

Blackmarked Core Rules

To Live In The End of Days Is To Know Misery

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Kaenis is a deadly place, where heroes are slaughtered in their tracks, and scoundrels live short lives of gluttony and hedony. The Church of the Ascendant tries to maintain order over the rugged populace, enforcing order on a lawless world, and generally acting as the most powerful political force, much more powerful than the squabbling noble families. The citizenry tries its best to scrape by, despite wars, rampant crime, and the Black Scourge: a disease which ravages the countryside, killing almost all who contract it.

However, not all that come into contact with the Scourge stay dead. There are rumors floating about of a dark god, the King of Rats, the primal god of old who seeks to plunge civilization back into the depths of animalistic chaos. Some say the Scourge is the King of Rats's doing, to find his chosen mortal champions. These champions arise from piles of the Scourge-ridden dead, branded with the Black Mark of the King of Rats. Some say these undead champions are capable of horrific miracles, acts of vile impossibility: magic.

In this world of traitors and backstabbers, of assassins and criminals, and of the unhallowed dead walking the streets, survival is a battle. One good sword swing can kill a man, and there's no shortage of people swinging swords in Kaenis. Will you be a hero to this damned world, and try to restore good? Or will you let it be consumed by darkness for your own gain?

Playing Blackmarked

Playing Blackmarked requires a fair amount of dice, specifically d4s, d6s, d8s, d10s, and d12s. Other than that, you need these rules, one character sheet for each player, and a pencil.

What Are Tabletop RPGs?

If you aren't well versed in role-playing games, tabletop role-playing game is a method of structured storytelling, where a group of people come together to create characters, and control those characters as they explore the world around them.

In a Tabletop RPG, people gather together to play. One person takes on the role of the Game Master, who is a sort of storyteller. The Game Master describes the world and the people in it, as well as the occurrences within this world. Everyone else has a single character who they have created as they see fit, who represents their will in this world. They get to decide how their character reacts to the world, and then the Game Master describes how the world reacts to those reactions. This cycle continues, thus creating a story with the player's characters at the center.

Tabletop RPGs in a lot of way resemble a simple game of pretend which children play on the playground. So as to prevent disputes about what exactly happens, the game is defined by a set of rules, all kept within this document, which define exactly how a character can go about interacting with this fictional world, and how to determine if a character is successful or not in their efforts.

How Does This Differ From What I've Played?

If you *are* well versed in role-playing games, you're probably wondering where Blackmarked differs from the games you've played, and why you should roll up Blackmarked characters, instead of characters in the games you've already invested the time to learn the rules of.

For starters, Blackmarked is much more brutal than most sword and sorcery role-playing games. Characters don't just have a massive buffer of hit points that enemies will chip away from until an arbitrary hit reduces them to zero hit points. Every wound that a character incurs is capable of killing them, and even if it doesn't, the exhaustion of adventuring will make every action a character does harder and harder, forcing them to eventually rest and slow down. Healing is also much harder, and characters require time and trained professionals to recover.

Furthermore, Blackmarked doesn't have magic spread about every corner of the world. In fact, most people in Kaenis assume magic simply isn't real, and is a story told to sinners and children to keep them in line. Those who know the truth are Blackmarked, who are the only magical beings in the entire world. They wield immense power through their spells, but pay dearly: they are hunted to death by the church's followers, and their spells are not powered by mana, or memorized in daily spell slots, but instead spells consume the days of a character's lifespan.

Blackmarked is focused on the slog of adventuring, on the physical and emotional drain of the art of being a hero, and on the practical side. Characters can't just galavant across the world, slaying evil 24/7 and dispensing justice; that's just not how the world works. Characters need time to rest, to recollect themselves and heal their grievous wounds. Characters also can't simply traipse around the world enforcing their idea of justice. There are very strict social systems in place, and players must work in their boundaries or face their wrath, even if they don't want to.

On top of this, Blackmarked is a game designed with largely taking on human opponents in mind. Characters will have to take on wild animals in order to survive out in the wilderness. Monsters exist in Kaenis, but the game is designed such that a single monster is a massive obstacle, requiring a massive amount of thought and planning to slay. Heroes who charge forth into battle with monsters, hoping to win on vigor and courage, will get slaughtered.

Characters

Blackmarked players are divided up into two categories. The vast majority of players will be, well, *players*, who each control a single, personalized *player character* in the world of Kaenis. One player, however, will be the *game master*, or GM, who controls everything in the game world that the players do not. It is up to the GM to control these *non-player characters*, as well as describe the world that the players are exploring, and the occurrences within it.

Both player and non-player characters in Blackmarked are represented mechanically by a collection of things. The first of these things are a character's *Innates*, which represent the

fundamental attributes of their person, such as their intelligence, or their athleticism. The second is the character's *Skills*, which represent fields of study that the character has applied themselves in and trained in. Skills range from Weapon Skills, which cover a character's aptitude in wielding different weapons, to Skills such as Drinking and Swimming.

Both Innates and Skills are expressed in terms of *base die size*. That is, instead of just a number, a character's aptitude in an Innate or Skilled is measured in a size of die. Larger dice represent higher aptitude: thus, a character with a Strength of d12 is a mighty and feared warrior, while a character with a Strength of d4 could be knocked over by a particularly strong wind. In ascending order, the possible die sizes are d4, d6, d8, d10, and d12. It is also possible to have a Skill with no die size at all associated, meaning the character has done no training in regards to that field of study. As a character adventures, these die sizes will be reduced from their base size due to exhaustion, and will only be able to be returned to their full size by resting.

There are several other aspects of characters beyond their Innates and Skills. They also will have a *Vice*, an indulgence they partake in to help rest and recover from a hard day's adventuring. Characters have a series of *Traits*, which further define the ways in which the character specializes themselves. Some characters will also have *Sands of Life*, which is both the currency that Blackmarked spend to cast spells, as well as the timer that ticks down to a Blackmarked's destined death.

Resolving Action

Blackmarked, like most role-playing games, is primarily a game about telling a story. The GM describes the world and the NPCs in it, and players respond by describing how the PCs react and act to their surroundings. Generally speaking, this loop is all that needs to happen: the GM describes something, the PCs respond, the world responds in kind, and so on, all occurring through the simple medium of descriptive conversation.

This loop is interrupted, however, if a PC or NPC attempts to do something for which they stand a meaningful, significant chance of failure, that requires a *skill test*. A skill test, or just a Test, is a dice roll, taking into account a character's stats and the difficulty of the task, which determines whether or not the character succeeds at the task they are attempting.

Skill tests are relatively simple to perform. When a character attempts to do something, the GM might decide that a test is in order to see if the character succeeds. The GM will then declare a relevant *Innate* (fundamental aspect of the character) or *Skill* (trained field of study), as well as a *Target Number*, or TN. TNs represent the difficulty of a task at hand. Higher TNs correspond to harder tasks. Approximately what TN is appropriate given the difficulty of the task is given in the table below.

Target Number	Difficulty of the Task
2	A simple task. Any untrained simpleton stands

	a solid chance of success.
4	A task of average difficulty. With proper thinking and preparation, it should be relatively simple to perform.
7	A hard task. Experts might find it easy, but most will have to spend noticeable effort to complete it.
10	A near-impossible task. Only the greatest experts will be able to complete this task.

Once the TN and the relevant Innate/Skill are decided, the person in control of the character (the player for a PC, the GM for an NPC) must make the test. That player must look at their character's description and find the Innate/Skill to be rolled against, and look at the *die size* given. This die size will be a d4, d6, d8, d10, or a d12. This die will then be rolled. If the result is greater than or equal to the TN, the character succeeds at the action they are attempting, and the GM may describe how the character successfully performs the task at hand. Otherwise, they fail, and the person in control of the character may describe how their character fails.

Example: Brunhilde is attempting to leap from a second-story window out onto a passing carriage below. The GM decides this action stands a significant chance of failure, and so imposes a test. The GM decides that the Skill most relevant to this action is probably Acrobatics, and that the task is hard, but not impossibly so: the carriage is moving fairly slow, and is full of hay, and the window's not that far off the ground. Thus, the GM sets the Target Number at 8.

Brunhilde has a d10 die size for her Acrobatics skill, so she grabs a d10 and rolls it, getting a 9. Since 9 is greater than or equal to 8, Brunhilde succeeds at her action, and leaps heroically from the window down onto the carriage, startling those around her.

It is possible that a character will not have any die size given for a Skill they are rolling a test for, indicating that their character has no training in the field required for the action they are attempting to perform. In this case, every Skill has an associated Innate. The person in control will look at that Innate, reduce the die size to the next smallest one, and roll that die in place of a Skill die.

Example: Sigarda is attempting to swim across a mighty river. The GM decides that the river is moving pretty fast, and thus Sigarda needs to succeed at a TN 9 Swimming test to successfully cross it. Sigarda has no die size for Swimming, however. Because of this, Sigarda looks at the Innate tied to Swimming, Strength, which she has at a d12. She reduces this by one die size, to d10, and rolls a ten-sided die.

Unfortunately, Sigarda rolls a 4, less than the Target Number of 9, and the GM describes Sigarda

getting swept away in the waters, struggling to stay afloat.

It is also possible that circumstances might give a character a *bonus*, or positive help, or a *penalty*, or a negative detriment, to their roll. Both bonuses and penalties are expressed as dice, just like Innates and Skills (that is, you might have a “d6 Strength bonus” or a “d4 Sneaking penalty”). When a bonus is added to a roll, a die of the given size is rolled, and the result is added to the test’s result. When a penalty is added to a roll, a die of the given size is rolled, and the result is subtracted from the test’s result. It is possible that a bonus or penalty will come in the form of multiple dice (ex. A 2d6 Strength bonus) in which case all given dice are rolled and then added or subtracted from the test result as necessary.

Example: Ada has been travelling through the foggy marshes, and has happened across a strange monolith in the distance, with people surrounding it. She wants to try and recognize some of the symbols on the monolith, in an attempt to try and guess the motives of those around it. The GM decides that this is an Knowledge (Religion) test, and due to the obscurity of the symbols, the Target Number is 5. Ada has a d8 in Knowledge(Religion), so this shouldn’t be too hard.

However, the GM rules that, since the marshes are full of fog, obscuring Ada’s vision, and thus imposes a d6 penalty on the test. He does, however, note that Ada is carrying a tome of obscure iconography on her person, and thus gets a d8 bonus for having a resource to check against.

With all bonuses and penalties established, Ada grabs two eight-sided dice (one representing her d8 Knowledge (Religion) skill, and one representing the d8 bonus for the book) and rolls them, getting a 3 and a 7, which sum to 10. The GM takes a d6, representing the d6 penalty for the fog, and rolls it, getting a 4, which is subtracted from 10 to get 6. 6 is greater than 5, so Ada successfully recognizes that the symbols on the monolith are of an extremely violent sect of Ratborn, and she’s probably best staying away.

Another type of test is a *Contested Test*, in which a character is directly stopping another character from performing an action. In this case, no Target Number is set by the GM. Instead, the GM decides on the Innate or Skill for both parties to make a test for. Both parties roll the appropriate die, and compare results. The character who rolled highest is the winner of the test. In the case of a Contested Test, any penalties either character suffers becomes a bonus to the other character.

Example: Gerhard is attempting to sneak past the town watch, who are looking for him after he robbed the local apothecary, and make his way back home. The GM decides this is a Contested Sneaking vs Spotting test, where Gerhard is going to have to roll Sneaking, and the guard is going to roll Spotting. Gerhard has a d8 in Sneaking, so he rolls it and gets a 7. The town guard has a d10 in Spotting so he rolls it and gets a 4. Gerhard’s 7 is greater than the guard’s 4, so Gerhard sneaks in the shadows unnoticed.

Strain and Rest

Adventuring through the world of Kaenis is a laborious endeavor, and as characters explore and fight in this world, they'll grow tired, worsening their ability to do anything until they manage to get some rest. The sum of a character's physical, mental, and emotional taxation is measured in *Strain*. Measured in points, Strain quantifies exactly how tired a character is.

If a character gets too much Strain, they'll become *Tired*, then *Exhausted*, then finally *Pass Out*. When a character is Tired, all dice they roll are reduced by one size. If a character is Exhausted, all dice they roll are reduced by two die sizes. If a character gets enough Strain to Pass Out, they simply go unconscious, their body forcing them to stop and recover.

Characters reduce their Strain by *Resting*, which is simply the act of a character slowing down and getting some sleep. Resting is a test, just like any other action, which when passed gets rid of all of a character's Strain. A character's Rest test is affected by where they are resting, in what emotional condition they are sleeping, and whether or not they have indulged their Vice, among other things.

Pushing Dice Rolls

Sometimes, you just need to solve a problem, despite knowing that the odds just aren't in your favor. Maybe you just know that the task at hand is beyond your abilities, and someone with greater expertise is needed. Well, sometimes you can't change those odds, can't increase your ability, and can't find anyone better. In these situations, all you can do is push.

When you *push* a dice roll, you incur 2 Strain to roll a die one size higher than you normally would. This can be done for any dice roll except for Rest tests and Inertia tests. Dice rolls must be pushed before the dice are rolled, and do not allow a chance to reroll. A single dice roll can only be pushed once.

Example: Maximilian has found himself stuck under a burning crossbeam as his house burns to the ground. The GM decides that pushing the heavy piece of wood off of himself will require Maximilian to make a TN 6 Strength test. Maximilian, more a scholar than a fighter, only has a d6 Strength die. Wanting odds better than one in six, Maximilian chooses to push the test, incurring two Strain and instead rolling a d8 for the test. Maximilian rolls, and gets an 8, pushing the burning log off of himself, but tiring himself out in the process.

Wounds and Dying

When adventurers go out, swords in hand, looking to impose their will on the world, chances are someone is going to fight back, and that fight is going to result in some physical damage. That damage is quantified in the form of *Wounds*.

Wounds come in two forms: *Non-Lethal* Wounds don't risk a character's life, but they do tire the character out and cause Strain. *Lethal* Wounds, however, are extremely dangerous, and each one poses a greater threat than the last of killing the character, on top of causing Strain.

Every time a character takes a Lethal Wound, they must make a TN 2 Healthiness test with a Xd6 penalty, where X is the number of Lethal Wounds they have. If they fail this test, they die. Characters can also die by expending all of their Sands of Life, if they are a Blackmarked.

Example: Kurt is in mortal combat with an enemy, trading sword swings and parries. Kurt has already suffered a Lethal Wound, but his enemy attacks and slashes at his chest, dealing another Lethal Wound. Kurt must make a TN 2 Healthiness test with a 2d6 penalty, one six-sided die for the old Lethal Wound, and one for the one just incurred. Kurt has d8 Healthiness, so he rolls and gets a 5. The GM grabs two six-sided dice, and rolls them to get a 6 and a 1, which are subtracted from 5 to get -2. This result is less than the TN of 2, so Kurt slumps to his knees, blood seeping from his chest wound, and dies.

Wounds cannot simply be healed away on the battlefield on the fly, they take time to recover. Characters have a Healing skill, but it takes proper equipment, preparation, and time to actually remove Wounds from a character.

Character Creation

Innates

Blackmarked simplifies the base complexities of a human being into what are called *innates*, which are numbers representing the character's innate aptitude towards certain types of tasks. There are 6 innates in Blackmarked:

Strength: The character's physical strength and stamina

Intellect: The character's intelligence, and ability to problem solve

Charm: The character's ability to get in other people's good graces

Quickness: The character's ability to move their body at a fast pace

Healthiness: The character's ability to stay alive despite injury or illness

Luck: The character's intangible propensity to have good things happen to them.

When creating a character, all of these innates begin at a d6 die size, representing below average aptitude. A player may increase two of their Innate's die sizes by one (or, similarly, one Innate's die size by two) for no additional cost. If a player wants to increase any Innates on top of these initial increases, they must reduce one of their Innates by one die size every time they increase another Innate's die size by one.

Skills

On top of Innates, each character has access to a range of *skills*, representing trainable task-based skills that the Blackmarked has access to. Skills are much easier to raise throughout the course of

a game than Innates, but are also more specific in their use. There are X skills in Blackmarked, divided up into 2 categories for the sake of organization, *general skills*, which can be used in day-to-day happenings or in combat, and *weapon skills*, specifically invoked when a character tries to hit another character with a weapon of that type.

Skills are given in the following format:

Skill Name: The name of the Skill

Innate: The Innate which is tied to the Skill, used for determining initial die size and untrained tests

Description: A short description of what aptitudes and abilities the Skill represents, and in what situations the Skill is used.

General Skills

Acrobatics

Quickness

Acrobatics represents a character's ability to perform feats of balance and coordination.

Acrobatics is frequently used by rogueish types, as well as assassins, to get around quickly outside of the view of those who would fail their plans.

Athleticism

Strength

Athleticism represents a character's stamina, as well as their ability to perform physical feats for an extended period of time. Blue collar workers, such as farmers or smiths, use Athleticism to maintain the pace of their jobs for an entire work day.

Diplomacy

Charm

Diplomacy represents a character's ability to control the flow of a conversation for their own needs. Noblemen frequently use Diplomacy to steer negotiations in their favor, while some criminals have taken to using Diplomacy to get themselves out of sticky situations.

Disguise

Charm

Disguise represents a character's ability to conceal their identity physically, allowing them to assume the appearance of a person other than yourself. Thieves and assassins use Disguise to slip deep into the crowd unnoticed, or for people of status to avoid the consequences of their identity.

Drinking

Healthiness

Drinking represents a character's ability to keep their composure while drinking alcohol, and to avoid being a "sloppy drunk". Anyone who finds themselves frequently drinking uses Drinking to keep their composure and to protect themselves from accidentally wandering into danger.

Healing

Intellect

Healing represents a character's ability to repair the physical injuries of themselves and others using medicine. Doctors and medicine men use Healing to try and bring their patients back to full health, although Healing is also extremely valuable to anyone who is frequently in conflict.

Hunting

Intellect

Hunting represents a character's ability to track, kill, skin, and prepare wild animals, either for consumption or to use their materials in crafting. Those who live off in the wilderness rely on Hunting to survive, although it also can benefit those who hunt people.

Identification (Category)

Intellect

Identification is a unique Skill, in that, when points of Identification are taken, the player who takes them decides the Category, selecting any sort of physical object (including a language, or a set of iconography). Identification represents a character's ability to identify the origin, design, meaning, abilities, and value of objects in the given category.

Knowledge (Animals and Plants)

Intellect

Knowledge (Animals and Plants) is a Skill used to identify the details in regards to flora and fauna, including, but not limited to: name, behavior, habitat, medicinal properties, danger presented, and rarity. Knowledge (Animals and Plants) is extremely valuable for anyone who frequently goes out in the wilderness, for use in gathering valuable resources and avoiding danger.

Knowledge (Culture)

Intellect

In a world as varied and multicultural as Kaenis, Knowledge (Culture) is a valuable Skill which ensures the character always understands the proper etiquette for a situation. A character can use Knowledge (Culture) to impress important people, or to simply identify unusual aspects of cultures foreign to them.

Knowledge (Crime and Law)

Intellect

The law of Kaenis is as complex as it is esoteric, and Knowledge (Crime and Law) helps a character make sense of the tangled web that is the law of the land. Characters with Knowledge (Crime and Law) understand the things prohibited by the laws of the area they are in, the punishments for those crimes, and whose duty it is to hunt down those criminals and enact justice.

Knowledge (Nobility)

Intellect

Most of the countries of Kaenis are ruled by some sort of noble family, and a character with Knowledge (Nobility) knows who belongs to which family, as well as the history, power, and machinations of the families. Characters who frequently need to deal with nobles use Knowledge (Nobility) to better understand how to manipulate the political system.

Knowledge (Religion)

Intellect

The Church of the Ascendancy holds sweeping power over the world, either directly or by influencing its opponents, and Knowledge (Religion) is a key skill to understanding the religious faiths of the world. A character can use Knowledge (Religion) to recall pieces of holy scripture, as well as to understand the social and political structure of the Church.

Knowledge (Science)

Intellect

Despite the profane influence of the King of Rats, most of the natural world still behaves as science would dictate, and a character can use Knowledge (Science) to draw upon that knowledge. Knowledge (Science) is a catch-all Skill that characters can use to pull information from chemistry, anatomy, geology, astrology, meteorology, and other scientific fields for their own benefit.

Knowledge (World)

Intellect

The world is a complicated place, and sometimes simply knowing where you are and what's around is extremely valuable, and that's what Knowledge (World) is about. Characters use Knowledge (World) to figure out where they are in the world, what sort of climate they're in, and what sort of natural features they are likely to find nearby.

Lockpicking

Quickness

There are many secrets and valuables hidden behind lock and key across the world, and an intrepid thief knows just how to break through those locks, key or not. Lockpicking is a Skill mastered by the best thieves and scoundrels in the world, to use forbidden pathways, access protected treasures and secrets, and to get to targets who think themselves safe behind locked doors.

Lying

Charm

The truth is sometimes extremely inconvenient, and Lying is the Skill that helps a character sell other people on a statement or belief that might not be 100% true. Nobles frequently use Lying to deceive people into falling in line with their political schemes, and criminals and Blackmarked might use it to hide their wicked nature.

Music

Charm

In a world where death, decay, and destruction seem like inevitabilities, it's natural to want to play a bit of Music to lighten the mood. Music is a character's ability to recognize, write, and perform musical works, either sung or played with one of a variety of instruments.

Pickpocketing

Quickness

Occasionally people have extremely valuable items on their person, and sometimes those items need to be lifted from their person. Characters who would want to eschew bartering or trade to get what they want specialize in Pickpocketing, allowing them to quietly pilfer the pockets of those who have what they want.

Poison

Intellect

When a direct fight presents a good risk of death or maiming, sometimes a bit of well-placed and well-selected poison can serve to keep one out of harm's way. Poison is a character's ability to identify poisons, properly apply them, and develop antidotes to them. Characters who wish to use poisons regularly, and those who'd believe themselves targeted by poison, utilize this Skill.

Sneaking

Quickness

Quite often, characters will find the need to get into places that they aren't exactly wanted. To evade the sight of those who would block them from what they want, characters use the Sneaking Skill to be unnoticed by those that would want to stop them from passing by, or simply to slip by unnoticed past those who would do them harm.

Spotting

Intellect

There are a lot of nuances to the world, and it takes an astute observer to notice all of the detail of one's surroundings.. Spotting seems to only refer to sight, but in fact the Skill refers to using any of the five senses to perceive the world as a whole. Spotting is used by characters who want to notice micro expressions on people's faces betraying their true feelings, markings on walls indicating a hidden passage, or small details in a large painting.

Survival

Intellect

If you're far from the comforting safety of a large city, beyond the gaze of guards and the church, surviving in the harsh wilderness of Kaenis can be difficult. Characters use Survival to find shelter, food, and water, as well as craft simple survival equipment from the naturally occurring materials around them.

Swimming

Strength

While most adventures in Kaenis will take place in the center of the continent, many, especially the naval traders of Palyss, will occasionally need to get into the water and do something other than drown. Swimming is used by characters who need to hold their breath underwater, swim quickly, and act with grace underwater.

Weapon Skills

Axes

Strength

An axe is any weapon which has a bladed head at the top of a long, usually wooden, handle. Axes can be used for chopping wood, but their design also allows warriors to strike blows with incredible power.

Bare Hands

Strength

There are many merits to fighting with a weapon, but sometimes people simply need to brawl as animals do: bare-handed, striking each other with nothing more than bone and muscle. Bare Hands covers all unarmed fighting, as well as fighting with weapons such as brass knuckles which complement bare handed attacks.

Bow and Arrow

Quickness

Despite the invention of the crossbow, the traditional bow and arrow is one of the most efficient and well-tested ways to attack a distant target. Using a tense string to launch pointed arrows long distances, a bow and arrow provides a skilled archer a range and lethality offered by few other weapons.

Clubs

Strength

One of the simplest weapons, a club is simply a heavy, blunt object designed to be bashed against a target, inflicting blunt force trauma. While many would scoff at using such a weapon, preferring to use a more elegant or efficient weapon, the brutal simplicity of a club means it will always have a place in the arms of the most brutal warriors.

Crossbows

Quickness

A recent innovation in ranged weaponry, the crossbow is an easier to use alternative to the classic bow and arrow. Consisting of a traditional bow mounted on a stock, a crossbow is easy to aim, and while it lacks the range of a bow, it makes up for it in ease of use.

Improvisation

Intellect

Sometimes, there are situations where a normal weapon simply isn't available. In these cases, a nearby object might have to be repurposed to serve as a weapon. In these cases, Improvisation is a measure of how well a character may use a non-weapon object as a weapon in a fight.

Knives

Quickness

Knives were one of the first things the human species ever invented, and the unending usefulness of them is most likely why. Knives work well as close-combat weapons, but they also serve as useful tools for hunters, artists, thieves, herbalists, and cooks, making them a good weapon to have on hand for any situation.

Shields

Quickness

Shields are a valuable tool for any soldier who gets into combat. Describing any solid material designed to deflect attacks, shields are used to deflect attacks from enemy, and can also be used to bash an opponent if necessary.

Staves

Strength

A staff is a long, slender weapon, usually constructed out of wood or metal, and sometimes with some sort of damaging implement at the end, such as a blunt instrument or a blade. Staves are slightly unwieldy to use, but their range is unmatched in melee weapons, and often times it is better to keep enemies at a distance while striking them.

Swords

Strength

A classic standby appreciated by warriors of all class and creed, swords feature a long, sharp, steel blade affixed to a hilt. Swords are extremely versatile weapons that come in all shapes and sizes, and their ease of use makes these extremely valuable both due to their speed, power, and ability to be used defensively.

At a character's inception, all of these Skills begin with no associated die size. A player gets 12 points to invest in their Skills. When a player spends a point on a Skill, if that Skill had no associated die size, it gets a die size equal to that of the associated Innate. If the Skill does have a die size when the player spends a point on it, it goes up by one die size. During character creation, no Skill may surpass a d10 die size.

The Black Mark

The next decision a player must make is whether or not they want their character to be *Blackmarked*. Blackmarked are the only beings in Kaenis capable of using magic, but they are also hunted by the Church of the Ascendant, who has instilled a belief in their followers that Blackmarked are demons to be destroyed, and on top of this have founded the Order of

Inquisitors, who exist solely to hunt and kill Blackmarked. Because of all this, most Blackmarked hide their nature.

Blackmarked are those who died from the Scourge, but were resurrected by the King of Rats in a vision, branded with his Black Mark somewhere on their body, and given magical powers from one of the King of Rats's five domains: Pestilence, Destruction, Madness, Death, or Manipulation. Blackmarked are given free rein to do as they please with their powers, as the King of Rats knows their mere existence is enough to ensure anarchy.

Blackmarked's lives are measured in the form of Sands of Life: a mysterious substance residing in an hourglass existing only in the Blackmarked's dreams. Should the final grain of Sand ever fall to the bottom of the Blackmarked's hourglass, they will die. Because of this, Sands of Life are measured in units of time (e.g there are three days of Sand in that hourglass). On top of simply falling due to time, Sands of Life are also expended by the Blackmarked's spells, meaning that Blackmarked pay for their spells with their own lifespan. The King of Rats will occasionally reward Blackmarked with additional Sands, for completing special tasks for the King.

If a player decides to become Blackmarked, their character is given an amount of Sand (usually around 5 years), dictating their lifespan and providing the resource for their spells. They then must select one of the five aspects of the King of Rats to align with, and then select three spells from that aspect to have (Spells are listed later). The Blackmarked will be able to obtain more Sand, and more spells, as the game progresses.

Characters who are not Blackmarked do not have Sands of Life, and needn't worry about it.

Vices

Kaenis is a terrible place. Wars have scarred the landscape and taken thousands of lives. Criminals and thieves take advantage of scattered and distracted governments to reign over the countryside. A plague sweeps across the countryside, and there are whispers of cults which worship a dark god, granting followers blasphemous powers to its followers. Combine that with the hard life living as a peasant and trying to scrape together a living, and many people succumb to Vice to help them find moments of peace.

A character's *Vice* is something bad they take pleasure indulging in. A Vice is never a positive thing, it is always an immoral, selfish, or hedonistic thing to take part in, but the character loves it nevertheless. The pleasure a character gets from indulging in their Vice is great, so great it's extremely hard to avoid it.

Vices are a character's way of spending their free time and combating Exhaustion. Every Vice grants a small bonus to the character (such as a Skill increase), as well as a condition. When a character is making their Resting check at the end of a night, if the character has fulfilled the condition of their Vice, they may increase the size of their Rest Die by one (essentially, this means it's more likely for a character to rest away their Exhaustion).

All Player Characters have exactly one Vice. That's not to say that a player character can only indulge in one of these activities, but one of them is always going to be more significant: that's their Vice. Nonplayer Characters do not have Vices, but similarly can still indulge in these activities.

Drinking

When you've had a hard day adventuring, few things calm your nerves like a good, stiff drink or two. Or three. If the company's really good, or the drinks are well made, or at least cheap, maybe that night becomes four or five drinks deep. After that, what's the point of stopping?

Gain: A character with Drinking for a Vice increases their Drinking die size by one (if they have no die for Drinking, they gain one equal to their Healthiness die).

Well Rested: A character with Drinking for a Vice may increase their Rest die size by one if they go to sleep drunk.

Drugs

Dulling the senses and loosening your grip on reality is an easy way to let the horrors of reality slip past you. When the real world is as nightmarish as ours is, and the threat of death is just a knife's edge away, why not just let your mind slip to somewhere else, just for a couple of hours?

Gain: A character with Drugs for a Vice increases their Poison die size by one (if they have no die for Poison, they gain one equal to their Intellect die).

Well Rested: A character with Drugs for a Vice may increase their Rest die size by one if they go to sleep under the influence of a drug.

Food

Food is hardly a Vice, is it? You need to eat to survive, and if you're going to have to eat, there's no reason not to make sure you eat well. While your fellow adventurers might be alright eating the fire-roasted scraps of some wild animal, you know to appreciate the finer flavors of a well-crafted meal, and as long as you're eating well, you should probably eat a lot.

Gain: A character with Food for a Vice may increase their Knowledge (Animals and Plants) die size by one (if they have no die for Knowledge (Animals and Plants), they gain one equal to their Intellect die)

Well Rested: A character with Food for a Vice may increase their Rest die size by one if they go to sleep having eaten at least four large meals that day..

Gambling

Adventuring is sort of a form of gambling. One throws their very life on the table, hoping to win big with riches, admiration, and prestige. If you're gambling with those high stakes all day, then gambling with dice and coin at the end of the day is hardly a comparable risk, right? Compared to the danger of being a soldier for hire, gambling is a children's sport.

Gain: A character with Gambling for a Vice increases their Luck die size by one.

Well Rested: A character with Gambling for a Vice may increase their Rest die size by one if they gamble at least 200 Place (or something equivalent) in a game of chance that evening.

Knowledge

Look at all these knuckle-dragging louts around you, so painfully unaware of the world around them. The world would be so much better if everyone shared your voracious desire to consume knowledge from wherever you can. Let them revel in their idiot's pastimes, you're too busy better yourself, and in a way, the world around you.

Gain: A character with Knowledge for a Vice increases the die size of any Knowledge Skill of their choice by one (if they have no die for that Knowledge Skill, they gain one equal to their Intellect).

Well Rested: A character with Knowledge for a Vice may increase their Rest die size by one if they spend at least 3 hours that evening reading a book, manuscript, or other text they haven't read before without interruption.

Love

The only thing that keeps us separate from the rats which scurry across the street is the human desire for, need for, love. The cultists we encountered state that we are all tumbling pointlessly through a dark abyss, but that can't be true, can it? If it is, I'm going to find someone to hold on to tight while I fall.

Gain: A character with Love for a Vice increases their Lying die size by one (if they have no die in Lying, they gain one equal to their Charm die).

Well Rested: A character with Love for a Vice may increase their Rest die size by one if they sleep alongside someone they are in a romantic relationship with.

Popularity

What good is completing daring feats of bravery and heroism if no one heard about it. I want the commoners to look with awe as I stride into their pathetic little town, blessed that such a hero, such a warrior of legend descended to their world. I deserve such treatment, after all, given how much I do for those philistines every day.

Gain: A character with Popularity for a Vice increases their Diplomacy die size by one (if they have no die for Diplomacy, they gain one equal to their Charm die).

Well Rested: A character with Popularity for a Vice may increase their Rest die size by one if they brag about the day's accomplishments in front of a crowd of respectable size that evening.

Sex

Adventuring is stressful, okay? When you spend your days strapped up in constrictive armor, risking death against all manner of horrific threats, sometimes you find yourself wishing for a more quiet moment, a more intimate moment, something to just remind you that you're capable of more than mindless slaughter.

Gain: A character with Sex for a Vice increases their Charm die size by one.

Well Rested: A character with Sex for a Vice may increase their Rest die size by one if they have sex with a character before sleeping.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: So, the Sex Vice creates a mechanical incentive for having sexual relations in a game where mind control magic is a thing, which could create some very uncomfortable

questions about consent. Such questions might come up even without mind control magic, much as they do in our mind control magic-free real world. My advice is, if you're thinking of creating a character with the Sex Vice, talk about it with your group. Figure out what people's limits are in regards to the subject, and if it seems like anyone is going to be uncomfortable as a result of this Vice, just pick a different one. Even if you do pick this Vice, remember the key rule to playing it at the table: *don't make it weird*.

Violence

Everyone's out to kill you. Between greedy highwaymen, vicious cultists, and the Church who would decapitate you for saying the wrong thing after you sneeze, people usually want your head on some sort of pike. It's only reasonable to want to defend yourself from that sort of thing, and sometimes a preemptive defense is the most powerful one. So what if maybe you find it a bit fun too?

Gain: A character with Violence for a Vice may increase their Bare Hands die size by one (if they have no die for Bare Hands, they gain one equal to their Strength)

Well Rested: A character with Violence for a Vice may increase their Rest die size by one if they kill or maim a human foe in melee combat within three hours of going to sleep.

Traits

Blackmarked is what is called a *classless* system. Unlike Dungeons and Dragons, in which player characters are defined by their role as Wizard, Barbarian, etc., Blackmarked characters are simply people, who derive their skills, abilities, and other noteworthy facets of existence from their *traits*, which are selected at character creation.

Ace Up The Sleeve

Only for Blackmarked

When the character casts a spell, they may instead opt to have no effects of the spell manifest, and "sleeve" the spell. The character may cast a "sleeved" spell, and have all of the spell's effects manifest, as a Lightning Fast action. A character may only have one spell "sleeved" at a time.

A Wicked Web Across Kaenis

The character has a network of information providers across Kaenis, some way or another, ensuring that they have a contact in, at bare minimum, every major city which they can tap for information.

Bloodthirst

Whenever the character successfully kills an opponent, they must make a TN 5 Intellect test or enter Bloodthirst. While in Bloodthirst, the character cannot make Cast Spell action, or an Attack action with a ranged weapon, has a d6 bonus to Strength tests, and attacks anything and everything around them. A character in Bloodthirst becomes animalistic, and suffers a d10 penalty to Intellect tests, or any tests of a Skill for which Intellect is the base Innate.

Bloodthirst ends when there is nothing left in sight to kill, when the character passes a TN 4 Intellect test (which may be made at the start of every turn as a free action), or when the character is knocked out or killed.

The character may also enter Bloodthirst willingly when they kill a target.

Born of the Cold

The character suffers no Nonlethal Wounds due to being out in the intense cold.

Bow to Me

The character gets a d8 bonus to Diplomacy against targets who are Tired.

Chameleon Voice

The character has the ability to assume most every accent, and as a result may use an accent to gain a d6 bonus on Disguise tests.

Champion of Nature

All non-predatory wild animals are naturally friendly to the character. The character may make an animal obey a simple command (able to be expressed with no more than one short word plus a simple gesture) with a TN 6 Charm test.

Constant Vigilance

Anyone attempting to sneak past the character must take a d6 penalty to their Sneaking test.

Crafter of Truces

The character gets a d6 bonus to Diplomacy checks when trying to create a compromise.

Drag You To Hell

Whenever the character would die, they instead may immediately take an Attack action. Once the attack resolves, the character dies.

Drunken Fist

The character suffers no Weapon Skill penalties while drunk.

Engine of Slaughter

When the character successfully kills an enemy, they may immediately perform another Action.

Eyes Bathed In Shadow

The character has an exceptional ability to see in the dark, and as such only takes a d4 penalty to Spotting tests in the dark.

Flurry of Blows

The character tends to violently bombard their foes with a fast series of vicious attacks. Whenever the character successfully deals a Wound to an enemy using an Attack action, they may incur 2 Strain to immediately take another Attack action using the same Weapon Skill at a d6 penalty. Every consecutive time they do this, the size of the penalty die goes up by one (to a maximum of d12).

Flying Blade

The character has mastered the art of throwing their weapon forward. The character may throw an Axe, Knife, or Sword as a ranged attack at a target up to 10 feet away, taking no penalty for doing so (they still suffer penalties due to range).

Hard Worker

The character is a master of pushing themselves to the edge, constantly putting in 110% into everything they do. Whenever the character pushes a roll, roll a d6. On a 6, pushing the roll incurs no Strain.

Hero of the People

The character has an established reputation as a hero for the people of their community. When the hero is within that community, people recognize and respect them, and are much more willing to help them. The character gets a d6 bonus to Diplomacy while within the community they protect.

Heavy Sleeper

No matter what conditions they are in, the character has an uncanny knack for slipping into a deep sleep. The character increases the size of their Rest die by one.

Ironclad

The character takes 1 less Non-Lethal Wound from every non-magical attack that deals damage to them (a non-magical attack that would not deal any Non-Lethal Wounds is unaffected by this perk).

Killer At Any Range

The character is experienced with using traditionally ranged weapons (such as guns and bows) as a tool in melee combat, and as a result they use the appropriate Weapon Skill when making a melee attack with such weapons, instead of rolling Improvisation.

Lightning Strike

The character may unsheathe their weapon at Lightning Fast Speed.

Lights Out

Whenever the character would deal a Lethal Wound with a Bludgeoning weapon, or with their Bare Hands, they may choose to knock out the target instead of doing damage. The target must make a TN 4 Healthiness check, with an Xd6 penalty, where X is the number of Lethal Wounds

they have incurred. If they fail, they are knocked out. The target remains knocked out for 2 hours. The character can only knock out targets human-sized or smaller.

Man of the Road

The character may carry an extra 50 pounds of gear.

Master Hunter

The character deals an extra Lethal Wound every time they deal a Lethal Wound to a non-human target.

Medical Expert

The character gets to increase their Knowledge (Diseases) die size by one, as well as their Healing die size.

Mental Mapper

The character can construct a perfect mental map of everywhere they go and, as a result, can always find their way back from anywhere they consciously travelled to.

Must Have Been My Imagination

Whenever the character fails a Sneaking test, they may reroll the test once with a d6 penalty.

Naturally Forgettable

The character reduces their Charm die size by one (to a minimum of d4), and increases their Sneaking die size by one (to a maximum of d12).

Paranoid Vigilance

The character believes that the world is out to get them, and is haunted by the thought, watching their backs at every moment. The character increases their Spotting die size by one, but reduces their Rest die size by one.

Pressure Point Seeker

The character's knowledge of anatomy allows them to target the natural weak points of an enemy's body. When the character makes an attack on a foe from Melee range, they may incur a d4 penalty. If they succeed the test, they may cause the target to incur 2 Strain.

Rapid Striker

All Attack actions with a melee weapon that the character performs are one Speed Level faster than usual (maximum Lightning Fast).

Ruler of Men

The character is a vicious leader, inspiring confidence or, at the very least, fear of the repercussion of failure. The character may make a Lightning Fast action to deliver a rousing

speech to those within earshot. Any subordinates of the character who hear this message get a d4 bonus to their next Skill test this turn.

Rush of the Hunt

The character may move an extra 5 feet in a single Move action, and gets a d6 Strength bonus, whenever they are chasing a fleeing target.

Sadist

The character loves dealing pain to their foes, and watching them squirm and suffer. Twice per day, when the character deals a Lethal Wound to an opponent, they may remove 2 Strain.

Second Slice

The character may opt to make two Attack actions in a single turn. Both of these Attack actions are performed at Glacial Speed.

Shadow Strike

Whenever the character makes a successful stealth attack on a foe, the attack deals an extra Lethal Wound.

Sheathed Fangs

The character gains a d6 bonus to Disguise when attempting to hide Darts, Guns, Knives, Poisons, or Swords from someone searching them.

Social Butterfly

When the character is drinking, but not drunk, they gain a +Xd6 bonus to Diplomacy, where X is the number of Drinks currently in their system - 3 (minimum 0d6).

Split Second

The character may, once per day, interrupt an action being performed by any participant in combat prior to it occurring, and take an action that is Fast or faster. Once this action is resolved, the turn resumes.

Strike With Drunken Fury

When the character is drunk, they obtain a d10 bonus to Strength instead of a d6 bonus.

Twin Birds Flying

The character may fire two arrows from a Bow at once at no penalty.

Unnerving Butcher

Whenever the character kills an opponent, anyone who witnesses it must suffer 1 Strain.

We Were Friends As Children

The character has a friend from their past that they were very close with, and while they've since parted ways, their friendship still lives on, which is useful, considering that friend now has some sway in the world.

The player may name and describe an NPC they knew in their past, who is now in charge or a part of the leadership of an Organization. What the Organization is, and what it does, is up to the player, with GM approval. The Organization has a d8 Influence die and an Inertia of 9. The character has a d6 Relationship die with that Organization.

Wounds

While many role-playing games have a subtractive health system, with characters having a certain amount of health points which are depleted as the character takes damage, Blackmarked has an additive health system, centered around *Wounds*, which are bestowed upon the character whenever they take hits. Wounds come in two different types: Non-Lethal and Lethal.

Non-Lethal Wounds are incapable of killing a player character and instead represent the sort of injuries we might get on a day-to-day basis. They represent an inconvenience, and maybe a health risk if they escalate, but generally they're pretty mundane. Lethal Wounds, however, risk a character's life every time one is incurred.

Every time a character suffers a Non-Lethal Wound, they immediately take a point of Strain.

Whenever a character incurs a Lethal Wound, they must make a TN 2 Healthiness test with a $Xd6$ penalty, where X is the number of Lethal Wounds they have. If they fail, they die. If they succeed, they still take a point of Strain. If a character takes multiple Lethal Wounds at once, they only make a single Healthiness test, using the total number of Lethal Wounds they have.

Strain and Rest

Blackmarked characters must keep track of how much damage they are taking to avoid death, but exhaustion is another serious threat to a character's survival. A character's exhaustion is measured in how much *Strain* they have taken. Strain is incurred by Wounds, as well as characters who Push their tests. Strain represents both physical tiredness and soreness, as well as mental and emotional exhaustion.

A character's Healthiness die determines 3 relevant thresholds involving Strain, as shown in the following table. When a character has Strain equal to or greater than their Tired threshold, for all Innate and Skill tests, they roll a die one size smaller than the die size they would normally roll. When a character has Strain equal to or greater than their Exhausted threshold, for all Innate and Skill tests, they roll a die two sizes smaller than the die size they would normally roll instead. Also, when a character reaches their Exhaustion Threshold, all of their Non-Lethal Wounds count as Lethal Wounds for the purpose of making a Healthiness test against dying.

When a character has Strain equal to or greater than their Pass Out threshold, the character passes out from sheer exhaustion. The character rolls their Healthiness die, and remains unconscious for that many hours. When they wake up, they lose 2 Strain for every hour they were unconscious.

Healthiness base die	Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
d4	4 Strain	6 Strain	8 Strain
d6	6 Strain	9 Strain	12 Strain
d8	8 Strain	12 Strain	16 Strain
d10	10 Strain	15 Strain	20 Strain
d12	12 Strain	18 Strain	24 Strain

Other than passing out from exhaustion, the only way a character may get rid of Strain is by *Resting*. Resting is simply the process of getting a good night's sleep, and recovering the energy they used up during the day's events. The TN for every Rest test is always 5. However, unlike most tests, Rest tests do not use a die size of an Innate or Skill. Instead, the die used for a Rest test is determined by the conditions in which the character is sleeping, as given below:

Sleeping Conditions	Die Size of the Rest Test
In the wilderness, with nothing more than simple bedding	d4
In the wilderness, in a camp	d6
In an average inn	d8
In a nice inn or one's own home	d10
In a luxurious inn, or a very nice home	d12

The bonuses and penalties for a Rest test are given below:

Condition	Rest Test Bonus/Penalty
The "Well Rested" condition of a character's vice is met	Increase Rest die size by one
The character has untreated Lethal Wounds	Decrease Rest die size by one

The character recently underwent significant emotional trauma	Decrease Rest die size by one
The character is uncertain about the safety of the place they are sleeping	Decrease Rest die size by one
The character is sleeping for less than six hours	Decrease Rest die size by one

If a character succeeds at their Rest test, then they may remove all of their Strain, and any Lethal Wounds they have which have been successfully treated with a Healing test turn into Non-Lethal Wounds. On top of this, all of their Non-Lethal Wounds heal completely. If a character fails their Rest test, they lose 1d6 Strain instead, and none of their Wounds heal.

Example: Two characters, Emmalyn and Otto, are going to sleep for the night, and both must make Rest tests.

Emmalyn is staying in a run-down inn, the best one she could get given her small amount of coin, starting her Rest die out at a d8. She had to fight off some wolves going into town, one of which dealt her a Lethal Wound. Unfortunately, when she got to town, the apothecary was closed, meaning her wounds have gone untreated, reducing her Rest Die one size to a d6. Emmalyn rolls her Rest die and gets a 2, less than the TN of 5. As a result, she rolls a six-sided die and gets a 4, indicating that she sleeps poorly, and only loses 4 Strain instead of all of it.

Otto, meanwhile, managed to get in the good graces of the local butcher as he strolled into town, resulting in an evening of merriment and drinking before being offered the butcher's guest bedroom in his house. The house is nice, but not palatial, indicating that Otto's Rest die starts at a d10. Otto also goes to bed drunk, which fulfills the Well Rested condition of his Drinking Vice, so his Rest die goes up a size, to a d12. Otto rolls a twelve-sided die and gets a 12. All of Otto's Strain vanishes, and he sleeps like a baby.

Move Speed

During combat, and other critical moments, how fast a character can move in a short amount of time is a critical question. This determines how well characters can get into dangerous situations, how deftly they can navigate them and, as necessary, how quickly they can retreat.

A character's Move Speed is determined by their Quickness die size, according to the table below.

Quickness Die	Move Speed
d4	20 ft.
d6	20 ft.

d8	25 ft.
d10	25 ft.
d12	30 ft.

Encumbrance

Adventurers can be considered defined by their gear. The swords of knights, the heraldry of a noble family emblazoned on a shield, the iconic crest of the usurper, the iconography of the characters of Kaenis is frequently built with equipment. However, characters can only carry so much equipment before they begin to be weighed down.

Instead of tracking the exact number of kilograms of gear that a character is carrying, every piece of equipment has an Encumbrance Score. Very small objects have an Encumbrance Score of 0, with larger objects having a greater Encumbrance Score. Objects that make carrying equipment easier, such as backpacks or beasts of burden, have a negative Encumbrance Score.

Whenever a character puts on all of their gear (such as at the start of the day, or after resting), they must make a Strength test, with a Target Number equal to the total Encumbrance Score of everything they are wearing. If they pass this test, they can carry all of their equipment with no hassle. If they fail, they are overburdened by the weight of their gear. Until they unequip themselves, any action the character attempts to make automatically incurs a point of Strain.

Example: Harvey went to go clean up in a nearby stream, and now that he's dry, he's ready to put all of his gear back on and get back to the road. Harvey has a Shortsword with an Encumbrance Score of 1, a set of Leather Armor with an Encumbrance Score of 2, and a buckler, with an Encumbrance Score of 1. All of these Encumbrance Scores total to 4, meaning Harvey must make a TN 4 Strength test. Harvey has a d8 Strength, so he rolls and gets a 4, equal to the Target Number. Harvey feels ready to take on the world, and carries his gear with ease.

Equipment

Now that most of a character's attributes are determined, there are only a few remaining factors of the character that need to be developed before the character is ready to play. The biggest of these factors is probably the character's *equipment*, or what items and objects the character has.

To determine what equipment a character has, the simplest way to do so is to begin by giving the characters an allowance of local currency, and letting players use that to purchase their equipment, keeping the rest as their coin on hand.

The most common form of currency in Kaenis is the one produced by Zaria, the *Blessed Place*. A copper coin which serves as the *replacement* for traditional bartered goods, the Place is the

accepted currency of the Church of the Ascendant, and thus is accepted anywhere in Zaria, Astar, and Palyss. Palyss also uses the *Tradesman's Mark*, although that currency is only shared with oceanic traders and free island states. Taeros, in their independence from the Zarian government, has their own currency, the *Taerosian Talar*.

What currency the characters will be given is up to the discretion of the GM. Characters that live in Zaria, Astar, or Palyss would probably have Place, while Palyssian characters might also have some Marks. Taerosian characters would have Talar, and characters who just recently travelled from one country to the other might have the wrong currency.

A quick and easy conversion chart between the three currencies is below:

	Blessed Place	Tradesman's Mark	Taerosian Talar
Blessed Place	1 Place	10 Marks	2 Talar
Tradesman's Mark	1/10 Place	1 Mark	1/20 Talar
Taerosian Talar	1/2 Place	20 Marks	1 Talar

To provide context to these numbers, 1 Place/10 Marks/2 Talar are fair pay for an hour of honest work, and is enough to buy 1 or 2 simple commodity items, like a loaf of bread, or a jar of milk.

How much money a character gets depends on the setting and the story (how wealthy the character is, their background, etc.), but 500 Place/5000 Marks/1000 Talar should be enough for an average wealth character to purchase starting equipment, clothing, and gear. This number can be adjusted depending on the character, the setting, and the story, with the GM's approval.

Players may purchase gear by spending from this initial fund to buy equipment. Below is a list of adventuring gear, from weapons and armor to camping gear to clothing, along with their relevant game statistics and their cost in Place. Also provided is a list of services adventurers might use while exploring Kaenis.

Weaponry

Name	Weapon Skill	Cost	ES	Range	Damage	Speed	Modifiers
Shortsword	Swords	40 P	1	Melee	Lethal	Average	
Longsword	Swords	50 P	2	Melee	2 Lethal	Average	
Falchion	Swords	50 P	2	Melee	Lethal	Fast	
Rapier	Swords	35 P	1	Melee	Non-Leth	Lightning	Precise

					al	Fast	
Zweihander	Swords	80 P	3	Melee	2 Lethal	Slow	Bludgeoning
Battle Axe	Axes	60 P	3	Melee	Lethal	Slow	
Throwing Axe	Axes	20 P	1	Melee	Lethal	Average	Throwing
Baton	Clubs	10 P	1	Melee	Non-Lethal	Average	
Flail	Clubs	35 P	2	Melee	Lethal	Average	Bludgeoning
Mace	Clubs	30 P	2	Melee	Lethal	Slow	Bludgeoning
War Hammer	Clubs	60 P	3	Melee	2 Lethal	Glacial	Bludgeoning
Morningstar	Clubs	45 P	2	Melee	Lethal	Slow	Bludgeoning
Quarterstaff	Staves	12 P	1	9 ft.	Non-Lethal	Average	
Glaive	Staves	24 P	2	9 ft.	Lethal	Average	
Halberd	Staves	30 P	3	9 ft.	Lethal	Average	
Lance	Staves	50 P	2	10 ft.	Lethal	Slow	
Scythe	Staves	10 P	2	Melee	Lethal	Average	
Longbow	Bow and Arrow	30 P	1	200 yds	Lethal	Slow	Precise
Recurve Bow	Bow and Arrow	45 P	1	230 yds	Lethal	Slow	Precise
Arrow	-	1 P	0	-		-	
Crossbow	Crossbows	60 P	1	40 yds	Lethal	Average	Precise, Simple
Arbalest	Crossbows	70 P	3	50 yds	Lethal	Glacial	Precise, Simple
Repeating Crossbow	Crossbows	100 P	2	90 yds	Lethal	Slow	Precise, Simple
Bolt	-	1 P	0	-		-	
Pocket Knife	Knives	8 P	0	Melee	Non-Lethal	Fast	Precise

Hunting Knife	Knives	12 P	0	Melee	Lethal	Fast	Precise
Dagger	Knives	6 P	0	Melee	Lethal	Fast	Precise
Throwing Knife	Knives	3 P	0	10 yds	Lethal	Fast	Precise

*Melee range is approximately arm's reach, plus a foot or two

Shields

Name	Skill	EP	Cost	Armor Die	Damage Dealt	Attack Speed
Buckler	Shields	1	40 P	d4	1 Minor	Slow
Full Shield	Shields	2	60 P	d6	2 Minor	Slow
Kite Shield	Shields	3	80 P	d8	3 Minor	Glacial
Tower Shield	Shields	4	100 P	d10	3 Minor	Glacial

Armor and Clothing

Name	ES	Cost	Armor Die
Leather Armor	2	60 P	d6
Chainmail	3	100 P	d8
Plate Mail	4	150 P	d10
Commoner's Clothing	0	10 P	0
Extravagant Clothing	0	30 P	0
Noble Clothing	1	50 P	0

Survival Gear

Name	Encumbrance Score	Cost
Backpack	-5	30 P

50 feet of Rope	1	60 P
Tent	2	50 P
Grappling Hook	1	20 P
Flint and Steel	0	5 P
Torch	1	3 P
Lockpick	0	1 P
Sleeping Bag	1	15 P
Saddle	5 (-8 if on a horse)	60 P
Canteen	0	7 P
Binoculars	0	10 P
Compass	0	8 P
Horse	0 (cannot be carried)	100 P

Food & Supplies

Name	Encumbrance Score	Cost
A day's rations	0	3 P
A good meal	1	5 P
A beer	1	2 P
A drink's worth of liquor	0	4 P
A bottle of wine	1	10 P

Drugs

Name	ES	Cost/dose	Potency	Duration	Effects
Gravedust	0	30 P	6	1 hour	Removes 2 Strain. Reduces Quickness by 1 die size

Bedlam	0	40 P	6	1 hour	Increases Quickness by 1 die size. Reduces Intellect by 1 die size.
Redsight	0	45 P	7	1d4 hours	Increases Spotting by 2 die sizes. Incurs 3 Strain.
Gloom	0	50 P	8	1d4 hours	Negates all effects of Strain. When done, incurs 4 Strain.
Kingmaker	0	100 P	10	1d4 hours	Character cannot gain Strain. When done, deals 1 Lethal Wound.

Services

Name	Cost
A carriage ride X miles	10 P per mile
A night's stay at an inn	30 P
Get a bit of gossip	5 P
A ship ride X miles	50 P per mile
Deliver a message X miles	30 P per mile
Hireling for a day	100 P
Toll	15 P

Weapon Modifier Words

Certain weapons listed on the above equipment table have special Modifier Words, represent in shorthand a sort of special rule that that weapon has. Modifier Words are used to encapsulate commonly-used rules that account for the special ways certain weapons behave in combat.

Below is a detailed list of every Weapon Modifier Word, and what they do.

Bludgeoning: The Weapon is a blunt weapon, capable of ignoring armor if the wielder is strong enough to apply a proper amount of force. When attacking with this Weapon, the character may roll their Strength die and add it to their Weapon Skill test.

Precise: The Weapon is an incredibly precise weapon which, when in the right hands, can easily make its way through weak points in armor, gaps in structures, and narrow openings for the kill. When attacking with this Weapon, the character may incur one Strain to ignore the Armor Dice of their target.

Simple: The Weapon is designed to be used by untrained commoners, and is extremely easy to understand. If a character attempts to make a Weapon Skill test with this Weapon, and they do not have any die size for that Weapon Skill, they may use the associated Innate Die with no penalty.

Throwing: This Weapon was designed to be thrown at foes, and thus, a character suffers no penalties for trying to throw this weapon at a foe (they still suffer penalties due to range).

Spells

When a character receives the Black Mark, and resurrects from death, they find themselves with the unique ability to perform acts of sorcery, to cast spells. The ability to warp reality as it's known is an extremely powerful one, and one unique to Blackmarked.

Blackmarked magic is not subtle, it does not consist of sleights of hand or minor misdirection. The spells of the Blackmarked are world-altering, bold, and nightmarish in nature. There is no healing magic, no magic of merriment or happiness. Magic, like the deity who created it, exists to destroy and to cause chaos.

All spells are given in the following format:

Spell Name: The spell's name

Sand Cost: The amount of Sand of Life a Blackmarked must expend when casting the spell

Speed: The Action Speed required to cast the spell

Domain: The domain of the spell. Blackmarked can only cast spells from their own Domain.

Description: A description of the effects of the spell

Berserker Strength

2 Weeks

Average

Destruction

The Blackmarked summons forth strength in their own body, channeling it to rapidly rip apart their muscles and rebuild them anew much stronger. The Blackmarked must pass a Strength test as their muscles are reformed, or else they will be crippled with pain for a turn. However, their muscles regrow much more powerful than before, gaining a d10 bonus to Strength and Quickness for 10 turns, or until the Blackmarked dispels it, at which point the Blackmarked's muscles return to their normal state. Doing this is extremely painful, however, and when the spell ends, the Blackmarked takes 3 Strain.

Blaze of Chaos

3 Weeks

Average

Destruction

The Blackmarked summons forth an inferno from their hands, casting fire in front of them in a 30 foot long, 15 foot wide cone. This cone continues to spray out for 3 turns, or until the Blackmarked dispels it, whichever comes first. This fire deals 1 Lethal Wound to any living creature it touches, as well as 1 more Lethal Wound per turn that the creature stays in the flames (unless the target is covered in water, or something else that doesn't combust, it can be assumed they ignite on contact).

Blood Explosion

3 Weeks

Special (see below)

Death

The Blackmarked uses their magic to boil the blood in a target, heating it up further and further until a point of no return. The Blackmarked may spend any amount of turns channeling Blood Explosion as a Glacial Action, focusing the power of their magic into the blood of a target within 60 feet. The Blackmarked may then release their energy as a Lightning Fast action, to deal 1 Lethal Wound per turn they spend channeling. If an enemy would be killed by Blood Explosion, they explode in a gory, bloody mess.

If the Blackmarked takes any Wounds while channeling the spell, the spell fails.

Command Weather

1 Month

Glacial

Destruction

The Blackmarked makes a decree to the heavens, and whatever may live within them, a declaration that demands the weather itself changes. Whatever may control the ways of the winds obeys, and the Blackmarked's wish comes true, changing the weather to the desired state in 2 turns. The Blackmarked may summon weather-based natural disasters (such as tornados), however they may not summon impossible weather (such as a hurricane whilst deep inland).

Dark Admission

1 Month

Fast

Manipulation

The Blackmarked reaches deep into the most shadowy parts of the mind of a target up to 20 feet away, and grabs and pulls at the darkest thought in their mind. The target then loudly blurts out the deepest, darkest secret they know, loud enough for all nearby to hear.

Deceptive Form

1 Week

Glacial

Madness

The Blackmarked creates a magical aura around them, altering the light around their body to change their appearance into that of a human being that the Blackmarked has seen before. The Blackmarked cannot assume the appearance of an imaginary person, or a person that they have only seen depictions of. This image is perfectly indistinguishable from the real person, and the Blackmarked's voice is change to match the target's voice (so long as the Blackmarked has heard the target speak, else the Blackmarked retains their own voice). It takes someone a TN 10 Spotting check to determine that the Blackmarked is not who they are disguised as. This form lasts for 1 day, or until it is dispelled by the Blackmarked.

Devour Soul

2 Weeks

Slow

Death

The Blackmarked takes the life force of another living creature, and consumes it, damning that creature to an afterlife of suffering, but invigorating their own power. The Blackmarked reaches out to a dead body, and grasps its freefloating soul, and consumes it. That soul can no longer be resurrected by any means, but the Blackmarked loses all Strain that they have accumulated.

Disappear

2 Weeks

Slow

Madness

The Blackmarked allows light to shine straight through them, rendering themselves, as well as all possessions on their person, completely invisible. The Blackmarked remains invisible for 20 turns, and while invisible, the Blackmarked has a d12 Sneaking die. The Blackmarked can still be heard at normal levels of clarity whilst invisible, however.

Disrupt Sensation

2 Weeks

Lightning Fast

Madness

The Blackmarked touches a target and, quick as a blink of the eye, extinguishes one of their senses. With that touch, the Blackmarked renders the target incapable of one of the following: sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch. This lack of sensation lasts for a week, or until the Blackmarked dispels it.

Earthshaker

1 Month

Slow

Destruction

The Blackmarked channels arcane power outwards through the soles of their feet, rupturing the earth around them and creating a small earthquake, which emanates outwards from their feet into a 50-foot radius. Those standing in the radius of the earthquake must make a TN 7 Acrobatics test every turn they stand in it, or fall to the ground. Structures that are in the earthquake shake, and weaker buildings are toppled if they remain in the earthquake for 3 turns. The earthquake lasts 5 turns, or when the Blackmarked dispels it.

Embed Lie

1 Month

Slow

Manipulation

The Blackmarked infiltrates the mind of the target, taking the time only to utter the faintest falsehood. This falsehood embeds itself in the target's mind until it is indistinguishable from truth. The Blackmarked embeds in their target's mind a single idea, simple enough to be expressed in a single, non-compound sentence, and the target believes that idea as truth. Anyone attempting to disprove that idea to the target takes a d8 penalty to their Diplomacy test.

Enshroud in Sleep

3 Weeks

Glacial

Manipulation

The Blackmarked snares the mind of a target with a simple touch, causing them to fall into deep sleep. This sleep is unlike any form of natural sleep, however, as no amount of stirring will wake the target from the sleep. The target will also not wake up of their own volition. Instead, the only thing that can wake the target from this sleep is either the will of the Blackmarked, or the death of the Blackmarked.

Excrete Poison

3 Days

Slow

Pestilence

The Blackmarked begins to excrete a viscous poison from his pores, and from his tongue. This poison has no effect on the Blackmarked themselves, but if it enters the bloodstream of a living creature, it causes a Lethal Wound, and incurs a d4 penalty to all of their tests.

False Doubt

2 Weeks

Fast

Manipulation

The Blackmarked embeds the seeds of doubt in the mind of a target up to 30 feet away, causing them to doubt some specific fact (defined by the Blackmarked) that they held to be true. The target will begin to seek out contradictions and contrary evidence to the fact, and anyone who

attempts a Charm or Diplomacy test on the target which either relies on, or reinforces, that doubted fact suffers a d6 penalty.

Feast Of Death

2 Weeks

Glacial

Death

The Blackmarked consumes the corpse of their fellow man, absorbing what's left of their life energy and putting it to use. The Blackmarked may make a Glacial action to consume the flesh of a corpse, in order to magically heal their most severe Wound, as long as Feast of Death is active. Feast of Death remains active for a day, or until the Blackmarked dispels it.

Forget

1 Week

Lightning Fast

Manipulation

The Blackmarked plucks a fresh thought from the mind of a target up to 10 feet away, causing them to temporarily forget what they were doing. The target forgets what they were just doing, causing them a minute's confusion as they try to remember. In combat, if the target has yet to act this turn, they forget what they were doing, forfeiting their action for the turn.

Form of Blades

2 Weeks

Average

Destruction

The Blackmarked uses their magic to modify their form drastically, compounding their blood into a material similar to steel, and jutting it forth from their skin, creating what appears to be a series of foot-long steel blades to extend from the skin of the Blackmarked by the dozens, all over their body. Any attackers using physical weaponry against the Blackmarked take a d6 penalty to their Attack action. On failure, their attacks are deflected by the blades.

These blades can obviously also be used as an offensive weapon. The Blackmarked can make Bare Hands attack to slash at foes with the blades, which deal 1 Lethal Wound per slash. These blades last for 10 turns, or until the Blackmarked dispels them.

Form of Flame

2 Weeks

Fast

Destruction

The Blackmarked is consumed by unholy flame, engulfing their whole body, as well as their weapon. However, this flame does not damage them, nor burn any items they have on their person. Instead, it acts as a powerful aura with multiple benefits. The flame aura ignites any flammable substance the Blackmarked touches. It also renders the Blackmarked unrecognizable,

and incurs a d6 penalty to the Attack action of anyone attempting to attack the Blackmarked, as they are blinded by the flames.

The Form of Flame aura remains for 1 hour, or until the Blackmarked dispels it, whichever comes first.

Form of Stone

2 Weeks

Average

Destruction

The Blackmarked transmutes his form to that of stone, replacing his permeable flesh with rigid rock. Any wounds the Blackmarked takes in this form are reduced to Non-Lethal Wounds.

Wounds taken while in the Form of Stone are removed when the Blackmarked returns to their natural form. This Form of Stone lasts for 5 turns, or until the Blackmarked dispels it.

Form of the Reaper

3 Months

Glacial

Death

The Blackmarked wraps themselves in magical energy, changing their appearance into that of the Reaper of myth, the invoker of death. The Blackmarked's appearance changes to a dark, ghost-like figure, lacking defined edges. The Blackmarked appears to be wearing a tattered black cloak, and their face is replaced by a human skull, scraps of flesh still apparent on it. The Blackmarked's current weapon is replaced with a Reaper's Scythe (described in the stat block below).

While the Blackmarked is in this form, they have the stats and abilities of a Reaper. Wounds that the Blackmarked has in their human form do not transfer to the Reaper form, and wounds incurred as a Reaper do not remain when the Reaper form ends. The Blackmarked does not have access to any of their inventory while in Reaper form.

The Blackmarked retains this Reaper form for 10 turns, when they would die, or when they dispel the form, all of which cause the Blackmarked to return to their human form.

Reaper

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d10	*	d4	d12	d12	*

Attacks: Scythe Swing (Fast, 2 Lethal Wounds)

*The Reaper has the same Intellect and Luck as the Blackmarked, as well as the same Skills and Weapon Skills

Tactics:

Consume Soul

Anything that the Reaper kills with its Reaper's Scythe has its soul reaped. One of the Reaper's Lethal Wounds is removed whenever the Reaper kills a target with its Scythe, and that target cannot be resurrected by any Blackmarked magic.

Form of the Spider

2 Months

Slow

Pestilence

The Blackmarked sprouts six spider legs from their back, ripping through the clothing on their backs. These spider legs last until dispelled, or 12 hours after casting, whichever comes first. The Blackmarked controls these spider legs with their mind, and may make an attack with the spike on the end of one as a Fast action, using Quickness in place of a Weapon Skill. These attacks have a range of 5 feet, and deal 2 Lethal Wounds.

Haunt Nightmares

2 Weeks

Glacial

Madness

The Blackmarked extends their subconscious forward into the mind of a sleeping person within 3 feet of them, allowing them to enter their dreams. Whilst in the dream, the Blackmarked has full control of the dream world, allowing them to manipulate everything in the dream, with the exception of the dreamer themselves, however they so choose. The dreamer cannot be killed, nor injured, in the dream. The dreamer also only loses half of the Strain they normally would from this Rest, due to the tortuous nature of the dream.

However, the dreamer, like anyone in a dream, will assume the dream is real while they are in it. However, the dreamer makes a TN 2 Intellect test every time the Blackmarked induces a change in the dream world that is unrealistic. If they pass, they realize they are dreaming, and may wake up when they choose. The Haunt continues until the Blackmarked willingly exits the dream, or when the dreamer wakes up.

Haunting Thought

1 Week

Slow

Madness

The Blackmarked infects the mind of a person with a single thought, no longer than a single, simple sentence. However, this thought is constantly at the forefront of that person's mind,

repeating like a beat, pounding in their mind over and over again. This thought cannot be dispelled, no matter how much the person tries. The thought even haunts the person's dreams.

What effects this Haunting Thought will have on its target are not set in stone, and how someone acts on their Thought, is up to them.

Image of Desire

2 Weeks

Fast

Madness

The Blackmarked reaches into a target's mind, and pulls from it the simple image of that which they covet most, allowing it to manifest in the form of an illusion. The Blackmarked targets a person within 40 feet, and conjures up an image of that person's greatest desire within 50 feet of that person. The image is a perfect recreation, and is a symbol if their desire is a more abstract concept (such as love, or to be accepted). The target of the illusion must pass a TN 7 Intelligence test to not be fooled by the Image. The Image lasts for 10 turns, or until the Blackmarked dispels it.

Image of Ruin

2 Weeks

Fast

Madness

The Blackmarked casts images over their target's eyes, haunting their mind with a vision of their own destruction, a violent, painful end. When the target is experiences the Image of their own Ruin, they immediately gain 3 Strain.

Incite Blood Rage

1 Week

Lightning Fast

Madness

The Blackmarked infects a mind with visions of slaughter and blood, with delusions of monsters setting out to hunt the target, and with the unrelenting thought that one must fight to survive. The Blackmarked selects a target within 30 feet, and forces them to take a TN 5 Intellect test. If the target fails, they succumb to Bloodthirst, as per the Perk. However, this Bloodthirst lasts 10 turns, or until the Blackmarked dispels it.

Kill

2 Months

Glacial

Death

The Blackmarked extends the energies of their magic to grasp the soul of an enemy, and then chokes the life from their foe. The Blackmarked selects a single target within 20 feet, and spends their whole action channeling their magic into the target. To perform Kill, the Blackmarked must

spend two consecutive Glacial actions channeling the spell. If they make it to the end of the second action without taking damage, the target instantly dies.

Manipulate Earth

1 Month

Slow

Destruction

The Blackmarked screams an unspoken command to the stone around them, and the stone and dirt bows to their subjugation, following the Blackmarked's commands. For the next turn, the Blackmarked may command all stone, dirt, and rock within 20 feet of them, to change and move as the Blackmarked chooses. After this turn, the command is relinquished, and the earthen constructs will collapse.

Miasma

1 Month

Glacial

Pestilence

The Blackmarked calls forth a fog of disease, large enough to cover a few city blocks. In that fog is the disease of the Blackmarked's choice, between either the Black Scourge, Ebola, or Dysentery. The Miasma lingers for a week given still winds (and as little as a day with strong winds). Anyone who inhales the Miasma must make a DN 2 Healthiness test or contract that disease.

Mindsnap

1 Month

Fast

Madness

The Blackmarked penetrates the mind of a target, grasping at the thoughts that bind them together into an individual and ripping them apart, driving the target to ruin. The Blackmarked forces a target within 50 feet to make a TN 9 Intellect test. If they fail, they are instantly driven insane by the Blackmarked's magic.

Mindsnare

3 Months

Slow

Manipulation

The Blackmarked ensnares the mind of a more feeble human, embedding their desires in it like a claw, and dominate their weak being. The Blackmarked snares the mind of a target, and forces them to pass a TN 6 Intellect test. If they fail, the Blackmarked dominates the target's mind, rendering them under the complete control of the Blackmarked. While the target is dominated, the target follows all of the Blackmarked's commands to the best of their ability without disobedience.

The Blackmarked may choose to begin the domination of their target immediately, or they may choose to make the domination latent, allowing the target free will after casting the spell. If the Blackmarked makes their domination latent, they may begin dominating the target at any time with no test or action required. Domination lasts until the Blackmarked dispels it, or when the Blackmarked dies.

Monstrous Vermin

2 Months

Slow

Pestilence

The Blackmarked channels the power of The King of Rats to enchant a vermin creature, specifically either a Rat, Spider, or Bat, and grow them to massive size. The enchanted creature is healed of all of their Wounds, and remains Monstrous until they are killed. The stats for each Monstrous Vermin are given in the Bestiary.

Phantom Selves

3 Weeks

Slow

Madness

The Blackmarked manipulates the light around them to conjure forth two exact mirror duplicates of the Blackmarked, identical in every form. These mirror duplicates are summoned anywhere within 10 feet of the Blackmarked, and the Blackmarked can control these duplicates independently of the Blackmarked (meaning, they do not need to exactly mirror the Blackmarked). However, these mirror duplicates cannot speak, and they are also completely intangible. These duplicates last for 10 turns, or until the Blackmarked dispels them.

Phylactery

2 Years

Special (see below)

Death

The Blackmarked performs the ultimate heinous sin, and rips their own soul from their body. They then place their own soul in an object they are currently touching. The object in question cannot be larger than a cubic foot, and must be a single object (i.e it cannot be a pile or collection of something). The Blackmarked's soul is then transferred to that object, rendering the physical body of the Blackmarked completely immortal. Any and all injuries sustained by the Blackmarked will fail to kill them, even if they are chopped into pieces (in this case, the pieces will coalesce and reform into the whole body over a period of an hour).

However, the Blackmarked is not immune to death. The Blackmarked will still die when their Sands run out, and the destruction of the Phylactery object itself will cause instant death for the Blackmarked.

If Phylactery is cast in combat, it is always the last action in a turn to resolve.

Possession

6 Months

Glacial

Manipulation

The Blackmarked assumes an incorporeal form, and enters the mind of a lesser human or animal, ensnaring it and taking control. The Blackmarked no longer remains their own person, instead dissolving into a mist and entering the head of a target within 10 feet, either a human or animal target. That target loses all control of their body, and the Blackmarked takes complete control. The Blackmarked becomes the dominant personality and intelligence (meaning that all of a Blackmarked's mental Innates and Skills remain the same), while simultaneously controlling the body of another (meaning that the body's Innates and Skills are used for any physical activities).

This Possession remains until the Blackmarked dispels it, at which point the Blackmarked exits the target and reconstitutes themselves within 5 feet of their host, or until the host body is killed, at which point the Blackmarked is also killed. The Blackmarked can cast spells while Possessing another, and the Possessed host does not exhibit the Black Mark.

Profane Mutation

1 Year

Glacial

Pestilence

The Blackmarked takes a living creature and channels dark energies into it, corrupting their very being and mutating their form into a more monstrous form. The Blackmarked grabs a living creature, including a person, and channels this energy into them. Once the energy has been channeled, the mutation takes another full turn to complete, as the target's body convulses and morphs. Once that turn ends, the mutation is complete, and the target has been irreversibly turned into a monster.

The type of monster that a creature mutates into depends on what sort of creature the spell is targeting. The available mutations for each target is given below, and the Blackmarked may choose amongst possible mutations when they cast the spell.

Human: Grendel, Strigoi, Deathless

Dog/Wolf: Fenrir, Hellhound

Horse: Phantom Rider

Cat: Dire Lion

Bird: Banshee, Strix

Cattle: Minotaur

Spider: Myrmidon

All monsters are mortal and exist in the material world (unlike the Executioner, which is made out of non-terrestrial material). Monsters will not attack Blackmarked unless provoked.

Resist Death

Variable

Lightning Fast

Death

The Blackmarked experiences the brink of death, either through violence, poison, or other causes, and as they feel their soul slip away into oblivion once more, they reach out with the power of their magic and firmly grasp at the waking world, resisting the grasp of death. When the Blackmarked would die, they may instantly cast Resist Death to remove all of their Lethal Wounds. This spell costs 3 months of Sand for every Lethal Wound it removes.

Step Through Darkness

3 Weeks

Fast

Manipulation

The Blackmarked takes a single step forward before they go up in a puff of black smoke, accompanied by a pungent smell of rot and a loud shrieking noise. At the same time, the Blackmarked reappears somewhere else in a similar fashion. The point to which the Blackmarked travels may be any physical location, unobstructed, which the Blackmarked has been to previously, with no limitations of range.

Summon Executioner

1 Month

Glacial

Death

The Blackmarked summons forth an Executioner from the realm of the King of Rats, granting it a material form. The Executioner is summoned forth in some clear area within 20 feet of the Blackmarked, and remains in the physical realm until it is killed. The Executioner obeys all of the Blackmarked's orders as best as possible.

Executioners are hulking humanoids, with leathery dark purple skin. The Executioner wears black leather armor, stained in blood and other mysterious fluids. The Executioner's face is covered by a dirty potato sack with eyeholes ripped into it, revealing dark red eyes. The Executioner is summoned with a massive axe.

The Executioner is given in the Beastiary.

Swarm of Flies

1 Week

Slow

Pestilence

The Blackmarked calls forth a Swarm of Flies, from the nooks and crannies around them. This Swarm of Flies follows the spoken commands of the Blackmarked without question, to the best of their abilities.

Swarm of Rats

1 Week

Slow

Pestilence

The Blackmarked calls forth a Swarm of Rats, from the nooks and crannies around them. This Swarm of Rats follows the spoken commands of the Blackmarked without question, to the best of their abilities.

Swarm of Spiders

1 Week

Slow

Pestilence

The Blackmarked calls forth a Swarm of Spiders, from the nooks and crannies around them. This Swarm of Spiders follows the spoken commands of the Blackmarked without question, to the best of their abilities.

Toxic Stinger

1 Month

Fast

Pestilence

The Blackmarked launches a long, sharp needle from their body (typically from the mouth or from their hand, but it's the Blackmarked's choice where the Stinger comes from), which flies forward with a range of 50 feet . The Stinger deals one Non-Lethal Wound, and anyone Wounded by the Toxic Stinger must make a TN 2 Healthiness test. If they fail, they contract Black Scourge.

Unholy Rebirth

6 Months

Glacial

Death

The Blackmarked reaches deep into the aether of death and grasps a lost soul, wrenching it back from its slumber and stuffs it into the corpse in front of them, with no regards to the thought of if this body was the soul's original soul. The Blackmarked reaches for a soul of a person (they must at least be able to name the person), and places it inside of a corpse that the Blackmarked is currently touching (the corpse must have died a maximum of one year ago). The soul now inhabits that body, and the soul is alive once more, with the knowledge and personality of the soul, but the physical features of the body.

Unholy Wilting

1 Month

Glacial

Pestilence

The Blackmarked emanates an aura of wilting from their body, with a radius of 1 mile. All living creatures feel a sense of general malaise while in this aura, and all plants begin to wilt, and will die once they've spent about a day within the Wilting. The aura of the Unholy Wilting remains for one week, or once the Blackmarked dispels it, whichever comes first.

Virulent Growths

2 Weeks

Fast

Pestilence

The Blackmarked rapidly grows a series of green, throbbing pustules on their body, host to the Black Scourge. When a foe successfully strikes the Blackmarked with an attack, these pustules burst, causing everyone within 5 feet of the Blackmarked to make a TN 8 Healthiness test or contract the Black Scourge. If unbroken, the pustules remain for 12 hours after casting before receding, or until dispelled.

Voice of Authority

2 Weeks

Lightning Fast

Manipulation

The Blackmarked hides their unholy magic within the sound waves of their voice, subtly manipulating those that hear their commands. For the next turn, the Blackmarked gets a d12 Diplomacy die whenever they attempt to command people to do something.

Voice of Destruction

1 Week

Fast

Destruction

The Blackmarked channels their dark magic through their vocal chords, amplifying their voice to monstrous levels. The Blackmarked's voice becomes much, much louder for 5 turns, amplifying it to the point where it can be heard from a mile away. The Blackmarked can incur one Strain in anyone they threaten in this voice, as well as invigorate any of their allies by uttering motivation with this voice, granting allies a d6 bonus on their next action.

Wave of Force

1 Week

Fast

Destruction

The Blackmarked calls forth a powerful, invisible wave of pure force from their hands, capable of shaking buildings and knocking down foes. The force emanates forward in a 30 foot cone from one of the Blackmarked's palms. Any people caught in this cone must make a TN 10 Strength test, or be thrown in the direction of wave up to 60 feet. The Wave of Force is enough force to blow a

hole in a building wall, and if it destroys enough structurally necessary architecture, it can topple a building.

Wipe Memory

1 Week

Manipulation

Lightning Fast

The Blackmarked uses their magic to purge the memory of a target, causing them to enter a state of complete tabula rasa. When a Blackmarked wipes a target's memory, they erase all of their personal memories of experiences they have had, but leave all of their skills untouched. The target forgets their identity, their relationships with other people, as well as all of their life experiences.

Worsen Wound

1 Week

Average

Death

The Blackmarked channels their energies into an injury on the body of a target up to 10 feet away. In doing so, they clear up blood clotting, exacerbate fractures and breaks, and twist nerves into knots, generally making a wound worse. One of the target's Non-Lethal Wounds becomes a Lethal Wound (this doesn't force the target to make a dice roll vs. death).

Combat:

Kaenis is a world shaped by violence. Kingdoms rise and fall not by political entropy, but by armies running the previous leader through with a sword. Monarchs do not peacefully pass away in their sleep, but gurgle blood as an assassin slits their throat, or choke after the duke's poison begins to take effect. Kaenis is a dangerous place, and those that cannot deal with violence are frequently destroyed by it.

Combat is a special situation in *Blackmarked*, easily defined as a situation in which one or more parties seek to take violent action against one or more other parties. Combat in *Blackmarked* follows the following steps.

1. (Optional) Surprise Step
2. Queue Step
3. Resolve Step
4. Repeat

1. (Optional) Surprise Step

The Surprise Step is an optional step in combat which only occurs whenever one of the attacking parties is unaware of the other party's attacking intent. This includes if one party isn't aware of the existence of the other party, or if simply one party isn't expecting the other party to attack.

When the Surprise Step occurs, all combatants who are aware of combat (i.e the combatants who are doing the surprising, not the ones getting surprised) may queue up a single action per combatant. Then, all actions are resolved, from the fastest to the slowest, as they normally would.

Once all Actions during the Surprise Step resolve, which presumably notifies the other combatants of the presence and intent of the attack, combat continues as per usual.

2. Queue Step

The Queue Step occurs at the start of a round of combat. Every combatant during this step has the option to queue up an action, indicating the action that they are going to take during this turn (a turn is the length of time it takes all combatants to perform 1 action, and takes approx. 30 seconds). Players needn't queue actions in any particular order. The GM also secretly queues up an action for each NPC acting in the combat (This can be accomplished by writing the actions down on a piece of paper). Each character may only queue up a single action.

A character may also choose to push an action, much as they would push a dice roll, by spending 2 Strain. By doing so, the character's action moves up one in the order of actions. A character may only push an action a maximum of two times.

3. Resolve Step

Once every combatant has queued an action, all queued actions between all of the participants are revealed. Every action has an assigned speed to it. The Action Speeds, in order from fastest to slowest, are Lightning Fast, Fast, Average, Slow, and Glacial. Thus, Lightning Fast Actions resolve first, then Fast actions, then so on, until Glacial Actions are resolved. If there is one or more action of the same speed queued, then those characters who are tied roll their Quickness die, and they then act in descending order of this roll's results.

4. Repeat

Steps 2 and 3 are repeated continuously until combat is over, usually due to all but a single side of the fight being eliminated.

Common Actions:

Attack

Variable Speed (See below)

Contested Weapon Skill vs Quickness (see below)

Most all melee and ranged attacks are the same, in that they all use the appropriate Weapon Skill for the Skill test, and use the Speed of the Weapon to determine Action Speed. The exceptions are unusual weapons, as well as using typically Ranged weapons as a Melee Weapon, and vice versa. All of these cases use the Improvisation Weapon Skill. This attack is a Contested Test against the target's Quickness and any Armor Dice of the Armor the target is wearing.

Attacking with a ranged weapon, such as a Bow, Gun, or Darts, usually consumes ammunition. For a Gun, attacking consumes a bullet, and once every bullet in the Magazine is consumed (Magazine size for every gun is listed in its stats), it must be Reloaded to fire again. A Bow consumes an arrow when it is used, and a new arrow must be Nocked to use the Bow again. A Dart is completely consumed by a throw, and must be pulled out of the target to be used again.

Attacks performed against an unaware target (that is, during the Surprise Step) gain a d10 bonus.

If a character is mounted, they gain a d4 bonus on their Weapon Skill test.

Throw

Average Speed

Contested Weapon Skill test (See below)

Characters will commonly need to throw an object, either lobbing it to an ally for them to catch, or trying to hit a target with it. Throw is used for a character throwing any object other than Darts (which is accounted in the Darts skill, and thus is considered an attack). If a character throws an object, it is a TN 2 Athleticism check, with a d4 penalty if the target is more than 10 feet away, d6 penalty if it is more than 20 feet away, and so on. Throwing an object is an Average Speed action.

If the character is attempting to throw a weapon not normally designed to be thrown, such as a Sword or an Axe, they instead use that weapon skill, with a d8 penalty, on top of the range penalties.

If the character is attempting to throw an object for someone to catch, then the test becomes a bit more complicated. If the thrower succeeds their Athleticism check, then the catcher must make their own TN 2 Athleticism check to catch it, or else they fail to catch it. If the thrower fails their Athleticism check, then the catcher still may make a TN 2 Athleticism check to catch the object, but they suffer a d8 penalty.

Cast Spell

Variable Speed (See below)

No test required

Blackmarked are able to cast all sorts of vile and unholy spells, most of which are extremely useful in combat scenarios. The Speed with which a Blackmarked casts a spell depends on the spell itself: some spells are extremely fast, while others are excruciatingly slow. No hand gestures

of utterances are required for any spell unless otherwise stated, although some Blackmarked do like to perform a bit of theatrics for their spells, but this is only for personal enjoyment.

Whenever a Blackmarked successfully casts a spell, that spell's cost in Sands of Life are reduced from the Blackmarked. If this would put the Blackmarked at 0 Sand, they die instantly.

Move

Average Speed

Quickness Test

Moving is a simple action that occurs at Average Speed. In a single Move action, a character may move up to their maximum Move Speed in feet. If the character is mounted, they move their mount's maximum Move Speed in feet instead.

Run

Fast

TN 2 Quickness test

Running is the simple act of moving faster than usual. In a single Run action, a character may move up to their maximum Move Speed + 20 in feet. If the character is mounted, they move their mount's maximum Move Speed + 30 in feet instead. If a character makes a Run action, and then makes a Melee Attack action afterwards, that attack deals an extra Non-Lethal Wound if it connects. If that Run was performed while Mounted, the attack deals an extra Lethal Wound instead.

Draw/Sheathe Weapon

Normal

No test Required

This action involves bringing an equipped weapon to hand and readying it for use, or vice versa.

Reload/Nock

Slow

No test Required

Guns need to be reloaded once all of the loaded bullets are shot, and archers need to nock new arrows to fire them from their bows. This action is the one used so that these ranged warriors can ready their weapons for more attacks.

Tackle

Normal

Contested Strength test

Tackling is the act of throwing one's entire body at an opponent with the intent of knocking them to the ground. In a Tackle action, both the tackler and the target make a Contested Strength test. If the tackler succeeds, they Pin the target to the ground, cancelling any actions they had queued up that turn. If the tackler fails, the target remains upright, and the tackler takes 1 Strain.

The target remains Pinned until the pinning character willingly cedes, or until the target successfully makes a Break Free action.

Characters get a d6 bonus to Tackle tests if their last Action was to Run.

Leaping Strike

Fast

Contested Weapon Skill test (See below)

A character may attempt to leap from a moving mount and use that momentum to deal a powerful blow to an opponent. A character may only attempt a Leaping Strike if they spend their last turn performing a Run action while mounted, are within Melee Range of the target, and are wielding an Axe, Club, Knife, Sword, Staff, or just using their Bare Hands.

When a character performs a Leaping Strike, they dismount from their mount and make a Contested test of their appropriate Weapon Skill with a d10 bonus, versus the target's Quickness and Armor Dice. If they succeed, they deal damage to the opponent and land on their feet adjacent to them. If they fail, they deal no damage, and they incur a Non-Lethal Wound as they fall to the ground.

A character performing a Leaping Strike may choose not to add the d10 bonus to their Weapon Skill test in exchange for the ability to knock a foe down. If they succeed their test in this case, they Pin the enemy to the ground as well as doing damage.

Break Free

Normal

Contested Strength test

If a character is Pinned, they may make a Contested Strength test against the Strength of the character pinning them in an attempt to free themselves. If they succeed, they push the pinning character off of them, and both characters are now just lying prone on the ground. If they fail, they remain Pinned.

Get Up

Slow

No test Required

Getting up is the simple act of moving from a prone position on the ground back to a standing position.

Heal

Special

TN 5 Healing test

Healing is an extremely slow process, so slow that it cannot be successfully done in the middle of a combat scenario. Instead, the process of healing sometimes takes hours to perform, and even

longer to finally recover. If a character successfully performs a Heal action, they “treat” one Lethal Wound on their target, meaning that it will fully recover in d6 days.

Parry & Riposte

Fast

Contested Quickness vs Weapon Skill test

A character may make themselves ready for an oncoming attack from an opponent. In order to Parry, the character must be wielding a bladed weapon (an Axe, Knife, or Sword) or a Shield. When a character declares that they are Parrying, they are really readying themselves to parry an attack this turn. If a character who is Parrying is attacked, that character then makes an Opposed Quickness test against the attacker’s Weapon Skill.

If the character who is Parrying succeeds, the incoming attack is deflected, and the character may immediately make an Attack action against their attacker. If the attacker succeeds, the attack continues as usual.

Regardless of if the Parry is successful or fails, a character may only Parry one attack per turn. A character ends Parry automatically at the end of the turn, and must make another Parry action to parry the next turn.

Stand Ready

Fast

No test required

A character may Stand Ready to prepare themselves to strike a foe who enters their range. When a character Stands Ready, they stand, weapon drawn, and wait for an enemy to enter their range. Whenever an enemy would enter the range of the character’s weapon, the character may opt to immediately interrupt the movement with an Attack action. A character may only make one Attack action per turn in this way.

Combat Dodge

Fast

TN 5 Quickness test

The character makes a single quick motion, be it a jump, slide, or roll, which allows them to quickly get out of the way of enemy attacks. If the character successfully performs their Quickness test, they automatically dodge the first attack against them this turn. This effect does not carry over to the next turn.

Dispel

Lightning Fast

No test

The Blackmarked character instantly cancels the ongoing effect of one of the spells they have cast.

Mount/Dismount

Normal

No test

The character either mounts a tamed animal right next to them, or gets off of a tamed animal they are currently mounted on, landing in a spot adjacent.

Health, Death, and Dying

Dying is extremely mundane in Kaenis. If one doesn't die from the Black Scourge or another disease, it's likely you'll die by the sword, perhaps of an invading army, perhaps of a ruthless highwayman, and perhaps by a simple psychopath. In Kaenis, one either brings death, or experiences it.

Blackmarked has an additive health system, centered around *Wounds*, which are bestowed upon the character whenever they take hits. Wounds come in two different types: Non-Lethal and Lethal.

Non-Lethal Wounds are incapable of killing a player character and instead represent the sort of injuries we might get on a day-to-day basis. They represent an inconvenience, and maybe a health risk if they escalate, but generally they're pretty mundane. Lethal Wounds, however, risk a character's life every time one is incurred.

Every time a character suffers a Non-Lethal Wound, they immediately take a point of Strain.

Whenever a character incurs a Lethal Wound, they must make a TN 2 Healthiness test with a Xd6 penalty, where X is the number of Lethal Wounds they have. If they fail, they die. If they succeed, they still take a point of Strain. If a character takes multiple Lethal Wounds at once, they only make a single Healthiness test.

If a character dies, their options are fairly limited. Some Blackmarked have the ability to raise the dead in some way or another, but doing so puts a massive strain on them, so all but the most selfless sorcerers will probably avoid doing so for any old corpse (not to mention the fact that acts of magic might bring about the attention of the Inquisition).

If a character dies due to the Scourge, there's a chance that the King of Rats will choose to resurrect them as a Blackmarked to fulfill some dark purpose. For that to happen, though, both the GM and the player controlling the character should be OK with the character undergoing that transformation. If either disagrees, the character should probably stay dead.

More often than not, though, a dead character will stay dead. Whenever a player character dies, it is recommended that the player simply create a new character, roughly equivalent in progression to their old character. It is up to that player to determine who this new character is, and how they integrate into the world already established. Characters might die in the middle of a session, and

for the purposes of not having that player sit idle for the entire session, it's recommended that players have at least a vague idea of a replacement character ready to go at all times.

Strain and Rest

Blackmarked characters must keep track of how much damage they are taking to avoid death, but exhaustion is another serious threat to a character's survival. A character's exhaustion is measured in how much *Strain* they have taken. Strain is incurred by Wounds, as well as characters who Push their tests. Strain represents both physical tiredness and soreness, as well as mental and emotional exhaustion.

A character's Healthiness die determines 3 relevant thresholds involving Strain, as shown in the following table. When a character has Strain equal to or greater than their Tired threshold, for all Innate and Skill tests, they roll a die one size smaller than the die size they would normally roll. When a character has Strain equal to or greater than their Exhausted threshold, for all Innate and Skill tests, they roll a die two sizes smaller than the die size they would normally roll instead.

When a character has Strain equal to or greater than their Pass Out threshold, the character passes out from sheer exhaustion. The character rolls their Healthiness die, and remains unconscious for that many hours. When they wake up, they lose 2 Strain for every hour they were unconscious.

Healthiness base die	Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
d4	4 Strain	6 Strain	8 Strain
d6	6 Strain	9 Strain	12 Strain
d8	8 Strain	12 Strain	16 Strain
d10	10 Strain	15 Strain	20 Strain
d12	12 Strain	18 Strain	24 Strain

Other than passing out from exhaustion, the only way a character may get rid of Strain is by *Resting*. Resting is simply the process of getting a good night's sleep, and recovering the energy they used up during the day's events. The TN for every Rest test is always 5. However, unlike most tests, Rest tests do not use a die size of an Innate or Skill. Instead, the die used for a Rest test is determined by the conditions in which the character is sleeping, as given below:

Sleeping Conditions	Die Size of the Rest Test
In the wilderness, with nothing more than	d4

simple bedding	
In the wilderness, in a camp	d6
In an average inn	d8
In a nice inn or one's own home	d10
In a luxurious inn, or a very nice home	d12

The bonuses and penalties for a Rest test are given below:

Condition	Rest Test Bonus/Penalty
The "Well Rested" condition of a character's vice is met	Increase Rest die size by one
The character has untreated Lethal Wounds	Decrease Rest die size by one
The character recently underwent significant emotional trauma	Decrease Rest die size by one
The character is uncertain about the safety of the place they are sleeping	Decrease Rest die size by one
The character is sleeping for less than six hours	Decrease Rest die size by one

If a character succeeds at their Rest test, then they may remove all of their Strain, and any Lethal Wounds they have which have been successfully treated with a Healing test turn into Non-Lethal Wounds. On top of this, all of their Non-Lethal Wounds heal completely. If a character fails their Rest test, they lose 1d6 Strain instead, and none of their Wounds heal.

Adventurers cannot simply adventure 24/7 without stopping, that's simply not how human beings work. When characters are going about their day, performing feats of danger and bravery for prestige, coin, or simply because it's right, they need to seriously consider how they're going to get a good night's sleep that night. There's no penalty for simply not Resting, nor is there a penalty for Resting at irregular hours. However, the longer a character goes without Resting, the more Strain they'll accumulate, and that means they'll be worse at everything they do.

Indulging a Vice is a good way to ensure that a character gets a good night's sleep, even if doing so can occasionally put a character in a tricky spot. However, Strain has the ability to render a character utterly useless, and if a heavy night of drinking or some lecherous behavior is necessary to remedy that, what's the harm?

This downtime as characters rest isn't just valuable mechanically, it's also valuable narratively. This is time that the party can converse and talk as friends, instead of simply combatants on the same team. This is also valuable time to explore the world, talk with the locals, and generally do things that don't involve travel and murder.

Adventure

As characters explore the world, following all manner of leads for adventure, they will surely face a wide variety of scenarios, settings, and situations in which they must learn to adapt. This section of the rulebook is dedicated to providing rules for all manner of situations, ensuring that every session of Blackmarked can be unique and interesting.

Cold and Snow

Kaenis is located in the southern hemisphere of the planet, meaning that the southern end of the continent, deep in Ulok Tribelands, is subject to intense cold, as are the peaks of the various mountain ranges that run through the continent. Attempting to survive in this cold is extremely dangerous, and anyone attempting to do anything in the deep cold must be ready to survive it.

In the severe cold and snow, characters can only get out of the cold by getting inside, into a well-insulated building, or perhaps deep underground. While out in the cold, characters must wear heavy arctic clothing with good insulation. Otherwise, every minute, they will incur one Non-Lethal Wound.

Furthermore, heavy snow will also greatly disable a character. In heavy snowfall, moving around is difficult, and any Move actions move one Speed slower as a result. On top of that, the heavy snow makes it hard to see, and all Spotting checks take a d6 penalty. Using any sort of ranged weapon also suffers a d6 penalty.

Darkness

Adventure doesn't always take place in the bright and cheery light of the noon sun. Frequently, characters will find themselves out in the middle of the night, in a cave, or in other dark locations.

When characters are dealing in heavy darkness, they suffer a d8 penalty to Acrobatics, Athleticism, Hunting, Identification, and Spotting, but a d8 bonus to Disguise, Pickpocketing, and Sneaking.

Disease

The health and sanitation standards of a society such as Kaenis are extremely low, and as a result, disease runs rampant. From minor bugs to the Scourge, which leaves piles of corpses in the street, the ever-encroaching influence of disease can always be felt, especially in tight quarters such as big cities.

The GM may decide that a character runs the risk of contracting a disease in certain situations, such as when encountering vermin, living in crowded cities, or coming into contact with the sick.

In these instances, the GM will have the character make a Healthiness test against the disease's Potency as a TN. If they succeed, they resist the disease. If they fail, they contract it, and feel the disease's effects until its Duration ends.

Disease	Transmitters	Potency	Duration	Effects
Black Scourge	Contact with rats, bodily fluids	7	1 week +1d6 days	Every day, make a TN 6 Healthiness test. On failure, incur a Lethal Wound. Strain may never go below 5.
Ebola	Bodily fluids	8	1d6 weeks	Every day, make a TN 4 Healthiness test. On failure, incur a Lethal Wound.
Dysentery	Infection of a wound	6	1d4 weeks	Rest die reduced by two sizes (minimum d4)
Malaria	Mosquito bites	8	2d6 days	Strain may never go below 6.
Bubonic Plague	Flea bites	10	1 week	Every day, make a TN 5 Healthiness test. On failure, incur a Lethal Wound.

Drugs

There are plenty of drugs circulating around Kaenis, some refined from naturally occurring plants and animals, and others synthesized in the labs of apothecaries and chemists. No matter the origin, these drugs are highly valued for their effects and potency, and usually are considered illegal and immoral by governments and the Church.

Whenever a character ingests, inhales, or otherwise uses a dose of a drug, they must make a Healthiness test against the drug's Potency. If they fail, they are affected by the drug, and suffers its effects. If they succeed, the dosage was not enough, and they simply are not affected. Taking multiple doses at once incurs a d6 penalty for every dose beyond the first.

The effects of a drug last as long as its Duration as given, with every additional dose take beyond the first adding an extra hour to the Duration.

Drunkenness

The tavern is a staple of fantasy storytelling, and in Kaenis, drinking is a common way to escape the misery of the common world. Soldiers come home to drown their wartime memories in booze, noblemen make deals and backstab over glasses of wine, and holy ceremonies would not be complete without holy libations.

When drinking, there's no real mechanical distinction between types of drinks, rather the distinction lies in the form of number of drinks. A single "dosage" of alcohol is a beer, a glass of wine, or a single mixed drink. It is also possible to have a strong drink, such as a double mixed drink, or a particularly strong spirit.

When drinking, players must keep track of every drink they consume, counting strong drinks as two. Every hour since finishing their first drink, the player may subtract a single drink from that running total. Whenever a player drinks, they must make a TN 2 Drinking test, with a -Xd6 penalty, with X equalling that running total of drinks. If they fail, the character becomes drunk.

When a character is drunk, quite a bit happens. They obtain a d6 bonus to Strength and Charm tests, but a d6 penalty to Intellect, Quickness, and Healthiness tests. Furthermore, they suffer a d6 penalty to Acrobatics, Athleticism, Healing, Hunting, Knowledge, Lockpicking, Music, Pickpocketing, Sneaking, Spotting, Survival, and Swimming tests, as well as to all Weapon Skill tests.

A character sobers up when their running total of drinks becomes zero.

Fire

In a society where many structures are still composed of wood, and where enemies frequently hide in woods and forests, fire is a valuable tool in battle. Furthermore, fire is an extremely valuable tool, used for illumination, cooking meat, and simply to signify a point of social gathering.

Fire will attempt to burn anything it comes in contact with. Normally, objects need to be flammable to catch fire (such materials include wood, cloth, gunpowder, leaves, and moss). However, targets can be covered in flammable oil to make them easier to burn.

When a target is aflame, they continue to burn, suffering one Lethal Wound every round they remain alight. Fire will burn for 1 round on a nonflammable substance, or 2d6 rounds on a flammable substance (introducing more material for the fire to burn will cause it to burn another 2d6 rounds). Materials which are lit will burn away as the fire rages on.

Gambling

Gambling is a fairly common pastime in bars, amongst friends, or simply in situations where people want to take the edge off. The social environment, the adrenaline rush of the risk, and the potential payout are more than enough to ensure gambling survives its reputation as a hobby of ill-repute.

It's possible to actually play out a game of chance at the table, but unless every player character is involved, this is likely to get boring for those not playing. Instead, in the interest of keeping a game going, gambling can simply be abstracted as a Contested Luck test between all gamblers. Whoever rolls the highest wins the round and gets the pot.

If a character wants to cheat, doing so is a Contested Pickpocketing test against all other gamblers' Spotting (after all, the act of subtly manipulating dice, cards, and other game pieces isn't too different to subtly manipulating objects in someone's pocket). If the character succeeds, they automatically win the round. If they fail, someone else at the table notices, and they probably won't be happy. If multiple characters successfully cheat, they must make a Contested Pickpocketing test against each other to see who cheats better and wins the round.

Pinned

Pinning is the act of holding a character to the ground, a wall, or another solid surface such that they are unable to move. Whenever a character is Pinned, they may not perform any actions other than a Break Free action, until they either successfully perform a Break Free action or the object Pinning them allows them to be free.

Poisons

Engaging in mortal combat with your foes is dangerous. Even if you win, the injuries you incur could debilitate or even kill you. So, if you're a killer with no sense of honor and a desire to do your work in a more devious way, you can turn to poisons to efficiently and mercilessly kill your foes without even having to get your hands dirty.

Using Poison is a relatively simple task. Most poisons are effective either ingested or applied to weapons, so properly using poison simply requires making a Poison test against the poison of choice's Complexity. Some poisons are much easier to apply, while others require careful application, lest they be noticed or worse, accidentally affect the assassin who is using them.

If the poisoner succeeds at their Poison test, they successfully apply the poison to their weapon, or sneak it into a meal or drink, depending on the situation. The result of failure is up to the Game Master. Maybe the poison is applied, but is obvious (granting those who would look for it a bonus on their Spotting test to find it), or maybe the poisoner accidentally poisons themselves.

As far as being on the receiving end of poison, noticing poison requires a Spotting test against the poison's Subtlety. If the character succeeds, they notice the poison, otherwise they are completely unaware.

Once poison has been noticed, however, it takes a Poison test against the poison's Complexity to correctly identify what type of poison it is. Identifying the poison that has already been consumed by an individual adds a d6 penalty to the test, as the character must try to extrapolate the poison's identity from its symptoms.

If a character consumes something that is poisoned, or is dealt a Wound with a poisoned weapon, they become poisoned. When a character is poisoned, they roll a Healthiness test against the poison's Lethality. If they succeed, their body manages to suppress the effects of the poison, and nothing happens. If they fail, the poison takes hold, and its effects begin to manifest

Treating poisoning is an extremely difficult affair. Doing so requires a Healing test against the higher of the poison's Complexity and Subtlety, as a doctor attempts to stop the effects. If the doctor does not know what kind of poison they are treating, they suffer an additional d6 penalty to this test. On success, the doctor is able to treat the poison and nullify its effects. On failure, the character remains poisoned, and the effects of the poison continue.

A table of sample poisons is below.

Poison	Complexity	Subtlety	Lethality	Effect
Ratshade	5	6	4	Knocks the subject unconscious for d6 hours
Chokeweed	5	7	3	Causes severe choking. Disables a character for d4 turns and incurs d4 Strain
Amaria	6	6	6	Causes the target to incur 2 Strain every hour for d10 hours.
Slaughterroot	6	6	5	Incurs a Lethal Wound.
Winterweed	7	8	8	Causes the target to incur 4 Strain every hour for d6 hours. If the target would Pass Out due to this Strain, they die instead.
Miranda's Kiss	9	10	10	Instant death by esophagus constriction

Organizations

The world of Kaenis is defined by the interactions between powerful, organized groups of people, from kingdoms and armies to churches to assassin's guilds and cults. The most crafty and shrewd of characters will know how to make deals with these organizations, and to leverage them for their own gain.

An *Organization* is simply any group of people united under a common name for a common goal. A government is an Organization, as is any particular wing of a government. A guild is an Organization. A group of farmers who have agreed to tend to one another's' fields is an Organization. Even a group of adventurers can be an Organization.

Organizations are defined by three things. The first is the Organization's *Influence Die*. Much like how characters use dice to represent their Innates and Skills, Organizations have an Influence Die representing their ability to perform tasks.

Whenever the Organization mobilizes to do a task, which could be anything ranging from finding a good sword to dethroning the king, they will roll their Influence Die against a Target Number, the same way that characters roll Innate or Skill dice against a Target Number when making a test. Just like with tests, if the result of the Influence Die is greater than or equal to the Target Number, the Organization successfully accomplishes its tasks. Doing this is, in fact, called an *Influence Test*.

Below are examples of what sort of Organizations would have what size of Influence Die:

Influence Die Size	Organization Power
d4	A small local group with some power over the immediate area (ex. An adventuring party, an organization of local farmers, a Ratborn cult)
d6	A local group with noticeable power over the immediate area (ex. The city guard, a gang of local highwaymen, the nearest Church)
d8	A large-scale group with some power over a large area (ex. A small assassin's guild, a baron or baroness, a weak craftsman's guild)
d10	A large-scale group with considerable power over a large area (ex. A powerful assassin's guild, a national army, a large, organized social movement)
d12	A group which has unquestionable power over a large area (ex. A monarchy, a powerful craftsman's guild, the central Church)

On top of an Influence Die, every Organization also has a set of *Goals*. Usually numbering three to five, Goals are simply short, single sentences representing a current goal of the group. Goals always represent significant accomplishments that will benefit the entire Organization. That is, "complete this one odd job" is not a Goal, but "Complete enough jobs for this one patron that they begin solely using our services" could be. Goals represent an Organization's ambition. They could be attempts to exterminate competition and threats, to gain the good graces of those they stand to gain from, or simply to make themselves more powerful. Organizations are never satiated: whenever they finish a Goal, they always get a new one in its place.

Goals always match the scale of an Organization. For a small farmer's union, "clear the fields for the season's crops" is a reasonable goal, but that goal isn't valid for the national Farmer's Guild. For the guild, a goal like "Collect missing dues from all members" might be a reasonable goal, as might "Craft a more beneficial alliance with the Baker's Guild".

Finally, the last element of an Organization is its *Inertia*. Scientifically, Inertia is the property of an object representing its resistance to change, and that's exactly what it means for Organizations as well. Organizations have plans, and want to act on those plans as they designed them. Thus, it's a hard task for someone to try and get an Organization to do a favor. Inertia represents exactly how hard.

Inertia is a number, between 1 and 15. An Inertia of 1 means that the Organization will basically do any favor for anyone, no matter who asks and how difficult the task. An Inertia of 15 means that the Organization almost never does favors for anyone, instead choosing to operate on its own plans. Most Organizations have an Inertia around 7, meaning that they'll do favors, but only for the right people.

A character's relationship with an Organization is represented by a *Relationship Die*. A character will have a different Relationship Die with every Organization they regularly deal with, and the size of this die represents the strength of this relationship.

When a character first encounters an Organization, they will have no Relationship Die, representing that no partnership exists between that character and the Organization. Eventually, they will reach the point where they have a d4 Relationship Die, representing that they have the loosest connection with that Organization, be it as a member, patron, or co-conspirator.

As the relationship continues to grow, a character might eventually reach a d12 Relationship Die, signifying that they have massive influence over the Organization, be it as a leader, as a valued patron, or simply as someone who always has the ear of guild leadership.

Whenever a character wants to get an Organization to act on their behalf, they make what's called an *Inertia Test*. This test is a roll of the character's Charm plus their Relationship Die with the Organization against the Organization's Inertia as a Target Number, plus any relevant modifiers. If the sum of the character's dice is higher, the Organization will perform the favor for the character, usually in the form of making an Influence Test. Otherwise, the Organization will refuse the request.

Possible modifiers for an Inertia Test are given below:

Condition	Modifier For Inertia Test
The task being requested is extremely	D10 penalty

difficult, or against the core philosophy of the Organization	
A member of the Organization's upper leadership particularly likes the character	D8 bonus
A member of the Organization's upper leadership particularly dislikes the character	D8 penalty
The character has a Relationship Die with an Organization that is an enemy/rival of the Organization being entreated	Penalty die one size smaller than that Relationship Die (minimum d4)
The Organization is currently busy with a large, unrelated initiative	D6 penalty

Just because a character wins an Inertia Test doesn't mean that the Organization will do a favor for free. In fact, most powerful Organizations will demand some sort of compensation, usually in the form of money, loyalty, or a favor in return.

Example: Hans is an assassin, and is a member of the Whispering Sparrow Assassin's Guild. The Guild has a d8 Influence Die, as they're a small guild with members across Kaenis. The Guild also has an Inertia of 6: they'll do jobs as long as they're the right ones. Hans has a d6 Charm Die (he's not the most charismatic person in the world), and a d8 Relationship Die with the Guild. Hans wants the Guild to assign a pair of assassins to protect a loved one he believes is in danger, so, when entreating Guild leadership for help, he makes an Inertia Test.

Hans rolled a 2 on his Influence Die, and a 5 on his Charm die, which totals 7, greater than the TN of 6 established by the Guild's Inertia. The Guild will assign some assassins not currently on duty to protect Hans's loved one, but in exchange, they'll demand Hans help shepherd some of the Guild's new assassins on their first assignment.

Characters can attempt to increase the strength of their relationship with an Organization (and thus, increase the size of their Relationship Die) by helping the Organization complete their Goals. Whenever a character plays a significant part in helping an Organization complete one of their Goals, they may make an Inertia Test against the Organization, except as a Contested Test, having the Organization roll their Influence Die instead of using the Organization's Inertia as a TN. If they succeed, their Relationship Die permanently increases by one size (maximum d12).

Example: As Hans has worked with the Whispering Sparrow Assassin's Guild, he assassinated the lead members of an Imperial task force assigned with destroying the Guild, thus completing the Guild's goal of "Dissolve the anti-assassin task force". Thanks to this, Hans now gets to make an Inertia test to see if his relationship with the Guild improves.

Hans rolls his Relationship and Charm dice as before, and gets a 4 on his Relationship Die, and a 1 on his Charm die. The Guild, however, rolled a 7 on their Influence Die. Hans loses the Contested Test, and his status in the Guild does not improve, despite their thankfulness that they are now safer to operate.

Growing and Improving

Surviving the world of Kaenis is difficult, but those who manage to do it use that experience and what they've learned to better themselves, becoming better in the process. Those who manage to survive the toughest challenges of Kaenis usually end up becoming the greatest adventurers, the mightiest champions, or the most terrifying threats.

At the end of any play session, every character who survived the entire session receives one *Experience*. Characters that die (even if they are resurrected) and characters that enter the game mid session do not get an Experience. Experience is a valuable currency, representing the sum knowledge and wisdom that a character gains while adventuring. Experience may be spent in a couple of ways.

First, and perhaps most commonly, a character may elect to spend an Experience before any Innate or Skill test, representing a gamble to see if that test will be a moment of growth for the character. When a character spends an Experience on a test, an automatic penalty equal to the Skill or Innate die being rolled is added to the test. If the character still succeeds, the Innate or Skill die used in the test increases by one size. The character experiences a moment representing their personal growth culminating in quantifiable results, and marks the point from which they are better. If they fail the test, their Innates and Skills remain the same, but the Experience is still used up.

The other way Experience is used is to obtain Traits. A character may spend 2 Experience to obtain a new Trait.

Experience can never be lost, only spent. Characters cannot spend more than one Experience on a single test.

The World of Kaenis

Kaenis is a massive continent, one which has been inhabited by man for thousands of years. Kingdoms have risen and fallen upon it, wars started and concluded, gods worshipped and forsaken. The ground itself is rich with history, and everyone who walks the crowded streets of one of Kaenis's many cities could do to learn the history of their land.

The following is an attempt to describe the broad strokes of the world of Kaenis. This section will mostly cover large-scale, sweeping descriptions of Kaenis, allowing room for Game Masters to create their own personalized section of the world for their players to explore.

The Divine and the Unholy

Kaenis is a land of great spirituality, where you'd be hard pressed to find someone who doesn't believe in some sort of higher power. It's a hard life out there, after all, between the grueling lifestyle, the constant threat of criminals, and the looming spectre of war, so it's understandable that people would seek the comfort in knowing that there is a higher power that is, in some way, looking out for them. Unfortunately, there is very little consistency in what people believe.

The most common religion on Kaenis is *Ascendancy*, spread forth from the Church of the Ascendant. According to Ascendancy, there is but one divine being, a holy, maternal figure known as the Ascendant. The Ascendant has complete control over the entire natural world which she has created, and she is the one who guides an individual through their life to glory and happiness, so long as they follow her moral Dogma, of course.

The Church of the Ascendant preaches of being selfless, helping others in need, and of being generous. Of course, this means the Church also expects selfless donations from its parish. Furthermore, the Church puts forth devotion above all other character traits, demanding that true believers always be zealous to their faith.

However, there is an undeniable dark counterpart to Ascendancy, not spoken of but in whispers, the followers of the God of Chaos known as the King of Rats. Believers in the King of Rats, called *Ratborn* whenever they aren't being called cultists or heretics, believe in a different supreme deity, the King of Rats. According to their beliefs, the King of Rats created this world as a miserable little plaything, as a source of amusement to be watched. The King of Rats despises stagnation, and ushers forth constant eras of war, disease, and famine as a way to keep things interesting.

Of course, there is an interesting dichotomy between the Church and the Ratborn, in that only the Ratborn have actually seen their god. The King of Rats frequently appears in visions to his Blackmarked, and the magical powers of the Blackmarked are a clear, tangible proof of the King of Rats's existence. The Church, meanwhile, holds on to their goddess through faith alone.

The Church of the Ascendancy despises the Ratborn and their miserable god. According to Ascendant scripture, the King of Rats is but a rogue servant of the Ascendant, sowing mischief across the world as a way to spite his former master. The Church ruthlessly targets and kills Ratborn and Blackmarked, going so far as to preach a doctrine of hate against them, and to establish the Inquisition: an armed legion of warpriests trained to hunt and kill Blackmarked, and to extinguish Ratborn cults.

Since Ascendancy is the primary religion of Kaenis, established in some respect in every province, Ratborn almost always have to hold their ceremonies in secret, performing black rites to their masters in basements and caves, in events known only to the trusted members of secret cabals.

There is also a mixed brand of Ascendancy, known as *Dual Ascendancy*, which has gained popularity with recent turmoil. In Dual Ascendancy, both the Ascendant and the King of Rats are divine beings, constantly locked into a stalemate as they battle for the fate of the world in a constant struggle of good and evil. The Church decries Dual Ascendancy as heresy, as it claims the King of Rats is equal in power to the Ascendant. Despite this, Dual Ascendants still hate the Ratborn, but they simply view the cosmology as a battle between good and evil, which they must be moral paragons to help win.

Ascendancy as a whole is well-established in civilized society. However, not all of Kaenis is civilized. The southern Ulok Tribelands are host to hundreds of barbarian tribes, each of which can have their own view of divinity and of religion. In general, though, Ulok Tribes tend to follow some configuration of the *Prime Spirits*. According to belief, the Prime Spirits are embodiments of natural substances, such as water, stone, and wood. The Prime Spirits are omniscient, and watch over the natural world. Crucially, the Ulok Tribes do not believe any Prime Spirits inhabit manmade substances, such as medicine or steel, and as a result they frequently eschew using such items.

The White Empire of Zaria

The largest and mightiest of all of Kaenis's established political entities is the White Empire of Zaria, whose flag has flown over a vast portion of the continent for hundreds of years. Centered in the massive capital city of High Koros, Zaria's government is inseparably tied with the Church of the Ascendant, as the Emperor of Zaria also holds a seat on the Council of Listeners, the powerful group at the top of the Church.

The White Empire of Zaria is ruled by the Emperor, the latest in a long bloodline of rulers who have commanded the Empire since its founding thousands of years ago. The most recent Emperor, Justinian Callistus, rules with an iron fist, commanding his team of Commandants, who in turn execute his will over every factor of Zarian life.

Commandants include Sage Poloros, Commandant of the Sword, who commands Emperor Callistus's armies, to Michael Tykos, Commandant of the Word, who commands the legions of agents responsible for eliminating interior threats to the throne. More mundane positions, such as the Commandant of the Field, who controls farm outputs, also exist.

The lower ranks of the Zarian government are filled by members of Zaria's hundreds of noble families, appointed to bureaucratic positions by the Commandants and occasionally by Callistus himself. The lower levels of Zarian bureaucracy are fraught with infighting, brownnosing, and backstabbing as nobles attempt to undermine each other and rise up higher in the ranks, maybe even reaching the rank of Commandant one day.

Zaria has a massive economy, largely centered around the mining, refining, and crafting of iron extracted from the Skypiercer Mountains which run along the Empire's east edge. Thousands of

miners risk their lives extracting iron ore from the mountains, which is refined, smelted, and used to produce anything from tools to building materials to household items. The most talented craftsmen use this iron to smelt steel, and Zarian steel is known as the strongest steel on Kaenis.

Zaria is home to the Church of the Ascendancy, and as a result, Ascendancy has a strong grip over the hearts and minds of the people of Zaria. Every town has an ornate Zarian church, and almost all of the population faithfully attends church to hear the word of the Church, crafted carefully by the Council of Listeners to ensure the Zarian people are faithful, pure, and most importantly, obedient.

Zaria has led a series of religious military campaigns, most notably a failed invasion of the anti-Church Taerosian Empire. Marching with the intent of spreading Ascendant beliefs to “heathen” lands, the steel-clad Zarian armies constantly march to claim new territory for their Emperor, often leaving locals brainwashed or brutalized in their wake. Currently, Callistus seeks to march his holy armies into Ulok Tribelands, in order to destroy the blasphemous barbarians. Unfortunately, the Empire of Astar lies between Ulok Tribelands and the Zarian border, and marching Zarian armies through Astar would surely cause Astar to fight back alongside their many political allies, causing a massive war to break out.

Despite the hold the Church has over Astar, the King of Rats still has plenty of loyal followers located within the borders of the Empire. Often using secret codes, subtle gestures, and private communication, otherwise upstanding imperial citizens have organized themselves into secret cults worshipping the King of Rats far from the eyes of the Church. Many Blackmarked walk the roads of Astar in secret, knowing that hundreds of Inquisitors would have them crucified over the town gates if their secret were revealed.

Life for a Zarian depends on where you live. If you live outside one of the major cities, in a small pastoral town or village, your life is probably pretty simple. You wake up early, farm or do your craft, read some pages of scripture, sit down for dinner with your family, before maybe inviting the neighbors over for a drink and some laughs. Every week you go to your local church to attend an Ascendant sermon, and every month or so you venture to one of the larger cities to sell your products, and maybe enjoy an evening of merriment. Blackmarked are just a scary boogeyman you tell your children about, and every once in awhile a regiment of friendly soldiers marches through town, off to some far off land to fight evil heathens for the good of the Church. Life is hard, sometimes it gets downright dangerous, but it’s wholesome.

For citizens of the larger cities, life is more complicated. You’re aware of the larger sociopolitical nature of the world, and the looming tension of impending war is sort of always in the back of your mind. You’re probably a craftsman or intellectual of some sort, if you’re not just a bum. The nooks and crannies of the city you live in scare you, as you have no idea what sort of mad men or cults lie therein. Life is full of unknowns, and you try your best to survive in an uncaring world.

Zaria is massive, and while the Zarian armies are equally as massive, they are simply not enough to police the entire Empire. As a result, outside of the relative safety of high city walls, and the close-knit communities of the Empire's towns and villages, Zaria can be a dangerous place to travel. Highwaymen, thieves, and murderers hide from authorities in the wilderness, ready to strike. Dangerous Ratborn cults perform their rites away from society. Even within city walls, there are plenty of places for those of ill-intent to hide. With soldiers and Inquisitors more focused on destroying political threats than criminals, Zarians frequently must fend for themselves, sometimes going so far as to become bounty hunters, or install themselves as sheriffs for their community.

The Empire of Astar

Sitting to the south of Zaria, the Empire of Astar is a relatively recent construct in the sociopolitical world of Kaenis. Formed of a dozen city-states which coalesced under a single leader, Astar is extremely diverse in culture, religion, and language, to its benefit and detriment.

Until a hundred years ago, what is now known as Astar was once the Twelve Vassal States of Zaria. These twelve city-states were considered loyal territories Zaria, as they all lacked the military power to protect themselves from the southern Ulok Tribes, as well as the resources to be self-sustaining. In return for protection and access to Zarian trade routes, the Vassal States were forced to convert to Ascendancy, as well as pay hefty taxes to the Emperor.

All of this changed when a man from Torlos, one of the smaller Vassal States, secretly presented a proposition to the governments of the Vassal States, a proposition now known as the Decree of Unshackling. In this proposition, the Vassal States would cast aside the oppressive rule of Zaria, and unite as a single, strong political body, capable of protecting and sustaining itself.

When the Vassal States finally united and declared themselves a single power, independent of Zaria, the response from their former masters was hostile at first. Small skirmishes broke out across the countryside, the largest of which being the great Battle of Vaxis, named for the capital of Torlos in which it occurred.

These skirmishes stopped, however, when the newly-born Astar received a diplomat from Taeros, at about the same time one arrived in High Koros, the capital of Zaria. The message both carried was the same: Taeros was declaring itself a formal ally of Astar, and continued military occupation of Astar by Zaria would be considered a declaration of war against both nations. Knowing a war on two fronts would be bloody, Zaria officially recognized Astari independence, and its forces retreated from Astar.

Now that Astar is an independent nation, it is having some growing pains. The cultures of the Vassal States were similar, but not identical, and as a result, there is a lack of a singular national identity. The religions practiced by the citizenry varies from an Ascendancy extremely similar to that practiced in Zaria, all the way to faiths more strongly resembling the Prime Spiritualism followed by the Ulok Tribesmen to the south.

Furthermore, the political system of Astar is equally as confusing, as twelve governments had to be combined into a single governing body. The leaders of the Twelve Vassal States became the Twelve Senators, who collaborate in the Senate which governs the entirety of Astar. The Senate is led by the Grand Senator, who guides the Senate and whose vote is worth that of 3 Senators. The first Grand Senator was from Torlos, but now the current standing Grand Senator is from the State of Neo Coolan.

The one fantastic bit of fortune for Astar is its deep-rooted alliance with Taeros, which has benefitted Astar in a variety of ways. Trade is extremely strong between Astar and Taeros, and Taeros pays fairly for the goods which Zaria once stole. The combined military might of Astar and Taeros is enough to hold the Zarian armies back, allowing both nations some safety against the imperialistic Zarian Empire which would invade either nation individually.

The average Astari, however, probably doesn't interact with the world on such a global setting. During the time of the Vassal States, most people in what would be Astar were simple farmers or craftsmen, only interacting with the outside world in the form of the Zarian tax collectors that would collect their goods. The tax collectors have been replaced with traders from Taeros, but the pastoral life has remained relatively unchanged. Townships are small, and all but those in the biggest cities don't bother thinking about the outside world, other than seeing Zaria as an old enemy, and Taeros as a new friend. Life in the countryside is serene and quiet, and the big world is scary.

For Astari who live in one of the larger cities, metropolitan life still barely resembles life in a city like High Koros. Animals and livestock still roam the streets, and structures are still mostly wood, instead of stone. The finer crafts like art, science, and literacy are still just beginning to become fixtures in cities, while even the urban population remains largely uneducated. What these cities gain from their diminutive nature, however, is a sense of camaraderie. Unlike in High Koros, where danger lurks in every corner, everyone is a friend in a Astari city, and everyone's in it together.

Everyone, of course, except the Ratborn and Blackmarked. Despite Astar's relative religious freedom, Zarian words about the evils of the Blackmarked still ring in the people's ears, and Blackmarked are now simply hunted down by angry mobs and mercenaries, instead of Inquisitors. Blackmarked may be able to hide in Astar's friendly towns and cities, but that will only make the sting of betrayal more bitter when they eventually turn on the Blackmarked.

Travel is dangerous for those Astari who hope to go beyond the bounds of their small towns. The new government wields an untrained and poorly organized force of guards, meaning criminals run rampant across the countryside, easily evading the bumbling forces of the government. As a result, mercenary work is extremely lucrative, to allow travellers and traders to go across the countryside without fear.

The Great Empire of Taeros

Standing opposed to Zaria as a long-standing rival is the Great Empire of Taeros, a ferocious, rigid empire ruled by cruel, strict rulers. Where Zaria rules its people with religion, Taeros rules with fear and all-consuming loyalty.

As Zaria began to grow in influence and consume the smaller nations around it, the royal Kaize family recognized the threat it represented to their substantial lands. With this growing concern, Emperor Wilhelm Kaize moved swiftly to ensure the longevity of his family's rule. First, he banned the practice of Ascendancy within the boundaries of his empire, to be punished by death. Secondly, the royal families which served as the advisors to the Kaize, and also as prime targets for Zaria to convert to their cause, were rounded up and executed. Finally, the Royal Army, led by the war veterans of the Kaize family, were put in charge of the guard across the empire, meaning the iron fist of the Kaize could be felt in every city and village in the land.

With the Kaize's iron fist thoroughly established, an era of conquest began as Taeros fought to match Zaria's growth. While Zaria converted national leaders to Ascendancy before eventually enveloping their land, Taeros brutally slaughtered regional rulers and threatened to publicly execute any dissenters to their new rule.

When Zaria's border and Taeros's border inevitably met, war was incited almost immediately. Zaria attempted to convert the Taerosian royalty, much as they had the royalty of a hundred other nations, but the ambassadors sent to the Taerosian capital were always slaughtered before they reached the gates. Their bodies were sent back to High Koros in pieces, and war was declared.

The War of Dominion, as the Taerosians called it, or the War of the Heathens, as the Zarians called it, raged for decades. The Zarian Army had greater numbers, but as they marched through Taeros, they discovered not a number of troops, but a density: every village and town, no matter how small, had a contingent of troops loyal to the Kaize, one which had the dedication, training, and knowledge of the land to prolong what could have been a simple conquest for days, sometimes weeks.

The people of Taeros initially welcomed the Zarian invasion, seeing it as a welcome release from the vile rule of the Kaize. However, this welcoming embrace of the usurper grew hostile: while the Kaize demanded subservience, they also provided safety, as well as a freedom of religion which the Zarians took away. As the Zarian armies marched on from their new territories, leaving churches and religious texts, but not sufficient soldiers to guard the towns in the same way the Taerosian Empire did. The people eventually rebelled against their new masters, returning their lands to the Kaize.

After a long, brutal war of attrition, in which the border between Zaria and Taeros shifted and bent, but never remained in any one place for long, the Zarian Empire sent a message to the

then-Emperor Volgin Kaize, a message requesting peace talks. The Zarian people were growing tired of the war effort's drain on people and resources, and thus, the Empire was forced to demand peace. Taeros, finally quelling the threat of Zarian incursion, accepted the terms.

Now free of the plight of war, the Kaize managed to quickly replenish their ranks with new soldiers, reinvigorated with a respect for, and even admiration of, the force and power of the Kaize. Ascendant churches were burned to the ground, and the banner of the Kaize flew higher than ever.

Taeros at peacetime is simultaneously a welcoming, and unforgiving place to live. For the citizens who submit to the rules, regulations, and taxes of the Kaize, life is good: the soldiers patrolling the lands have expunged most every criminal and murderer from the land, allowing for prosperous and safe trade routes. Taeros's alliances with Astar and Palyss means every town has access to a variety of foods, textiles, and luxury items, although such goods are oppressively taxed.

For those that disobey the laws of the Kaize, don't pay their taxes, or, worst of all, are branded as Dissenters, however, Taeros's oppressive rulership takes no mercy. Those who are not maimed, imprisoned, or executed in the streets are shackled and sent to The Pit: a mining colony where slaves of the Empire work until they collapse in the mines and die.

Satisfying these laws and taxes isn't easy, either. Taerosian taxes are extremely high, and there is no leniency for being even a day late. A strict curfew is in place, as well as laws against excessive drunkenness and debauchery, gambling, drugs, as well as thousands of more mundane laws, ranging from building codes and farming laws, to rules for manners while in the presence of a Kaize nobleman or noblewoman. Simply being for the Kaize rule isn't even enough sometimes: if an Imperial Guardsman is in the wrong mood, not showing *enough* loyalty is sufficient grounds to be sent to The Pit.

Crime and debauchery and dissent still exist in Taeros, of course, but they cannot afford to dwell in the cities where the Imperial Guard marches. Instead, criminals and dissenters have fled to the more inhospitable regions of Taeros, hiding in mountain ranges and deep in caves, constructing shantytowns where rebels, drunks, and criminals dance in secret merriment.

The Imperial Guard is also on the hunt to kill Blackmarked, as their magical powers represent a threat to Kaize supremacy. However, Ratborn are tolerated by the Guard, so long as they, like every other religion in Taeros, show proper respect to the Kaize.

The Kaize are an inescapable part of life in Taeros. Religious structures, no matter what backwater, local belief they represent, always have the banner of the Kaize right next to their religious icon of choice. The symbol of the Kaize also is emblazoned on the armor of the Imperial Guard, who march the streets of every town, crushing dissenters and enforcing the peace. As if this weren't oppressive enough, the Kaize have instituted the Gift to the Loyal: a large monetary

reward for anyone who manages to report treasonous activity with sufficient proof. Now, whatever dissenting activity the Imperial Guard do not find, a neighbor certainly will.

The Dominion of Palyss

A small seafaring nation in the northeast corner of the continent, Palyss has remained free not due to its military might or religious influence, but due to its power as an country of trade.

Palyss was a small, seafaring nation of sailors, which made its riches off of the bounty of the ocean. With the bounty that Palyss made in fishing and boatbuilding, it was able to afford some of the finest luxury items in the land. Soon, master craftsmen flocked to Palyss to peddle their wares, and the economy of Palyss thrived.

To help regulate this economy, the King of Palyss established the Guilds, to oversee the industries of Palyss and to ensure that merchants behaved in a fair and legal manner. The Guildmasters of these Guilds were masters of their industries, who could properly maintain and control their industries not just with authority, but also with the respect they command within their trade.

The problem is that, while Palyss's economy continued to grow, the Guilds grew in power as well. While the relationship between the Guildmasters and the King remained at ease for a while, eventually the Guildmasters grew tired of the King's taxes and regulations which the Guilds had to follow. In the Guildmasters' eyes, these laws and taxes restricted the artisans and the merchants without the necessary knowledge of the fields themselves.

This conflict reached its conclusion when the Guildmasters of the 10 largest Guilds came together in a secret meeting. These Guildmasters, representing the Fishing Guild, Boatbuilder's Guild, Merchant's Guild, Farmer's Guild, Blacksmith's Guild, Doctor's Guild, Hunter's Guild, Baker's Guild, Tailor's Guild, and Brewer's Guild, came together and decided to move to overthrow the King. Using the combined coffers of all ten Guilds, the alliance hired a team of the greatest assassins in the land, and staged the coup, successfully ending the Kingdom of Palyss.

The Guildmasters, now in charge of the new Dominion of Palyss, instated themselves as the Council of Elder Guilds which would serve as the oligarchal head of the new government. The former army of the King, allowed to reform as the Soldier's Guild, was also given a seat on the Council. The Guilds were now able to self-regulate, and with the exception of major affairs, they were largely allowed to operate independently of one another.

Guildmasters in the Council come and go, as each Guild has its own way of deciding leadership. For instance, the Merchant's Guild uses a purely democratic process within its membership to appoint a new Guildmaster every year, while the Boatbuilder's Guild awards the title of Guildmaster to the winner of a race which occurs whenever the old Guildmaster passes away.

There are a variety of Guilds representing lesser trades, from cobblers to gravediggers, whose Guildmaster is not represented in the Council of Elder Guilds. These Guildmasters instead tend to pledge fealty to one of the 11 Guilds in the Council, allowing that Guild regulatory control over their lesser Guild, in exchange for having the lesser Guild's concerns heard by the Council.

For the people of Palyss, the rule of the Council of Elder Guilds has been of varying success. As is to be expected, the economy of Palyss is the greatest in Kaenis, as the Guilds are allowed to grow and thrive as they see fit. Guild members remain competitive in their crafts, as the Guilds reward those of greater skill in their craft with greater influence in the Guild, and the consumers get superior products as a result.

On the down side, the Council is very slow to move on affairs that don't directly affect the economy of Palyss, such as social issues and issues of health and safety. The Council's policy is also heavily biased towards the eleven Guilds of the Council. For instance, since the Soldier's Guild, the Blacksmith's Guild, and the Boatbuilder's Guild all hold Council seats, Palyss is quick to ally itself with militaristic powers in search of profit, which is the probable reason behind Palyss's long standing military alliance with Taeros.

For the commoners of Palyss, life is certainly better than in other places. Common criminals will tend to avoid members of the Elder Guilds, fearing their wrath. Members of lesser guilds, or guildless folk, however, make for much more lucrative targets. After all, the bringers of law and order are controlled by the Soldier's Guild, and sending them off to chase down criminals requires filling out the proper paperwork.

The Ulok Tribelands

It is technically incorrect to call the Ulok Tribelands a single political body. Rather, the Ulok Tribelands is a name encompassing a large swath of land to the south, inhabited by barbarian people collectively considered Ulok.

The Ulok Tribes are harsh, uncultured people who have long followed a tradition of respecting power and violence as equivalent to political might. Hundreds of tribes are scattered across the Tribelands, each headed by a Warchief: the most powerful warrior of the tribe. Warchiefs are constantly declaring war upon one another, hoping to prove themselves the most powerful warrior alive.

The Ulok Tribes have been roaming the Tribelands for centuries, a fluid set of political constructs which ebb and flow as tribes are absorbed and dissolved. However, many years ago, a single Warchief, Chief Talrok Blackblood, arose to power after a series of brutal wars. Blackblood defeated all Warchiefs who opposed him deftly in battle, claiming it was his destiny to rule over every Ulok in the Tribelands.

Blackblood preached his destiny and what he considered “The Grand Tribe”, the idea that the ultimate destiny of the Ulok Tribes are to be unified under a single banner, and become a single, great army as one. Blackblood, obviously considered himself to be the Warchief destined to usher in the era of The Grand Tribe.

The wars of conquest continued for Talrok Blackblood, until his massive tribe began to march upon the lands of Chief Skor Winterwhite, a Warchief who commanded a small tribe in the wintry southern region of the Tribelands. Blackblood’s army outnumbered Winterwhite’s ten to one. However, Blackblood, not wanting to slay experienced warriors who could aid his army, instead opted to challenge Winterwhite to a one-on-one duel.

Winterwhite slew Blackblood in a single hit, driving a stone stake deep into the Warchief’s throat in a single strike. With that, the chosen Warchief fell, and Winterwhite became the new leader of the old Warchief’s army. However, Winterwhite had a calm, quiet demeanor which did not befit the leader of such a massive, bloodthirsty fervor, and the massive tribe rapidly dissolved as individuals thought themselves more befitting leaders than Winterwhite.

Since the era of Blackblood, the story of The Grand Tribe has yet to die, but the Warchief who is “destined” to usher in this era changes by the day. Some tribes have grown quite large, but none have grown to quite the size of Blackblood’s mighty tribe.

The Ulok Tribes do not believe in The Ascendant, nor The King of Rats. Instead, the Ulok Tribes have always believed in the Prime Spirits. These Spirits are godlike entities which epitomize a single domain of nature. What exact Prime Spirits are worshipped, and the precise details of that worship, vary from tribe to tribe. One such Spirit is frequently called Su’anoo, Spirit of the Snow, who is believed to be the Spirit who smote Warchief Blackblood. Another is Amerat, Spirit of Stone, the Spirit that Ulok Tribesmen hope to invoke while crafting their weapons and tools.

An interesting note is that the Prime Spirits only embody materials which exist in nature. As such, there are no Primal Spirits of steel, or medicine. Since the Ulok Tribes believe so strongly in the power of the Primal Spirits, they refuse to craft using materials which are not represented by a Primal Spirit, and they believe such objects to be heinous, and offensive to those Primal Spirits whose blessed substances were desecrated to make these amalgamations.

Ulok Tribesmen use very simple construction and crafting techniques. People live in simple leather or wooden huts, and use simple stone tools in their day to day lives. Farming techniques are extremely simple, and most tribes rely on the tribe’s hunters to provide food. Medicine is non-existent, and instead most tribes have a medicine man who understands how to use herbs and powders to heal wounds.

Game Mastering Blackmarked

As a Game Master, it is your job to develop the world that your players explore and change. GMing involves a lot of prepwork, a lot of improvisational ability, and a lot of patience, but the reward is great: to develop a real, breathing world, and to watch your friends interact with it, and make something new together.

Game Mastering Tips

GMing is more art than science, and there's plenty of resources available already to help make sure you're a good Game Master. Here are some good suggestions, though:

Treat your world like building blocks, not like a story

When I first DMed for my friends playing *Dungeons and Dragons*, I spent hours developing this long story about a noble family being reunited, then travelling to the capital city and making a series of power plays to claim ultimate political power. The party would have traversed dark dungeons, discovered ancient relics, fought the avatar of the God of Destruction, and ultimately been the standard bearers in a war against a malicious Logic God.

Instead, they killed the nobility with a lucky crit, and set up a shop selling drugs.

Remember that the key to tabletop RPGs is absolute freedom. Players can do whatever they want, and will feel betrayed if they always seem to end up falling in line with your plans. Players sometimes wanna go "off the grid".

To account for this, I recommend not developing a cohesive narrative with characters, story beats, and progression. Instead, prepare the skeletal structure of a few, vastly different stories. Prepare some characters, but don't define exactly what role they have in the world. Create locations that have multiple purposes, multiple things going on at once. Then, as the players explore your world, and find the path they want to go down, you can pull plots, settings, and characters out from your DM bag of tricks and slot them into the story when appropriate, ensuring that players have some degree of control over the story, but you do too, plus you're spared the need to improv everything on the spot.

I like to think of DMing as a sort of Mad Lib, except instead of filling every noun spot with "butts", you're trying to make a coherent story. Players are the ones providing you the sentences. "We travel north, and crest the hill to find _____", and it's your job to make sure you have a wide enough vocabulary of people, places, and events to fill every blank they throw at you in a satisfying way.

All logical solutions should work

Tabletop RPGs are not video games, you don't have to spend time programming and debugging solutions. For a solution to work, all that needs to happen is for you to say "Yeah, it works". If you build some intricate puzzle, where a door can only be opened at the right point in the lunar cycle,

but only on a Tuesday, and only if you have the three Keystones, and one of your players wants to just bash their way through the door, if they're strong enough and the door is flimsy enough, let 'em.

Don't be serious all the time, but don't be goofy all the time either

Your players may be playing these hardened, thuggish soldiers fighting for their lives, but they're still real-world people, who are over at a friend's house to have fun. If you stifle any joking around or goofy behavior, you're gonna come off as a spoilsport. You can't maintain a serious tone all the time, no matter how serious the tone of your adventure is.

At the same time, if you want your adventure to have some impact, you're going to need moments of tension, of serious danger. As a result, you're gonna want moments of seriousness, where everyone gets their act together and focuses. Don't ruin these moments with a poorly-timed joke, or with a non-sequitur in game.

Don't be afraid to let funny things naturally happen though. For example, for another gaming group, their party had just entered these mystical woods, to discover an ally defeating some goblins in combat. In my mind, I was unsure whether to use the expression "staving off the goblins" or "beating down the goblins", so I accidentally said both at once in a, let's say *impolite*, way. Everyone laughed, I laughed, and after it died down, we got back to the game. I let the moment happen, but I didn't let it distract from the game for too long.

As the King of Rats, don't leash your Blackmarked players

No matter what setting you create for your campaign, chances are you're going to have one character for sure: The King of Rats. The King of Rats has a direct line of communication with Marked player characters at all times, and is capable of bestowing them Sand, as well as taking it away, at his whim. And by his whim, I mean yours.

Don't use this power to keep Marked players under your control. Don't force them to do what you want with threats of taking massive amounts of their Sand away, nor by offering impossible-to-resist bounties of Sand as reward. In general, the moments where the King of Rats threatens to take away/add Sand should be *interesting*, not *pivotal*. Offer your Blackmarked players reasonable sized bounties in exchange for a task that throws a wrench in the party's plans. Similarly, given them reasonable, but noticeable punishments for disobeying the dogma of the King of Rats. Remember, the King of Rats is a god of chaos: he wants to disrupt order, cause panic and fear, and to shake established norms. When the Blackmarked players get a little too cozy, a little too predictable, use the King of Rats's control of their Sand to shake things up.

Don't split the party

This is a more practical piece of advice. Keep in mind that all information about the game world flows forth from your mouth, and you can only talk about one thing at a time. If you split the party, then each party member is only going to care about what you're saying whenever you're

talking about their situation, and they're not going to have anything to do when you flip back to the other half of the party's situation. In general, people should feel like they can do something 100% of the time, but they can't when the situation you're describing is taking place 10 miles away.

Everyone should be having fun

This is the singular most important rule of Game Mastering, and if this rule and any other rule come into conflict with each other, this one always wins. This is not to say that everyone at the table needs to be having a maximum amount of fun all the time, as that is impossible, but in general, you should try to make sure everyone's having a generally good time. Even if you're not hosting the game night, consider yourself the "host" of this world, and it's up to you to make sure all of your "guests" are comfortable.

If someone looks like they're not enjoying themselves, try to figure out why. Maybe they're not getting as much time in the spotlight as they'd like. Maybe they feel useless in the session's encounters. Maybe there's been too many jokes at their expense. Try and adjust to them, and maybe change something up to give their character a moment to shine, or to pull attention away from them if they feel like they're getting picked on.

If that still doesn't work, feel free to have a one-on-one with them after the session. "Hey, were you having fun today? How can I make the next session better for you? What do you wanna do in the game?" Listen to their feedback, and incorporate it into the game wherever possible.

Also, get your group's feedback at the end of every session, even if everyone was having the time of their life. What did you guys like? What did you not like? What were the highlights of today for you? By identifying things your players didn't like, you can avoid including those things in the future, and by identifying what they do like, you can maximize those elements of your game.

Creating a Story

If you already have an idea in your head about what sort of events you want to transpire over the course of your Blackmarked game, you've already made a mistake. By planning a story in your head, and assigning your players roles in that story, you haven't planned a tabletop RPG, you've written a play to be performed at your home.

There are a lot of philosophies about how best to craft a story and run a tabletop RPG, so what I'm presenting here is this author's opinion. If you disagree with these ideas, they aren't law by any means, nor are they the only way to run this game, so just ignore them!

Roleplaying games aim to simulate, using the rules defined in the game, a world, and to describe what happens when players make meaningful changes in that world. With this in mind, it's productive to think about your game world as less of a single narrative and more as a set of elements. These elements are narrative building blocks, and could be anything from single characters or groups all the way up to cultures, religions, and nations.

These elements are related to each other in some way. Characters love each other, hate each other, work with each other, conspire against each other, and so do towns, cultures, groups, and nations. A complex web can be formed of the way the elements in your game world interact, and that web is where the “story” of your game originates.

When thinking about this web of relationships, consider how they would play out over time given no player influence. Left alone, it’s safe to say that most relationships will Escalate: lovers will get married, rivals will kill each other, business partners will combine forces, one competitor will drive the other out of business, and so on. Relationships left alone will naturally grow and snowball until they reach a logical conclusion.

It’s also possible that an external force acts upon a relationship, causing it to Reverse: lovers break up when a devilish newcomer comes into the mix, rivals become allies in the face of a common threat, business partners cut ties after a bad deal, business rivals unite in a decaying market. Players can choose to become these external forces, or maybe other nonplayer elements are this force of change.

To design an interesting, changing world, model a web of these relationships. Define some characters, groups, places, cultures, and think about the relationships they have with one another. You can do this in as great or as little detail as you want, just use as much detail as you need to prepare adventures.

Then, once you have this web of relationships figured out, decide for yourself if, left untouched by the players, this relationship is going to Escalate or Reverse, and if it’s going to Reverse, what force is going to Reverse it. Set a time frame for either to happen. For instance, if you have two characters who are in love, maybe make a note that says in four sessions’ time, these two will get married. Alternatively, maybe in four sessions’ time, the man discovers that the woman has been sleeping with the local magistrate, and they break up in a heated argument.

Once you sort of have a (very abstracted) plan for this simulation of a world to head in, you have no established a plan that your players will, inevitably, break. Your players are going to be the agents of change for Reversals that are in their favor, or to their liking, and similarly will eliminate agents of change for Reversals that they do not like. Because of this, it might also be beneficial to consider both possibilities for any given relationship, since your players might guide them towards either.

This way of modeling a world allows you as the Game Master some creative control over the inhabitants of your world, and a bit of a guiding hand as to how the story might play out, but by modelling the world as a series of actions and reactions, you allow your players as much room for disruption as they want, giving them a large amount of agency over the world.

Making Characters

Characters are, arguably, the most important start of your job as Game Master. Most of your players' interaction with the game will be in their interaction with characters, so you need to design these characters well, such that these interactions are impactful and meaningful.

While perhaps reductive, non-player characters in a tabletop RPG can be categorized in two camps: Talking NPCs and Stabbing NPCs. Talking NPCs are characters that your players are going to talk to, discover the personality of, and will generally have some sort of significance in the tale of your characters' deeds. Stabbing NPCs are the ones who are openly and violently hostile to your players, your classic "mooks" or "minions". They exist to stab, or to be stabbed (or beaten, maimed, bruised, burned, or whatever).

We'll start with Stabbing NPCs, just because they're easier. These are your bandits, the followers of the real head bad guy, your faceless assassins sent in the night. If you play video games, these are not your boss fights, these are the mobs you grind.

However, this doesn't mean you can't characterize these guys and gals a little bit. There's no need to write entire backstories for characters that are probably just going to be cut into ribbons, but you can pepper in small, easy to design personality details into each of them, to avoid them from feeling like Nameless Goon #1745. For maximum effect, these should be details that can be caught in a quick examination of the character (scars, noteworthy clothing or jewelry, eye-catching keepsakes, a pungent smell, etc), or something that can be expressed in the short bits of dialogue the character might say in a fight (an accent, a verbal tic, a personal bias or belief, etc).

It also might be worth thinking about why this character is currently trying to murder the player characters. Are they motivated by an ideology that conflicts with that of the player characters? What are those beliefs? Are they motivated by money? What do they need that money for? Are they in debt? Are they just violent sociopaths? What caused them to be that way? How have they not been stopped, arrested, or killed before this moment?

Another easy way to add depth to these throwaway enemies is to consider their role in the group of opponents (assuming that they belong to a group of enemies). It's probably not the case that the group of however many enemies just never spoke prior to the battle. They probably had some people in the gang that they liked, some people that they couldn't stand, some running jokes, some sort of a hierarchy established.

These simple relationships are really easy to manifest in simple, noticeable ways in a fight. The group of foes lets the guy no one really likes take point, and spits on his corpse when the players do him in. The two characters who are friends fight in tandem, and one will get sullen and sad if you kill the other. A leader will bark orders at the others, who will maybe follow them and maybe not, depending on the group's loyalty to the leader. Friendly rivals will banter at one another,

throwing around some friendly insults as the fight goes on. Things like this breathe life into what would otherwise be a boring old fight.

Now, let's think about our Talking NPCs. These are characters that the players are probably going to get to know, at least for a brief amount of time, so figuring out how they talk, what they want, and how they do the things they do is quite a bit more important than for regular mooks.

When developing a Talking NPC, you can use as much or as little detail as you want, although there is the stipulation that more detail per character equates to more time spent by you as a GM. Personally, I've found that I can usually get away with just developing a few specific details, which I'll share with you now.

First is the name, obviously. Very important characters I'll name myself, usually sticking to a central naming scheme for characters from the same area. For example, if you've read the playtest adventure *The Missing Girl*, you'll note I gave all of the characters Germanic names. This also allows you to characterize an NPC through their name: if you've been talking to Hanses and Brunas all day, and then Giorgio rolls into town, you know he's from somewhere far away.

I'll also keep a table of random male and female names handy, so as to be able to name any NPCs the party takes more interest in than I expected.

The next thing I'll do is I'll decide upon a general physical description, usually just by combining a few words max, such as "heavily ornamented priest", "rugged hunter", or "sunken-faced beggar". On top of this, I'll decide on a single, unique, attention-grabbing physical detail, such as a particularly noticeable piece of clothing, an unusual hairstyle, a limp, a strange piece of ornamentation, or a strange way of carrying oneself.

With physical details out of the way, I'll then set about coming up with a pair of goals for the character. These are one sentence descriptions of something the character wants to personally do, or at least aid in doing. I like to make one of these big ("extinguish the presence of Ratborn in my village" or "construct a new chapel worthy of the Ascendant's name") and one small ("grow an herb garden" or "talk to that cute girl I see at the tavern every weekend"). These serve as plot hooks, which can be used to generate impromptu quests if you need some unprepared content at a moment's notice, and can also drive how the character interacts with the party and with other NPCs.

Next, I'll give the NPC two character traits that they display in a very obvious manner. This helps to flavor interactions with the NPC. I wouldn't pick two traits that cancel each other out (such as "ostentatious" and "shy"), but I also wouldn't limit myself to two that obviously go together (such as "angry" and "paranoid"). An interesting pair of personality traits can lead to more questions about the character. Why does this pretentious nobleman have such a quick temper? Why is this inquisitive scholar so bloodthirsty? Why is this friendly barkeep so secretive? These confusing pairings inspire questions, questions which can be interesting to answer.

Lastly, you have the mechanics. I save these for last, for the point where I already have a good idea of who the character is as a person. That's because I usually just go through traditional character creation, generating the NPC the same way I would an NPC. Since you're GM and you can cheat, I recommend just giving your NPCs all of the Traits and Equipment that you think they should have. Honestly, at this point, assigning mechanical attributes to your characters is just a matter of mechanically representing the elements of the character you've already defined.

The one part of the mechanics that you don't need to worry about are Vices. Vices are just meant for player characters, and while your non-player characters can have things they indulge in, they do not interact with the Vice mechanics in any way. Also, NPCs don't Rest, they just sort of lose all of their Strain when it makes sense to you. This'll save you a lot of bookkeeping.

Crafting and Running Organizations

These rules present Organizations as a tool for Game Masters, to easily abstract large and possibly complicated groups into game entities that can be easily quantified and manipulated by the mechanics.

To create an Organization, you as the Game Master have a few things to consider. First, consider the concept of what sort of Organization you're making. Is it a small club of would-be adventurers who wander the countryside looking to help the weak? Is it a secret guild of master assassins that spans the continent, doing work for anyone who can pay their massive dues?

Here are some questions to ask about the Organization you're trying to create before you ever define the stats. They're not necessarily required to create an Organization, but they do make you better informed when you're making the decisions that are.

- What is the name of the Organization?
- How long has the Organization existed?
- What is the goal/purpose of the Organization?
- What sort of people belong to the Organization?
- Where does the Organization have power?
- How do you join the Organization?
- Does the Organization consider itself acting on public interest, or for its own goals?
- How does the Organization affect the world around it?
- What do people think of the Organization?

With these questions thoroughly mulled over, it's time to assign mechanical attributes to the Organization, starting with its Influence die. The Influence die is a direct mechanical representation of how powerful the Organization is in the world of Kaenis. Think carefully about how much this Organization should be able to do, then assign the proper Influence die to match that.

Influence Die Size	Organization Power
d4	A small local group with some power over the immediate area (ex. An adventuring party, an organization of local farmers, a Ratborn cult)
d6	A local group with noticeable power over the immediate area (ex. The city guard, a gang of local highwaymen, the nearest Church)
d8	A large-scale group with some power over a large area (ex. A small assassin's guild, a baron or baroness, a weak craftsman's guild)
d10	A large-scale group with considerable power over a large area (ex. A powerful assassin's guild, a national army, a large, organized social movement)
d12	A group which has unquestionable power over a large area (ex. A monarchy, a powerful craftsman's guild, the central Church)

Once the Influence die is established, now's a good time to set the Organization's Inertia. This number represents how easily the Organization as a whole can be entreated to do something on someone's behalf. More friendly, caring, altruistic Organizations will have a lower Inertia, while selfish Organizations will have a much higher Inertia.

Also consider the narrative idea of a single person entreating the Organization for a favor. Can a single person get the entire Zarian Empire to do them a favor? How about the entire Church of the Ascendant? No, such massive Organizations are hardly going to move to benefit one person, so their Inertia is going to be astronomically high to match. Meanwhile, the local parish will probably do something if a single person asks for help, as well a group of heroes for hire. As a result, their Inertia is probably going to be very low.

Game balance is important to consider here as well. If an Organization's Inertia is low, your players are going to be able to reliably get that Organization's help over and over. Do you want your players to have that much help at their fingertips? If you're OK with that, maybe set the Inertia a bit lower. If you want that power to be harder to wield, set the Inertia a bit higher.

As far as the actual Inertia number goes, remember that Inertia is the Target Number for rolls made by characters trying to get help from the Organization. Thus, regular TN guidelines apply. An Inertia of 1 means the Organization will help literally anyone, of any class and creed, with any task. An Inertia of 2 represents an Organization that is easy to entreat, an Inertia of 4 represents

an Organization that is slightly harder to entreat, 7 means they are fairly difficult to entreat, and 10 means they are very difficult to entreat. In the interest of game balance, I recommend using an Inertia around 7.

With the Influence die and Inertia determined, the last part of the Organization left is the Goals. Typically numbering from three to five, Goals represent the things which the Organization is trying to achieve. These Goals are significant in the eyes of the Organization, without being unreasonable. A Goal should be difficult for an Organization to finish, but not impossible. Completing them should take time and effort.

Think through what completing these Goals would require. After all, player characters need to help an Organization with these Goals to increase their Relationship with the Organization, so more than likely these Goals are going to be pursued as quests. Keeping the Goals amount low means that the players will have less options to pursue, and less you have to prepare.

Good Goals are ones that will make for good adventures, or maybe even good campaigns. It's even better if the Goal naturally produces "follow-up" Goals. For instance, if an Organization's Goal is "Obtain a contract to work with the Zarian government", once that's completed, the Goal "Perform task X for the Zarian government" is an obvious replacement. Remember, Goals are immediately replaced.

Now that you have the Influence die, Inertia, and Goals of an Organization die, you're almost done. Remember that while an Organization is abstracted in the rules as a single entity, it is also a collection of people, and your players are going to eventually want to meet some of those people. As a result, it's a good idea to have a few NPCs developed who belong to the Organization.

Specifically, I'd recommend creating:

- The leader or leaders of the Organization
- The main executors of the Organization's will
- The members of the Organization in charge of recruitment/orientation
- A few friendly (or unfriendly) faces to flesh out the Organization's members.

When all of this is done, you have an Organization ready to go in your game! You are prepared for most everything your characters will want to do in regards to that Organization. Now it's just a matter of running it.

Generally speaking, Organizations can be treated as a narrative element. It's a collection of NPCs that are interacted with the same way the player characters interact with any other NPCs. That's why you developed some NPCs who belong to the Organization: to give players a human face to talk to.

In fact, the only times that you need to think about the Organization as a mechanical entity is in the following three situations:

1. A player character wants to get the Organization to do something.

2. A player character wants to do something for the Organization
3. The Organization is trying to do something.

When Situation 1 comes up (player character wants an Organization to do something), they're going to make an Inertia test to attempt to get the Organization to do something. It's possible to have every single player character have a Relationship die with the Organization, and have every single character attempt an Inertia test. However, this dramatically reduces the difficulty of Inertia tests, perhaps unintentionally. On top of this, this doesn't make much narrative sense. Would someone really take kindly to being asked for the same favor over and over again?

As a result, I'd recommend either only allowing one Inertia test per request, only having one member of the party have a Relationship die with the Organization, or simply having the entire group share one Relationship die.

Also, just because a player passes their Inertia test doesn't mean the Organization does the favor for free. It's more than reasonable for an Organization to ask for something in return for the task, be it money, loyalty, or a favor in kind.

As far as Situation 2 goes, players are going to want to complete Goals in order to increase their Relationship die with the Organization, and you're going to have to be prepared to craft adventures around those Goals.

An immediate question in regards to these adventures is "How is the Organization helping?" After all, Goals are important to the Organization, and so it doesn't make sense that they'd leave some random adventurers to perform them. Maybe the Organization has members working alongside the players, or maybe they provide resources. It's also possible that the Organization is dealing with the Goal on another front (ex. Attacking the front of a castle that the party is assigned to sneak into), or perhaps they have their hands tied with another matter, and can't afford to split their resources.

When the Organization attempts to do something, that something almost always occurs in the form of an Influence test. What's worth noting is that, unlike tests that players and NPCs make, which represent actions made over the course of a few moments, Influence tests represent the mobilization of potentially dozens, maybe hundreds of Organization members towards a goal, and succeed or fail, any actions of a significant enough scale are going to need days, weeks, maybe months to complete.

As far as assigning a TN to Influence test rolls goes, try and judge how easily any given Organization could perform that task. The normal difficulty ratings for tests still apply, they're just being applied on a larger scale. Below are some example TNs for Influence tests:

Influence Test Goal	Target Number
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Get a well-made sword	2
Equip an entire unit of soldiers with well-made swords	4
Gather information about a target of interest	5
Protect an ally targeted by an enemy	6 (if the enemy is also an Organization, you could instead make a Contested Influence test)
Offer room and board to an ally	1
Determine the location of a rare and ancient artifact	9
Kill a highly defended target	9 (again, if the enemy is also an Organization, you could instead make a Contested Influence test)
Convince a high-ranking politician to adopt a policy	7
Convince law enforcement or the Church to let a member's transgressions be forgotten	10

If an Organization fails an Influence test, there are a variety of reasons why it could have failed that could be interesting. Maybe it did literally fail to complete the task successfully. Maybe they failed, but thought they succeeded. Maybe they failed due to a lack of funds, or maybe another matter came up that ended up distracting them. Maybe a double agent in their ranks sabotaged their plans, or maybe another Organization stopped them. Failing an Influence test rarely needs to be as boring as "It didn't happen".

Planning Encounters

The number one rule of planning encounters in Blackmarked is this: any combat at all is lethal. Any Lethal Wound stands a nonzero chance of killing the character that it's inflicted upon. Unless you want your players to be constantly be churning through new characters (which is a totally viable way to play), you're going to need to embrace one of two philosophies:

1. Violent combat encounters should be kept to a bare minimum
2. Every combat encounter should have a way to be avoided, or to have danger mitigated

As far as the first philosophy is concerned, this doesn't necessarily require having a non-violent campaign, or focusing on non-violent characters, but it does focus on making every encounter count. Enemies shouldn't have teams of minions that need to be killed to get to the big boss, nor should adventurers randomly encounter minor enemies while wandering in the woods.

Instead, every fight should have major emotional or narrative significance. Each should represent major plot progress, even if that progress is just towards the goal of “survive”. The key to this philosophy is that, if a player dies during an encounter, they don’t go “Aww, man, *this* killed me?” Players spend a lot of time constructing, developing, and discovering their characters, so having them be killed by a whatever, nothing encounter is extremely heart-wrenching.

Don’t have the characters encounter a random animal in the woods, have them slog for hours through harsh snow, using up their last resources before a ferocious bear springs forth from the woods. Don’t have a random assassin jump the players, have a mysterious stranger shadow the party for days before launching his master trap and revealing himself as a master assassin. Don’t have an Inquisitor wander into town and attack the Blackmarked players, have an Inquisitor spoken of in legend march into town with a cadre of followers and fans, and challenge the Blackmarked to holy mortal combat.

If you don’t necessarily want every fight to be an epic struggle, the second design mantra might be more your speed. The idea behind philosophy 2 is that players should be able to leverage their Skills, the environment, and their roleplaying ability to either lessen the danger presented to them in fights, or avoid combat entirely.

This sort of design requires a bit more work from you as a Game Master, because it requires you to really flesh out your combat encounters. After all, the more details you add to these fights, the more potential points exist that clever players can latch onto and leverage to help themselves in fights.

In general, the sky's the limit as far as ways to seed a combat encounter with little tidbits to help players survive combat. Here are just some of the little additions that can be remixed and added to any combat encounter to ensure characters can survive (just as long as they’re thinking):

- There’s something in the area that increases the killing potential of the player characters, such as burning oil, siege weaponry, some sort of explosive, some sort of construction that can be toppled, or a large chasm or pit.
- The enemies can be rendered non-hostile through some sort of action, like paying off a group of highwaymen, distracting a group of feral dogs with a treat, convincing a murderous psychopath to back down, or terrifying drunken bar brawlers into just fleeing.
- The environment offers some sort of alternate route that lets the players go above, below, around, or perhaps even through the enemies, without them noticing, or without aggravating them, such as a cave running below, a castle wall that can be climbed, or a harmless-seeming trade caravan that can stow away the player characters.
- There is some sort of physical or mental obstruction which the two or more combating parties must pass before engaging in an actual fight, like a cavernous pit, a raging river, an unruly mob, a bridge cut off for a holy parade, or a chained up rabid dog.
- There are some sort of special conditions imposed upon the battle, like the honor rules of a duel between nobles, or a fight over a neutral NPC that both parties want to emerge unharmed.

- The fight can be won before it starts through clever play on the players' end, be it by sneaking up on foes and killing them before they're aware of the players, by poisoning foes, by rendering foes helpless before attacking them, or by holding hostage something that the enemies hold dear.

Now, the recommendation of these two philosophies doesn't necessarily mean that a hyper-lethal play of this game isn't condoned: quite the opposite, actually. Blackmarked was designed to be extremely lethal, as lethal as real life could be in a society where swordfighting and backstabbing is common. If you're going to play a game like this, though, be prepared for it. Tell players to have at least part of a backup character established in case their main character eats it. Be prepared for total party wipes. Let everyone know from square one: *there's a good chance of your character dying*.

Blackmarked also features, mechanically, some ways to try and circumvent character death with no Game Master help required. Faster characters will be able to attack foes first, and kill enemies before they kill them. Clever characters will use combat actions like Parry & Riposte to maintain an aggressive defense, protecting themselves while winning the fight. Bigger characters will simply equip a large amount of weapons and armor, protecting themselves from harm.

Being the King of Rats

The King of Rats is one of the most interesting characters in Kaenis. His motives are vague, and his origin is utterly unknown, but the only constant is that the influence of the King of Rats always manages to sow chaos throughout the world.

The King of Rats is a powerful force in Kaenis, and will be a reoccurring character to your party if any player characters are Blackmarked. Despite this, a lot of aspects of the King of Rats are vague, and thus, are completely up to you as a Game Master to decide. In fact, only a few elements of the King of Rats are defined in Kaenis:

- The King of Rats has five aspects which together comprise them: Death, Destruction, Madness, Manipulation, and Pestilence
- The King of Rats selects champions from those who die from the Scourge, resurrects them, and grants them power based on one of the five aspects
- The King of Rats controls the Sands of Life which dictates how long a Blackmarked will live

Beyond this, the King of Rats is a mystery, an enigma who could change every campaign of Blackmarked. Thus, despite being a named character in the setting, he is still quite mysterious, and could manifest in a variety of different ways. When thinking about what role the King of Rats is to take in your story, ask yourself these questions about the King of Rats:

- How does the King of Rats appear in visions? How is he portrayed by his followers?
- What sort of people receive the Black Mark from the King of Rats?
- How does the King of Rats talk? Is he regal, animalistic, polite, rude? Does he talk at all?
- What sort of character traits does the King of Rats value?

- How does the King of Rats want to destroy civilization? Burn it to the ground? Slaughter everyone with plague? Drive enemy armies against each other until everyone dies? Lull the commoners into a self-destructive decadent lifestyle?

Having a good idea about who the King of Rats is and how he exerts his influence on the world is a good way to start shaping stories around the Blackmarked in your group's story, and what sort of things are happening in Kaenis as a whole. If the King of Rats is a violent warmonger, Kaenis is going to be in turmoil, as cities burn to the ground and monsters wander the countryside. If the King of Rats is more of a political puppetmaster, there may be a veneer of peace, behind which the governments of the world are falling apart due to infighting.

How to play the King of Rats is up to you, but below are some ideas on how to play the character, either for use in your game, or to spur your imagination for how to construct your own interpretation of the character.

The Unknowable Monster: A true personification of chaos, the King of Rats is indecipherable, even to his followers. Never opting for a comprehensible or human form, the King of Rats manifests in visions as an eldritch abomination: a pile of mangled body parts to Death Blackmarked, a fractured, impossible mirror covered in eyes to Madness Blackmarked. Communicating only in insane, nonsensical visions, the followers of the King of Rats simply try to interpret the unintelligible ramblings of a being not of this world, and as such they frequently disagree over the exact interpretation.

The Dapper Madman: A cultured and almost friendly gentleman, the King of Rats appears as a fashionable nobleman, wearing beautiful, fine-tailored clothes and outrageous but finely-crafted hairstyles. The King of Rats likes to subject followers to visions of opulence and royalty, but cracks can be seen every once in awhile: a lump crawling beneath the folds of the King of Rats's suit, a feast slowly rotting away, his eyes fluttering colors to a burning red. This King of Rats makes well constructed contracts and deals with mortals, if only to tear them apart later.

The Court of Madness: Instead of appearing as a single form, the King of Rats manifests as a group of 5 Aspects, each both a unique entity and fundamentally the King of Rats. These 5 beings represent the 5 Aspects personified, and they each have different followers, agendas, and personalities. While the servants of the Aspects might have grand plans to enact on the world as a whole, they also machinate against each other, crafting schemes to weaken their fellow Aspects and bolster their own power.

The War God: The King of Rats manifests as an animal-like warrior, perhaps even part animal, covered in blood and standing in an ethereal battlefield. Similar in behavior to a viking, or a war deity, the King of Rats respects warriors and killers, and seeks to rain destruction and death down upon the world with no subtlety or finesse. While hardly nuanced, the King of Rats musters forces before summoning them upon a great crusade that razes the land.

Playing Blackmarked Without Kaenis

Kaenis is crafted from the ground up to be the setting for Blackmarked. Between the political turmoil, noble backstabbing, rampant crime, and the Black Scourge, Kaenis is perfect for the grim, dire, and dark roleplaying which Blackmarked thrives in.

Despite this, however, Blackmarked was not built for Kaenis, and the setting can easily be removed from Kaenis in favor of a new setting of the GM's selection. Doing so is totally viable, and is a great way to personalize a campaign of Blackmarked for you and your group.

The only element of the Blackmarked mechanics that is specifically tied to the world of Kaenis is the idea of the Blackmarked themselves, which are born of the Black Scourge and controlled by the King of Rats.

In a different setting than Kaenis, it's possible to simply do a one-to-one transfer of this system: whatever this new place is, it too is being ravaged by the Black Scourge (or an equivalent plague), and it too is home to the King of Rats. With this transfer, all of the rules for spellcasting could transfer over as written.

However, there are plenty of interesting ways to model a new world to significantly change the magic system of Blackmarked. These major changes can target one, or more, elements of the Blackmarked magic system, as given below:

Blackmarked are chosen by the King of Rats: Instead of having the King of Rats select people to gain magical powers, what if a different deity chose them? What if magic was a genetic trait, or a direct side-effect of the Scourge? What if exposure to some magical source was the source of magic?

Blackmarked are permanently branded with the Black Mark: The Black Mark is an icon representing the King of Rats, but of course it could represent a different god, or maybe something else entirely. Maybe instead of the Mark, magic users have a more subtle physical change, like different colored eyes, or a more drastic one, like black skin. Maybe there are no physical changes to someone when they gain magical powers. Obviously, changing the nature of the Black Mark also means changing the name of the Blackmarked.

Blackmarked pay for their spells with time from their own lifespan: Blackmarked spend time from their own lives in exchange for their spells. Instead of spending this, maybe Blackmarked spend magical energy, which they refill in one way or another. Maybe they need to sacrifice blood, or some other physical object? Are they limited to spending their own lifespan, or can they spend the lives of others?

Blackmarked can only cast destructive magic: The spells given for Blackmarked are all in some way destructive, manipulative, or otherwise *bad*. Spells can be added that provide beneficial effects, such as healing, removing Strain, boosting the capabilities of allies, charming foes, and other beneficial effects. Similarly, even more destructive spells can be added to create massive destruction.

With the magic system settled, the rest of the setting is up to you as the GM. With the right tweaking, Blackmarked can be played in an original fantasy setting, in the setting of your favorite books, movies, or video games, or in a completely different genre, such as pulp, noir, or even sci fi.

Provided below are some of the guiding principles with which Kaenis was developed. Since Kaenis was built to exemplify the gameplay mechanics of Blackmarked, so understanding how those decisions manifested might help you build your world:

Kaenis is low fantasy: Magic is not extremely commonplace in Kaenis. This decision was made such that martial warriors would have a greater chance to shine, without the risk of being overshadowed by wizards. Those spellcasters that do exist must spend a very precious resource (their life) to cast spells. This works well with the lethality of the game: when any wound stands a reasonable chance of killing you, someone flinging fireballs without a care in the world could wreak havoc.

Contradict: If Blackmarked is going to be played in a high-fantasy world, magic users are going to dominate combat, being able to rain death upon any enemy. Maybe magic users have risen to control the world as a result, or maybe anti-magic tactics and weaponry have evolved to counter the threat. Maybe magic is weaker in such a world, to keep it from being too powerful, or maybe the cost is much greater.

Monsters are a rare event: On a similar note, monsters are not just gallivanting across Kaenis, as common as wild dogs and other mundane animals. Blackmarked's damage system means that any creature of advanced combat capability, such as the monsters of lore, could absolutely eviscerate most any combatant. So, it reasons that if the countryside were swarming with the things, civilization would basically be doomed. Instead, monsters are extremely rare, with most citizens seeing at most a single monster in their lifetime.

Contradict: If Blackmarked is going to be played in a world where monsters are common and roam free, then the people of the world are going to be in near constant fear of death by the hands of monsters. Maybe a dedicated monster hunting force needs to be established to contain the monsters, or maybe militaries are so focused on destroying monsters that countries can't afford to go to war. Maybe civilization never got a chance to grow in the first place, because people were too busy surviving to create culture.

The politics of Kaenis are complicated and backstabbing: To create a greater need for assassin-like characters, and to allow characters to play a game of politicking, backstabbing, and alliances, the politics of Kaenis are a bureaucratic nightmare everywhere, from the complex Guild structure of Palyss to the Taerosian dictators to the Zarian noble families. This sort of structure explains why the commoners of Kaenis have a miserable life, since the nobility is too busy bickering to solve anything.

Contradict: If Blackmarked was played in a game where government actually did their job, instead of looking out for their own wellbeing, the entire world would probably be for the better, as governments leveraged their resources to public works projects. Quality of life would probably be far better for the common folk, and assassins would find their work less in demand.

Kaenis hasn't invented gunpowder: While maybe it exists in the lab of some remote whackjob scientist, or is being used for fireworks or some other novelty, gunpowder has yet to be adopted as a major military tool in Kaenis. Like many other aspects of Kaenis, this is due to the lethality of Blackmarked's combat. Playing a melee-focused character would be pointless if a sharpshooter could kill you. As a result, combat would be focused on guns, and that's not the spirit of the game.

Contradict: Of course, you may decide that you want a game that focuses on guns, and that's fine. To see the way a world might change if gunpowder was popularized, simply do some research on actual world history upon the invention of gunpowder. Old world battle tactics fell away in favor of the dawn of modern combat, castles became obsolete, and the days of intimate combat ended.

Thinking about your setting for your game will result in an interesting game setting, one perfectly adapted to the kind of gameplay style you want to play. If doing that requires modifying the rules to better suit your game, so be it.

A Rogue's Gallery

Kaenis as a whole is full of unsavory types. While it may not have dragons, fairies, or other things that go bump in the night, it still has its fair share of far more terrestrial threats: thugs, bandits, mercenaries, marauding soldiers, Blackmarked, thieves, unruly mobs, and all sorts of various psychopaths, crazies, and mad prophets. What Kaenis lacks in mythical beasts, it more than makes up for in malicious citizens.

Below is a small bank of characters for use in assorted adventures. From this base, the GM of a game of Blackmarked should be able to populate an adventure with dangerous foes, or use these characters as the basis for their own heroes and villains (not that the distinction matters much anymore in Kaenis). Also provided is the base template for constructing an NPC.

All NPCs are provided in the following format:

Name: The NPC archetype's name

A stat block of the NPC's Innates

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck

The NPCs Tired, Exhausted, and Pass Out Thresholds:

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out

Attacks: This will be a list of the sort of attacks the NPC is likely to perform. If they're attacks a player character can do, assume they are performed in the same manner. Otherwise, the Innate/Skill to roll, the speed of the action, and the Wounds caused, will be listed.

Equipment: The gear, equipment, and loot which the NPC is likely to carry

Skills: A list of the skills that the NPC has available, of the format *Skill Name* dX

Weapon Skills: A list of the weapon skills that the NPC has available, in the same format as before

Spells: If the NPC is a Blackmarked, this will be a list of the spells they can cast. Assume that NPC Blackmarked have enough Sand to last the current fight without dying.

Tactics: Tactics are a catch-all term for the behaviors, quirks, strategies, and one-off rules which that NPC can utilize. Use Tactics to shape how the NPC behaves, as well as what tricks they have up their sleeve that just can't be easily defined by other rules.

Banshee

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d8	d6	d4	d10	d8	d6

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
8 Strain	12 Strain	16 Strain

Banshees are mutated birds, changed by the dark magic of a Blackmarked. Banshees are monstrous birds, standing about 5 feet tall, with bones protruding from its skin and its feathers falling out. Banshees have dead gaps for eyes, and their scream is so shrill and horrifying it causes actual pain in those who hear it.

Attacks: Claw Scratch (Quickness, Normal, 1 Lethal Wound), Scream (No skill test, Slow, deals 2 Non-Lethal Wounds to everyone within earshot)

Skills:

Hunting d8

Spotting d8

Survival d6

Tactics:

Predator

Banshees fly high up in the skies, looking for injured, tired, or weak prey. When they see such prey, they swoop down, using their scream to weaken them. They then select the weakest, most appetizing target and carry them off.

Butcher of Prey

If Banshees are having a problem killing prey, they'll simply grab them and lift them into the air for two turns, before dropping them onto the ground below. Unless they use magic or fall into water, the fall will kill any target.

Blackmarked

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d4	d10	d8	d8	d12	d4

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
12 Strain	18 Strain	24 Strain

Blackmarked are those unlucky, or perhaps incredibly lucky, souls chosen by the King of Rats to be resurrected as sorcerers. Branded with the Black Mark on their body, Blackmarked must wander the world, hiding the secret of their true nature from those who would persecute them. Some Blackmarked want to just return to normalcy, while others take advantage of their new power.

Attacks: Sword Slash, Cast Spells

Equipment: Shortsword, Leather Armor, Hunting Knife, Backpack, Tent, Canteen, 40 Place

Skills:

Athleticism d6

Disguise d12

Healing d10

Knowledge (Religion) d10

Lying d12

Sneaking d8

Survival d8

Weapon Skills:

Knives d6

Swords d8

Spells:

(for a Death Blackmarked) *Blood Explosion, Devour Soul, Feast of Death*

(for a Destruction Blackmarked) *Berserker Strength, Blaze of Chaos, Wave of Force*

(for a Madness Blackmarked) *Deceptive Form, Disappear, Mindsnap*

(for a Manipulation Blackmarked) *Dark Admission, Embed Lie, Forget*

(for a Pestilence Blackmarked) *Monstrous Vermin, Swarm of Rats, Virulent Growths*

Tactics:

Nomad Soul

Blackmarked don't tend to stay in one place for very long, lest their identities be discovered. As a result, Blackmarked don't feel comfortable staying one place for very long (except for Madness and Manipulation Blackmarked, who can use their powers to stay hidden for much longer).

Last Resort

Blackmarked will attempt to keep their nature hidden for as long as humanly possible, or else they'll be ostracised or hunted by the Inquisition. As a result, Blackmarked will only use their powers as a last resort, or in situations where there's no chance of the general public knowing (ex. to kill the only witness).

Deathless

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d8	d8	d4	d10	d4	d8

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
-	-	-

Blackmarked have the power to rip a soul out of the cycle of life and death, forcing it to assume a new, tortured form. This form is a Deathless, a spirit which haunts the ground it used to walk, striking out against those it sees out of maddening agony, Deathless lack corporeal form, but make up for it with their debilitating magic.

Attacks: Cast Spells

Skills:

Sneaking d10

Spotting d8

Spells: *Enshroud In Sleep, Haunt Nightmares, Phantom Selves, Worsen Wound*

Tactics:

Not of This Life

Deathless are not corporeal beings. They are freefloating, incorporeal spirits which haunt the world, crafted from a mutated soul. Because of this, Deathless are immune to Strain, and cannot be harmed by traditional weapons or Spells except for their Bane (see below). Furthermore, Deathless may use their magic without limit, and do not have Sands of Life.

Bane

All Deathless have a Bane, something which is capable of anchoring their soul in the corporeal and rendering them mortal. While Deathless are normally immune to all damage. However, damage done to a Deathless by a weapon constructed of, or coated in, their Bane can do Wounds to them.

To determine a Deathless's Bane, roll a d6 and check on the following table:

d6	Bane
1	Honey
2	White Wine

3	Silver
4	Gold
5	Wax
6	Silk

Destroyer of Men

Deathless, without an ability to physically manipulate the world, sow a slower, more painful discord upon those they find, usually by inspiring fear and mentally manipulating them, until a combination of fear, exhaustion, and insanity cause their target to simply die in the wilderness.

Dire Lion

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d10	d8	d6	d8	d10	d8

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
10 Strain	15 Strain	20 Strain

A mutated feline turned into a monster by dark magic, a Dire Lion is a monster which lurks in mountainous and arctic regions. About 4 feet tall, a Dire Lion is a solitary predator, one who plays with its prey and toys with it before finally pouncing and shredding them with its massive fangs.

Attacks: Bite (Strength, Lightning Fast, 3 Lethal Wounds), Claw (Quickness, Lightning Fast, 2 Lethal Wounds)

Skills:

Athleticism d10

Hunting d12

Spotting d10

Swimming d12

Tactics:

Inspire Fear

Dire Lions know the threat they pose to their prey, and as a result they forsake stealth in favor of making their presence known to their prey early. The Dire Lion will wait and follow their prey, inspiring a feeling of unease and fear, and only when the prey is either on the verge of insanity, or believes themselves moments from freedom, will the Dire Lion attack.

Solitary Creature

Dire Lions hate the company of other predators, seeing them as an annoyance. Dire Lions will ruthlessly attack any predators who wander into their territory until they die or leave.

Executioner

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d12	d4	d4	d6	d10	d4

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
10 Strain	15 Strain	20 Strain

Attacks: Axe (Axe, Glacial, 3 Lethal Wounds), Tackle (Strength, Normal, 1 Non-Lethal Wound, knocks foes to ground), Pin (Strength, Normal, No Wounds, pins enemy to the ground)

Weapon Skills: Axe d8

Tactics:

Imposing Presence

The Executioner is a frightening, monstrous individual, and all who lay eyes on it for the first time take 2 Strain.

Decapitator

The Executioner's main method of attack is by tackling foes to the ground with its massive size, pinning that foe to the ground, then swinging its axe, dealing a massive blow to the target, and sometimes decapitating them.

Being From Beyond

Despite its tangible form, the Executioner is not a real living being, but sort of an avatar of a magical being given physical form, like a statue. As a result, the Executioner cannot be healed by mundane or magical means.

Fenrir

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d10	d6	d4	d10	d10	d6

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
10 Strain	15 Strain	20 Strain

Reminiscent of massive wolves, Fenrir on all fours stand about 5 feet tall. With burning red eyes and massive fangs, Fenrir are dangerous predators, commanding a pack of wild wolves and dogs to hunt and kill for it. When the Fenrir is forced to fight itself, it does so with an untamable ferocity and a feral brutality.

Attacks: Bite (Strength, Fast, 2 Lethal Wounds), Claw (Quickness, Fast, 1 Lethal Wound), Pin

Skills:

Athleticism d10

Hunting d12

Spotting d10

Swimming d10

Tactics:

Pack Alpha

A Fenrir will use its incredible size to command local packs of wild wolves and dogs, essentially turning them into its servants. A Fenrir will have a following of 10-20 wild wolves and dogs, who hunt prey for the Fenrir and bring their bodies to it. This pack will also defend the Fenrir from threats.

Overwhelming Size

Fenrir are massive creatures, and they will use their enormous size to pin opponents before tearing them apart with their massive jaws.

Grendel

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d12	d6	d4	d6	d10	d6

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
10 Strain	15 Strain	20 Strain

A tortured body pumped full of dark magic, a Grendel was once a human, but is now an eight foot tall monster which is driven only by maddening bloodlust. Grendels wander the wilderness, barging in on what its twisted mind deems “worthy” warriors and challenging them, usually ripping the arms and legs off of those it bests.

Attacks: Club Swing, Pin, Rip Off Limbs (Strength, Slow, 4 Lethal Wounds and rips off a character’s limb)

Equipment: Massive Club (Clubs, 10 ES, Melee, 2 Lethal Wounds, Glacial)

Skills:

Athleticism d12
Diplomacy d4
Hunting d8
Spotting d8
Swimming d12

Weapon Skills:

Clubs d12

Tactics:

Challenge to the Strongest Warrior

Grendels seek out strong warriors and, using their crude comprehension of language, challenge them to a battle to the death to prove who is the better warrior. If the warrior refuses, the Grendel flies into rage and attempts to murder the “weakling” as well as everyone nearby. If the warrior agrees, the Grendel will battle them one on one. If anyone interferes with the duel, the Grendel will kill the “cheating” warrior and the interferer.

Maim the Weak

Anybody that the Grendel beats in battle it will attempt to permanently maim as a mark of shame. The Grendel’s terms for “loser” are vague, and it will consider anything from falling to the ground to passing out to deal a “loss”. When it deems its opponent a loser, the Grendel will pin it to the ground and rip off its arm, eating it as a final show of supremacy.

Childish

The Grendel speaks and in some cases behaves like a petulant child, speaking in broken sentences and throwing tantrums. The Grendel is easily deceived, but also easily annoyed. The duels the Grendel demands have the loosely-defined rules of a child's game, and like a sore loser, if the Grendel feels it is about to lose, it will cry and run away.

Hellhound

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d8	d6	d4	d10	d8	d6

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
8 Strain	12 Strain	16 Strain

Hellhounds are wolves and dogs which have had their soul ripped out by a Blackmarked and replaced with that of a vicious creature from beyond, giving the creature a hateful drive and a desire to slaughter. Hellhounds have the power to dash in and out of reality in a fiery blaze, allowing them to surprise prey when they least expect it.

Attacks: Bite (Strength, Fast, 1 Lethal Wound)

Skills:

Athleticism d8

Hunting d10

Spotting d8

Tactics:

Dash Through Hell

Hellhounds have the magical ability to teleport long distances, appearing and disappearing in a puff of fire and ash as a Fast action. Hellhounds use this ability to surprise unsuspecting prey, as well as to escape when things start to turn against its favor. Hellhounds can teleport up to 200 feet away, and may teleport an unlimited amount of times.

Defend the Castle

Hellhounds have dens in isolated, hidden areas such as caves and remote areas of forest. These dens are where Hellhounds recover and rest away their wounds, as well as consume food that it rips off of prey. Hellhounds tend to hunt within a few teleports' distance of their den, and will retreat to their den when threatened. If a Hellhound is threatened at its den, it will not retreat, and will instead defend its home.

Pack of Hunters

Hellhounds tend to gravitate towards each other, forming packs of three to four. These packs share a den and hunt together, using the superiority of numbers to gain a powerful advantage

Highwayman

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d8	d6	d4	d10	d8	d6

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
8 Strain	12 Strain	16 Strain

Recent conflicts between the nations of Kaenis have decimated the population of able-bodied soldiers to keep peace across the land and caused peacekeepers to be spread thin across the countryside. With the law so thinly enforced, highwaymen patrol the countryside in packs, hoping to separate honest workers from their coin.

Attacks: Knife Stab, Punch

Equipment: Dagger/Hunting Knife, Commoner's Clothing, a few Lockpicks, a flask of liquor, 30 Place

Skills:

Athleticism d10

Diplomacy d4

Disguise d6

Drinking d12

Lockpicking d4

Pickpocketing d8

Sneaking d6

Weapon Skills:

Improvisation d4

Knives d8

Spells: *None*

Tactics:

Robber

A Highwayman will usually stake out a desolate, but well-traveled, section of road, usually with up to four of his buddies. Then, when a weak-looking traveller passes by, they will accost them, demanding the traveller's possessions. If the traveller refuses, the Highwayman and their crew will attack, looting the corpses after they are through.

Greedy, Not Stupid

The Highwayman's main goal is wealth, not bloodshed. If the Highwayman realizes they stand a real risk of dying (such as by incurring a Lethal Wound), or get at least 10 Strain, they will flee.

Inquisitor

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d10	d8	d6	d6	d10	d6

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
10 Strain	15 Strain	20 Strain

Families hoping to gain the Church's favor will offer up a child to be raised by the Inquisitorial Order, to grow up as executors of the Church's will. Inquisitors are keepers of peace and law, wandering the countryside and helping wholesome, common folk. Of course, Inquisitors also are assigned to hunt, track, and kill all who would worship or follow the King of Rats.

Attacks: Sword Attack, Crossbow Shot, Melee Combat, Improvisational Fighting

Equipment: Zweihander, Crossbow, 30 bolts, Buckler, Plate Mail adorned with religious iconography, Compass, Horse, 50 Place

Skills:

Athleticism d10

Diplomacy d8

Hunting d8

Identification (Heresy) d12

Knowledge (Religion) d12

Spotting d10

Weapon Skills:

Bare Hands d6

Crossbows d8

Improvisation d8

Shields d8

Swords d8

Spells: *None*

Tactics:

Hunter of Blackmarked

Inquisitors have been trained from birth with only one goal in mind: hunting and killing Blackmarked. Inquisitors will help the meek and punish the wicked occasionally, but their roles as general peacekeepers are a far second to their main task of hunting Blackmarked, and nothing will ever come first in their mind.

Hardened by Training

As evidenced by their Skills, Inquisitors have spent an untold tens of thousands of hours training. As a result, they're extremely keen, calculated, and focused. As a result, Inquisitors are immune to Strain.

Divine Hate

Inquisitors will always seek the destruction of a Blackmarked. Inquisitors do not accept pleas, bargains, bribes, or logic in favor of keeping a Blackmarked alive, no matter how great the bribe nor convincing the argument. Inquisitors will always kill Blackmarked.

Malicious Nobleman

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d4	d12	d10	d6	d6	d6

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
6 Strain	9 Strain	12 Strain

The noble families of Kaenis make up a tangled network of politics and false alliances which holds up the governments of Kaenis. Members of these noble families are frequently backstabbing, selfish traitors, willing to do whatever they can to crawl up the social ladders of the world and exert more of their influence over the world.

Attacks: Rapier Slash

Equipment: Rapier, Noble Clothing, 100 Place worth of trinkets

Skills:

Diplomacy d12

Drinking d8

Knowledge (Nobility) d8

Lying d10

Music d6

Weapon Skills:

Swords d4

Spells: *None*

Tactics:

Soft

Noblemen are not particularly known for their ability to get “down and dirty”, typically preferring to either bribe or sweet-talk some thugs to spill blood on the Nobleman’s behalf.

Selfish

Kaenis’s nobility is a backstabbing, traitorous lot. It is safe to assume that nobility will bribe, blackmail, barter, and backstab whenever necessary in order to further their own political influence.

Minotaur

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d12	d4	d4	d6	d12	d6

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
12 Strain	18 Strain	24 Strain

A massive, muscular beastman standing ten feet tall, a Minotaur has the body of the most fearsome warrior, but the head of a bull. Guided only by animalistic hunger, Minotaur use their massive strength to pummel and pulverize prey, requiring legions of the strongest soldiers to fell the primal beast.

Attacks: Gore (Strength, Slow, 3 Lethal Wounds), Punch, Stomp (Quickness, Glacial, 2 Lethal Wounds), Improvised Club

Skills:

Athleticism d12

Hunting d10

Spotting d4

Survival d6

Weapon Skills:

Bare Hands d12

Improvisation d10

Tactics:

Simple Tools

The Minotaur will use large objects that it can find, such as large trees, wagons, or rocks, as weapons to bludgeon and kill targets. The Minotaur has no attachment to these weapons, though, and will simply discard them once the fight is done.

Seeing Red

A common tactic of the Minotaur is to simply charge at foes, using a Run action then attempting to Gore them for massive damage. The Minotaur's massive size means that such an attack is extremely powerful, but its stupidity and slowness means a crafty opponent could take advantage of this.

Massive Domain

Due to a Minotaur's massive size, they tend to prefer in reside in areas where their stature isn't inconvenient, such as fields, deserts, and other wide open spaces. Minotaurs heavily dislike cramped areas, and will thrash about in rage if they ever feel trapped.

Monstrous Rat

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d8	d4	d4	d8	d6	d6

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
6 Strain	9 Strain	12 Strain

Attacks: Bite (Strength, Fast, 1 Lethal Wound)

Skills:

Sneaking d6

Swimming d6

Tactics:

Plague Rat - Anyone who takes a Wound from the Monstrous Rat's Bite attack must make a TN 2 Healthiness test. If they fail, they contract Black Scourge.

Low-Light Vision: The Monstrous Rat has exceptional vision in low-light, and takes no penalties from being in the dark.

Consume Flesh: The Monstrous Rat may consume the flesh of any dead creature as a Glacial Action in order to heal up to one Lethal Wound.

Monstrous Spider

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d6	d6	d4	d10	d6	d4

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
6 Strain	9 Strain	12 Strain

Attacks: Bite (Strength, Lightning Fast, 1 Lethal Wound), Sting (Quickness, Fast, 1 Lethal Wound), Spin Web (Quickness, Glacial, No damage (see below))

Skills:

Hunting d8, Sneaking d8

Weapon Skills:

None

Spells:

None

Tactics:

Poisonous Sting - Any target successfully Wounded by the Monstrous Spider's Sting must make a TN 5 Healthiness test. If they fail, they contract the Spider's Poison (deals 1 Non-Lethal Wound per hour, incurs a d4 penalty on all tests).

Web - The Monstrous Spider is capable of spinning webs, and is able to spin 1 square foot of web as a single Slow Action. This webbing can be spun such that it hangs from a surface, like a door frame or tree, or launched at a foe as an attack. Webbing sticks to any surface it touches, and anyone with webbing caught on them suffers a d6 penalty to all physical tests. Webbing can be spun to completely encase a target, rendering it completely immobile, but doing so is a Glacial action.

Crawl and Climb - The Monstrous Spider can crawl up walls, provided they aren't completely sheer.

Monstrous Bat

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d8	d6	d4	d6	d8	d4

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
8 Strain	12 Strain	16 Strain

Attacks: Bite (Strength, Slow, 1 Lethal Wound)

Skills:

Hunting d10

Spotting d10

Tactics:

Echolocator

Because bats use echolocation instead of traditional sight to perceive the world, they are capable of seeing through most methods of stealth. As a result, characters incur a 3d6 penalty when attempting to Sneak past the Monstrous Bat.

Bloodsucker

Unlike their smaller cousins, Monstrous Bats do truly suck the blood of foes. Whenever a target takes a Wound from the Monstrous Bat's Bite, they are drained of some of their blood, resulting in 3 Strain. If a human target is struck by the Bite three times, they die from blood loss in 2 turns.

Myrmidon

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d10	d10	d4	d8	d8	d6

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
8 Strain	12 Strain	16 Strain

A Myrmidon is a giant spider, mutated by Blackmarked magic into a form about the size of a wagon. The Myrmidon is a hateful predator, creating nests in caves and other dark places, venturing out during the night to hunt prey. When Myrmidons are threatened, they violently tear apart their aggressor, or save them to be consumed by their children.

Attacks: Claw Slash (Strength, Slow, 2 Lethal Wounds), Web Spin (Quickness, Glacial, no damage (see below))

Skills:

Acrobatics d8

Hunting d10

Spotting d12

Tactics:

Intelligent Hunter

Myrmidons are intelligent creatures, sometimes comparable in intelligence to humans. They will fight smart, only taking on fights that they know they will win and retreating otherwise. Myrmidons will use their size, their ability to hunt, and their knowledge of their lairs to their advantage.

Myrmidon Shell

The hard carapace of a Myrmidon provides tough armor, granting it a d10 Armor Die.

Web Snare

By performing a Web Spin attack, a Myrmidon can wrap a target up in sticky webs, rendering them immobile. Characters stuck in these webs may attempt a TN 10 Strength test as a Glacial action to break free.

Caring Mother

Myrmidons reproduce asexually, spinning large cocoons of eggs in their lair. A Myrmidon will lay 1d6 eggs per reproductive cycle, and will have a reproduction cycle every month or so. In the period between laying the eggs and the eggs hatching (usually around a week), the Myrmidon

will capture live prey with its webs and take them back to its lair, for its young to eat after hatching.

Vicious Offspring

Every egg a Myrmidon lays will hatch into a small swarm of average-size spiders, equivalent to a Swarm of Spiders, as the spell. As the swarm grows, eventually a single offspring will consume the rest of its fellow brood, eventually growing to the size of an adult Myrmidon in two weeks' time.

Phantom Rider

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d8	d6	d4	d12	d8	d8

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
8 Strain	12 Strain	16 Strain

Blackmarked sometimes torture horses by summoning spirits of the dead and leashing them to the soul of the horse, turning the two into a single, tortured entity. This abomination, resembling a phantasmal figure screaming while riding a pained skeletal horse, rides across the horizon, inflicting its pain on others to dull its own misery.

Attacks: Sword Slash, Trample (Strength, Fast, 1 Lethal Wound)

Equipment: Longsword

Skills:

Athleticism d10

Spotting d8

Weapon Skills:

Swords d10

Tactics:

Thoughtless Monster

The mind of a Phantom Rider is tortured, both by the misery of being pulled from death back into profane unlife, and the torture of being two distinct souls bound together by dark magic. This pain consumes the mind of the Rider, rendering it impossible to reason with the Rider. It simply lashes out in pain and anger, attacking anything it sees.

Damned Forever

The Phantom Rider simply races at high speed, never stopping due to fatigue, hunger, thirst, or boredom. All the Rider does is follow roads forever, staying away from large population centers and attacking stray travellers.

Reclusive Hunter

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d10	d8	d4	d12	d10	d6

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
10 Strain	15 Strain	20 Strain

There is abundant wilderness across the continent basically untouched by human civilization. For those who prefer the quiet of nature to the crowded nature of the big cities, this wilderness is an open domain of freedom, where one is free to do as one pleases, only looking out for their own needs and living a simple life.

Attacks: Arrow Volley, Knife Slashing

Equipment: Recurve Bow, 30 Arrows, Hunting Knife, Leather Armor, a few days' rations, 1-3 animal pelts, Flint and Steel, Canteen

Skills:

Acrobatics d10

Athleticism d10

Hunting d12

Knowledge (Animals and Plants) d12

Knowledge (World) d10

Sneaking d8

Spotting d10

Survival d12

Weapon Skills:

Bow and Arrow d10

Knives d6

Spells: *None*

Tactics:

Loner

The Hunter has opted to shy away from civilization, instead opting to live alone in the wilderness, surviving off of what they can gather and hunt, and living a simple, subsistence lifestyle. The Hunter strongly dislikes the company of other people, and while not outwardly violent, they will try to distance themselves from others as much as possible, usually resulting in them coming off as quite rude.

Expert Hunter

The Hunter has spent years in this wilderness, learning the behaviors, migration patterns, and locations of all of the local wildlife. They have truly mastered the art of the Hunt, and as a result, they gain a d8 bonus on all tests against wildlife in their area they reside in.

Strigoi

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d10	d6	d4	d10	d8	d8

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
8 Strain	12 Strain	16 Strain

Strigoi are poor souls who Blackmarked have mutated and transformed into dark monsters. Strigoi still retain their human personalities, but have an unquenchable thirst for blood. Some will retreat and hide, trying to reconcile their humanity, while others revel in primal bloodshed, but all eventually take a life to feed their bloodlust.

Attacks: Punch, Bite (Strength, Fast, Lethal Wound, sucks blood (see below))

Skills:

Acrobatics d10

Athleticism d10

Sneaking d10

Survival d8

Weapon Skills:

Bare Hands d12

Spells: *Command Weather, Disappear, Wave of Force*

Tactics:

Sentient

A Strigoi perfectly retains the memories, thoughts, and personality it had prior to its mutation. However, it cannot speak.

Insatiable Bloodlust

Strigoi are always plagued by a need to drink blood, one which constantly throbs in their mind like a migraine, only sated for a brief period after drinking blood. Strigoi will go on hunts to drink blood, first of livestock, then of human targets. In combat, Strigoi will try to bite foes, sucking their blood and inflicting 5 Strain per bite.

Born of Magic

While Strigoi are capable of casting spells like a Blackmarked, they do not have Sands of Life like a Blackmarked. Instead, they have no limits on their ability to cast spells.

Strix

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d8	d12	d8	d10	d8	d6

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
8 Strain	12 Strain	16 Strain

A Strix is a massive owl, created when dark magic mutated a bird to incredible size and intelligence. Strixes are about three feet tall, and have a wingspan of seven or so feet. Cursed with human-like intellect and the gift of speech, Strixes are sociopaths who so enjoy manipulating, toying with, and eventually killing those it considers inferior to it.

Attacks: Claw (Quickness, Fast, 2 Lethal Wounds)

Skills:

Diplomacy d10

Hunting d12

Knowledge (World) d12

Lying d12

Spotting d12

Tactics:

No Need to Be Uncivil

Strixes are intelligent creatures, and will infrequently simply attack a target. Instead, Strixes will converse with prey, at first appearing friendly. If the Strix believes the target to be an intellectual equal, it will happily converse with them before taking its leave. If it believes the target to be “stupid”, it will get tired of dealing with such idiocy and attack.

Manipulator

When a Strix has decided it wants to kill a target, it knows that direct combat is not its strong suit. As a result, it will try its best to lead its target into danger, to sow discord amongst groups of enemies, and to draw the attention of other enemies of the target.

Swarm of Flies

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d4	d4	d4	d10	d6	d4

Attacks: Swarm of Bites (Strength, Lightning Fast, 1 Lethal)

Skills:

Hunting d6

Spotting d8

Weapon Skills:

None

Spells: None

Tactics:

Swarm

The Swarm of Flies is not a single entity, but rather a swarm. As a result, traditional attacks against the Swarm of Flies are ineffective, as they only kill members of the Swarm, without disbanding it. The Swarm of Flies is killed if it is subjected to an attack that affects an area, such as fire, poison gas, submersion, or getting crushed.

Swarm of Rats

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d8	d4	d4	d6	d8	d4

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
8 Strain	12 Strain	16 Strain

Attacks: Swarm of Bites (Strength, Normal, 1 Lethal)

Skills:

Hunting d6

Spotting d6

Weapon Skills:

None

Spells: None

Tactics:

Swarm

The Swarm of Rats is not a single entity, but rather a swarm. As a result, traditional attacks against the Swarm of Rats are ineffective, as they only kill members of the Swarm, without disbanding it. The Swarm of Rats is killed if it is subjected to an attack that affects an area, such as fire, poison gas, submersion, or getting crushed.

Plague Rat - Anyone who takes a Wound from the Swarm of Rats' Swarm of Bites attack must make a TN 2 Healthiness test. If they fail, they contract Black Scourge.

Consume Flesh: The Monstrous Rat may consume the flesh of any dead creature as a Glacial Action in order to completely consume all living tissue from the carcass.

Swarm of Spiders

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d6	d4	d4	d8	d6	d4

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
6 Strain	9 Strain	12 Strain

Attacks: Swarm of Stings (Strength, 1 Lethal)

Skills:

Hunting d8

Sneaking d8

Spotting d4

Weapon Skills:

None

Spells: None

Tactics:

Swarm

The Swarm of Spiders is not a single entity, but rather a swarm. As a result, traditional attacks against the Swarm of Spiders are ineffective, as they only kill members of the Swarm, without disbanding it. The Swarm of Spiders is killed if it is subjected to an attack that affects an area, such as fire, poison gas, submersion, or getting crushed.

Climb Foe

The Swarm of Spiders will attempt to get close to a foe and climb them, covering them in the Swarm. Anyone who the Swarm is trying to climb may make a TN 7 Athleticism test to attempt to dodge the Swarm, or else the Swarm will climb and envelop them. When the Swarm has climbed a foe, they suffer one Non-Lethal Wound every turn they are enveloped by the Spiders.. The Spiders will not climb off of a foe unless commanded to, killed, or until the foe is killed.

Poisonous Sting - Any target successfully Wounded by the Swarm of Spiders' Swarm of Stings must make a TN 5 Healthiness test. If they fail, they contract the Spiders' Poison (deals 1 Non-Lethal Wound per hour, incurs a d4 penalty on all tests).

Zarian Soldier

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck
d10	d6	d6	d4	d8	d4

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out
8 Strain	12 Strain	16 Strain

The White Empire of Zaria has long exerted its will with the power of its army. Thousands of soldiers march under the banner of Zaria, bearing the sigil of their glorious empire and goddess, and the training to clash in the fields of battle. These soldiers are well trained, well armed, and have the zeal to fight for Church and country.

Attacks: Sword Slash, Shield Bash

Equipment: Longsword, Full Shield, Plate Mail, a day's rations, 10-20 Place

Skills:

Diplomacy d6

Drinking d10

Knowledge (Crime and Law) d6

Spotting d6

Weapon Skills:

Shields d10

Swords d10

Spells: *None*

Tactics:

March in Formation

Zarian Soldiers usually travel as a group, either as a whole battalion, or as individual units. As such, when geared up for combat, Zarian soldiers can usually be found in groups of 5-8.

Zarian Combat Training

The Zarian style of melee combat involves holding up one's shield as they approach melee range. Then, once the soldier is within range, they will only drop their shield during safe moments during an enemy's attacks, or in order to perform a parry. Zarian soldiers typically eschew long strings of attacks in favor of singular blows from safety.

NPC Template:*Name*

Strength	Intellect	Charm	Quickness	Healthiness	Luck

Tired	Exhausted	Pass Out

Description:

Attacks:

Equipment:

Skills:

X Skill dX

Y Skill dY

Z Skill dZ

Weapon Skills:

X Weapon Skill dX

Y Weapon Skill dY

Spells: *Spell Name, Spell Name, Spell Name*

Tactics:

Tactic Name

Brief description of the tactic

Tactic Name

Brief description of the tactic

Tactic Name

Brief description of the tactic

