



**WORLDS OF
LEGACY**

RHAPSODY OF BLOOD

JAMES ILES



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Rhapsody of Blood

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CHAPTER 1

UNDER A BLOOD MOON





There's a wound in the world, and it's bleeding. Most of the time, you can't put your finger on what's wrong. Yes, pain and suffering abounds. Yes, plagues and wars carry the young to their graves and tear apart communities. Yes, those in power enrich themselves as the poor beg for food. But isn't that just the way of the world?

A select few have a different idea. They've come into contact with a corrupting, corrosive force from outside reality, and even as it's tainted their bloodline it's given them the insight to spot its effects. From across the world - from the forests of Wallachia to the slums of London, from the plains of the Lakota to the savannah of the Serengeti - brave souls have faced down the corruption and tracked it back to its source.

That source is **the castle**: a sprawling, chaotic and ever-shifting gothic nightmare. Everything it touches is twisted into a nightmare or empowered with occult magic, all at the whims of **the castle's** regent. From the moment it tears a hole into our reality the blood shed by that wound collects in **the castle's** corridors and keeps, eventually pooling in an Unholy Grail in the regent's sanctum. When it's full, they'll work some grand ritual to blight the land - unless those brave souls can stop them first.

And if they manage to defeat the regent, what then? The Grail remains, ready to work great changes on the world. A victorious explorer can seize that power, bringing fortune to their bloodline and peace to the world, but there's a cost: **the castle** needs a regent, and whoever claims the Grail must go with it as it retreats from the mortal world. When it returns it'll be their hands guiding the beasts, their hands working blasphemies, their will forming a new Grail. Are you willing to pay the price?

WHAT IS THIS?

Rhapsody of Blood is a gothic action RPG where you wage war on an evil castle from outside the world. The players will control a **bloodline** able to recognise **the castle's** corruption and fight against it, and an **explorer** sent by that bloodline into **the castle** to defeat the regent, protect humanity and win glory and power. Each time the regent blights the world or is defeated, **the castle** retreats from the world; you cover in broad strokes how your bloodline fares until the blood moon rises again a generation later, and new heroes are chosen.

One of you will be the Game Master (GM), controlling the forces of **the castle** and working to make the game an enjoyable experience. Like other Powered by the Apocalypse games (*Apocalypse World*, *Monsterhearts*, *Dungeon World*) the GM has an agenda they're working towards and a list of actions they can take to keep the game focused on that agenda, but never rolls dice.

Rhapsody of Blood asks the GM to do some prep work between sessions, designing **the castle's** regent and their acolytes. During the session their role is more reactive: they call for particular rules to be used when their triggers are hit, steer the results of the mechanics back into the fiction, and build the story's tension and maintain its tone with their GM reactions.

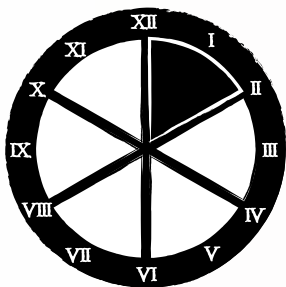
Players have a narrower focus: it's their responsibility to portray their bloodline and explorer honestly, seek out danger and tell thrilling tales of action and adventure. Be willing to see your explorer die or fall to **the castle's** contamination - the looming tragedy will make your victories all the sweeter. For the most part, you'll play by taking it in turns to describe what your characters do and say while the GM describes the world around you. Sometimes your description will trigger a **move**: a chunk of rules that narrows down that conversation into a particular set of stakes and outcomes, sometimes mediated by dice.

When a move needs a dice roll it'll describe it as 'roll +stat' - you roll two six-sided dice, add the relevant stat, and that's your result. Generally a 10+ is great, a 7-9 is alright and a 6- is the GM's cue to make a **reaction** that makes life harder for you.

Sometimes you'll roll with **advantage**: you roll 3 dice instead of two and take the highest two. If the advantage is **fleeting**, it lasts for one roll; otherwise, it helps any time its criteria is met. **Disadvantage** works the same, but you take the lowest two dice.

How It Works

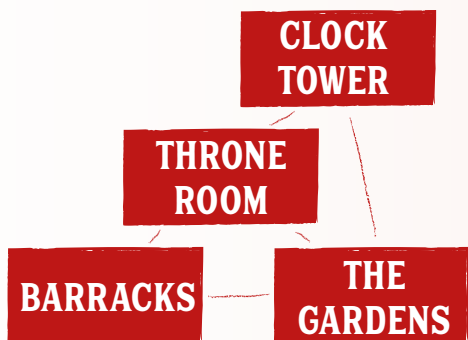
The regent is working a grand ritual, marshalling the power and resources given to them by **the castle** to inflict their blight on the land. The form this ritual takes varies from regent to regent: a disgraced opera singer may be tuning and refining a libretto that will drive the world mad, while a ferocious werewolf might be abducting local dignitaries to inflict lycanthropy on them. Whatever they're planning, it's reflected in the regent's clock. As the players explore **the castle** actions that take time tick the clock down towards midnight, bringing the regent's victory closer.



A regent's clock with one segment filled in.

How do you stop them? By killing them, or breaking their hold on the grail. But that won't be easy: they're incredibly potent, and unless you really fancy your chances you'll need to chip away at their power base first. Thankfully a ritual this grand cannot be performed by a single participant, however potent. To that end, the regent is assisted by several **acolytes**, instilled with a fragment of the regent's power. In their own **ward** of **the castle**, each acolyte works on their fragment of the ritual. By defeating each acolyte the explorers set back the clock and steal that power for themselves. Eventually the explorers will be strong enough to challenge the regent in their own ward: **the castle's** heart.

Rhapsody of Blood doesn't want you to map out every twist of **the castle's** corridors - its shifting dreamlike chaos makes that futile. Instead, you track the relationships between the wards, with the *Travel the Labyrinth* explorer move guiding movements within a ward. As you defeat acolytes you'll create safe camps you can use to rest and resupply without leaving **the castle**, and close in on the regent's lair.



The four wards that make up a version of **the castle**.



BLOODLINES

Standing between the waking world and the nightmare castle are your bloodlines. The taint of **the castle** cannot be scrubbed from your family, but you've found yourself able to resist the lure of madness and use its siren call to guide you to your ancient enemy. Each time **the castle** breaches reality and begins spreading its poison you'll be there to fight it back, save the lands it's stolen from its influence, and claim its power for your own.

BLOODLINES HAVE FOUR STATS:



Chalices: Their ability to provide aid to the characters and let them rest and heal.



Swords: Their ability to project force into **the castle** and claim forward bases.



Coins: Their ability to influence mortal institutions and draw resources from them.



Wands: Their ability to push back against the occult predations of the regent.



They also collect **Relics** - objects imbued with **the castle**'s power that can fetch a high price in the mortal world or be used in grand rituals.



Finally, they have **Pacts** with the other bloodlines - ancient agreements binding the bloodlines together. Each bloodline has particular actions they reward with pacts, and things pacts can be cashed in for.

EXPLORERS

In any given generation, each bloodline will produce a handful of heroes with the tenacity to enter **the castle** and fight its denizens. Each explorer has their own set of skills, particularly suited to a certain aspect of the journey into **the castle**'s depths.

EXPLORERS HAVE FIVE STATS:



Iron: Your stubborn will and ability to fight and kill. When exploring, you use it to fight hordes. When fighting a powerful adversary, use this to take advantage of an opening and strike them down.



Glass: Your ability to stay sane and clear-eyed. When exploring, use it to find your way through and assess your surroundings. When fighting a powerful adversary, use it to spot openings and help your allies exploit them.



Sulphur: The strength of your passions and ability to tap into occult power. When exploring, use it to learn magic from **the castle**'s relics. When fighting a powerful adversary, use it to pull allies from danger.



Mercury: Your ability to be stealthy, quick and graceful. When exploring, use it to find safe refuge from **the castle**'s inhabitants; when fighting, use it to dodge away from blows and use trickery and guile.



Blood tracks how corrupted your explorer has been by **the castle**'s power. As it increases you unlock advances, gaining improved stats and strange gifts, but risk falling under the permanent sway of the regent.

PROLOGUE:

THAT TERRIBLE NIGHT

It's the middle ages, somewhere in Eastern Europe. The castle has spread nightmares and beasts across the world, and heroes from far and wide have come to fight its evil. You are one of these heroes - in time, you will be remembered as the founders of a great bloodline. But that's all yet to come. Before you is the gate to the regent's inner sanctum, and the end of your quest.

To get playing, it's recommended you have at least 3 people (one GM and two players). You'll also need some six-sided dice (two per player is best), copies of the playbook handouts, and some pencils or other means of making notes.

To get your game rolling, Rhapsody lets you set up your game by playing through the first emergence of **the castle** and the founding of your bloodlines. Start with each player picking and customising a founder:

FOUNDER OF THE LEGENDARY HEROES: THE PALADIN

You're brave and bold, and where your fellows faltered you inspired them to press on. Now the regent stands before you, and they will answer for the evils they have brought to the land.

One of the other founders risked great danger to save your life. Say what they did and give their bloodline 2-pact on you. They say how you're still wounded.

Your stats:

Iron 2 Glass 0 Sulphur 1 Mercury -1.

Your weapon: **fists** (tags: stun, close) or a **greatsword** (tags: cleave, unstable).

Looks: Gleaming chivalric plate; basic peasant garb; rugged travelling gear.

Name: Joseph, Gerda, Ambrose, Faysal, Fatima, Katerina, Zlatomir.

FOUNDER OF THE HALF-DAMNED: THE TAINTED

*Maybe **the castle** almost claimed you, and it was only thanks to your fellows that you remained human. Maybe the darkness was always inside you, and your struggle to stay in control is even harder now **the castle** has given it physical form. Either way, it's time to put these gifts to use.*

One of the other founders is helping you keep control. Give their bloodline 2-pact on you. You say how they're keeping you sane, they say what will happen if they stop.

Your stats:

Iron 1 Glass -1 Sulphur 2 Mercury 0.

Your weapon: **claws** (tags: tether, close) or a **rapier** (tags: piercing, grazing).

Looks: Half-human, half-beast; undead pallor; grotesque chaos.

Name: Willem, Annah, Petra, Mico, Amelia, Lyko, Tali, Haruto.

FOUNDER OF THE HOLY CHURCH: THE SAINT

You may not be trained in occult lore, or mortal combat. But you know evil, and you know good. And so long as good people stand against evil, you will be there with them to keep them safe.

One of the other founders joined your flock and helped spread your healing truth.

Give their bloodline 2-pact on you. You say how you blessed them, they say what doubts remain.

Your stats:

Iron 1 Glass 2 Sulphur -1 Mercury 0.

Your weapon: **ceremonial staff** (tags: holy, brace) or a **sling** (tags: ranged, ammo).

Looks: Ancient and venerable; young and naive; grizzled survivor.

Name: Irene, Timothy, Marija, Dobroslav, Zhang, Costin, Malina.



FOUNDER OF THE HIDDEN HAND: THE MASTERMIND

You're not here out of the goodness of your heart, but raw pragmatism. Frankly, hordes of monsters are liable to ruin your plans for wealth, prestige and power. At least your talent for command has come in useful managing this ragtag band of 'heroes'.

One of the other founders helped you find a wondrous treasure. Give their bloodline 2-pact on you. They say what form the treasure took, you say how it's liable to taint its owner.

Your stats:

Iron 0 Glass 1 Sulphur -1 Mercury 2.

Your weapon: **sharp dagger** (tags: piercing, close) or a **crossbow** (tags: ranged, reload).

Looks: Young and ambitious; portly and arrogant; spindly and scheming.

Name: Sigismund, Mohana, Livonia, Ciannait, Vígi, Kwame, Halim.

FOUNDER OF THE MAGI: THE RITUALIST

Ancient lore and improvised cantrips have got you this far, but you can feel the power rolling off the Regent in the next chamber. You'll set your soul alight if that's what it takes to burn this place down.

One of the other founders is a lynchpin in your ritual to keep the Regent's power contained.

Give their bloodline 2-pact on you. You say what they had to sacrifice to empower the ritual, they say what insight it's given them into the Regent.

Your stats:

Iron -1 Glass 1 Sulphur 2 Mercury 0.

Your weapon: **blood whip** (tags: flexible, painful) or **pyromancy** (tags: ranged, reload).

Looks: Robes covered in sigils; a bandoleer of charms; tattooed with occult sigils.

Name: Morgan, Imar, Jabir, Vyasa, Virgil, Albertus, Ramon, Pietro, Ursula, Isobel.

INTO THE FIGHT

Once you have chosen and fleshed out your founders, it's time to kick down the door and confront the Regent.

GM: decide what form the Regent takes by picking three Qualities for them. No matter what you pick, their attacks deal 3 Harm.

BESTIAL

The regent is half-mad and twisted into an animalistic form.

- Leap across the arena.
- Hit with devastating force.

ARCANE

The Regent can shapeshift and use supernatural forces.

- Lash out with crimson fire.
- Summon walls of boiling blood.

COMMANDING

The Regent has hordes of minions.

- Mob a character and isolate them from the party.
- Place a wall of minions between the regent and the explorers.

DARK

The regent is insidious and controls shadows.

- Teleport from one shadow to another.
- Disappear in a cloud of choking poison.

ELEGANT

The Regent has a noble grace and precision to them.

- Disarm an explorer.
- Travel at impossible angles.

ARMoured

The Regent has potent defences.

- Demonstrate immunity to a weapon tag.
- Redirect an attack to hit an explorer.

This fight will have one of two outcomes:

THEY DEFEAT THE REGENT.

The castle crumbles and slides out of reality. As it's crumbling, describe the Grail forming, and see if any founder tries to claim its power. If they manage it, they trigger *Gnosis* (p. 22). If any founder dies, they give another bloodline 1 pact on them and say how they carried on their legacy.

THE REGENT WINS

The regent completes their evil ritual over the barely-alive founders. Somehow you all survive - good luck or part of **the castle's** diabolical plan? Trigger *Darkness Falls* (p. 23) and explain how the land is now cursed.

THE TURNING OF AGES

In the decades following **the castle's** emergence, your bloodlines grew into potent organisations waiting for its return. They've learned something of **the castle's** nature, and will be better prepared next time.

Go through your bloodline playbook, making choices for:

- **Stats:** What are your bloodline's capabilities, and what does that say about them?
- **Traditions:** What's the internal culture of the bloodline like?
- **Pacts:** What things earn your respect? What can your allies gain from your loyalty?
- **Shelter:** How does your explorer provide solace to the others when resting in the castle?
- **Specialists:** What assistance can your bloodline provide at their camps?
- **Moves:** What special abilities can your explorers call on?

Finally, there's **Context**. Generations after your founding, the blood moon has risen and **the castle** has returned. Your *refuge* is your first *safe camp*, on the outskirts of **the castle**. Your *breach* is the ward your refuge borders on, and your plan to break in.

Finally, your *drive* gives your explorer a particular reason to break into that ward and fight back the evil of the regent. Take it in turns to pick options, until you have a fully-sketched out castle map.

BUILD YOUR CHARACTERS

Each player should pick an explorer playbook. Try to avoid doubling up. To make your explorer, follow these steps:

- **Stats:** You have a basic statline, customised by adding 1 to a stat of your choice.
- **Looks:** Options for your appearance, gender presentation, racial background and so on. These lists are not intended to be exhaustive - use your own ideas if you like!
- **Motivation:** What pulled you into the life of a castle delver. Use this to add an extra dimension to your bloodline's current drive, or give yourself a personal quest.
- **Covenants:** The bonds you've formed with other explorers. Each covenant option describes how it was formed, how it can be strengthened, and how it can be broken.
- **Gear:** Build a weapon (using one perk and one flaw from the weapon table on p. 18) and pick options for backup and utility gear.
- **Moves:** Pick two moves to give your explorer particular tricks to use in their journey.

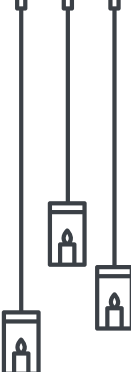
With those choices made, you have everything needed to start your assault! Start at one of the player's refuge, with the characters discussing which breach plan to go with, and play the attack on **the castle** out from there...



CHAPTER 2

RULES OF THE BLOOD





Rhapsody of Blood builds on the basic framework of *Legacy: Life Among the Ruins* (and *Apocalypse World* before it), but it's aiming to emulate a different genre and set a different pace in play. Its basic moves have been written from the ground up to support castle exploration, gothic action and bloodlines waging a shadow war against **the castle**'s regents.

Each generation starts with a party of explorers invading **the castle** through a breach point found in castle creation. As a party delves into **the castle**, they'll use **exploration moves** to chart its twisting layout, deal with the traps and minions that haunt its halls, and learn to not just survive but turn **the castle**'s strengths against its regent.

As you master a ward of **the castle** you'll eventually confront its ruling acolyte. These fights are tense and dramatic, run using **confrontation moves** (p. 20). As the foe brings their fiercest powers to bear, you must find openings to strike, use those

strikes to slice away the foe's powers, and finally go in for the kill.

And when the acolyte's dead, what then? That's where **bloodline moves** (p. 21) come in. With their resources you can claim the ward as your own, using it as a place to rest up and stage further expeditions into **the castle** or work rituals to push back the regent's plan.

Ward by ward you'll take down the regent's acolytes, walking the tightrope between death and corruption. Maybe you'll fail, and the regent's ritual will blight the world. Maybe you'll defeat them in their sanctum, and banish **the castle** from reality. Depending on the circumstances, each player will have choices to make - choices that might change the abilities of their bloodline, reshape **the castle**, and make strides towards an eventual permanent victory against the forces of darkness. Those choices made, the story moves forward a few generations to **the castle**'s return.

CASTLE EXPLORATION

These are the moves your explorers use as they travel through **the castle**. They're not intended to guide you through every moment of the journey; instead, you jump from point of interest to point of interest, guided by the player's rolls.

TRAVEL THE LABYRINTH

*When you attempt to navigate **the castle**, roll +Blood.* If you choose, you may **mark contamination** to roll with advantage. On a hit, hold 1 and describe your insight into the ward's purpose or layout.

On a 7-9, the area you arrive at contains castle denizens or traps.

On a 10+, the area you arrive at contains relics, a place of power, or valuable insight.

When you leave the area, spend 1 hold to retreat to a safe camp, 2 to find an exit to another ward, and 3 to find the Acolyte's sanctuary. One person rolls each time you navigate, and the group's hold from multiple rolls is pooled together.

Thanks to Jason Cordova of Discern Realities for the basic structure of this move!

FACE THE HORDE

When you assault a group of castle denizens, roll +Iron. On a hit, you tear through them - say how. On a 7-9 pick 2, on a 10+ pick 1:

- They hit back - suffer harm.
- You get some on you: **mark contamination**.
- You end up in a risky position.
- More are coming.

FLOW LIKE WATER

When you risk danger to change your environment, or your position in it, roll +Mercury. On a hit, pick one:

- You're somewhere you need to be.
- Another explorer has a clear path to you.
- A particular threat isn't a problem any longer.

On a 7-9 the GM will give your action a cost: harm, **contamination** or lost gear.

SEE CLEAR

When you try to read a dangerous situation, roll **+Glass**. On a hit, you can ask the GM questions. Get fleeting advantage when you act on each answer.

On a 7-9 ask 1, on a 10+ ask 3:

- Which exit will take me to my goal?
- What here is valuable?
- What can the enemies here do?
- What should I be on the lookout for?

On a miss, ask 1 but prepare for the worst.

SHELTER

When you look for a safe space to recover, roll **+Mercury**. On a hit, each explorer picks 1:

- Tend to another explorer: they heal 2 Harm, or step down their worst Wound.
- Encourage another explorer - they get fleeting advantage.
- Use your bloodline's Shelter move.
- Gain aid from a contact (p. 61).

On a 7-9, advance the Regent's clock.

DRINK DEEP

When you draw on the power in a potent item or ritual site, roll **+Sulphur**. On a hit, **mark contamination** and learn a spell - the GM says what it does. When you cast it, pick 1:

- Mark **contamination**.
- Forget the spell.
- Take 1 Harm.

On a 10+, you don't need to pick an option on your first cast.

SAMPLE SPELLS

Remove all poisons, disease and toxins in a substance you're touching.

Coat your weapons in ice (add perk: *stun*).

Breathe underwater.

Grow wings to slow falls or jump further.

Cast lots to divine a yes/no question.

Return to where you were 6 seconds ago.

HARM AND WOUNDS

HARM

Glancing blows, exhaustion, stress and curses all deal you **Harm**. Harm has a rating from 1 to 5 - when you take damage, you mark off a number of boxes equal to its rating. Armour works as a phantom harm box: if you have 1 Armour and take 2 Harm, you can mark off the armour box and only one harm box. A marked armour is useless: refresh it by finding *Shelter* or *Rest and Relaxation*.

DEATH

When you mark your fifth harm box, you're on the verge of death. Choose one:

Expend the last of your energy. Trigger your playbook's Death Move, then die.

Collapse unconscious until the current danger has passed. Heal all harm but mark your Mortal Wound box: so long as it's marked, you can't take action unless another explorer is assisting you

WOUNDS

When you take harm, you can choose to mitigate it by taking a wound. Wounds are harder to heal, and whenever they would interfere with your actions you take disadvantage on the roll.

Wounds come in three varieties, each mitigating a different amount of harm:

Minor wounds reduce the harm by 1. You're confused, bleeding, sprained, bruised. *When you take a minor wound*, choose:

- Get infected and **mark contamination**.
- Fall back and recuperate, healing 1 Harm.

Major wounds reduce the harm by 3. Your leg's broken, you're blinded, you're absolutely terrified. *When you take a major wound*, choose:

- Frenzy and get fleeting advantage on your next attack.
- Play possum, making foes focus on someone else.

Example: Hans is fresh and healthy:



- Minor Wound
- Major Wound
- Deadly Wound

As he faces down a pack of wolves, he chooses 'They hit back - suffer harm' - in this case, 2. Wanting to shepherd his resources, he takes a minor wound to bring that down to 1 harm.



- Minor Wound
- Major Wound
- Deadly Wound

After a gruelling journey through the regent's hunting forest, he's better equipped with 1 Armour but finds himself facing down this ward's acolyte: the Lady of the Pack. As she rakes her claws across his belly - 3 harm - Hans declares the claws glanced off the breastplate he's found. He marks 1 armour box and 2 harm boxes, taking him to 3 harm.



- Minor Wound
- Major Wound
- Deadly Wound

BLOOD

As the Castle's corrupting blood begins to flow through your veins, you gain a measure of the regent's power. But the power always comes at a cost. When you get corrupted by the power, you'll be told to **mark contamination**.

When you've marked contamination 3 times, raise your Blood stat and take a blood advance to show how **the castle** empowers you. Then clear out your contamination track.

BLOOD ADVANCES

- Get +1 to a stat (max 3).
- Get +1 to a stat (max 3).
- Get a Blood Gift.
- Get a Blood Gift.

Each may only be taken once.

You can take 4 blood advances before finally succumbing. When Blood hits 5, **the castle** has full control of you. At the end of your current fight, you twist into an acolyte of the regent, occupying an empty ward or forming a new one to rule over.

COVENANTS

Within the twisted reality of **the castle**, your explorer's relationship with the others takes on tangible force. Stay true to them and they'll be able to help you, even crossing the vastness of **the castle** to stand by your side. Break your promises with them, and **the castle** will reward you with a taste of its power.

Each covenant exists between two players. As you make your characters, you'll form a covenant with the character to your left, and with the character to your right. Pick one of the examples on the opposite page, or make up your own.

As you work together and help each other you'll strengthen the bond, but the stronger the bond is the more **the castle** will reward you for sundering it.

HELP OR HINDER

When you help or hinder another explorer, spend a point of covenant with them to give a dice to roll as per dis/advantage. If the dice you gave is the highest, get a point of covenant back; if it's the lowest, gm will say what misfortune you suffer.

SUMMON AID

When you call on your covenants for help, distant (or dead) characters can answer. If they do, they step from the shadows near you as a wraith. They take action as normal, but can't take wounds. The first harm they take weakens them; the second harm banishes them, weakening their covenant with you by 1.

BETRAYAL

Why let your sentiments hold you back when **the castle** will give you power in return for betrayal? Each covenant sets out a way the bond between you is weakened: whoever hits that trigger marks contamination, and the covenant's rating is weakened by 1.

ONE OF YOU NURSED THE OTHER BACK TO HEALTH.

When one of you protects the other from harm, strengthen the covenant.

When one of you recklessly puts the other in danger, betray the covenant.

ONE OF YOU IS TEACHING THE OTHER TO FIGHT.

When the trainee gets a killing blow, strengthen the covenant.

When one of you shows concerning brutality, betray the covenant.

YOU'RE HUNTING DOWN A LOST TREASURE TOGETHER.

When you find a clue to the treasure's location, strengthen the covenant.

When you lie to or mislead the other, betray the covenant.

YOU USED TO BE CLOSE FRIENDS OR LOVERS.

When you share stories of the good times, strengthen the covenant.

When you act as you did when you broke up, betray the covenant.

YOU'RE AFFLICTED WITH THE SAME CURSE.

When you help the other manage the curse, strengthen the covenant.

When you willingly embrace the curse's benefits, betray the covenant.

YOU'RE LONG-TIME MONSTER HUNTER PARTNERS.

When one of you saves the other from danger, strengthen the covenant.

When one of you embraces the castle's corruption, betray the covenant.

ONE OF YOU HAS STRANGE DREAMS THE OTHER IS STUDYING.

When one of you benefits from an insight gained from the dreams, strengthen the covenant.

When one of you is hurt because they followed the dreams, betray the covenant.

THERE'S A GRUDGE OR RIVALRY BETWEEN YOU.

When one of you risks danger or cost to aid the other, strengthen the covenant.

When one of you shows off their superiority over the other, betray the covenant.

YOU GREW UP TOGETHER.

When you take time out to catch up, strengthen the covenant.

When you turn your back on the ways of your youth, betray the covenant.

YOU FOLLOW DIFFERENT FAITHS.

When one makes sure the other has time for their observances, strengthen the covenant.

When you preach the superiority of your faith's teachings, betray the covenant.

ONE OF YOU IS HEAVILY IN DEBT TO THE OTHER.

When one of you forgives or pays back the debt, strengthen the covenant.

When you take the other's gear without permission, betray the covenant.

WEAPONS

Your armaments in *Rhapsody of Blood* are simple, defined by perk tags and flaw tags. Your starting gear has one of each, but better weapons can have many perks or no flaws.

Weapon tags govern the situations where your weapon is effective, and the effects attacks with it have on your target and you.

PERKS		FLAWS	
Cleave	Can slice through many foes in a single swing.	Ammo or Fragile	If any dice on an attack come up 1, the weapon's useless until you <i>Shelter</i> or get <i>R&R</i> .
Flexible	It wraps around defences and can be redirected mid-swing.	Brace	You need to stand on steady ground to use it.
Hefty	Knocks an enemy back on a hit.	Close	You need the enemy to be within arm's reach to use it.
Holy	Causes intense pain against a particular foe. <i>This tag is only accessible via moves.</i>	Grazing	It only deals surface harm, not deep wounds.
Lingering	It causes ongoing pain: if you hit someone with it they'll try to stay away from you.	Heirloom	If you lose it, get disadvantage on bloodline moves until you get it back.
Piercing	Can penetrate armour and thick hide.	Painful	If any dice on an attack come up 6, take 1 Harm.
Ranged	Can attack any foe in eyesight.	Reload	You need to take action to attack again after using it.
Stun	Makes enemies slow and sluggish on a hit.	Thrown	Once you attack with it, you need to recover it.
Tether	After you hit, you can easily hold onto/keep pace with the foe.	Unstable	You're vulnerable and unable to move after using it.

EXAMPLE WEAPONS

Warhammer: hefty/brace.

Rapier: piercing/grazing.

Harpoon: tether/thrown.

Flintlock: ranged/ammo.

Greatsword: cleave/unstable.

Blood whip: flexible/painful.

Bareknuckle boxing: stun/close.

MINIONS

As you explore **the castle** you'll encounter the rank and file of the regent's minions: skeletons and ghouls, wraiths and beasts, crazed cultists and eldritch demons. They need very little prep - just a description and a few **reactions** they can use to hurt the explorers:

EXAMPLE: BURNING SKELETONS

A skeleton walking in defiance of the natural order, surrounded by viridian flames.

- *Hurl a burning skull at the explorers.*
- *Set something important on fire.*
- *Travel between fires.*

SIGNIFICANT FOES

Significant foes are more detailed. One of these foes is the regent squatting at the centre of **the castle** or walking its halls performing strange rites. But the regent also has **acolytes**: mortals, beasts or eldritch creatures invested with their power and playing some role in their schemes.

Each significant adversary has:

- A description guiding their actions in the fiction.
- A rating for how much Harm their attacks deal to explorers.
- Three or more **qualities**: packages of **reactions** tied to a particular strength of the adversary. When all qualities are destroyed, the adversary's defeated.

EXAMPLE: THE SURGEON

A maniacal medic called to the regent's service by the castle's siren song. Here, she has worked great miracles of medicine to prolong life far beyond any natural limits, and her ambition grows with each victim she converts into an orderly.

Attendant orderlies.

- ☞ *Mob a character and isolate them.*
- ☞ *Stab a character in the back (2 harm).*

Paralytic venom.

- ☞ *Numb a limb.*
- ☞ *Stab them with a needle (1 harm).*
- ☞ *Release poison from a needle (3 harm).*

Overdrive Serum.

- ☞ *Leap to the room's rafters.*
- ☞ *Hit with devastating force (2 harm)*

CONFRONTATION MOVES

Face the Horde lets you deal with **the castle's** minions, but what about the Regent and their Acolytes? To give those fights appropriate weight, you add these **confrontation moves** to the regular set whenever you fight the regent and their acolytes. In these fights, your explorers must find **Openings** to attack as they weather the foe's assault. These Openings don't stack: you have one, or you don't. Each successful strike against the foe strips away one of their qualities, bringing you closer to victory even as the foe grows more frenzied and deadly.

STRIKE

When you take advantage of an Opening with...

- **Stealth and guile**, roll +**Mercury**.
- **Physical force**, roll +**Iron**.
- **Precise insight**, roll +**Glass**.
- **Sorcery or sacrifice**, roll +**Sulphur**.

On a hit, you damage one of the foe's qualities - if you destroy its final quality, it's dead. The Opening's now gone. On a 7-9, the GM picks 1:

- The foe lashes out at you: take Harm appropriate to the enemy.
- The foe separates you from the others or puts you in a spot.
- The foe frenzies, dealing +1 Harm for the rest of the fight.

DODGE

When you try to avoid incoming danger, roll +**Mercury**.

On a hit pick 1, on a 10+ pick 2:

- You avoid taking harm.
- You avoid getting separated from the others or losing something valuable.
- The foe's heedless in pursuit of you: create an Opening.

LINE IT UP

When you size up the enemy to locate a weak spot, roll +**Glass**. On a hit you find an Opening. Say where it's coming from - the environment, a chink in their armour, a flaw in their fighting style. On a 7-9, pick 2, on a 10+ pick 1:

- The foe makes you its highest priority.
- The Opening only lasts a few moments.
- Attempts to use the Opening without one weapon perk have disadvantage.

CONFRONT

When you confront the foe head-on, roll +**Iron**.

On a hit, you throw them off-balance and create an Opening, but take the brunt of their attacks. On a 7-9 pick 1, on a 10+ pick 2:

- You roll with the blow: take 1 less harm.
- You are fearsome and commanding: the foe will focus only on you.
- Your mind is steel: you don't **mark contamination**.

STAND WITH ME

When you heal, encourage or aid an ally, roll +**Sulphur**.

On a hit, pick 1:

- You rescue them from danger: a precipice, poison, a curse, etc.
- They heal their lightest wound.
- They heal 2 harm.

On a 10+ the camaraderie shown gives your ally fleeting advantage.

VICTORY

When the foe is defeated, everyone still living may raise Blood and add 1 to their Covenant with each other. The foe's sanctum becomes a place of power, usable for **Forward Base**.

FLEE

When you use an Opening to retreat, any and all characters can flee the battle. Advance the regent's clock by one.

BLOODLINE MOVES

Bloodline moves govern the efforts of your bloodline's support structures. If explorer moves are the vanguard pushing into the regent's domain, these are the logistics keeping them in fighting condition and cementing their victories. Each of these is usable at one of your bloodline's *safe camps* - either the *refuges* defined in castle creation or ones you've claimed in the *castle* with *Forward Base*.

ARCANE POWER

When you use the *castle*'s cast-offs to empower your bloodline's actions, spend 1 Relic and get advantage on a roll.

REST AND RELAXATION

When you provide aid to characters in a *safe camp*, roll +Chalices.

On a 7-9, pick 2; on a 10+ pick 3.

- Each explorer may heal all harm.
- Each explorer may heal all wounds.
- Each explorer can repair and resupply their weaponry.
- Each explorer may form a new covenant, or raise an existing covenant by a step.
- The regent's clock doesn't tick down.

FORWARD BASE

When you claim a place of power as a *forward base* in the *castle*, roll +Swords. On a hit it's yours, and you can use it as a *safe camp* for the purposes of *Rest and Relaxation* and *Travel the Labyrinth*. On a 10+ pick one bonus:

- There's room for more: it counts as another Bloodline's camp too. Get 1-pact on them.
- It's well-located: explorers leaving the camp get +1 *Travel the Labyrinth* hold.
- It's comfortable and secure: get advantage on *Rest and Relaxation* here.

Note: The lairs of defeated Acolytes are great targets for this, but so are the mystical sites you find exploring the castle (e.g. on a 10+ for *Travel the Labyrinth*).

LEND AID

When you help another bloodline with a move, offer them a dice. If they take it, they roll it with their own as if they had advantage. If your dice is the highest, say how you made the difference and gain 1-Pact on them. If it's the lowest, the GM will say how helping them hurt you.

RESIST DOOM

When you work a *grand ritual*, spend 1-3 Relics on occult resources and ceremonial paraphernalia and roll +Wands. On a hit, choose one for each Relic spent:

- Reduce the Regent's clock by 1.
- Bless a weapon to strike true against one Acolyte, giving it the Holy perk.
- Reduce a character's Blood rating by one - they lose a Blood Advance.

On a 7-9, the Regent weaves a counter-spell; you'll need to defeat an Acolyte before anyone can work further rituals.

REINFORCEMENTS

When your Bloodline members search for rumours or resources in the mortal world, roll +Coins. On a 7-9 choose 1, on a 10+ choose 2.

- They find resources worth 1 Relic.
- They hear tales of a ward's acolyte, and clues to how they're helping the regent.
- They learn what the regent plans next, and which clock segment it'll trigger on.

THE PASSING OF GENERATIONS

The castle is an eternal foe. It cannot be defeated, only pushed back. It's your bloodline's calling, then, to wage a shadow war keeping the mortal world safe. When **the castle** breaches reality, you muster and push it back; while it's banished, you heal the wounds the regent inflicted on the world and gather resources for the next breach. Each generation the blood moon rises and **the castle** returns, and new heroes rise to meet it.

Each expedition will have three outcomes:

- **The explorers defeat the regent**, and one claims their power to work a miracle in the world - but they're claimed by the castle as its new regent.
- **The explorers defeat the regent**, and the castle retreats from the world.
- **The regent's clock fills**, and they enact their dark ritual.

Here's how each of those outcomes work.

GNOSIS

When the Regent is slain, the explorer with the highest Blood can choose to claim the Grail. If they do, they raise a bloodline stat by 1 but lose 1 Pact on the other bloodlines. They get one wish from the Grail:

- **Life Everlasting**: Your character may return each generation, and cannot die.
- **The Resurrection of the Dead**: One person of your choice is returned to life.
- **Insight From Beyond**: Gain a new bloodline move.
- **Wealth of Kings**: Your bloodline gains 5 Relics.
- **Peace on Earth**: Each bloodline gains 1 Relic; you gain 1-Treaty on the others.
- **Purification**: Remove a Blight infected by a previous Regent.

The castle then takes them with it as it leaves reality behind. They will return as its next regent unless they chose Life Everlasting - in which case the next regent is Death Itself.

SPOILS OF VICTORY

If you leave **the castle** without claiming the grail, pick a choice unlocked by your Explorer's Blood.

BLOOD 0+

- **Your explorer loots the castle for valuable trinkets**. Say what they spend the rest of their life doing with their fortune, and start the next generation with 1 more Relic.
- **Your explorer devotes their life to preparing the next generation**. Choose one other bloodline - say how you helped train their next explorer, and get 1 Pact on them.
- **Your bloodline works to heal the wounds left in this community** by the castle. Name an alliance you've made, and get advantage when you call on it for **Reinforcements**.

BLOOD 2+

- **Your explorer instils their skills into a piece of gear**. Pick one of your moves: when your descendants use the gear they can access that move, but the gear gains the *heirloom* tag.
- **Your explorer forces permanent order on the castle**. One ward will remain in its current form for the rest of time; your bloodline gets advantage **Travelling the Labyrinth** there.
- **You invest in your resources**. Sacrifice 3 Relics to raise a bloodline stat by 1.

BLOOD 4+

- **You let the corruption sink deep into your bloodline**, controlled but ever-present. Your future characters start at Blood 1, with a Blood Advance to match.
- **You form a bond with the castle**. Your explorer can always **mark contamination** to get a vision of the regent, and ask one follow-up question the GM must answer truthfully.

DARKNESS FALLS

When the regent's clock fills, they blight the mortal world. The GM marks one:

- ❑ A section of the region's population is cursed and made monstrous.
- ❑ Day is short and nights are starless.
- ❑ Monsters walk the world every full moon.
- ❑ Weather becomes unnatural and devastating.
- ❑ Plagues strike a section of the population.

If all are marked, the **castle** claims the mortal world and all is lost.

Each player picks how their bloodline responds to the blight, and adjusts their stats:

- *You stayed safe, at the cost of withdrawing from the world.* Say which of your connections suffered in your absence. +1 Chalice, -1 Coins.
- *You fought to push it back, but your best mystics lost their lives.* Say what their sacrifice achieved. +1 Swords, -1 Wands.
- *You took some of the taint into your family.* Say what lingering malady the blight has left you with. +1 Wands, -1 Chalice.
- *You waged a shadow war keeping society safe at great cost to your warriors.* Say which settlement still stands thanks to you. +1 Coins, -1 Swords.

THE NEW GENERATION

Once the group has resolved these moves, you skip forward to the next time the blood moon rises. Follow these steps:

1) WHERE DOES THE CASTLE EMERGE?

Is it somewhere it's haunted before, or a new location? Each bloodline picks a **refuge** option from their playbook to flesh out the surrounding area and define their starting **safe camps**.

2) HOW HAS THE EVIL MANIFESTED?

Blood calls out to blood, and each bloodline is drawn to the **castle** by misfortune or curse. Each bloodline picks a **drive** that brought them here, and says what they suspect the drive says about the regent's plans.


3) HOW DO YOU BREAK IN?

You're ready to break into a ward of the **castle**. Each bloodline picks a **breach** option and says what they've seen of the ward they're preparing to assault.

4) MAKE EXPLORERS

Each player picks an explorer playbook and builds them up, picking stats, looks, motivation, covenants, moves and gear. Start with the first explorer breaking in, with the other explorers assisting them as wraiths or in the flesh.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY



It's the depths of winter in Victorian London. The river is frozen over, people on the streets huddle round braziers for warmth, and nobles shutter themselves inside their houses and turn their backs on the hungry cold.

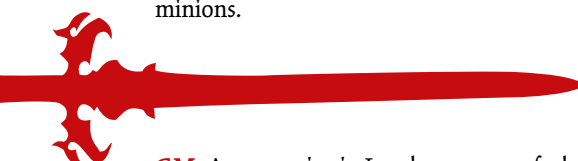
Behind the darkness and the ice, certain secret societies have seen the movements of **the castle** and its regent. Descending on London to confront the evil, we see:

The Serpent's Eye: an academic order of **Magi**, formed from those spiritualists and mediums that have touched something dark beyond death's border. Their explorer this age is **Lucretia Coldwater**, a **Slayer** who fights with a duelling sabre and pistol.

St. Wilfred's Priory: a small monastic order (**The Holy Church**), nominally affiliated with the Anglican church, who see it as their duty to protect those brave souls that fight back evil. **Brother Wendell** sees himself as a protector and nurturer, using his **Packrat** supplies to support the others.

The Candle Kindred: Those **the castle** touches rarely survive. The Kindred are an exception. These **Half-Damned** know ways of feeding the fire within them, drawing power from it without being consumed.

The Manticore is barely human, a bloated form whose burned flesh is swathed in bandages. The fire comes from within, bursting forth when they use their **Mystic** powers to claim the souls of **the castle's** minions.



GM: As you arrive in London, you can feel the stain of **the castle** seeping out from the bricks of the city. Each day the temperature drops lower, the nobles' revels grow more desperate, and your dreams warn of growing darkness. How do you begin to fight back?

Lucretia: These streets are The Serpent's backyard. We'll start by sending letters to the spiritualists and fortune-tellers of London - what have they seen, and what clues can they give us?

GM: That sounds like you're using **Reinforcements**. Give me a Coins roll.

Lucretia: Alright... that's an 8, 9 after adding our Coins. I'll find tales of a ward's acolyte.

GM: What's your Breach, again?

Lucretia: Let's see... "a garden of perfect geometric statuary, and a hole in its iron fence".

GM: So, you can pin down who owns that garden, and the attached mansion: it was gifted to the Royal Society a few months ago by a benefactor with very specific instructions, that it be used to host the brightest minds in philosophy and mathematics. A number of intellectuals and their students took up residence, but nobody has seen them leave for weeks. A friend of yours lives nearby, and tells you they've been having terrible dreams - a room of scribes scribbling frantically, the ink from their paper flowing down and dying the world black.

Lucretia: Sounds like some kind of corrupting ritual. You folks alright with making that our first stop?

Manticore: Sure.

Wendell: Actually, before we do, could I gather you both to our church for a quick prayer?

GM: What do you have in mind?

Wendell: A blessing, using **Resist Doom**. If you're both OK with it [they nod] I'll recite a prayer, burn some incense, and then use some of my blood to anoint Lucretia's sabre. I'm attempting to Resist Doom, using my Martyrdom move to take a light wound instead of spending a relic.

GM: Cool, roll plus Wands!

Wendell: Eesh, we're at -1 for that. Can't be great at everything I guess.

Mandrake: Hold up, don't roll yet. The Candle Kindred can help, if you'll let us.

Wendell: Getting advantage would help, but honestly I think the Priory would want to do this by the book. No offence intended! So, Wands of -1 plus 11 on the dice gets us the best result - Lucretia, your weapons get the *holy* tag against this ward's acolyte.

Lucretia: Grand. We ready to head off?

Wendell and Mandrake: Sure.

GM: OK. So the three of you set off through the snow-covered streets. Everyone you see is concealed beneath layers of scarves and wool, though even then you three draw odd looks. Soon you're outside that mansion, and you can see how it came to Lucretia's attention: the statuary is so clean, so precise in its perfection that it *hurts* to look at. Part of the fence is bent back, it looks like from a carriage impact or something. Lucretia, how do you breach **the castle**?

Lucretia: Carefully. I'll pick my way through the fence delicately. Once I'm on the other side I'll draw my sword and pistol, ready to confront anyone coming to stop us.

GM: The garden is still, for now. Wendell and Mandrake?

Wendell: With Lucretia taking watch, I'll start unpacking some provisions. I have some blessed water I'll sprinkle over you both -

Mandrake: Not me.

Wendell: Ah. Right. And I'll rig up an array of pouches and bandoleers, and reverently unwrap an ornate brass bell, making sure its muffler is still in place.

Mandrake: And I'll simply unwrap a few of my bandages, exposing the glowing wounds on my arms.

Lucretia: Good. Looks like we're ready. I'll nod to the other two and stride towards the mansion, through the sculptures.

GM: Great, sounds like you're trying to navigate **the castle** - want to give me a *Travel the Labyrinth* roll?

Lucretia: Sure. My Blood is 0, though I'll **mark contamination** to get advantage. 1, 3 and 6, so a final result of 9.

GM: OK, you get 1 hold. What do you understand better about this ward now?

Lucretia: I think I mostly navigate by listening for the whispers of the dead. There's a lot of people dead in that house.

GM: Nice. As you're walking between the statues, those whispers shift ninety degrees to the left. You keep following them as they twist and change, like you're walking an invisible maze.

Wendell: Just to test, I'll throw a rock down one of the passages Lucretia avoided.

GM: As it passes between the two passages it stretches upwards, like space itself is warping. It slows as it stretches until it's just hanging there, infinitely thin.

Wendell: Oh dear. Lead the way, Lucretia!

Lucretia: Yeah, I'll close my eyes and let the spirits guide the way. A 7-9 means the next area's dangerous, right?

GM: You bet! You're in a wider part of the garden, skirting the rim of a frozen pond, when the ice cracks and then erupts. Clawing their way out of the pond come a spindly, emaciated group of people, but their skin is pocked with masonry and a statue bust is grafted onto their neck stub. They surge onto the pathway, skeletal fingers reaching for you. What do you do?

Mandrake: I'll shoulder my way to the front. If they've been waiting in the pond, I think they need some warming up. I'll thrust my arms towards them, sending tongues of flame out.

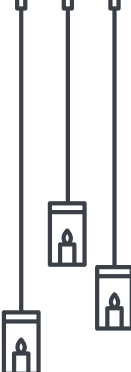
GM: What are your weapon tags, again?

Mandrake: Lingering and Painful.

GM: Yeah, you're definitely in a good position to hit the first few, at least. Give me a *Face the Horde* roll.

Mandrake: Alright, rolling plus Iron gets me... a 6. Uh oh.

GM: Hah, they're too cold and sodden for your fire to put a scratch on them. They pile



in on you, damp skin steaming with the heat, and attack with masonry-covered fists. Take 1 harm.

Mandrake: Thankfully my bloodline gives me 1 Armour, which I'll mark off - I guess my tough skin protects me. Anyone want to help?

Lucretia: Sure. I'll pull Mandrake back and charge in, swinging my sable left and right.

GM: Great, give me an Iron roll.

Lucretia: That's a 9! I tear through them, slicing them apart. For the downsides, I'll say I get tainted a little and **mark contamination**, and I suffer harm.

GM: OK, cool, I guess a minion digs its fingers into your shoulder before it dies, and you feel chill spread through you as it draws blood. Take 1 Harm.

Lucretia: Plenty of distance to go - I'll take it as a minor wound, *shivering*, and choose to **mark contamination** again.

GM: That's the third point, right?

Lucretia: Yup! Hello, Blood 1. For my blood advance, I'll grab **Burning Blood** - maybe to avoid the ice, I fall prey to the same affliction Mandrake is dealing with?

Mandrake: Or at least, its initial stages.

Lucretia: Sure, makes sense.

GM: Right. So the creatures are dead, and the mansion looms above you. Who's taking the lead?

Wendell: I will, if that's alright?

Lucretia/Mandrake: *Nods.*

Wendell: OK, Blood of 0 but I'm **marking contamination** to get advantage. 11!

GM: Great! What do you understand better about this ward or its layout?

Wendell: As we make our way to the mansion, I think we have to go in through the conservatory. Inside, it's really hot - like they're somehow extracting heat from the outside.

GM: Huh, cool. So on a 10+ you get to a place with useful resources - relics, or a ritual site, or a valuable insight. I'll say that the conservatory is full of verdant

greenery, and in the centre of it is a stone shape, floating in midair. When you get there it looks like a cube, but it's constantly, grindingly inverting into new shapes. Space is constantly rippling and twisting around it, but you get the sense it's in a controlled way. Scattered around it are smaller stones, precisely carved. They're worth 3 Relics.

Wendell: Cool, I'll grab one and leave the other two for my companions.

Mandrake: This stone shape - I'm going to study it, try to understand what makes it work.

GM: You looking to *Drink Deep*?

Mandrake: Sure. Rolling plus Sulphur, I get a 7. Just enough! I'll **mark contamination** - what sort of spell do I get?

GM: I'll say a heat exchange spell makes sense - make one thing very cold to make another very hot, that sort of thing.

Mandrake: OK, nice. I'll nod to the others and head off - I think we're getting close.

GM: Give me a *Travel the Labyrinth* roll!

Mandrake: Don't mind if I do. I'll take that tasty contamination for advantage, and get... 9. I think as I take us into the house proper, the temperature extremes get more are more, well, extreme. Some rooms are basically arctic, some are like the sahara.

GM: Nice! You come out of a frozen, snow-covered room into one that feels surprisingly temperate. It actually looks like a big exam hall, loads of desks set up with people sat at them. Well, I say people - they're all scribes, quills scribbling away, but their flesh is withered and all of them are missing their heads. From their neck stumps, ribbons of blackness flow upwards to a central black sphere, rippling in midair.

Wendell: Well, this looks blasphemous. I gently pull out my bell, reverently remove its muffler, and toll out a single, pure note.

GM: That's your weapon, right?

Wendell: Yup. Ranged and grazing.

GM: Cool, give me a *Face the Horde*.

Wendell: 8! I'll pick 'you end up in a risky position' and 'more are coming'.

GM: And how do you hurt them?

Wendell: Oh yeah. I think the bell dispels that link from the scribe's necks to the sphere. Without that power flow, the scribes stop writing.

GM: OK. So the scribes aren't animated any more, but that sphere is still hanging there, dark and glistening. It makes a noise like a rusted metal gate opening, and then extrudes dozens of dark spines and falls directly downwards towards you.

Wendell: Oh blast. Can I dodge it?

GM: Depends on how well you *Flow Like Water* - give me a Mercury roll!

Wendell: 7 - I just make it. The threat 'is no longer an immediate danger'.

GM: OK, but as the ball hits the floor some of that black fluid splashes on you - **mark contamination**. Meanwhile, Lucretia and Mandrake - you hear pounding on the doors of the chamber, and the wood's starting to splinter. What do you do?

Lucretia: We should pick a door and leave, right?

Mandrake: Reckon so. I think it's time I used that spell. I'll use my *Arcanist* move, and say that 'the spell affects more targets': I want to freeze all the doors except one, and use that heat to explode the final door. And as a cost to cast the spell, I'll **mark contamination**.

GM: Cool! That takes you to Blood 1, right?

Mandrake: Yeah, I think I'll take the Blood Move *Eyes on the Inside* to let me see intangible or immaterial things.

GM: OK, so, there's a moment where the air flow in the room goes extremely weird, and then most of the walls are covered in ice while one door is doused in flames. Through the burning door you can see more of those headless scribes, writhing and flailing as the flame consumes them.

Lucretia: I'll take advantage of that confusion and push through, slicing through any that look like they might put up resistance.

GM: Cool, no need to roll. Going to Travel the Labyrinth?

Lucretia: No need, we have 3 hold now. I'm going to spend that to take us straight to the Acolyte.

Wendell: Wait up, let's take a bit of time to rest and prepare first. I'm going to look for a room in this mansion that's easily defended. That's a *Shelter* roll, right?

GM: Yup - does Lucretia let herself be pulled back from charging in?

Lucretia: You'll have to work a bit to catch my attention, but sure.

Wendell: Think of it as my pastoral responsibility! So, that's a 7: the Regent's clock advances but we get to rest. First up, I'll use *Apothecary* to spend 3-stock and cure our minor wounds. Next, I'll say a quick prayer over the group: you each get 1 hold you can spend to avoid any mystical attack

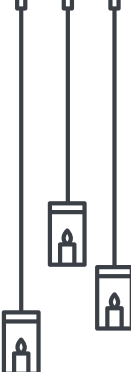
Mandrake: Thanks! My armour box comes back, and I think I'll encourage Lucretia - I think that takes the form of giving her advice on how to deal with the burning blood. You get fleeting advantage.

Lucretia: Cool. I'll return the favour, congratulating you on your quick thinking freezing the doors. Can we head off?

Wendell: I'll just crush this Relic down into another point of Stock, and then yeah, sure.

Lucretia: OK. I spend 3 Travel the Labyrinth hold to take us to the acolyte's lair. What do we see?

GM: Right, so, you climb up through the floors of the mansion, eventually arriving in what looks to be an observatory, great brass telescope and all. Floating in the centre of it is a figure wearing flowing scholar's robes, but every inch has equations scribbled over in black ink. Where their head should be there's a stone polyhedron, floating over the neck, and tendrils of black shadow flow out of that stone. As you set foot in the observatory, the figure slowly rotates towards you, and then one of those tendrils flicks towards you, growing vast as it comes. What do you do?



Wendell: I'll step forward and ring out my bell - I'm going to try and use *Shield of Faith*.

GM: Hah, great. Give me a Sulphur roll.

Wendell: 9 - radiant light stops the creatures of the castle from coming within a few metres of me. I'll pick that moving or attacking breaks the barrier - that's what you folks are for.

GM: Alright, so the tendril splashes against the light and recoils back. What do you do?

Lucretia: Try and bring this creature down to earth. I'll pull out my flintlock, and try to work out how to shoot them down.

GM: Sounds like you're trying to *Line It Up*. Give me a Glass roll!

Lucretia: 11! OK, I spot an opening - it's that perfect polyhedral head. I think if it's chipped even slightly his ability to twist space will be lost. But you need a ranged weapon to do that.

GM: Sounds good. So the scholar is sending a barrage of black tendrils against you, trying in vain to pierce Wendell's barrier. You taking the shot?

Lucretia: Indeed. I think this *Strike* has to be with Glass - precise insight and all - so I'm rolling plus zero. But that's boxcars, 12!

GM: Awesome! You wanted to remove its ability to fly, right?

Lucretia: Yeah.

GM: Ok. So your bullet flies straight from your flintlock into that stone head, sending a small stone chip flying off, and immediately the scholar plummets to the ground, sending up a huge dust cloud.

Mandrake: Time for me to get involved. I'll shuck off my robes, exposing a mass of burning wounds, and charge into that cloud looking to tackle the bastard.

GM: Alright, you charge out of Wendell's sanctuary into the dust. But it's choking, and actually filled with tiny ice crystals, so you're having trouble finding the acolyte.

Mandrake: Not so much - I have *Eyes on the Inside*, remember? So I'll close my eyes, mark contamination, and focus on the twisting of the world. He can't hide from that.

GM: Hah, nice. So you're diving head-on into danger to attack the foe- sounds like *Confront* to me. That's an Iron roll.

Mandrake: ...not good. That's a 3.

Lucretia: Remember, you have fleeting advantage from *Shelter*.

Mandrake: Oh yeah. I'll roll an extra dice... but 4 plus 2 plus my Iron of -1 is still 5. Blast.

GM: Ouch. So you're pushing through the freezing dust, focusing on that twisting void, when you feel the wrongness hurtling towards you too fast to dodge. You have your eyes closed, but the other two? You see a giant black tendril whip around Mandrake and lift them up into the air. Mandrake, take 2 Harm.

Mandrake: Oof.

Wendell: Lucretia, keep it busy - I'll try to help Mandrake.

Lucretia: Can do. I'll follow the tendril back to its source, and try to stab up the acolyte.

THE SCHOLAR OF THE VOID

An obsession with the equations of an alternate reality has lead to a dark kind of enlightenment in this scholar's mind. Blessed by an alternate set of physics, their flesh is turning to silicates and space is beginning to bend to their will.

Warp Space

- ☞ Separate the explorers.
- ☞ Smash them together (2 harm).
- ☞ Float away.

Black Tentacles.

- ☞ Pluck an explorer up.
- ☞ Smash down.
- ☞ Pierce armour.

Stone Skin

- ☞ Deflect a blow.
- ☞ Crush with stone fists.

GM: As you charge in, your ears pick up a sudden scream of warning from those ghosts: another tendril is pushing towards you, needle-thin.

Lucretia: I'll try to dive out of the way, as fast as I can. That's *Dodge*, right? So rolling plus Mercury gets me an 8. I'll avoid the attack, but get separated from the others.

GM: Alright - the tendril keeps changing direction as you duck around it, seeking blood, and before you know it you're on the far side of the hall from the others. Wendell, looks like Lucretia's doing her part - what's the plan?

Wendell: You know how my bell dispelled the black tendrils earlier? I'm going to try and do that to save Mandrake. So, I steel myself, and walk calmly towards the tendril holding them, all the while sounding my bell and whispering prayers.

GM: Great! Sounds like a *Stand By Me* roll.

Wendell: Can I get help from Lucretia?

Lucretia: Sure - I'll spend a point of our covenant to give you advantage, as I *dodge* for my life over here.

Wendell: It's appreciated! Two 1s and a 6, so even with advantage that's only 8. Still, that's enough to save Mandrake from danger.

GM: Yeah, as your bell rings out the tendril flickers in and out of existence, and that's enough for Mandrake to get free.

Lucretia: When I see they're safe can I press the attack? I want to try and hurt this thing.

GM: Sure, give me a *Confront* roll.

Lucretia: That's an 8, respectable. I'm going to throw them off-balance, of course. But I take full harm and *mark contamination*.

GM: OK, so you're definitely taking a sharp tendril through the chest - take 2 harm. How do you throw the acolyte off-balance?

Lucretia: I think I grab the tendril as it stabs through me, set my feet, and pull - the idea is to yank the creature off-balance and hopefully towards me.

GM: Nice! OK, so you grit your teeth through the pain, yank, and are rewarded with the sight of the acolyte's shrivelled human body stumbling out of the cloud towards you.

Lucretia: Got you! I don't need to be fancy, I'll just swing my sabre down on them. A *Strike* with Iron gets me... a 7. Just enough. I'll get rid of those bloody tendrils, and with *Regain Momentum* I heal back that 2 harm.

GM: Alright, your sabre swings down onto the bit of the stone polyhedral your bullet chipped away, shattering the whole thing. The tendrils vanish, but the body doesn't drop. Instead those scribbled equations that cover it glow bright, and where its flesh has turned to stone it writhes and forms spikes and plates. It ducks down low, its neck hole a black void, and charges towards you.

Lucretia: No problem, I'll try and tackle it and throw it - give the others a chance to find a shot. I got another 7 on *Confront*, so again I'll open it up for a counterattack.

GM: Its stone body means it has too much momentum to stop, and it tackles you to the ground. Those stone fists rain down on you - take 3 harm. But as it's beating you it's not paying attention to the others.

Lucretia: And, hey, my blood burns, which should keep it occupied.

Mandrake: Perfect. I've recovered from being grabbed, and I'm going to carefully make my way towards the two. I want to take him by surprise, and grab him around the chest, sending fire straight into him.

GM: Attacking by stealth? Sounds like a *Strike* with Mercury. How do you do?

Mandrake: 12! Goes off without a hitch. The stones may not burn, but the rest of the flesh can. By the time I'm done, he's just a heap of charred stones. Then I reach a hand down to Lucretia and help her up.

GM: Good job, acolyte vanquished! You can all gain 1 Blood, and raise your covenant with each other. You're alone now in the observatory - what do you do?

Lucretia: Call in help: I think I need a rest...



CHAPTER 3

PLAYBOOKS





BLOODLINES

Rhapsody of Blood presents five bloodlines for you to use:

The Legendary Heroes are a bloodline in the truest sense of the word: a lineage where the virtues of heroism recur again and again. Whether they've been trained from birth to match the deeds of their forbears or brought to **the castle** by the winds of fate ignorant of their destiny, they're tenacious and audacious foes of the regent.

Play the Legendary Heroes if you want to be big damn heroes. Their abilities let them take blows for others and reveal secret fighting techniques, but their biggest strength is their heart. They can extend the hand of mercy to defeated acolytes and win their support, raise the morale of the local community and get resources in return, and forge a personal connection with the regent.

The Magi use secretive and arcane rituals to draw power from the blood. Where other bloodlines may draw on its power recklessly and spiral down into corruption, the Magi precisely measure out each portion of their soul as they trade it for power.

Play the Magi if you want to meddle with terrible power. Their moves let you extract power from the Regent's machinations - gaining ritual resources as they bring their plan to completion, or extracting organs from their acolytes. Once they have those curios, they can bend space to transport their explorers, learn spells from a travelling library, and create lasting defences against corruption.

The Holy Church draw power from their faith. Whatever the truth of their particular creed they're defenders of humanity able to purge contamination, build protections against evil and provide respite to the afflicted.

Play the Holy Church if you want to be a beacon against contamination. They can guard themselves and others with prayers, and use acts of faith to bring the dead to life. They prize sacrifice, and can spend their life to push back the Regent's evil - and willingly accept contamination to become incredibly powerful.

The Half-Damned show clearer than most the marks of corruption. Lurking on the fringes of society, they fight a constant struggle against the dark blood within. In **the castle** they have the unique advantage of blending in with its inhabitants, giving them unmatched powers to infiltrate and gain information on the regent's plans.

Play the Half-Damned if you want to be inhuman. Your explorers can start with uncanny abilities other bloodlines must risk their soul to win, or maybe manifest claws, wings and chitin. Their proximity to the Regent's minions lets them send bloodline members in to infiltrate the Regent's rank and file, or issue them orders.

The Hidden Hand focus on temporal power, using the treasures of the blood to shape mortal society. When **the castle** returns they call on legions of allies and cutting-edge technology to push it back and get rich in the process.

Play the Hidden Hand if you want to be rich and resourceful. They can shower their explorers in luxury to keep them fighting fit, call on a web of influence to get up-to-date info, and provide troops and bodyguards. Their access to the best scholars can provide explorers with experimental weaponry, and retain access to relics at a cost the Hidden Hand is happy to pay.

EXPLORERS

There are also five Explorer types to play as:

The Bonded has forged a link with a powerful spirit - a ghost of an ancestor, an avatar of their god, an elemental force or something stranger. With this spirit standing behind them, they can work strange miracles and walk between worlds.

Play The Bonded if you want to have a relationship with the source of your powers, and work with the GM to play out the special things that relationship lets you do.

The Mystic is an expert at extracting occult power from **the castle**. In their hands the blood is coaxed into amulets, weapons and explosive incantations.

Play the Mystic if you want to be a master of sorcery, and if you'd like to fight by empowering your allies and placing restrictions and compulsions on your enemies rather than directly hurting them.

The Packrat is comprehensively prepared for this expedition. Within their pack you might find the perfect weapon, the needed medicine, or just the matches you need to light your pipe.

Play the Packrat if you want to be a resourceful support character, command minions, and play around with explosives.

The Reckoner is a navigator, able to force order on the shifting chaos of **the castle** and get their allies where they need to be. In combat they're experts at using **the castle** as a weapon, turning traps on their owners and finding escape routes.

Play the Reckoner if you want to have a clear picture of what's happening, fight at range, define (or redefine) the arena of play, and use the environment to your advantage.

The Slayer is a monster hunter, plain and simple. They're fast and lethal, equally at home confronting a horde of beasts and a single towering colossus.

Play the Slayer if you want to be right in the centre of every melee, flinging yourself into combat safe in the knowledge it'll hurt them more than it'll hurt you.

BLOODLINE EMPOWERMENT

A lot of bloodline moves give your explorers additional capabilities. For your ease of reference, these have been marked with a † symbol. I'd recommend you write a note on your Explorer Playbook as a reminder that you have these moves to call on!

LEGENDARY HEROES



STATS

Pick one:

- Chalices 1 Swords 1 Coins 0 Wands -1** if fate keeps bringing your bloodline to the castle despite their ignorance of mystical matters.
- Chalices 0 Swords 1 Coins -1 Wands 1** if your bloodline is tested from childhood for martial aptitude and trained to face the castle.
- Chalices 0 Swords 1 Coins 1 Wands -1** if your bloodline are world travellers with a fortune built on castle raids.

TRADITIONS

Pick one from each or write one of your own:

Style: Stylish contemporary fashion; family crests and heirlooms; rustic or simple clothing.

Lore: Picking it up as they go along; ancestor's crumbling journals; oral history passed from parent to child.

Name: A noble title; an inherited naming convention; bearers of the _____.

CONTEXT

Each generation, pick or invent one from each:

REFUGE

A inn or cafe where your sister plays music.

A general shop run by your grandfather.

A club, park or alley where friendly gangs lurk.

DRIVE

Your love, kidnapped by the Regent.

Your parent, cursed to waste away

A neighbourhood, devastated by monsters.

BREACH

A grand door and a sturdy boot.

A great stained glass window and a hefted brick.

A high wall and a knotted rope.

PACT: THE WAY OF GOLD

One bloodline's legends taught you how to be heroes. Set your pact with them to 1. You say what legend you've heard, they say what secret failure the legend left out.

You prize heroism and valour. At the end of each play session, pick the explorer whose heroism most impressed you and raise their pact with your bloodline by 1.

While at one of your camps, members of other bloodlines can spend 1-pact to gain a weapon from your stores. Give it two perks and a flaw, and describe its history.

SHELTER MOVE

When your explorer finds **Shelter** in the **castle**, they can inspire the others with tales of selfless heroism. The next time their allies would **mark contamination** while trying to aid or protect another explorer, they ignore it.⁵

BLOODLINE MOVES

Pick two:

AUDACIOUS†

When your explorer confronts the Regent or an Acolyte, roll +Swords. On a 7-9 pick 1, on a 10+ pick 2:

- They'll talk before attacking or leaving.
- They let slip a weakness of their plans.
- They ignore the other explorers.

DEFEAT MEANS FRIENDSHIP†

When your explorer would inflict the killing blow on an Acolyte, they may stay their hand. If you do, roll +Chalices. On a 7-9, before they retreat they get enough control to tell you one of:

- How the Regent's ritual can be set back.
- How the Acolyte can be saved.
- A secret weakness of another Acolyte.

On a 10+ they gain enough control to change sides and work alongside you.

OUR TOWN

When you ask for aid in a community that knows your legend, roll +Chalices on **Reinforcements** instead of +Coins.

SECRET TECHNIQUE†

There's a fighting style passed down your bloodline through training, genetics, or mystical empowerment. Pick one:

- ❑ **Cheating Death:** The first time your explorer triggers their Death Move, they take a mortal wound instead of dying.
- ❑ **Consecrated Blood:** Any monster that tastes your blood feels agonising pain. Your explorer can take 1 Harm to give one **Strike** the Holy perk.
- ❑ **Accelerate Perceptions:** Can take 1 Harm to move incredibly fast for a few seconds, at the cost of being exhausted and unable to move for a few seconds after.

THE WILL TO FIGHT†

Your bloodline has a tenacity that lets them cheat death so long as they have something to fight for. All of your explorers start with +1 Armour. Whenever they take a blow for another explorer, they can refresh the Armour box.

THE HALF-DAMNED



STATS

Pick one:

Chalices 0 Swords 1 Coins -1 Wands 1 if your bloodline is cursed with obvious signs of damnation and live on the fringes of society.

Chalices -1 Swords 1 Coins 1 Wands 0 if your bloodline appears mundane but is cursed with terrible hungers.

Chalices 1 Swords 0 Coins -1 Wands 1 if one descendant each generation has the curses' physical gifts, while the rest have its frailties.

TRADITIONS

Pick one from each or write one of your own:

Style: ragged fabrics and skins; fastidiously clean and modern; anonymous and drab.

Lore: Immortals with flawed memories; whispers in your nightmares; religious texts that damn you but hold wisdom.

Name: A shared mark or feature; after your progenitor; what zealots and bigots call you.

CONTEXT

Each generation, pick or invent one from each:

REFUGE

A graveyard where your peers shelter.

An aerie overlooking the land.

Underground tunnels forgotten by man.

DRIVE

The beast that turned you, serving the Regent.

Your sibling, called to **the castle** by an irresistible compulsion.

A mob whipped into a frenzy by fear of the Regent.

BREACH

The regent's menagerie, using yourself as bait for the game wardens.

The servant's quarters, and a stolen uniform.

The barracks, and notes on the patrol schedule.

PACT: THE WAY OF RED

One bloodline hunted you as monsters before you forged a treaty. Set your pact each other to 1. You say how you proved your humanity, they say how they made amends.

You prize integrity and humanity. At the end of each play session, pick the explorer whose mercy most impressed you and raise their bloodline's pact with you by 1.

While at one of your camps, other explorers can spend 1-pact to transfer a point of contamination to a member of your bloodline. Say how the recipient is further twisted.

SHELTER MOVE

When your explorer finds **Shelter** in **the castle**, they can use the power of the blood to push back death. Anyone in the party can **mark contamination** to heal 1d6 Harm.

BLOODLINE MOVES

Pick two:

DARK LEGACY†

All your explorers are cursed by **the castle**, but have learned to resist its corruption.

Each explorer starts with a Blood Gift; when using it, you may choose to take 1 harm instead of **marking contamination**.

SHADOWS OF HUMANITY

Human society may recoil from you, but that doesn't mean you're powerless. *If you intimidate people into helping you or appeal to their baser urges*, roll +Swords on **Reinforcements** instead of +Coins.

MORE THAN HUMAN

When you make an explorer, choose one:

- They have natural weapons: claws, spines, etc. Give them a perk and a flaw.
- They have resistance to harm: fur, chitin, thick skin etc. Get 1 Armour.
- They have unnatural agility. They can climb walls, run on water or leap dozens of metres, and get advantage on Dodge.

ONE OF THE HORDE

*When you send your family members to blend in with **the castle's** denizens*, roll +Wands.

On a 7-9 hold one, on a 10+ hold three.

Spend the hold 1-for-1 to get them to:

- Strike from within a group of castle denizens, sending them into disarray.
- Help you navigate, giving you 1 **Travel the Labyrinth** hold.
- Smuggle you a useful item.

VOICE OF THE REGENT

Add the following option to **Resist Doom**:

- Give your explorer a one-time ability to command the castle's denizens.

When they use this, the denizens become their loyal servants. When they fight alongside you, your attacks gain the **cleave** tag. When you send them to act independently of you, the GM will decide how well they do. When you take Harm, you can choose to have the denizens be destroyed instead.



THE HOLY CHURCH

STATS

Pick one:

- Chalices 1 Swords 0 Coins -1 Wands 1** if you act as a mystery cult, revealing deeper truths to those who have earned them.
- Chalices 1 Swords 0 Coins 1 Wands -1** if you are part of a grander church, trading freedom to dabble in the occult for temporal influence.
- Chalices 1 Swords 1 Coins -1 Wands 0** if you're a scattered group of devotees resisting persecution in pursuit of righteousness.

TRADITIONS

Pick one from each or write one of your own:

Style: A simple symbol of faith, fastidious clerical robes, joyous flowing colours.

Lore: Dreams of whispering martyrs, a holy book filled with ecstatic visions, accumulated folklore from your flock.

Name: The virtue you follow, the mark you wear, your hope for the future.

CONTEXT

Each generation, pick or invent one from each:

REFUGE

An old church warded against malign influences. A memorial remembering the dead of the last great war.

The home of a believer, where the faithful are waiting out the horrors.

DRIVE

A saint's relics stolen from a desecrated grave. A great demon only vulnerable to the righteous. A sin that only martyrdom can wash clean.

BREACH

The tainted chapel, and the supply wagons that bring in sacraments.

The burial catacombs, and a crevasse that's opened them to the world.

A marble-floored museum, and its skylights.

PACT: THE WAY OF WHITE

You saved another bloodline from falling to darkness. Get 1 pact on them. They say what dark temptation was twisting them; you say what you did to redeem them.

You prize self-sacrifice. At the end of each play session, pick the explorer who risked the most to help others and raise their bloodline's pact with you by 1.

While at one of your camps, other bloodlines can spend 1-pact on you to take a Relic from your stores. Describe it, and suggest how it came to be owned by your order.

SHELTER MOVE

When your explorer finds *Shelter* in **the castle**, they may lead the group in prayer. They each hold 1: spend it to miraculously avoid a curse, spell or mystical attack.

BLOODLINE MOVES

Pick two:

HOLY VANGUARD†

You are vigilant protectors of the mundane.

When an Acolyte ventures out to attack the mortal world, your explorer can spend 1 Travel the Labyrinth hold to immediately intervene and confront them.

SHIELD OF FAITH†

So long as your camps maintain a constant vigil of prayer, they will not come under attack.

When your explorer attempts to manifest this shield, roll +Sulphur. On a hit, radiant light prevents creatures of **the castle** from coming within a few metres of you. On a 7-9 pick two, on a 10+ pick one:

- Moving breaks the shield.
- Attacking breaks the shield.
- No-one else can shelter under the shield.

STOKE THE FLAME

When an explorer on the verge of death is brought back to one of your camps, roll +Chalices. On a 7-9 the deadly wound is stepped down to a major wound; on a 10+ it's gone entirely. On a 6- their soul gutters out entirely, replaced by something dark: they'll die and become an undead Acolyte, unless 1 Relic is sacrificed to stop it.

MARTYRDOM

When you Resist Doom, your character can sacrifice some of their lifespan to channel greater power. You may substitute a minor wound for 1 relic, a major wound for 2 relics, or a deadly wound for 3 relics.

THE FLESH IS WEAK†

You can concentrate **the castle**'s corruption in one part of an explorer's body. Actions using the body part have advantage, but the explorer marks an additional point every time they **mark contamination**. Amputating the node of corruption deals the explorer a major wound, and they lose a point of Blood and a Blood Gift. The removed body part counts as 1 relic.

THE HIDDEN HAND



STATS

Pick one:

Chalices 1 Swords 0 Coins 1 Wands -1 if you live lives of luxury and try not to think too hard about the source of your wealth.

Chalices -1 Swords 1 Coins 1 Wands 0 if you act as mercenaries, guiding the world's conflicts in a direction that benefits you.

Chalices 0 Swords -1 Coins 1 Wands 1 if you're a secret society of the world's elite bound by occult rituals and mutual blackmail.

TRADITIONS

Pick one from each or write one of your own:

Style: Formal wear and subtle marks of membership, opulent clothes and jewellery, state-of-the-art arms and armour.

Locale: Reports from far-flung agents, ruling the rare book market, a private research institute.

Name: a mythical creature, an alchemical process, a feudal role.

CONTEXT

Each generation, pick one from each or make your own:

REFUGE

A mansion filled with helpful servants.

A watch station, barricaded up against the darkness.

A scholar's laboratory, fizzing with strange chemicals.

DRIVE

A treasure rumoured to bring eternal life.

Your political rival, empowered by the regent's corruption.

Rare reagents created by abhorrent rites.

BREACH

The deeper vaults, and a brace of explosives.

A grand soiree, and a forged invitation.

The clock tower, and a zip line from great height.

PACT: THE WAY OF SILVER

You split the fabulous wealth you found with another bloodline. Gain 1 pact on them.

They say what they used the wealth for; you say how misfortune robbed them of it.

You prize entrepreneurship. At the end of each play session, pick the explorer who most increased their wealth or power and raise their bloodline's pact with you by 1.

While at one of your camps other bloodlines can spend 1-pact on you to get access to more luxurious supplies. They get advantage on *Shelter* until they return to a safe camp.

SHELTER MOVE

When your explorer finds *Shelter* in **the castle**, they may upgrade and reinforce their party's gear. They each hold 1: spend it to get fleeting advantage on *Strike* or *Confront*.

BLOODLINE MOVES

Pick two:

AVARICE

The strange by-products of **the castle's** intrusion into our reality retain their power, if you let them feed from you.

When you would spend a relic, you may **mark contamination** to keep it in your bloodline's stocks.

EXPERIMENTAL WEAPONRY

Your family's resources are devoted to the creation of new weapons to be used against darkness. Once a generation, you can gain one of these weapons for your struggle.

When your scholars bring their most recent creation to your camp, roll +Coins.

On a 7-9 pick one, on a 10+ pick two:

- You can sacrifice it to **Strike** without needing an Opening.
- You may spend a relic to give it the *holy* tag for the rest of the fight.
- It has three perks and a flaw, or two perks and no flaw.

BODYGUARD†

Your explorer has a skilled companion to back them up in **the castle**. Pick one when you make your explorer:

- ☐ Your companion fights beside you, giving your attacks the *cleave* tag.
- ☐ Your companion protects you, giving you advantage on *Confront*.
- ☐ Your companion heals you: whenever you *Shelter*, heal 4 Harm.

OPULENCE

When you shower luxury on a party of explorers, you may roll +Coins to give them *Rest & Relaxation*.

A WEB OF INFLUENCE

Your contacts stand ready to support your war against evil. **When you roll a 7+ on Reinforcements**, you may pick one extra option.

THE MAGI



Pick one:

Chalices 0 Swords -1 Coins 1 Wands 1 if you're a selective academic institution teaching occult rituals to those that can afford your fees.

Chalices 0 Swords 1 Coins -1 Wands 1 if you're hands-on, extracting occult wisdom from the beasts and devils you hunt.

Chalices 1 Swords 0 Coins -1 Wands 1 if you're warlocks without borders, globe-trotting and cleansing blights wherever they form.

STATS

TRADITIONS

Pick one from each or write one of your own:

Style: Skin covered in arcane glyphs, thick robes of strange fabrics, bags and bandoleers loaded with reagents.

Lore: A bag full of texts, a chorus of spirits bound to your gear, drilled-in mnemonics.

Name: The name of your school, The _____ Way, The Path of _____.

CONTEXT

Each generation, pick or invent one from each:

REFUGE

A caravan on the city's outskirts selling charms and occult paraphernalia.

A visionary doctor's surgery-laboratory.

A cafe where the intelligentsia gather and debate.

DRIVE

A celestial conjunction promising great change.

A chance to fix a mistake made in your training.

An unnatural plague infesting the city's slums.

BREACH

A garden of perfect geometric statuary, and a hole in its iron fence.

A pocket dimension outside reality, and a ritual to transport you there.

An alchemical storage vault, and the combination for the vault door.

PACT: THE WAY OF BLUE

You taught another bloodline how to use the castle's power safely. Gain 1 pact on them. They say what the ritual lets them do; you say what it costs them instead of their souls.

You prize arcane insight. At the end of each session, pick the explorer who wielded the most supernatural power and raise their pact with your bloodline by 1.

While at one of your camps, other bloodlines can spend 1 pact on you to get an item of power from your stores. They can destroy it to cast a spell as per *Drink Deep*.

SHELTER MOVE

When your explorer finds *Shelter* in the castle, they may lead the group in a ritual of controlled corruption. Each explorer may transfer 1 point of contamination to another explorer, with that explorer's consent.

BLOODLINE MOVES

Pick two:

DIMENSIONAL RELOCATION

When you warp space to move explorers between two safe camps, roll +Wands. On a hit, they make the journey successfully; on a 7-9, pick one:

- They leave something important behind.
- They bring something nasty with them.

ARCANE LIBRARY†

While at your safe camps, any explorer can archive a spell (learned via *Drink Deep*) and receive a Relic in return. At any later point anyone can spend a Relic to learn a spell from the archive. Choose two spells to have in your archive already:

- ☐ See your foes with perfect clarity.
- ☐ Charge your weapon with lightning (add perk: stun).
- ☐ Float gently down instead of falling.

EMPOWERED WARDS

When you roll 10+ on *Resist Doom*, your ritual lingers providing active opposition to the Regent. The next time their clock would tick down, it's stopped from doing so.

ELDRITCH INSIGHT

You have learned how to turn the castle's burgeoning power towards your own ends. *Whenever the Regent's clock ticks down,* gain a Relic.

A MIRACLE OF SCIENCE†

When your explorer dissects a defeated Acolyte, gain 1-organ. With a few minutes of preparation, they may spend 1-organ to:

- Craft a healing salve and remove a minor or major wound.
- Merge it with a weapon and give the weapon a new perk.
- Graft it on and raise Blood by 1.
- Inspire those around them, restoring 4 harm to all explorers nearby or rejuvenating any wraiths.

THE SLAYER



STATS

You start with this array; add 1 to any stat.

Iron +1 Glass ±0 Sulphur ±0 Mercury -1

LOOKS

*Ambiguous, Concealed, Feminine, Masculine
Maimed, lithe, muscular, stout.*

*Asian, South Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic,
Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, _____*

*Lilianna, Isidor, Ayako, Farhana, Laura,
Peter, Simon, Julian, Laurens, Jiddu*

COVENANTS

Pick a covenant you have at rank 1 with the player to your left. See p. 16 for examples.

Add details and context to the covenant you have with the player to your right.

GEAR

Start with a weapon (1 perk, 1 flaw), plus one:

- ❑ A backup pistol (*ranged, reload*).
- ❑ Breastplate or mail shirt (1 Armour).
- ❑ A shield (advantage on Confront, disadvantage on Dodge).

Pick two pieces of utility gear:

Torches and fire lighting kit; bandages and healing salves; anti-venoms and stimulants; as many rations as you need.

SLAYER MOVES

Pick two:

LIGHTNING SWIFT

You're incredibly fast. Your attacks always have the cleave tag, and you have advantage on **Dodge**.

REGAIN MOMENTUM

Flesh and blood is less important than confidence. When you land a successful **Strike**, heal the last Harm you took.

TRICK WEAPON

Your weapon is versatile, enchanted or a marvel of engineering. Pick two perk/flaw sets for it: you can switch between the two at a moment's notice.

BLOOD TRAIL

You're merciless in pressing your advantage. Once you've landed a **Strike** on a target, get advantage on future **Strikes**.

TROPHY

You know secret rituals to preserve an enemy's power in a severed part of their body. When you draw on the power of a trophy carved from an Acolyte, roll **+Iron** on **Drink Deep** instead of **+Sulphur**.

BLOOD GIFTS

FRENZY

When you roll a miss on Strike, you can **mark contamination** to immediately make another Strike.

LUPINE

Your teeth and fingernails gain a keen edge. You always have access to them, as a weapon with Piercing/Close.

BURNING BLOOD

Your blood burns as it leaves your body. You may **mark contamination** to create a wall of fire most monsters won't willingly cross.

VOICE OF COMMAND

When an Adversary is bearing down on an ally, you can **mark contamination** to force them to target you instead.

DEATH MOVE

As the final blow comes down you choose not to defend yourself, instead using your attacker's momentum to drive your weapon home. Now it's lodged in them, slowing them down and creating a weakness your allies can use to take revenge. Until the embedded weapon is used as an Opening, your allies take advantage on Dodge and Confront.

THE MYSTIC



STATS

You start with this array; add 1 to any stat.
Iron -1 Glass ± 0 Sulphur ± 0 Mercury +1

LOOKS

Ambiguous, Concealed, Feminine, Masculine.

Slim, athletic, stout, frail.

Asian, South Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic,

Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, _____

Reuben, Harland, Maria, Ume, Emilio,

Mercurio, Abaris, Julia, Hugh, Miles

COVENANTS

Pick a covenant you have at rank 1 with the player to your left. See p. 16 for examples. Add details and context to the covenant you have with the player to your right.

GEAR

Start with a weapon (1 perk, 1 flaw), plus one:

- ☐ An amulet (destroy to lose 1 contamination).
- ☐ Purified salt (1 armour when you stand within a circle of it).
- ☐ A last-ditch ice burst (stun, painful).

Pick two pieces of utility gear:

Crystals that glow like candles; bandages and healing salves; a pouch of alchemical samples; as many rations as you need.

MYSTIC MOVES

Pick two:

SOUL VESSEL

When you try to catch the spirit of a defeated minion, roll +Sulphur. On a hit, you catch it; on a 7-9, it taints you and you mark contamination. So long as a spirit is contained, you can freely use one of its moves. When you mark contamination you can shift it onto the vessel, destroying the spirit. You may have one spirit at a time.

BINDING

When you land a Strike on an adversary, choose one:

- It must not cross a specified boundary.
- A specified explorer gets advantage to Dodge its attacks.
- You can use the wound as a sympathetic weapon: *ranged, piercing, painful.*

BLOOD REINFORCEMENT

When you perform rites to manipulate the castle's power, roll +Relics sacrificed. On a 7-9 pick one, on a 10+ pick two:

- Add a perk to a weapon.
- Remove a flaw from a weapon.
- Make an outfit give 1 Armour.
- Create an elixir that heals all harm.

CAST THE RUNES

When you scry into the future, ask the GM a yes or no question and roll +Mercury. On a hit, they'll answer truthfully; get fleeting advantage acting on the answer. On a 10+ you may ask a follow-up question.

ARCANIST

When you use a spell from *Drink Deep*, pick one:

- The spell's effects last as long as you like.
- The spell affects more or fewer targets.
- The spell doesn't take effect now, but when a condition you set out is met.

BLOOD GIFTS

EYES ON THE INSIDE

You can mark contamination to perceive the intangible and immaterial. When you Line it Up or See Clear with this sight, you can roll +Mercury instead of +Glass.

GHOST EATER

You can consume the spirits trapped in your Soul Vessel. When you do, mark contamination but heal your last wound.

THE UNQUIET FLESH

Your body is shifting to become something ancient. You may mark contamination to grow an organ or limb - arms, tentacles, etc.

THE BLOOD IS LIFE

When you shed your blood to create a body for a spirit, roll +Harm taken. On a 7-9 pick 1, on a 10+ pick 2: they're obedient, they're knowledgeable, you can banish them at will.

DEATH MOVE

As you die, you perform a feat of soul alchemy. Each explorer may lose a point of Blood and a Blood Advance of their choice but keep the stat advance/blood gift. For each, one part of your corpse becomes a Relic.



THE BONDED

STATS

You start with this array; add 1 to any stat.
Iron ± 0 Glass ± 0 Sulphur +1 Mercury -1

LOOKS

*Ambiguous, Concealed, Feminine, Masculine.
Maimed, lithe, muscular, stout.
Bound to a ghost, an angel, a demon, an elemental.
Asian, South Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic,
Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, _____
Kujo, Aamir, Malkhazi, Aretha, Temperance,
Christa, Camilla, Sebastian, Drahomira.*

COVENANTS

Pick a covenant you have at rank 1 with the player to your left. See p. 16 for examples. Add details and context to the covenant you have with the player to your right.

GEAR

Start with a weapon (1 perk, 1 flaw), plus one:

- ☐ Martial arts training (*tether, close*).
- ☐ Reinforced coat (1 Armour).
- ☐ Spiritual aura (advantage on attacks against intangible foes).

Pick two pieces of utility gear:

Survivalist gear; old journals from past explorers; a hip flask, wineskin or tobacco pouch; as many rations as you need.

BONDED MOVES

Pick two:

SOUL BLADE

Your spirit has its own weapon: give it a perk and a flaw. When the spirit fights, roll +Sulphur to *Strike* and *Face the Horde*. If you have Astral Projection, the spirit can fight while you take independent action.

ASTRAL PROJECTION

So long as you concentrate, you can project your spirit away from you, see through its eyes, and - with effort - pull switches, open doors, move small objects, etc.

BLOODY INSIGHT

When you take harm from an adversary, hold 1. Spend 1 to reveal a weakness in their fighting style and give an ally advantage against them. Spend 3 to create an Opening.

SPIRITUAL FUSION

When you fuse with your spirit, roll +Sulphur. On a 7-9 hold 2, on a 10+ hold 3. On a 6- hold 1 but mark contamination. Spend a hold to use the spirit's power; work it out with the GM, but it should be about the level of a spell from *Drink Deep*. This power is draining: to use it again, you must use *Shelter* or *Rest and Recreation*.

SPECTRAL KNOWLEDGE

When you ask your spirit for advice, roll +Glass. On a hit, ask a question and the GM will answer honestly... for the most part. On a 7-9 pick two, on a 10+ pick one:

- The spirit confuses its past and the present.
- The spirit misses one significant detail.
- The spirit will ask you to agree to something before it answers.

BLOOD GIFTS

BLINK

When your spirit is away from you thanks to *Astral Projection*, you may mark contamination to swap places with it.

APOTHEOSIS

Your spirit's true, terrifying form guides your blows. Mark contamination to give an attack advantage and a tag of your choice.

HALF-DEAD

You're losing your mortality. Gain 1 Armour against physical attacks, but take 1 more harm from magical/spiritual attacks.

MEDIUM

You can mark contamination to summon a lesser version of your spirit. They won't be hostile - at least, at first.

DEATH MOVE

As your life fades, the spirit and the castle fight for your soul. Pick one:

- You come back to life: you're immune to harm, but die at the end of the fight.
- The spirit vows to continue your mission, aiding the other explorers.
- Heal fully, but be damned. From then on, mark contamination instead of taking harm.

THE RECKONER



STATS

You start with this array; add 1 to any stat.
Iron -1 Glass +1 Sulphur 0 Mercury 0

LOOKS

*Ambiguous, Concealed, Feminine, Masculine.
Spindly, stout, athletic, out-of-shape.
Asian, South Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic,
Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, _____
Hector, Taniqua, Lamia, Oscar, Arsene, Richter,
Sypha, Kasi, Joseph, Grant.*

COVENANTS

Pick a covenant you have with the player to your left. See p. 16 for examples.
Add details and context to the covenant you have with the player to your right.

GEAR

Start with a weapon (1 perk, 1 flaw), plus one:

- ☐ A crossbow (ranged, reload).
- ☐ Bulky protective gear (+1 armour).
- ☐ An old map (sacrifice to get 2 **Travel the Labyrinth** hold).

Pick two pieces of utility gear:

Long-burning glow sticks; chalk, paints and dyes to mark the corridors; a theodolite and a spirit level; as many rations as you need.

RECKONER MOVES

Pick two:

TRUE SIGHT

You can always recognise an illusion or supernatural deception as what it truly is. In addition, you get advantage on **See Clear**.

RESHAPE CHAOS

You may spend **Travel the Labyrinth** hold, 1-for-1, to uncover one of these details in your environment:

- A mechanism to close off a passage.
- A secret place to shelter from harm.
- An environmental hazard (caustic vat, rock-slide, etc) ready to be unleashed.

BEND TIME

When you roll 10+ on **Dodge**, time slows for everyone but you. If you can do an action within a few seconds, it'll have advantage.

AND NEXT YOU'LL SAY...

When you tell an opponent what they'll do next, roll +Glass. On a hit, they pick one:

- They do exactly what you predicted.
- They stumble, hesitate or flinch.

On a 10+, reveal a trap you set up to take advantage of your prediction. If they do what you predicted, the trap creates an immediate Opening or takes out a minion.

PINNING FIRE

Your shots are precise and lethal. When you attack a foe with a **ranged** weapon, the foe must choose: remain where they are, or be taken out (if they're a minion) or provide an Opening (if they're an adversary).

BLOOD GIFTS

JUST YOU AND ME

If you're within arm's reach of a foe, you can **mark contamination** to reshape **the castle** and trap you both within an empty room. The previous state is restored when you will it, or when you take a major wound.

WORLDS AWAY

If a foe's within arm's reach, you can **mark contamination** to reshape **the castle** such that you are separated by a deep chasm, a barricade or a surging river (of what?).

CHAOS EYES

The shifting chaos of **the castle** bleeds out of your mind and into those that meet your gaze. Your eyes are a weapon with **ranged**, **piercing**, **unstable**.

PSYCHOPOMP

You can **mark contamination** and spend 1 **Travel the Labyrinth** hold to take your group to or from: an individual's psyche, the land of the dead, where **the castle** comes from.

DEATH MOVE

As you die, you work one final effort of will to enforce order on **the castle**. Choose one:

- Give your fellows advantage on all future **Travel the Labyrinth** rolls.
- Prevent the Regent and their Acolytes leaving their respective wards.

THE PACKRAT



STATS

You start with this array; add 1 to any stat:
Iron -1 Glass ± 0 Sulphur +1 Mercury ± 0

LOOKS

*Ambiguous, Concealed, Feminine, Masculine.
Burly, bent, stocky, weaselly.*

*Asian, South Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic,
Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, _____
Yasmin, Vyasa, Cathaoir, Aleksander, Cecilia,
Angela, Clement, Krister, Orinth, Elizabetha.*

COVENANTS

Pick a covenant you have with the player to your left. See p. 16 for examples.
Add details and context to the covenant you have with the player to your right.

GEAR

Start with a weapon (1 perk, 1 flaw), plus one:

- ☐ Homemade Explosives (*lingering, ammo*).
- ☐ Enchanted shirt (+1 Armour).
- ☐ Extraordinary wine (when you find *Shelter*, sacrifice to pick an extra option).

Pick two pieces of utility gear:

A musical instrument; antitoxins and miracle cures; shiny metal coins, in hundreds of denominations; as many rations as you need.

PACKRAT MOVES

You get this move:

CORNUCOPIA

You carry endless satchels, packs, pouches and bandoleers. Within them is anything your party might need as they explore **the castle**. You start with 5-stock; reset to 5 every time you return to a safe camp. Spend 1-stock to pull out a useful item: matches, rations, rope, a mirror, pitons, chalk, etc.

Pick one:

HIRELINGS

You have servants helping you carry gear. Your maximum stock is 8 instead of 5, and your staff can perform useful duties: lift something heavy, barricade a door, etc. When they fight alongside you, get advantage on *Strike* and *Face the Horde*.

WALKING ARMOURY

Your bags are bristling with weaponry and armour. Spend 1-stock to:

- Pull out a basic weapon (1 perk, 1 flaw)
- Ready a weapon with fragile/ammo.
- Give someone 1-armour that can take 1 hit.

APOTHECARY

You can spend 1-stock to create a poultice that can heal a minor wound, or a draught that will heal 3 Harm. In the field, you can convert a Relic into 1-stock.

LUCKY CIGARETTE CASE

When your pack intercepts a blow, roll **+stock spent** (minimum 1). On a hit, the harm is negated; on a 7-9, the GM will name one other piece of gear you have that is destroyed in the process.

BLOOD GIFTS

TITAN'S MIGHT

You can **mark contamination** to augment your strength, letting you carry any weight. Leverage may still present issues.

PARADOX BAG

When you reach into your sack, you can **mark contamination** to pull out something impossible: something too big, or too dangerous, or on the other side of the world, or in your antagonist's hands.

MAW OF THE VOID

If you get something in your bag, it cannot escape without your say-so. You can **mark contamination** to turn the void inside the bag into a powerful vacuum (*tether, close*).

JUNK HOMUNCULUS

When you assemble the odds and ends in your pack into a rough human form, you can **mark contamination** to give it life. It will follow your commands to the best of its ability, but cannot leave **the castle**.

DEATH MOVE

As you die, you reveal a final pouch - one packed with explosives. Pick one: the explosion destroys a Quality, or the smoke gives your allies advantage on *Dodge* and *Stand With Me* for the rest of the fight.



CHAPTER 4

RUNNING THE GAME



YOUR LEADING LIGHTS

AGENDA

You have three guiding rules as you run this game:

- Make the world feel real.
- Fill the character's lives with action and adventure.
- Play to find out what happens.

WHAT TO SAY

- What your prep demands.
- What the rules demand.
- What honesty demands.

PRINCIPLES

- Keep momentum up.
- Make a move that follows.
- Begin and end with the fiction.
- Think off-screen too.
- Taint everything **the castle** contacts.
- Give power alongside corruption.
- Twist reality around them.

REACTIONS

As the GM you're here to manage the pacing of the game, push the players into interesting decisions, and portray the world and its inhabitants. As such you don't make proactive moves so much as reactions. You make reactions in four situations:

- When a player rolls a 6- on a move.
- When everyone's looking to you to find out what happens next.
- When the regent's clock ticks.
- When the players offer you up a golden opportunity.

To explain that third point, it's when the fiction so far has established that an action will have a specific and direct consequence. If it's been previously established that stepping on a pressure plate will trigger a trap, and a player describes their character stepping on the plate, that's a golden opportunity.

The difference between this and the first two categories is that the GM can actively interrupt a player's narration to give an immediate reaction. The GM should only do this when the trigger has been firmly established in the fiction.

THE STRENGTH OF A REACTION

When you make a reaction, it can be *hard* or *soft*.

A soft reaction is one that leaves room for the players to react - for example, describing a treasure chest the characters spot on the other side of a gate (Offer an Opportunity), or that a werewolf bares her fangs and charges the Slayer (Put Someone in a Spot). Once you've described the reaction, you ask the players what they do and work through the actions they describe.

A hard reaction is one that cuts straight to the consequences. They tread on a weak floor section and fall into the cavern below (Separate Them), or they get home and find that their brother's lost their food stocks on a bet (Erase a Surplus). Often enough, a threat introduced by a soft reaction can lead to hard reactions down the line if the players overlook it or decide to focus their efforts on other dangers.

REACTION LIST

- Use a reaction from a minion or foe.
- Reveal an unwelcome truth.
- Forecast doom.
- Deal harm as established.
- Take away their stuff.
- Turn their move back on them.
- Separate them.
- Put someone in a spot.
- Highlight a weakness of their gear.
- Give them an opportunity fitting their strengths.
- Offer an opportunity, with or without cost.
- Strike at their mortal allies.
- After every reaction: "what do you do?"

THE DARK MENAGERIE

THE REGENT

When **the castle** returns to reality, it'll bring with it one of the past generation's explorers corrupted into its service. Or if its throne is empty, it'll whisper into the mind of someone with a burning need: for power, for justice, for adulation. It'll call them into its heart, promise them whatever they desire, and then begin the work of transforming them into an enemy of the mundane world.

Your generation's Regent is the first thing you should sketch out as you plan your castle. Here are the key things to decide:

What's their Drive? Each regent has an intense desire burning in their heart. As **the castle** whispers poison into their minds, even the noblest goals are soon twisted into a blight on the world. Here's some ideas:

- **Dominion:** The Regent seeks power, authority and acclaim. Impulse: Offer rewards for service.
- **Excellence:** The Regent wants to be the best - the best soprano, the best duellist, the best painter in the world. Impulse: seize a chance to demonstrate their skill.
- **Insight:** The Regent wants to know why something happened, or who was truly behind a crime, or how the world really works. Impulse: Relentlessly pursue hints to their goal.
- **Avarice:** Is it the most luxurious food, silks and wines the Regent desires? Or is there a particular work of art, luxury, or even person that they seek to own?

What's their style? Each Regent will colour **the castle** around them, whether willingly or subconsciously. Pick out a few stylistic cues that'll be present throughout every ward and tie them together in a coherent whole. Here's some examples:

- **Ecclesiastic:** Altars, acolytes, candles and incense, the sound of chanting.

- **Regal:** Knights, thrones, opulence, adoring public, string quartets.
- **Artistic:** Painting galleries, theatres, opera masks, still life, stage hands.
- **Science:** Fizzing racks of chemicals, lightning rods, steam engines, automata.
- **Wild:** Swamps, forests, lightning-lashed peaks, great beasts, unclement weather.

What's their plan? Each Regent has a reason they took the grail, and a plot they're working towards. Take a look at the options in *Darkness Falls* (p. 23) and pick out which one you're working towards for now, though be willing to switch things round depending on how the Regent's interactions with the explorers go.

QUALITIES

The Regent has a base of three qualities. They may be granted extra qualities by their Acolytes - see the next page. The Regent is the end boss of your generation and the climax of these character's stories, so don't be afraid to make their qualities explosive, dramatic and awe-inspiring. A fight tough enough that the explorers have to dig deep into their reserves and risk their very souls makes the ensuing showdown over who claims the grail that much more dramatic.

WHEN THE REGENT'S DEAD

Once the regent falls, the grail forms. It's rightfully the property of the living explorer with the highest Blood - but there's plenty of room for other explorers to change both of those things. The final decision of who claims the grail is the emotional denouement of your generation - run it with a light touch, and give the explorers plenty of time to argue, plead and fight with each other. If it comes to blows, the confrontation moves work fine: a strike that makes use of an Opening deals 4 Harm, such that an unwounded explorer can take 3 before dying.



ACOLYTES

The acolytes of the Regent are far more potent than their minions, and trusted with far more responsibility. Each rules over one ward of **the castle**, and is more than a match for a single explorer. When you're building a ward's acolyte, draw on these for inspiration:

Breach: The ward's theme - a lab, a feast hall, a menagerie - should dictate what sort of creature rules over it. A crimson theatre could be ruled by a *prima donna*, a conductor or a phantom lurking in the rafters, but a towering armoured skeleton would be out of place.

Drive: Each explorer has something calling them to enter **the castle**: vengeance, duty, someone to rescue, a great ritual to thwart or co-opt. For each drive, pick an acolyte that's behind it, and decide how the acolyte's actions here serve the regent's plan. This ensures that there'll be clear stakes in the final battle with the acolyte - a struggle to save one explorer's kidnapped lover from undeath is much more dramatic than a simple hack and slash.

History: The events of previous generations are great fodder for acolytes. Did the players fail to save a neighbourhood from attack? Maybe one resident survived but fell to darkness.

A PIECE IN THE PUZZLE

The Regent isn't just collecting the Acolytes so that they have companionship. Each Acolyte plays some part in the regent's plan - pick one:

- **The Acolyte strengthens the Regent.** Give the Regent an extra quality, so long as this Acolyte is still serving them.
- **The Acolyte guards the Regent.** While the Acolyte is serving the Regent, it will ambush the explorers when they attempt to travel to **the castle's** heart.
- **The Acolyte speeds the world's blight.** If the Acolyte still serves the Regent when the clock has ticked a certain number of times, it will enter

the mortal wound and cause terror, ruin and corruption. At best, this will remove one of the player's bloodline's safe camps outside the castle. At worst, it will trigger one of the options listed under **Darkness Falls**. The first Acolyte given this role triggers on the 4th tick, the second on the 3rd tick, and the third on the 2nd tick.

QUALITIES

All acolytes have three **qualities**. Each should represent some aspect of the acolyte's behaviour and abilities that is clear to the players - any quality's loss should markedly affect how the acolyte fights.

A basic setup is something like this:

- A quality representing the main way they attack.
- A quality giving them useful movement abilities, letting them close the gap with the explorers or escape close combat.
- A quality that lets them alter the battlefield: plunge it into darkness, open fissures, command hordes of minions, unleashing traps.

To mix things up, try one of these:

- They have a defensive quality that the explorers must remove to target their other qualities.
- Only one quality is active at any one time. As the explorers strip each one away, the next one activates and the battle enters a new stage. Each individual quality will need to pull more weight here, so write ones that give offense and defence.
- The acolyte is multiple individuals. Maybe each individual is represented by their own quality - remove the quality, remove the adversary. Or maybe the explorers are striking away their formation, their cohesion, their armaments.
- Or some hybrid of the above!

For example **Qualities**, see pages 62-64.

ATTACKS

Each quality should give the adversary some kind of attack, to which you should assign a harm rating. Here's some guidelines - though feel free to adjust up and down depending on the circumstances in play.

1 harm: An adversary may deal one harm if they are particularly weak in a certain circumstance - for example, if a fire demon is attacking you while you're underwater.

2 harm: The default. Stick with this if you don't have reason to change it.

3 harm: If an adversary's attacks are particularly effective in a certain circumstance - for example, if a lightning demon is attacking you while you're underwater.

4 harm: An attack that the adversary needed to take some action setting up. For example, if a flesh demon needs to merge with your flesh before bursting out in shower of gore.

SAMPLE ACOLYTES

Here's a basic acolyte:

MAN-BAT

One of the regent's experimental subjects, its body twisted with the muscles needed to support its wingspan. A withered human head begs for mercy as the maw in its chest hisses and bites.

Beating Wings

- ☞ Take to the skies.
- ☞ Push them back with a gust of wind (1 Harm).

Beast Maw

- ☞ Bite deep (3 Harm).
- ☞ Inject lingering infection.

Flock of Bats

- ☞ Mob an explorer.
- ☞ Pull them up into the sky.

Here's an acolyte with multiple stages:

THUNDER WOLF

A crackling beast made of solid lightning, bound and imprisoned within an articulated cage of copper wiring. It paces its cell, waiting for its chance to escape and rejoin its pack in the clouds.

Copper Cage Armour

- ☞ Lash out with sparks (2 harm)
- ☞ Bat them away with a paw.
- ☞ When destroyed: activate Voltaic Beast.

Voltaic Beast

- ☞ Surge as fast as lightning.
- ☞ Breathe deep.
- ☞ After breathing deep, exhale a torrent of plasma (4 harm)

Storm's Howl

- ☞ Deafen them.
- ☞ Terrify them.

5 harm: Attacks that need setup before using, give plenty of opportunity for the players to get away, and that destroy one of the adversary's qualities.

EXPLORERS AS FOES

When an explorer hits Blood 5, they fall to corruption at the end of the current conflict. At that point, you can choose to have them return as an acolyte. How to stat them up? One easy way to do this is to look at their character sheet! Give them a quality from their signature weapon, a quality from one of their two playbook moves, and a quality from one of their blood moves.

This also works if a character returns as the next generation's Regent, though in that case I'd recommend replacing their weapon quality with some representation of their command over the castle.

MINIONS

The minions of **the castle** come from three broad origins:

The castle is blasphemous: minions may be people from the mortal world, twisted by vice and lust for power. The castle may have given them strange abilities to match their desires: a greedy merchant may be armoured in flowing gold, while an angry mob may find their fingers lengthening into claws as they sniff out the scent of their foes.

The castle is alive: just as **the castle** has a dark intelligence within its stones, it can grant life to the inanimate. Exposed to its blood, **the castle** can make suits of armour walk and fight, chandeliers fall and roll with malevolent intent, and the earth itself rise up to consume unwary explorers.

The castle is otherworldly: it comes from a place outside reality, and there's no need for its denizens to obey the laws of physics and reason. You can make minions from shifting anomalies that defy comprehension, singing crystals that ossify any flesh that touches them, or strange elfin creatures that summon the wrath of stars to fall on the explorers.



When you're making a minion, pick one of these for its origin and then theme it to with the ward it's lurking in: a masquerade ball should have skeletal waiters, ghost dancers, animate chandeliers, corrupted courtiers. A barracks should have demonic soldiers, minotaur generals, zombie conscripts.

Also, maybe pick an overriding theme stemming from the regent: if **the castle** is ruled by a feral werewolf, minions from every ward could have fangs, a lupine gait, or a hunting motif. If an arcanist is working on a grand ritual using **the castle**, maybe each ward carries signs of scrolls, crystals, and arcane insight. This way each generation's **castle** is set apart even if the same Context is chosen.

REACTIONS

The reactions available to minions set out how they present a threat different from the standard. As such, these are great things to build reactions from:

- Special movement abilities: teleportation, flight, wall crawling etc.
- Special attack options: ranged attacks, triggering traps, lingering poisons etc.
- Complications: Summoning more enemies, setting fire to the environment, performing another step of a ritual, etc.
- Interference: Special immunities to particular attacks, splitting up players, etc.

ASSIGNING HARM

Minions deal 1 Harm by default. Add 1 for each:

- The minion is towering and powerful.
- The minion empowers its attacks with magical force.
- The attack is close-range and brutal.

OTHER INTERLOPERS

The players aren't alone in exploring **the castle**. The siren song of the blood, the promise of riches, or the drive for vengeance can call others to **the castle**'s dark halls, and even if they don't have the powers of the bloodlines they'll have tricks up their sleeve.

Use these to add a bit of variety to your castle, give the players non-hostile characters to interact with and build relationships with, and flesh out the world of this time period. When you make a neutral character, work out what's motivating them and what the players could do to win their support. If they do, these contacts are usable with the *Shelter* move, conferring particular benefits:

Alchemist: Can convert a Relic into a potion of vigour. Consume it to give yourself fleeing advantage.

Apothecary: Sacrifice a Relic to create a healing salve - 1 use, heals 4 Harm.

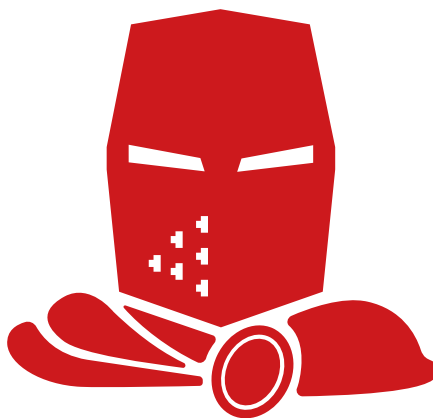
Armourer: Performs repairs, giving each explorer fleeing Advantage on Confront.

Chronicler: When you tell them a story of your expedition, write it down. Later generations can strike off a story to get fleeing Advantage on a related roll.

Civilian: Get up-to-date information on the state of the world outside.

Engineer: Collapse a corridor, bridge a narrow gap or create a route between different floors.

Lure: Can make enough noise to attract all monsters in an area, letting you sneak by or set up an ambush.



Mapmaker: Name a destination you've been to and spend the appropriate *Travel the Labyrinth* hold. The resulting map will take whoever holds it there for 0-hold.

Medics: One Explorer can heal their least severe wound.

Priest: Spend 1 Relic to create purifying incense, removing 1 Blood and an Advance.

Occultist: Spend 1 Relic and **mark contamination** to learn a simple spell, as per *Drink Deep*.

Oracle: Sacrifice a Relic to see what the Regent or an Acolyte is currently up to.

Scout: They'll have information on the monsters seen in neighbouring areas.

Soldiers: They'll travel with you, and can take out a single mob of minions.

Weaponsmith: Can use 2 Relics to add a perk to a weapon, or 4 Relics to remove a flaw.

EXAMPLE CASTLE

ROME, 1523

THE REGENT: GIACOMO BORGIA, THE CRIMSON ANTIPOPE

Drive: Dominion.

Giacomo has forever been second in line. Second son, assistant priest, passed over for the post of Cardinal despite his *obvious* merits. **The castle** came to him, whispering that it saw his righteousness, that it could make him the holy of holies. Now he seeks to sanctify himself by the power of the grail, and become eternal bloodstained ruler of the church.

Aesthetics: Marble cracked to reveal flesh, candles, statuary, opulent feasts.

QUALITIES

EYES OF GOD

Giacomo is surrounded by a halo of floating crimson eyes.

- Fire a volley at an explorer (2 harm).
- Track an explorer.

LESSER ACOLYTES

Where the Antipope goes, the clergy must follow.

- Deafen with bells.
- Grab an explorer.

SANCTUARY

Giacomo is surrounded by a 'holy' aura.

- Push away those who get close.
- Redirect projectiles.

CLEANSING INCENSE

A cloud of choking spices and exotic chemicals issues from vents throughout the unholy basilica.

- Nullify a supernatural power.
- Hide away enemies from the explorers.

CLEANSING TOUCH

Giacomo can burn out 'impurities' - of course, to him all independent thought is impure.

- Grab an explorer.
- Fill a grabbed explorer's veins with fire (4 harm).

CASTLE WARDS



WARDS

THE MENAGERIE

Basic Idea: Exotic beasts kept in cages for the old emperor's pleasure, now grown more exotic and strange with the regent's arrival.

Theme: Infection and falling into beasthood.

MINIONS

Infected humans: Civilians from Rome kidnapped and infected with the Beast's corruption.

- 1 Harm - claws and teeth.
- Call for reinforcements.
- Fall back and flank using pack tactics.

ACOLYTE: THE BEAST

Role: Guards the Regent's throne room. If explorers want to confront the Regent, they'll have to fight the Beast first.

Look: A horrible, multi-jointed creature that used to be human. Now spindly and gangly, with horrible claws and teeth.

Qualities:

FERAL VECTOR

- Swipe at them - deal 2 Harm and *infect* them.
- Inflict agony and confusion on an Infected explorer.

SHROUDING FOG

- Separate them.
- Retreat into the fog.

IMMORTAL

- Regrow limbs lost to harm.
- Endure terrible pain.

AN ALTERNATE DIMENSION

Basic idea: Nightmare frontier among the stars, moving through furrows engraved on the crystal spheres.

Theme: A new cosmic machine being engineered to supplant the normal workings of the world.

MINIONS

Star Gremlins: Spindly-limbed creatures with silver skin, working to construct the new celestial machinery.

- 1 Harm.
- Steal gear and re-jig it.

Lanternites: The new stars. Like manta rays with silvery glowing bellies. Hungry and wild, but maybe tameable?

- 2 Harm: focused starlight.
- Search for food.

ACOLYTE: THE NEW SUN

Role: Will replace the mortal world's sun when the clock hits 4, letting **the castle** manifest physically in the world.

Look: Wings and hands stretching out forming a sphere, surrounding a glowing lantern.

Qualities:

ENDLESS WINGS

- Buffet them away.
- Fly to a distance.

MANY HANDS

- Grab an explorer.
- Crush an explorer (4 harm).

SACRED LANTERN

- Spot a hiding character.
- Blind a character.
- Shoot scorching fire (2 harm).



THE MAIN HALL

Basic idea: The grand hall of a cathedral. Lots of water features, overflowing and flooding the floor. High walls, encrusted with shrines. The muttering of hymns fills the air.

Theme: People getting brought in from the streets, cleansed in the font, and turned into minions of **the castle**.

MINIONS

Penitent ones: Pilgrims who have suffered ritual punishments for their sins. They bear spikes driven into their flesh.

- 1 Harm.
- Tear out a spike and stab with it.
- Knock out a sense or a limb.

Clergy: Lesser members of Giacomo's church, brought here by the siren song of **the castle**.

- 1 Harm.
- Ring a bell, banishing supernatural influence.
- Grab an explorer and try to baptise them.

APOSTLE: THE ARCH-REDEEMER.

Role: Gives the Regent the Quality: Cleansing Incense.

Look: A hulking clergyman in straining, sodden robes.

Qualities:

THE BAPTIST

- Throw them in the water.
- Force a revelation (3 Harm).

BRUTE FORCE

- Slam with a huge fist (2 Harm).
- Leap great distances

THURIFER METEOR HAMMER

- Wrap around an enemy's defences (2 Harm).
- Release gouts of choking fog.

THE MUSEUM

Basic idea: Ancient relics brought from across the world, being scrutinised to understand the power of reverence.

Theme: Holy or priceless relics from the across the world, stolen and only valued for their value as expendable ritual fodder.

MINIONS

Curators: Scholars and academics swayed to **the castle**'s service with the promise of impossible insights.

- 1 Harm.
- Pull a relic from a display case and use it for unpredictable effects.

Suits of Armour: Ornate but reeking suits of armour, leaving crimson footprints wherever they go. As the armour shifts, its cracks reveal a web of bloody muscle.

- 3 Harm.
- Release a gout of boiling blood.

APOSTLE: THE CRUSADER

Role: Gives the Regent the Quality: Sanctuary.

Look: Dozens of purloined relics of saints and crusaders, puppeted by acolytes into the shape of a knight on a horse.

Qualities:

PUPPETEERS

- Part to avoid an incoming attack.
- Grab a dropped weapon and add it to the Crusader's arsenal.

HOLY LANCE

- Mutter prayers over the lance.
- Impale an explorer on the blessed lance (4 Harm).

RIGHTEOUS COURSER

- Rear up, knocking close-by explorers away.
- Charge to the far side of the arena.

