

ALMBRECHT

AFTER DARK



CJ THOMPSON

A WORLD OF
ADVENTURE FOR

FATE
CORE SYSTEM

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ALMBRECHT AFTER DARK

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FATE[™]
CORE SYSTEM

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An Evil Hat Productions Publication
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Almbrecht After Dark

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First published in 2019 by Evil Hat Productions, LLC.
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This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible,
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reflections of reality is purely coincidental, but kinda hilarious.

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A CITY ON THE EDGE

The city of Almbrecht crouches over the murky waters of the Alm. Grimy sandstone tenements lean together conspiratorially over the city's winding Closes, back alleys you can take from the thaumaturges' Works, to the docks, to the High Street, to Cheapside—provided you don't get lost. Power—political, commercial, and cultural—has accumulated in the city over the centuries. And both the quest for power and the exercise of power create secrets, which many would prefer to remain that way. When you find yourself in possession of knowledge someone doesn't want you to have, you have to rely on your unique connections and awareness of the city to survive, even as the larger Empire slides further into chaos.

In *Almbrecht After Dark*, the players enter a world undergoing massive social changes and currently in the throes of what might be a revolution. Military leaders and revolutionaries struggle for control in the wake of the emperor's disappearance. Almbrecht, a provincial capital and significant port city, has been spared the worst of the violence wracking the countryside. The city's relative safety, however, means that refugees have flocked there, looking for work and stability. The populations of the already overcrowded slums have swelled, and concerns around infrastructure, like plumbing and food distribution, have only grown more urgent. The Council of Three Sevens, the traditional ruling body of Almbrecht, has voted to disband



and cede power to a single Lord Protector under murky circumstances. And now, as the city sweats through a blistering summer, citizens report nightmares of needle-fingered creatures spreading like a nighttime plague. Tensions are rising, and the people of Almbrecht need answers.

Fortunately, answers have a way of making themselves known—at least to some people, some of the time. As players, you will navigate Almbrecht as a team of Secret Keepers, citizens who have come to possess one or more potentially dangerous or powerful pieces of knowledge about events in Almbrecht. You can choose to play as scheming politicians, hard-working labor organizers, inventive thaumaturges, experienced veterans, or other concerned citizens trying to make their mark on an ancient, complicated city. There are as many ways to understand Almbrecht as there are people living there, and each Secret Keeper will have a unique relationship to the city. What, or who, you know may make all the difference as you work to save Almbrecht—or change it to suit yourself.

Inside this book you'll find suggestions on how to assemble the city your PCs will explore and investigate; potent, story-driving secrets for your PCs to learn and share; fun and challenging roles for your PCs; ways to escalate Almbrecht's troubles and complicate your PCs' lives; and the real issues driving Almbrecht's difficulties.

The World at Large

The Empire of Imlan has pushed to expand its boundaries and economic influence for the last thousand years. Almbrecht fell within those boundaries a few hundred years ago, around the same time Imlan began to call itself an empire rather than a kingdom. Now, however, this patchwork of old and new territories threatens to come apart at the seams. The Upheaval is the name generally given to the current unrest—unless you're calling it a Glorious Revolution or dismissing it as the misguided actions of a few disloyal troublemakers.

The bureaucracy needed to sustain a large and growing empire offers many opportunities for corruption, and a series of scandals involving several high-level politicians over the last twenty years has badly shaken the people's faith in the fundamental sovereignty of the Imperial Edict. An inexperienced and unpopular emperor failed to restore faith in the structures of the state, and now he's disappeared under mysterious circumstances. While no one has claimed responsibility for his death, no one expects him to return to the throne anytime soon.

In the sudden power vacuum, various military leaders and revolutionary factions vie for control. A few quiet voices in Almbrecht have long advocated for a return to independence from Imlan, and with the emperor's presumed death they're getting louder. Others in Almbrecht want to stay in the Empire, either due to economic concerns or because they believe they're more secure as imperial subjects. And then there are the Reds, militants calling for a complete restructuring of the political and economic system. They have their followers in Almbrecht too.

The True Believers

Led by Evender "The Red" Martisson—two parts charismatic revivalist, three parts master strategist—the True Believers are committed to lifting up the working masses of Imlan, from the farm laborers to the workers in the manufactories, whether those workers want it or not. Skeptics maintain that the Reds talk a good game, but are wrecking the countryside like every other faction.

The Ironsiders

Having lived their lives in service of Imlan's military conquests, these men and women seized the opportunity to wield the power of Imlan's standing army and navy when they realized the emperor couldn't stop them. Servicemembers are mostly retained through promises of future power and rewards once enough of the Empire is brought back under their control, and through threats of being shot if they try to leave. Some might say this is an unsustainable way to run a military—but they'd run the risk of getting shot too.

Loyalists

These folks think that Imlan should stay Imlan, regardless of the emperor's ability to do his job. Many of them have taken up arms to defend their villages and farms from the other factions, although rumors are flying as to which sections of the Imlan military are still fighting for the Empire, and which are fighting for their own profit. In the Upheaval, the truth often depends on who you ask—and the day.

Happenings in Almbrecht

Recently, Almbrecht's traditional Council of Three Sevens was replaced by Jorren Arsbright, voted in by a majority of the Council as Lord Protector. The Council has already granted the Lord Protector a broad range of powers. Most importantly, she has the ability to unilaterally issue executive decrees to more effectively protect Almbrecht during the Upheaval.

Bandits and marauders threaten even large, well-armed merchants' caravans, and make traveling alone or in small groups extremely dangerous. Refugees have flocked to the security of Almbrecht's walls, and Jorren has ordered repairs on the fortifications as well as improvements to the city's infrastructure to handle the additional demands of a swelling population. Dangerous roads also mean that accurate information about the Upheaval throughout the rest of Imlan has slowed to a trickle, and wild rumors and speculation circulate instead.

Edicts of the Lord Protector

By now, the Lord Protector has issued various edicts in response to the new stresses on the city of Almbrecht. They can include but are not limited to the following:

- Increased recruitment and powers for the City Watch
- Seizure of goods from merchants who price-gouge or smuggle in violation of the Lord Protector's declaration of emergency
- Barred entry or exit through the city gates after dark without a writ of passage from the Lord Protector herself
- Curfew after midnight for anyone not on essential business
- Market regulation, including directing thaumaturges to shift production to only medically and industrially necessary products and selling those to the population at cost
- Imposing rations
- Restricting free speech and press and right to assemble to crack down on both labor organizers and xenophobic mobs

As you can imagine, not all of these changes are popular, and there's a lot of angry talk in some quarters about so much power being vested in one person. As the game goes on, the Lord Protector may issue more edicts to reflect the raised stakes.

What's the Council of Three Sevens?

Even when it existed as an independent kingdom, Almbrecht was never an absolute monarchy. The power of the king—or queen, at various points—was always checked by a council of important citizens, usually seven from the nobility, seven from the clergy, and a third group of seven whose composition has been disputed, but may have been farmers or traders.

The exact nature of the Council's powers has shifted somewhat over the centuries, but in general a monarch would need their approval for any major decisions, such as declarations of war, changes to taxation, or shifts in relationships with other nations. Rulers usually worked with members of the Council to try to guarantee enough support for a measure to pass, but obviously there would have been plenty of opportunities for backroom deals and sudden reversals.

When Imlan incorporated Almbrecht and its territory into the Empire, the Council was allowed to remain as the local government—with the emperor serving in the place of a king—but with its powers much reduced. With the emperor gone, a reasonable person might expect the Council to make a bid for power, so it's all the more curious that they chose now to disband and invest a single person with the powers of the Lord Protector.

Who's Jorren Arsbright?

Jorren is a native daughter of Almbrecht, although she's studied in the capital city of Imlan and traveled widely throughout, and beyond, the Empire. She hails from one of Almbrecht's oldest families, but earned her own reputation as a clever, unorthodox strategist during her time as an officer in Imlan's imperial army. Once she returned to Almbrecht, she began to gain political influence by building alliances with other noble houses and powerful merchant families, as well as popular support among the middle and lower classes of Almbrecht—not a typical move by someone of her standing. There was widespread speculation that Jorren would be invited to join the Council once a seat became available. Her appointment as Lord Protector is an unprecedented step in Almbrecht's political history, shocking both outside observers and many within the city itself. Then again, these are strange and shocking times.

Jorren Arsbright

ASPECTS

High Concept: LORD PROTECTOR OF ALMBRECHT

Trouble: THERE MIGHT BE A WAR ON

Other Aspects: THE BLUEST BLOOD; ALWAYS HAS A PLAN; COMMANDING PRESENCE

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Contacts, Resources

Great (+4): Deceive, Rapport, Will

Good (+3): Empathy, Fight, Notice, Provoke

Fair (+2): Athletics, Investigate, Lore, Physique, Shoot

STRESS

Physical **1 2 3**

Mental **1 2 3 4**

Social **1 2 3 4**

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Mild Social (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):



ALMBRECHT'S BIG ISSUES

Before creating characters, everyone at the table will collaboratively come up with Almbrecht's big issues, one **crisis** and one **conspiracy**.

The Conspiracy

A conspiracy is essentially a current issue from *Fate Core*, but one which isn't widely known or acknowledged. You might feel the consequences of a conspiracy, but you don't know about the *cause* of your difficulties—until you start unraveling them. Here are some examples to get you started:

- A manufactory owner covering up on-site deaths or injuries—especially if you know the people who have been injured or killed
- A member of the Council skimming manufactory output to sell for themselves or to help finance one of the insurgent factions in the Upheaval
- Plans to demolish or build over parts of Cheapside to build additional manufactories or housing for merchants and gentry
- Planned strikes or strike-breaks to deal with labor unrest in the manufactories
- Corrupt thaumaturges selling banned coercives or devices which cause harm without leaving visible marks, especially if the buyer can be traced back to powers within the city or one of the insurgent factions
- Plans by a disaffected member of the Council—or a senior Lightbringer, or even the Lord Protector herself—to open the gates of Almbrecht to one of the insurgent factions in the Upheaval

“CONSPIRACY?”

We're using the word “conspiracy” here a little loosely. You can make your conspiracy a faction of former Council members plotting to overthrow the Lord Protector, which reflects a pretty traditional use of the word. But your team could also work out that Cheapside residents are getting sick as an unintended consequence of thaumaturgic run-off in the Alm. Conspiracies aren't widely known, and there are costs both to exposing them and to letting them persist, but they may or may not be *intentionally* hidden.

The Crisis

A **crisis**, just like an impending issue in *Fate Core*, is a problem that has just started to appear on the horizon, but which will make life in Almbrecht harder for the majority of citizens if it comes to pass. Or at least harder for groups of people the PCs care about. Here are some examples:

- **FOOD SHORTAGE:** Diminished trade and disrupted harvests have severely cut into the amounts of food reaching Almbrecht. Money provides some buffer, but even High Street is starting to feel the pinch.
- **LABOR STRIKE:** Workers at one or more of the big manufactories are striking for safer working conditions. This can worsen existing shortages, and raise tensions between workers and other citizens.
- **CONSCRIPTIONS:** Various factions in the Upheaval are running short of willing troops. The swelling population of Almbrecht offers many potential “volunteers”, many of whose disappearances the Watch seems content to ignore.

Players, if you need more examples—and are willing to risk spoiling some plot—you’ll find them in “*Adding Crises*” (page 42).

Collaboratively, decide which section of the city this crisis affects more deeply than others—this area is known as the **crisis location**. A crisis aspect is only present during scenes in which the PCs are in its crisis location.





CREATING CHARACTERS

Your characters are Secret Keepers, a team of citizens searching for what really makes Almbrecht tick, who have crossed paths before and have probably helped each other out of a jam or three. You're savvy, colorful characters in your own right, who know where your hopes for the city overlap—and what you're willing to do to protect your visions and the people you care about.

A certain level of trust binds you together—except under extenuating circumstances, a Secret Keeper wouldn't sell another Keeper out to their enemies—but you may well come from different backgrounds and have different ideas about what most needs changing.

Creating your character is much the same as creating one in *Fate Core*.

You get a high concept, a trouble, and three aspects from a modified phase trio. Your high concept is made up of your **social class** (page 11) and **role** (page 16).

You start with one skill at Great (+4), two at Good (+3), three at Fair (+2), and four at Average (+1). The skill list has all of the skills from *Fate Core*, although Drive and Shoot both reflect the level of technology available in this setting, and it also includes the new skill Thaumaturgy (page 20).

You get three free stunts and a refresh of 3. Your role gives you access to some stunts, and you can always access these two:

- **Like the Back of My Hand:** Because I know my home turf, I get +2 to losing a tail in my part of the city.
- **Look into My Eyes:** I get +2 to Rapport when convincing someone to believe me, but only when I'm lying about my reason for being in a specific place.

In addition to physical and mental stress tracks, you also get a social stress track, which starts with two stress boxes and increases with your Contacts rating, as in *Fate Core*.

High Concept

The first part of your high concept is your **social class**. There are effectively four social classes in Almbrecht—low, middle, upper, and elite—but your character must start as low, middle, or upper class.

The second part is your **role**. Choose one of the following:

- **Labor organizers**, who dodge union breakers and bosses in Almbrecht's manufactories to unite workers and improve conditions.
- **Politicos**, who maneuver between landed gentry, newly rich merchants and manufactory owners, and members of the Council to advance their own visions for the city.
- **Spies**, who sift through the movements of Loyalists, Ironsiders, and revolutionary factions for vital information to relay to their side, or sell to the highest bidder.
- **Soldiers**, who engage in the active conflicts of the Upheaval, as well as the subtler struggles in Almbrecht itself.
- **Thaumaturges**, who mold mysterious forces to craft a future worthy of their dreams and ambitions.

You'll find more information on all the roles, as well as the stunts they give access to, in *The Roles* (page 16).

Examples of high concepts include **LOW-CLASS ORGANIZER SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS**, **HIGH-CLASS OFFICER WITH A DEBT TO PAY**, and **MIDDLE-CLASS MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER WITH A THAUMATURGY PROBLEM**.

Social Class in Play

Almbrecht is a city of many parts, and different characters will know the city in different ways. As you create your character, think about how their class and profession might impact their access to and knowledge of different parts of the city. Did they grow up in Almbrecht and know it like the inside of their eyelids? Or are they a recent newcomer? A thaumaturge might be able to navigate the Works while still half-asleep, but not know which part of the docks the boats go in—unless they're from a family that's traditionally worked as longshoremen. But *that* probably means they can't walk into a social club on High Street—unless they're there on business, and use the tradesmen's entrance.

Think about how a PC's social characteristics will help and hinder them in different places, and how you can use them to tell a compelling story together. If PCs share many characteristics of class and profession, think about what parts of the city they typically live and work in and their relationships in those spaces. The goal is not necessarily to create a group of PCs who have nothing in common in their backgrounds, but to reflect the many ways the PCs might move through a city as old and complicated as Almbrecht.



CLASS AND OPPOSITION

Interactions with the class above or below your own may feature some difficulties, increasing your opposition to social actions by +1, unless there's an aspect representing moderating circumstances, such as **PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP** or **OLD FAMILY FRIENDS**. In contrast, interacting with someone of the same class may give you +1 to your roll.

Trying to interact across multiple class levels creates more significant impediments—this is as true of a high-class PC trying to get information out of a recalcitrant manufactory floor supervisor as it is of a middle-class merchant's daughter trying to bargain with a member of the Council. This may add +2 to opposition to social actions—unless, again, you have an aspect which mitigates your class status, like **SERVANT IN THE LORD PROTECTOR'S HOUSEHOLD** or **RESPECTED VETERAN WHOSE REPUTATION PRECEDES YOU**.

You'll want to discuss as a group how much you'd like to have class affect opposition to social actions. While doing this may raise the stakes and add realism, you do still want to be having fun. Class doesn't need to affect opposition all the time, either—some NPCs may care more about class than others.

DEGREES OF SUCCESS

Succeeding on social actions may mean that you accomplish your objective, but are noticed as wildly out of place, while succeeding with style may mean that you succeed discreetly. There may also be times when it's good to stand out, although that's often a matter of opinion.

Remember too that your PC's class will affect how they respond to an aspect like **ROUGH AND TUMBLE** or **PAINSTAKINGLY WELL-GROOMED**. A good balance to keep in mind as you build your team is that a mixture of classes will give your characters access to different social spaces and resources, and more similar backgrounds may make collaboration in different environments easier. No matter what you choose, secrets will be an important element binding your team together, so don't worry too much about getting just the right mix.

Phase Trio

Beyond your high concept and trouble, you'll have three other aspects defined with a phase trio, like in *Fate Core*. At least two of the phases should take place in or center on Almbrecht. You're also looking to weave encounters with the other PCs into these events, as normal.

Phase One: Your Awakening

You saw or experienced something that opened your eyes to the way power actually works in the city. Maybe you were one of the few workers to escape a manufactory fire that could have been prevented by safer working conditions. Or *you* got thrown in lock-up for protecting another PC from some carousing Council members' sons. Newcomers and the residents of Cheapside typically get the shortest, sharpest end of this particular stick, but people from a variety of backgrounds can understand this legal discrepancy. You saw the way that power and class affect how the law is applied—or isn't. And now you can't unsee it.

Aspects from this phase can be as straightforward as I KNOW ARECH'S GOT MY BACK or I ALWAYS KNOW WHERE THE EXITS ARE, or may set you up for higher stakes, like I CAN'T WORK FOR THE MEHNDELSSONS AGAIN or WATCH CAPTAIN TERRICH HAS IT IN FOR ME.

Phase Two: Your Goal

You have some sense that Almbrecht, or the world, could be improved. You're an action-oriented Fate protagonist—what are you going to *do* about it? This aspect can stem from your awakening aspect, or may originate in your background. You may decide EVERYONE DESERVES CLEAN WATER after your family's row house is contaminated by industrial run-off. Or that ARDRIK REVNER MUST PAY after your brother is arrested for trying to form a union at Ardrik's manufactory.

Phase Three: Your Secret

Any city with a memory as deep and convoluted as Almbrecht's contains a wealth of secrets. Some people can't help but be drawn to those secrets. Some secrets are as simple as where a rich lord keeps the keys to his lockbox. Others are much bigger and more dangerous.

Your first two phases set you on the dim and dangerous path to uncovering Almbrecht's conspiracies. But now you've found something concrete. It's clearly just a piece of something much larger. You'll need the help of your fellow Secret Keepers to continue unraveling this mystery.

We've included handy lists of possible secrets tied to the many parts of Almbrecht throughout *The City of Almbrecht* (page 24).

Most if not all of your secrets will help your team start untangling Almbrecht's starting conspiracy. In games with more than four players, some of the PCs' secrets could tie into the starting crisis. If you dig deep enough during play, you can pick up more secrets, helping you untangle Almbrecht's conspiracy and mitigate its crisis.

HOW DO YOU BUILD A SECRET?

A secret, by definition, isn't widely known. But even more than that, its obscurity is intentional. Who benefits from this staying a secret? Do they gain an advantage from this secret? Or would they be harmed by it coming to light? And who's *being harmed* by this secret? If a secret doesn't hurt anyone by staying a secret, there's less impetus to reveal it, and you lose energy to drive the plot forward.

First, a good secret grounds the action in a specific location in Almbrecht, like Cheapside or High Street.

Second, it gives the PC a hook related to their backstory or personality. After all, *how* a PC learned their secret may matter almost as much as *what* it is. Did your charismatic spy charm an unexpected scoop out of a contact? Or did your bull-headed thaumaturge burst into a high-level Guild meeting?

Third, it reinforces the kind of story that your group wants to tell. Do you want to play a campaign centered on righting wrongs and improving conditions for the working classes of Almbrecht? Or are you roguish politicians and thaumaturges looking out for your own necks and not much else? What you care about will inform your secrets.

For example, if your group's contacts and secrets are focused on the thaumaturge Works, then including a secret about a Council member smuggling goods out through the *docks* may not make much sense—unless those goods are made in a thaumaturgic workshop your group is familiar with. And in this case, you'd likely figure that out by reviewing missing inventory at the workshop or by talking to your established connections, not by overhearing a Council member's crony talking about the smuggling over breakfast at a local inn.

FOCUSING SECRETS

You can lengthen or shorten your campaign by adjusting how much your secrets relate to the starting crisis and conspiracy. For a one-shot, the PCs should focus on a conspiracy related to one location, group, or person, with their secrets giving them access to meaningful, distinct information. For shorter campaigns of three to four sessions, more overlap in secrets will help concentrate the action, while you can fill out a longer campaign by having the PCs on the track of multiple conspiracies or crises, letting them shift focus between different plotlines in Almbrecht.

As a group, you'll want to carefully consider how much information your characters withhold from each other. The PCs will work together better if they trust each other and are more transparent with their secrets and goals. Though there are multiple ways to handle this, the easiest way is probably for all players to know each other's secrets, and collaborate around them during character creation. This method makes sense given your characters' shared experiences of Almbrecht, and it can make them simpler to compel during play.

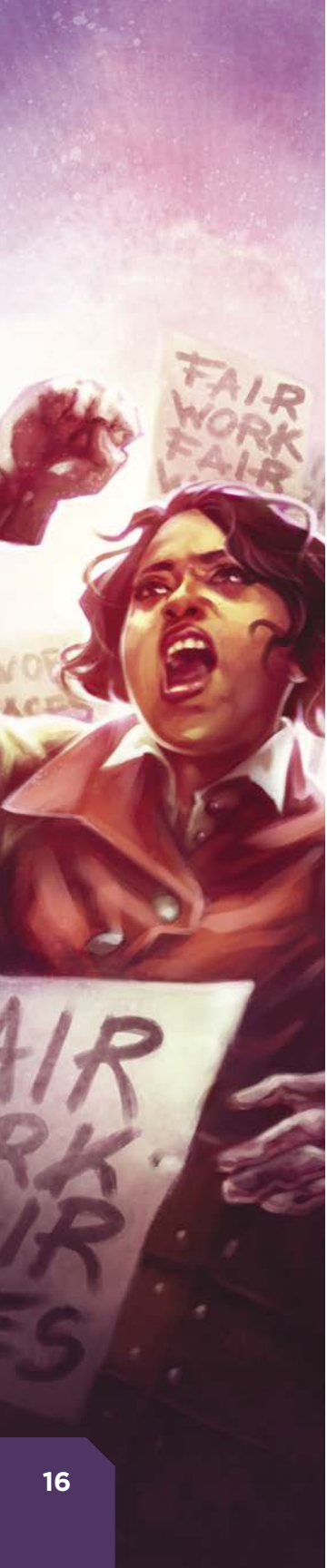
Please note, just because the players know each other's secrets doesn't mean that the *characters* do. If other PCs didn't discover your character's secret during the phase trio, they may have suspicions or guesses about your character's history and motivations, but working through the gap between assumption and reality can provide powerful story moments among the PCs as your campaign progresses.

INVOKING AND COMPELLING SECRETS

To reflect the importance of revealing a secret at the right moment, you start with a free invocation on your secret. As a group, you can also decide whether the GM can invoke or compel secrets before they've been revealed to others outside the group.

GMs, you'll want to strike a balance in invoking the PCs' secrets against them. They are aspects, after all—and hopefully ones that provide a lot of juicy hooks for action. Depending on how open your group is in creating their secrets, your ingenuity may be tested trying to invoke players' secrets without giving them away. Invoking them is, however, strongly encouraged.





THE ROLES

Labor Organizer

Building the World

Conditions in Almbrecht are ripe for change. Characters with a background in Cheapside or the manufactories may be driven to bring their neighbors or fellow workers together to push for better working or living conditions. Organizers typically have relatively high Contacts but low Resources.

If you're interested in playing this role, consider how a well-intentioned manufactory owner's daughter might be received differently by the community she's trying to help than someone *from* that community. Of course, the manufactory owner's daughter probably has a higher Resources rating than the typical organizer. She'll also face a different response from the manufactory owner or the strikebreakers than someone who grew up in Cheapside would.

Give special consideration to who your organizer knows—good connections are essential to successful organizing. It might include a sympathetic watch captain or manufactory overseer, other influential members of their community in the rowhouses or on the workforce, and clergy or even members of the upper classes who are interested in improving conditions for Almbrecht's working poor.

Work as a group to construct appropriate contacts for the length of campaign you want to run. Having one or two high-value contacts makes sense for a one-shot, while a broader network will help sustain a longer campaign.

Organizer Stunts

- **Command the Room:** Because I know what to do when all eyes are on me, I get +2 to use Provoke to overcome a social obstacle when I'm the center of attention.
- **Friends in High Places:** Because I have at least one high-class social contact, I get +2 to using Contacts, but only in high-class settings.
- **They Know Me Here:** Because I've established relationships in a specific community, I get +2 to use Rapport to win over people there and in similar low-class settings.

Politico

Plotting and Planning

Just because the Council of Three Sevens ceded power to the Lord Protector doesn't mean they aren't still hard at work behind the scenes. Members of Almbrecht's political class might be involved in any side of the conflicts between landed gentry and manufactory owners, relations with factions in the Upheaval, responses to organized labor and refugees, and relationships with the Temple of Enduring Light.

Politicos are Almbrecht's movers and shakers—some prefer the spotlight, and operate a lot like how we think of contemporary local politicians. Others are more like policy analysts, examining the social and economic trends emerging in Almbrecht—and Imlan at large—and offering their advice to those who will listen. The trick is getting someone influential to pay attention. Of course, some are taking advantage of the new, exciting technology that is cheap, widespread printing, using it to bring their case to all the citizens of Almbrecht. Or at least to those who have the leisure time and education necessary to read. You may want to play as a politico if you like moving between settings and classes in the city, figuring how to pull strings from behind the scenes.

Politicos can have contacts spanning the breadth and depth of Almbrecht. Depending on the areas your group is focused on, your politico may rub elbows with manufactory owners or labor organizers, Lightbringers, City Watch captains, heads of thaumaturgic workshops or Guild members, or the representatives of former Council members. You have lots of opportunities to access secrets—and to make sure secrets reach the right ears when you choose to reveal them.

Politico Stunts

- **A Little Bird Told Me:** I ignore class penalties when I roll Contacts to find a friend or ally.
- **Greased Palms:** Because I've already bribed the right person, once per session, I can declare that I have access to a space or information I wouldn't otherwise be able to, as long as that access depends on the loyalty of a single lackey.

PLAYING AS A COUNCIL MEMBER

GMs, think very carefully before allowing a player to run as a member of the Council. They're a powerful, mysterious force in the world, and make more sense as possible antagonists or sources of secrets—or high-value allies to win over—than as an intimately known quantity.





Soldier

Unhealed Wounds

Soldiers may be active members of Imlan's army or navy, or fighting for the Reds, Ironsiders, or loyalist factions, or veterans of any of the above. They've seen combat, and have both valuable skills and still-healing scars. War is terrible, and recent advances in manufactured technology and thaumaturgy have made it deadlier. Repeating cannons, chemical grenades, and communications technologies have all seen rapid innovation during the current conflict. Among the refugees fleeing the violence and instability of the Upheaval are survivors from various militias. Tensions in the city have risen as various citizens feel more loyalty to different factions and resent the presence of veterans from other groups.

Returning soldiers carry wounds seen and unseen. Though improved thaumaturgic quickpatches and poultices mean that fewer wounded soldiers bleed out or die of infection, the medical resources available to help these soldiers when they return from the field are sparse, and finding and holding onto work while recovering can prove difficult. There are some advocates pushing for relief funds to assist returning soldiers, but there's tension about which factions should receive help from those funds. Beyond physical injuries, returning soldiers report insomnia and nightmares. While some have attributed these nightmares to the "sleeping sickness" plaguing Cheapside, others believe they stem from what soldiers have seen and experienced in battle.

Soldier Stunts

- **Against All Odds:** Because of my combat experience, I get +2 to Fight when defending friendly characters against a larger or more powerful group of opponents.
- **Follow My Lead:** Because I can lead a team in a fight, I get +2 to Notice when directing my teammates in combat.
- **Stand Behind Me:** Because I want to protect my team, once per session I can give each friendly character a free boost on a defend action.

Spy

Flying by Night

The Upheaval has created an abundance of opportunities for spies. Shifting alliances between rebel factions, loyalists to the Empire, and those just looking to survive the mess yield a wealth of information that's both highly sought after and dangerous to purvey. As the Lord Protector tightens limits on travel through the docks and as the countryside becomes too dangerous to travel across, it's easy to feel the walls of the city closing in, especially if you're used to being able to slip away from trouble under cover of darkness.

More than almost any other role, spies will have access to a wide range of secrets, including ones that matter *outside* the walls of Almbrecht. They're also uniquely positioned to get information from outside Almbrecht that may be more rather than less true. If you're looking to run a longer campaign that explores more about the larger Upheaval, spies are a great choice.

Spy Stunts

- **Nose to the Ground:** Because I'm used to getting information out of people, once per scene I get +2 to Notice when asking someone about one of my secrets.
- **The Way the Wind Is Blowing:** Because I still have connections outside the city, once per session I can create an aspect with one free invoke that defines or modifies the world outside the city. It lasts until at least the end of the session.



Thaumaturge

Creating the City

You can think of thaumaturges as essentially what happens when you give engineers low-intensity magic. The Thaumaturges' Guild is one of the most powerful in Almbrecht, although they're not as highly respected as you might expect. Hazardous byproducts, unintended explosions, and their nearly universal professional brusqueness do not win popularity contests in Almbrecht any more than they usually do elsewhere. However, people *do* respect the effectiveness of the medical products, non-burning lamps, and weapons which the thaumaturges produce.

The Thaumaturgy Skill

Characters with the Thaumaturgy skill have most likely studied thaumaturgy in a workshop, and can build or repair thaumaturgic devices. The complexity or power of the devices they can work on successfully—meaning, without breaking them—increases with their skill rating. Characters with a high skill rating may also be able to invent new thaumaturgic devices—after properly registering their blueprints and patents with the Guild, of course—or reverse-engineer devices they haven't learned how to make themselves.



Overcome: You may encounter thaumaturgically locked or bonded doors or items that you want to use. Thaumaturgic understanding is needed to activate or bypass the scribing locking a door thaumaturgically, or to engage certain thaumaturgic engines. You can also reverse-engineer some thaumaturgic devices, especially if you have a related stunt.



Create an Advantage: Because thaumaturgy works primarily by adding or modifying the thaumaturgic aspects of an item, this is where the skill really shines. You might add IMPROVED RANGE to an aetheric resonator, or FAST-ACTING to a pain-relieving quickpatch. Alternatively, you could scribe FAILING SEAM onto a water reserve tank to help douse a fire in a manufactory.



Attack: Someone with a thaumaturgy stunt related to pepper boxes, grenades, or similar items could use them as weapons in attacks.



Defend: Thaumaturgically augmented armor never took off like other lines of products, but that shouldn't stop players from considering it. Additionally, a room could be scribed to “jam” aetheric resonators, and an agent or artefact might also help defend against Jacks. So, thaumaturgy isn't used to defend against most attacks, but it can be used to create and augment defensive items.

To modify, build, bypass, or reverse-engineer any thaumaturgic device, you need at least Average (+1) Thaumaturgy. If you have a lower rating, you can still use thaumaturgic devices, but only as they're designed to be used.

You can take ranks in Thaumaturgy even if you don't have the thaumaturge role—a manufactory owner's daughter might have Average (+1) or Fair (+2) Thaumaturgy, even if she's more of a politico, due to time spent learning from the thaumaturges at her mother's manufactory. However, only a thaumaturge can increase their Thaumaturgy rating beyond Fair (+2).

Thaumaturge Stunts

Thaumaturges can take stunts representing the models or categories of thaumaturgic products they've studied and spent time building—or deconstructing, where appropriate—giving them bonuses to do so. For example:

- **Quickpatches:** Because I've focused on building quickpatches, I can build them on the fly without specialized equipment or resources, and I get +2 to Thaumaturgy to modify, repair, or create them.

Categories for thaumaturgic specializations include but aren't limited to incendiaries (can include pepperboxes *and* grenades, depending on how much knowledge your group has of those technologies), quickpatches and medicinals, aetheric resonators, and industrial machines.

You can of course play as a skilled generalist—more points in the skill, but no stunt—or try playing as a thaumaturge who only makes a few types of thing well—fewer points in the skill, but with one or more stunts.

Thaumaturgy in the Public Eye

Everyone knows that thaumaturgy is powerful but unpredictable. Goods produced using the same thaumaturgic method, or “scribing,” and made of the same materials don't always react consistently—and are sometimes downright hazardous. This is why the supervision and rigorous testing of the Guild is critical to thaumaturgy's continued viability as a source of mostly reliable goods. Buy from the black market, and you don't really know what you might get. Moreover, the unpredictability of results suggests something more than the merely material affects the process to a considerable degree.

Historically, this unpredictability prevented much practice of thaumaturgy in large population centers. Through multiple centuries of trial and error, scribing has advanced to a level of predictability that profit-minded entrepreneurs couldn't resist combining thaumaturgy with up-and-coming mundane technologies.



How Does Thaumaturgy Work?

The short answer is, even the thaumaturges don't really know—they just know that it does. Mostly. As the discipline of thaumaturgy evolved over the centuries, practitioners found that some combinations of elements and symbols called “scribes” produced inexplicable but tangible changes in the world. It's just inconsistent enough to fall outside the purview of natural science, while still seeming to obey some underlying principles. We just don't know what they are.

In terms of professional demeanor, thaumaturges tend to think of themselves more like engineers than wizards, despite the sometimes arcane and unpredictable nature of their work. How, then, do they maintain public confidence in their products? In some part, they don't. A bad experience with a quickpatch may turn someone off thaumaturgic goods for life—assuming they survive the ordeal. But this is what makes the Guild's work so critical: ensuring a measure of civility and unity between different workshops, negotiating rates and access to materials with the government of Almbrecht, and, above all, guaranteeing an acceptable margin of safety and reliability in goods produced under Guild auspices all keep thaumaturgy “safe”—and secretive—enough to sell.

Common Thaumaturgic Goods

Here are some examples of the goods produced in the workshops that earn thaumaturgy a grudging respect from much of the citizenry. To reflect their thaumaturgic nature, these products are represented by aspects, like EXPERIMENTAL QUICKPATCH or BLACK-MARKET PEPPER BOX.

Feel free to expand on this list with additional medical products, such as bandages with thaumaturgically derived antibacterial resistance, or more innovations spurred by the Upheaval.

- **Aetheric Resonators:** Communications technology has advanced dramatically in response to the Upheaval. Once keyed to each other, these resonators allow for voice communication over distances of a few hundred yards to a few miles, provided there aren't sources of significant thaumaturgic interference in the way. Of course, anyone sufficiently familiar with this technology may be able to pick up signals attuned to *other* resonators—but there's no telling who might notice unwanted eavesdroppers.
- **Agents:** Single- or limited-use powders or potives that allegedly protect against supernatural threats. While rumors of dangerous dreams aren't widely believed, these are the more affordable types of thaumaturgic protection available for those feeling nervous, or perhaps predisposed to bad dreams for other reasons.
- **Artefacts:** Fancier, more expensive gadgets that are supposed to protect against supernatural dangers plaguing sleepers. Generally, they're priced out of range for anyone who doesn't live on High Street or in a similar neighborhood.

WHY AGENTS AND ARTEFACTS?

Many thaumaturges will tell you their belief in the unseen extends only to the mysterious forces that dictate whether a set of scribing will work—or malfunction spectacularly. A few workshops have started selling potions, powders, or more expensive talismans that are supposed to relieve sufferers of the “sleeping sickness.” Professionalism—not to mention Guild oversight—requires that the products *work*, but most thaumaturges attribute the nightmares and illness to mundane, rather than supernatural, causes. A few, however, acknowledge that there may be more mysteries in play here than just the arcane powers at the heart of thaumaturgy.

- **Chemical Grenades:** These come in a variety of compositions, and can be designed for non-lethal incapacitation—or not. There are rumblings about the Guild and the Council—or the government of Imlan, depending on who you listen to—discussing regulations on what can be put in these, as the Upheaval shows no signs of abating and various factions struggle with the balance between ethics and efficacy in warfare.
- **Coldchests:** Food preservation has become increasingly important as populations rise in urban centers and conflict threatens harvests and trade. Coldchests are just that, boxes that use thaumaturgy to keep food—or whatever is stored in them—from spoiling for a few days to a few weeks, depending on the strength of the scribing.
- **Pepper Boxes:** Simple handguns with rotating barrels, usually three. They’re one of the products carefully regulated by the Guild, as they represent a significant increase from earlier personal weapons in potential fatality. Citizens must appeal to the Watch for a license to carry a firearm, and the license is only good for a specific weapon, which you then receive from the Guild. Obviously, it’s possible to get pepper boxes extra-legally, but they may not function as safely as Guild-sanctioned weapons, and being caught with an unauthorized weapon carries hefty costs—depending, of course, on who you know.
- **Quickpatches:** You can purchase these in a variety of compositions. Fast- or slow-acting, they can suppress bleeding, numb pain to prevent shock, or gradually release pain-relieving substances. When successfully applied, a quickpatch allows the recipient to rename a consequence and begin the healing process almost immediately without rolling, but it doesn’t change how long it takes for that consequence to clear. Of course, quickpatches are sold that purport to address a whole *range* of other ills, but may be under investigation by the Guild.
- **Repeating Cannons:** Larger artillery, capable of firing up to three rounds a minute. They are stationary once set up and require team loading, but are of large enough caliber to damage structures, never mind a human body.
- **Unburning Lamps:** In a city with lots of wood structures, reliable, affordable illumination that doesn’t use fire would be a potentially revolutionary invention. The most recent innovation is lamps small enough to carry in your hand. Unfortunately, they’re currently too expensive to be widely accessible—and with the shortages imposed by the Upheaval, that doesn’t look set to change anytime soon.

THE CITY OF ALMBRECHT

Almbrecht nestles a crook in the coastline above a cold and choppy sea. It's grown over and around the hills surrounding the mouth of the river Alm as centuries have passed. Almbrecht's historians estimate that people have lived on the spot for close to two thousand years, although they've spoken different languages and crossed that cold, hungry sea in waves. History has a weight in Almbrecht that can oppress newcomers, until they get used to walking down the same streets as people who've been dead a thousand years.

The city is built mostly of sandstone, mined from the quarries nearby. Attempts at grandness have been made in some of the civic buildings and nicer homes, but there's only so much that can be done to mask the fact that the city has been building atop itself for about a dozen centuries. Wander down any of the switchback cobblestone streets—or try navigating the Closes, if you're feeling daring—to Cheapside, and you'll find tenements of staggering depth and complexity, as residents have built higher and deeper in order to make space for themselves and their families in this seething metropolis.

Admirers of the city have described it as breathtaking—and that's more or less true. Plumbing ranges across about a thousand years of technological advancement, depending on which neighborhood you're in. There are channels down the center of the streets in Cheapside you're ill-advised to step in, although some reformers have been trying to implement more sanitary forms of waste disposal, with mixed results. In the fanciest houses, you can get either purely manufactured flush toilets, or thaumaturgically augmented waste disposal systems. In between, there are chamber pots and centralized waste collectors which use thaumaturgy and chemicals to render waste into something useful, à la biofuels. Basically, some places smell pretty bad, while others smell less bad. The Works reek of gunpowder, ammoniac, and various peculiar compounds aflame—some intentionally, others not so much. There's baking bread, spices and cooking meat in the Haymarket, the smells of animals and feed, and over everything else, the salty smell of the sea.

Almbrecht is ultimately what you make of it. The people who live there are deeply human. Many of them know that they live in the midst of history, though they don't always agree on what that history means. They are the polluted water of the Alm, and the choppy hunger of the cold North Sea, the roaring furnaces of the manufactories, and the cold, clear light of the unburning lamps. Secrets fuel the monstrous, convoluted engine of the city's heart, and it's possible that by carrying those secrets, you can drive it forward into a new and extraordinary future.

THE SECRETS OF ALMBRECHT

Throughout this chapter, we describe various ideas for secrets (page 13) that the PCs might know or uncover throughout the districts of Almbrecht.

Manufactories

The manufactories are essential to Almbrecht's financial well-being, even as they pose environmental dangers and create hazardous conditions for their workers.

The Means of Production

While steam-engine technology is developing rapidly due to collaboration—as well as espionage—between manufactories in Almbrecht, water and manpower are still widely used. Textiles, early machining tools, flour, and lumber are all produced in Almbrecht's manufactories. A handful of foundries remain in the city, although they're at risk of being supplanted by metal goods produced in up-and-coming manufactories.

The oldest manufactories are nestled against the Alm to take advantage of the waterway, and the warren of ancient sluices and water wheels can quickly prove hazardous to anyone sent down there who isn't sure of their way. Even so, this network may prove useful for going between manufactories or to the Closes.

The Cost of Progress

Industrial engineers are making exciting advances in steam technology, but sometimes attempts to increase the steam pressure of new mechanisms result in hazardous explosions. And that's ignoring the atmospheric impact of smoke and chemical byproducts from the manufactories and foundries. Workers in the manufactories frequently report breathing trouble and worse injuries. Some manufactory owners provide on-site medical aid for workers and their families. Others do not.

Loosening Chains

Some manufactory workers are pushing to organize into unions. These efforts have been met with a range of responses from the owners and the wider population of Almbrecht. In general, no owner has sanctioned the formation of a union, and some have tried to violently repress efforts at organization. Some manufactory owners hire newcomers to the city, knowing they'll take lower wages. Beyond that, vocal factions of native Almbrechtians often resent newcomers being hired into these jobs and may be less willing to form unions with them. Nevertheless, these efforts at organization seem to persist.

What Now?

Players can get involved in these storylines by supporting or opposing workers trying to unionize; they may be engineers who want to work in a manufactory; they may be hired by a rival manufactory to spy on products and techniques under development; they may come from a family which owns a manufactory and have a vested interest in which labor-management techniques are—and are not—successful.

Ideas for Secrets

Secrets in the manufactories can pertain to products under development, either a new product or an established agent engaged in corporate espionage; access to rare materials made scarcer by the stress of the Upheaval; smuggling materials in or finished products out to various factions; or the conditions experienced by workers.

You may discover who's trying to organize a union at one of the manufactories, and decide to support them—or sell them out to the manufactory owner for a reward, to repay a debt of your own, or for a favor down the line. You might find some correspondence about issues with an unstable thaumaturgic or chemical compound, perhaps coinciding with a new bout of illness among the workers at that manufactory.

Examples: THE UNION ORGANIZERS ARE MY COUSINS; STASH OF RARE MATERIALS HIDDEN IN A SUB-BASEMENT; THE OWNER OWES THE WATCH CAPTAIN A FAVOR

Imbliss Mehndelsson

Scion of a wealthy family of manufactory owners, Imbliss knows good business when she sees it. Determined to make her mark on the city and ensure her family's prosperity in the brave new world of thaumaturgically augmented manufacturing, Imbliss is willing to pay for the very best engineering talent Albrecht has to offer. But she has high expectations, and her employees respect that their comfortable facilities depend on them reliably producing the exceptional.

Imbliss Mehndelsson

ASPECTS

High Concept: SCION OF A WEALTHY FAMILY OF MANUFACTORY OWNERS

Trouble: CUTTHROAT COMPETITORS

Other Aspects: EXTREMELY LOYAL TO HER OWN; HIGH-DEMAND, HIGH-REWARD MANAGEMENT STYLE; CUTTING-EDGE FASHION SENSE

SKILLS

Great (+4): Resources, Will

Good (+3): Contacts, Empathy, Rapport

Fair (+2): Crafts, Deceive, Lore, Notice

Average (+1): Athletics, Drive, Investigate, Thaumaturgy

STRESS

Physical

Mental

Social

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):

The Works

You thought the manufactories smelled bad. Almbrecht has a reputation as a city that at least tolerates eccentrics and free thinkers, and is one of the larger cities with a significant thaumaturgic population. Given this, the Works—an area of Almbrecht given over to thaumaturgical workshops—has grown up in the last hundred or so years.

Intermarried with Almbrecht's development of mundane technology, thaumaturges in the Works produce a range of technical, medical, and pharmacological goods. Simple handguns—and the quickpatch you'd want after being shot to slow bleeding and numb the pain—are both produced by thaumaturges, a seeming conflict of interest their critics stubbornly insist on bringing up. But in general, thaumaturges are appreciated for their utility, if not their near-universal professional brusqueness.

How Do You Become a Thaumaturge?

Like any other skilled trade, thaumaturgy is theoretically open to anyone who can convince someone to teach them. In practice, some people seem to display more of a knack for this type of work, but that knack shows up across all lines of class or place of birth. Individual thaumaturges take on students and train them in their specialties, and the rivalries between workshops can be fierce.

Who's In Charge Here, Exactly?

Maintaining some semblance of professional unity over all this is the Thaumaturges' Guild. A roughly democratic body, the Guild represents the thaumaturgic profession when negotiating prices with the Council and manufactory owners—and now the Lord Protector. They're also responsible for ensuring the quality of products sold under Guild auspices, investigating consumer complaints, and suppressing black-market thaumaturgic goods.

What Now?

With the Upheaval looming ever closer, rumors say that the Lord Protector is negotiating with the Thaumaturges' Guild to improve city defenses. Stories circulate about stockpiles of thaumaturgic elements stored deep beneath the city, in case any of a number of factions lay siege to Almbrecht—but they are noticeably vague on specifics. Furthermore, a craze has developed among some wealthy patrons for thaumaturgic agents and artefacts which are supposed to ward off various supernatural threats.

Ideas for Secrets

You could find out that one of the workshops is making prohibited coercives—truth serums, uncutting knives, markless cudgels, etc.—in violation of the Guild’s ethical regulations. This is even more damning if you discover the buyer is a manufactory owner looking to break strikes, or a member of the Council or City Watch looking to arm the newly empowered city guard. You might have found out the location of one of the rumored stashes of rare and valuable thaumaturgic materials hidden in the city. Or you might be approached by a junior apprentice who’s developed a new device which would destabilize the market for a rival workshop—or an unaffiliated manufactory, since those products aren’t regulated by the Guild if they don’t have thaumaturgic components—and you realize that the competitor’s market share won’t be threatened if the Guild never receives the new device or application for review.

Examples: SECRET BLUEPRINT FOR AN UPGRADED AETHERIC RESONATOR; SELLING BANNED UNCUTTING KNIVES; SUDDEN INCREASE IN THE USE OF A RARE THAUMATURGIC COMPONENT

The Lord Protector’s Keep

In what some see as a worrisome trend, since her election Jorren has refurbished the ancient castle that dates back to when Almbrecht was the capital of an independent nation. Theories abound as to why the Council elected Jorren to the post of Lord Protector—almost unanimously, although the details of the vote aren’t widely known.

Some citizens complain—but not loudly—about this shift in the city’s balance of power. But in many ways, Jorren seems more responsive to the issues afflicting different classes in the city than the Council has been historically. She holds regularly scheduled public audiences and has issued mandates prohibiting price-gouging, and is beginning to improve infrastructure in Cheapside in response to the influx of new residents. There are even rumors of plans to implement a new form of government representation, something called ward aldermen, but Jorren has refused to confirm these reports. Also, she still appears to be working closely with many of the known members of the former Council of Three Sevens. In any case, she seems to understand that her power depends on keeping not just the elites but also the merchants, craftsmen, and lower classes all relatively satisfied.

Ideas for Secrets

Any additional insight into the Lord Protector’s plans for the city would constitute a powerful and potentially dangerous secret. This could include negotiations with the leaders of Imlan; plans for securing the city from invasion or unrest; further executive orders which will impact life in the city; or new deals being struck with manufactories or thaumaturgic workshops.

Examples: SECRET GRAIN-TRADE AGREEMENT WITH REDS-HELD TERRITORIES; PLANS FOR EMINENT DOMAIN IN CHEAPSIDE; ARMING THE CITY WATCH WITH PACIFYING GAS GRENADES



High Street

So called because it runs up a ridge in the center of the city, High Street has since time immemorial housed the city's wealthiest and most powerful citizens, because you-know-what runs downhill. Currently, the richest merchants and manufactory owners jockey for available space, to the chagrin of landed gentry who regard them as classless usurpers. Of course, these households depend on a virtual army of servants and specialized tradesmen, so people from a variety of backgrounds travel to High Street on legitimate business.

As Above, So Below

In a city as old and compacted as Almbrecht, it's hard to maintain absolute physical boundaries. The Closes—hidden back alleys—wind into and under High Street and the rest of the city. Some peek out between back doors of fine houses. Others are architectural relics winding between cellars, gradually buried as the residents of High Street built homes on top of older foundations. Why someone wealthy enough to live on High Street would leave a potential entry for thieves or other dangers into their cellar is anyone's guess.

Seeing and Being Seen

The City Watch spends much of its time and manpower here—even though many are quick to point out the need is arguably greater in the crowded streets of Cheapside—and anyone who looks like they don't have legitimate business on High Street is quickly asked to move along. That being said, looking “legitimate” is often a matter of how you carry yourself or who you're seen with.

Ideas for Secrets

You may have discovered the identity of one of the more secretive members of the Council who lives on High Street. Or you may have found out that a “secret” cellar entryway to the Closes is used fairly often—and why, if you're particularly good at finding things out. Even something as seemingly straightforward as the location of a valuable object or important document is a useful secret.

Examples: A COUNCIL MEMBER LIVES HERE; WELL-USED DOOR OFF THE CLOSES; WHERE MY LORD KEEPS HIS LOCK BOX

The Docks and the Haymarket

Almbrecht's ports have proved central to its prosperity and relative safety in the Upheaval so far. The city has remained able to trade for needed supplies overseas, even as the Upheaval renders land routes unsafe. Moreover, no faction has been willing to risk their own supply chain or the ill will generated by attacking such a large, important population center.

Historically, the docks have offered plenty of opportunities for illicit dealings, if you know the right people. But the Lord Protector has been keeping a closer eye on them to prevent smuggling, as stocks of most supplies have begun to run low. There is also concern about potentially dangerous goods or persons entering the city, so surveillance has increased. The docks are also sites of labor unrest, as dockworkers push for better working conditions and the representatives of the Merchants Guild try hiring recent arrivals to keep wages low.

Next to the docks, the Haymarket is the primary market square of the city, where most classes meet and mingle—although with varying degrees of acknowledgement. Some may come for work, some for leisure, but almost everyone in Almbrecht has some knowledge or experience of this space.

This space is unique in Almbrecht in how various classes and professions mingle. Taverns play host to musicians, and troupes of actors perform everything from Temple-sanctioned morality plays to bawdy popular entertainments. It is the mass market for most thaumaturgic and manufactured goods as well as staples like foodstuffs for humans and livestock. Booksellers, cartographers, and clerks all serve clientele in a city more literate than much of its surroundings. It's another place where your connections can get you most things, if you know the right person. Or where you might come to figure out who the right person to know is.



Ideas for Secrets

Many secrets here have to do with the movements of people and goods, both legal and otherwise. You might happen to know which of the Lord Protector's dock inspectors or watchmen is still taking kickbacks to allow smuggling. Or you might discover that a high-level thaumaturge has been meeting frequently with dock inspectors or merchants in recent weeks. Through your "research" in the offices of a prominent shipping company, you might uncover discrepancies on the manifests of a series of vessels in the last three months. Or your dock-worker connection might have tipped you off as to when a shipment of supplies for a rebel or military faction is arriving in the city. These secrets might focus more on the Upheaval itself, relating to the movement of conscripts and weapons, or on the shortages troubling the city more generally.

Examples: CHEERFULLY CORRUPT PORT OFFICIAL; MISMATCHED MANIFESTS; THIS MERCHANT CAPTAIN OWES ME A FAVOR

Finneas Orlack

If not one of the most prosperous innkeepers in the Haymarket, then certainly one of the most well-known. Running a congenial if rowdy common room, and a number of profitable backroom games, Finneas has been known to toss out any drunk who runs off too much at the mouth, without much regard for their name or station—and he does it himself. It's earned him a few enemies, but a good many more admirers. If you're looking for something or someone who keeps out of the way, there's a good chance Finneas has at least heard something about it. He may even be willing to tell you—for a price.

Finneas Orlack

ASPECTS

High Concept: ROUGH-AND-TUMBLE INNKEEP

Trouble: EARNED THE IRE OF A COUNCIL MEMBER'S SON

Other Aspects: NOT ASHAMED OF HIS ROOTS; KNOWS TROUBLE WHEN HE SEES IT; A DAMN FINE BARTENDER

SKILLS

Great (+4): Contacts, Rapport

Good (+3): Empathy, Notice, Physique, Resources

Fair (+2): Athletics, Deceive, Fight, Provoke, Will

STRESS

Physical **1 2 3 4**

Mental **1 2 3**

Social **1 2 3 4**

Cheapside

The city's historic slums, downhill from High Street—and the Lord Protector's keep, for what that's worth. Here, the majority of the new refugees have found themselves competing for already scarce lodging and amenities. Lacking room to expand outward, the buildings grow taller, denser, and deeper. Cheapside has always been described as a warren—particularly by those who don't live there—but the recent increase in population has people living on top of each other, and delving into ancient cellars to find a place to call home.

Cheapside residents face significant health and safety concerns, due to lack of access to clean water and sanitary waste disposal. In most parts of Cheapside, that means a gutter down the center of the street. (Children are taught *not* to splash in puddles here.) As you might imagine, Cheapside has been a long-simmering site of social unrest, both positive—like pushes for reform in oversight, construction, and social programs—and detrimental, as in xenophobia and violence.

Ideas for Secrets

Cheapside is where the gap between the city's governing principles and how power is actually wielded will be most glaringly obvious, and it's where many of the city's conspiracies will come to light—the trick is getting the resources to solve the problems that erupt. Your friends and neighbors may have given you information on a gang operating in Cheapside which plans to attack recent arrivals. Or you may belong to a group which is trying to organize for better conditions in Cheapside, or help form unions of manufactory or dock workers, and you'll have to contend with all the risks such plans entail. You may discover that all the workers in your family's manufactory are getting sick due to the thaumaturgic byproducts leaking into Cheapside's water supply—from your family's manufactory.

Examples: RUNOFF FROM THE MISERICK FOUNDRY POISONED THIS WELL; MY NEIGHBOR IS A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER; “ALMBRECHT FIRST” IS PLANNING A RAID ON THIS ROWHOUSE

The Closes

Not a specific place so much as a network of narrow, winding passageways between parts of the city. The Closes are maintained by ancient law as public thoroughways, even though the city has grown over and around them. Those who know the Closes can make quicker, more confident getaways or can track others more effectively across the city, and can turn up in unexpected places at unexpected times. The Closes are an old part of Almbrecht built over by newer, nicer parts of town. But that doesn't mean that no one lives there anymore. The Alm flows down here, separated from the sky for almost a century, and some of Almbrecht's oldest memories are waiting here, for those brave enough to look.

Ideas for Secrets

Many of the secrets you could learn are about the movement of people or goods between different parts of the city. You could learn the route used by a group of smugglers, or that there's traffic of a suspicious volume or nature to a particular door at the end of a formerly quiet Close. There's potential for smuggling, espionage between manufactories and workshops, hidden caches of thaumaturgic or mundane supplies, and meetings of sympathizers to various factions active in Almbrecht. Witnessing or learning about a murder, especially of someone who had no obvious business being in a place like the Closes, is a good start. You might even live in the Closes if you can't find another place to live—or if you've been forced into hiding but can't escape the city.

Examples: DISGRACED THAUMATURGE LIVING IN HIDING; THIS NOBLEMAN'S BODY DEFINITELY SHOULDN'T BE HERE; SECRET MEETING PLACE FOR REDS SYMPATHIZERS

The Temple of Enduring Light

The Temple of Enduring Light became the state religion of Imlan a few hundred years ago. Like in any organization that claims authority over their fellow travelers' spiritual well-being, you have some who join the clergy out of a sincere desire to help others, and some who join because they are tempted by the prospect of power. In Almbrecht, this means you may have a few senior clergy or local priests working to promote better conditions in Cheapside and the manufactories—and others working behind the scenes with or against the Lord Protector and the members of the former Council of Three Sevens.

Whose House Is This?

The Temple is monotheistic, and most orthodox interpretations of its Precepts tend to support a top-down, hierarchical form of society. There are a variety of sects, with sometimes violent clashes of opinion. Broadly, the Temple promotes peacefulness and stability among its adherents—but what good religion hasn't had a power-crazed mystery cult or two?

The Precepts of Enduring Light hold that Creation arose out of primordial Darkness, and that the sacred Light of Order is present in every living thing. Or at least, that's how it looks on paper. A common theological debate is whether that light is distributed equally amongst all people, or if some parts of the world hold more light and are consequently more blessed than others.

The Temple encourages peacefulness, charity, and humility as expressions of the love the Light has for itself as it permeates creation. However, in actuality, money, class, and the age of your family name all come to bear—at least in some parts of the Temple. There are radical elements in the Temple who maintain that the Light *is* everywhere and with everyone. These tend to be the Lightbringers you find out in Cheapside, working to improve living conditions. They find that it's most effective try to work with these communities, rather than around or on behalf of them.

Ideas for Secrets

Temple politics is always fertile soil for secrets. With the right focus, you could also learn more about conditions in Cheapside or the manufactories, or even begin to encounter people suffering from alleged attacks by supernatural beings known locally as Jacks. Some priests claim to have found ways to ward off Jacks, but as the attacks themselves aren't confirmed, this claim is viewed sidelong by many outside the Temple as well as within it.

Examples: THESE SENIOR LIGHTBRINGERS SUPPORT JORREN ARSBRIGHT; UNSAFE CONDITIONS AT A MEHNDELSSON MANUFACTORY; UNWAKING SLEEP IN CHEAPSIDE

Everett Minrys

A radical Lightbringer who has worked primarily in Cheapside since coming to the city. He preaches and helps relay food and medicine to the people who live there, giving them hope and a sense of worth. Many people are very loyal to him—and he's got serious reservations about Jorren. He's savvy enough to not be openly antagonistic, but is deeply skeptical of the centralization of power and has refused to lend her his endorsement.

When his parishioners report cases of “sleeping sickness,” fevers and nightmares and unawaking sleep, he listens. He delves with a few others into more mystical aspects of the Precepts, and comes back with exercises he claims can protect people from some of whatever is out there. Some people adopt them and claim they help, but none of this is widely accepted outside the communities that already believe in Everret and his preachings.

Everett Minrys

ASPECTS

High Concept: UNKEMPT HOLY MAN

Trouble: TEMPLE SUPERIORS QUESTION HIS...EVERYTHING, REALLY

Other Aspects: WALKS THE WALK; SINCERELY FAITHFUL; SKEPTICAL OF AUTHORITY

SKILLS

Great (+4): Lore, Rapport

Good (+3): Empathy, Notice, Will

Fair (+2): Athletics, Contacts, Investigate, Provoke

Average (+1): Crafts, Deceive, Physique, Stealth

STRESS

Physical **1 2 3**

Mental **1 2 3 4**

Social **1 2 3**

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):

THE SUPERNATURAL

In general, most people believe in some level of magic. There have been stories about dangerous entities to encounter in your dreams for time out of mind, even if they're sometimes dismissed as superstition or the byproduct of overworked or uneducated imaginations in the modern day. But the recent stories of attacks have been numerous enough to heighten public anxiety. Symptoms of “sleeping sickness” include vivid nightmares of needle-fingered creatures, fever, and, eventually, un waking sleep. *Why* these symptoms occur remains a mystery. But their impact is becoming undeniable—whether these **Jacks**, as they are called, are real or not, the harm suffered by victims of the sleeping sickness is tangible.

There are lots of explanations floating around as to what the Jacks are. Some believe they're a form of mass hysteria brought on by the Upheaval and resultant stress on resources and living space in the city, or by the conditions in Cheapside and the manufactories. Some mutter darkly about conspiracies to promote unrest, spread by opponents of the Lord Protector—or her supporters. A few even think they're real.

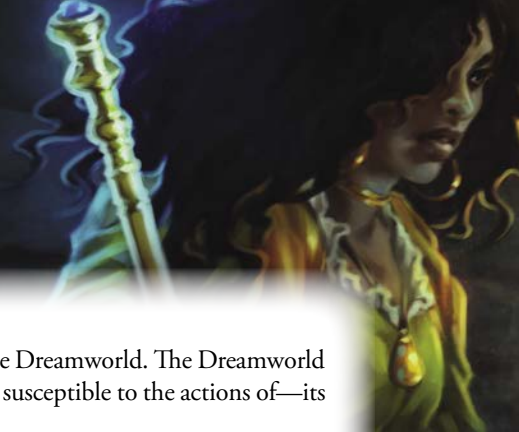
No one has identified a pattern to where the sleeping sickness is reported to have occurred. One rowhouse may be fine, while in the one next door no one sleeps soundly. Some thaumaturges sell artefacts that purport to ward off Jack attacks, although mostly at prices only affordable to denizens of High Street. A few Lightbringers also claim to have developed spiritual exercises to protect against Jacks—and other non-material threats—but again, they are not generally believed.

SHOULD WE GO DEEPER?

Your group might want to add Jacks if that sounds like another fun set of secrets to delve into, to heighten the fear and tension or to add or confirm a supernatural dimension.

The remainder of this chapter contains more specifics on the rules of Jacks and their world, so if you're not keen on spoiling yourself, stop reading here.





The Dreamworld

Jacks operate in another part of reality we'll call the Dreamworld. The Dreamworld is always present, you're just closer to—and more susceptible to the actions of—its denizens when you're dreaming.

Agents and artefacts are tools you can bring from the waking reality of Almbrecht to the Dreamworld to help maintain your focus and find your way—to help you remember that you are, in fact, dreaming—and defend yourself when needed. GMs and players, you'll need to discuss whether thaumaturgic agents or artefacts only help in creating advantages or can actually be used as weapons in the Dreamworld.

Everret Minrys (page 34) and some of the other Lightbringers have explored parts of the Dreamworld, and can also offer PCs a set of exercises as tools to help them understand the Dreamworld and move through it. Those exercises will be steeped in the philosophy and language of the Temple of Enduring Light, but do offer deeper insight into the creatures that live in the Dreamworld.

Tying the Dreamworld to Almbrecht

The Dreamworld represents a massive potential resource. As a group, think about who in Almbrecht might know about it, and who would want to exploit it. The ability to meet and exchange information covertly across massive physical distances, especially with the Upheaval cutting off conventional routes for information, is just one possibility. So is the ability to harm your enemies via their dreams, if you could convince—or coerce—the Jacks to do it for you. Who knows what a thaumaturge might be able to do if their scribing could somehow tap into the energy of the Dreamworld—assuming it doesn't already? Senior Lightbringers and thaumaturges would have access to the right kinds of knowledge to enter the Dreamworld. But politicians, spies, and military leaders would all have reasons for wanting to use the Dreamworld.

You can also make the Dreamworld relevant to events on the ground in Almbrecht by asking the players to protect important NPCs from Jackdreams, or to go after and try to retrieve people who've been sent into unwaking sleep. Stress from Jackdreams may also heighten tensions in the city, or undermine efforts to organize a strike or defend the city from siege. Agents or artefacts produced outside Guild supervision would still fetch a healthy profit on the black market. And if they don't work, will the buyers necessarily be in any condition to demand a refund?

It's also worth considering *why* Jacks have begun attacking the city. Maybe humans are just prey for them. Or maybe living conditions in the city have provoked some kind of widespread psychic trauma that's drawn their attention. Perhaps some very powerful, very secret form of thaumaturgy has been harming them by drawing energy from the Dreamworld, and the attacks are actually self-defense. This is deliberately left open-ended; you can pick an answer that suits your world.



Dreamwalking

Jacks invade dreams and harm humans while they're asleep, inflicting mental stress. If a PC has a dream invaded by Jacks and ends up taking harm from them, that PC may get a **dreamwalking aspect**. Alternatively, PCs can use thaumaturgic agents or artefacts, or Lightbringer exercises to help them navigate the Dreamworld. A dreamwalking aspect gives you the ability to move volitionally and find, direct, or defend others in the Dreamworld. Without a dreamwalking aspect, all you can do is defend.

“Distance” is much less linear in the Dreamworld and doesn't map directly onto the physical world in a meaningful way. If you've gone in search of someone who's been taken by unawaking sleep, your connection to them is much more important than how far away their unconscious body is. Places may look similar to “real” locations—or even be related, in some mysterious way—but their relative positions are *much* more fluid, and moving between them takes an applicable roll.

GMs, you may ask players in the Dreamworld to roll Will (as an expression of focus or mental strength), Physique (ability to escape bonds of an individual dream and move freely), or Rapport (connection to their target), as appropriate, when they want to move around or affect the Dreamworld. Players, if you can figure out justifications to use another skill, feel free.

As players delve into the Dreamworld, they may find that some of the entities that live there are disposed to help them, while others pursue their own agendas, or may offer assistance—but only for a price.

The Jacks

Jacks have different stats if a PC encounters them with or without a dreamwalking aspect, because their ability to understand them will be fundamentally different. GMs, you can even choose to have Jacks turn out to be a couple different varieties of creature, which PCs can perceive more clearly once they have a dreamwalking aspect.

We've included stat blocks for both “seen” and “unseen” Jacks below. Note that, though we give examples of unseen Jacks, a PC's perception of their appearances will be largely informed by what they've heard about Jacks and what's frightened them. The stat blocks give examples based on common conceptions of Jacks—creatures with needle fingers. Their shape, size, whether their eyes glow—or are a deep, bottomless black—all depend on the dreamer.

Bad Dream

ASPECTS

High Concept: HUNGRY, NEEDLE-FINGERED SWARM

Other Aspects: HARD TO KEEP TRACK OF; CHITTERING

SKILLS

Good (+3): Fight

Fair (+2): Provoke, Physique

Average (+1): Deceive, Athletics, Notice

STUNTS

Strength in Numbers: Because Bad Dreams are used to having the advantage of numbers, they get a +2 to Deceive rolls in conflicts when they outnumber the PCs by at least two to one.

Unwelcome Here: Because PCs who are unfamiliar with the Dreamworld are more likely to be disconcerted by Jacks, Bad Dreams get a +2 to Provoke rolls once per scene against a character without a dreamwalking aspect.

STRESS

Physical **1** **2** **3**

Mental **1** **2**

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Worse Dream

ASPECTS

High Concept: NOISY, NEEDLE-FINGERED RELENTLESSNESS

Other Aspects: HAPPY TO TRICK YOU; THEIR BARK IS AS BAD AS THEIR BITE

SKILLS

Great (+4): Deceive

Good (+3): Fight, Provoke

Fair (+2): Notice, Physique, Will

Average (+1): Athletics, Crafts, Notice

STUNTS

Persistence Is Key: Because it's used to targeting prey over multiple nights and getting inside their head, a Worse Dream gets +2 to one Provoke roll per scene against a dreamer it's encountered before.

Don't Blink: Because it relies on its wiles above even its strength, once per scene a Worse Dream gets +2 to Deceive against a dreamer who already took stress or consequences from them during that scene.

STRESS

Physical **1** **2** **3**

Mental **1** **2** **3**

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):

Nightmare

ASPECTS

High Concept: PEERING, NEEDLE-FINGERED RAVENOUSNESS

Other Aspects: ALARMINGLY CURIOUS, CURIOUSLY ALARMING;
TOO CLEVER BY HALF

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Notice, Provoke, Will

Great (+4): Deceive, Fight, Investigate

Good (+3): Athletics, Crafts, Physique, Stealth

STUNTS

The Enemy Within: Because Nightmares are unnervingly observant of most other lifeforms, they get a +2 to Deceive rolls if they're trying to convince a dreamer of something they already want to believe.

You've Already Lost: Nightmares are scary stuff. If a Nightmare succeeds with style on a Fight roll against a dreamer, the dreamer also takes one mental stress.

STRESS

Physical

Mental

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Mild Mental (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):



Grey Whisper

ASPECTS

High Concept:

SEARCHING RESTLESSNESS

Other Aspects:

INSUBSTANTIAL;
VAGUELY WINGED; NEVER
COMPLETELY QUIET

SKILLS

Great (+4): Empathy, Fight

Good (+3): Deceive, Notice, Will

Fair (+2): Athletics, Crafts,
Physique, Lore

STUNTS

Wait, What's That?: A Grey Whisper can roll Notice against Good (+3) difficulty. On a success, it gets to create a setting aspect with one free invoke.

We Never Said That: If something a Grey Whisper says makes PCs suspicious or hostile, the Grey Whisper can add +2 to a Deceive roll to alter the dreamers' perspective on what was said.

STRESS

Physical **1 2 3**

Mental **1 2 3**

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Radiant Wind

ASPECTS

High Concept:

UNFOCUSED BRIGHTNESS

Other Aspects:

ALMOST TOO
BRIGHT TO LOOK AT; AMUSED
BY PECULIAR THINGS; USUALLY
DISTRACTED

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Will, Empathy,
Notice

Great (+4): Fight, Lore, Provoke

Good (+3): Physique, Investigate,
Crafts, Deceive

STRESS

Physical **1 2 3**

Mental **1 2 3 4**

STUNTS

Let It Go: If a dreamer can earn a Radiant Wind's sympathy and convince it to help, and the Radiant Wind succeeds on an Empathy roll against Good (+3) difficulty, the dreamer may clear a mild or moderate mental consequence caused by other Jacks.

Leaves on the Wind: Once per scene, the Radiant Wind can give a defensive boost to each cooperative dreamer.

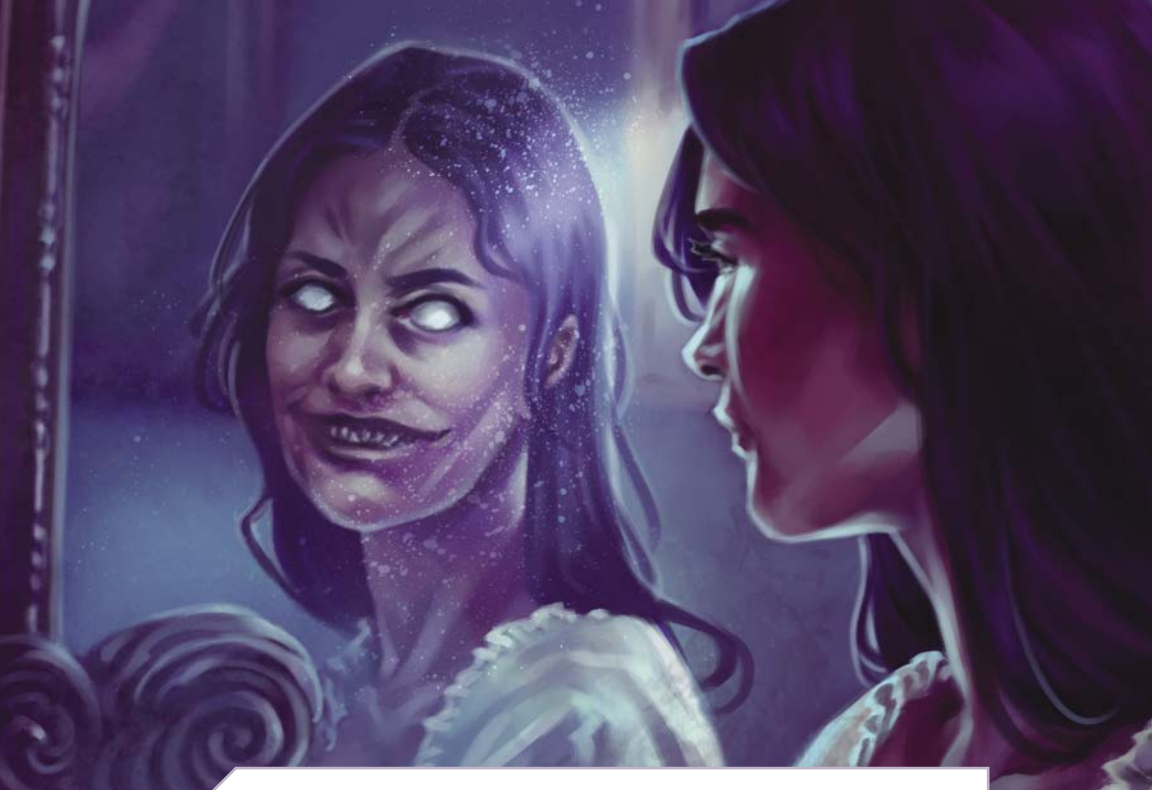
CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Mild Mental (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):



Unblinking Reflection

ASPECTS

High Concept: GRINNING UNEASINESS

Other Aspects: LOOKS JUST LIKE YOU—IF YOU LET THEM; DOESN'T SEEM TO BLINK; A DISQUIETING NUMBER OF TEETH

SKILLS

Great (+4): Deceive, Rapport

Good (+3): Notice, Fight, Provoke

Fair (+2): Stealth, Physique, Will, Athletics

STUNTS

Made You Look: If an Unblinking Reflection assumes a dreamer's appearance by succeeding on a Deceive roll against Good (+3) difficulty, it gets +2 to its next attack roll.

Now You See Me, Now You Don't: If an Unblinking Reflection concedes a conflict after taking at least two consequences, it can roll Stealth to help it get away with limited additional harm.

STRESS

Physical **1** **2** **3**

Mental **1** **2** **3**

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):

FLESHING OUT ALMBRECHT

Almbrecht is a complex place where a lot happens. Because of this, you can use Fate's Bronze rule to represent Almbrecht as a character.

PLAYERS, BE WARNED

This chapter is mostly useful for the GM, and you may spoil yourself if you read on.

Adding Crises

As your game goes on, you can add more crises. While your group may develop new crises on their own, we've provided a set of roughly escalating crises below if you want to get running quickly. You can add these crises to raise the stakes in Almbrecht and add challenges for the PCs to work on, depending on their values and motivations. Feel free to alter the details of these stories to tie them more tightly into your PCs' backstories.

Be careful of adding too many crises at once, as doing so would test even experienced groups. For a one-shot, we recommend keeping the one starting crisis. For longer campaigns, where players are building up relationships and resources in the city, introducing more crises as the story progresses can deepen the story and challenge your players to interact more with the world as they work to find solutions to their own plotlines and to the challenges faced by the city as a whole.

It's important to think about how multiple crises happening at the same time would cross-pollinate—what additional complications arise out of the combination of stressors? Would native Almbrechters angry about recent immigrants disrupt attempts to distribute supplies in Cheapside to alleviate a food shortage? Ex-Council members might be more than willing to play their own games while the Lord Protector negotiates with a hostile faction laying siege to the city. Paranoia about Jackdreams could very easily derail attempts to organize a strike, if the dreams were widespread enough. Consider how one of these tracks completing might add stress on another track.

Crisis One: STRIKE AT THE MEHNDELSSON PLACE

Your friends and neighbors in Cheapside are organizing to push for better working conditions at the Mehndelsson manufactories. How will the PCs respond if the owners bring in strikebreakers—or if the Lord Protector sends the City Watch to intervene—and people you know are injured or killed? What might the PCs be willing—or compelled—to do to keep their friends and family safe? If the strike isn't broken, what does the city start to run short of? Consider how a low-class organizer will respond differently from a high-class politico.

Crisis Two: GONE, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

The Council of Three Sevens hasn't gone away. While a majority were apparently convinced to cede power to a single Lord Protector to more efficiently respond to the threat of the Upheaval, that doesn't mean everyone agreed with the decision. Moreover, not everyone may have gotten what they felt they were owed out of the bargain.

PCs with a background in High Street, or who work as politicians or spies, may have ways of interacting with, or being discovered by, motivated members of the former Council. If approached by someone who wants to shift the balance of power in Almbrecht back toward the Council, or toward a faction in the Upheaval, what will the PCs choose? Will they remain loyal to the Lord Protector? Or work against her? What might inspire—or ensure—their loyalty? Are the known factions really the ones at play here? These are murky waters, so swim carefully.

Crisis Three: NOT WELCOME IN ALMBRECHT

Cheapside is already crowded, and some native Almbrechters don't look kindly on the additional competition for limited food and work from recent arrivals. Not to mention the short supplies of essential thaumaturgic elements. It's all too easy to see power-hungry politicians making hay out of people's fear and distrust of strangers, prompting attacks on anyone perceived as "not Almbrechter enough." How do PCs choose to involve themselves? How familiar are they with the different sides of this conflict? What will they do when riots break out? How might the middle-class spy feel differently about this than the low-class veteran?

Crisis Four: I FOUGHT THE LAW, YOU KNOW THE REST

As tensions rise in the city, the Lord Protector's edicts become more restrictive, and those daring folks looking for answers wherever the truth may take them will likely end up on the wrong side of the Watch. How are the PCs hampered by having specific members of the Watch on the lookout for them or for their friends and families? Is it harder to reach out to "respectable" contacts? Alternately, what allies might their actions earn them? Remember, there are folks with enough money and power who consider themselves *above* the law, as well as outside it. If the Lord Protector restricts freedom of speech or assembly, how does that impact the PCs? Might they have to go into hiding or find ways to protect their family members from harassment by the Watch? Or will they try to work with the Watch or earn the Lord Protector's favor?

Crisis Five: WE'RE UNDER SIEGE

Eventually, someone decides Almbrecht is too ripe a fruit to leave unplucked. The Ironsiders—or the Reds, or someone else, if you prefer—lay siege to the city. How does the Lord Protector respond? How do the citizens respond? Are the PCs in a position to organize a defense of the city? Or are they sympathetic to the faction attacking and will try to broker a peace—or push the city to surrender?

Crisis Six: WE'RE RUNNING OUT

Food, clean water, medical or thaumaturgic supplies—all of these are essential to keeping a large city like Almbrecht from going over the edge. But trade is dwindling, between the Upheaval and the rumors surrounding the Jacks, and rationing only goes so far.* Expect rioting, hoarding, and black markets despite the Lord Protector's emergency edicts. A shortage of thaumaturgic supplies will make citizens increasingly fearful of Jackdreams, and probably increase panic in the city in a way that material shortages might not immediately. Do PCs try to help alleviate these shortages by trying to keep the peace? Find alternate sources of supplies? Manipulate the markets to their own ends?

* There have also been advances in medical and food-preservation technology, in response to both military and civilian needs. While these have helped to alleviate some of the stresses around food and medicine in the city, the growing population and fractured supply lines caused by the Upheaval are stretching the city's resources to their limits.

Crisis Seven: THEY'RE GETTING STRONGER

Reports of Jack attacks are increasing in frequency, and the ill effects on sleepers seem to be getting more severe. Panic is rising. PCs could investigate reported methods of resisting or warding off Jacks, and spread that knowledge—or use it for themselves. This may mean going to the Lightbringers who've been working to combat the “sleeping sickness” in Cheapside, or to the thaumaturges selling artefacts and agents. Are these methods of protection genuine? Self-interested fraud is always a possibility when markets are hot, but the price of failing to deliver on promised results is starting to rise dangerously.

This crisis should probably be a mid- to late-game break, as it will further stress the social networks of Almbrecht, limiting people's ability to work outside the home, to care for afflicted family members and neighbors, and to respond to other crises.



Using Stress Tracks

Adding stress tracks to Almbrecht itself is a good way to keep an eye on bad—or good—things that await the PCs. You can give a track as few as two boxes or more than eight. A track with fewer boxes will simply happen sooner than a track with more boxes.

These tracks are useful at many scales. You can set up a track for how alert the guards are at a mansion as easily as you can for how close a manufactory workers' strike is to turning violent. In general, a small-scale track, like the guards or the mood of patrons in a pub, can be affected by a roll, while a large-scale track, like an organization of some size or a movement, can be affected by a scene, and a huge-scale track, like the city's overall stability, can be impacted by the session.

You can even mark multiple stress boxes if something the players did—or failed to prevent—was especially impactful. If they're working to prevent an outcome, you can also set up a counter-track to track their progress, either with negotiating with the union and bosses at the manufactory, or garnering additional supplies to ease shortages. Using this method, you can create relatively complex dynamics with fairly simple tools.

Stress and Crises

You can attach stress tracks to crises to show how close they are to going over the edge. Filled stress tracks can introduce new crises, and new crises can add stress to other tracks.

Think about the stress you're introducing with each crisis as a dial you can adjust. Do you want your PCs to feel like they're *just* managing to marshal their resources and connections in time to stay ahead of the city's problems? Or do you want to force them to make hard choices about who and where they're choosing to help? Remember that players play games to feel empowered *and* challenged—it's important to give them choices that feel and actually are meaningful.

When the players are in a crisis location, you can invoke the crisis to justify adding story details. Let the players know that their actions during the scene could make the crisis better or worse, and through the scene you'll decide how their actions add or remove stress from the relevant tracks and counter-tracks. Likewise, NPCs in the scene might be able to attack a crisis stress track directly, if the crisis is on a smaller scale. Even if the PCs fail to mitigate a crisis, their failure should still contribute plot.

How Much Do You Say?

You probably don't want your players to be aware of all the stress tracks in play. There are lots of secrets beyond what the players know, and it makes sense that their actions will have consequences they'll only gradually become aware of. Even so, giving them some insight into the progress they're making—even if it's done with narrative, rather than by telling them an exact number of boxes—can affirm their decisions and hint at which directions to move in.

One action might add stress in the short term, but if players choose to intervene, could ultimately improve conditions. For example, in a game focused on intrigue and working conditions in the manufactories, you might have the Lord Protector impose mandatory ten-hour shift limits for workers. As you can imagine, various parties would respond to this measure differently. Some workers might support it, while others oppose it. There would be debate as to who should get hired into the new positions, and how all of this should affect wages, given that there's something suspiciously like a war on. This creates more directions for your team to move in, and will probably increase stress in the short term, but also contains possible resolutions that may improve some conditions your PCs care about, and which could ultimately remove more stress from the track than it added.

Monitoring the stress tracks against your team's actions and goals should tell you if you want to keep building challenges for them to work through, or if you want to ramp up the tension to a big climax. If you do opt to go big, consider what happens if your team fails. How do you play through catastrophic failure, if the city falls to invasion or various members of the team are imprisoned, banished, or otherwise incapacitated?

Deepening Secrets and Conspiracies

Or, what's really going on around here?

Almbrecht is a multifaceted place where a lot happens beyond what the PCs are aware of. The city can and will continue to generate new secrets on its own, and with a little digging, the PCs can pick up more secrets that will help them unravel conspiracies and mitigate crises.

As you're adding new secrets for the PCs to discover, consider the following questions:

- How can your players get access to new secrets in ways that feel appropriate to their characters?
- How do the new secrets tie into the secrets your PCs already have and into the big issues of Almbrecht?
- How can the characters use the new secrets to try to resolve the conspiracies that they're part of? Put another way, how does knowing a secret make them better at solving the bigger puzzle?

Here are some inspirations for creating new secrets to tie into crises and conspiracies.

The Emperor

The uncertainty of public knowledge around the emperor's current condition is intentional. You can choose whether the emperor is alive or dead, and whether and how much you want this plot arc to interact with the story. An imprisoned emperor—or one who *chose* to go missing—when he is widely presumed to be dead is rich fodder for plot, if you're running a longer or more political game. How do the PCs gain access to those secrets? Are there loyalist members of the Council in Almbrecht who know the emperor is actually alive?

The Lord Protector

Jorren Arsbright favors one of the insurgent factions in the Upheaval. So did a majority of the Council, but they didn't want to risk openly supporting this faction and being seen as betraying the Empire. They elected Jorren so that supplies and personnel for various factions could travel more-or-less freely through the city, while still paying lip service to the Empire. If the Loyalists successfully quash the Upheaval and suspect the role Almbrecht played, Jorren can be handily scapegoated and executed as a traitorous usurper. Why volunteer for the role of Lord Protector? Jorren's no fool—she understands the stakes she's playing for. She's a woman of ambition and vision, and is willing to take on the risk in order to give the rebel faction much-needed access to supplies and volunteers. There's certainly also some appeal to being able to control and leave your mark on one of the oldest, most important cities in the Empire.

The Council of Three Sevens

Almbrecht is not a democracy. While the people who live there are commonly referred to as citizens, they have wildly varying degrees of influence on how the city is governed. The citizens with the most influence belonged to the Council. Historical records conflict as to who comprised the original Council, and the compositions of the Sevens have changed over time, in response to significant economic and social shifts. It's rumored that at one point farmers and laborers comprised one of the three Sevens, although other sources list nobility, merchants, and clergy.

Prior to the appointment of the Lord Protector, the manufactory owners pushed to increase their influence among the merchants' Seven. Various members of the merchants' Seven and the Thaumaturges' Guild had either been proposing restructuring or redistributing the seats, or supplanting the clerics' Seven. As you can imagine, the various machinations involved in these power struggles provide fruitful grounds for plot. Each Seven has a few members who are more publicly known and accountable, while others are much more private, to the point where citizens not on the Council don't really know who they are. The groups represented by each Seven have their own methods for electing members to their Seven. But in most cases, a lot of it has to do with power, wealth, and connections.

Factions in the Upheaval

One or more factions works at smuggling supplies and volunteers—or conscripts—through the city. What influence do they have with local merchants or former members of the Council? Who's interested in letting them move unimpeded through the city?

An Independent Almbrecht

Almbrecht is not the capital of the Empire, or even its second city. It was, however, at one point the capital of an independent kingdom subsumed in the Empire some hundreds of years ago. It has a deep history, and while many Almbrechtians count themselves as loyal citizens of the Empire, many others envision an independent future for Almbrecht—or at least a more equitable relationship to the Empire. They may have that opportunity, in the Upheaval.

Using Secrets to Move the Plot

Once your group has built their secrets, consider who wants this information to stay secret, and what they're willing to do to keep it from coming to light. Simply threatening PCs with violence or death can offer the opportunity for a series of minion fights and exciting chase scenes, if that's the swashbuckling story your group wants to tell. But how would your PCs respond to an offer to help reach their ultimate goal? Or the promise of a better life for their family? Would they be tempted? Alternatively, what motivation would threats against their family or a fellow Secret Keeper produce?

Feel free to talk this over as a group if you're not sure what the answer might be. Consider the characters' backstories and goals. But remember, GMs, you also want to be able to throw them some surprises too.

What compels a given PC to keep their secret? Are they just waiting until the opportune time to share it? Are they blackmailing someone with it? Might someone they care about be harmed by revealing it?

Ultimately, the Secret Keepers will have to decide what to do with their secrets. Is it enough to solve the problems of their immediate families or neighborhoods that pushed them into action in the first place? To restore Almbrecht to pre-Upheaval levels of security and prosperity? Or does resolving their secrets entail changing Almbrecht from the ground up, and possibly its relationship to the Empire?

You'll want to work with the players to meaningfully address their characters' secrets as conspiracies and crises unfold in and around Almbrecht. Here are some possible outcomes—or just complications—along the route:

- The PCs fail to prevent hostile factions from coming to power inside the city and working to eradicate the Secret Keepers, and one or more of them have to go into hiding.
- Almbrecht falls to siege or internal unrest.
- The PCs effectively leverage their secrets or perform favors to accrue political and social capital and begin using that power to achieve their goals.
- They earn the favor of the Lord Protector and direct her toward governing the city in line with their goals.
- The PCs depose the Lord Protector and either re-empower the Council or bring about a new form of government.