Blightburg

Mikko Karttunen

Blightburg
An intrigue-drama tabletop roleplaying game
First Edition, July 2019
Designed & developed 2015-2019 by Mikko Karttunen
Cover art by Toni Katajisto

Playtesters
Ossi Sandberg, Janne Räsänen, Otto Martin, Nestori Lehtonen, Hannele Ahlroos, Viktor Haimi, Marjaana Karttunen, Antti Sarjanoja, Mikko Eronen, Vesa Koskela, Jussi Eerio, Jaakko Leinonen, Sami Koponen, Juusi Haavisto, Seppo Järvelä, Jussi Kuivamäki and Kari Salmela

Additional help
Ossi Sandberg, Janne Räsänen, Tommi Brander, Sami Koponen, Eero Tuovinen, Heikki Hallamaa, Antti Sarjanoja, Jaakko Leinonen, Otto Martin, Petteri Hannila and Marjaana Karttunen

Special thanks
Ossi Sandberg, Janne Räsänen and Eero Tuovinen

You'll also want to print the **situation creation references**, **character creation references**, **character sheets, move references** and the **Devil's seat play aids**.

These are available as free downloads from `www.frozendepths.net/blightburg`.

Inspirational RPG products

• ***Apocalypse World***, by D. Vincent Baker and Meguey Baker. The inspiration for the game's structure, basic mechanics and multiple moves, as well as many other aspects.
• *Class Warfare*, by Johnstone Metzger. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 4.0 International license `(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)`. The Deceive move is inspired by the Impersonation move, and the Orate move by the Crowd Control move.
• *Conspiracy of Shadows*, by Keith Senkowski. Partial inspiration for witchcraft and some of the darker tones of the game.
• *Dungeons & Dragons 5th edition*, by Wizards of the Coast. The inspiration for the advantage/disadvantage move.
• *Dungeon World*, by Sage LaTorra and Adam Koebel. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license `(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)`. The Face Danger move is inspired by the Defy Danger move, and the Poison move by the Alchemist move.
• *Fate*, by Fred Hicks and Rob Donoghue. The inspiration for the Compel move and partly how traits work.
• *Fiasco*, by Jason Morningstar. The initial inspiration for situation creation.
• *Solar System*, by Eero Tuovinen. Playstyle inspiration.
• *Sorcerer*, by Ron Edwards. The inspiration for demonic deals.
• ***The Burning Wheel***, by Luke Crane. The inspiration for beliefs, grit, lifepaths, and the player driven nature of the game.
• *The Shadow of Yesterday*, by Clinton R. Nixon. Playstyle inspiration and the initial inspiration for stress.
• *Town*, by Lisa J. Steele. Inspiration for the setting.
• *Wraith: The Oblivion*, by Mark Rein·Hagen. The inspiration for the Devil's seat.

CONTENTS

Introduction **6**
The Pitch 6
How Does It Play? 6
Setting Up 8
Basic Concepts **10**
Game Mechanics 10
Player Agenda 17
Setting: a City of Lies **20**
Starting a Campaign **30**
Homework for the GM 30
The City Baseline 30
Creating the Web of Conflict 31
Wrapping Up the First Session 46
Example Conflict Web 47
Character Creation **48**
Step-by-Step 48
Lifepaths **66**
Childhood 66
Commoner 67
Privileged 68
Criminal 69
Religious 70
Martial 71
Moves **72**
Basic moves 72
General moves 83
Lifepath moves 94
Peripheral moves 100
Witchcraft **106**
Witches 106
Blight & Witch Marks 107
Demons 109
Witchcraft moves 111
Playing the Game **118**
Scene Flow 118
Beliefs 119
Traits 122
Compels 124
The Devil's Seat 125
Player Characters in Conflict 126
The GM's Tools **128**
Agenda 128
Preparing for a Session 129
The Second Session 133
During a Session 135
The End 138
Character Sheet **140**

INTRODUCTION

THE PITCH

Blightburg is a player driven game of intrigue and character drama set in a grim Renaissance era city. The dramatic intrigue is spiced with occasional action, witches and Faustian pacts with demons. The characters range from shifty lowlifes and zealous fanatics to powerful but flawed individuals involved in complex schemes. As a TV series analogy, think of it as a mash-up of Game of Thrones and Salem in the Renaissance period.

HOW DOES IT PLAY?

The object of Blightburg is to find out who the player characters are deep down inside. Players (referring specifically to character players) are not allowed to state beforehand what their characters are truly like, now or in the future. Instead the characters go through tense situations, make hard choices and thus reveal who they really are. The game master is responsible for creating the tense situations and non-player characters required to challenge the characters.

The first session is dedicated to situation and character creation. Several factions are scheming against one another in the city with each player character tied to a different faction.

Between the first and second sessions, the GM develops a cast of characters and situations to challenge the player characters. Character play begins during the second session with the GM driving the game into motion. After a session or two the players will have a good understanding of what's going on and they will become the active part while the GM's role becomes reactive.

As the player characters don't form a party, all of them are rarely in a scene together. It's not passive downtime for a player whose

character isn't in a scene, though. Instead the audience members have tools to ask the other players hard questions and influence the unfolding events as well.

A campaign of Blightburg is always set in a fictional Italian city-state during the Renaissance period. Florence with all the names changed works splendidly, for example. A dramatic game such as this doesn't benefit from historical nitpicking. You're free to mix your favorite Renaissance era phenomena in your city of lies.

In a game of intrigue all player characters are influential one way or another. Most will likely have traditional power such as money, status, military strength or the backing of an important institute in the city. Other characters might be part of a criminal syndicate or have the powers of witchcraft at their disposal.

Blightburg's combination of intrigue and individual characters on different sides of the conflict often leads to player character conflicts as well. Alliances will be betrayed, friends backstabbed and unlikely partners might find themselves working together. Make sure your play group is okay with this. Also note that it's the characters that are in conflict, not the players. The players need to cooperate to make this work.

While this is a game of intrigue, there are no secrets at the player level. The GM probably knows something about the NPCs that the players don't, but the players don't keep secrets from each other, and the GM doesn't keep secrets about, for example, the player characters' past. A strict separation of player knowledge and character knowledge is required to make most of the drama.

The mechanics of the game give the players tools to explore their characters, and make sure the situations keep moving forward. The mechanics are generally light, but intertwined. The game values fictionally interesting characters, not mechanically optimized ones.

The focus isn't on simulation, instead the play style is more akin to a dramatic movie, but without a preplanned plot. The situation

develops organically with each choice the characters make. The characters and their relationships are in the focus, and the GM should be prepared to frame convenient meetups and coincidences to get the characters in the same scene.

SETTING UP

The game works best with a GM plus 3-4 players. The players should preferably be proactive people since they'll be driving the game forward with very individualistic characters. A campaign of Blightburg takes five to ten sessions of about four hours each depending on how fast your pace is. The campaign ends organically when the most important story threads are resolved and the group decides not to spin the consequences into a new starting point.

To play Blightburg, you need at least three ten-sided dice as well as printed copies of the reference sheets: a few situation and character creation references and the character sheets for the first session, as well as move references and Devil's seat play aids after the first session. The references can be found on the game's website at `www.frozendepths.net/blightburg` as free downloads. You might also want to find and print a suitable city map if you like to visualize where the action is taking place. Google image search is your friend here.

BASIC CONCEPTS

GAME MECHANICS

MOVES

Playing Blightburg means having a conversation about fictional characters in their fictional situations. In this context the term fiction refers to the imaginary situation at hand. There are no strict turns in the game, instead it's a free-flowing conversation that gets resolved in the order that makes sense in the fiction. Sometimes *moves* (self-contained mechanical rules) add to the conversation. The game's mechanics consist of moves for the most part. Take a quick peek at the Moves chapter on page 72 to get an idea what a move looks like, then come back here.

Taking action in the fiction may trigger moves. Each move tells you when it's activated and what happens next. Some triggers are in the fiction, some are not. The main rule for fiction triggered moves is: If it happens in the fiction, it happens in the mechanics and vice versa. You may trigger a move in the fiction by taking character action and then rolling the move you triggered, or you may declare that you're using a move and then taking the corresponding action in the fiction. Either way, both halves need to happen or neither does.

Here's an example. Vittorio is making a deal with captain Leone and Vittorio says: "Fine. I'll marry your cousin if you free my brother." This triggers the Manipulate move, whose trigger is *"When you have something a person needs or wants and you ask them to do what you want using that as a leverage"*. Another way: Vittorio's player says he Manipulates Leone to free his brother, the GM asks what Vittorio is using as a leverage and the player answers "I'll offer to marry his ugly cousin".

Moves that require rolling instruct you to roll+*Stat*, which means rolling 2d10 plus the stat from your character sheet. A final result of 14+ (14 or more) is a strong hit, 9-13 is a weak hit and 8- (8 or less) is a miss. You can think of 14+ as a "yes" (what you tried to do succeeded), 9-13 as a "yes, but…" (you succeeded, but there's a cost) and 8- as a "no, and…" (you didn't succeed, and something bad happens). There are also moves that don't involve the dice, for example the End of Session just lists things for you to do.

Only the players roll for their characters. Instead of rolling the GM describes a situation, asks the players "what do you do?" and reacts. If a move is triggered, the GM applies the move's effect in the fiction. If an NPC would require a roll, the GM either decides what happens based on the fiction and the needs of the drama, or applies an implicit weak hit, making the situation more interesting for the players.

An important point to remember: A weak hit is fundamentally a success, it just has a cost attached to it. This is most relevant with the generic Face Danger move since generally other moves have well defined outcomes that may or may not be what your character wanted.

Most moves don't have strictly defined outcomes for a miss. What this means is that the GM makes your character's situation worse one way or another, using the danger inherent in the situation. A bland failure with no consequences is no good, the situation needs to move forward toward a worse state from the character's perspective. Every move changes the situation.

Moves use certain terms that have special meanings. If a move or its effect says +/-X *forward*, it means that you apply a +/-X modifier to the next roll you make. *Hold* means that you have points that you can spend to purchase certain options or benefits during a situation. You don't need to spend all of your hold immediately. *Advantage* means taking an extra die with the roll and dropping the

lowest die before reading the result. Similarly *disadvantage* means rolling with an extra die, but dropping the highest die after rolling.

STATS

Your player character has six basic stats: *might*, *rigor*, *guile*, *insight*, *will* and *reason*. In addition to these there's one special stat, *blight*. The *lifepaths* you choose during character creation determine your stats. Blight is determined by your witch age, or the lack of it. The full stat range is from -4 to +2, but most stats end up being in the -2 to +1 range.

Each of the six stats is linked to one basic move and one lifepath move. These moves require rolling the dice. All characters have access to all basic and lifepath moves, but whether your character can use lifepath moves with or without a disadvantage depends on your choice of lifepaths.

The higher your blight, the better you're at witchcraft, but a high blight makes you weaker at resisting demonic taint. Contact with the demonic can taint you, increasing your blight among other effects, whether you're using witchcraft voluntarily or facing a demonic threat involuntarily.

GRIT

Grit is a resource pool that you can tap into when you really want your character to succeed. Hero points, basically. You can use grit after a roll to bump the result higher, one grit for one point bonus. Stats aren't often enough to get you to the result you'd really like to get (and this is intentional), so be prepared to rely on your grit to push through.

You get grit by exploring your character. Mechanically this means that you're following the character's *beliefs* toward challenges, and resolving their *traits*. More on these two concepts in a bit.

STRESS

Blightburg doesn't track harm or hit points, instead it tracks how stressed your character is. You gain *stress* when you roll misses, when you're physically injured, when you resist your urges and when witchcraft doesn't go as planned. Stress does determine when you're incapacitated in a fight, but that's not the juicy bit. Stress is also a resource pool for the player sitting on your character's *Devil's seat*. The more stress you have, the easier it is to sway you away from your goals.

BELIEFS

A player character has three beliefs: One related to the overall situation, one to another player character and one to a personal matter. Beliefs are both value statements and goals for the character. Each one is broken down into three parts: a value statement, a long-term goal, and a short-term action.

Here's an example as a full sentence: *I believe greed will destroy our guild, so I must depose the current guildmaster. Next I'll talk to the treasurer to determine whether he's an ally or an enemy.*

Beliefs both help the GM prepare for the players' antics and help the players drive their characters forward. They change rapidly, especially the short-term action. The players should be prepared to rewrite one or two every session. When a player drives the game forward with their beliefs, they gain grit points at the end of the session.

TRAITS

Where beliefs represent your character's values and goals, traits represent what your character is like, behaviourally. Is your character kind or cruel? Zealous or perhaps deceitful? You'll find out in play.

Your character has two kinds of traits: the traits that you're currently exploring, and *deep traits* that you've resolved. You're always exploring a pair of opposing traits, trying to find out which one of them is stronger for your character. A trait meter on the character sheet keeps track of this.

However, you're not the one that tests them. It's the other players using *compels* (more on those in a bit). Once you've resolved your trait pair, the stronger one becomes a deep trait, you gain a few grit points and you get to come up with the next pair to explore.

COMPELS

Compel is one of the game's moves, but it's a special kind of move. It's triggered by the players and there are no stats involved. Traits, compels and the Devil's seat intertwine with grit and stress to form one of the major ways to explore who the player characters are.

Essentially a compel is a question: "since your character has this trait, would they do this despite their better judgement?" where the compelling player decides which trait to compel and what the ill-considered action is. The compelled player then makes a judgement call about their character and either acts according to the compel or rejects it. A mark is then added either for the trait if the compel was accepted, or for its opposing partner if it wasn't. If a deep trait was compelled and accepted, the player gains grit instead.

A player wants their character to be compelled, since that's the road towards a deeper understanding of the character, interesting situations and more grit points. On the other hand the compelling player is rewarded with the compelled character's Devil's seat.

THE DEVIL'S SEAT

Each player character has a Devil's seat where a player (not a character) may sit. The seat is metaphorical, not an actual chair in the fiction. Whenever a player sits on a character's seat, misfortune looms

over the character. Usually only one player can sit on someone's seat, but if a character is overly stressed, all other players automatically sit on the character's seat. A player can't sit on their own character's seat, but each player can sit on multiple seats at the same time.

Coming back to compels, if a compel is accepted, the compelling player takes the compelled character's Devil's seat (and deposes the previous seat holder, if any) and gains its powers. A player sitting on another character's Devil's seat can use the character's stress pool to coerce them to act in ill-considered ways as well as hinder their roll results.

The Devil's seat can only be used when the seat holder's own character isn't in the scene. Thus compels and the Devil's seat are the two tools the audience has to influence the unfolding events. You'll find examples of their use in the Moves chapter, and more advice in the Playing the Game chapter.

WITCHCRAFT

Witchcraft is technically an optional part of the game; you can easily play the game with no witch characters. The function of witchcraft is to empower characters that don't otherwise have strong ways to influence the situation. For example, commoner characters probably lack any political platform from the get go, while powerful characters may lose their leverages during the game. Luckily dark powers are always ready to help ambitious individuals.

There's a whole chapter on witchcraft, but these are the basic concepts: All witches can cast spells. Casting a spell always has consequences. All witches can also summon demons and make pacts with them. Consider this when the spells aren't enough.

Any contact with demonic powers triggers the Resist Blight move. It's a move that first makes you more powerful, but eventually destroys you if you keep using witchcraft. *Witch marks* are the

permanent consequences of failing to resist blight. They are physical marks on your body that e.g. the Inquisition looks for.

MONEY & ITEMS

Blightburg doesn't have an a equipment list nor does it have a stat for wealth. These aspects of the game aren't mechanized, so we're left with the fiction. When a character wants to buy a horse, you make a judgment call about the character, their background and the situation. A beggar can't just buy a horse, for a magistrate it's nothing, while for an artist it largely depends on their employment status and how they've been spending their money recently.

This illustrates an important point of the game: Stay true to the fiction. Make honest judgements, play the characters honestly and think of the consequences honestly. Let the situation evolve organically, handwave the nitpicky details that don't contribute to the drama, but respect the fiction and keep it coherent.

In addition to the fiction itself, you have a few tools to help you in these judgements calls. The most important one is the character background in the form of lifepaths. If your character has the Poison move, you'll likely also have access to poison. Your status is another big indicator; if you're high class, you probably know someone who could be willing to lend you money. The factions are another aspect to consider. A mercenary company has ready access to weapons, but the Weavers' Guild doesn't.

PLAYER AGENDA

The game is built on certain assumptions and failure to fulfill these assumptions will lead to an unsatisfying experience. This is what you should do when you're a character player and not the GM:

- Play your character as a real human being, albeit determined and tough.
- Never compromise the integrity of your character.
- Don't preplan who your character is deep down inside, let it emerge from the situations in play.
- Drive hard towards your beliefs, but relent if something turns out to be more important for your character.
- Compel the other characters' traits to learn what their true nature is.

Since the game is all about exploring your character, you need to play them as if they were a real person. There's no meaning in your choices if the character isn't coherent. Don't let this come in the way of interesting play, though. You don't want to protect your character from every risk. You're playing a determined character who's willing to take risks to reach their goals.

There's a certain tension between playing your character truthfully and selecting interesting move options. You should try to do both if possible, but as long as you avoid contradicting your character's core values, you're doing it right. It's also okay to first pick an interesting move option and then justifying the choice for your character after the fact, as long as you actually can justify it.

You can have some ideas where your character might be going, but always make the final decision when you're in the scene, under pressure, and someone demands you to make a choice. It's a special kind of satisfaction to really get your character after playing for a few

sessions, for it all to click, when you can say "ah, now I understand why this character is the way they are".

While you should drive hard with your beliefs, remember that your character can change their mind. Perhaps it's just not worth it to sacrifice your family for power, maybe you need to find a different way. When you come to a point where the cost is too high, relent and let your character change.

Be curious about the other player characters. Wonder whether they really are, for example, proud enough to decline an offer for help and then test them by compelling them in the right moment. Stay aware of the other characters' traits and use them.

And finally, remember that your job is to be your character's advocate, driving them towards their goals and the troubles that await them there. You shouldn't try to directly sabotage your own chances of success to get more drama. The other players and the GM are there to get you into all sorts of trouble, so if you don't fight for yourself, no one will.

SETTING: A CITY OF LIES

What follows is historical fact, told from a biased perspective. Take it as setting inspiration, not as a straitjacket for the game. Drama should always come before historical accuracy.

Everything went to hell in the 14th century. The plague killed millions, never caring about people's wealth or influence. The surviving half of the population gained a remarkable position in a hungry world full of vacant fields and empty markets. Weavers, bakers, butchers and other workers began to rebel against guilds and government all over Europe. Violence and unrest drove people from farms into towns further reducing the supply of food. Towns began to fortify themselves and trade plummeted. Those were dark times. I pray for the Black Death to never return here.

Nothing lasts forever, though, and in time towns began to grow wealthy again. We weren't an exception. New ideas emerged in the early 1400s, ones that would've been shunned in earlier times by the Church and its narrow pedantry. Humanism, arts, music and science. First in Florence, the ideas then spread to Siena and Lucca and later to Venice, the heart of eastern trade routes. The whole of the peninsula was in upheaval. A new kind of appreciation for education and arts paved the way for the world we now have.

Recent mechanical innovations have created a variety of new machines including the printing press which has allowed a lot wider spread of information. New techniques in metallurgy have improved the production of iron tremendously. Cannons and arquebuses blast in the battlefields while noblemen joust in ever more impressive plate armors. And it's all thanks to the vibrant cities and towns.

Nowadays no one underestimates the importance of cities. Their merchants form vast networks of trade and commerce.

Their cathedrals and universities are the homes of the clergy and scholars while the noble govern and plot in their courts. Artists and craftsmen, dyers and candlemakers all work in the cities in close association with their guilds. Whether one is a privileged citizen or an untrustworthy foreigner from the countryside, towns offer the chance to become something more than just a common peasant.

Life in the city isn't easy, though. Grain comes from the countryside, everyone knows that, but that's also where new residents come from. Disease and high child mortality make sure that urban birth rates aren't enough to keep the markets busy. Beggars comprise a tenth of the population while most others live in filthy residences where neighbours hear every quarrel and conversation through the walls and over narrow streets.

A married urban couple might expect to live together for some fifteen years before one of them dies. Unless it's an unhappy marriage in which case it's just easier to live under different roofs. That's just common sense as the Church makes divorce very difficult for commoners.

Life isn't easy, but it's not equal either. To use just one example, it's not that uncommon for wealthy families to "discover" that their unwanted marriage is actually forbidden due to distant family ties or other convenient reasons. Some wealthy families have also "discovered" rather impressive genealogies to improve their prospects in a society where marriage is also often a way to seal an economic or political arrangement.

Despite its diseases, rampant crime and the ever-looming risk of fire, the city is the place to be for people of influence. People like us.

If you want influence and power, you must first understand the power structures you're dealing with. The structures of a city-state. On the one hand we don't bow to faraway kings or suffer from their wars. On the other hand we don't have anyone else to help us. What we

do have is a complex mess of power players both ecclesiastical and secular, and the freedom to make our own mistakes.

We have the freedom to select our own rulers and decide our own forms of government. One might think this leads to a well managed community, but that's rarely the case as ambition rules over common good. Governance varies widely in different cities and each has their own drawbacks. Some city-states have popular assemblies led by appointed counselors. This idea seems to work in smaller towns, but as the town and its governing grows more demanding, it's increasingly hard to settle disputes between factions.

Popular assemblies might then appoint an executive, a podestà, to oversee the city. This chief magistrate might handle legislature, act as a high judge and even command the military. Or they might only chairman the council. Even though they have a lot of power, they are theoretically chosen by the people and their terms are often just six to twelve months. Cities try to guarantee their podestà's impartiality by selecting them from neighbouring towns, but they're still well-connected social elites with their own agendas. This is what we currently have, a podestà with their small council.

I'm not sure how long that'll last though, since the common people, which is to say the wealthy merchants and guildmasters, can grow dissatisfied with a single leader, and as we've seen elsewhere, they might form another form of government, the popolo. The popolo, lead by a captain, is supposed to protect the interests of the people against the whims of the nobility. It can supplement the city council or podestà, but it further complicates the network of power in a city.

Nowadays many cities have fallen under the control of a single ruler, a signore, or a group of lords, the signoria. Some signores were chosen by the people to end a problematic situation, some managed to gain more power than was expected as captains or podestàs while others took control after a violent revolt. Once they solidify their

position and start to work on their new dynasty, these despots are a lot harder to overthrow than mere podestàs.

Regardless of the form of government, the day to day administration is handled by the general council. It passes the legislation while the city's own law courts handle the actual trials. Councilors are usually chosen by lot from a pool of eligible people, divided by districts. While the process is nominally random, certain notable families seem to be a lot luckier than others.

A councilor's life is far from carefree, make no mistake. While they have plenty of opportunities to favor friends, seek alliances through marriage and hire family members to high positions, they also need to host and entertain visiting dignitaries and maintain an expensive staff. They're also personally responsible for any financial irregularities and mismanagement.

A bishop's or noble's court might further complicate the web of influence, as our lovely bishop regularly demonstrates. While they bring money and employment, they also interfere with the city's administration and finances. Even worse, they aren't generally subject to the local courts.

Parties and associations are another source of tension in city politics. Usually they follow guild or family lines, but their loyalty might even extend to the clergy. Different parties support different factions in a complex struggle for power. They show their more or less secret allegiances by symbols, the style and color of their clothing and even how they drink their wine. When one party gains dominance, the losing side is exiled from the city, only to plot their eventual return.

What of guilds, then? To simplify, a city gathers raw materials from the countryside, processes them into finished goods and sells them to various customers. The guilds seek to gain absolute control over this flow in their respective industries. They are monopolists that

can make or break their smaller partners. They form exclusive deals with producers in the hinterlands, control the demand for goods, set the standard of scales and dominate the market place.

Most cities have dozens of guilds: textile manufacturers and merchants, spice specialists and goldsmiths, lawyers and doctors, butchers and brewers, wheelwrights and needlemakers. The list goes on, each with their own monopoly. A lone craftsman doesn't stand a chance against these organizations.

And where there's money, there's power. Guilds take part in the local politics in various ways. The bigger guilds might lend money to the city council and expect an interest of favours in return. They protect their members from extortion and violence and demand satisfaction from landholders that are unable to protect them. They impose trade embargoes on those who refuse to play by their rules. Guilds are also often the source of bloody uprisings, dissolving councils and detaining rulers if the governance is too harsh. Be careful with guilds, they're not just communities of craftsmen and merchants.

Banks are a closely related concept of the modern day. The Church prohibits usury, which has given rise to the masses of Jewish moneylenders, but there are ways to circumvent this problem. Some banks charge high fees for failing to make timely payments while others label the interest as a gift from the borrower to the lender. While most credit is handled within people's own social networks, banks have plenty of clients ranging from nobles to institutions. And as with guilds, banks are often power players in a city.

In many ways the Church and its offshoots are even worse than the nobility or guilds. We need the Church, for who wouldn't fear for their soul in an environment such as ours? The Church has immense social presence, but it's also a key political and economic player in a city. The clergy guards their privileges jealously, which

hardly pleases the secular rulers. Priests, monks and scholars compete for prestige in parish churches, monasteries and universities, each with their own political and economic interests. All the same, they form a key part of daily urban life.

Here, as in other cathedral cities, roughly six percent of the population, the clergy, is immune from secular prosecution, taxes and tolls. Some of them are subject to the bishop, others to their own orders and all to the Pope in Rome. It wouldn't be such a mess if they didn't take part in secular politics, but given how parishioners donate land to the Church in a steady stream, the Church's expansion causes ever more tension with the city administration.

It goes both ways, though. Formally a city's bishop is elected by a chapter of monks, but in practice, powerful families draft lists of nominees for the chapter to consider. Unsurprisingly the list of nominees contains people from these families. Refusal to work with the list might even elicit a violent response.

The Church isn't without operative tools either. The Inquisition with its power to arrest, imprison, interrogate and send heretics to execution is not an organization to neglect. The Inquisition's usual method is effective. When it seizes a heretic's property, a portion of the wealth is given to the informant as a just reward. This incentive spurs locals to action, and the accusations are rarely thought to be false. Once the Inquisition suspects someone, it has a wide set of tools to coerce statements out of the accused.

Even the use of torture is allowed, but a person can only be tortured once and the confessions made under torture are not valid evidence. The confession needs to be ratified a day after the ordeal. It's not quite this simple, though, since it's possible to "suspend" a session of torture and resume it at a later time. The Inquisition isn't responsible for executing heretics, instead the accused is given over to a secular court once the case has been considered by a separate trial of judges.

Our Catholic faith isn't the only one the citizens devote themselves to. Many a city offers Jews a safe haven, often protected by a major landholder or other supporter in exchange for generous loans. The Jews form their own insular society within the city, rarely mixing with Christians. This separation breeds wild rumors of murder, ritual sacrifice of children, intentional spread of disease and poisoning of wells. Many of these accusations have led to mass arrests, false confessions and executions when the clergy bows to popular pressure.

The protestant movement is another, even less tolerated faith. The Pope didn't take kindly to Luther nailing his theses on the church door in Wittenberg, detailing misconduct, abuse and criticizing the selling of indulgences. Sure, to name a common gripe, the clergy is supposed to be celibate, but young men do what you'd expect them to. Their improprieties go unpunished as long as their superiors are as tarnished from their own adventures. Still, I wouldn't recommend opposing the Church in this way unless you fancy excommunication.

As we're still discussing the political power of the Church, we can't leave the university unmentioned. Because of our local institute of higher learning, we have yet another set of people with their own privileges. Most students are minor members of the clergy and in addition to this, when they're within a day's travel of the university, they're only subject to its own justice.

Perhaps it's this layer of protection that has given students a well-earned reputation for fighting, burglary and mayhem. The city has to do a balancing act with the university, as it's a valuable part of the city. Punishing the students too harshly might result in strikes or even the university community leaving the city. On the other hand if the students aren't restricted at all, who knows what they'll decide to do next with their communal power.

Where there are people, there's also crime. Cities are full of thieves, burglars and other brutes. Nearly half of all sentences are for violent

crimes, brawls and dire insults. Vendettas can turn a simple fight between two street gangs into a cycle of revenge, eventually escalating into a full riot.

Sure, we try to restrict crime with curfews and fines, but that merely stops the common people from walking in the night. It does very little to dissuade students, sons of merchants and real criminals from gathering after dark. We do regulate weapons, yes, and only people of status are allowed to carry anything bigger than a knife, but again the real criminals don't exactly care. Vandalism, robbery and housebreaking are facts of urban life.

Most cities, including us, hire a captain who then hires the watchmen. Their term is kept short enough not to pose a threat, often just six months or until the end of a podestá's own term. The watchmen wander the dark streets with torches or lanterns looking for wrongdoers, but it's just as efficient as you might imagine. Nevertheless, the captain of the guard is a person you want on your side.

On the other side of the system we have judges. Some cities try to prevent favoritism and political struggles by hiring judges from neighbouring towns, but even these judges can be bribed. As sworn testimonies are common, it's not always necessary to find a corrupt judge either. However, some of our judges allow trials by combat, or formal judicial duels, which require a different approach if you want to ensure a favorable outcome.

For some reason even the harsh punishments we have aren't enough to prevent crime. The city doesn't want to feed criminals, so imprisonment isn't a common form of punishment. Instead a criminal can expect fines, torture, banishment or execution in either a painless or painful manner. My advice is, if you need to do something shady, don't get caught. And if you're good with a sword, consider resolving your dispute in a duel like a gentleman.

Criminal organizations do exist as well, though they are rare. The largest have been nearly 500 members with specialists in various criminal activities, including forging and lock picking. They ransom people, sell false jewellery and of course pick pockets. The rumor has it that some syndicates even have their own kings, jargons and secret safe houses. As useful as these kinds of organizations can be for people of power, they aren't reliable.

Mercenary companies are another faction of martial power often seen in the city-states. Whether the city's government hires the captain and his company for defense or offense, they can easily become troublesome if they end up staying too long in their tents outside the city walls. The company might grow bored and start inventing their own entertainment, the captain might take part in the local politics or the local rulers might decide to use these convenient foreigners to suppress domestic enemies. Assassinations are not unheard of, after all.

Live by the sword, die by the sword they say. That may well be, and you'd do well to first consider social schemes to further your goals, but never forget there might be a more permanent solution to your problem. Your enemies certainly won't.

STARTING A CAMPAIGN

HOMEWORK FOR THE GM

You'll want to read the whole book and pay special attention to the situation creation procedure and how characters are built. Print a few copies of the situation creation reference, character creation reference and character sheets for all the players.

While you're at it, you should also print a few move references and a Devil's seat play aid for each player, though you won't need these until actual play begins. You can find these references on the game's website: `www.frozendepths.net/blightburg`. Bring pencils and a few sheets of blank paper to the first session along with the references.

Discuss the intended length of the campaign with your group before the session, or before situation creation at the latest. A short campaign needs a tight situation while a longer one can handle a bit looser starting point. The players will also want to pace their play so that e.g. witch characters don't take insane risks or get over-blighted during the first half of the game.

Starting the campaign happens together with your group during the situation & character creation session. You'll need to know the situation and the characters to prepare for actual play, which starts next time.

THE CITY BASELINE

A Blightburg campaign takes place in a fictive Renaissance era Italian city-state in the middle of a web of conflict. There's a procedure to create this web, but let's first solidify the default facts that the setting chapter hinted at. You don't have to go by these defaults

if you have opinions what the city should be like, but they form a good fallback.

For most purposes you can think of the city as an alternate Florence, though you should pick a different name for the city. Here are a few names to consider: Novagia, Avenio, Saletici, Bicena, Luscia or perhaps Gicenza. Pick a name before the planning starts.

The city-state resides in central Italy, inland. The year is around mid 1500s, but it's not necessary to pick a specific year unless you have a good reason for it. The city has a relatively long history and a few neighbouring city-states, most of which it has fought with one time or another. The game focuses on the city's internal politics, so we won't need a detailed view of the surrounding states. It's peace time now, though somewhat uneasy.

The region's economy is doing quite well overall, but not all places have benefited from this. The city has a university, teaching primarily theology, law and medicine, as well as a cathedral. A river runs through the city and it has a population of about 35 000 souls. Definitely big, but there are bigger cities around.

There's some forest nearby, a lot of farmland to support the city and an active volcano near enough to pose a threat. The city is governed by a small council of influential people, lead by a podestà. This chief magistrate chairmanning the city council is supposed to be a foreigner to ensure their neutrality. A few notable noble families live in the city. Criminal activity is common and not under the control of the city watch. The city council hires a mercenary captain, usually for a term of six months, to assemble and manage the city watch.

CREATING THE WEB OF CONFLICT

Okay, let's start building the messy conflict. You'll be chairmanning the process, but you should also take an equal part in the situation

creation with the players. You shouldn't dominate the discussion, nor should you be passive.

Since there's a lot to do during the first session and never too much time, we'll want to follow an efficient process for this. Let's set a target of 120 minutes for creating the web of conflict. You may continue beyond this, and you must if you're not ready in two hours, but having a target should make you more focused. It shouldn't be too hard to beat this target if you stay focused. Each major step has a rough time cap to give you an idea of the steps' lengths. Character creation happens after creating the web of conflict and takes about 90 to 120 minutes for 3-4 players.

Next we have the steps you'll follow to create the situation. Each step is split into two parts, first general advice and then the actual substeps you need to do. The situation creation reference your players are following is a condensed version of the process while this chapter offers a bit more guidance.

A common procedure for many steps is deciding something turn by turn. You'll go around the table one person at a time, choose something and go to the next person until the step is done. You'll be choosing many elements and placing them on the conflict web. This shouldn't be done blindly, instead you should try to maintain a personal vision for the evolving situation. Your vision definitely isn't the only way to interpret the elements, but it makes sure you can see coherence in the situation. When you lose all sense of coherence, stop and ask why the other player made the choice they made.

Some steps have rules for discussion as well. There are two reasons for this. First, it's very easy to start speculating the half formed situation further than is actually useful and thus waste precious time. Second, safe committee decisions are often boring, so we want everyone to make individual, interesting decisions. When you're instructed to "adhere to the discussion rules in this step", it means that you're not allowed to discuss options before a choice is

made. If you feel the need to detail why you made a certain choice, do it, but keep it short.

You shouldn't think of the player characters when you're creating the web of conflict. It might be tempting to think of goals and how the different potential characters might work as player characters, but resist it. You'll have plenty of time to think of player characters after the situation is otherwise finished.

There's an example of a finished web of conflict at the end of this chapter on page 47, take a quick look at it to know roughly what's coming. Ready? Let's go.

STEP 0: BRIEFING (10MIN)

After you've socialized enough at the beginning of the session, start the planning process by briefing the players about the game. The purpose of this step is to ensure everyone is approaching the game with the right expectations.

Instructions

1. Explain the game's premise and objective in your own words
2. Explain the basics of the setting and the baseline for the city
3. Go through the player and GM agendas
4. Hand out the situation creation references
5. Explain that we'll now create the situation together. Mention that some steps limit discussion, and that all steps require you to make individual choices following your own sense of drama.

STEP 1: RECENT PAST (15MIN)

First off we'll make sure life in Blightburg isn't too happy. Something awful happened some months ago, it was this event that ravaged the city and made it the dirty hole it's now. This isn't the main problem anymore, instead its consequences are now ripe for a three sided brawl. It forms the backdrop for the conflict we're building. Keep the exact timeline fluid for now, you can fix it in place when you know more about the situation in step 5.

Since we're setting the unifying backdrop for the conflict web, it's important that everyone finds it interesting. That's why we involve all the players in this step even if it takes a bit more time.

Instructions

1. Highlight 1-3 interesting events from the Tragic Events list below.
2. Go around the table and ask the players to do the same.
3. Discuss and pick the most popular one. If the event offers two factions, pick which one is relevant in your situation.
4. Take a blank sheet of paper, write the event on the very top of it and underline it.

Tragic Events

An unjust war initiated by our **noble houses**, barely won, but killing the wisest leaders and heirs

A plague, killing thousands, allegedly set loose by a terrorizing **witch coven** or a **cult**

A famine, killing thousands, the only food supplies open to townsfolk controlled by **criminal gangs**

A mass migration, assisted by an **ethnic community**, leading to civil unrest

A wild demon, driven off by a **mercenary company** or the **city watch** with unethical tactics

A witch panic, numerous innocents and heretics burned at the stake by the **Church**

Religious or ethnic community cleansing done by the **Inquisition**

A failed people's uprising, suppressed with unnecessarily heavy use of force by the **city council**

An economic collapse, having something to do with a corrupted **bank** or **guild**

A volcanic eruption, ruining people's health, but leading to improved medical research at the **university**, though only for the benefit of the rich

STEP 2: SIDES AND FACTIONS (15MIN)

Next we'll need the four factions that take part in the conflict. Adding more factions is a good way to ensure that there's enough material for a longer campaign, but it's best to add any additional factions after you've first introduced the first four in play.

You'll soon divide a paper into three equal sections. Each of the sections serves as one side of the conflict; there are always three sides in the conflict web. You'll choose the factions next, placing them on different sides so that one side has two factions and the other two have one faction each. Note that you'll already decide which two factions are allied.

We're now entering a series of steps where discussion is strictly limited. Follow your sense of drama and make your choices so that there's at least some way you could form a coherent whole of the mess. Trust the other players to do the same. Ask for clarification only if you're totally stumped.

Instructions

1. Adhere to the discussion rules in this step.
2. Divide the blank area of the paper into three equal sections.
3. Handpick the bolded faction related to the tragic event and place it on the conflict web.
4. Starting from the player sitting left from the GM, each person picks either a faction or a descriptor for a faction, following their own sense of drama.
   - » If you picked a faction, place it on one of the sides. One of the sides will end up with two factions while the other two sides end up with one.
   - » If you picked a descriptor, add it to an existing faction that doesn't have a descriptor yet.
5. Continue until there are four descriptor-faction pairs on the conflict web.

Factions

• A Cult	• A Noble House
• A Witch Coven	• A Criminal Gang
• The City Watch	• The Church
• A Mercenary Company	• An Ethnic Community
• A Merchant/Craft Guild	• A Religious Community
• A Bank	• The City Council
• The Inquisition	• The University

Descriptors

• Wronged	• Unlucky	• Ruined
• Desperate	• Oppressed	• Dominant
• Envious	• Indebted	• Vengeful
• Misguided	• Zealous	• Influential
• Sinful	• Two-faced	• Murderous
• Intolerant	• Populistic	• Self-righteous

STEP 3: THE ALLIANCE (5MIN)

The factions that were placed on the same side share an alliance. Now it's time to choose what the alliance is like. There's only one alliance, the factions that don't have an ally on their side don't get one.

Instructions

1. Adhere to the discussion rules in this step.
2. Continue from the next person. That person chooses a relationship for the allied pair of factions
   - » Draw a labeled arrow between the factions for the relationship, indicating which faction initiated the alliance.

Alliances

• Has hired	• Shares ideology with
• Bribes	• Shares goals with
• Blackmails	• Is bound by the leaders' witchcraft to
• Manipulates	• Is bound by the leaders' friendship to
• Trades favors with	• Is paying off its leader's personal debt to
• Shares ethnicity with	• Shares religious beliefs with

STEP 4: FACTION GOALS (10MIN)

Now we'll get to the meat of the conflict, goals. Each faction has one primary goal and it's always directed at a faction on another side. Even though there can be members both for and against the faction goal, this is the goal the leaders of the faction drive toward.

Instructions

1. Adhere to the discussion rules in this step.
2. Continue from the next person. That person picks a faction that doesn't have a goal, chooses their goal and points it at another faction.
   - » You can't point more than two goals at one faction.
   - » Allied factions don't need to point their goals at the same target.
3. Keep going until all factions have a goal.

Goals

• Exact revenge on	• Sabotage an endeavour of
• Gain dominance over	• Take something valuable from
• Collect a debt from	• Enforce a deal struck with
• Utterly destroy	• Manipulate to change the course of
• Purify the deviants of	• Reveal the misconduct of

STEP 5: SITUATION DETAILS (30MIN)

Now we have the raw framework for the situation, but it's missing detail. From this point on you can't rely on blind lists, you'll need to do some creative thinking and connect the dots with your group. This step fleshes the mandatory details of the situation out.

The conflict web may look overwhelming at this point. There's a lot going on and not much of it's set in stone yet. Trust yourself, your group and the process. Start making binding decisions one by one, keep the big picture coherent and the situation will fall into place. If you need an anchor to make sense of the mess, remind yourself of the tragic past and start untangling the situation from there. Though honestly, any starting point works if you stick with it.

If everything seems to fit together really well except for a small detail somewhere, consider changing it. I wouldn't recommend changing many things at this point, but you don't have to cling to the details you choose with an iron grip. The goal is to create a tense starting point for play, not to get frustrated by this puzzle.

When you're going through the factions' goals, I instruct you to check that the situation doesn't resolve itself too trivially. This means you should take a faction level view of the situation and make sure that no faction is simply crushing another. Don't worry about the details in this regard, those will change rapidly during play anyway.

Next up is a series of questions. Continuing from the next person, they'll ask the following person the current question about a specific faction or connection. You can now talk about the answers to the questions and what they mean in the larger context, but keep it focused. If you feel that earlier discussion has already answered a question, skip it and move on to the next question.

Instructions

1. Continue from the next person. That person picks a faction and asks the first faction question from the next person.
2. Once they've answered the question, they pick the next faction and ask the current question from the next person.
   » Feel free to add notes on the conflict web along the way
3. When the current question has been answered for all factions, move on to the next question. Keep going until all the faction questions have been answered for all factions.
4. Then go through all the connections (the goals and the alliance) and ask the corresponding question as you did with faction questions.
   » When going through the goals, make sure the whole situation can't resolve itself trivially. There's a reason why this is the starting point of play. If the conflicts are trivial, they should've already been resolved.

Faction Questions

- Why/how is the faction <its descriptor>?
  » For example, how is the noble house unlucky?
- How large is the faction?
  » An adjective is enough at this point, no need for numbers.
- Was this faction involved in the tragic event in any way? How?
- How has the tragic event affected this faction's current goal?

Goal Question

- Why does the faction want to achieve this goal?

Alliance Question

- Why do the allied factions need this alliance?

STEP 6: OPTIONAL DETAILS (15MIN)

Next up we have details that are not absolutely required at this point, but they make the situation more vivid and concrete. If you're way overtime, skip this step and let the GM decide these while preparing for the second session.

Instructions

1. Decide whether you have time to answer the optional questions and skip this step if you don't.
2. Stop taking turns now. Go through the optional questions one by one, but this time let everyone answer the questions that they find interesting
   » If the group doesn't have a strong opinion on something, leave it to the GM and move on.
3. When no one has anything to add or you've used up your 15 minutes, go to the next step.

Optional Questions

- What do the townspeople call the factions? Name them.
- What makes a faction unique, colorful or interesting?
- What kinds of resources does a faction have access to?
- What characters obviously belong to one of the factions?
- What's the history of a faction like?
- What kinds of informal ties exist between the factions?

STEP 7: FREE DISCUSSION (15MIN)

Your conflict web is now finished and should look something like the example at the end of this chapter. Remember, this is only the starting point. Anything can happen during play, including betrayals, the annihilation of a side or a faction and even new factions entering the fray.

We have some time for free discussion now. The goal of this step is to make sure the group has a shared idea of what's happening and that everything makes sense. You're even allowed to change the situation now if you find that something just doesn't work as it is. Try to keep this to a minimum, though.

Instructions

1. Take a look at the situation you've created. Do you have a shared idea of what's happening? Does the situation make sense? Discuss.
2. Add details if something critical is missing or change details if something doesn't make sense.
3. Move on to the next step when everyone has a clear idea what the situation is about.

STEP 8: PLAYER CHARACTERS (30MIN PER PLAYER)

Now we move on to player characters and their creation. You'll be mostly following the instructions in the next chapter. As the instructions state, no player character shares a faction with another. This makes sure there's tension between the characters. Don't make any exceptions if you have four or less players.

However, if you happen to have more than four players, some characters will share factions. In this case I'd place the least cooperative characters in the same faction, if possible. Also be prepared for the downtime the large group inevitably causes.

Now that the players are thinking about their character concepts, mention that if someone is planning to play a low status character without much influence to back their ambition, they'll end up creating a witch. This is the game making sure all characters have enough influence to affect the situation at play. Check the witch section in character creation for more info on this.

Instructions

1. Each player picks a faction they would like their character to be a part of.
    » All player characters must belong to different factions in the beginning.
2. It's likely that the players have come up with character concepts by this point, but if not, they need ideas now.
    » If you need ideas, skim through the lifepath list in the character creation reference and pick a lifepath that you fancy. This is your last lifepath, i.e. the target lifepath for character creation.

3. The players should take their character creation references while the GM follows the instructions in the character creation chapter.
4. Create the characters.
    » The GM facilitates character creation, asks provocative questions and makes sure they're tough and determined enough for this mess.

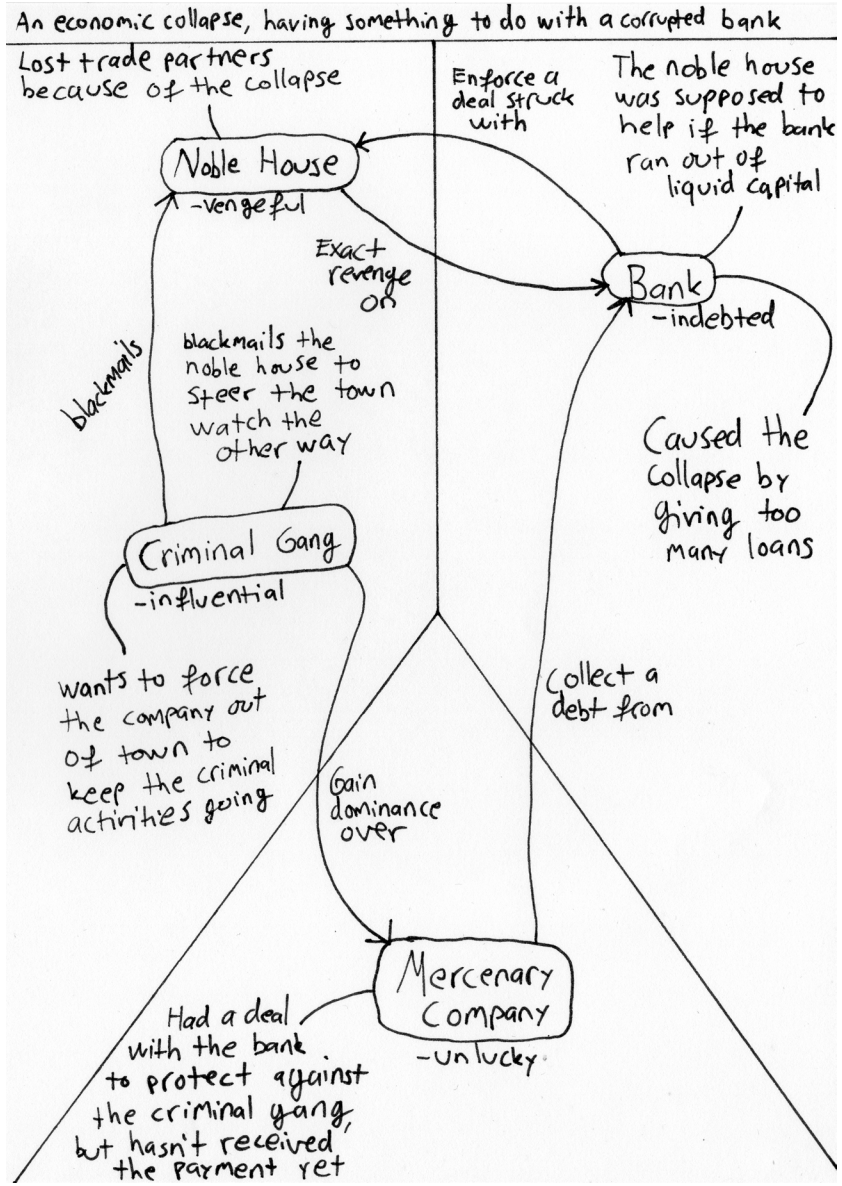
WRAPPING UP THE FIRST SESSION

If you have extra time after character creation, you can wrap up the starting session by detailing the starting situation further until the GM knows roughly what the first scene for each of the player characters could be. This isn't mandatory, though. The GM shouldn't have any problems deciding the first scenes by themselves.

Then before the second session the GM prepares a cast of NPCs and bangs as per the session preparation instructions. During the second session the GM is the one who kicks the situation into motion, following the advice for the second session.

After a session or two of play the players should have enough context to start driving the game with their beliefs, and the GM becomes the reactive counterpart.

EXAMPLE CONFLICT WEB



CHARACTER CREATION

STEP-BY-STEP

Before entering character creation you should have created the starting situation for the campaign as a group using the procedure found in the previous chapter. Based on that the players should have a rough character concept and an idea of the target lifepath to work towards.

You should hand out character sheets and character creation references at this point. Similar to the situation creation, the reference sheet only includes the steps to create a character, while this chapter gives you more guidance in each step. Let the players follow the steps to create their characters, answer their questions and guide them based on your additional info.

1. AGE & LIFEPATHS

The first decision a player needs to make is their character's approximate age. Sometimes a character could easily fall into one of two age categories. In this case it's best to let the player decide based on how they want to play: Older characters have better stats, but have fewer grit points to rely on while younger characters' larger grit pools allow more flexibility to decide when to shine.

Lifepaths are chosen from truncated lists to both speed up decision making and to keep the focus on fictional details, not on mechanical ones. Not all characters will have equal mechanical stats, but that's not a problem for a drama game such as this. You don't win the game by rolling high. A fictionally interesting character is more important than stats.

A character's first lifepath is a childhood lifepath, but other than that there are no restrictions. The important thing is to consider what makes sense and how far-fetched character concepts your group wants to tolerate.

Instructions

The number of lifepaths you pick depends on your character's age, so first you need to decide an approximate age based on the rough concept you have. Here's how character age correlates with the number of lifepaths:

Age & Lifepaths

Age	Lifepaths
10-14 years old	2 lifepaths
15-19 years old	3 lifepaths
20-29 years old	4 lifepaths
30-44 years old	5 lifepaths
45+ years old	6 lifepaths

Each lifepath increases the character's stats and may teach them certain lifepath moves. Don't worry about optimizing your character's stats, instead be honest with your character and their past to create a coherent and interesting person. All characters regardless of their mechanical power receive the same amount of screen time and tough choices, so optimization isn't useful.

Use the lifepath lists below to make sure you won't get distracted by mechanical details. If a lifepath is unclear to you based on name alone, ask the GM for more details. Keep the target lifepath in mind, pick one childhood lifepath and then continue jumping from one lifepath to another. Decide why the character ended up where they did at every junction. Keep going until you reach the target lifepath and the number of lifepaths you need.

When you're ready, present your character's lifepaths to the GM and briefly describe how your character moved from one lifepath to another. If you can't come up with a reasonable explanation for a lifepath jump, go back to the drawing board.

Lifepath Lists

Childhood	Commoner	Privileged
Outcast, unhappy[1]	Beggar	Student
Outcast, happy	Urchin	Professor[5]
Laborer, unhappy[2]	Drunk	Astronomer
Laborer, happy	Ratcatcher	Philosopher
Middle Class, unhappy[3]	Wench	Dean[6]
Middle Class, happy	Alewife/Barkeep	Chancellor[7]
Privileged, unhappy[4]	Prostitute	Council Member[8]
Privileged, happy	Fortune Teller	City Treasurer
	Cook	Chief Magistrate[9]
	Servant	Lawyer
	Butler	Judge
	Peddler	Merchant
	Vendor	Merchant Prince
	Apothecary	Guild Director
	Moneylender	Banker
	Negotiator	Squire
	Accountant	Lady-in-Waiting
	Scribe	Knight
	Taxman	Courtier
	Artist	Lord
	Musician	Lady
	Apprentice	
	Journeyman	
	Master Craftsman	

Criminal	Religious	Martial
Smuggler	Acolyte	Watchman
Burglar	Monk/Nun	Thief-taker
Kidnapper	Abbot/Abbess	Executioner
Pickpocket	Cantor	Jailer
Thug	Preacher	Bodyguard
Blackmailer	Priest	Pikeman
Assassin	Cardinal	Scout
Con Artist	Bishop	Arquebusier
Spy	Nurse	Longbowman
Gang Leader	Doctor	Drummer
Syndicate Advisor	Inquisitor's Squire	Cavalryman
Syndicate Lieutenant	Interrogator	Staff Sergeant
Syndicate Boss	Inquisitor	Field Sergeant
	Head Inquisitor	Captain

1) Outcast parents could be criminals or unemployed.
2) Laborer parents do unskilled work.
3) Middle class parents could be shopkeepers, artisans or artists.
4) Privileged parents could be nobles, politicians or merchants.
5) Usually a professor of law, theology or medicine.
6) The administerial head of a university faculty.
7) The head of the university.
8) A member of the city council.
9) The chairperson of the city council.

2. STATS AND LIFEPATH MOVES

The players need to check the full lifepath lists from the book in this step. It might be easier for you to check the stats for them when they ask for the details unless the players get to this step one by one.

You may need to explain how grit works at this point if the players are worried about their low stats. If you do, explain that a stat of +0 is actually a good stat even though it might not look like it yet.

You may also need to briefly describe the basic moves to the players if they're wondering how to allocate their any-type stat raises.

Instructions

Next you need to determine your character's stats. All stats start at -3, and the strict upper cap is +2. There's no lower limit. If a stat ever goes above +2, it defaults back to +2. You gain 2 grit points per overflowing stat point during character creation, so keep a note of these for step 3. Ignore the blight stat in this step, you'll get back to it soon.

For each lifepath you chose, check the full lifepath list (or ask the GM to check) for its details and mark the stat raises or drops next to each stat on your character sheet. Keep track of any-type stats raises and drops separately. Add any lifepath moves gained by underlining the move name on the character sheet.

Sum the fixed stat raises and drops from your lifepaths to each individual stat. Then allocate your any-type raises and drops as you see fit.

Some of the stats of young and old characters are capped lower than the default +2. If you go over the limits, drop the stat down to its cap and gain 2 grit points per overflow.

Lifepath Stat Caps

Number of Lifepaths	Stat caps
2 lifepaths	All stats capped to +0
3 lifepaths	All stats capped to +1
4 lifepaths	No penalties
5 lifepaths	Might capped to +1
6 lifepaths	Might capped to +0

You can expect to end up with multiple negative stats, especially if you don't have 5 or 6 lifepaths. Don't worry about this, you'll have grit points to help you when your stats alone aren't enough.

3. STARTING GRIT

Tell the players that grit isn't a scarce resource, they'll gain a lot more during play. Also tell them what grit actually does during play.

Instructions

Set your starting grit points according to the number of lifepaths you took.

Starting Grit Points

Number of Lifepaths	Starting Grit Points
2 lifepaths	10 grit points
3 lifepaths	6 grit points
4 lifepaths	3 grit points
5 lifepaths	1 grit point
6 lifepaths	0 grit points

Note that the number of lifepaths you chose also affects how much grit you gain at the end of the session.

4. WITCHCRAFT & BLIGHT

Having multiple witches changes the tone of the game somewhat, so consider whether you'd like to restrict the number of witches at character creation. Discuss with your group if multiple players consider witch characters.

Remind the players that it's also possible to become a witch during the game, though only a contract witch is an option then. Cradle witches should be created during character creation. The game works fine without any witches as long as all characters have enough influence to take part in the intrigue.

When a player that doesn't want to play a witch explains where their influence comes from, ask yourself whether the character has enough of it to be a protagonist in the starting point you built. If you see a significant risk that they'll get brushed aside by the powerful people involved, you should flip the witch switch. This is only to make sure that the character stays relevant in play.

If a player decides to play a witch, be prepared to refer to the Witchcraft chapter and explain the basics of blight, witch marks and spells.

The starting number of spells is blight+3, so anything from 1 spell (-2 blight) to 5 spells (+2 blight) is possible.

Instructions

Decide whether your character is a witch or not.

If you don't wish to play a witch

Explain to the GM how your character has the influence to back their ambition without help from the demonic. Examples of valid answers include noble social status, ecclesiastical influence, wealth, military might, or an exotic political platform such as a criminal syndicate at your command. The backing of an institute is usually enough as well.

If the GM feels that your character is likely to get sidelined, your character is a witch whether the character knows it or not. We don't want characters that can't reasonably take part in the intrigue.

If you're not a witch, set your blight to -2 and continue to the next step.

If you want to play a witch

Set your blight to any value from -2 to +2, representing your witch age. At -2 blight you've just received your powers or have never touched them, while at +2 blight you're already close to being consumed by the very powers you harness.

If your blight is +0 or more, you start with a minor witch mark. If your blight is +2, you also start with a moderate witch mark. Ask the GM about blight and witch marks. Then specify where and what your marks are.

You also know a number of spells equal to your blight+3. The spells are **Terror**, **Telekinesis**, **Illusion**, **Compulsion**, **Divination** and **Curse**. Ask the GM about spellcasting and pick your spell(s).

Choose whether you're a cradle witch, born to a family with witchblood, or a contract witch, having made a dark bargain with a demonic being to gain your powers. Each has their own strings attached. Either way, you have access to the witchcraft moves detailed in the Witchcraft section of the book.

If you're a cradle witch

You need to detail your family's position in the society and your relationship to your family. The GM needs to create at least one NPC whose goal is to make sure you fulfill your family obligations. Pick or tailor your obligation based on these options:

Cradle Witch Obligations

Goal
You're expected to help with a goal the whole family is invested in. It's likely related to the rest of the situation, and it's likely against your personal interests.

Task
The family has set a personal task for you. You can't expect help from them, but the price of failure is harsh.

Ritual
Every month (or week or day, scales with complexity) you need to perform a ritual with your family. Make sure the ritual time coincides with the campaign timeframe. The ritual might involve e.g. a sacrifice, or letting the family elder molest you, or just dancing naked around a fire. Collaborate with the GM.

Guardian
You need to take care of a young or senile member of your family, and keep them out of trouble.

Fugitive
You've already failed your obligations and now your family is hunting you down.

If you're a contract witch

Choose whether your patron is a creature of death or lust. The GM creates the patron as an NPC with its own goals, powers and means of interacting with the world. Then detail the nature of your relationship with your patron: Exploitative, worshipping, competitive, partners or something else.

You can communicate with your patron easily, either telepathically if the demon isn't present in this world, or face to face if it is. You also have a contract that restricts how you may use your powers. Pick or tailor based on these options:

Contract Witch Obligations

Prepaid
You can't use spells unless you've made an appropriate payment beforehand, but it doesn't matter when you've made the payment. The payment might be a sacrifice or a task set by the patron, for example.

Side effect
Every time you use a spell, you allow your patron to do something else in your vicinity.

Debt
Mark every use of your spells on a list of debts. The patron may come take what's theirs at any moment from there on. They can command you to do something, which you can resist by rolling Face Danger+Will (followed by Resist Blight), though it doesn't count as paying the debt if you resist and succeed. Negotiating about the payment is an option.

Ritual
Every month (or week or day, scales with complexity) you need to perform a ritual of appeasement or you'll face the wrath of your patron. Your spells work as long as your patron is content. Make sure the ritual time coincides with the campaign timeframe. The ritual might involve a sacrifice, or letting the patron possess you, or just dancing naked around a fire. Collaborate with the GM.

Goal
You may use your spells as long as doing so furthers a goal set by your patron.

5. TRAITS

Be prepared to explain the basics of compelling if the players need more context for their trait picks, or if someone asks about it.

You should also explain that the traits don't have to be diametrically opposite to each other. The important thing is to have traits that are interesting and easily compellable.

Instructions

Now you need to choose a pair of behaviour traits for the trait meter. You'll examine these traits' relative strengths in your character's personality during play, so you should pick a pair that's both interesting and doesn't feel trivial to resolve. Don't worry about making the perfect pick, though, you can freely change the traits you currently have on your trait meter if you feel you've made a bad choice.

It's a good idea to pick traits that represent behavior that doesn't come naturally to you. The other players have mechanical tools to remind you to play according to your traits (the Compel move) and challenging yourself this way can be satisfying in itself. Additionally, if you pick very familiar behavior patterns, there's a risk that you don't leave enough room for compels in your play.

The trait pair you choose can be anything you like as long as the traits work well with a protagonist character. However, if this is your first time playing the game, take a look at the examples below. The first list gives you generic trait pairs that work for most characters. The second list has pairs that can be difficult for some characters while they might work very well for others.

Easy Trait Pairs

- Abusive - Kind
- Arrogant - Respectful
- Intimidating - Bombastic
- Cruel - Compassionate
- Manipulative - Naive
- Scheming - Direct
- Helpful - Short-tempered
- Defiant - Obedient
- Dishonest - Honorable
- Vengeful - Violent
- Aggressive - Cold-hearted
- Unreliable - Fanatic
- Passionate - Stubborn
- Daredevil - Petty

Situational Trait Pairs

- Bossy - Submissive
- Careless - Neurotic
- Charitable - Greedy
- Conscientious - Irresponsible
- Selfless - Disloyal
- Genial - Repulsive
- Self-centered - Benevolent
- Vulgar - Chaste
- Immoral - Selfish
- Faithful - Pessimistic
- Malicious - Forgiving
- Nervous - Fearless
- Impulsive - Deliberate
- Protective - Neglectful
- Romantic - Pragmatic
- Audacious - Cynical
- Ambitious - Oppressive
- Zealous - Unjust

6. NAME & APPEARANCE

This part of character creation shouldn't take long. Its primary purpose is to allow the player to visualize their character, and to help them introduce the character in the next step.

Instructions

Describe the appearance of your character in a sentence or two. Decide your exact age, guided by the number of lifepaths you chose as well as your target lifepath. Give your character an Italian name using the lists below as inspiration.

Male names

Alessandro, Alessio, Angelo, Antonio, Battista, Bernardo, Bruno, Carlo, Claudio, Clemente, Cristiano, Daniele, Dante, Dario, Davide, Elia, Enrico, Federico, Felice, Filippo, Francesco, Gaspare, Gastone, Giacobbe, Giorgio, Giovanni, Giuliano, Giuseppe, Gregorio, Leone, Lorenzo, Luca, Marco, Norberto, Ottaviano, Paolo, Pietro, Raffaele, Riccardo, Roberto, Salomone, Salvatore, Samuele, Silvio, Stefano, Valentino, Vitale, Vittore, Vittorio

Female names

Adelaide, Adele, Agnese, Alice, Angela, Arianna, Aurora, Beatrice, Berenice, Berta, Bettina, Carla, Corinna, Elena, Elisa, Eugenia, Federica, Francesca, Gabriella, Geltrude, Gianna, Giovanna, Giuliana, Irene, Isabella, Lavinia, Loredana, Lucia, Lucrezia, Luisa, Maddalena, Maria, Martina, Matilde, Nicoletta, Olivia, Paola, Patrizia, Rachele, Roberta, Sara, Silvia, Simona, Sofia, Stella, Teresa, Venere, Vittoria, Viviana, Zarina

Surnames

Abis, Argiolas, Baldovini, Balducci, Bellone, Bernardino, Bissacco, Boccaccio, Bonatti, Bonazzi, Borriello, Bortoletto, Bortolotti, Brombal, Capone, Cavallaro, Cavinato, Cherisi, Codutti, Comaco, Fanton, Ferrero, Floris, Francescon, Giordanengo, Iannuccillo, Lambertenghi, Lunati, Manganiello, Mangione, Mantone, Martaci, Martinengo, Melis, Meneghin, Moratti, Orsatti, Pascutti, Pastene, Perin, Peron, Pizzati, Rambaudi, Ravellino, Rigonat, Rosi, Rosso, Santi, Terrazzo, Vallone, Varasso, Vazzoler, Verdino, Vernengo, Zanon, Zoccarato

Feel free to add a prefix of "de" or "di" to your surname if you're feeling fancy.

7. BELIEFS & INTRODUCTIONS

This is the hardest part of character creation so be prepared to support the players. First help them understand the basic concept of beliefs. Give the players examples of beliefs and how they change in play. Tell them how beliefs and grit work together.

Next help them come up with actionable beliefs. The value statements don't need to be perfect, instead focus on the goals and immediate action. You need the characters to have an opinion on something so that you can prepare provocative situations for them.

If a player feels paralyzed, encourage them to pick the direction that first comes to mind. Just about any direction that has something to do with the situation works because you as the GM will build on that choice. Since there are numerous valid options, it's more important to pick something than to come up with the perfect belief.

When all the players are in this step, oversee character introductions. Then offer ideas how the characters might know each other. The important thing is that the characters have at least some excuse to interact during gameplay. They'll get to know each other better during play.

Then help them form a web of relationship beliefs by suggesting who they should direct their relationship beliefs at. You don't want to see a situation where players A and B have a two-way relationship and players C and D have their own two-way relationship. This isolates the relationships too much from the other characters.

Writing beliefs gets easier after a session or two when the players both have a better idea of the situation and how their beliefs reward and guide their play.

Instructions

Next you'll write beliefs for your character, and doing so, tie your character to the situation. Beliefs are your guideposts for play and the GM's biggest session preparation support.

A belief has three parts: A value statement, a long-term goal and a short-term action. The three parts are separate on the character sheet, but you can think of them as parts of a phrase: "I believe X, so my long-term goal is Y. Next I'll do Z to further it". Your character has three beliefs:

- **Situation belief**: A belief concerning the shared overall situation
- **Relationship belief**: A belief directed at another player character
- **Personal belief**: A personal value/goal/philosophy based belief

If you're playing a witch, your personal belief needs to be directly or indirectly related to witchcraft or your obligation, unless your situation or relationship beliefs already cover this.

You don't need extremely focused beliefs at this point since it'll probably take a session or two before you've got a good grasp of the situation. Basically the GM needs to be able to see which NPCs to prepare and what your initial scene might be based on your beliefs.

Pick a direction that interests you and aligns with your character's general goals, you can be more specific later. The beliefs you write aren't set in stone, instead they're constantly changing during play. You'll probably end up rewriting at least the short-term action of about two beliefs every session.

Here's a full belief you might see after a session or two: *"I believe my family is worth protecting, so my long-term goal is to become the captain of the city watch. Next I'll publicly show how misguided the current captain is during the witch trial"*.

However, during character creation this is enough: *"I believe I can't support my family well enough in my current position, so my long-term goal is to further my career in the city watch. Next I'll ask the lieutenants their opinion on the current captain"*.

One way to create strong beliefs is to pick a different faction for each belief and trying to tie another player character either directly

or indirectly to the belief's action. While strongly worded beliefs are good, never start with a belief to kill another player character!

You can start writing your first and third beliefs on your own, but you should wait for the other players to get to this step before you start writing the relationship belief.

When all the players are in this step, briefly introduce your characters to each other. When all the characters have been introduced, decide how each character knows the other characters. Some characters might know each other only by reputation, some might have met in the past based on their lifepaths while others might currently work together. Use convenient coincidences if the characters lack any other ties. All player characters need to be aware of each other, however flimsily.

Now that you have a better idea of the other characters, you can start working on your relationship belief as well. Communicate with the other players and create ties between your characters during this step. Make sure the relationship beliefs form a web between the characters.

Once you have written your beliefs, your character is ready for actual play!

LIFEPATHS

CHILDHOOD

The childhood lifepaths are generic combinations of social class and whether the childhood was happy or not. The player is free to determine what, for example, an unhappy privileged childhood meant to the character. Some examples of parents of different backgrounds:

- Outcast parents could be criminals or unemployed
- Laborer parents do unskilled work
- Middle class parents could be shopkeepers, artisans or artists
- Privileged parents could be nobles, politicians or merchants

Name	Stats	Moves
Outcast, unhappy	+1 guile, +1 any, -1 reason	Shadow
Outcast, happy	+1 rigor, +1 any	
Laborer, unhappy	+1 might, +1 any	
Laborer, happy	+1 might, +1 any, +1 any	
Middle Class, unhappy	+1 insight, +1 any, +1 any	
Middle Class, happy	+1 reason, +1 any, +1 any	
Privileged, unhappy	+1 will, +1 any, +1 any	
Privileged, happy	+1 will, +1 any, +1 any, +1 any	

COMMONER

Commoner lifepaths include mostly laborers and middle class occupations. These lifepaths are usually steps toward a more influential position, unless the character is a witch.

Name	Stats	Moves
Beggar	+2 insight, +1 reason, -1 might	
Street Urchin	+2 guile, +1 insight, -1 will	Shadow
Drunk	+1 might, +1 rigor, +1 guile, -1 insight	
Ratcatcher	+1 guile, +1 insight, +1 reason	Poison
Wench	+2 insight, +1 will	
Alewife/Barkeep	+1 will, +1 insight, +1 reason	
Prostitute	+2 will, +1 insight	
Fortune Teller	+2 guile, +1 insight	
Cook	+2 reason	
Servant	+2 insight	
Butler	+1 insight, +1 will, +1 reason	
Peddler	+1 will, +1 insight, +1 guile	
Vendor	+2 will, +1 insight	
Apothecary	+2 reason, +1 insight	Poison
Moneylender	+1 rigor, +1 insight, +1 will	Forge
Negotiator	+1 insight, +1 will, +1 reason	
Accountant	+2 insight, +1 reason	Forge
Scribe	+2 insight, +1 guile	Forge
Taxman	+2 rigor, +1 insight	
Artist	+2 insight, +1 will	
Musician	+1 insight, +1 will, +1 reason	
Apprentice	+2 reason	
Journeyman	+1 insight, +1 will, +1 reason	
Master Craftsman	+1 rigor, +1 insight, +1 will	

PRIVILEGED

Privileged lifepaths include the nobility, influential positions in the society as well as wealthy occupations.

Notes concerning the university lifepaths: A dean is the administerial head of a faculty at the university while a chancellor is the head of the whole university. Professors usually teach either law, theology or medicine.

Notes concerning the city council lifepaths: The council consists of multiple council members. It's lead by the chief magistrate, whose family isn't usually from this city.

Name	Stats	Moves
Student	+1 will, +1 insight, +1 reason	
Professor	+1 will, +1 insight, +1 reason	Orate
Astronomer	+2 reason, +1 guile	
Philosopher	+3 reason	
Dean	+1 will, +1 insight, +1 rigor	
Chancellor	+2 will, +1 insight, +1 reason	Orate
Council Member	+1 will, +1 insight, +1 reason	Orate
City Treasurer	+1 insight, +1 guile, +1 reason	Forge
Chief Magistrate	+1 will, +1 reason, +1 insight, +1 guile	Orate
Lawyer	+1 guile, +1 will, +1 insight, +1 reason	Orate
Judge	+1 guile, +1 will, +1 insight, +1 rigor	Orate
Merchant	+1 guile, +1 will, +1 insight	
Merchant Prince	+2 will, +1 insight, +1 rigor	
Guild Director	+2 will, +1 insight, +1 reason	Orate
Banker	+1 insight, +1 will, +1 guile	

Name	Stats	Moves
Squire	+2 might, +1 insight	
Lady-in-Waiting	+1 insight, +1 reason, +1 will	
Knight	+2 might, +1 will, +1 rigor	Lead into Battle
Courtier	+1 will, +1 insight, +1 reason, +1 guile	
Lord	+1 insight, +1 will, +1 might, +1 rigor	Orate
Lady	+1 will, +1 guile, +1 insight, +1 reason	Orate Poison

CRIMINAL

Criminal lifepaths include both organized crime and lone outcasts.

Name	Stats	Moves
Smuggler	+2 guile, +1 will	Forge
Burglar	+2 guile, +1 might	
Kidnapper	+1 might, +1 rigor, +1 guile	Shadow
Pickpocket	+2 guile, +1 insight	Shadow
Thug	+2 rigor, +1 might	
Blackmailer	+2 rigor, +1 insight	Interrogate
Assassin	+1 insight, +1 guile, +1 reason	Poison
Con Artist	+1 insight, +1 will, +1 guile	Forge
Spy	+2 guile, +1 insight	Shadow Forge
Gang Leader	+1 might, +1 rigor, +1 will	Lead into Battle
Syndicate Advisor	+2 insight, +1 will, +1 reason	Forge
Syndicate Lieutenant	+2 rigor, +1 insight, +1 will	Interrogate
Syndicate Boss	+2 will, +1 rigor, +1 insight	Orate

RELIGIOUS

Religious lifepaths include monastic paths, Church paths and the Inquisition. They can be used for non-Christian characters as well.

Name	Stats	Moves
Acolyte	+2 insight, +1 reason	
Monk/Nun	+2 insight, +1 reason	
Abbot/Abbess	+2 will, +1 insight	Orate
Cantor	+1 insight, +1 reason	
Preacher	+2 will, +1 insight	Orate
Priest	+1 will, +1 insight, +1 reason	Orate
Cardinal	+1 will, +1 insight, +1 guile	Orate
Bishop	+2 will, +1 insight, +1 rigor	Orate
Nurse	+2 insight, +1 reason	
Doctor	+1 insight, +2 reason	Poison
Inquisitor's Squire	+1 might, +1 insight, +1 guile	Shadow
Interrogator	+2 rigor, +1 insight	Interrogate
Inquisitor	+1 will, +1 might, +1 rigor	Interrogate Poison
Head Inquisitor	+1 will, +1 might, +1 insight, +1 rigor	Forge

MARTIAL

Martial lifepaths include both law enforcement and military careers.

Name	Stats	Moves
Watchman	+1 might, +1 insight, +1 rigor	
Thief-taker	+1 might, +1 insight, +1 guile	Shadow
Executioner	+2 might, +1 insight	
Jailer	+2 rigor, +1 insight	Interrogate
Bodyguard	+2 might, +1 insight	
Pikeman	+3 might	
Scout	+1 might, +1 guile, +1 insight	Shadow
Arquebusier	+2 insight, +1 rigor	
Longbowman	+2 might, +1 rigor	
Drummer	+1 rigor, +1 might, +1 insight	
Cavalryman	+2 might, +1 rigor	Lead into Battle
Staff Sergeant	+1 might, +1 insight, +1 rigor	
Field Sergeant	+2 might, +1 rigor	Lead into Battle
Captain	+1 will, +1 might, +1 reason, +1 rigor	Lead into Battle Orate

MOVES

BASIC MOVES

These moves are based on the characters' stats, they're the bread and butter moves that resolve most problems the characters face. All characters have equal access to these.

FACE DANGER

When you take a course of action that involves a real danger, say how you deal with it. If you do it…

- *…with physical strength, agility or speed, roll+Might*
- *…with thoroughness, severity or discipline, roll+Rigor*
- *…using sly, sneaky or deceptive tactics, roll+Guile*
- *…with keen senses or observation, roll+Insight*
- *…through mental fortitude or social grace, roll+Will*
- *…with logic, knowledge or learning, roll+Reason*

On a 14+, the danger doesn't hinder you
On a 9–13, you can't avoid the danger completely, the GM will offer you a worse outcome, a hard bargain or a tough choice.
On a 8–, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

This is the generic move that should be used when you feel the player needs to roll, but none of the other moves seem right. The important thing to consider is whether there really is a danger present: If there isn't and the roll is a weak hit, you're hard pressed to come up with any meaningful cost. Also, remember that a weak hit is fundamentally a success when you interpret the results. It's easy to slip into all-negative outcomes when thinking of costs.

There are times when you can either call for a Face Danger roll or just say yes to a player's question. This can be especially true when a character is looking for information, material resources or social connections. In these cases, if a character's lifepaths don't give you a clear answer, you either call for a Face Danger or say yes, "you have heard rumours that the Orsatti family has ties to the criminal underground".

A worse outcome: Vittorio tries to run through a crowd of people in pursuit of a thief, rolling+Might, but the player rolls a 11. "You get through, but you trip and land on your face. The thief takes advantage of the situation and tries to kick you hard. What do you do?"

A hard bargain: Vittorio tries to look tough in front of a cult overseer so that his cover isn't blown. He decides to do this by mutilating a slave to prove his toughness, rolling+Rigor. "You got a 10 so I'll offer you a bargain: you look tough enough only if you kill the slave, harming her isn't enough."

A tough choice: Vittorio tries to remember what he did while being possessed by his demonic patron, so he rolls+Will. The player gets a 13 and the GM asks the player whether they'd like to remember what Vittorio did with the Inquisitor or the Captain of the city watch.

FIGHT

When you attack a single human opponent in hand to hand combat, roll+Might

For NPC opponents:
On a 14+, you avoid their attacks and subdue them.
On a 9–13, they manage to hit you, suffer the consequences and take 2 stress. Then:
• If you had an advantage on this roll, you subdue your opponent.
• If not, check whether you're subdued and gain an advantage to your next Fight roll if not.
On a 8–, suffer 3 stress, check whether you're subdued and be prepared for the worst.
If you didn't subdue your opponent and have 6 or more stress, you're subdued.

For PC opponents:
On a 14+, you avoid their attacks and deal 3 stress. Check whether you subdued them
On a 9–13, you trade hits, deal 2 stress and suffer 2 stress. Then check whether either or both of you are subdued
On a 8–, suffer 3 stress and check whether you're subdued
If either combatant has 6 or more stress, the one with more stress is subdued. If both have the same number of stress and it's 6 or more, both combatants are incapacitated.

Subduing means that the opponent can't fight anymore: They can't trigger the Fight move in the current context. This can be for any reason that makes sense in the context of the fight, be it injuries, disarming or some way of of being incapacitated.

The Fight outcomes don't mention death or killing. What you do after subduing your opponent is up to you: kill them, capture them, humiliate them etc. Death happens in the fiction, not in the mechanics of the game.

Since weapons and armor don't have any mechanical weight, you need to use your judgement based on the fiction. If the combatants have equal equipment, just roll Fight. If one of them has an equipment based advantage, but the underdog can reasonably fight with them (say, a knife vs bare fists), give an advantage or disadvantage (check the peripheral move) to the rolling player.

If the underdog can't reasonably fight the other person (a fully armed knight in full plate vs bare fists), don't let them roll. It's not a fight anymore, it's a slaughter. Use similar fiction first judgement when you're faced with multiple combatants fighting one person.

Note that one Fight roll might not end the whole combat if both combatants are still able to and willing to continue fighting. Only PC vs PC fights can end in both combatants being incapacitated, and only if the combatants trade hits and end up with more than 6 stress.

Don't devolve combat scenes into a numbers game. Describe what the combatants actually do, how the situation changes based on the roll and then continue to the next roll if it's needed. Hits that land, but don't subdue the opponent welcome you to add detail to the fight: people falling down, losing their grip on something, the audience reacting to the fight etc.

You can't fight demons one-on-one, you need to lead a group into battle against them (check the lifepath move).

THREATEN

When you threaten someone to do what you want with a credible threat, like immediate physical violence, and you are committed to following through with your threat, roll+Rigor
On a 14+, they have to choose:
• Refuse defiantly and suffer the consequences of your threat
• Submit and do what you want
• Beg or explain and be at your complete mercy
On a 9-13, they can choose 1 of the above, or the most appropriate of the following:
• Give you what they think you want
• Tell you what they think you want to hear
• Disengage from a situation they think you mean
On a 8-, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

This move is for verbal threats before things have turned violent. You shouldn't let the player roll if they don't have a credible threat; either they miss the roll or the person being threatened just refuses to do what they want.

The threat doesn't need to be immediate, but the character has to be committed to following through with it, otherwise it's just bluffing. If the person being threatened refuses a non-immediate threat, the character must fulfill the threat without unnecessary delay. A significant change in the situation is the only valid reason to back off once the dice are rolled.

When a player rolls a weak hit, but none of the weak hit options seem appropriate, the person being threatened has to choose from the strong hit options.

DECEIVE

When you tell a bold lie to affect someone's behavior, or actively hide the truth from someone, roll+Guile
On a 14+, only people well versed in the matter you're lying about can tell you're deceiving them
On a 9-13, only those who don't know the matter are completely fooled, anyone else will suspect that something is off. It's up to them to decide what they do about their suspicion
On a 8-, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

Deceive is a move that is often triggered by the GM when a character starts avoiding direct questions or tries to misdirect someone during a conversation. There are times when a character wants to deliberately deceive someone, but you should especially keep an eye out for lies that the player doesn't notice during the heat of play. Don't bother rolling with lies that aren't meant to have an effect on anyone, though.

The move works from the character's subjective point of view, which means the character doesn't have to be objectively lying to trigger this move. They just need to believe that they're delivering a lie.

Pinpointing the subject matter of the lie is important when interpreting the results. For example the head inquisitor won't believe that all witches are women even if the player rolls a strong hit, he has seen male witches himself. However if the character tells him that they've seen the main benefactor of an orphanage do witchcraft and the roll is 14+, he would believe the false testimony if he knows this person only by reputation.

READ BODY LANGUAGE

When you're able to see another person clearly and closely study them during a charged interaction, roll+Insight
On a 14+, hold 3 and spend it to ask questions from the list below during the conversation.
On a 9-13, hold 1 instead.
- *Is your character telling the truth?*
- *What is your character hiding?*
- *What are you concerned or fearful of?*
- *What does your character intend to do?*
- *What are your real feelings concerning __?*
- *How could I get your character to __?*

On a 8-, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

While this move isn't mind reading, often the player gets more information than the character could really get from just the other person's body language. This is deliberate as information is what allows the player to make strong decisions and drive forward.

The player doesn't have to ask all the questions immediately, they can hold on to the questions and spend the hold during the conversation. The hold must be spent during this conversation, though.

Always answer truthfully, even generously if you feel that it would have a better impact, but do use situational discretion. For example, when a player asks what a character is hiding, answer based on the context of the conversation. You shouldn't go divulging that Angelo is actually a demon in human form if the conversation is about the poisoning of the bishop's bastard son.

Sometimes you don't have ready answers for the questions. Come up with them on the spot, make sure they make sense in the big picture and commit to them as truth. And since you have

a chance to come up with answers like this, use the opportunity to drop something the character really doesn't want to hear.

When a character reads another player character, let the player answer for their character, but stress that their answers need to be as truthful as yours. Also note that the answer to "How could I get your character to _?" can be "Nope, there's no way I would do that".

Reading body language requires time and a clear way to observe the other person. A person who doesn't interact with you or for example hides themselves in a dark cloak and hood can't be read.

MANIPULATE

When you have something a person needs or wants and you ask them to do what you want using that as a leverage, roll+Will

For NPCs:
On a 14+, you only have to promise to give it to them and they'll do what you ask
On a 9-13, they want concrete assurances before they do what you ask
On a 8-, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

For PCs:
On a 14+, choose 1:
- *if they refuse, halve their grit pool (round up)*
- *take both from the list below*

On a 9-13, choose 1:
- *if they do it, they get a grit point*
- *if they refuse, they need to spend a grit point if they have any*

On a 8-, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

This move can be used for seduction, manipulation and negotiation. The leverage can be, for example, a physical object, some important information, an offer of sex or a joint effort in a new alliance. The leverage is usually positive in nature, though. Threats and lies have their own moves.

This move works a bit differently for NPCs and player characters. With an NPC, the concrete assurances should have something to do with the leverage being used, and the player doesn't have to keep their promises to NPCs.

However, if a PC doesn't follow through with their promise, they suffer the negative consequences and lose the grit if they gained

any. The leverage doesn't have to be as large for player characters either, since there's already the grit carrot and stick.

CONVINCE

When you try to change someone's mind concerning a specific matter and you believe you're absolutely right, explain your argument. In case they're well versed in the matter and know that your argument is nonsense, don't roll; They see that you really believe in your nonsense, but aren't convinced. Otherwise, roll+Reason
On a 14+, they accept your reasoning, both emotionally and rationally
On a 9-13, they only accept your reasoning on a rational level
On a 8-, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.
What they actually do is up to them.

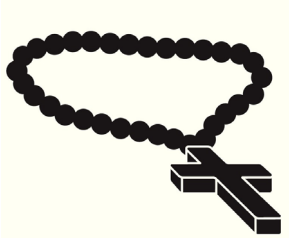
This move is often used when dealing with an unreasonable or mislead person and all the player character has is facts and sound logic to back their arguments. Like Deceive, this move works from the character's subjective point of view. They really need to believe their arguments, otherwise it's deceiving, even if the arguments aren't actually sound.

Accepting something on a rational level means that they see the logic behind the character's words and find it sound. Adding the emotional layer means that they're also moved by the character's words, be it sincerity, the implications of the argument or something else. This means that the result of this move, what they actually do, depends on how emotionally driven the character is. Convincing someone is not mind control and it's fine even if a strong hit doesn't change a character's course.

Player characters should be fairly well defined in this respect, so the player should be able to make consistent decisions if this move

is used on them. However, sometimes it's hard to decide how an NPC would react if they aren't that well defined yet.

There are different ways to resolve this. Either you can choose what's most dramatically appropriate in the situation, or you can roll a die to define the NPC in a neutral way, or you can just go with your gut. It's a matter of style, but it's all fine as long as you're consistent with the NPC after you've made your judgement call.



GENERAL MOVES

These moves are used often, but they're not tied to the basic stats. All characters can use these moves equally.

OPPOSE

When you oppose a PC's action, describe how you do it before they roll for it. Determine which stat you're opposing with. They get your stat's modifier as a penalty forward (or as a bonus if your modifier is negative).

Spending grit works differently in an opposed situation. After the roll has been made and the players have seen the initial result, both players take a die and use that to secretly set the number of grit points they want to spend on the roll. The number 0 or 10 on a d10 represents zero points, so you can spend 0–9 points of grit on a single roll. Once both players are ready, they reveal the number. Add the number of grit the rolling player spent to the roll, decrease the number the opposing player spent and read the final results.

If you can't or choose not to oppose someone from doing something directly to you, they automatically succeed without rolling. *This is important. The only exception to this is witchcraft: You can't oppose Cast a Spell, but they have to roll it. You can, however, try to resist the effects of a spell by rolling Face Danger+Will.*

If the opposing character has an advantage, apply a disadvantage to the roll and vice versa for a disadvantage.

Oppose is how you handle PC vs PC situations mechanically. Like this: Vittorio decides to "grab the contract papers from him!", which triggers a move. The opposing character, Luca, then decides "I'll grab the papers first".

Vittorio's player picks up the dice and tells his modifier, "my might is +1", and Luca's player tells them how much to add or subtract based on the stat they're opposing with, "damn, mine is -1, so take +1 to your roll". Vittorio's player then rolls the move and declares the result, "I got a 12, a weak hit".

The players then take a die each, and secretly set the number of grit they want to spend. Let's say Vittorio's player sets to 10 (zero grit) while Luca's sets theirs to 5. The players reveal the dice and read the final result "shit I didn't think you'd be that desperate to stop me, it's a miss (12 + 0 - 5 = 7)".

Some further examples: If a character's might is +2 and they oppose with it, the opponent gets -2 forward. With a might of -3, they would get +3 forward. The stat used in opposition depends on the fictional details. For example, if the opposition is physical, it's usually might. Check Face Danger for the stats' meanings in this context.

If the player can't describe a credible way of opposing the active player (or doesn't want to oppose) and the action is directly targeted at the other player character, the active player gets an automatic full hit, no rolling. If the target is someone else or the move has other side effects, they don't get an automatic full hit. Witchcraft is an example of this, it's always rolled.

The math of opposition balances evenly skilled opponents, but some moves' results favor the aggressor. It's best to be decisive, but don't let the table talk devolve into a shouting contest. Let everyone declare what they're doing and judge who initiated the action in the fiction. That player rolls, the other(s) oppose.

A simple case of opposition: Two PCs are fighting. You apply the modifiers, the active player rolls Fight, both bid grit and you interpret the results.

A more complex case: One PC is trying to orate to an audience and another is trying to counter his arguments from the crowd. In this case the PCs are in opposition, but both are actually targeting the crowd. Apply the defender's will opposition modifier to the first PC's orate roll, bid grit and interpret how the crowd reacts.

An even more complex situation: A PC is running away from an NPC and a PC. The first PC is rolling+Guile to lose his pursuers in the twisting alleyways while the NPC and the PC oppose him. Let's deem that one NPC chasing the PC isn't worth a disadvantage (the peripheral move), but the PC is definitely opposing the attempt at fleeing, so their guile opposition should count against the first PC.

Now if their guile modifier is bad, and you apply it to the whole roll, the chasing PC is actually helping the fleeing PC. That doesn't make sense, so we need to interpret two results from the roll, one for the NPC without modifiers and one for the PC with the oppose modifier. Roll once and read the results from that roll with and without modifiers. It's possible that only the NPC or only the PC manages to catch the escapee, or both do, or neither does.

COMPEL

When you compel another player to play according to one of their character's traits, suggest a course of action rising from the trait in the current situation. It's up to the compelled player to judge how their character would behave and either accept or refuse the course of action.

If you compelled a trait on their trait meter, and:

- *they accept, they add a mark for the compelled trait on the trait meter*
- *they refuse, they add a mark for the opposite trait on the trait meter and suffer 1 stress*

If you compelled a deep trait, and:

- *they accept, they gain a grit point*
- *they refuse, they suffer 1 stress*

If they accepted your compel, Take the Devil's Seat for their character.

There's a lot going on with Compel. It gives the audience agency as it's usually triggered by players who aren't in the current scene. It has the power to change the course of the scene and any plans the character had. It's how you acquire the Devil's seat. And most importantly, it's a way to explore player characters with interesting questions. Questions like "how greedy are you, exactly?", "are you really this cold-hearted?" or "how far are you willing to protect his honor?". Of course the questions come in the form of suggested courses of action, but they're questions nevertheless.

Compel is triggered on the player level, but its use is inspired by the fiction and tied to the situation. A compel is simply a well-timed interjection, "I compel your short-tempered, Raffaele! Threaten the craftsman with a knife, he's clearly trying to misdirect you and you don't have time for this crap". Then it's time for the compelled

player to decide whether their character would really threaten a harmless, bumbling carpenter with a knife or not.

Note that it really needs to be with a knife in the above example, fists aren't enough. The players may negotiate the extent of the compel, but it's always the compelling player that decides the suggested course of action. It's better to avoid negotiating compels unless it requires just a bit of adjustment to be fun.

If the compelled player refuses, the fiction continues as if nothing had happened. If the compel is accepted, it's up to the compelled player to describe the details: "Now listen to me you pig, see this knife here? It's gonna carve a pork chop out of you unless you tell me where the white haired man ran." And like that, the scene continues. The mechanical effects of grit, trait marks and stress apply in both cases, of course.

Compels that somehow complicate the situation are excellent, but as long as the player has a real decision to make and the course of action somehow changes the situation, the compel is valid. All compels that trigger a move are clearly valid, but you'll have to use your judgement when the effect would be more subtle.

Let's have another simple example. Raffaele has the trait pair short-tempered - compassionate. He's hiding a bloody knife behind his back and is now asking a little girl whether she saw where the white haired man ran. Another player who isn't in the scene compels Raffaele's short-tempered: "Hey Raffaele, another compel for your short-tempered. Stop hiding the knife and just start shouting at the girl, asking where the witch ran". Raffaele's player decides that while Raffaele has seen a lot of evil, he still has a soft spot for kids. He refuses the compel, adds a mark for compassionate and takes one stress point.

In the above example the compel wouldn't have triggered a move, at least not immediately. But it would've had an effect: It would've revealed just how much of an ass Raffaele is, it could've drawn

attention to the situation and everyone around would've heard that there's a witch on the loose. A lot of effects without any dice.

It's also possible to double compel. Sometimes two players compel opposing traits at the same time. In this case a mark is added only for the trait whose compel was accepted. If both compels are refused, the character gains no marks and suffers only one stress point.

A player can't compel themselves, but they may encourage the other players to compel them. This could happen, for example, if a player feels their character would choose a safe and boring option if nothing interferes them, but they'd like to see what would happen with a more risky approach. The player is after all the character's advocate, and they need to play the character honestly. This encouragement is of course an opportunity for the other players to devise an especially tough compel.

Compels are usually done by players who aren't playing in the scene themselves, but this isn't a hard rule. I'd allow a compel from a player whose character is in a scene as long as the compel isn't used to further the character's agenda. Compels should be used to learn more about the characters and to make the scenes more interesting, not to get a meta-game advantage.

The GM is also allowed to compel the players, but usually the GM has more pressing matters to manage during scenes. GM compels also take the Devil's seats from the players' hands, which might not be something you want. Nevertheless, you shouldn't be afraid to demonstrate compelling during the first session or two, and if you see a perfect opportunity, take it!

TAKE THE DEVIL'S SEAT

When you're told to take a character's Devil's seat, take their Devil's seat play aid and update the stress count. Everyone gains automatic access to a character's Devil's seat if the character has 8 or more stress points. While you have the seat and your own character isn't in the scene, you can use the following powers on the character whose seat you're on, from the player level:

You may spend the character's stress points to either coerce them, given an opportune moment, to:

- ***1p*** *Drop their inhibitions and give into sin*
- ***1p*** *Intensify what they're currently doing*
- ***1p*** *Act according to a deep trait in a detrimental way*
- ***2p*** *Take rash social action (e.g. say what they really think)*
- ***3p*** *Lose self-control and give in to aggression*

Or to tamper with their dice after a roll before grit is spent / hinder their opposition:

- ***3p*** *If they rolled a full hit (14+), set one of the dies to 3*
- ***4p*** *If they rolled a weak hit (9-13), set one of the dies to 1*
- ***4p*** *Give a character they're Opposing an advantage to the roll*
- ***7p*** *If they rolled a full hit (14+), set both dice to 3*

If their roll is a miss because of your tampering, they don't gain the normal stress point from the miss.

If you voluntarily drop out of the seat when you spend their stress, you get a ***1p*** *discount on the above prices.*

You lose your seat when one of the following happens:

- *You spend the character's last stress point*
- *The character opens up to someone about their sins, honestly*
- *Another player gains the seat through compelling*
- *The character's stress points go below 8 and you aren't holding their play aid*
- *The session ends*

As with Compel, that's a lot to unpack. First, this is what a player gets when they compel another player and the compel is accepted. This is how characters lose stress, and it also contains most of the bad effects stress can have. It's also another tool for the audience to play with. It's a way to make scenes more interesting and a way to put a lucky roller into a tough spot.

There are two ways a player can get access to the seat powers. First is by making a compel that the other player accepts. The second is when a character's stress reaches 8 or more points. That's when all other players, the GM included, have temporary access to the seat powers, until someone burns the stress below 8. At that point only the player holding the character's Devil's seat play aid stays on the seat. The 8 point limit is also the only time multiple players can have access to the same character's seat powers.

You'll want to print a copy of the Devil's seat play aid for each player, it makes keeping track of the seat holders easier. NPCs don't have stress, nor do they have a seat. At the beginning of a session no one sits on anyone's seat, but when the compels start firing, the seats can change hands quickly.

These powers are triggered on the player level. The player's character doesn't have a mystic connection with evil powers. The whole concept of the devil is likewise metaphorical, unless you decide otherwise. Just to make it clear: The devil, whether actual

or metaphorical, doesn't want to kill people. They want people to give into sin. The devil's ways are unpredictable, though, so you as the player can have a lot of fun with these powers.

The first set of seat powers says *given an opportune moment*. An opportune moment is simply one where it would make sense that the character drops their inhibitions / acts intensely / according to a deep trait / takes rash action / loses their self-control. You can't force a character to lose self-control if there's no viable reason for it. Even this move isn't mind control. But if someone insults a character, they're irritated by something or they encounter the person who killed their brother, there's an opportune moment to coerce them to lose their self-control.

As with compels, the character's player decides the details of, for example, how they drop their inhibitions and give into sin. And as with compels, triggering a seat power is simply a matter of "Hey Vittorio, insulting the magistrate isn't really enough for you, is it? *Why don't you lose your self-control and give in to aggression*".

The second set of seat powers allows the seat holder to tamper with rolls. Setting dice simply means that the seat holder can take a rolled die (or dice) and change the die's result to a different number. Different tampering options cost a different number of stress, they can be used only with specific result categories (full or weak hit) and each one specifies how the die can be set. Hindering opposition is simpler. When the character opposes another character and the seat holder hinders them, the rolling player gains an advantage (check the peripheral move).

An example. Vittorio is orating to a crowd and the player rolls the dice for 8 and 5. The player adds Vittorio's +2 will and gets a result of 15 (8 + 5 + 2). This is the moment another player who is sitting on Vittorio's seat can interfere. If Vittorio has 7 stress, they can drop the result to 8 (3 + 3 + 2) for 7 stress points. They can

also choose to spend 2 stress to drop the result to either 10 (3 + 5 + 2) or 13 (8 + 3 + 2).

The player decides it'd be more interesting if Vittorio failed spectacularly, so they drop the result to 8. Now Vittorio's player needs to decide whether they spend grit points to boost the result or accept the failure. If they accept the failure, they don't gain the stress point from a missed roll since it was caused by the Devil's seat.

RESIST BLIGHT

When you've harnessed demonic powers or been on the receiving end of them, after the tense situation is over, roll + the opposite of your Blight.

On a 14+: You manage to steel yourself

On a 9–13: If your blight isn't +2, choose one below. If it is, take the second option.

- *Increase your blight by one (maximum +2). If you're a witch, gain a new spell*
- *Your body is blighted by the demonic: gain a minor witch mark and suffer 1 stress*

8–: If your blight isn't +2, take both from the 9–13 list. If it is, take all four below.

- *If you don't have 3 moderate witch marks yet, gain a moderate mark. If you do, gain a severe mark*
- *Gain a new lifepath called Blighted (up to 6 lifepaths)*
- *Decrease your might by one*
- *Suffer 2 stress.*

Playing with witchcraft isn't exactly safe, nor is it fair for the victim. This move shows why. Blight is a downward spiral into decrepitude, but first it offers the witch more power. Resist Blight is triggered by any active contact with witchcraft or the demonic. Environmental blight doesn't usually trigger this move, nor does speaking with a

demon. Casting spells, suffering from spells, summoning demons and receiving unholy blessings do trigger this move. The opposite of Blight simply means that, for example, a +2 blight becomes a -2 modifier for this move. A modifier of 0 remains a 0.

Resist Blight isn't rolled immediately after casting a spell, instead it's rolled after the scene is over. This also means that a witch needs to roll only once per scene even if they cast multiple spells. At first it may be hard to remember to roll this move after a tense situation is over. Don't worry too much if you forget a roll though, roll it when you do remember. Sometimes the effects of blight reveal themselves long after the incident.

The witch mark categories and spells are explained in the Witchcraft chapter. Suffice to say, when you gain a new witch mark, specify what and where it is using the examples in the Witchcraft chapter as guidelines. When you gain a new spell, pick one from the Witchcraft chapter. The Blighted lifepaths are mostly cosmetic, but they do have one indirect consequence: they affect the number of grit points a character gains by pursuing their beliefs (see the End of Session move). A character's actual age isn't changed by the blight, but their body and spirit is.

LIFEPATH MOVES

All characters can trigger these moves, but only characters that have gained the lifepath move during character creation can use the move without penalties. If a character that doesn't have the lifepath move triggers it in the fiction, they roll it with a disadvantage.

LEAD INTO BATTLE

When you lead a group into a battle with either an enemy force or a demon, the GM decides whether the battle is even. If it's not, but it's not overwhelmingly one-sided, apply an advantage or a disadvantage to the roll. Then, roll+Might
By default:
• You'll suffer 3 stress
• Your troops will suffer casualties, weakening them significantly (a disadvantage to the next otherwise even battle)
On a 14+, the enemy attempts to flee or surrenders. Choose 1:
• You don't suffer any stress
• Most of your troops are unharmed (no disadvantage to the next even battle)
• You get something valuable (a prisoner, a letter, etc.)
On a 9-13, the enemy attempts to flee or surrenders. Choose 1 from above and 1 from below
• You're struck unconscious and wake up in a worse situation
• Your troops suffer heavy casualties (can't fight anymore)
• The enemy achieves something wretched (wounds your friend, takes something etc.)
On a 8-, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

This is the mass combat move. Influential characters often have access to soldiers, watchmen, personal guards or just an angry mob of people. When a character orders their troops to attack an enemy,

it's usually this move you use to resolve what happens. However, it's also possible that a fight is so one-sided that it doesn't even trigger this move. No uncertainty, no roll. Unlike Fight, this move resolves the entire battle, which might take a long time in the fiction.

Naturally the player can't pick options that don't make sense in the fiction, and they can't, for example, undo the effect of heavy casualties by picking *your troops are unharmed*. The player can pick options that nullify the default results, though. The GM decides whether the enemy attempts to flee or surrenders, unless another player character was leading the enemy force. If the enemy tries to flee, you might need another move (such as Face Danger) to resolve the situation further.

INTERROGATE

When you interrogate an unwilling person using one-sided violence as your main tool, ask your questions and roll+Rigor
On a 14+, the person answers truthfully
On a 9-13, about half of the answers are truthful, the other half is lies, but you don't know which are lies
On a 8-, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

This is basically your torture move, but it can apply to other situations than methodological torture as well. Torture is also used to get confessions, but that's not what this move resolves. You interrogate to get information, and usually the character doesn't have all the time in the world to interrogate their victim. Use this move to see whether the victim cracks under pressure.

You can either use dramatic judgement to decide what the victim lies about, or just roll randomly whether an answer is truthful or not with the weak hit. There's a possibility that the player can guess which answers are truthful and which are lies, but the character doesn't realize this.

SHADOW

When you stealthily follow someone, roll+Guile
On a 14+, you can follow them unseen to their next destination. Hold 3.
On a 9–13, you can follow them unseen to their next destination. Hold 1.
Spend your hold while you're following them to:
• Ambush them and gain an advantage over them for that roll
• Keep on following them unseen when they move from their current location to the next
• Bypass guards undetected while following them, if plausible
• Eavesdrop a conversation they're having within earshot of you
• Identify who they're with if their partner is hiding themselves
On a 8–, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

When a character starts following someone, they trigger this move. Roll the move first and then play how the situation continues, letting the player spend their hold during that time. If the player follows an NPC, the GM needs to take an objective view of the NPC at this point and do what the NPC really would. The NPC can't take unnecessary detours to waste the player's hold, though it's possible that not all hold spent gives the player anything concrete to work with.

Time for an example. Vittorio is following a merchant and the player rolls a 17, so they hold 3. The merchant walks to the church. Vittorio gets here for free. The church doesn't interest Vittorio, though, so they don't spend any hold. The merchant leaves the church and heads toward a noble's house. The player spends 1 hold to continue following them. At the noble's house they spend 1 to eavesdrop the conversation through a convenient open window.

The merchant then leaves and heads to the dock. The player spends their last hold to follow them there, but now you're out of hold.

FORGE

When you forge a document or modify an existing document for a specific purpose, decide whether you try to weave in an additional fact unrelated to the document's main purpose. When the forged document is read, roll+Insight.
On a 14+, the reader believes it's authentic. If you weaved in an additional fact, they believe it. Otherwise gain an advantage in the situation that follows from this.
On a 9–13, the reader believes it's authentic unless they're expecting a forgery and can compare this with a document written by the alleged author. If you weaved in an additional fact, they're sceptical of it.
On a 8–, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

This is a straightforward move as long as you remember to roll it when the forged document is read, not when it's crafted. Naturally the character can't weave long stories to dense existing documents, so try to keep it on a detail level.

For example if a letter says that the Pope was poisoned last night and that the primary suspect is the head of the Butchers' Guild during the dinner, a character could modify the document to say that, instead of the Butchers' Guild, they suspect the Inquisition. As an additional fact, they could, for example, call for a meeting later today to set up an ambush.

ORATE

When you try to influence a group of people by appealing to their emotion with rhetoric, roll+Will
On a 14+, you sway the majority of the group to take a general action of your choosing
On a 9-13, you instill one strong emotion of your choice to the majority of the group, but the group decides what to do next
On a 8-, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

As always, this move isn't mind control. The character needs a non-hostile crowd that is willing to listen before they can trigger this move. Also, the crowd needs to be open to the idea the character is suggesting on a basic level. So no turning pious Christians against the Church without a very good reason.

The general action of full hit can't be very specific. "Sack the Moratti estate!" is good level of detail. The character can't influence how the crowd should do it, or whether something should be saved. The weak hit is even less general, and should be a lot of fun for the GM. It's usually best to give the player what they wanted, but twist it to the extreme. For example an angry crowd going totally berserk, when the character just wanted to apply some pressure on someone.

POISON

When you've brewed or otherwise acquired poison and you or someone you've instructed poisons a victim with it, roll+Reason.
On a 14+, the poison works as expected
On a 9-13, the poison works, but the GM chooses 1:
- *The poison has an obvious side effect*
- *The poison takes effect faster or slower than intended*
- *Evidence of the poisoner is left behind and it will be noticed it*

On a 8-, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

Unlike Forge, this move is rolled when the poisoning happens. We need to know the results immediately in case, for example, someone acts on the evidence left by the poisoner. The poisoner might even still be sitting at the dinner table, after all. Also note that it doesn't have to be the player character doing the poisoning as long as they were the one who instructed how to use the poison.

How easy it is to find or brew poison depends on the fiction and your style. Unless the character has an obvious access to poison or someone who has some, it's best to call for a Face Danger roll. You could even give the poison on a miss, but with heavy strings attached.

Normally it shouldn't be easy to get poison with exotic effects, though. Poisons aren't magical unless they're brewed with demonic assistance or acquired straight from a demon. A demon can also only assist with poisons that are related to their type, death or lust.

PERIPHERAL MOVES

All characters have access to these moves, but instead of giving the players new tools and options, they codify parts of the basic infrastructure of the game.

GRIT YOUR TEETH

When you as the player decide that your character needs to grit their teeth and try harder, you may spend grit points after rolling to increase your roll result, 1 grit point for +1 to the roll. You can spend up to 9 grit per roll. The only exception is when another player character opposes the action. See Oppose for more information on this.

This move codifies grit usage. The decision to use grit is made on the player level, the characters don't know about these meta resources. It's the player who decides what's important enough to burn grit on. When the player spends grit, they're making a statement: "I find this important!". Usually these moments also define what's important for the character, but the player doesn't have to spend the grit to optimize their character's success. Often "would this make the situation more interesting?" is also a consideration.

ADVANTAGE & DISADVANTAGE

If you have a clear advantage in a situation requiring a roll, roll 3d10, keep the highest two dice and then apply your modifier.

If you have a clear disadvantage in a situation requiring a roll, roll 3d10, keep the lowest two dice and then apply your modifier.

Multiple (dis)advantages don't stack no matter how big or numerous the fictional (dis)advantage. These moves should be used when an

external factor changes the situation in a dramatic way, internal factors such as stats are already mechanized. Only the modifiers from Oppose may weaken the odds further if a character has a disadvantage.

The fictional (dis)advantage has to be significant for this to apply as it's roughly equal to a +/-3 forward. If you're not sure whether something is worth a (dis)advantage, think whether a movie director would emphasize it in a scene or cut it out. Don't micromanage small details, underline the dramatic.

Never forget what the (dis)advantage represents in the fiction. Keep the game grounded in the situation and its details, don't substitute them with a colorless extra die. This is only a way to give mechanical weight to dramatic fictional details.

ADVANCEMENT

When you spend months or years mastering a new set of skills, gain a new lifepath and all of its mechanical benefits and drawbacks (up to 6 lifepaths).

This move codifies how characters advance. That is, they usually don't. Longer campaigns may use lengthy time skips to set a new interesting situation, which can trigger this move. Other than that, the characters don't advance their stats.

END OF SESSION

When you reach the end of a session,

- *If you have more than 5 grit, reset it to 5. The next step can increase your grit beyond 5.*
- *Count the number of beliefs you used to drive the situation forward during the session, whether ultimately for or against the belief. Gain grit according to this number and the number of lifepaths you have:*
  - » Grit Gained = (2 × Beliefs Driven) + 4 - Number of Lifepaths
- *If you didn't compel anyone during the session, lose a grit point*
- *Revise traits if you feel the need for it:*
  - *» You may change the trait pair on your trait meter. If you do, clear all marks.*
  - *» You may remove deep traits if e.g. a dramatic event has changed your character*
  - *» If another character's traits are hard to compel because the character already behaves according to a trait on the meter, you can suggest that the trait becomes a deep trait immediately. If the other player agrees, resolve the trait.*
- *If you need to update your beliefs, do it now*

This is the grit, trait and belief upkeep procedure you do at the end of every session. Resetting the grit back to 5 might sting some players, but there's a good reason for it: We don't want players to save their grit for huge situations, we want them to spend grit constantly so that they're also striving to gain more of it. Beliefs are the biggest stable source of grit for the players, so they're unlikely to forget their beliefs. That makes the GM's job easier since they can rely on the characters to drive with their beliefs.

Here are the results of the grit gain formula in a table format.

Lifepaths & Grit

	0 Beliefs	1 Belief	2 Beliefs	3 Beliefs
2 Lifepaths	2	4	6	8
3 Lifepaths	1	3	5	7
4 Lifepaths	0	2	4	6
5 Lifepaths	-1	1	3	5
6 Lifepaths	-2	0	2	4

Compels keep the trait cycle moving, and make sure the players have opportunities to spend each others' stress points via the Devil's seat. It's very important that the players compel each other. Consider the grit penalty for not compelling a reminder.

The end of the session is a calm moment to check whether both the player's own traits and the other players' traits are fine. It's also a good time to update beliefs since the GM needs the characters' beliefs for the next session's prep.

TRAIT RESOLUTION

When either of your traits on the trait meter has 3 more marks than its opposite trait, the pair is resolved:

- *The stronger trait becomes a new deep trait*
- *Count the number of marks on the stronger trait. You gain this number of grit points*
- *Then reset the trait meter and choose a new pair of opposing traits to examine. If you feel that you have conflicting deep traits, you can also pair them up, or take one deep trait and a new trait for further examination.*

This move is what happens when a character's traits have been compelled enough to make some conclusions on their relative strengths. Trait resolution can happen at any time during a session.

The only requirement is that one of the traits has 3 more marks than its opposite, so it could be 3 marks vs 0 marks (gain 3 grit), or 5 marks vs 2 marks (gain 5 grit).

You can look at deep traits as stable facets of a character. They can still be compelled, and the Devil's seat can use them to their advantage. If a deep trait feels wrong, it's always possible to drop it, or pair it again if it makes more sense. Traits should be in sync with the actual character we see in the fiction, but they can also be prescriptive.

It's often good to give the player the grit points immediately after triggering trait resolution, so that they can use the points during the current situation, but let them decide the next trait pair when they get some downtime. If the player has a hard time deciding a new trait pair, instruct them to let their curiosity guide them. A player shouldn't just pick a pair blindly from the list of examples, it's better to pick a pair that allows them to learn something interesting about their character.

If trait resolution happens just before the end of the session, it's fine to award the grit points at the start of the next session.

WITCHCRAFT

WITCHES

Witches are people who wield the demonic powers that either course in their very blood, perhaps due to ancient demonic ancestry, or is granted to them by a demon via a contract. Anyone can be a witch: a man or a woman, a child or a crone. Witchcraft is considered a dark art due to its link to the demonic, and its corrupting effect on the witch.

Anyone can become a wielder of otherworldly power, even of the person isn't born to a family of witchblood. If the person isn't a cradle witch, they need to seek out a demonic patron and make a contract to receive their powers. Whether this corrupts the soul permanently isn't certain, unless one asks the Church.

While witchcraft is often used selfishly, for revenge or for greedy purposes, there are many witches who first grasped the power with the intent of supporting their family or doing good in their society. Power has the tendency to corrupt, but witchcraft itself doesn't make people evil.

In the larger society cults have formed around both real witches and fake witches. Especially the lower classes are linked to illegal pagan and witch traditions. However, witchcraft is also present in the upper echelons of society, often taking a form more akin to a degenerate vice, a kind of a high class drug club.

Of course there are also individual witches who use their powers to further their own interests in life, to take revenge out of anger and to rise against oppression. Covens of witches are very rare outside of powerful witchblood families, as most witches try their best to hide themselves.

The Church has zero tolerance for witchcraft, and preaches the dangers of witches to the obedient general public. Actual witch incidents are quite rare and often personal in nature, though. The Inquisition is in charge of investigating both accusations of Protestant heresy and witchcraft. The job of an upstanding inquisitor isn't an easy one as the townsfolk are all too eager to accuse their neighbours, mothers-in-law and other enemies of witchcraft. An inquisitor doesn't have the right to sentence anyone to death. That power belongs to the secular court.

Not all inquisitors are righteous, though. Many veteran inquisitors have decided that it's too dangerous to ask first, or to let the ignorant secular authorities decide who is a witch and who isn't. Their veteran status protects them from the worst sanctions even when they go over the line, especially during times of witch panic. These are the people who believe that all corruptions of the body are witch marks, and everyone bearing witch marks should be burned at the stake, all the while bearing their own blight scars from previous battles.

The actual practice of witchcraft comes in two main forms: spells and summonings. Spellcasting isn't often obvious to a bystander, and even the spell effects might not be. Spells are unpredictable and risky, however, so many witches resort to spells only in emergency situations. The real path to power lies in summoning demons and making pacts with them. The extent of what demons can offer a witch is unimaginable, as is the price.

BLIGHT & WITCH MARKS

Blight is the corruption related to demonic powers. From a human perspective, blight seems to have an aging effect on anything it touches, but it bears an ominous aura right at the edge of perception that suggests there's more to it. In people blight's effect is often localized to a smaller or larger region of the body instead of aging the whole person. These regions are called witch marks. A child

witch doesn't actually grow old by using witchcraft, but parts of their body might.

The effects of blight extend to the environment as well. Witchcraft and demonic beings blight the environment around them during strong bursts of power, or during prolonged presence. As with people, the effect manifests itself by aging the surrounding environment, decaying plant life and ruining organic materials. A place touched by blight might not be immediately dangerous or even obvious to lay people, though inquisitors are taught to look for these signs of witchcraft.

Blight is a double edged sword to a witch. On the one hand it makes the witch more powerful, but it's also the most likely cause of discovery. Even though witches have access to tremendous powers, they rarely use their powers due to its costs. Every time anyone is in contact with the dark art, they risk blight exposure.

The witch needs to choose when it's worth it to risk using their powers, and when they do, it's a clear sign of what the witch finds important in life. They also need to decide whether it's okay to subject potentially innocent bystanders to blight's effects, and perhaps condemn them to the stake if their marks are found.

Mechanically witch marks are gained with the Resist Blight move. They follow a three step scale, each category having its own characteristics. Check the following table for an overview on witch marks.

Witch Mark Characteristics

Severity	Search required	Roll	Examples
Minor	A thorough full body search, naked	9-13	A small patch of wrinkled skin on the inner thigh, a liver spot in the armpit
Moderate	A search of the arms, legs and torso	8-	An atrophied forearm or calf, sagging skin
Severe	A cursory look	8- and 3 moderate marks	Balding gray hair, extremely stooped posture, clouded eyes

DEMONS

Demons are the otherworldly creatures a would-be contract witch contacts, or an actual witch summons. They're beings of immense power, and they all have one goal: to tempt and corrupt people into sin. It might not be obvious and their schemes might not even target the witch themselves, but that's what all demons ultimately want. They're creatures of evil.

There are two types of demons: demons of death and demons of lust. Demons of death want to create misery by severing bonds, ties and relations. A soul from its body, lovers from each other or wealth from the fortunate. Each demon type has their own characteristic powers. The powers of death include famine, pestilence, rage and other negative emotions, physical harm such as scouring the flesh off the living, decay, abortion, turning the day into night and raising the dead. Wild death demons occasionally gather morbid cults around themselves.

Demons of lust on the other hand torment people by bringing together things that aren't good for each other. Temptations to the innocent, perverted habits to the unwise or sins to the pure. Lust demons' powers include manipulation, seduction, lies, illusions,

instilling desire in people, poisons, insemination, hypnosis and addictive pleasures. Sex cults aren't uncommon where demons of lust roam.

Demons come in a wide variety of shapes. Many take on a human form and infiltrate the society. Others take the form of beasts or monsters. Even more insidious are the demons who take the shape of a desire or idol, or even the voice of God in a Christian's head. Whatever the shape, demons have many ways to communicate with people. All contract witches have a convenient way to hear their patron's whispers.

Killing, or more accurately, banishing a demon isn't a simple job, even though they do obey steel. You need a small army to drive away the most powerful of demons, and there are no demons that are weak enough for a single human to deal with, witch or not.

Luckily no demon has an agenda as simple as killing humans. Demons routinely refuse pacts to assassinate people, though they may be willing to e.g. bring someone to their summoner for the right price. Demons do kill in self-defense, though.

Demons don't betray their contract witch unless the witch betrays the demon first. As long as one doesn't consider incitement and temptation forms of betrayal, of course. All contract witches have obligations to fulfill, though, and rare is the lenient patron. The most obvious punishment is stripping the witch of their powers, or giving additional tasks to complete.

If the witch is killed, the summoned demon is free to roam the Earth. As witches are rare and wild demons are even rarer, the visible effects of the demonic are extremely rare. Not even all of the clergy believe that demons actually walk the Earth. To the laity, demons are but myths. Witches and experienced inquisitors know better.

However, the laity are quite safe in their beliefs as demons have no way of coming to our world without the aid of a witch. A witch seeking a contract can bring a demon to our world, as can a witch

making a deliberate summoning ritual. Usually a witch summons a demon to make a pact and thus gain something they couldn't get with spells alone. The witch should be careful of the way the pact is formulated, though.

WITCHCRAFT MOVES

SEEK A CONTRACT

When you venture alone into a place of power at the right time, for example a deep forest at the witching hour, and willingly offer yourself to any demon listening, a creature will come forth and offer you a contract of witchcraft. The GM decides the details of the contract and whether a demon of death or lust has arrived. Whether you accept the contract then is up to you. If you do, increase your blight by 1, gain a spell and then roll to Resist Blight. Also gain access to the witchcraft moves.

This is the "I want to become a witch!" move. The GM should be flexible instead of restrictive when defining what a place of power is. If a character feels the need for witchcraft, the option should be open to them. The patron demon is certainly more than willing to step into the world.

The demon should set their contract right within the reach of the would-be witch. More severe terms for a desperate case, less so for someone who contacted the demon on an ill-considered whim. You can expect to see this move used when a character loses their existing influence and needs some leverage to stay in the game.

CAST A SPELL

When you twist reality using your demonic powers, there will be consequences. If you're willing to take the risk, select a spell you know and roll+Blight
On a 14+, you gather power for the spell unnoticed and cast it, but choose 1
On a 9–13, you gather power for the spell unnoticed and cast it, but choose 2
• Suffer 2 stress as you sustain the demonic energies
• The spell's effect is much stronger or its duration is shorter, GM's call
• The spell's effect is weaker or its area of effect is larger, GM's call
• The spell's effect draws attention to you, making it obvious that you just cast a spell
• The spell blights the environment, aging and decaying the surroundings. Lay people may consider this a bad omen while those who know about witchcraft know that there are demonic energies present
On a 8–, gain 1 stress point and be prepared for the worst.

After the tense situation is over, roll to Resist Blight.

Spells

Terror
Overwhelm a group of people by an irrational fear. You need to be able to see the victims.

Compulsion
Give a single target a spoken command, up to a sentence, that they're compelled to obey. Only their survival instinct or other such primal instincts can resist you.

Illusion
Create either a large static illusion, up to a few human sized moving ones or change how you look. Illusions can't produce sounds.

Curse
Curse a group of people to suffer. You may choose the nature of the suffering, such as instant warts, recurring nightmares or bad luck. A curse can't kill anyone directly, though. You need to be able to see the victims.

Divination
See briefly and instantly into the future concerning a situation (reading what will likely happen) or a person (reading what they might do next). Exploiting this knowledge immediately counts as having an advantage.

Telekinesis
Move one heavy object or multiple light ones as if you had the strength of a few invisible men at your telepathic command.

This is the move to roll when a witch needs to achieve something right now. As there are always consequences to casting a spell, this move is often used in either emergencies or when the witch has planned the situation well in advance so that there aren't too many bystanders around. A witch can only cast spells they know, but it's quite easy to learn more spells with intentional or accidental blight exposure.

Keep in mind that a successful roll is a successful roll even if it has a cost: The options chosen must not invalidate the basic point of the spell. That doesn't mean that the GM can't have fun with the side effects. It's often best to create side effects that don't have anything to do with the main intent of the spell, but make the situation more chaotic. All successful spells are cast unnoticed by default unless the player chooses the option to make the casting obvious. If a witch doesn't have to hide themselves, it's a free option to pick.

The spells are powerful and that's by design. Witches have a lot of power over ordinary people, but it comes at a heavy cost. When the witch targets NPCs, they just succumb to the effects. However, if the witch targets a player character, let the player roll Face Danger to resist the effects of the spell. Characters can't normally Oppose spellcasting, but unlike other moves, this doesn't mean that the witch gets an automatic success. Always roll when casting spells, and remember Resist Blight after the dust settles.

NPC witches might have other spells than these six, or they might have more powerful versions of these spells. Demons can have a lot stronger powers compared to these spells, of course.

SUMMON

When you painstakingly prepare a summoning circle to call forth a demon, choose whether you reach for a creature of death or lust. The creature appears before you, then roll+Blight
On a 14+, the summoning circle holds the creature and it's willing to hear you out
On a 9-13, the summoning circle holds the creature, but the GM chooses 1:
- *It's in a foul mood*
- *It demands a sacrifice before it's ready to negotiate*
- *It wants you to do something to further its agenda before it's ready to negotiate*

On a 8-, the circle is critically flawed and doesn't hold the creature. You're under the gun and the demon is here to advance its agenda

After the tense situation is over, roll to Resist Blight.

As long as the circle holds you may banish the creature at will.

Demons are the path to real power, and summoning is the way to find just the right demon for the character's needs. If a character needs something that the spells don't cover, they need to summon a demon and seal a Faustian pact with it. Demons can offer a wide variety of magical and non-magical services, but they can't make a character younger. The appearance of youth isn't a problem, though. It's considered extremely rude to summon your patron.

Preparing a summoning circle takes time, but it doesn't require exotic materials. If the player happens to roll a miss, the demon's first instinct shouldn't be to attack. It should either be to roam free, or to press the character into an arrangement they really wouldn't

like to take part in. They might even fulfill what the character asks, but on their terms.

Summoned demons love to sell information for the right price and might even make the offer themselves. They lose nothing, gain something from the pact and may very well bring more misery into the world. They may even actively tempt characters with hints of what they're offering.

SEAL A PACT

When you have negotiated a deal with a demonic being and both of you seal it in blood willingly, you're both cursed to fulfill the deal. If either of you betrays their obligation, the betrayed party may either completely dominate the betrayer once at will, or instead banish them to Hell for 1001 years. This ends the pact. Beware of loopholes.

Roll to Resist Blight after sealing the pact.

When a character summons a demon and makes a wish, an offer of pact is the demon's answer. The character might ask for an exotic poison, information, a new spell, wealth, fame, good health or anything really. Then it's the GM's job to say yes if at all possible, and determine the price. It's up to the demon to set the price, which can be anything from a simple favor all the way to the character's immortal soul.

Demons don't like to do things themselves, and they pretty much never accept assassination pacts. They'd much rather give the human the tools to do it, and make the human commit the sin personally. A demon would only betray its pact in highly extraordinary circumstances, if ever. The clause for betrayal is just to make sure both parties can trust each other to keep their end. How the demon fulfills the pact depends on its type.

Demons like to use humans, corrupt them at a deeper level and always make deals that they can exploit. A pact is a pact, but if there's a loophole, that's the mortal's fault. However, the GM shouldn't play hard gotchas with the players. How much is okay depends on the group. You should discuss this aspect of the game when the first pact is being made.

PLAYING THE GAME

SCENE FLOW

Blightburg is a game that benefits from deliberate scene framing. Scene framing is simply the technique of deciding where a scene is taking place, which characters are present and what's happening when the scene starts. Framing and cutting scenes allows the GM to move the action quickly and make good use of screen time. In a drama game such as this, we don't want to spend time watching the characters travel from one building to the next. We want to focus on conflicts and the decisions the characters have to make.

When the GM is deciding what kind of a scene to frame next, there are three natural options to choose from: a player can drive toward one of their beliefs, the GM can push a problem related to a belief to the player, or the GM can push a consequence of a previous decision to the player. Most of the time it's going to be the first or second option, depending on the nature of the character's belief, GM prep and how long you've been playing (see the GM's Tools chapter for more info). Consequence scenes will spice the flow of the game, but they shouldn't distract the game too far from the characters' beliefs.

Another thing that's going to affect the nature of a scene is the number of player characters in it. Most scenes are going to have one or two player characters in them, while a few, likely climactic scenes will feature more than two characters. As you've likely understood by now, this isn't a game that features a party of characters. Much of the time we're focusing on individual characters making decisions, or the interactions of two characters. The rest of the players are in the audience, looking for good spots to compel and use the Devil's seat.

A single scene usually revolves around a conflict or a decision point, which is either developed on the fly as the situation changes organically, or is prepared by the GM beforehand. From this perspective moves are the tools that players use to solve their problems. Choosing what to do corresponds to what move the player is going to roll. The results of moves then change the situation, create further problems and consequences and occasionally solve the actual problem.

That's the scene level flow of the game. There's also another flow you should be aware of, the mechanical flow of grit and stress economies. The players gain grit by driving towards their beliefs, resolving traits, accepting compels to deep traits and with the Manipulate move. Players spend grit to boost their rolls, and to bid with Opposition. It's also possible to lose grit by not compelling at all, or when refusing to be Manipulated.

On the other hand players gain stress when they miss rolls, fight, do witchcraft or refuse compels. The only way to lose stress is to have another player use the Devil's seat powers on the character. Grit and stress don't have a direct link, but their relative strengths determine a lot about the character's immediate fortunes, which wax and wane during the course of the game. Consider this an undercurrent that changes how the actual scenes work out.

BELIEFS

A belief is a communication tool between the player and the GM, a reminder for the player and a way to concretize the character's values. First and foremost they're a preparation tool for the GM without which they couldn't create relevant NPCs and situations for the characters. On the other side of the coin they help the player decide what to do next whenever that's not obvious. And through rewriting beliefs, we can see how the character's values and priorities change over time.

As outlined in the basic concepts, a belief has three parts: the value statement, the long-term goal and the short-term action. The short-term action is the most important one of these as that's the immediate place to look at for both the preparing GM and the player who needs a reminder. The long-term goal keeps the rapidly changing short-term actions coherent while the value statement answers the question "why is the character after the long-term goal". A value statement changes rarely, but when it does, it's a big moment for the character.

A solid belief is one where the value statement is meaningful to the character, the long-term goal is aligned with the value statement and helps the player come up with short-term goals, and the short-term action is concrete enough to communicate what the character is going to do next. The short-term action also needs to be something the character can realistically achieve in a single session.

The best way to write solid beliefs is to look at the relationship between the character and the situation. How does the character fit in the current situation? How would the character like to change the situation? Why? What's the next step along that path?

At first this is difficult since the players don't have solid answers to these questions. It's best to start with an interesting guess and see how the situation develops. After a session or two, once the players have a good idea of the situation and their characters, the answers to these questions start to clear up. Then it becomes easier to write new beliefs as well.

The players should be prepared to rewrite at least the short-term actions of a belief or two every session. It's not rare to update all beliefs after a particularly turbulent session. If a belief hasn't changed in, say, three sessions, either the player isn't driving it hard enough or its scope is too large. Focused beliefs are always better guideposts for both the player and the GM.

Let's have a concrete example of beliefs by painting a situation, locating player characters in it and then writing a few beliefs for the characters.

There are three factions in conflict, a small city council, the university and the Inquisition. The university is secretly supporting a revolt against the city council, whose despotic magistrate has a strong grip on the other council members and isn't afraid to further her family's goals from her position.

One of the university's professors is a demon, and it would greatly please him to incite the city into a civil war. However, the Inquisition knows that a dark force lingers over the university, but it doesn't know who the demon is. The magistrate would like to use the Inquisition to solidify her position as the rightful ruler of the city, but the Inquisition is more interested in justice and the spiritual welfare of the citizens.

The player characters are Maria, the despotic magistrate, Stefano, a bright-eyed inquisitor from a low family, and Antonia, Maria's daughter, a student at the university. She's studying under the demon professor, Fausto, who is the patron demon of a fourth player character we don't need in this example.

Maria's priorities are to solidify her position as the city ruler, and to make sure her daughter is safe. Stefano's priority is to find the dark presence without having to resort to corrupted political aid from the council. Antonia's relationship with her mother is distant and cold, and she'd rather marry Stefano and get away from her family. Here are two beliefs for each of the characters:

Maria's situation belief could be: *A strong dynasty will keep my family relevant now and in the future. I'll crush whoever supports the revolt at the university. Next I'll arrange a meeting with the Inquisition to recruit their aid in this.*

Her relationship belief could be: *A family is only as strong as its weakest link. I'll have to terminate Antonia's relationship with the lowly Stefano. Next I'll ask Stefano what his price would be to reject Antonia.*

Stefano's situation belief could be: *Corruption is at the heart of unhappiness. I'll find and banish the evil lurking at the university. Next I'll go look for clues of blight with Antonia.*

His personal belief could be: *The Inquisition lacks the resources to do what's right. I'll try to secure aid from the city council without strings attached by demonstrating what the evil we're facing is capable of. Next I'll bring the Black Book to the council and show its corrupting influence.*

Antonia's situation belief could be: *The university revolt group is building a better world. I'll need to support them without letting my mother know. Next I'll ask professor Fausto what I could do to help the cause.*

Antonia's relationship belief could be: *I detest my family's ways. I need to marry away from the political circles, and Stefano seems like a good person. Next I'll warn him not to get involved with the council's political plots.*

This should give you an idea how a complicated situation can become truly charged when the characters have solid beliefs that involve the other characters and are partly in conflict with each other.

There's no single right way to write a good belief, but as long as the beliefs seem charged with interesting tension and no one can say where the overall situation is going in actual play, you're doing it right.

TRAITS

Traits are a way to explore the player characters. As traits are explored through compels, they also allow the players to explore each others' characters. They allow the audience members to be active, and they're a stepping stone towards the Devil's seat.

Traits work through a few separate mechanics: the Compel, the Trait Resolution and the trait meter on the character sheet. Deep traits are the mostly stable end result of the exploration process. Mostly stable, because the characters can change their behavior after dramatic events.

The trait meter has two opposing traits and each of these traits has its own set of compel marks. When one of them is compelled, either one of the traits can receive a mark depending on how the compelled player judges their character. When one trait is clearly stronger than the other, the trait pair is resolved and the stronger trait becomes a deep trait. After this happens a new pair is picked for examination. All player characters have one pair of traits in the trait meter at all times, plus an unlimited number of deep traits.

The point of traits is to find out what the character is like, not to see how they change. This is reflected in the fact that gaining deep traits and playing according to them is incentivized, but removing them isn't. Whether a player accepts or refuses a compel, we've learned something new about the character. That's why the player needs to judge their character honestly, otherwise the player isn't finding their character, they're defining the character.

There are roughly two types of solid trait pairs: A pair of opposites and a pair of negatives. A pair of opposites would be, for example, cruel - kind. Aggressive - cold-hearted would be an example of a pair of negatives. A pair of positives doesn't work as well since it's often hard to find good spots to compel them. They can work as situational or character specific pairs, but it's best to start with easy generic pairs.

A trait that readily suggests character behavior is an easy trait to compel, and an easy trait to compel is a good trait. In addition to this, the player should be interested in the trait pair and be open and curious about the result. Well chosen traits should often lead to complications when compelled in the right situation. If it turns

out that a trait pair is hard to compel, it should be modified or changed either during or at the end of a session.

The players need to see each others' traits easily, so either write the other players' traits on your character sheet, consider putting index cards in front of each player or use a whiteboard if you have one.

COMPELS

To some players, compelling can feel like pushing into the other player's territory. Whether it feels okay or uncomfortable depends on the play culture you're used to. Another perspective might help you orient yourself to what the game expects if the mechanic feels iffy.

When I'm in the audience, playing Blightburg, I like to speculate where the situation is going and what the characters are going to do next. Of course I do this with full respect for the other players, I let them speak and don't interrupt them.

However, if a player stops to think for a moment, I use the opportunity to compel them into a worse situation. This isn't to make the player suffer or to deny their character success, but to explore how far the character is willing to go. And to make the situation even more dramatic and twisty, of course.

A player usually has an intuitive understanding of their character's behavior even before a trait pair is resolved, otherwise they couldn't play the character. This can lead to a conflicting vision of the character when a compel nudges the character's behavior toward something the player didn't see coming.

The solution to this conflict is to hold on to the intuitive understanding of the character very lightly. The player needs to accept that they might not know everything about the character at first. There could even be a dramatic reason why the character hasn't shown a particular kind of behavior until this point.

Players should actively look for opportunities to compel the other characters when they're not in the current scene themselves.

A good rule of thumb for the players is to focus on the beliefs when in a scene and on the other characters' traits when in the audience. Being out of the current scene shouldn't be pure downtime.

Compels can be used to change the course of a scene, which gives the audience an interesting tool of dramatic coordination. Everyone at the table should be curious about the characters and the situation and see whether they could ask the other characters questions that throw them off in an unexpected way. And remember that the game doesn't work without compels; the Devil's seat, traits and stress are all tightly linked to them.

THE DEVIL'S SEAT

The Devil's seat is a reward for the compelling player and a way to get a hold of the character. It's a way to spend stress points and allows us to see the characters make mistakes and go overboard. As with compels, it's a tool of dramatic coordination as the audience members can create twists and turns in the scene when they feel like it.

The way the seat is used depends on the group and how far the campaign is. A group that doesn't compel a lot tends to hold on to the seats, while a group that compels constantly also drops out of the seats often to get the discount. The seat doesn't usually see a lot of play during the first session or two since the characters don't have a lot of stress yet, but once the conflicts start to boil over, the seat starts to see a lot more use.

This should be obvious, but bears mentioning: The seat powers aren't meant for bullying or furthering one's own agenda. They should be used to create interesting situations and decisions for the other character, and to let the other character lose some stress points.

PLAYER CHARACTERS IN CONFLICT

Player versus player situations are a core part of the game, and while not all campaigns climax with the player characters at each other's throats, with or without weapons, it's a common way to end a campaign. A few friendly reminders about player versus player play may be in order.

Remember that the characters are in conflict with each other, not the players. It's best to look at the situation from an outside perspective and be curious about the characters' decisions and where they take the game.

Further, this isn't a game that anyone can win by coming out on top of the political situation in play. Instead a player who learns what their character is like deep down inside can be considered to win the game. Thus player versus player situations aren't about winning, they're about who the characters are, what decisions they make and how that affects the situation.

Player versus player (or GM vs player) situations can rouse intense feelings on the player level when the character's feelings bleed into the player. It's also a part of the Blightburg experience. Some people like it, others hate it, but either way you as the GM should be aware of it. If an argument between characters is getting out of hand on the player level, stop the scene for a moment and make sure the players are comfortable with the situation. Just a friendly reminder of bleed as a phenomenon is usually enough to prevent any animosity between the players.

As far as the mechanics go, Oppose is the main way to resolve player versus player situations. Using it should be quick and shouldn't cost you any tempo. It's a matter of announcing opposition, deciding the modifier for the roll, rolling, bidding and burning grit and reading the result. If it's an intense situation, you can take your time when bidding grit as the blind bid mechanic allows bluffing and

some mind games to make the situation even more tense. Also if anyone is sitting on the characters' seat(s), remind them to consider whether they'd like to tamper with the conflict as a third party.

Sometimes the results of a player versus player conflict require careful neutral judgement from the GM. If it's a hard decision, return to this basic principle: If the roll is a full hit, the rolling character won. If the roll is a weak hit, it's as much a draw as possible, and if that's not possible, favor the rolling player. If the roll is a miss, the rolling character lost.

THE GM'S TOOLS

AGENDA

These are the things that you as the GM should do when playing the game:

- Portray a gritty Renaissance era city as coherently as a movie would
- Play NPCs consistently and to the hilt. Make them human, but never protect them
- Put the characters' beliefs under pressure
- Show the players the consequences of their actions
- Create opportunities for the player characters to interact with each other
- Play to find out what happens, never preplan outcomes
- Remind the players to compel each other and use the Devil's seat

Portraying the city as coherently as a movie would means that you can stretch time and probabilities to create interesting situations for the characters. This holds especially true when something isn't defined yet. Keep the consequences logical, and don't change what's already defined. Let the situation guide you when deciding the outcomes of moves.

Name each NPC, and resist the temptation to play them too nicely or reasonably. We need conflict, not a merry tea party. It's also good to keep a list of names, for example from the character creation chapter, close by when you need to create a new NPC on the fly.

Always strive to either test the player characters' beliefs, or show the consequences of their actions. That's more than enough content for the campaign.

Frame scenes where the player characters can interact with each other. Be liberal with timelines to make this easier. Never preplan chains of events, you only need the first action or reaction an NPC takes. Let the players shape the course of the game by reacting back to whatever you throw at them.

Make sure the players use the mechanics of the game to keep the grit and stress engines running. Help them compel and use the Devil's seat, support them when they're making moves, remind them to burn grit and drive towards their beliefs.

The following sections give you concrete advice on how to fulfill your agenda.

PREPARING FOR A SESSION

NPCS

First and foremost, you as the GM need NPCs whose human motivations are at odds with the player characters' beliefs. Look at the situation and the characters' beliefs. Which of the beliefs remain unopposed? Which vital NPCs are motionless? What kinds of NPCs can you create to challenge the characters' goals? Drawing a relationship map of the characters or a mind map of the situation can help visualize what's missing and what's going on.

While you should play your NPCs as real people and maintain the consistency of the situation during a session, it's okay to bend the campaign world's objective reality a bit when preparing new NPCs for a session if that makes things easier for you. Don't change existing facts, create convenient new ones.

You only need a rough vision of an NPC, their position in society, a name and a motivation that's in conflict with one of the player

characters' beliefs. Everything else is extra. Starting from such a blank slate allows you to shape the NPC in reaction to the players choices. Of course you can start with more detailed NPCs if you like, but don't feel obligated to do so. Also try to use one NPC for multiple purposes if possible. This way you'll create a web of relationships effortlessly.

BANGS

NPCs aren't enough, though, you also need to be able to create suitable situations with your NPCs. Once you have a bunch of NPCs and a grip of the big picture, take a blank paper and divide it into areas, one per player character. Then write the character names on top of their respective areas, split each area into three rows and label them SB, RB and PB. These stand for situation belief, relationship belief and personal belief.

Bangs are how you make NPCs take deliberate action, and also how you create interesting situations in play. Bangs are events that demand a choice from the player, and making that choice is often a value statement for the character. A bang kickstarts a situation, but doesn't determine how the situation ends.

Create a bang for every character's every belief by taking an NPC that opposes or is otherwise related to the belief, and make the NPC take action. This method makes sure you aren't ignoring any beliefs and gives you enough ammunition for more than one session, so you have some flexibility to choose as well.

Some beliefs are easier to hit than others. If the character is currently actively pursuing an agenda, create a reactive bang that the player will trigger when they drive forward with the belief. If a belief is more passive, create an active bang that you'll trigger when there's a pause in the action. Some relationship beliefs are so tightly woven around two PCs that there's no room for outside bangs. This is fine as long as the player is active about the belief.

An example. Let's say one of the PCs, Viviana, has this belief: *I believe our family shouldn't use witches to do our dirty work, so I'll crush the witch coven. Next I'll find out who are involved with the coven.* Let's also say that it's the second session and this is the first bang I'm writing for this belief.

I have two clear options. First, I could have an NPC show Viviana that the witch coven isn't a threat to her or her family. This would probably be an active bang. Second, I could have an NPC protect the witch coven from outside threats, i.e. Viviana. This could be a reactive bang if the NPC doesn't know Viviana yet. But it could be an active one as well if Viviana has already started asking about the coven.

The first option works only if Viviana isn't likely to back off from her goal of crushing the witch coven. If she's likely to back off if bribed or lied to, the bang doesn't challenge her as hard as I'd like. Since it's the second session, I can't count on her being determined enough not to flinch.

The second option is less subtle, but is more likely to challenge her. I'll go with the second option: The NPC, Viviana's brother in fact, protecting the witch coven will threaten her not to mess with things she doesn't understand, or she can forget about her dowry.

This example also brings up a point about challenging beliefs: should you challenge the belief part or the action part? As a rule of thumb, challenging the belief creates stronger drama, but it's also harder. Challenging beliefs works only if you can trust the player to push back instead of just deciding that "oh, well I guess the witch coven is actually quite useful to our family after all". This is why it's easier to start by challenging the action part of the belief until you have a good grasp of the character.

The best NPCs and bangs challenge both the belief part and the action part. These NPCs are often like mirror images of PCs with opposite values and goals. Not all NPCs should be mirror images of

PCs, though, nor should you feel pressured to create perfect NPCs and bangs. Basic NPCs grow more complex as you play, and basic bangs can often have unforeseen consequences.

The most important thing to remember when preparing bangs is this: Make sure the player has to roll one way or another if they want to further their belief goals. I don't mean that you should railroad the player into rolling, just craft the situation in such a way that the NPC isn't willing to change their mind without the player character really trying, ie. rolling.

Do not give in to the temptation of giving things easily to the characters, or to play NPCs as nice people. This can't be overstated; the game falls apart if you don't challenge the characters and make them roll.

Here's an easy way to make sure you're challenging the characters. First decide whether you need an active bang or a reactive one to challenge a belief. If you need an active one, make an NPC really want something the player character doesn't want. If a reactive bang is what you need, make an NPC really not want what the player character wants. Both situations lead inevitably to the player rolling some dice.

It's the player's responsibility to further their character's goals, and to come up with the means to do so. Your job is to challenge the characters' beliefs, not to help or enable the characters to reach their goals. It's actually fine even if the characters don't reach their goals, since it's a strong opportunity for character growth. Just don't outright block what the character is trying to achieve.

GENERAL ADVICE

Do create convenient meet-ups, lucky coincidences and other excuses to bring characters easily together, both when writing bangs and during play. This is another place where you don't want

to stress realism or timelines too much, unless you're in the middle of a high stakes situation that you want to see through objectively.

The players' actions have consequences and some of the NPCs have active plans of their own, so be sure to review the previous session and drive hard with the consequences. These can be written as stand-alone active bangs even if they don't fit to any belief slots on your bang sheet.

Another useful technique is to mark the session opener bang for each character during prep so you immediately know which bang to drop when you get back to the game.

You shouldn't prepare anything based on character traits. The players will leverage them during play. Let them surprise you.

It's also good, though not mandatory, to draw or print a map of the city and its surroundings. While this isn't a tactical game, it makes the world a lot more concrete instead of being a fuzzy cloud.

If a situation, NPC or location feels flat or you don't have a firm grip of it, try detailing its background further. How and why did it become involved in the situation at play?

Also make sure you as the GM are genuinely interested in finding something out of the situation or the characters. This can take the form of an explicit stakes question, or just an idea of what you're looking forward to.

THE SECOND SESSION

Here's what you should try to do during the second session, when you start actual character play:

Introduce the system. Before beginning play you should give the players the move reference sheets you've printed. Explain the basics of how moves work, but don't go through each and every option. Especially explain how the game rewards the players, i.e. how beliefs, traits and compels work. Hand out the Devil's seat play aids as well and write the characters' names on them.

Kick the session into motion. The players can't do this, it's on you. Especially during the first session or two of actual play you have the better view of the situation. Session opener bangs are valuable here, and as you'll probably need to do some preparations before the session you'll be the one who remembers where things were left off previously.

Introduce the PCs. Use the first scene for each PC to introduce them. Don't worry about compelling them or challenging them from subtle angles. Do the obvious and establish the baseline for who this person is.

Introduce the NPCs. The players can't take the reins until they know who the NPCs are. Use the first session to introduce as many NPCs as you can without making it contrived. You can also make a list of NPCs by name, age and occupation and give it to the players. They'll learn the NPCs a lot faster this way.

Make them roll. Some people may easily forget the dice during social situations. Don't let this happen as most situations during the game will be social in nature. Interpret their actions into moves as appropriate. Suggest possible moves they could trigger. Remind the players to read body language. If a character is clearly threatening someone, encourage the player to take the dice or back down.

Demonstrate compelling. After the PC introduction scenes are done you should demonstrate how compelling works. The players should do the vast majority of compelling during the game, but they might be shy about it if you don't show them how to do it first.

You can also demonstrate how the Devil's seat works if you get a good opportunity. The GM is allowed to compel characters and they're allowed to take the character's seat if they feel like it, both during the this session and after it. Use your discretion when doing so, though. Compelling and the seat options are mostly for the players, but if they're missing a great opportunity, you don't have to waste it.

DURING A SESSION

DRIVING THE ACTION

So you're playing your NPCs to the hilt and seeing where the situations go. At some point there will be a pause in the action when a scene ends and it's not clear what happens next. What you as the GM do next depends on how many sessions you've played thus far, i.e. whether the players have oriented themselves and know the key NPCs.

During the first session or two you should say what happens next by dropping an active bang at the player who has received the least amount of screen time. Your immediate goals are to keep the game moving and to introduce the situation as well as the key NPCs.

After the first two sessions of actual play, in the same situation where there's no clear continuation scene or when a player hasn't been in a scene for a while, instead of dropping a bang you should ask the player what they're going to do next. Now they should have an idea of the overall situation, so they can just take a look at their beliefs and start driving forward. You as the GM have become reactive and start dropping reactive bangs that the players trigger. This doesn't mean you can't take active action, of course you need to drive with the consequences of their choices occasionally. The main point is to look for the moment when the players are ready to take the reins.

Either way, when you're the one who drives the situation forward, say something provocative and then ask the player what they'd like to do. Don't lead with irrevocable consequences, lead with events and actions that will lead to irrevocable consequences if the player doesn't react. The only times you don't give the player a chance to react are when they roll a miss, or when they give you a golden opportunity to escalate a threat into a consequence. A golden

opportunity can be, for example, a willfully ignored threat. Basically anything that the player can see coming, but doesn't react to is a golden opportunity.

If you find it hard to keep the game focused on the characters' beliefs, or to let the players drive the action, here's a technique one of the playtest GMs used. When you're framing a new scene, instead of asking the player "What do you do?", ask them which one of their beliefs they'd like to further, and how. This gives a solid base for the GM to frame a scene, focuses the game on the characters' goals and makes the choice more explicit for the player. The downside to this technique is that there's less room for color scenes and other consequences. It's a good way to get into the flow of player driven gameplay, though, even if you plan on moving back to the implicit way of framing scenes later.

MOVES

If you've played or read other games powered by the Apocalypse World engine, you may notice that there isn't a list of GM moves. Prepared bangs and the player driven nature of Blightburg make a list of GM moves less important, but players still roll moves and get misses. Let's break the moves down to their result categories and see how the GM should handle them.

Strong hits (14+) are easy, the player succeeds at what they attempt and the move tells everyone what happens. Weak hits (9-13) are equally easy except for the generic Face a Threat. What you do with that move is you take the danger, the threat the character is facing, and either split it in half and make the player choose which half to take, or you weaken the threat in someway and then enact it in the fiction. Weak hits should leave the situation open, creating a snowballing effect.

Misses (8-) are where things get interesting. The main principle is to fail forward. Avoid saying "you fail" without continuing with

"and something bad happens". Again, take the danger inherent in the situation and use it. You aren't supposed come up with anything brand new on the spot, just think what would reasonably make the situation worse if the character messed up whatever they were trying.

Even though most moves say "be prepared for the worst" to the player, you don't literally have to do the worst you can imagine on a fail. Be truthful to the situation at hand, and if possible, make sure the situation changes for the worse from the character's point of view. If it doesn't sting, the players are less likely to burn grit next time, and there's a risk that the grit engine starts coughing.

Most moves are only triggered in situations where there's a threat present, but there are exceptions. For example the information gathering moves, like Read Body Language, aren't always embedded in danger. In this specific case you could turn the move against the character and let the opponent ask them questions.

However, there's also an option that always works if you don't have any other ideas: making the character suffer more stress than the default one point from a failure. It's a fine option especially when the character has very low stress since it opens up more options for the player sitting on the character's seat. However, you shouldn't default to this. It's easy to forget about the fiction when you're just handing out numbers.

In any case, when you're describing what happens as a result of a roll, you should be able to end with "What do you do?". This is part of the basic flow of moves: a player action triggers a move, the situation changes a result, and you ask what they're going to do about it next.

If the situation gets chaotic with multiple people trying to act at the same time, and you're not sure how to resolve it, take a quick pause and look at the situation as a whole. Whose action happens first in the fiction? What would make sense? Go with that order,

even if it means that one of the players ends up rolling multiple times in a row.

While moves don't require you to establish what a fail means before rolling, it's fair to give the player a clear hint if they ask about it, or if the situation is somehow vague. If a player is considering whether they should burn grit or not, it's good to be even clearer about the possible consequences of a miss. That said, this game works well with a quick tempo, and the game's mechanics support this, so if the player doesn't ask, don't feel obligated to describe what a miss means before they roll.

GENERAL ADVICE

You can diagnose how the campaign is working by monitoring your players' grit pools. If they seem to have too much grit all the time, either you're not challenging their beliefs hard enough or they're not rolling enough. If they're not rolling enough, are you forgetting to use the moves? If they don't seem to gain enough grit, they're probably not compelling each other, or they're not driving with two or three beliefs per session.

Another resource you should keep an eye on is stress. If the characters have a lot of stress for a long time, they're probably not using the Devil's seat effectively. If on the other hand there's not enough stress to use, you as the GM should probably challenge them harder.

THE END

Now you have all the tools to play Blightburg! If, however, something is unclear to you or you'd just like to ask a question, feel free to contact me at `mikko.t.karttunen@gmail.com`. I'm happy to help, and I'd especially like to hear from you if you end up playing a campaign!

CHARACTER SHEET

Character

Name: Age:

Appearance:

Lifepaths

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Situation Belief

Belief:

Long-term goal:

Next:

Relationship Belief

Belief:

Long-term goal:

Next:

Personal Belief

Belief:

Long-term goal:

Next:

Trait Meter

_____ _____

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Deep Traits

_____ _____

_____ _____

Stats	Mod.	Associated moves
Might:	____	Fight, *Lead into battle*
Rigor:	____	Threaten, *Interrogate*
Guile:	____	Deceive, *Shadow*
Insight:	____	Read body language, *Forge*
Will:	____	Manipulate, *Orate*
Reason:	____	Convince, *Poison*
Blight:	____	Witchcraft moves

Grit points

□ □

Stress points

□ □

Witchcraft & Spells

Witch type:

Obligation:

Spells:

Witch Marks:

Trait Notes for other characters:

Agenda

- Play your character as a real human being, albeit determined
- Never compromise the integrity of your character
- Don't preplan who your character is, let it emerge from play
- Drive towards your beliefs, but relent if your priorities change
- Compel the other characters' traits to learn what their true nature is