

# EAGLE EYES



PETE WOODWORTH

A WORLD OF  
ADVENTURE FOR

**FATE**  
CORE SYSTEM

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**FATE**<sup>™</sup>  
CORE SYSTEM

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Eagle Eyes

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This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible, impossible, glorious things. All the characters and events portrayed in this work are fictional. Any resemblance to real people, Roman centurions, corrupt senators, or hard-bitten noir detectives from 45 BC is purely coincidental, but kinda hilarious.



## CONTENTS

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<b>Chapter I—Roman Noir .....</b>	<b>4</b>
The Ages of Rome .....	6
The Eagles .....	8
<b>Chapter II—The Dusty Streets of Rome.....</b>	<b>13</b>
A Walk in the Eternal City .....	14
Districts.....	15
Government .....	16
Social Classes .....	17
Religion .....	23
Crime and Punishment .....	24
Economics .....	25
<b>Chapter III—Rules and Characters .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Aspects .....	26
Pleas.....	28
Stunts .....	30
Social Class and Group Dynamics.....	30
Conspiracies.....	31
<b>Chapter IV—Secrets, Lies, and Blood.....</b>	<b>36</b>
The Anatomy of a Mystery .....	36
Investigation Briefs.....	42



*Eagle Eyes* takes the themes and tropes of classic noir detective stories and transplants them to the dusty streets of ancient Rome. As members of the Eagles, the secret investigative arm of the Senate, you'll delve into the seedy underbelly of the Eternal City, where lies and intrigue keep company with murder and betrayal. The rewards for service are impressive, but the risks run deep, and only those with sharp eyes, steady hands, and steely hearts will survive.

## INSPIRATIONAL MATERIALS

Many players will be at least passingly familiar with the notion of ancient Rome, but for those who wish to dig a little deeper—or just want to immerse themselves in some more source material for the fun of it—here are some great starting points for further exploration.

*Rome*—HBO’s lavish historical drama begins in the very last days of the Republic period. With that turmoil as a starting point, it does an excellent job showing a cross-section of Roman life. Besides being an excellent example of a “fictionalized history” story, it tells a tale at once epic and intimate that connects the lives of various patricians, soldiers, plebians, slaves, and even foreigners. Highly recommended for historical flavor, a sense of everyday life in the city, and plenty of bloody Roman intrigues. Imagine Pullo, Vorenus, Posca, Timon, and young Octavian as a team of Eagles, and think about what they’d be able to accomplish together.

*Daily Life of the Ancient Romans*—David Matz’s book is a nice overview of the everyday life habits of the period, informative without being too dense. Excellent material for getting a sense of what it was like to walk the streets of Rome. Highly recommended for groups looking to start a regular game of *Eagle Eyes*—it will bring a lot of solid, evocative, authentic stories to the table.

*Gladiator*—History buffs have plenty to pick apart regarding this movie’s timeline and historical continuity, but it remains a stirring evocation of the feel of the period, and it’s a great example of a classic revenge tale. Maximus has the makings of a superb Eagle, too, not just in fighting skill but in patience and dedication to accomplishing a task at all costs.

*Bulfinch’s Mythology I: The Age of Fable*—An excellent if a bit dry compendium of Greek and Roman myths. Not only a good source for understanding the cultural context behind a lot of Roman thought, but also excellent fodder for stories about mystery cults and superstitions.

The Eagle series—Fans of Roman military history will enjoy Simon Scarrow’s earthy and accurate series of novels about a seasoned Roman centurion and his tough *optio*. Detailed, vivid, and painstakingly realistic, the books capture daily life in the legions as they fight wars and have all manner of adventures a very long way from home.

*Meditations*—Marcus Aurelius was an emperor whose time came almost two centuries after the default setting of *Eagle Eyes*, but his philosophy is an excellent window into the Roman mindset, and his words are thought-provoking and endlessly quotable besides.

## CHAPTER I—ROMAN NOIR

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Running an *Eagle Eyes* game is about balancing the two chief elements of the setting: Roman history and the dramatic principles of noir storytelling. Let's examine them each in turn.

### Rome

*Eagle Eyes* takes place in the late Republic period of Roman civilization. *Chapter II—The Dusty Streets of Rome* includes a very brief primer on life during this time to provide some context on life in the world of the Eagles, but fortunately those groups looking to add more detail won't have to go very far. Film and television both show at least a passing glance of what Rome was like, and for those seeking more detailed or historically accurate experiences, classical Rome is one of the most closely studied ancient civilizations in the world.

While we've worked to provide enough historical detail in *Eagle Eyes* to construct a vivid and viable frame for gameplay, it isn't a comprehensive study of Roman life and history. Aside from the not-insignificant fact that the Eagles are a fictitious group, we employ a great number of historical compromises, conflation, and creative adjustments for the sake of convenience and playability.

When dealing with games set in historical settings, it's important to consider the concept of *satis*—Latin for “close enough”—when constructing your stories. Even if a detail isn't historically accurate, so long as it *feels* right to the table, then use it. Sure, maybe gladiator bouts didn't actually work the way you have them in your story, or perhaps the particular mystery cult to which the antagonists belong didn't exist until a hundred years after the game is set—but is that really important? If it's dramatic and the table is enjoying it, then it's fine. That is *satis*.

This is not to say you can't enrich your *Eagle Eyes* experience with more research if you like, taking inspiration from historical records or even crafting a story framework around real events in Roman history. Authenticity has a power all its own, and knowing you're playing a shadow version of a true story can add a powerful thrill to the experience. GMs, if you have true Roman history buffs at the table, use their expertise to aid the game! A player with a grasp of Roman philosophy, military history, or arts can add a lot to a story just by contributing extra details.

In the end, though, keep in mind the concept of *satis*. If historical accuracy is colliding with fun, defer to fun every time.



## Noir

Noir storytelling is less familiar to many players than Roman history, so it deserves a bit of an introduction. In brief, noir stories feature settings rife with corruption, brutality, sin, and injustice, where monolithic institutions crush ordinary people without a second thought. Genuine idealism is in short supply, and even “good” characters tend to have a hard edge to them, tempered by past failings or run-ins with the darker elements of the world. Life isn’t hopeless, but hope’s closely guarded or else easily crushed.

Characters in noir stories often find themselves inexorably drawn into conflict with the forces that drive their society; no matter how much abuse it earns them, they simply cannot sit by and do nothing. This works well with the Eagles—those who won’t take risks and challenge the powerful aren’t much good to the organization, after all.

What’s more, one’s willingness to take on this sort of world typically stems from a deep-seated passion or traumatic personal experience. Noir characters rarely do what they do simply for fun, but rather because they feel they have no other choice. Whether they work patiently to take revenge for their brother’s murder at the hands of a powerful senator, stoke a religious zeal to remove those who harm the Republic, or even just know they’ll do whatever it takes to make enough money to retire to a quiet life in the country, noir characters have a personal stake in the world around them, grim as it might be at times.

Unlike the plots of most conventional roleplaying games, noir isn’t about changing the world so much as surviving in it. At best, noir protagonists remove a particular evil, but society at large remains corrupt and unjust. In some cases they must even contend with knowing that removing one evil has in some way benefited the plans of another, bolstered only by the sample hope that, in the end, the good will outweigh the bad.

None of this means a noir story shouldn’t be fun to play, GMs. It can be too easy to slide from putting the PCs in bleak and brutal situations to making the *players* feel as though nothing they’re doing can succeed or even matters. A certain amount of cynical humor comes with the territory, as do rare moments of genuine warmth or idealism—if only to serve as contrast—and both can be necessary interludes to ensure the mood isn’t always excessively paranoid and oppressive.

Remember that doomed heroism, persevering in the face of seemingly impossible odds, and fighting a corrupt social order just to make the world *slightly* better than before are all the stuff of highly entertaining stories. It’s just good for the players to understand that the tone of the story will be a bit different than what they might be used to in other, perhaps more lighthearted games.

## The Ages of Rome

Roman history is generally divided into three periods, characterized by the ruling form of government: the Monarchy, the Republic, and the Empire. By default, *Eagle Eyes* is set in the late hours of the Republic, perhaps even as events unfold that will see Gaius Julius Caesar take his place as the first of the new Roman emperors. This period is the focus because it is a great time for the sort of intrigue this scenario thrives on. While some people certainly hold eminent positions in society—a few even close to emperors in all but name—it is still a time when even the most powerful must tread carefully and cloak their actions in some semblance of populism.

By the late Republic period, Rome is well established as a great power. It spans much of the known world and even takes pride in its own origin mythology. Many of the great works of Rome are complete, and the systematic conquest and assimilation of Rome's enemies seems an eventual surety. Romans take great pride in their invincible nation, and to be a citizen of the Republic is an honor sought after throughout the known world. Civilization is flourishing, and with Rome as its standard-bearers, it looks as though it will continue until even the farthest corners of the world are under the eagle.

And yet, like any seemingly monolithic power, there are cracks spreading in the foundations of the greatest nation on Earth. Tensions between some of the Republic's most powerful politicians and military leaders are reaching a boiling point. The resulting power plays and intrigues frequently spill into the streets and back alleys of Rome, where they're settled by whispered promises from soft lips or bloody blades in the hands of hard men. The Senate, long considered a model of fair and representative government, divides along strict factional lines, as senators gather around like-minded colleagues to block the advances of their rivals and expand their personal power bases.

Without the Eagles rooting out the worst offenders and stopping up the biggest scandals, chances are good that the rival factions—senators, merchants, military leaders, even plebian firebrands—would have descended to open conflict, tipping the Republic right over the edge and into chaos, perhaps even prompting the return of tyranny. As it is, even the most idealistic Eagles can feel the change coming, so they ready themselves for the worst even as they wade into the latest sin, the latest intrigue, the latest killing.

Nobody said keeping the Republic on its feet would be easy.



## ALTERNATE TIMELINES

It is certainly possible to set a game of *Eagle Eyes* in the later Imperial period if the group desires. In this case the Eagles are probably either the personal agents of the Emperor, some kind of spy network, trouble-shooters, and secret police all rolled into one. Be advised that such a move does shift the style of play a bit more toward an espionage thriller than a noir detective story. With the authority of an Emperor behind the Eagles, however covertly, their nature changes in important ways. If that suits the group's interests, though, have at it!

Of course, the Eagles can still serve as agents of the Senate during the Imperial period; though in theory the power of the Senate diminishes sharply under Imperial rule, in truth it actually varies considerably from one emperor to another. Strong emperors do their best to craft a pliant and obedient Senate, of course, while weak or mad emperors create opportunities for the Senate to take back some of its power—or even to make a play for the crown. There's a lot of fertile ground for stories of corruption, conspiracy, and murder.

A more historically ambitious group could also go back to the days of the Monarchy or the very early Republic period. Roman society was a bit more primitive during those times than the comparatively sophisticated political colossus it would become, which might necessitate a bit of research to adjust certain setting elements. If the doomed ambitions of the early kings and the machinations surrounding the creation of the Senate aren't excellent hunting grounds for Eagles, though, then no such grounds exist.

## The Eagles

The binding element that brings the characters together is membership in the Eagles, a select group of private investigators and troubleshooters for the Senate. The Eagles are not an officially recognized organizations, but arose over the years as a cabal of necessity, allowing the Senate to conduct discreet investigations, head off scandals, and even punish transgressions in ways that shield the worst state secrets from the public light.

The Eagles serve a group of three senators known as the *Sinistram* (“Left Hand”), chosen to represent three key elements of Roman society: the plebes, the patricians, and the spirit of the Republic itself. Disputes among the Sinistram triumvirate conclude with a simple vote, with the representative of the spirit of the Republic breaking any ties. The selection criteria for the Sinistram is a closely guarded secret, but whispers say that the representative of the plebians selects the next patrician representative and vice versa, and the Republic representative ascends by unanimous agreement of the other two members.

The group’s unofficial status serves the Eagles and their masters well in many ways. It offers discretion, for one—the public is always hungry for scandal and outrage, especially when it comes to the rich and powerful. Having a covert organization handle matters ensures that they do not reach the public eye or that, when they do, it is on the Senate’s terms. While vigorously denied in public, the existence of the Eagles is something of an open secret in the Senate, the better to ensure that senators give proper respect when agents come calling.

It also offers a measure of deniability, should something go truly wrong during the course of an investigation, but a wise Eagle knows this also means they are ultimately expendable. While the Sinistram has been known to go to impressive lengths to aid its agents in difficulty, in a contest between the organization and its members, everyone knows who will come out on top.

Of course, as with any agency involved in politics—and perhaps especially a covert one—there is certainly potential for abuse. While there are no official records kept of the Eagles’ actions, stories passed down from one generation of members to the next talk of times when the Eagles walked the streets as weapons wielded against political opponents, business rivals, or even other members of the Sinistram.

That final possibility, while the most vigorously denied, is undeniably true. Perhaps the Eagles were once a more idealistic group with purer motives, but in the time of the late Republic, agents learn quickly that loyalties are as important within the group as they are to the group. There are the Golds, who side with the patricians; the Coppers, who side with the plebes; and the Laurels, who officially claim no part in the squabbles between baseborn and highborn, but are something of a mystery cult themselves, worshipping the Republic with fanatical zeal.

These distinctions are not cut across class lines either—there are plebians and foreigners among the Golds, most often attempting to curry favor and secure advancement, and there are patricians and highborn legionnaires among the Coppers, either rebelling against their station or hoping to sow seeds of popular support for future endeavors. The Laurels are the most unpredictable, on several



levels, and appear to recruit without criteria other than fanaticism. While temporary alliances come and go, the factions don't trust each other, so most Eagles live in a world of shifting allegiances, where one misstep can easily spell disaster.

### **Recruitment**

One is far more likely to be approached by the Eagles than the reverse, though an enterprising individual who can pick up their trail and clever enough to keep the secret may also receive an invitation. Membership in the Eagles is only ever offered once, though, no matter who you are—if you turn it down, they will not come calling again. There is one exception to that rule: if you turn down an invitation and start talking about it to the wrong people, the Eagles will most assuredly visit you a second time, but for a much shorter, far less friendly conversation.

Unlike many other areas in Roman society, the Eagles don't consider social class to be a ruling factor when selecting new members—they may be patricians, plebians, soldiers, resident foreigners, even slaves. Nor is gender a concern; while Roman society as a whole has many strict notions about gender roles, which may complicate certain matters in the field, ultimately the Eagles care about personal ability and initiative above all else. Indeed, the Sinistram values having a wide variety of agents at its disposal, and so considers candidates from all walks of life; at times, agents with uncommon skills or connections may find themselves relatively indispensable. The factions themselves also push for diverse and aggressive recruiting so that no one group has the only agents versed in a particular region or culture.

Often the recruiting offer that finds a potential Eagle also includes an appeal to join one of the subgroups of the Eagles: the Golds, the Coppers, or the Laurels. If the new recruit agrees to join the Eagles but turns down or misses the ulterior offer, they will still be admitted but start off with enemies already watching them.

## Organization

While the Eagles rarely recruit whole teams all at once, and their members are perfectly capable of working solo or with a partner, in practice they often organize into small teams known as “hands” when assigned particularly involved or dangerous tasks. Hands are composed of several agents with complementary talents or specialties, as suits the anticipated needs of the job. A hand on a particularly involved or uncertain mission might have a skilled liar and petty criminal, a burly former gladiator, a wealthy socialite, and a crippled former legionary with a keen tactical mind.

Hands that prove competent frequently reassemble for subsequent assignments, so long as it suits the interests of the factions backing them. Often a hand has members of two or even all three factions, as that ensures the outcome of the mission escapes none of them. Though rare, a hand composed entirely of a single faction is known as a “fist”—a reflection of the group’s cohesion and propensity for brutal resolutions in pursuit of their goal.

In the field, a hand is led by the first among equals, or simply the first. If a first isn’t designated by the Sinistram, the Eagles sort it out as they see fit. Being the first can be a rather thankless task: if the mission fails, they bear a heavier weight of responsibility, but they rarely receive a larger share of the glory if it succeeds. And if a hand has Eagles belonging to different factions, one Eagle—first or not—might complete a task only for a fellow agent to steal the credit right out from under them. While they might let it slide now and then if it favors their faction, the firsts of hands with mixed loyalties know that they can’t let it be known that they are too biased, or their effectiveness may be questioned, which is rarely a good thing in a secret society. As such, firsts have a well-deserved reputation for being hard-nosed, demanding, and more paranoid than their compatriots.

## Mandate

The Eagles are not an official law enforcement organization and have no standing in Roman law beyond what any Roman of their class and origin might possess. This nature is generally advantageous to them, however, as it means they do not need to respect laws or social niceties in the course of their duties—except, of course, when doing so gets them ahead. This frees them up to use just about any means they deem necessary to accomplish a goal, so long as those means don’t bring any undue public scrutiny or outcry back on the Eagles.

The primary task of the Eagles is investigation. Even if the Sinistram generally know what transpired and what they want done about it, they rarely send agents to take direct action without first doing at least a bit of field investigation, the nature of which varies by the task and the agents assigned to it. For example, piecing together an alleyway knifing of a prominent senator might first require bribes and beatings to wring information from the local criminal element, only to be followed by polite conversation and political maneuvering over a lavish feast in a Palatine estate. Most Eagles learn early to be flexible and always at the ready.

After investigation, the next most common task for the Eagles is obfuscation. Concealing the truth, or at least critical parts of it, from anyone the Sinistram deems unworthy is a key component of what the Eagles do. Roman justice is highly public, and presenting the right information can shift a verdict from guilty to innocent or vice versa. Obfuscation can also involve redirecting information in exchange for favors or leverage—or, as it's more commonly known, blackmail. The Sinistram is not above putting useful individuals in its pocket, and so long as the Eagles achieve the Senate's goals in the process, not too many complain about it. Or if they do, they do so in whispers.

Of course, not every offender the Eagles track down faces conventional justice. Retribution is the first option: making sure the offender suffers commensurate punishment, whether at the hands of the legal system or other, more discrete means. If that fails, or if the offense is so serious that nothing less will do, there is removal. While removal missions are rare, they do occur, particularly for targets that have proven resistant to other forms of justice or persuasion. Eagles must be particularly careful on these assignments, not only because they are likely to encounter stiff resistance if they tip their hand, but failure could also expose the organization, which is bad for everyone—very bad.

Because of these high stakes, Eagles on a removal mission have a free hand in how they accomplish it as well as access to whatever tools they might need. But each and every one knows that failure means taking the full weight of their actions. Compromised Eagles who try to offer up the secrets—or worse yet, the services—of their agency in order to save their own skins can look forward to short, painful lives when their offer comes to light. Because, rest assured, it will.

## Retirement

With such dangerous work and the myriad chances to make powerful enemies and learn deadly secrets, it might seem a wonder that anyone would accept an offer to join the Eagles. Especially when most Eagles serve for five years, minimum, and many as much as a decade or more. The answer lies in a deceptively simple practice: the *petitio videtur*.

When an Eagle joins the organization, they present a *petitio videtur* (“unseen request”), a single boon required of the Sinistram. This request can be for almost anything, in theory, short of the outright supernatural. Common requests include land, titles, or sums of money, though it is not uncommon for marriages to be arranged, educations provided, criminals pardoned, exiled relatives returned, or prosperous businesses founded.

Provided the Eagle serves loyally and well, the request is honored and the agent released at such time the Sinistram feels it has been earned. Arrangements are made, alliances sealed, documents provided (or forged), funds transferred, lands claimed—and if anyone questions the legitimacy of the deal, one can be sure more Eagles will come to convince the doubter of the error of their objections. Over the years, the Sinistram has learned that allowing Eagles to name their price for service ensures a dedicated, motivated cadre of individuals willing to do most anything to succeed.

Given the reach of the Sinistram in Roman society, the power of the *petitio videtur* is great indeed, but a prospective Eagle must consider their request carefully, as it determines in part the length of their service to the agency: the more difficult, demanding, or complex the request, the longer the Eagle must serve to earn their reward. An Eagle need not present their *petitio* upon joining, but they are encouraged to do so before a year is out at the latest. Should an Eagle change their request, it is customary to expect at least another year of service, even if the new one is much more humble and obtainable than the first.

It is extremely rare for the Sinistram to fulfill an agent's *petitio videtur* in advance of service—the Eagles are not fools, after all, and know their hold is much weaker on an agent who already has what they desire—but there have been exceptions in the past. Typically these involve matters of great urgency, such as saving a relative from execution, where delay would render the request irrelevant. When the Sinistram agrees to such a request, the Eagle is often assigned the harshest, most dangerous duties until the debt is worked off, and watched carefully for signs of desertion or disloyalty.

After a *petitio videtur* has been granted, the Eagle in question is not required to leave the organization unless the terms of their request make it impossible to continue. An Eagle whose first term is up may attempt to “re-enlist” by offering the Sinistram a *petitio secundo* (“second request”). If the Sinistram agrees, the Eagle continues their service as before. At the end of each term of service, they may continue offering a new *petitio* until the Sinistram declines their offer, in effect retiring them.

Should an Eagle die before their *petitio* can be fulfilled, the Sinistram often elects to honor the request posthumously, assuming there remains a potential beneficiary. If the Eagle wanted a farm in the country, for instance, the Sinistram might grant it to the bereaved family. To do otherwise would invite great unrest among the ranks of the Eagles—or even promote talk of eliminating Eagles simply to avoid fulfilling their requests. However, if an Eagle dies well before meeting their *petitio* burden, the Sinistram may elect to pass, unless other Eagles take up the burden. While doing so adds months or potentially even years of service, it is one way of honoring a fallen comrade. Taking on this burden is considered a mark of great loyalty and integrity, though more cynical Eagles scorn it as a sucker's play.

Sharing the terms of one's *petitio* with fellow Eagles is acceptable, though it is extremely poor form to ask about it—if it is not offered, it is best not to inquire. Rumors abound that this courtesy comes from what is known as the *petitio mortem* (“death request”)—when an Eagle requests a death or even multiple killings as the price of their service. Officially, the Sinistram denies that such requests are honored, but off the record such requests supposedly can be granted—if the Eagle is willing to wield the dagger.



## CHAPTER II—THE DUSTY STREETS OF ROME

While a comprehensive guide to a society spanning hundreds of years and thousands of miles is well beyond the scope of this book, this chapter covers a few basic aspects of Roman society needed for a game to function. We've taken quite a few historical liberties to condense this information into playable form; if you're inclined, though, go forth and research the periods and topics that interest you! A little extra authenticity can add tremendous flavor to a scenario.





## A Walk in the Eternal City

Most views of ancient Rome are colored by the lens of antiquity, informed as they are by later civilizations that either idealized Rome as a paragon of culture and learning or vilified it as a grasping, bloody-handed colossus. Both perspectives have some truth, naturally. Historians have made great strides, particularly in recent years, in understanding what daily life was like in ancient Rome, and it can be a bit different from what people expect. Before the game begins, then, consider stopping for a moment so you can gain a detailed, immersive sense of what it was like to live long ago in the Eternal City.

Close your eyes, and take a walk.

One of the first things to strike a visitor is the scale of the place. In a time when the vast majority of the world's population lived in tiny villages or farms, Rome must have seemed like the work of the gods. Massive stone temples and palaces loom like mountains, and even simple homes are packed high and deep, condensing the populations of whole rural villages into a single block of housing. Though natives walk the city with ease, visitors can find the sheer size of the place difficult to navigate, so much sometimes that they hire guides. Perched on its seven hills and connected by a network of cobbled streets and dirt alleys, Rome seems greater than any person, any one nation really—an impression that its officials are only too happy to use when treating with foreign dignitaries.

Then there are the sights. While the modern world inherited pristine white marble, Rome was actually a blaze of colors. Fabric dye is big business, for one, with the more exotic colors fetching impressive prices. Brightly colored paints cover everything from temples to statues to the layers of graffiti covering the city walls. Banners and pennants snap and wave in the breeze, while people of every hue and origin walk the streets in glittering jewelry and flashy fabrics. Even the most humble Romans are fastidious about their appearance by the standards of antiquity, and the wealthiest have ornate hair and complex makeup that is simply astounding.

The city is alive with sounds as well. In the markets the merchants tout their wares, engaging in lively games of insults and boasts with their rivals as they attempt to win customers to their stalls. Servants clear paths for their patrician masters, whether afoot, borne in a litter, or on horseback, shouting noble names and hurling abuse to clear the street for their betters. Heralds proclaim the latest

news from the Senate floor to the far reaches of the Republic, pipe and drum music spills out of tavern doors, prayers echo out from the temples, and the roaring crowd from the arena signals the rise of a new champion.

Sight, sound, and scale are all good starts, but they don't engage the mind in the immediate way that some other senses do. Rome is thickly layered in scents, and not just the pungent ones you'd imagine—especially since aqueducts gave many citizens incredible plumbing for the time. Cooking fires bring the scents of dozens of foods to every quarter, while perfumed patricians waft past the sweating laborers toiling in the market. The wealthy keep lavish gardens not just as a treat for the eyes, but also as an olfactory refuge, particularly during the warm summer months. The smells of baking bread and cooking oats are common, a side effect of the grain dole to the common folk, and naturally the scents of horse, oxen, and other livestock mark a city with a bustling marketplace.

Then, feel the relentless heat of summer, oft dry apart from the summer storms. Combined with the dust and smoke, it can be stifling, especially in the close-packed neighborhoods of the poorer citizens. Gardens are not just visual and olfactory delights; they also represent the wealth required to have space to use just as, well, space. In winter, the smoke of hearths and cooking fires hangs heavy over the city, and citizens fight the bitter chill with layers of heavy fabric.

## Districts

Though famed as the city of seven hills and organized in various ways throughout its history, for *Eagle Eyes* the city of Rome divides into four principal districts, known colloquially as the quarters. Each quarter is further divided into neighborhoods, or *vicii*, which have small governments of their own and elect positions such as magistrates and tax collectors. Pride in one's neighborhood runs strong, and many are quite close-knit, with generations of families living on the same streets.

**The Palatine:** Considered the heart of the city, the Palatine is the site of Rome's legendary founding as well as such prominent landmarks as the Forum and the Circus Maximus. It is a place of public business, religious observance, and spectacle, as well as home of kings and emperors.

**The Aventine:** A working-class quarter known for its many tradesmen and communities of freedmen and foreigners, the Aventine is also a hub for much of Rome's criminal activity. Its locals are well aware of which *collegia* organizations run which neighborhoods.

**The Capitoline:** A place of massive temples and buildings considered old even by Roman standards, the Capitoline holds great religious and prophetic significance, making it familiar to many of the most devout citizens.

**The Caelian:** A residential district for many of the city's patricians and some of the more ostentatiously wealthy plebians, the Caelian is home to lavish parties and displays of wealth, all neatly tucked away behind high walls and locked gates, of course.

## Government

During the Republic period, the nation's ultimate governing body is the Senate, a gathering of wealthy and influential patricians. Membership in the Senate is limited to some of the oldest and wealthiest families of Rome, each contributing a single man to the governing body, though it's possible for new families to be added to the Senate rolls, particularly if old lines die out or get removed for high treason or other terrible crimes. In very rare cases, senatorial status is bestowed as a reward for extraordinary merit.

Senators accept some limitations in their role; they are unpaid, for one, and they are forbidden from conducting many forms of trade. Of course, nothing prevents a senator from using shell companies and cronies to earn a healthy living in trade, but officially speaking this ban on trade and banking is thought to make them more impartial. Senators could not leave the environs of Rome without permission from the Senate, though it is rarely denied. Catching a senator breaking these restrictions is quite a boon to the Eagles, as it gives them a great deal of leverage.

The power of the Senate is vast and far-reaching. While daily administration and law enforcement in the territories falls to regional governors and local magistrates, the Senate can issue sweeping legal decrees and direct military actions. And if all else fails, it holds paramount control over the national treasury, letting them “starve out” territories and measures of which they disapprove simply by withholding necessary funds. Senators can raise issues themselves, or magistrates can summon the Senate to hear a petition, and matters are decided by simple vote. The Senate can even declare a dictator in times when a single executive decision-maker would be beneficial, but doing so has grown rarer over time because of the great potential to create a tyrant or self-styled king.

By the late Republic period, the powers of the Senate had some checks, chiefly the consuls and the tribunes. Consuls, elected in pairs from the ranks of the patrician military, held military powers and could veto certain decrees that conflicted with their authority, as well as the decrees of other consuls. Representing the plebians were ten tribunes, who could veto Senate decrees that affected the plebian class. They also had the power to call plebian assemblies, which passed laws affecting the plebians alone—the patricians were subject only to the Senate. Exactly how willing the consuls and tribunes were to use their veto power depended heavily on their influence and standing, of course, as they were subject to the same pressures, temptations, and coercions as any other men.

While reforms very late in the Republic period would change the membership of the Senate somewhat, it remained a patrician organization to the core. They did not concern themselves with the affairs of plebians and foreigners, much less slaves, unless it happened to concern the patricians as well. The Senate liked to see itself as the guiding hand of the Republic, and took the long view of affairs, setting policy with an eye toward expanding and stabilizing the nation. This attitude is exploited by clever Eagles—it's remarkably easy to justify something if it's presented as being in service of the greater good, after all.

## Social Classes

Social class is a complicated factor in Roman society, and centers most on two things: wealth and citizenship. Citizens of the Republic enjoy many more rights and privileges than resident aliens or other outsiders; even the poorest, dirtiest plebe can take some comfort in the knowledge that he enjoys more freedoms and protections than the comparatively pampered slave of a wealthy patrician. Harming a slave is a purely civil matter, for example, treated like destruction of property and usually punished with a fine, while attacking a citizen is a criminal offense with potentially dire ramifications. Citizens are exempt from certain punishments and indignities—torture, for example—and citizens cannot be executed for any crime other than treason.

Of course, citizenship wasn't everything. Money went a long way in ancient Rome; a wealthy foreigner might not have much recourse under the law if you cheated him in a business deal, but he could certainly hire some knifemen to pay you a visit and show you the error of your ways. And if you swore a complaint against him, his friends in the Senate—their own fortunes entwined with his business dealings—would certainly do their best to quash it. Specialized slaves, such as tutors and trained bodyguards, who belonged to wealthy Romans enjoyed a level of *de facto* protection and social freedom that many ordinary plebians did not—after all, who wants to make an enemy of a powerful patrician by insulting or injuring their prize possession?

Historically speaking there were several different classes of citizenship, each conveying distinct legal rights and protections, but in *Eagle Eyes* characters are simply citizens or non-citizens. Citizens are represented by the Senate and enjoy the full range of legal rights and protections of Rome; they can vote in assemblies, hold public office, marry, inherit, create binding contracts, and bring complaints both civil and criminal to court. Non-citizens have no say in government, hold very limited capacity to appeal to the law for help, and are subject to any punishments and indignities the law can imagine. Think about playing up the divide, GMs; it was very real in Roman society, and can serve as fodder for any number of stories about injustice, persecution, ambition, and of course revenge.

These descriptions of social classes don't differentiate by gender roles; while this isn't quite in keeping with Roman history, we wish to give players the most options for character inspiration. A woman from the legion social class might not be a soldier—unless you want to be even more liberal with history, that is—but rather someone who learned from her soldier father as she grew up. Or perhaps she was a servant or a camp follower who traveled with the legions. Likewise, while male and female patricians traditionally received very different educations, whether that matters is something for the group to decide.



**Patrician:** Those born into privilege, a member of Rome's ruling elite. Some patrician families can trace their ancestries back to the founding of the Republic, while others are of more recent creation, having clawed their way up through exemplary service, shrewd marriages, booming businesses, and more than a little intrigue. Patricians are educated as a matter of course, often by slave tutors, with a mixture of classical history, philosophy, and oratory, as well as literacy and mathematics. Patricians are taught to think in the long term and hold the family name above their own, to manage their fortunes and holdings with an eye toward future generations. Of course, this didn't stop them from indulging in the sort of decadent lifestyle that made Rome famous, not to mention intrigues and feuds aplenty. And when you're so close to top, it only means you can fall farther than anyone else...

Patricians tend to see themselves as the keepers of the Republic, shepherds of the plebian masses who would otherwise let the great nation fall apart. This sense of civic responsibility doesn't always produce the best results on a personal level—after all, if you see yourself as a savior of civilization, it's easy to justify all manner of sins to get what you want—but it is still a key part of understanding the patrician mindset. Even if only to uphold their own holdings and lifestyle, they fight to keep the Republic together and functioning in the long term.

**Legion:** Those members of a legion, one of many forming the army of the Republic. Both patricians and plebians serve in the legions, the plebians comprising the infantry and the patricians typically serving as officers and cavalry forces. Though a term in a legion is long, lasting six years for conscripts and up to sixteen for volunteers, a career of exemplary military service is one way for an enterprising individual of otherwise limited means to gain notice and get ahead in Roman society. Serving a full term might also give a foreigner a chance at citizenship. Legionnaires receive extensive physical and martial training, march great distances, and learn how to work and fight as a unit, including how to construct and assault fortified positions. Even after leaving the military, many former soldiers proudly wear signs of their service, which often grant them an extra measure of respect.

Being part of the Roman military was different from virtually every other military in the world at the time, and worth noting because of it. While training varied somewhat by rank and region, the intense discipline of the Roman military was fairly uniform and left a lasting impression, for better or worse. Many soldiers traveled vast distances by the standards of the day, and came into contact with a number of exotic places and peoples—even if it was sometimes through combat. This often made veterans surprisingly cosmopolitan, particularly those drawn from the lower classes, who might have not otherwise seen more than a sliver of the world in their lifetime.





**Plebian:** Those born into the common folk of the Republic, making up the vast majority of its population. Plebians are true citizens of the Republic, a fact which most plebians take extreme pride in, as it separates them from slaves and foreigners—it gives even the poor Roman plebe a way to feel superior to the wealthy foreign merchant he passes on the street. Though some plebians are quite wealthy, most live humble lives as laborers, farmers, and craftsmen, providing the raw materials and basic goods of the Republic's economy. Many plebes receive a basic education sufficient to recognize important words or symbols and handle simple sums, but beyond that they learn only what they pick up by their trade and their own curiosity.

One thing known to canny Eagles, priests, and politicians alike is that the plebians are far and away the most dangerous force in the Republic, and not just because of their sheer numbers. Given the weight of popularity and the power of social stigma in the Republic, the will of the masses is a very real thing, and astute generals, senators and patricians recognize this and play to the plebes whenever possible. Certain prominent plebes recognize this as well, of course, and are only too happy to make their influence available—for the right price, of course.



**Foreigner:** A blanket term for anyone residing in Rome who is not a slave or a citizen. During the Republic period, Rome was a fairly cosmopolitan place, and visitors from North Africa, the Middle East, Northern Europe, and the British isles could all be spotted on its streets. Foreigners occupy a curious position in Roman society: they frequently encounter open prejudice for their strange customs, exotic religions, or even their looks; they enjoy far fewer legal protections than the average citizen; and they have almost no voice in the government. Yet they are vital to the Republic's economy, so they are tolerated, even encouraged, to provide goods and services that Romans consider necessary but too distasteful or exotic to easily produce themselves.

Foreigners enjoy a certain amount of minor celebrity in their dealings with most Romans, who find foreign customs curious and don't shy away from asking foreigners about their manner of dress or their religious beliefs. Foreigners must deal with ever-present condescension from the Romans, even the most well-meaning—their assumption of superiority is so ingrained that most aren't even aware of it, or wouldn't care if they were—but this behavior does allow foreigners a certain latitude in their behavior, as Romans expect them to act a bit odd.





**Slave:** Slaves are an everyday necessity in many Roman households, and not just the wealthiest ones. The city features a brisk slave trade, with “stock” coming in from across the Republic, and most Romans regard it purely as a business matter, little different than other livestock auctions. While many slaves are destined for a life of hard manual labor or menial domestic servitude, those with specialized training or talents are in high demand and fetch equally high prices. Educated Greeks are prized as tutors to the children of the wealthy, for example, and strong Franks, Gauls, and other men from far-off lands provide exotic fodder for the arenas. Roman slaves have few rights, as expected, but also enjoy a certain social invisibility—they can easily blend into the background, gaining access to a surprising number of locations, so long as they are ostensibly on their master’s business.

While slaves can purchase or be given their freedom—and the latter outcome is a not-uncommon reward for faithful service, either during their owner’s lifetime or as a provision in the owner’s will—being freed does not automatically grant citizenship. Freed slaves are essentially native foreigners in terms of their rights under Roman law; while some are subjected to a certain amount of residual contempt for their former standing, this is far from universal. Indeed, a Roman might hold a certain grudging respect for the former slave—they must either have worked industriously to buy their freedom, or must have done something right in order to have it granted.

## Religion

Religious belief was a critical part of Roman life and important to understanding their society and worldview. Rome itself claims divine origins, and the successes of the nation's military and diplomatic expansion were seen as signs that the Roman gods were powerful and favored their mighty nation. This assumption of divine favor goes a long way toward explaining the superior attitude of many Romans when encountering other cultures—after all, they reasoned, if they were not the most beloved of the most powerful gods, how could they possibly have forged such a mighty Republic?

The traditional Roman pantheon is well known—Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Pluto, and the like—but by no means encompasses the deities that Romans recognized. Roman religious observance was a complicated thing, and part of daily life on many levels. Many citizens began their day with devotions to their household god, a spirit that oversaw the health and prosperity of the family, often supplemented by honoring famous and beloved ancestors. Worship of the Republic itself even became popular during the Republic period; the very nation was a divinity of sorts, and obedience to it a form of religious observance.

Indeed, Roman adherence to religious ritual encompassed almost every aspect of daily life, and even those who might privately doubt the efficacy of such devotions still took pains to observe the proper rites in public. Blessings were invoked to open and close businesses, as well as to seal important deals and commemorate rites of passage. Military leaders and politicians consulted auguries to determine whether their actions would enjoy the favor of the gods. Even a declaration of war would await auspicious signs, and acting against bad omens was considered the height of hubris and liable to cost tremendous popular support. Of course, those augurs were as human as any other citizen, and some were not above taking a bribe to rig their predictions in favor of their benefactor's wishes—something clever Eagles might exploit.

Also of particular interest to the Eagles are the many mystery cults thriving throughout the Republic. Some are tiny, just a handful of followers, while others are vast, with dozens of cults in cities across the nation. Some are packed with zealous true believers, while others are essentially social organizations; some are open secrets while others are closely guarded cabals. Mystery cults vary widely in purpose and dogma, but are subjects of endless rumor and speculation. The Eagles have investigated quite a few in the past, if only to make sure they were not breeding grounds for dissidence and zealotry. These assignments are some of the most dangerous known to the Eagles; because the mystery cults diverge from established dogma, it can be very difficult to predict how their followers will react to strangers in their midst.

## Crime and Punishment

Though much of what the Eagles do necessarily avoids the ordinary Roman justice system, there are times when a target may be sent up to face the law—after the Eagles get what they need first, of course, or only after they get framed for a crime. Still, having a working knowledge of legal basics is useful for any Eagle who wants to use the system as leverage—or avoid falling victim to it.

In short, most everyday offenses are what modern courts would call civil matters, which are handled by a local magistrate, an elected official responsible for overseeing a particular neighborhood. The magistrate would hear testimony from both parties and anyone else they thought had relevant input. Then they would issue a summary judgment, typically involving financial compensation and perhaps a limited physical punishment to deter future offenses.

It's worth noting that, during the Republic period, the corruption of magistrates is proverbial—while ostensibly impartial, as elected officials they are not above making decisions based on who backed their campaign. Often, an early step of an Eagle's investigation will be learning a magistrate's proclivities and prejudices, especially in the poorer districts of the city.

For more serious offenses, the accused are tried in a public court. They are allowed counsel—lawyers waited outside the courts to sell their services as needed—and, absent a specific plaintiff to bring charges, the counsel represents the people of Rome instead. The public nature of trials is an essential part of the process—public shame and persistent stigma being key elements of the Roman legal system—and secret proceedings are frowned upon. In the trial itself, the lawyers exchange arguments, moderated by a judge, with each side attempting to simultaneously refute the opposition and advance their own case.

Herein lies one of the main obstacles—or surest strengths—facing the Eagles. In an age well before recognized forensic science, definitive physical evidence is often in short supply, so cases are typically decided in favor of the side with the most persuasive counsel. Indeed, popular lawyers attracted followings at their public trials; some even had their most effective arguments recorded for posterity. Reputation and popular opinion factor heavily as well, so even known criminals often walked free if they commanded enough love—or fear. Conversely, a clever group of Eagles can virtually guarantee conviction if they can sway public opinion, suborn the arguing attorney, or otherwise influence the perception of important parties.

## Economics

The Roman economy can be challenging to adapt, but as so much of it revolves around money—especially bribery, hush money, and all manner of ill-gotten gains—it's important to understand something about how Romans were paid. By the Republic period, Rome circulated huge amounts of standardized coins, and Roman currency was accepted not just within the nation but also by a number of allied powers, vassal states, and trading partners. The values and inflation of Roman currency varied throughout their history, but a quick online search can provide any number of currency tables, even the costs of some common items at various times.

However, while currency was widely used, especially in urban centers, it was by no means the only way to conduct business. Many Romans still made good use of the barter system, exchanging goods or raw materials for what they desired; while bartering was more common in more remote regions and among the poorer classes, even the patricians bartered when it suited them. There was something simple and efficient about it that appealed to the practical Roman spirit; after all, coins alone won't build a house, stop a knife, or fill an empty belly.

In addition, many Roman salaries—a word, incidentally, believed to originate from the practice of compensating Roman soldiers with measures of salt as part of their pay—included trade goods in addition to or entirely in place of monetary payments. Salt is perhaps the most famous commodity, but other professions received payment in grain as well, and rations of produce or even meat were not unheard of. As part of their income, many laborers in service to master tradesmen would receive a small amount of their employer's trade goods or services.

If sorting currency tables and calculating barter rates proves cumbersome, getting in the way of play, you can always declare the simple expedient that one denarius equals one modern dollar, fix sums at modern price and salary equivalents, and eliminate most forms of barter (or tag them with cash values). Doing so gives up a certain level of authenticity, but can make it easier for players to intuit how much they should offer to bribe the warehouse guard, or just how much of a fortune they stumbled across in the chest hidden under the dead senator's bed.

## CHAPTER III—RULES AND CHARACTERS

*Eagle Eyes* is designed to be run using *Fate Accelerated* in order to capture the fast-moving nature of Roman intrigue. Unless otherwise noted in this chapter, follow the rules and character creation presented in *Fate Accelerated*.

### Aspects

Characters in *Eagle Eyes* have five aspects: a **high concept**, a **trouble**, an **ideal**, a **petitio videtur**, and a **virtus**. Each one differs slightly from the aspects in *Fate Accelerated*.



## High Concept

Due to the prominence of social class in ancient Rome, a character's high concept must include their social class in some fashion: *Battle-Scarred Legionnaire Troublemaker*, *Ingenious Household Slave*, *Ambitious Wife of a Fallen Patrician*, and so on. The actual name of the social class doesn't need to be included in the aspect, so long as it demonstrates which class the character belongs to.

## Trouble

An Eagle's trouble should cover some difficulty that might arise during the course of an investigation, or that would complicate their involvement with the agency: *A Coin in the Hand Is Worth Two in the Future*, *Injustice Makes Me Sick*, *Haunted by My Father's Mistakes*, and so on. Make the trouble aspect potentially relevant to your Eagle's work, otherwise it won't come up often enough during play.

## Ideal

Despite—or perhaps because of—their cynical surroundings, many noir characters stand by certain ideals, higher notions that give them some sense of stability and purpose. Make this aspect reflect some deeply held belief, a fundamental notion that guides much of your Eagle's behavior: *All Men Should Be Free*, *Speak Truth to Power*, *I Am Apollo's Chosen*, and so on. Even a more pragmatic Eagle might have a deeply held belief such as *Never Trust an Honest Man* or *Anything for the Right Price* to reflect their cynical nature.

## Petitio Videtur

The *petitio videtur* is another powerful motivation, one that can keep an Eagle going despite terrible odds. It is the price they asked in return for their service in the Eagles, so it's unlikely to be something they arrived at lightly. Knowing what an Eagle is working toward can be a wonderful way to understand what they're looking forward to—and what they're willing to do to get it. *My Son Deserves a Better Life* is the sort of motivation that can drive a person to do almost anything, after all, and even more selfish ones like *One Day Soon He'll Be Mine Forever* or *When I'm Rich I Can Afford to Be a Better Person* can provide a lot of interesting ground for stories, not to mention compels.

## Virtus

From the Latin for “excellence,” this aspect describes a talent or quality that makes the Eagle stand out, often why the recruiter sought them out in the first place. While it should not be supernatural, it can represent truly exceptional abilities or advantages, particularly those related to a specific field or talent. *Sudden Death with a Blade in My Hand* marks an Eagle as a dangerous enemy in a fight, for example, while *Talk a Cat Off a Fish Cart* represents a less lethal but no less useful talent for talking people into almost anything, and *A Friend Around Every Corner* means that the Eagle has a network of allies and informants, no matter the place. Regardless of the nature of the *virtus*, don't be shy with it—this is the place to make an impressive declaration of ability.

## Pleas

*Eagle Eyes* uses approaches from *Fate Accelerated*. However, in keeping with the spirit of the setting, they are presented as pleas to six particularly appropriate Roman deities, whose blessings make various undertakings possible—and whose wrath brings ruin on a cursed endeavor. Players, use pleas to indicate your approach while adding a little color and avoiding game terminology. Naturally, you can put some spin on these pleas as suits your Eagle and the story.

### Minerva (Clever)

Daughter of Jupiter, Minerva is the goddess of wisdom, and especially its expression through the arts, business, and strategic victory. That might seem a problematic diversity for a single goddess, but Romans see no conflict—such affairs have common roots in a sharp mind and a knack for learning. Minerva can become quite taken with especially brilliant individuals, and she is not shy about heaping favor upon them, though never to the point where they stop using their wits entirely. Fittingly enough, she serves as the patron goddess of Clever actions.

**Plea:** “With Minerva’s voice, I...”

### Mercury (Quick)

Messenger of the gods, Mercury is often an intermediary in the affairs of gods and mortals, bringing messages and edicts down to earth and appearing to heroes with divine blessings in hand. Though famed as the god of travelers and couriers, Mercury is also a god of magic and medicine, and always acts swiftly to find the fastest, simplest route to resolving seemingly complex problems. Mercury values the quick-witted and quick-footed, making him the patron of Quick actions.

**Plea:** “On Mercury’s wings, I...”

### Juno (Careful)

Wife of Jupiter and protector of Roman women, Juno is a complex figure. While her husband is well known for his rages, infidelity, and legendary outbursts of temper, Juno is far more reserved, but those who mistake her quiet maneuvering for weakness always suffer for it in the end. She is a figure of martial prowess and marital fidelity, invoked for defense and to honor vows, and while her wrath is not as immediately terrible as her husband’s, it is grim, long-lasting, and terribly thorough. Her endless planning and reserved aspect make her the patron of Careful actions.

**Plea:** “Juno shield me as I...”



## **Pluto (Sneaky)**

Lord of the Underworld and brother of Jupiter, Pluto is one of the mightiest of the gods. He is not seen as a figure of evil, but respected as ruler of the realm where all men ultimately reside. A jealous god of a dread domain, Pluto is rarely invoked directly by the living for fear of being drawn into his realm. Naturally, this forbidden nature makes Pluto a prominent feature in many mystery cults and other secretive sects. Pluto's tremendous yet rarely invoked power associates him with Sneaky actions—the darkest words and deeds often involve his realm.

**Plea:** “Eyes of Dis, watch as I...” (This refers to Dis Pater, an early god of the dead that eventually merged with Pluto. “Dis” was used to refer to Pluto indirectly.)

## **Jupiter (Flashy)**

King of the gods and ruler of the skies, Jupiter is a being whose immense passions are rivaled only by his colossal power. His sacred eagle is emblazoned on countless Roman structures, and to invoke his name is to swear the most solemn oath. Jupiter can be extremely generous and affectionate when appeased, but his mood shifts swiftly when slighted, and his wrath rains down as thunderbolts. His rages and his blessings alike are rarely subtle, which lends him to favor Flashy courses of action.

**Plea:** “By Jupiter’s stone, I...”

## **Mars (Forceful)**

Though Mars is renowned as a god of war, the Romans also believe him to be an agricultural deity and a protector of the people. While some of Mars' characteristics are adapted from the Greek god Ares, the Romans typically view Mars with a great deal more respect; he is seen as more of a sacred guardian and warrior than the coarse brute of Greek myth. With his aggressive spirit and sheer virility, he embodies Forceful action.

**Pleas:** “Look here Mars, I...”

## **Using Pleas**

These are not actual magical charms in the game, but simply ways to phrase game actions so they add to the atmosphere—rather than saying “I’m drawing my sword and using a Forceful approach to intimidate them,” it’s more evocative to say “I’m drawing my sword and praying that Mars smiles on me as I convince them to back off.”

## Stunts

Stunts in *Eagle Eyes* work the same as in *Fate Accelerated*. GMs, if players create a stunt that lets them ignore the normal rules to do something cool or say something true, it doesn't automatically negate the drama of the investigation. *Eagle Eyes* is all about untangling webs of deception, and stunts are a perfect way to do it. They give players a way to cut to the heart of the mystery in ways appropriate to their characters. After all, noir deals in hard truths, but if the players can't reach those truths at all, they're bound to get frustrated. So rather than seeing these stunts as impediments, use them to heighten the tension by offering stumped players a way out of dead ends or letting them crack puzzles no one else could.

For example, say a player wants a stunt called *I Can Read People Like a Book*, which lets their Eagle know, once per session, if someone is lying without rolling. In a game built around lies and deception, this might seem off-putting, but remember: the Eagles are *supposed* to unravel these mysteries. Besides, knowing once per session whether someone is lying isn't so much to ask—in fact it can be downright useful to a clever GM. Guaranteeing at least one absolute truth per session can certainly help a group struggling to unravel complicated plots and layered intrigues.

## Social Class and Group Dynamics

Given the sharp distinctions between social classes in ancient Rome, it might seem difficult to outline mysteries that characters of different classes can all investigate equally, but there are ways to do it while still remaining true to Roman culture as presented. For one thing, those class distinctions can actually work to the Eagles' advantage—soldiers are naturally welcoming of other soldiers, slaves can get access to most anywhere if they are about their master's business, patricians can expect hospitality from other patricians, foreigners can find it easy to bond with other outsiders, and so on. So long as they stay within the “context” of their class in society, an Eagle can enjoy a certain amount of social invisibility and camaraderie.

If needed, GMs, you could also split up the group as they go about their work. Say the Eagles must infiltrate a wealthy senator's manse to look for clues. The patrician in the group could create some business pretext, bringing along the foreigner as his trading partner and the soldier as his bodyguard, while the plebian accompanies the slave as an “overseer” as they go around back to the kitchens and servants' quarters, where they can talk to the other half of the household. Splitting up the group can be a little more demanding on the GM, but it ensures every character has a task to complete and time to shine, not to mention how it increases the tension as the Eagles must face down dangers alone.

Of course, GMs, if you're having trouble imagining how a particular social class might participate in a story, you can always disallow characters from that class. While this is often a last resort, it can be better than forcing a particular social class into a situation where they really don't fit. Regardless, before an investigation begins, take a few minutes to look over the group's composition of social classes and brainstorm ways that each Eagle might interact with the story. As a rule of thumb, so long as there is a reasonably plausible explanation for why each Eagle could be part of a scene, it's best not to split hairs—remember the concept of *satis!*

## Conspiracies

Almost by definition, those the Eagles investigate are no ordinary wrongdoers; the everyday system of Roman law suffices for such miscreants. Instead, the Eagles typically face off against criminals and conspirators insulated from the normal corrective mechanisms of society, whether due to noble birth, great wealth, ruthless reputation, the love of the public, or some other special talent or quality. When investigating such untouchables, it's often not enough to simply gather evidence; you must also dismantle the network or reputation that protects them from consequences.

To represent this tangled web of safeguards, misdirection, and backup plans, investigations in *Eagle Eyes* center on the **conspiracy**. Each conspiracy has a stress track and, possibly, some consequences. Before the target can be subject to game-ending punishment, truly solving the problem, the conspiracy must be taken out. So long as the conspiracy track has even one box unfilled, some vestige of trouble is still out there and the Eagles still have work to do.

The conspiracy track does not necessarily protect against physical attack—though it could represent bodyguards and precautions if the story involves circumventing such hazards in order to continue the investigation. In theory, often very little prevents an Eagle from walking up to their target and putting a knife in their ribs. In practice, though, killing rarely solves the sort of problems Eagles are called on to handle; if it were that simple, the target would likely already be dead.

In other words, killing the corrupt senator who ordered a murder on one of his rivals might seem to solve the problem—but, if the conspiracy track still has unfilled boxes, he might turn out to have only been a pawn, meaning the Eagles just killed off a potential lead to the true mastermind. Or perhaps they find that he left behind a “hit list” to be executed in the event of his untimely death, and now the Eagles must scramble to find out who's on the list and prevent his knifemen from doing their bloody work. Perhaps his death even created a power vacuum, producing a situation far more dangerous and unstable than whatever problem he was causing.

## Conspiracy Stress, *Claritas*, Consequences

Though conspiracies are not strictly characters, they can still suffer stress and take consequences. Unlike a character, a conspiracy can have more than 3 stress boxes. As conspiracies get more involved, they get more stress boxes and consequence slots:

- A simple conspiracy that can be unraveled with 2–3 scenes of solid investigation—roughly a short gaming session—gets 2–4 stress boxes.
- A complex conspiracy that might take 4–6 investigative scenes—a long gaming session, or perhaps two short ones—gets 4–7 stress boxes and maybe one consequence slot.
- A truly labyrinthine conspiracy that takes three or more sessions to pick apart could have 7–10 stress boxes, and it’s likely to have one or more consequence slots (see below).

The PCs can deal stress to the conspiracy like any other character. However, the conspiracy cannot be attacked at just any time—it requires a situation where the Eagles have a chance to further their investigation in a significant way, at the GM’s discretion. These moments are called *claritas* (Latin for “clarity”).

Most of the time, moments of *claritas* suggest themselves—dramatic confrontations with antagonists, tense interrogations, and hard-earned payoffs from investigative digging are all valid moments, though by no means the only ones. Players, if you feel a situation is ripe with *claritas*, make your case!

Players, at a moment of *claritas*, you can attack the conspiracy. GMs, if the PCs are facing an active antagonist, the conspiracy defends using a relevant approach of that antagonist. If the Eagles are trying to wring the truth from a corrupt senator, for instance, roll defend for the conspiracy using the senator’s Pluto approach. If there is no active antagonist, set a passive opposition by accounting for the successes and failures the Eagles incurred along the way.

Some conspiracies can suffer consequences, indicating that they are particularly difficult, resourceful, or dangerous—or can bounce back just when the Eagles believe they finally have it defeated. On a mechanical level, having one or more consequence slots can provide some insurance against a single lucky roll signaling the endgame for a conspiracy, as it represents extra levels of planning or preparation by the conspirators.

As with stress boxes, give the conspiracy more consequence slots as it grows in complexity:

- A single-session conspiracy gets one minor or no consequence slots.
- A two- or three-session conspiracy could have one mild and one moderate consequence slot.
- A truly elaborate or durable conspiracy could have one mild, moderate, and extreme consequence slot each, making them extremely hard to unravel.



### ***Extrema***

When a conspiracy can suffer no more stress and has no remaining consequence slots, that doesn't always end the investigation on the spot—though it certainly can, if it is appropriate to the story. However, if it doesn't end right away, it does mean that the Eagles are closing in on their goal, for better or worse, meaning the next scene is the *extrema*, the final act. This scene marks the close of the current assignment, where villains are confronted and questions answered. While you don't have to neatly resolve every thread, GMs, take a moment to answer the major points of the investigation.

Don't skimp on the revelations in the *extrema*, either—if the Eagles have taken out the entire conspiracy, consequences and all, they've earned those hard truths! Lay bare any remaining secrets, bring forward any malefactors waiting in the wings, and give the Eagles a final showdown or moment of truth in their investigation. As a good rule of thumb, GMs, have each player offer a question they want answered in the *extrema*, something about the mystery that's been nagging them, and try to answer as many of them as you can within the structure of the narrative. You don't have to wrap up everything with a neat little bow, but you want the players to come away satisfied, even if the answers are little comfort to their characters.

There's also the question of what to do if the narrative seems to have reached a natural conclusion, but the conspiracy still has unfilled stress boxes or consequence slots. Naturally you could give a "false ending," where one problem is solved only to reveal more matters lurking beneath. If this does not seem suitable—if prolonging the story would feel too artificial—then just ignore the remaining boxes and conclude the story. Keep the extra boxes for the next conspiracy, of course, as the enemies of the Eagles will surely come to exact revenge.



## TAKEN OUT AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

What happens if the conspiracy is taken out, but the story has not reached a satisfactory stopping point? The short answer is that, just like a character who's been taken out, the conspiracy might not be dead and gone, either.

When a conspiracy is taken out, the Eagles have made a significant advance in their efforts, one leaving their opposition at least momentarily reeling. Exactly what this means depends on the scene in question, but it should always be a clear gain for the Eagles—this is not a time to be stingy. Reward the investigators for their efforts: unmask villains, eliminate obstacles, answer questions, remove threats, provide assistance, whatever seems right for the narrative at the time. If there is no obvious benefit, put it to the table and go with the most appropriate suggestion.

In game terms, taking out a conspiracy has both an upside and a downside. The downside is that no further *claritas* rolls are allowed during that scene. Just like a character who's been taken out can't be targeted with more stress during the same scene, neither can a conspiracy. Individual antagonists can get into conflicts and take stress, but the conspiracy itself can't take more hits until the next scene.

The upside is that the Eagles gain a mechanical advantage for the rest of the scene—or, if the scene is ending soon afterward, one that carries over into the next. A good option is an aspect related to the victory, such as *Hot On the Senator's Trail* or *All the Aventine Saw Them Bleed*, though a new stunt could be appropriate as well, such as *Well-Planned Ambush*, which grants a +2 to the Eagles' rolls on the first round of the next conflict.

This benefit fades at the end of the scene where it applies, as the conspiracy has regained its footing a bit, removing the Eagles' advantage. If the conspiracy is taken out again before a benefit expires, the new benefit stacks with the old one for their overlapping duration.

## Using Conspiracies

Players might find it a little tricky to understand that finding ironclad evidence of a criminal's guilt might not be the end of the conspiracy. In noir stories, having proof is never enough on its own, much less being “right”—this is a world where bribery, betrayals, smear campaigns, and other dirty tricks rule the day.

The Eagles might walk out of the first scene with all the hard evidence they'd need to prove their target committed a heinous crime, in theory—and still have five unfilled stress boxes left on the conspiracy track. Which means the case is only getting started. Filling the rest of the conspiracy track might involve fighting off others who are out for the evidence, circumventing the corrupt judge trying to derail the case, enlisting the aid of local officials to sway the public, and so on. As a rule of thumb, players, assume you'll encounter these setbacks:

- Until the conspiracy track is filled, no one will believe you.
- Until the conspiracy track is filled, it's not safe to bring the evidence to light.
- Until the conspiracy track is filled, your foes will pay off the crowd or bribe the judge.
- Until the conspiracy track is filled, there's an accomplice, minion, or hidden mastermind who is willing to carry on the criminal's work—or who was behind it all along.
- Until the conspiracy track is filled, you might have driven your foes away for now, but they're just “summering in the country,” and if you don't finish them off, they'll be back with a vengeance.

This is part of what makes the conspiracy a useful narrative tool, in fact. It helps the players understand the pacing of the investigation, and also shows them how much progress they've made toward completing the mystery. This can help prevent players from feeling frustrated—when they can see the conspiracy still has some stress boxes left, they know the twists and problems they're facing are part of the story, not just thrown in arbitrarily to limit them or slow them down.

Remember, GMs, that the conspiracy is there to mark the progress of the case, not to spite and punish the players. When you introduce a new twist, don't invalidate what the players have accomplished so far. Noir is bleak enough without the players feeling like every action is utterly futile—or worse yet, like they're being punished for not investigating the conspiracy the “right” way.

Even if you don't think it's a good idea for the players to kill the corrupt senator—even if they did so against the orders of the Sinistram—they should still gain *something* from it. It might not be as good or as much as they could have gotten otherwise, and ultimately far more trouble than it's worth, but still, they accomplished something.

## CHAPTER IV—SECRETS, LIES, AND BLOOD

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Of course, neither the Eagles nor the Sinistram would be necessary if it weren't for the endless mysteries, scandals, intrigues, crimes, and other matters that require their unique attention. And since the Eagles don't handle run-of-the-mill situations—though some might seem relatively ordinary at first—it's important to understand how to build stories that require their involvement.

### The Anatomy of a Mystery

Noir thrives on complicated plots and webs of deception, which can seem a bit intimidating to set up, especially if you're trying to put together a quick pick-up game. Fortunately, you can break things down into a few simple categories, mix them together, and come up with surprisingly complicated plots in just a few minutes.

### The Status Quo

The Eagles are called in only when there's a problem that needs solving, or perhaps an impending problem that they must head off before it causes trouble. But before you have a problem, you need to know what's being targeted in the scenario—what is at risk or at stake—which means you need to know the situation as it stands. Once you know this, you can piece together how it might come apart without the Eagles' intervention.

That's where the Status Quo becomes important—the state of affairs that either needs to be protected or restored. Here are some sample Status Quos, which you might find useful as the starting points for developing your scandals.

**Happy Home:** What could be better than a loving family? Sure, every family argues now and then, but overall in this family everyone loves each other and gets along.

**Political Stability:** The Senate is in a period of relative calm and cooperation, and the business of the Republic is conducted with as much honesty and civility as one could hope.

**Business as Usual:** A particular enterprise—criminal or legitimate—is running smoothly, making everyone involved money with a minimum of difficulty or fuss.

**Pax Romana:** The legions are not conducting any major campaigns, and there are no pending enemy attacks or rebellions. Well, nothing especially notable, anyway.



## The Break

Now that you've got a basic situation, it's time to introduce the element that threatens to ruin everything: the Break. Take a look at the nice, pristine Status Quo and think about how to wreck it. Is it under pressure from external forces? Succumbing to decay and disorder from within? Both? What's happening to it, and why?

If you're in a hurry or you're having trouble coming up with a suitable problem, here's a quick list of classic noir Breaks that you can use. Just pair one up with the Status Quo, and ask yourself how that Break might introduce problems and chaos. If your Status Quo is Happy Home, for instance, taking Money as the Break might mean a young heir is tired of waiting for their fortune, or it could indicate that the family has fallen on hard times and racked up some dangerous debts. A Break of Power might well indicate that the whole family is ambitious and willing to do some dark deeds to expand their holdings, or it could mean that they have some influence someone else wants.

**Money:** Someone stands to collect a big payday from this problem, or maybe they're just trying to scrape together enough to keep debt collectors away. Who is it?

**Sex:** Maybe they think it's love, maybe they know it's not, but things are heating up in ways they shouldn't, and this new relationship threatens to bring others down.

**Power:** There's influence to be gained by breaking up the current order and replacing it with a new one. Someone's making a play, and it's causing a lot of damage.

**Secrets:** Everyone has something they'd rather others not know about. Blackmail is an old weapon, but an effective one, and some people will gladly kill to keep things from seeing the light.

**Madness:** Rome has a long and bloody history of insanity, especially among the powerful. Lunatics are a source of great stigma and shame, not to mention dangerously unpredictable enemies.

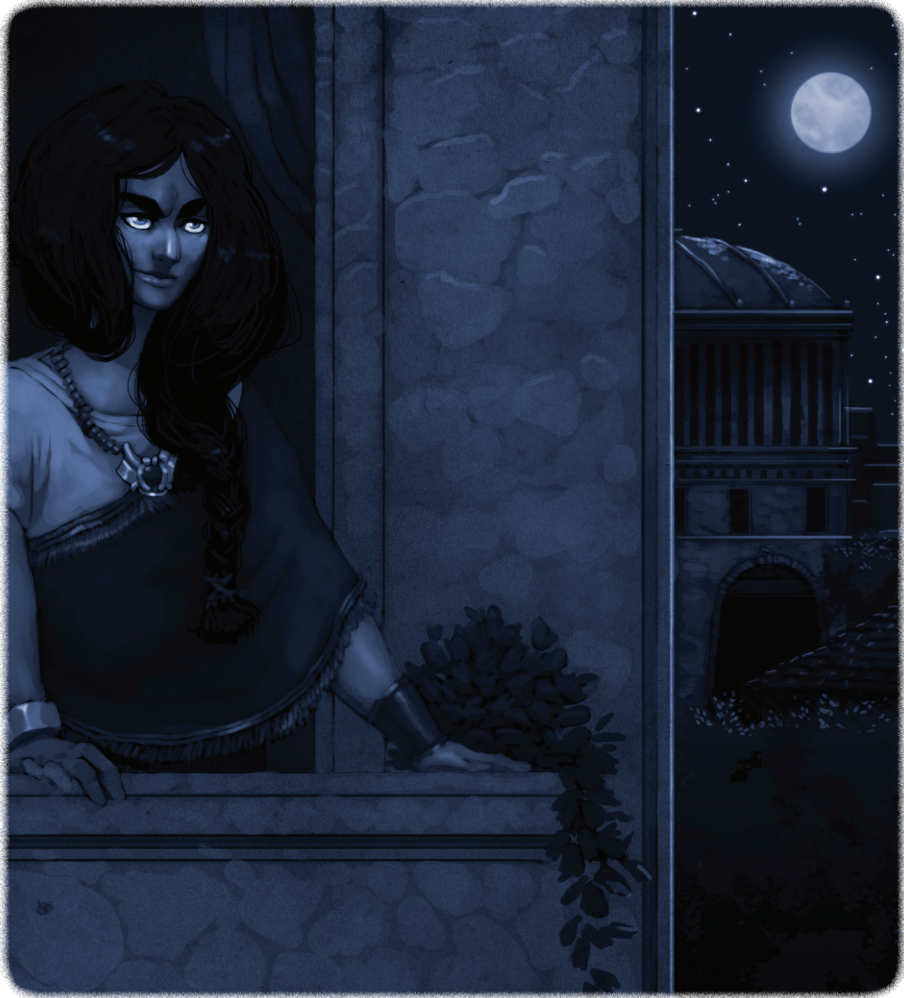
**Revenge:** Sometimes the justice allowed by law falls far short of what a perpetrator deserves, if they're even punished at all. And not everyone is content to let it lie at that. Oh, no.

**Betrayal:** Someone important is switching to the side of a former hated rival, or maybe they're just striking out on their own. Either way, it's at the worst possible time.

**Zealotry:** Faith can be a comfort, but it can also be a weapon. Whether from a mainstream faith or mystery cult, religious zealots lead inquisitions and order crimes in the name of their gods.

## The Heavy

As the antagonist of the story, the **Heavy**—an old slang term for villain, common to classic noir—is the one behind the problems the Eagles are up against. In noir, perhaps the most important question to ask when deciding on a Heavy is *cui bono*—Latin for “who benefits?” People don’t just upset the status quo for no reason, after all, especially in a risky or destructive way. A good antagonist always has a solid motivation for their actions, however malevolent or insane it might seem to others. Even crazy people have their reasons for doing what they do, much less shrewd politicians and ruthless criminal masterminds, so if someone is acting in a way that the Eagles notice, the stakes and motivation must be commensurate to the risk.



**The Brute:** This villain simply takes anything they want, and what they lack in subtlety, they make up for in sheer brute force and cruelty. What's more, they have such power that—even if you see them coming a long way off—it still might not be enough to make ready for when they arrive. The Brute isn't necessarily physically violent, though they can be—a Brute of a politician could easily use the law as a blunt object to batter his enemies, just as a criminal Brute could take a club to the knees of his rivals. Brutes are excellent “straight line” villains for characters to show off their raw prowess, or conversely for forcing characters to find new ways to solve their problems other than simple application of power.

**The Corruptor:** This antagonist doesn't want to defeat their enemies so much as convert them to their cause. Often the Corrupter appears first as an ally, offering the Eagles assistance of some kind: money, information, or even simple comfort. However, the longer the Corruptor keeps their claws in, the more their gifts come with a cost, until the Eagle is either totally under their sway, or so compromised that they have no choice but to do their new master's bidding or be destroyed. Corruptors make excellent secondary villains or great opponents for socially inclined characters who might enjoy cutting through the Corruptor's webs of minions and navigating their network of promises and betrayals.

**The Mastermind:** Perhaps the toughest of all antagonists to portray on the fly, but also one of the most rewarding, the Mastermind is the villain of schemes. Brutes threaten, Corruptors seduce, but the Mastermind simply outmaneuvers. They typically employ distractions and misinformation to disguise their real purpose, and have contingency plans in effect so that foiling one scheme is merely a setback. One of the keys to portraying the Mastermind is the feint—they rarely go straight for their goal, but put forward a few fake leads and false starts first to draw out their enemies. Masterminds are excellent antagonists for testing the cleverness and perception of the Eagles, as their schemes require dedication and ingenuity to unravel.

**The Weakling:** An unusual sort of antagonist, the Weakling is someone the Eagles need to protect or otherwise deal with for their case, but whose own failings make the job exceedingly difficult. They don't necessarily actively oppose the Eagles, they're simply incapable of handling themselves in some crucial way that makes the investigation difficult. They might be cowardly, prone to spilling their guts at the worst time, relapsing into addiction, or simply incompetent when expertise is required. Weaklings test the patience and ingenuity of the characters, as they present a situation where the Eagles cannot simply fight or outwit their “enemy,” but instead must find a way to cope with a fundamentally incompetent character.



## The Twist

Another classic noir element is the Twist, a moment or element that takes an investigation down an unexpected path or steers events in an unforeseen direction. While not required for all investigations—indeed, if overused the Twist loses all impact, as the players come to expect it—a good Twist reflects the paranoia and uncertainty that lie at the heart of many great noir stories. Hardly anything is ever as simple, easy, or straightforward as it seems, and old friends are often just those best positioned to knife you in the back.

A good Twist flows naturally from the situation—even if the players didn't see it coming, it should still make sense in the existing fiction. If the Eagles have learned across multiple scenes that the leader of a mystery cult obsesses over certain ancient texts and will do anything to get them, it's not a Twist to suddenly have him not care about those texts at all. It's just an arbitrary setback, likely to frustrate the players because it makes no sense in the established story.

The best way to ensure a Twist doesn't feel like a punishment or some random deviation is to seed it into the story ahead of time, even if only a little bit, so that that the players can look back and say "It all makes sense now!" If you're worried about giving away too much for the characters, but still want the players to know in order to build tension and avoid feeling too gimmicky, one way to do this is a cut-away or another narrative technique that takes place outside of what the Eagles see. For instance, if you want to set up that a friendly tavern keeper is actually a member of a mystery cult the Eagles are investigating, you could continue narrating after the Eagles have left, describing how the tavern keeper bends over to pick up a cask of wine—exposing the cult tattoo at the base of his neck previously hidden by his tunic. Now the players know but their characters do not, which can really heighten the dramatic tension.

Of course, while some players enjoy the added tension of knowing things their characters don't, other players dislike knowing the answers before their characters do, either because they feel it ruins the suspense or because they don't want to separate player knowledge from character knowledge. Particularly in a mystery-oriented game, excess player knowledge or "metagaming" can be problematic; even if players aren't worried about "cheating" with this information, it might take away some of their satisfaction at uncovering the information themselves. So GMs, before you give away information in this fashion, it's usually best to ask the players first, so you can use the techniques best suited for your players.



**The Next Break:** One simple way to introduce a Twist is to work in a new Break right as the first Break is resolved. An investigation that begins with Eagles following a Money trail in pursuit of a thieving senator could suddenly veer into a Revenge story as they find the senator has been stealing in order to fund a massive vendetta against a political rival he blames for his family's deaths.

**The Double-Cross:** Perhaps the most classic noir move, where a supposed ally suddenly betrays the players, usually at the least opportune moment. Done right, it's a real jaw-dropper, as the characters must rapidly re-evaluate their priorities and the landscape of their alliances. Even more debilitating than the initial reverse is the paranoia that sets in afterward—if one ally can turn traitor, who knows who else can be trusted? For a double-cross to work best, the characters must already have some kind of relationship with the betrayer. They don't have to be best friends, but betrayal by someone who's always been a jerk to them—or hasn't really ever spoken to them—isn't going to have much impact.

**The Strange Bedfellows:** Also known as the “enemy of my enemy is my friend” principle, this trick forces the characters to cooperate with people they would normally consider enemies or else face defeat at the hands of a common foe. Make sure that both groups have a compelling reason to work together: A common enemy or problem is a necessary start, of course, but you can really get rivals working together if they have to depend on each other—for example, if the characters must bring along a rival Eagle for a crucial part of the mission because they don't have the skills necessary to complete their objectives.

**The Double Reverse:** Basically a pair of double-crosses, the double reverse finds the characters betrayed by someone they trusted, only to find out someone they thought was an enemy was actually their ally all along. The double reverse is different from strange bedfellows because the latter implies the characters are tied to their new “allies” only by necessity, while the double reverse means that the former enemies are in fact definitely on the same side for the long term. Like the double-cross, the double reverse requires that the characters have reason to trust the person who betrays them, plus they also need to have real antipathy for the enemy that turns out to be their ally. However, don't go overboard with building up their dislike for their enemy too much, or the characters won't buy it when the switch happens.

## Investigation Briefs

What follows are seeds for some mysteries and scandals the Eagles can dive into immediately. Each one establishes a basic premise, along with a developing problem and some reasons behind it, including possible unexpected plot twists. Each mystery is broken down into the elements found earlier in this chapter to demonstrate how they're constructed and to inspire future mysteries.

### Sons and Daughters

The Senate asks the Eagles to visit the slave markets near the Coliseum; Senator Cornelius' personal valet has been showing an unusual amount of interest in finding a particular lot of slaves coming from Gaul, and it's starting to attract attention. With an important vote on the disbursement of the treasury due in a few days, it's important to ensure that nothing underhanded is afoot. Of course, when two of those of slave children turn out to bear a striking resemblance to that Senator's chief rival, Senator Pontius, you can bet things are about to get very complicated indeed. Pontius will want his bastard children covered up, Cornelius will want them exposed for his gain, and the Eagles must keep both sides from igniting civil unrest in the city.

**Status Quo:** Political Stability (slave markets)

**Break:** Secrets (Senator Pontius' illegitimate children, Albus and Fabia)

**Heavy:** Mastermind (Senator Pontius' wife, Agrippina)

**Possible Twists:** Next Break of Zealotry (A mystery cult wants the children because they believe the children fulfill a prophecy of some kind); Double Reverse (Agrippina is actually trying to keep the children safe from her abusive husband's hands, while Senator Cornelius tries to kill the Eagles for interfering in his own scheme to use the children for his benefit)



## Blood and Wine

In the middle of a lavish feast attended by many of Rome's most powerful and decadent elite, a murder. Senator Titus Avitus' young daughter is dead, throat slashed, and the Eagles are tasked with keeping the incident quiet and the party contained while figuring out who committed the horrible crime—and what must be done for the sake of justice. (Or if it turns out it might help incriminate a rival senator, you know, blackmail.) Early signs point to a ruthless underworld figure, but why would such a man choose to draw the wrath of a powerful senator? What could possibly warrant such a brutal killing in such a high-profile location?

**Status Quo:** Happy Home (Senator Titus)

**Break:** Money (Senator Titus owes tremendous gambling debts)

**Heavy:** Brute (Crassus, local crimelord and holder of those debts)

**Possible Twists:** Next Break of Revenge (Crassus and Titus used to be allies and Titus betrayed him, leaving him to wrongfully rot in jail); Strange Bedfellows (Titus attempts to have the Eagles and the criminals wipe each other out to remove any evidence of his past misdeeds, forcing an alliance between the Eagles and Crassus to survive)

## Just Following Orders

The Senate has reason to believe that a popular general is considering an act of high treason—unlawfully seizing a governorship, maybe, or perhaps even ousting the Emperor. In his house in the city, his villa in the countryside, or even his legion's camp itself—it's your job to find evidence of his treachery. And if there isn't any? Manufacture some. The Senate won't be happy with anything less. The Eagles must work with an especially light touch, though; not only is the general amply supplied with loyal military might, but he is also beloved by the plebians. A clumsy attempt at slander will only rile them and further his cause. And then there's the matter of what happens if some of the Eagles just might agree with some of his populist ideas...

**Status Quo:** Pax Romana (General Flavius Africanus, popular military leader)

**Break:** Power (the Senate is wary of the General's growing influence)

**Heavy:** Corruptor (General Africanus is in fact gathering power, and will try to convert the Eagles)

**Possible Twists:** Next Break of Sex (Flavius' lover Petronia is the daughter of a member of the Sinistram, who decrees she must be stolen back from him); Double Cross (Lucio, the friendly soldier sent to guide them, turns out to be Flavius' loyal man all along)

## ID

NAME

# EAGLE EYES

DESCRIPTION

REFRESH

CURRENT FATE POINTS

## ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT

TROUBLE

IDEAL

PETITIO VIDETUR

VIRTUS

## APPROACHES

JUNO (CAREFUL) (+)

MINERVA (CLEVER) (+)

JUPITER (FLASHY) (+)

MARS (FORCEFUL) (+)

MERCURY (QUICK) (+)

PLUTO (SNEAKY) (+)

## STUNTS

## STRESS

I

II

III

## CONSEQUENCES

II MILD

IV MODERATE

VI SEVERE