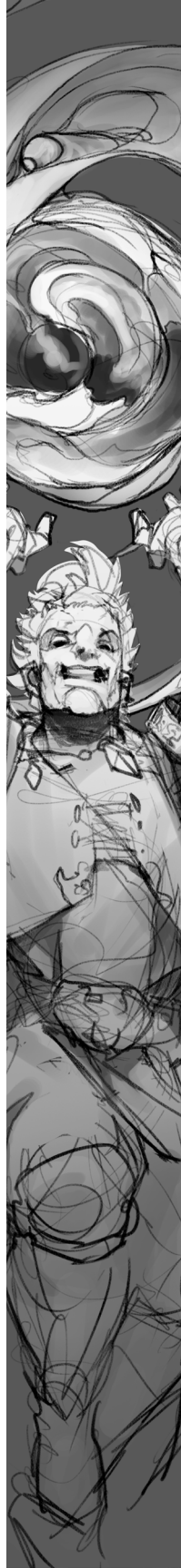
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SPELLS SUMMARY (CONT.)

Spell	MP	Skill Check	Resolution	Duration
Mind Read	3	Opposed	Read a target's memories. Varies with successes: 1 = last hour. 2 = last day. 3+ = last week.	Instant
Mind Write	5	Opposed	Erase or rewrite memories. Varies with successes: 1 = weak detail/emotion. 2 = strong detail/emotion. 3 = profound detail/emotion.	Instant
Name Wraith	5	Opposed	Summon ghost to torment a target. Varies with successes: 1 = victim uses keys known by caster. 2 = victim goes to a place determined by caster. 3+ = victim does malice towards an actor chosen by caster.	Varies
Psychometry	3	Varies	Read an object's memories. Varies with successes: 1 = last time touched. 2 = important events. 3 = entire life story.	Instant
Resurrection	5	Tough	Raise the dead. Varies with successes: 1 = 4 downtime sessions to recover MP again. 2 = 2 downtime sessions to recover MP again. 3 = no recovery period.	Instant
Scout Sprite	1	Trivial	Magic wisp flies around at 1 move per turn, sharing vision with caster.	1 scene

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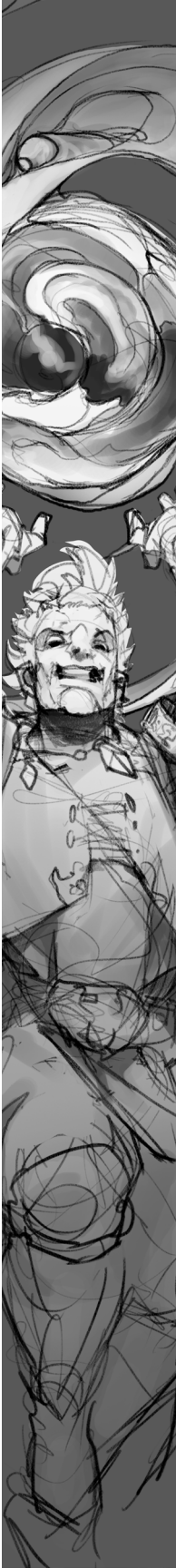
SPELLS SUMMARY (CONT.)

Spell	MP	Skill Check	Resolution	Duration
Shadow Cashe	3	Trivial	Store things in a shadow, retrieve them from another shadow. Varies with successes: 1 = recover in 1 scene. 2 = recover in 3 turns. 3 = recover instantly.	Varies
Shard Scry	3	Determined by shardnet size. Trivial: < 6 Tough: >20	Varies with successes: 1 = scry from origin of any clear-text or decrypted echoes. 2 = scry from any echo. 3 = scry from any shard.	1 scene
Shard Spike	3	Challenging	Varies with successes: 1 success = notification. 2 successes = geolocation. 3 successes = geolocation plus 4 HP damage, ignoring armor.	Varies
Shard Warp	5	Determined by shardnet size. Trivial: < 6 Tough: >20	Varies with successes: 1 = 3 HP damage. 2 = arrives gently. 3 = arrives in advantageous position, gains Stealth successes.	Instant
Share Sight	1	Opposed	Sends a snapshot of one's vision to someone else.	1 scene
Siege Shield	3	Challenging	Beneficial area of effect emanating from the caster (up to close range), reducing incoming/outgoing ranged and magic damage by 1 HP per success rolled..	1 scene
Stasis	1	Challenging	Halts the effects of poisons and toxins.	1 scene
Swarm Song	1	Challenging	Beneficial area of effect emanating from the caster (up to medium range). Create light or noise, or detect magic.	1 scene

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SQL>SELECT * FROM
SPELLS SUMMARY (CONT.)

Spell	MP	Skill Check	Resolution	Duration
Swarm Strike	3	Opposed	Harmful area of effect emanating from a target (up to close range). Burn metal, push back, or horrify.	Instant
Terraform	3	Varies	Varies with successes: 1 = transforms in 1 scene. 2 = transforms in 3 turns. 3 = transforms instantly.	Varies
Tracer	1	Determined by shardnet size: Trivial: < 6 Tough: >20	Divines the physical location of every shard in a shardnet at a moment in time.	Instant
Transmute	1	Challenging	Transforms a concoction into a different one of lesser value.	Instant
Warning Glyph	1	Opposed	Warns the caster of trespassers if it works.	Forever, sort of
Wild Recon	5	Varies	Each success yields 1 category of intelligence: approximate troop strength, strategic bent, detailed geography and architecture, persons of interest, and objects of interest.	Instant



MAGIC IN SOCIETY

In Cryptomancer, magic is treated like a dual-use technology. It can be used for good or for ill, but it is not inherently good or evil. Magic users are not “chosen ones,” nor do they face persecution from jealous and fearful “mundanes.” Anyone with the time, resources, access, and inclination to learn magic can do so. Despite this, magical acumen is relatively rare, but the reasons are primarily economical.

While a society where everyone can magically heal wounds sounds ideal, it does not sound ideal to the healer, who would lose her esteemed station in society as well as her primary income if that were the case. Luckily, she is the only one in town capable of teaching the healing arts to a pupil or transcribing that knowledge to a tome. The same could be said for the king’s inquisitor who can read minds, or the mercenary battlemage who earns a princely sum being a walking siege engine. Spells are trade secrets to some, and their value is diminished when they become commodity.

Another factor limiting the distribution of magic spells is the consideration of *who* will use a spell and *how*, a problem set that societies struggle to manage. Resurrecting a laborer who died in a mining accident is noble, but resurrecting a convict recently executed by the state would likely be considered a capitol crime by authorities. Intention is only half of the problem. If a greater spell is horribly miscast by an amateur apprentice, everyone suffers. When spells are taught, then, they are typically only taught to those who have the acumen to cast them skillfully and in accordance with secular laws and/or the teacher’s personal ethics. Of course, people change, complicating the matter further.

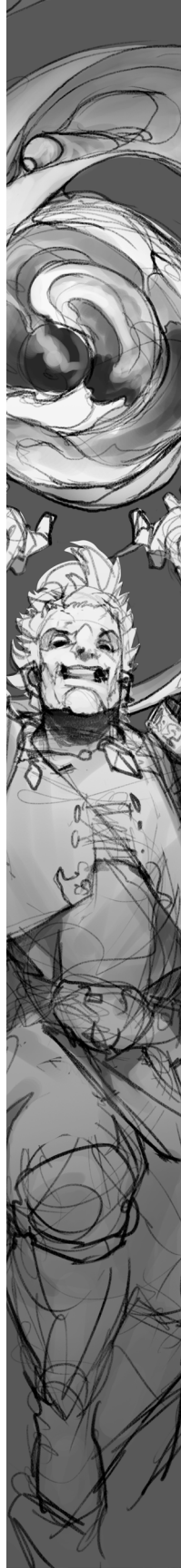
A rogue spell caster doesn’t simply ruin the reputation of her teacher. She can potentially ruin things for other spell casters, or worse, ruin things for even those without any interest in magic. Consider the Maze spell. Casting Maze on the door to one’s home to keep out would-be thieves or assailants is perfectly reasonable in virtually every

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society. However, casting Maze on the exits of a burning theater house full of people is essentially *cryptoterrorism*. If such a thing happened, any reasonable state would take serious measures to prevent such a twisted act from happening again.

Outlawing the Maze spell entirely might be an option, though it would likely harm many businesses and organizations relying on the security and privacy this spell provides. A softer option might be to require those casting Maze legally to do so only using keyphrases assigned to them by the state. While the risks of such a plan are obvious to the magically- and cryptomantically-inclined, the state would likely propagate a campaign stating, “If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear,” gaining support from virtually everyone else. When and if such an apparatus was put in place, it would only makes sense to extend the idea to keyphrases used to protect communications. After all, the theater fire could have been prevented if the authorities had the cryptoterrorists’ keyphrases.

That is just one example. The legal, ethical, practical, and economic implications of magic make it one of the most hotly contested topics among thinkers and politicians. In fact, many of the most important magical theorists and thinkers in the Modern Age are not even spell casters themselves, but simply curious persons analyzing and assessing the impact that magic has on society. The most successful have been those able to balance the interests of the magical, the mundane, and the state. They’ve also been the most likely to have accidents.



RITUAL MAGIC

The magic presented so far has been tactical in nature: allowing a gifted individual to exert her will to overcome obstacles and enemies. Ritual magic is strategic in nature: big and/or enduring magical events that shape the very course of history. Ritual magic explains the really fantastic elements of the Cryptomancer setting, from floating continents to cursed bloodlines to ancient adversaries continually rising from the dead. Ritual magic can also be a means of reversing some particularly troublesome examples of “magic gone wrong” mentioned in the previous section. No rules for ritual magic are made available to players because ritual magic exists as a purely narrative device to explain wondrous magical reality as well as create interesting story hooks.

Whereas magic available to player characters is about exerting will and expending mana, ritual magic is about the execution and maintenance of some type of elaborate ritual, potentially by many people, over time, and at great cost. The ritual might be as benign as keeping a sacred oil lamp lit for all time, protecting the very last of an endangered species, or keeping a sacred door sealed no matter what. The ritual also might be as sinister as feeding children to some Moloch-like creature à la the classic film *Metropolis*. The execution and maintenance of rituals are frequently at the core of any religions or cults in this setting, and may explain a belief’s bizarre tenants as well as the believers’ utter devotion to their cause (“If we don’t do this twisted ritual every year, something far worse will happen”).

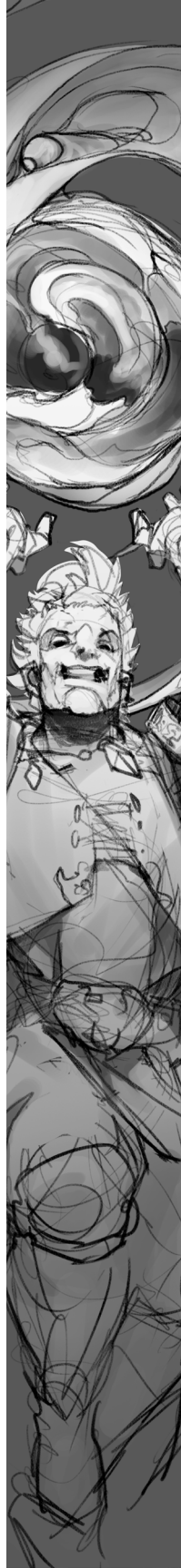
The key to ritual magic is that the magic effect can be disrupted if the ritual is disrupted. This might be a good thing (e.g. close the ancient seal and the immortal demon is vulnerable) or it might be a bad thing (e.g. extinguish the sacred flame and the floating continent will plummet to the ground and obliterate everything). Whatever the case, it’s a really easy and fun plot device.

MAGIC STUFF

No story or game of the fantasy genre would be complete without addressing powerful magical artifacts. In *Cryptomancer*, there are two main categories of magical artifacts: enchanted items and relics. Enchanted items provide useful abilities to their owner (e.g. a magic sword that cuts through anything), while relics provide immense strategic power (e.g. a standard that commands an entire army of ghosts).

Enchanted items are normal objects imbued with special properties, but either require the maintenance of some type of ritual magic or have some type of unfortunate side effects. While they are relatively rare (1 out of 1,000 mortals possess an enchanted object), they are not the type of artifact that entire civilizations go to war over. Enchanted items are, however, a great way to reward players for a job well done.

Relics, on the other hand, are ancient, powerful, coveted, and dangerous objects that imbue great power to their owner but at great cost. Their power predates the magic of the noble races and is terrible to behold. Those who possess a relic frequently become consumed by it until they are merely a vessel of that relic. That is to say that a relic's great power and great cost can be an exciting recurring theme throughout a campaign. Players ought to tread lightly when encountering a relic. The old magics have a twisted sense of humor.





ENCHANTED ITEMS

What follows are a few examples of enchanted items, including their benefit and the ritual required to sustain their power. Enchanted items should be rare enough where each instance of them has a dramatic introduction/demonstration, or at the very least, an interesting backstory gleaned by a character who is good at Query.

The list is purposefully short. GMs are encouraged to create their own enchanted items or remix some of the ones included here to fit the needs and desires of the players. It's pretty simple. Just take a thing, give it some cool benefit, and then come up with a ritual condition that keeps the enchanted item happy. A good GM will spend a little time dreaming up a great enchanted item for each player character to eventually discover or earn during the campaign.

SQL>SELECT * FROM

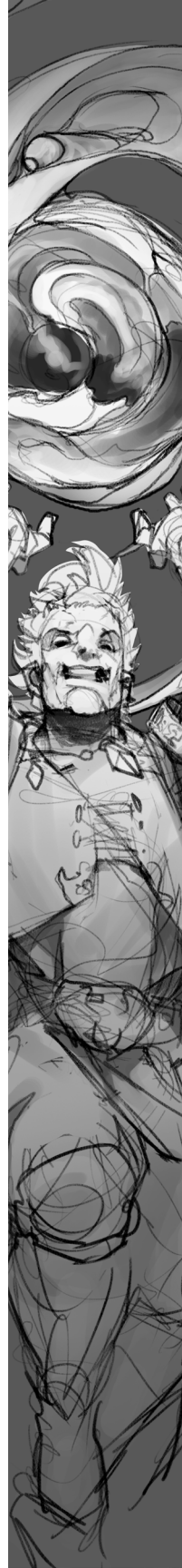
ENCHANTED ITEM EXAMPLES

Enchanted Item	Benefit	Ritual
The Harpy Cloak	A heavy feathered cloak that can expand into two magically animated harpy wings. Wearer can fly during her movement phase at the cost of 1 MP per movement, or spend 1 MP to negate the +1 damage penalty the moment she fails to dodge an attack.	The wearer of the cloak craves the flesh of mortals (i.e. dwarves, elves, and humans). If and when she violently incapacitates a mortal, she must succeed at an unopposed Willpower skill check of tough difficulty or spend her next full turn devouring her prey.
The Paladin's Plate	A blessed, shining suit of scale or plate armor that automatically stabilizes its wearer's critical and mortal wounds and makes her immune to the effects of poison.	If the wearer tells a lie, strikes an unwitting foe, or denies mercy when it is asked for, the armor erupts in holy hellfire. The sinner is engulfed in flame until she spends her full turn repenting and succeeds at an unopposed Willpower skill check of tough difficulty.

--MORE--

SQL>SELECT * FROM
 ENCHANTED ITEM
 EXAMPLES (CONT.)

Enchanted Item	Benefit	Ritual
The God Missile	An axe, spear, or hammer that, when thrown, explodes and damages like a Kill Ball (but uses Thrown Missile instead of Willpower to determine damage). Weapon rematerializes in wielder's hands if she spends 5 MP.	The God Missile does not tolerate failure. If throwing the God Missile results in a dramatic failure, it will forever renounce its wielder and never again rematerialize for her, unless she spends Risk reversing that outcome.
The Death Draught	A macabre water horn that seems to never run out of magical healing tincture during battle. It holds the equivalent of 1 strong healing potion, and magically refills itself...	...every time its owner kills a mortal (i.e. dwarf, elf, or human).
The Chrono Egg	A small egg that, when consumed, stops time and transports the consumer to a magical facsimile of her safehouse, where she has three sessions of downtime to do whatever she wants (e.g. rest, meditate, research, craft potions, etc.) before returning to reality.	Defying space and time is non-trivial. When the consumer of a chrono egg returns to real-time, she has aged one year and forfeits 1 Talent Point she would have otherwise received at the end of a session.
The Mind Eater	A heavy medallion that emits a magical aura, steeling the resolve of friends and crushing the will of foes. For the purposes of resisting magic, all allies within short range of the staff have Resolve 8, while all foes within short range of the staff have Resolve 4.	The medallion must be fed four units of pure soma every day, or its effects are reversed. If the owner of the medallion takes it off for any reason, it will forsake the owner forever and strangle her if she tries to don it again.
The Phase Blade	A ghostly dagger, sword, or claymore that phases through inorganic material, only materializing to sever flesh and bone. The weapon ignores armor and cannot or be parried. However, because it phases through inorganic matter, it can only parry unarmed attacks.	The wielder of the weapon is tormented by the spirits embodying it. The wielder cannot be productive during downtime, as if surrendering to the effects of soma addiction. If the wielder renounces the weapon or gives it to someone else, the effect still lingers for a week.



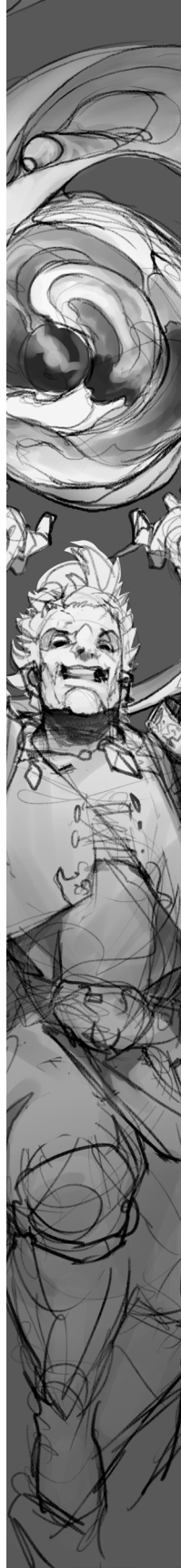
RELICS

What follows are a few examples of relics, including the great power they provide, and the great cost that comes along with toying with objects that were likely abandoned and buried for a good reason. Even more rare and dramatic than enchanted items, relics should be the equivalent of major characters, major villains, or natural disasters in a campaign. In the examples provided, there happen to be references to rules that have not been defined yet. Don't worry! It will make sense later. Just know that relics are truly game changers in the world of Cryptomancer, and a great method of spiking a campaign with themes of greed, obsession, and absolute power corrupting absolutely.

This list is also purposely short. Like we suggested in the previous section, we encourage GMs to either remix the relics we include below or dream up their own to fit their campaigns. One of the most useful functions of relics as a narrative device is that they can explain some truly weird, mysterious, and diabolical behavior that is occurring in the game world - behavior that will only make sense once the party discovers the relic that is behind it all.

SQL>SELECT * FROM RELIC EXAMPLES

Relic	Great Power	Great Cost
The Chalice of Nod	A shadowy cult serves whoever is the chalice holder. Holder gains 6 strategic assets worth of cells (all deniable) to do her personal bidding. This benefit increases by 1 every time the chalice is taken by force and the previous owner is killed.	Nod cells that fail dramatically at tasks commit terrible atrocities, often doing so while chanting their master's name. Nod cells that are idle (not assigned to tasks) each generate 1 Risk for the party.
The Midas Engine	An ancient dwarven engine that gruesomely processes a living mortal into 1,000 golden coins matching the design and dimensions of any coin placed in its receptacle.	It usually begins as, "We will just use it once, and only on a very bad person. We will live within our means." What follows, however, is usually very, very dark.
The Siege Censer	A twisted mass of rare meteorite from a star that exploded in the sky eons ago. When set ablaze and hurled by a siege engine, it erupts in a seemingly endless cloud of lethal gas that creeps down every alley and into every window and cellar, squelching life where it can find it. Populations are obliterated, but structures and spoils go unharmed.	Those who succumb to the gas (after hours or sometimes days of agony) rise again as zombies that finish off the survivors. But surely the walking dead can be more easily managed than an organized and fully stocked resistance, right?
The Shard of Wishes	A shardnet of two. One shard belongs to someone or something that seems capable of fulfilling the wishes of whoever possesses the other shard, no matter how outlandish a wish might seem. Paupers become princes, unrequited loves become requited, rivals die horribly, etc.	Now that your wish has been fulfilled, you need to help the wish-granter fulfill someone else's wish. You don't want the wish-granter to think you are ungrateful, do you? However, you better sit down before you hear what you need to do.



/ROOT/MAGIC/CD ..
/ROOT/CD PARTY AND CAMPAIGN MECHANICS
/ROOT/PARTY AND CAMPAIGN MECHANICS/LS

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PARTY AND
CAMPAIGN MECHANICS









OVERVIEW

The previous few chapters covered all the things that an individual character can do in Cryptomancer. Yet, role-playing games are necessarily a group experience, so there is a subset of rules that apply not to an individual character but to the entire table. We've developed the party sheet to manage this subset of rules. We'll be spending this chapter walking through everything on the party sheet and how it informs the progress of a campaign.

RISK

Risk represents just how much of a threat the party has become to the Risk Eaters. It is a meta-mechanic not tied to any specific actor, but instead applied to the game campaign and tracked by the GM and documented on the party sheet. Risk accumulates when player characters practice poor operational security or defy fate. The more risk that is generated, the more watchful the Risk Eaters are to the players' actions and the more threatened they feel about these actions. And when the Risk Eaters feel threatened, they lash out with ferocious violence when the party least expects it.

RISK		STRATEGIC ASSETS		TALENT POINTS		ATTRIBUTE POINTS	
------	---	------------------	---	---------------	---	------------------	---

Risk is measured on a scale of 1 to 100, and that number should be written down on the party sheet. New campaigns begin with 1 Risk, which translates to a 1% chance that the Risk Eaters will ambush the party with their most lethal agents at the party's most inconvenient time. The lower this number is, the longer the party will live to see another day. Before discussing what triggers violent Risk Eater intervention, or what it looks like, let's discuss how and why risk is generated.

-- MORE --

The two primary engines of risk are:

- Bad operational security
- Defying fate

Bad operational security is when the party is not taking appropriate steps to keep a low profile, protect their communications, and/or mask their affiliations. Some examples include: getting involved in something they shouldn't, reusing keyphrases over multiple sessions, not cleaning up after themselves (e.g. not disposing of the bodies), resorting to preventable violence, operating in broad daylight, etc. If and when a GM notices these types of activities taking place, she has the option to increase risk between 1 and 3 points, depending on the severity of the behavior, but must notify the players and tell them why it occurred. If the GM is nice, she'll even advise the players when they are leaning towards bad opsec, so they can course correct before risk is accumulated. Below is some guidance for generating risk based on bad operational security.


SQL>SELECT * FROM

BAD OPSEC EXAMPLES

Risk	Reasons
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The party used clear-text in almost all shardnet communications and/or forgot to change their shared keyphrases over multiple sessions.• The party unnecessarily got involved in something they should not have and/or resorted to violence when other alternatives were clearly available.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The party did not take sufficient precautions to conceal their identity or their affiliations when interacting with other groups.• The party did not do enough to sufficiently cover their tracks or clean up their mess after an operation, infiltration, or scene of combat.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The party engaged in an operation, infiltration, or scene of combat in broad daylight and/or in front of many witnesses.• The party's affiliation with their patron and/or their flight from the Risk Eaters has been shared with a group they cannot hope to manage (e.g. gossips, courtiers, rival houses, the Shardscape, etc.).

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Defying fate is when a player character achieves something that simply should not have happened. This manifests during gameplay when a player chooses to convert a botch into a success after a skill check is rolled. Unlike bad operational security, defying fate is completely within the players' control and can be leveraged at any time. That means that a player can "buy" her way out of a dramatic failure, or "buy" her way into a dramatic success, all after a dice roll is made. However, a player must announce her intent to buy successes before the GM resolves the failure (that is, a player cannot wait until she hears how bad an outcome is before upgrading it). A player generates a number of risk equal to the botches she decides to convert into successes.

Herkin's player rolled horribly during an attempt cast Kill Ball, the magical equivalent of artillery. The result was a grand total of -2 successes, otherwise known as a dramatic failure. The GM grins mischievously, knowing that Herkin's player will need to think this one over. Herkin's player quickly weighs the risks of earning the Risk Eater's ire versus accidentally blowing up in magical hellfire, and opts to live another day. Herkin's player buys off the 2 botches that brought the roll down to -2, at the cost of 2 risk added to the party. The resulting roll is then 0 successes. The Kill Ball fizzles out instead of blowing up in Herkin's hands.

Risk due to bad opsec is typically added at the end of a session, while risk due to defying fate is added immediately.

RISK TRIGGERS

So how much risk is too much risk? At what point has the party's antics become so noticeable that the Risk Eaters lash out at them? There are certain game events that result in *risk triggers*: rolls that determines if the Risk Eaters abruptly ambush the party. Unlike all other die rolls in this game, a risk check is a percentile die roll (d100, or 2d10 where one number stands for 10's and the other stands for 1's), made by the GM. If the GM rolls a result greater than the risk rating, nothing happens. If the GM rolls a result equal to or less than the risk rating, Risk Eaters assassins appear immediately and all hell breaks loose. They either jump out of the woodwork like they have been stalking the party, or they are nearby GM characters that the players never suspected. When the Risk Eaters attack, players can no longer defy fate (spend risk converting botches into successes) until the Risk Eaters attacking them have all been killed, captured, or evaded. The capabilities and lethality of an individual Risk Eater is discussed in the "Threats" chapter later in this book, but to summarize: they are absolutely lethal.

What events are risk triggers?

- Any session of downtime NOT taken in the party's safe house is a risk trigger.
- Every day that goes by where the party does not have a patron is a risk trigger.
- Any time a player rolls a dramatic failure, the GM can declare it a risk trigger *instead of* punishing that player with the immediate consequences of their roll.

What does a Risk Eater attack look like? It depends on the party's threat level, discussed in the next section.



THREAT LEVEL AND RISK EATER ATTACKS

The Risk Eaters commit agents and resources to deal with the party based on the party's *threat level*, which describes how dangerous the Risk Eaters think the party is. Threat level is presented on the party sheet so the whole table can appreciate how much trouble the party is in. The little dots next to the words are provided so someone can check them off when the party hits those hallmarks. When a campaign begins, the Risk Eaters are not actively chasing the party because they are protected by a patron. No filled-in dots, no problem. However, the first time a risk trigger results in a Risk Eater attack, the dot next to nuisance gets filled in and the party begins its downward spiral.

THREAT LEVEL

NUISANCE	<input type="radio"/>
DISRUPTION	<input type="radio"/>
DESTABILIZER	<input type="radio"/>
EXISTENTIAL THREAT	<input type="radio"/>

A threat level of *nuisance* means that the party has become an irritant to the Risk Eaters that should be dealt with before becoming a larger problem. 1-2 Risk Eater assassins appear out of nowhere to assail the party. If the party actually survives this encounter, continues playing the campaign, and lives long enough to see a second risk trigger result in a Risk Eater attack, their threat level is upgraded to disruption.

A threat level of *disruption* means that the party has actively disrupted some of the Risk Eaters plans, whether it was purposeful or not. 2-3 Risk Eater assassins appear out of nowhere to assail the party. Should the party survive this second encounter, continue playing the campaign, and live long enough to see a third risk trigger result in a Risk Eater attack, their threat level is upgraded to destabilizer.

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A threat level of *destabilizer* means that the party's actions are not only disrupting plans, but are putting considerable strain on the Risk Eater's power base. 3-5 Risk Eater assassins are typically dispatched to address a destabilizer. In the unlikely chance that the party survives this third encounter and lives long enough to see a fourth risk trigger result in a Risk Eater attack, their threat level is upgraded to existential threat.

A threat level of *existential threat* means that the party's actions threaten to topple everything the Risk Eaters have spent decades building. In response, this otherwise reclusive and shadowy organization will publicly project their will and declare the players "grand heretics." Any faction or fiefdom allied with or harboring the grand heretics will be wiped off the face of Sphere, first pummeled by magical weapons of mass destruction fired from the Risk Eaters' spire, and then finished off by an axis of Risk Eater agents and thrall armies sent to obliterate survivors. No one, not even loved ones, would risk entire civilizations to save a handful of fugitives. The player characters are irreversibly on their own and finished. Grand heretic status is a great time to wrap up the campaign on a nihilistic note. Basically, the campaign spirals to a bloody and unwinnable conclusion and the party has "lost the game." However, that doesn't mean the conclusion isn't awesome. We encourage GM's to conclude "failed" campaigns with a final scene as epic, nihilistic, and violent as seems appro, even if it takes an extra session or two to fully realize it.





You'll notice there is no mechanism by which to reduce risk. The downward spiral is assured. It is merely its velocity that is uncertain. Grim? Yes. But this is a thematic design choice. The Risk Eaters truly are the omniscient, omnipotent, and ever-present masters of this age. Anyone contesting them lives on borrowed time, period. The player characters' ultimate victory, then, lies in all the heroic deeds they accomplished, challenges they overcame, and cryptosystems they exploited while being pursued by this era's most terrible and powerful overlords.





STRATEGIC ASSETS

While most fantasy role-playing games provide mechanisms to track and explain a character’s personal growth (e.g. have more health, cast better spells, swing a sword better, have cooler stuff, etc.), not that many provide mechanisms to track the growing influence and power of the party. Strategic assets are a gesture towards filling this gap. Every time a strategic asset is acquired, it represents an increase in the party’s capabilities and scope. The acquisition of strategic assets, and their intelligent use, is how a ragtag group of dungeon-crawlers transforms into a major political operator and existential threat to the Risk Eaters.

RISK		STRATEGIC ASSETS		TALENT POINTS		ATTRIBUTE POINTS	
------	---	------------------	---	---------------	---	------------------	---

Strategic assets are earned when the party successfully completes missions assigned to them by their patron.

Strategic assets manifest in three distinct ways: as improvements to the party’s safe house, as cells of agents recruited to serve the party, and as mounts. The important thing to consider with strategic assets is that they belong to the party, not any individual player. Their use should be dictated by consensus or majority vote.

A strategic asset may cost coin in the game space, or come at some other type of cost. Sellswords work for money, and alchemy labs don’t restock themselves. However, the players need not worry about these types of details. The idea behind strategic assets is that the party has amassed enough favors, influence, or wealth so they don’t have to bother with things like mundane maintenance costs. When a strategic asset is spent, all of these things work themselves out behind the scenes.

The party can save strategic assets for a rainy day, but can never have more than 5 unspent strategic resources lying around. Use ‘em or lose ‘em.

SAFE HOUSES

Player characters in *Cryptomancer* are necessarily on the move at all times, evading detection, traveling to exotic locations, and setting up shop in hubs of adventure. While the player characters might have a home proper, it is sort of a liability to hang out there. Instead, player characters generally set up a safe house: a somewhat secret, temporary, and safe place to rest, discuss plans, prepare for action, and retreat from danger. The actual location of a safe house varies on the player characters' location, need for secrecy, and tolerance for lacking creature comforts. For example, a traveling band of agents might be holed up in a luxury guest suite in a castle one day, and then holed up in the crypt beneath a temple the next. Regardless, when a safe house is properly invested in, it can provide a significant strategic advantage to a party and make many tasks much easier.

ALCHEMY LAB	2○
+ LIMITLESS SUPPLY OF TRIVIAL AND CHALLENGING REAGENTS	
+ ALCHEMY SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH	

This leads us to *safe house improvements*: semi-portable “rooms” full of stuff that add useful features to the party's safe house and grant the party new strategic capabilities. In the image above, you see a sample safe house improvement found on the party sheet. The dot in the upper right is checked if the party acquired it. The number next to the dot is how many strategic assets it costs. The rest of the stuff is a summary for what the improvement does for the party.

Let's consider some of the narrative gameplay elements that come with safe houses. First and foremost, GM's should treat the safe house as the only place where discussing business is safe. GM's should press on the players that there are always adversaries eavesdropping and taking notes on

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player character activities, sometimes in plain sight. Players not respecting this reality are bound to be harassed by nosy witnesses, accusations of conspiracy, assassination attempts, intercepted communications, run-ins with local authorities, and other bad news situations. This should reinforce the importance of tradecraft, stealth, and subtly in all the player's activities, as well as provide a tangible sense of relief when the player characters return to the safe house.

Secondly, safe houses represent an instance of where players truly care about something outside of their characters. The more that players invest in a safe house, and the more their characters live in and use this space, the more that the safe house becomes a communal character of sorts that everyone cares about. This attachment provides GMs a handful of interesting story angles. When and if adversaries discover a safe house's whereabouts, it can lead to a number of interesting situations, as blatant as a full-on siege that the characters must repel, or as subtle as the players returning to the safe house and knowing that "something is off" but not exactly what. If the characters get into trouble and must leave town quickly, do they leave the safe house behind? Do they come back for it later? If so, who is waiting for them? All these questions articulate the importance of player characters ensuring that they are not tailed on their way to the safe house.

The table on the following pages covers the effects of safe house improvements. Note that the bonuses granted by safe house improvements *do* stack with other bonuses, such as those granted by talents.

SQL>SELECT * FROM

SAFE HOUSE IMPROVEMENTS

ALCHEMY LAB

20

- + LIMITLESS SUPPLY OF TRIVIAL AND CHALLENGING REAGENTS
- + ALCHEMY SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

An alchemy lab is a fully stocked, fully equipped laboratory featuring all the tools of the alchemical trade and shelves of organized reagents and specimen jars. The lab provides a nearly limitless supply of trivial and challenging reagents as well as allows an alchemist to ignore 1 botch on all Alchemy skill checks made within the safe house.

CRYPTOADMIN

30

- + A LOYAL CRYPTOADMIN: DISPATCHER, RESEARCHER, AND BRIDGE TO THE SHARDSCAPE
- + ALLOWS DENIABLE CELLS
- + REQUIRED BEFORE ACQUIRING A GOLEM

A cryptoadmin is a loyal retainer skilled in the principles of cryptomancy and shard communications. The cryptoadmin spends most of her time in the safe house, coordinates with the party over private shardnet, and possesses a Shardscape shard. She is always available at a moment's notice to query the Shardscape on the party's behalf or bridge the party's shardnet with any other shardnet she is part of. She can also manage the party's relationship with cells, permitting the party to have deniable assets working for them. While a cryptoadmin might be provided by the party's patron, she is ultimately loyal to the party and the party alone.

DUNGEON

20

- + SAFELY HOUSE CAPTIVES FOR INTERROGATION AND RANSOM
- + SOCIAL SKILL CHECKS MADE AGAINST CAPTIVES OF THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

A dungeon is an artificially terrible place, featuring locked cages, shackles mounted to the floor or wall, an interrogation chair, and sophisticated locks to keep prisoners from going anywhere. Perhaps ironically, the dungeon represents an alternative to violence: it is a place to house inconvenient persons until the party can decide what to do with them. The dungeon allows the party to ignore 1 botch on any social skill made against the safe house's captives.

FORGE

20

- + ALLOWS THE PRODUCTION OF LARGE, LONG-TERM PROJECTS
- + CRAFT SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

A forge is a workshop featuring a large furnace, bellows, anvil, pulleys to hoist and position heavy loads, and pretty much any type of smithy tool imaginable. Unlike the simple set of tools that an individual craftsman can carry, a forge allows for the creation and fabrication of large works: claymores, suits of armor, steam engines, golems, and lasting structures. In addition, all Craft skill checks made in the safe house ignore 1 botch.

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SQL>SELECT * FROM

SAFE HOUSE IMPROVEMENTS (CONT.)

GOLEM

4 ○

- + ALLOWS INSTANT QUERYING OF THE SHARDSCAPE
- + ALLOWS PRIVATE SHARDNETS TO CONNECT WITHOUT BRIDGING

A clockwork automaton capable of instantly querying the Shardscape on a user's behalf, or connecting private shardnets without actually needing to bridge them. In short, instead of needing to ask a cryptoadmin to perform research or bridge shardnets, the party is essentially able to do these things automatically through the golem. While a golem outperforms a cryptoadmin handily when it comes to Shardscape queries or communications between hostile shardnets, a golem does require a skilled cryptoadmin to keep it fueled, maintained, and properly configured.

HEALER'S DEN

3 ○

- + REPLENISH ALL HP WHEN RESTING IN THE SAFEHOUSE
- + MEDICINE SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

A room fully stocked with bandages, jars of medicine and painkillers, sanitized tools, leeches, and a medical slab for operation, autopsy, or vivisection. All Medicine skill checks made in this space ignore 1 botch. Further, anyone resting in a safe house equipped with a Healer's Den restores all of their HP.

LIBRARY

2 ○

- + ALLOWS A PLAYER TO GAIN AN OUT-OF-THE-BOX INSPIRATION OR INSIGHT FROM THE GM
- + QUERY SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

A room of shelves and chests brimming with leather tomes, scrolls, maps, and sketches, all conducive to deep research, performing intelligence analysis, scheming plots, and plotting schemes. All Query skill checks made in the safe house ignore 1 botch. Further, any time the party is stuck and needs a clue or an outside-the-box idea to solve a problem, the GM should provide this type of help to any character who spends a session of downtime pouring through tomes and looking for inspiration.

LOUNGE

2 ○

- + SAFELY HOST AND ENTERTAIN DISTINGUISHED GUESTS
- + SOCIAL SKILL CHECKS MADE AGAINST GUESTS OF THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

A lounge is a warm and comfortable place, ideal for forgetting one's worries and entertaining guests. It is typically outfitted with comfortable seating, a choice selection of alcoholic beverages, and other pastimes such as recreational soma products and fine tobacco. A lounge is good for morale, but also an infinitely better place to discuss business with allies or guests than a dungeon. The dungeon allows the party to ignore 1 botch on any social skill made against the safe house's guests.

-- MORE --

SQL>SELECT * FROM

SAFE HOUSE IMPROVEMENTS (CONT.)

RITUAL CHAMBER 3○

- + REPLENISH ALL MP WHEN MEDITATING IN THE SAFEHOUSE
- + WILLPOWER SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

A room with the artifacts, aesthetics, and ambiance conducive to the deepest meditation and most focused spell casting. All Willpower skill checks made in this space ignore 1 botch. Further, anyone meditating in a safe house equipped with a Ritual Chamber restores all of their MP. Lastly, this room can be used as a place to maintain a single ritual required for ritual magic, should the need arise.

STABLE 3○

- + SAFELY HOUSE AND SUPPORT THE PARTY'S MOUNTS
- + BEAST KEN SKILL CHECKS INVOLVING MOUNTS IGNORE 1 BOTCH

A safe place to keep mounts of any species, as well as the supplies needed to feed and maintain them, complete with stablehand(s). While a stable is not required to possess mounts, a stable does dramatically improve their quality of life. All mounts belonging to a party with access to a stable are happier, granting their masters the ability to ignore 1 botch on all Beast Ken skill checks involving those mounts, even when outside of the safe house.

TRAINING ROOM 3○

- + ALLOWS A PLAYER TO TRAIN A SINGLE PHYSICAL SKILL, BANKING A SINGLE FREE RE-ROLL ON THAT SKILL, LASTING UNTIL THE RE-ROLL IS USED OR ANOTHER SKILL IS TRAINED.

A large vaulted room equipped with wooden weapons, padded floors, training dummies, targets, training locks, and modular obstacles that can simulate challenging terrain. A character can spend a session of downtime in the training room mastering a single physical skill of her choice. This grants her the ability to re-roll a single skill check using that skill after the die roll is made, regardless if it was a success or failure. This re-roll is banked until used once, or until a different skill is trained.

TRANSFER 2○

- + A ONE-TIME TRANSFER OF ALL SAFEHOUSE IMPROVEMENTS FROM ONE LOCATION TO ANOTHER

A one-time elaborate smuggling operation that transfers the entirety of a safe house's contents, personnel, and mounts to a different location, specified by the party. Note: patrons that are not informed of these types of transfers beforehand generally perceive them as stealing at best, or betrayal at worst.



CELLS

Without allies and contacts, a player party is just a handful of heroic upstarts at best, or a small gang at worst. They can't be everywhere at once, they cannot influence regional politics, and certainly cannot express regional power. However, player characters can achieve these heights by leveraging *cells*: small groups of agents (and GM characters) that do the party's bidding because of political alliance, contract, or personal loyalty. Further, players can stay in near constant communication with the remote resources doing their bidding, thanks to the Shardscape and the courier network.

- ☐ CLOSE, 4 SKILL DIE
- ☐ DENIABLE, 2 SKILL DIE

SMUGGLER

- ☐ CLOSE, 4 SKILL DIE
- ☒ DENIABLE, 2 SKILL DIE

Cells perform tasks for the players, typically at a rate of one task per 3 blocks of time (e.g. scenes or sessions of downtime or a combination of the two) or approximately 1 full day. An example of a task might be commanding a hunter killer cell to chase down a fugitive and deliver her to the party's safe house. As another example, a cell of agitators may be tasked with tarnishing a politico's reputation leading up to an important diplomatic event.

Just like skill checks, these tasks have a difficulty assigned to them (trivial, challenging, or tough), and just like skill checks, a dice roll is made to determine outcomes. Task difficulty is determined by the GM after the players decide what they want a cell to do, and whether or not the cell is equipped to handle the task. For example, the task of defending an outpost against raiders is a trivial task for sellswords but a tough task for cell of political agitators. Dramatic success results in the cell achieving their objectives even faster, cleaner, and more profitable than the party had anticipated. Dramatic failures result in the death, capture, or compromise of the cell, which may or may not implicate

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the party in nefarious activities. Which leads us to how a cell is handled: closely or held at arm's length (i.e. deniable).

A close cell has a strong trust relationship with the party. They are highly effective and roll 4 attribute dice and 1 fate dice. A deniable cell is managed through cut-outs, dead-drops, and anonymous Shardscape communications. They have do not have strong loyalty to their employer and roll 2 attribute dice and 3 fate dice. However, if they are captured or killed, there is absolutely no link to the player party (unless the party took actions to implicate themselves, accidentally or otherwise). Keep in mind, a cryptoadmin is required to manage deniable assets.

Depending on what task is being assigned to a cell, and against which potential adversary, the party may determine it is better to have either a close or deniable relationship with that cell. However, this relationship is determined when the cell is acquired. The party can't "unknow" a close cell, and deniable cells typically want to know as little as possible about their employer. Of course, the party can opt to have 2 or more cells of the same skill set (e.g. agitators) with different relationship types.

A cell can be assigned a task any time during a session. The outcome of that task is determined by a skill check at the end of the 3 blocks of time. Depending on the task and the flow of the adventure, the GM may determine that not enough time has passed for the cell to realistically achieve their objective, so will postpone the roll until another 3 blocks of time have passed. Players can also mix and match their cells, sometimes assigning multiple cells to help achieve one objective that might otherwise not be possible (e.g. use the smugglers to sneak the hunter killers into the fortress). If tracking time blocks is a little too laborious for the table, feel free to switch the cadence of cell activity to one task per session.

Lastly, cells will *never* operate against the Risk Eaters. It's the equivalent of trying to contract a modern private military company to combat the Illuminati.

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SQL>SELECT * FROM CELL EXAMPLES

Cell	Description	Strategic Assets
Agitators	A small group of political agents who specialize in destabilizing and demoralizing an organization through propaganda, vandalism, vicious rumors, and divisive rhetoric. Depletes morale, ruins reputations, exploits societal fractures to generate disarray, and creates contentious factions where none existed previously.	2
Career Sellswords	A small group of warriors who specialize in conventional warfare, siege warfare, and guerrilla warfare. Will attack or defend a stronghold, waylay an unstoppable force for a time, or cut a path through the most fearsome battle lines to deliver the party to a target (or extract them from the fray).	2
Cleaner	A powerful operative who specializes in cleaning up messes made by cells who have been captured, gone rogue, or performed particularly sloppy work. A cleaner will do things her own way, and the outcome is almost always grim for the cell requiring this service. A cell that is “cleaned” is no longer a strategic asset, but more importantly, no longer a liability.	3
Code Clerics	A group of ascetics who spend their every waking moment generating and absorbing new keyphrases. Will make quick work of all but the most long and complex keyphrases presented to them. They require access to an adversary’s shardnet, obtained via a stolen shard or a series of bridges establishing connectivity. Can also attempt to decrypt documents and spells in the physical realm by being present or scrying through their client’s shardnet.	3
Echo Collective	A group of gossips, subject-matter experts, and information peddlers who use the anonymity of the Shardscape to exchange sensitive information. Each echo collective is dedicated to a single domain but has deep understanding. The domains include: shards and cryptomancy, physical security and warfare, politics and economics, and magic and arcana.	1
Hunter Killers	A small group of bounty hunters who use investigation, skulduggery, and martial skill to find, capture, and if necessary, destroy a mark. Will handily capture or destroy weaker or obvious marks, but will typically only discover the location of powerful or elusive marks, so the player party can deal with them.	2

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SQL>SELECT * FROM

CELL EXAMPLES (CONT.)

Cell	Description	Strategic Assets
Negotiator	A respected merchant, emissary, or third party who performs a one-time negotiation on behalf on the party or their patron. A primary use of this cell is to pay ransom for captured operatives (especially player characters) at a rate of 1 Strategic Asset per player character freed.	Varies
Scouts	A small group of rangers, fixers, and specialists dedicated to making the party's travels and adventures in a specific realm (Sphere, Sylvetica, or Subterra) as safe and productive as possible. Will trailblaze, map terrain, meet locals, and report forward intelligence to the party so they know what they are getting into.	1
Shard Stormers	A collective of offensive cryptomancers who will use the cryptomantic spells (e.g. Denier, Tracer, Shard Scry, Shard Spike) and denial of service techniques to perform a one-time assault on a targeted shardnet. They require access to an adversary's shardnet, obtained via a stolen shard or a series of bridges establishing connectivity.	3
Spy	A spy maintaining deep cover in an organization, be it a human noble house, an elven tribe, a dwarven clanhall, a religious order, a commercial organization, or anything in between. Will "manage" this organization's relationship with the party, provide names of actors and locations of organizational assets, and report on the organization's next move.	1
Smugglers	A small group of professional infiltrators and exfiltrators capable getting virtually anyone or anything either into a place or out of a place undetected (at least, initially). Will move a party through a blockade, sneak a person out of a building, or deliver highly restricted goods in large quantities.	2
Unlikely Ally	An ally in the unlikeliest of places: an orcish clan, a gnollish pride, a profane coven, a hated rival house, a dragon, a gang of orphans, an asylum full of lepers, etc. It's not necessarily this ally's power, skill, or influence that makes it effective, it's the fact that no one could have predicted they would help the party when they did, and in the way they did.	3

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Like we did with safe houses, let's consider some of the narrative gameplay elements that come with cells, starting with one of the most disruptive elements. By allowing players to outsource tasks that would otherwise be a GM-planned adventure, cells represent a fundamental change in how a session or campaign might be played.

For example, the GM may present a situation where an adversary must be slandered and destroyed in the court of public opinion, and design a session of intrigue to facilitate this. However, when presented with the situation, the players may opt to send a cell of agitators to achieve this objective instead. They might do this for a number of reasons: the characters may have more pressing things to do, the players might not be interested in a session of political intrigue, or the party may just really want to get their money's worth out of the agitator cell they recently acquired. All of these are valid reasons, and GMs should embrace this move towards "management" instead of dungeon-crawling, as it is a key sign that the characters are becoming more powerful and strategic.

However, there are always some adventures that players cannot and ought not outsource: the ones that are too important to fail, the ones that have become personal, and the ones involving the Risk Eaters. To that end, GMs running campaigns for players who have acquired a number of strategic assets should always be thinking of what tasks are more "side-quest" in nature, and which tasks are so important they warrant direct player intervention (and thus, adventure planning on the GM's part).

Cells are a great way to keep the party connected to campaign setting events, and pull the party mindset out of the dungeon, for a moment, and into the strategic theater. There should always be troubling trends, bad omens, and disturbing rumors making themselves manifest in distant locales - not yet pressing enough to pull the party towards them, but concerning enough to divert resources to investigate further. Not only do these distant events plant the seeds of further adventures, but they are also an organic and

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narrative way of “polling” the players for where they’d like to see the campaign go. For example, rumors of mysterious village massacres in Sylvetica may garner more interest, and cell usage, than news of a hated rival gaining strength in a foreign land.

/ROOT/PARTY AND CAMPAIGN MECHANICS/

MOUNTS

Mounts are large, tamed beasts of burden that can be ridden. Generally speaking, a mount should remain both a loyal or ornery bit actor and a narrative device, but there are a couple of game-play considerations regarding those riding mounts.

While riding a mount, no skill check that an actor makes can be higher than that actor’s Beast Ken skill check. Actors do, however, retain any talents they might have.

Moriarta readies her bow while riding horseback and fires a flaming arrow at the troll that’s chasing her. She is normally an excellent shot (Dexterity rank of 4), but has never gotten along with her mount (Presence rank of 2). For this shot, she will only be able to roll 2 attribute dice instead of four. However, she has the Sniper talent, so will still ignore 1 botch result.

Mounts will generally do whatever their riders want them to, but anything that challenges a mount’s physical abilities (e.g. jumping over a chasm), problem solving abilities (e.g. returning on command) or courage (e.g. galloping towards a horde) requires an unopposed Beast Ken skill check. Task difficulty, along with resolving failure or success, is resolved like any other skill check. If the mount is taking actions against a target, such as attacking their master’s assailant, make an opposed Beast Ken skill check instead.

When riding a mount, riders forfeit their move action, but the mount does have 2 move actions per turn and will take the rider where she needs to go. Mounting and

-- MORE --





dismounting uses the rider's action. Riders are high up off the ground and hard to hit by attackers who themselves are not mounted. It is always a tough task to strike a mounted target with a melee weapon, unless that weapon is long, or the attacker herself is also mounted. These rules are referred to in the weapon rules, too.

Riders can still use any defense they need to when attacked. It is then up to GM fiat if a mount itself takes the damage. Purposely harming mounts is beyond the pale for most sentient races, but it does happen. If it becomes relevant, mounts are hardy, have 20 HP, and can be armored.

Other than HP, mounts are not given mechanical statistics for a reason: they are meant to be a tool, a bit actor, an obstacle, and/or a narrative device. The descriptions for the different common mounts below attempt to capture their abilities, temperament, and maintenance requirements. Actors who do not take these items into consideration (e.g. not stopping to let their mount graze) are likely to face more difficult Beast Ken skill checks.

Thoroughbred

1 Strategic Asset

A powerfully built horse with massive hooves and ice-cold temperament. Thoroughbreds are the strongest, fastest, and most unflappable of the mounts, and will readily charge towards virtually any danger. The thoroughbred is also the only mount that will pull a wagon or plow without serious cajoling. Thoroughbreds are also fiercely loyal to whoever takes care of them and become disturbed and combative when their owners are in danger. When left to its own devices, a thoroughbred will graze grass and drink from rivers, lakes, and creeks.

Molephant

2 Strategic Assets

A long and muscular giant mole with claws bigger than its head and a shield-like crown protruding from the back of its skull, protecting its rider from the dirt and stone it throws while burrowing. Molephants can burrow through nearly any surface (and bring their riders with them), mov-

-- MORE --

ing a single range category (e.g. short to close) per turn if moving through soft materials like soil or clay. However, if moving through solid materials like stone, it can move a single range category per session of downtime. While they love to burrow, molephants are exceptionally lazy and obstinate and will frequently play dead if tasked to do anything they don't like (such as carrying too much load). They are sensitive to ground vibration, making them flighty in the face of massive creatures or galloping hordes. Molephants primarily subsist on vermin, and will uproot every plant and turn every stone in sight to feed, but will also settle for fresh or rotting food.

Gigaphid

3 Strategic Assets

A giant insect capable of not only leaping great distances and scaling sheer surfaces while mounted, but also capable of maintaining flight for nearly an hour at a time. Gigaphids have no concept of fear, but they have keen self-preservation instincts, and will make sudden leaps or aerial maneuvers to avoid injury. Riders who are not strapped in can be easily thrown from a leaping gigaphid, and inexperienced riders have been known to be crushed against cavern ceilings or tree branches when the creature does not have enough clearance. The gigaphid's appetite is astonishing, and it will ravish nearly an acre of forest per day if permitted.

As was mentioned in the "Safe house" section of this chapter, getting a stable for the party's safe house allows everyone in the party to ignore 1 botch to Beast Ken skill checks related to mounts, even when away from the safe house. Take care of your mount and it will take care of you.



FAMILIARS

Familiars aren't technically strategic assets, but they are so similar to mounts we just had to introduce them in close proximity. Familiars are available to any character who possesses the Whisperer talent.

Familiars are small creatures that have the ability to bond with mortals. Familiars are intended to be bit actors, plot devices, and ways to make characters interesting. However, they do have some unique properties that make them different from other creatures.

Familiars act as an extension of a character. They do useful things for their masters, as if there was a psychic link between master and familiar. Any time a familiar is either tasked with doing something, or does something on its own volition, the probability and severity of that attempt is resolved with a Beast Ken skill check.

Inflicting harm on familiars is generally reserved for sadists, but it does happen, especially if the familiar becomes aggressive. Familiars are relatively frail and have 3 HP. Other than HP, familiars are not given mechanical statistics for a reason. They are meant to be a tool, a bit actor, an obstacle, and/or a narrative device.

Hound

Hounds are domesticated wolves bred for strength and loyalty. Hounds are somewhat dull and their ability to perform complex tasks is limited to fetching items, staying in one spot for a long duration, barking when intruders are detected, and tracking prey when they are given a scent. However, they are powerful and heavy creatures, strong enough to carry saddle bags, maul a humanoid, or drag an unconscious one to safety. They will also defend their masters to the death.

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Goblin

Goblins are tiny, one-foot tall reptilian creatures with a monkey-like build and a reputation for being insufferable. Goblins are truly awful creatures in a nearly constant state of cackling, belching, flinging feces, stealing objects, and breaking things. They are so hated by the dwarves that they are forbidden in most clanhalls. A goblin will bond with any larger creature that will protect it and tolerate its antics. It will still terrorize its master, among others, but it will also perform parlor tricks and complex tasks, such as lock picking, pick-pocketing, scrounging for specific items, etc.





Echoeater

Echoeaters are fat, palm-sized beetles that develop a kinship with mortals who feed them a steady diet of alchemical reagents. Prone to flying away or getting squashed, echoeaters typically live in a sturdy aerated jar hanging from a belt, backpack, or staff tip. Echoeaters do not interact with their masters like other familiars, but they do have two useful properties. They get their name from the fact that they are hypersensitive to shards, flailing and hopping erratically in their jars whenever anyone in the vicinity (e.g. within long range) uses a shard to create an echo. More than one betrayal or ambush has been detected by this creature's thrashing. The other useful property is that echoeaters can be fed an alchemical concoction to later inject it into the bloodstream of a target with its piercing maw. A successful opposed Beast Ken skill check against a target defending against a missile attack injects the concoction into the target's bloodstream. Unfortunately, even targets intended to be the recipient of beneficial concoctions, such as healing potions, still instinctively defend themselves.



ADVANCEMENT

Lastly, we close the game mechanics section with the idea of character advancement. Compared to most role-playing games of the fantasy or science-fiction genres, advancement in Cryptomancer is relatively slow. The design decision to slow down individual character progression is to emphasize a fantasy world where true power comes from alliances, wealth, armies, and leverage (favors compelled by oath or threat), all gained by accumulating strategic resources and exploiting the social networks that compose the campaign setting. That is, the party's quantity of strategic assets is a better representation of the party's overall power than the current state of their attributes, talents, and spells. All characters "level up" at the same rate and are rewarded the same advancement at the end of each session and campaign (though players can accelerate this leveling up by "hacking things").

RISK		STRATEGIC ASSETS		TALENT POINTS		ATTRIBUTE POINTS	
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Surviving a session (+1 Talent Point)

Every player character that survives a session should be rewarded 1 Talent Point at the end of the session. Talent Points can be cashed in to acquire talents and spells the same way they were acquired during character creation. There should be something happening during sessions to explain the acquisition of new talents. For example, engaging in battle is a simple way to account for increases to combat efficacy, while combing through spell books by candlelight might account for learning a new spell.

Hacking things (+1 Talent Point)

Any time the players come up with a new method of hacking something, be it exploiting a cryptosystem, manipulating a trust relationship, cheating on an economic

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transaction, breaking a cipher, or evading a physical security system, every player should be rewarded 1 Talent Point at the end of the session. This bonus only applies once per session. The key is that it is an idea that the players came up with, and not simply a successful skill check made by a character. GMs will know when this happens: it will be when a player pitches an idea so clever the GM thinks, “I did not think of that one.”

Narrative gaps (+1 Attribute Rank)

Between campaigns, (typically lasting between 4-6 sessions) there are narrative gaps: the stuff that happens between the end of one campaign and the beginning of a new one. During the narrative gap, characters do not simply sit idle and wait for the GM to finish a campaign and summon all the players. The characters continue to exist in the game world and are up to something. What exactly that something is should be decided on by each player and taken into consideration by the GM. What’s important, mechanically, is that one of the character’s attribute ranks rises 1 point.

A narrative gap can be filled with a story that is epic or a story that is banal. The important part is that it explains why and how one of the character’s attributes have increased. Consider the attribute Presence. Perhaps a character spent the narrative gap deeply enmeshed in court politics, engaging in heated debates, orating proposals to policy makers, and was central to some high stakes negotiations between kingdoms teetering on the brink of war. Through the course of this experience, the character learned what makes leaders tick, and learned how to play to the emotions and motivations of others to achieve specific outcomes. This all could explain a rise in Presence. A more banal story, but perhaps equally as important to a player, might be that a character spends the narrative gap courting and being with a GM character who may have been a bit actor during the previous campaign. Perhaps the character, otherwise crude and inept at people skills, rediscovered some of the humanity that a hard life of adventuring, battle, and conquest had otherwise squashed. This is another acceptable explanation

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of a rise in Presence. Lastly, the story behind a narrative gap is chock full of events, GM characters, and anecdotes that the GM can and should incorporate into the new campaign, either directly, or as a backdrop to events. After all, the narrative gap defined by players is a way for players to tell their GM what is important to them as players and what is important to their characters.



/ROOT/PARTY AND CAMPAIGN MECHANICS/

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CRYPTOSYSTEMS



OVERVIEW

For the purposes of Cryptomancer, a cryptosystem is any security apparatus that employs cryptomancy. Cryptosystems can be simple or elaborate and solve different types of security and privacy challenges. Two actors protecting their communications with a keyphrase is an example of a cryptosystem. Another example is a system that leverages true names and soul keys to establish someone's identity before admitting them into a building. Yet another example is a postal system where encrypted scrolls are transported from town to town by couriers, who then nail the scrolls to a public bulletin board in plain view, with the hope that only the intended recipient is able to decrypt each message.

All cryptosystems do a pretty good job of protecting their participants from *attackers*, defined as anyone who is not an intended participant of that system. However, all cryptosystems can be defeated by someone who is skilled, motivated, patient, or lucky enough. The following sections introduce some cryptosystems that are common in the world of Cryptomancer.

COURIERS AND THE TOWN BOARD

Couriers have delivered letters and packages from town to town for millennia. This postal service's primary means of security and privacy were wax seals attached to scrolls, tamper-proof dwarven parcels, and the courier's code: to neither read mail nor surrender it to anyone other than the recipient unless death or dismemberment were a sure thing. These measures were not strong enough. Senders and receivers of packages had to assume that their contents were read by nosy couriers at best and direst enemies at worst. Cryptomancy solved this problem. Senders could encrypt their messages on scrolls and have reasonable confidence that only the recipient who knew the keyphrase could

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read them. In cases where no shared key had been established, senders could encrypt a message with the intended recipient's true name, if it was known, and be confident that only that person could read it.

However, this still wasn't enough privacy for some. Couriers frequently knew who composed a message, and to do their job, had to know who to give the message to. Agents could use this limited information to establish relationships between actors. For example, a merchant receiving encrypted mail from a known rebel could be accused of treason, and compelled to surrender the keyphrase or tell the authorities what the message says. The solution to this was the town board: a massive bulletin board in the town square, where the courier would simply nail all messages to it, and let the contents of the encrypted messages be exposed to the light of day. All could gather round the board, but only each individual recipient could read the contents of the messages intended for her.

Town boards are refreshed whenever a courier arrives with new messages. New messages are typically nailed over the old ones, though sometimes a courier will instead pull down and burn all previous messages to clean the board. Generally speaking, it is taboo for anyone but a courier to either add or remove a message from the town board. It is also taboo for anyone to harm a courier, intercept their messages, or waylay them for long. The town board is the bedrock of modern communication, and even the Risk Eaters rarely meddle directly with this institution, cognizant that all might stop using it should it become clearly compromised.

The town board remains the most prominent method of cryptomancy and long distance communication, and is adopted by virtually all settlements, be they human, dwarven, or elven. There is usually a number of secure deposit locations around each settlement where encrypted letters and parcels can be dropped off. Letters and parcels are only marked with the name of the settlement where they should be delivered. Typical non-conspiratorial uses of the town board include, but are not limited to: simple corre-

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spondence, love letters, living wills, updates about regional weather patterns and farming yields, current commodity prices, tabloid gossip, political news and affiliation changes, employment opportunities, bounties, claims, legal proceedings and proclamations, and propaganda. Such postings may or may not employ cryptomancy to limit their audience.

Despite being slow, sometimes days or weeks between updates, the town board is a staple of modern society. Those who are convinced that the Risk Eaters control the Shardscape find some comfort in this antiquated method of communication (though many paranoid people also suspect Risk Eater infiltration of the couriers).

From a security perspective, the town board does have some issues. Unless true name cryptomancy is employed, the recipient can never be certain that the sender really is who they say there are. Worse, clear-text messages or messages encrypted with weak keyphrases are susceptible to man-in-the-middle attacks. If an attacker gains access to a courier's satchel of scrolls or a secure deposit box, she can read unencrypted messages and attempt to read messages encrypted with a keyphrase she knows. She may then modify the contents of a message, re-encrypt the message with the same keyphrase, and put it back where it belongs so it can be delivered to the recipient.

To review:

- A scroll is placed in a designated secure drop box. Its destination (but not its recipient's name) is written in clear-text. Its contents may or may not be encrypted.
- A courier opens the drop box, grabs all scrolls designated for whatever destinations are on her route, and then heads out. Once she has arrived at a destination, she opens all the scrolls intended for that destination and nails them to the town board.
- People gather around the town board to see if there are any scrolls of interest. In particular, they are keeping an eye out for scrolls encrypted with a keyphrase they know or scrolls encrypted with their true names.

CRYPTOSIGNATURES

Cryptosignatures are used to validate that a message actually came from the person who supposedly sent it. The most common way to achieve this is signing a document with one's true name and then encrypting that signature with one's soul key. This way, if the recipient knows the sender's true name, she can now be certain that the signature came from (or was at least encrypted by) the actual sender, and not someone pretending to be her. While this method is useful to ensure a sender's authenticity, it assumes a level of intimacy between both sender and recipient (for one knows the other's true name).

In the case of a document that is signed for official purposes (such as a business contract or a legal document), a signer will provide her true name signature twice. One of those signatures will remain in clear-text, the other will be encrypted with her soul key. This way, any third party (such as a judge or a regent settling a dispute) able to view the document can attest that the clear-text signature contains the true name that decrypts the encrypted signature, and that both signatures are the same.

Institutions such as dwarven banks use contracts to hold signers accountable as well as use those true name to hunt down those who renege on contractual terms. In the case of highly sensitive contracts where both parties fear the other will break their promises (such as a diplomatic peace treaty), two contracts are drafted (one for each party) and both documents are signed by both parties. This way, it is impossible for one party to steal the contract, rewrite its terms, and re-sign it.

Cryptosigned documents like contracts are an example of extremely sensitive artifacts sought by thieves, agents, and cryptomancers. If a contract can be physically acquired by a signer, she can destroy it (effectively nullifying its terms) or potentially rewrite its terms and resign it. Further, contracts contain true names in clear-text, making

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them extremely valuable to attackers even if one is not concerned with the legal or contractual terms of the document. For these reasons, cryptosigned documents are stored and handled with the utmost security in mind.

To review:

- A signer signs a document with her true name twice. She then encrypts one of those signatures with her soul key.
- A third party reviewing the document can then attest that the signature is real, because the clear-text signature is the true name that decrypts the signature that has been encrypted with the signer's soul key.

/ROOT/CRYPTOSYSTEMS/

SHARDNETS

We've already introduced how shards work in the Cryptomancy chapter. Here, we'll be discussing techniques used to protect shards from eavesdroppers and adversaries.

There are different ways to secure a shardnet. The least secure shardnets are those in which cryptomancy is not employed. All messages are sent in clear-text and fully readable by anyone who possesses one of the shards in the shardnet regardless of intended audience. The only security measure here is that an attacker must possess one of the shardnet's shards in order to read or send messages, which usually requires stealing a shard or taking it off of someone's dead body.

A slightly more secure shardnet involves all participants encrypting their communications with a shared key. To infiltrate this shardnet, an attacker must not only acquire physical access to a shard, but they must also either know the keyphrase or extract it (forcefully or otherwise) from an authorized participant. Though this is an improved security model, it still has some problems. If an attacker knows the keyphrase, all security benefits are lost. If the shardnet's par-

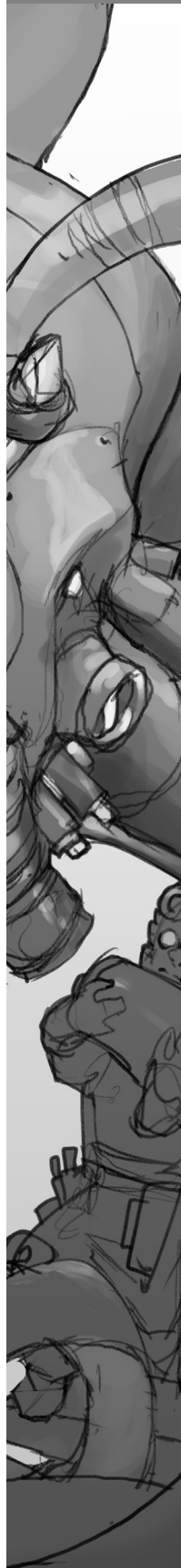
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ticipants suspect this to be the case, they must find an "out of band" method to distribute a new keyphrase because you certainly don't want to announce your new keyphrase on a compromised channel. Further, private communications intended for an individual are still received by all participants, unless two participants share a separate keyphrase beforehand or out of band.

The most secure shardnet implementation involves concentric circles of cryptomancy using multiple shared keys along with true names as well as periodic challenge questions and "out of band" verification measures to ensure the authenticity of the shardnet's membership. Such a shardnet might have a "basic broadcast" keyphrase along with other keyphrases known only to some to facilitate communication between subgroups on the shardnet. Further, the shardnet might employ true name cryptomancy to either establish secure sessions between individuals or to rotate shared keys in a fashion that is perfectly secure against eavesdroppers. Finally, this type of shardnet will take actions to ensure that the intended participants are the ones who actually possess the individual shards in a shardnet. This might include periodic challenge questions posed to specific actors or sending an agent to visually confirm that a certain actor is still in physical control of her shard.

In secure shardnets, communications sent in clear-text are ignored and are typically evidence that a shardnet has been compromised. In this case, the participants will take actions to weed out those in their network that have lost control of their shards. Savvy attackers who gain unauthorized access to a shard will usually observe shardnet traffic first, learning a shardnet's cryptomantic patterns and transmission frequency before betraying their secret. Even if they cannot understand the messages that are passing through a shardnet, they might be able to ascertain a shardnet's approximate size and perhaps correlate bursts of shardnet traffic with bursts of activity in the physical world. Alternatively, they might announce to the entire shardnet where they can come and pay ransom for the comrade who lost control of their shard.

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To review:

- An insecure shardnet employs clear-text communications only. An attacker only needs to gain physical access to a shard to compromise the shardnet.
- A somewhat secure shardnet employs a single shared keyphrase to encrypt all communications. An attacker needs to gain both physical access to a shard as well as the shared keyphrase to compromise the shardnet.
- A secure shardnet employs a single shared keyphrase for basic communications, special keyphrases to keep some topics private to subgroups, and true name cryptomancy to distribute new keyphrases or validate a user's identity. An attacker will have to use advanced techniques to avoid detection and maintain their access over time.

/ROOT/CRYPTOSYSTEMS/

OUT OF BAND COMMUNICATION

In the case of a compromised shardnet, out of band communication methods must be used to reestablish security and privacy. By *out of band*, we mean using virtually any communication channel except the compromised shardnet to distribute new keyphrases to legitimate users. This might involve using couriers to physically distribute new keyphrases written on scrolls, or using a separate and uncompromised shardnet to distribute new keyphrases.

The Messenger and Share Sight cantrips are useful mechanisms for distributing new keyphrases or instructions to recipients on a compromised or hostile shardnet. One can write a keyphrase or instructions on a scroll and have a Messenger animal deliver it to a recipient. Alternatively, one can write a keyphrase or instructions on a scroll, look at it, and then use the Share Sight cantrip to instantly send it to a recipient. However, both techniques require knowledge of the recipient's true name.

BRIDGED SHARDNETS

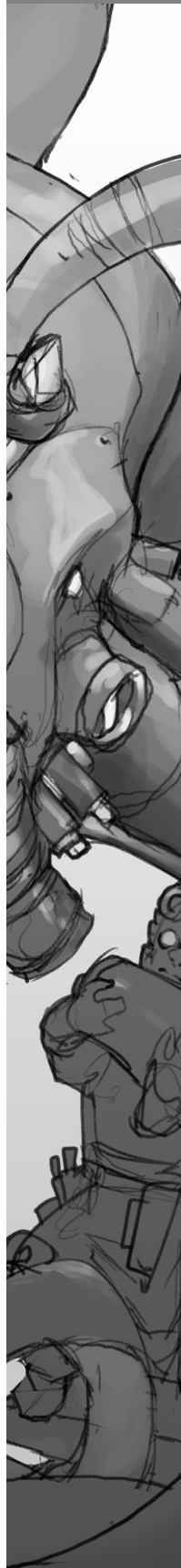
Any time a shardcaster holds a shard from two different shardnets in each of her hands, she has become a bridge between those shardnets. The primary purpose of bridging shardnets is to enable communication between two private shardnets which are otherwise entirely closed off from one another. Some organizations have a business or security need to periodically connect otherwise compartmentalized shardnets. The actor maintaining the bridge can listen in on communications (assuming she knows the required keyphrases), but cannot be an active participant. While new messages sent during a bridge will resonate throughout both shardnets, historical messages sent before the bridging occurred will not cross the bridge. This means that if one shardnet is completely silent, it is very likely that bridging will go unnoticed for some time.

When two shardnets are bridged, all new echoes on bridged shardnets will resonate for a number of hours equal to the sum of shards in both shardnets. That means if two shardnets composed of 4 shards each are bridged, all messages sent during the bridge will echo for 8 hours, even if the bridge is torn down. Echoes lasting longer than a single shardnet's expected duration indicate a bridge.

It is also possible for multiple bridges to occur, where 3 or more shardnets are bridged simultaneously (though each individual bridge requires one shardcaster to hold two shards). This is often used where one party is serving as a broker between two parties who do not trust each other. The two untrusted parties "traverse" the broker's shardnet, though they often employ true name cryptomancy to ensure that the broker cannot intercept their communications with each other. In this case, the same rules discussed above scale accordingly. More shards equals longer echoes.

Bridging is often used offensively. It allows a single eavesdropper to share her access to a larger group of eaves-

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droppers. Bridging can be used to flood a target's shardnet with so many echoes that it becomes nearly impossible to use. This is done by bridging a private shardnet with the Shardscape.

To review:

- A bridge occurs when a user holds a shard from two different shardnets in each hand. She can listen in but cannot send her own messages.
- Echoes created during a bridge traverse both shardnets. Historic echoes (those created before the bridge was established) do not.
- Echoes last a number of hours equal to the number of shards in a shardnet. Echoes over a bridge last for a number of hours equal to the sum of each shardnet's shards.

/ROOT/CRYPTOSYSTEMS/

THE SHARDSCAPE

During the Mythic Age, a small meteor crashed onto Sphere, obliterating a handful of kingdoms outright, and choking the sky with soot for months, prompting a harsh winter purveying over climates that are normally balmy. The brutal winter would eventually subside, and mortals returned to the great crater where the meteor had landed. A massive, obsidian crystal, as big as a palace, laid at the crater's center. Mortals who laid a hand on this crystal lost their sanity, babbling about what echoed in this great shard: the collective thoughts, knowledge, and cries of entire civilization from beyond. Over time, these echoes faded and then stopped. What was left was the largest shard in all the realms, and one that would be shattered into tens of thousands of shards to formulate what is known as the Shardscape: a vast global shardnet, as ecumenical as it is hostile. The Shardscape is Cryptomancer's Internet.

The obsidian shards of the Shardscape are virtually

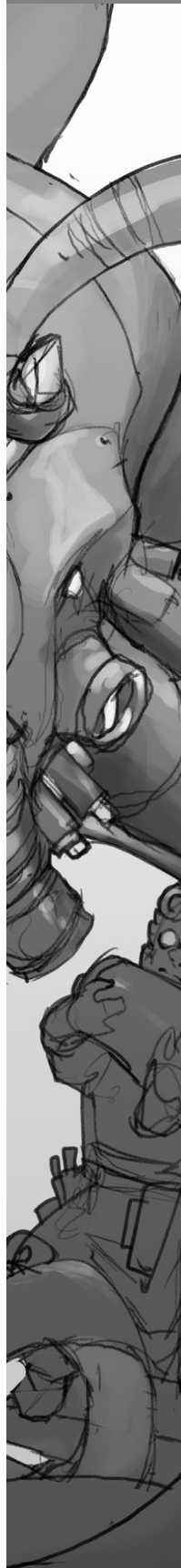
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everywhere, in every realm, frequently as shared fixtures in public squares, private estate, fortresses, and remote outposts. However, they are not practical for personal use: the smallest of them are the size of melons, losing their connectivity completely if cut any smaller. The Shardscape is essentially a public shardnet, with tens of thousands of mortals communicating over it at any given time, continually adding to the backdrop of millions if not billions of echoes that seem to take months to fade away. The sheer volume of echoes flowing through the Shardscape makes its basic mechanics somewhat unique from private shardnets. In fact, the Shardscape is so saturated with both clear-text and encrypted echoes that it is impossible for most mortals to pull anything intelligible out of it without focusing intently on either a clear-text phrase or a specific keyphrase and then waiting for the right echoes to slowly separate from the torrent of noise. This all means that users of the Shardscape must “search” for specific echoes instead of having them instantly manifest in their mind’s eye.

If one wants to create an echo on the Shardscape that will be eventually read by a specific recipient, she needs to choose her words carefully so the intended recipient purposefully or accidentally sees the echo when they are on the Shardscape. For example, most users of the Shardscape frequently search for their common name to see if anyone is trying to contact them. Starting a message with someone’s common name is a great way to ensure they will receive a message. Because new echoes resonate more clearly than old echoes, a user can determine which echoes are new and therefore relevant.

Another technique to reach a specific audience is to begin an echo with a topic that interests that audience. For example, echoes beginning with “wheat prices at Helmspire” will likely be received by farmers and merchants whose livelihood is impacted by this topic. Some groups informally “claim” a specific Shardscape query (e.g. “Merchants Guild of Helmspire”) to establish social networks in the Shardscape that mirror their flesh and blood social networks. This means that users can specifically tag their echoes with such

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phrases if they are interested in their messages being received by said groups that habitually focus on these phrases (or someone who is not affiliated with the group but interested in their goings-on).

Many users still leverage cryptomancy on the Shardscape, not simply to protect their confidentiality, but also to make it considerably easier for intended recipients to find their echoes. If a user knows that someone trying to communicate with her secretly will always use the keyphrase “Gallows Goblets Gold,” she can just search for this keyphrase to receive any messages encrypted with it. Social networks wishing to make their discussions quasi-private will use an agreed upon keyphrase that is only distributed through out-of-band channels. Entry to such groups, then, requires that one first knows the keyphrase, which is likely only provided by a current member.

Focusing on either a specific clear-text phrase or a specific keyphrase requires one’s full concentration (that is, it takes a character’s full action) and can sometimes take minutes (or multiple turns) to parse for relevant information (for many users might be using similar phrases). It always requires an unopposed Query skill check, with the difficulty dependent on how generic or rare the queried content is. Rare and specific terms are trivial to parse, while generic and common terms are tough to parse. Anything in between should be considered challenging.

The Shardscape’s unique properties makes its security equation a little different. An eavesdropper needs to know exactly what topic, name, or keyphrase she is looking for and then focus on these things. Otherwise, her target is simply more noise on the Shardscape. In addition, the Shardscape has two other unique properties relevant to security. First, it is simply too massive for shard-based spells to work. Secondly, when a bridge between a private shardnet and the Shardscape is established, new echoes originating from the private shardnet are “dumped” into the Shardscape where they will reside for months. Meanwhile, echoes from the Shardscape flooding into the private shardnet will vanish

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from the private shardnet the moment the bridge is torn down.

To review:

- The Shardscape is Cryptomancer's Internet. However, the shards are so big, they are rarely carried around for personal use.
- The Shardscape is so noisy and disorienting that one must "search" for a specific topic, name, or keyphrase. This activity typically requires one's full concentration for one or more turns, as well as succeeding at an unopposed Query skill check, with the difficulty of this roll increasing the more generic the term is.
- Shard-based spells (e.g. Tracer, Denier, Shard Spike, etc.) do not work on the Shardscape.
- The Shardscape can be bridged with a private shardnet. All new echoes on the private shardnet are dumped into the Shardscape, but all echoes flooding into the private shardnet from the Shardscape vanish on the private shardnet when the bridge is torn down.

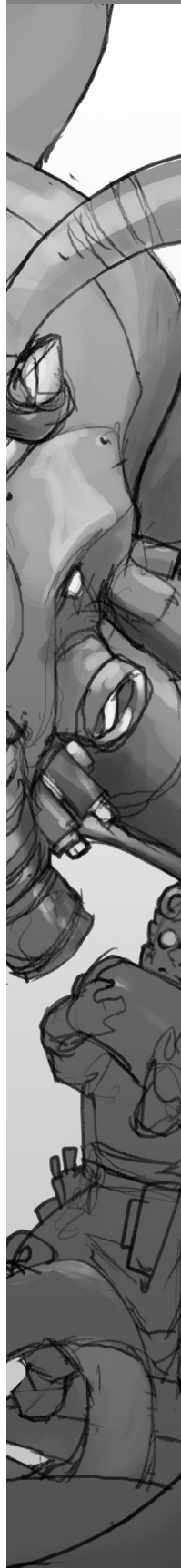
/ROOT/CRYPTOSYSTEMS/

CRYPTOADMINS

A *cryptoadmin* is one who manages and facilitates complex cryptosystems. Cryptoadmins spend most of their time in shardnets monitoring activity, enforcing security rules, and responding to properly formed and encrypted queries for information or access. The security and privacy of any large shardnet is only as good as its cryptoadmin(s).

Networks fortunate enough to be able to house and finance a cryptoadmin to support their shardnets have a number of advantages. First, a cryptoadmin can serve as a dispatcher who coordinates the actions of disparate cells, pushing status updates upwards to leadership, and pushing down orders to field operatives. Unlike units in the field,

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the cryptoadmin has the “big picture” of what’s happening. Secondly, cryptoadmins are able to query the Shardscape on behalf of agents in the field who may not have the time nor the required access to a Shardscape shard. This makes them an invaluable provider of intelligence. Lastly, the cryptoadmin enforces the security policies of a shardnet, scolding participants using clear-text, managing the regular rotation of shared keys, and administering periodic challenge questions to participants in order to detect compromises.

Most cryptoadmins reside in a cryptovault: a heavily fortified vault in a hidden and/or remote location. When they are not monitoring shardnets, they are reviewing and updating a massive tome referred to as a *registry*. Registries contain important security information such as lists of valid users, their schedules, and whatever passphrases they use to prove their identity. A good cryptoadmin will also document every echo that happens on her shardnet in the registry, including who (presumably) created an echo, when it happened, what was the content of that echo, and what keyphrase (if any) was used to encrypt it. While it is a considerable amount of work to manage a registry, many organizations such as dwarven banks and regional fortresses demand it, because registries can be used to investigate security incidents after they happen. Further, a cryptoadmin might not observe an intrusion or anomaly while it is happening, but she might later while reviewing the registry. For example, if she notices that an echo created early in the morning is still echoing late at night, even though the shardnet is only composed of 6 shards, she will know that an unauthorized bridge occurred. She can then determine when the bridge happened, how long it lasted, and which communications and keyphrases are suspect. This information can all be packaged up for her superiors to review. For obvious reasons, unauthorized access to the registry can be disastrous.

Cryptoadmins frequently manage shards from multiple shardnets, and facilitate communication between shardnets when remote cells need to communicate directly with each other. They will either pass along messages them-

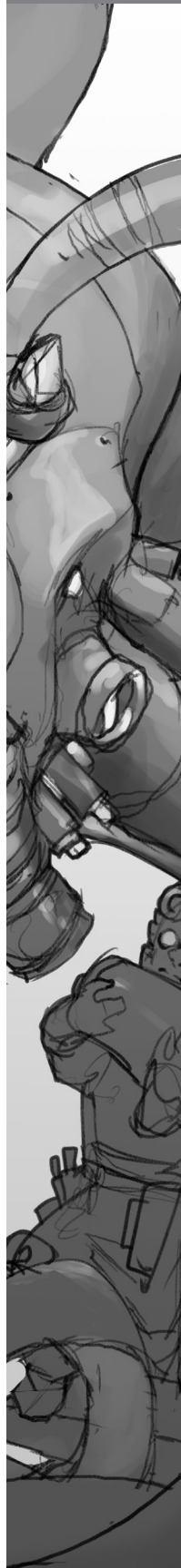
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selves, or in some cases, bridge the two shardnets. The cryptoadmin might provide a shared keyphrase to individuals in both shardnets before bridging, to ensure that the channel through which they communicate is secure from all others who would otherwise eavesdrop. Participants who don't trust the cryptoadmin might have additional security measures still, such as true name cryptomancy. The point being that establishing a bridge is a non-trivial endeavor that takes time and effort to establish securely.

A cryptoadmin's abilities are dramatically improved if she possesses shard-based spells. Depending on the spells available to her, she can geolocate missing shards, set cryptomantic traps for shardnet intruders, or even leverage the shardnet like a magical surveillance network. However, the same spells can also be used against her. Because her safety and security are tied to those she shares a shardnet with, she supports them as if she was in the field right there with them.

To review:

- Cryptoadmins are dedicated shardnet users who operate from a safe and remote cryptovault. They coordinate operations, perform Shardscape research for field agents, and enforce security policies.
- Cryptoadmins often have multiple shards from different shardnets, as well as a Shardscape shard. They can bridge shards to connect groups that are otherwise totally separated.
- Cryptoadmins document all shardnet activity in a big tome called a registry. Each entry contains what is presumed to be the name of the sender and the recipient, as well as a timestamp, what was said, and what keyphrase was used to encrypt the message (if known). The creation of encrypted echoes is also documented, even if their contents remain a mystery. Registries also contain important security information such as lists of valid users, their schedules, and whatever passphrases they use to prove their identity.



GOLEMS

Golems are semi-sentient dwarven automatons capable of being cryptoadmins. Most serious factions, businesses, and illicit organizations possess one or more golems. A golem is a stationary engine resembling a mechanical squid, built around a Shardscape shard and installed in a secure location such as a cryptovault. It uses its many limbs to handle several shards at a time while also using a limb to frantically scrawl notes in a registry. Golems are expensive. To stay in working order, a golem requires a steady supply of power (typically in the form of steam, wind, or waterwheel) and a cryptoadmin performing regular maintenance on it. While golems are mechanical beings, they do have the capability to project programmed responses into shardnets and are adept at cryptomancy. When a golem is first activated, it will create its own true name and tell that name to the cryptoadmin maintaining it. It will then compute a corresponding soul key, which it will keep secret.

The primary function of a golem is to securely connect two or more shardnets. A golem must have access to one shard from each shardnet it connects. When an actor wishes to communicate to one or more recipients on a shardnet other than her own, she directs a message to the golem, and then the golem replays that message to the recipient(s). It works like this: the shardcaster uses the golem's true name to encrypt a message, so only the golem can decrypt the message. The shardcaster tells the golem what to communicate, and what keyphrase the golem should use to relay that message. The golem will then replay that message across all shardnets it is connected to, in rapid succession, encrypted with the keyphrase or true name that the shardcaster specified. The golem is also using one of its spare limbs to document this action in the registry while it is occurring.

A golem does not technically bridge networks. Once it receives instructions on one shardnet, it will disconnect from that shardnet, connect to a different shardnet, and execute those instructions. This means that shard-based

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spells cannot traverse a golem. However, a golem's programming and multiple limbs allow it to switch between shardnets so fast that the process appears to be seamless to users.

Extending this idea, golems have the capacity to connect a private shardnet with the Shardscape while blocking the flood of echoes that would otherwise result if a mortal attempted to do the same.

A golem can manage outbound traffic, where the source of an echo is a private shardnet and the destination is the Shardscape. The golem receives a message from a shardcaster on a private shardnet, encrypted with its true name, and then broadcasts that message to the Shardscape, encrypted by a keyphrase included in the message. Whoever on the Shardscape knows that keyphrase will be able to focus on it and receive the message.

A golem can also manage inbound traffic, where the source of an echo is the Shardscape and the destination is a private shardnet. A golem is always in the process of listening for its true name on all shardnets it is connected to, including the Shardscape. This means that an actor on the Shardscape can encrypt a message using the golem's true name, and that message will be sent directly to the private shardnets behind that golem, encrypted with whatever keyphrase she included in the message.

A shardcaster encrypting with the golem's true name can instruct it to listen for specific keyphrases on the Shardscape. A golem listening for a keyphrase on the Shardscape will relay any message it sees encrypted with that keyphrase back to the golem's private shardnets. This permits message recipients on the Shardscape to reply back to the golem without knowing the golem's true name, something smart organizations are loathe to share with outsiders. The golem can be also be instructed to stop listening for specific keyphrases, but will always listen for its true name.

The golem's capability to securely connect private and public shardnets comes with some risk. First, it permits malicious actors on the Shardscape who know a golem's

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true name, or the keyphrases it is listening for, to send the equivalent of “spam” or “phishing” messages into private shardnets. Secondly, it permits the same malicious actors to potentially disrupt the shardnets a golem is supposed to protect. If adversaries on the Shardscape use a golem’s true name, or a keyphrase it is listening for, to encrypt a high volume of messages over a short period of time, the golem suffers from the equivalent of a denial of service attack.

Denial of service attacks flood a golem’s private shardnets with so much traffic that the users of those shardnets must concentrate and query specific terms as if they were connected to the Shardscape. To make matters worse, the golem will begin switching between shardnets and scribbling in the registry so fast that it overheats and races towards a complete mechanical breakdown. Further, it is working so diligently that it will disregard instructions to stop listening for keyphrases, including those that are enabling the denial of service attack. When such an attack begins, a cryptoadmin has two options: reboot the golem or perform emergency mechanical maintenance so it can ride out the storm.

When a golem is rebooted, it stops listening for all keyphrases and generates a new true name and corresponding soul key. This immediately halts the denial of service attack. However, now the cryptoadmin must find a way to distribute the golem’s new true name and new keyphrases to her users, not to mention get those users to trust it is actually her they are talking to. After all, adversaries could use this opportunity to masquerade as the cryptoadmin and convince users to connect to their own golem instead.

When performing emergency mechanical work, the cryptoadmin makes an unopposed Craft skill check, the difficulty of which is determined by how many malicious actors are slamming the golem (trivial for dozens, challenging for hundreds, tough for thousands). Upon success, the flooding effect will continue until the attackers get bored, but the golem will sustain no mechanical damage. Upon failure (or approximately one scene of total neglect), bad things happen. Before becoming entirely bricked, the golem will malfunction severely, leaking the contents of its registry

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to the public Shardscape, encrypted with the keyphrases it was instructed to listen for.

A golem's secure bridging capabilities enable users to query the Shardscape from private shardnets. One simply creates instructions for the golem to search for specific terms and then encrypts those instructions with the golem's true name. The golem will scour the Shardscape and then report back its results on the user's private shardnet, encrypted by whatever keyphrase was specified in the instructions. This means that instead of assigning a single research task to a cryptoadmin (who likely has other responsibilities that must be juggled), a golem permits anyone connected to it to perform their own research in real-time.

To review:

- A golem securely connects, but does not bridge, different shardnets, including the Shardscape.
- It does so by acknowledging instructions (e.g. "Golem, send this message encrypted with this keyphrase") that are encrypted with its true name.

/ROOT/CRYPTOSYSTEMS/

AUTHENTICATION

Authentication is where a user proves she is who she says she is by providing a pre-established passphrase that only she and the cryptosystem knows. The cryptosystem confirms that the name and passphrase match an entry in the registry. If it is a match, the user is provided access. If it is not a match, the user is denied access.

There are many use cases for authentication. A fortified location might require a visitor to successfully authenticate before the guards will open the gate. Some other common use cases include: transactions with merchants, withdrawals from banks, and entry into secret organizations. Further, the dwarves have manufactured a number of mechanical systems enforcing authentication, such as

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locked chests, swiveling mantraps, and other physical controls. These *cryptogears* are discussed later.

Most authentication schemes are facilitated through a shardnet where a single shard is exposed to the user, but all other shards are secure. The user will touch the shard and communicate her name and passphrase, encrypting that message with her name and passphrase (so no one else on the shardnet can see clear-text echoes and steal the passphrase). The cryptoadmin on the other end of the shardnet will then confirm that this name and passphrase combination exists in the registry and then grant access to whatever privileges are documented for that user (i.e. access to a specific bank account, but not all bank accounts). Cryptoadmins will regularly push out generic user instructions to the shardnet in clear-text, so that anyone who touches the input shard can know the rules of conduct of the shardnet.

This type of authentication has a number of vulnerabilities. First and foremost, it is predicated on the idea that both the user and the cryptosystem are protecting the user's passphrase. There are many ways for a passphrase to be compromised:

- an easy to guess passphrase is either chosen by the user or assigned by the cryptoadmin
- the user forgets to encrypt the passphrase before communicating it, making it possible for eavesdroppers to intercept it
- the user had the same passphrase on a different cryptosystem that is compromised
- the cryptosystem's registry is compromised or the user writes down the passphrase in a place where it can be seen by others

Further, authentication schemes should have mechanisms to rotate passphrases at regular intervals, detect and prevent guessing attacks, and properly handle scenarios where legitimate users have forgot their passphrases.

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The longer an individual passphrase is used for something, the more likely it is that said passphrase can be guessed or mishandled. Passphrase rotation makes it harder for attackers to guess passphrases over time. Sensitive cryptosystems might force users to rotate passphrases every month, while more lenient systems might do so annually. Rotation is simple. When a valid user authenticates, the cryptoadmin gives that user a new passphrase and tells the user that the old passphrase is no longer valid. The cryptoadmin then puts the old passphrase on a “bad list.” When she sees this passphrase used, she knows something is wrong.

Authentication schemes are frequently attacked by unauthorized users guessing passphrases. These attacks are easily recognized by even a junior cryptoadmin. An attacker will input multiple instances of the same name with different passphrases (hoping to break into a specific account), or different names with the same passphrase (hoping to break into any account). Remember how most authentication systems require that users provide their name and passphrase, and then encrypt this message with the same name and passphrase? This means that the cryptoadmin might also observe a number of encrypted echoes on the shardnet that she cannot decrypt, suggesting an attacker is attempting username and passphrases combinations that the cryptoadmin herself has never seen or assigned.

Depending on the system’s requirements, there are a number of things a cryptoadmin can do in response. If the cryptoadmin knows which shard is the source of the disturbance (and more importantly, where it is), she can dispatch physical security to see what is happening. Where physical security is not an option, the cryptoadmin can also simply stop responding to any message until the attacks stop, but this also presents a scenario where legitimate users are also locked out during that time.

Lastly, people do forget their passphrases, especially if they have accounts across multiple cryptosystems. In these cases, cryptosystems need secure methods of reestablishing trust with these users. Some cryptosystems employ “challenge questions” to users who have forgotten their pass-

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phrases. Challenge questions, when properly designed, asks the legitimate user a question to which only she would know the answer. The answers are personal but not sensitive pieces of information that the user shared with the cryptosystem when she initially enrolled in or joined the organization requiring authentication. While there are numerous security issues with challenge questions (e.g. an attacker might know the person she is trying to imitate very well), the biggest obstacle in this context is agreeing on a keyphrase used to protect a legitimate user's answers from eavesdroppers. In this case, one party needs to provide their true name (which is very unlikely), or some out-of-band method must be used to deliver a new keyphrase to the actor trying to authenticate.

To review:

- Most authentication schemes require a user to provide her name and passphrase, and encrypt this message with her name and passphrase combined, to ensure that eavesdroppers cannot intercept it.
- There are many ways in which passphrases can be compromised, allowing an attacker to authenticate as someone they are not. Passphrases that are easy to guess, written down, echoed in clear-text, or used across multiple cryptosystems are the biggest culprits.
- Authentication schemes should have mechanisms to rotate passphrases at regular intervals, detect and prevent guessing attacks, and properly handle scenarios where legitimate users have forgotten their passphrases.
- For “challenge questions” to be somewhat secure, a new keyphrase needs to be provided to the user so she can encrypt her answers. Otherwise an eavesdropper can intercept these answers and impersonate her (potentially across multiple cryptosystems).

TRUE AUTHENTICATION

True authentication, or true auth, leverages true name cryptography to verify users are who they claim they are. It is considerably more secure than other authentication schemes, but requires a population of users willing to surrender their true names to a registry.

To authenticate, a user simply declares who they are with their common name (or some other non-sensitive value, such as an account number). The cryptoadmin will then encrypt a shared keyphrase with the true name associated with that common name (written in the registry) and send it back to the user. The user then uses that shared keyphrase to continue her conversation with the cryptoadmin. Because only the actual owner of that true name could possibly decrypt the message in order to access this shared keyphrase, this validates that the user is who they say they are beyond a shadow of a doubt. In short, true authentication uses true name cryptography to securely share a keyphrase that both parties will use for the remainder of the communication.

True auth cryptosystems are extremely secure, but not invulnerable. The communication session established by true auth is only as good as the strength of the shared keyphrase eventually provided to the user. True auth schemes are rare, because few people trust organizations with their true name. Only powerful and necessary institutions like governments and dwarven banks can get away with mandating this enrollment requirement.

To review:

- True authentication is where a cryptoadmin knows the user's true name and makes the user prove that they are who they say they are by decrypting something encrypted with that true name.



BANNERS

Many shardnet cryptosystems have banners. Banners are clear-text echoes that welcome users. Banners vary greatly, but generally they declare the purpose or affiliation of the shardnet (“Welcome to the Bank of GraniteSpit Hall”), provide instructions for use, (“Please provide your name and passphrase, encrypted with your name and passphrase”), and sometimes provide rules of conduct, (“Abusers of this system will be tortured to death”). Banners are echoes regularly broadcasted in clear-text by cryptoadmins or golems, and are generally very useful in helping a user orient themselves to a cryptosystem.

When it comes to less-than-aboveboard shardnets, like those operated by covert cells or criminal organizations, banners can be a liability, but they can also be useful when used creatively. A shardnet belonging to a covert operation will likely provide no information whatsoever in case an outsider stumbles onto one of its member shards. A clever use of a banner would be to replace either a public input shard or someone’s personal shard with a shard from a compromised network and use an identical banner to spoof the legitimate network. When victims see the banner, they are more likely to continue with their normal user behaviors and potentially compromise themselves.

To review:

- Banners are clear-text echoes broadcast continuously on shardnets, designed to announce to users what cryptosystem they are accessing as well as the expected rules of conduct when interacting with those cryptosystems.

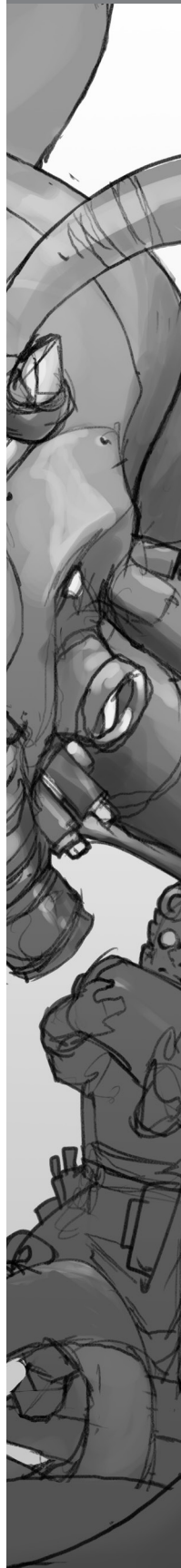
CRYPTOGEARS

The dwarves spent centuries developing ways to incorporate shards into their inventions, magically awakening clockwork-consciousness in otherwise inanimate objects. The golem is the culmination of these efforts, but there were many useful innovations discovered along the way. One such innovation was the cryptogear: a gear built around a shard, capable of responding to specific passphrases communicated to it.

The simplest example is the *cryptolock*: a locking mechanism with an imbedded shard that a user must authenticate to in order to lock or unlock it. Cryptolocks do not have keys and cannot be picked. To “turn the key,” so to speak, a user must touch the shard and transmit the right passphrase, encrypting the passphrase with the passphrase itself (lest someone else touch the shard and recover the clear-text passphrase). Cryptolocks can be fitted to any manner of chest or door, just like conventional key locks. Further, the shard embedded in them can be an orphan shard (that is, a lone shard that is not part of a shardnet) or a shard that’s part of a shardnet. The latter case can be very useful in the case of door locks being centrally monitored and administered by a cryptoadmin.

Cryptogears only respond to a single passphrase and are therefor limited to simple binary logic (e.g. “open/close,” “on/off,” “left/right,”) or sequential logic (e.g. a machine that shifts between forward, neutral, and reverse depending on what the previous state was). One can apply these principles to any clockwork or steam-powered device imaginable, not to mention more mundane mechanisms. From aqueducts to windmills and everything in between, simple machines can be remotely operated with cryptogears as well as centrally managed. As such, cryptogears are the key to building industrial control systems. Railroad switches, sluice gates, assembly lines, and the like can be managed over shardnet by a handful of engineers who do not have to even be in proximity to these systems to control them.

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Of course, like all shardnets, these systems can be compromised if not adequately defended. Cryptogears in centrally managed systems are often designed so their embedded shards are inaccessible (without significant sabotage to the device), ensuring that only a secure “command shard” can issue commands.

Cryptogears only respond to echoes the moment they are received, but this is by design; there is no risk of a cryptogear responding continuously to a single echo. Changing a cryptogear’s passphrase is as simple as encrypting a new passphrase with the previous passphrase. If the shard is physically removed from a cryptogear, the cryptogear locks into whatever default position its design dictates (e.g. a cryptolocked door becomes permanently shut), or engages some other security control (e.g. tamper protection that melts the contents of a cryptolocked chest with acid).

Creating a new cryptogear or replacing the shard (and passphrase) of an existing cryptogear are delicate operations that require a significant amount of time. Refer to the Crafting Items section of the “Downtime” chapter, and assume anything involving cryptogears is considered a tough task.

To review:

- Cryptogears are mechanisms that respond to a specific passphrase encrypted with that same passphrase. To reset a passphrase, simply encrypt a new passphrase with the previous passphrase.
- Cryptogears have binary logic (on/off) or sequential logic (1, 2, 3, 2, 1).
- Industrial control systems are composed of cryptogears part of a single shardnet, centrally managed by one or more engineers orchestrating the system by issuing passphrases via a designated “command shard.”
- Creating a new cryptogear or replacing the shard (and passphrase) of an existing cryptogear are considered

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tough tasks. Refer to the Crafting Items section of the “Downtime” chapter for specifics.

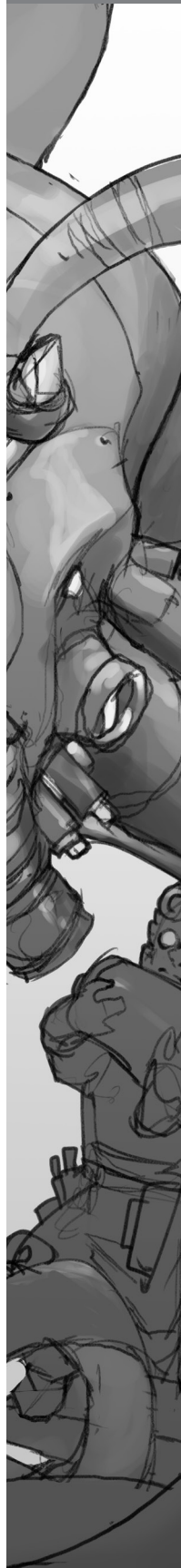
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SCRYER NETS

If you take the “Shard Scry” spell and apply it to a large, distributed shardnet where each shard is fixed in a hard to reach location that provides maximum visibility, you have a scryer net, which is, for all intents and purposes, a video surveillance network. Many organizations employ scryer nets to surveil strategic locations, maintain situational awareness of their facilities, spy on their adversaries, or keep track of their assets (e.g. a scrying captain can see what his soldiers see). While both the offensive and defensive potential of scryer nets is immense, their deployment is anything but simple. The most obvious barrier to entry is the considerable cost of a disposable shardnet. The next barrier to entry is that the operator must be capable of casting the Shard Scry spell and actively watch the scryer net. Scryer nets do not “record” per se, so if no one is actively scrying, they are ineffective. Maintaining constant surveillance requires multiple castings of the spell per day, an exhausting and expensive endeavor for even an accomplished caster. Further, there are often so few echoes on a scryer net that the casting of the spell is truly difficult, unless someone is physically accessing and “checking in” on each of the shards.

The magical requirements for a scryer net are just the beginning of potential problems. A scryer net is still a shard net, which means anyone who touches one of the member shards can monitor and manipulate this network. The attack scenarios are numerous. An adversary could use this private network as their own communications channel, or use any of the shard-based spells to torment the “owner” of the scryer net. For this reason, scryer nets are typically deployed with a number of controls in place. They are placed in hidden and/or hard to reach places, such as fixed to the top of a flag-pole, fixed to rooftops, hidden in brush, etc. Despite the cost and fragility of scryer nets, they have been used to great effect, and are a preferred tool of constabulary

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forces, paranoid tyrants, and organizations with more assets to protect than they have soldiers to deploy. Conspicuous scryer nets that aren't even being monitored still deter certain types of behavior.

To review:

- A scryer net is a shardnet where each shard has been strategically placed to allow a cryptomancer casting the “Shard Scry” spell to monitor specific physical locations. They are used to spy on specific targets or provide surveillance over an area.
- A scryer net is only as effective as the operator's skill in casting the “Shard Scry” spell. One technique to make the caster more effective is to have a patrol periodically use each shard in the scryer net to create an echo.
- A scryer net is just another shardnet, meaning that any actor who is able to physically reach one of its member shards can use the shardnet for her own purposes, and potentially turn the tables on the scryer net's owner.

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DISTRIBUTED DENIAL OF SERVICE ATTACKS

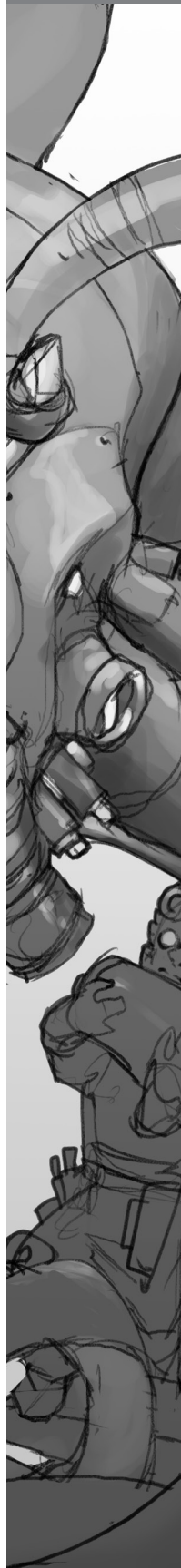
There are 3 known techniques to bring a shardnet to its knees. One is the continued application of the Denier cantrip, though this only lasts a few moments and requires physical access to the targeted shardnet. A second technique is bridging the targeted shardnet with the Shardscape, but this also requires physical access to the targeted shardnet. The third and most powerful technique was discussed in the “Golems” section of this chapter, but an important question was never discussed: where can one find the dozens, hundreds, or thousands of users it takes to pull off such an attack? Afterall, a party only has so many allies, who in turn have access to only so many Shardscape nodes.

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The best way to do it is trick the unsuspecting masses on the Shardscape into pummeling an adversary's golem. An attacker uses an extremely popular query term (e.g. weather, news, etc.) to encrypt an echo on the Shardscape. This will ensure that many recipients see it. The body of this message, however, includes a provocative statement (e.g. "The baron of Dreadwall married a goat") or an enticing offer (e.g. "I am giving away my wealth"), whatever it takes to elicit a response from many people immediately. The message will also contain a keyphrase the reader needs to use to respond to the echo's author. If that keyphrase is actually the true name of a golem, or a keyphrase that golem was listening for on the Shardscape, that golem is in big trouble. Suddenly, the golem is absolutely slammed from echoes originating from strangers who think they are replying to the attacker's slight or promise of wealth. The number of respondents (e.g. dozens, hundreds, or thousands) depends on how widely circulated and cleverly designed the attacker's query term and lure are. This is Cryptomancer's equivalent of a reflected denial of service attack. 300 Gbps!

To review:

- To execute a distributed denial of service attack on a golem, an attacker creates an echo on the Shardscape encrypted with an extremely popular query term that many people will see.
- The echo is a provocative statement or an enticing offer that will elicit many responses. The echo will also contain a true name that responders should use to reply. Of course, that true name is actually the targeted golem's name.
- The number of respondents (e.g. dozens, hundreds, or thousands) depends on how widely circulated and cleverly designed the attacker's query term and lure are.



CODEBREAKER ENGINES AND THE CODE CLERICS

The great dwarven codebreaker engines resemble colossus-sized slot machines. However, instead of 3 to 5 spinning reels containing a few symbols repeated over and over, codebreaker engines have dozens of spinning reels containing thousands of words appearing only once. Every few seconds, the engine randomly shifts its reels. When they stop, they form a readable string of random words. This allows a cryptomancer with an extremely high tolerance for tedium to read the continually changing string and expand her mental lexicon of keyphrases considerably. Depending on how many reels it has, it can take anywhere from years to centuries for a codebreaker engine to cycle through all of its possible combinations. Dwarves consider it a form of meditation to gaze into a codebreaker engine and most clanhalls feature a codebreaker engine as a prominent and central feature in their great hall to promote this practice.

There are cloisters throughout the realms where meditative codebreaking is taken to an extreme. The Code Clerics are a cult of ascetics who spend their every waking moment gazing into the output of a codebreaker engine. When given a shard, they make quick work of all but the longest and most complex keyphrases. There simply aren't enough words in the human, elven, or dwarven tongues to hide from the clerics, and their services are for hire. Operatives leveraging the clerics' services must first establish a means by which the cult can access an adversary's shardnet. This involves physically delivering an adversary's shard to one of their cloisters, or creating a series of bridges to link the clerics' shardnet to the adversary's. Alternatively, clerics can also operate in the physical space, cracking the keyphrases of encrypted scrolls or cryptomantic spells like Babel, Dissemble, and Maze. A cleric in the field is never alone; many clerics see what she sees, thanks to the Shard Scry spell. This allows them to help her attack problematic encryption remotely.

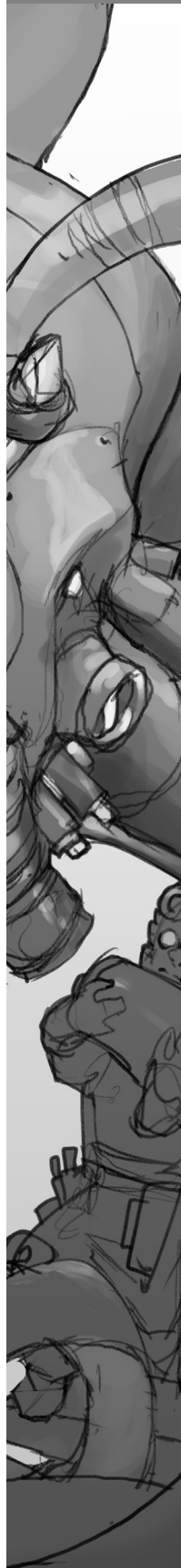
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An individual cleric has absorbed a massive amount of keyphrases in her lifetime, resulting in a powerful mental lexicon. She knows nearly every possible keyphrases that is 3-4 words long, as well as a massive amount of keyphrases longer than that. However, the clerics don't simply rely on their accumulated keyphrases to crack a keyphrase. When assigned a task, they will profile their target in order to build a conceptual model of that target's lexical universe. Variables like the target's occupation, education, background, and station in life all point to the words, phrases, and grammatical approaches the target will use when creating keyphrases. The clerics then create custom reels to fix to their codebreaker engines and begin their necessary meditation.

The efficacy of the clerics, like any cell, is determined by a skill check, the difficulty of which is determined by the length and complexity of the keyphrases they are attacking. They can be assigned a general task (e.g. decrypt everything on this shardnet) or a specific task (e.g. decrypt this scroll). However, the reclusiveness of the Clerics ensures that they will never be able to decrypt messages encrypted with soul keys on account of them not knowing anyone's true name (unless their client shares true names with them). The relationship with the Clerics can be close or deniable, or both (in the case that the party acquires two Code Cleric cells with their strategic resources). While the act of decryption may be instant, the task of assembling and absorbing a custom codebreaker engine generally takes time, as does gathering multiple clerics to take a shot at the targeted encryption.

The neutrality, professionalism, and discretion of the clerics is beyond reproach. The clerics will never hold decrypted information back from a client or use that information to further their own interests. They consider both the town board and the Shardscape to be a sacrosanct institutions and will refuse requests to indiscriminately surveil the masses. That is not to say they won't operate in these spaces. In fact, they frequently do. There is an enormous difference, though, between cracking the keyphrase of a single encrypted scroll pulled off of the townboard, and decrypt-

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ing virtually every scroll on the townboard on a daily basis. The clerics will readily do the former, but only do the latter if compelled to do so against their will.

There do exist *codebreaker farms*, a less savory alternative for those who cannot afford the clerics' considerable retainer. Codebreaker farms are composed of addicts who perform codebreaking services for a steady supply of soma. The farms are operated by cartels and mercenary outfits who have acquired a codebreaker engine and a group of thralls to stare into it during their soma-fueled stupors. While none of the codebreakers are technically held against their will, the pangs of soma addiction may as well be a set of shackles. The groups work for coin (typically 50/250/500 coin for a trivial/challenge/tough keyphrase, respectively) and have none of the ethical scruples that the clerics have, which can be a double-edged sword.

To review:

- Codebreaker engines are mechanical devices that generate a random keyphrase every few seconds. Codebreakers are people who spend most of their time staring at codebreaker engines to learn new keyphrases.
- The Code Clerics can be employed to decrypt shardnet communications, encrypted scrolls, or cryptomantic spells (e.g. Babel, Dissemble, and Maze). They are powerless against true name cryptomancy, however.
- The clerics detest surveillance and will not perform surveillance-like tasks, even against an individual target. Their only service is decryption. It is up to the client to determine what to do with whatever information is gleaned. Clerics will only perform specific decryption task (e.g. decrypt everything on this shardnet, decrypt this scroll, etc.) and reject anything akin to "be on the lookout for" tasks.
- Codebreaker farms are the underworld alternative to the clerics. They work for coin and have none of the ethical restrictions that the clerics have, including loyalty to their clients.

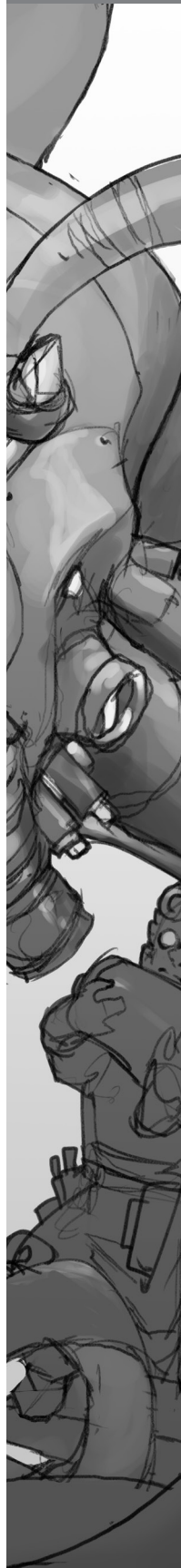
SHARD STORMERS

Shard stormers are what cryptoadmins have nightmares about. They are collectives of cryptomancers dedicated to shard-warfare: abusive and offensive uses of cryptomantic spells, denial of service techniques, and in the most egregious cases, suicide commandos shard-warping their way into otherwise impregnable cryptovaults. Their services are exorbitantly expensive due to the risks taken on by stormers, but also due to stockpiles of mana potions and soma they burn through during sustained offensives. So long as a client can pay their princely fee and provide access to a targeted shardnet, they can and will do whatever it takes to enumerate, disrupt, and/or assault the target's shardnet.

Enumeration of a target's shardnet involves a liberal use of the Tracer and Shard Scry spells to determine how many shards compose the victim's shardnet, where every single one of them are in the physical space, and what tactical information can be gleaned by scrying through them. Stormers will report this information to their client in near real-time, giving them situational awareness as to what is transpiring both in the target organization's shardnet and physical stronghold.

Disruption of a target's shardnet involves a sustained use of the Denier spell. Stormers will take turns denying the targeted shardnet and replenishing their depleted mana through whatever means necessary (typically soma, which is considerably cheaper than mana potions). Another denial technique involves dropping high-powered and poorly-encrypted Shard Spikes on the targeted shardnet, punishing anyone foolish enough to use the shardnet with lethal psychic feedback. This drug-fueled denial of service can last several hours, depending on how long the stormers' soma supply can last and what countermeasures the defender is capable of deploying. Even a junior cryptoadmin will use Tracer to determine the shard storm's origin. If she has the means, she will dispatch a raiding party (whether that is her house's own security force or perhaps some local authorities

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that are closer to the source of the storm).

In rare cases, stormers have been observed shard-warping into hostile territory to commandeer the target's cyrptovault. Knowing that it is likely a one way trip, stormers only consider this technique if the welfare or reputation of their entire collective is at stake, or if their client's cause is something truly important (however, this is *not* a sentimental bunch). Those brave or desperate enough to attempt such a maneuver are often highly proficient in destructive spells and/or unarmed combat.

An important consideration when employing shard stormers is how their connectivity to the targeted shardnet has been established. That is, a shard stormer collective can either be distributed (i.e. deniable) or clustered, depending on what their connection to the target looks like.

In a distributed storm, the stormers are all physically distant from one another, making a raid against the collective difficult if not impossible. However, this type of storm requires a single stormer, the client, or the client's cryptoadmin to bridge the targeted shardnet with the stormers' shardnet, putting the mortal maintaining that bridge at severe risk. If defenders dispatch security forces anywhere, it will be to the physical location of the bridge, who might consider staying mobile (perhaps in the back of a moving wagon). Further, whoever is maintaining this bridge is potentially the first one absorbing any lethal Shard Spikes being dropped by the defender.

In a clustered storm, a shard stolen from the targeted network is delivered directly to the stormers' stronghold. This way, stormers can take turns assaulting the targeted shardnet by simply passing that shard around and only bridge to facilitate certain simultaneous actions (such as one stormer denying the targeted shardnet while another stormer does the scrying). Clustered stormers can be considerably more aggressive in their attacks because they are gathered around a large stockpile of mana potions and soma. However, their congregation is also more prone to being raided by

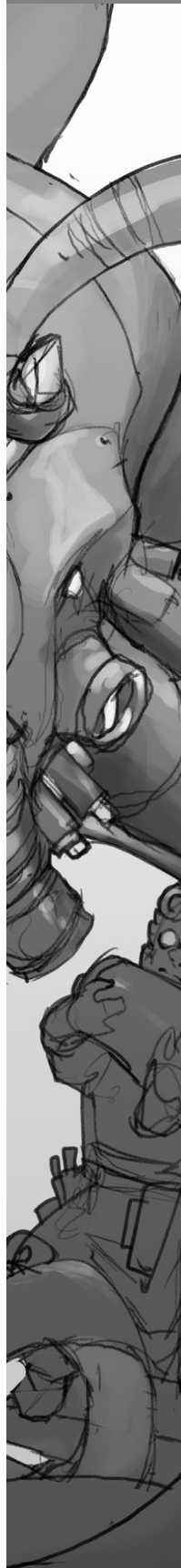
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either the target's physical security forces or the local authorities to whom the targeted organization has appealed.

The efficacy of a storm, like any cell, is determined by a skill check, the difficulty of which is determined by the target's cryptomantic discipline as well as the quality of intelligence provided to the stormers before their attack. Even against a very skilled defender, stormers are brutally effective if they have been provided keyphrases, true names, architecture diagrams, golem true names, golem protocols, and other pieces of shardnet reconnaissance related to their target. The actual skill check can be rolled either at the beginning of a storm or perhaps right at a critical moment where the party needs the storm to be most effective (e.g. while they are physically infiltrating the target's stronghold). The duration of a shard storm is primarily driven by the needs of the group contracting the stormers' services, but generally speaking, even a well-stocked, well-hidden, clustered shard storm will burn through their supplies, be forced to flee a raid, or simply hit exhaustion after 24 hours (or three sessions of downtime).

To review:

- Shard stormers disrupt a targeted shardnet with the Denier cantrip and spy on it with the Shard Scry spell for long periods of time. In extreme cases, they will leverage the Shard Warp greater spell to physically assault a target's cryptovault.
- Distributed (i.e. deniable) stormers are very resilient to raids but less effective in their attacks, while clustered stormers are vulnerable to raids but extremely effective in their attacks.
- Shard storms last no longer than 24 hours or 3 sessions of downtime, and the GM may require skill checks to be made on behalf of the cell at dramatically appropriate times.



/ROOT/CRYPTOSYSTEMS/CD ..
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MUNDANE
SECURITY



OVERVIEW

This chapter discusses mundane security: the realm of security that exists in the physical, corporeal world. The topic of physical security is actually pretty exciting, and is considerably more complex and dynamic than its typical fantasy role-playing reduction to guards, traps, and locked doors, especially when one considers how physical security is required to achieved information security. As we learned in the previous chapter, physical access to cryptovaults, golems, shards, or personnel can spell doom for even the most cryptomantically secure networks. Thus, skilled attackers and defenders neglect mundane security at their own peril.

The goal is this chapter is to help GMs and players start thinking about traditional role-playing game environments (e.g. dungeons, castles, fortresses, etc.) not simply as environments or set-pieces, but as *systems* designed to achieve specific goals. Cryptosystems can be exploited by those who understand their weaknesses and so too can physical security system.

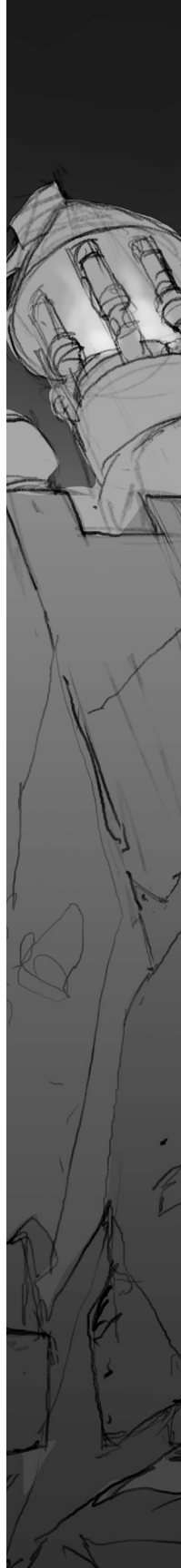
Following a discussion of defense-in-depth and providing an example as a dungeon as a system, we will discuss diverse offensive and defensive physical security techniques, including security architecture, social engineering, lock-picking, clandestine tradecraft (i.e. “spy techniques”), facility infiltration, and more.

DEFENSE-IN-DEPTH

The medieval castle is a beautiful expression of the idea of *defense-in-depth*: multiple layers of security that augment each other, ensuring that even if one defense fails, another can pick up the slack. A castle has high walls around it to prevent large armies from marching in. It has a moat outside of the walls, to make it difficult and dangerous to scale those walls. It has archers and warriors atop the walls, to kill attackers attempting to climb up. If the walls are breached and the drawbridge opened, it creates a bottleneck where a small number of defenders can inflict terrible damage on an incoming horde. Lastly, there is the keep, a castle within a castle, where all wealth and royalty are kept, and where the defenders can make their last stand.

No castle is invincible, but it does not need to be. The point of a castle's numerous defenses is to convince potential invaders that the gains of raiding it are not greater than the costs of raiding it. You might make a fortune raiding a castle, but you'll likely spend a fortune and lose hundreds of men doing so. Taking this cost-benefit analysis further, if the invaders are going to attack something, they would be better served attacking a less formidable castle. That is to say that a castle might deter an invasion simply by being more formidable than a neighboring castle.

We should apply the lessons of the medieval castle to all security systems. A security system is simply a series of obstacles that work together to stop an attacker from doing something. That something might be killing a monarch, stealing secrets, or simply changing something the defender doesn't want changed. Castles are security systems that protect royalty and treasure. Cryptosystems are security systems that protect secrets. Dungeons are security systems that prevent prisoners from escaping. All of these security systems rely on not one control, but a collection of controls that work together.



A DUNGEON IS A SYSTEM

Let's take the idea of a medieval dungeon to elaborate on the concept of environments as systems employing defense-in-depth, and how multiple controls come together to deter, detect, and defend against attackers.

The “business objective” of a medieval dungeon or prison is to serve as a location to detain, punish, interrogate, and execute prisoners. A dungeon is an awful place to be, so it must rely on multiple layers of security to keep prisoners inside and liberators out. The first and most obvious control is the dungeon cell. A prisoner is in a locked cell that can be only opened from the outside. The key to this cell and others is protected closely by guards. Prisoners are in separate cells to isolate them from one another to make it difficult for them to conspire. Next, there are guards who not only manage the prisoners, but also perform routine patrols and as well as headcounts of both prisoners and guards to make sure no one has gone missing. Guards are armed and chartered to further punish or outright kill prisoners who behave poorly or attempt to escape. They are also clearly distinct in appearance from the prisoner, who is often marked, branded, chained up, and/or wearing something to indicate their status.

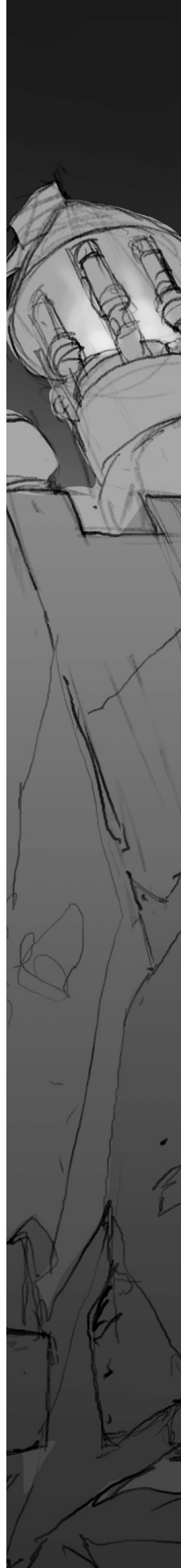
Then there is the architecture of the dungeon. Not only is it buried deep underground, it also surrounded by check-points and watch-towers which simultaneously look out for escapees and for those outsiders who would attempt to liberate escapees. Further, it is in a dangerous and inaccessible location. Those who do escape are likely to die of exposure, be eaten alive by predatory wildlife, or become ensnared by the many traps the guards have set to recapture escapees. Though the dungeon could not withstand a legitimate siege, it doesn't need to. It is in such a remote and inhospitable location that no general in their right mind would march their men to it.


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Aside from these various physical security controls, there are a number of both psychological and procedural controls in place. First, prisoners are convinced that escape is impossible. Failed escapees are punished horribly in front of other prisoners to reinforce this idea. Compliant and passive prisoners are given minor favors (like an extra serving of gruel, or fewer beatings) while those who rat out other prisoners' escape plans are given major favors (like a "luxury" cell, or a bottle of wine). Through this process, the prisoners are basically deputized to monitor themselves. The guards must also monitor themselves. All guards have keys to the dungeon and could liberate one or all prisoners if so inclined. This means that there must be strict adherence to procedure, as well as utilization of a "two man rule," where two guards must turn two keys simultaneously to open a critical gate or deactivate an important control. This ensures that no single guard can compromise the system; it would require conspiracy between two or more guards. A would-be traitor must first find a willing accomplice to help her execute her plan, which itself is a high risk proposition. Conspire with the wrong person and end up a prisoner. Lastly, the guards carefully manage their roster. "New recruits" who arrive unannounced are assumed to be spies until their identities are verified. Those who cannot verify their identity or don't know the secret passphrase given to them by an official recruiter are either killed or imprisoned. Visiting supply caravans undergo the same level of scrutiny.

We've exhaustively explored this security system, and discussed the various controls that protect against escaping prisoners, traitorous guards, and external threats. It should be evident that any of the controls discussed here can be defeated by a motivated and resourceful attacker. However, with all of these controls working together, an attacker must account for and defeat many different controls, during specific windows of opportunity, to defeat this system. It's certainly possible, but it won't be easy. In fact, for most, it probably won't be worth trying, and that's how we know that the dungeon has achieved an optimal level of security. When building adventure locations and challenges for players, we encourage GMs to think critically about security sys-

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tems, and at the very least, map out how people (e.g. guards and servants), process (e.g. must have red badge to be in this area), and technology (e.g. need a key to open this door) all work together to protect against threats, both internal and external. Security only works when all three of these things work together harmoniously. Luckily for the attacker, something always breaks down - especially people.

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SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Social engineering is the art of tricking others into doing things for you, such as providing access to resources or information that you shouldn't have. Social engineering is not simply lying to someone, or wearing a convincing disguise, but more of a methodology of planning and executing an attack against a target's better judgment. The planning and pretext of a social engineering attack are often more important than the attacker's skill in lying, disguise, or fast-talk. We'll introduce a very basic explanation of what a social engineering approach should look like in the context of this game.

First, the attacker should try to learn as much about her victim as she can before actually engaging. This is called information gathering. This may involve asking around about the victim, spying on them, and understanding the victim's social circles and place in society. Some examples of useful information might be the victim's true name, favorite tavern, political affiliations, vices, personal wealth, phobias, self-esteem, loyalty, etc. These types of details will be helpful in constructing the pretext of the attack.

The pretext is the scenario that the attacker creates to manipulate the target's thinking. Pretending to be a family member of a very important noble is one example of a pretext used to potentially gain access to an otherwise closed-off location. Pretexts that elicit emotional reactions are the most effective. Emergency is a great way to convince a victim to take sudden action (e.g. "There was a building with a red thatched roof burning in the village. Wait, that

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was your home!?"), but so is greed (e.g. "An enormous jewel-encrusted chest washed to the shore, but it was too heavy for me to carry back here"). The attacker should have the pretext prepared, informed by the intelligence gathered during the information gathering phase, before finally executing the attack.

Lastly, there is the attack itself. This is the time where acting skills, props, and disguises can help sell the pretext. Running up a hill and actually being winded is a great way to tell the "your house is on fire" story, while pretending to be a delicate and naive person is a great way to sell the "leave your post for the beach treasure" story. Flattery can also make it easier for a pretext to succeed, especially to persons accustomed to being treated poorly (e.g. most guards and servants), but rarely works against those who frequently employ these techniques themselves or deal with frauds on a daily basis (e.g. politicians, merchants, and constables). It is during this phase where opposed skill checks against the victim, using the Charm, Deception, Menace, or Performance skills can and should be used to determine the efficacy of lies, feigned emotions, and various theatrics that occur during the final attack.

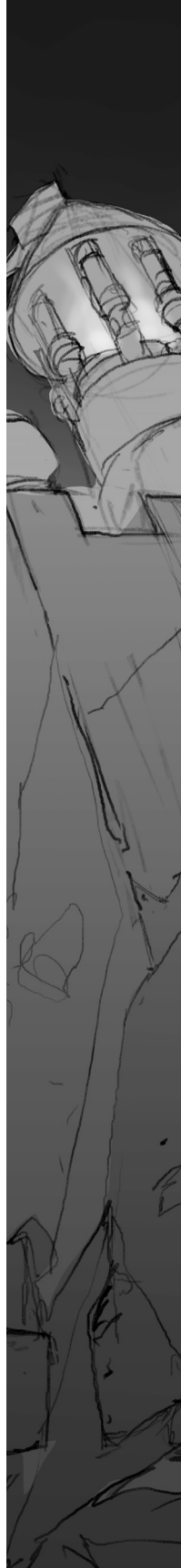
As a general rule, when determining if a social engineering attack is ultimately successful, GMs should put more weight on the actors' planning, information gathering, and pretexting, rather than just the skill checks made during the moment of truth.

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PATROLS, SENTRIES, AND DISPATCH

Patrolling guards and sentries are a staple of fantasy dungeons, fortresses, and outposts. Cryptomancer gives them a distinct advantage they don't have in many other games: shardnets. Guards will often have a shard on an amulet or embedded in their armor's chest plate for rapid and easy access. To that end, guards act more like modern police

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forces when it comes to suspicious or dangerous activity. They will use their shard to report suspicious activity, request reinforcements, and respond to welfare checks. This changes the dynamic between infiltrators and defenders considerably. Of course, acquiring a guard's shard also provides attackers and infiltrators another means of exploiting the defenses of a physical security force.

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RISK MANAGEMENT & PROPORTIONAL RESPONSE

Even the most powerful and well-funded security organizations have the problem of finite resources to deal with infinite possible threats. This means that smart organizations will only utilize the necessary amount of resources to address problems. If constables investigated every crime in equal measure, serious crimes would fall through the cracks. If guards turned over the entire castle every time an expensive piece of dinnerware went missing, no one would be manning the parapets. Smart trade-offs must be made on a constant basis, otherwise organizations will squander resources on minor offenses and distractions at the peril of their larger mission.

Skilled attackers will do everything in their power to make their operations look like minor problems - the kind that aren't worth responding to with everything the security organization can bring to bear. They also understand that it is better to abort an operation midstream and try again later than it is to escalate things unnecessarily.

Skilled defenders will neither take their eyes off the prize nor let themselves become so fatigued by false alarms that they stop paying attention. Maintaining a constant warrior mentality is impossible, even a war zone. Complacency always sets in. Leaders will combat this eventuality through various means: harsh discipline, constant drills, sudden changes in operations or defensive posture, surprise inspections, or outsiders brought in to simulate a real attack and test the efficacy of defenders. The rank and file fear these things more than they fear real adversaries.

LOCK PICKING

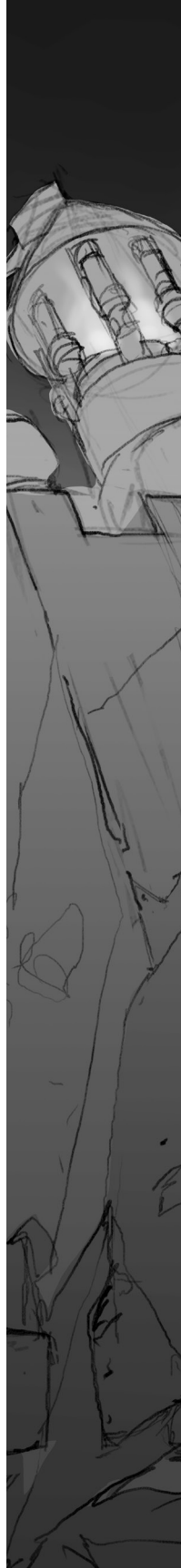
Lock picking is an important part of security and deserves a bit more elaboration than what is discussed in the “Skills” chapter. While it's perfectly OK to resolve lock picking with an unopposed Lock picking skill check, GMs are encouraged to add a little more realism and granularity to lock picking if they have a player who really embraces this skill for their character. But first, a small treatise on what lock picking is in a security context.

Locks do not stop attackers. Locks buy time for other security controls to save the day. A lock, by itself, regardless of its complexity, is no match for even the most amateur of attackers. It does, however, slow down an attacker and force them to make certain decisions that play into the defender's hands. They force an attacker to find another way in (e.g. an open second story window), smash the lock open (which makes a ton of noise and leaves evidence), or attempt to pick the lock (which puts the attacker in an extremely suspicious position). These options are especially difficult on the attacker if the defender has other security controls in place, such as traps, alarms, and especially patrols.

Why do attackers pick locks? It is because they don't want to make a ruckus, don't want to leave behind evidence of forced entry, don't want to have to find another way in, and don't want to get caught trying to pick the key from someone's pocket. Entering through a locked door can also establish trust. It's much easier to sell yourself as just another guard when you come through the front door than it is to do so after you've crawled in through a bedroom window. Lastly, tamperproof chests cannot be smashed open without destroying the contents inside, so sometimes lock picking is truly the only option.

The most basic form of lock picking involves using a small L-shaped torsion wrench to turn a lock, and then using a pick to tap that lock's tumblers into place. Once all the tumblers are tapped into place, the pressure applied to

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the torsion wrench forces the lock open. Simple locks might have 3-5 tumblers, while sophisticated dwarven locks might have 9-12 tumblers in place. A GM can decide that a player needs to roll a number of successes equal to the amount of tumblers in a lock, over the course of multiple turns, to successfully pick a lock. Barely failing has no consequence; clearly failing causes all of the tumblers to reset back into place, and a dramatic failure jams the lock completely. A way to make this type of scene truly exciting is to add an element of urgency. For example, there might be a 10% chance that guards arrive at the scene at the beginning of each turn, and perhaps this percentage rises over time. Every setback becomes that much more dramatic.

Lock picking cannot be done without tools. Those who have to resort to scrounging for improvised tools need to find things that substitute not only a pick but also a torsion wrench. Picking an unfamiliar lock is difficult and relies on considerable luck, which is why accomplished lock smiths frequently practice on different types of locks to become acclimated to them. A lock picker who studies a lock and practices on a facsimile before being tasked to attack the real thing should be given some leeway by the GM, whether this is reduced task difficulty or free successes towards tapping tumblers.

/ROOT/MUNDANE SECURITY/

TRADECRAFT

Tradecraft is all the clever things that spies do to collect information, protect their communications, hide their identities, and reduce risks to themselves and their allies. It's somewhat easy to hide one's own identity and affiliations, but it's a little trickier to hide one's identity and affiliations when there are multiple conspirators and regular meeting spots. The following techniques are examples of how a cell can maintain operational security in a hostile environment full of enemy agents and antagonistic authorities.

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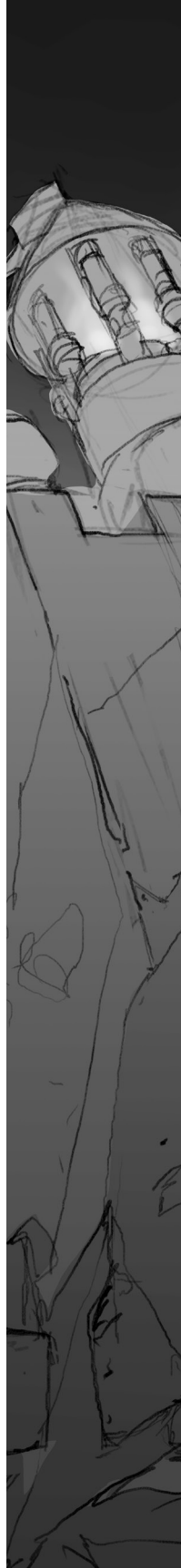
Dead Drops

Dead drops are a way for two or more actors to communicate in secret. One actor leaves a package, message, or scroll in a hidden or remote place and then a recipient returns later to extract it. Two actors hoping to hide their affiliation with one another will use an agreed upon dead drop location to exchange information and artifacts, but they will never be at that location at the same time (which would defeat the purpose of the dead drop). Instead, there is typically some type of innocuous sign or trigger used by one actor to tell another actor to proceed to the dead drop location. For example, one actor may place a secret message at a dead drop location, and then either light three candles in their window cell or lower a flag to half-mast. This symbol, seen by the intended recipient, tells said recipient to go to the dead drop and collect the secret message. The recipient may have their own subtle way of telling the sender that the message has been safely recovered, or that the dead drop location has been compromised.

Tailing

Tailing is the act of following and observing a target without being detected. Tailing can be done through stealth and acrobatics (e.g. tailing someone from the roof tops), but it is usually done in plain sight, simply by acting innocuous. Tails represent a threat to the secrecy of safe houses and dead drops, and can also identify secret affiliations (e.g. the priest walks to the apothecary every night, where he meets a political agitator from a rival city-state). However, this is exactly why many agents and cells employ countermeasures against tails. Picking different routes every time, and moving at different times, is the easiest way to obscure patterns or affiliations. An agent might take the most dangerous, roundabout, or confusing path to a specific location, hoping to throw off a potential tail. Alternatively, agents will work together, planning their routes in a way that one can keep an eye on the other at different points, in order to spot a tail and notify each other over shardnet if one is being followed.

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Cut-outs

Cut-outs are middle-men between two groups, and their primary function is to facilitate communication between the two groups while also establishing deniability that the two groups are connected. Cut-outs typically understand that they are delivering a message from one place to another, but never know the contents of the message, nor the authors of it. If and when they are intercepted and interrogated, they legitimately don't know who they are working for, and certainly don't know the keyphrase to decrypt the message they are carrying. Rulers and other public figures will often use cut-outs to distance themselves from the secret or illegal operations they carry out against their rivals.

Fronts

Fronts are political, religious, or business operations that provide a cover story for a cell. The operation does all the things it is supposed to. For example, a temple serving as a front still heals the sick and holds service. However, the operation secretly provides funding, safe houses, and other support for the cell. A front remains useful as long as its true purpose can be hidden. The cell cannot be congregating and planning assassinations while typical guests walk through the front door. The cell must have a compelling reason to be entering and exiting the front randomly and at all hours, or proceeding immediately to the wine cellar, crypt, or attic every time they enter. Lastly, a cell needs to have someone manage all of the front's legitimate-looking business: serving customers, paying taxes, filing for permits, fulfilling orders, etc. The more a front can incorporate itself into the local community, the more convincing it will be. However, all it takes is for one patron, server, or courier to open the wrong door at the wrong time, and the jig is up.

False flag operations

False flag operations are criminal, military, or espionage operations carried out in a way to trick a target into thinking it wasn't the cell who carried it out, but some other group. When the cell carries out such an operation, they are

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sure to leave behind some type of evidence or calling card essentially framing a different organization, or carry out the act in front of witnesses while wearing a disguise. For example, wearing the raiment of the local guard and committing some type of atrocity is good way to turn a population against the authorities. That is, assuming the false flag operation is convincing. If all framed actors have alibis, or provide full cooperation in investigating the event, the false flag could be detected, and there could be trouble on the horizon for the cell. If a false flag operation is not convincing, it has the potential of actually strengthening the very relationships that the cell intended to fracture.

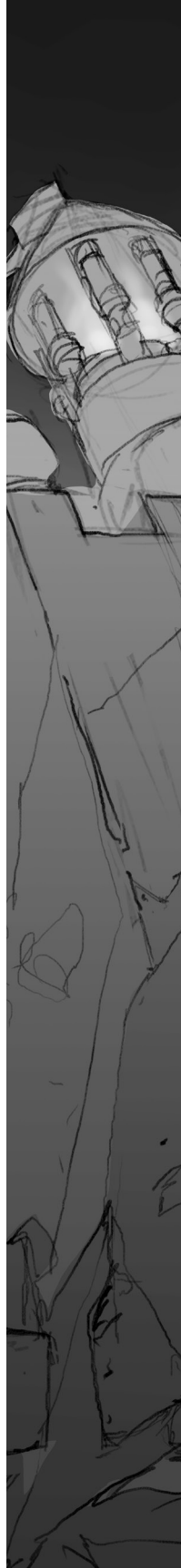
Walk-ins

Walk-ins are when someone from an opposing organization voluntarily defects to the other side and offers elicit information about her former organization or even agrees to secretly spy on it. Walk-ins are an extremely high risk, high reward proposition. They could be the ace in the hole needed to bring down an adversary, or they could be a double agent sent by that adversary. For these reasons, walk-ins endure the most intense scrutiny imaginable, including long interrogations and liberal usage of the mind reading spells.

Aliases

Aliases are fake identities assumed by agents who need to either infiltrate a hostile organization or disassociate themselves from a friendly organization. For example, an agent hoping to infiltrate a shadowy cult might assume the identity of a downtrodden soma addict, the very type of person the cult has been known to target for its recruiting efforts. Assuming an alias is not nearly as simple as picking a new name, donning a new outfit, and having a willingness to lie to people. It requires the near eradication of one's real identity and a complete separation from one's true affiliations. Being spotted by an old acquaintance who does not know the agent is under cover can literally be a death sentence. Considerable planning is required to place an under cover agent and isolate her from external exposure. Howev-

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er, that is the easy part. Any relapse into one's actual identity, even as subtle as a facial expression or word choice, can potentially lead to an agent being exposed. Thus, the prolonged maintenance of an alias requires enormous mental stamina and the ability to control one's own physiological responses to stress or lying, something only true sociopaths can do without considerable training.

While the Deception skill may seem invaluable to an agent using an alias, it is easily secondary to the skill Performance. Performance dictates a character's ability to truly embody a role: to talk like someone else talks, to walk with the same gait, to get into their mindset and understand how that translates into believable actions and opinions. Further, assuming an alias can sometimes demand that an agent do things she would never do on her own volition, including acts that violate her loyalties or personal code of ethics. There are certain expectations and requirements that go with maintaining an alias. The deeper an agent has gone with an alias and the more influence she has amassed with it, the greater the requirements are for maintaining that alias. You can't sew yourself into the inner circle without doing the things expected of those who are in the inner circle. When there is a conflict between a character's real ethics and those expected of her alias, the GM might require an unopposed Willpower skill check, with the difficulty dependent on what is being asked of her. Upon failure, the agent simply cannot bring herself to carry out the act, which may spell trouble for her alias. Critical successes, on the other hand, allow the agent to carry out the acts with such conviction that no one will ever question her loyalty again.

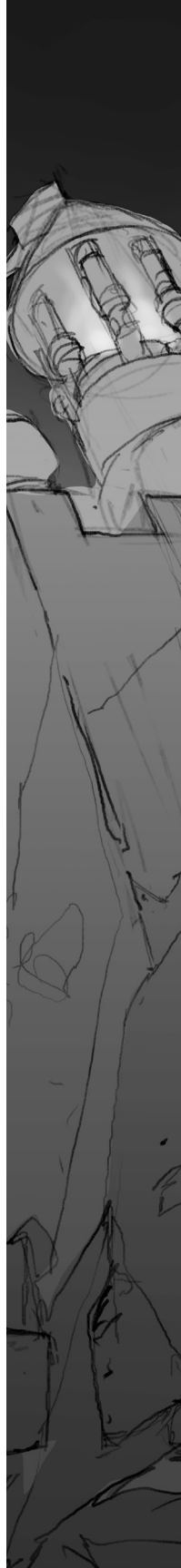
STEALTH

Violent confrontation isn't just life threatening. It is also an inconvenience, a political mess, and often a preventable tragedy. The cleanest (but not always simplest) way to achieve objectives that others might object to (e.g. stealing a tome of keyphrases they use) is to employ stealth. Stealth comes in a variety of forms, but at its most basic, it is the concept of getting things done while remaining unseen and unheard. Let's discuss why someone would employ stealth before discussing the how.

Stealth is key when you don't want to get caught. "Getting caught" can manifest in various ways. Perhaps if you are spotted in a location you shouldn't be, guards will immediately attempt to kill or capture you. A subtler but just as important variation of getting caught is being identified. You might be pulling off a caper where an adversary will eventually find out something bad happened (e.g. a dignitary was assassinated), but you want to make sure that they don't know it was you who did the bad thing, because you'll become a fugitive. Lastly, there are situations where perhaps you don't want an adversary to know something ever happened (e.g. swapping a work of art for a facsimile). In this case, it's not so much about getting caught or being identified (in fact, you might be operating in plain sight), but more about pulling something off in a discrete way no one notices.

How does one avoid all of these fates? By being unseen and unheard, or at the very least, unidentified. While there is some acrobatics and light-footedness involved, stealth is primarily about recognizing opportunities to act. In any scene where a character must get past a sentry or witness undetected, a GM should consider what that actor can see and hear. A sentry facing the wrong direction or pouring her attention into a scroll might not see a character's movements but can probably still hear the character move. Alternately, a character only moving when a bell tolls or when a horse whinnies might be unheard, but can be still

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be spotted. With these items in mind, GMs are encouraged to create scenes of stealth composed of factors that will aid or hinder characters' stealth attempts: raucous parties, roaring insects, dark nights, flickering torchlight, and all manner of things to hide behind. Players can also manipulate these forces through creativity: creating smoke clouds, agitating animals, smothering torches, and creating all manner of distraction. The videogame series *Thief* has many unique stealth ideas (e.g. shooting “water arrows” at torches to create darkness) if players are looking to expand their portfolio of stealth techniques.

Scenes of stealth tend to be nerve wracking, because if a stealth attempt fails, bad things happen. That's why the best sneakers always have a plan B, whether it's an escape plan, a compelling alibi, or the skill and moral flexibility to take care of witnesses. In situations where a failed stealth attempt might significantly derail or sidetrack a session, GMs are encouraged to ask their players to consider what plan B is before a player makes a skill check.

/ROOT/MUNDANE SECURITY/

SURVEILLANCE

Most of the important aspects of this topic have already been said in previous chapters, but we'll just tie it together here in the context of physical security. Magical surveillance and alarm techniques including scyer nets, scout sprites, and warning glyphs permit a security force to monitor and protect vast swaths of territory with a relatively small amount of personnel. Instead of requiring guards to be stationed everywhere and patrolling at all times, defenders can instead rapidly deploy their forces to respond to intruders who have tripped alarms or have otherwise been detected through magical means. The responders will likely be given a play-by-play of an intruder's actions, armament, and current location by the dispatcher or cryptoadmin monitoring the situation, so that when they do intervene, they are at a distinct tactical advantage. Smart attackers will purposely test a defender's surveillance measures, observe their response, and adjust accordingly. Smarter defenders know this.

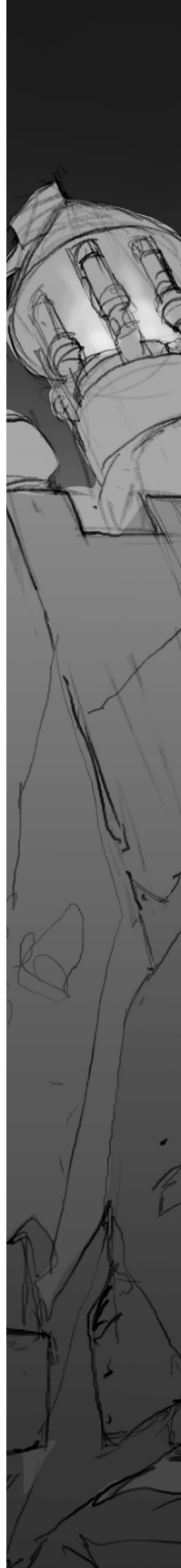
INFILTRATION


Infiltration is the process of getting into a hardened place by avoiding detection, avoiding identification, and methodically bypassing security controls. It is where the all of the mundane security topics discussed so far come together. Some examples of infiltration include breaking into a prison to liberate a prisoner, sneaking into a noble's bedroom in order to steal a diary, sneaking into a war camp in order to assassinate a general, gaining access to a vault that contains proprietary dwarven schematics, etc. Infiltration scenes are tense because there are both constraints to how characters can get things done ("If we're detected, the cryptoadmin will call for reinforcements") as well as time pressures ("The prisoner's execution happens in 2 hours"). A successful infiltration sometimes requires successful and timely acts of stealth, social engineering, and lock picking, but nearly always requires a plan. To help GMs and players structure infiltration plans, let's elaborate on the concept of primary goals, rules of engagement, entry points, and exit strategies, so they can all be discussed and agreed on before an infiltration.

Primary goals

The primary goal of an infiltration is the single most important reason the infiltration is taking place. It might be as simple as free the prisoner, steal the plans, or kill the noble. Whatever the case, if characters do not achieve their primary goal, the infiltration is likely a wasted (and needlessly risky) effort. Players should have a very clear idea of what their primary goal is before executing an infiltration. GMs should put all manner of obstacles between characters and their primary goal, including but not limited to locks, cryptolocks, authentication schemes, sentries, patrols, accidental witnesses, monsters, moats, sheer walls, barred windows, alarms, deathtraps, etc. However, the single most compelling way to divert players from their primary goals is temptation. Greed and curiosity are fantastic forces to ap-

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peal to. Perhaps, there is a treasure vault that is nowhere near the primary goal, but is simply too tempting to pass up. Perhaps a character simply has to find out who is doing the scandalous activities she hears up the stairs. These types of deviations should always lead to trouble, and it should be an agonizing exercise in discipline for both characters and their players to pass them up.

Rules of engagement

Rules of engagement are operational and ethical guidelines that the characters agree to adhere to during an infiltration. A simple example might be “avoid identification at any cost” which means that the characters will prioritize this mandate, even if it requires the murder and disposal of witnesses. Alternatively, “no violence, no matter what” might be another example of rules of engagement confining character actions during an infiltration, especially one carried out against a political ally or taking place in a hallowed place. Rules of engagement should be informed by two things: the “moral flexibility” of the player characters (both individually and as a group), as well as the mission parameters. Perhaps the party is composed of one or more sociopaths not above dispatching inconvenient witnesses, or perhaps the organization being infiltrated is composed of truly bad people who deserve to die for the dark deeds they have been carrying out. Still, maybe violence threatens the primary objective. For example, perhaps the party is tasked with planting damning evidence on a noble to remove her as a political distraction. If the party storms the noble’s estate and slaughters her bodyguards, the ruse doesn’t work. Further, even a “clean kill,” where a bodyguard goes missing will raise alarms. Soon the noble and remaining guards will suspect infiltration and begin searching the estate for theft or malice. Rules of engagement are a great way for GMs to challenge players and also add tension and conflict between characters.

Entry points

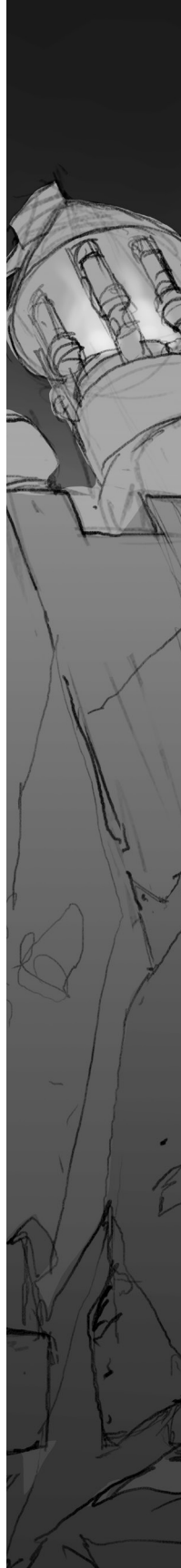
Entry points are where and how an infiltration

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starts. Characters know what their primary goal is, and approximately where they need to get to in order to achieve that goal, but they must find a way in. This typically requires both reconnaissance and planning on the part of the characters. Some entry points might require skill to exploit while others might require opportunity. For example, perhaps the only stealth means to get into a fortress is to scale a sheer wall, use acid to burn through window bars, and then set up a rope rig to pull the rest of the party up. As another example, perhaps wading through a muck-filled sewer, crawling through cramped and grimy tunnels, and climbing up a well in the courtyard is the way in. These examples would likely be scenes in and of themselves, requiring skill checks and coordination. Yet, not every entry point needs to be an exercise in acrobatics and nose-holding; sometimes it is possible to make your adversary bring you inside. Hiding in a large soma shipment is a great way to infiltrate a city, while being thrown into a dungeon is a great way to infiltrate that dungeon. Getting invited to an event, or masquerading as someone who was invited (and is now tied up somewhere), are great ways to infiltrate a courtly affair.

Exit strategies

Lastly, there is the exit strategy: the plans and means by which the characters will extract themselves once the primary goal is achieved, or once the infiltration has become a dangerous failure. A seamlessly executed infiltration is all for naught if the characters haven't planned how they are getting out. The most straightforward way to get out is to leave the same way you came in, but GMs are encouraged to have events conspire to make entry points a one-way ticket, and assure players this is a very real possibility. Further, exit strategies may have contingencies: happy-path (where the primary goal is achieved), sad-path (where everything that could go wrong has gone wrong), split-up (where each individual escapes in their own special way and meets up later), or together (where the party leaves together, no man left behind). It should be noted that "rules of engagement" are still paramount during an exit strategy, and will likely become even harder to adhere to if the infiltration has degenerated into failure. "Killing our way out" might be a viable exit strategy, but very well might be anathema to the established rules of engagement.



BREACH

Breach is infiltration's violent and sudden cousin, and therefore deserves a violent and sudden explanation. A breach is a choreographed action where all members of a party act in a nearly synchronous manner to enter a place and solve a problem very quickly. A breach might be appropriate to save a hostage at knifepoint, assassinate a mark before he can call out for help, or storm opposing forces who are the other side of a door and waiting for the party.

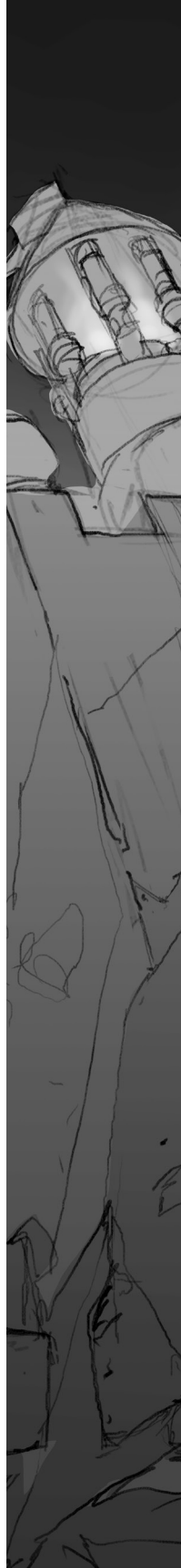
A breach typically involves removing an obstacle (e.g. blowing up a lock, kicking down a door, smashing through a window), removing threats (e.g. throwing a bomb, hurling a kill ball, or rushing a specific target), and preventing lingering problems (e.g. cries for help, shardcasts, hostage deaths, or escaping marks). Players about to carry out a breach should decide who is responsible for which actions, and the specific order in which they must occur (e.g. "I blow up the lock, you kick down the door, he runs in and tackles the hostage to cover, and she will hurl a kill ball at the assailants"). When the breach is executed, it is resolved like a turn of combat.

For a breach to work, the plan must be communicated to everyone in the party: whispered to one another, gestured to one another, or communicated secretly over a shardnet. If characters are not careful about protecting both their intent to breach as well as the means by which they breach, they face a number of potential problems, not the least of which is a pre-emptive breach waged against them first.

INVESTIGATION

Even a perfectly executed infiltration can result in lingering problems once the impacted organization realizes a security incident occurred. Players should keep in mind what type of footprint they leave behind (literally and figuratively) when executing an infiltration. Also, player characters may be tasked with investigating actions taken against their patron. Below is a list of investigative actions that a security force might take after the fact:

- Interview all authorized personnel who were on site to determine if they either witnessed anything out of the ordinary or were complicit with the offending party. Interviews can escalate into interrogations, potentially augmented by the Mind Read spell.
- Inspect all physical controls for signs of tampering or trespass, and look for physical evidence that someone was present, such as footprints. Doorways, windows, and locks are inspected for signs of forced entry or tool use. This type of inspection can be augmented by the Astral Eyes spell.
- Inventory missing or misplaced items to determine what, if anything, the attackers were after. Unique items that may have been handled by attackers, or items dropped by the attackers, can be evaluated with the Psychometry spell to glean more information.
- Look externally for signs of research and reconnaissance leading up to the attacker's operation and determine who has been asking questions, around town or on the Shardscape, about the attacked organization's defenses.
- Review all shardnet communications and cryptovault registry logs for signs of malicious activity. Failed authentication attempts, encrypted echoes that cannot be accounted for, and unusual or untimely communications might be signs of shardnet exploitation.



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ADVENTURING IN
CRYPTOMANCER



OVERVIEW

The realms of Sylvetica, Subterra, and Sphere should not be thought of in a standard geographic way, separated by borders on a two-dimension map. They interact, intertwine, overlap, and collide in numerous ways, and it is not always clear where one realm ends and the next begins. Maps and borders are not suited to tell the story of the complex web of alliances, markets, relationships, and infrastructure connecting virtually every node in the larger network. This section, however, will attempt to do so, while introducing locales and environments that will serve as the backdrop to Cryptomancer campaigns. Throughout this section, there will also be lists that summarize the adventure hooks articulated along the way, to give GMs instant inspiration for their sessions.

SUBTERRA

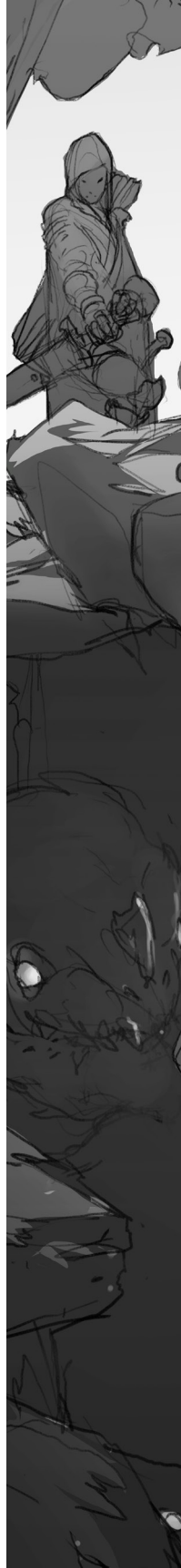
The natural tunnels and artificial catacombs of Subterra connect dwarven clanhalls, but also connect to the human controlled mines and sewers of Sphere and the flooded grottoes and forgotten valleys of Sylvetica. Some of these pathways are flat, heavily traveled, and wide enough for wagons and beast transport, and are easily the fastest method of traveling from point A to point B. Some even feature dwarven railworks that provide personnel transport and the shipment of goods to surface regions, not to mention support dwarven mining operations and clanhall defense. However, most of these pathways are truly harrowing and unforgiving landscapes underground. Travel is often vertical and death-defying, requiring considerable climbing expertise or considerable faith in ancient dwarven infrastructure. Lava, flooding, cave-ins, and geothermal eruptions are commonly the death of unprepared interlopers. The basics of light, food, potable water, and oxygen are sometimes rare commodities, and those places containing these resources in abundance are more often than not the den of orcs or

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Subterranean monstrosities. There are some truly stunning and serene places in Subterra, however, including glowing lakes, cliff-side grottoes privy to daylight, massive caverns where gem deposits sparkle like constellations, and forgotten ruins carved out by lost civilizations predating even the dwarves.

Adventure Hooks

- Purging pathways of bandits, orcs, creatures, or factions either hurting commerce, maintaining a blockade, or simply starving out a clanhall before mounting an invasion.
- Investigating who in a clanhall has been leaking secrets and keyphrases to a rival clanhall, and then deciding whether to help them or turn them in.
- Taking a dangerous short cut in order to arrive at a distant locale fast enough to perform a time-sensitive task or prevent something from occurring.
- Infiltrating a clanhall to steal schematics, sabotage a golem or codebreaker engine, or assassinate a prominent dwarven leader.
- Traversing exotic obstacles and battling/outwitting rival prospectors to discover an artifact or mineral deposit allegedly buried in a forgotten and forbidden place.
- Partaking in a shadowy guerrilla war between dwarven cloaks of clanhalls disputing over a shard mine or simply settling a grudge between moguls.
- Building and maintaining a frontier town in a desolate region of Subterra and dealing with ancient evils that were accidentally disturbed from their slumber.
- Attending a dwarven gala as a means of bypassing the otherwise impenetrable security of a dwarven estate, to plant damning evidence in the host's quarters.



SYLVETICA

Anything on the surface that isn't a sprawling human development or a mountain scape is likely to be under the canopy of the Sylvetica's prehistoric forests. It always seems like nighttime under Sylvetica's high and thick canopy blotting out the sun, and the constant hum of wildlife and insects drowns out most noise. Paved roads, checkpoints, and campgrounds between human settlements are in constant disrepair, not from overuse, but by virtue of the forest flora either smothering or uprooting under any semblance of architecture. Further, these paths are often exceedingly long, winding around mountains, through valleys, and along rivers and lakesides. This is because the direct route to any location is suffocated by impossibly dense and often hostile forest. Only skilled and well-supplied pathfinders can lead parties through this sea of razor grass, strangling vines, latticed tree roots, and erratic topology. Rope bridges spiderweb throughout the forest, offering faster travel. These bridges are typically just under the canopy and connect elven enclaves, but only the elves truly trust these fragile constructs to protect them from a deadly drop to the forest floor. While wildlife and plant life are sparse in Subterra, they are positively suffocating in Sylvetica, and all mortals are quickly reminded of their place on the food chain when entering this place. Like Subterra, Sylvetica is home to many wondrous sights: cascading waterfalls, lush valleys, haunting groves, and ancient trees that tower above the canopy and provide views of the larger landscape for dozens of miles.

Adventure Hooks

- Tracking a legendary man-eating creature to its lair, either for sport, to harvest a needed medicinal reagent, or to stop its reign of terror.
- Defending a lacuna tree village from hostile annexation, facing gigaphid cavalry, mercenary armies, dwarven cloaks, a pride of gnolls, or all of the above.

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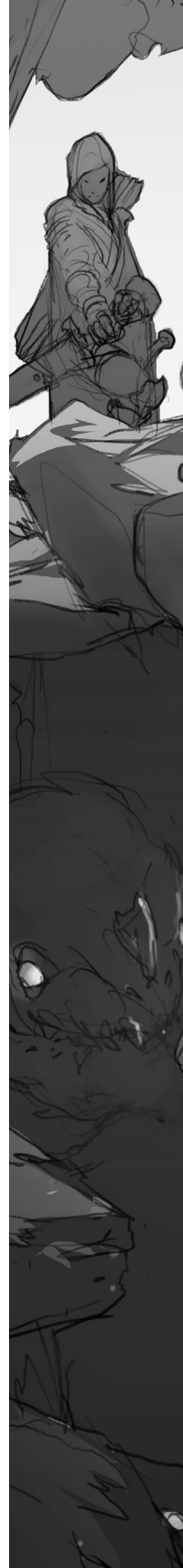
- Convincing a tribe speaker to abandon her support for an opposing cause, either through blackmail, sabotage, or turning her advisors against her.
- Uniting the elven tribes and human villages surrounding a city-state to help rebels within oust a brutal dictator.
- Pathfinding from point A to point B, escorting a mad and rich archaeologist searching for a lost civilization home to wealth beyond measure.
- Hunting a fugitive who has fled to a sacred grove and preventing her from angering and unleashing the grove's powerful guardians.
- Solving a murder that took place on Elysian grounds to prevent an important tribal alliance from fracturing further.

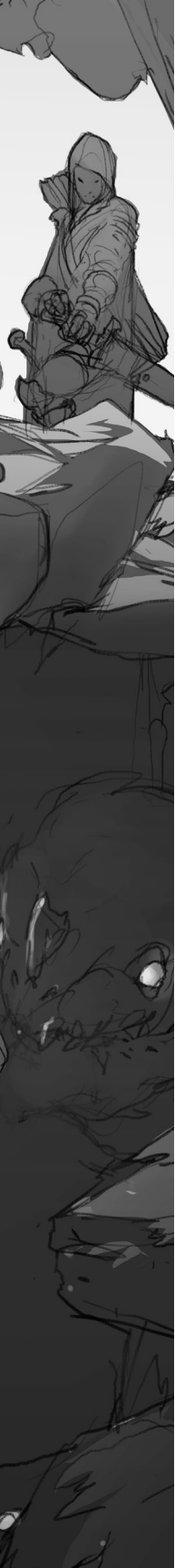
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SPHERE

Lastly, there is Sphere, the patchwork of human settlements dotting the vast forests of Sylvetica. All human settlements, save for those situated in the mountains, have huge walls erected around them to keep the ever encroaching forest at bay. Massive stone walls, some stretching for miles, are not unheard of, but most walls are log palisades that seem to creak and shudder while barely holding back the plant life steadily throwing itself against them. Within the walls, settlements vary greatly. In some, massive palaces towering above the forest canopy are surrounded by noble estates and tenement slums nearly as large. Some of these settlements are one large ziggurat, a hive inspired by dwarven architecture, only above ground. Others still seem to be carved from the forest and sewn into the landscape, like an elven enclave with more open space and artifice. Both within and without the city walls, forests have been leveled into farmland and pasture, and those who toil defending these lands from nature and invasion equal those who toil in the

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fields. Deep core mining operations scour the landscape and blot the sky with smoke and soot. While Sphere is markedly absent of the dangerous wildlife and treacherous environments of the other realms, it is neither a safe nor pleasant experience for most. Crime is rampant, hysteria and sickness break out at a regular cadence, and crumbling infrastructure threatens to bury, drown, or poison the masses. Despite this, human settlements remain centers of regional intrigue, essential hubs of commerce, and rallying points for all the races when existential threats arise.

Adventure Hooks

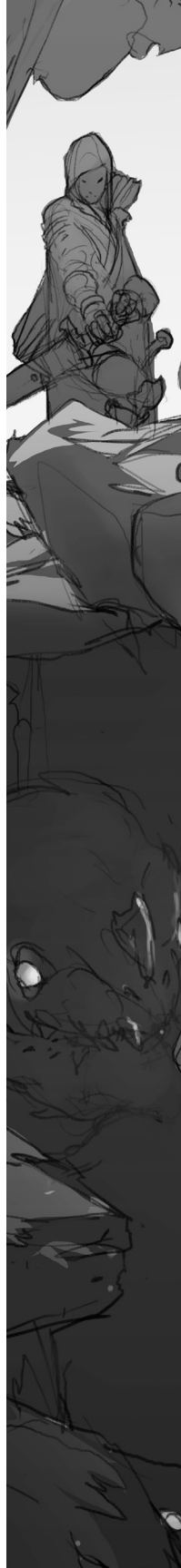
- Earning the favor of a powerful merchant benefactor by helping her crush her rivals through intimidation or espionage.
- Helping authorities quell a violent and bloody struggle between soma kingpins that is spilling into the streets.
- Influencing regional policy by out-scheming, out-plotting, and out-maneuvering rivals in noble court.
- Uncovering the group responsible for a series of abductions, murders, and ritual sacrifices that is causing the local population to turn on itself.
- Ensuring the success of an important infrastructure project by discovering who is behind a recent series of sabotage attempts.
- Liberating an important prisoner from a chaotic city under siege by orcs or an elven air raid.
- Choosing sides in a territory war between an expanding human settlement needing farmland and an expanding elven tribe needing lacuna trees.

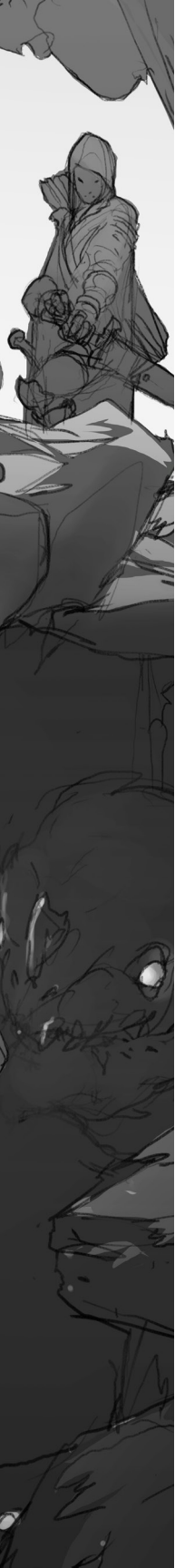
ECONOMICS

The three realms are deeply interconnected through commerce, regardless of wars, disasters, or political tensions that strain relationships between the noble races. Human, elven, and dwarven kingdoms only war over truly serious matters, and even then, contain their aggression enough to ensure that markets and economic stratification remain relatively stable. This section elaborates on the economic interconnectedness of the realms.

Soma, the ambrosia of Sylvetica, is the most important consumer commodity in history. None of the races can get enough of soma or its byproducts (e.g. liquor, spices, salves, elixirs, and narcotics). An entire generation of elves have transformed their society to facilitate the production, refinement, and distribution of this commodity, while both human and dwarven societies have evolved diverse markets, services, and schemes to trade, peddle, and consume it. Elven prospectors expand their lacuna tree networks, often by force, while experimenting with human and dwarven industrial patterns to out-produce their competition. They move soma in bulk either through traditional caravans (escorted by mercenaries) or by flying smaller shipments into settlements via gigaphid. Meanwhile, human and dwarven merchants squabble over incoming soma shipments and corner consumer markets through honest competition, guild intimidation, or noble writ. Soma salves, spices, elixirs, and miracle cures are quite popular, and while this market is rife with scams, it is considerable less ruthless than other soma markets. Soma distilleries in all realms spend fortunes protecting their recipes from theft and their facilities from sabotage. Soma narcotics dealers, with clientele ranging from all walks of life, battle one another either in the street with blades or in noble court with barbs. And of course, nearly every aspect of the soma economy, from production to distribution to sales, is coordinated, negotiated, and settled in the Shardscape.

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Shards are simultaneously the backbone of the modern economy as well as a highly sought after commodity. Shards come from heavily fortified dwarven mines. Neither the elves nor the humans have been able to seize a shardmine for their own purposes, though attempts have been made. Natural shards are typically enormous, ranging from the size of a melon to the size of a cart and horse. The smaller specimens can be broken into maybe 4-6 shards, while the larger ones can be broken into hundreds of shards. The expert cutting of shards is another component of the shard economy that the dwarves enjoy a monopoly on. Shardnets are exorbitantly expensive. Outside of dwarven clanhalls where they are relatively common, only the rich and powerful can afford a shardnet. Humans and elves alike acquire shards and use them to support business, politics, and warfare. Nobles buy them for their family members and retainers, merchants buy them for production leads and caravans, generals buy them for their lieutenants and assassins, and all three groups buy them for their elaborate spy networks. Those without means must rely exclusively on the public Shardnet, with all of its strictures and limitations, the worst of which is standing in line in public squares, waiting for one's turn.

The dwarves are also the architects of the much of the machinery and infrastructure keeping modern economies alive. From railworks to steam-powered production facilities, the mass production and mass distribution of all modern goods is facilitated by dwarven engineering. Humans rely on dwarven engineering for massive residential projects and wall fortification, while elves rely on the same to modernize lacuna trees into full blown factories. Much of this infrastructure is designed and manufactured in dwarven clanhalls, composed of rare earth and ore that few human mines delve deep enough to harvest, and transported to surface piecemeal. Some dwarves have taken these production capabilities to the surface, though few moguls will suffer entrepreneurs diverting wealth away from the clanhalls for long. Dwarves are also the premier artisans, jewelers, and rare-earth sellers of the realms. Humans, and nobility in particular, pay handsomely for the finest dwarven works and

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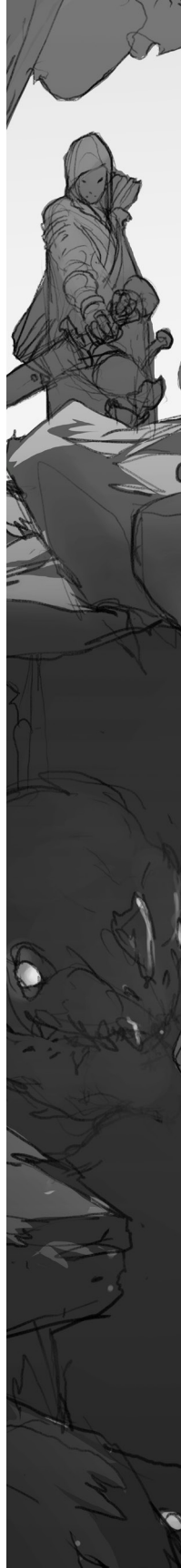
latest dwarven fashions. However, even the elves purchase dwarven gems, ore, and technology in growing quantities as their industrial capabilities continue to evolve.

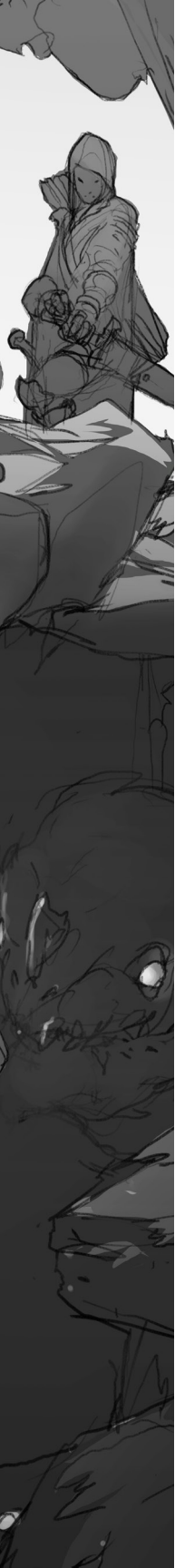
Labor and war are humanity's greatest exports. All three of the races are constantly designing and constructing great industrial projects. Windmills, dams, waterwheels, steam plants, cryptovaults, aqueducts, palisades, tenement buildings, palaces, monuments, soma refineries, and production facilities are just a sample of the massive works each of the races are typically in the process of building. This work is extremely difficult and dangerous, and only humanity seems to have the willingness to toil and the tolerance for accidental death or dismemberment that is needed for these projects to reach fruition. Traditional labor, such as mining and large-scale farming, are the bedrocks of society and require massive workforces, but are also tasks that the dwarves and elves seem to have little willingness to do themselves. In all societies, humans of all shapes, sizes, ages, and genders typically fill these roles, and sometimes even fight over the opportunity to do via trade guilds and gangs. Lastly, those with strength and courage often serve as soldiers, enforcers, bodyguards, or mercenaries to escape the drudgery of manual labor or banal servitude. This is often a short and brutal lifestyle, never at all as glamorous as it seems in poem and song. Those who survive, however, have the chance of rising from their station, however remote. Further, humanity's willingness to fight and die en masse makes them the only group capable of confronting and defeating an orcs invasion with conventional warfare.

Adventure Hooks

- Posing as simple laborers to gain access to facilities, perform reconnaissance, and spy on adversaries.
- Weakening a rival's soma wealth by infiltrating a lacuna tree to poison a production gigaphid, steal secret recipes, or taint goods before they are sent to market.
- Negotiating aggressive taxes and tariffs to influence re-

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gional power structures, or lower taxes and tariffs to diminish the coffers of antagonistic rulers.

- Protecting a workshop reverse-engineering dwarven technology from dwarven cloaks hoping to preserve their monopoly through assassination or sabotage.

/ROOT/ADVENTURING IN CRYPTOMANCER/

SOCIAL GROUPS

The goal of this section is to elaborate on the different types of networks an individual actor might be part of. There are two reasons for this section. First, we want to assist GMs and players in making three-dimensional characters, with complex and sometimes conflicting loyalties. Second, enumerating and exploiting interests and social ties is how to hack people. Will you appeal to the dwarven merchant's business interest, his loyalty to the kingdom, his concern for fellow dwarves, or to the tenets of the religion he espouses? It all depends of which of these factors are the most compelling to him under the circumstances.

The loyalties of any mortal are never black and white, but best described as matrix of geographical, economic, factional, and racial interests. Depending on the situation, these interests will wax and wane, and drive the motivation of actors. Networks are built upon interest. While an actor may live in and have loyalty to a specific kingdom, they might also be tied to economic, religious, or racial networks that span entire regions. This is primarily because the Shardscape and the town board facilitate long range and secret communication for all mortals in the realms. Many people frequently sympathize with and feel part of factions and movements thousands of miles away, and sometimes feel more connected with those groups than local groups.

Geographical interest is most easily described as loyalty to one's village, clanhall, or city-state. When this place is threatened either blatantly (e.g. invasion) or latently (e.g. constraints imposed by regional politics), most actors will sympathize with their home location and come to its

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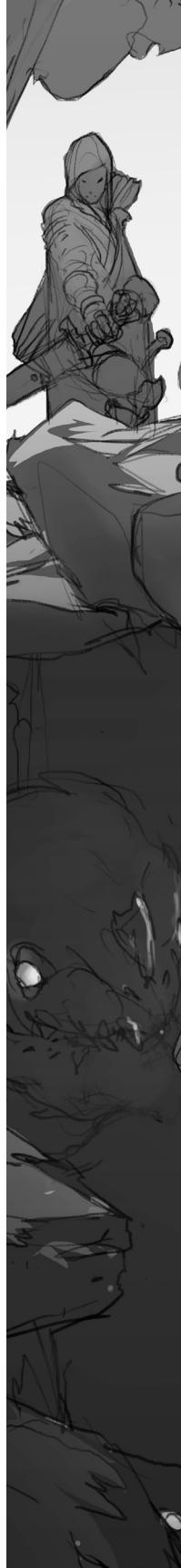
defense. Generally speaking, this interest manifests as loyalty to regional leaders, regents, and local authorities, as well as admiration of political symbols, uniformed soldiers, and distinct political borders. Given that most locations are very metropolitan and full of immigrants, not everyone prioritizes this interest, and in fact, many might act against it. This is particularly the case in locales where racism, severe economic inequity, or a brutal regime is prevalent.

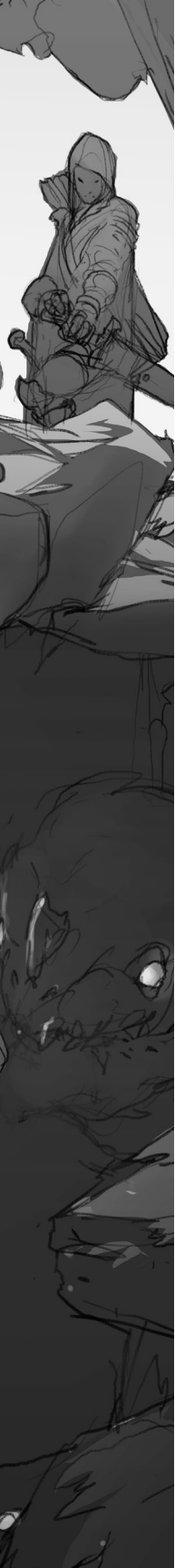
Economic interest can be described as loyalty to one's industry or employer. Competition in all markets is extremely fierce. Few merchants are above skulduggery or violence against those who threaten their wealth or market share. Yet, even competitors can and do come together when politics, war, or regional events threaten entire markets. High taxes or other constraints on mining, shard communication, soma production, and labor typically provoke severe backlash against authorities, up to and including armed rebellion. However, things rarely get this intense, for most economically-driven actors are always in the process of infiltrating politics and influencing political leaders through bribes and favors.

Factional interest can be described as loyalty to an informal group, cult, cabal, or family that is dedicated to a particular cause. This is the most varied interest category, as it can manifest in a wide range of options: secret cults partaking in taboo rituals, disenfranchised groups plotting coups and rebellions, noble bloodlines ensuring that they maintain power throughout the generations, or religious orders either evangelizing, hoarding wealth, or launching inquisitions. Factional interests are usually the most discreet but most severe interests, and typically dictate an actor's secret, private, or "night time" activity.

Lastly, there is racial interest, which is loyalty to one's race: human, dwarf, or elf. This somewhat complicated interest usually only manifests when events force the topic to prominence. Settlements in all three realms always have minority populations with a "we need to stick together" mentality that transcends other interests, especially when

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the host population is hostile or racist. Despite the intermingling of the three races, there are frequent human-only, dwarf-only, and elf-only summits where one race discusses the maneuvering and transgressions of the other races, and appeals for racial (and frequently racist) solidarity are championed. Though it has never occurred in history, a great and final war between humanity, dwarven-kind, and elven-kind, leading to only one surviving race, is often alluded to. This rhetoric may be backwards but it is also compelling, and typically bubbles up during political summits and finds its way into historical literature. It has also been used to push desperate populations on the brink (via plague or war) into carrying out purges and atrocities.

Adventure Hooks

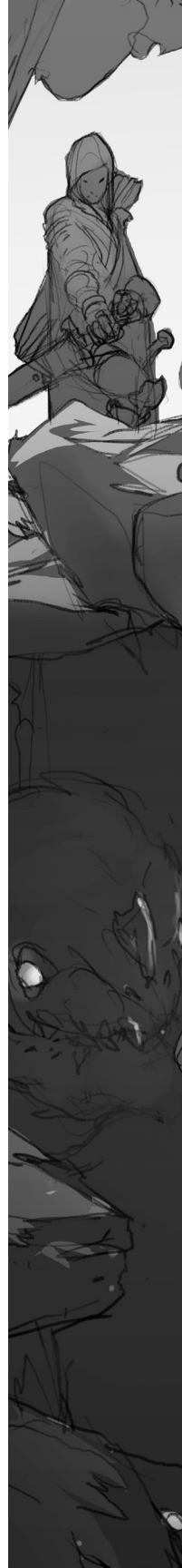
- Spying for a distant kingdom and providing intelligence on leader psychology, troop strength, city defenses, and ways to circumvent those defenses.
- Preventing race-fueled violence from shattering the morale and efficacy of a rag-tag band of citizens defending a city from an invading force.
- Joining a cult suspected of providing cover for Risk Eater agents, and doing whatever it takes, despite how dangerous or unsavory, to be accepted into the inner circle.
- Exposing a powerful leader who has been selling out virtually everyone and everything to line her own pockets.

THE UNDEFINED

We have left much about Sphere, the world of Cryptomancer, undefined. We have only specified factions at the highest and most generic level (i.e. the races) and have not discussed important individuals either living or dead. We have provided the most generic of historical timelines (i.e. Mythic Age versus Modern Age). We have skipped out on other exotic environments that fit the genre, be they endless tundras, sun-scorched barrens, or dimensions that might exist beyond the physical world. We have alluded to religions and cults, but have not called out specific deities. This ambiguity was a design choice.

We don't insist on a Cryptomancer *canon*. We have endeavored to provide just enough setting to demonstrate how a somewhat standard fantasy world can be tweaked to support the hacking and fantasy-espionage themes of Cryptomancer. We are convinced that the Shardscape, or something like it, can be bolted onto nearly any fantasy game setting. Here's hoping we begin to see more network and security concepts propagate throughout the role-playing genre.

That being said, we're not totally done with the world of Sphere. Later in the book there is a full adventure and campaign starter, "Silent War for Thronehouse," about a specific city-state in the middle of an important election. People and factions are named. Local geography and noteworthy places are defined. An intricate web of political, economic, and familial relationships is presented. Much of the setting materials alluded to in this chapter and earlier chapters is referenced and/or reinforced. GMs can feel free to acknowledge this city-state in their own game setting, or ignore it entirely. We won't mind.



/ROOT/ADVENTURING IN CRYPTOMANCER/CD ..
/ROOT/CD THREATS
/ROOT/THREATS/LS

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THREATS



AN APPROACH TO BAD GUYS

Threats are the player characters' adversaries. They are dangerous monsters or evil antagonists that stand between characters and their goals. They are the type of thing you'll typically see in a game bestiary: a collection of monsters and enemies, all with their own strengths and weaknesses articulated in flavor text and stat blocks. For this game, however, all one needs to know is if a threat is trivial, challenging, or tough.

Trivial threats

Trivial threats are relatively weak creatures or characters that rarely pose a significant threat on their own. In terms of game mechanics, trivial threats can be summarized as follows:

- All core ranks are 4 (trivial).
- All attribute ranks are 2.
- Incapacitated by either two wounds of any kind, or a single critical or mortal wound.

Challenging threats

Challenging threats are creatures or characters of average strength and ability, and the threat they pose to characters depends on whether or not they have the advantage. In terms of game mechanics, challenging threats can be summarized as follows:

- All core ranks are 6 (challenging).
- All attribute ranks are 3.
- Incapacitated by either three wounds of any kind, two critical wounds, or a single mortal wound. Will never act and move when critically wounded.

Tough threats

Tough threats are creatures or characters that are, at

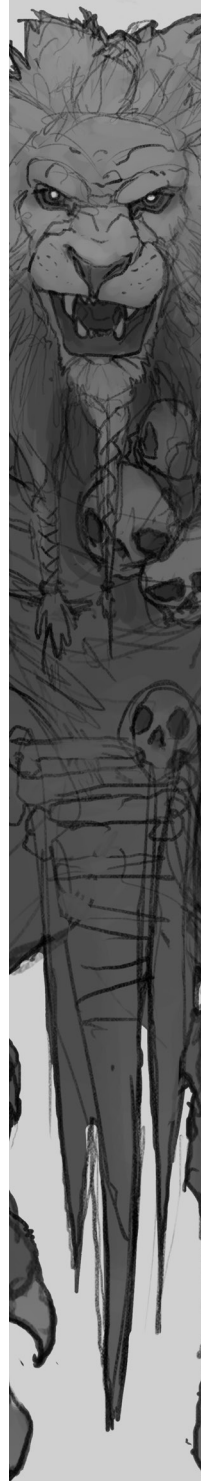
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their weakest, stronger than any individual player character, and at their strongest, significantly stronger than the entire party on their best day. In terms of game mechanics, tough threats can be summarized as follows:

- All core ranks are 8 (tough).
- All attribute ranks are 4.
- Lots of HP, tracked just like a player character's HP.

That's it. GMs can just pick the appropriate threat level and keep prep and bookkeeping to a minimum. Of course, they can pepper in specific tactical details as they see fit. Does the threat spit acid, cast spells, or swing a claymore? Does it wear armor or carry a shield? Does some type of cool special effect occur if it succeeds dramatically at a skill check or strikes a mortal wound? As a GM becomes more comfortable with the game's rules and the specific effects of weapons, armor, items, and spells, she can add this type of granularity to scenes of action and combat. She can also keep things super simple and only leverage the threat rules we've defined in this chapter. Whatever works best for the table and campaign is the way to go.

We've provided some examples of threats that are fairly common to the world of Cryptomancer and emphasize story hooks over stats. Monsters and adversaries themselves are never as interesting as the situations and context in which heroes must fight them. It's not the orc that's interesting, it's the fact that there are a million of them. It's not the zombie that's interesting, it's the fact that one of the party has been bitten by one. We encourage GMs to think very critically about the context and situations in which they present threats. We also fully encourage players and GMs to not only build their own threats, but also shamelessly steal them from movies, fiction, and the many awesome bestiary books that exist for other settings and just plug them into Cryptomancer as a trivial, challenging, or tough threat.



ORCS (TRIVIAL)

Orcs are a sentient Subterranean race of half-ape, half-lizard brutes that terrorize humans, elves, and dwarves according to a calendar no one has figured out yet. They tend to be larger in build than humans, but slightly hunched over and possessing pointed ears, beady black eyes, and huge under-bites bristling with teeth. The violence, simplicity, and apocalyptic fervor of orcs is primarily informed by their lifecycle: they are born in litters of 6-8, reach full physical and mental maturity in approximately 2 years, and have a lifespan of approximately one decade. Life is cheap for the orcs, so they embrace gluttony, hedonism, and conquest as if each day was their last. The simple orc belief system, espoused by their shamans, reinforces this. The only way to be reborn and live longer is to gorge on food and drink, hoard the wealth of enemies, and die at the hands of a stronger foe. Orcs who don't follow this mandate are shamed and cajoled into frenzy by their fellow broodkin, who are authentically concerned for the afterlife of these deviants.

Orcish clans spend most of their time battling one another, sieging dwarven clanhalls, engaging in surface banditry, and waiting for The Calling: that unseen, unheard, but fully acknowledged omen that it is time to conquer the world. Once The Calling is heard, the orcish clans come together, spend a few years breeding and training vast legions at an exponential rate, and then hurl their collective might against virtually everything in the three realms simultaneously. Mythic legend indicates that The Calling has led to the extinction of more than one sentient race. Orcs do not record history, but the other races who do are keenly aware that each Calling generates a force larger, smarter, and more vicious than the last. This reality has led to disturbing rumors of organizations experimenting on orcish physiology and working towards creating an alchemical solution to the orc problem. If such experiments are occurring, it is very likely that mortals are toying with forces too powerful and terrible to contain.

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GMs running orcs should keep one simple fact in mind: they never stop coming. Ever. They simply won't let up, and though characters will occasionally have to make a stand against them, it should be to facilitate a blocking action to buy time for retreat: closing a gate, burning down a bridge, or collapsing a tunnel. But that just slows the orcs down. Something dramatic needs to happen for orcs to truly stop: the cavalry arrives, a natural disaster strikes, or a more interesting target makes itself known.

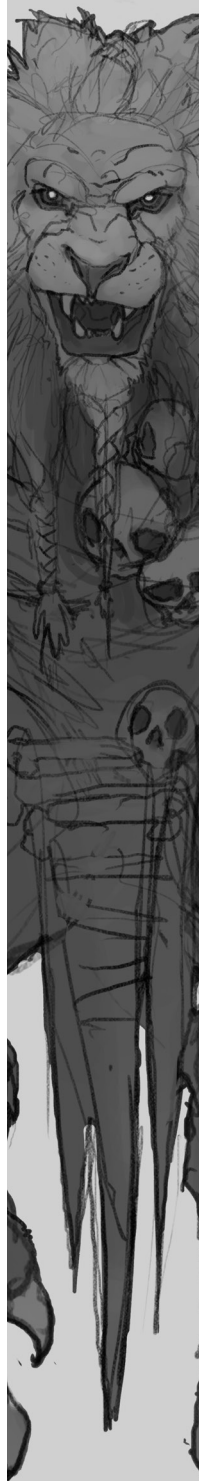
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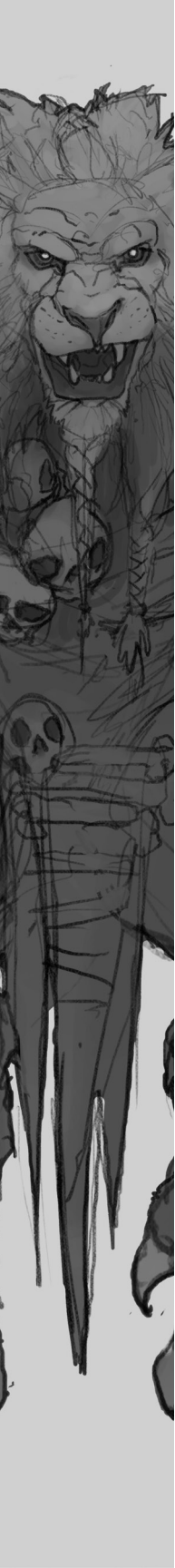
GIANT VERMIN (TRIVIAL)

While many mortals have an irrational fear of bugs, all mortals have a perfectly rational fear of giant vermin: mutant spiders, ticks, centipedes, and carrion-eating creepy crawlies as big as cats and dogs. Giant vermin are predatory and awful creatures that make their home in abandoned and remote places, primarily because when they are found in civilization, they are summarily destroyed with fire and extreme prejudice. Most mortals would rather demolish an infested habitat before even considering purging it by manual means. To be fair, giant vermin have earned the genocidal wrath they provoke. These creatures are considerably more clever, conniving, and vindictive than their smaller cousins, and have demonstrated an appetite for smaller and slower-moving humans, dwarves, and elves alike. They sometimes construct webs and sinkholes big enough to trap men, and sometimes drop down from great heights or burst from cadavers. Those who are attacked by giant vermin are sometimes paralyzed by fear and sometimes paralyzed by poisonous bite before being swarmed and slowly devoured. By all accounts, it seems like one of the worst possible ways to go, and something that is not even wished on one's worse enemies. It is not unheard of for warring combatants to cease all hostilities in order to instead kill every bug in sight.

GMs running giant vermin should use them as a device to generate feelings of foreboding, animal fear, and utter chaos. When giant vermin does land a mortal wound on a target, the target should become paralyzed. This possi-

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bility, however unlikely, should still be enough to instill intense fear in players and likely compel them to flee outright or fly into a murderous, bug-killing rage. Further, GMs might want to play up the nightmarish things that giant bugs do, but it is imperative to check in with the players before such a session to establish their sensitivity to the topic. Making players uncomfortable or giving them nightmares is not cool. In fact, we encourage readers sensitive to gross-out bug stuff to skip the italicized portion of this paragraph.

GMs wishing to capitalize on bug-discomfort might play up frantic skittering sounds of approaching bugs, blood-drained cadaver-husks stuck in webs, giant blood-engorged ticks hanging from emaciated animals, giant larvae writhing underneath the flesh of a cadaver or bursting out of it when a player approaches, or giant vermin slowly crawling out of food. Seriously, be a good GM and check with your players first.

/ROOT/THREATS/

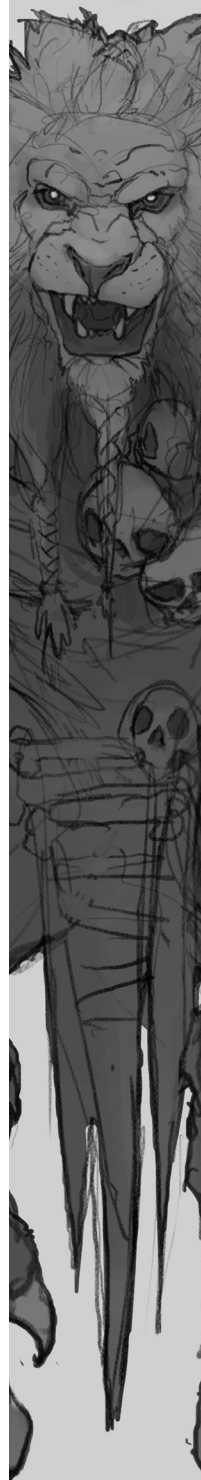
ZOMBIES (CHALLENGING)

Zombies are the mindless and hungry animated dead. Walking corpses in various states of decay, zombies will stay active as long as a brainstem is intact and there is enough meat left on the skeleton to propel the body forward. They hiss and groan and lurch their way towards the still living, clawing, biting at, and eating their victims until they die and join the ranks of the undead. When a zombie lands a mortal wound, it bites its victim. Those who are bitten by a zombie grow progressively more ill by the hour, becoming incapacitated after 6 hours, and dying after 12 hours, only to rise as a zombie. There are cases where some have survived this ordeal, but not without a heavy cost. Those who know of a bite-victim's experience know that she will one day die, either through violence, accident, or natural causes, and rise again as a zombie. Banishment, branding, or summary execution are unfortunately common ways for people to manage this fear - when they know about it. The greatest fear of many leaders is that their enemies are vile or desperate enough to plant one of these ticking time bombs in their midst.

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No one knows where zombies came from or how outbreaks start. While zombie outbreaks have always been shocking and horrific, they have typically been local events, and have rarely developed into regional epidemics, primarily because the voracious carrion-eating vermin of the forest make quick work of any walking corpse that ventures outside of civilization. However, as travel and trade become more pervasive via railworks, underground highways, Sylvetic rope bridges, and gigaphid flight, the threat of zombie pandemic is becoming more real. Further, the Shardscape only adds to the horror and hysteria, as settlements near a zombie breakout receive the desperate pleas for help from their neighbors. The panic will continue to spread, until all the industry and commerce of a region has come to a standstill while mortals hoard goods, blockade doors, and prepare for an apocalypse that might never actually stumble into town.

GMs running zombies should do so in populated and preferably confined places. The drama should never be about defeating the zombies so much as staying alive, and frequently about keeping others alive too. The fear and hysteria of a zombie outbreak should cause political, factional, and racial differences to reach a boiling point and manifest in behavior threatening to the survival of the group. The fate of bitten actors should be hotly debated. Weak-willed player characters should act cowardly in the moment of truth, but if that doesn't seem fun or fair to the players, think of ways to tempt players (not their characters) into bad choices. For example, tempt them with treasure, opportunity, or easy solutions, and rejoice when you hear things like "Just a few more turns and I'll be able to pop this chest open!" or "We really ought to split up the group!" or "I'm going to kill this coward before he gets us all killed!" or "He's slowing us down... leave him!"



MERCENARIES (CHALLENGING)

Mercenaries are the discrete “work unit” of kingdoms, factions, and adversaries that need to solve certain problems (and problem people) but would rather spend coin than get their hands dirty or embroil themselves in the political or legal consequences of violence. Mercenaries are hired by all manner of faction, from nobility, to cults, to soma narcotics dealers, to Risk Eaters. They typically work in small to medium-sized warbands composed of a mix of races, not unlike the player party. A mercenary warband frequently serves in a defensive capacity as bodyguards, caravan escort, and security. Sometimes they embark on more direct actions, however, including assassination, bounty hunting, kidnapping, and supporting regular armies in military actions. Mercenaries are always armored and armed for combat, and supplied to carry out operations over long periods of time. Aside from being capable in combat, many of their ranks are frequently adept at all manner of subtlety and subterfuge, and will readily outflank and outmaneuver their rivals in social scenes if unable to compete on the battlefield.

The thing that makes mercenaries dangerous is the same thing that makes them sometimes more reasonable than other threats: they work for money. While death is certainly an occupational hazard, few mercenaries are truly willing to die for a job, and therefore are prone to surrendering against stronger rivals or striking bargains with rivals to avoid unnecessary and unprofitable confrontation. However, not all mercenaries have the luxury of being this sane, shrewd, or humane. Some work for powerful masters that do not tolerate failure or infidelity. Some work for masters who know their darkest secrets, or have made threats against their loved ones. Finally, some take their job so seriously that they would rather die than lose the reputation they have built up over their careers.

GMs running mercenaries should treat them as the player party’s mechanical equals. That means it’s all about vying for the initiative and the advantage. If a warband has

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launched an ambush, or has the high ground, or has the player party cornered, they will likely win any contest with the player party. Alternatively, if the warband is ambushed, out in the open, or cornered, they will likely lose any contest with the player party. A toe-to-toe contest will end badly for both sides. As such, most encounters with mercenaries should be games of stealthy and sometimes social cat-and-mouse, where both the warband and the party take turns being predator and prey. GMs should try to establish a sometimes playful and sometimes psychotically violent rivalry between the player party and the warband that manifests over several scenes and perhaps several sessions during the course of a campaign.

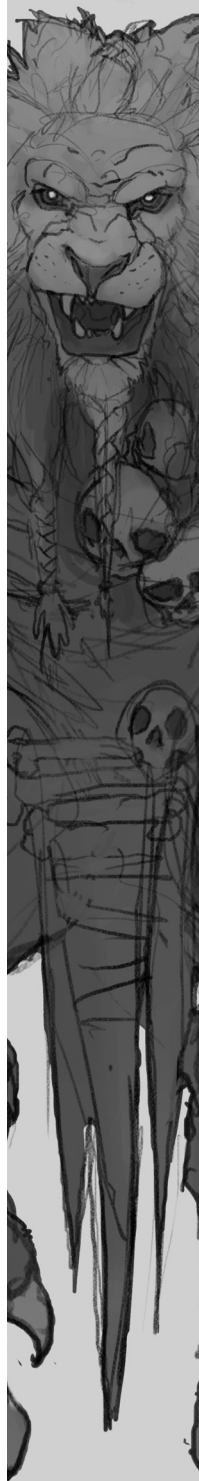
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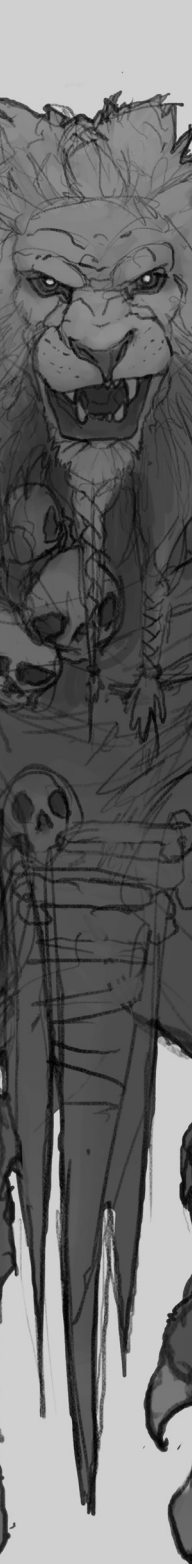
GNOLLS (TOUGH)

Gnolls are a sentient Sylvetic race of massive, 9 foot tall bipedal lions. They have enormous top-heavy builds, digitigrade legs, wild manes, and huge flesh-ripping claws and teeth. They typically wear makeshift plates of carapace armor and trophies of their most recent kills. Gnolls are nomadic hunter-killers than travel in prides of 4-6. Gnolls earned their place at the top of the Sylvetic food chain by perfecting their hunting prowess slaying monster and mortal alike. They have deep contempt for all other species, which they do not distinguish between and merely consider prey. Aside from being fast and powerful combatants, gnolls are masters of psychological combat, bellowing ominous threats at bowel-shaking decibels, devouring their victims while they still live, and promising to spare those who would offer up others. They are a truly frightening foe and the mere suggestion of them makes most mortals shiver.

Gnolls live for the hunt and to battle worthy adversaries. Their acts of terror against the weak are not entirely driven by sadism, but intended to provoke a response from the mortal races' strongest and most courageous. Between months-long hunts deep in Sylvetica, they set upon a settlement and reign terror until they identify and destroy the strongest prey, or lose one or more of their own in combat.

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They are not vindictive regarding the death of their own, and instead see it as a sign that the pride must return to the forest and train harder. In combat, gnolls leap from shadows and rooftops onto their prey, and slash with razor sharp claws that slice through tree trunks and spark against stone. Gnolls are adept at alchemy, and employ fire, smoke, and poison gas to manage and escape from crowds of unworthy combatants.

GMs running gnolls should run them like bogeymen of horror movies: omnipotent, omnipresent, nigh-unkillable, but most of the time unseen. In fact, the gnolls of *Cryptomancer* were inspired by the human-hunting alien of a wildly popular 1987 science fiction film. Gnolls should terrorize, stalk, and threaten their prey for what seem like endless nights and days, and always make their presence uncomfortably and violently known when the players feel their most safe. More time should be spent building up the uncertainty and tension of when, where, and how the gnolls will strike their prey, than actual camera time battling them. Gnolls should play twisted mind games. For example, one might leave a severed head next to a guard that has fallen asleep, just to remind their prey of the futility of even trying to fight back. Another example might be declaring safe passage to anyone willing to kill another one of the survivors in hiding, and even making good on that deal, just to watch what happens. When a gnoll finally does strike, it should be a frantic scene of death and carnage.

/ROOT/THREATS/

DRAGONS (TOUGH)

Dragons are a race of gigantic sentient flying lizards with incredibly long lifespans. A mature dragon, from maw to tail's end, is approximately 60 yards long and weighs nearly as many tons. At any point throughout Mythic Age or Modern Age, between 2-3 of these juggernauts have soared the skies, perched on mountain tops, and obliterated settlements. A raiding dragon is like a force of nature. It throws its massive weight against the strongest of mortal-made structures and belches torrents of white hot flame

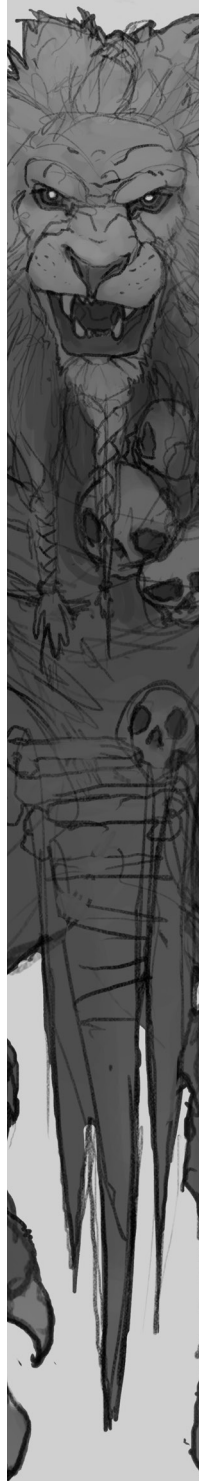
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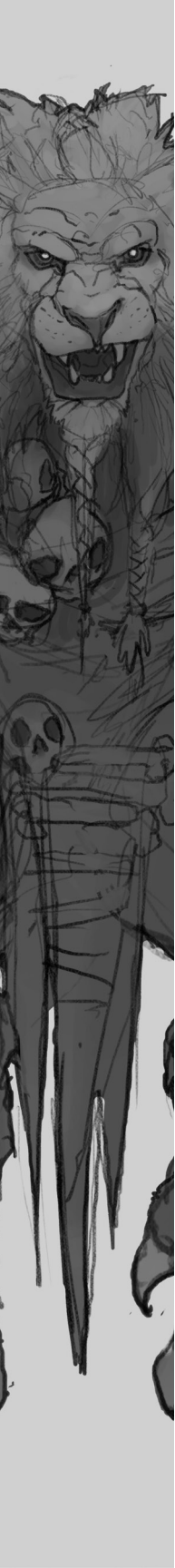
on anything it is not physically smashing. However, dragons are not inherently brutal or psychotic. Quite the opposite, dragons are brilliant, thanks to a massive brain and the wisdom that comes with being alive for millennia-long lifespans. In fact, the most common cause of a dragon raid is to alleviate the acute, nagging, centuries-long existential boredom that comes with a nearly eternal life span. In the modern era, dragon raids have been distinctly less frequent. The reason is simple: they aren't bored anymore.

With the advent of the Shardscape, dragons finally had a way to interact with humans, elves, and dwarves that didn't involve being a siege engine, despot, or demi-god. When a dragon isn't soaring through the skies, slumbering for decades, or gorging itself on an entire herd of cattle, it is lurking in the Shardscape. Even the Risk Eaters envy a dragon's cryptomantic prowess and its ability to consume the Shardscape's torrent of echoes. Dragons have lived long enough to read, think, hear, or utter almost anything a human, elf, and or dwarven might say, making it extremely challenging to generate a keyphrase that a dragon doesn't know. Further, they seem to have the ability to focus on multiple cryptomantic threads at a time, able to see the forest of echoes while most shardcasters struggle to see the trees. These gifts, coupled with dragonkind's newfound fascination with the smaller races makes them the ultimate lurker, meddler, and stalker of the Shardscape. The new games they play in the Shardscape are infinitely more entertaining to them than the raids of yore, and sometimes just as devastating. At the same time, the Shardscape has finally given dragons the ability to assume the role of a human, elf, or dwarf, and be as vulnerable as one. They can have a simple conversation with a peasant, for example, by masquerading as another peasant, something they could never do in the physical space as a 60 ton mythical beast.

GMs should run a dragon as one part Tokyo-destroying lizard and one part bodiless artificial intelligence in the Shardscape on a quest to somehow complete itself and assert a new identity. When dragons do lash out violently, it is often because of something that has happened

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to their Shardscape identities, or something terrible that has befallen the unwitting mortals they have developed a kinship with in the Shardscape. Though fighting a dragon is typically a campaign-ending suicide mission, they can be killed. However, it takes an army. A party fighting a dragon needs the support of several cells worth of strategic assets to fight alongside them to not be summarily stomped, crushed, devoured, or torched. Each turn, every cell that fails a tough task of fighting the dragon is obliterated by the dragon or is otherwise routed (“Run away!”). However, as long as one cell continues to stand and battle the dragon, the party can make attacks against it, while the dragon can only attack one player character per turn (doing 3 HP damage per success rolled). If these circumstances align, treat dragons as a tough threat with 40 HP and a thick, scaly hide that downgrades every attack by 2 HP. If and when no support cells remain, the dragon makes attacks against every member of the party each turn.

/ ROOT / THREATS /

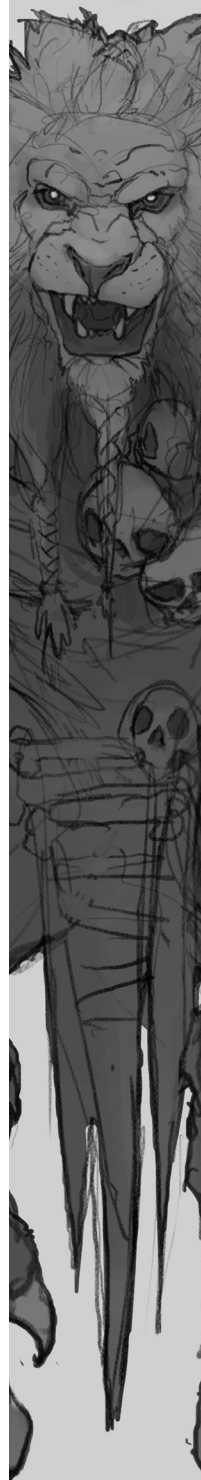
RISK EATERS (TOUGH)

Untold legions serve as spies, servants, assassins, and informants for the Risk Eaters, but the Risk Eaters themselves rarely show their face, and instead manipulate events behind concentric veils of secrecy and deception. When they do show their face, terrible things are bound to occur in short order. The Risk Eaters are the best and brightest men and women of the three noble races, all of them handpicked by the organization, often before they are even born. While they are the smartest, fastest, and strongest mortals alive, their true power lies in their belief of the Risk Eater mission. The individual Risk Eater is certain that she is acting for a benevolent cause that supersedes all mundane political, ethical, or moral interests: saving the world from the most powerful threats of a future history. Future tyrants and despots, future genocidal megalomaniacs, and future architects of mass destruction and mortal extinction. As long as a Risk Eater maintains faith in this mission, he or she will stop at nothing, and will do anything, to see it through.

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Risk Eaters operate in cells 4-6 strong. Each cell directs the politics and policy of a region from the shadows, only leaving their safe houses to rendezvous with their agents, informants, thralls, and victims. They are masters of cryptomancy and hide their safe houses in catacombs, caves, and alleyways rendered labyrinthine with the Maze spell. A Risk Eater is a rare and disturbing sight: they are mortals dressed in dark, sharply tailored, heavily fortified long coats and brandishing the cruelest of weapons. However, their most distinct features are their faces and voices. Risk Eaters always obscure their face with the Dissemble spell, making their heads an ever-shifting canvas of eyeballs and grinning mouths twisting around their skulls like zippers. They also always obscure their voices with the Babel spell, talking to each other in a deep-voiced guttural jargon, and cocking their heads mechanically as if they were bipedal mantises examining their prey.

GMs running Risk Eaters should run them as if they were actually not even real, but instead dark myths whose names ought not be uttered, and beings only ever seen by raving lunatics and charlatans. Most mortals should deny that the Risk Eaters even exist, and shame those who bring them up as conspiracists, agitators, or mad men. Risk Eaters should remain extremely cunning and elusive, and always operate through proxy. They are mortal, however, and therefore make mistakes and let base emotions like pride or jealousy blind them. Some even become curiously obsessed with those they are ordered to destroy, overcome by their quarry's importance to a terrible history that must be prevented. When the party does encounter a Risk Eater, it should be a pivotal moment in a campaign, unveiling profound secrets while simultaneously hinting at even deeper, darker secrets. A single Risk Eater is a legitimate threat to the party. However, when 2 or more Risk Eaters set their sights on the party, it is time for the party to run for their lives or prepare for a campaign-ending confrontation. In combat, an individual Risk Eater will go after the nearest or easiest to kill target and continue to attack even after incapacitation, to ensure her victim is beyond resuscitation. In short, Risk Eaters kill player characters dead, dead, dead.



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RUNNING CRYPTOMANCER



OVERVIEW

This section provides advice to GMs looking to run Cryptomancer sessions and campaigns. To summarize what the average Cryptomancer campaign looks like, in bullet points, here are the big items:

- The party is on the run from the Risk Eaters and serves a patron in exchange for protection.
- The patron needs the party to solve a strategic problem in return for protection and strategic assets.
- The Risk Eaters don't want that thing to succeed.

We'll elaborate more on these ideas going forward, but along the way, we will also discuss general advice on planning RPG sessions and campaigns. Much of this will not be unique to Cryptomancer, but applicable to the role-playing game genre at large.

BUILDING CAMPAIGNS

Campaigns are episodic stories played over the course of several sessions, centered around the party. The cast might shift subtly, as player characters die and are replaced, or players themselves leave and join the gaming group, but generally, the party is fairly consistent. Campaigns have somewhat concrete introductions and conclusions. A strategic problem is presented (e.g. "the blockade will starve the kingdom in one month") and it will take several successful operations to change this reality, or several failed operations to allow this fate to come to fruition. Either outcome sets the stage for a new campaign. The length of campaigns can vary from a few sessions to a few decades, but in Cryptomancer, we suggest campaigns between 4 and 6 sessions long. This is to keep the game's emphasis on strategic outcomes, as well as emphasize the idea that the real players in the world of

Cryptomancer aren't individual heroes, but instead are the fiefdoms and factions vying for power. It should be OK if players fail at a campaign's goal or even die in the process of trying to achieve certain outcomes. It merely sets the contours of the next campaign.

So what should a campaign be about? What should be the "strategic problem" that needs solving? Well, start with the concept that there are multiple factions vying for power. The factions might be two or more kingdoms that are next to each other, or two or more political groups within a single kingdom, or a complex mixture of both scenarios. Next, there is some kind of event that has occurred, is occurring, and or will occur, which threatens to disrupt the balance of power in a truly significant way. This event is either really good or really bad for the faction that has become the party's patron, and the party is tasked with either protecting or undoing this event. At the same time, the Risk Eaters feel the opposite way. In addition to mundane political forces acting to prevent the party from achieving their goals, there is always the meta-threat of Risk Eaters coming after upstarts who could upset the Risk Eaters' ideal conception of the future. To summarize, it's the party and their patron versus another faction and the Risk Eaters.

Things can get dicey when the party does not agree with their patron's goals or methods, or when the patron realizes that the party is no longer worth the resources required to protect them. Or when the party suddenly realizes it is on the wrong side of the conflict, or discovers that their patron works for the Risk Eaters and will turn the party over to them as soon as they achieve their goals. Or, just as victory is assured, a staunch ally betrays the party's patron (perhaps to liberate the party from the just-mentioned betrayal). These are great surprises that a GM can throw into a campaign mid-stream. However, GMs should make sure their campaigns have a very simple and straightforward framework (Faction A versus Faction B, disagreeing on thing C, and patron needs party to do thing D), before getting weird with the betrayals and complex intrigue.



WHY ARE WE TOGETHER?

The stock backstory for a party in Cryptomancer is fairly simple. Each character has been on the run from would-be captors and assassins. Even friends and family have inexplicably turned on them. The conspiracy is so pervasive and so dangerous that flight was the only option. The characters all met each other in some of the shadiest parts of the three realms: sewers, slums, ruins, and the like. Few words have been exchanged, but each could sense the desperation and determination of the other. One became two, two became three, and so on, until the current party had formed.

Variations on this theme might be that all the characters were thrown in the same dungeon cell, summoned by the same noble, mysteriously drawn to the same hidden place, witness to the same disaster, or close friends of the same fallen leader. Maybe the characters aren't even a party, per se, when the adventure begins. We encourage GMs to not get too hung up on the question of why the party formed. For some, it can be a creative hurdle difficult to overcome. Backstory, no matter how compelling, clever, or well-written, will never be as important as the story that transpires during actual play.

WHY ARE WE WORKING FOR SOMEONE ELSE?

Cryptomancer is a world of political factions battling each other over generations. The party will inevitably get caught up in these battles. Constantly haunted by the Risk Eaters, why would the party ever stop hiding and moving long enough to get ensnared in mundane politics? It is because factions have enough influence, wealth, and might to protect the party from constant pursuit. They enable a party to have a base of operations and to start acting stra-

tegically and proactively instead of remaining on the run like a fugitive at all times. GMs, take note: a party without a patron should feel very, very vulnerable. If and when the party publicly denounces their benefactor, or is discovered betraying their benefactor, it is time for the Risk Eater tension to rise. Former servants poison food and wine and unsheathe daggers. Safe houses become death traps and former contacts arrange ambushes at dead drops. Party paranoia spikes and everyone seems to stare at them in an unsettling fashion. The only way to alleviate this very real fear is to find another patron.

Patrons don't simply alleviate the Risk Eater threat. They also bestow strategic assets on the party in exchange for the successful completion of missions that further the benefactors goals. Improvements to safe houses, cells of disposable allies, and mounts provide the party great advantages and make life considerably more pleasant.

/ROOT/RUNNING CRYPTOMANCER/

THE OPENING SCENE

Once the back story has been established, there is always that first scene where the characters are experiencing something in the now. This is the most important scene in the first session and potentially the most important scene in the campaign because it will set the tone for the remainder of play. It is during this scene that the party must be compelled into action by some type of conflict, threat, opportunity, or objective that may or may not be meaningful to the larger campaign. Here are examples that put characters in a specific setting and prompt them into some type of action:

"The party finally arrives outside of the opulent manor of the noble who penned your stays of execution. You wonder why he saved you from wrongful death and what he knows about your false accusers. Suddenly, a body bursts through the stained glass window of the central tower and plummets to the cobblestone below. Something terrible is happening here. What is your next move?"

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“A lone zombie must have made it through the Sylvetic forest, past the quarantine’s blockade, before stumbling onto the road and being devoured by large vermin. It continues to twitch slightly, but is a shell of itself and no longer a threat. A shard fell from one of its pockets. Clear-text echoes suggest at least one soul still survives within the quarantine: ‘Anyone... get me out of here.... I will make you rich beyond measure... I will lead you here... I know the code to the vault... please respond... anyone...’ There are also encrypted echoes, suggesting this survivor might not be alone on the shardnet.”

“Your host and benefactor for the last few months remains in captivity, and those who took him threaten death or worse unless the party kidnaps the soma baron’s master alchemist and delivers her in exchange. The party has three days to comply. The lacuna tree vibrates with industry, and the baron’s many mercenaries stare at the party, outsiders, with contempt and suspicion. Three days. Do you want to use them to kidnap and deliver the alchemist, plan an infiltration to liberate your friend, or notify the soma baron of his competitors’ maneuvering? The clock is ticking.”

“Assassins have been asking around town and it is only a matter of time until they discover the small hovel the party has been using as a safe house. The party is in the middle of hasty preparations to steal off into the night when blood curdling cries at the village center are followed by the deep bellowing and cackling of a pride of gnolls ascending on the village. What is your next move?”

MAINTAINING PLAYER INTEREST

A properly executed opening scene can have players fully engaged and contributing to the story right out of the gate. The challenge, then, is to maintain that level of player engagement throughout the lifespan of a session, and then over the lifespan of a campaign. Perhaps the best and most general advice that can be given is to achieve this objective through good pacing: rationing out scenes of plotting, playing, and pandemonium at the right time and at the right intervals.

Plotting can be summarized as scenes where the characters are experiencing quiet time in a safe place and have the luxury to openly discuss events, plan operations, train skills, buy or build things, etc. It is also a time where players can have their characters “live in” the game world, engaging in either social scenes or scenes of exploration that don’t drive the story so much as help flesh out the shared setting. Plotting scenes can be used in a number of ways by players and GMs. These scenes are ideal for players who want to plan and prepare before their next caper. GMs can also reward players with plotting scenes of relative calm and easy progress after particularly challenging or dramatic scenes. The big catch is that scenes of plotting that go on too long, or seem to have no purpose, can derail the flow of a campaign and result in some players getting bored. GMs are cautioned to keep these scenes productive and on track, and as soon as players stop coming up with things they want to do, move on to the next scene.

Playing can be summarized as scenes of hard decisions and serious consequences, but delivered at a tolerable cadence. Infiltrating a fortification at night, exploring a forgotten dungeon, tailing a suspect, or engaging in courtly conversations to extract intelligence, are all good examples of playing. Obstacles in the form of puzzles, monsters, sentries, and difficult social interactions are frequent. Good tactics, coordinated efforts, clever improvisation, sticking to the plan, and good dice rolls generally rule the day here.

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This is good ol' fashioned tabletop role-playing. The challenge for GMs here is to ensure that these scenes are not formulaic (e.g. "get into fight A, then get into fight B, then fight the boss"), nor do they have specific challenges that insist on success for the session to continue (e.g. "unless you pick this specific lock at a specific time, the entire mission will be a failure"). Players should also be presented a vast array of obstacles, challenges, and opportunities that insist on different ways to solve problems. A scene where only swinging a claymore, or only sweet-talking to contacts, or only sneaking across rooftops, will typically only appeal to a single type of character, and potentially leave some players frustrated that their character does not seem effective or relevant to the campaign.

Pandemonium can be summarized as scenes where terrible things continue to pile on top of terrible things. One method of executing pandemonium is with scenes of mini-apocalypse: dragon raids, orcish invasions, and zombie swarms banging down the door, until all that is left is violence, chaos, fire, and every man, woman, and child fending for themselves. Another form of pandemonium is upending everything the characters have built: agents are outed, safe houses are tossed, and allies are killed or imprisoned, all while the characters flee from hounds, skilled assassins, or angry mobs. It's not Cryptomancer unless the possibility of horrible things happening permeates every scene. We're not suggesting that GMs leverage scenes of pandemonium cheaply or often. Instead, it should be done just enough to remind players the importance of making smart decisions (e.g. thorough planning, good operational security, etc.) as well as emphasize a fantasy world where society hasn't yet grasped just how interconnected things are because of the Shardscape.

CREATING ENVIRONMENTS

GMs: stop making dungeons, castles, and towns! There are simply too many awesome environments ready to steal from your favorite console and computer role-playing games. The Witcher series, the Elder Scrolls series, the Dragon Age series, and Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning are just a handful of really cool games we encourage you to steal environments from. Load up one of your saved games, quick travel to a location, take screen shots of maps, and take note of all the architecture, clutter, hazards, traps, and magical or natural features that make these locations interesting. Make adjustments as necessary, populate the location with characters and creatures, and then figure out how the location ties into the larger campaign. That's it! In 15 minutes or so, you'll be able to create an exciting location that might have otherwise taken hours to develop on your own. Want to go even faster? Just do a quick web search on any of your favorite games plus the word "maps."

Be sure to think about each environment in a network context. What other locations is an environment linked to via roads, tunnels, factions, races, religions, trade agreements, treaties, and geography? Feel free to draw it out using the social network analysis techniques taught later in this chapter. Understanding the relationship between different environments (e.g. "this is where the city gets its ore," or "this cult has allies in other clanhalls") are the things that really make a game world seem real, interconnected, and worth hacking.



CREATING CHALLENGES

Sessions contain stuff to do. Goals. Goals are usually straightforward: don't die, get the thing, protect the person, find the place, kill the boss, and so forth. When goals are achieved, the campaign either continues without a hitch, or continues with some kind of player character growth or advantage. When goals are not achieved, the campaign hits a rough patch, or perhaps even ends outright (e.g. everybody dies). Challenges are the things preventing folks from achieving goals. In traditional tabletop role-playing games (and Cryptomancer is one of them), player characters are faced with challenges composed of combat, stealth, social encounters, exploration, and problem-solving. A session will usually contain at least one or more of these challenges a number of times. A good GM will tailor the distribution of challenges based upon player interest, which is most clearly articulated through the characters they create and their individual styles of play.

A way to make challenges interesting is by always introducing a variable: an element of surprise, tension, or asymmetric threat that makes a straightforward challenge less than straightforward. Let's take the example of "kill the mark," a very straightforward challenge. When a party takes inventory of how they can achieve this goal, they'll first look at their skills and resources. "We got weapons, poison, magic, traps... we can certainly kill someone. In fact, we could kill a lot of people." However, while a session of the party killing their way from point A to point B so they can finally kill their mark might be fun every once in a while, it's more interesting to throw in a variable. For example, the goal might be "kill the mark" but the variable might be "it must be done before she signs the peace treaty" and/or "it must look like an accident." We now have an element of tension (a time limit) as well as mission parameters that require the players to look for opportunities and think on their feet. If we want to have even more fun at the players' expense, we'll throw in the fact that there was a failed attempt on the mark's life just days ago, so everyone is on high alert. We've

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now taken a very straightforward challenge and made it very interesting. Here are some examples of variables to add excitement/complexity to a challenge:

- It all happens during a disaster: zombie outbreak, plague outbreak, dragon raid, orc siege, crop famine, martial law, or catastrophic weather, for example.
- A third party's presence is making it very difficult to operate: assassins, investigators, inquisitors, important visitors, innocent bystanders, nosy people, rivals who want to do something before you do it, or even allies who disagree with the mission and/or how it is being executed.
- There is a big surprise discovered midstream: the mark is innocent and/or not the real threat, the person that must be exfiltrated has the plague, the artifact that must be stolen has dark magical properties, an enemy knows about the mission and actually wants to help, or there is an opportunity to do something good (e.g. save prisoners, steal wealth, discover secrets) that will undoubtedly disrupt all plans and threaten mission success.
- There are environmental factors adding to the complexity: burning fires, brutal blizzards, flowing lava, grinding gears, spouting steam, cave-ins, racing railcars, fast-moving caravans, perilous falls, wobbling bridges, crumbling towers, sand storms, poison clouds, traps, locust swarms, etc.
- There is a time limit. The players must do "X" before the prisoner is executed, before the treaty is signed, before the usurper is crowned, before a scroll is delivered to the authorities, before the key allies surrender to the enemy, before the competitor completes their research, before the siege engine construction is completed, etc.



CREATING GM CHARACTERS

Just like environments, GMs, stop making characters! Instead, like mentioned earlier, borrow villains, heroes, and bit actors from other sources (including fiction, film, television, and video games), but simply change their names and maybe change or leave out some recognizable characteristics. Pull up a game FAQ or a wiki entry on a source of your choice, peruse the more interesting characters or factions, and say “My campaign needs one of these.” Don’t restrict yourself to fantasy titles, either. There are a ton of truly awesome characters to steal from science fiction, historical fiction, or modern drama. But whatever you do, don’t start building stat blocks or equipment lists for these GM characters. Simply declare them trivial, challenging, or tough, and move on.

This approach may seem like sacrilege. Indeed, good characters are the lifeblood of good stories. The trouble is, GMs are building a fantasy sandbox for players who may or may not really be interested in a GM character, regardless of how many hours a GM has spent on said character’s backstory, statistics, equipment list, and unique characteristics. They might meet the character and ignore her, kill her summarily, or not even be able to remember her name. Alternatively, they might meet one of the GM’s bit-actors and obsess over her, plot against her, or do things to earn her favor. The reality is, it is players who decide which GM characters are important to the story, not GMs. It’s one of the great ironies of gaming and campaign building.

If GMs want to ensure that they maintain mastery of their cast list, create a world that seems vibrant and populated, and create a campaign conducive to hacking, social engineering, spying, and breaking things, we suggest leveraging social network analysis. GMs should start mapping out the following: who knows who, and how? Who hates who, and why? Who loves who, and why? Who are the brokers and gatekeepers between important factions? Who is indispensable and who is replaceable? Who seems to know everyone?

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Who will look for this person when they go missing? Who will go to whom for help when things get challenging? Who has seemingly random contacts (e.g. the butcher and the local regent go on hunting trips sometimes)? Who is having secret or illicit contact that is forbidden by law, religion, or political realities? It is all these connections that make a truly compelling cast of characters, and a complex social network for your players to enumerate and exploit.

It seems like a lot of work and complexity, but once you start mapping it out, it will come easy, and you'll find yourself considering these various relationships during gameplay and being remarkably consistent. Players will accuse you of ingenious subplots and sophisticated storytelling when all you did is connect a few dots.

/ROOT/RUNNING CRYPTOMANCER/

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND NETWORK ANALYSIS

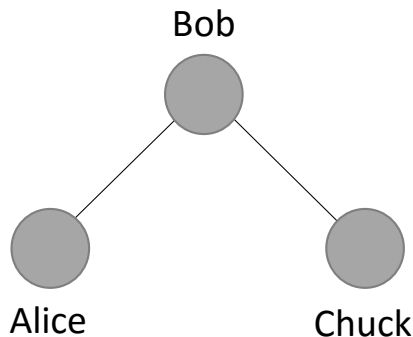
Epic stories tend to have a ton of characters. In some of the most popular works of fantasy fiction, there are sometimes dozens of characters to keep track of. However, it is the complex web of relationships, rivalries, alliances, romances, seething resentments, and betrayals that makes these works so successful. This remains a great way of telling grand political dramas about multiple factions over the course of multiple generations, but is pretty tough to scale in tabletop role-playing games. This is also a pretty challenging problem set in real-life geopolitics. With so many countries, religions, political parties, ethnicities, and geographical ties to account for, it's nearly impossible to keep track of who's on first. Especially without the right tools. So for Cryptomancer, we provide a tool for GMs and players to manage even the wildest of casts: social network analysis.

Social network analysis (SNA) is a sociological discipline dedicated to the study of, and visualization of, the relationships that comprise social networks. It can be an incredibly complex topic, but we're going to introduce

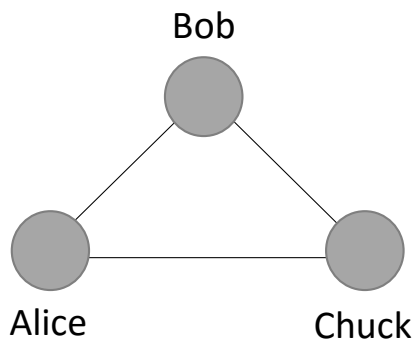
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the bare bones essentials and make the case that it can be a fantastic way for GMs and players to develop, discuss, and visualize complex webs of relationships. So here we go.



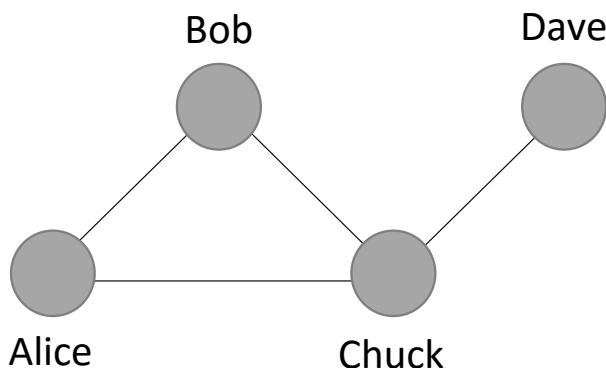
What you see here is the simplest of networks. The gray dots are *nodes*. They represent actors. The solid black lines are *links* or *ties*. They represent a relationship. In this case, we'll say that relationship is "they know each other." We see that Alice and Bob know each other, and Bob and Chuck know each other, but Alice and Chuck do not know each other. Let's say that one day Bob introduces Alice to Chuck. What happens to the network?



Well that was easy. Alice and Chuck now have a line connecting them, indicating they know each other. We can now call this network a *clique*, that is, a subnetwork where everyone knows everyone.

Let's say that Chuck one day meets a new person named Dave and they hit it off and become friends. No one else has heard of Dave before. What happens to the network?

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As you can see, this is pretty straightforward. However, let's think critically for a second about Chuck's relationship with Dave. Dave is sort of the outsider in this network and is only known by Chuck. Let's assume Dave has a unique skill: he knows how to pick locks. This means that if Chuck runs into a situation where he must pick a lock, he can contact Dave and ask for help. However, what happens if Alice, who does not know Dave, runs into a similar situation?

Alice might ask the people she knows if anyone knows a locksmith. Chuck might volunteer that he "knows a guy." This makes Chuck a very important actor in this network: he is a *broker* or *gatekeeper* between multiple actors. Though Dave is the one who knows how to pick locks, the other actors in this network rely on Chuck to get access to Dave. Maybe Dave prefers things this way. Perhaps he will only work directly with Chuck to ensure that he keeps a low profile.

Let's summarize so far. First, actors must sometimes break out of their clique to acquire skills, resources, or information they need. Second, the number of ties an actor has, and their place in the network structure determines their relative social power. Third, there are compelling reasons to be either part of a clique or on the fringe of a network.

With these basic SNA concepts, GMs should be able to map out social networks and present relationships in a way easily accessible and explainable by everyone playing

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Cryptomancer. These techniques can be shared with players, who might take it on themselves to map out relationships as their player characters meet GM characters.

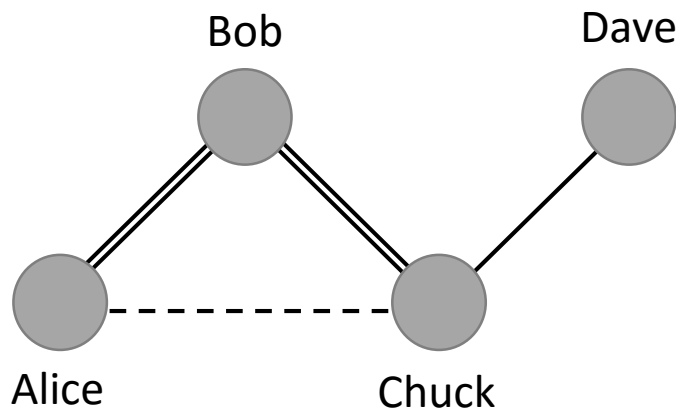
Before we move on to managing bigger strategic networks, let's add one interesting nuance to this small tactical network: different types of links.

Allies **=====**

Neutral **—————**

Enemies **- - - - -**

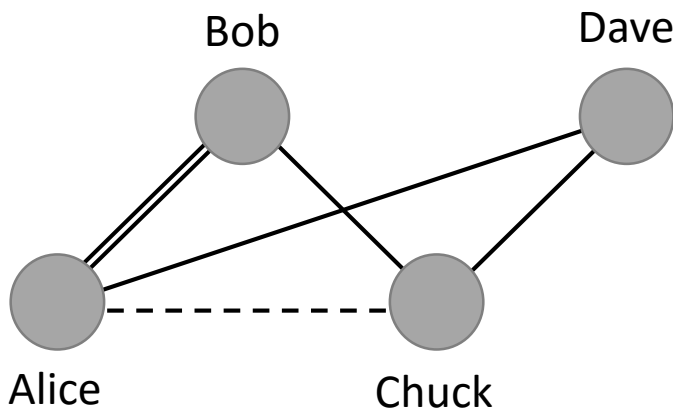
A solid line represents neutrality between actors. A double line represents an alliance between two actors. A dashed line represents hostility between two actors. Let's examine how this adds exciting complexity to the otherwise very simple network of Alice, Bob, Chuck, and Dave.



Examining the links, it's still the case that Alice, Bob, and Chuck all still know each other, and of those three, only Chuck knows Dave. Chuck and Dave's relationship can be described as "neutral." They haven't seen each other enough to have strong feelings either way. Chuck is very good friends with Bob, however. They go way back and will probably do anything for each other. Chuck and Alice, though? They can't stand each other. Even though Al-

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ice knows that Chuck “knows a guy” who can pick locks, she refuses to be reliant on Chuck for anything. So instead, she meets up with Bob, her good pal, and asks Bob to ask Chuck to ask Dave to help with a lock picking job, but keep her name out of it. Assuming Dave agrees to the job and finally meets Alice during the job, how might the network change? There are many possibilities, but let’s just throw one to the wall and see what sticks.



In this scenario, we see two distinct changes to the network. First of all, Alice finally met Dave during the job. Dave keeps his clients at arms length, but she did pay well, so he might consider working for her directly in the future. There now exists a link representing neutrality between these actors.

However, we see something has happened between Bob and Chuck. Chuck discovers that Bob has been working on Alice’s behalf and is resentful of losing his broker status. He enjoyed the fact that both Bob and Alice had to come to him to get access to Dave, because Chuck always got a cut of the action. Chuck already hated Alice to begin with, but he’s disappointed with Bob, and his relationship downgraded from “allied” to “neutral.” Bob is not concerned, because he no longer needs Chuck to get access to Dave - now he can go through Alice to get to Dave. The plot has thickened.

We won’t belabor this example longer than we need to. We hope this simple explanation (and enormous simplification) has demonstrated the power of using SNA to map

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A black and white illustration of a bearded man with a crown, wearing a heavy coat, standing over a table. On the table are a small jar, a quill, and a small cup. The man is looking down at the table.

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This strategic network is taken from “Silent War for Thronehouse,” the adventure and campaign starter at the end of this book. In a strategic network, a node represents an entire faction instead of an individual. Let’s take a look at some of the interesting dynamics occurring in this network.

Starting in Subterra, we see that the two dwarven clans hate each other and are likely vying for the same turf. Over in Sylvetica, there is only one elven tribe that has diverse relationships with both humans and dwarves. In Sphere, we see a lot of neutrality between noble houses, though House Glower seems to feuding with both House Falcron and House Arach, who are strong allies with each other. House Glower has one possible ally in House Xol, who hates House Arach, but it will remain to be seen if House Xol is willing to forge an alliance with House Glower at the risk of angering House Falcron. Out of all the nodes, House Arach actually has the most links out of any faction (6), making House Arach a very influential faction. However, with 3 of those relationships manifesting in hostility, it is also the most hated and embattled of the factions.

We can certainly get crazy with the strategic view. Consider if we put this example on a geographic map, where the distance between nodes represent the geographic distance between them? What if we also drew additional lines that indicated roads, trade routes, or battle lines? What if we wanted to quantify sentiment on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was total war and 5 was lasting alliance, and then say that a political marriage might increase sentiment by +1 while increasing taxes again might reduce sentiment by -1? We offer this teaser of potential, but realize we’ve already piled on a lot of information, and would rather leave more advanced SNA ideas to our reader’s imagination and campaign needs.

The important part, again, is that SNA is an extremely powerful narrative tool and game aid. It can provide players a visualization to help them plot, scheme, argue, and propose hypotheses, both on the tactical level and the strategic level. Imagine your gaming group with sharpies and whiteboards going all Machiavelli, Sun Tzu, and Mossad on

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their adversaries' faces. We insist that SNA is the secret sauce to awesome Cryptomancer campaigns and potentially other tabletop role-playing endeavors. Intelligence agencies (not to mention marketing agencies and epidemiologists) use this methodology to understand and manage the real world, so we are confident in its power to help you and your fellow gamers understand and manage fantasy worlds.

/ROOT/RUNNING CRYPTOMANCER/

MISCELLANEOUS GM TIPS

This section provides some miscellaneous tips for GMs running Cryptomancer. While Cryptomancer strives to be a traditional fantasy role-playing game, the inclusion of shards and the Shardscape insists on somewhat “modern” approaches to play. The idea is simple: fantasy characters would do things very differently if they all had the equivalent of a modern mobile device. Let’s discuss what that means.

In most fantasy role-playing games, it is often difficult to split the party up because there is a lack of long distance communication options. Not the case here. Shards allow instant and silent long range communication between player characters. They do not need to stay in physical proximity with each other to be successful. If the GM sees the party stuck in “dungeon-crawl formation” when it is neither necessary nor optimal for a situation, she should remind players of this reality.

When player characters bring their shards into a hostile place, they bring their social network with them. That means they are able to call for reinforcements, or a lawyer, if they get in to trouble. The party’s patron is likely to aid the party if it gets into trouble, because the party is both an asset and investment worthy of retaining. To that end, GM’s are encouraged to think like guild masters instead of dungeon masters. Captives can be interrogated for intelligence, ransomed off, or turned against their masters. Scenes of interrogation, imprisonment, and escape can make for some truly exciting gaming, so don’t squander these oppor-

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tunities by killing off (all) player characters every time they botch an operation. At the same time, if a situation is going poorly for GM characters, fighting to the death is generally less desirable than surrender, flight, or negotiation.

If possible, give each player a tennis ball or some other physical artifact to emulate shards. Encourage players to hold them when their characters in the game space are communicating over shard. Make a special point of ensuring players are properly injecting keyphrases before sending messages, lest they communicate in clear-text.

In gaming, *table talk* is the phenomenon where players talk “out of character” about their thoughts and plans while their characters are in the middle of a scene. Imagine a scene where the party is stopped by a constable who needs to question them. A player might say, “Whatever we do, he cannot know about our connection to the priest,” but she certainly did not intend for her character to say that out loud (and definitely not in front of the constable). That is an example of table talk. Some GMs and players do not like table talk because it breaks the 4th wall of the narrative. Some GMs and players think its a fun and necessary component of tabletop role-playing games. While every group will have to organically figure out their stance on table talk, we will say that shards do provide a narrative explanation for table talk. All those “out of character” things that players say are actually being communicated to each other over shard (in clear-text) and can be used against the players if their shardnet is mismanaged. Imagined the same constable confiscating one of the party’s shards, reviewing its contents, and saying, “So, tell me about your connection to the priest?”

A GM should be able to detect when a party has stumbled into *analysis paralysis*, where the players have gone so far down the rabbit hole of plotting, scheming, discussing, and second-guessing that the game has essentially stopped. When decision-making is no longer productive (or a player says “I’m bored, let’s just pick a plan and stick to it”), GMs are encouraged to take control of the conversation, call out the options she has heard throughout the discussion, and tell the players to simply pick one and move forward.

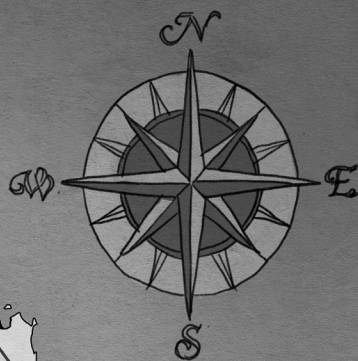


/ROOT/RUNNING CRYPTOMANCER/CD ..
/ROOT/CD SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE
/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/LS

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SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE

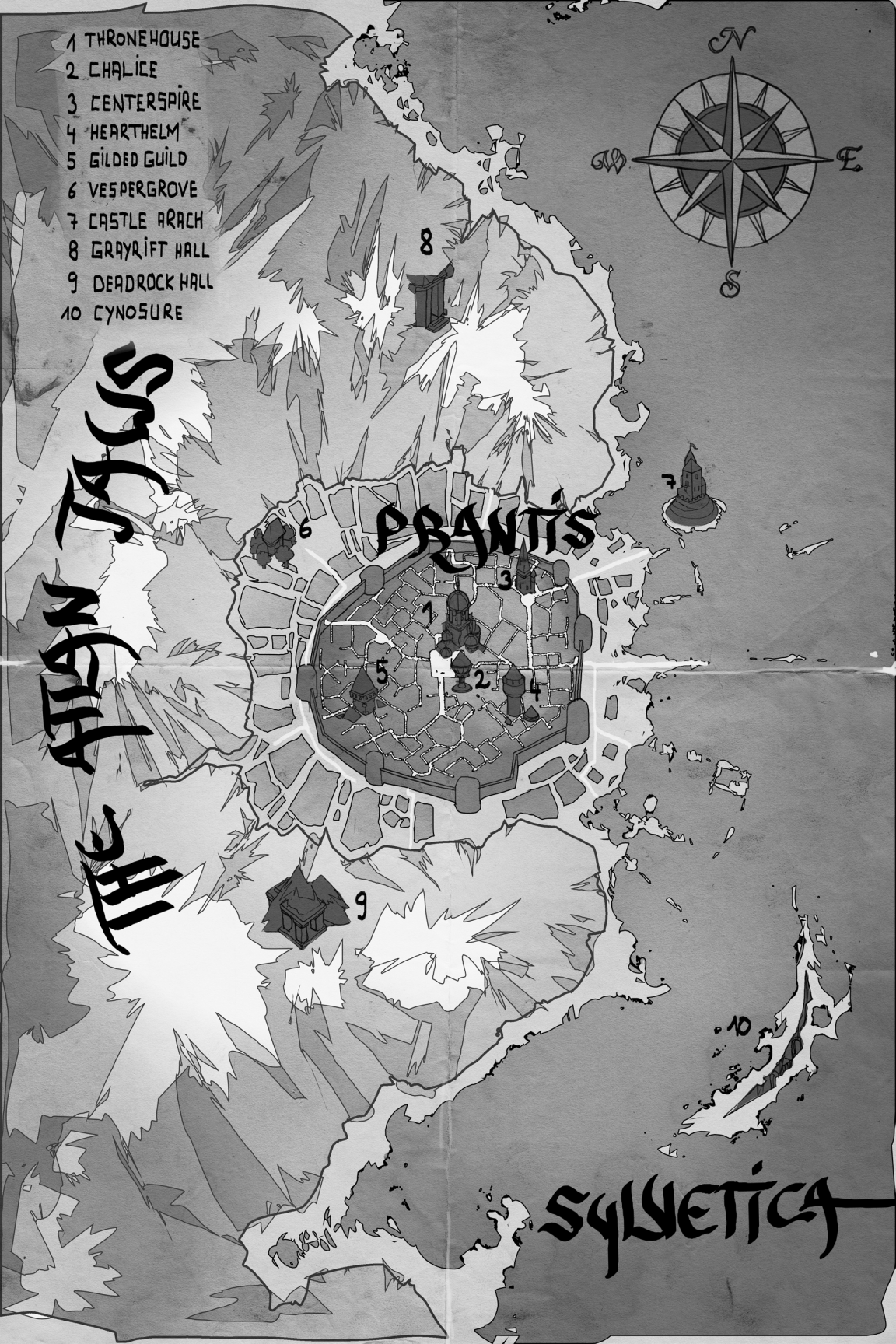
- 1 THRONEHOUSE
- 2 CHALICE
- 3 CENTERSPIRE
- 4 HEARTHELM
- 5 GILDED GUILD
- 6 VESPERGROVE
- 7 CASTLE ARACH
- 8 GRAYRIFT HALL
- 9 DEADROCK HALL
- 10 CYNOSURE



STON
TALL
THE

PRANTIS

SYNETICA



OVERVIEW

Silent War for Thronehouse is an introductory adventure designed to illustrate what a Cryptomancer campaign can look like. This section is purposefully didactic in order to really draw out how the game mechanics, setting devices, and gameplay suggestions discussed throughout the rules reinforce the “high-fantasy hacker” concept behind Cryptomancer. GMs are encouraged to read this section to bring it all together, and even run this adventure for their players if they think it might be fun. Players are discouraged from reading this section, as it will take a lot of the mystery and enjoyment out of the adventure should their GM choose to run it. This section will begin with a high level overview of a city-state in the game world and then establish how player characters are at the center of a dramatic conflict. After these introductory elements, the adventure proper begins with an opening scene and a series of choices.

This adventure is the story of multiple factions vying for power in a large city-state called Prantis. Every ten years, five human factions in the city-state come together to elect a *patrark*, the executive of the city-state who inhabits Thronehouse, an opulent palace and the seat of power. An election is only a few months away, and an abrupt shift in alliances has all but guaranteed the reelection of the current patrark, whose policies have become progressively more reckless and bizarre over time. At the beginning of the adventure, the party of player characters receive patronage and protection from Aden Glower, head of House Glower, and the frontrunner of the election until a sudden and unexplainable reversal by a key ally changed everything. In return for all he has done for the player characters, and what he will continue to do, he compels them to discover why this series of events occurred, and do everything in their power to reverse them. Their unknown status in city-state makes them ideal candidates to perform this task, and the threat of disowning them (and putting them at the mercy of the Risk Eaters) if they don’t comply makes this an arrangement they can’t refuse, at least in the short term.

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The adventure quickly thrusts the players in some dangerous and interesting situations and eventually culminates in the infiltration of the highly fortified Castle Arach. This final challenge will truly put the players' hacking, scheming, and social engineering skills to the test. It should be noted at the outset that the ending to this adventure is purposefully open ended. The intent here was to provide a structured and complete adventure that serves as a launch pad for whatever type of campaign best suits your gaming group. To that end, GMs should read this adventure in its entirety well before play, to determine which final scene lends to the type of adventures they wish to run going forward, and adjust accordingly.

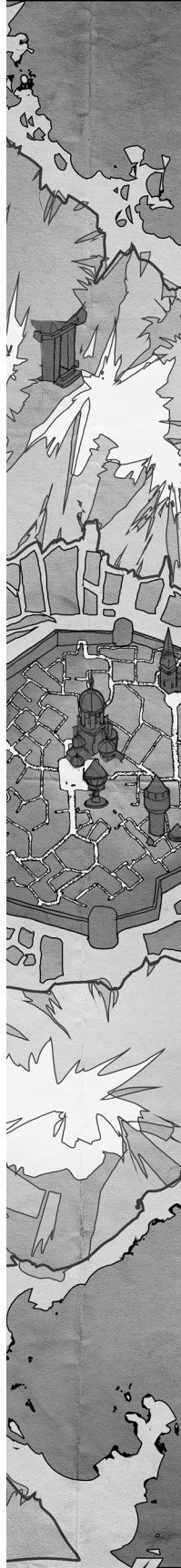
/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

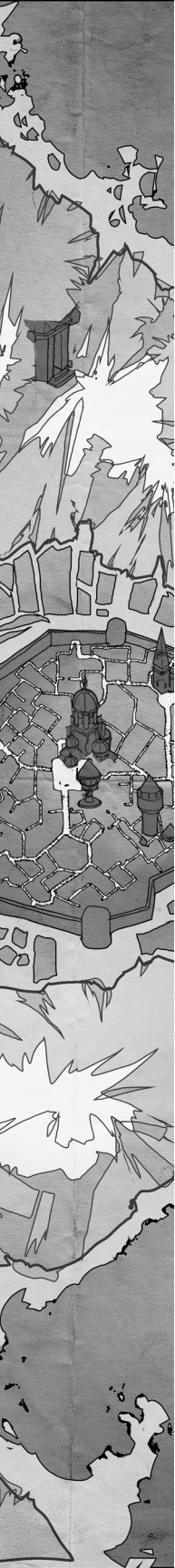
THE CITY-STATE OF PRANTIS

Prantis is an enormous walled city-state surrounded by a crescent of a mountain range that opens up into a hundred miles of dense forest. It has a population of tens of thousands, two-thirds of which are humans. The mountain range is called the Atlan Jaws, and is frequently characterized on maps as a toothed maw about to devour Prantis. The foothills of the Jaws are home to farmlands and estates, but the mountain itself is inhabited by two dwarven clans which spend most of their time in low intensity conflict with one another. The forest, referred to Atlan's Breath, is sprinkled with human villages and logging operations, but is otherwise controlled by a powerful and expansionist elven tribe. As far as the civilizations of Sphere go, Prantis is centrally located and virtually impossible to siege through convention means, making it both an important trading hub and a regional stabilizer. While the trade lanes leading into and out of Prantis pass through Subterra and Sylvetica, it is in the elves and dwarves best interest to allow this to continue (with light tariffs and tolls), lest they face the wrath of Prantis's powerful standing army.

Prantis is ruled by a patrank, who is elected every ten years by five noble houses, each having a single vote. The current patrank of Prantis is a man named Mortin Falcron,

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head of House Falcron, whose demeanor and decision-making has become increasingly erratic in the last two years. Martin's policies change with disturbing frequency. He'll waver between investing heavily in infrastructure projects one day to preparing for a full blown invasion of Sylvetica the next. The patrark holds court at Thronehouse, a beautiful and heavily-fortified manor in a miniature walled-city within the city-state, surrounded by stunning gardens and high, hedgerow mazes.

Beautiful locations like Thronehouse and a handful of other noteworthy estates and temples are the exception to the norm. Prantis is brimming to the walls with buildings, primarily multistory tenement building so crowded against and atop each other that they seem to almost lean over Prantis' narrow cobblestone streets and block the sun. It seems like half of the city-state's buildings are in the process of being built up or torn down, so rubble piles, smoke stacks, and scaffolding seem to be common architectural features of every neighborhood. While a balcony view of Prantis shows a picturesque city-state bristling with industry and trade, the lower stories of most building facades are caked in dust and grime, and the streets and alleys are seemingly choked with foot traffic, ware-peddling stands, and soma-addicts squabbling over garbage. There are main thoroughfares that are well-lit and heavily-patrolled by the city-state's feared Constabulary, but they rarely get most pedestrians exactly where they need to go.

The Constabulary is a force that answers to the patrark, and is half standing army, half secret police. While the official charter of the Constabulary is to maintain peace and order in Prantis, it exists primarily to make life tolerable, safe, and stable for the city-state's five noble houses, whose coffers finance this organization. To nobles, constables act as humble retainers, but to all else, constables may as well be underworld enforcers not above blackmail, protection rackets, or helping themselves to whatever they want. However, constables that push this power too far are often publicly chastised by the noble houses and stripped of their title, or are dealt with by the people in considerably less generous ways. Though answering to the patrark, and appearing to

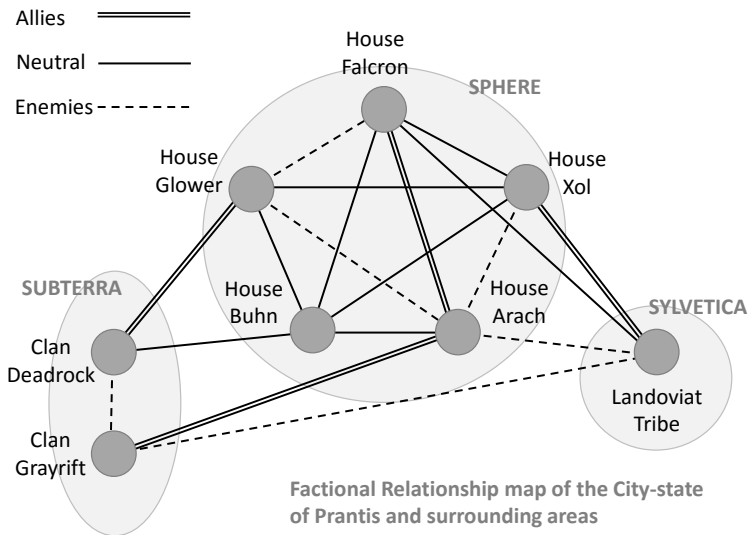
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do so zealously, the Constabulary always remains somewhat independent. Patrarks come and go, so the leaders of this organization are always hedging their bets, never throwing their lot entirely to any faction.

/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

THE FACTIONS

There are five human factions, two dwarven factions, and a single elven faction that either share or struggle for power in Prantis and its surrounding areas. The five human factions are House Falcron, House Glower, House Buhn, House Xol, and House Arach, each vying for the title of patrark. The two dwarven factions are Clan Deadrock and Clan Grayrift, who battle each other for control of the Atlan Jaws Subterranean trade routes. Lastly, the single elven faction is the Landoviat tribe, which is at odds with the entire city-state over territory and resources.



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House Glower

House Glower is ruled and represented by Aden Glower. The seat of power for House Glower is Hearthelm, a small but formidable keep inside the city-state walls that masks its militant facade with urban trappings and noble finery. House Glower is strongly allied with House Buhn, and until very recently, was strongly allied with House Xol. The house's primary source of wealth and power is trade with the dwarves, particularly Clan Deadrock. House Glower is a pragmatic and occasionally principled House. Aden Glower lost the patrark seat to Mortin Falcron for his seemingly soft and unprofitable negotiations with the dwarves, as well as his harsh punishment of Constabulary favorites guilty of excesses against the people. Aden Glower heard of the player characters' plight through his spy network and saw an opportunity to acquire a trump card in his political machinations. Little did he know that he would need them so quickly, when beyond belief, House Xol indicated its continued support for Mortin Falcron in the coming election. House Glower's primary goal is to elect Aden as patrark.

House Falcron

House Falcron is ruled and represented by Mortin Falcron, the current patrark of Prantis. House Falcron currently inhabits Thronehouse, by virtue of owning the patrark seat. However, their family estate and seat of power is Centerspire, a spiraling tower of rusted iron and obsidian, the tallest building in Prantis. House Falcron is strongly allied with House Arach and sudden allies with House Xol, despite decades of animosity between these houses. The house's primary source of wealth and power is real estate, bids on infrastructure projects, and "representation" of labor guilds. House Falcron was never above board, but also never entirely self-serving. Mortin Falcron was elected to replace Aden Glower as patrark, running on a platform reestablishing and reasserting Prantis' regional power (and by extension, humanity's regional power). Glower's tolerance for the other races, though entirely motivated by economic factors, was easily characterized as weakness. As soon as Mortin took

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the throne, he began arrangements to (unsuccessfully) ban soma and expand into elven territory. However, after a failed assassination attempt by actors from a northern kingdom, Patrark Mortin began to show signs of paranoia and then derangement. Only House Arach stood by him, and his replacement was assured. That is, until House Xol suddenly declared support for him, ensuring that three out of five votes will be cast again for Mortin. House Falcron's primary goal is to keep Mortin as patrark.

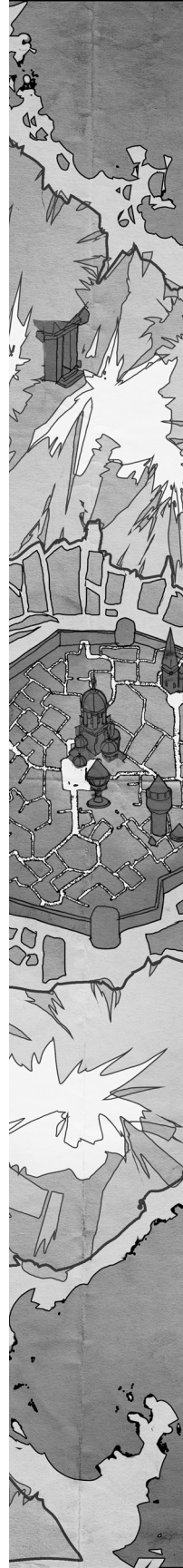
House Xol

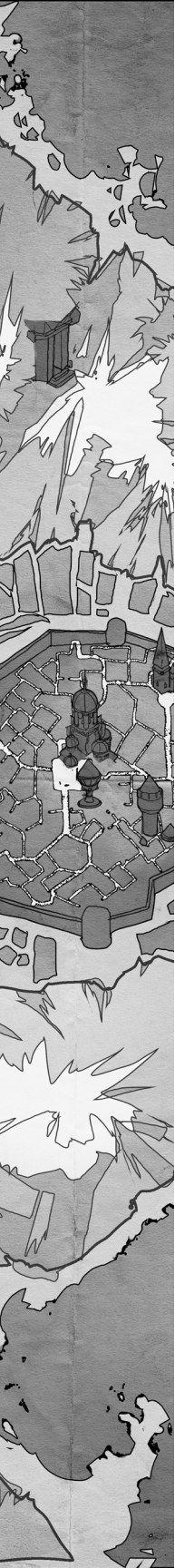
House Xol is ruled and represented by Olindys Xol. The seat of power for House Xol is Vespergrove, a massive plantation in the foothills of the Atlan Jaws, surrounded by vineyards, ancestral tombs, and picturesque ruins of a civilization predating Prantis. House Xol was strongly allied with House Glower until recently, but maintains a strong relationship with the Landoviat tribe. The house's primary source of wealth and power is its production and sales of soma-infused wine, spirits, liquors, and other products, something House Xol has a near monopoly on because of their relationship with the elves. House Xol is a paradox of piety and cut-throat mercantilism. Olindys originally cast her vote for Mortin because of economic interests. Petrark Glower was too close to the dwarves putting tariffs on the soma trade passing through Subterranean highways. However, Olindys quickly regretted her support for Mortin's ascension to patrark and planned to course correct. Yet, bizarrely, Olindys recently declared her strong support for Patrark Mortin and intent to cast her vote for him again, ensuring his continued ownership of the patrark seat. House Xol's primary goal is to keep Mortin as patrark.

House Buhn

House Buhn is ruled and represented by Cordia Buhn. The seat of power for House Buhn is Chalice, a humble manor (at least as far as the other house's manors go) right off the busiest public square in the city-state, slightly bigger and cleaner than the tenement buildings surrounding

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it. House Buhn is strongly allied with House Glower. The house's primary source of wealth and power is its deep affiliation with the city-state's standing army and the Constabulary. Cordia Buhn is Master Commander of the army and is beloved by her forces, as well as the people of Prantis. Her younger brother Darl Buhn is Grand Constable, though the two can barely stomach each other's presence in court. House Buhn is highly respected for their martial legacy and highly panned for their very public domestic dysfunction. House Buhn's unbreakable bond with House Glower is primarily informed by a number of political marriages that occurred so long ago that they are legally and financially irrelevant today. Yet, House Buhn, taken with history, heraldry, and tradition, can't help but continue this alliance lest they be haunted by their ancestors' ghosts. House Buhn's primary goal is to elect Aden as patrark.

House Arach

House Arach is ruled and represented by Valdr Arach. The seat of power for House Arach is Castle Arach, a massive but dilapidated castle atop a hill outside the Prantis walls, in the Sylvetic forest. House Arach has always shunned the other houses, but recently developed a strong relationship with House Falcron. The house's primary source of wealth and power has been its seemingly endless coffers, a combination of the house's apparent frugality, coupled with very old and profitable investments dating back earlier than most other houses' genealogy. House Arach is the most reclusive and aloof of the houses, as well as the oldest of the houses. Valdr Arach's support for Patrark Falcron is not fully understood, but is likely the result of the Arachs taking pleasure in the angst and downfall of the other houses, seen by this family as pretenders and usurpers. The Arachs are so disdainful of modern Prantisian politics that they have virtually no overt presence in court at Thronehouse. House Arach's primary goal is to keep Mortin as patrark.

Clan Deadrock

Clan Deadrock is ruled by mogul Daylis Kor. The clan is named after Deadrock Hall, the clan's seat of pow-

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er, located deep under the center of the Atlan Jaws. Clan Deadrock enjoys a strong and profitable relationship with House Glower and maintains a military treaty with Prantis through House Buhn. The clan's primary source of power is the sale of precious metals, the production of clockwork gadgets, and control of most of the Subterranean trade routes connecting Prantis to the rest of Sphere. Clan Deadrock is considerably more mercantile and metropolitan than their Clan Grayrift cousins, and has fared considerably better in recent history. They even have a handful of ambassadors and aids making a minimal court presence at Thronehouse. However, recently, they have been enduring a series of mishaps and assassinations orchestrated by Clan Grayrift, and their status as the primary Subterranean power of the region is becoming shaky. Clan Deadrock's primary goal is to unite Prantis against Clan Grayrift, by first restoring Aden Glower to power.

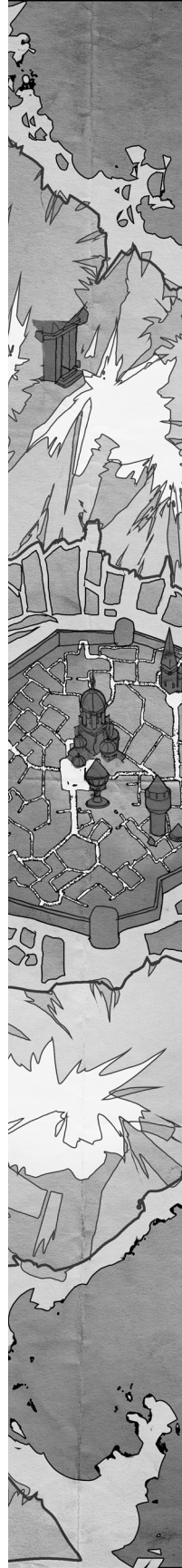
Clan Grayrift

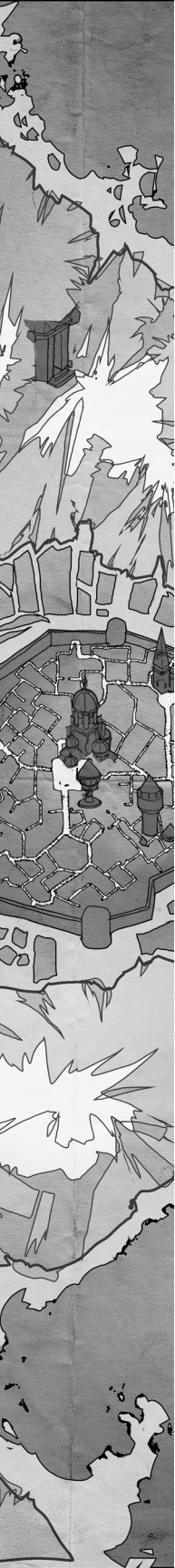
Clan Grayrift is ruled by mogul Beal Skold. The clan is named after Grayrift Hall, the clan's seat of power, located deep under the northern tip of the Atlan Jaws. Clan Grayrift has an old alliance with House Arach, dating back to when an Arach sat on the patrark throne for successive decades. Their primary source of wealth and power is their control of the Atlan shardmine and their services as mercenaries and assassins, sold to the highest bidder. Clan Grayrift is a xenophobic clan obsessed with restoring the dwarven culture of mythic legend. When they aren't waging guerrilla warfare on Clan Deadrock, who they see as betrayers, they are stoking the flames of a millennia-old feud with the Landoviat elves. While almost universally loathed by most of human and elven kind in the region, they have proven too useful to allow Clan Deadrock to erase this clan from history. Clan Grayrift's primary goal is retake the Subterranean roads back from Clan Deadrock, which is threatened by Aden Glower's return to power.

The Landoviat Tribe

The Landoviat tribe is represented by, but not ruled

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by, Speaker Kadin. The tribe's seat of power is Cynosure, an ancient and beautiful city in a petrified forest a hundred miles to the southeast of Prantis. The Landoviat Tribe has profited greatly from its business relationship with House Xol. Soma production has fueled Landoviat expansion in territory over the last century. The tribe's primary source of wealth and power is the production, distribution, and sale of soma, protected by its armada of gigaphid knights. The Landoviat elves are as gentle as they are ruthless, and very matter of fact about their annexation of lesser tribes and their slow crawl toward the walls of Prantis. The scouts of House Arach and the Grayrift cloaks have stunted Landoviat annexation of Prantis' forests, but the steady flow of soma through House Xol ensures that the tribes influence runs deep throughout Prantisian politics. Speaker Kadin has made a handful of visits to Thronehouse, though less since Mortin Falcron became Patrark. The Landoviat Tribe's primary goal is to continue to expand into the forests of Prantis without provoking total war... until they are ready, that is.

/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

THE OPENING SCENE

The party is in their safe house: the cellar of a gem shop (The Gilded Guild) owned by Gumble Krag, Dead-rock dwarf and secretly a close friend Glower. They receive an encrypted message on the shardnet given to them by Glower's agents. The player characters share this shardnet with Glower and two of his agents, and use a shared keyphrase to protect their communications. The message calls for an urgent meeting at the prayer grounds of Vespergrove at midnight. They are to arrive cloaked and observe night prayers to whatever god they see fit until approached by one of Glower's agents. It is imperative that they are not followed to this meeting. The final bells for midnight will toll from Centerspire in two hours. The party must leave immediately. An enterprising player may ask the value of meeting in person when the shardnet is available. This is a good question, but should be left to speculation. As the party gathers their things, there is a pounding on the shop's front door, making it a great time to leave out the back door

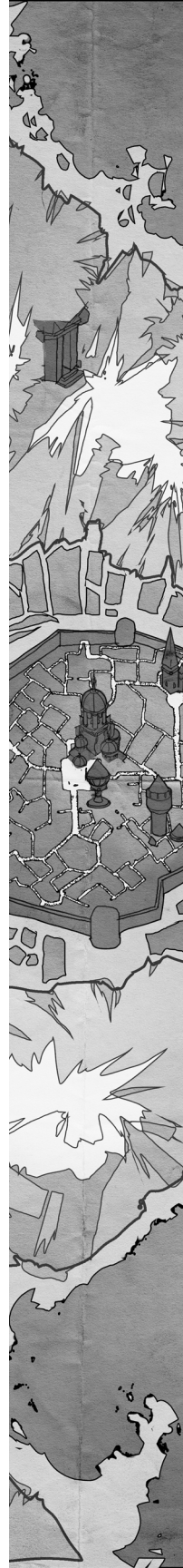
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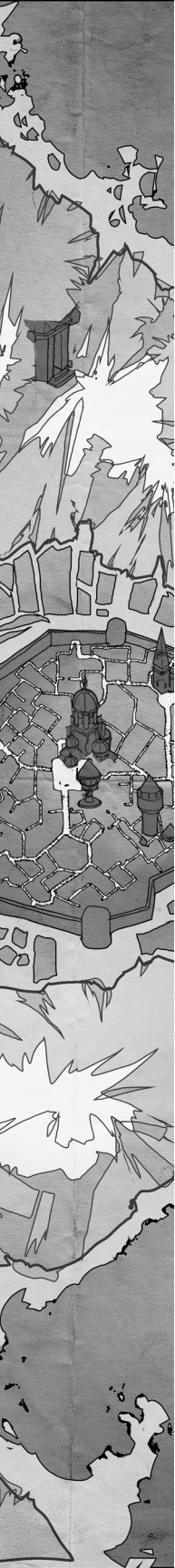
into a dark and refuse-filled alley.

Two constables (challenging threats) rapping on the store's front door have come to collect protection money from Gumble. They will threaten and even roughhouse Gumble inside his store, but Gumble keeps his cool without playing his affiliation with Glower. If the players intervene at all, they generate 1 risk. If they intervene violently, they generate an additional 1 risk and might even have to split their party so that some can stay behind and deal with the aftermath (lest they generate another 1 risk by leaving Gumble to handle the fallout (i.e. bodies) himself. If the party does help Gumble, he makes a side-deal with them meant to be kept secret from Glower: he will pay top coin for found or stolen items made of gems and precious metals. He can extract gems and melt items down to make superior dwarven jewelry. Anyone who stays behind will have less time to make it to the meeting, meaning they will have to take a more direct path to it. The group does have a tail, but it is one of Glower's best agents, assessing the skill of the group at a distance. If they take actions to be alert and spot him, he will compliment the group over shardnet, and tells them he has other places to be. This sub-scene is intended to create tension, reinforce the idea that the party can split up because of shards, and establish the importance of restraint, tradecraft, and trusted allies.

The trip is likely uneventful. The party is not the only group of cloaked figures walking the streets. There are also street urchins digging through refuse-piles and pressing against doors and shutters to see if they have been left unlocked. Beyond the city-state walls, a winding path patrolled by the occasional pair of mounted soldiers wearing House Buhn insignia leads to the prayer grounds. The prayer grounds is a grassy plane atop a hill. Heavy stones have been strewn across the plane to prevent trees from sprouting underfoot. Throughout the grounds, there are icons and small shrines to diverse gods, a pantheon of specialized deities not unlike that of the ancient Greeks or Romans. Though there are a handful of other persons in this area, all are silently paying their respects to different shrines, and none seem to acknowledge the other. Light cast from windows of

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the sweeping Vespergrove manor can be seen further up the mountain side, as can the top of vineyard trees swaying in the moonlight, on a plane below the prayer grounds.

Over shard, the party is again communicated to. They are informed that this locale is a dead drop location. There is a deep hole bored into the porous stone upon which the shrine of Cahil rests, plugged with a smooth pebble. Inside this hole will be a scroll with an encrypted message. It must be extracted. The party is told that the group is being watched and will be tailed, which is why all were sent. Tailing one is easy, but tailing multiple marks scattering to the wind is difficult. The party must scatter when they leave Vespergrove to lead their tails anywhere but their safe house or their benefactor's keep. The tails may have murderous intent. It is going to be a long night for everyone.

/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

CAT AND MOUSE

When the scroll is extracted, six of the cloaked figures paying their respects drop what they are doing to tail the party. These agents (challenging threats) did not anticipate so many showing up and are not about to shed blood on hallowed ground in front of witnesses. If the party refuses to split up relatively soon after descending from the prayer grounds, however, there will be a violent confrontation, with their assailants attacking with daggers and crossbows primed with poisoned bolts. If the players split up, even in smaller groups, the likelihood of such a risky encounter is significantly reduced.

Like the player characters, the agents are communicating and coordinating via shardnet. They practice good cryptomancy, so player characters who acquire one of their shards will be unable to intercept their communications without extracting the keyphrase somehow. All will try to detain or murder their marks once it is determined that they are being led on a wild goose chase, though none will risk their own lives, or identities, unless they know they can get away with it. House Glower does have at least a single agent

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coordinating with the players over shardnet, so if there is a player character about to die (and it doesn't seem totally deserved), this agent can arrive just in time to save the day. Who are these mercenaries? They are about as in the dark as the player characters are, hired through multiple layers of cut-outs and middlemen obscuring their actual employer. All they know is that they are to 1) tail the dead drop recipient to their home and wait for more orders, 2) kill or capture the recipient if they are about to get away, but do not get caught or leave a mess that must be investigated.

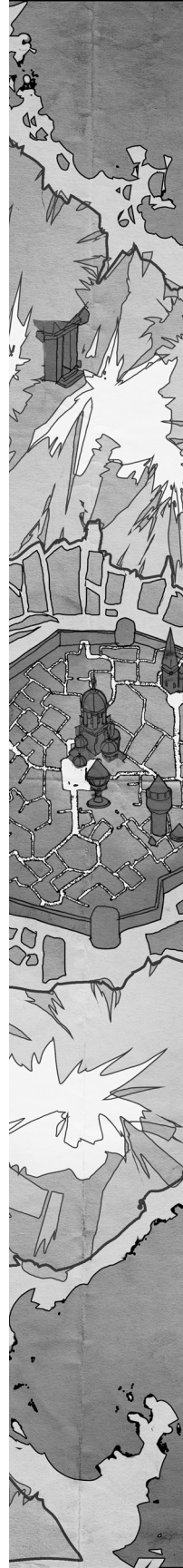
Enterprising players might incapacitate an agent, take his shard, extract the keyphrase (forcefully, via spell, or as the price of his freedom), and then use this to coordinate a trap or send them all to the wrong location. This type of misdirection should be rewarded greatly, working nearly without effort and stringing the agents along exactly how the player sees fit. The goal here is to reinforce the value of compromising networks.

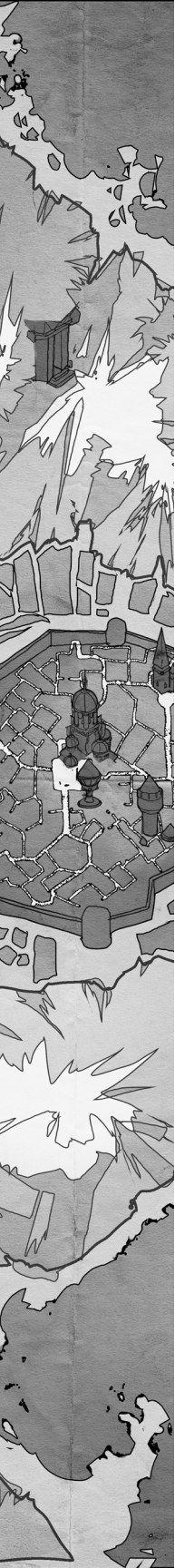
The following are separate "paths" or set-pieces that players can opt to take when splitting up, each emphasizing different ways of solving problems, in this case, losing a tail (or taking one out discretely).

The Alleyways

Once Prantis is entered, a player can opt to vanish into the city-state's labyrinthine alleyways. There are countless buildings and dark corridors to disappear into, from taverns still raging in the wee hour, to treacherous construction sites prone to falling debris and brutal accidents, to dilapidated tenement buildings full of addicts in the worst stages of soma delirium. Wrong turns (which are frequent for the characters new to Prantis) lead to dead ends where characters need to scale building facades, pick or breakdown locked doors, or plunge down into open sewers (where all manner of equally desperate thing might be hiding). There are also a number of ideal spots to lure a tail into an ambush, although most of the agents are trained to call for and wait for at least one other agent before entering a dangerous loca-

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tion. This path is ideal for characters skilled at slinking into small spaces, scaling sheer surfaces, or willing to commit to a stand-up fight in the dark (and dispose of the evidence).

The Thoroughfares

Once Prantis is entered, a player can opt to stick to the well-lit, well-travelled, and well-patrolled major thoroughfares that connect the various public squares and the estates of the major houses. This is the most brazen path, gambling on the notion that the enemy agents wouldn't dare force a confrontation in plain sight. This is somewhat true, as long as the player globs onto a crowd and stays with it. The tailing agents will walk alongside their mark casually, calmly waiting for an ideal moment to pull the mark into the nearest dark alley before finishing them off with daggers. While it might be tempting to notify one of the many constables walking this path that one's life is in danger, this is an extremely high risk proposition. One doesn't know the true affiliations of any constable, and even if an honest one is approached, the encounter will likely warrant interrogation and follow-up that will generate risk. The best way to escape is to find the largest and liveliest crowd (most are intoxicated), join it, and wait for an opening to escape. That, or hitch a ride on a fast moving wagon, or get oneself thrown into jail. This path is ideal for fast-talkers, dilettantes, and escape artists.

The Forest

Instead of re-entering Prantis through the gate nearest the prayer grounds, a player can opt to veer off-road into the Sylvetic forest and cut a path along the city-state walls until reaching either the next gate (approximately 1 mile away), or crawling through one of the many vile sewage pipes pumping out of the city in controlled bursts. Going this way ensures encounters with frightened wild life, voracious mosquitoes, occasional sudden drops into mud pits, and a handful of snares designed for catching small game. The most important factor here is the darkness. Carrying a torch through this path defeats the purpose of vanishing into the forest. However, the poor lighting insists on travel-

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ers to feel through their path and rely on instinct. If someone goes this way, they will have a head start. That is because the tail(s) braving this path first retrieve a vicious hound to lead the chase. This is an ideal path for rangers, hardened warriors, as well as characters good at dealing with animals.

GMs should resolve conflicts and dramatic scenes using opposed roles, unopposed rolls, and contests, all found in the Skill Checks chapter of the game rules. Opposed rolls are ideal for resolving attempts by the player characters to sneak away from their pursuers using the Stealth skill, or for their pursuers to reestablish the scent using the Track skill. Unopposed rolls are ideal for resolving attempts to pick locks, jump between roof tops, and quickly scale fences, whether it is player character or their tail making the attempt. Lastly, contests are ideal for resolving any foot chases that break out during this scene.

The scene is over when all player characters are confident they have lost their tails and notify Glower's agents. There is no need for the group to physically reconnoiter, as they can communicate over shard. However, they might be compelled to have discussions about what just took place, using a keyphrase not known by their employer.

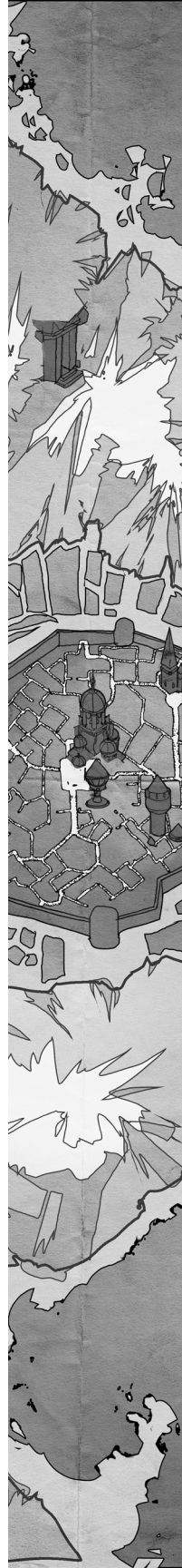
The last message the party gets from Glower's men: "Tomorrow morning, Thronehouse Square, the jugglers tent. Bring the scroll. All will be illuminated."

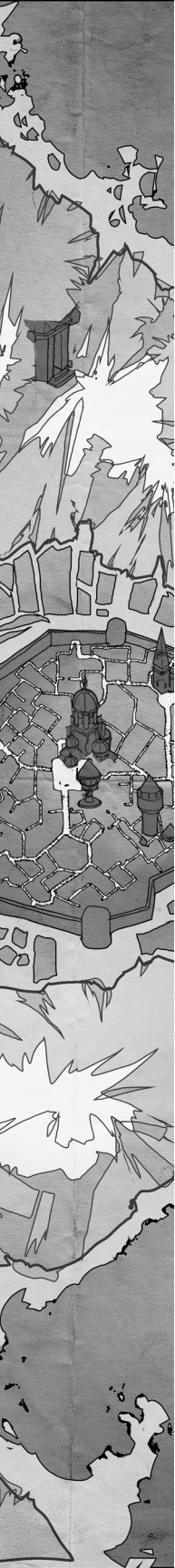
/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

FULL DISCLOSURE

Thronehouse Square is the most lively and densely populated space during daylight hours in Prantis. It is a full bazaar, with nearly every inch of this massive space taken up by the tents, improvised shacks, the wagons of merchants peddling their wares, and performers earning coin. It is at the mouth of the long pathway leading to the entrance of Thronehouse, though formidable guards and gates ensure that only nobility and invited guests head in that direction. The town board is located in this place, a stone wall approx-

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imately eight feet tall and surrounded by a metal gate that prevents anyone but couriers from taking or posting notes. Two performers outside the jugglers tent are putting on a performance that involves throwing knives at each other and catching them in a progressively faster fashion with each exchange, to the cheers of bystanders. A massive shirtless man permits the party entry. Aden Glower and one of his agents are inside.

First order of business is to congratulate and reward the party, granting them 1 strategic asset to spend in any way they see fit. Aden asks for the scroll, reads it, and the blood drains from his face. He utters three elven words (the keyphrase to decrypt the scroll) and hands the scroll back to the party so it can be read:

Sir,

I regret to inform you that I have been lying to you this entire time, telling what you wanted to hear because I felt it pleased you. The story of Lady Xol visiting the estate was entirely invented, as were my characterizations of the Arach family. I will leaving be Prantis for good because I fear your reprisal. I am also ashamed that I have betrayed and spied on the noble family that generously offered me employment. I have not informed them nor the Constabulary of my treachery, so I beg you to not send your agents after me. Please let this simple urchin live in peace.

Aden explains that this message is from his mole inside Castle Arach, a street urchin he spent nearly a year preparing for the infiltration. He is convinced that the letter was written under duress, and provides the party another scroll he received days earlier.

Sir,

My time is running out. It is likely only a matter of time until I am summoned to Master Uric's office. I've seen him flog a servant who stole a spoon until the sinew under his flesh shown. He's as bad as the servants say he is. Gods know what he'd do to a spy.

I am so close to getting access to the ancestral tomb, to

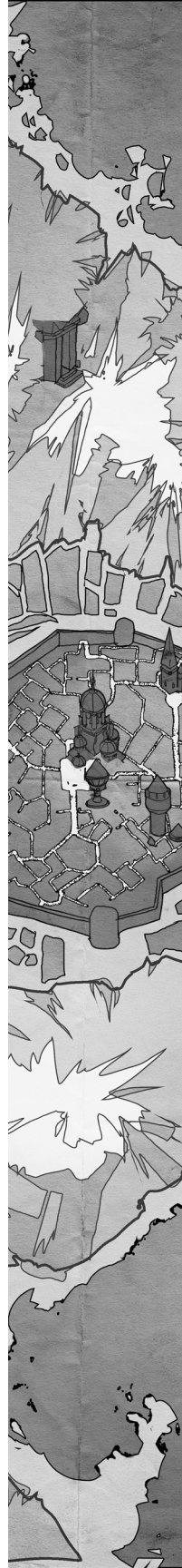
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see what gave Lady Xol such a fright that she left the castle pale and distraught. I will make one more attempt tonight, and give one final report, but after this, I will no longer participate in this operation. It is too dangerous, and I'm convinced that the Arachs would do much worse than you would.

After hours, I began to teach one of the maids the basics of cryptomancy, and in the process, compelled her to use her passphrase to Castle Arach as an example. In case I need to be extracted: Servant Larin's passphrase is "mountains horses wonders," encrypted with the same. She arrives daily at dusk by wagon and serves the Guest wing. Lives in the gray tenement near the north wall. Old and mean.

Aden says he must assume she is dead, or dying in the dungeon of Castle Arach. He cannot publicly decry the Arachs' actions without making it known that the Glow-ers had a spy at Castle Arach, which would kill his chances of becoming patrark and make his spy's sacrifice worthless. He explains that a week ago, Lady Xol made an unprecedented visit to Castle Arach, and then abruptly declared her support for Patrark Mortin at Thronehouse the next day. Specifically, she entered the Arach's ancestral tomb and left disturbed. She has rebuffed any attempts to discuss her change of heart whatsoever, and no amount of coin offered to her retainers in secret has yielded any more information. It seems only Lady Xol, and perhaps her most trusted advisors, know what took place in that castle. Further, Aden cannot confront Lady Xol with the fact that he knows this event occurred, because for all he knows, she is allied with the Arachs at this point.

Players might wonder why House Glower would employ dead drops instead of shards. The answer is simple: Tracer and Shard Scry could be used to prove House Glower's involvement in this plot.



RENT'S DUE

Aden says that Servant Larin's passphrase is a way into Castle Arach. He must send someone inside to both find the truth, and gods willing, rescue his spy. That someone must be skilled, trusted, and someone whom he is not officially affiliated with: the party. It is time the players pay back Glower's generosity. More than a few strangers have been inquiring about the party's whereabouts. House Glower will continue to protect them if they now protect him. He will provide whatever material support they need for their operation, to be communicated and coordinated with his agents over shard. Player characters not keen on subtle threats might consider their own leverage because of the information they know. Yet, they are unknowns in the city, and can do little more than smear the reputation of nobles with "baseless slander," and face the combined wrath of all three noble houses caught up in this dark drama. Aden will remind the party of this if they bring up the matter.

Aden also informs the party that the passphrase is time sensitive. Assuming the spy, Vonna, has been caught, it is only a matter of time until the Arachs take security precautions to prevent further compromise, such as resetting passphrases permitting entry to the castle, or interviewing anyone Vonna worked with. The sooner the castle is infiltrated, the more likely it is that Larin's passphrase will work and that Vonna will still be alive. Of course, performing an operation without days of research, reconnaissance, and planning is also very risky, so it is up to the players.

The party now has a primary goal (discover what's in the ancestral tomb), a secondary goal (rescue Vonna), and a soft time limit (a diminishing-value passphrase and a dying spy). They must also continue to keep their affiliation with Glower secret at all costs. Aden explains that the party will be rewarded 2 strategic assets for solving the mystery of Castle Arach, and an additional 1 Strategic Asset if they are able to extract Vonna alive. They can try negotiate this,

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convincing Aden to offer a maximum 3 strategic assets for the primary mission and 2 for the secondary mission.

For each session of downtime the party takes to prepare for this operation, there is an accumulating 10% chance that Larin's passphrase will be reset or flagged, and an accumulating 5% chance that it is too late to save Vonna. The GM should tell the players this fact, but roll these percentages and keep the results a secret. This tradeoff between preparation and expediency should add some interesting tension, but keep in mind, the party might opt to find a different way in and not use Larin's passphrase at all. Larin's passphrase is just the easiest and most immediate way for at least one of the player characters to get into the otherwise (reportedly) impenetrable Castle Arach.

/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

SERVANT LARIN

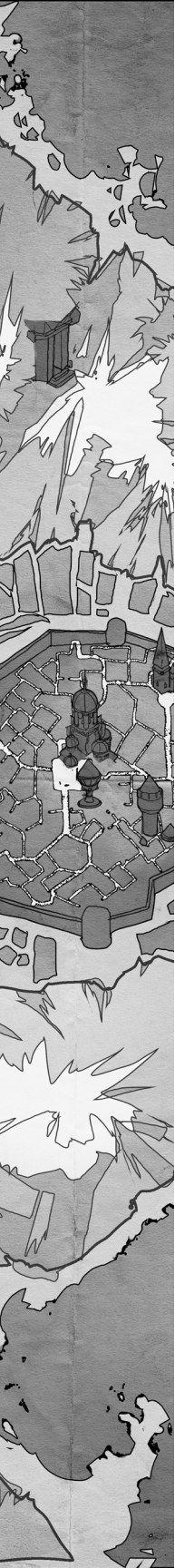
If the party does wish to use Larin's passphrase to enter the castle, there is a catch: Larin cannot show up to work on that day.

Larin sleeps in until two hours before dusk and eats a meager breakfast on the way to a wagon outside of the eastern Prantis gates, where a wagon picks up Castle Arach's night laborers and transports them to the castle. Despite her age, Larin (a tough threat) is a powerful woman with a large build, and has lived in the Prantis slums long to know how to spot a scam, call a bluff, or put someone through a window. The fact that Vonna was able to pull a fast one on her is a testament to Vonna's skill. Larin will not be bullied into skipping work, refusing to lose her 10 coin a day job. Nor will she accept an offer too good to be true. The players might be tempted to offer her a job at the Glower estate, but this would create a link between Glower and any operations about to take place using Larin's passphrase, an unacceptable risk to Glower.

It's not that threats, scams, or other distractions can't work; they will just be quite tough to pull off and likely

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require multiple layers of fraud and solid skill checks, unless the players plan a social engineering approach before arriving at the tenement building she lives in. Despite her ferocity, Larin is very afraid of Uric Arach, head of security for Castle Arach. If the players pretend to be Uric's henchmen and confront her with her mishandled passphrase, it might be very easy to convince her to not show up at Castle Arach and consider new employment. Of course, this will create a false link between the party and the Arachs in the mind of a neighborhood gossip, which might be problematic down the road.

Larin is both a neighborhood fixture and a loudmouth. This interaction will require delicate handling. If the interaction becomes violent or loud, 1 risk is generated. If the interaction becomes lethal, the neighborhood will demand that the Constabulary prioritize the case, generating an additional 1 risk.

/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

RESEARCH

Glower will provide basic information on Castle Arach, including approximate floor plan, relative guard strength, and known security protocols. GMs can feel free to review the later sections on Castle Arach's cryptosystems and mundane security systems and decide what Glower, equipped with a spy on the inside, might already know about the target. The party will likely want to know more about what they are committing to, and getting more information will require some reconnaissance and research. There are a number of methods to do reconnaissance and research to make the party's mission more successful. The least risky and least rewarding of these methods is to leverage the Shardscape. General information on the Shardscape concerning the Arachs and their castle will be scant and dubious, but give a general impression of the family: the filthy rich, old, secretive, and racist ranger vanguard of Prantis.

If the players use a strategic asset to purchase an echo collective, they will be able to learn more useful spe-

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cifics that can lead to interesting encounters, defined below. This adventure does not elaborate on any of these possible leads, but enterprising GMs should be able to devise a way in which these leads might point to an alternate route inside Castle Arach. Further, in the event that basic Shardscape research yields a dramatic success on a Query skill check, GMs can feel free to also reward the party with one of these compelling leads:

Shardscape and cryptomancy

“There’s a strung-out soma-head in the tenement quarter of Prantis, swears he was a cryptoadmin for the Arachs about ten years ago. Refuses to say anything about them, but I bet he’d do anything for some pure soma.”

“All of their regulars are connected. Solid discipline, daily rotation of keyphrases, backups if they get bridged. That’s what I hear, anyways. But 50-some shards among the guards? Think about it, that’s two full days of echoes.”

Physical security and warfare

“The Landoviats and the Grayrifts know Castle Arach’s perimeter best. That’s because the Arachs and Grayrifts are duking it out with the Landoviats in Sylvetica. The elves HATE the Arachs, and gods-know any dwarf can be bought. Stupid dwarves.”

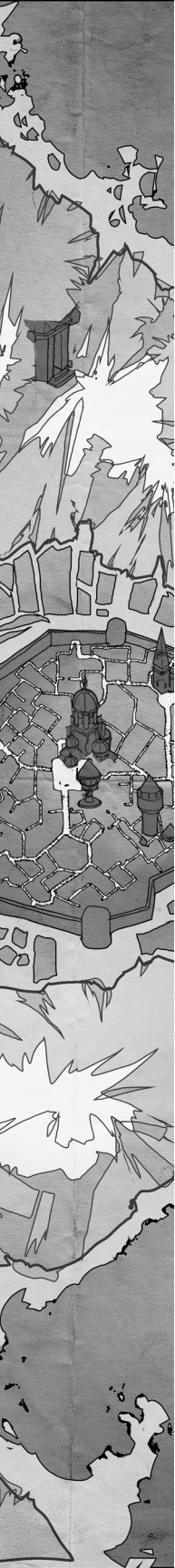
“They must be losing, then. Theres a coffin maker in the tenement quarter who stopped working for anyone other than the Arachs. Good riddance to that whole family.”

Politics and economics

“The Arachs never show up to court. Instead, they send a seneschal, one Ambester Larg, who speaks on their behalf. I’ve seen him coming and going at both Thronehouse and Centerspire, as if you needed any more proof the Arachs and Falcrons are joined at the hip.”

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“It’s all about coin. The Arachs have been buying up a lot of real estate the Falcrons no longer find profitable. That failed aqueduct on the north part of Prantis, the one that couldn’t pull enough water from the Jaws to justify its cost? Yeah, the Arachs bought that.”

Magic and arcana

“Ah, the Arachs... a learned family with a deep roots, deep appreciation for ritual magic, and deep coffers. Their retainers are always preferred customers at my booth in Thronehouse Square.”

“I’ve read Constabulary reports that vagrants have been disappearing from the sewers. Good riddance. But if I was tasked with figuring out why, I’d probably start with the local house that seems to avoid daylight. Just saying.”

/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

RECON

If the party spent their 1 strategic resource on scouts, or takes a field trip themselves, they will learn a little bit about the land surrounding Castle Arach.

Castle Arach is the ancient estate of the old, esteemed, and very secretive house Arach, a house of warriors who have served as the city-state’s scouts, vanguards, and rangers for generations. It is on a mountain-top approximately two miles away from Prantis (approximately 30 minutes by wagon or stead). There is poorly maintained road that leads to a checkpoint tower in the foot hills of that mountain, and then turns into a an even more poorly maintained path that winds around the mountain until reaching the perimeter wall of the castle.

There is no Landoviat presence in the land leading to and surrounded Castle Arach, but there is much in the way of giant vermin. The hollowed out carcasses of deer and elk hang high in the trees, stuck in the webs of eight-legged monstrosities. Fortunately, travelers who stick to the road

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and move at a fast clip are rarely assailed by these creatures. As vile as the vermin are, they do serve as a natural defense, protecting the Arach's land from squatters and Landoviat scouts.

If the party employs scouts or succeeds at a Tracking skill check, they will discover a steep but climbable section of foothill on the eastern side of the mountain that leads to an even steeper and barely climbable sheer stone wall that is higher than the forest canopy. This is the eastern wall of Castle Arach, impenetrable, save for a series of balconies. Not even the most skilled of climbers could scale their way to a balcony without the help of a grappling hook thrown up to the balcony or a rope dropped down from the balcony.

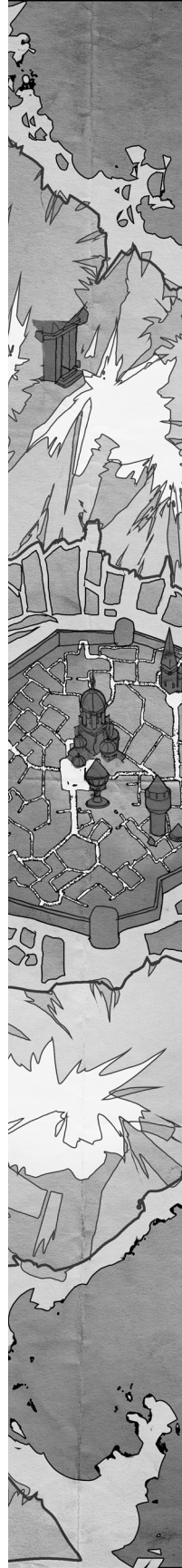
If the party employs scouts or succeeds dramatically at a Tracking skill check, they will be able to notice some wagon tracks that veer off the main path and lead to a small lake below the mountain where a cavernous waterfall seems to drain. While there is certainly no way up the waterfall, it appears that this area is a staging ground for some type of activity. Perhaps there is a way *out* of Castle Arach that leads to this place.

/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

RANDOM TROUBLE

Prantis can be a dangerous place, especially at night. Walking the streets always presents the risk of being shook down by crooked constables, stumbling into the middle of a street battle between feuding soma-dealers, or having to pick sides in a booze-fueled tavern brawl that becomes lethal. These encounters are the backdrop of nightlife in a big city-state. The GM need not thrust these types of encounters on the party, but they should be common enough in the background that the party maintains adequate levels of paranoia and operational security to avoid them.

Player characters exploring the Arach's land for themselves risk being detected by Arach rangers or facing off against a swarm of hungry giant vermin.



CASTLE ARACH CRYPTOSYSTEMS

Admittance to Castle Arach is by invitation only. The Arachs do nearly all of their business with others in Prantis and at court. They do not suffer unannounced visitors lightly, and both their garrison of seasoned warriors and various authentication schemes enforce this aloofness. The Arachs are extremely secretive and don't even trust their servants, retainers, or guards, which explains the cryptosystems and security of the estate.

The first checkpoint tower is a multistory tower and gatehouse with battlements and a small garrison of six soldiers armed with crossbows. The tower itself blocks the path and is straddled over a large, slightly warped portcullis that has seen more than its fair share of siege attempts. The portcullis itself is operated by simple machinery on the top floor of the tower, and is always in the shut position by default. There is a heavy door within the portcullis, to permit entry to people without lifting the entire gate. This door is heavily fortified, with all latches and locks on the interior only. Near the portcullis, there is a small altar with a large shard imbedded in it. This is a kiosk where guests can check in. Guards will watch from the tower's upper levels, but will generally ignore visitors and tell them to authenticate to the shard in the kiosk if they call out for entry. This shard is part of the "gate" shardnet, composed of two shards: one at the checkpoint tower and one in a cryptovault deep below Castle Arach.

There are three different protocols for entry: Arach family member, servants/retainers, and visitors. Why does Castle Arach rely on an authentication scheme for entry? It is because the guards, servants, retainers, and even cryptoadmins serving House Arach are all temporary, expendable, and untrustworthy in the eyes of the Arachs. They rely on repeatable, auditable procedures, and not trust in their fellow man, to ensure the security and privacy of their estate.

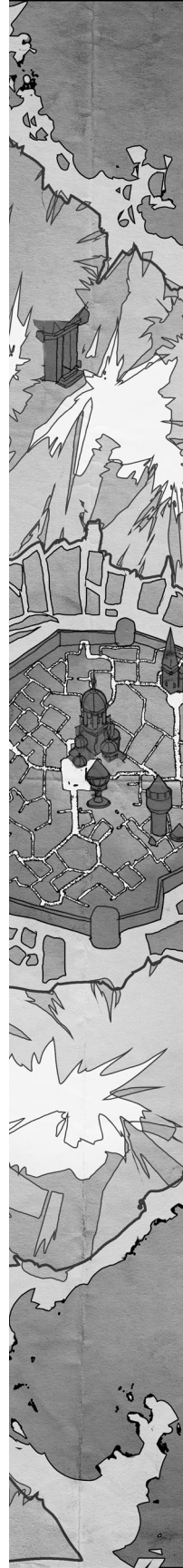
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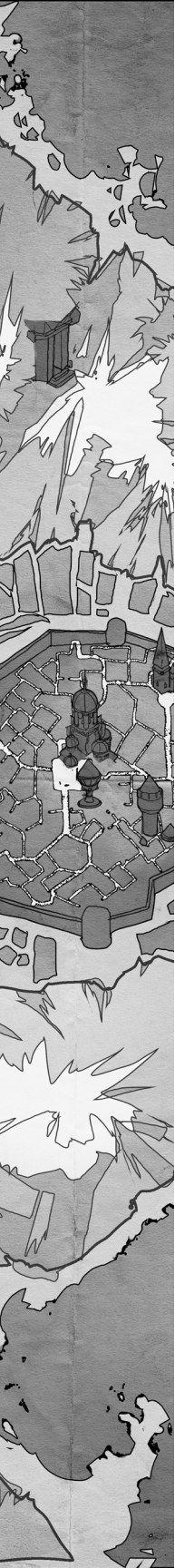
The following is the authentication protocol for Castle Arach family members. The Arachs touch the shard, encrypt with the cryptoadmin's true name (something only the Arachs and a few others know), and provide a passphrase that only the Arachs and the cryptoadmin know. Upon success, the cryptoadmin contacts the checkpoint tower garrison over a separate "garrison" shardnet, and tells them that an Arach has arrived and is admitted entry.

The following is the authentication protocol for all servants and retainers. Each servant is assigned a unique passphrase. The servant touches the shard, and encrypts that unique passphrase with that very same passphrase. The cryptoadmin will then check the passphrase against the registry, and then either permit or deny access. The encryption of the passphrase with the passphrase seems redundant, but it prevents someone from walking up to the shard and seeing clear-text passphrases echoing for two hours. New servants sometimes write down their passphrase on a scroll so they don't forget it. More unfortunate still, some servants, especially those that are tired, drunk, or in a hurry, simply forget to encrypt at all and send their passphrases in clear-text. Sometimes the cryptoadmin will notice, sometimes they won't. Even when they do, they sometimes do nothing about this breach: echoes fade in two hours and the problem takes care of itself. Regularly scheduled visitors, such as couriers or the deliverers of supplies, are assigned passphrases like servants.

The cryptoadmins do make servants change their passwords once every season, or in the case of clear, demonstrated compromise, or whenever a cryptoadmin leaves the service of house Arach. If a servant forgets her passphrase, the cryptoadmin contacts the garrison and has the garrison provide the servant a temporary shared key to have a discussion. These emergency keys are in a scroll with a wax seal, and are generated by the cryptoadmin. The garrison tosses a random one down, and the servant uses this key to encrypt her communication to the cryptoadmin. The garrison sometimes takes a look at the scroll first, particularly if a servant is new or none-the-wiser, though this violation is punished

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if discovered. Those who forget their password are prompted for the following (weak) security questions:

- What year were you born?
- In what city-state, clanhall, or village were you born?
- What is your mother's common name?

Those who pass the test are assigned a new passphrase right there. Those that fail are also permitted entry, just long enough to be detained by the garrison and brought to the dungeon.

The following is the authentication protocol for all other visitors. Visitors are handed a temporary keyphrase much the same way as servants who forgot their password. The visitor uses this keyphrase to encrypt her communication to the cryptoadmin and announce themselves. The cryptoadmin will check the registry to see if an invitation had been approved by an Arach family member. Alternatively, a visitor can present a physical invitation, a scroll bearing the wax seal of the Arachs. If no invitation exists, the visitor will not be permitted entry. If the visitor makes an appeal, insisting on some kind of mistake, or some other urgency, the cryptoadmin will contact the Arach via the "house" shardnet, a shardnet composed of shards possessed by only Arach family members and whatever cryptoadmin is in the cryptovault. Again, if malintent is detected, entry is permitted, just long enough to capture the offenders.

When the visitor passes through the checkpoint tower, the path winding up the mountain to the castle walls takes approximately 20 minutes. When they arrive, they are greeted by another gatehouse somewhat larger and more fortified than the first. It is this gatehouse where more physical and manual procedures for authentication occur. Guards will confirm the identity of those servants, retainers, and Arach family members they know. Visitors will be asked the nature of their visit. All but the Arachs are subject to random and invasive searches by the guards who look for concealed weapons, poisons, explosives, and undeclared shards. This second gatehouse exists to address a major weakness

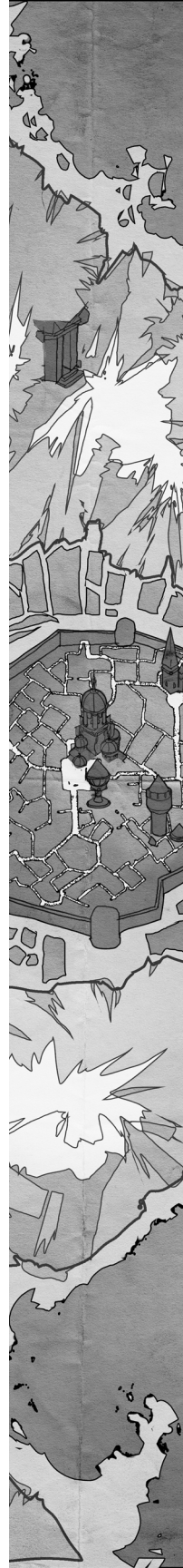
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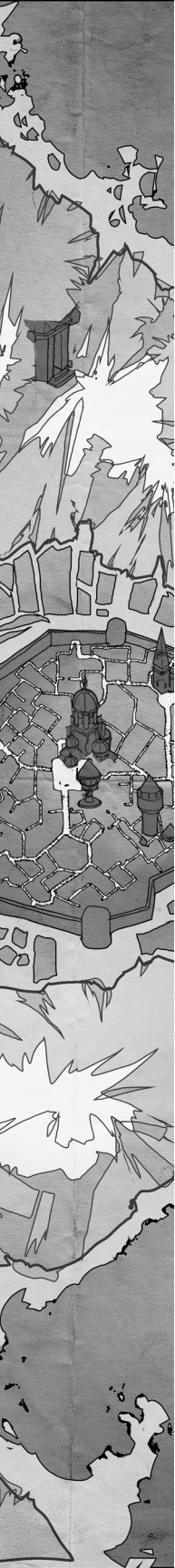
in the Arach cryptosystem: the cryptoadmin can't know if someone who says a passphrase is the actual owner of that passphrase. To compensate for this, the cryptoadmin tells the garrison the name, race, and gender of the servant (all of which are documented in the registry) prior to allowing entry. These items are validated in this second gatehouse. Due to the nature of how non-Arachs are marginalized and anonymized, guards rarely know the name of most servants, but they can at least validate race and gender, to a degree.

There are several dozen soldiers in the garrison, all holding on to a shard. The cryptoadmins, too, have one of these shards, as do some key members of House Arach. The "garrison" shardnet is protected by a shared keyphrase that is rotated during a daily briefing, and cryptoadmins do an hourly welfare check for all guards on watch (typically a half dozen per checkpoint tower, a half dozen patrolling Castle Arach itself, and another half dozen patrolling the outdoors). The garrison shardnet is where the cryptoadmin announces to the garrison whether a guest should be permitted entry (e.g. "Visitor authenticated, open the first gate"). The cryptoadmins pay less attention to the garrison shardnet than they do the gate shardnet, so it is certainly possible for anyone on the garrison shardnet to pretend to be the cryptoadmin, at least until the cryptoadmin returns to the garrison shardnet and declares wildly, "that wasn't me!" If this event occurs, there are three "smash in case of emergency" cases containing a new keyphrase, one located in each tower, and one in the cryptovault. The garrison shardnet then switches to this backup keyphrase and another roll call is made immediately.

To review, we've discussed three distinct shardnets: the gate shardnet, the garrison shardnet, and the house shardnet. The cryptoadmin has a shard for each of these shardnets, but the shards stay in the cryptovault, not with the cryptoadmin. All guards have a shard from the garrison shardnet, as do a handful of Arachs who concern themselves with security matters. All Arachs have a shard from the house shardnet. Lastly, there is the gate shardnet, which only the cryptoadmin has access to. In addition to these private

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shardnets, there is one large shard from the public Shardscape in the Arach's cryptovault.

/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

CASTLE ARACH

MUNDANE SECURITY

Castle Arach has a number of mundane security controls to detect, prevent, and respond to intruders. A primary control is fear. All servants, retainers, and guards serving House Arach take an oath of loyalty. This oath includes not only abstaining from crimes against the Arachs (such as stealing valuables, or plotting with rivals), but also keeping the castle's security protocols secret. Enforcing this policy is Castle Arach's chief of security and interrogator Uric Arach, who is able to interview subjects at random and uses the Mind Read spell to detect trespasses or malintent against his house. This man is very good at his job and makes terrible examples of those who break their oath. Sometimes, however, he will offer to forgive certain trespasses in exchange for personal favors, which are more often than not performed at the expense of his political and familial rivals.

Everyone admitted into Castle Arach, with the exception of the Arachs themselves, must wear a decorative sash that indicates their status in the estate. All are given one befitting their station as they enter the second checkpoint. There is a sash for guards, servants, trusted retainers, and visitors, each coming with a certain set of privileges within the castle. A visitor sash indicates that one must be escorted by someone else with a different sash at all times, and are never permitted into secure areas (e.g. dungeon, armory, treasury, cryptovault, the Arachs' quarter, the keep tower, or the ancestral tomb). Guard sashes authorize access to virtually everywhere save the Arachs' quarter or the ancestral tomb, unless they are escorted by an Arach or a retainer. Trusted retainer sashes offer full access to all areas. Servant sashes are unique to the areas they are permitted to service. There are designated public areas, such as a dining hall, the great hall, and the guest quarter where anyone is permitted. Anyone

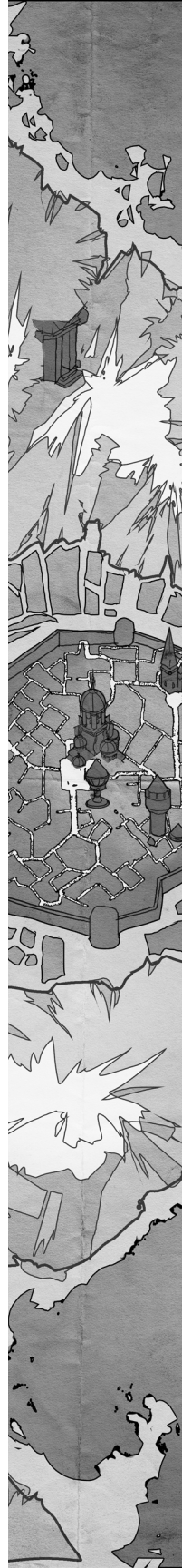
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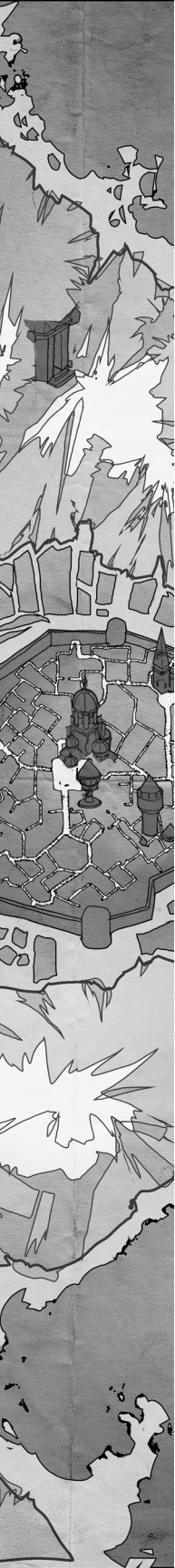
not wearing a sash, who is not an Arach, is immediately detained by guards and processed (which typically involves some time in the dungeon before meeting Uric). Anyone who loses their sash, or gives it to another, is also immediately detained by the guards and processed. Further, a sash by itself is sometimes not enough. Those wearing a sash must be dressed like and indicating behaviors of one befitting said sash, and both guards and servants alike will question those deviating from this pattern.

The garrison at Castle Arach is a highly trained and motivated force (a challenging threat). They are not simply guards, but also a vanguard force that the city-state calls on to solve problems from time to time. They enjoy a relatively comfortable existence when not on duty, either staying in their somewhat lush barracks, blowing off steam in the city, or granted limited leave to travel. They are typically well-armed, and the Arach raiment is chainmail with a crimson surcoat and the Arach seal (a black spider clutching barley with one leg and a bundle of arrows with another). They are not only good combatants, but shrewd negotiators and clever investigators. Most hope to serve long enough, and loyally enough, to become a trusted retainer of the house, and be permitted into Castle Arach's most exclusive locations.

Many actors in Castle Arach have the keys required to get to the areas they are permitted. Doors are rarely left ajar in the Castle, and doing so is a security violation worth punishing and an anomaly worth telling a guard and declaring over the garrison shardnet. The doors to the most secure areas (e.g. the Arachs' quarter, the ancestral tomb, and the cryptovault) are heavily fortified, in conspicuous high-traffic areas, and are fitted with advanced dwarven locks. The exterior windows throughout the Castle are fitted with iron bars on the first three floors and lockable wooden shutters on all levels above. While the dining hall, great hall, and the Arachs' quarter are illuminated at all times, from either daylight coming through stained glass windows or lit chandeliers and wall sconces holding torches, the castle does get eerily dark at night, especially in the dungeons, the keep tower, and all catacombs connecting the different areas. Pa-

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trols throughout the Castles interior and exterior are fairly common, occurring nearly every 15 or so minutes in all areas, and even more when the castle has guests or is on high alert. Patrols consist of at least two guards and sometimes a trained hound with a keen sense of smell. A good way for GMs to simulate guard patrol frequency is to have guards approach the player's vicinity any time a skill check fails, forcing them to scramble for cover or an alibi.

/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

KEEPING SECRETS

The Arachs have many secrets, and one of their darkest secrets is found in the ancestral tomb deep below the great hall. Before elaborating on this secret, one probably wonders how the Arachs keep dark secrets from their somewhat large population of servants and retainers. It is achieved mostly through the compartmentalization, layers of mistrust, and area-specific privileges discussed earlier, but also through cryptomancy. There are a couple of areas in Castle Arach obscured by the Maze spell, encrypted by key-phrases known only to the Arachs and their most trusted retainers. To get to the Ancestral Tomb, one must traverse the catacombs below the castle, burrowing deep into the mountain it resides on. The catacombs are obscured by a number of Maze spells, either causing misdirection and vertigo, or by obscuring falls to one's death. The unfinished and "haunted" keep tower enjoys the same level of obscurity, and it is almost once a season where a servant tragically plummets to their death. Many of the Arachs keep diaries of their misdeeds, but the diaries are either built with tamper-proof dwarven devices, have all of their pages encrypted, or both. Lastly, the Arachs ensure secrecy, division, and rivalry among their trusted retainers so that all remain fiercely loyal to the Arachs but maintain a key eye on each other's activities, and report to their lords.

Virtually every powerful family in any realm, be it in Sphere, Subterra, or Sylvetica, has some skeletons in the closet, and nearly without exception, all have been accused of scandal, treason, and monstrous behavior behind closed

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doors. Those guards, servants, and retainers who have witnessed the Arachs' dark secrets and decide to bring them to light are rarely believed and are instead dismissed as agitators and disgruntled gossips. Any noble house publicly acknowledging another house's dirty laundry faces the risk of having their own exposed, so the Arachs allow these upstarts to shout and flail until they lose their credibility and are forgotten... and when no one is looking anymore, the Arachs exact brutal vengeance for their slights against their family name.

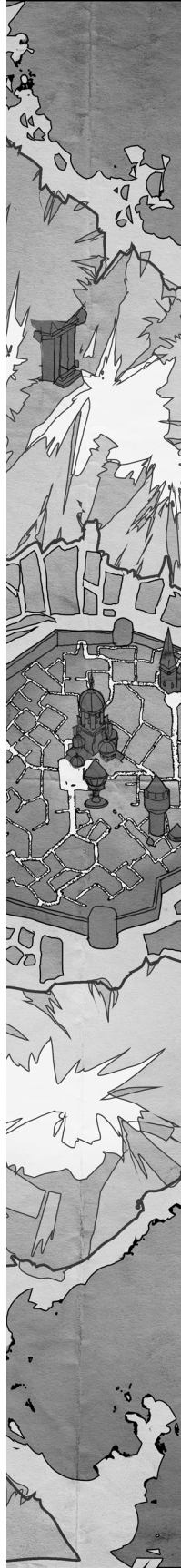
The remainder of this section is purposefully speculative. We've already introduced the Arach family itself as a very secretive family living in an estate with considerable security measures. Lady Xol witnessed something so grave in the ancestral tomb that she threw her lot in with the Arachs and Falcrons. Let's postulate some scenarios as to why. GMs are encouraged to pick any or all of these scenarios as is befitting their campaigns, and feel free to bank some of the remaining scenarios for other adventures.

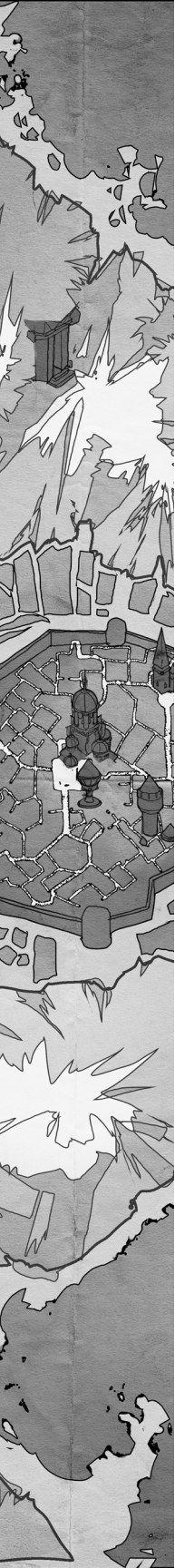
Ticking bio-weapon

Perhaps the Arachs are engaged in disturbing research, for their own purposes, or at the pleasure of some greater power. The Arachs might be engaging in biological and alchemical experimentation on some captured orcs, with the end goal of either eradicating that species, or "domesticating" a variant of that species to bolster their own military might. While orcs are a hated enemy of the noble races, they are a sentient species, and what the Arachs are doing to their orcish prisoners is beyond the pale. Alternatively, maybe the Arachs are experimenting with zombies, retaining them as biological weapons to inflict on their enemies, or exposing some of their less than loyal servants and guards to the zombie bite on purpose, to learn more about the ailment for medical research or attempts at harnessing immortality.

Maybe Lady Xol saw this macabre research demonstrated. Whatever breakthrough the Arachs have made,

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they're about to scale it for the purposes of political power. Perhaps the Arachs have sprinkled various locations in Prantis with "zombie time bombs"... zombies stowed away underneath or near population centers, only separated from the masses by one cryptolocked gate. With one keyphrase, the Arachs can unleash a zombie epidemic on Prantis, or unleash a selective one against their enemies. Perhaps they control a "domesticated" and alchemically mutated clan of orcs that now thrive in the sewers below Prantis, ready to launch a raid against any of the Arachs' foes at moment's notice.

Ritual of the ancestral army

Perhaps the Arachs are engaged in dark and hedonistic ritual, manifesting in the most profane ways, such as torture, cannibalism, or human sacrifice. Maybe the Arachs are an ancient holdout of magic's old ways of bloodletting and usurpation, and have been carrying out this taboo discipline for centuries in the confines and secrecy of their estate. Perhaps their various crusades over the years have been not for mundane glory, but instead procuring forbidden magical texts and unholy reagents required to carry out a powerful spell: the resurrection of an ancient ancestor warlord or the conjuration of a demonic siege engine. Perhaps all the people who keep mysteriously disappearing from the city-state have either been converted to the Arachs' cult, or have been vessels kidnapped to feed its dark ends.

Maybe Lady Xol saw the power, and terrible price, of an Arach ritual. Ritual magic that magically extends life or raises the dead always requires an immense sacrifice of life blood, willing or otherwise. Due to their longevity, elves are considered prime specimens to power this type of ritual magic. Perhaps the Arachs' frontier battles with the Lando-viats is providing the specimens to power such magic. If there is any group eager for restoration of ancient heroes, it is the Arachs' unusual allies, Clan Grayrift: the anachronistic and xenophobic dwarven clan on the losing side of history. A Clan Grayrift restored to even half of its mythical height would be a most powerful ally - or servant (in the case that the Arachs control the maintenance of the ritual).

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Risk Eater proxy

Perhaps the Arachs serve the Risk Eaters, and their estate is a regional center of power for that organization. Maybe the Arachs are beholden to the Risk Eaters for assuring their position of power and relative opulence. More likely, the Arachs are beholden because the Risk Eaters know terrible secrets: the unknown war crimes and usurpation upon which the Arach wealth was built, or family secrets that could nullify political marriages, sever the Arachs from inheritances, and have them cast as bastards and pretenders by other noble families. Whatever the case, the Arachs are embroiled in some serious scheming: planning coups or kidnappings, or striking deals with foreign enemies planning to sack the city-state, all to enable a future that the Risk Eaters have deemed necessary.

Maybe Lady Xol met the Risk Eaters face to face and learned that her own family's seeming incapability to conceive an heiress and failing crops will only be reversed when the Xols comply with the master plan. First on the agenda is to discover and destroy some interlopers being protected by the Glowers (you guessed it, the player party). By the time the player party discovers this much, Lady Xol's agents will have already infiltrated Aden Glower's inner circle and flipped one or more of his most trusted aids.

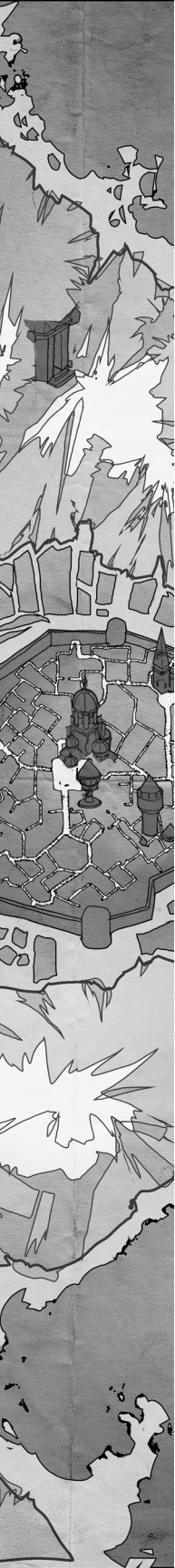
/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

VONNA'S FATE

Like the dark secrets of Castle Arach, Vonna's fate should be tailored to fit the campaign's thematic and narrative needs. Vonna is an interesting and talented GM character and her experience is central to the campaign. That makes her fate a particularly powerful storytelling element. What we do know about her fate is that she was most likely discovered, interrogated, and forced to dictate the final note left at the prayer grounds. After that is anyone's guess. Let's postulate a couple of possible outcomes for her. GMs are encouraged to pick (or invent) whatever outcome seems most appropriate to the type of game they want to play.

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Perhaps Master Uric broke Vonna during an interrogation. Not only did he extract as much as he could from her with the Mind Read spell, but he also leveraged the Mind Write spell to inject some profound memories deep into her psyche, triggered by words only Uric would ever utter. Vonna may have escaped on her own, taking severe injuries and perhaps even killing in the process. All this, of course, to make Aden Glower less likely to suspect that his star asset is now a Manchurian candidate. This outcome is ideal for emphasizing tradecraft, trust, and paranoia in a campaign.

Perhaps Vonna became part of whatever dark machinations she discovered. In one scenario, she resides in a cryptolocked cage in the Arach catacombs, slowly succumbing to the fever of a zombie-bite. She'll soon be transported to a more strategically useful location, and become another cached bio-weapon that the Arachs could release on their enemies. In another scenario, she has aged dramatically, her life-force usurped in ancestor-raising ritual magic. This outcome is ideal for campaigns emphasizing just how brutal and unfeeling factions can be in their pursuit of power.

Perhaps Vonna has vanished. That is not to say that her fate is either good or bad, but simply inconclusive in the short term. A missing agent represents many possible story arcs, and might be intriguing enough for the party to spend some of their discretionary time tracking down for themselves. Was Vonna murdered? Is she on the run from the Arachs, the Glowerns, or both? Has she told anyone what she knows? This outcome is ideal for campaigns that are less about factions but more about the personal stories of their pawns.

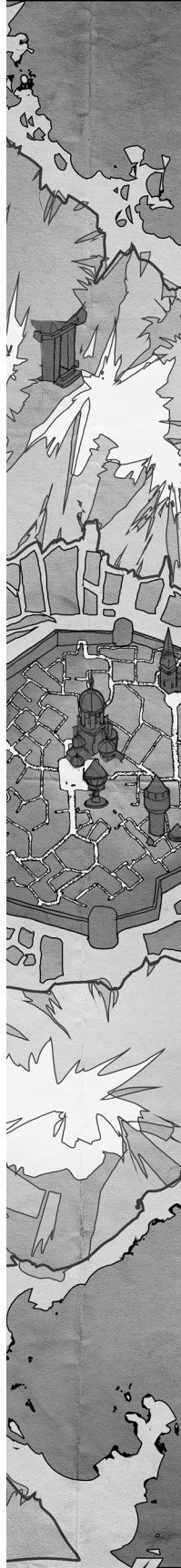
THE ANCESTRAL TOMB

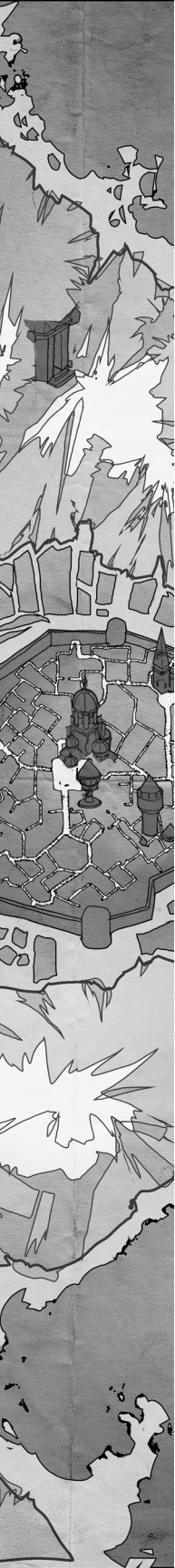
Regardless of the conspiracy the GM choses, or the fate chosen for Vonna, all is revealed in the ancestral tomb, the place where the infiltration of Castle Arach reaches its climax.

The ancestral tomb is massive and labyrinthine, housing the collected dead of all Arachs for centuries (save those who disappeared or died on a battlefield and couldn't be recovered). The sarcophagi themselves are functional, with granite slabs and the name of the interred etched on top. An enterprising player could use a cryptomancy kit to transcribe interesting names for later research. The layout is somewhat unusual. The titled men of each family have their own individual sarcophagi, but the women, children, and untitled men associated with that titled man share a common, larger sarcophagi. Traversing deeper into the tomb, you can mark the reversal of time by which coat of arms is emblazoned on tapestries. The coats change in color, skill, and iconography, becoming more primitive the deeper one traverses into the catacombs. The oldest ancestors of the Arachs in the furthest reaches of the tombs have no iconography at all. Astute player characters might notice the names on the oldest set of sarcophagi are encrypted, perhaps hiding a less than favorable lineage.

The tomb is not as dank and dusty as it should be. In fact, some areas look well-traveled. The air is fresh and there is a quiet murmur of a distant waterfall, though its uncertain where it is coming from. To the east and west of the long corridor housing the sarcophagi, there are additional slim and winding corridors housing secrets on their own. To the east is a corridor lined with torches and the steel grate doors of prison cells. At the end of this corridor is a laboratory full of alchemy supplies, interring supplies, a recently vivisected body (zombie? orc? elf? Vonna?) on a stone slab, and perhaps a pair of scientists or cultists cowering in the dark, waiting to ambush interlopers interrupting their research.

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Vonna either is or was in one of the prison cells. Perhaps she is still there and using her shackles to stave off a zombie bite that was administered to one of her limbs. Perhaps a pair of picked shackles and an ajar prison door are the evidence she left of her escape. Perhaps it was her body being vivisected on the laboratory slab. Whatever occurred, those cowering in the laboratory can attest if compelled, but not without a struggle. As to the contents of the other cells: other prisoners, the remains of other prisoners, zombies in various states of decay, alchemically-mutated orcs, elves to be fed to macabre ritual - whatever is most appropriate to the GM's designs.

To the west of the primary catacomb is the source of the sound of flowing water. This area could house a number of scenes. Perhaps there is a cavernous study near an underground waterfall; book-shelves are carved into stone, scrolls and maps strewn over long tables, and a soma pipe is still burning, left behind by someone who fled. Perhaps there is a channel where wooden coffins filled with gods-know-what (e.g. zombies, corpses, sacrificial elves, failed orc experiments) are sent down the waterfall and extracted by wagons as the base of the mountain, to be buried, destroyed, or brought back into Prantis at night. The waterfall is a final means to escape Castle Arach in the case that the player characters are unable to leave the same way they came in.

/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

GAMER NEEDS 1: PHAT LOOT

Castle Arach is not just a fortress but also the home of one of the most affluent families in the region. There is a nearly endless supply of useful and valuable things to pilfer from the armory, the treasury, the cryptovault, and other places. Even the lightly guarded and non-strategic rooms like the guest quarters and the great hall are full of gorgeous tapestries, stunning paintings, bejeweled chalices, silver dinnerware, and other valuables. Keep in mind, however, that if things go missing during the infiltration, a guard might notice and put the rest on high alert. Further, Arach loot that is either pawned, kept, or even touched might tie back to

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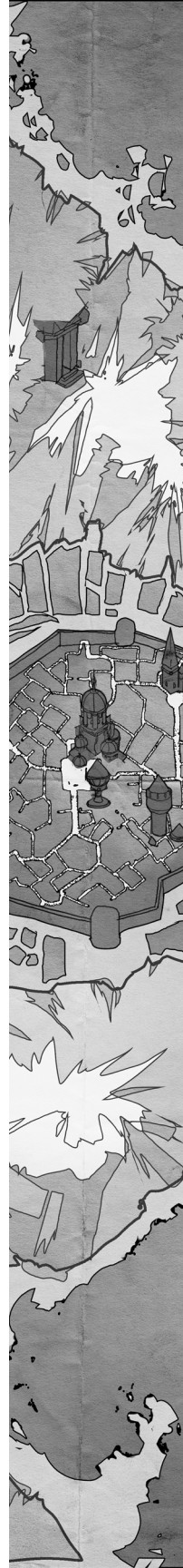
the party during the investigation that will inevitably occur once the Arachs discover that their castle hosted an adversarial infiltration. GMs wishing to torment players into making poor, greed-informed decisions might want to notify them that it appears the Arachs bury their dead in their armor and weapons, and that a handful of Arachs throughout history were legendary heroes and adventurers. Then, sit back and watch the party start popping the tops off sarcophagi.

/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/

GAMER NEEDS 2: ULTRAVIOLENCE

There are all kinds of threats alluded to in the adventure, including corrupt constables, assassins, a bloodhound, giant vermin, orcs, cultists, castle guards, and even Risk Eater agents. However, this adventure does not feature any staged battles. There are two reasons for this: 1) combat is not the primary focus of this game and 2) if decades of gaming has taught us anything, it is that things will invariably go badly at some point and result in a scene of combat (which is why there are a good amount of game rule supporting combat). Why plan violent encounters when you can bank on them happening organically?

We defer to the guidance given in the threats section when it comes to how a GM should handle scenes of combat in this adventure. One suggestion we will make here, though, is that the party should not be able to succeed at the infiltration of Castle Arach through violence. There is no final boss. The party may find themselves offing an inconvenient guard or two, or even engaged in a legitimate skirmish if their operation goes awry and they must escape. Eventually, however, the Arachs will coordinate an overwhelming, simultaneous, multi-pronged attack to crush intruders. With the benefit of outnumbering the party ten-to-one, not to mention home field advantage, the best the party can do with violence is buy themselves a little more time to find an escape route, or negotiate the terms of their surrender.



POST MORTEM

So the infiltration was either a success, a failure, or somewhere in between. What is next? That depends on the outcome of the adventure. Let's start with the most likely scenario: the mission was botched and the player characters are now captives of the Arachs.

In this scenario, Valdr Arach will give the party two choices: swear fealty to him (which would make him the party's new patron) or suffer an absolutely horrible fate (e.g. become a zombie, a ritual sacrifice, or a victim of recreational torture). In the former case, the Arachs would coerce each of the player characters to give up their true names so magical and cryptomantic means could be used to assure their loyalty. The first order of business would be to serve as double agents against House Glower and exploit his trust. They would return to Aden and report an outrageous story. Aden would make accusations at court, and in response, the Arachs would invite the Constabulary to raid their estate (which, by that time, would be perfectly cleaned of any incriminating evidence). Some of their follow-up tasks would include isolating and destroying Aden's lieutenants, souring his relationship with the Deadrock clan, and likely assassinating one of his strongest allies (Cordia or Darl Buhn) and framing House Glower for the crime.

This scenario also begs for a triple agent scenario where the party returns to Aden and informs him that they have been pressed into the Arachs' service. The Arachs expect this possibility, of course, and if this scenario happens, it is likely to turn into a deadly battle of daggers and wits bloodying the streets of Prantis at night. The party must either see this secret war come to a violent conclusion, or seek a new patron outside of Prantis - perhaps from the dwarves or the elves.

In the case that the party is successful, Aden will privately confront Lady Xol with the truth and commit to ensuring that the Arachs' devious plot will come undone.

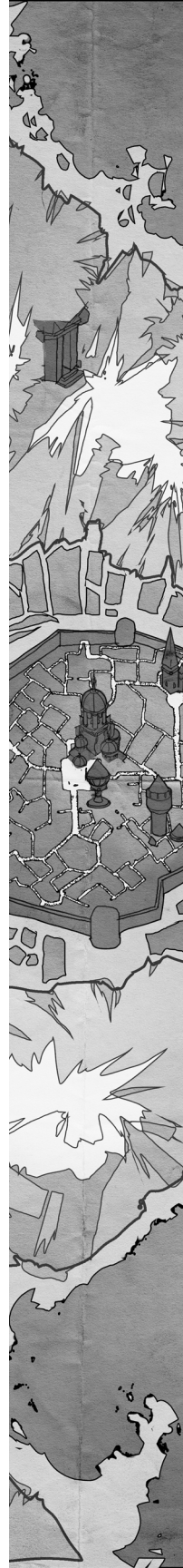
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She need not be blackmailed into compliance anymore. Aden will either send the party to disrupt the Arachs' secret plot, or dispatch his own highly trained agents to do so. Lady Xol would publicly continue her support for Morten Falcron, but secretly conspire with House Glower. She would then bolster the Landoviat tribe's feud with House Arach and weaken the Arachs' relationship with the Grayrift clan. Aden would lend the party to support these efforts, meaning the party would be engaged in guerrilla operations in the forest surrounding Castle Arach or in the deep roads surrounding Grayrift Clanhall. The Arachs would respond by employing House Falcron's numerous labor guilds to terrorize soma peddlers within Prantis, while also pushing for the prohibition of soma in court.

In fact, the only house not fully invested in the resulting machinations is House Buhn, who will not risk the perceived independence of the Constabulary or the standing army in the off chance that they pick the losing side of the coming election. This inaction will of course enable the house squabbles to escalate into riots, wanton street violence, and anti-elf or anti-dwarf pogroms. The next patrark will be elected to the backdrop of Prantis burning - the perfect time for orc invasion, dragon raid, zombie outbreak, or total war with the elves to occur. This final disaster will determine if the player characters are truly heroes or just hard-bitten survivalists.

There will be many opportunities for the party to amass strategic assets, bolster their safe house, acquire independent cells, and establish themselves as an independent power. However, there will also be many opportunities for botched missions, botched rolls, poor tradecraft, and difficult trade offs, all of which will eventually manifest in Risk Eater intervention. This is what a Cryptomancer campaign looks like: bleak, Machiavellian, and ripe with opportunities to exploit systems, power structures, and relationships. Will the player characters be loyal soldiers ultimately fed to the meat-grinder of house war, or will they find a different path?

Good luck, cryptomancers.



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/ROOT/SILENT WAR FOR THRONEHOUSE/CD ..  
/ROOT/INIT 0
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PREPARING FOR SHUTDOWN...
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INIT 0

I am here today to proclaim the dwarf Cablund as grand heretic, a traitor beyond contempt. Anyone colluding with or hiding him will face the same wrath we will exact on him. Cablund was a part of our program and swore our oath to hunt down those who would abuse cryptomancy to evade justice for crimes against society. Not only did Cablund violate this oath, but his very public disclosure of our program has had catastrophic consequences for the safety and security of law-abiding citizens throughout the realms.

Before coming under our employ, Cablund was a soma-addicted vagrant performing indecent acts and committing petty crimes to support his habit. Recognizing his potential, we took him in, supported his rehabilitation, and provided him stable employment for three years. Despite our benevolence, Cablund took it upon himself to make absurd accusations about us on the Shardscape and identify the location and use of secret assets that were supporting a mission of security and justice for the realms. Like-minded degenerates quickly seized on Cablund's lies, destroyed those secret assets, and have been waging campaigns of vandalism and intimidation against innocent nobles, guilds, and business interests who, according to this deluded dwarf, were strong-armed into supporting our mission.

Let it be known that Cablund was not the architect of this program, as he has claimed, but a mere apprentice who did not even have access to the assets he identified, nor did he understand the exact nature of their use. Further, Cablund was given every opportunity to express any concerns he had through proper channels in our organization, again, an organization he swore an oath to. Yet, despite these factors, this coward chose to slander us, sowing chaos and discontent, and then flee justice by hiding amongst our enemies, the brutish orcs, who will likely eat him the moment they get bored with him.

We take it upon ourselves today to tell you the truth behind this matter in the spirit of full disclosure and maintaining the people's trust. May the gods bless us all and may they have mercy on Cablund's soul when we find him.



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APPEARANCE QUALITIES

BUILD

EYES

HAIR

SKIN

PERSONALITY QUALITIES

DESIRES

FEARS

TENDS TO

USED TO

TALENTS & SPELLS

COMMON NAME

TRUE NAME

SEX, AGE, RACE

THE PARTY

WITS

TAKE COVER
VS MISSILE

KNOWLEDGE

CUNNING

ALCHEMY

DECEPTION

CRAFT

SCROUNGE

MEDICINE

TRACKING

QUERY

TRAPS

RESOLVE

RESIST
VS MAGIC

PRESENCE

WILLPOWER

BEAST KEN

MANA POINTS

CHARM

MENACE

PERFORMANCE

SPEED

DODGE
VS MELEE
VS MISSILE
+ 1 DAMAGE

AGILITY

DEXTERITY

ACROBATICS

FIRE MISSILE

ATHLETICS

LOCK PICKING

ESCAPE ARTISTRY

PRECISE MELEE

STEALTH

SLEIGHT OF HAND

POWER

PARRY
VS MELEE

STRENGTH

ENDURANCE

BRUTE MELEE

HEALTH POINTS

FEAT OF STRENGTH

THROWN MISSILE

UNARMED MELEE

☐ CRITICAL WOUND / WEAK POISON

☐ MORTAL WOUND / STRONG POISON

-1 HP IF MOVE AND ACT

-1 HP PER TURN

TRADEMARK WEAPON:

RULES

QUALITIES

TRADEMARK OUTFIT:

RULES

QUALITIES

EQUIPMENT, CONSUMABLES, AND LOOT

SAFEHOUSE IMPROVEMENTS

ALCHEMY LAB

2○

- + LIMITLESS SUPPLY OF TRIVIAL AND CHALLENGING REAGENTS
- + ALCHEMY SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

CRYPTOADMIN

3○

- + A LOYAL CRYPTOADMIN: DISPATCHER, RESEARCHER, AND BRIDGE TO THE SHARDSCAPE
- + ALLOWS DENIABLE CELLS
- + REQUIRED BEFORE ACQUIRING A GOLEM

DUNGEON

2○

- + SAFELY HOUSE CAPTIVES FOR INTERROGATION AND RANSOM
- + SOCIAL SKILL CHECKS MADE AGAINST CAPTIVES OF THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

FORGE

2○

- + ALLOWS THE PRODUCTION OF LARGE, LONG-TERM PROJECTS
- + CRAFT SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

GOLEM

4○

- + ALLOWS INSTANT QUERYING OF THE SHARDSCAPE
- + ALLOWS PRIVATE SHARDNETS TO CONNECT WITHOUT BRIDGING

HEALER'S DEN

3○

- + REPLENISH ALL HP WHEN RESTING IN THE SAFEHOUSE
- + MEDICINE SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

LIBRARY

2○

- + ALLOWS A PLAYER TO GAIN AN OUT-OF-THE-BOX INSPIRATION OR INSIGHT FROM THE GM
- + QUERY SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

LOUNGE

2○

- + SAFELY HOST AND ENTERTAIN DISTINGUISHED GUESTS
- + SOCIAL SKILL CHECKS MADE AGAINST GUESTS OF THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

RITUAL CHAMBER

3○

- + REPLENISH ALL MP WHEN MEDITATING IN THE SAFEHOUSE
- + WILLPOWER SKILL CHECKS MADE IN THE SAFEHOUSE IGNORE 1 BOTCH

STABLE

3○

- + SAFELY HOUSE AND SUPPORT THE PARTY'S MOUNTS
- + BEAST KEN SKILL CHECKS INVOLVING MOUNTS IGNORE 1 BOTCH

TRAINING ROOM

3○

- + ALLOWS A PLAYER TO TRAIN A SINGLE PHYSICAL SKILL, BANKING A SINGLE FREE RE-ROLL ON THAT SKILL, LASTING UNTIL THE RE-ROLL IS USED OR ANOTHER SKILL IS TRAINED.

TRANSFER

2○

- + A ONE-TIME TRANSFER OF ALL SAFEHOUSE IMPROVEMENTS FROM ONE LOCATION TO ANOTHER

CELLS

- CLOSE, 4 SKILL DIE
- DENIABLE, 2 SKILL DIE

- CLOSE, 4 SKILL DIE
- DENIABLE, 2 SKILL DIE

- CLOSE, 4 SKILL DIE
- DENIABLE, 2 SKILL DIE

- CLOSE, 4 SKILL DIE
- DENIABLE, 2 SKILL DIE

- CLOSE, 4 SKILL DIE
- DENIABLE, 2 SKILL DIE

- CLOSE, 4 SKILL DIE
- DENIABLE, 2 SKILL DIE

CAMPAIGN TOTALS

RISK



STRATEGIC
ASSETS



TALENT
POINTS



ATTRIBUTE
POINTS



THREAT LEVEL

- NUISANCE ○
- DISRUPTION ○
- DESTABILIZER ○
- EXISTENTIAL THREAT ○

MOUNTS

CRYPTOMANCER

APPEARANCE QUALITIES

BUILD	GAUNT, TOWERING
EYES	DEADPAN, LIZARD EYES
HAIR	BLONDE, LONG
SKIN	GOLDEN

PERSONALITY QUALITIES

DESIRES	COMPETITION, PLEASURE
FEARS	THE AFTERLIFE
TENDS TO	MUMBLE, STARE
USED TO	BE A CRIMINAL

TALENTS & SPELLS

REAPER (STRIKE ALL CLOSE TARGETS WHEN USING 2 HANDED WEAPON).

BONECRUSHER (BRUTE MELEE IGNORES 1 BOTCH).

INTIMIDATING (MENACE IGNORES 1 BOTCH).

HEIGHTENED SENSES (SCROUNGE AND STEALTH IGNORE 1 BOTCH).

WARDANCER (DODGING GRANTS AN ADDITIONAL MOVE ONCE DURING ENEMY TURN).

COMMON NAME	TWYLL
TRUE NAME	MIDSYLLAN
SEX, AGE, RACE	MALE, 87, ELF
THE PARTY	

WITS

TAKE COVER
VS MISSILE

4

13

KNOWLEDGE

CUNNING

ALCHEMY

DECEPTION

CRAFT

SCROUNGE

MEDICINE

TRACKING

QUERY

TRAPS

RESOLVE

RESIST
VS MAGIC

6

33

PRESENCE

WILLPOWER

BEAST KEN

MANA POINTS

CHARM

MENACE

PERFORMANCE

SPEED

DODGE
VS MELEE
VS MISSILE
+ 1 DAMAGE

6

42

AGILITY

DEXTERITY

ACROBATICS

FIRE MISSILE

ATHLETICS

LOCK PICKING

ESCAPE ARTISTRY

PRECISE MELEE

STEALTH

SLEIGHT OF HAND

POWER

PARRY
VS MELEE

8

53

STRENGTH

ENDURANCE

BRUTE MELEE

HEALTH POINTS

FEAT OF STRENGTH

THROWN MISSILE

UNARMED MELEE

CRITICAL WOUND / WEAK POISON

MORTAL WOUND / STRONG POISON

-1 HP IF MOVE AND ACT

-1 HP PER TURN

TRADEMARK WEAPON: "QUIET" (HALBERD)

RULES

BRUTE MELEE, CUMBERSOME, DAMAGE + 2, MELEE, OVERWHELMING, STRENGTH REQUIREMENT 3, TWO-HANDED

QUALITIES

ELVEN MAKE, NAMED, OVERSIZED

TRADEMARK OUTFIT: DOUBLET

RULES

INNOCUOUS

QUALITIES

DISTRACTING FEATURE (JEWEL-ENCUSTED CODPIECE), PRECIOUS, RISQUÉ (NEVER EVER BUTTONED)

EQUIPMENT, CONSUMABLES, AND LOOT

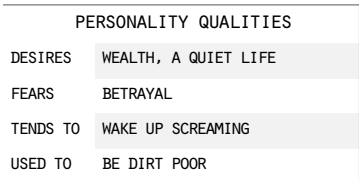
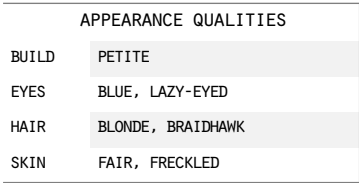
CLOAK

TORCH

CAMPING GEAR (PERMITS PARTY TO TAKE DOWNTIME IN WILDERNESS)

PUNCHING DAGGER (CONCEALABLE, DIRTY, DAMAGE 0, LIGHT, MELEE, SHORT, UNARMED MELEE).

GNOLL-PELT MANTLE, CORKED MEAD HORN, JAR OF EXOTIC TEETH



<p>○ CRITICAL WOUND / WEAK POISON</p> <p>-1 HP IF MOVE AND ACT</p>	<p>○ MORTAL WOUND / STRONG POISON</p> <p>-1 HP PER TURN</p>
--	---

EQUIPMENT, CONSUMABLES, AND LOOT
CLOAK
INFILTRATION TOOLS
TORCH
CHANGES OF CLOTHING (ADULT MALE TUNIC, SMALL CHILD'S DRESS)
DAGGER (BALANCED, CONCEALABLE, DIRTY, DAMAGE 0, LIGHT, MELEE, PRECISE MELEE, SHORT, THROWN MISSILE)
STRAW DOLL, COIL OF YARN, IMMACULATE PAIR OF SLIPPERS

APPEARANCE QUALITIES

BUILD	BARREL-CHESTED
EYES	DETERMINED
HAIR	SHORT, BLACK
SKIN	LEATHERY, TATTOOED

PERSONALITY QUALITIES

DESIRES	POWER
FEARS	GHOSTS, FAILURE
TENDS TO	CURSE, BROOD
USED TO	HAVE A TITLE

TALENTS & SPELLS

BLOODLETTER (PRECISE MELEE IGNORES 1 BOTCH).

SMUGGLER (HIDE A SMALL THING ON PERSON, IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND).

ASSASSIN (ALCHEMY IGNORES 1 BOTCH WHEN MAKING POISONS).

SHARD WARP (5 MP, UNOPPOSED OF VARYING DIFFICULTY, TRAVEL THROUGH SHARDS).

SHADOW CACHE (3 MP, UNOPPOSED TRIVIAL, STORE OBJECTS IN SHADOWS).

DISSEMBLE (1 MP, OPPOSED, ENCRYPT FACES).

COMMON NAME	DANERYCK
TRUE NAME	MORIKHAN
SEX, AGE, RACE	MALE, 41, DWARF
THE PARTY	

WITS

TAKE COVER
VS MISSILE

6

3

3

KNOWLEDGE

CUNNING

ALCHEMY

DECEPTION

CRAFT

SCROUNGE

MEDICINE

TRACKING

QUERY

TRAPS

RESOLVE

RESIST
VS MAGIC

6

2

4

PRESENCE

WILLPOWER

BEAST KEN

MANA POINTS

CHARM

MENACE

PERFORMANCE

SPEED

DODGE
VS MELEE
VS MISSILE
+ 1 DAMAGE

8

3

5

AGILITY

DEXTERITY

ACROBATICS

FIRE MISSILE

ATHLETICS

LOCK PICKING

ESCAPE ARTISTRY

PRECISE MELEE

STEALTH

SLEIGHT OF HAND

POWER

PARRY
VS MELEE

4

2

2

STRENGTH

ENDURANCE

BRUTE MELEE

HEALTH POINTS

FEAT OF STRENGTH

THROWN MISSILE

UNARMED MELEE

<div>CRITICAL WOUND / WEAK POISON</div> <div>-1 HP IF MOVE AND ACT</div>	<div>MORTAL WOUND / STRONG POISON</div> <div>-1 HP PER TURN</div>
--	---

TRADEMARK WEAPON: DAGGER

RULES	BALANCED, CONCEALABLE, DIRTY, DAMAGE 0, LIGHT, MELEE, PRECISE MELEE, SHORT, THROWN MISSILE
QUALITIES	DISTRACTING FEATURE (FLAT SQUARE TIP), DWARVEN MAKE

TRADEMARK OUTFIT: LEATHER ARMOR

RULES	LIGHT DEFLECTION
QUALITIES	GENERIC, HUMAN MAKE (STYLED LIKE A TRENCH COAT), SHODDY

EQUIPMENT, CONSUMABLES, AND LOOT

BUCKLER (BLOCK ANY MELEE)

CLOAK

TORCH

WALKING LAB (ALLOWS ALCHEMY ANYWHERE)

BOW (DAMAGE 0, FIRED MISSILE, RANGED, TWO-HANDED)

EMPTY JOURNAL, MYSTERIOUS LOCK OF HAIR, RING ON A NECKLACE

	<table><tr><td>COMMON NAME</td><td>AHKA</td></tr><tr><td>TRUE NAME</td><td>BIANKETTA</td></tr><tr><td>SEX, AGE, RACE</td><td>FEMALE, 63, ELF</td></tr><tr><td>THE PARTY</td><td></td></tr></table>	COMMON NAME	AHKA	TRUE NAME	BIANKETTA	SEX, AGE, RACE	FEMALE, 63, ELF	THE PARTY																																																																																																					
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COMMON NAME	AHKA	TRUE NAME	BIANKETTA	SEX, AGE, RACE	FEMALE, 63, ELF	THE PARTY		AGILITY	DEXTERITY	ACROBATICS	FIRE MISSILE	ATHLETICS	LOCK PICKING	ESCAPE ARTISTRY	PRECISE MELEE	STEALTH	SLEIGHT OF HAND	STRENGTH	ENDURANCE	BRUTE MELEE	HEALTH POINTS	FEAT OF STRENGTH		THROWN MISSILE		UNARMED MELEE		TRADEMARK WEAPON: SPEAR		RULES	BALANCED, CUMBERSOME, DAMAGE + 1, MELEE, PRECISE MELEE, THROWN MISSILE, TWO-HANDED	QUALITIES	PRECIOUS (CARVED OF STUNNING BLOOD-RED OAK)	TRADEMARK OUTFIT: LEATHER ARMOR		RULES	LIGHT DEFLECTION	QUALITIES	DISTRACTING FEATURE (HAY PADDING PROTRUDES FROM PLATES), ELVEN MAKE (PURPLE CARAPACE BRACERS AND SHIN GUARDS).	EQUIPMENT, CONSUMABLES, AND LOOT		CLOAK		TORCH		CLIMBING GEAR (CAN SET RIGGING FOR OTHERS TO CLIMB)		CROSSBOW (DAMAGE + 2, FIRED MISSILE, RANGED, SLOW RELOAD, TWO-HANDED).		BAG OF RAT JERKY (FOR DIRT), DECK OF CARDS, POUCH OF TOBACCO	
KNOWLEDGE	CUNNING																																																																																																												
ALCHEMY	DECEPTION																																																																																																												
CRAFT	SCROUNGE																																																																																																												
MEDICINE	TRACKING																																																																																																												
QUERY	TRAPS																																																																																																												
PRESENCE	WILLPOWER																																																																																																												
BEAST KEN	MANA POINTS																																																																																																												
CHARM																																																																																																													
MENACE																																																																																																													
PERFORMANCE																																																																																																													
APPEARANCE QUALITIES																																																																																																													
BUILD	SINEWY																																																																																																												
EYES	GREEN																																																																																																												
HAIR	RED, DREADLOCKED																																																																																																												
SKIN	DIRTY, TAUT																																																																																																												
PERSONALITY QUALITIES																																																																																																													
DESIRES	ANARCHY, HELPING THE NEEDY																																																																																																												
FEARS	PEASANTS, DWARVES																																																																																																												
TENDS TO	STEAL, FALL IN LOVE																																																																																																												
USED TO	BE A SOLDIER																																																																																																												
TALENTS & SPELLS																																																																																																													
DEATH FROM ABOVE (ADD ACROBATICS SUCCESSES TO ATTACK WHEN FALLING).																																																																																																													
POLEVAULTER (CAN MAKE IMPOSSIBLE JUMPS IF EQUIPPED WITH STAFF/SPEAR).																																																																																																													
WHISPERER (HAS A FAMILIAR, A GOBLIN NAMED "DIRT").																																																																																																													
MESSENGER (DELIVER SMALL OBJECT TO PERSON WHOSE TRUE NAME IS KNOWN).																																																																																																													
BLOOM BLESSING (AREA OF EFFECT SPELL, EFFECTS DEPEND ON FLORA COMMANDED). -CREATE CALM, CREATE CLOUD OF DEBRIS, SMOTHER FIRES.																																																																																																													
SWARM SONG (AREA OF EFFECT SPELL, MAKE LIGHT, MAKE NOISE, FIND MAGIC, ETC.).																																																																																																													
WARNING GLYPH (SET MAGICAL TRAP THAT DETECTS TRESPASSERS).																																																																																																													
COMMON NAME	AHKA																																																																																																												
TRUE NAME	BIANKETTA																																																																																																												
SEX, AGE, RACE	FEMALE, 63, ELF																																																																																																												
THE PARTY																																																																																																													
AGILITY	DEXTERITY																																																																																																												
ACROBATICS	FIRE MISSILE																																																																																																												
ATHLETICS	LOCK PICKING																																																																																																												
ESCAPE ARTISTRY	PRECISE MELEE																																																																																																												
STEALTH	SLEIGHT OF HAND																																																																																																												
STRENGTH	ENDURANCE																																																																																																												
BRUTE MELEE	HEALTH POINTS																																																																																																												
FEAT OF STRENGTH																																																																																																													
THROWN MISSILE																																																																																																													
UNARMED MELEE																																																																																																													
TRADEMARK WEAPON: SPEAR																																																																																																													
RULES	BALANCED, CUMBERSOME, DAMAGE + 1, MELEE, PRECISE MELEE, THROWN MISSILE, TWO-HANDED																																																																																																												
QUALITIES	PRECIOUS (CARVED OF STUNNING BLOOD-RED OAK)																																																																																																												
TRADEMARK OUTFIT: LEATHER ARMOR																																																																																																													
RULES	LIGHT DEFLECTION																																																																																																												
QUALITIES	DISTRACTING FEATURE (HAY PADDING PROTRUDES FROM PLATES), ELVEN MAKE (PURPLE CARAPACE BRACERS AND SHIN GUARDS).																																																																																																												
EQUIPMENT, CONSUMABLES, AND LOOT																																																																																																													
CLOAK																																																																																																													
TORCH																																																																																																													
CLIMBING GEAR (CAN SET RIGGING FOR OTHERS TO CLIMB)																																																																																																													
CROSSBOW (DAMAGE + 2, FIRED MISSILE, RANGED, SLOW RELOAD, TWO-HANDED).																																																																																																													
BAG OF RAT JERKY (FOR DIRT), DECK OF CARDS, POUCH OF TOBACCO																																																																																																													

APPEARANCE QUALITIES

BUILD	LITHE
EYES	BROWN, HYPNOTIC
HAIR	BRUNETTE, SHELLACKED
SKIN	PALE, SHINY

PERSONALITY QUALITIES

DESIRES	ORDER
FEARS	NOBILITY, SOMA
TENDS TO	FLIRT, HOARD
USED TO	BE A CONSTABLE

TALENTS & SPELLS

LIAR (DECEPTION IGNORES 1 BOTCH)

ATTRACTIVE (CHARM IGNORES 1 BOTCH SOMETIMES).

MIND READ (3 MP, OPPOSED, ACCESS A TARGET’S MEMORIES).

PSYCHOMETRY (3 MP, UNOPPOSED OF VARYING DIFFICULTY, ACCESS AN OBJECT’S MEMORIES).

MAZE (3 MP, UNOPPOSED OF VARYING DIFFICULTY, ENCRYPT PORTALS/PASSAGES.

ASTRAL EYES (1 MP, UNOPPOSED TRIVIAL, SENSE MAGIC AND HIDDEN EVIDENCE).

TRACER (1 MP, UNOPPOSED OF VARYING DIFFICULTY, GEOLOCATE SHARDNETS).

COMMON NAME	ROOK
TRUE NAME	TANASSAH
SEX, AGE, RACE	FEMALE, 39, HUMAN
THE PARTY	

WITS

TAKE COVER
VS MISSILE

6

2

4

KNOWLEDGE

CUNNING

ALCHEMY	△	DECEPTION	▲
CRAFT	△	SCROUNGE	△
MEDICINE	△	TRACKING	△
QUERY	△	TRAPS	△

RESOLVE

RESIST
VS MAGIC

8

3

5

PRESENCE

WILLPOWER

BEAST KEN	△	MANA POINTS	
CHARM	▲		○○○○○
MENACE	△		●●●●●
PERFORMANCE	△		●●●●●

SPEED

DODGE
VS MELEE
VS MISSILE
+ 1 DAMAGE

6

3

3

AGILITY

DEXTERITY

ACROBATICS	△	FIRE MISSILE	△
ATHLETICS	△	LOCK PICKING	△
ESCAPE ARTISTRY	△	PRECISE MELEE	△
STEALTH	△	SLEIGHT OF HAND	△

POWER

PARRY
VS MELEE

4

3

1

STRENGTH

ENDURANCE

BRUTE MELEE	△	HEALTH POINTS	
FEAT OF STRENGTH	△		○○○○○
THROWN MISSILE	△		●●●●●
UNARMED MELEE	△		●●●●●

○ CRITICAL WOUND / WEAK POISON	○ MORTAL WOUND / STRONG POISON
-1 HP IF MOVE AND ACT	-1 HP PER TURN

TRADEMARK WEAPON: CLUB (“PERSUASION”)

RULES	BALANCED, BRUTE MELEE, CONCEALABLE, DIRTY, DAMAGE 0, SHORT, THROWN MISSILE
QUALITIES	ELVEN MAKE (CURVED, WITH A BALL ON TOP), NAMED

TRADEMARK OUTFIT: BRIGANDINE

RULES	LIGHT DEFLECTION
QUALITIES	DWARVEN MAKE (OBSIDIAN STUDS), RISQUÉ (BACKLESS)

EQUIPMENT, CONSUMABLES, AND LOOT

LANTERN STAFF

CLOAK

TORCH

CRYPTOMANCER’S KIT

FIRE BOMB, ACID BOMB

READING CANDLE, CADAVER SKETCHES, ABACUS, SACHEL OF COAL DUST

COMMON NAME

THANNER

TRUE NAME

HECKERAN

SEX, AGE, RACE

MALE, 29, HUMAN

THE PARTY

WITS

TAKE COVER
VS MISSILE

8

4

4

KNOWLEDGE

CUNNING

ALCHEMY ▲ DECEPTION △

CRAFT ▲ SCROUNGE △

MEDICINE ▲ TRACKING ▲

QUERY △ TRAPS △

RESOLVE

RESIST
VS MAGIC

6

2

4

PRESENCE

WILLPOWER

BEAST KEN ▲ MANA POINTS

CHARM △

MENACE △

PERFORMANCE ▲

APPEARANCE QUALITIES

BUILD

BROAD-SHOULDERED, STATUESQUE

EYES

GREEN, PIERCING

HAIR

SHAVED

SKIN

DARK, DUSTY

PERSONALITY QUALITIES

DESIRES

MEN, JUSTICE

FEARS

CONFINEMENT

TENDS TO

LOSE HIS TEMPER

USED TO

HAVE A PARTNER

TALENTS & SPELLS

VALOROUS (SACRIFICE SELF TO HIT THAT WOULD REDUCE AN ALLY TO 0 OR LESS HP).

HEALER (MEDICINE IGNORES 1 BOTCH, ALCHEMY IGNORES 1 BOTCH WHEN DEALING WITH HEALING POTIONS AND ANTIDOTES).

HUNTER (BEAST KEN AND TRACKING IGNORE 1 BOTCH).

HEALING HANDS (3 MP, UNOPPOSED CHALLENGING, RESTORES SOME HP).

STASIS (1 MP, UNOPPOSED CHALLENGING, SLOWS THE EFFECTS OF POISONS/TOXINS).

ARTISAN (CRAFT IGNORES 1 BOTCH, PERFORMANCE IGNORES 1 BOTCH FOR WORKS OF ART).

CRITICAL WOUND / WEAK POISON

-1 HP IF MOVE AND ACT

○ MORTAL WOUND / STRONG POISON

-1 HP PER TURN

TRADEMARK WEAPON: SWORD

RULES

BRUTE MELEE, DAMAGE + 1, MELEE, SHORT

QUALITIES

HUMAN MAKE, REFLECTIVE

TRADEMARK OUTFIT: SCALE ARMOR

RULES

ENDURANCE REQUIREMENT 3, HEAVY DEFLECTION, MAX AGILITY 4

QUALITIES

PREVIOUS OWNER (DEAD LOVER), STORIED (A LEGENDARY SMITHS LAST WORK).

EQUIPMENT, CONSUMABLES, AND LOOT

KITE SHIELD (BLOCK MELEE/MISSILE, DEFEND OTHERS)

CLOAK

TORCH

MEDICINE BAG (ALLOWS STABILIZATION)

SLING (DAMAGE -1, FIRED MISSILE, RANGED)

OUTDATED MAPS, PRAYER BEADS, COLLAPSIBLE FISHING POLE

CRYPTOMANCER

CRYPTOMANCER™

A FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAME ABOUT HACKING



Cryptomancer is a tabletop role-playing game made for hackers, by hackers. It features an original fantasy setting and gameplay informed by diverse security disciplines: information security, physical security, intelligence analysis, clandestine tradecraft, and risk management. Players assume the role of characters on the run from a shadowy organization that rules the world through mass surveillance, propaganda, and political coercion.

- Explore a rich fantasy setting connected by the Shardscape, the magical equivalent of the Internet
- Attack and defend fantasy networks built upon real networking and cryptography principles
- Build up your safehouse and manage covert cells of spies, scouts, political agitators, and assassins
- Customize your character with dozens of talents and spells emphasizing stealth, deception, and creative problem-solving

KILL ALL THE ORCS,
HACK ALL THE THINGS