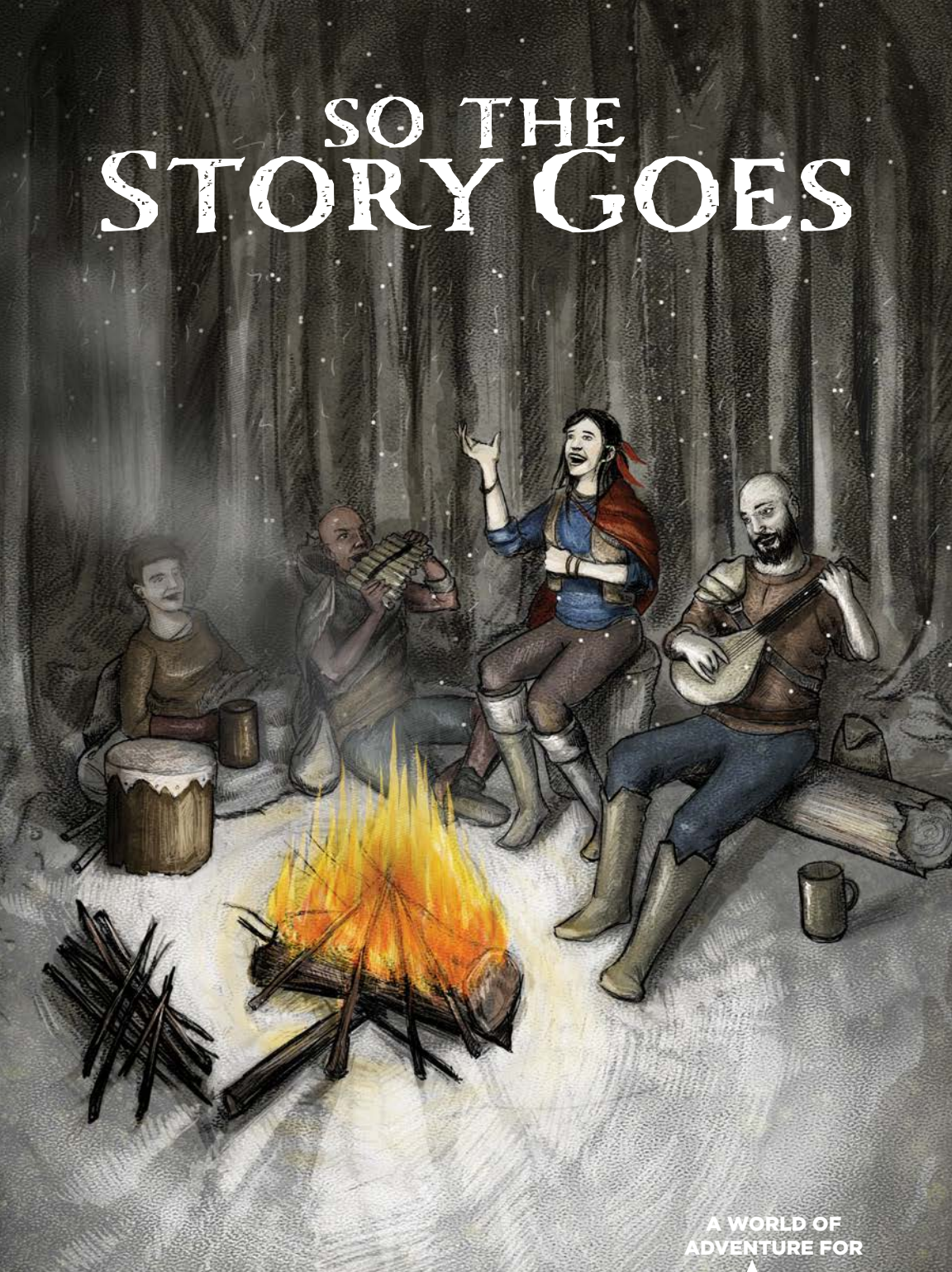
SO THE STORY GOES



A WORLD OF ADVENTURE FOR FATE CORE SYSTEM

DON BISDORF

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vargr1
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William McDuff
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ADVENTURERS

A Person
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Ehedei
Eirch Mascariatu
Elsa S. Henry
Elsidar Amhransidhe
EmissaryOfZork
Emmanuel
Emmanuel Genot
Enrique Esturillo Cano
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Eric Bontz
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Justin
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Mook
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Natalie Ash
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Seth Clayton
Seth Halbeisen
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Shadowmyre Kalyn
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Stuart Dollar
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SO THE STORY GOES

A WORLD OF ADVENTURE FOR

FATE™ CORE SYSTEM

WRITING & ADVENTURE DESIGN
DON BISDORF

DEVELOPMENT
ROB DONOGHUE & ED TURNER

EDITING
JOSHUA YEARSLEY

PROJECT MANAGEMENT
SEAN NITTNER

ART DIRECTION
BRIAN PATTERSON

LAYOUT
FRED HICKS

INTERIOR & COVER ARTWORK
ANDY HUNT

MARKETING
CARRIE HARRIS

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
CHRIS HANRAHAN

EVIL HAT PRODUCTIONS



An Evil Hat Productions Publication
www.evilhat.com • feedback@evilhat.com
@EvilHatOfficial on Twitter
facebook.com/EvilHatProductions

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This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible, impossible, glorious things. All the characters and events portrayed in this work are fictional. Any resemblance to real people, tyrannical warlords, seafaring nomads, bandit drummers, legendary exemplars of virtue, or storytelling social engineers is purely coincidental, but kinda hilarious.

The finest storytellers of the Northlands provided invaluable assistance during development of this game: Mary Lynn Gregory, Bean Lucas, Ken Newkumet, Lynn Conlon, Etienne Picard, Andrea Faenza, Tom Martin, Pedro Rivero, Roe Portal, Mike Lake, Nathan Hare, Dustin Smith, Derrick Miles, and Kevin L. Nault.

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THE STORYTELLER'S WARNING

"Because I am a storyteller, and you're my apprentice, this is the part where I'm supposed to start teaching you all the tales and legends I have locked up in my head. I'm supposed to give you the wisdom and history that I've inherited from a hundred generations of storytellers. I'm supposed to teach you the songs the first miners sang at Ruby Well, and the stories that warn you to never cross the Seakeepers, and the reason why there's a hundred little statues of children in the forest near Grass Road.

But I can't, because the Tyrant killed all of the storytellers in the Northlands. And after your grandparents and their allies finally defeated her—well, maybe not specifically your *grandparents, but you never can tell—everyone who survived the war was too busy fighting famine and plague to learn to play a lute. It's only in the past few years that some of us have had the time and the arrogance to call ourselves storytellers, and we don't have more than a few rumors and drinking songs to pass around.*

But people still know what a storyteller is supposed to do, and they still know what being a storyteller is supposed to mean.

First, it means you have to remember faithfully, and speak truly. When you tell people about what we saw in Standing Stone, it doesn't matter whether you think the story would be better with more romance, or more action, or with a happy ending. If you change the story at all, and the next storyteller changes it more, and the next one changes it again, pretty soon no one will remember at all why there's a pile of human bones in the cave outside of Standing Stone, and no one will remember how to make sure that never happens again.

Second, it means that when you do lie, you do it for a good reason. People like made-up stories. They like stories about magic and monsters and the good orphan who wins or the evil uncle who loses. But you don't tell those stories just to earn a jug of wine and a warm bed. You teach people something so they don't keep making the same mistakes over and over. You help them laugh so they don't mind working another long day, or you give them the courage to face another long night.

And last, whenever people come to you for help, whenever they ask you for advice, whenever they beg you to share the wisdom you've received from the proud lineage of storytellers you belong to, you help them. *It doesn't matter if we're not the great singers of old—we have to pretend to be them, because our audience* needs *us to be them. And I don't want to be the one to tell the spirits of our long-dead predecessors that we've spoiled their reputation.*

No, I have no idea whether any angry old spirits are actually going to show up and torment us for singing off-key.

You're the storyteller now. You tell me."

—Proud Bird, storyteller of the Northlands

A LAND STILL HEALING

The storytellers were the guardians of the oral history of the Northlands. They carried a thousand years of legends and fables, songs and stories, riddles and lessons. They taught farmers to build, taught children to laugh, and taught leaders to rule. They remembered the failures of the past so the Northlands would have a bright future.

Seventy years ago, when the Tyrant rose to power, the storytellers spoke out against her, warning their audiences that the Tyrant's hunger for war would bring sorrow and ruin. The Tyrant responded by sending assassins to eliminate the storytellers, so that the Northlands would only hear the truth she had fabricated to support her reign.

Eventually, the Tyrant's lies could no longer mask her cruelty, and the Northlands rose against her. A hundred independent armies and militias marched forth to put an end to her bloody reign. Ten years of battle turned farmlands into ash, meadows into mass graves, villages into death-haunted ruins.

Now that the wounds of war have healed, a few adventurous souls have picked up lutes and pipes and have left their homes to follow the paths of the storytellers of old. Whether the Northlands regain their strength and prosperity, or sink back into fear and chaos, may depend on the songs these new storytellers sing.

WHAT'S MY MOTIVATION?

In a typical game of *So the Story Goes,* your characters have chosen to follow the ancient tradition of storytelling so they can change their world for the better. The game is about the triumph of reason over fear and hatred, of truth over propaganda and dogma, of tolerance and cooperation over prejudice and xenophobia. Your storytellers might each have their own reasons for embarking on this quest, but in the end they are working toward a common altruistic goal.

Your own game of *So the Story Goes* might be different. You could tell a more morally gray tale where your characters are seeking fame, wealth, or power. They could be a band of con artists who prey upon the gullible and foolish, or a group of demagogues building an empire around a cult of personality.

You're the storytellers now. What kind of world will you build?

Setting Aspects

The game's first setting aspect, We Tell the Tales, represents the traditional role of a storyteller in the Northlands. As storytellers, your characters are guardians of knowledge and history. They have a responsibility to remember and share their stories, to offer advice, and to judge fairly.

The Northlands are a patchwork of city-states, towns, and villages, united by a common language but not a common government. These people have diverse origins: some traveled from faraway lands to settle here, while others have lived here since before even the storytellers can remember.

Despite this, the communities of the North have usually existed side by side in peace, thanks in no small part to the efforts of the storytellers. Through their songs, the storytellers showed their audiences the tragic mistakes and joyful triumphs of their ancestors. They reminded rulers of ancient oaths and treaties, and they established understanding and cooperation between rivals.

The people of the North remember little of the teachings of the old storytellers, but they do remember that the storytellers were entertainers, teachers, and advisors. They were trustworthy mediators and impartial judges. They carried the history of the land, and they were as valuable and as necessary as clean water or a good harvest. Most people will show a storyteller respect and hospitality, and will hope to receive advice and wisdom in return.

Before moving on, work as a group to choose a second setting aspect. This aspect describes a long-term issue that will affect the course of your campaign. Here are a few suggestions:

- The Silencers Return: The Tyrant formed an order of assassins called the Silencers to find and kill the storytellers of the Northlands. Though the Tyrant perished, her Silencers passed their mission down to succeeding generations. They remain hidden but vigilant, and are prepared to silence anyone who contradicts the lies the Tyrant told to justify her reign.
- The Seakeepers Never Forget: The sailing tribes known as the Seakeepers have obstructed all sea trade with the Northlands due to a generations-old dispute. A truce will only be possible if the PCs can inspire the right people on both sides to set aside their grievances.
- The Riddle of the Tyrant: The Tyrant may be the best-known and least-understood figure in the memory of the North. Few reliable facts survived the firestorm of hatred, violence, and chaos she ignited. But without the truth of the Tyrant's life and death, any history of the Northlands will never be complete.

CREATING CHARACTERS

In *So the Story Goes*, your characters are storytellers in a traveling troupe. Storytellers in the Northlands commonly travel in troupes for several reasons:

- **Safety.** Crossing the Northlands is a hazardous task. A traveler must contend with bandits, bad weather, questionable food, corrupt local officials, suspicious villagers, hungry predators, and errors in navigation. A team of companions is more likely to succeed than a lone wanderer.
- **Mastery.** Performing as part of a troupe allows each member to develop a different artistic talent. The troupe can therefore offer its audiences a band of performers who are each expert in their chosen craft.
- **Harmony.** Though anyone can tell a story alone, a performance is more vibrant if several performers are available to portray different characters or to combine different mediums of performance.
- **Variety.** Since storytellers must draw on their own histories for emotion and authenticity, a band of performers with a broad base of experiences can adapt to many different subjects.

Lone storytellers will look for opportunities to join other storytellers as they travel. Someone who is not a storyteller, but who wishes to become one, may ask to become a storyteller's apprentice. If pre-war storytellers had maintained any specific apprenticeship procedures or rituals, those have been lost, and the process is now entirely up to the teacher.



Aspects

Your character will start the game with a **high concept**, a **trouble**, two **story aspects**, and a **relationship**. These aspects represent the experiences your character will draw on to add strength to your performances, so it's important to choose aspects that provide emotion and drama.

High Concept

Your high concept must include the type of performance you are best at. For instance, you might be a Perfection-Driven Lutist or a Morbid Puppeteer.

The storytellers of the Northlands traditionally use these instruments and methods of performance:

- **Acting:** An adept storyteller can single-handedly perform an argument between a vengeful grandfather, a naïve youth, and a scorned lover as convincingly as if there had been three performers instead of one.
- **Song:** Telling stories through songs helps storytellers and audiences to remember these tales word for word. Also, music can carry emotion, and the people of the North consider storytelling without song to be dry and dull.
- **Lute:** Northland lutes have long necks, narrow bodies, and three strings, similar to the sintir or guembri of our world.
- **Claves:** These are hollow wooden rods, about the length of a hand and slightly thicker than a thumb. A clave player strikes two of them together to mark time or to construct rhythms.
- **Drums:** A performer might carry one or two small drums to provide bass notes, contrasting with the bright tones of the claves.
- **Pipes:** A set of wooden pipes is durable and lightweight, and is therefore an excellent traveler's instrument.
- **Dance:** Dancers illustrate stories by representing the characters or emotions within a performance.
- **Puppetry:** The puppets used in the Northlands are two-dimensional silhouettes suspended from strings, stylized to emphasize the personality, virtues, or villainy of their characters.

Other methods of performance are less common, but not unheard of. You may choose a different method if your group agrees that it's appropriate for the game, and if it's suitable for a traveling performer in a low-tech society. You could be a juggler, or you could play an ocarina, but constructing and traveling with a pipe organ would be beyond your capabilities.

Trouble

Your trouble represents a serious problem that your character is trying to work through. During play, the story should force your characters to confront their problems and eventually resolve them, for good or for ill.

Story

Your two story aspects describe significant experiences you've had or lessons you've learned. You might have grown up as a Fortune-Teller's Daughter, or you might have been Justly Imprisoned. As a storyteller, you draw upon these memories to add depth to your performance.

Relationship

Your last aspect describes the relationship between your character and one of the other PCs. This relationship should lead you to confront difficult decisions during play.

If another PC has a relationship that describes a connection to you, you don't have to choose a reciprocal aspect. For example, if Raincloud took the relationship My Daughter Moonlight Is a Disappointment, Moonlight doesn't necessarily have to have a relationship indicating that Raincloud is her mother. She could choose Why Doesn't Arrow Respect Me? instead if she's more interested in exploring her relationship with Arrow.

Skills and Stunts

As master storytellers, your characters will solve most of their problems through communication and performance. Through your words and songs, you might persuade a father to forgive his contrite children, or you might convince a village of warriors to stop preying on its weaker neighbors.

All storytellers have their own strengths and talents, and each might approach the same problem in a different way. The list of skills for *So the Story Goes* provides the possible avenues your character will use to accomplish their goals:

Appeal	Listen	Rhetoric	Trick
Confront	Notice	Risk	Will

When creating a new PC, choose one Good (+3) skill, two Fair (+2) skills, and three Average (+1) skills.

Most action in *So the Story Goes* involves talking to people and finding the right words to influence them. For example, when the storytellers need to learn a warlord's plans, they might discover that his strategy map is in his tent, and that a single guard stands watch outside the tent at all times. His commander has ordered him to defend the tent, and because he has the aspect Pride in My Duty, he'll guard it with his life. Just asking politely won't get the storytellers into the tent.

The following skill descriptions show how four different storytellers might use their skills to get past the guard: Proud Bird, the charming singer; Branch, the wise traveler; Creek, the clever pickpocket; and Winter, the former bandit.



Appeal

Use Appeal when you use emotional influences such as friendship, desire, pity, greed, and guilt to lead someone to agree with you or to accept your suggestions. To do so, you must find an influence your subject is susceptible to.

> If Proud Bird just approaches the guard and asks to see the warlord, the guard will turn her away. But if Proud Bird knew that the guard is an Enthusiastic Gambler and she invites him to a game, the GM might allow her to overcome with Appeal. Similarly, if she had spent time telling the guard a tale of woe, making him Sympathetic, he might step away from his post briefly to help her.

Overcome: Beg, tempt, cajole, or bribe someone to do what you want.

Create an Advantage: A well-handled bribe could make someone Loyal Until Your Money Runs Out, while a few kind words could create a Good First Impression.

Attack: In a social conflict, you use Appeal to wear down your opponent's resistance with tempting or emotional gambits.

Defend: You don't defend with Appeal.

STUNTS

Love Is in the Air: Gain +2 to bestow aspects such as Infatuated or Blinded by Passion on characters who might be romantically attracted to you.

Sycophant: Gain +2 to create aspects that reinforce someone's sense of superiority, such as Drunk with Flattery or These Fools Are No Threat to Me.

Lingering Whisper: Even the memory of your words can be persuasive. If you fail an overcome action to petition an NPC with Appeal, you may attempt the same action once more in a future scene when you aren't near that NPC. For an explanation of petitions, read *"Petitions"* (page 21).



Confront

Use Confront when you are using dominance, assertiveness, or verbal abuse to command, intimidate, humiliate, or anger someone.

The guard won't leave his post just because Winter threatens him with violence. He'll gladly hoist his spear to protect himself and his warlord. But if the guard Always Defends His Honor, and Winter aims a grievous insult at him, the guard might pursue Winter away from his post.

Alternately, if Winter had succeeded at a Risk action to quickly seize the guard and hold a knife to his throat, she could use Confront to order him to remain silent. With certain death just an inch from his skin, the guard might agree not to resist.

Overcome: Threaten or insult someone to influence their behavior.

Create an Advantage: Bestow aspects such as Blind with Rage or Utterly Humiliated.

Attack: You attack with Confront when you're trying to inflict emotional pain.

Defend: You don't defend with Confront.

STUNTS

I'm In Charge Here: When you respond to intimidation with a stronger threat of your own, you can use Confront to defend against someone using Confront to attack you.

If Looks Could Kill: When you glare at someone who can see your face clearly, regardless of distance, you can attempt to give them an aspect such as Afraid or Cowed and Cooperative.

Primal Rage: When you release your fury, nothing can stand in your way. Once per session, you can use Confront instead of Risk to overcome a physical obstacle.



Listen

Use Listen when you are gathering information through careful observation and communication.

> Creek decides to spend some time chatting with the warlord's soldiers to see if he can pick up any useful information. Only one or two trusted lieutenants have seen the map, and they won't discuss it openly. But many rank-and-file soldiers will be willing to trade stories about their comrades, and if Creek asks around about the guard in front of the warlord's tent, he might learn that the guard is Afraid of Snakes. Getting the guard away from the tent might be as easy as dropping a snake in the right place.

Overcome: Conduct an interview, collect gossip while mingling, or discern the difference between someone's words and their intentions.

Create an Advantage: Discover an audience's aspects. You might find that a merchant is Hiding Something from the Authorities or that the guests at a drinking house Hate the New Governor.

Attack: You don't attack with Listen.

Defend: Identify the truth when someone lies to you, or locate the holes in your opponent's logic. Use Listen to defend against attacks or aspects inflicted with Trick or Rhetoric.

STUNTS

Subtle Questioning: You have a knack for sneaking important questions into an innocuous conversation. Once per session, when you use Listen to collect information, you can declare that the people providing you with the information won't remember giving it to you.

You're My Inspiration: You've listened closely to the histories of your friends, and you've learned from them. During storycrafting, you may use one aspect belonging to another PC when choosing helpful aspects to support your story element. This cannot be an aspect representing a secret the other PC has not shared with you.

That Reminds Me: Once per session, you may declare that you overheard something previously in the scenario that would help you in your present circumstance. You must overcome using Listen to determine the accuracy and usefulness of this information.



Notice

Use Notice when you are gathering information through observation, not communication.

Succeeding at a Notice action allows you to detect a hidden or obscure detail, but doesn't help you interpret that detail. If you catch sight of two people whispering, for example, you might need to overcome using Notice to hear their words clearly, but you would need to overcome using Listen to determine that one of the two is lying.

> While chatting with the guard, Proud Bird glances over his shoulder, and then tells him that she thought she heard someone moving in the warlord's tent. The guard thought the tent was empty, but Proud Bird succeeded in using Trick, so the guard opens the tent flap and peers inside. Proud Bird has just a moment while the tent flap is open to study the map, and the GM allows her to roll Notice to learn something useful.

Overcome: Follow a trail in the wilderness, spot the knife hidden up someone's sleeve, or catch sight of the bandits about to ambush you.

Create an Advantage: You might notice that an opponent has a Weak Left Leg or that the ice on a lake is Dangerously Thin.

Attack: You don't attack with Notice.

Defend: You don't defend with Notice.

STUNTS

Sharp Eyes: If you have an unobstructed line of sight, you can see something a mile away as clearly as if you were standing next to it.

An Obvious Move: You can use Notice instead of Risk to defend against a physical attack, as long as you can see your attacker.

Simple Deduction: Simply by observing someone for a few moments, you can use Notice to learn one of their aspects, even if the aspect would not produce a visible sign anyone else could detect. You cannot use this stunt to learn more than one aspect from any single character.



Rhetoric

Use Rhetoric when you use facts and logic to convince someone to accept an assertion as valid. This must be an assertion you believe to be correct. If you're deliberately leading someone to a false conclusion, use Trick instead.

> Though the guard knows that his warlord finds these new storytellers entertaining, the guard has received orders to allow no one into the warlord's tent, and he has no reason to make an exception for Branch. However, Branch might be able to use his Rhetoric and his military acumen to convince the guard that the camp has several strategic vulnerabilities. If he also convinces the guard to immediately alert his commander of these weaknesses, the guard may temporarily leave his post, giving the storytellers access to the tent.

Overcome: Demonstrate why your viewpoint is rational and objective. Present a compelling argument. Find the flaws in someone else's proposal.

Create an Advantage: After a conversation with you, someone might be Vindicated by the Truth or might have their Principles Cast Into Doubt.

Attack: In a social conflict, you can use Rhetoric to assail your opponent's position with assertions and rebuttals.

Defend: You don't defend with Rhetoric.

STUNTS

Haggle: Gain +2 to Rhetoric when you are negotiating a trade of material goods.

I Bow to Your Wisdom: By asking the right questions, you can lead someone to make a decision that you control. Once per session, when you use Rhetoric to convince someone to grant your petition, you can declare that they believe it was their idea instead of yours.

Remember These Words: Once per session, you can give someone an argument that they can use to get someone else to grant a specific petition. When your subject uses your argument, they use your Rhetoric rank instead of their own.



Risk

Use Risk when you're performing a dangerous or difficult physical activity.

> While Proud Bird engages the guard in conversation, Creek sneaks up from the opposite direction and tries to slip into the tent quietly. The GM allows Creek to overcome using Risk, and the guard opposes this using Notice.

Overcome: Swim a turbulent river, sneak past a watchful sentry, or pick the pockets of a jailer.

Create an Advantage: You might blow dust in someone's eyes to leave them Blinded or kick over a tent pole so that everyone inside gets Tangled and Confused.

Attack: You can inflict a physical attack with Risk.

Defend: You defend against physical attacks with Risk.

STUNTS

Tools of War: You have experience handling weapons in combat. When you successfully attack with a handcrafted weapon, your attack inflicts one extra shift of harm.

Like the Wind: If you're traveling by foot, you arrive at your destination in half the time it would take anyone else. This benefit doesn't extend to your companions.

Master of Shadows: In darkness, you gain +2 to Risk to move or hide without someone seeing you.



Trick

Use Trick when you are persuading someone to accept falsehoods as truth.

> If Creek lies to the guard, telling him that the warlord needs to see the guard on the other side of camp, the guard might not have any reason to believe this. But if Creek stands off at a distance in the shadows and mimics the warlord's voice, ordering the guard to approach him, the guard might step away long enough for Winter to slip into the tent and study the map.

Overcome: Tell a lie. Twist your opponent's words. Disguise yourself or impersonate someone.

Create an Advantage: You might spread lies among the bandits to create Mistrust and Suspicion or use mimicry and disguise so that people believe you're The Ghost of the Murdered Oracle.

Attack: You can use Trick to attack in a social conflict as you weave a web of lies around your opponent.

Defend: You don't defend with Trick.

STUNTS

A Thousand Faces: You can improvise an effective disguise in less than a minute, using whatever materials you might have on hand. Neither lack of time nor lack of proper costumes and makeup will increase your opposition.

Tales of Terror: Gain +2 to create aspects such as Afraid of the Dark or Jumpy and Jittery when you tell a story about a supernatural threat. This bonus doesn't apply to storycrafting (page 24), only to stories you tell on your own.

More Truthful Than Truth: Your audiences *want* your lies to be the truth, and will be reluctant to accept any facts that contradict you. When you use Trick to place an aspect representing a false belief on someone, you may oppose any attempt to remove that aspect, even if you're not present, with a +2 bonus.



Will

Use Will to resist distractions or emotional influences and to hold true to your convictions.

> When the guard becomes suspicious of Proud Bird, he threatens her, trying to drive her away. He uses Confront to verbally attack her, but she holds her ground, using Will to defend.

Overcome: Focus, concentrate, and endure.

Create an Advantage: After a night of intensive study, you might be Well Rehearsed for a performance the next day. Or you might take time before a battle to set aside your fears so that you're Prepared for the Worst.

Attack: You don't attack with Will.

Defend: Use Will to defend against emotional attacks or aspects inflicted with Appeal or Confront.

STUNTS

Steely Gaze: The look in your eyes tells people that you aren't an easy target. You can use Will instead of Risk to defend against a physical attack at close range.

Spirit of the Wild: You can use Will to convince animals to perform simple actions such as "follow me" or "carry this" or "leave us alone."

Survivor: You still need to eat and drink, but hunger and thirst never give you aspects or increase your opposition.

Using Knowledge

There's no knowledge-related skill—such as Lore—for the same reason that there are no dramatic performance skills. *So the Story Goes* assumes that your characters are knowledgeable, talented storytellers, so there's no need to choose skills to represent this.

If you want to determine whether a character knows any useful information about a given subject, look at the character's aspects and background. A woodcutter might know a great deal about trees and woodlands. She might also know how to find her way through the forest where she grew up, and how to find the reclusive hermit who lives in a hut deep in the woods.

If a given fact or rumor seems particularly obscure, the GM may ask the player to pay a fate point and invoke an aspect to produce that knowledge, as you would do to declare a story detail according to *Fate Core* (page 13).

Alternately, if a character knowing a certain fact would advance the plot or create an interesting situation, the GM can grant that knowledge regardless of aspects or invocations.

TEAMWORK

Fate Core suggests two methods for multiple characters to contribute to a single action—combining skills (page 174) and stacking advantages (page 175). For *So the Story Goes* we recommend allowing characters to stack advantages instead of combining skills.

Combining skills can lead to one character frequently taking the initiative and rolling the dice, while other characters simply tag along to provide +1 bonuses. Asking players to stack advantages gives everyone the opportunity to roll dice, take risks, and apply their own creativity to the situation.

Similarly, we recommend representing a group of nameless NPCs as a single character rather than as a group of individual characters combining their skills. If a pack of thieves turns up, you can give the group the skills and stress they would have when acting together, instead of choosing statistics for a single thief and then allowing six of them to combine their skills.

Stress and Consequences

Wielded properly, a sharp word can cripple as well as a sharp knife. In *So the Story Goes*, characters have only one stress track with three boxes to track both physical and mental harm.

Because the PCs collect knowledge and folklore, they are familiar with simple remedies, and they roll to recover consequences at a Fair (+2) skill rank. If the PC performing treatment has an aspect that indicates training appropriate to the consequence being treated—for example, medical or martial training for a physical injury, or shamanic training for mental trauma—they instead roll at Great (+4). NPCs normally have a Mediocre (+0) skill rank for this purpose, or Fair (+2) if they have some general education, or Great (+4) if they have specific training in the form of treatment required.

Sample Characters

You can use the following example characters as PCs or NPCs in your game, or just as inspiration when creating your characters. If you put these example characters into a troupe with newly created characters, adjust their relationship aspects to connect them to their new companions.

Proud Bird

Your family is wealthy and powerful, and would have given you anything you wanted—except the freedom to sing, which they found frivolous and undignified. Even the first and greatest love of your life urged you to choose a different vocation. In your final argument with your parents, they called you a proud bird, too enamored with your own voice to accept food or shelter. You fled your home and your lover, taking a new name from the words your parents intended as contempt.

Proud Bird

ASPECTS

High Concept: Fascinating Singer
Trouble: Impossible? I'll Do It Anyway
History: Memories of Wealth and Privilege; Love Always Turns Sour
Relationship: I Want Branch's Secrets

SKILLS

Good (+3): Appeal
Fair (+2): Listen, Trick
Average (+1): Confront, Rhetoric, Will

STUNTS

I'm Better than That: Gain +2 to Will to oppose someone trying to place an aspect on you that would make you feel inferior, such as Pangs of Guilt or Intimidated.

Guilt Trip: If you've already made a favorable impression on someone, in the form of an aspect like Enamored or Impressed, you gain +3 instead of +2 if you invoke that aspect to influence that person by expressing disappointment with their behavior.

Starstruck: Once per session, you can spend a fate point to gain the complete trust and willing service of one nameless NPC who has heard you sing.

STRESS 1 2 3



Branch

Under your leadership, the fighting men and women of Still Water became a potent military force. Once you had eradicated the local bandit gangs, you turned your attentions to the nearby town of Hearth. You invented evidence to convince your people that Hearth was a threat to Still Water's existence, and then you went to war. Your arrogance and recklessness led to the annihilation of your army. Hearth didn't destroy Still Water in retaliation, but demanded that Still Water pay a steep, regular tribute as the cost of Hearth's mercy. Your former peers exiled you, and in disgrace you changed your name and picked up the trade of the storyteller, letting the roads of the Northlands carry you far away from your failure.



Branch

ASPECTS

High Concept: Travel-Worn Lutist
Trouble: Haunted by Those I Killed
History: They Called Me Brave Banner; Disgraced in Still Water
Relationship: I'll Keep Creek Out of Trouble

SKILLS

Good (+3): Rhetoric
Fair (+2): Notice, Listen
Average (+1): Confront, Risk, Will

STUNTS

Comrade in Arms: Gain +2 to Risk to defend someone within arm's reach from a physical attack.
I've Seen That Trick: Gain +2 to Listen to oppose someone using Trick against you, if you can tell a brief anecdote about a similar form of deception.
Commanding Presence: Use Will to create an advantage by issuing rapid orders and reassurances during an immediate crisis.

STRESS 1 2 3

Creek

You and your mother enjoyed a good life in Cerulean until the day of the storm, when she didn't return from her job at the docks. After that, you turned to pickpocketing, which you were good at—but not as good as you thought. A critical mistake landed you in serious trouble, and it's fortunate your uncle Branch turned up to get you out of the city. He's been teaching you the storyteller's trade, and it's fun, but sometimes you miss being on your own, with no one to tell you what to do and how to behave.

Creek

ASPECTS

High Concept: Adventure-Seeking Piper
Trouble: In Over My Head
History: Pickpocket of Cerulean; A Storm Took My Mother
Relationship: Secretly in Love with Winter

SKILLS

Good (+3): Trick
Fair (+2): Appeal, Risk
Average (+1): Confront, Listen, Notice

STUNTS

I Didn't Do It: Gain +2 to Trick whenever asserting your innocence of something you actually did.
Exit, Stage Left: Once per session, you can disappear immediately from a location from which you could physically leave, if no one is watching you at the moment.
Quicker than the Eye: Gain +2 to Risk to steal or manipulate items smaller than your hand.

STRESS 1 2 3



Winter

You and your former bandit crew told yourselves that you would become a conquering army, that the lands of the North would be yours to plunder. Your dreams of glory only lasted a year before your friends turned on each other, and after a night of betrayal and sharp knives, you were the last survivor. You wandered half-mad through the wilderness, starved and feverish, and eventually woke up to find that a few traveling storytellers were nursing you back to health. You were just as surprised as they were to find that you had a knack for remembering and telling stories, and so they adopted you. Since then, you've been trying to repay their kindness by making sure that no one—*no one*—hurts your new friends.



Winter

ASPECTS

High Concept: Blunt and Belligerent Drummer
Trouble: Savage Instincts
History: We Were Bandits; Visions and Apparitions in the Wilderness
Relationship: I Owe My Life to Proud Bird

SKILLS

Good (+3): Confront
Fair (+2): Risk, Will
Average (+1): Listen, Notice, Trick

STUNTS

Shrug It Off: You may take two mild consequences instead of one.
Verbal Ambush: If you initiate a conflict with an emotional attack in the form of a violent threat, you gain +2 to Confront for this attack.
I Won't Be Held: Gain +2 to Risk to break through a physical barrier, such as a locked door, a tree across a road, or binding ropes.

STRESS 1 2 3

THE POWER OF WORDS

As storytellers, you have two methods for influencing the people you meet: your social skills and your performances.

The setting aspect We Tell the Tales establishes that your characters are talented storytellers. There is never a need to roll dice to determine whether you know how to play a lute or sing a melody. Under normal circumstances you can perform at a moment's notice, and your audience will be appreciative.

Petitions

When your character uses verbal or emotional methods to cause an NPC to provide assistance, share information, or agree with an assertion, this is called a **petition**.

If the petition is something the NPC would willingly provide without hesitation, there's no need to pick up the dice. If the NPC is unwilling, you must perform an overcome action. You must first describe how your character is influencing the NPC. Then, based on your tactics, you and the GM determine which skill you use.

The GM also chooses which skill the NPC uses as opposition:

- Use **Appeal** if the NPC tries to avoid granting the petition by pleading for mercy, asking for forgiveness or understanding, or leveraging bonds of friendship or infatuation.
- Use **Confront** if the NPC responds with aggression, insults, or authoritative commands.
- Use **Listen** if the NPC analyzes the PC's words to find an error or misunderstanding.
- Use **Rhetoric** if the NPC tries to present a rational reason to refuse the petition.
- Use **Trick** if the NPC uses deception or confusion to cause the PC to drop the petition.
- Use **Will** if the NPC is simply ignoring the PC or refusing without explanation.

If a PC is trying to petition a group of NPCs, find the skill that the NPCs are using to provide opposition, and then find which NPC in the group has the highest rank in this skill. Use this NPC's skill rank to set the level of opposition.

An important distinction is that if you're trying to convince an NPC to *do* something, that's a petition, but if you're convincing an NPC to *believe* something, you're creating an advantage.



Impossible Petitions

GMs, you may declare that an NPC will not grant a certain petition under any circumstances. An NPC might never agree to burn down her farm or expose her child to danger. Use common sense and the NPC's aspects to identify these situations.

The PCs might be able to convert an impossible petition into a possible petition if they can provide justification. For example, if they had convinced their audience that wicked spirits were plaguing their village, and if the PCs had somehow demonstrated that fire could drive off the spirits, they might then be able to persuade one of the villagers to burn down her own farm. Several examples in *"Skills and Stunts"* (page 7) demonstrate how storytellers can convert impossible petitions into possible petitions.

NPCs can't use their skills to force PCs to grant their petitions. The GM can describe how an NPC is attempting to petition a PC, and the player decides whether or not to grant the petition.

Verbal Conflicts

You may wish to run lengthy, significant arguments as conflicts to help track the impact of every assertion and accusation. In a verbal conflict, opponents take turns using Appeal, Confront, Rhetoric, and Trick to attack, and use Listen and Will to defend. Determine turn order using Will.

Before starting the conflict, set the stakes. Decide what each side is trying to achieve or prevent. Players, your attacks should either reinforce your goals or undermine your opponent's. GMs, remember that NPCs cannot force PCs to take specific actions. "I want you to go away" is not a goal an NPC could achieve in a conflict with a PC, but "I refuse to admit you're right" or "I'll make you look foolish in front of your allies" would be achievable.

When you take consequences, make them reflect the short-term or long-term effects of a hard-fought disagreement. You might feel Guilty or Offended as a result of an accusation that struck home, or you might become Exhausted from emotional strain.

When a matriarch named Whistle stands up to give a speech at the harvest feast, Branch knows that she is about to accuse her daughter's husband, Oxtail, of sorcery. She does not approve of her daughter's marriage, and wants to drive Oxtail out of town. Branch interrupts the speech to question Whistle's honesty.

Her goal in this conflict is to turn the townsfolk against Oxtail, while Branch's goal is to demonstrate that her motives are misleading and selfish. He attacks with Rhetoric to show that Whistle's accusations are false, while she attacks with Confront to intimidate the storyteller. In the end, she concedes, and though Oxtail maintains his good reputation, a few of Whistle's closest friends remain faithful to her and help her plan her next move in secret.

Verbal conflicts can become physical conflicts, and physical conflicts can involve verbal conflicts. A violent argument might explode into a fistfight, or you might try to persuade two rival warriors to set down their spears. When mixing these flavors of conflict, characters making physical attacks determine their turn order using Notice, while characters making verbal attacks determine turn order using Will.

Creating and Resisting Aspects

The skill descriptions starting on page 8 explain how you can use your skills to create advantages on individual NPCs. If your troupe is delivering a performance to create a situation aspect on an entire audience, though, you'll find the highest-ranked skill among the members of your troupe, and use that skill when you roll the dice to create an advantage. It doesn't matter which skill is ranked highest—you're just using this skill rank to measure the group's overall expertise.

> Proud Bird and Winter are singing a duet to create a Romantically Inspired aspect on their audience. Proud Bird's best skill rank is Good (+3), as is Winter's, so they'll roll with a Good (+3) skill rank to try to create an advantage.

Whether you use a performance or some other social interaction to create an advantage, the nature of your message determines the skill your audience uses to oppose you. If you're using reason, logic, or deception to influence the audience, they oppose with Listen. If you're playing on your audience's emotions, they oppose with Will.

If you're creating an aspect on an entire group, find the member of the group who has the highest rank in the skill they're using to oppose you, and use this skill rank to provide opposition.

As always, situation aspects are temporary and last only until their circumstances no longer apply, which might be no longer than a single scene or session. The storycrafting rules in the next section will allow you to permanently change your audience's aspects.

Storycrafting

You can sway an audience with a conversation or a speech, but as the memory of your words fades, so will your influence. If, however, you tell your audience a story—a good story—it will stay with them for a lifetime. They'll see your scenes in their dreams, and repeat your words to their friends. Wherever they go, your story will be with them, whispering in their ears.

When you want to create a permanent change in a society's attitudes or beliefs, your troupe must gather an audience and perform a story. Your audience may be as large as an army or as small as a single child, but the audience must be willing to pay attention for the duration of the performance.

You begin by deciding what the story will be about, and what message it will convey. Phrase the story's message as an aspect, like A House Made of Lies Will Soon Fall or Forge Friendships, Not Daggers. If your performance is successful, this **story aspect** will shape the future of your audience.

You'll then use the dice and your aspects to determine how effective your performance is. You'll start by determining the strength of each storyteller's performance. When you're done, the performance with the lowest result will determine how your story aspect affected your audience.

Step 1: Individual Performances

Each storyteller describes an important element they will contribute to the performance. You might play a sorrowful song, deliver an inspiring monologue, or portray a crucial character. Explain what this element of the performance looks like, and how it contributes to the story. These elements do not describe the entire performance; they are just the highlights of your troupe's creation.

Each storyteller must determine the strength of their own performance. To do so, roll an overcome action against Fair (+2) opposition.

You won't add a skill rank to this roll. Instead, look at your character sheet to find aspects that would help you add authenticity and emotion to the story element you chose to portray. You may include your high concept if you use your preferred method of performance. Add the number of helpful aspects as a bonus to your roll.

For example, if you found that three of your aspects would help your performance, you would roll the dice and add +3.

WHY NOT SKILLS?

The storytelling actions and opposition are based on aspects, not skills, because a meaningful performance comes from the soul, and speaks to the soul. The PCs are all talented performers, but they draw their inspiration from different sources, and their personal passions can transform a simple poem into a heart-rending ballad. The members of your audience, for their part, don't need iron wills to reject the moral of your story if it clashes with their personal truths and prejudices.

You may invoke aspects as usual to reroll or add a +2 bonus. These may be your own character's aspects, or aspects you've established ahead of time to prepare for the performance. When you invoke an aspect, describe a new facet of the performance that relates to that aspect.

GMs, you may invoke aspects to increase the opposition rank for individual storytellers. For instance, if one storyteller was under a Cloud of Suspicion, you could invoke that aspect once to increase the opposition of that storyteller's performance action to Great (+4).

- **If you succeed with style**, you may give your boost to another storyteller to improve their performance, even if they already rolled their dice and determined their result. When you give another storyteller your boost, you must describe how you're assisting their performance.
- **If you succeed**, remember how many shifts you rolled.
- **If you tie or fail**, you cannot succeed at a cost. You must either invoke aspects or hope that one of your fellow storytellers can roll well enough to lend you a boost.

Step 2: Performance Result

When all storytellers have determined the strength of their performances, find the lowest result rolled by the troupe, and use this to determine how your story affected your audience, as listed below.

- **Success with 4+ shifts:** The power of your story will spread through the Northlands. Your story aspect applies to your entire audience, regardless of how many aspects they have that might oppose you or your message. Your story aspect also becomes a new setting aspect that the troupe can invoke for free once per scenario.
- **Success with 3 shifts:** Your voices swayed the hardest hearts. The story aspect applies to all audience members.
- **Success with 1–2 shifts:** You were convincing, if not exceptional. The story aspect applies to all of the audience members, except those who have an aspect that contradicts your story's message *and* an aspect that makes them hostile to you personally.
- **Tie:** This wasn't your best work. The story aspect applies only to members of the audience who have no aspects that would contradict your story's message or that would make them hostile to you personally.
- **Failure:** The performance is a failure. Create a harmful aspect such as These Performers Are Fools or They've Insulted Our Honor to show how the audience has turned against you. This aspect lasts until the end of the scenario.

The story aspect becomes a new character aspect for the affected members of the audience. The PCs do not receive free invokes on this aspect.

TOO MANY FATE POINTS?

If the players have a big stack of unspent fate points, it'll be easy for them to achieve the best possible result for their performance. As the GM, you can make performances more challenging by encouraging the players to spend their fate points earlier in the session. Try confronting the players with conflicts or with NPCs that have high opposing skill ranks. You can also invoke appropriate aspects, if there are any, to make performance actions more difficult for individual storytellers.

The Story Aspect

As with any character aspect, the story aspect will affect the behavior of the NPCs it applies to. If the story aspect conflicts with a situation aspect on an NPC, the situation aspect expires. If the story aspect conflicts with one of the NPC's character aspects, the NPC suffers a crisis of beliefs and cannot invoke either aspect. Both aspects will compete for the NPC's attention, and the NPC may pursue either one, depending on other aspects or surrounding influences.

GMs, when the scenario ends, remove the story aspect and its conflicting aspect from any NPC in crisis, and give a new character aspect to the NPC representing their new viewpoint. Use the events of the scenario to make this new aspect.

Example: A Complicated Wedding

The PCs were invited to perform at a wedding celebration, but the couple cancelled the celebration after an old feud between their families boiled over. Tensions rise and threats fly, and violence may break out if no one intervenes.

The PCs stage a performance to demonstrate the value of forgiveness. They call their play "The Fatal Insult," which will tell the story of two mortal enemies whose struggle destroyed everything they loved. If successful, the performance will create the story aspect Never Let Your Past Destroy Your Future.

Proud Bird declares that she will sing a song about the pain of a friend's betrayal. She finds two of her aspects will help her perform this song: Fascinating Singer and Love Always Turns Sour. Her dice come up +2, so she adds +2 from her helpful aspects to get a Great (+4) result, a success with two shifts.

Each other storyteller rolls to create their own performance elements. Branch gets an Epic (+7) result, a success with five shifts, when he acts out the violent death of the brother of one of the rivals. Creek adds a satirical dialogue between two minor characters, and gets a Good (+3) result, a success with one shift.

Winter, the final storyteller, explains that she will use her drums to represent the heartbeats of the main characters as they wield their jealousy and fury. She gets a Good (+3) result, but because she suffered an Unsure of Myself consequence in an earlier conflict, the GM invokes this to raise her opposition to Great (+4). Since Branch had succeeded with style, he gives his boost to Winter, explaining that he adjusts the rhythm of his dialogue to reinforce Winter's drums. With this boost, Winter gets a Superb (+5) result, a success with one shift.

Since the lowest result achieved by the troupe was a success with one shift, the performance affected most of the audience. The members of both families have the character aspect An Age-Old Enmity, and the new story aspect gives them a crisis of beliefs. They now understand the cost of their feud, but don't know how to move past it. Later, the storytellers spend time mediating between the family elders and showing them how they can achieve peace. Because of this, the GM will replace their conflicting aspects with A New Harmony when the scenario ends.

However, the troupe did not roll well enough to apply the story aspect to the cousin of the bride. In addition to having An Age-Old Enmity, she is Offended and Indignant because Creek had failed at earlier attempts to befriend her. Since she has an aspect opposing the story's message ***and*** an aspect that makes her hostile to Creek, the troupe's lowest result would need to be a success with at least three shifts to apply the story aspect to her. She continues to plot against the groom, and later in the scenario, the PCs must prevent her from putting a knife in his back.

THE NORTHLANDS

The Northlands are bounded by the Middle Sea to the south, the Ember Desert to the north, the Dead Hills to the west, and the Many Mothers River to the east. Before the war, no single city or leader had claimed ownership of this wide and bountiful territory. These city-states and humble hamlets were bound together by trade and goodwill, not fealty or dynasty.

The Tyrant changed all of that.

The Tyrant

Travel across the Middle Sea has always been controlled by the Seakeepers, a nomadic people who spend their lives on the water, sailing from shore to shore, stopping only briefly to collect supplies before heading back out toward the blue horizon. No one builds ships as fast and reliable as the Seakeepers do, and no one crosses the Middle Sea without their permission. Those who challenge the power of the Seakeepers soon rest in watery graves.

Before the civil war, almost all overseas trade in the Northlands went through the port of Cerulean, and through Seakeeper vessels. The Harbor Guild of Cerulean negotiated deals with Seakeeper tribes to keep trade flowing. But when the Guild attempted to play several tribes off each other, they gained nothing but the wrath of the Seakeepers. The nomads declared a blockade, forbidding all overseas trade in or out of the Northlands.

Regular trade with the Southlands had enriched the guildmasters of Cerulean, the traders of Lapwing Lake, and the gem-cutters of Ruby Well. When overseas trade stopped, the great merchants and caravan masters suffered.

During this crisis, a warlord named Thorn arrived in Cerulean, leading an army of warriors from the Duskgrass. Thorn had recently demonstrated her military genius and ruthless aggression by defending the Duskgrass from an invasion of tribes to the east. With two hundred of her kinsfolk behind her, she told the Harbor Guild that she would shatter the tyranny of the Seakeepers if the guildmasters made her the absolute ruler of Cerulean.

The Guild rejected her. Thorn had no naval experience, and even if she did, the price she demanded was impossible.

In response, Thorn went to Ruby Well, to complain to the mining clans about the short-sighted arrogance of the guildmasters of Cerulean. She took the same complaints to the traders of Lapwing Lake, so that their caravans would carry the story of the fearless Duskgrass general and the cowards of the Harbor Guild. She visited farms and villages, finding the young and strong and promising them the glory of a righteous war against the Seakeepers. She gained allies. Her army grew.

When she returned to Cerulean, she had two thousand soldiers and the support of wealthy parties across the Northlands. She repeated her proposal to the Harbor Guild. The guildmasters, understanding that they no longer had a choice, capitulated.



Thorn constructed a navy. Sailors, laborers, supplies, and materials poured into Cerulean. Soldiers marched across the North to collect recruits and resources, by force if necessary. When the storytellers began to question the wisdom of giving such power to a warlord, she quietly assembled a force of assassins she called the Silencers, and sent them to destroy the storytellers. To replace them, she sent out her own heralds to promote fear and hatred of the Seakeepers, and to praise the courage of Thorn and her soldiers.

After two years of effort, the Northlands had produced the largest navy it would ever see. Thorn boarded her flagship and set off into the Middle Sea to give battle.

The Seakeepers annihilated Thorn's navy. Two hundred ships left Cerulean, and only ten returned. One of those surviving ships carried Thorn. Humiliated and furious, she pledged to build a second navy, bigger than the first. But the people of the North had already given Thorn more than they could afford. When her forces marched out again to conscript sailors and seize supplies, they met armed resistance.

Thorn had failed at sea, but her prowess as a land general was undiminished. Though rebel forces outnumbered her own ten to one, she fought them to a standstill for a decade. She might have outlasted her opponents, but she became paranoid, irrational. Her extreme measures taken to weed out imagined traitors and conspirators prompted the appearance of actual traitors and conspirators. Her forces deserted, her allies turned against her, and she fell in battle in the blood-soaked streets of Cerulean.

Fifty years have passed since then. The ashes of the dead are scattered, and flowers bloom where armies once fought and died. But though the scars left by the Tyrant's ambition may fade, the Northlands will never forget her.

Places

The Northlands contain many peoples, many roads, and many secrets, but a few landmarks are well known to all.

Cerulean

Aspect: No Ships, No Hope

Before the war, Cerulean was the greatest port of the Middle Sea. But now, only local fisherfolk use the shelter of the harbor, and even they must take care not to stray far from shore. The Seakeepers will not pass up any opportunity to send a violent message that the Middle Sea remains closed to the Northlands.

The Harbor Guild has reclaimed control of the city and has pledged that they will redress the crimes of the Tyrant, rebuild Cerulean, and make peace with the Seakeepers. So far they have achieved little success. The Seakeepers have refused all requests to parley, and the Guild has been unable to dislodge the gangs of thieves that have claimed the underpopulated areas of post-war Cerulean. The city needs effective solutions and strong leaders before it can return to its former glory.

Ruby Well

Aspect: A Jewel Waiting to Be Stolen

The city of Ruby Well began as neutral ground between the mining clans of the Dead Hills, who battled fiercely for the gems buried below this dry, rugged territory. Eventually, with storytellers acting as intermediaries, the clans constructed the Ruby Concord, an agreement that dictated the limits of competition and cooperation. The Concord also created a role for a tie-breaker and moderator who would be known as the Last Word. Over time, ambitious holders of this title persuaded the clans to give them more and more power—until today, when the Last Word is a monarch, ruling with complete authority over the enterprises of the city.

At the beginning of her reign, the Tyrant believed she had the full support of the young, inexperienced Last Word. She discovered her mistake when he used the city's wealth to fund the largest, best-equipped armies of the rebellion.

The same Last Word still rules today, but his years are running out, and he must appoint a successor. Several factions stand ready to assume control of Ruby Well, and the city could plunge into conflict no matter who becomes the next Last Word.

The Duskgrass

Aspect: Us Against the World

Only the tribes that dwell here know the secrets of these trackless, golden grasslands, and they jealously guard their knowledge and territory from outsiders.

The Tyrant was born here and learned the art of war here. She earned the everlasting respect of her people after she led a series of successful, brutal reprisals against invading nomads from the east. When she declared her intention to win the wealth and power of Cerulean, the warriors of the Duskgrass eagerly picked up their spears and followed her banner.

The fall of the Tyrant proved irrevocably to the Duskgrass tribes that no one outside their lands could be trusted. Those who survived the rebellion returned home to nurse their wounds and to pass their grudges on to their descendants. They have adopted the Tyrant's lies as the true history of the North, and will be even more hostile to strangers than they were before the war.

Lapwing Lake

Aspect: Bandit's Refuge

The settlement on the shores of Lapwing Lake had been a crucial hub of trade in the Northlands. The lake's clear waters made it an excellent resupply point for caravans, and the broad Sleeping River leading south to Cerulean was a highway for cargo.

During the war, armies from both sides raided the town again and again until nothing was left but empty storehouses and the bones of those who had refused to hand over their wealth. Now the town is controlled by several large bandit gangs who ride out on long-range plundering expeditions, returning to the lake to celebrate, drink, and gamble.

The Ember Desert

Aspect: Cruel and Mysterious Sands

Even the storytellers of old believed that nothing human lived in the endless wastes of the Ember Desert. There had always been tales of lost cities, drowned in sand centuries ago, but no explorers fortunate enough to return from the desert had ever found anything but dust and death.

Now, though, hardy villagers on the fringes of the desert have seen things moving out in the dry haze, as if there are travelers crossing the dunes. A few scouts have reported distant sightings of people in voluminous, brightly colored robes, riding odd long-legged beasts. These might be friends or they might be enemies, or they might be waiting to speak to their first Northlander before deciding which to be.

She Who Watches

Aspect: Suspicion and Greed

A tall cliff face on the shore of the Middle Sea bears a hundred-foot-high bas-relief carving of a woman shielding her eyes with one hand, peering eternally out to sea. Her other hand curls around a tunnel in the cliff face, at the height of her waist, accessible only by a narrow track leading up from the water's edge.

This unusual habitat is the home of a religious order whose disciples look forward to the day when their deity returns from the sea to grant immortality to her followers. Local farmers have traditionally lowered baskets of food to the tunnel entrance in a sign of neighborly good will.

The survivors of the civil war, however, are less tolerant of the superstitious recluses who live in the cliff. Local gossip is full of rumors about the reprehensible practices of the disciples, and about the precious and valuable relics they hoard. It may only be a matter of time before someone attempts to starve out the disciples or invade their refuge.

Noble Leaf

Aspect: Waiting for a Miracle

Before the war, Northlands legends asserted that the tea picked on a certain day on a certain hill near this village had miraculous properties. But a rebel army, in a misguided show of defiance against the Tyrant, burned the tea bushes and trampled the ashes into the mud. Since then, the tea grown here has been unremarkable, and the farmers of Noble Leaf would pay any price to restore the fabled potency of their crops.

The Southlands

Southlander Character Aspect: We'll Never Forget Our Homeland

The lands to the south of the Middle Sea are marshes and misty hills, occupied by perpetually warring clans linked by a complex web of grievances, alliances, and blood ties. Trade between the Southlands and Northlands was mutually beneficial, and some Southlanders had crossed the sea to live in the North, either for business reasons or to flee trouble in their native lands.

Now that the Seakeepers have closed the ports of the Northlands, the Southlanders who live in the North have been out of contact with their homeland for seventy years. These displaced people do not always fit in with their Northlander neighbors, and their fierce loyalty to their own traditions can cause misunderstandings and conflict.

Names

The names of people and places in the Northlands are composed of ordinary words. A merchant named Bronze might cross the Wise River to sell cloth to the villagers of Echo.

Most people will keep the same names for all their lives. Others may change their names after changing vocations, or moving to a new place, or just on a whim.

USING WORDS AS NAMES

This naming system is not an attempt to evoke any particular Earth culture. The goal is to allow players to quickly invent easy-to-remember names, while avoiding familiar names such as Adam or Zoë or awkward imaginary names such as Archelorax or Zr'Kel'Thiss.

Life in the Northlands

Before the war, the Northlands used small, cubic beads of precious stone as currency. The basic unit of currency was known as a pledge, and one bead might be worth one or more pledges depending on its size and the rarity of the stone it was made of. The use of currency is less common now, and barter is common even in prosperous areas, since useful or edible goods are more immediately valuable than polished rocks.

Cattle are the most important domesticated animals in the Northlands. Oxen pull carts, move stones, and plow fields. Cow milk is a common drink, and beef is a delicacy for those who can afford to eat their cattle instead of putting them to work. Cattle serve their community even after their death, giving up their bones for spear points and their hides for leather.

There are no horses or other similar riding animals in the Northlands, which means that overland travel is never faster than a person or a cow can walk. Caravan masters once drove trains of thousands of cargo-bearing oxen across the North, and now that peace and order have returned, the great caravans of old may soon reappear.

The written form of the Northlands language is composed of complex ideograms, and is used most often to document laws, treaties, and contracts. Northlanders do not create historical documents, as they believe that paper and ink cannot properly communicate the nuance and context of past events. They prefer oral history and the informed perspective of trained storytellers.

LITERACY

Literacy is rare in the Northlands, and is not a necessary skill for storytellers. Players may decide whether their characters are literate based on their backgrounds. No special skill, stunt, or aspect is necessary to indicate literacy.

Symbols

When the myriad settlements of the North learned common myths, it was from the storytellers, who carried stories and songs across the land. Now, the people of the North have a more powerful shared experience—the war.

Because of the violence that tore the Northlands apart, there are several symbols that carry powerful meaning for nearly everyone your characters will meet.

The Tyrant

The Tyrant herself is the most enduring and powerful legend to emerge from the war. She was superhuman even in life, and her deeds and misdeeds have grown to mythical stature. To her former allies in the Duskgrass, she is a fallen hero who tried to purge the Northlands of corruption. To nearly everyone else, she was a cruel, wrathful, terrifying villain who may have been the offspring of demons, or an eater of human flesh, or an agent of the Seakeepers, or all of these at one.

Armies and Soldiers

Wherever soldiers march, tragedies follow. Soldiers burn fields, raze villages, slaughter livestock, steal food, and conscript the unwilling.

To the right audience, though, a soldier can be a sympathetic, tragic figure. A soldier could be a parent, grandparent, or old family friend, scarred by the war and burdened by the nightmares of violence endured and inflicted.

Famine

The violence of the war destroyed farmers and farms alike. Villages had barely enough food to survive during good weather, and winter meant certain death for many. The slow suffering of hunger was an invincible enemy that stalked the Northlands, smothering life and hope. Though crops are bountiful once more, no one takes harvests for granted, and only the young can greet winter without the memory of starvation.

Dead and Forgotten Places

The vast landscape of the Northlands is littered with the wreckage of war, and with the signs of history that no one remembers. A traveler might encounter a field of blackened tinder that had been a prosperous town, or a mass grave that had been the better part of an army. Asking a nearby farmer about a certain vacant stone building, or a line of tall cairns, or an enshrined skeleton might produce a baffled shrug or a superstitious shiver.

The Seakeepers

There are few people living in the North who have ever seen a Seakeeper in the flesh. The mere sight of a distant sail is enough to drive fisherfolk into fits of terror. Depending on who you speak to, you may hear that the Seakeepers are ravenous demons, or are half-human water-breathing horrors, or are sorcerers who command the winds and waves. Along the seacoast, the Seakeepers are scapegoats for all manner of misfortune, from poor fishing to fatal illness to sudden storms.

Pre-War Deeds

The past may appear brighter when the present is difficult and uncertain. Most Northlanders believe that their pre-war ancestors lived in peace and plenty, among great leaders, brave heroes, and peerless artists. The glory of these renowned people and deeds grows with every passing year. Without storytellers to provide an honest record of the past, the history of the Northlands may become nothing but a collection of truthless legends.

The Supernatural

Superstition is common in the Northlands. A village in the western mountains might still worship its nomadic ancestors, while a group of farmers in the fertile southern hills might pray to a colossal ancient tree. The storytellers of old collected hundreds of contradictory myths and performed them all with equal enthusiasm. By spreading many different beliefs, the storytellers never encouraged a common faith or religion to develop in the North.

Regardless of the source, these myths are just fanciful stories. Gods do not interact with the world, magicians do not command the elements, and spirits do not plague the living.

That's not to say that there is no wonder or mystery in the world. In the remote wilderness, it may be reassuring to believe that the clean, bubbling spring you found in the forest is the repose of a friendly deity. And in the shadows of night, it's all too easy to believe that the sound you just heard is an undying monstrosity that hungers for your blood.

And even if it isn't, what will make for a better story to share at the next caravanserai?



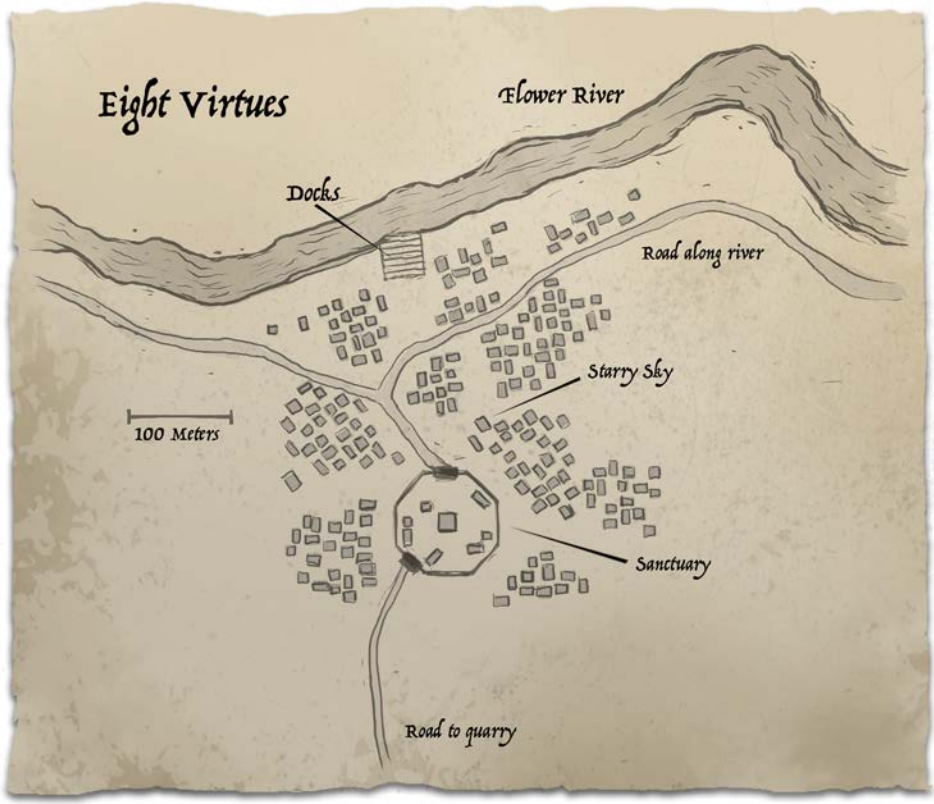
THE FORTRESS OF VIRTUE

This is a scenario you can use as part of a *So the Story Goes* campaign, or just as an example of the situations that a group of storytellers might encounter when traveling the Northlands.

The scenario begins with the PCs approaching a town called Eight Virtues, which sits beside the Flower River, a tributary of the Sleeping River. The PCs have not been to Eight Virtues before, but they have heard from travelers that it is home to some sort of spiritual retreat.

The terrain is green and hilly, and the river curls back and forth among peaceful farms and forests. The path the PCs are traveling parallels the river, and along the way they have encountered carts and boats carrying food to sell at Eight Virtues.

When the PCs first catch sight of Eight Virtues, they will see a dense crowd of wooden buildings, enough to hold a thousand residents. The town is bounded on the north by the river, and on the south by an impressive eight-sided stone fortress. The walls of the fortress are new, but still under construction. They enclose an area about a hundred meters across, and are between ten and fifteen meters high, depending on their state of construction.



The Exiles

The next thing the PCs will notice are four people on the road. Two are carrying spears and dragging the other pair away from town.

The spear-carriers have bright yellow sashes around their waists. Eight characters in the written language of the Northlands are embroidered in black on the sashes—the symbols for generosity, temperance, humility, harmony, serenity, honesty, obedience, and silence.

They are dragging a man and woman who appear to be sixty years old, dressed roughly and simply. They are begging and weeping, and they have fresh tattoos on their cheeks that may have been inscribed less than an hour ago. Each tattoo is the symbol for "empty."

The spear-carriers will dump the older couple in the dirt, warn them to never return to Eight Virtues, and then start walking back to town. If the PCs question the spear-carriers, they will explain that the old couple violated the town's traditions and that the magistrates have exiled them.

The exiles will immediately beg the PCs for help. The man's name is Pebble, and the woman's is Raindrop. They are farmers who live half a day's walk from Eight Virtues. Twenty years ago, their son Hop entered the town's sanctuary to study virtue. Since then, Hop's parents have had no contact with him or any word of his welfare. Over the past two decades, they have repeatedly begged the keepers of the sanctuary, who call themselves magistrates, for news of their son. The magistrates have denied every request, and have now exiled Pebble and Raindrop from town to prevent them from pursuing the subject.

Hop's parents don't care that their actions violate the traditions of the sanctuary. They just want to see their son again, and since they can no longer enter Eight Virtues themselves, they'll ask the PCs to assist them.

The Story of Eight Virtues

This is the history that everyone in Eight Virtues knows and believes.

Before the war, the town was known as Red Stone, because of the sandstone quarry in the hills to the south. The town's leaders were sympathetic to the Tyrant, and took swift, harsh action against any of the Tyrant's opponents.

One of these opponents was a woman named Dutiful. She was immune to the Tyrant's propaganda, and she expressed her distrust of the warlord to anyone who would listen. She was passionate and persuasive, and others in Red Stone soon agreed with her.

The town's leaders knew that the Tyrant was not merciful to those who plotted against her. They imprisoned Dutiful and her comrades, and lowered her into a deep pit without food or water, telling her that they would only free her if she swore to end her troublemaking.

Immediately after this, a rebel army approached Red Stone, just as the Tyrant's forces arrived to defend it. Many townspeople fled to avoid the battle, and soldiers fought over the town for weeks.

After the rebels drove off the Tyrant's forces, they threw open the prison, which had been ignored during the battle. Dutiful's comrades had died of neglect, but when the rebels lifted the stone that covered the prison's deep pit, they found that Dutiful was alive and healthy.

She told them that her perfect isolation had forced her to face her own weaknesses. She had realized that, although she had worked to resist the Tyrant's oppression, she was always doomed to fail because of the anger, jealousy, and vanity in her own heart. She could not build a virtuous world until she had mastered virtue within herself. She saw clearly the eight virtues that would create perfect harmony in a community—the same eight virtues that the town's officials now wear as badges of authority. The power of this vision allowed her to cast off her material concerns and survive for weeks without food or water.

After telling her story to the astonished rebels, Dutiful ascended to a state of pure joy and then vanished, leaving nothing behind but a beautiful fragrance that was carried off by the wind.

The rebels, inspired by this miracle, reconstructed the town's prison as a spiritual retreat where seekers of virtue could follow Dutiful's path and achieve enlightenment. The sanctuary's caretakers chose titles to preserve the memory of Dutiful's ordeals as a prisoner. The caretakers became magistrates; those who served them directly became wardens; those who entered the sanctuary to learn virtue became penitents. Finally, the magistrates renamed the town Eight Virtues, as a reminder of Dutiful's message of salvation.

Local Traditions

The sanctuary is the focus of the town's commerce. It employs laborers to cut stone from the nearby quarry and to carry the stones up to the sanctuary's ever-growing walls. Rose quartz from the quarry becomes pledge beads, which the sanctuary uses to buy food and supplies and to hire skilled craftspeople. These small square beads represent service to the sanctuary and serve as both currency and spiritual relics.

The sanctuary also sells virtue tokens, which are lacquered wooden disks the size of dinner plates, carved with proverbs of the eight virtues. Locals believe these will provide good luck to their households, and will pay high prices to purchase new tokens every year.

The town maintains a nine-day work week, with eight days of labor followed by a day of rest and reflection. At mid-day on the ninth day, a magistrate delivers a lesson on the pursuit of virtue, outside the north gate of the sanctuary, which anyone may attend.

Anyone who requests to enter the sanctuary to study virtue might be granted admittance if there is a vacancy and the magistrates approve. Penitents who enter the sanctuary must give up their prior lives to pursue enlightenment, never leaving the sanctuary again. Penitents who faithfully follow Dutiful's example may hope to transcend to a state of pure joy, just as she did.

To ensure that no worldly bonds will hinder the penitents, the magistrates have decreed that those outside the sanctuary should avoid remembering or discussing the penitents as much as possible. The penitents must disappear completely from the memory of the outer world before they can achieve peace.

When the magistrates fill vacancies among the penitents, they favor those who attend lessons regularly and who demonstrate the eight legendary virtues in their daily lives. Also, the wardens keep careful watch to identify those who demonstrate contempt for the eight virtues. The magistrates have prepared several punishments for those who disturb the town's peace or violate its traditions:

- For most offenses, the magistrates will temporarily ban the offender from any interaction, employment, or business with the sanctuary, and may impose fines proportional to the severity of the crime.
- If the offender is a serious threat to the town's order, the wardens will tattoo the offender's cheek with the character for "empty," to show that the offender is empty of virtue. Anyone with such a mark may not enter the town without risking further punishment.
- In extreme cases, the wardens will imprison the offender in the sanctuary, forcing the offender to accept the lifelong burden and seclusion of a penitent. The magistrates might secretly send dangerous prisoners directly to the Well of Joy (page 45).

Common and Uncommon Knowledge

The magistrates of the sanctuary conceal many secrets. Some townspeople know part of the truth, due to their official connections or their long experience with the town's residents and rumors.

The following sections will describe the beliefs and knowledge of the townspeople, wardens, and specific characters.

LEARNING THE TRUTH

This scenario isn't just about learning the secrets of the sanctuary. It's also about what the PCs decide to do about the town's problems. GMs, don't make it impossible for the PCs to find the truth, or else they won't get a chance to take action.

Townspeople

To avoid the displeasure of the wardens, townspeople are quiet and deferential. Streets are silent, and conversations occur in whispered huddles. Public disagreements end quickly with apologies on both sides. There is little laughter, and no song.

The magistrates control the townspeople through punishment and reward. The magistrates buy crops, livestock, and crafted goods, supplying a reliable income to those who obey the law. They command the wardens, who keep the territory clear of bandits, and who punish those who defy authority. For the truly virtuous, the magistrates offer the ultimate boon—spiritual ascension to an existence of pure joy. These tactics have convinced the townspeople that Where the Magistrates Lead, We Must Follow.

Townspeople

ASPECTS

Where the Magistrates Lead, We Must Follow

SKILLS

Average (+1): Notice

NOTES

No stress or consequences. The first hit takes them out.

What Most Townspeople Believe

- If we demonstrate a life of virtue, the magistrates may allow us to become penitents and eventually ascend to a state of pure joy, like Dutiful.
- The penitents have left the world behind, and we must release them from our thoughts, or they'll never transcend.
- The magistrates are wise. Without them, the town would collapse into chaos and vice.

The Starry Sky

The Starry Sky is a two-story tea house and a common gathering place for townsfolk. Its proprietors, Cookpot and Empty Pockets, are a married couple who brew and sell tea from their own farm and serve dumplings that Cookpot makes himself.

The subdued atmosphere of the town persists here as well. Guests dine quickly, speak softly, and hurry out to resume their day's labor.

Cookpot is heavyset, balding, cheerful, and energetic. He manages the daily affairs of the tea house with the help of his three children from a prior marriage. He seems to know everyone in town, as well as their troubles and gossip.

Empty Pockets is tall, with square shoulders and a thick brow, giving him a looming appearance. He manages the farm with the assistance of a few hired hands. He is solemn and reserved, and cherishes Cookpot's children as if they were his own blood.

MARRIAGE

In most places in the Northlands, marriage is a custom that has no connection with law, property, or procreation. It is a sworn bond of everlasting love and companionship between partners. No ritual, priest, or civil official is necessary to seal a marriage, though a celebration may accompany the promises exchanged by the couple.

Cookpot's first wife, Treetop, willingly and without warning entered the sanctuary as a penitent, leaving their children in Cookpot's care. He blames the magistrates for beguiling Treetop with tales of virtue and transcendence, though he has always kept this grudge a secret.

Neither Cookpot nor Empty Pockets are happy with the way the magistrates live in luxury while imposing an impossible standard of behavior on the townsfolk. They both believe that Our Children Are Our Lives and worry about the welfare of their children under the authority of the magistrates. For now, though, the couple hopes they will be safe if they Don't Offend the Magistrates, since the magistrates have the power to destroy their livelihoods.

What Cookpot and Empty Pockets Know

- Penitents spend all their time working or meditating. They get little rest and little to eat. Working until you drop is considered desirable, because the truly ill get admitted to the Hall of Judgment quickly.
- Few people have access to the Hall of Judgment—only the magistrates, a few penitents, and the head warden. Penitents serve as house staff for a while before they disappear downstairs. The basement is called the Hall of Excess, and penitents who go there never come back.
- The magistrates live very well. They get the best of everything, and penitents serve them like slaves. Wide Awake is arrogant and ambitious and no one seems to know where he came from. Moth is harmless. Petal enjoys her privileges as much as possible. Bell is genuinely inspiring, but seems sad as of late.

Cookpot and Empty Pockets

ASPECTS

Our Children Are Our Lives; Don't Offend the Magistrates

SKILLS

Good (+3): Appeal
Fair (+2): Listen
Average (+1): Notice

STUNTS

I've Heard This Before: Cookpot and Empty Pockets can roll Listen to determine if they've heard their customers talking about a subject some time in the past.

STRESS 1 2 3

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

NOTES

When both are working together, they gain another mild consequence slot.

Wardens

The wardens enforce the peace and safety of Eight Virtues. They carry spears and knives, and wear yellow sashes embroidered with the symbols of Dutiful's eight virtues. The sashes are badges representing their loyalty to the magistrates. Wardens are never reluctant to use their authority or their weapons to compel townsfolk to Obey the Magistrates or Else.

There are fifty wardens. During the day, ten stand watch over the quarry, ten guard the sanctuary, ten watch over the town, and ten patrol the surrounding territory. At night, four wardens watch the gates of the sanctuary, while another six patrol the outskirts of town.

Wardens

ASPECTS

Obey the Magistrates or Else

SKILLS

Average (+1): Notice, Risk

STRESS [1]

NOTES

- No consequences.
- These are the statistics for a pair of wardens, since they typically work in pairs.

What the Wardens Believe

- Being a warden is a virtuous profession. When the magistrates fill vacancies among the penitents, they'll choose wardens ahead of other applicants.
- We don't discuss the penitents, because it's improper. But they spend their time meditating and serving the magistrates, and eventually they're admitted to the Hall of Judgment for their final preparations before they transcend.
- The magistrates have earned a life of luxury because they have the welfare of Eight Virtues on their shoulders. Wide Awake in particular is trustworthy because he was once one of us.



Summer

Summer is the head warden. From a distance, she does not seem physically impressive, but up close, her scarred face, her severely chopped hair, and her unflinching gaze are as intimidating as an army on the march.

Fifteen years ago, she served side by side with Wide Awake as ordinary wardens. His insight and quick thinking impressed her, as did his ambition to share the sanctuary's wisdom with all of the Northlands. When Wide Awake became a magistrate, Summer was one of many to applaud his promotion. She herself benefited from Wide Awake's authority when he promoted her to head warden.

Her opinion of the general public is that You're All Fools and Liars, and that without firm leadership and sharp punishment, most people will fall victim to corruption, lawlessness, and dissipation. Wide Awake approves of her measures, and she in turn is certain that, no matter what happens, Wide Awake Has the Answers.

What Summer Knows

- The townspeople are mostly worthless, but the magistrates are compassionate, and through their charity some lowly townspeople get the chance to transcend.
- I don't discuss the penitents because it's against tradition. I do know what happens in the Hall of Judgment, the Hall of Excess, and the Well of Joy, because it's my duty to open and close the Well.
- Wide Awake was once a penitent. No one discusses this because the magistrates broke their rules when they released him from the Hall of Judgment. I disapprove of rule-breaking, but Wide Awake is intelligent and capable, and I support him.
- I respect Moth, even though he doesn't seem to do much. Petal is too gregarious for my tastes, but it's not my place to judge her. Bell is Moth's daughter and is a fine public speaker, but moody.

Summer

ASPECTS

You're All Fools and Liars; Wide Awake Has the Answers

SKILLS

Great (+4): Risk
Good (+3): Confront, Notice
Fair (+2): Listen, Trick, Will

STUNTS

The Voice of Law: Once per session, Summer can gain +2 to create an advantage using Confront when she uses her authority to issue commands or threats.

STRESS 1 2 3

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):



The Sanctuary

Within its octagonal walls, the buildings of the sanctuary are artfully constructed and harmoniously decorated. Doors and eaves bear ornamental carvings, and stone pathways wind through colorful gardens.

The two-story building in the center of the enclosed space is the House of Judgment. This is the residence of the magistrates. The remaining buildings of the sanctuary are dormitories for wardens and penitents, a workhouse for penitents carving pledge beads and virtue tokens, and a storehouse for food and supplies.

The outer wall has two gates. The narrow gate in the north wall is where magistrates emerge from to deliver lessons, and where penitents enter to begin a life of seclusion. The broader gate in the southwest wall admits wardens and carts of supplies.

Even the construction work on the wall shares the town's silence. Laborers use flags instead of shouts to coordinate group efforts, and they endure their grueling work without a word of complaint.

Penitents

Presently there are forty penitents in residence. From dawn to dusk, eight days out of every nine, these penitents tidy the sanctuary buildings, cook meals for magistrates and wardens, carve rose quartz from the quarry into pledge beads, copy proverbs onto virtue tokens, and participate in monotonous sessions of meditation and recitation.

They receive nothing in return for their labor other than meager, bland rations and daily lectures on the meaning of virtue. These lessons may briefly inspire the penitents with hopes of transcending their miserable lives, but for the most part, the penitents are Tired and Hungry.

The House of Judgment

The magistrates live on the upper floor of the House of Judgment. On the main floor is an audience chamber, a kitchen, a dining room, a library, and quarters for a half-dozen penitents who work as house servants. These penitents have lighter duties than their peers elsewhere in the sanctuary, but they may never leave the House of Judgment.

THE HALL OF EXCESS

The prison cells that once housed the Tyrant's enemies are still beneath the House of Judgment, but no longer serve the same purpose. The magistrates call these chambers the Hall of Excess. When the magistrates declare that a penitent has achieved sufficient spiritual purity, they will lead the penitent to these chambers, which are luxurious, with tapestries, cushioned beds, and fine clothes. Magistrates provide these penitents with wine and fine food, encouraging them to eat and drink their fill, and to sleep and sing and revel as much as they like.

The purpose of the Hall of Excess is to expose the penitents to all of the pleasures of the physical world, so that a penitent may demonstrate a profound sacrifice later by leaving these pleasures behind. The magistrates will often spend their evenings in the Hall of Excess to demonstrate indulgence by example. There might be three or four penitents here at any one time, Drunk and Disorderly.

When the magistrates determine that the appropriate time has arrived, they will lead a penitent to a small locked chamber at the end of the Hall of Excess for the final stage of the penitent's journey. Within this bare round room is the Well of Joy—the pit where Dutiful achieved her spiritual transformation, according to legend. A heavy stone sits on the floor in the middle of the chamber, sealing the pit. Using a rope and pulley, the head warden will move the stone aside, and will then lower the penitent into the pit and move the stone back into place. The penitent, alone, deprived of food and water, is now in the proper condition to emulate Dutiful by ascending to a state of pure joy.

No one ever achieves Dutiful's transcendence. For the past fifty years, the magistrates have sent penitents to perish in the Well of Joy, and the pit is full of the bones of spiritual pilgrims.

Only the head warden, the magistrates, and the house servants know of the existence of the Hall of Excess. House servants know of the locked door at the end of the Hall of Excess, but do not know what lies behind it. Also, since house servants never leave the House of Judgment, they have no opportunity to discuss their experiences with outsiders.

The Magistrates

The magistrates are the secular and spiritual authorities of Eight Virtues. In public, they wear bright yellow robes embroidered in black with the symbols of the eight virtues.

The magistrates are free to promote anyone they like into their ranks. There have never been more than six magistrates at once; presently there are four.

All magistrates must study the sanctuary's library of philosophy, to acquaint themselves with the recorded teachings of their predecessors. These documents are an assortment of facile and contradictory ramblings that magistrates pick and choose from to justify their own conclusions.

Magistrates do not attempt to follow a penitent's path to enlightenment. The duty of the magistrates is to manage the worldly details of the sanctuary, and they believe that this attention to material concerns prevents them from achieving spiritual purity. They will claim this is a sacrifice they willingly make on behalf of the community.

Wide Awake

Wide Awake is the head magistrate. He is tall and broad-shouldered, and forty years old. He wears a veil of gold thread, not as a badge of office, but to conceal the burns that cover the left half of his face. Anyone standing close to him will notice the burns, but the veil is effective at hiding both the burns and his features from a distance.

Few people know that the head magistrate was once known as Hop, the son of the farmers that the PCs met at the beginning of the scenario. When Hop entered adolescence, his parents allowed him to walk to town on rest days to hear lessons from the magistrates. Hop was captivated by these lessons, and would gladly start out before dawn to make sure he arrived in time for the day's lecture. The magistrates gave him hope that if he remained virtuous, his life could become something more than digging in the dirt for food. When he was seventeen, without consulting his parents, he asked a magistrate if he could become a penitent. At the time, the sanctuary had enough room, so Hop disappeared from the world. His parents only discovered this later, hearing the news from other townspeople who had seen Hop enter the sanctuary.

Hop's admiration for the magistrates made him one of their favorites. They admitted him to the Hall of Excess, and his story might have ended soon afterward, except for an incident that changed his fate. One of the other penitents, drunk and surly, became inexplicably enraged and attacked a magistrate's daughter named Bell. Hop intervened but was injured when a brazier fell on him, leaving him with permanent burn scars across the left half of his face.

The magistrates sent the violent penitent to the Well of Joy, removing any risk of further violence. They might have sent the injured Hop to the Well also, but Bell's father, Moth, chose instead to command the house staff to nurse him back to health.

The shock of sudden violence wounded Hop more deeply than the heat of the brazier. He became convinced that life is cruel and chaotic, and that The World Is Wretched. He saw that the attack might have killed him, and that he would have left nothing behind him, as if he had never existed. He concluded that if he could seize power for himself, he could ensure that his name and deeds would not be forgotten.

When Hop asked to become a warden, Moth was reluctant. The sanctuary's tradition holds that penitents must disappear permanently from the memory of the outside world. Hop solved this by offering to take a new name—Wide Awake. His burned face also helped him to conceal his identity.

Moth agreed to this solution, and Wide Awake served as a warden side by side with Summer. Her contempt for the general public reinforced Hop's own hatred of his former life. With diligent service, he earned Summer's respect and distinguished himself in the eyes of the magistrates.

When an elder magistrate passed away, Wide Awake rose to fill the vacancy. He dazzled his new peers with plans to construct a larger sanctuary—a fortress of virtue that would stand as a great wonder of the Northlands. From this fortress, the magistrates would send forth messengers to distant villages and cities, proclaiming the sanctuary's mission. The sanctuary would attract more followers and more penitents. Eight Virtues would become a metropolis, the focus of a spiritual revolution that would unite the Northlands. And Wide Awake intends to be the hand that controls this new cultural force, because he believes My Power Is My Immortality.

Bell

Bell is close to thirty years old. She is slim, with straight black hair and a long, solemn face. She is a natural orator, and she has inherited the task of giving lessons to the townsfolk on rest days. Though her lectures on virtue are heartfelt and compelling, she has begun to doubt the sanctuary's traditions.

She still has nightmares about the drunk, violent penitent who attacked her. Moth has advised her to dismiss such dreams, but as she has grown older, this frightening memory has led her to question all of the sanctuary's practices. She is no longer confident that mindless labor and senseless debauchery can truly lead the penitents to spiritual purification. She has come to suspect that the purpose of the Hall of Excess is to give the magistrates an excuse to spend their evenings in lusty celebration, and that the purpose of the Well of Joy is to dispose of penitents that the magistrates have grown tired of.

She has not approached anyone with her concerns yet, because she wants to believe in the sanctuary's essential mission—to promote virtue and harmony. She understands that she holds a position of power and influence, and she believes there is still a chance that We Can Do Good Here.



Wide Awake

ASPECTS

The World Is Wretched;
My Power Is My Immortality

SKILLS

Great (+4): Rhetoric
Good (+3): Confront, Will
Fair (+2): Appeal, Listen, Notice

STUNTS

My Wish Is Your Command: Once per scenario, if Wide Awake issues an official proclamation, he can use Rhetoric to bestow an aspect such as The Fugitives Must Be Found or Don't Trust the Storytellers on all wardens and townspeople of Eight Virtues.

STRESS 1 2 3

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):
Moderate (4):
Severe (6):

Bell

ASPECTS

We Can Do Good Here

SKILLS

Good (+3): Appeal
Fair (+2): Listen
Average (+1): Will

STRESS 1 2 3

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moth

Moth is in his fifties, and is the oldest of the magistrates. He is short and mostly bald, with wild tufts of white hair springing from his temples. He is a devoted servant of the sanctuary, and has never questioned its teachings. He tells himself that This Is Our Tradition, and he is comfortable and confident in this knowledge.

He has faith in Wide Awake's grand plans, and congratulates himself for giving Hop a chance to become something more that a permanent resident of the Well of Joy. Moth believes that this decision is his most significant contribution to the sanctuary, and with this accomplishment behind him, he is satisfied to spend the rest of his life meditating on virtue, overseeing the labor of the penitents, and contributing to the sanctuary's library of philosophical writings.

Petal

Petal is a short, stout woman in her forties. She wears her dark hair in complex braids, smiles easily and broadly, and speaks with calm confidence, as if everything she suggests is the obvious and rational course of action.

She is the magistrate most often seen outside of the sanctuary walls, as she manages the sanctuary's business affairs. She buys food and supplies, hires workers, and meets with townspeople to assess the community's welfare. She believes material comfort is the natural reward for leadership, and she feels no shame in securing privileges for herself and her fellow magistrates—after all, We Deserve the Best.

She partakes of those privileges by personally overseeing the Hall of Excess, and she spends every evening in the raucous company of the penitents who reside there. She honestly believes that the penitents who enter the Well will transcend to pure joy, though she would not be upset at the suggestion that these penitents merely starve and die. After all, the penitents had willingly given up their lives when they entered the sanctuary, and from that point of view, they had died the moment they knocked on the sanctuary gate.

Moth

ASPECTS

This Is Our Tradition

SKILLS

Fair (+2): Rhetoric
Average (+1): Appeal

STRESS 1 2 3

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Petal

ASPECTS

We Deserve the Best

SKILLS

Good (+3): Appeal
Fair (+2): Listen
Average (+1): Trick

STRESS 1 2 3

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Crisis of Beliefs

If the people in and around Eight Virtues receive conflicting aspects as the result of storytelling, they'll eventually discard one of the conflicting aspects depending on who remains in power and who remains in control of public opinion. In the short term, if any audiences receive story aspects that might turn them against the magistrates, they will react as follows.

- **Townspeople:** A few may be willing to take action against the magistrates, but most will be confused and will prefer to stay out of trouble and return to their homes.
- **Wardens:** A few wardens will drop their spears and walk away, but most will follow orders as long as someone like Summer or a magistrate is giving those orders. If the wardens lose their leadership and doubt their mission, they will fall apart.
- **Penitents:** Most penitents will flee if they lose faith in the magistrates, though some may be willing to take more constructive action. The occupants of the Hall of Excess will be too intoxicated or hung over to have coherent opinions.
- **Magistrates:** Wide Awake will react with violent anger against anyone who suggests he might be wrong. Bell will hesitate to take action against her fellow magistrates, but will eventually do what's necessary to reform the sanctuary and the town. Moth will attempt to rationalize any perceived flaws in the traditions of the sanctuary; at the same time, he'll try to protect his daughter from harm. Petal will cloak any self-doubt in denial, and will flee from town if she believes her position of power has become fragile.

Story's End

If the storytellers disrupt the traditions of Eight Virtues, the townspeople will need to determine what the future of their community will look like. Who should govern Eight Virtues? What power should they have?

Also, the sanctuary is a source of pride for Eight Virtues, and it serves as a reminder that something wonderful and unique once happened here. If the townspeople discard or alter their traditions, what new meaning will they attach to the sanctuary, and to the story of Dutiful?

You and your fellow players are the storytellers now. What ending will you choose?