

Circles of Power



A Game of Sorcery and Society
Powered by the Apocalypse



Apprentice Edition

By Jason Pitre

CIRCLES OF POWER

APPRENTICE EDITION



BY JASON PITRE

LIMITED EDITION

OF 100

CIRCLES OF *POWER*

APPRENTICE EDITION

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Please note that this game is a work in progress. We recommend that you wait for the full version of the game, before reusing this text so you get the best work.

Dedication

CIRCLES OF POWER is a game about those who suffered oppressions, and found their magic. It's a game about people who fought for what was right, no matter the cost. It's dedicated to the many who broke ground to bring hope and magic to the world.

Prince

Williams

Ali

Fisher

Rest in Power

Chapter 1: Introduction

For generations, your people you have suffered. Your elders recount tales of hardship and hate. The young look to their futures with fear and despair. The **Dominant** Society controls all of the levers of power, creating laws that protect their interests above yours. Wealth and influence is held only by a few in the dominant Society, to use as they see fit. Your people are left only with silenced voices and crushed dreams. The world seems set against you.

You come from one of the marginalized communities, who suffer at the hands of the Dominant Society. You might be one of the **Burdened**, your mind or bodies shaped by trauma and misfortune. Perhaps you are one the **Forsaken**, deemed inferior by virtue of your sex or the passions of your heart. Are you **Foreign**, set apart by your ethnicity, faith, or culture? Were your people **Native** to these lands, before the occupation? Each of these communities cries for justice, for opportunity, and for peace.

Few souls have stood fast against injustice and oppression. Shaped by your traditions and resolve, you have learned to wield the Secret Fire of the magi. You are one of **The Wise**, who might draw upon mighty sorceries and clever enchantments. You hold the keys to the universe, and will seize respect for your people. You will not be quiet. You will not be still. You will not comply.

Unfortunately, you have other struggles beyond liberation. There are whispers of dark things lurking on the far frontier. The **Doom** threatens us all, the powerful and the oppressed alike. Only the Secret Fire can keep them at bay, burning away their corruption and shattering their terrible forms. The Wise are given a grudging respect, and a measure of social power, by virtue of fight against this distant foe. This struggle will temper you and teach you to master your magics.

CIRCLES OF POWER is a game about individuals who have suffered oppressions, and have gained magic to balance the karmic scales. In this game, you play one of the Wise who arise from marginalized communities. You cast your spells to ward off the Doom and to earn valuable favours from the Society. You spend that favour to **TAKE A STAND** against the Society to protect your communities from oppression and violence. The struggle for justice and freedom will teach you the lessons you need to learn, to master your spells.

The Wise

The Wise are members acknowledged by one of the marginalized communities. They were all stuck by tragedy, cruelty, and hatred. They had lost their families, fortunes, or the faith in their hearts. In the darkest night of their lives, when all seemed lost, they the Secret Fire found them.

The Secret Fire, the ancient magic at the heart of the world, found these wounded souls. It burned eldritch wisdom and mystic visions into their sleeping minds. When they woke, all the world had changed. They saw the currents of folk-magic, keeping misfortune at bay. They saw auras of glory around the holy women who led their sermons. They tasted the magic in every meal, felt it woven into every piece of homespun cloth, and heard it resonate in every song. For a day of glorious insight, they connected to the world arcane. They only had one day of beauty and wonder, before this wisdom faded from their conscious minds.

After they woke the second time, they became Wise. Their vision of the arcane world faded, but they gained a deeper understanding. It wasn't long before they found themselves chanting secret words and inscribing resonant sigils to channel the Secret Fire through arcane foci. They began to cast the smallest of cantrips: small miracles to spark a campfire, or summon phantasmal images before them. Over the weeks that followed, they grew in the art and began to cast mightier sorceries.

You are one of the Wise, users of magic and wielders of the Secret Fire. You call upon the light that dispels the gathering shadows. You hold the coldest nights at bay. You burn those who threaten your people. The Secret Fire fills your soul, as you stand against the forces of oppression and destruction.

Our Impending Doom

In every game of *CIRCLES OF POWER*, a terrible Doom lurks. This malicious force comes in many forms, from hulking demons to memory-devouring Fae. No matter their nature, they seek to corrupt and destroy all that is good in the world. They hide in the distant woods, the deep mountains, and the frozen tundra, on the borders of human lands. They send scouting parties, spies, and messengers into the heart of our land, spreading their corruption day after day.

The Doom is a common threat facing all of humanity. Their evil intent presents a clear danger to both the Dominant Society and the Marginalized Communities. Only the Wise have the arcane resources and lore to confront and abjure the Doom.

The Wise have a special place in society, thanks to the peril of the Doom. Despite the fact that you belong to marginalized communities, your value in the conflict affords you a modicum of status from the Dominant Society. They see you as you as valuable weapons who must be respected and placated. You are something outside of the normal social order, as you alone hold the keys to salvation in your mystic fingers.



Themes and Ideals

Games, like art, are political. Each one has a message, intentional or discovered, which it communicates. *CIRCLES OF POWER* is designed with three such goals in mind, which drive all of the mechanical systems within. It's important to know what the game is about, so that you are able to adapt the narrative to suit it.

A GAME OF ACTIVISM

Activism is power. *CIRCLES OF POWER* focuses on the many systems of oppression which permeate society. It presents sexism, racism, xenophobia, ableism, transphobia, and other forms of prejudice up front. During play, the players will be faced with these ills, and given all the tools to fight them. The game is about fighting to create a better world, while recognizing our own our failings.

Activism is a messy affair though, and that aspect is reinforced in the various systems of play. The Wise have terrible powers of violence and domination at their disposal, and will often be tempted to use violent means for liberating ends. Sometimes this might be the only path for justice, while other times this will only increase the suffering in the world. The Wise must make hard choices, for the good of their people and for themselves.

Your power has a price. It would be easy to make peace, trusting that the society will gradually better itself. It offers you the opportunity to claim benevolent rulership over your community. It offers dreams of violent revolution, and all of the suffering you may spread to those who stand against you. It can erode your identity and faith, as your new gifts distance you from your community. It turns you from a person into a weapon, one that everyone seeks to wield.

Activism is all about power; those who have it, those who don't, and those who bridge the gap. It's a game about people who discover their own power, through trials and ordeals. This game is about the difficult choices and moral compromises made by people thrust into the seat of leadership. It's about legal and economic power, long withheld from your people.

GAME OF COMMUNITIES

People naturally or in-groups and out-groups. Are you part of the tribe, or are you an outsider? Who determines who is welcome to be a member of a group? Who can lead the community or speak for it? What are the norms of behaviour, and the expectations placed on their members?

This game looks at all of these questions, by focusing specifically on the individuals who make up the varied social groups. The game privileges those normally silent in these kinds of stories; the marginalized people who struggle to live in an oppressive society. It looks to the daily challenges that anyone might face, compounded by the prejudicial treatment and disrespect they each suffer.

CIRCLES OF POWER also looks to the relationships between the various social groups. In each game, a hierarchy of relative status is established between the five Circles, with the privileged Dominant Society always standing at the top. Each of the marginalized communities in the middle jockey for position and vie for the scraps left behind. Just because everyone suffers from the system, doesn't necessarily mean that everyone gets along. These status hierarchies are established in the first session of the game (page 66).



A GAME OF MAGIC

CIRCLES OF POWER is a game that aims to replicate the experience of a wizard or magic user. Each member of the Wise has their own magical tradition, from the forceful Evokers, to clever Illusionists, to the wary Abjurer. Your arcane gifts provide you with social power in the form of favour, which allows you to backstop your progress and hold back the forces of oppression.



There are robust systems for casting spells, creating new sorceries during play, research, enchanting wondrous items, scribing arcane scrolls, and even training apprentices. It's a game where magic is the central activity, where each character playbook reflects a different tradition. It's a game about strange souls, blessed with profound insight and unnatural power. Your magical efforts allow you to experiment with new spells and refine them based on your experience. The path of the Wise will eventually lead you to mastery, creating arcane wonders forged from the Secret Fire, to help carry on the fight for freedom.

MAGIC WILL CHANGE THE WORLD

Magic is indisputable and invaluable power. During play, you are offered several moves, allowing you to *EVADE A THREAT*, *CONSULT THE SECRET FIRE* or *TAKE A STAND*. All of these moves are reactive in nature, offering safety or information. The only moves which allow you to act are magical ones; *CAST A SPELL*, or *CRAFT AN EXPERIMENT*. This means that the only tools at your disposal for making a difference and wielding your power is through the use of your magical gifts.

The Apprentice Edition

The Apprentice Edition is a work in progress; a preliminary version of a game in development. This version of the game is being produced and sold specifically for the purpose of gathering feedback and playtesting. The core of the game is derived from the Apocalypse World system, although the rules have drifted considerably from that excellent foundation.

This version of *CIRCLES OF POWER* is playable, but has plenty of rough edges to it. The game explicitly deals with very difficult issues including racism, sexism, xenophobia, ableism, and colonialism. The game is intentionally designed for focus on, and explore the complex social dynamics of multiple marginalized communities and their conflicting needs. It's a game about intersectionality and a dysfunctional society.

I have designed the game to address important issues, and give a voice to those often silenced by society. I know full-well, however, that intent is not magic. Despite my best efforts, this version of the game is likely to get many things wrong and might unwittingly cause pain. I would like to ask for your help to identify the problems, so I can fix them going forward. I want the full version of the game to be welcoming to everyone interested in playing.

My contact information, as well as a list of feedback questions are available on “Chapter 7: Feedback” on page 71.

What you Need

To play, you need a number of things.

- ‡ 1 person to act as Game Master
- ‡ 2–5 people to act as Players
- ‡ Printed copies of all the tradition playbooks
- ‡ A First Session Sheet
- ‡ A Favour Sheet
- ‡ Pens or pencils
- ‡ At least 2 six-sided dice, preferably more.

You can find all of the relevant sheets over at
<http://www.genesisoflegend.com/products/circlesofpower>

WHAT'S IN THE BOOK?

The Apprentice Edition of the book includes the essential elements that you need to play. This means that the book contains...

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION PAGE 4

What is the game about, and why are we playing it?

CHAPTER 2 – SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY PAGE 15

What are the dominant society and marginalized communities?

CHAPTER 3 – MOVES OF THE WISE PAGE 25

What action can the Wise perform, and what rules govern them?

CHAPTER 4 – THE SECRET FIRE PAGE 32

How do spells, research, and other magical issues function?

CHAPTER 5 – THE TRADITIONS PAGE 42

What kinds of wizards exist among the Wise?

CHAPTER 6 – THE GAME MASTER PAGE 56

How does the Game Master run the game?

CHAPTER 7 – FEEDBACK PAGE 71

What would we like to hear from you?

The final version of the game is likely to have much more content, based on your feedback.

The Structure of Play

In this game, there are two roles available. One person at the table will normally fill the role of the Game Master, while everyone else plays the role of specific characters known as the Wise.

ROLE OF THE GAME MASTER (GM)

One member of your group needs to take the role of the Game Master. This person is responsible for leading the game, describing the setting and portraying many characters within it. Typically, the person who knows the game best takes this role. As GM, you guide the players into telling dynamic, character-focused stories.

As the Game Master, you have exclusive control over the Dominant Society. With careful intention and surgical precision, portray the various oppression of the setting. Wield the blade of economics and shield yourself with law as you strike down any rebellious rabble.

Think of play like a movie: you are the director, producer, and most of the minor characters. Don't worry; the game comes with all the tools you need to moderate the game. As the GM, you will...

- ‡ Shape and control the setting directly during play.
- ‡ Portray the Dominant Society and the hierarchy they control.
- ‡ Portray the Burdened, the Forsaken, the Foreign, and the Native Communities.
- ‡ Speak for various relationships bound to the Wise.
- ‡ Make judgments and arbitrate when appropriate.
- ‡ Interpret and explain the rules of the game.
- ‡ Keep the story moving.

ROLE OF THE PLAYERS

Everyone else playing the game portray Player Characters (PCs) known as The Wise. These characters are wizards; wielders of the secret fire and voices for their marginalized communities.

As a player, you portray a character who can make a difference in the world. The Wise stand apart from society, and guard the Secret Fire within their souls. You decide when to unleash it to transform the world.

Think of play like a movie: each player is both actor and screenwriter. As a player, you will...

- ‡ Create a character who is accepted by one of the marginalized communities.
- ‡ Portray that character, deciding what they say and do.
- ‡ Cast your spells upon the world to heal or to sunder it.
- ‡ Research new sorceries and enchantments within your traditions.
- ‡ Stand up to defend your community from the oppressions by the Dominant Society.
- ‡ Ward off the Doom which threatens to destroy everyone.
- ‡ Bring your energy and passion to the story.

Safety Tools

CIRCLES OF POWER is a game focused on a lot of sensitive issues. This is a game about community, activism, and oppression. The game can often go to dark places, where players might feel vulnerable. Some content in a game can trigger discomfort or past trauma, so be considerate. Make yourself aware of everyone's boundaries. Respect them.

THE X CARD

John Stavropoulos presented a tool known as the X-Card as a way of keeping games comfortable and fun for everyone involved. The first time you play the game, introduce the X-Card by reading the following text for the group before play:

I'd like your help to make this game fun for everyone. If anything makes anyone uncomfortable in any way ... [draw X on an index card] ... just lift this card up, or simply tap it [place card at the centre of the table]. You don't have to explain why. It doesn't matter why. When we lift or tap this card, we simply edit out anything X-Carded. And if there is ever an issue, anyone can call for a break and we can talk privately. I know it sounds funny but it will help us play amazing games together and usually I'm the one who uses the X card to protect myself from all of you! Please help make this game fun for everyone. Thank you!"

For more information about the X-Card, check out the full explanation at <http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg>.

THE BRACKET TECHNIQUE

This game addresses issues of hate and prejudice directly. The challenge within roleplaying games is to portray characters who are hateful, without causing harm to the other players around the table. The Bracket Technique is a safe way to portray fictional characters who would be prone to using racist, sexist, or homophobic slurs.

With the bracket technique, describe what *kind* of discriminatory slur or joke they are using. Treat it as if the description was a placeholder, left to signify the attitudes of the speaker. For instance, you might say,

- ‡ "Did you hear the one about the sexist joke?"
- ‡ "That racial slur merchant stole from me! I just know it!"
- ‡ "Why can't those ablest slur pull their own weight?"

Chapter 2: Society and Community

Social Circles

Humans are social creatures. We create groups that welcome those who are like us, and exclude those who differ. We tell ourselves that the world is simple, that you either with us or against us. This is a game about the communities we build, and the walls we build between them.

CIRCLES OF POWER refer to the focus on communities and identities. There are a total of five social Circles, some broad groups whose interests are generally aligned, and who hold the same social status. These are...

- ‡ **The Dominant Society**, who writes the laws, sets the rules, and wields the power.
- ‡ **The Burdened Community**, those whose bodies and minds are deemed unworthy.
- ‡ **The Forsaken Community**, those who have been cast out due to gender or sexuality.
- ‡ **The Foreign Community**, those who are alien from other ethnicities, faiths, or languages.
- ‡ **The Native Community**, representing those peoples whose lands were stolen by settlers.

When the text refers to the **society**, it refers to the Dominant group who have all the privilege. When the text refers to a **community**, it refers to the Burdened, Forsaken, Foreign and Native Circles.

These Circles have differing ranks on the status ladder, representing the hierarchy of privilege. The Dominant Society is always the top rank, consisting of the most respected and powerful individuals, who write the laws and enforce the social order. The marginalized communities are below them, each with a differing level of social status and prestige. The precise order of status is uncertain, determined during the first session of play (“The First Session” on page 66)

Each of the Wise is strongly affiliated with one of the four marginalized communities, though they may also hold membership in other communities as well. As the Wise begin to understand a given social Circle, the Secret Fire burns hotter and brighter. Knowledge is, quite literally, power.

Arbitrary Labels

The real world is a complicated tangle of identities, in-groups, and hierarchies. People define themselves, and find the world refuses to accept their definitions. This game tries to model the complexities of society, while simplifying it enough to be playable. The rules are informed by reality, but cannot accurately reflect the diversity of the human experience.

The world isn’t neat and tidy, and doesn’t fit neatly into equal-sized categories. *CIRCLES OF POWER* posits that there are four major Communities, each of which is united by the kinds of experiences they share. The communities are intentionally defined broadly so that they can be used in the game, but this risks erasing many groups. Don’t read this as an intent to disregard the conflicts within these communities, from TERFs to colourism.

When you create the Wise, you are the only one who decides which communities your character is acknowledged by.

The Dominant Society

There are always those who hold the power. They are the right people, virtuous and exalted souls whose efforts will change the world. They write bold new laws, to protect their position in the social order. They enforce those laws in countless ways, from administrative burdens to brutal violence. They have the loudest voices, the strongest platforms, and the weight of public opinion on their side.

Members of the Dominant Society have the luxury of being able to ignore the plight of others. They certainly have their own hardships and challenges, like anyone else. Unlike the less fortunate though, members of the Dominant Society have robust support networks and an abundance of opportunities. When they overcome hardship, their efforts are lauded and respected by the broader society. It's easy to take risks, when the stakes are so low and the rewards so great.



Members of the Dominant Society may work in almost any profession or trade. They might be a famous scholar, dwelling in a magnificent library where they study the secrets of the world. They might be a general or lesser military officer, directing the common soldiers to fight for their people. They might rise to the high ranks of the clergy, preaching virtue and warning of vice. They may be a wealthy merchant, whose exotic wares command a high price. They may be a minor functionary, issuing permits and administrative penalties based on their professional discretion. Any of those opportunities are waiting for them, and all the world wishes to see them succeed.

The Dominant Society rests perpetually at the highest rung of the social order. Many of them have good intentions and consider rulership to be their noble burden. They seek to care for those who lack the wisdom, virtue, or education to make the right decisions.

The Burdened Community

Fortune is cruel. There are many souls who have suffered, through accident of birth or human brutality. The Dominant Society seems to rejoice in the misfortune of others, and labels these people as broken or damaged. Members of this community reject those labels, pointing out that the society refuses to make the world accessible to them. They call themselves The Burdened, and carry that name with pride.



As a member of the Burdened Community, you might otherwise have been deemed to be of the Dominant Society. The world conspires against you, restricting your ability to act. Your body or your mind doesn't work in the same way as "normal" people. Perhaps your vision is failing, the world a blur of light and darkness. Perhaps you are shrouded in silence, unable to hear sound or speech. Your limbs might fail to serve you, either in absence or obstinacy. Your mind may be filled with manic energy, or smothered in relentless sorrow. You may simply see the world in all its glorious details, comforted by routine and patterns.

As a member of the Burdened Community, the world is full of walls. Steep stairs keep you from reaching your destination. Information is hidden from you, leaving you dependent on others to show you the way. Crowds of people drown out your thoughts, or cruel words hammer into your souls. No matter how hard you try, the world is an exhausting place. Don't worry though, no-one from the Dominant Society expects you to do anything of value. They have written you off, as a cautionary tale rather than a human being.

In some places, these hardships or differences are respected or even honoured. In other cruel places, their difficulties are considered markers of vice or depravity. The Burdened Community may be respected or scorned, depending on the culture they live in.

Oppressions: Ableism, Mental Illness, Poverty

The Forsaken Community

Not everyone is welcome within the Dominant Society. They exclude vast numbers of their own kin from privilege and power. Their choices, their passions, or their identities exclude them from the opportunities they might otherwise have. Those assigned the wrong gender are deemed less worthy of a voice. Those who long for the wrong people, or those who stand apart from desire, are ostracized. They are the Forsaken Community.

As a member of the Forsaken Community, you never felt like you belonged in the space allotted to you. The Dominant Society made it quite clear that certain behaviours were acceptable, and others were absolutely forbidden. The right kind of people don't wear the clothing of another gender. The right kind of men don't fall in love with the man-at-arms. The right kind of women would never look hungrily at the fine ladies of the court. The right kind of person knows their place in society, and will put up with the invisible knives that hide in everyday life.

As a member of the Forsaken Community, you decided that you were done being the right kind of people. You could have hidden your true self beneath layers of shame, fear, and false smiles. Instead, you chose to live life freely on your own terms. You abandoned the pretense of conformity, held your ground, and made a statement. The constant abuse, intimidation and minor cruelties are not, and can never be, acceptable. If they are not willing to accept your basic rights and your fundamental nature, then there was no place for you. That was when you left the Dominant Society for good.

The most charitable members of the Dominant Society consider your “regrettable behaviour” to be a temporary phase, or a symptom of some mental illness. Others decry you as a moral corruption, a vainglorious sinner who must be “fixed” or “re-educated”.

Oppressions: Sexism, Homophobia, Transphobia



The Foreign Community

Fear the Other. They lurk outside of the torchlight, bringing strange customs and evil intent. Look to their foreign clothing, marking them as strangers. Listen to their alien tongues, frightful and barbaric. Look at how their skin, their hair, and their eyes are so different from your own. Tribalism and xenophobia are potent moral poisons, which set the Dominant Society against the Foreign Community.

As a member of the Foreign Community, you have never been a part of the Dominant Society. You may have been a new arrival from one of the great civilizations from distant lands. You may come from a religious tradition largely unknown in the local area, or you might speak a tongue that none can understand. You may simply look different from the Dominant Society, whose members' judge you based on your skin.

As a member of the Foreign Community, you are always the example of your people. When you excel or behave in socially-sanctioned ways, you are lauded as a model minority, unlike the rest of your "kind". When you represent your culture honestly, even in the gentlest ways, the Dominant Society lashes out with hateful speech and closed doors. If you ever make a single mistake, revealing your frustration or disturbing the "peace", you add another heavy link to the chain of prejudice that binds your people.

There are some members of the Dominant Society who welcome your diversity, so long as it doesn't challenge their systematic privileges. There are others who delight in taking every opportunity to harm, harass, or kill your people or the slightest disrespect.

Oppressions: Racism, Xenophobia, Religious Intolerance



The Native Community

Your people were always here. You walked the land freely, trapping and harvesting to feed your families. Your cultures stood the test of time, passing down custom and story from generation to generation. Your language resonated through the open woods and shared inherited wisdom. Your people were once whole, before the Dominant Society invaded.

Generations back, the Dominant Society came and stole your land. They formed treaties of peace, and used them as vicious weapons of war. They cut down the woods, plowed the plains, and flooded the valleys to suit their purposes. Your people were forced to small reservations of land, barely enough to sustain the remnants of your communities. Your languages were suppressed, rights ignored, and children stolen.



As a member of the Native Community, you have always been outside of the Dominant Society. You came from a world that was broken, with families trying to find their way in the dark. No matter how hard the settlers tried, they could never stop the last stories or silence your elders. You stood to learn from those who came before, and to teach those who will follow you. You will stand tall, and rebuild what was taken from you.

There are some members of the Dominant Society who consider you to be “noble savages”, unburdened by the corruption of “civilization”. There are others who try to “educate” or “integrate” your people into the Dominant Society, often by force.

Oppressions: Colonialism, Imperialism, Disfranchisement

The Favour Economy

Favour reflects on how a society feels about a character. It is the social currency which each of the Wise hold with the dominant society and with the marginalized communities. Characters receive favour when they work to support the Circles. When you investigate them, or defy their will, you spend that Favour.

The more Favour they have with Circle, the more social power they wield and the greater acceptance they receive. Favour is earned by providing gifts to the Circles. The amount of Favour that any given deed may provide is variable depending on the relative status of those involved. The GM keeps track of how much favour each of the Wise has them or with the various Circles.

If one of the Wise has a great deal of Favour with one of the Circles, that group will treat them kindly. If they have little or no Favour, they will be ignored or scorned instead. Players can only guess how much Favour they have with any of the various Circles by how you are treated. The only time that a player will be told their level of favour with a circle is when they have no Favour or when they have 10 Favour.

GAINING FAVOUR

There are four ways to gain Favour with a Circle.

HELP A CIRCLE

During play, the wise may provide assistance, support, or gifts to a Circle. Perhaps an officer from the Dominant Society wants a charm to protect his home in the cold nights. Maybe a mother from the Burdened Community needs food for her family. When one of the Wise helps someone in a meaningful way, they may gain some Favour with their Circle.

- ‡ Meaningful assistance may provide 1 point of favour.
- ‡ Major assistance may provide 2 points of favour.
- ‡ Life-saving assistance may provide 3 points of favour.

The GM is responsible for interpreting the level of assistance that the Wise have provided. You will never know exactly how much favour your actions have earned you. The ambiguity is intentional.

AID A COMMUNITY

When you *AID A COMMUNITY*, you may receive 2 or 3 points of favour with one of the marginalized communities. Beware, as a mixed result (7–9) on this move might also reduce your favour with another community.

CONFRONT THE DOOM

When you *CONFRONT THE DOOM*, you may receive 1 or 2 points of favour with the Dominant Society. Should you fail on your move though, the Doom might retaliate against a marginalized community and remove any favour you hold with them.

GM DISCRETION

The GM may choose to provide the Wise with additional favour, when it is appropriate.

Spending Favour

There are four ways to spend or lose favour with a Circle.

CONSULT THE SECRET FIRE

When you use the move *CONSULT THE SECRET FIRE*, you may spend favour in order ask more questions about a Circle. The more you helped a circle, the more they will open up to you.

TAKE A STAND

When you use the move *TAKE A STAND*, you may be invited to spend favour to avoid certain consequences for your actions. With enough favour, you can prevent them from acting against you and yours. The more you helped a circle, the more they will listen to you.

LEAD THE CIRCLE

As the Wise, you may claim a position of leadership within a Circle and direct them to act as you wish. You make your opinions known, present compelling arguments, and make a sympathetic case. The more favour spent, the greater the potential action might be.

Minor Action: Spend 2 Favour to make the Circle perform some action which works in their best interest, or imposes no significant costs on them to perform.

Moderate Action: Spend 4 Favour to make the Circle perform some action which benefits another circle, requires significant resources, or puts community members at some risk.

Major Action: Spend 6 Favour to make the Circle perform some action which works against their best interests, requires the dedicated commitment from most of the group, or puts the entire Circle at risk.

GM DISCRETION

The GM may choose to remove some of the favour held by the Wise, in accordance with their Agenda, and GM Moves, when it is appropriate.

PROVISIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Membership in communities is provisional and conditional in nature. So long as you hold 10 Favour with a circle, that group acknowledges you as a legitimate member. This affects three Moves mechanically: *EVADE A THREAT*, *CONSULT THE SECRET FIRE*, or *TAKE A STAND*. If you behave in a way that violates the norms of the relevant circle, the GM can very well remove a point of favour and temporarily deprive you of this privilege.

Chapter 3: Moves of the Wise

Overview of Moves

Moves are the fundamental mechanics that drive play in *CIRCLES OF POWER*. Each move allows you to determine what happens in the fiction, when the outcome is uncertain. Each player has control over their character, speaking in their voice and narrating their actions. When the player describes certain actions which match the trigger associated with one of their Moves, pull out the dice to see what happens next.

When you makes a Move, you roll two six-sided dice (2d6) to determine the outcomes.

If you get 10+ on your roll, you succeed completely and get what you want.

If you get a 7–9, you receive a partial or complicated success.

If you get a 6-, disaster strikes and the GM will move against you.

When you **receive meaningful assistance** from another of the Wise or one of your relationships, add +1 to your roll. Anyone who provides assistance will suffer any consequences you receive from the move. Individual moves may also provide a way that you can gain an additional bonus to your roll.

The Wise have access to a total of nine distinct moves which they can make. Five of these are **Session Moves**, which are used by the Wise during play.

- ‡ *EVAD A THREAT*
- ‡ *CONSULT THE SECRET FIRE*
- ‡ *TAKE A STAND*
- ‡ *CAST A SPELL*
- ‡ *CRAFT AN EXPERIMENT*

The remaining **Interlude Moves** represent long-term actions that the Wise may perform. The Wise select one of these four options at the beginning of each session to represent their efforts.

- ‡ *FURTHER YOUR RESEARCH*
- ‡ *CONFRONT THE DOOM*
- ‡ *AID A COMMUNITY*
- ‡ *ADVANCE A PROJECT*

The GM also has their own rules and list of moves.

Triggers and Scope

Moves are triggered when a character attempts some specific action aligned with the move's fictional trigger. If you want to use a specific mechanical move, you need to describe how you do so in the fiction. If your action doesn't line up with a move's trigger, put away the dice. The GM will describe the outcome based on their Agendas, or they will leave the description to you.

Note that the Wise only have access to a total of 9 moves, through which they can affect meaningful change. This means that there are a great many problems which you cannot resolve through traditional means. There is no move that would allow you to hack and slash your way through a group of soldiers. Instead, you better *CAST A SPELL* to conjure blades of force, if you want to do so. The limited selection of tools in *CIRCLES OF POWER* is very much deliberate.

Experienced players of games Powered by the Apocalypse may be asking about custom moves at this point. Unlike many other PBTA games, *CIRCLES OF POWER* doesn't ask you to create new moves to match specific fictional situations in the game. If the basic moves of the wise don't apply, the GM will narrate what happens rather than rely on random chance. Characters are able to create their own mechanical effects (with all their Drawbacks), through the use of the *CRAFT AN EXPERIMENT* move.



Session Moves

During each session of play, the Wise have access to five distinct Moves. These are the tools of knowledge, community, and magic that they use to change the world.

EVADE A THREAT

When you attempt to evade a direct threat to your body, mind, or soul.

On a 10+, you do it successfully and avoid the consequences of that threat.

On a 7–9, you succeed, but you pick one consequence.

- ‡ You receive a permanent Scar
- ‡ Someone else suffers what you evaded.
- ‡ You are out of the action: unconscious, trapped, incoherent or panicked.
- ‡ You lose control of something or someone important.
- ‡ A Circle rescues you from harm, which costs you favour.

On a 6-, the GM will make a move.

When you *EVADE A THREAT* in service a Circle which acknowledges you as a member, add +1 to your roll.

SCARS

When one of the Wise suffers severe trauma, they can receive a Scar. This is a permanent and serious infliction, which hinders them in certain actions. It could be a physical injury, mental disorder, or social affliction. Regardless, it's something that will stay with them, and will provide -1 for all Moves which would be hindered. After one of the Wise accumulates their third Scar, the GM is permitted to slay them outright.

CONSULT THE SECRET FIRE

When you seek to understand a Circle in a charged situation.

On a 10+, choose 1 question from the list below, and you may spend one favour to ask another.

On a 7–9, the GM will 1 question from the list below to answer, unless you spend one favour to make the choice yourself...

- ‡ What do they wish I would do?
- ‡ What emotion drives them to behave this way?
- ‡ What here is working against the status quo?
- ‡ What here is reinforcing the status quo?
- ‡ What dangerous truth is being concealed?
- ‡ How is history influencing current events?
- ‡ Which of the Wise is most favoured by them?

On a 6-, the GM will make a move.

If you target a Circle that acknowledges your membership when you *CONSULT THE SECRET FIRE*, add +1 to your roll.

TAKE A STAND

When you stand in defiance the will of a Circle to prevent an action.

On a 10+, pick one option from the list below, and spend favour with that Circle, 1 for 1, to pick additional options from the list.

On a 7–9, spend favour with that Circle, 1 for 1, to pick choices from the list below.

- ‡ The Circle remains united.
- ‡ The Circle remains peaceful.
- ‡ The action will not occur in short term (coming months).
- ‡ The action will not occur in the long term (after months have passed).
- ‡ You do not suffer personal retaliation or retribution.

On a 6-, none of those items on the list will be chosen, and the Circle will be thrown into chaos.

If you target a Circle that acknowledges your membership when you *TAKE A STAND*, add +1 to your roll.

CAST A SPELL

When you Cast a Spell through Experiment, Ritual, or Rote.

On a 10+, select 2 of the permutations from the spell list.

On a 7–9, select 1 permutation from the spell list.

On a 6–, you lose control of the spell and the GM will describe what happens. Gain one point of Research towards that spell.

When you incorporate your foci in the description when you **CAST A SPELL**, add +1 to your roll.

CRAFT AN EXPERIMENT

When you attempt to cast a new spell under your tradition.

On a 10+, it works perfectly on the first try.

On a 7–9, the spell mostly works, but the GM will describe some unexpected side-effect or cost.

On a 6–, this spell is unworkable and can never be created.

When you incorporate your foci in the description when you **CRAFT AN EXPERIMENT**, add +1 to your roll.

If you successfully **CAST A SPELL**, name it immediately. When you have done so, write down the key information about this new Experiment. As the creator of the experiment, you establish the spell's trigger and the three Drawbacks associated with the casting. Drawbacks may come in the form of limitations, counters, costs, challenges, side-effects or instability, which a caster might try to avoid. Perhaps a magic missile spell unleashes a thunderclap, making stealth impossible. Perhaps a flight spell has a variable duration.... The group can help you craft your experiment at the table.

For more information on Spells and Experiments, see Chapter 4 on The Secret Fire.

Interlude Moves

The Wise can never rest for long, and ceaselessly work to further their goals. At the beginning of each session, each of the Wise declares what long-term action they have been working on since the previous session. Each of them will make one of the following four Interlude Moves to determine how successful their efforts have been.

FURTHER YOUR RESEARCH

When you advance your arcane studies and refine your spells.

On a 10+, you discover new secrets, rites, and formulae. Gain two points of Research to allocate to your current Spells.

On a 7–9, your research is productive, but requires access or components held by the Dominant Society. Spend one favour in order to get a point of Research to allocate to one of your current Spells.

On a 6-, your research frightens, harms, or corrupts someone from a Circle. Lose 2 favour with that Circle.

For each project established that helps you *FURTHER YOUR RESEARCH*, add +1 to your roll.

CONFRONT THE DOOM

When you strike out against the Doom, either on the distant frontier or the home front.

On a 10+, you strike a decisive blow against the Doom, earning 2 favour from the Dominant Society in the process for your valiant efforts.

On a 7–9, you harm the doom, earning 1 favour from the Dominant Society for your efforts and attract the unwanted attention of the Doom.

On a 6-, the Doom retaliates with terrible fury against one of the Circles. The Circle harmed by the Doom blames you, and you lose 2 favour with them.

For each project established that helps you *CONFRONT THE DOOM*, add +1 to your roll.

AID A COMMUNITY

When your mundane or arcane efforts aid a marginalized community.

On a 10+, your work offers a lasting benefit to the community, giving you 3 Favour with that community.

On a 7–9, your work benefits one community (+ 2 Favour) at the expense of another community (–1 Favour).

On a 6–, whatever aid you provided is overshadowed by the retaliation of the Dominant Society. They lash out at the community with new forms of oppression.

For each project established that helps you *AID A COMMUNITY*, add +1 to your roll.

ADVANCE A PROJECT

When you work on a special project that helps your research, threatens the Doom, or supports a community. This project will provide you an ongoing +1 on the relevant Interlude moves.

On a 10+, you complete a project which will help you *FURTHER YOUR RESEARCH*, *CONFRONT THE DOOM*, or *AID A COMMUNITY*.

On a 7–9, in order to complete your project, you need the assistance of two other people. The GM will tell you who they are.

On a 6–, your project is sabotaged or blocked by a malevolent group. The GM will describe how they interfered with your efforts.

Chapter 4: The Secret Fire

Magic is at the heart of the game. Each character holds several spells at a variety of different levels of development. During play, you gather points of research which gradually improve your spells from lvl 1 Experiments, to lvl 2 Rituals, to lvl 3 Rotes or beyond.

Each spell is a move, and improving a spell allows the Wise to customize that spell. This means that the reward of play is customization and creative contributions. You are also given the option of making new Experiments, allowing you to create new magical effects within your school of magic. In this game, you have the opportunity to build your own tools of liberation. You can only gain these benefits by taking actions, taking risks, and using your creativity.

Spell Components

Much of the game revolves around the use of spells, which are ranked in complexity from a Tier 1 to Tier 4. Whenever you use the “CAST A SPELL” move, reference the specific components of the relevant spell to see what the potential outcomes are. Each spell has the following components.

Name: A title for the spell, so it may be referred to.

Category: Describing the school of magic and level of refinement

Effect: A single sentence that describes the overall effect of the spell.

Permutations: Every Spell has 3 permutations at any point in time, being a combination of negative Drawbacks and positive Enhancements.

Magic Missile (Evocation Experiment)

SAMPLE SPELL

When you launch bolts of force to injure a foe.

- ‡ The spell doesn't need to be memorized before it can be cast again.
- ‡ There is no collateral damage from stray bolts of force.
- ‡ The screaming bolts of force don't attract unwanted attention

When one of the Wise triggers the “*CAST A SPELL*” move, they will roll their dice to determine how many permutations they may select from the spell. On a 10+. They select 2 permutations. On a 7–9, they select one instead.

Permutations come in two forms; Drawbacks you would hope to avoid, or Enhancements you might hope to gain. When the spell is first created, all three permutations consist of Drawbacks which present limitations, costs, side effects, or other consequences for casting the spell. As you evolve the spell, you replace one of those Drawbacks with an Enhancement instead, which provide additional benefits when chosen. Drawbacks and Enhancements are described below.

DRAWBACKS

Drawbacks are negative outcomes that you may choose to avoid. Drawbacks describe a potential risk, cost, or side-effect which an action might normally produce. Only by selecting that option from the list will you avoid the negative outcome. When an experiment is first created, it begins with 3 Drawbacks. There are seven varieties of Drawbacks.

Limitations: When a spell has limited scope, area, or influence. For example, a spell might only be able to target something touched by the caster, or it may be unable to affect children.

Counters: When a spell can be negated by a certain action or item. The spell either has no effect, or it is actively dispelled by contact with the counter. For example, chanting a certain prayer, or holding cold iron might block a spell.

Costs: When a spell requires some expense to be paid in order to be cast. For example, a spell might require physical components, precious gems, or an hour of time to be cast.

Challenges: When a spell requires that a caster must confront some obstacle in order to succeed at casting the spell. For example, it might require negotiation with a spirit, or the blood of a mighty foe.

Side Effects: When a spell has some additional detrimental effect, in addition to the normal ones. For instance, a spell might deal collateral damage to the environment, or warp the caster's perceptions.

Instability: When a spell is chaotic and some of the conditions associated with it (duration, area, or targets) is not under complete caster control. For example, a spell might have a variable duration or might affect a variable number of individuals.

EXAMPLES OF DRAWBACKS

- ‡ The spell doesn't need to be memorized before it can be cast again.
- ‡ The spell doesn't unleash (unexpected side-effect).
- ‡ The spell doesn't disturb and frighten onlookers.
- ‡ The spell doesn't physically exhaust the caster.
- ‡ The spell doesn't require expensive components.
- ‡ The spell doesn't attract unwanted attention.
- ‡ The spell doesn't require an hour to cast.
- ‡ The spell doesn't expend a Favour with the relevant Circle.
- ‡ The spell doesn't threaten your body, mind, or soul.
- ‡ The spell doesn't require negotiation with a powerful being.

ENHANCEMENTS

Enhancements are positive outcomes which you may choose to benefit from. Enhancements present additional rewards, better outcomes, or increased scope for relevant spells. You will only get this extra benefit if you select this option from the list.

Enhancements are additional benefits which occur when the permutation is chosen. These can expand the potential benefits of the spell, and offer benefits which are not logically included in the base spell. There are many different types of enhancement which are possible.

Scope: The spell may affect a broader area, more targets, or persist for a longer period of time than it otherwise would. For example, as spell might be able to affect an entire ship, or persist for a year.

Control: The caster gains an ability to dynamically change parameters of the spell, after it has been cast. For example, a barrier created by a spell could be opened by the caster.

Secondary Effect: A secondary, complementary magical effect is included with the original spell. For example, a spell might also create light, or heal the caster.

Piercing: The spell can bypass obstacles which would normally stop it from operating. For example, a spell might pierce heavy armour, or reach through incredible distances.

Impact: The spell has dramatically more significant effect on any targets. For example, a spell might kill or transform someone permanently.

Subtle: The spell is quiet and can be cast without raising the attention or suspicion of others. For example, a spell might only require slight gestures or whispers to cast.

Spell Research

Spells are living things, whose natures change over time. The Wise create initial **Experiments**, refine those into more functional **Rituals**. Over time, experience will teach the Wise how to upgrade that into a **Rote**. Eventually, these Rotes can be bound into permanent **Artifacts**, or **Scrolls** that teach the spell to others.

Spells evolve through research, experimentation, and ambitious failure. Each individual spell has a research track beside it, which look like empty circles on the characters sheet. Whenever you gain a point of research, draw an arcane symbol on the relevant circle beside the spell.



- ⌚ Any spell that has 0, 1, or 2 points of research is an **Experiment** (level 1).
- ⌚ Any spell that has 3, 4, or 5 points of research is a **Ritual** (level 2).
- ⌚ Any spell that has 6, 7, or 8 points of research is a **Rote** (level 3).
- ⌚ Any spell that has 9 points of research is a **Wonder** (level 4), which allows you to either create an artifact or a scroll.

Once you have scribed all nine symbols, you have completed your research and evolved the spell into its final form.

You gain research in three ways.

- ⌚ Each time you fail to **CAST A SPELL** (6-), gain a point of research in that spell.
- ⌚ Each time you choose not to participate in three consecutive scenes, gain a point of research to allocate as you see fit.
- ⌚ After using the “**FURTHER YOUR RESEARCH**” Interlude move and getting a 7+ result.

Spell Categories

Spells are complex things which are refined as they are used. The Wise work to improve their spells, turning crude experiment into elaborate ritual or elegant rite.

LEVEL 1—EXPERIMENT

Each spell begins as an experiment, with three negative permutations. These are the dangerous, cutting-edge prototypes of the arcane world, filled with wonder and terror. While they often pose pretty significant danger, they also offer amazing opportunities for arcane growth. When you allocate three points of Research to this **Experiment**, upgrade it to a **Ritual**.



Magic Missile (Evocation Experiment)

When you Cast a Spell to launch bolts of force to injure a foe.

- ⌚ The spell doesn't have a limited range.
- ⌚ There is no collateral damage from stray bolts of force.
- ⌚ The screaming bolts of force don't attract unwanted attention.

LEVEL 2—RITUAL

As spells are used, they gradually improve and become more reliable arcane effects. When an **Experiment** is upgraded to **Ritual**, replace one of the Drawbacks with an Enhancement. The majority of all spells are Rituals, and they may often be used safely with sufficient care. When you allocate three points of Research to this **Ritual**, upgrade it to a **Rote**.



Magic Missile (Evocation Ritual)

When you Cast a Spell to launch bolts of force to injure a foe.

- ⌚ The spell doesn't have a limited range.
- ⌚ There is no collateral damage from stray bolts of force.
- ⌚ The screaming bolts of force don't attract unwanted attention.
- ⌚ The spell strikes up to two additional targets in the same volley.

LEVEL 3—ROTE

When a Ritual is upgraded to **Rote**, replace one of the two Drawbacks with an Enhancement. Rotes are dependable and impressive spells that the Wise wield to great effect. When you allocate three points of Research to this **Rote**, you may choose either to craft an **Artifact** or scribe a **Scroll**. When that is done, the spell will be complete, and you will continue to use the Rote version whenever you cast the spell.



Magic Missile

(Evocation Rote)

When you **CAST A SPELL** to launch bolts of force to injure a foe.

- ⚔ The spell doesn't have a limited range.
- ⚔ There is no collateral damage from stray bolts of force.
- ⚔ The screaming bolts of force don't attract unwanted attention.
- ⚔ The spell strikes up to two additional targets in the same volley.
- ⚔ The arcane missiles pierce the thickest armour.

LEVEL 4—WONDER

When you allocate three points of Research upon a Rote, you may choose either to Craft an Artifact, or Scribe a Scroll. Artifacts are permanent tools, which can help generations of people change the world. Scrolls allow you to spread your magical tradition to other members of the Wise, or spread it to apprentices who can carry on your legacy. Your choice is final and will have lasting consequences.

Crafting an Artifact binds the spell into a physical object. You imbue a thing with the secret fire, weaving it into cloaks and inscribing it into sword-blades. These beautiful and precious items allow the wielder to create that spell effect without a roll. These are no permutations, either positive or negative, associated with the Artifact but it may be used safely by anyone who has discovered the secret to activate it.

From a mechanical perspective, using an artifact does not trigger any moves. If a character uses a ring of invisibility, the player simply narrates how they vanish from sight. If a character wears enchanted mail, sword blows cease to trigger the “*EVADE A THREAT*” move.

Wand of Magic Missiles

(Evocation Artifact)

When you trace the pattern of the Hunter in the air before you with this wand, you launch a bolt of force that injures any unprotected foe.



Scribing a Scroll allows you to share your tradition with others. When another mortal reads the scroll, they learn the fundamental requirements of that spell. This allows for any magic user to learn the Experiment version of this spell, even if they are from a different specialty. By creating a scroll, a Diviner can teach her Necromancer companion how to cast an Augury spell, for example.

Scrolls can also be used to teach the uninitiated the fundamentals of magic. Most mortals have some innate capability with one of the schools of magic, and this capability is unlocked when they read an arcane scroll. Doing so is a sacred and costly act, done only after great consideration. When the time is right, and the Wise is certain that the candidate is worthy, they can begin the ritual. The Secret Fire may embrace the apprentice enthusiastically or with great reluctance, at the discretion of the GM.



A Multitude of Missiles

There are countless different ways of creating and evolving spells during play. To show some practical examples, here are the 3 different versions of the Magic Missile Ritual which have been found in the forbidden tomes of the Evoker's Hall.

Ruby Magic Missile (Evocation Ritual)

Launch bolts of force to incapacitate a foe.

- ‡ The spell doesn't need to be memorized before it can be cast again.
- ‡ There is no collateral damage from stray bolts of force.
- ‡ The screaming bolts of force don't attract unwanted attention.
- ‡ **The magic missiles are shrouded in flame and ignite targets.**

The Ruby Magic Missile is the common variant, taught to new evokers. It is a form of messy, attention-grabbing ordinance that is primarily used on the battlefield. The upgrade cancelled the first drawback, which means that the spell can be cast frequently.

Emerald Magic Missile (Evocation Ritual)

Launch bolts of force to incapacitate a foe.

- ‡ The missiles are not blocked by cold iron.
- ‡ ~~The spell does not consume one of the caster's memories.~~
- ‡ The spell doesn't displease the Kindly Ones.
- ‡ **The missiles are invisible and strike with deadly silence.**

The Emerald Magic Missile was a gift stolen from the Kindly Ones of the Great Wood. It's a subtle defence that protects a canny evoker, but the Fae nature of the spell is apparent. The upgrade cancelled the second drawback, which means that the spell no longer drains the memories of the caster.

Sapphire Magic Missile (Evocation Ritual)*Launch bolts of force to incapacitate a foe.*

- ‡ The caster doesn't need to shoot the missile from a bow.
- ‡ ~~The spell does not consume an arrow inscribed with mystic runes.~~
- ‡ The missile does not attract attention with the blue glow.
- ‡ **The magic missile seeks out the target unerringly.**

The Sapphire Magic Missile was an ancient magic from the steppe peoples, whose archers were the best in the world. It's a spell that offers an archer a magical arrow that strikes with intimidating force, used to focus fire on specific targets. With the upgrade, the spell allows the archer to fire a limitless supply of target-seeking arrows.

The Laws of the Secret Fire

The Secret Fire offers wondrous gifts, but it has its limits. Certain kinds of experimental spells fail every time they are attended. The following laws have been established by the Wise, as a way of trying to pass down these lessons to their apprentices.

The scars shall not fade. The Wise are meant to learn the lessons taught by the world. To that end, they cannot remove any Scars which they have suffered. Restorative spells might cure the worst injuries suffered by the common folk, but those spells fail to help the Wise.

The fire cannot be stolen. The Wise are unable to grant the arcane aptitude to the common folk with a spell. Neither can they suppress the Secret Fire within the hearts of their peers. Only through artifacts and scrolls can the gift of magic be shared.

The past cannot be changed. The Wise may not alter what has already come to pass. The Secret Fire works to improve the future, not correct the mistakes of earlier days. They can only try to learn from the past, to try to keep it from happening once more.

The circle cannot be breached. The Wise may not gain Favour directly with their spells. Only through the using spells for the benefit of a circle, can you gain Favour and acceptance from them.

Chapter 5: The Traditions

Overview

Before you play the game, you need to create your characters. The apprentice edition contains six different Traditions to choose from, each representing practitioners of the various styles of magic. Print off the six tradition sheets, and distribute each of them. The full game will include many more traditions.

WHAT'S IN A TRADITION?

Each Tradition of the Wise has several different elements to consider. Some of these are choices to be made at character creation, while others are predetermined.

1. Your **Name**, how you are known to the world.
2. Your **Community**, the marginalized group acknowledges you.
3. Your **Profession**, the work you do to survive.
4. Your **Views** on the Dominant Society.
5. Your **Foci**, used to channel your magic.
6. Your **Questions**, which you alone may answer.
7. Your **Relationships**, the people who you are bound to.
8. Your **Cantrip**, representing a minor magical action you can perform at will.
9. Your three **Spells** from your tradition, with research to allocate between them.

THE CORE TRADITIONS



THE EVOKER,
who calls upon raw forces
to shake the world.

THE ILLUSIONIST,
who crafts phantasms
and twist perceptions.



THE DIVINER,
who calls on the
secrets of the world.



THE TRANSMUTER,
who alters the world to
suit their whims.



THE CONJURER,
who summons assistance
from the outer planes.



THE NECROMANCER,
who twists the forces
of life and death.



The Evoker



CHARACTER QUESTIONS

You have been acknowledged as a member of ...

The Burdened Community, The Forsaken Community, The Foreign Community, The Native Community, No-one.

You work as a....

Caregiver, Farmer, Soldier, Priest, Bruiser, Barber,
or another profession.

(Pick 2) The Dominant Society must be....

Respected, Appeased, Resisted, Overthrown, Feared, Healed, Restored,
Improved, Avoided, Honoured, Served, Educated, Pitied, Defended, Destroyed.

(Pick 2) You Magical Foci are....

Staves, Gestures, Circles, Shouts, Knives, Stones

Whom have you vowed to destroy, and why?

Which of the Wise will you protect at all costs?

RELATIONSHIPS

Ahanu, a trapper from the Native Community, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

Prajit, a merchant of the Foreign Community, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

Lukas, a military officer of the Dominant Society, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

CANTRIP: THE ARCAN E HAND

Evokers have mastery of the fundamental forces, able to manipulate objects from afar. They may extend an invisible hand at great distance to manipulate and transport objects. This arcane hand is as strong as the caster themselves, capable of opening a door, transporting an object, or even wielding a weapon.

SPELL 1: MAGIC MISSILE

Launch bolts of force to incapacitate a foe.

- ‡ The spell doesn't have a limited range.
- ‡ There is no collateral damage from stray bolts of force.
- ‡ The screaming bolts of force don't attract unwanted attention.

SPELL 2: FIRE BALL

Hurl an explosive ball of flames at a large target.

- ‡ The spell doesn't need to be memorized before it can be cast again.
- ‡ The fires don't spread uncontrollably
- ‡ The fireball explodes where you desire.

SPELL 3: SHIELD

Create an unbreakable, protective barrier of force.

- ‡ The shield doesn't attract unwanted attention.
- ‡ The shield doesn't absorb all of your concentration to maintain.
- ‡ The shield is not immobile, anchored to the earth.

The Illusionist



CHARACTER QUESTIONS

You have been acknowledged as a member of...

The Burdened Community, The Forsaken Community, The Foreign Community, The Native Community, No-one.

You work as a....

Diplomat, Minstrel, Cook, Jeweler, Painter, Con-artist, or another profession.

(Pick 2) The Dominant Society must be....

Respected, Appeased, Resisted, Overthrown, Feared, Healed, Restored, Improved, Avoided, Honoured, Served, Educated, Pitied, Defended, Destroyed.

(Pick 2) You Magical Foci are....

Mirrors, Smoke, Paint, Chalk, Song, Gemstones

What about yourself do you need to hide from the world?

Which of the Wise will you never deceive?

RELATIONSHIPS

Lukas, a military officer of the Dominant Society, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

Artens, a smith of the Burdened Community, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

Jacquel, a sex-worker from the Forsaken Community, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

CANTRIP: PHANTOM WHISPERS

Illusionists speak with a thousand voices. They are able to create illusionary noises and sounds at will, from a quiet ghostly whisper to a terrifying dragon's roar. Illusionists can also project these voices if they choose, and even mimic the voices of others.

SPELL 1 DISGUISE SELF

Disguise the caster as someone else, with a compelling illusion.

- ‡ Your disguise doesn't have subtle inconsistencies.
- ‡ Your disguise doesn't warp your mind or personality.
- ‡ Your disguise doesn't exhaust you to maintain.

SPELL 2 INVISIBILITY SHROUD

Conceal a target under a shroud of invisibility.

- ‡ Beasts cannot see through the shroud.
- ‡ Your shroud is not dispelled by blood or running water.
- ‡ The spell doesn't need to be memorized before it can be cast again.

SPELL 3 PROJECT IMAGE

Create a life-like visual illusion.

- ‡ The image feels tangible and real, when touched.
- ‡ The image you project is not still and immobile.
- ‡ The image you project doesn't fade if you move beyond line of sight.

The Diviner



CHARACTER QUESTIONS

You have been acknowledged as a member of...

The Burdened Community, The Forsaken Community, The Foreign Community, The Native Community, No-one.

You work as a....

Bookbinder, Sexworker, Tutor, Scout, Councillor, Spy, or another profession.

(Pick 2) The Dominant Society must be....

Respected, Appeased, Resisted, Overthrown, Feared, Healed, Restored, Improved, Avoided, Honoured, Served, Educated, Pitied, Defended, Destroyed.

(Pick 2) You Magical Foci are....

Dice, Runes, Sticks, Crystals, Mushrooms, Smoke

What secret plot could have been avoided through divination?

Which of the Wise has a future shrouded in fire and pain?

RELATIONSHIPS

Jacquel, a sex-worker from the Forsaken Community, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

Raynard, a scholar from the Dominant Society, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

Prakas, a refugee from the Foreign Community, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

CANTRIP: ARCANES SENSE

Diviners possess arcane senses, which allow them to sense the subtle currents of the Secret Fire within all things. They are able to see the colour of magic, taste the bitter flavour of a curse, or feel the demonic fires beneath the skin of a thrall.

SPELL 1 IDENTIFY

Discern the properties and history of an item.

- ‡ The spell does not require an hour to cast.
- ‡ The emotional resonance of the item doesn't bleed into the caster.
- ‡ The spell doesn't reveal the information in confusing metaphors.

SPELL 2 PROPHECY

Predict the outcome of an action or decision.

- ‡ The prophesied outcome is not unchangeable.
- ‡ The spell does not conceal your own future.
- ‡ No one else receives the same prophecy in their dreams.

SPELL 3 SCRY

Project your vision to a great distance.

- ‡ Your senses are not limited to the horizon.
- ‡ Your scrying is not limited to your sense of sight.
- ‡ You don't need extensive herbs, drugs, and crystals to project your senses.

The Transmuter



CHARACTER QUESTIONS

You have been acknowledged as a member of...

The Burdened Community, The Forsaken Community, The Foreign Community, The Native Community, No-one.

You work as a....

Brewer, Smith, Carpenter, Sculptor, Herbalist, Beggar, or another profession.

(Pick 2) The Dominant Society must be....

Respected, Appeased, Resisted, Overthrown, Feared, Healed, Restored, Improved, Avoided, Honoured, Served, Educated, Pitied, Defended, Destroyed.

(Pick 2) You Magical Foci are....

Coins, Chisels, Phials, Oils, Candle, Ink

What personal flaw do you seek to overcome through alchemy?

Which of the Wise have you supported financially, at a terrible cost?

RELATIONSHIPS

Prakas, a refugee from the Foreign Community, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

Wapun, a teacher from the Native Community, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

Arman, a priest from the Dominant Society, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

CANTRIP: ALCHEMY

Transmuters are trained alchemists, first and foremost. They can create many substances of value, such as solvents, acids, or metallic alloys in their arcane labs. Unlike mundane alchemists, however, Transmuters can use the Secret Fire to transform their Favour with one of the Communities into precious metals.

SPELL 1 ANIMATE

Imbue an inanimate object with false life and simple mind.

- ‡ The animated object does not rebel against your direct commands.
- ‡ The animated object does not resent you and undermine your interests.
- ‡ The object does not fall inanimate after a day.

SPELL 2 SCULPT

Bend metal and shape stone according to your will.

- ‡ You do not have to touch any metal or earth to shape it.
- ‡ Your spell doesn't take hours to cast.
- ‡ The sculpture does not revert over the weeks that come.

SPELL 3 POLYMORPH

Transform a creature's body, with or without their consent.

- ‡ The spell is not limited to partial transformations of the target.
- ‡ The spell is not permanent and irreversible.
- ‡ The spell does not rob the target of their full personality, intelligence, and morality.

The Conjurer



CHARACTER QUESTIONS

You have been acknowledged as a member of...

The Burdened Community, The Forsaken Community, The Foreign Community, The Native Community, No-one.

You work as a....

Bartender, Animal Trainer, Scholar, Lay Priest, Trapper, Musician, or another profession.

(Pick 2) The Dominant Society must be....

Respected, Appeased, Resisted, Overthrown, Feared, Healed, Restored, Improved, Avoided, Honoured, Served, Educated, Pitied, Defended, Destroyed.

(Pick 2) You Magical Foci are....

Bells, Incense, Drums, Circles, Birds, Names

What terrible event struck you because no-one would help?

Which of the Wise do you consider to be your chosen family?

RELATIONSHIPS

Arman, a priest from the Dominant Society, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

Selene, a painter from the Forsaken Community, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

Martje, a veteran of the Burdened Community, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

CANTRIP: FAMILIAR

Each Conjurer has a single, soul-bound familiar; a common beast, an arcane construct, or an unnatural monster. This Cantrip creates an unbreakable bond of mutual friendship, family, and service between two beings. They gain the ability to speak each other's tongues, see through each other's eyes, and unfailingly find each other.

SPELL 1 MORTAL SUMMONS

Call a mortal to travel to your location.

- ‡ The mortal travels to you of their own free will, rather than by compulsion.
- ‡ The mortal does not suffer any consequences or costs for their travel.
- ‡ The caster doesn't need the true name of the target to summon them.

SPELL 2 CONJURE ELEMENTALS

Conjure a native of the elemental planes into your presence.

- ‡ Your spell doesn't take hours to cast.
- ‡ The conjuring doesn't require the use of expensive material components.
- ‡ The elemental is not angry and resentful for being summoned.

SPELL 3 APPORTATION

Teleport an inanimate object to you.

- ‡ The object doesn't need to have been etched with mystic rune.
- ‡ The object doesn't have to be within a day's travel.
- ‡ The object doesn't acquire strange properties in the process.

The Necromancer



CHARACTER QUESTIONS

You have been acknowledged as a member of the...

The Burdened Community, The Forsaken Community, The Foreign Community, The Native Community, No-one.

You work as a....

Gravedigger, Sex worker, Executioner, Butcher, Midwife, Guard, or another profession.

(Pick 2) The Dominant Society must be....

Respected, Appeased, Resisted, Overthrown, Feared, Healed, Restored, Improved, Avoided, Honoured, Served, Educated, Pitied, Defended, Destroyed.

(Pick 2) You Magical Foci are....

Bones, Blood, Rings, Veils, Chalk, Silver

Who was the loved one who crossed the veil of death?

Which of the Wise stood by your side and offered life-saving comfort?

RELATIONSHIPS

Martje, a veteran of the Burdened Community, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

Raynard, a scholar from the Dominant Society, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

Ahanu, a trapper from the Native Community, is your...

Lover, Family, Friend, Colleague. Rival, Foe.

CANTRIP: DEATHSIGHT

Necromancers are blessed, and cursed, with the ability to see the dead. Necromancers can see poltergeists who haunt decrepit buildings. They can see ghosts re-enact their final moments, at the site of their grisly murders. They clearly see the spectres who ride the bodies of the living, and the undead revenants who wander the streets.

SPELL 1 GRAVE SPEECH

Negotiate with the dead.

- ‡ The dead will not lie.
- ‡ The dead will not demand anything in return.
- ‡ The dead won't be angered by your demands.

SPELL 2 HEX

Bind a debilitating curse on the living.

- ‡ You do not require a hair and blood from the target.
- ‡ You do not suffer the same curse as that suffered by the target.
- ‡ You are able to determine when the curse will end.

SPELL 3 BLIGHT TOUCH

Spread disease, decay and rot through touch.

- ‡ The blight will not spread beyond the intended target.
- ‡ The blight doesn't consume the vitality of the land.
- ‡ Your spell doesn't take hours to cast.

Chapter 6: The Game Master

CIRCLES OF POWER is a challenging game to run, for many reasons. The rules are deceptively simple, with a handful of common Moves, and a basic framework for portraying magic. This simplicity leaves spaces for the complex and messy social dynamics that arise during play.

As the GM, you are asked to represent each of the Circles authentically and honestly. Each of them wants what is best for their members, which is often to the detriment of everyone else. Focus on the conflicts of intersectionality, of conflicting identities, and of contradictory desires.

As the GM, you should know how to run a game for a table of players. What *CIRCLES OF POWER* offers is an overarching framework to make your job easier. The structure is designed to give you tools when you need them, and get out of your way when you know how to proceed. This chapter will show you what you need to know.

Your Mandate

As the GM for *CIRCLES OF POWER*, you're making a promise to the Players to do three things:

- ‡ Present a world of boundless magic and arcane mysteries;
- ‡ Portray a hierarchical and oppressive society; and
- ‡ Show the communities through human eyes.

So long as you are honouring these three promises, you are running *CIRCLES OF POWER* “correctly”. This is not a game about battlefield wizards on campaign, fighting inhuman hordes. It isn't a game about elderly philosophers debating magical theory from obsidian towers. This is about people who rose above oppression to seize magic by the throat, and wield it to help their communities. This is a game about the little people who *TAKE A STAND* against a world that hates them, and refuse to back down. It's a game about heroes.

Your Agenda

The introduction of the game describes it as game about magic, activism, and communities. As a game master, your goals are to reinforce those three fundamental themes. Your Agenda offers signposts to show you the path forward.

PORTRAY A HIERARCHICAL AND OPPRESSIVE SOCIETY.

The world is unfair. A privileged few control all the fulcrums of society. The few hold the riches, living in comfort and safety while others starve. The few decide which voices should be heard, and which should be silenced. The few write the laws that protect their place in the world and punish any agitators who resist them. The few control the many, to protect their privileged place in the world.

As the GM, you need to reinforce hierarchical and oppressive character of society. Portray members of the Dominant Society who are terrified that they may lose their privileged place in the world. Speak as the powerful few, who confuse equality with aggression. Speak for the marginalized, desperate for justice and opportunity. Present the status ladder as if it were an objective fact of the universe, rather than a social construct.



SHOW THE COMMUNITIES THROUGH HUMAN EYES.

The world is not filled with platonic ideals, shining and pure. It's formed by the people who live within it. The world is a human place, with all the flaws inherent to the race. People with bickering families, quixotic dreams, and nighttime terrors. People who try their best to make the world a better place, despite all of the obstacles which stand in their way. Humanity makes the world in our image.

As the GM, you need to focus on the marginalized communities whose stories are rarely told. The Wise are your protagonists, and they are inexorably linked to the people at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Present the world from the perspective from the oppressed and the victimized. Keep their goals and values at the forefront of their mind, even as you portray the privileged few who oppress them.

PRESENT A WORLD OF BOUNDLESS MAGIC AND ARCAINE MYSTERIES.

There is so much more to the world than most people perceive. Ancient, mystical traditions have left their mark on the world in the smallest things. Poems guide the Wise towards enlightenment. Statues reveal secret passageways to arcane sanctums. Heavy tomes are chained in private libraries, binding the cryptic secrets and ancient rituals. Ephemeral spirits dance the wild woods, while the dead walk in shadowed halls.

As the GM, you need to present a mystical world for the Wise to explore. The Secret Fire has granted them enlightenment and arcane gifts which they can wield to change the world. Make the world feel like a place of hidden magic and secret lore. Offer the Wise problems that cannot be solved through mundane means, and applaud them when they succeed. Make them feel like wizards.

Your Voices

As the GM, you are responsible for portraying a wide variety of characters; the faces and the relationships who are bound to the Wise. Play them as human beings, with fragile hearts and noble dreams for a better tomorrow. Remember their names, describe their faces, and remember their families. Ask the Wise to give you comfort, safety, and vengeance. Use their voices to speak on behalf of their Circles.

During play, you will speak with many voices and see the world from many perspectives. Whenever you portray an NPC during play, pick one of the options below to guide your roleplaying,

THE VOICE OF HATE

Keep the marginalized in their place. The Burdened are drains upon society, contributing nothing yet demanding that we sacrifice on their behalf. The Forsaken are self-absorbed and perverse creatures, seeking to corrupt our noble civilization. The Foreign are outsiders and invaders who want to infect our culture and destroy our nation. The Natives are lazy savages, who should be grateful for our benevolence. All of these “marginalized communities” need to be put in their place, for our great society to flourish again.

THE VOICE OF BENEVOLENCE

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. People are kind and thoughtful by nature, seeking instinctively to help others. They may want to help their children succeed in life, guiding them to positions of comfort. They may wish to help the less fortunate, offering charity or advice to the humble. They might write the laws for the express purpose of supporting the disenfranchised, yet fail to consult those same marginalized people.

THE VOICE OF DOOM

There are always whispers of The Doom. They say that it lurks on our distant borders, threatening our way of life. It's said that brave soldiers and the Wise will strike mighty blows against the Doom, in that far away country. The Doom is always on the horizon, casting long shadows upon our noble society. It is behind every misfortune we suffer, and breeds chaos in its wake. If we ever let down our guard, the Doom will surely destroy us.

THE VOICE OF STATUS

Everyone has their place in the world. If you work hard, and offer the right favours, you can rise above your station and make things better for your children. If you let down your guard, the unwashed masses will steal your future out from under you. There is a ladder of privilege and status that we all must climb, if we hope for prosperity. You don't have to like the game, but you have to play it if you hope to survive in this world.

THE VOICE OF DEFIANCE

Overthrow the oppressive regime that holds the marginalized down. The oppressors have harmed you, your family, and your community for the last time. You will *TAKE A STAND*, no matter the cost. If they try to silence you, you will scream in their face. If they try to hold you, you will break their arms. If they try to bargain, you will ignore their pleas. You will stand against your oppressors and your resolve shall not falter.

THE VOICE OF DESPERATION

You need help, from anyone who can offer it. Your family is suffering, and you don't care who is to blame. Blame doesn't fix broken roofs, fill empty stomachs, or heal the wasting sickness. Blame doesn't give justice to those who have been wronged, or safety for those who are vulnerable. What you need now is help from any source. If the Dominant Society will not help you, perhaps the Wise might?

The Lens of Favour

As a GM, you are responsible for keeping track of favour. This is a secret currency, which you alone control. It represents the social power and acceptance that the Wise has with each of the Circle. It's also an incredibly powerful tool for portraying the world.

You have a Favour sheet, which tracks exactly how much Favour each of the Wise has with each Circle. The more favour they have with Circle, the more social power they wield and the greater acceptance they receive. If one of the Wise has a great deal of favour with one of the Circles, that group will treat them kindly. If they have little or no favour, they will be ignored or scorned instead.

- ‡ **With no Favour**, the Circle treats the character with hatred and fear.
- ‡ **At 1-3 Favour**, the Circle treats the character with scorn and distrust.
- ‡ **At 4-6 Favour**, the Circle treats the character with curiosity and judgement.
- ‡ **At 7-9 Favour**, the Circle treats the character with acceptance and friendship.
- ‡ **At 10 Favour**, the character is granted provisional membership in the Circle, if they do not already belong.

So long as a character holds 10 Favour with a Circle, that group acknowledges them as a legitimate member. If you behave in a way that violates the norms of the relevant circle, remove a point of favour and temporarily deprive them of this privilege.

Use the Favour ratings to inform your roleplaying as you portray each of the relationships. Those NPCs are proxies and representatives of the various Circles in play. The sheet is a powerful tool for tracking the complex social dynamics of an interconnected society.

As a GM, you are also responsible changing the levels of Favour that each of the Wise hold. You can give them Favour when they:

- Help a Circle during play (1-3 Favour)
- Use the “*AID A COMMUNITY*” Interlude Move (2-3 Favour)
- Use the “*CONFRONT THE DOOM*” Interlude Move (1-2 Favour)
- When you think it appropriate. (1 Favour)

You can remove Favour from when they:

- Use the Session move, *CONSULT THE SECRET FIRE* (1 Favour)
- Use the session move, *TAKE A STAND* (1-5 Favour)
- Lead a Circle, directing them to an action (2, 4 or 6 Favour).
- When you use the Hard Move “Reject” (1-3 Favour).
- When you think it appropriate. (1 Favour).

Favour is at the core of the game. By helping the marginalized, the Wise gain acceptance by them. By helping the Dominant, they Wise gain social standing. They then use those hard-earned favours to learn about the Circles and to modify their behaviour to noble ends. The Wise lead through service.

GM Moves

Gameplay is a conversation between the Players and the GM. Most of the time, the Players should lead the conversation and direct it where they want it to go. Invariably, the GM will need to respond to something, or introduce a new topic, to keep the conversation fresh. The GM does so by their own set of moves, which describe different ways to direct the story.

There are two types of moves available to the GM. Soft moves are prompts that establish tension and give the players a chance to respond. Hard moves are harsh, decisive statements that the players can only react to.

SOFT MOVES

Soft moves are designed to prompt players to respond and act. They set the stage for the players, and provide momentum for the story. use a Soft Move whenever....

- ‡ The conversation at the table has slowed, or
- ‡ the players look to you for a response.

The soft moves are....

QUESTION:

Ask a probing or leading question about a player's character, asking about their history, relationships, or beliefs. You can either ask the question out of the fiction (at the table) or through fiction (speaking as an NPC).

BARGAIN:

Offer an opportunity or incentive if the Wise were to behave in a certain way. The Society often bargains with the Wise to convince them to fight off the Doom, in exchange for tangible benefits and valuable Favour.

THREATEN:

Present some clear and present danger to the Wise, their communities, or the people they care about.

ENTANGLE:

Bring forward individuals with problems that only the Wise may solve. These individuals may come from anywhere; the Society, the Communities, or the World. Introduce problems which are either:

Internal to a Circle, from local politics to unfulfilled needs, to broken relationships;

Conflicts between different Circles, each seeking to better their own kind at the expense of the other;

Suffering by one of the communities, caused by the oppressive power of The Society; or

A Circle which is threatened by the malicious influence of the Doom.

HARD MOVES

When failure or bad luck strike, the GM makes Hard Moves. These happen most often when a player rolls a 6- on Evade a Threat or Consult the Secret Fire. This can also be triggered when a player ignores a clear threat, or when the fiction makes it abundantly clear. The following are hard moves at your disposal.

HARM:

Provide one of the Wise with a Scar, representing some kind of lasting physical, social, or mental trauma they have suffered.

LIE:

Provide false or misleading information, which a character is convinced to be true by their hubris or prejudice. This is most often the best response to a failure on Consult the Secret Fire.

REJECT:

A community is displeased with the actions of the Wise. Remove 1–3 points of Favour with a relevant Circle, depending on the severity of the mistake they made.

CONTROL:

Seize control of a character or their assets, either physically or through legal means.

OPPRESS:

Use laws and violence to silence voices, control bodies, and restrict opportunities for those who displease the dominant Society.

Tools of Oppression

As the MC, you are asked to portray the Dominant Society, and members of the various marginalized communities. You set the tone by establishing the oppressive social norms through a number of tools. Chief among these tools are macro aggressions; minor cruelties which appear to be benign to members of the Dominant Society. Most people do not intend to flavour their words with subtle racism and casual sexism, but are taught to do so by society. These are some micro-aggressions that you can use as a guide, and you are encouraged to research more of these on your own.

THE BURDENED

- ‡ Treat the Burdened like fragile things, easily broken.
- ‡ Demand acknowledgement for your consideration and charity.

THE FORSAKEN

- ‡ Speak over, or on behalf of, the Forsaken.
- ‡ Name the Forsaken as you wish, with names of affection or those they cast off.

THE FOREIGN

- ‡ Speak with the Foreign with exaggerated slowness and simplified language.
- ‡ Flatter the Foreign with your limited knowledge of their culture and faith.

THE NATIVE

- ‡ Question the education and credentials of the Natives.
- ‡ Share your opinions on the “best use” of native lands and resources.

The First Session

The first time you sit down to play *CIRCLES OF POWER*, you need to some preparation. Here is the process for starting your first game, in a series of steps.

1 ~ DISTRIBUTE SHEETS

Hand out the sheets for the six traditions to the players, and ask each of them to pick one of those traditions for their characters. Ask them to quickly look over their tradition, but not to fill in any of the information just yet.

2 ~ INTRODUCE THE SETTING

The Apprentice Edition of the game presents one setting, titled “The Steel Throne”. Read out the setting description, presented below.

The Steel Throne is an ancient kingdom, with a royal lineage spanning hundreds of years. The Steel Kings are renowned as mighty warriors and cunning tacticians, undefeated against foreign powers. Within their kingdom, they are respected and feared for their harsh treatment of tax-evaders and law breakers. The Steel Throne is sharp, merciless, and relentless.

3 ~ ASK SETTING QUESTIONS

Each setting has a set of eight questions for the group to answer. These will further define what the kingdom is like, and how the various communities are mistreated.

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM KNOWN FOR?

- ‡ A rich duelling tradition, bound into the legal system
- ‡ The holy order of the Brotherhood Penitent, suffering on our behalf.
- ‡ The safest roads in all the world, under constant patrols.

WHAT IS THE LAND OF THE KINGDOM LIKE?

- ‡ Gentle plains and bountiful fields
- ‡ Harsh craggy mountains and sheltered valleys.
- ‡ Frigid tundra, with knife-sharp winds.

WHAT GOODS DOES THE KINGDOM PROVIDE?

- ‡ Masterworked arms and armour, forged of meteoric iron.
- ‡ Soft cloth and warm wool, dyed in brilliant colours.
- ‡ Fine cordials of plum and pear brandies.

WHAT IS THE HIGHEST VIRTUES OF THE KINGDOM?

- ‡ Charity and hospitality, by offering sanctuary to those in need.
- ‡ Confidence and ambition, by taking bold risks to further your goals.
- ‡ Restraint and temperance, by resisting emotional displays and vulnerability.

WHAT RIGHT IS WITHHELD FROM THE BURDENED?

WHAT PRIVILEGE IS WITHHELD FROM THE FORSAKEN?

WHAT PROFESSION IS WITHHELD FROM THE FOREIGN?

WHAT CULTURAL TRADITION IS FORBIDDEN FOR THE NATIVES?

4 ~ DISCOVER YOUR DOOM

Humanity is threatened by a terrible Doom. As a group, decide which of the following statements best describes the Doom in your game.

- ‡ **Devils** of black flame and alabaster masks, who dine on sin and depravity.
- ‡ **Giants** whose hunger for human flesh shall never be sated.
- ‡ **Elemental horrors** of living flame, miasma, ooze, and stone, who open rifts in reality.
- ‡ **The Fae**, beautiful beyond imagining, who feast on dreams and memories
- ‡ **Flesh-burrowing abominations** who infect and puppeteer unwitting victims.
- ‡ **The undead horde**, who raise the fallen to join their shambling legion.

Only the Wise have the skills necessary to deal with this terrible force, no matter what you chose.



5 ~ COMPLETE THE CHARACTERS

Now that the players know what world they live in, and what perils they face, ask them to complete their character sheets. This means the players will create the following for their characters:

- ‡ A Name
- ‡ Which Community acknowledges them as a member.
- ‡ What profession they hold.
- ‡ How they view the dominant society
- ‡ What magical foci they use to channel their magic.
- ‡ Two questions about their past.
- ‡ The form of three relationships.

When all of that is complete, tell the players to look to the three spells on their sheet. Tell them that each character begins with six points of research which they may distribute between their spells as they see fit. They allocate those points of research by drawing magic symbols in the circles beside the relevant spell.

- ‡ Any spell that receives 0, 1 or 2 points of research will remain as an Experiment (level 1).
- ‡ Any spell which receives 3, 4 or 5 points of research will be upgraded to a Ritual (level 2).
- ‡ Any spell which receives all 6 points of research will be upgraded to a Rote (level 3).

If any player is uncertain what to choose, invite them to put 2 points of research in each of their spells. That option means that the player won't have to worry about making any lasting decisions until a later time.

If any spells are upgraded to Rituals or Rotes, refer to the rules in Chapter 4.

6 ~ ESTABLISH HIERARCHIES

The social hierarchy in *CIRCLES OF POWER* is murky and uncertain. The only thing that everyone agrees on is that the Dominant Society is on the top of the social order. As a group of the Wise, you need to determine where each of the marginalized communities falls on the ladder of power.

Rank 1: Privileged. The Dominant Society is always at the top of the social hierarchy.

Rank 2: Tolerated Which of the marginalized communities receives grudging respect and tolerance? Give each of the Wise one Favour with this community.

Rank 3: Ignored Which of the marginalized communities is ignored and forgotten? Give each of the Wise two Favour with this community.

Rank 4: Spurned Which of the marginalized communities is considered distasteful and unclean? Give each of the Wise three Favour with this community.

Rank 5: Hated Which of the marginalized communities is subject to blatant hatred and abuse? Give each of the Wise four Favour with this community.

7 ~ PRELUDES

Now you know the setting, and the nature of the Wise. You understand the terrible Doom that threatens you, and you have established the status hierarchy. Now it's time to introduce the characters through prelude scenes.

Each prelude is a brief scene where one of the Wise meets with one of their relationships. In each of these scenes, the Wise comes with aid or information which would benefit that Circle. They get a chance to describe their characters, and to show how they interact with that relationship. In thanks for their assistance, the Wise receives a Favour with that community.

Continue to administer these brief prelude scenes until each of the Wise has been introduced. Once all of the preludes are complete, continue to play through a series of scenes in accordance with your Agenda.

Chapter 7: Feedback

Apprentice Edition Questions

The Apprentice Edition is a work in progress; a preliminary version of a game in development. This version of the game is being produced and sold specifically for gathering feedback and playtesting. This game is powered by the Apocalypse, and the modifications have been tested in-house. We are publishing these to get your thoughts and experience with regards to the game.

This version of *CIRCLES OF POWER* is playable, but has plenty of rough edges to it. The game explicitly deals with very difficult issues including racism, sexism, xenophobia, ableism, and colonialism. The game is intentionally designed for focus on, and explore the complex social dynamics of multiple marginalized communities and their conflicting needs. It's a game about intersectionality and a dysfunctional society.

We have designed the game to address important issues, and give a voice to those often silenced by society. We know full-well, that intent is not magical. Despite our best efforts, this version of the game is likely to get many things wrong and might unwittingly cause pain. We would like to ask for your help to identify the problems, so we can fix them going forward. We want the full version of the game to be welcoming to everyone interested in playing.

The Apprentice Edition of the game is still in development, and it would greatly benefit from your insight. We have a series of 14 questions about the game, and we would love your insight so we can make it better for everyone.

If you would like to respond to these questions, please either fill out our survey at (<http://tinyurl.com/COPApprentice>), or email us directly at genesisoflegend@gmail.com. Please join us in our Google+ community at <http://tinyurl.com/CirclesOfPower>

We would be happy to have any additional information you make available, including audio recordings of the sessions, scanned copies of the completed sheets, and the names of the various playtesters for the book's credits.

Questionnaire

1. What is one thing you like the most about the game, as it is currently written?
2. What is one thing you dislike the most about the game, as it is currently written?
3. Are any of the moves too harsh or too generous?
4. Do you see any issues with the Favour economy?
5. Do you see any issues with the magic system and spell research?
6. How do you feel about the GM instructions?
7. What portions of the current text do you find to be unclear?
8. If you were to allocate another 2000 words worth of text, where would you allocate them?
9. The fundamental purpose of this game is to give a voice to people who have been marginalized, and focus on their experiences. This is, however, a game that deals explicitly with oppression and has certainly gotten many things wrong. What portions of the current game text do you feel to be harmful or offensive?
10. Are there any prejudicial assumptions which you see baked into the text or the mechanics?
11. What elements of marginalization have I failed to highlight, which you believe might strengthen the game?
12. Where has the text gotten overly preachy, academic, or inaccessible to a general audience?
13. If you playtested the game, what assumptions did you have to make in order to run the game successfully? If this was a reading review, please write N/A.
14. What outstanding questions did you have about the game?

We welcome all feedback and thank you very much for your time.

You are the Wise

They call you Wizard
They call you Witch
They call you Warlock
They call you Miracle-Worker

The one thing they don't call you is their equal.



Circles of Power is a game about wizards in a world that hates them. In this game, you portray individuals who have suffered from oppression, discrimination, and prejudice. You learned to wield the Sacred Fire, both to protect yourselves and aid your marginalized communities.

It's a game about magic, where you refine your spells, create new sorceries, and train apprentices to follow your traditions.

It's a game about activism, and the difficult choices and moral compromises made by people thrust into the seat of leadership.

It's a game about marginalized communities, each of who suffer from the oppressions of the dominant Society.

Circles of Power is a PBTA roleplaying game inspired by games such as Monsterhearts, Dream Askew, and Nightwitches. The Apprentice Edition is an experimental, limited-run version of the game, commonly known as an ashcan. This 72-page rulebook contains everything you need to run the game, including setting information, playbooks, and the GM's rules.



POWERED BY THE
APOCALYPSE

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