

BLADES AGAINST DARKNESS

Ironwood is city of adventure from top to bottom. Every guild, clan, religion and hungry freebooter is competing for fortune and glory. They swarm over the bones of a dead civilization and scheme and struggle for the choicest cuts. The winners at famed and fêted. Most simply die in obscurity.

For most adventurers who come to our city life is a short and brutal affair. They arrive, and driven by either desperation or bravado, proclaim their inevitable rise to fame and fortune. Their story is always the same. They will be the ones to return from the depths of Agartha with some legendary artifact. They will retire on the spoils and the stories they tell will ensure they never buy their own drinks again.

Many who go down below into the caverns of that dead city are not seen again. Of those that do return, most have lost their taste for the life. They disappear in the night leaving unfulfilled boasts and unpaid debts behind them.

Those that survive and stay on are easily recognized. They are a hard, practical lot. They trust their tools, their allies, and the coin in their pockets. The care little for titles, rank, or social niceties. They live to swap stories and burn coin on their chosen poisons. They are tellers of impossible tales. Liars. Gamblers. Unpredictable. Mercurial. Living for the here and now because tomorrow they could die. Slowly. Messily. Alone. Another set of bones deep underground

Most will simply disappear one day. Their luck will turn. Some monster will get the drop on them. A rope will break. A map will prove false and they will be lost. No small few will simply succumb to their chosen vice. They will be consumed and wither and die from either want or excess

But you're different. You will be one of the storied few. You are a legend just waiting to be told. You will be remembered as one who rose above the desperation, hunger, and greed. A shining paragon of bravery, prudence, and iron will. You will amass such great wealth, respect and arcane power that you and your line will lead this poor, harrowed, corpse of a city to greatness.

Doubtless. Now, if you'd care to get started, I happen to have recently come into possession of this map to a particularly rich find. Just the thing for a budding adventurer such as yourself. Practically littered with treasure. Small Shrieker infestation, but nothing you can't handle. A pittance at 20 coin. No, no Hevlan trade chits, thank you. I won't be buying from the Company Store. This is my last exchange in Ironwood. I'm headed home.

What? No. No one else knows of this particular claim. Well, no one has returned at least.

SUMMARY

- You play a crew of brave, or foolhardy, treasure seekers attempting to expand their wealth and influence in the city Ironwood.
- Ironwood is a boomtown. It's built on the ruins of the ancient city of Agartha which honeycombs its way into the heart of a slumbering volcano.
- Game play focuses on the moments of daring action during a job (with occasional flashbacks) and the downtime between scores when you recover and pursue personal interests.

THE GAME

Blades Against Darkness applies the mechanics and structure of John Harpers Blades in the Dark to the oldest and most familiar roleplaying game tropes and narrative: looting ancient tombs and slaying monsters. The game is about an upstart crew of professional "Adventure Archeologists" and their rise to fame and fortune on the frontier of an ancient land littered with the wonders of a bygone era. There are desperate scrabbles against strange beasts, tense negotiations with "fellow" tomb robbers, rediscovered mysteries from the forgotten past, alien and wonderful landscapes, and heaps of coin. We'll play to find if your band of freebooters can survive against the threats of rival adventures, savage monsters, fiendish traps, siren song of their own vices.

TOUCHSTONES

The general tone of the stories you tell should be in the vein of Robert E. Howard and Fritz Lieber. Your characters are hardy thrill seekers in a land of exotic wonders. You are not heroes, you are tomb robbers. Like those characters, you have a particular knack for survival. Stress and Trauma, some of Blades core mechanics, allow you resilience that your stock Moldvay D&D character only dreams of.

Aesthetically, Blades Against Darkness draws from the Western. Especially Revisionist Westerns. Boomtowns and hucksters. A lawless frontier where those who have money and influence rule. Well armed and highly trained individuals wandering the wastes, looking for coin, love, vengeance, or atonement. Conan the Barbarian meets The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly. Human cultures in conflict writ large against a fantastic, but somewhat familiar, world.

In keeping with this, for landscapes, go with sandstone mesas, redwood forests, and glacial peaks. Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Arches National parks all rolled into one. Sergio Leone and John Ford should be your inspiration. Also the Playstation RPG series Wild Arms with its unique mélange of Western, Fantasy, and ancient technology. Joe Abercrombie's Red Country is a another example of the Fantasy/Western hybrid.

When you get into dungeons the tone changes. The key here is alien. Tomb robbing is a little like deep sea diving. It's plumbing a lightless and incredibly hostile environment. It is ancient, alien, and *hungry*. Look to Metroid, Aliens, and The Legend of Zelda. Dungeons are arcane computers the size of buildings. They were built with a purpose, and defenses, ages ago by powerful wizards. You are petty thieves, treading into the homes of a race of dead gods.

IMPORTANT CHANGES 1/2

Gear: Players do not chose a load out. Instead each playbook has a load limit. Players still declare gear as needed on an item by item basis, but the GM can declare a coin cost they must pay for particularly rare or expensive gear. See guidelines on playbooks. If a player wants to add gear over the maximum it costs one stress (in addition to the coin cost) for each item.

Sometimes players will fill a slot with a placeholder item. For instance, your players scour the wizard's lab. Let them write down a general catch all (wizards lab gear). Give it a particular number of boxes (depending on how heavy it is). When they want to have a particular item from that location, erase the "gear" and replace it with the specific item.

Sometimes an item will break, or be lost. Cross it out, but leave the boxes filled. Just because it's gone doesn't mean it didn't take up space in your pack. You declared it. It was a thing. Now its gone. You don't get to have infinite crowbars just because you throw them over your shoulder when your done with them. Each one of those crowbars took up a slot in your inventory. Even though its not on your person any more, it still consumed a slot.

Vice: Vice rolls during downtime do not determine how much stress a player recovers. When you indulge your Vice, clear all your stress and roll your lowest attribute. On a 1-3 you Overindulge as per Core Blades. Note that there is an new Entanglement roll (see page 3)

Camping: In the dungeon players may camp to recover stress. The stress track is broken into 3 segments of 3 dots. Camping clears the current segment. That is a player with 5 Stress:



who camped would clear the second "block" and be reduced to 3 Stress:



Camping does this for everyone who camps. Make a Fortune Roll based on camp and advance your prep as GM. Healing, working magical rituals, preparing weapons, are not "making camp." If they happen at camp, roll for them independently. This is about clearing stress.

Harm: Harm functions the same as in Core Blades. But the world of dungeon crawling is gritty and hard. You're go-to compromise should be harm. If you don't have a better idea for a Devil's Bargain always offer "no Resistance Roll." This should help the game feel a little more lethal and Old School.

Heat: In Core Blades, Heat represents how easily a crime can be traced back to you. But, in Blades Against Darkness, you're not *technically* criminals. Ironwood is a capitalist utopia. The only laws that really exist are those that can be enforced. Therefore, Heat becomes less about how much evidence you leave behind. It's more about how much you leave your mark. How messily did the job go down? How much do people know? How many stories start getting told back in the bar? How accurate, or exaggerated, do they become? How much do you stand out from the crowd?

Aggro (Wanted): This isn't a game about evading the law or doing time in prison. Instead, as Heat rises the crew gains Aggro. This is a measure of how swift and severe the dungeon and the city respond to the crew's presence/actions. In the city, enemies send more/better troops. Patrons offer jobs more suited to blunt instruments and offer less pay. In the dungeon, bigger and meaner monsters come for the players. Denizens are better prepared. Aggro is how much friction the world throws your way because you're getting too important. Too heroic. Too *epic*. The world of Blades Against Darkness isn't a world of larger than life heroes who slay ancient lich kings and drift away to the Grey Havens. It's a

world where desperate or crazy individuals rob tombs to feed their vice. They are fragile humans who die on the turn of dice.

And yet... as Blades characters, Stress, Trauma, Flashbacks and the rest of Blades mechanics allow you to affect the world in a way that you're average tomb robber can't. You, on a fundamental level, are characters that don't really belong here. Aggro is a measure of how hard the world hates you for breaking the rules.

How do you drop Aggro? Character death. When a character dies reduce the crew's Aggro level and clear your Heat. Somebody dies and suddenly you're not so invulnerable. The world has taken something from your crew. It is appeased. You've fed the beast. Better start gathering that 10,000 gp in diamonds...

Glory: Turf has been replaced with Glory. It has the same mechanical effect as turf, but this game is not about literally controlling space. The characters are not attempting to wrest control of actual territory from each other. Instead they are competing for social currency, Glory. It's a zero sum game. For me to get some, I have to take it from you. Everyone wants to be *the best*. When you gain Glory, you must answer the question "What is the story they tell." What did you do to earn this? What part of the job you just pulled has become a legend in Ironwood. Who wants to steal your Glory?

IMPORTANT CHANGES 2/2

Entanglements: Use this entanglements table instead of the standard one:

Level 0-3		Level 4-5		Level 6 +	
1	Cohort Trouble	1	Cohort Trouble	1	Flipped
2	Ancient Past	2	Ancient Past	2	Sorcerous Notice
3	Bullying	3	Cornered	3	Reprisals
4, 5	Leverage	4, 5	Bullying	4, 5	Show of Force
6	Cooperation	6	Reprisals	6	Cornered

Ancient Past: Something you brought out of the dungeon attracts the attention of spirits or monsters. Pay 2 coin per threat level of the entity (1-8) to an arcanist handle it, or deal with it yourself.

Bullying: A neutral faction throws their weight around. They threaten you, a friend or contact, or one of your vice purveyors. Forfeit (1 rep or 2 coin) per Tier of the bastards, or stand up to them and lose 1 status with them.

Cohort Trouble. One of your cohorts causes trouble due to their flaw(s). Lose face (forfeit rep equal to your tier+1), make an example of one of the gang members, or face reprisals from the wronged party. If you lack a gang or other cohort with a flaw, there's no entanglement.

Cooperation. An allied faction asks you for a favor. Agree to do it or forfeit 1 rep per Tier of the friendly faction.

Cornered: A rival or interested party corners one of the PCs, to question them about the crew's actions. Tell them what they want to know or resist with your Resolve to avoid escalating the conflict and/or bringing down the attention of The Grey Foxes, or pay them off with 5 coin.

Leverage: A neutral faction offers you a job, but there are strings attached. Some threat (veiled or otherwise) is included in the deal. Agree to do it or forfeit 2 coin per Tier of the interested party.

Flipped. One of your contacts, patrons, clients, or a group of your customers switches allegiances due to the heat on you. They're loyal to another faction now.

Reprisals: An enemy faction makes a move against you (or a friend, contact, or vice purveyor). Pay them (1 rep and 2 coin) per Tier of the enemy as an apology, allow them to mess with you or yours, or fight back and show them who's boss

Show of Force. A enemy faction gathers their allies and makes an outright attack against your operation. Pay them off with:

- Aggro Level +5 coin
- 2 Claims
- Aggro Level coin & 1 claim

Or show them who's boss

Sorcerous Notice. A powerful magi approaches the crew with a dark offer. Accept, hide until they loses interest (forfeit 3 rep), or deal with them another way.

Coin: Coin has a different scale in Blades Against Darkness. 1 coin is the price of a useful tool (a crowbar, a lantern, a collapsible 10 foot pole, etc.). Characters are expected to have more coin on hand for jobs (due to gear rules) and gain more coin due to Treasure.

Treasure: Because load and gear are important factors in dungeon crawling most treasure takes the form of dice. Each dice of treasure fills 1 "box" of gear in a player's inventory. Roll all the treasure dice at the end of the score for the payoff.

Pay Off: A score yields 1 rep per Tier of the target. Players also roll their treasure dice and gain that much coin. If you've seized a claim, you gain its benefits (hold and/or other bonuses).

Designer's Note: The economy of this game and how it relates to gear, load, and dungeon crawling is under testing. Be advised this system is in its infancy and will require work.

Making Characters: follow the normal character creation with the following changes: take two special abilities; take 5 coin.

Actions: Most of Core Blades actions are here and unchanged. There are a few differences (in *italics*) to take note of.

Attune: your body and soul to act as a circuit for arcane energies; expand your mundane senses to perceive the workings magic.

Skirmish: With an opponent in close combat; assault or hold a position; Brawl and wrestle.

Finesse: an item from someone's pocket; employ subtle misdirection or sleight-of-hand; handle a vehicle or a mount.

Wreck: a place, item, or obstacle with savage force or carefully applied sabotage; breach defenses with force; create distractions and chaos.

Hunt: a target; gather information about its location and movements; attack with precision shooting from a distance.

Marshal: your resources, allies, or will. Lead an overland expedition. Manage your gear. Inspire or command hirelings.

Prowl: about unseen; Ambush with close violence—a backstab, throat cutting, black-jack, etc

Note: Prowl no longer applies to feats of athletics. See Vault.

Survey: a location or situation to understand what's going on; sense trouble before it happens; gather information about opportunities or exploits.

Study: a person, document, or item with close scrutiny to gather information and apply knowledge; gain a deeper understanding; do research.

Sway: someone with charm, logic, deception, disguise, or bluff; change attitudes or behavior with manipulation or seduction.

Tinker: with mechanisms to create, modify, disable, or repair; disable a trap, pick a lock, or crack a safe.

Vault: over a chasm. Run over rough terrain. Swim against a raging river. Climb a difficult surface.

THE SETTING

For nearly 100 years the continent of Ush'dvania (oo-sh-d-va-nee-a) has endured a slow war of colonialism. Long ago The Anumalik, ancient witch kings, ruled this land with spell and sword. Now all that remains are the monster haunted ruins of their once great empire.

When the Ostrolaith discovered the remnants of the Anumalik civilization they started sending their longships to the coast and building cities. Their Tessian allies soon followed. Ever since these outlanders have been pushing deeper, plumbing the ruins, and extracting the treasures they find.

Meanwhile, the native Ush'dvani have few good choices: find allies and adapt with the times, or fight an increasingly difficult war of independence. The mysterious Trau, who dwell in the earth and amidst the ruins, are assaulted on all sides. Meanwhile the Edroshani, strangers to all, have begun establishing their own colonies, claiming land in the name of their god and, it seems, their birthright, for they claim to be the exiled children of the Anumalik.

At the geographic and political heart of this conflict is the city of Ironwood. Built high on the slopes of a slumbering volcano, Ironwood stands atop the ruins of the intact, if abandoned, Anumalik city Agartha, the richest known source of ancient artefacts, monsterflesh, and coin in the world. Ironwood is home to bustling thousands, many of whom sell their services as professional "acquisitions experts". You are one of these brave, desperate, foolish, or driven individuals.

MAGIC

Historically, most magic comes from the flesh of monsters. Whatever destroyed the Anumalik long ago warped the land, laid their empire to waste, and filled the ruins with strange creatures. Giant bees that smolder with volcanic heat. Vampiric plant life. Razor winged manta rays that disappear in shadow. Monster flesh resonates with arcane power. So, of course, monsters are hunted and butchered. Bones are ground into powders that grant strength. Eyes are pickled and eaten to enhance sight. Hearts are eaten raw to capture their power and bind it in a wizards flesh. Legends say that Anumalik went too far. They brought monsters here from somewhere else. They consumed too many, and became monsters themselves.

Recently, Anumalik artefacts have introduced a new form of magic, Golemetry. A few Anumalik glyphs and a fragment of the wizard's soul can breathe life and purpose into unliving matter. A wheel can be made to turn on its masters command, a crystal to glow with light, an automaton to follow orders. To function a golem absorbs heat from the environment. Under extreme workloads, golems can absorb so much heat that they can ice over or even freeze flesh. Legends say the Anumalik were all golemists. They bound too much of their own souls into their servants. The grew cold and hard and became one with their creations.

There is one other type of magic, spoken of only in whispers. A person who makes a pact with unknowable forces, a Faust, is granted terrible powers at a terrible price. Legends says the Anumalik were all Fausts. The price they paid was their empire.

PEOPLES

◆ **Ostrolaithi:** Ocean going pirate democracies who land their fleets on foreign shores, burn the sails, and establish compounds around their sacred maple trees. Ostrolaithi fleets are organized into complex loyalties and rivalries called "knots."

◆ **Ush'dvani:** A wide variety of peoples united primarily by geography and a mother tongue. There are two traditions shared by all Ush'dvani. First, they all have a different story about how the Anumalik were destroyed, reformed, or vanished. Second, they all carry a mask with them, though for different reasons.

◆ **Zinoviy:** Traders, goatherds, and spice merchants. Believes ghosts have no face. Carves their masks with life events so they will have an identity in death.

◆ **Ohlezka:** Cliff city builders and river farmers. Believes the spirits of the Anumalik are steal the faces of the living. Carries a mask to ward off evil.

◆ **Jeremy:** Deep forest sages and hunters. Wears masks in public as they believe it is improper to share your true self with strangers.

◆ **Edroshani:** Famous for their strange custom of tattooing personal debts on their forearms. They worship their god Malok, Keeper of Debts and claim to be the exiled children of the Anumalik.

◆ **Trau:** Mysterious dwellers of the underground ruins who act as merchants and guides. The Trau answer no questions about their origins or agenda to outsiders. All queries met with the ritual phase "I am but a simple merchant."

◆ **Tessians:** Feudalist noble houses famous for their expert craftsmanship. Militaristic, structured and stratified. Each House encompasses multiple generations and tiers of society, all of which bear the House's crest. Members work for the House's betterment and perfection of its chosen craft.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The world of Blades Against Darkness makes clear distinction between people and monsters. There are no lizard men, elves, or goblins. *Everyone* who is human is just that. They may have strange customs or gods, but when you kill them and take their stuff, it's murder. What does that say about your characters? Do you negotiate, or take no prisoners? Most importantly, if this is what the world is like, do you push back? You know there will consequences, right?

By the same token *everything* that is a monster is obviously not human. Fractal symmetry and bioluminescence are common. The depths of a dungeon are like the bottom of the ocean. Lightless and hungry. But, despite their alien appearance, most monsters are simply animals. They seek food, shelter, and a mate. Their lifecycles might be alien, but they are simply trying to survive. A few might be intelligent, but it is an inhuman intelligence. It is either cold machine logic or alien malevolence. There is no place for you in it.

Every rule has an exception. Every binary must be deconstructed. The White Apes who live in the Silver City and Bloodvine Fens might have some semblance of culture. They could even, hypothetically, be reasoned with.

What you do with this world is yours. I give it to you to make your own. How will you shape it? Who will you be?

IRONWOOD

The city of Ironwood is a tombstone built on the largest grave ever constructed: the dead city of Agartha. Buried here is the corpse of an entire civilization. Agartha is an endless sprawling complex of tunnels and massive caves honeycombed into the heart of a sleeping volcano. It is filled with ruined manors, ancient sepulchers, dusty libraries, and hidden vaults. Those who built it were the Anumalik, ancient witch kings who ruled this land long ago. Why they abandoned it, and what happened to them, is the greatest mystery of our time.

Built high on the slopes of the mountain Halinja Stradnor (called Valdov's Foly by outlanders) Ironwood is a bustling metropolis of vendors, traders, artisans, scholars and, of course, adventurers. It is largely built out of the repurposed Anumalik ruins. Ancient broken structures built into hollows in the cliff side have been patched and given new life. The city is an animated corpse. Broken, faceless statues, ignored for centuries are garlanded with poppies and surrounded by votive candles. Empty grain silos are filled with hammocks that are rented out by the night. The main gate to the inner mountain, its columns scoured clean of whatever writing had made them sacred long ago, is patrolled by Hevlan Trading Co. agents checking licenses and extracting tolls.

It is an exotic blend of varied peoples, all with barely concealed rivalries, hatreds, and grudges living together in the hollowed out shell of a dead empire.

Note: There are blank spots on this list. Populate them with your own factions as they arise in play. Probably a good portion of them are various "Adventuring Companies" like the players.

Tier	+ Status	Name	- Status	Hold
5	000	Hevlan Trading Company	000	S
	000		000	
	000		000	
4	000	Church of Agnilos	000	F
4	000	House Chalevoir	000	W
4	000		000	
4	000	House of Maloch	000	S
	000		000	
3	000	The Penitent	000	W
3	000	The Blue Roses	000	S
3	000		000	
3	000	The Grey Foxes	000	F
3	000		000	
3	000	The Lamprimmers	000	W
	000		000	
2	000	The Sevens and Nines	000	F
2	000	The Trau Embassy	000	F
2	000		000	
2	000	The Ironhides	000	S
2	000	The Moonshiners	000	W
2	000		000	
	000		000	
1	000	Shashka and Sons	000	W
1	000		000	
1	000	The Growers Union	000	F
1	000	Strychnine Syndicate	000	S
1	000		000	
1	000	The Green Men	000	S
1	000	The Thunderhead	000	W
1	000		000	
1	000	The Falconers	000	F
1	000		000	

The Blue Roses: Iahaphon Puriel united the sex workers of Ironwood before the HTC established control. In Edrostani style, Puriel maintains a debt to each employee, symbolized by a blue rose tattooed on her arm. Her employees also bear her mark on this inside of their wrist. Independent operators are dealt with quickly and harshly.

Church of Agnilos: Led by Tristan Carré, the clergy of the Goddess of Civilization, Truth, and Life and are devoted to building the continent spanning “Goddesses’ Way” a trans-continental road of pure white bricks. Though it is more often called the Bone Road. Recent influx of the faithful has increased the church’s power accordingly.

Falconers: The Ush'dvani used trained falcons to carry messages and the outlanders adopted the technique. The Falconers, controlled by Ilodex Amuliel, provide Ironwood with a life line to the outside world. Though sworn to never profit from the messages they relay, they make a tidy profit in selling secrets to interested buyers.

The Green Men: Haradim Trost and his druids tend the ironwood forests of the mountain. They claim their songs and runic carvings give the trees iron harness and help them grow to massive heights. Of course, they also smoke the amber they find and claim it gives them visions. Each year they host a carnival/controlled burn called “The Cleansing.”

The Grey Foxes: Once the most famous treasure hunters in Ironwood, now the de facto police force of the HTC. Hypothetically an independent operation, Keniov Oksim and the last of the old guard are still famed dungeon crawlers, but their parent company gives them the choicest contracts and access to supplies.

The Growers Union: Not much grows on the slopes of the mountain and there are endless bellies to fill in a boomtown. Turnips and beans provide the bulk. But, the union’s president, Nuala Fallon, has learned to supplement The Union’s crops with cinder bees hallucinogenic honey.

Hevlan Trading Company: Galin Troad heads the Ostrolathi Corporation that controls Ironwood. The HTC enjoys a stranglehold on access to the depths of Agartha as well as control of the gondola line that ferries goods in and out the city. HTC guards patrol much of Agartha and those found without licenses branded as claim jumpers

House Chalevoir: Tessian Noble house specializing in arcane knowledge, alchemic compounds, and medicines. Lord Cadyern Chalevoir is Ironwood’s main buyer of lost knowledge and monsterflesh. He has recently broken his long standing arrangement with the HTC, breached into Agartha, and started offering contracts to freebooters.

House of Maloch: Balthial Mahaneir, Hand of Maloch, has wedded the Edroshani concept of debt to Ironwood’s need for capital. Borrowers from the church’s coffers take a loan and have a contract/debt written in their skin by the temple’s ink barristers and needle maidens. Those who cannot pay are hunted by the temple’s confessor-collectors.

Iron Hides: Descendants of the original prospectors who established a beach-head and general store deep inside Agartha before HTC rose to power. Artemyi Koscha and his hardy allies have loosely allied with the Trau resistance they are known for selling their wares to adventurers as well as their vicious and expertly organized raids on enemies

Lamptrimmers: Ironwood occupies ruins that are haunted by ghosts and worse. The Lamptrimmers, led by Valerian Nicolae, provide the sacred lamp oil that lights the streets and homes, keeping people safe. They also manage most of the lodging that isn’t haunted by ghosts, vagrants, or both.

Moonshiners: Ironwood is powered by its addictions and chief among them is liquor. Saux Picour, exiled scion of a fallen Tessian house has attempted to turn the Moonshiners Guild into something worthy of his family’s legacy to little success. Though turnips and cactus make for shitty whiskey, no one seems to mind but Saux.

The Penitent: Though Ironwood is a lawless frontier town, it *functions*. This is due largely to the efforts of Cyrill Han and the faithful of Kyeron, god of hunger, law, and the grave. They ensure the guilty repay their debt to society. Criminals are bound in iron collars and put to work. Other followers are simply dedicated to the life of service or hunting escaped convicts.

Sashka and Sons: Mikhail Shashka supplies the city’s need for hide, horn, meat, milk, wool, and animal labor by tending an army of Makorhn, native Ush’dvan mountain goats. His sons roam the mountain managing the herds. But, they are also famed as guides and many act as coyotes guiding dungeoneers into Agartha’s hidden entrances.

The Sevens and Nines: The Sevens and Nines saloon, managed by Kaythana Noor, Trau expatriate, is a marvel of exotic woods, gold leaf, and finely tooled jade. It hires the most skilled and beautiful of the Blue Roses. It offers the cheapest and the rarest the Moonshiners can create. And best of all, it offers credit to any who are in need.

Strychnine Syndicate: Ariael Marut leads the daring, or mad, group of tomb robbers who are recently risen to power due to their fearless raids and distain for established claims. They are also known for riotous celebrations after a raid that often end with The Grey Foxes and a Penitent fire brigade being forced to intervene. Recently rich scores have increased membership.

The Thunderhead: Remnants of an Ush’dvani resistance band led by Mata Nadiya. After a crushing defeat, she moved the last of her forces to the city’s outskirts and build her own access tunnel into the heart of the mountain. Much to the HTC’s frustration she has started offering her own contracts to freebooters.

Trau Embassy: To Akil Yuva and the Trau, Agartha isn’t a mystery, it’s home. On the surface the Trau Embassy works with the HTC to “further mutual benefit” while individual Trau act as merchants of artefacts or information. But deep in Agartha, the Trau are fighting a painful guerilla war to keep what is theirs.

STARTING SITUATION

This page describes the situation your characters in at the start of the game. Go over this material with your players before you build characters and a crew as it help you understand your role and the world around you.

ADVENTURE CAPITALISTS

Your gang of dungeon crawlers has found themselves at a dangerous and, if they play their cards right, profitable crossroads.

The Coffin Nails, an established adventuring company, have a problem on their hands. They owe the Black Dogs a lot of money. The debt has been standing since the Dogs happened upon the Coffin Nails in dire straights and “rescued” them for an exorbitant price.

Recently the Nails have come into possession of a particularly rich find. Their leader, Fania Maedoc, has set her sights on an untouched newly discovered ruin. It’s high up in the Silver City, the clifftop ruins near the mountain’s peak.

Meanwhile ,The Black Dogs and their leader Ohiem Solak, are looking to maintain their leverage on The Coffin Nails. They figure that if the hit the ruins first they can get have the best of both worlds. They can make off with the money and keep the Nails under their thumb.

And then there’s the fact that the tomb in question is in a section of Agartha controlled by The Trau. They are fighting a war on all fronts against invaders. They know the terrain and have ambushed and robbed many adventurers who have passed through their territory.

Worse, rumors say the Trau are protecting something. Rumors speak of a powerful presence entombed in the ruins. Some ancient golem security system, horrible monster, or the not-dead-but-dreaming mummy of one of the Anumalik witch kings. The Trau are willing to let invaders come, and rob them as they go, but their ultimate goal is to seal or destroy whatever slumbers in the ruins.

You and yours could make a tidy profit from all this. Do you have friends, allies, lovers in one gang or the other? Who’s side will you take? Will you play them both off each other and clean up the treasure afterward?

This is what we’ll play to find out.

THE COFFIN NAILS

Hard cases with the patronage of a petty god. They possesses the fetish of some ancient death godling they are trying to re-instate. Known for iron piercings.

NPC’s: Fania Maedoc (leader, godtouched, charismatic, calculating, gambler)

Assets: The relic of an ancient death god. A devout core of followers willing to die for the cause, as well as a large group of thrill seekers who like to break heads.

Allies: The Sevens and Nines, The Falconers, The Red Cyclones

Enemies: The Black Dogs, The Iron Way, The Strychnine Syndicate

Situation: The Coffin Nails owe the Black Dogs a tidy sum and would be thankful to anyone who helped them get out from under the Black Dogs thumb.

THE BLACK DOGS

Former band of mercenaries turned to tomb robbing. Known for their pseudo-military dress and decorum. Strict, organized, and well trained.

NPC’s: Ohiem Solak (leader, tactician, gregarious, ruthless, playwright)

Assets: Well trained and disciplined troops used to working as a unit. Supply lines/claims in the Fossil Cliffs. A secure base of operations.

Allies: The Ironhides, The Green Men, The Jade Serpent Company

Enemies: The Coffin Nails, The Thunderhead, Kyeron’s Fare

Situation: The Black Dogs are looking to maintain their leverage over The Coffin Nails by stealing their latest find. This will stop the Nails from paying back their debt and score some coin in doing so.

THE TRAU

Merchants of wonders and secrets and native to the depths of Agartha. Always robed, hooded, and goggled on the surface. Known to posses secret knowledge from before the fall of The Anumalik (The Witch Kings who ruled Agartha long ago).

NPC’s: Akil Yuva (leader, cold, devoted, golemist, spider-silk cello player)

Assets: Intimate understanding of Agartha. Access to ancient and, possibly, forbidden knowledge.

Allies: The Ironhides, Grey Foxes, The Order of Lead

Enemies: The Strychnine Syndicate, The Hevlan Trading Company,

Situation: The Trau are fighting a war on all fronts. Invaders make more progress into their home with each passing day. They have few allies but access to ancient magical power.

JOBS AND SCORES

Score Generator: Use the following tables to generate possible jobs for the players. PC's might be approached to by the patron to do the job or there might simply be open contracts offered at any guildhall. You should be able to use the following format:

Patron/Culture/Job/Target/Culture/Payment. Executing the job always involves clambering into some godforsaken ruin. These ruins are located in one of the various zones of Agarth.

Patrons and Targets 3D6							
D6	1 & 2: Locals	D6	3 & 4: Strangers	D6	5&6 Outsiders	D6	1D6 Culture
1	Criminal	1	Diplomat	1	Warlord	1	Ostrolathi
2	Merchant	2	Trader	2	Noble	2	Edroshani
3	Cult	3	Drifter	3	Explorer	3	Ushd'vani
4	Scholar	4	Refugee	4	Bounty Hunter	4	Tessian
5	Guild	5	Speculator	5	Prophet	5	Trau
6	Freebooter	6	Storyteller	6	Magi	6	Roll Twice

Jobs and Payment 2D6					
D6	1-3	D6	4-6	D6	Payment
1	Retrieve/Deliver	1	Escort/Kidnap	1	Information
2	Locate/Hide	2	Curse/Sanctify	2	Influence
3	Kill/Assassinate	3	Negotiate/Threaten	3	Artefacts
4	Perform/Stop ritual	4	Banish/Summon	4	Coin
5	Sabotage/Destroy	5	Raid/Secure	5	Favors
6	Steal/Plant	6	Con/Espionage	6	Arcane Power

Locations	
Name	Impressions
Silver City	The bite of windblown snow on your exposed flesh. An ancient tower, decorated with bones by a White Ape tribe. The rumble of distant avalanche. Billows of steam from deep in The Mountain. A thick rime of ice over unstable footing. The cry of a frost wraith.
Frozen clifftop skyport and observatory	
White Forest	A path overgrown with pale glowing ferns. Silk tripwires of a Shriekers communal hive. Heady taste of psychotropic pollen. A ghost memory of the city's vibrant past. A frescoed villa filled with drifts of glowing spores. A gibbering fungal clone of yourself
Ruined city choked with glowing fungal creep	
Vitriol Mire	A thin salt crust over caustic fluids. The burn of toxic fumes in your throat. Strange glass coffins filled with shadowy twitching forms. A library of black glass tablets. The hush of burrowers though the drifted salt. The flap of a nightshroud's leathery wings.
Laboratory drowned in salt acid swamp	
Ashworks	Stifling heat of the volcano's heart. An ancient blast door, sealed. The char marks of a Guardian's beam weapon. The earth shaking under your feet. The hollow remains of a control room, kept in perfect order for the masters return.
Power plant teetering on the caldera's edge	
Fossil Cliffs	The basilisk gaze of a Shun's massive eye. A forest of giant bones, carved with strange runes. The distant circle of the volcano's opening high overhead. A titanic skull, half buried in the living rock. The chatter of teeth. A fragile bridge of mushroom wood and rope.
Mine of bones of ancient creatures	
Bloodvine Fens	The brightly burning artificial sun that is the cinder bee hive. The distant roar of some titan from another age. The skitter of reptilian claws. Sweltering humidity. A ruin choked with tangled, toothy vines. The beat of white ape drums.
A game preserve overrun by the beasts	
Shadow Facility	Fragile stone bridges over an endless drop. Memories you thought you had shut away. Far below, alien music. A transfixing light that drifts into the darkness. Memories that are not yours. A figure stands silent, motionless, as if waiting. Memories you do not want.
Stalactite city over a night black sea	
Crystal Labyrinth	A diamond monolith, carved with runes. A path lined with razor edges and humming faintly. A million fractured images. The taste of lightning in the air. The deceitful light of a Lantern Idiot. A single pure tone vibrating through the system. The reek of ozone.
A library of knowledge housed in etched stone	

DUNGEON CRAWLING

PROCEDURE:

Tests have shown that the 10x10 style of dungeon crawling is too taxing on characters stress for Blades to function properly. Instead abstract the dungeon as a series of interconnected zones. Describe a zone broadly. Let players know how they got in and (if they take the appropriate fictional actions) where they might move to the next zone. I've included a sample dungeon sheet. It represents the dungeon as a series of spaces which you can connect by arrows.

TURNS

At the edge of The Dungeon page is a series of spaces marked Turns. Use this to track time in the dungeon. At the start of the job place a marker on turn 1. Every time the players take an action (usually when they roll) advance this clock (move the marker to the next space). Turns are an abstract unit of time. They are the time it takes for something interesting to happen, not a particular number of minutes or seconds. Also, you can/should advance the dungeon clock as the fallout from the "it takes extra time" consequence of a roll, or just when the players spend too much time bickering.

When it becomes the GM's turn (turn 6) the dungeon responds to the players presence. Something has changed in the environment. Tell the players what they see/hear/feel because of this change. It won't always be obvious to them what has changed, but give them a clue based on what they can perceive. After this set the turn clock back to 1.

GM PREP:

Here are some sample moves you might make when it becomes your turn, broken into themes you'll likely encounter. Some jobs might emphasize one over another. When its your turn as GM pick whichever you find most interesting or makes the most sense with the fiction. Note that any of these could be broken out into its own clock if you really want to emphasize it. The Grind works especially well for this. You can use "Light" to track how long a torch burns or the crushing weight of the black on the characters' souls.

System: The Dungeon itself as a semi-aware arcane computer resisting intrusion	
Wake	The dungeon's defensive systems begin to wake from slumber. <i>How does the system show it's active?</i>
Sweep	Low level security begins regular patrols. <i>What entity/force is making patrols?</i>
Trace	Dungeon recreates player actions as ghost images. <i>What did they do to garner attention?</i>
Analysis	Ghost images highlight particular abilities of the characters. <i>How will the system adapt to their strengths?</i>
Lockdown	Doors begins sealing off blocking escape and forward progress. <i>Will they press on or retreat? How?</i>
Purge	Guardians begin a room by room sweep of intruders. <i>Will they escape or fight? Who will be left behind?</i>

Monsters: Strange beasts that lair here.	
Spoor	Evidence of the monster's movements. <i>How long until they come back?</i>
Remains	Bodies of the previous victims show the monster's abilities. <i>How does the monster attack?</i>
Lair	Signs of the monster's making it's home in the dungeon. <i>What is the monster's lifecycle?</i>
Attack	The first encounter. <i>How does the monster attempt to drive off intruders?</i>
Regroup	The monster retreats and gathers its forces. <i>How does it prepare to fight to the death?</i>
Assault	Constant direct attacks against intruders. <i>How does it make a last stand?</i>

Agents: People who live here or nearby.	
Spoor	Signs of the people's movements. <i>Where are they now? When will they be back?</i>
Faction	Markers that show who these people are. <i>Who are these people?</i>
Actions	Evidence of the people's actions in the dungeons. <i>What do they want here?</i>
Sight	People are seen/heard at a distance from the players. <i>What are they doing here?</i>
Scout	A scout or party encounters the players. <i>Do they know the players are here? What will they do?</i>
Force	The core of the Agent's forces are discovered. <i>How strong are they? Can they be reasoned with?</i>

The Grind: The steady wearing away of the characters resources.	
Light	The light flickers and dims.
Hirelings	Hirelings need coaxing/bribing/threatening to move onward.
Exhaustion	Everyone needs to stop and rest/eat.
Fear	A character becomes afraid of the pressing black/hungry monsters/enemy and needs a rest and comfort
Anger	A character becomes angry one of their allies failures/their past mistakes and refuses to offer help/acts out.
Injury	A character suffers a harm due to the environment or horrific trap.

Turns

THE DUNGEON

1

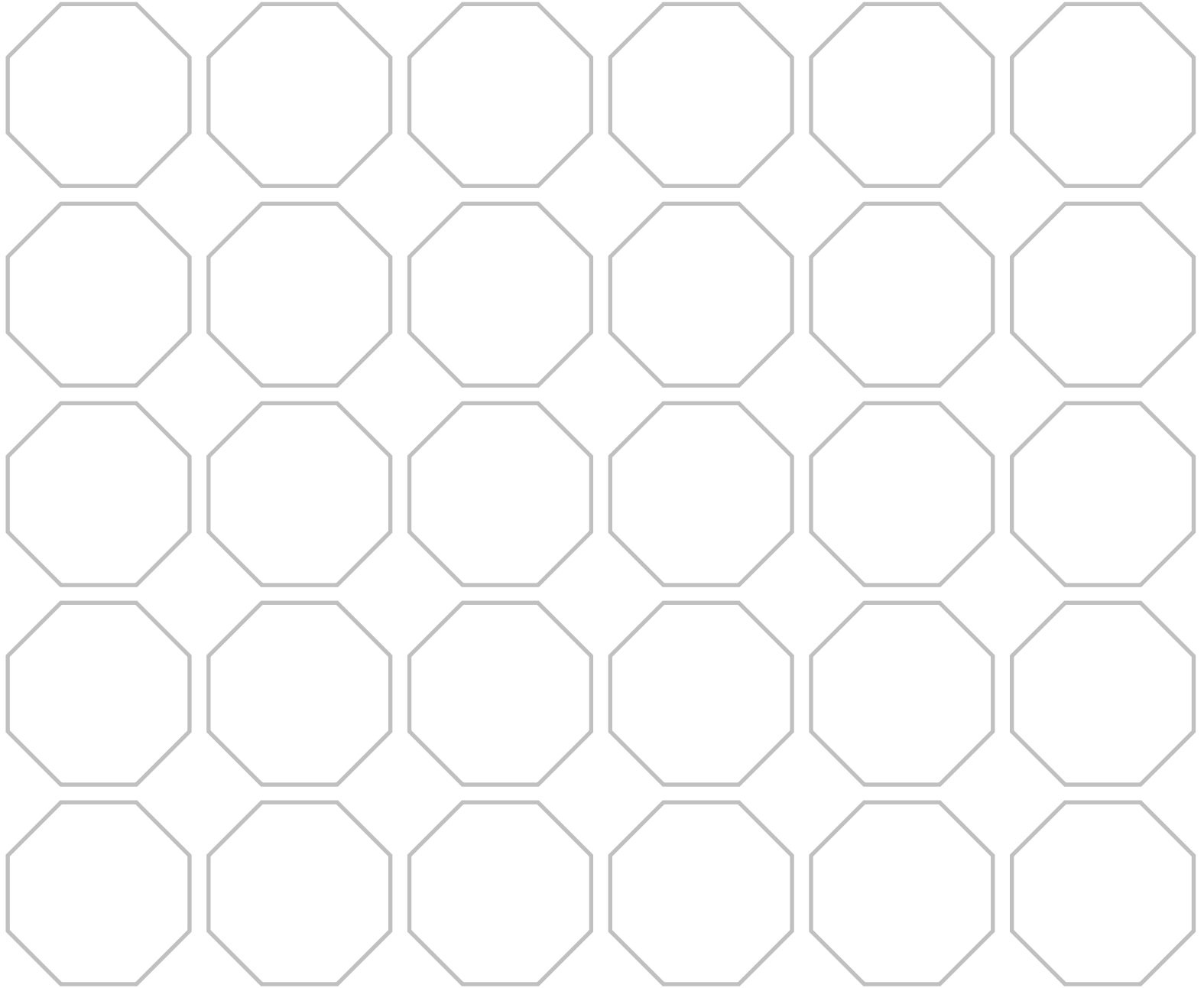
2

3

4

5

END



BLADES AGAINST DARKNESS

Name: _____ Concept: _____

Look: _____

Heritage: Ostrolaith - Edroshan Background: Academic - Labor - Military
Trau - Tessia - Ushd'vania Noble - Criminal - Trade

WITS	RESOLVE	VIGOR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SURVEY ○ STUDY ○ HUNT ○ TINKER 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ATTUNE ○ FINESSE ○ MARSHAL ○ SWAY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SKIRMISH ● PROWL ○ WRECK ○ VAULT

HARM	STRESS	ARMOR	+HEAVY
3	Need Help	Coin	special armor
2	-1D	Stash	special armor
1	Reduced Effect		

TRAUMA Cold - Haunted - Obsessed - Paranoid - Reckless - Soft - Unstable - Vicious

VICE Faith - Gambling - Luxury - Obligation - Pleasure - Stupor - Weird

NOTES & PROJECTS

COPPERHEAD A VENOMOUS TRICKSTER

- **Alchemist:** You can tinker with chemicals and arcane substances to design and produce poisons, drugs, and other strange mixtures.
- **Cold Reading:** When you gather information through lies, charm or deception, you get +1 effect level. When you first enter a scene you may ask the GM what happened here recently and they will answer fully.
- **Spec Ops:** When you defeat security measures, attack from hiding, spring a trap, or execute a feat of acrobatics (climbing, tumbling, balance, etc) take +1 effect.
- **Connected:** During downtime, you get +1 result level when you make acquire asset, gather info, or reduce heat rolls.
- **Shed Skin:** When you use a disguise or other form of covert misdirection you get +1 effect. When you throw off your disguise, the resulting surprise allows you to act from a Dominant position.
- **Coiled and Ready:** When there is a question of who acts first the answer is you.
- **Venomous:** Choose a drug or poison to which you are immune. Take 1 stress to secrete it through your skin or saliva or exhale it as a vapor.
- **Hypnotic:** When you sway someone, you may alter their memories or impart suggestions.
- **Shadow:** You get special armor vs. consequences from detection or security. When you roll a critical on a feat of athletics or stealth, clear 1 stress.
- **Veteran:** Chose a special ability from another playbook.

ALLIES UNIQUE EQUIPMENT EQUIPMENT LOAD: 7

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> △▽ Pyotr, a burglar △▽ Grégoire, a beggar △▽ Elham, a crooked guard △▽ Jawad, a fence △▽ Larion, an influential contact △▽ Etzil, a chirurgien | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fine Shadow Cloak <input type="checkbox"/> Fine Chemical Reagents <input type="checkbox"/> Darksight Mask <input type="checkbox"/> Lock Picks <input type="checkbox"/> Disguise kit <input type="checkbox"/> Throwing Knives <input type="checkbox"/> | <p>1 Stress Per Item Above Load</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> A Blade or Two <input type="checkbox"/> A Pistol or Bow and Ammo <input type="checkbox"/> A Large Weapon <input type="checkbox"/> An Unusual Weapon <input type="checkbox"/> Armor <input type="checkbox"/> +Heavy |
|---|--|--|

Mark XP:

- ◆ Address a tough challenge with athletics or infiltration.
- ◆ When you roll a desperate action.
- ◆ At the end of a session, if you expressed your beliefs, drives, heritage, or background. And also mark XP if you've struggled with issues from your vice or trauma durring the session

PLAYBOOK ADVANCEMENT

- Coin Costs for Adventureing Equipment
- 1 Goods and Sundries:** rope, spike, ration, bandages, torches, etc
 - 2 Tools and Weapons:** Crowbar, Lockpicks, Grapnel, Caltrops, etc
 - 3 Rare Items:** Mirror, Lantern or Oil, Spyglass, Magical Components, etc

GATHER INFORMATION

- ◆ What do they intend to do?
- ◆ What might I suspect about this? What can I prove?
- ◆ What's the danger here?
- ◆ How can I find X?
- ◆ What is really going on here?
- ◆ Ask about a detail for a plan.

TEAMWORK

- Assist another character.
- Lead a group action
- Protect for a teammate
- Set up another character.

PLANNING

- Choose a plan, provide the detail.
- ◆ **Assault plan:** Point of attack.
 - ◆ **Deception plan:** Method.
 - ◆ **Infiltration plan:** Entry point.
 - ◆ **Occult plan:** Arcane power.
 - ◆ **Social plan:** Social connection.
 - ◆ **Transport plan:** Location / Route.

