

H I G H C A S T E R



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DUNGEONCASTER

C A S T E R  S Y S T E M

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CHARACTER CREATION

THE FOLLOWING CHAPTER WILL DETAIL ALL OF THE STEPS the group goes through during their first session to create their characters. If you are only doing a single session (one shot), then you can use pre-generated characters and skip this.

STEP ONE: CULTURE

The first thing the group needs to decide is their shared **CULTURE**. This will determine their home society, shared values, language, and basic primary motivations. All characters will be a part of the same culture. After your group has chosen their shared culture, each player will choose:

- ◆ Language: Since you all share the same culture, you will have at least one language in common.
- ◆ Cultural Talents: Every player can choose from three Talents they get because of their culture. These are specific abilities they can do that will help them in the game.
- ◆ Trade: Every player can choose from what their trade or skill sets are. These will give them other additional boons in the game and also help develop what the character does.

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Deirwesch (Forsen)

Language

You are literate in two languages, and can speak an additional third language.

Cultural Talents (Pick One)

- ◆ Native of Riverlands: You naturally know your way around.
- ◆ Politico: You get a Talent die when confronting threats using politics.
- ◆ Cultured: You get a Talent die when using your knowledge of a society.

Your Trade (Pick One)

- ◆ Laborer: You get a talent die when you need to lift/carry something heavy.
- ◆ Politician: You have a group of powerful constituents that will do favors for you.
- ◆ Barrister: You get a talent die whenever you confront a threat with knowledge of the law.

Highdoni

Language

You are literate in one language, and can speak an additional second language.

Cultural Talents (Pick One)

- ◆ Native of the Region: You naturally know your way around your home region.
- ◆ Mounted Warriors: You get a Talent die when confronting threats on a mount.
- ◆ Shield Warrior: You get a Talent die when using a shield to confront a threat.

Your Trade (Pick One)

- ◆ Farmer: You get a Talent die whenever you confront a threat by using your understanding of weather, botany, irrigation, or soil.

- ◆ **Trader:** You get a Talent die whenever you attempt to haggle.
- ◆ **Noble:** You have a number of hirelings equal to a roll of your Prestige.

Rishen

Language

You are literate in both two languages and can speak an additional two languages.

Cultural Talents (Pick One)

- ◆ **Native of the Coast:** You naturally know your way around your home region.
- ◆ **Guild Elite:** You call upon your guild for funds or favors whenever it is needed.
- ◆ **Coastal Affinity:** You get a Talent die when you pilot a boat or ship.

Your Trade (Pick One)

- ◆ **Guild Leader:** You get a Talent die whenever you confront a threat relating to Rishen guilds.
- ◆ **Trader:** You get a Talent die whenever you attempt to haggle or negotiate.
- ◆ **Artisan:** You have a number of hirelings equal to a Prestige roll.

Saeberds (Inesen)

Language

You are literate in two languages and can speak an additional language.

Cultural Talents (Pick One)

- ◆ **Native of the Coast:** You naturally know your way around your home region.
- ◆ **Skeipen:** You get a Talent die when confronting threats on or with a ship.
- ◆ **Cultured:** You get a Talent die when using your knowledge of a society.

Your Trade (Pick One)

- ◆ **Voyager:** You have your own ship that can be used at sea or on rivers.

- ◆ **Crew:** You are the member of a crew that will come to your aid in exchange for periodic service at war.
- ◆ **Feared:** Get a Talent die whenever confronting someone who has heard of you.

Sterboren (Khem)

Language

You are literate in one language and can speak two additional.

Cultural Talents (Pick One)

- ◆ **Native of the Region:** You naturally know your way around your home region.
- ◆ **Forest Warriors:** You get a Talent die when confronting threats in a forest.
- ◆ **Long History:** You get a Talent die when using lore or history to confront a threat.

Your Trade (Pick One)

- ◆ **Worker:** You get a Talent die whenever you confront a threat by using a trade or a trade tool.
- ◆ **Bureaucrat:** You get a Talent die whenever you create a plan to confront a threat.
- ◆ **Revered:** You have a number of hirelings equal to a roll of your Prestige.

Witlanders

Language

You can speak one language and can choose to either speak another language or be fluent in oral traditions and poetry.

Cultural Talents (Pick One)

- ◆ **Native of the Region:** You know your way around your home region.
- ◆ **Beastwardens:** You get a Talent die when confronting threats dealing with animals.
- ◆ **Pastoral:** You get a Talent die when you fight alongside someone in your clan.

Your Trade (Pick One)

- ◆ **Raiser:** You get a Talent die when you try to

train or domesticate an animal.

- ◆ **Trader:** You get a Talent die whenever you attempt to haggle or negotiate.
- ◆ **Guide:** You never get lost and can always find the easiest path in the wild.

Wyrmgarde

Language

You are literate in one language and can speak another.

Cultural Talents (Pick One)

- ◆ **Native of the Region:** You naturally know your way around your home region.
- ◆ **Alpine Warriors** You get a Talent die when fighting in mountainous terrain.
- ◆ **Hardened:** You get a Talent die when withstanding natural elements.

Your Trade (Pick One)

- ◆ **Peasant:** You get a Talent die whenever you have to do a trade or work with your hands.
- ◆ **Warrior:** You get a Talent die whenever you fight with your trained weapon.
- ◆ **Noble:** You have a number of hirelings equal to a roll of your Prestige.

STEP TWO: HERITAGE

Next the group will build their individual characters. Each player will choose their character's **HERITAGE**, which is the type of being they will play. Heritages are not specific to a culture and the players can play anyone they want.

Each player can choose whatever heritage they please, and it makes no difference if more than one player plays the same one. Heritages are also very biologically different. All non-mortal heritages came from other realms or were immortal at some time. So while people of different heritages can and do share lives together, they cannot procreate.

- ◆ **Look:** Each heritage has specific physical qualities to choose from. Simply select the qualities you want.

- ◆ **Abilities:** Each heritage has a choice of three abilities that provide unique traits as a result of their heritage.

Bledseni:

Chimeric Descendants of Nature Spirits

Look

- ◆ **Height (choose one):** small, average, tall
- ◆ **Form (choose one):** avian, reptilian, canine, feline, rodent, insect, bear, horse, deer, goat or sheep, amphibian
- ◆ **Bestial Nature (choose one):** mighty, fast, great endurance, withstand extreme temperatures, nightvision, birds-eye vision, insect vision, excellent climber, excellent swimmer

Abilities (Pick One)

- ◆ **Fly:** You use natural wings to fly and can go to great heights without exerting too much energy.
- ◆ **Exoskeleton:** You have an exterior skeleton like an insect or crustacean and you shed and regrow the shell as you age. It is difficult to harm you.
- ◆ **Claws or Teeth:** You have sharp teeth or claws that are highly dangerous against foes.

Draken (Drak):

Mortal Descendants of Dragons

Look

- ◆ **Height (choose one):** small, average, tall
- ◆ **Scales (choose one):** brown, ocher, white, black, umber, red, dark green, bright green, yellow, blue, multi-patterned
- ◆ **Eyes (choose one):** silver, bronze, green, blue

Abilities (Pick One)

- ◆ **Fire Glands:** You can breathe fire in a powerful and steady stream.
- ◆ **Venom:** You spit a spray of toxic venom that will paralyze or otherwise chemically burn.

- ◆ Noxious Gas: You release a poisonous gas that will cause others to become very ill or incapacitated.

Ekwin (Ekwi):

Magical Creatures of Nature

Look

- ◆ Height: small, average, tall
- ◆ Hide: brown, ocher, white, black, umber, red, dark green, bright green, yellow, blue, multi-patterned
- ◆ Eyes: gold, silver, bronze, green, blue

Abilities (Pick One)

- ◆ Flight: You have c wings and can fly for long distances.
- ◆ Telepathic: You can hold conversations with other creatures in their minds.
- ◆ Radiance: You emit a blinding multi-color light from your body.

Fynd:

Descendants of Demons

Look

- ◆ Height: small, average, tall
- ◆ Form (describe): A mortal heritage with a monstrous body that embodies an intense emotion or fear
- ◆ Shadow Nature (choose one): darkness emanates from the body, overwhelming powerful presence, nightvision

Abilities (Pick One)

- ◆ Empathy: You can sense emotion or intention from any living creature.
- ◆ Darkness: You can create a wide spread area of complete darkness in which only you can see.
- ◆ Terrifying: You can inflate your presence and terrify most creatures around you.

Giantkin:

Mortal Descendants of Giants

Look

- ◆ Height: small, average, tall
- ◆ Hair: black, brown, umber, violet, silver
- ◆ Eyes: black, brown, yellow
- ◆ Skin: black, light green, dark green, ocher, orange, gray, violet

Abilities (Pick One)

- ◆ Giant-Size: You are much taller than a mortal.
- ◆ Giant Strength: You have more power than mortals with the ability to knock down walls or lift heavy objects.
- ◆ Giant Stamina: You have more endurance and fortitude than mortals.

Holten (Holt):

Immortal Creatures of the Earth

Look

- ◆ Height (choose one): small, average, tall
- ◆ Form: flesh-like bipedal form but made from (choose one) dirt or sand, stone, crystals, a hybrid mix
- ◆ Eyes: gold, silver, bronze, brown, gray, pink, green

Abilities (Pick One)

- ◆ Earthen Touch: You can alter and sculpt earth as if it were semisolid or fluid.
- ◆ Stone Body: Your stone flesh makes it difficult to harm or damage you.
- ◆ All Times: You have keener memory and can quickly know the right moves to make.

Mortals:

Look

- ◆ Height (choose one): small, average, tall

- ◆ Hair: black, brown, yellow, silver, red, orange, lavender, violet
- ◆ Eyes: black, brown, gold, silver, lavender
- ◆ Skin: black, violet, dark blue, light blue, dark green, light green, white, pale, pink, light brown, dark brown, lavender

Abilities (Pick One)

- ◆ Adaptable: You get a Talent die whenever you confront a threat as a result of the elements.
- ◆ Builder: You get a Talent die whenever you need to build a shelter or understand engineering.
- ◆ Mortal Voice: You get a Talent die when you attempt to mimic a vocal sound.

Nomes:

Mortal Descendants of Fay

Look

- ◆ Height: small, average, tall
- ◆ Appearances: (choose one) youthful, radiant, aged
- ◆ Skin: green, blue, orange, yellow, brown
- ◆ Hair: green, blue, red, brown, black

Abilities (Pick One)

- ◆ Healer: You can heal harmed creatures.
- ◆ Fly: You have wings of a bird, mammal, or insect that allow you to fly.
- ◆ Nature Hands: You can influence plants and animals by communicating with them subconsciously.

Sael:

Mortal Descendants of Celestials

Look

- ◆ Height: small, average, tall
- ◆ Form (choose one): like a mortal, multiple

limbs that can be used independently, wings, several eyes, tentacles or pseudopods, part mortal and part beast such as a lion or bird of prey

- ◆ Celestial Nature (choose one): glows with an otherworldly radiance, overwhelming powerful presence, can hear thoughts

Abilities (Pick One)

- ◆ Transcendence: You can hover at great heights and control your ascent or descent.
- ◆ Radiance: You can radiate blinding light from yourself as if a visible aura.
- ◆ Celestial Fire: You robe yourself in a supernatural fire that can harm others and protect you.

STEP THREE: PATH

Next, the players will decide their character's **PATH**, which will define their role in the culture—their purpose.

- ◆ Magister: worker of magic
- ◆ Oathen: holy warrior or knight
- ◆ Outdon: criminal or hireling
- ◆ Scoplar: scribe or poet
- ◆ Veneren: priest or holy person
- ◆ Warren: soldier or warrior
- ◆ Wicker: worker of spirits
- ◆ Wildkin: outsider or traveler

The character's path is their most important aspect. It defines almost every aspect of the character from both a game mechanics perspective and an in-story perspective. The path represents what the character *does* and *why*. It is more than only a profession, it is the character's reason for being. The path also represents the character's role in the story. Unlike other aspects of the character is important that no player plays the same path as one another. These are the paths of heroes, who leave their safe borders to venture into the unknown for reasons greater than themselves.

Most people in this world do not have a path. Taking on a path is a step beyond the mundane and requires a great deal of training to achieve even the basics of disciplines. The very fact that your characters have chosen a path will place them in an entirely different league from everyone they meet.

Consequently, characters with a path have a responsibility. They must not take respect for granted. They must protect the people. Finally, they must make a positive mark, as whoever meets them will never forget them.

A hero with a path striding into a town will cause daily life to stop altogether so that everyone, child and elder alike, can step out and watch them pass. They will be given any accommodation the people can offer and provided anything else they ask if possible. Heroes are deeply feared, as well as respected.

Each player should go through the following section and look at the details of their Path. Several prompts there will help flesh out your character. This is your chance to build the character to be a three-dimensional person.

- ◆ Culture: The Path will outline how each culture defines it and may include background prompts you can use based on your group's culture. This should be openly discussed so the group can begin to see how the characters will all create journeys and stories together.
- ◆ Background: These are prompts for the player to work through and answer to develop additional character framework. The questions are all designed to help forge a more three-dimensional vision of your character and get you to think about some of their motivations, tensions, aspirations. You need not necessarily answer all the ones listed, and you can also come up with your own.
- ◆ Belongings: This section will help you determine the types of things your character owns to add even more dimension.
- ◆ Relationships: Players can ask relationship questions of each other to define the group's dynamics. They are not required but should help open up conversations about how the characters know and relate to each other. Be

sure to work with each other and get consent for any relationships.

- ◆ Path Talent: Every Path has a boon.
- ◆ Disciplines: Every Path has three Disciplines as their primary stats during gameplay. They are used along with a move to compel a particular style of play for the character. A player can use a Discipline die whenever the character applies that Discipline to what they're doing.

MAGISTER, PATH OF SORCERY

Sorcery is a perilous Path and one that has brought destruction on many, both to others and the sorcerers themselves. Magic entails manipulating the powers of the natural world through force of will and ritual. In contrast to more natural forms of magic, such as practiced by the Path of Wicker, the Sorcerer bends reality using words of power, the strength of will, and the power of symbols.

Background (Answer Each)

- ◆ What does your magic look like when you manifest it through tomes, power words, or runes?
- ◆ Who was the person who really unlocked your internal powers in your youth?
- ◆ How did you do during your training and who helped you to succeed?
- ◆ What does magic feel like to you when you use it?
- ◆ What transformative moment happened in your past that set you on your path?
- ◆ What discipline are you most attracted to, tomes, power words, or runes?

Belongings (Answer Each)

- ◆ What are your runes inscribed onto for casting your rune-based magic?
- ◆ What does your tome of magical spells look like and what makes it unique to you?
- ◆ What magical artifact do you have and what does it do?

- ◆ Describe your home, the place you will return to when your journeys are complete.

Relationships (Ask the Other Heroes Any or All)

- ◆ Who needs to understand my power better and why?
- ◆ Who is too reckless and must be calmed?
- ◆ Who has a natural magical power of which they may not be aware?
- ◆ Who is hiding something important?
- ◆ Who do I confide in when I need counsel?

Path Talent

Get a Talent die whenever your knowledge of the magical arts is tested.

Disciplines

- ◆ **Sage, The Discipline of Tomes:** Use a tome to perform a ritual for a magical effect that harms or protects from harm.
- ◆ **Vocar, The Discipline of Words:** Speak incantations to create a magical effect that summons spirits or beasts.
- ◆ **Myster, The Discipline of Runes:** Draw sacred glyphs to create a magical effect that reveals wisdom or truth.

OATHEN, PATH OF THE KNIGHT

No matter culture or heritage or philosopher or fighter, one follows the Path of the Oathen if they've sworn an oath to something greater than themselves.

Oathen are sometimes simply called "knights," but they are referred to by different names depending on their culture. The Path demands a commitment to a Creed beyond any other and insists upon one's oath above all.

Background (Answer Each)

- ◆ What drove you to take a lifelong oath?
- ◆ Who do you consider a trusted sibling within your order or knighthood?

- ◆ What adversary nearly drove you to break your oath, and what happened?

- ◆ What trinket do you carry to remind you of your oath?

- ◆ Who or what did you have to give up in order to take your oath?

- ◆ What is it about your oath that you love the most?

Belongings (Answer Each)

- ◆ What is your preferred weapon?

- ◆ Name three items that are always on your person, apart from your weapon.

- ◆ Describe the place you will return to when your journeys are complete.

- ◆ Describe the person to which you owe your fealty and life.

Relationships (Ask the Other Heroes Any or All)

- ◆ Who needs help maturing?

- ◆ Who believes my oath gets in the way of what must be done?

- ◆ Who has a strong will and is vital to my purpose?

- ◆ Who will ultimately come into conflict with my oath?

- ◆ Who do I confide in when I need counsel?

Path Talent

Get a Talent die whenever you make ethical or moral judgments about a situation.

Disciplines

- ◆ **Chevalar, The Discipline of Honor:** Adhere to your creed or oath when in the face of adversity.

- ◆ **Braven, The Discipline of Bravery:** Risk your life to assist or protect another without hesitation.

- ◆ **Comandur, The Discipline of Battle:** Take strategic leadership to undergo a task.

OUTDON, PATH OF THE OUTCAST

Some walk on the outskirts of society or have been cast out. They do not belong to the ordinary routines of the world in which they live. Yet, they still, in their unique way, work to preserve and protect their society. Perhaps they don't abide by the laws of their land, or perhaps they don't share the same Creed or beliefs. But the Path of the Outdon is about doing what one knows is right, even if others think it's wrong. So they persevere despite cultural norms and thrive on uncoupling from a society that binds others.

Background (Answer Each)

- ◆ What caused you to be an outcast?
- ◆ What culture has cast you out, and do you continue to help their people? If not, why did you bond with the new culture?
- ◆ Who in your past pushed you to your limit, provoking you to become who you are?
- ◆ Who in your past would you destroy if you ever lay eyes on them again? Why?
- ◆ What do you hope to gain with your lifestyle and where would you like to end up?

Belongings (Answer Each)

- ◆ What is your most prized possession?
- ◆ Name three other items that are always on your person.
- ◆ Describe where you live. Is it safe? Would you like to stay? Why or why not?
- ◆ Do you have a family? If so, do they know where you are?
- ◆ Describe the person that you trust the most. Why do you trust them?

Relationships (Ask the Other Heroes Any or All)

- ◆ Who should trust me but doesn't?
- ◆ Who does not understand me and will likely interfere?
- ◆ Who understands me and what I'm doing?

- ◆ Who do I know you find most untrustworthy, and why?
- ◆ Who owes me favors?

Path Talent

Get a Talent die whenever use your understanding of the criminal/outcast world to confront a threat.

Disciplines

- ◆ **Thef, The Discipline of Thievery:** Attempt to take something of great importance that is not yours.
- ◆ **Highpath, The Discipline of Banditry:** Attempt to intimidate someone to get what you want.
- ◆ **Mordras, The Discipline of Murder:** Attempt to take a creature's life, not out of emotion, but out of duty.

SCOPLAR, PATH OF THE STORYTELLER

Historians, actors, orators, musicians, humorists, singers, poets—the Scoplar Path is truly the heart of all cultures and societies. They are the observers and the truth-speakers, always working to better their communities through art and wisdom. They are kept in courts and included in memorable journeys to hold counsel with leaders, record important events, and entertain. They inspire armies, move societies, and serve as the voice of their people.

Background (Answer Each)

- ◆ What is your talent and how does it translate into your role as cultural advisor and entertainer?
- ◆ Who nurtured this talent and what is their significance to you?
- ◆ Who in your past pushed you to your limit to become who you are?
- ◆ Who in your past is your lifelong rival? Why?
- ◆ For which work or performance are you most famous for?
- ◆ What other talents do you have?

Belongings (Answer Each)

- ◆ What is your most prized possession?
- ◆ Name three other items that are always on your person.
- ◆ Describe your home, the place you will return when your work is complete.
- ◆ Describe your family, the loved ones you keep in your life.
- ◆ Describe the person to which you owe your success.

Relationships (Ask the Other Heroes Any or All)

- ◆ Who needs my advice but will not admit it?
- ◆ Who believes my talent isn't what I profess?
- ◆ Who is a promising entertainer who could use my training?
- ◆ Who has a creed that will ultimately come into conflict with mine?
- ◆ Who do I confide in when I need counsel?

Path Talent

Give a Talent die to another character whenever you do something to inspire them.

Disciplines

- ◆ **Canter, The Discipline of Song:** Recount a legend, poem, or historical fact to assist in a situation.
- ◆ **Oraten, The Discipline of Oration:** Use your wit or words to change someone's mind or the tone of a situation.
- ◆ **Pleier, The Discipline of Performance:** Perform an instrument, dance, or sing to affect a situation.

VENEREN, PATH OF THE DEVOUT

Many still worship the gods, and plenty of creatures still harness divine power. They can draw power from the divine, whether they are Stern-ewn, drawing power from the memory of the gods or Stergress, who draw power from the belief gods exist and people are being tested.

Background (Answer Each)

- ◆ What is a deity or religious path do you adhere to, and what are the primary principles?
- ◆ Who initiated you into service of the divine?
- ◆ What does it look like when you call forth divine power? Is there a symbol or ritual object you favor?
- ◆ Did your family reject or embrace your path?
- ◆ What do you hope your divine connection will bring to the society you serve?
- ◆ What did you experience that brought you faith?

Belongings (Answer Each)

- ◆ What is your most prized possession?
- ◆ Name three other items are always on your person?
- ◆ Describe your home, the place you live and practice your devotion?
- ◆ Describe your family or the loved ones in your life.
- ◆ Describe the person to which you owe your devotion and life.
- ◆ Describe your place of worship.

Relationships (Ask the Other Heroes Any or All)

- ◆ Who needs faith but will not admit it?
- ◆ Who believes my creed gets in the way of what must be done?
- ◆ Who shares my devotion?
- ◆ Who has a creed that will ultimately come into conflict with mine?
- ◆ Who do I confide in when I need counsel?

Path Talent

Get a Talent die whenever your understanding of the divine is needed to solve a problem.

Disciplines

- ◆ **Haelan, The Discipline of Healing:** Call upon your divine source to heal someone in need.
- ◆ **Wrothu, The Discipline of Divine Wrath:** Call upon your divine source to cause harm to someone.
- ◆ **Prier, The Discipline of Prayer:** Call upon your divine source to find wisdom or truth.

WARREN, PATH OF WAR

The Path of War does not make one a ruthless killer or tyrant. It is a carefully balanced Path that infuses the honor of battle with the needs of society. Warren are protectors of the realm. It is not a Path for the bloodthirsty or those with angry dispositions.

Background (Answer Each)

- ◆ What is your most prized weapon and what makes it different?
- ◆ Who gave you this weapon and what is their significance?
- ◆ Who in your past pushed you to your limit to become who you are?
- ◆ Who in your past would you destroy if you ever lay eyes on them again? Why?
- ◆ What atrocity did you witness that compels you?
- ◆ Who do you fight for? Why?
- ◆ If you were anointed as a monarch how would you run your realm?

Belongings (Answer Each)

- ◆ What is your most prized possession?
- ◆ Name three other items that are always on your person, apart from your weapon.
- ◆ Describe your home, the place you will return to when your journeys are complete.
- ◆ Describe your family, the loved ones you left behind.

Relationships (Ask the Other Heroes Any or All)

- ◆ Who needs my protection but will not admit it?
- ◆ Who believes my creed gets in the way of what must be done?
- ◆ Who is a promising warrior from whom I can learn?
- ◆ Who's worldview will come into conflict with mine?
- ◆ Who do I confide in when I need counsel?

Path Talent

Get a Talent die whenever your understanding of battle strategy and tactics will help your situation.

Disciplines

- ◆ **Warder, The Discipline of Protection:** Defend someone from harm.
- ◆ **Swyrder, The Discipline of Swordplay:** Fight an opponent with swordplay.
- ◆ **Archer, The Discipline of Archery:** Fight an opponent at a distance.

WICKER, PATH OF THE WISE

Sometimes characterized as folk magic practitioners, the Path of the Wicker belongs to the commoner—the everyday person under the yoke of the wealthy or high-born. They protect, heal, and support those who aren't of a station to do so themselves. They are the voice of the marginalized, disenfranchised, or rejected.

Background (Answer Each)

- ◆ What artifacts, trinkets, and tools do you use for magic?
- ◆ Who brought you into the life of wicker, and why were you attracted to it?
- ◆ Who never understood your power and ostracized you?
- ◆ Who in the world are you most devoted to helping?
- ◆ What is it about the current social structure you'd like to change the most, and how do you plan on doing it?

- ◆ What community or city have you most tried to serve, and what did you do to help them?

Belongings (Answer Each)

- ◆ What is your most prized possession?
- ◆ Name three other items that are always on your person, apart from your weapon.
- ◆ Describe your home, the place you will return to when your journeys are complete.
- ◆ Describe your family, the loved ones you left behind.
- ◆ Describe the person to which you owe your loyalty and life.

Relationships (Ask the Other Heroes Any or All)

- ◆ Who needs my protection but will not admit it?
- ◆ Who believes that I get in the way of what must be done?
- ◆ Who is a promising warrior from whom I can learn many things?
- ◆ Who has a creed that will ultimately come into conflict with mine?
- ◆ Who do I confide in when I need counsel?

Path Talent

Get a Talent die whenever you are directly working to help or protect someone that is marginalized or oppressed.

Disciplines

- ◆ **Chaerm, The Discipline of Talisman:** Spend at least a full day to create a talisman with a long-term magical effect.
- ◆ **Cursian, The Discipline of Curses:** Cast a magical curse that will have a harmful effect on a person.
- ◆ **Bledsen, The Discipline of Blessing:** Cast a magical blessing that will have a helpful effect on a person.

WILDKIN, PATH OF THE NOMAD

Some thrive without an organized society and,

since the Fall of the Stars, have found a way to flourish without ruling councils, clan leaders, monarchs, or nobility. Many of this nature adopt the Path of the Nomad. They depend on the crucial links provided by the wildkin, as they forge paths and routes between, close rifts, and identify territory for new communities.

Background (Answer Each)

- ◆ What is your ideal natural environment?
- ◆ How long have you been on this path and how did you get brought into it?
- ◆ What about society cause you concern?
- ◆ What about society do you believe is essential and beneficial to the world?
- ◆ What societies have you worked with as a diplomat, soldier, or guide?
- ◆ If you had to choose, where would you call home?

Belongings (Answer Each)

- ◆ What is your most prized possession?
- ◆ Name three other items that are always on your person.
- ◆ Describe your dwelling place and where you can recuperate.
- ◆ Describe your family, the loved ones you left behind.
- ◆ Describe a beast that is your acquaintance. How did you come by them and what do they do for you?

Relationships (Ask the Other Heroes Any or All)

- ◆ Who needs to understand the natural world better and is a threat to it?
- ◆ Who believes my creed gets in the way of what must be done?
- ◆ Who excels with the balance of nature and society?
- ◆ Who will ultimately come into conflict with me?

- ◆ Who do I confide in when I need counsel?

Path Talent

Get a Talent die whenever you are attempting to balance nature and society with your action.

Disciplines

- ◆ **Marchen, The Discipline of Journeys:** Known and understand how to navigate an area.
- ◆ **Ferox, The Discipline of Survival:** Know and understand how to withstand the elements.
- ◆ **Hunta, The Discipline of the Hunt:** Know and understand how to track and capture or kill a creature.

STEP FOUR: STATS

At this point, the character is almost ready to go. You will need to determine a name and the character's pronouns, which are entirely up to you. You will also need to choose your stat array. The stats are:

- ◆ **Virtue:** They are ethical. They bring people together. They are protective.
- ◆ **Courage:** They are fearless. They brave through the unknown. They are good fighters.
- ◆ **Prestige:** They are influential. They can change the whims of others. They are powerful.

First, choose the one you want your character to be best at, then assign d8 to that stat. Then decide the one your character is least good at and assign d4 to that stat. That leaves the final one as d6. These are your starting stats. Don't roll them; the die itself is each score. Together they are called your **STAT DICE**.

STEP FIVE: FEATS

Your last step is to choose a **FEAT**. Feats are designed to be customizations unique to a character and not tied into a culture, heritage, or path.

While most of a character's traits (Stats, Disciplines, and Talents) add dice to the modifier dice pool, Feats will customize another aspect of game play that will fundamentally give a character an advantage.

Every player chooses a feat during character creation. They can "buy" more feats simply by

spending waxes of a stat equal to your existing number of feats times three after a session or when narratively appropriate.

It doesn't matter if your waxes are reduced below your current die level, because the die itself won't be reduced. However you'll need to earn them back to get the next dice tier.

Affluent

You always seem to have what you need. Once per session you can introduce a truth without spending a Favor.

Blessed

You always seem to have a way out of trouble. You get two Favor at the start of each session.

Courageous

You exhibit extraordinary bravery. Immediately spend Favor to negate harm to the Courage Stat.

Driven

When you succeed, you are inspired to do even better. You get two Favor when you roll 20+.

Favored

It seems as if something or someone is always looking out for you. Whenever you spend Favor to add a d6 to your modifier die pool, you add 2d6.

Fortunate

You seem to be exalted with fortune. Reroll the d20 whenever it lands on 1. Describe how you bounced back from what appeared to be a bad situation.

Healer

You can assist others in finding their full strength and potential. You help another character regain two harm a day when they rest.

Inspirational

When you show your mettle, you inspire others to have momentum against a foe. When you resolve a stage of a threat, you can give a d6 to another player to be used in a future roll. Your inspirational nature must be detailed in the narrative.

Intimidating

When you show your mettle, you gain momentum against a foe. When you resolve a stage of a threat, you get a d6 to be used in a future roll. Your intimidating nature must be detailed in the narrative.

Leader

You are known for being able to lead others to do difficult tasks. Spend Favor to give one of your Discipline dice that narratively applies to another player to use before or after their roll.

Learned

You are well educated and know far more than most about the world. Once per session, your character may know something about the world that will help a situation. You may choose to introduce a truth if it is not about an existing threat or ask the Chronicler to reveal a truth.

Prestigious

You exhibit extraordinary status and presence. Immediately spend Favor to negate harm to the Prestige Stat.

Relentless

You do not stop against a foe until you have deemed it time to relent. You can confront subdued threats without spending Favor. Your relentless nature must be aligned with what is happening in the narrative.

Resolute

When you must succeed, you do. Spend a Favor to succeed automatically on a die roll once per session.

Skilled

You are exceptionally talented in a Discipline. Choose a Discipline in which you are highly trained. Whenever you use that Discipline, double that die for your modifier dice pool. You can choose this Feat for each of your Disciplines.

Soothing

You have the ability to calm an escalating situation. Spend a Favor to move a threat down one stage. If the threat is at a single stage, it is automatically subdued, and the narrative plays out accordingly.

Strong-Willed

You do not let troubles set you back. You can negate up to two harm a day when resting.

Suave

You are well-loved and charming. You may reroll a failed Prestige roll once per session.

Tactical

You can always turn a situation to your advantage. Roll normally whenever a roll requires a disadvantage.

Tenacious

You do not give up in the face of danger. You may reroll a failed Courage roll once per session.

Trained

You are very well trained and can quickly recover. You regain up to two Discipline dice per rest (8 hours at least).

Trainer

You are very good at training others. You can help one other character regain up to two Discipline dice per day when they rest.

Virtuous

You are very true to your honor and word. Immediately spend Favor to negate harm to the Virtue Stat

Witnessed

You are very moral in the face of adversity. You may reroll a failed Virtue roll once per session.

CHARACTER CREATION

AS A GAME, HIGHCASTER IS INTENDED TO BE A ready-made stage for your story. It is best to think of it as a toolbox. The design is focused on giving you rich cultures to work with, character motivations to push on, and threats to pull from—but it leaves everything else open and up to you.

The stories you create at the table should be momentous and feel timeless. They should feel like long sweeping tales of legend that have been adapted time and time again and are now the subject of popular culture.

In Highcaster, very few people leave the safety of their homes to venture beyond the borders of their realms. Leaders work with these few on behalf of entire societies. People look up to them as the divine on earth, placing the mantle of hope on them to make their world better. They are superheroes capable of changing the tides of history.

So your characters are overpowered. They will likely not die—not unless there is a very good reason. And if they do, their death will go down in history. The adventures they experience are completely inaccessible to the everyday person. They are even beyond the reach of emperors and monarchs. They will become gods.

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The players must embrace this principle as the game rules are built with these assumptions in place. If you are looking for a gritty survival fantasy game, you will not find it here. Highcaster is a place of mythology and wonderment. Hope and courage. It is about crafting a world from scratch, overcoming societal obstacles to create a new and better place. It is about moving mountains to do the right thing.

The stories you create will be worthy of novels, movies, and prestige television shows. You will ultimately participate in the creation of something bigger than yourself. Lean into it.

This section will detail everything you need to know to play Highcaster.

DICE POOLS

Highcaster uses a MODIFIER DICE POOL system. Whenever a roll needs to be made (when a character confronts a threat), the player pools together dice based upon their MOVE and then determines whether or not ANY OTHER MODIFIER applies to the situation. This dice pool is rolled all at once.

Once rolled, the player picks the highest number represented on any rolled die and adds that number to a twenty-sided die (d20) roll. The total from the highest pool modifier die and the d20 tells us what happens:

- ◆ 2-9: The player's intended outcome does not happen, the threat ESCALATES, the character WAXES and potentially takes HARM.
- ◆ 10-19: The player's intended outcome happens, a stage of the threat is

resolved. If all stages are resolved, the threat is subdued, but there is a complication, and the character potentially receives harm.

- ◆ 20+: The player's intended outcome happens, a stage of the threat is resolved. If all stages are resolved, the threat is subdued. The player gains a FAVOR and can INTRODUCE A TRUTH over the outcome.

Modifier Dice Pool

The d20 (twenty-sided die) is the primary die you'll use. The character's STATS will modify the d20 to improve the possibility of success.

The trait that most aligns with the move adds a d4, d6, or d8 to the d20 roll (and result). The chance of success can be further improved by adding any applicable DISCIPLINE or TALENT dice to the modifier pool, as well as considering any possible FEAT ADVANTAGE.

You are looking for the highest number on a modifier die, so the more dice you add to the pool, the better your chance of getting a high number. However, no modifier die will ever be higher than d8, so you will never get more than +8 to the d20 roll.

Threats

When a character confronts a Threat in the story by doing something, they are making a MOVE. A threat can be anything from a tense situation to a violent attack. A threat is essentially any fiction that gets in the way of what the character wants.

The Chronicler will often write threats on index cards to show them clearly to the players as an additional tool to help guide the fiction.

Some threats have STAGES, which are aspects of the threat that need to be resolved before a threat is subdued. Simple threats have one stage and are subdued whenever a player successfully confronts them. However, very challenging threats may have many stages that must be resolved before they can be subdued.

Players may not know how many stages the threat has (in other words, how difficult it is),

but the Chronicler can disclose this or track each stage's resolution on an index card for the table to see.

To confront a threat, a player explains what they do about what is happening—that is a move. Then, based on what the character does and the motivation behind it, the Chronicler will tell the player what move to roll against the threat.

Stats and Moves

The moves are tied to the three stats: VIRTUE, COURAGE, and PRESTIGE. First, a player will add whatever stat die the move calls for to their pool. Then they will add a Discipline die if that applies, a Talent die if that applies, or an advantage die if it applies. Finally, the player will roll the dice and pick the highest one to add to a d20 roll.

There must be a threat in play for a character to be able to make a move. Threats are frequently introduced by the Chronicler.

If there are no relevant threats in play, players can choose to create one by paying FAVOR (narrative currency) or accept Favor from the Chronicler to escalate a threat to confront.

- ◆ VIRTUE: They are ethical. They bring people together. They are protective. (Used for ALLY, DEFEND, and MAKE A STAND.)
- ◆ COURAGE: They are fearless. They brave through the unknown. They are good fighters. (Used for ENFORCE YOUR WILL, SCOUT, and STRIKE.)
- ◆ PRESTIGE: They are influential. They can change the minds of others. They are powerful. (Used for CONDEMN, NAVIGATE OTHERS, and RALLY.)

The character moves are:

- ◆ Ally (+Virtue): Generate good will or establish trust.
- ◆ Condemn (+Prestige): Bring judgment down upon someone.
- ◆ Defend (+Virtue): Defend yourself or another.
- ◆ Enforce Your Will (+Courage): Influence

someone's behavior.

- ◆ **Make a Stand (+Virtue):** Make a social/moral conviction.
- ◆ **Navigate Others (+Prestige):** Read or understand another.
- ◆ **Rally (+Prestige):** Compel others to help.
- ◆ **Scout (+Courage):** Find something hidden.
- ◆ **Strike (+Courage):** Resolve a conflict using combat.

There may also be situations when the moves don't describe what needs to happen. In that case, the Chronicler may assign the stat that best fits the situation and ask the player to roll the stat instead of a move. But the end result is the same, and that die is placed into the modifier die pool.

Disciplines

Once the move is determined, the player (or Chronicler) reviews the character's Disciplines to see if any apply to the situation. Disciplines were determined by the character's PATH and are loosely described to apply to many aspects of the story.

Each Path has three Disciplines and three dice (a d4, a d6, and a d8) for each of them. Whenever a Discipline applies to a situation, you can spend one of these dice and add it to the dice pool.

Once you spend a Discipline die, you can't use that die again until the character recovers. When you are out of dice, you will be unable to add Discipline dice to the modifier pool until your character recovers.

Talents and Feats

The last dice a player can potentially add to the modifier dice pool are for TALENTS and ADVANTAGES. Some characters receive Talent dice because of their culture, heritage, or perhaps path. If the talent described applies to the situation, the player can add a d6 to the pool. You can add a d6 for any talent that applies.

In addition, if the Chronicler believes the char-

acter would have an advantage because of the situation, the environment, or any narratively appropriate reason, they can tell them to add a d6 Advantage Die to the pool as well. These situations won't be common but can absolutely come into play based on what's going on.

The modifier dice pool is complete, and the player can roll. Again, whatever die is the highest becomes the modifier added to the d20 roll.

Disadvantage

There may also be environmental challenges or a particular type of situation that could get in the way of a character's move. If that is the case, the Chronicler may state that the move happens with a DISADVANTAGE.

In that situation, the player will roll the d20 twice and pick the lowest result before adding the highest modifier die from the modifier dice pool.

Threat Escalations

If a threat stage is not resolved or a single-stage threat is not subdued (because a player gets a 9 or less from the total of their modifier and the d20), the threat escalates.

The Chronicler will have planned what escalations look like for each stage of a threat and have several examples and building tools available to do this as well. Escalations can also include introducing additional threats.

In short, escalation causes things to get worse for the characters. They may sustain harm, be put in a worse situation, lose something, get trapped, be separated, be confronted with more enemies, etc. Ultimately, something in the narrative *changes* for the worst.

The idea here is also not to punish the players. On the contrary, the Chronicler is working to make the story more interesting. Additionally, stories that grind to a halt because a hero can't do something are also not fun. Escalations propel the story forward and increase the dramatic tension. As a player, you get to play out both failure and success.

When a threat escalates, the Chronicler will explain what happens and how it gets worse.

If the threat was written down, record what changed. Also, if escalation introduces another threat, the Chronicler does so at this time.

Harm

Inevitably threats will lead to harm. However, we are not very interested in harm as a way to track damage. Getting hit with a sword and receiving a bloody wound is not as narratively important as being bested by a foe. So harm is much more abstract and ultimately reduces your character's effectiveness. Harm can happen on any roll 19 or less.

Remember, *characters don't die unless you choose to have them die*. That is because randomly killing characters off due to bad dice rolls is inconsistent with the legendary tales we're trying to tell. Instead, character deaths should be deliberate, narratively significant, and meaningful.

So harm is a way of tracking your character's journey but will not lead to their death unless you want. Therefore you can focus on exciting story options beyond protecting your character. If you care most about the story, bad things happening to the character will make the story more nuanced and interesting, as well as working to tie into the three stats:

- ◆ **Virtue:** Take harm when your sense of self-worth, moral responsibility, or faith in your creed worsens. When you take three harm to Virtue, your character is **ANGRY**.
- ◆ **Courage:** Take harm when your abilities, skill, or bravery are challenged. When you take three harm to Courage, your character is **AFRAID**.
- ◆ **Prestige:** Take harm when your influence, station, or pride are compromised. When you take three harm to Prestige, your character is **SHAMED**.

A player marks harm when told to by the Chronicler as a consequence of confronting a threat. The harm should relate to how the failure affected the character. For example, they may have been hit with a sword, but does that mean they are losing faith in their purpose, or

are they embarrassed? The Chronicler may ask those questions to help dial it in, but most often, harm is taken to the stat used in the failed roll.

When a character takes three harm in a particular stat, they sustain a condition (Angry, Afraid, or Shamed). It is up to the player just how they represent that condition within the narrative. Mechanically, once a character has a condition, they can no longer use that stat die when making moves. Depending on the situation, they may still be able to add other modifier dice, but otherwise, they will roll with only a d20.

When a character has all three stat conditions, they can no longer confront threats. It is at this point that players can choose to have their character die if narratively appropriate. Otherwise, they cannot affect the story until they recover, or they get help.

Waxing and Advancement

If a player rolls 9 or less, they will wax a stat one point. To do this, they'll mark the next available box on the track of the stat used.

Waxes are checked from the beginning of a track, left to right. When all waxes are filled under the current die level, the next highest die level for the stat can be taken. For example, if a character has a d4 Prestige and rolls a 9 or less on a Prestige move, they mark one wax on their Prestige.

When players get their first three waxes, they will have filled up their d4 die wax tracks and can now advance Prestige to a d6. When they get three more waxes, they can advance to d8. Likewise, if a character has a d6 for a stat, it will take six waxes to fill up both d4 and d6 before they can advance to d8.

Once all stats have advanced to d8, and all waxes are filled (nine for each), the player can choose another Path to add to their character. The character will now have Talents and Disciplines for it and their original one. However, the wax track is then cleared, all stats are reduced to d4 and the process starts again.

Players can also choose to spend waxes to buy Feats. The cost is three times the number of characters' existing Feats. If waxes are used in this way, simply erase what was spent on purchasing the new Feat. Advancement can theoretically continue until a character has mastered all Paths

Subduing Threats

If the players resolve all stages of a threat, it is **SUBDUED**. While it can return naturally through the fiction, that particular threat, as it stands, can no longer be confronted for the scene. This is a significant point because moves typically resolve fictional problems. If they don't, the fiction *changes*, adapting to introduce new problems to be resolved.

That way, heroes aren't grinding on the same problem repeatedly. Either they fix it and move on, or they fix it, and it changes, so they must address it again.

In practice, that means that once a character subdues a threat, they can't target the same threat without a change in fiction.

For example, let's say they resolve an angry fighter's attack by disarming them. That's great! The threat is subdued; the angry fighter is no longer attacking. But if the character then wants to knock the fighter down and bind them, they can't unless the fiction changes. The threat was already subdued.

Another example: let's say there's an avalanche, and the group is getting tossed up in snow and debris. A player rolls to pull their character out of the avalanche and gets a success. Great! They are no longer getting stuck in the snow, but they can't go and save their friends unless the fiction changes because the threat was subdued.

There are also some feats that are activated when a player pays favor, but those are specific to the individual feats.

Subduing a threat doesn't mean getting rid of it. It means the moment is resolved, and now the story must change to continue. So, if a character wants to (or needs to) confront a threat that's already been subdued, there are two options:

- ◆ Pay Favor to introduce a new threat that changes the fiction.
- ◆ Accept Favor to allow the Chronicler to escalate the threat so that you can confront it.

Favor

Favor is a currency to help give players more agency over the story. You can use coins, tokens, or just track it on paper. Each player should start with one Favor every session, but it doesn't carry over from session to session.

Players receive Favor:

- ◆ One at the start of a session
- ◆ When they allow a Chronicler to escalate when confronting a subdued threat
- ◆ Whenever they have a result of 20+ on a move roll

Players can spend Favor to do the following:

- ◆ Introduce a truth in the fiction at any time
- ◆ Create a threat when you want to make a move, and no threat is available
- ◆ Add a d6 to your modifier dice pool

If you spend a Favor, you can simply create a new threat to confront. That puts the fiction in your control and allows you to reset the stage. Let's consider the examples from above. Maybe the disarmed fighter starts kicking a character, and that's now a new threat. In the other instance, perhaps the avalanche has begun to settle, and the group is falling deeper into the snow.

Alternatively, the player can choose to get a Favor from the Chronicler, who will then take control of the fiction and escalate the threat. This option will usually create a more challenging situation for the characters and amp up the drama quotient.

So maybe the disarmed fighter is suddenly joined by three of their friends. Or the avalanche has cracked open a crevasse, and the group is hanging a thousand feet above icy darkness. If the player really wants to make another move but

doesn't have Favor, this is the option they'll need to choose.

Introducing Truths

Players can sometimes take over the fiction. They do this by introducing something true in the story. It can be anything, really, as long as it is not about a threat that is currently in play and does not overturn or conflict with truths that were already established.

Examples can include a situation that gives the players an advantage (we happened upon the monster without it realizing we were there), something about the world (a zealot runs the settlement here), or something they have (I have a giant puma pet). It could also be something about the world's history, how the government works, or geography.

When this mechanic is used, it becomes true in the story and cannot be overruled by the Chronicler or other players (except via X-Card for safety or tone reasons). Thus, players need to take a "yes and" approach to the truths and bring them into the narrative as if they came from the Chronicler.

There are two situations in which players who are not Chroniclers can introduce truths:

- ◆ When a player rolls 20+ on a move
- ◆ When a player decides to spend a Favor to introduce a truth

Assistance

Characters can assist others when they are confronting a threat. They simply describe how they are helping and then hand the other player their appropriate stat die for the move. The assisted player can then include that die in their modifier dice pool. There is no limit to the number of players that can help or how often a player assists, even within the same move; it just needs to make narrative sense.

Using Threat Stages

When introducing a threat, the Chronicler can choose to have stages to be resolved before the threat is subdued. These stages are entirely narrative trappings and can be anything from

closing the distance of a foe to different fighting styles an opponent takes on after the heroes defend themselves. Whatever they are, once they are all resolved, the threat is subdued.

Many common threats will be considered "one-stage," in other words, one success will resolve the stage and subdue the threat. Sometimes it will be unnecessary to spell the threats out (or put them on index cards). But if there are a lot of them, or if they have stages, they should be noted for the whole table to see. That way, the players will understand what they need to do to subdue the threats and be narratively specific about which they are addressing with their moves.

Staged threats will include much of what players may be used to in terms of combat mechanics. Instead of creating a rule for every edge case, this game assumes that each threat will have the necessary steps to subdue a threat in whatever makes narrative sense.

Examples of stages:

- ◆ **DISTANCE:** If a foe is out of reach of the characters, they may need to find a way to close the distance. Once they resolve this stage, they can then make a move to fight a foe.
- ◆ **HIDING:** A foe may be hiding from the characters, or, conversely, they may be hiding from a foe. This would be a stage that must be resolved before the threat is subdued.
- ◆ **CHASES:** A foe may be running away or characters may be running away. To subdue the threat they'd need to resolve this stage first.
- ◆ **MINIONS:** A foe may have tons of lackeys the heroes must get past before they can get to them.

Common threats may have simply one or two stages, one where something is in the way of the threat and then the threat itself. But more dangerous or complicated threats may have more, and each stage can be more involved than the last.

A giant monster, for example, may have natural armor to get past, fire breath, a lashing tail, and the ability to fly. Each time one stage is resolved, the heroes will need to apply a new tactic until all are resolved.

Situational Threats

One type of threat may involve an entire threat scenario, having an overarching effect on the other threats until they are subdued. These threats can also come in stages and are usually about the environment, such as a storm or weather problem, slick or uneven surfaces, fire all around, or a landslide occurring.

Situational threats will cause all rolls to be at a disadvantage until they are resolved, meaning players will roll a d20 twice and choose the lower result.

Situational threats are subdued just like any other threats, but they will negatively affect all moves until they are.

Chapters

Gameplay is split into CHAPTERS, which frame the scenes for the players and provide focus on what the characters are supposed to accomplish during this part of the story. The Chronicler determines the type of Chapter, as seen below, and each affects rules or story somehow.

The purpose of Chapters is to help move the story forward so that players don't get stuck not knowing what to do. They also work to reframe scenes to increase or decrease drama.

Generally, Chapters are invisible in gameplay until they change, and the group reframes the situation. They can be as short or as long as the story requires and change when the goal of that Chapter is reached in the narrative.

Culture Chapters

The heroes are focused on the people in their society, the commoners or the elite, and their everyday needs.

- ◆ Any threats that occur in the narrative are not dangerous and are focused on the culture or homeland.

Danger Chapters

The heroes are confronting a dangerous threat that is overwhelming or terrifying.

- ◆ The threats in play catch the heroes off guard, and they will find themselves in perilous circumstances.
- ◆ All die rolls are made at a disadvantage in this Chapter.

Hero Chapters

Each player takes control of the narrative, in turn, to reveal more about their hero.

- ◆ Players, in turn, have narrative control and can introduce truths into the fiction as long as those truths are not about threats currently in play or other player characters.
- ◆ Player characters cannot confront threats or make moves.

Journey Chapters

The heroes are making a journey through unknown lands, confronting danger, and finding their way.

- ◆ The default setting of the game, standard threat and roll rules apply.

Preparation Chapters

The heroes gather all of the resources and information they need to go on a journey or quest.

- ◆ Players have narrative control and can introduce truths about what they acquire to prepare for a journey.
- ◆ Players can ask questions of the Chronicler concerning any information they need or introduce truths about a threat not in play.
- ◆ Characters cannot confront threats or make moves.

Quest Chapters

The heroes are showing their mettle in accomplishing a significant task or feat

- ◆ The players get an advantage die on all rolls;

| all other aspects of the game are standard.

Rest and Recovery

Characters will need to recover to remove harm or recover spent Discipline dice. A character must rest for a full night (or 8 hours) to negate one harm and regain one Discipline die.

Certain Feats will help improve that rate of recovery.

Force a Recovery

Additionally, players can immediately reduce one harm by forcing a recovery.

Negate a harm, or step back from a condition, by addressing it within the story as follows:

- ◆ **Virtue:** Lash out emotionally at another character in a way that causes harm to the relationship.
- ◆ **Courage:** Hide, run, or shut yourself off demonstrating weakness and fear.
- ◆ **Prestige:** Cut another down with insults, or by being arrogant, demanding, or insolent.

Train

In addition to receiving a Discipline die by resting overnight, you can also spend a full day training (at least 8 hours) to recover an additional Discipline die.

THE CHRONICLER

THE CHRONICLER IS THE GAME'S WEAVER. THEIR JOB IS to take the tapestry of the world the group has created and weave it together with the other players' choices. They are, in a sense, the film's director. Yes, they have ultimate authority over the occurrences of the story. Still, those decisions are made in cooperation with the players either directly when they concede narrative control or indirectly by propelling the story forward in a way that makes their characters heroes.

The Chronicler's job is to make the story interesting. They must love the characters like they would love the protagonist of their favorite book or movie. And they must bring forward challenges that will make those characters change and grow, so they emerge from the journey as incredible legends.

Those that have facilitated other games as Game Masters, Storytellers, Dungeon Masters, MCs, Guides, or any similar role may have a preconceived notion about what that means. However, it is important to understand this role in Highcaster because that may differ from prior experiences in other games. For example, the number one aspect of a Chronicler is that they are a champion of the story's heroes.

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preconceived notion about what that means. However, it is important to understand this role in Highcaster because that may differ from prior experiences in other games. For example, the number one aspect of a Chronicler is that they are a champion of the story's heroes.

They are not setting a victory condition for the players; instead, they focus on the story and the characters' arcs. They work with the players cooperatively to create the most memorable and exciting experience they can.

AGENDA

Before you move forward as Chronicler, take note of what the game expects of you. There is a particular agenda at play that will define your approach to facilitating the game. No matter what happens during a session, everything comes back to these three essential points.

- ◆ **CREATE STORIES OF LEGEND.**
Your story should feel like it came from the pages of antiquity, passed down through the generations as mythology. You are not creating trite tales; these are stories of epic legends.
- ◆ **MAKE CHARACTERS RISE ABOVE TRIALS AND TRIBULATION.**
You are creating heroes that transcend all adversity, no matter what peril they encounter. No matter how dangerous and frightening things become, they find a way to rise above it all and conquer the unconquerable.
- ◆ **PLAY TO FIND OUT WHY THE STORY IS A TIMELESS LEGEND.**
Let the story live on its own and find out why it is such a legendary tale through playing the game. This is something you should never plan for—you must play to find out.

The Chronicler's role is to keep the other players on track and keep the focus on the story's themes. Frequently, players will tend to narrow their focus to their characters in the moment and not on the story as a whole. Because of this, the Chronicler must guide them, assist them with mechanics and game structure, and work towards an interesting and collaborative story.

While the Chronicler adjudicates the rules, they are less a judge and more of an advisor. Most importantly, the Chronicler is not an adversary; threats exist to enrich the story, not punish the players.

PRINCIPLES

Principles are the Chronicler's tools for making the session feel like Highcaster. Review your principles whenever you sense the story has stalled, the other players don't know what to do, or the content has become repetitive.

- ◆ **MAKE IT EPIC.**
You are not creating fairy tales or run-of-the-mill fantasy fiction. You are creating mythologies. Everything should be at maximum volume and with the highest possible stakes. These are the wars, battles, victories, and losses that will go down in history for all time.
- ◆ **BE A CHAMPION OF THE HEROES.**
You are there to help the heroes grow beyond their limitations and rise above all else to become the heroes of mythology. Embrace them, watch them grow, and insert the trials they will need for growth.
- ◆ **BUILD YOUR PERSISTENT HIGHCASTER AS YOU PLAY.**
You are creating your Highcaster. It is a profound living world that you will develop as you play. You and the other players will introduce truths that become the canon of your mythology.
- ◆ **NOTHING IS SACRED, OCEANS RISE, EMPIRES FALL.**
You cannot and should not control the fate of your heroes or the world in which they live. It is the Chronicler's job to drive forward whatever conclusion the story mandates. Never hold back. No empire is too great, no individual too powerful to fall.
- ◆ **NAME EVERY CHARACTER, BEAST, ARTIFACT, AND LOCATION.**
Make your Highcaster authentic. Everything and everyone has a name.
- ◆ **THINK ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE REALMS.**
Your Highcaster is persistent. It lives on no

matter what the heroes are doing. Keep track of what other peoples and realms are doing as your heroes rise above their trials and tribulations.

- ◆ **GIVE THREATS DEPTH.**
Threats in Highcaster are not just footnotes in an action-adventure story. They are serious situations that heroes must rise above and resolve. They are beasts of epic legend, villains known throughout the realm, catastrophes that consume cities, legendary wars. Take your time with them; give them depth, texture, and weight.
- ◆ **ASK WHAT THE HERO WANTS.**
Find out why the character is doing what they are doing. It's not enough to want to attack a beast. It's the why. Does the character seek to strike the beast because they want to prove their worth or because they are angry?
- ◆ **STEER TOWARD THE CHAPTER.**
The Chronicler's job is to make sure the players experience the story according to how the Chapters are structured. When playing the game, it is easy to get wrapped up in the act of playing. At each Chapter's start, declare the Chapter's purpose. During the Chapter, ask questions to guide players toward confronting threats, thus moving the story forward.
- ◆ **MOVE THE SPOTLIGHT.**
Every character is a critical contributor to the story. Give every player the spotlight time they deserve. The Chronicler needs to be conscious of how long the story has rested with a single character, or a group of them, and how many still need to have the spotlight.
- ◆ **EXPLORE THE DETAILS.**
Your story is not a fast-paced blockbuster film—your story is one of heart, humanity, motivations, and consequences. Slow down and explore the details of what is happening right now. Who is there? What do they see? Express what people want through behavior. Explain their tone and tenor. Feel the authentic world around you in the story, notice each detail, and help the players see them too.
- ◆ **YOU DON'T ALWAYS NEED TO KNOW.**
Allow uncertainty in the story. Allow players to make decisions for you. Allow the dice to

tell you what happens. You don't always need to have an answer.

HOW HIGHCASTER FUNDAMENTALLY WORKS

Highcaster is focused on the story and hero drama, not on the big action pieces or plot intricacies. While there can and should be combat and action scenes, that is not the point of our story. The point is how those events change the heroes.

What a character does is less important than why a character does it. That is why heroes can have massive powers, and players can have narrative control. It doesn't matter how skilled a character is, but how they handle those powers and skills, along with what they do with them.

Players will be rolling to determine how threats are resolved via their heroes' approach to the problem. For example, is Prestige going to fix the problem, or is Courage? And why is the hero selecting one over the other? The choices will speak to the hero's mindset, personal story arc, and how that threat builds their story.

Of course, there will be times when there is an action scene. For example, you may be drawn into "a monster snaps at you, see if you can dodge it." But that's not how this game functions. Instead, you will be rolling to find out if *their approach* to the problem worked.

In Highcaster, you are rolling to see if the hero possesses the Virtue, Courage, or Prestige to confront a threat, not whether or not they hit it with their axe. Openly discuss this. Make a habit of asking "why?" Action scenes should flow moment-to-moment, not action-to-action. That is why threats are fashioned in stages—with each stage, the very nature of the threat changes, compelling the players to change their approach. So you aren't watching blow by blow; you are watching beat by beat and observing how the characters react and change due to the circumstances.

CHRONICLER MOVES

Whenever the story needs a push, it's time to make a **CHRONICLER MOVE**. These moves cre-

ate deliberate changes in the fiction or compel the players to confront a threat.

Chronicler moves generally happen in response to a die roll, but they can also occur any other time you need to push the story or break the players out of a place of indecision. Any move should drive the fiction forward and create options for the player to act.

Hard Moves

These moves put characters into a worse position without providing them the opportunity to react. Use hard moves when:

- ◆ A roll results in a 9 or less when confronting a threat
- ◆ A character needs to face an escalated threat

Soft Moves

These moves present a difficult situation but offer an opportunity to react or change course. Use soft moves when:

- ◆ A roll results in a 19 or less when confronting a threat
- ◆ The players (or characters) are stuck about what to do next in the fiction

A soft move will most likely compel the player to change course but will not require it like a hard move.

Your Moves

- ◆ Create a Threat
- ◆ Escalate a Threat
- ◆ Inflict Harm
- ◆ Present a Dilemma
- ◆ Raise the Stakes
- ◆ Reveal Consequences
- ◆ Make a Threat Move
- ◆ Make Use of Favor

Create a Threat

Signal something has become a problem by creating a threat, even if the narrative hasn't in-

icated one. This can be done either without warning or as a natural course of the fiction.

- ◆ As you are discussing this, you suddenly hear a distant roar in the forest beyond. I'm introducing a new threat called "Something is Hunting You."

Escalate a Threat

Escalate the current stage of a threat, especially if the players have not confronted this threat yet. Make sure the escalation directly impacts the characters.

- ◆ The Warleader bangs his shield from afar and points his axe at you. You've ignored him too long and now he is charging across the battlefield to take you on personally. What do you do?

Inflict Harm

Cause harm to a character's stat with a sudden revelation or escalation of a threat. This harm can come from the natural progression of the fiction or unexpectedly if you introduce a new threat.

- ◆ As you turn the bend. You are suddenly knocked down by a massive boulder flung at you from the mountainside. You look up and see a large monstrous giant who is picking up another boulder. You take harm to your Courage, as the sight is unexpected and frightening. What do you do?

Present a Dilemma

Force a situation in the narrative wherein the characters must make a hard choice—perhaps between what they want versus what they need.

- ◆ The ship is buckling under the weight of the waves, and you see several of your crew tumbling over into the stormy sea. But your prisoner is getting away, swinging onto the bow of another ship, what do you do?

Raise the Stakes

Increase a threat's sense of urgency by adding time constraints or escalated adverse outcomes for delays.

- ◆ Your magic envelopes her, and you see

her skin begin to burn painfully from her flesh. However, the room is now ablaze and spreading fast toward the bound hostage.

Reveal Consequences

Present real consequences for the character's decisions.

- ◆ If you cross swords here, then the queen will likely order her bodyguards to attack.

Make a Threat Move

Every threat includes moves to be made against the characters. You will determine these when creating a threat or simply refer to the threat suggestions in this book. You can make a threat move anytime, but particularly when a character rolls 19 or less when confronting it.

- ◆ The dragon takes a pause then sits upright and says, "I have lost patience" and a wall of fire comes pouring down on top of you. What do you do?

Make Use of Favor

Ask if the player would like to spend a Favor to create a truth or add a die to their modifier pool, or if they'd like to get a Favor for accepting an escalated threat.

- ◆ I'll give you a Favor if you smack this insolent lord across the mouth.

CREATING THREATS

Create a threat when there is someone or something in the way of what a hero wants. Threats can be as general as "tyrannical monarch" or environmental like "a raging winter storm." Usually, however, threats are adversaries that the heroes must confront and overcome, such as beasts, monsters, or villainous characters.

Threats happen in stages, which means the hero must do one or more things to resolve the situation and subdue the threat. Players may be accustomed to games with stats like hit points that their damage depletes, but Highcaster doesn't work that way. Instead, it presents challenges as story moments that need to conclude before the next moment comes into play.

So, for example, you are not playing out how

many times you hit a monster; you are playing out the different moments the character has fighting the beast until it is subdued.

Threats will often be single-stage threats, meaning you simply need to succeed once in the narrative to subdue the threat (roll a 10+ when confronting the threat). However, threats with more stages are more complicated.

A six-stage threat against a dragon, for example, requires that the characters get past six narrative moments for the dragon threat to be subdued. The first stage may be about the dragon revealing itself and the characters withstanding its presence. The next stage may be about closing the distance between the dragon and the heroes, and the third could be about avoiding the dragon's fire breath, and so on.

Every threat will have a unique set of stages, depending on what is transpiring in the story. There is a list of threats in this book that provides examples of stages. However, you will need to create them to align with the circumstances.

Playing Threats

Threats should be played “visually” by writing the threat down and placing it on the table, shared online document, or virtual tabletop. You may find cases where visually displaying threats is not necessary, because there isn't a lot to track. But in general, it will be important to present them clearly to the players.

Visually displaying the threats can help guide gameplay. Players can easily see what moves are needed, if the threat can be quickly subdued, and if it has been subdued.

The last example helps prevent players from wanting to move after a threat has been subdued. Instead, they'll be able to clearly see that the threat either needs to be escalated (by the Chronicler) or a Favor needs to be paid (by a player).

Visual prompts also help frame the narrative situation. Players can easily see what is going on and make an informed decision on where they want to put their focus. In addition, it helps

players avoid spinning the wheels on activities or moves that don't contribute to the story.

Simply write the name of the threat down in a way the whole group can see. This can be done with index cards on the table, an online spreadsheet document, a kanban board, or a virtual tabletop.

Then indicate how many stages there are by putting empty checkboxes on the card or in columns of a spreadsheet or kanban board. That way, players can easily see the difficulty of the threat.

You can and should introduce threats whenever an obstacle comes up in the narrative. You can also introduce threats as a Chronicler Move, servicing as a beat in the story, changing the direction of game flow.

When players move to confront the threat, check the stages off with each success. Then, when they are all resolved, turn the card sideways (or checkmark the threat on your shared document) to indicate that it was subdued.

If a player does not succeed when confronting a threat, it escalates. Specifically, that means the particular stage the threat is in escalates. The situation becomes worse and the Chronicler may make a hard move and/or harm the hero.

Whatever the case something *must happen* and the situation *must change*. Not succeeding doesn't mean the game stops, it means the story changes.

Mark an escalation by adding an up-arrow or some sort of indicator that the stage has escalated. You can even add to the what you've already written.

This can be done on the index card simply by describing the escalation below the threat you wrote, or by using an escalation column on shared document or kanban and typing it in there.

When the escalated stage is resolved, then the next stage starts as normal (with the potential to escalate as well).

Let's take a situation as an example where the characters have found themselves in com-

bat with a corrupted monster. The Chronicler might open the situation by saying “You hear a deep growl in the darkness beyond” and put down the threat on a an index card, showing it has two stages.

Note that the Chronicler did not reveal what the threat was; they just indicated a shadowy threat with two stages. Of course, those stages can be anything really, but for the sake of the example, let’s say the Chronicler thinks the first stage would be to close the distance or find the creature, and the second will be to overcome its attack or defeat it.

So, let’s say a character confronts the threat with a move to find out what’s in that dark chamber and succeeds. In that case, the Chronicler would mark one stage as resolved and then describe the creature to the players, perhaps with embellishments on lore or what they know about it.

Then they’d move to the next stage, where the creature attacks the party. In this case, let’s say they move to get out of the way or protect and fail the roll, the Chronicler would then escalate the stage.

For example, maybe the creature has locked its jaw on a party member’s arm, and they take harm to their courage. They could just mark an arrow to show the escalated, or they could write the escalation out, whatever is most dramatic or best fits with the flow.

Or they could decide to make an entirely new threat for the escalation, such as the room locks them in, another monster appears, or the bitten hero is now poisoned. In that case, they would add another card as a new threat.

Theatre of the Mind

To play the threat through Theatre of the Mind, you don’t need to do much more than describe the threat and keep track of its stages in your own way. However, the sticking point on running threats with theatre of the mind is that you need to define when a threat is subdued clearly. That way, if a player wants to confront it again, you can offer an escalation, or they can pay Favor.

Character Threats

There will be situations when characters are in conflict with one another. In general, heroes should work together, but certainly, there are times in which they will disagree or even fall into arms against one another. In these cases, Chroniclers can create a threat that only the involved characters can confront. Whoever is making the narrative move against the other player rolls (or determine with help from the Chronicler who of a group is the main aggressor), and the resolution is handled as follows:

- ◆ On a 20+, the player who rolled has narrative control over the outcome. The other player gets a Favor if they allow the winner to succeed in their goal.
- ◆ On a 10-19, the other player has narrative control over the outcome, but they also get a Favor if they allow the winner to succeed in their goal.
- ◆ On a 9 or less, the other player has narrative control over the outcome, and they get a Favor for going against the rolling player’s goal.

These rules are meant to support inter-party conflict in a story but provide player agency as well. For example, the affected player does not have to go along with the outcome but is rewarded with Favor if they do. Also, character conflict should enrich the story, not cause problems with players, so use safety tools to ensure everyone is comfortable with what is happening in the game.

Building Threats

There may be a temptation to be flippant about threats. In other words, Chroniclers may want to throw threats out like mooks in traditional fantasy RPGs. But in Highcaster, threats are very serious business. Chroniclers should take their time in revealing them, describing them, staging them, and escalating them. If there are multiple threats in play, the situation should feel perilous, maybe even impossible.

Because heroes in Highcaster are so—well, heroic, you will need to increase the drama of

each interaction relentlessly, so that narrative stakes are felt. Consequences should be painful *in the story*, not necessarily on paper. So be sure to spend the mental labor to make the threats *matter*.

There may be an inclination to introduce threats as simply a monster or a villain that attacks. But that limits the narrative to be entirely about the specifics of combat. Instead, threats should be about the bigger picture, escalated if they aren't addressed, and change when subdued.

For example, let's take a classic fantasy scenario, where the heroes encounter a roaming group of bandits. A Chronicler may be inclined to put down a threat called "Bandits" and then say that the bandits jump out of the woods and start attacking. That's a pretty limited scenario and doesn't allow you to fully pull the threat's levers.

- ◆ How will it escalate if the characters fail to subdue the threat (or don't confront it)? Bandits attacking doesn't leave you with much. You could say "more" bandits are attacking, but that isn't all that exciting.
- ◆ How does the threat change if the characters subdue the threat and it has more than one stage? Bandits are already attacking, so you really can't easily maneuver them into another approach.

In this situation, you'll want to introduce the threat in a non-escalated way to give yourself room to escalate or add a stage. Also, you'll want to present it in a way that won't force players to respond in just one way (e.g., fighting).

In this case, if you were to introduce the threat as "People are lurking in the forest," you leave yourself plenty of opportunities to change the situation (they jump out) or escalate it (arrows fly at you from the trees) or make non-combat solutions viable.

THE POWER OF FAVOR

As the currency of narrative control, Favor makes the story a genuinely collaborative storytelling experience. While it is true that as the Chronicler, you generally drive the story, con-

ceding your power willfully, deliberately, and graciously expands the horizons of the story.

Favor removes barriers to a story's potential, activates multiple points of view, and levels the playing field for all players.

Make an Offer

Whenever the player wants something to be true about the setting or situation, that is an opportunity to hand them Narrative Control. If someone asks, "Do we know anyone in this town?"

You can answer, "If you pay me a Favor, you can tell me."

Offer to Create a Threat

When a player needs to make a move and no threats are immediately available or appropriate, offer to create one. "You can spend a Favor to create a threat. Or I can give you a Favor and escalate one of the existing threats. What do you want to do?"

Hedge the Roll

A player will naturally try to get as many dice in their modifier pool as possible. While they prepare for an important move confronting a threat, always remind them that they can spend Favor to add a d6 to the pool.

HOME REGION

Your game will usually start somewhere within the lands of your group's shared culture. Cultures are somewhat geographically bound because the region's environment contributes to the development of that culture. However, the precise location of the cultures, boundaries, outer areas, and neighboring cultures—all of those details are yours to determine.

You will need to decide if the story starts in the culture's capital, within the broader lands, or along the marches and boundaries of the land. You may also consider starting separate from the culture's territory, like in a distant settlement, satellite, or an isolated region.

Once you've determined your starting location, you will emergently build your Highcaster through game play.

This is not a game that requires you to plot out every conceivable detail of the world in advance. Remember your Chronicler Principle, “Build your persistent Highcaster as you play.” Your world will expand with your story. The following section will help you set up that story, which will, in turn, set up your world.

YOUR STORY

Now that you have your homeland figured out and likely the boundaries, you can jump into your story. As mentioned before, you don’t (and shouldn’t) know the world yet. You are playing to discover the world with your heroes, so, you’re pretty much ready.

Also, don’t worry, you won’t need to make up everything on the fly. The game, by design, requires cooperation from your players to help build the world. Additionally, we’ll walk through six Preparation Steps to do before each session to arm you with everything you’ll need.

- ◆ Review
- ◆ Prepare People
- ◆ Prepare the Journey
- ◆ Prepare Locations
- ◆ Prepare Truths
- ◆ Prepare the Big Open

Review

The first preparation step is to review the game’s themes, the players’ desires, the heroes themselves, and the prior session (if there was one). The purpose of this step is to make sure that as your legend grows, you are repeating themes the group thinks are essential.

Sometimes in long-play games, it’s easy to lose focus and head down routes that are not significant to the story or the players. Hence, this is the moment to check to see if you are planning suitable material and content for the game.

If possible, record your game sessions (be sure to get your players’ approval before you do). That way, you can listen back to remember what happened more clearly and take notes

about what may be missing or find chords you want to strike in the next session.

Beyond the reviewing and note-taking mentioned above, here are two additional steps in the Review phase:

- ◆ **REVIEW PRIOR SESSION (IF THERE WAS ONE):** Write down three things you liked about the session and want to continue, and write down three things you’d like to see in the next session that you didn’t in this one.
- ◆ **REVIEW THE HEROES:** Look at each character sheet and write down one moment you want to include that will spotlight something in each hero’s background or Disciplines.

Prepare People

You’ll want to pre-make some NPCs that you can grab at a moment’s notice, especially if this is your first session. If it isn’t, you’ll still want a list to draw from, in addition to the NPCs you’ve already established.

Before each session, create 3-5 NPCs by filling in the phrase “[Name] is a [descriptive] [heritage], that is [personality trait].” For example, “Arach is a bawdy Holt, that is controlling.”

After you’ve determined new characters, take this moment to review the existing NPCs already in play. Write the ones down that you believe will come up in this session, and also write down a brief statement describing what they want. Then, if you have an idea of what the new characters will be doing, you can do the same for them.

Prepare the Journey

There is sometimes a tendency in fantasy games to rush to a destination or jump to the core plot, skipping over the journey. Highcaster is a game of legendary heroes, however, so it is almost entirely about the journey. Yes, there is some sort of looming threat, MacGuffin to find or restore, or distant land to reach, but the story is about what happens along the way.

This principle does not apply only to literal journeys but the plot journey as well. Highcaster is best played over time, a crescendo that ultimately reaches its dramatic conclusion.

However, that conclusion would not nearly be as satisfying had you not gone on the journey with the characters to get there. And remember, while that journey could be literal, a trek across strange lands, it could also be the journey of a character, a community, a political situation, estranged lovers, or even a journey from loss to regaining hope.

In short, the journey is the game.

So, the Chronicler will make every encounter significant rather than navigate game rules about handling overland travel and dealing with random encounters. Each session is the next encounter along the journey of the heroes in this legend. When they finally reach the story's climax, they will have gone through trials and ordeals and will have grown, so they are equipped to rise up and confront their final challenge.

To wit, instead of mapping hexes to get to dungeons or villages, you will be mapping story pillars that will move characters from one arc to the next, all within the framework of the overall journey.

Every campaign should start with an overall goal. You will shape and introduce the characters in the first session, but you will also introduce the journey. After that, you will continue to generate choices for the heroes' odyssey, each session, until they confront the final threats at the journey's culmination.

- ◆ **CREATE THE DESTINATION:** In the first session, the Chronicler will, through the narrative, describe the overall journey. This could be a literal journey wherein the heroes must traverse great distances to accomplish a critical mission or put down a dangerous threat. Or it could be a metaphorical journey wherein the heroes must address a crisis, such as a crucial social, political, or economic problem.
- ◆ **CREATE JOURNEY CHOICES:** Once the heroes understand their destination, you will create breadcrumbs for their journey. You won't (and shouldn't) ultimately know how everything will pan out or what will happen when they reach the destination. Instead,

before each session, write three potential choices the heroes could make to get closer to their goal. Then reveal options naturally throughout the session. You'll do this each session until it makes narrative sense for the heroes to arrive at the destination.

- ◆ **LIST THREATS:** After you've thought through three choices, list threats the heroes will need to confront along with each option. You can choose from the threats in this book or make your own. Just know that threats are significant and will be the primary focus of the session. Remember, you'll also want to consider environmental threats like weather problems, civil unrest, or an approaching army.

After you have your three potential paths and their corresponding threats, you're ready for the next step of session preparation.

Prepare Locations

Since we are telling epic stories of legendary heroes, the locations need to fit that description. It is not enough to say that this is happening in a forest, along a river, or in a city. Highcaster locations should be incredible. They are set pieces for mythology and need to transcend everyday perceptions of a fantasy world.

Apart from the culture's home regions, very little of the world is specifically outlined in this game. Even the areas revealed in this book are explained in broad strokes. That is by design.

So at the beginning of each session, you will prepare the three potential locations for the heroes to experience that session. Generally, they will correspond with the three possible paths you've created and accompanying threats, but there may be more than one location you'll need for each

- ◆ **IDENTIFY THE REGION:** Write down the biome, climate, or general region. Use the home regions as a guide but feel free to expand upon that. The natural world of Highcaster is very much like ours. There are deserts, forests, mountains, marshes, coastal lands, and more. Take note of the types of flora and fauna they'll find there to help crystallize the area in your head and to be

used as you introduce the scene.

- ◆ **SENSORY QUALITIES AND WEATHER:** Next, think about the weather, given what you know of the region or seasons, and write down anything to call out for the senses. Think of the smell of a particular type of flora, the feel of brisk wind, the lack of visibility due to mist.

Go through each sense and jot down anything that jumps out, given the location.

- ◆ **CALL OUT THREE LANDMARKS OR POINTS OF INTEREST:** Now, list three landmarks or visuals that you can use to give them something to interact with in the scene. It could be scattered boulders, thickets of trees, or a structure.
- ◆ **THREE QUALITIES THAT MAKE THE LOCATION INTERESTING:** For the last step, take what you've written and jazz it up. Make it more lively and compelling. Find a way to expand on the landmarks, weather, or local region into something memorable. Maybe the river is rushing toward an impossible waterfall. Perhaps the bell tower is made of lapis lazuli, or the boulders are under a spell and are hovering above the ground.

Step up the set pieces to become memorable and larger than life.

The Journey and Locations need not be about far-off places or long quests. These tools can be used for intimate games in villages, homesteads, or even in a stronghold or palace. Apply the principles to rooms, instead of locations; to the ambiance of a location instead of weather; to the people or objects around instead of landmarks.

Prepare Truths

Part of the effect of running a collaborative narrative-driven game means that the Chronicler cannot completely control how the story turns out. That's not a bad thing; you aren't writing a novel. Instead, you're creating a shared story experience. However, it does present challenges when trying to prepare for your sessions.

The previous steps allow you to prepare op-

tions so that you will not have to improvise everything. You'll come equipped with scenarios, choices, threats, and set pieces to use when the story advances.

However, when constructing a story session-to-session this way, it can be challenging to thread everything together into a continuous plot. And even harder to project where it will all end up.

Here is where we get the benefit of the "Prepare Truths" step.

Preparing Truths is a critical preparation you can do before each session that will help you tie everything together, look ahead at what may be, and by the end, appear as if you'd planned the whole thing all along (even though you most certainly haven't).

- ◆ **WRITE DOWN TEN POTENTIAL TRUTHS:** Before each session, write down ten things that might be true, but they must be different than the truths you wrote down in the last session. These truths can be about villain motivations, the setting or environment, the journey or destination, the cultures—anything relevant to the story.
- ◆ However, they *aren't actually true* until you use them in the narrative. So, the ones you do use are woven into the narrative. As for the ones you don't use, cross them off and develop new ones next time. In this way, you're subtly driving the fiction from session to session and keeping your eye on what is happening outside the heroes' sphere of influence.

Prepare the Big Open

Finally, think about how you want to open the session. You are looking for a way to go *in media res* and start right away with action. This need not be combat, chases, arguments, or anything like that. It just needs to be at a moment when the story is in motion.

Write up a blurb that will help you quickly set the scene, set up the action, and say, "What do you do?"

It is up to you to start the game on a smooth trajectory and avoid the awkward "getting to know you what is happening" exchange that

happens when the Chronicler does not clearly frame a scene

THREAT LIST

Threats, as we've learned, are highly variable and amorphous. However, this section does lay out some easy options for NPCs or beasts. Each listed threat also provides a handy list of ideas for stages that you can use as needed

NPC Threats

Magister

STAGE(s): 2-5

- Uses a tome to create magic that protects
- Uses a tome to create magic that harms
- Speaks an incantation to summon a spirit
- Speaks an incantation to summon a beast
- Draws a sacred glyph to reveal wisdom or truth

Minion

STAGE(s): 1-2

- Is at a distance
- Uses a range weapon to attack
- Calls for more minions
- Runs away or hides from the situation
- Attacks or strikes with a melee weapon

Monarch/Royal

Leader of a realm

STAGE(s): 3-5

- Calls for other NPCs
- Orders other NPCs
- Learns the truth
- Leaves the situation
- Uses powerful relic

Noble

Leader of a group or family

STAGE(s): 3-4

- Calls for other NPCs
- Orders other NPCs
- Charges into combat
- Runs away

- Attacks from a distance

Oathen

A warrior with a pledge or oath

STAGE(s): 2-4

- Adheres to a creed or oath when challenged
- Risks life to protect
- Commands other NPCs
- Inspires other NPCs
- Defends other NPCs

Outdon

A realm's outlaw

STAGE(s): 2-4

- Attempts to steal
- Attempts to intimidate
- Attempts to murder
- Sneaks or hides

Scoplar

A storyteller or historian

STAGE(s): 2-4

- Knows about a situation because of myth or legend
- Convinces other NPCs to change their mind
- Convinces other NPCs to follow their lead
- Performs to change the situation
- Inspires other NPCs

Veneren

A holy person

STAGE(s): 2-4

- Heals someone
- Calls down divine wrath
- Inspires others
- Reveals the truth
- Defends other NPCs

Warren

A warrior or soldier

STAGE(s): 2-4

- Defends another from harm
- Fights another with swordplay
- Fights with archery
- Leads other NPCs
- Is at a distance

Wicker

Folk magic practitioner

STAGE(s): 2-4

- Uses a talisman with a long-term magical effect.
- Casts a harmful curse
- Casts a magical blessing
- Casts magic that obscures or changes them
- Casts magic that summons beasts

Wildkin

A wanderer or scout

STAGE(s): 2-4

- Uses the environment to help them
- Finds protection
- Guides others
- Attacks from afar
- Commands beasts

Beast Threats

Bears

STAGE(s): 3

- Investigates, explores
- Hunts
- Protects young
- Chases
- Mauls
-

Birds of Prey

STAGE(s): 2

- Dives to attack
- Grabs with talons
- Flies away
- Perches and observes
- Caws for help

Cats (Large)

STAGE(s): 3

- Ignores
- Pounces
- Chases
- Hunts
- Runs

Horses

STAGE(s): 2

- Stampedes
- Kicks
- Runs
- Stops and is stubborn
- Charges

Primates

STAGE(s): 2

- Postures and intimidates
- Observes
- Punches and kicks
- Flees
- Swings or climbs

Wolves

STAGE(s): 3

EXAMPLES:

- Howls for help
- Circles and postures
- Lunges
- Chases
- Bites

THE CHRONICLER

HIGHCASTER USES A RULESET, DUNGEONCASTER, DESIGNED TO EMPHASIZE THE story aspects of role-playing games. The framework can be used for any setting or adventure in the fantasy genre but will adapt the experience to focus on the story, not on gameplay tactics. This story-focused approach means that you can skip a lot of the minutia of other game systems and just play out the fiction and character moments.

Many other fantasy game systems use the story as a backdrop to play a more tactical game. That is a viable way to play and can be a gratifying experience, but it is not how Highcaster plays. In tactical play, you are more focused on making the best possible player choices, using your character as a tool, and reaching a victory condition.

Highcaster is more story-focused play focuses on making the best choices for the story, which may or may not be ideal for the character, to reach a narrative conclusion.

Highcaster's adaption of the *Dungeoncaster* ruleset is highly conducive to any high fantasy game setting where heroes of myth and legend are the focus. It can adapt most fantasy RPG system rules, but it does so by throwing out tactical play and ignoring rules that are not story-focused.

If you want tactical play, there are plenty of games that do this well, namely *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, and *King Arthur Pendragon*, more recent games such as *Shadow of the Demon Lord*, *Savage Worlds*, and *Forbidden Lands*, and also original D&D revival games like *Old School Essentials*, *Black Hack*, and *B/X*.

These other systems and settings have incredible content. Many of them have been producing campaigns and adventures for decades. Some of the new ones have active communities around them that consistently put out supplements and other materials.

That said, the purpose of this section is to create a clear set of guidelines on how to adapt other settings and systems to how Highcaster plays. This way, you can use decades of adven-

tures and campaigns from popular game systems but play them in a more streamlined and story-focused way.

The guidance here should support you in taking any campaign or adventure from most published settings and systems and converting it into Highcaster rules quickly.

CHARACTER CREATION

While every game is different, most games will segment character creation into race and class or archetype. For Highcaster, you will be converting elements of race into both Heritage and Culture and then converting Class into Path. The primary difference here is that character aspects attributed to physical or cosmetic features will be linked to Heritage, and abilities or skills will relate to Culture.

Also, when breaking down other character creation systems, you will need to end up with a Heritage Ability, a Cultural Talent, and a Path Talent, as well as three Disciplines.

STATS AND MOVES

Highcaster ties moves and narrative actions the character makes to three stats: Virtue, Courage, and Prestige. So the stats of other games need to be distilled into the stats.

Converting Stats

No matter how the specific system asks you to create core stats, they are always determined by a character's stats in the Highcaster. As in the core ruleset, players choose which die goes with each stat (d4, d6, or d8). To determine your character's stats, note the original game's most favored stat for the class or archetype and place a d8 for the corresponding stat, then the least favored is matched with a d4, and the third and last stat is marked as a d6.

Even with this conversion, it's not precise. Other games use stats to describe a character's ability to do something, but, remember, in Highcaster, you are more concerned with *why* they do things. These conversions are about the *intent*. Below you'll see correspondences with typical stat names, the core Highcaster's ruleset *Dungeoncaster*, and Highcaster.

Original Stat	Dungeoncaster's Stat	Highcaster Stat
Agility	Force	Courage
Constitution	Force	Courage
Charisma	Charisma	Prestige
Dexterity	Will	Virtue
Empathy	Charisma	Prestige
Health	Force	Courage
Intellect	Charisma	Prestige
Intelligence	Charisma	Prestige
Might	Force	Courage
Nature	Will	Virtue
Smarts	Charisma	Prestige
Speed	Will	Virtue
Spirit	Will	Virtue
Strength	Force	Courage
Vigor	Will	Virtue
Will	Will	Virtue
Wisdom	Charisma	Prestige
Wits	Charisma	Prestige

CONVERTING TO CULTURE & HERITAGE

Many games will conflate a person's culture and heritage. In other words, players will choose a trait (like race, species, kin) that contains both physical and cultural qualities. To convert these traits to Highcaster Heritages, you will need to separate the cultural aspects from the physical aspects, using only the physical ones for the character. Then, the remaining cultural traits can either be used for the character's chosen culture or omitted altogether.

Physical qualities include attributes like flying, darkvision, or strength. Cultural qualities include traits like learned skills, talents, or status.

For Highcaster play, you will need a Heritage Ability and a Cultural Talent. You can pull both from the leftover cultural elements, but the cultural Talent should be cultural, not based on any physical characteristics. Generally, however, you just need to call out a notable physical trait for their heritage ability, keeping culture separate until your group decides what culture they are playing.

Racial Traits to Convert to Heritage	Racial Traits to Convert to Culture
Age or Lifespan	Alignment
Size	Combat Training
Speed	Tool Proficiency
Darkvision	Language
Resilience	Special Knowledge of a Craft
Keen Senses	Known Magic
Natural Weapons	Personality or Disposition

CREATING CULTURES

Highcaster requires all players to be part of the same culture, so cultural traits pulled from another system's peopling tropes might be helpful here. Ultimately, your group will determine your table's shared culture. After that, each player will receive Language features for the culture and derive a Cultural Talent and Trade Talent in alignment with that culture.

If you are using a setting agnostic adventure or campaign, you can create the culture together at the table by discussing what your shared cultural qualities are. For example, cultures could be derived from nations, but they could also stem from guilds or adventuring parties.

Ultimately, once determined, your group may still need to do additional world-building to fill out all the character aspects related to culture. Also, as a reminder, Cultural Talents and Trade Talents can add a d6 to the modifier die pool if they narratively apply to the situation.

Language

- ◆ You can speak the culture's native tongue.
- ◆ You can choose either to speak another language or to be literate in the culture's language.

Cultural Talent

Choose one Talent that your character has as a result of being a member of a culture. The Talent must make sense in the fiction your group has created for the culture (such as knows their way around the region, has good business sense, etc.) A d6 can be added to the dice pool when this Talent is used to confront a threat.

Trade Talent

Choose one Talent that is related to a trade or occupation common within your shared culture. The Talent must make sense in fiction your group has created for the culture (such as knows how to barter, makes weapons, is a good hunter). A d6 can be added to the dice pool when this Talent is used to confront a threat.

CONVERTING CLASS TO PATH

There is little difference between Highcaster's "Path" and what most games call Classes or Archetypes or such. Highcaster takes a more streamlined approach concerning the mechanics of a class or its progression.

Since we're playing a more story-driven game, you are simply looking for a broad description that you can use to bolster a modifier dice pool when it makes narrative sense. In other words, you are trying to find the role of a class and allow for extra dice when the character leans into the class in that fashion.

Cultural Naming Conventions

Your group should determine what each Path is called within the game world, perhaps even by different cultures. If you are using a prepared setting, you can simply choose that setting's term or create your own.

Background

Many games have character background traits that can provide mechanical benefits to a character. In Highcaster background refers to a character's life story or history, and there is no mechanical benefit. Although, these bits could inform a Trade Talent. If that works, simply select what seems fitting and beneficial from the background and convert it to a Trade Talent.

Finally, if the game you are converting has tables for backgrounds, you can use those—but none of the mechanical boons/edges or drawbacks apply.

Belongings

Because gear and equipment have little to do with the mechanics of Highcaster, this is more about flavor for your character. These items can

be lifted directly from character creation in the original game, or you can just have the player write down items they would naturally have as a result of their Path.

Path Talent

Path Talents detail something a character can do exceptionally well because of their Path. So, when converting specifics for a Path Talent, find a fundamental aspect of that class to create a Talent.

This is perhaps the trickiest part of the conversion so far, but think about what the character would do intuitively that no other class would do—that will be the Path Talent. And, like other Talents, this die can be added to the modifier dice pool if applicable.

Relationships

You may not find anything in the original game to convert to Highcaster for relationships. But, if there is, use it. Otherwise, come up with prompts for your players to answer about others in their party. The prompts should somewhat reflect the character's Path.

Disciplines

As the real engine of Path, Disciplines are the most crucial mechanical aspect of the character apart from their stats. Every Path has three Disciplines, which represent its core training—really their entire reason for being. When converting from another game's class, find three key things that define what the class *does*.

It is okay if it is something the class does all the time (Fighter with a Discipline of Melee, for example). Path Discipline dice are only added to the dice modifier pool when the player chooses, and there is a limit to the number of times this can be done.

Remember, Disciplines should clearly represent the Path and should be unique, representing things differently from other Paths. It's where you truly define the role of a Path and its fundamental purpose in the game.

FEATS

Many games will have extra edges or feats that

give players more choices for stats. Don't worry too much about converting them since they tend to be system-specific. Instead, allow the players to choose one Highcaster's feats.

CHARACTER SPELLCASTING

It is unnecessary to convert magic into spells because Highcaster cares more about why you do something, not how you're explicitly doing it. Therefore, if it is narratively appropriate for you to know how to cast fireballs, you do. However, it may be worthwhile to refer to spells from other systems as fictional prompts for players, possibly assisting them with character or narrative flavor. It may also be helpful to have spells to reference for threat stages.

You may also want to have constraints on magic because of the type of story you are telling. Allowing unchecked narrative authority on spells and what they do may create scenarios outside your theme and tone, even if they can't break the game system.

That said, there are three methods for converting magic to Highcaster.

High Fantasy

In high fantasy, magic is ubiquitous and extremely powerful. This setting is the default for the Highcaster. The only thing you need to do is determine how magic works in your world or game and ensure those setting principles apply to Disciplines.

The Path examples demonstrate how this can be done. In short, the player has complete authority over what their magic looks like, what it does, and how it is cast. However, magic must happen in a way that is consistent with the setting and their Path. Truly, the outcomes are less important than the narrative imagery of the magic itself.

However, this means magic can be extremely powerful and very flexible. Given how the Highcaster mechanics work, nothing is too overpowered. And, there are natural narrative consequences for doing magic too destructively or too over the top.

Swords and Sorcery

The tried-and-true fantasy settings in which magic exists, but may be more challenging to control or perform, fall into the standard Swords and Sorcery fantasy style setting. This dial may be most appropriate for gamers moving from *Dungeons & Dragons* or *Forbidden Lands* and looking for more limitations on magic.

To convert into this method, first, limit the ability to use magic to pre-determined Paths. Also, creatures cannot commonly perform magic. Those that can are unusual and have to use a precise method (such as a wizard using a tome).

Next, match a Path's Discipline with specific categories of magic they can access, such as enchantments, evocations, and necromancy. Then list the names and narrative effects of the spells in the original game in those categories. Characters should be limited to the first tier (or first three magic levels) until they get enough XP to take another Discipline. At that point, they can choose the next tier of one of the categories. This process could continue until they have all tiers and categories, and the character would then have reached their magical limits.

You can refer to the spells from the original game, omitting any of the mechanical benefits and keeping the focus on the narrative impact.

The *Dungeoncaster* ruleset uses a Swords & Sorcery approach to magic and the SRD can be downloaded for free at dungeoncaster.world.

Gritty Fantasy

You may be looking for a low fantasy setting from games like *B/X* or *Dungeon Crawl Classics*. In these settings, you will further constrain magic by making Disciplines function like "spell slots" for magic users. Essentially, a character can cast any spell they know but only do it with Discipline dice. And when they are out, their magic is exhausted.

So, adapt whatever magic or spells their character would know from the original game into a list for their Disciplines. Depending on the setting, you can also keep limitations from the

original game (such as only being able to cast once a day). How far you go is up to you, but converting Disciplines into spell slots and limiting players to only using magic as detailed in the original game, will dramatically decrease the power level of the characters for a grittier setting.

CHARACTER GEAR

By design, Highcaster does not worry about equipment or gear. If it makes narrative sense, they have what they need. If there is a question of whether or not they have it, based on the fiction, dice can be rolled, or Favor paid.

However, some games use equipment and attrition to add another dimension of tension to the story. Often, in grittier games, it may be essential to know how many torches a character has or how many gold chests they can carry.

In these circumstances, you can refer to equipment and cost directly from the original game's material for Highcaster, with no need to convert anything. Then, run the economics as you would in the initial system or any way that suits your story. However, if you do this, you will need to ensure the heroes are paid in-game currency and allow for other credit-making economies in your game (like found treasure or treasure drops from defeated foes).

Also, some games give substantial benefits or effects for having specific pieces of equipment, especially magic items. As with magic itself, simply import the fictional impact of the item without worrying about the mechanical effects.

Some magic items may give a character a mechanical boon, such as increased strength or speed. In that case, the items add a d6 Talent die to the pool when used in a narratively appropriate way. In general, play fast and loose with magic items by using Talent dice and Advantage Dice.

CONVERTING SITUATIONS TO THREATS

Since Highcaster doesn't have tactical combat, using threats to escalate the situation is best to replicate the combat or other situational mechanics from other games.

- ◆ **DISTANCE:** If a threat is out of range of the attacking character, add a stage to the threat so the character must close the distance to confront the next stage.
- ◆ **DIFFICULT TERRAIN:** If there is terrain that another game would consider mechanically difficult, make it a threat to be subdued which can escalate. You can also include a disadvantage until the threat is subdued.
- ◆ **FALLING:** If a character is falling to their death or from a dangerous height, you can make a multi-stage threat that must be subdued to stop the fall.
- ◆ **CHASES:** Convert chase mechanics by creating multi-stage chase threats that must be subdued, helping to close distance or aid escape.
- ◆ **SAVING THROWS:** Anything that requires a saving throw can be treated as a threat to be subdued.

Converting to Harm

You will not need to convert game mechanics that track damage, hit points, armor class, or physical/mental harm, as Highcaster doesn't use it. Instead, if something in an adventure or campaign requires damage, transform it into a threat or disadvantage.

Additionally, since characters can only die by player choice, you don't need to convert mechanics around death and dying, such as saving throws or revival skill checks.

Making Highcaster Harmful

As an option, if desired, you can make your game more lethal. Track harm as usual, but the conditions change to the following:

- ◆ If one stat takes maximum harm, the character is **INJURED** and will need to rest for a week to recover.
- ◆ If two stats take maximum harm, the character is **BROKEN** and will need to rest for a month to cover.
- ◆ If three stats take maximum harm, the character is **DEAD** and can only be revived through magical means.

MONSTERS AND NPCs

Converting a monster or NPC into Highcaster is as simple as deciding how many stages (how difficult) the threat is, listing what it does during those stages, and noting thoughts about those stages can escalate. Much of this can be repurposed from monster stat blocks.

Since threats are tied to the narrative, you can pull dramatic moments or conflict out of pre-written adventures and present them as threats. So, for example, you might have goblins attacking villagers as a threat and another for the orc archers on the ramparts.

Feel free to use and adapt the monsters and NPCs listed in this book. The biggest challenge will be listing what the NPC or monster does as a consequence and as an escalation. In other words, list narrative moments that happen if a player gets a mixed success or misses and also moments you can use to escalate the situation.

Often this simply entails taking the special abilities or actions available from the other game's stat block and translating those into hard moves or soft moves to have available when you need them.

For example if the game's stat block says they can cast fireball, then you'll know you can use a fireball when as a hard move when appropriate.

