

DNITY

FREE SAMPLER

UNITY

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ZENSARA STUDIOS

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Free Sampler

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SAMPLER PREFACE

What you are currently reading is the Unity Tabletop RPG Sampler. The next 40+ pages are snippets from the Core Rulebook that have been selected to give you a sense of the spirit and design philosophy embodying the game.

Story book. Art book. Game book. It is our sincere hope that there is something in here that will excite you and ignite your imagination. Unity is an opportunity to embrace a new and unique fantasy world full of wonders and long-lost secrets for you and your friends to discover. Fighting is powered by a combat system that encourages teamwork, communication, and combining your powers in spectacular ways to overcome the impossible. But at the heart of it all are the characters. Unity encourages you to create deep and compelling characters with rich histories by offering you an avenue to peel back the layers behind your avatar as an integrated part of the game system.

The complete Core Rulebook will contain **everything** you need to play:

- Full roleplaying rules for character creation, adventuring, and combat.
- Full setting guide that explores the world of Unity and its rich history.
- 4 Factions complete with cultural write-ups and short stories.
- 9 Classes and hundreds of power combinations to master.
- Mysterious and perilous locations to explore.
- Deadly foes to fight.
- Powerful treasures to acquire.
- A Game Master's Guide.

For more information, please visit www.unity-rpg.com



ZENSARA STUDIOS

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CHAPTER I

WELCOME TO UNITY

The Ivory Queen is dead; the Mad God sleeps for now. For how long? No one knows. His Children, the people of Unity, struggle to make sense of the crumbling world he left behind. What were once pristine lands filled with lush green forests, majestic snow-capped mountains, and sparkling oceans now lay desolate and parched. There was a time when this world was a glorious beacon among the cosmos, unmatched in its surreal beauty and harmony. It was a time when the races of Unity stood together and created societies and shining cities full of wonder and technological marvels. That time has long passed.

Now the Mad God's Children struggle to survive the harsh landscape and the many terrors that beset them from all sides. In a vengeful rage, the Mad God, once the benevolent Skyfather, sundered the very fabric of reality, causing the catastrophic merging of two worlds: the physical and the energetic. From the Great Beyond spilled a world composed of the emotional, spiritual, and psychic energies of all living beings—now unleashed into physical reality.

This second world, dubbed "the Drift" by Unity's shamanic elders (with their sight beyond sight), brought with it many anomalies. The burgeoning spiritual energies unleashed upon Unity imbued its population of automaton slaves with sentience; it infused the dead corpses buried deep beneath the ground with a second chance at life; and it whispered to the fantastical creatures of a forgotten age to emerge from the Great Wilds once more. The Drift also brought with it the darkness of countless past lifetimes—a darkness that had hardened over eons in the shadowy and hidden places of that world. This darkness, which manifested itself as the Fell, swept across all of Unity and brought its mighty civilizations to their very knees.

It is here that our story begins. Now more than ever is a time for heroes. As the world slowly slides towards apocalypse, the broken people of Unity need to find a reason to believe again. They need to believe that something incredible is possible—that the light will one day shine upon them again.

Be that dim light of hope flickering in a sea of darkness . . . or not . . . you don't owe the world a damn thing. By all means, take advantage of the chaos and make your mark in history if that's more your speed. Whatever you decide, boundless adventure and spectacular stories await you.



Throughout the book, you'll find notes on the sides of pages just like this one. These notes can be little tidbits of information about the world, suggestions, tips, or just designer notes that provide insight into the creation of the game.

Most of the default rules and suggestions provided are tailored towards a group of 1 GM and 4 players. Some adjustments can be made to better accommodate alternative group numbers, especially towards the difficulty of combat encounters.

If you are the GM of your group, be sure to check out Chapter IX: GM Guide.

THE GAME

Unity is a game of cooperation, imagination, and collaborative storytelling. As this is a group game, you will need some friends to play with. *Unity* is best played with four or more total participants. There will always be a single Game Master and 2 or more players. As a group, you will enter a world prepared by the Game Master and together your actions and choices will weave a story that is uniquely your own—hopefully one that will be full of cherished memories and interesting moments!

THE GAME MASTER

The Game Master or “GM” takes on the role of creator, narrator, and adjudicator. The GM initially constructs the world, its denizens, and plot points for players to start their adventure. On top of all these responsibilities, the GM wears many more hats:

- The GM controls all the non-player characters (NPCs) that the players encounter and interact with. Some of these NPCs may be ferocious enemies that the players must defeat; others may be gentle souls that the players can win over and garner aid from.
- The GM, with help from the players, will continually drive the story forward. This can be achieved by introducing obstacles that must be overcome, or by presenting rewards that are tempting to the player-characters’ (PC) objectives, for example. While the GM has seemingly god-like powers and decides what happens, what doesn’t, and what might, the GM is not the antagonist when conducting a game.
- The GM and players’ relationship should be a collaborative one of moving the story forward together, and of creating interesting situations that can lead to memorable moments. The GM’s power to preside over a game can be viewed as a tool to help generate a compelling and cooperative play experience. Achieving just the right amount of tension and pushing and pulling at the appropriate times to get everyone at the table riveted are the hallmarks of a great GM.

THE PLAYERS

The rest of the group at the table are considered players. As a player you create or use a pre-made character as your avatar to interact with the world created by the GM. There are rules for Character Creation and, if need be, your GM can help you bring to life your vision of the character you would like to play.

Whether you create a character from scratch or use a pre-made character, your character is wholly your own. When playing, you will decide what your

character does, where they go, whom they talk to, and what they say. Their behaviour and reactions are completely up to you. You will be able to don the persona of your character and immerse yourself in the world through your character’s eyes.

PLAYING THE GAME

As a storytelling platform, you play the game by talking to each other. Your actions and reactions to the situations presented by the GM, or the situations that the players get into through their own choices, all contribute to the collaborative narrative of the adventure.

Players will engage with the GM by talking about where they want to go and what they want to do. In turn, the GM will react accordingly, creating a living and breathing world. Most of the interactions and interpretations between the GM and the players will be rooted in common sense, and reflective of what we expect to happen in reality. Where things might get a bit fantastical or murky, we can turn to the rules provided in this book to help with arbitration.

THEMES

Below are a few core themes inherent to the setting that will play a prominent part in how adventuring in *Unity* will feel.

A WORLD ON FIRE

The lore and rules in this book are geared towards exploration of the world of *Unity* during a time period known as the Age of Wrath. The land is a dangerous place and reality itself has been sheared. The once mighty civilizations of the Valla, Furians, and Humans have all been sent reeling, with societal progress halted and great losses suffered. The harmony that once bound the three races of the Children of *Unity* and brought them into their glorious Golden Age of prosperity and advancement has been shattered.

Dark times lie ahead as the major players of the world struggle to make sense of the calamity that has befallen them. Not only has a great darkness been unleashed on the world by way of the demonic hordes of Fell, but each of the Skyfather’s Children has been cursed by his hand as punishment for their hubris when they challenged his beloved, the Ivory Queen, and destroyed her.

Scorched deserts, smouldering ruins, dead grey forests, and steamy bog marshes dot the lands where the Drift has spilled through the cracks of reality, bringing with it terrors from the dark. It has been difficult to find harmony since danger lurks around every corner. This has caused a shift in cultural consciousness—from one of striving to merely surviving.

MORAL QUAGMIRE

One of the core themes *Unity* promotes exploring is the question of morality. In a world that's slowly devouring itself, people's hearts become closed as fear and instinct overtake them. The imperative to survive can lead to actions that are questionable. Yet these situations can also inspire reflection. Is it wrong to steal so that your child won't starve? Is it wrong to kill the bandit who tries to steal from you in order to feed her own child?

Unity's setting provides ample devices and fertile themes around which to create emotional stories and confront and discuss moral dilemmas. One example is that of the sentient automata: once mindless slaves, they are now thoughtful living beings. Some of them seek to liberate the many still entrapped, while others seek vengeance on their fleshy "masters." Should they be free? Are they truly alive? Does a "good robot" truly exist? Can they feel as mortals do?

CULTURE CLASH

Since the beginning of creation, the major races of the world have oscillated between apathy, tension, unity, and all-out war. Throughout the ages, the Valla, the Furians, and Humans have fought both against each other and together against the Crimson Horde. When our story begins, the Age of Unity has ended, like the setting of a glorious sun, and made way for what may only be the dusk of the troubled times to come.



The pressures of survival cause tensions between the races to run high as fear conquers empathy. Each race points a finger at one another, blaming them for the Great Calamity and the darkness that is now encroaching on their world. As one of the new generation in this treacherous landscape, will you be able to inspire hope and open doors again, or will you take advantage of the prejudices and chaos to serve your own ends?

TECHNOLOGICAL WONDERS

Before the Skyfather became the Mad God; before the Fell spilled into the world; before the Children of Unity were brought to their knees; there was a time when the people came close to touching perfection.

The Age of Unity was a golden era for all the major races. Working together as one united force, they knew no equal in the world. There was no enemy or power that could threaten them—not until the Skyfather returned from his journey across the stars, full of wrath and vengeance, as the Mad God.

During that Golden Age, the Children of Unity combined technological ingenuity with arcane knowledge to create marvellous wonders. Weapons and tools of great power became common; robotic slaves were a household item; and, as a symbol of their mortal aspirations, they built constructs so high they could touch the sky.

Now those great machines, known as the Titan Rigs, are long buried and lost to the sands of time, along with a host of other incredible creations. The knowledge to maintain and recreate such things is said to be lost, especially since the Mad God afflicted his Children's best and brightest minds with the horrible disease known as the Phage.

EXPLORATION & DISCOVERY

Despite the bleakness of the world, there are hidden gems tucked away from the turmoil that besets Unity. Secret places as yet untouched by the darkness await discovery, ripe for exploration. These are places of beauty, where folks have learned to work together: places where hope still lives on.

As the world burned, borders receded and civilizations shrunk. There are large swathes of the landscape that are now uninhabited, and which have been transformed so significantly that it is difficult to say what will be found by an intrepid adventurer.

Where will you go? What will you discover out there?

Hard choices presented as moral dilemmas or opposing views in between characters can be a wonderful source of tension and drama.

The land of Unity is a large place to explore. Check out the Locations section on pg. 118 for a taste of Unity's history and interesting sites to discover.

Timeline Legend

- Age of Strife
- Age of Unity
- Age of Wrath

Unity's known timeline shows only a fraction of what has transpired in the world. The chaotic landscape was ruled by the primal elements and nature long before the Skyfather and his Ivory Queen arrived.

Because Unity takes place during the Age of Wrath, the GM and players are able to decide just how prevalent a role technology plays in the current setting. A lot of the Golden Age technologies are long buried and considered lost. Those wanting a more low-tech adventure can keep it that way.

For a campaign where technology is more prevalent, it's not uncommon for a group of players to eventually man a Titan Rig to do battle with colossal threats.

TIMELINE



History is inescapable. Wise folks attempt to chronicle and study the events of the past to help them understand not only the conditions of the present but to also help ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. After the Great Calamity and the horrific death toll that came with it, the torch for Keeper of Records has passed onto a young bright-eyed historian by the name of Sorensen.

**SORENSEN,
KEEPER OF RECORDS**





CUSTOMIZATION

One of the major design philosophies behind *Unity* is based on allowing GMs and players to easily customize their play experience.

GAME TYPES

Within the pages of this book, you will find a richly detailed setting that should provide ample material for you to craft immersive locales teeming with textured characters with various roles and motives. So while the world of *Unity* is presented as an epic fantasy adventure about mighty heroes standing against the coming darkness, your game can actually take on several different scopes.

- You can be great heroes, battling against impossible odds and saving the world from annihilation.
- You can be a group of adventurers seeking excitement, fame, and fortune in places that hold many secrets just waiting to be discovered.
- Or perhaps you want to turn the dial up on “gritty” and create a harsher landscape focused on survival, deadly encounters, and tough choices.

The world of *Unity* was built to provide a large canvas and a rich palette with which to paint.

FAMILIAR TROPES

Learning a new system and a new world can be a daunting task. With this in mind, *Unity* has been designed to draw upon the familiar tropes and archetypes found in typical fantasy. While *Unity* deviates slightly from various traditional fantasy aspects to weave a unique world and generate a sense of discovery, GMs and players familiar with fantasy role-playing games should be able to quickly draw parallels and easily understand the different concepts, creatures, and classes prevalent throughout *Unity*.

SETTING CONVERSION

Because of its basis in familiar tropes and archetypes, *Unity* is readily adaptable to your own vision of a fantasy setting. While it does require a little elbow grease and effort, a lot of *Unity*'s aspects, such as the races and classes, can be converted and customized to your liking lore-wise.

The closer your vision aligns with a fantasy world where magick and magi-tech are accepted, the easier it will be to convert various aspects of *Unity*.

When you reach the Classes section, you should be able to draw connections between Unity's classes and certain classic fantasy archetypes e.g. the Mystic could be a Wizard in another world and the Dreadnought might be a mix of Barbarian and Warrior.

THE WORLD OF UNITY

The known world of Unity is a large land mass surrounded on both sides by two great oceans, the Cerulean Expanse and the Roaring Depths. The inhabitants of Unity have never ventured beyond the great oceans. Mighty storms and deadly maelstroms have swallowed up any expedition that has been sent out to explore what lies beyond the vast watery horizons. Some say the storms and violent waves are a fatal warning from the Divine to protect Unity's people from the forbidden; others speak of the possibility of paradise beyond the great oceans, and believe that whoever—or whatever—resides there creates these storms to keep others away.

Whatever the truth is, the great continent where our stories take place is vast and varied—from the Arctic Mountains and unending Wilds of the North, to the shining cities that dot each coast and the unforgiving desert sands of the South. Every step in between these borders holds the promise of adventure, culture, and excitement. While all of Unity was once beautiful and raw, the current Age of Wrath has set the world on fire and transformed the land into a much darker and more desolate place. Since the Skyfather sundered reality, Unity will never be the same as it once was.

It is now a place of extremes: breathtaking beauty struggles against a backdrop of rampant destruction. Like a healthy body that's been stricken with disease, the dark tendrils of corruption slowly spread across the land, tainting everything they touch. The once Sparkling Coast of the Gemini Peninsula has been transformed into the Edge of Night, a place of perpetual darkness; the Golden Forests have rotted to the core and become the Deadwood, a place of blight and decay; the lush wetlands of the West have been twisted into a noxious swamp known as the Dreadmarsh; and the verdant valley that straddles the edge of civilization and the scorching desert sands of the South now exists as a barren land of crumbling dirt known as the Wastes. Despite the darkness and gloom, however, pockets of beauty untouched by the Great Calamity still exist: the Obsidian Forests of Furia, the Starlight Woods of Vallantis, the emerald waters of Greenwater Bay, and the magnificent Jade Mountain, risen from the ocean off the coast of the Great Wilds. All serve as a reminder of better times, and as a beacon of hope—and something to fight for—for the future.

THE DRIFT

While this world formed, a second world was growing alongside it: a mirrored reality, in which the psychic and emotional emanations of all sentient creatures amassed. It was a world of spiritual energy, unseen to the naked eye. The seers and shamans of old called this world the Drift.

Initially, the Drift was a benign place that co-existed with the physical world, both realities feeding into one another in an unending cycle. The spiritual energy from the Drift gave life to the physical bodies created in the real world. These creatures then interacted with each other and the world around them, generating emotions that fed back into the Drift, and eventually becoming the seeds for new life in the physical realm in a never-ending cycle. It was the natural order of things and ensured that Unity continued to evolve, lush and beautiful and teeming with life.

The arrival of the Skyfather and Ivory Queen marked an end to the perfect cycle that had come to define the primordial world. Two beings of immense power, they looked upon the world and saw it as a perfect home in which to create their Children. When they created them—first the Valla, then the Furians, and finally the Humans, along with thought and free will—they disrupted the natural flow between the physical and spiritual worlds. The cycle that had served the primitive world of Unity so well for eons, before the arrival of the gods and their Children, had been tainted. With thought and free will came the potential for evil.

Vices such as greed, wrath, and pride now infected the Drift. This negative energy accumulated over the centuries, and the rate of accumulation grew as time passed and the population in the physical world expanded. In the physical realm, there were no signs of change, because the invisible walls that separated the Drift from reality were strong and stable. But deep inside the Drift, the concentrated darkness that existed in the hearts of the denizens of Unity gave way to the creation of unspeakable horrors. The resultant foul creatures raged against the boundaries of their spiritual prison, longing to taste the physical world and wreak destruction upon it. The Valla called these creatures “the Fallen” in their ancient tongue, for they are the manifested demons of those who have fallen from grace and given...

The Cerulean Expanse and the Roaring Depths have appetites beyond just naval ships. During the Age of Unity when technology was at its peak, mighty airships powered by lightning failed to move past those stretches of endless oceans as gale-force winds obliterated smaller airships and froze larger ones, causing them to drop out of the sky.

Even in the darkest and most inhospitable places that exist in Unity, life finds a way.

The Vallan word for the Fallen or Fell is “Umbria.”



CHAPTER II

CHARACTER CREATION

Before you are able to adventure in Unity, you must first create a character. This character will be your avatar and you will experience and affect the world through this character's senses and actions. This chapter will guide you step-by-step in bringing your vision of a hero to life.

[*Sampler Note:* Click and view [CHARACTER CREATION VIDEO](#)]

SESSION ZERO

Take a moment with your group to discuss the type of game you all want to play and use this time to set expectations for both players and the GM. The agreements you come to during this step may help inform your character-making decisions. The *GM Guide* section contains a thorough write-up on how to conduct a Session Zero.

CHOOSE YOUR RACE

Select your race. See *pg. 12* for available races and their write-ups.

DISTRIBUTE YOUR ATTRIBUTES

You have a set of floating points in an array to distribute among your race-defined baseline attributes. Alternative rules to allow rolling for attributes are also provided.

CHOOSE YOUR CLASS

Select your class. See *pg. 156* for available classes.

CREATE YOUR CORE PATHS

Create or select THREE initial Core Paths. Your Core Paths define your character's history and are a reflection of the experiences and skills they bring to the table. You are encouraged to create your own Core Paths using the guidelines outlined on *pg. 138*.

CHOOSE YOUR CLASS PERKS

Select ONE Class Perk to start off with.

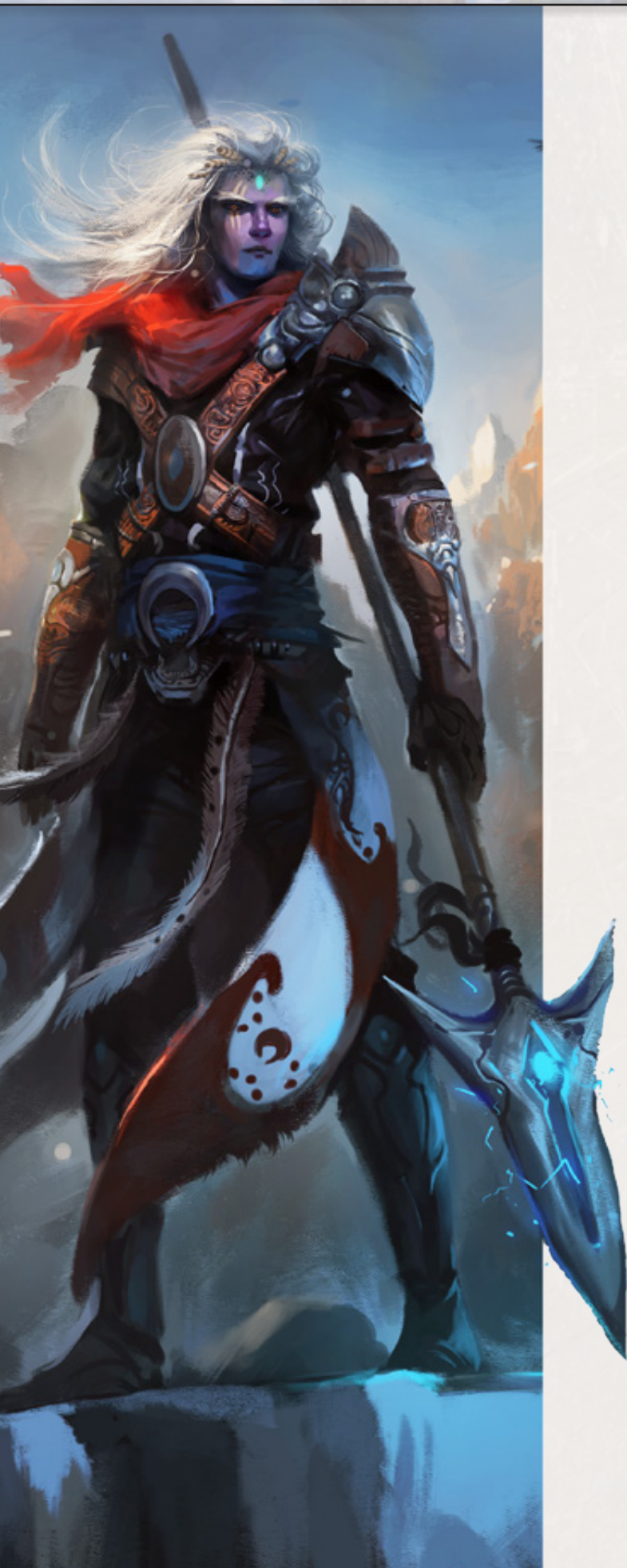
CHOOSE YOUR POWERS

Select THREE Tier 1 Powers. You do not have any Tier Tokens at Level 1 and will not be able to purchase Power Upgrades yet.

CHOOSE YOUR EQUIPMENT

Choose your equipment based off the Equipment Table on *pg. 285*. Examine your Class restrictions before selecting your equipment.





VALLA

“Together as one.”

RACIAL TRAITS

Average Height: 1.70–1.90m

Average Weight: 63–99kg

ATTRIBUTE SCORES

MIGHT	AGILITY	MIND	PRESENCE
0	2	1	1

Harmony: Silencing your mind, a whisper of the once-great psychic power of your race awakens in you. You form a brief psychic link with your allies, taking your defenses and talents to a supernatural level.

You may either spend a Free action to grant an extra HL+1d4 to yourself and all Adjacent Allies on Defense rolls against a single incoming attack, or spend a few moments to form an empathic bond with a single Nearby Ally, granting them a +1d4 bonus on a single skill check. Either effect must be activated before the roll is made. Can be used once per Full Rest.

The Skyfather and his Ivory Queen smiled to each other when the first Valla sprung to life from his hands. The Skyfather had snatched the light from the rising sun and blown life and spirit into it. The Firstborn was created that day, and began a race of people created to tame and conquer the primordial world that would become Unity. The Ivory Queen took a dew drop left from the morning rain and placed it on the first Valla’s forehead. With this Spirit Stone, all Valla would be psychically and spiritually linked to each other: they would never have to know the loneliness that their Mother and Father had endured for eons.

Gifted with centuries of life and a culture that operated at the speed of thought, the Valla were perfect. They erected beautiful cities that made the soul ache. The Valla were the ones to name the world *Una*, which meant “Unity” in their native tongue, for they had known nothing else since the day they were born.

As the centuries turned, the Valla, already so perfect in every aspect, began to grow complacent. They knew their shining cities would glow eternally, and they were provided with everything they required for a comfortable, if not lackadaisical, life. Their fire to thrive and forge ahead faded slowly. Vallan society began to seem frozen in time, like an impossibly beautiful mural.

When the Great Calamity struck, the prideful Valla were not exempt from the Skyfather’s wrath. As the world teetered towards oblivion, he tore from them the very link that defined them and made them strong as a race—their Spirit Stones. In a single moment an entire race was plunged into

chaos and, for the first time ever, they learned what loneliness was. The agony that was the absence of thousands upon thousands of voices, now silenced, tormented the Valla as the light of their psychic community was snuffed out in an instant. It dealt an absolutely devastating blow to their civilization. The effects of The Severing still reverberate throughout Vallan lands even after hundreds of years.

Only as a new generation begins to emerge does Vallan society begin to rebuild itself—slowly—recovering gradually from their dependency on their now-defunct psychic link.

PLAY A VALLA IF YOU WANT..

- to live long and see life through a lens measured in centuries, not decades
- to play a Class that favours grace and stealth
- to be revered and looked up to by the other, younger races
- to explore the themes inherent in the life of a wide-eyed, new-generation Valla who is reaching out and tasting the world firsthand or to struggle as a Golden Age Valla, wrestling with the reality of great loneliness due to the loss of your psychic link.

PHYSICAL QUALITIES

The Valla have an unearthly beauty about them. Taller than the average human by about half a head, yet shorter than the mighty Furians, the Valla have slim yet strong, wiry builds. They are the most graceful of all the races. Gifted with quick reflexes and superb coordination, Vallan movement appears almost like an enchanting dance to onlookers.

The Valla share the same skin tone and hair colour range as Humans, with a few shades more. Deep purple and near porcelain-white are not uncommon skin and hair colours among the Valla. The Valla do not possess body or facial hair.

A Valla's eyes are incredibly striking. Their eye colours are always vivid. Hues of rich gold, sapphire blue, deep lavender, and emerald green are common.

All Valla are born with a Spirit Stone embedded in the centre of their forehead—even those born after the Great Calamity. The Spirit Stone's default colour is a beautiful cerulean blue when it is active and connecting the Valla together. After the Great Calamity, all Spirit Stones simmer with a muddled amber tone, indicating the loss of their psychic link.

Just above the Valla's Spirit Stone is a set of vestigial feathers. Some Valla have a more prominent "plume" than others. The purpose of these feathers has been lost to time.

ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD

Life is experienced differently by the Valla than it is by the lesser-lived races. Some very rare Valla have lived to see the turn of a millennia. Valla reach full physical maturity in the second or third decade of their life. From there, as if frozen in time, their bodies and minds remain pristine and robust, until the last century of their life when the wiles of age begin to take their toll on their appearance and strength. With such longevity, Valla are slow to rouse. There is never a true sense of urgency—outside of immediate danger—that riles a Valla.

PARADISE LOST

The loss of the Valla's psychic link was a devastating blow to Vallan society on many levels. All their greatness was built upon the foundation of being immediately connected to each other at all times.

Now, as the Valla begin to rebuild and explore new ways to connect, not only with each other but also the outside world that they neglected for so long, there is an opportunity for the Valla nation to be reborn, and possibly become stronger and more versatile than before.

Valla left over from the Golden Age struggle with the loss of paradise and their psychic link. Some have turned to an addictive herb called the Drifting Glory to satiate their yearning for connection. Others are just beginning their journey to rediscover who they are now that they've lost such an important piece of themselves. Newer, post-Calamity Valla see the world with fresh eyes, and fail to understand the depths of loss their elders feel since the Severing. These young Valla are optimistic, chatty, and curious.

NAMES

Common Male Names: Aldruin, Altaris, Belron, Calreth, Eramdel, Malfusiel, Soren, Valaris

Common Female Names: Alluria, Corin, Enna, Gillindra, Lillandris, Maelleneth, Nimiriel, Shayanna, Valoria

Family Names: Arundel, Celeborn, Dawnstar, Laromar, Stormsong, Windwalker



While the Valla may seem haughty and aloof, the Great Calamity has spawned a new generation of Valla that are much more open and curious than their elders. The Valla's long lifespans make it plausible for a player to choose either concept to build their character upon.

Surprisingly, the Valla have melodic and hauntingly beautiful voices despite having evolved to never really require the use of their vocal chords. The emphasis on beauty and the finer things in life of Valla culture cultivated a strong penchant for song and art in their society.

Drifting Glory. A mysterious, efflorescent flower that sprung up shortly after the Great Calamity. Botanists believe that the burgeoning spiritual energies bleeding through from the Drift have caused this new plant species to emerge. Various uses for the flower have been discovered. The most significant finding is that the flower's essence can be distilled into a potent drug that temporarily re-activates a Valla's psychic abilities. There have been many detrimental side effects from continued usage. See pg. 24.

One of the more interesting takes on playing a Valla has been exploring the journey of an old-world survivor who yearns for her lost connection. With only the Drifting Glory available to provide a fleeting glimpse into that psychic connection, how far will she go for her next hit?

See Chapter 1: Welcome to Unity for an extensive cultural write-up on the Valla.



FURIAN

“Strength, duty, and honour.”

RACIAL TRAITS

Average Height: 1.85–2.10m

Average Weight: 80–160kg

ATTRIBUTE SCORES

MIGHT	AGILITY	MIND	PRESENCE
2	1	0	1

Unbound: Tapping into a reservoir of rage, you drive your power to meteoric levels for a brief moment.

Deal your highest Attribute score as extra damage on a single attack, or you may add half your Level to your Might score on a skill check. Can be used safely once per Full Rest. You may attempt to use this more than once per Full Rest but risk losing control. Roll 1d10 on subsequent attempts. Rolling below a 6 causes you to perform a single attack (with the Unbound bonus) on an ally of the GM’s choosing or yourself with that attack. The threshold for losing control increases by 1 with each subsequent attempt.

Molten lava spewed forth from the middle of the mountain as the Skyfather rent it with his hands, tearing the landmark asunder. Scooping up the liquid fire before it had a chance to cool, the Skyfather mixed it with the volcanic stone that had splintered from the mountain. Steam and smoke hissed out between his divine fingers as the first of the Furian race was formed.

Forged from solid rock and infused with molten blood, the Furians were a mighty presence to behold. The Skyfather wanted a race complementary to the Valla’s lackadaisical and airy nature; Unity required balance, and the Furians were created to achieve that purpose. Unmatched in physical strength, they were a solemn and stalwart race of people.

The Skyfather’s beloved, the Ivory Queen, noticed that the Furians, while powerful, would burn out quickly due to the heavy demands of their physical form. She dove into the centre of a dying star and snatched from it a tiny spark—a mere sliver of the star’s power. She returned to Unity and imbued her new children with a proper heart that could power their demanding bodies.

With a deep reservoir to draw from, the Furians learned to channel this newfound power and could work tirelessly for days on end. They were an industrious people, and soon their iron and stone cities dotted the lands of Unity, multiplying at an alarming rate. What they lacked in beauty and nuance, they made up for in sheer output. It was not long before they were caught up to their older sibling, the Valla, in cultural and territorial advancement.

When the Great Calamity occurred, the Furians were among the many guilty Children deserving of the Skyfather's wrath. With a heavy heart, he corrupted the heavenly spark his Queen had bestowed upon her Furian children. The reservoir of power that the Furians had grown accustomed to drawing from became unstable. Those that reached too quickly and too deeply were thrown into what became known as the "Red Rage:" a state of madness that drove those affected into a murderous frenzy. Too often a Furian awoke from the Red Rage with hands stained with the blood of their loved ones.

For a culture so steeped in honour and family, the advent of the Red Rage drove many Furians to shun all emotionality. A small handful of Furians were determined to conquer the Skyfather's curse, and preached about an internal place that lay between rage and serenity, a place where all Furians could realize their power without falling victim to it.

PLAY A FURIAN IF YOU WANT..

- to come from a culture that values strength, honour, and family
- to play a Class that favours might and blunt force trauma
- to have a feral side to your character
- to explore themes of restraint, regret, and redemption, whether in the character of a typically jaded and closed off Furian who has succumbed—or fears to succumb—to the Red Rage, or as one of the few Furians who preach the possibility of emotional temperance and control.

PHYSICAL QUALITIES

The Furians are a physically imposing race. They tower over Humans. The majority of Furians, even those not practiced in martial pursuits, are thickly built and muscular.

Their skin has a smooth, stone-like texture owing to their volcanic origins. Their veins run hot with magma-like blood, and when they call upon their great strength these veins glow red with fire. Furian skin tones share the same palette as the mountains: shades of grey, brown, and obsidian.

Furian facial features are feline, with males resembling the great lions of the Scorched Plains. Female Furian features are subtler, yet still noticeably feline.

Their eyes come in a few shades of colour: variations of green, hazel, grey, and yellow. Furian eyes

flare with luminous intensity when a Furian becomes enraged.

Furian hair is thick and unruly. The hair's texture is akin to a lion's mane. Colours range from pure white to gold, brown, orange, red, and jet black. Only Furian males grow facial hair. Moments of intensity or rage cause Furian hair to stand erect, giving the illusion of even greater size and resulting in a fearsome visage.

BLOOD BONDS

Furian culture revolves around duty and family: filial piety is the cornerstone of Furian society. The respect and love shown among Furian family members—not only to those living but to their ancestors—is deep-seated in the belief that everything that they are and everything that they will be is owed to those that came before them.

Because Furian notions of family are so strong, duty and honour are perpetually extolled and upheld. It is a horrible disgrace to soil the family name with misdeeds and failures.

While it is rare, Furians have been known to come to love non-Furians with the same fervor and selfless devotion that they would show to their family members.

FURY RISING

Since the emergence of the Red Rage, Furian society has fractured into three camps. The first camp practices a life devoid of emotions in order to prevent the rousing of the Red Rage. The second camp has been driven insane, unable to cope with the horrific deeds they inflicted upon their loved ones while lost in the Red Rage—like a perpetual spiral into madness, their inability to control their emotions has led them into a constant berserker state, and most are either exiled or locked up deep beneath the mountains. The final camp preaches a different path: one that exists between burning fury and an empty, cold heart. Those that follow this path demonstrate unpredictable behaviour; they live on the edge of madness but also have moments of triumph when they are able to harness their emotions and tap into their true power.

NAMES

Common Male Names: Anga, Bran, Date, Drax, Hark, Jin, Laz, Nazam, Pagon, Urag, Yat, Zan

Common Female Names: Akane, Corra, Eshima, Gena, Haru, Juno, Kana, Murai, Nara, Sora, Yassa

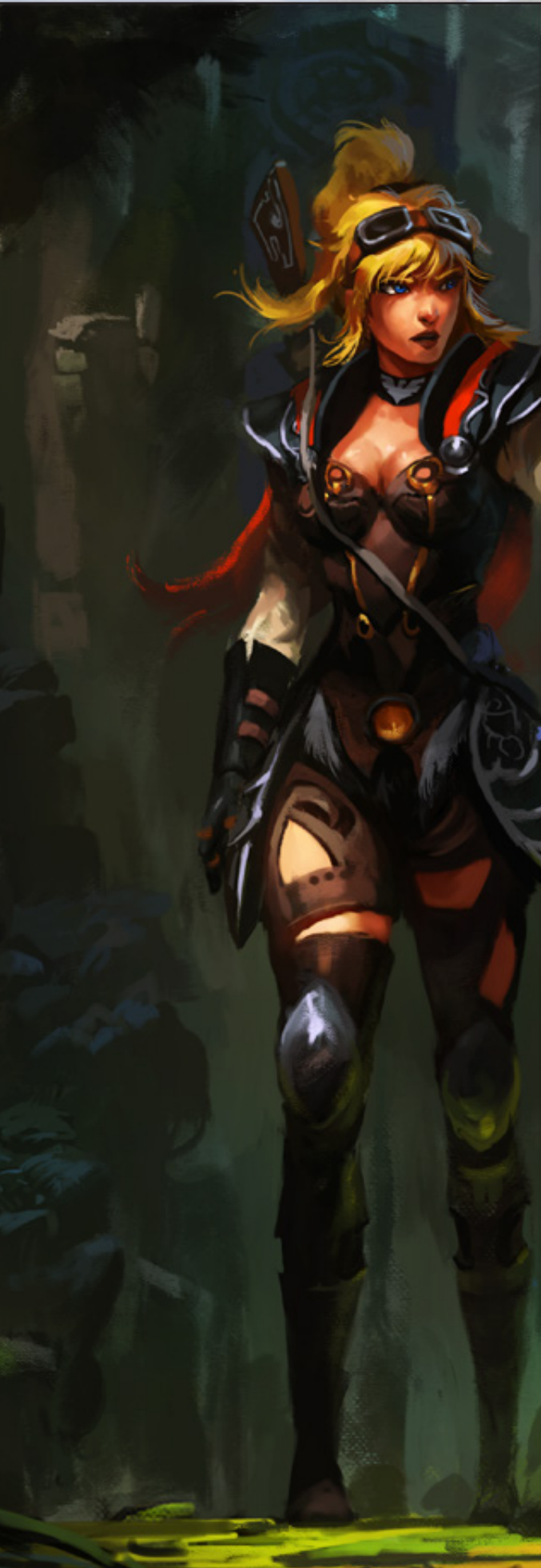
Family Names: Blackstorm, Cinderglow, Doomlash, Firefist, Hellbringer, Stonehammer, Redhand, Rivermane, Sungloom, Truesworn, Youngscream



After the Great Calamity, many Furians still struggle with a sense of dishonour arising from turning down some of the other races when they came to Furian lands for help—especially the Afflicted. The Furians have told themselves that they were already too burdened with their own tragedy and the Red Rage to open their doors, but still a sense of shame hangs over many of them. Some Furians have taken it upon themselves to cleanse the lands as a step towards redemption.

Red Rage. *This was the curse that the Skyfather struck the Furians with. When a Furian tries to tap into their reservoir of power using anger (the quickest route), it might trigger the Red Rage and send the Furian into a berserker rage, sundering their mind and causing them to attack everything in sight. Those that come out of the madness talk of a blood red haze that clouds everything. When the haze clears, they are usually covered in the blood of their loved ones. See pg. 39.*

See Chapter 1: Welcome to Unity for an extensive cultural write-up on the Furians.



HUMAN

“Believe.”

RACIAL TRAITS

Average Height: 1.55–1.80m

Average Weight: 51–95kg

ATTRIBUTE SCORES

MIGHT	AGILITY	MIND	PRESENCE
1	1	1	1

Tenacious: When faced with adversity, you find the grit and determination to push forward even when all hope seems lost.

You may re-roll any roll and use the result you prefer. Can be used once per Full Rest.

When the Skyfather shaped the first of Humanity from the soft clay of the earth, he did so with the wisdom acquired from having created the Valla and the Furians. He saw that gifting the Humans physically or psychically was not a method that worked to its fullest potential for his First and Secondborn. Instead, he gave Humans a reason to seize each day like it was their last. He “gifted” Humans with only a short time to live in comparison to the older races. It was precisely this “gift” that spurred the youngest of the Skyfather’s three Children to explode with progress, and to thrive.

With life measured in decades instead of centuries, Humans constantly pushed their limits and lived life feverishly. The majority of the technology that exists in Unity originated from the precocious minds of Humanity. Combining steam, arcane magick, and lightning stolen from the sky, they were the first to explore the creation of automata and constructs—if they could have robotic slaves perform the mundane yet necessary tasks in their lives, they could buy themselves time for loftier, more self-actualizing pursuits. It was their ferocious tenacity to make the most of their short lives that allowed them to rise beyond their physical and psychic limitations to become a major force in the world of Unity.

Much was lost when the Skyfather sundered Unity, but what endured was the undying resilience and optimism of the Human spirit. Those who were spared from the tragedy of the Great Calamity saw it as a sign that they were the chosen ones, while the heathens among them—those that had created constructions so grand that they touched the sky and, by extension, the face of God—were marked with the terrible disease that is the Phage.

The zealous saw their punishment as a stark reminder of the price of pride. Tensions mounted between those afflicted by the new disease and those who were spared. Eventual-

ly, fear replaced tolerance, and civil war broke out. Those stricken with disease were eventually driven from the Human Empire.

Humanity has only recently begun to rebuild itself. Without their greatest minds and innovators, the process has been slow and arduous. Many wonder if the Empire will ever reclaim its former glory.

PLAY A HUMAN IF YOU WANT...

- to come from a culture that values diversity and ambition
- to be able to perform well as any Class
- to be adaptable and versatile
- to explore themes of faith and legacy, potential characters could include an overzealous Human believing themselves superior having been spared from the Phage, or a Human seeking to make amends for the callousness of having cast out their own brethren.

PHYSICAL QUALITIES

Humans are the shortest of the three original races. The average Human's build lies between the slender Valla and the muscular Furians. "Average" is a poor descriptor for Human features, however; Humanity is the most physically diverse—and numerous—of all the races.

Their short lives, strong ambition, and penchant for exploration have caused them to spread across most of Unity. Separated groups of Humans, developing in isolation throughout history, mean that the race as a whole has diverged into different ethnic groups. This has led to variations in physical features across the race. These variations are a showcase of Human adaptability.

Human skin is generally smooth, and some possess more body and facial hair than others. Skin tones range from deep black to olive brown, golden yellow, and pale white.

Human eye colour can be brown, blue, green, grey, hazel, and amber.

Human hair has wildly varying textures, from thin and straight to coarse and curly. Hair can truly be any colour and style, especially with the development of vanity dyes, particularly popular in upper-class Human society.

MOMENTS ARE ALL WE HAVE

Humans have the shortest life span of the original three races. Whereas the Valla live for up to five centuries (often more) and the Furians for half of that, it is a rare achievement for a Human to reach a century of life—and even then, they will be too hobbled by age in the twilight of their years to enjoy it.

However, it is precisely this frugal allotment of time that has caused Humanity to rise faster and stronger than all those that came before them. For a Human, every day is a gift and an opportunity to be better, do better, and experience more. They don't have the luxury of time. It's this constant sense of urgency that drives Humanity so fiercely to achieve so much. When they are gone, their deeds will remain, and in some small way that means that a part of them gets to live on.

FAVOURER SON

It was no secret that Humanity was the favourite child of their divine Father and Mother. When the Skyfather created the Humans, he believed he had finally perfected the creation process, and that he knew exactly what needed to be done to create an ambitious race to cultivate all of Unity. His faith was rewarded when Humanity set out, with feverish intent, to explore and conquer. Deeply pleased, the Skyfather and the Ivory Queen showered Humanity with affection. It was this blatant display of favouritism that helped fuel the Chaos Wars between the Valla, Furians and Humans. Even to this day, Humans remember the love that was shown to them, and as a society they are deeply religious.

NAMES

The range of Human names is so great due to the diversity of their various ethnic groups. Below are common names found in the southern Falcon Kingdom.

Common Male Names: Allan, Ben, Christopher, Darius, Eli, Jack, Liam, Ned, Sebastian, Viktor

Common Female Names: Anna, Becca, Daphne, Ginny, Jenna, Lynn, Miriam, Sarah, Talia, Yvonne

Family Names: Abel, Brightheart, Carlisle, Dalton, Hightower, Hobbs, North, Stark, Terrell, Underwood



The majority of Humans are grateful that they were 'spared' the Skyfather's wrath (in the form of the Phage) and have turned to religion and practice reverence. But, there are some that feel slighted by their Creator. These few look to the heavens and ask "Were we not good enough for your judgment? Are we that insignificant and lacking in gifts that there was nothing for you to take away from us?" Perhaps it's innate Human ambition that drives such perturbed thinking.

While Humans have an average spread of attributes with no remarkable strength in any one area, their initial Racial Ability: Tenacious can be a game changer. It allows you to push your character and take greater risks which is reflective of the ever-striving Human spirit.

Chaos Wars. A series of wars that spawned from the friction between the Valla, Furians and Humans during the Age of Strife. It was this war that sent the Skyfather to wander the cosmos in grief. See pg. 14.

Tenacious works on any roll that requires dice. Don't limit yourself to just skill checks. You can re-roll for higher damage on an attack or re-roll the damage you've taken from an attack in hopes of a lower result.

See Chapter 1: Welcome to Unity for an extensive cultural write-up on the Humans.

AFFLICTED

“We will persevere.”

RACIAL TRAITS

Average Height: 1.60–1.80m

Average Weight: 54–95kg

ATTRIBUTE SCORES

MIGHT	AGILITY	MIND	PRESENCE
1	1	2	0

Grisly Triage: A lifetime of scavenging and salvaging parts (organic and robotic) has led you to become gruesomely resourceful.

If there are fresh corpses after a battle, a quick infusion of their vital fluids or electrical charge invigorates you and heals you for 1d6 + [2×Level] hitpoints. You may spend an additional 5 minutes and 1 Gear to scavenge for parts that will grant you 1 Recuperation. Can be used once per Full Rest.

Cast out and persecuted like pariahs, the Afflicted were perhaps the most tragic outcome of the Great Calamity. Formerly a part of Humanity, the Afflicted were once the best and brightest that the Empire had to offer. They were the innovators, the forward-thinkers, philosophers, scientists, courageous adventurers, and dreamers. It was precisely this burning fire, this spark of immeasurable potential that was weaponized against the Divine which led the Skyfather to afflict them with the Phage.

The Phage is a horrific disease that eats away at flesh and bone. It may start as a small scratch, then a slow peeling of the skin. When the sores come, with them begins the eventual and grisly atrophy of the affected appendage. Sometimes the Phage can be more subtle. A slight wheeze or persistent cough can be a precursor for the eventual destruction of a lung. Its appetite is slow yet voracious.

With no cure, the victims of the Phage were slowly shunned and eventually met with outright terror and rejection from their former Human brethren. The seeds of fear gestated and bloomed into an unchecked morass of prejudice and hatred. This irrationality ignited a civil war, which claimed the lives of thousands of Afflicted and Humans alike.

Eventually, the battered and exhausted Afflicted were forced to flee from the Empire. They had to leave behind the place they called home, along with all that they knew. Adopting a nomadic lifestyle, they leveraged their brilliance and technological skills to hinder the Phage as best they could. The Afflicted moved from place to place, scavenging and salvaging what—or in the cases of the most cold-hearted among them—who they could find. Determined to carve out a piece of Unity to call their own, no matter the price,



many collectively vowed that never again would they let their guard down and become victims.

As time went on and the Phage claimed more and more of their bodies, the Afflicted made use of their technology to create prosthetics and limbs to replace them. Some began to fear that they would begin to lose whatever precious remnants of Humanity they had left as they gradually became more machine than man. Others revelled in their new form, embracing the strength and versatility their hybrid physiology afforded them. There remained those, though few, that hoped for a brighter tomorrow—a future where they could walk in the sun once more with the other races.

PLAY AN AFFLICTED IF YOU WANT...

- to play an outcast
- to be able to excel at a Class that favours the mind
- to be part machine
- to explore themes of identity and morality as a character struggling to find their place in the wake of Divine retribution.

PHYSICAL QUALITIES

The Afflicted possess similar physical qualities to their Human counterparts from which they originated. The Afflicted are heavier than Humans in general due to the machinery that replaces the parts of their bodies that have been consumed by the Phage.

Afflicted skin tones tend more towards fair and light colouring due to their lack of exposure to sunlight. Afflicted dwellings and cities are generally shrouded in darkness and shadow and are often located underground. Their skin is also often scarred from the Phage.

While the Afflicted have hair, they generally lose it due to the Phage or the incredible stress they put their bodies through during the grafting process when replacing lost limbs.

Parts replaced by machinery may not be a one-to-one replacement. An Afflicted who loses her hand may have it replaced with a tool, such as a hook or claw, instead of a mechanical hand.

Those who have been in the presence of more ‘developed’ members of the Afflicted have mentioned the perpetual hum that accompanies them, thanks to the technology that keeps them alive.

AT ANY COST

Due to the horrific tragedy the Afflicted have suffered since the onset of the Phage, Afflicted culture

itself is dark and brutal. There is a distrust of outsiders, and a vengeful fire still burns in the hearts of the many that feel betrayed by their Human brethren.

The Afflicted have had to constantly fight a war on two fronts: they battle a relentless disease that even their incredible minds cannot find a solution for, and they face fear, prejudice, and rejection from the other races. In their time of need, the Afflicted were turned away—countless times. This rejection has caused the Afflicted to become fiercely self-reliant and callous to those who are not part of their group.

In order to survive such harsh circumstances, some Afflicted have turned ruthless, and constantly cross moral boundaries to get the resources they require to live.

BRIGHTEST STAR

Before the Great Calamity struck and the Phage was unleashed upon Humanity, the Afflicted were the greatest minds in the Empire. When they were Human, they were well respected—revered in fact—by their peers for bringing such amazing technological wonders to society. Their inventions made life better.

With the Afflicted banished and scattered across Unity, all of the technology that Humans grew reliant on began to fail from lack of maintenance. The knowledge to maintain and recreate it was lost. Even the Afflicted, having had to focus their efforts so heavily on stemming the Phage for so long, have begun to lose the knowledge of the Golden Age. Still, there are those from the other races that begrudgingly seek out Afflicted Tinkerers and Technomancers for help. The Afflicted have begun leveraging this dependence, and many carry an air of superiority about them now that the tables are slowly turning.

NAMES

The majority of the Afflicted maintain their Human names. The names below are the common names found in the central parts of the Empire. For family names, Afflicted often take the name of their community or settlement as a sign of solidarity and shared suffering.

Common Male Names: Allan, Ben, Christopher, Darius, Eli, Jack, Liam, Ned, Sebastian, Viktor

Common Female Names: Anna, Becca, Daphne, Ginny, Jenna, Lynn, Miriam, Sarah, Talia, Yvonne

Family Names: Donnager, Eden, Haven, Nightingale, Sirroco, Sleeper, Underholme



The Afflicted are a bit of a darker race to play as due to their tragic history. It is not uncommon for some tension to arise in a party over an Afflicted member. Sometimes a little discomfort has been well worth some of the stories and character development that have come out of Afflicted characters. Learning to trust and love again outside of your race and letting the emotional walls come down makes for some powerful storytelling.

The Phage. A grim disease that slowly eats away at the flesh of those infected by it. The process is slow and painful yet can be unpredictable at times. The Phage seems oddly specific about whom it targets and has not spread outside of the Human race. The Afflicted are slowly perfecting the technique of replacing lost limbs and organs with technological variants. See pg. 78.

See Chapter 1: Welcome to Unity for an extensive cultural write-up on the Afflicted.

CORRA REDHAND

SAMPLE CHARACTER

JUDGE

Level 1 Furian

Age: 28 Height: 1.78m Weight: 70kg

COMBAT STATS					
+	🛡️	🏃	🗡️	🛡️	🧠
15	2	0	3	0	1

ATTRIBUTES			
MIGHT	AGILITY	MIND	PRESENCE
3	0	1	1

RESOURCE: FERVOR

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WEAPON(S)

Anointed Maul: *Melee. 2d6+3 damage.*

ARMOUR

Platemail: *Heavy. +2 Armour*

GEAR & RECUPERATIONS

4 Necessities 3 Gear 3 Recuperations

RACIAL TRAIT: UNBOUND

Unbound: Tapping into a reservoir of rage, you drive your physical power to meteoric levels for a brief moment.

Deal your highest Attribute score as extra damage on a single attack, or you may add half your Level to your Might score on a skill check. Can be used safely once per Full Rest. Additional uses may result in loss of control.

CLASS FEATURE: ZEALOT

Two-Handed Weapon: You can choose to re-roll any weapon damage dice that come up as a 1 or 2. You must accept the next roll even if it is a 1 or 2.

CLASS PERK: VOICE OF THE EMPEROR

When you channel your conviction into a command, your voice becomes blessed with divine authority.

- Applies only to social actions (parleying, bartering, coercing, etc.)
- If you fail your roll, you may immediately re-roll with Benefit.
- Cost: 3 Fervor

BACKGROUND

Corra is the daughter of the famed Furian scholar Drax Redhand. Spending most of her childhood in the bustling stone halls of Mount Furia, Corra knew firsthand the value of hard work and physical might. She never understood her father and his proclivity for the written word and scholarly pursuits. It clashed jarringly with the ideals of the warrior society that she grew up in. She was ashamed of the disparaging remarks the other Furians made about her father.

All of that changed on Corra's 14th birthday. The skies darkened as grey clouds spewed rain and lightning. Fell magicks were at work as the demonic hordes crashed into the obsidian gates of Mount Furia. There were just so many of them. Her mother and her brothers were lost that day. Corra remembers hiding in the smoldering ruins, her small body easily concealed by the wreckage. She remembers seeing her father dragged out in chains and surrounded by Fell spawn. She remembers letting out a scream as they laid into him. Most of all Corra remembers how her father transformed into her hero that day.

Upon hearing her scream the Fell snatched her from the rubble. The sight of his daughter in danger on top of the staggering loss of his family ignited something inside of Drax. Rage filled his eyes as he shattered the chains binding him with a single tug. Wrapping the very things that bound him around his fists, he exploded into action, punching and smashing through Fell like wet paper. Their demonic death cries called more and more Fell into the area and Drax continued to fight with unbound fury. He turned to Corra and screamed "Run child! Run!"

His voice rang with such conviction, Corra's legs were moving before she could process what was happening. Corra ran until she could run no more. Exhausted, she turned around and saw nothing but wet grassy plains and a pillar of smoke off in the distance. It was the last thing she saw before she collapsed. Upon waking, there was no sign of her father.

She wandered the wilds in grief for days, gradually accepting that death was coming for her. It was then that a voice whispered to her from beyond. The voice was warm and loving, it guided her to food, and to shelter. It was her constant companion for months and eventually led her to a caravan that would take her to the shining city of Taloran.

It was here, as she was ushered into the hallowed halls of the city's temple, that the voice she had heard, the same voice that had kept her alive all these months, was made manifest in the glorious image of Aluvane the Dawnwalker, God of Justice. His marble statue exuded the same warmth and authority that she had felt all these months. Standing in his presence, she could hear his voice loud and clear.

It was in that moment that her purpose was also made clear. She would train to become a warrior of justice. She would protect those that could not protect themselves. She would never let anyone feel the way she had felt the day she lost both her family and her home. Corra would also never stop searching for her father, for one day she would be able to tell him how proud she was of him and how much she loved him.

CORE PATHS

SCHOLAR'S DAUGHTER (1)

Corra would often sit by the hearth and listen to her father's wondrous stories of his travels and the strange people he'd met. Despite her protests, Drax always believed in strengthening not only the body but the mind as well. Many nights during Corra's youth were spent poring through her father's numerous books.

LONE SURVIVOR (1)

Corra was forced to grow up very quickly. Watching her family slaughtered before her eyes and driven into the wilderness to survive alone, she only had herself to rely on. Although the voice of her patron god guided her initially, Corra eventually developed skills to survive in the wilderness.

A WARRIOR'S HEART (3)

The halls of Mount Furia oozed with warrior culture. Trophies, weapons and armour adorned the walls. Corra grew up immersed and enchanted in a society that valued physical might. She was always eager to compete in the athletic competitions and strived to keep up with her older brothers.

CHOSEN POWERS

RADIANT STRIKE

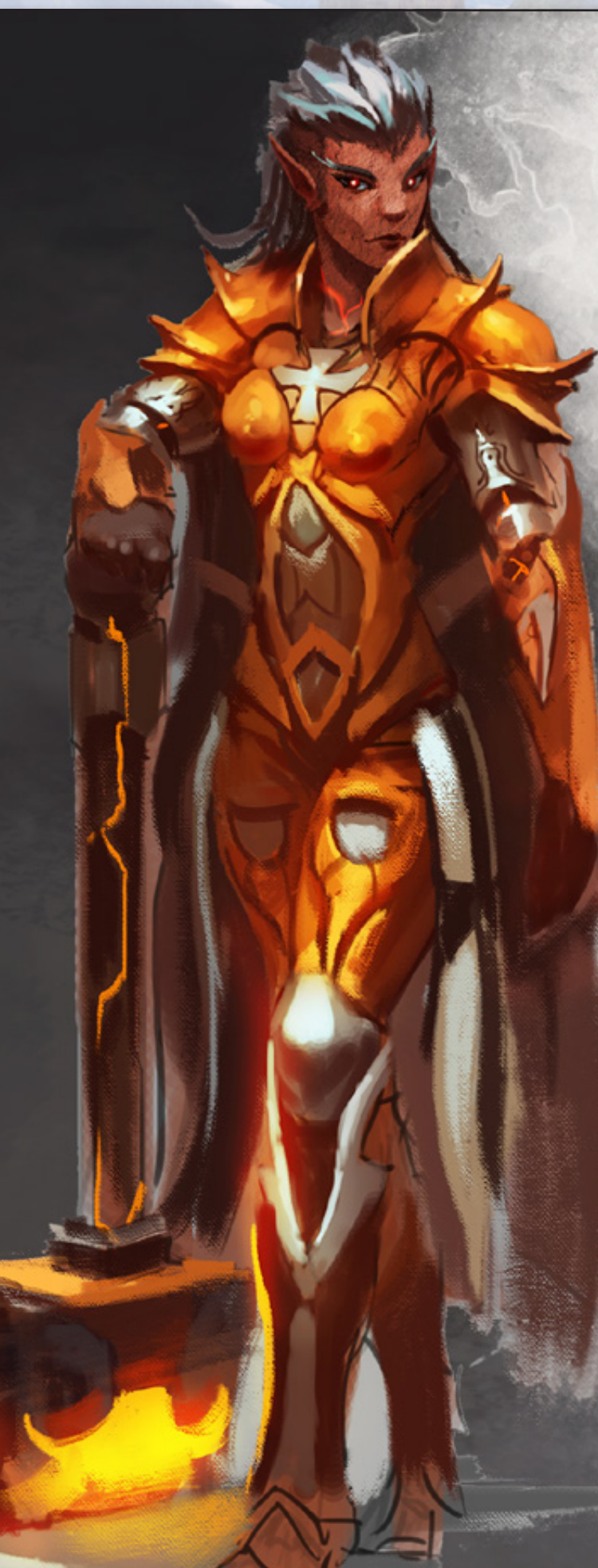
Transforming your weapon into a torch for justice, you illuminate the darkness within your target's soul. You empower your weapon to detonate in a flash of divine light upon impact, disorienting your target.

SPEED OF LIGHT

Your weapon glows with heavenly power and you toss it. As soon as it lands, your body explodes with golden energy and instantly streaks across the battlefield to rejoin with your weapon.

RIGHTEOUS DEFENSE

For a brief moment, you are imbued with divine precognition. You readily parry or block your opponent's blow, blunting the impact.



DREADNOUGHT

The fires of Mount Furia raged on as the Crimson Horde surrounded what remained of the Furian army who were defending their capital city. Down to a mere hundred warriors, the Furians stood their ground and fought until their weapons broke and their armour shattered. Undaunted, they continued to use their bare hands to smash the enemy. It was during this deep and desperate fight that a new fighting ideology was born.

Knowing that they were the last line of defense against the Crimson Horde—the only thing preventing the annihilation of everything that they had ever loved and cared for—the Furian warriors forewent all notions of self-preservation to become an absolute force of carnage. They decided that day that they would not die of attrition. They would not let their instinct for survival dictate the fate of their race. Instead, they openly embraced the chaos of battle and the ear-shattering din of war. They dug deep inside themselves and tapped into a fury that they had not known existed, and threw themselves at the enemy with reckless abandon.

The shock and awe of such an explosive and unrelenting assault caught the Crimson Horde off guard, and they died by the hundreds in the initial charge. But even as the Horde gathered to rebuff the onslaught, they noticed that the Furians were not tiring. Instead they seemed to gain more momentum with every advance. Some could swear they saw the Furians' wounds healing as they spilt Horde blood everywhere.

Over a thousand of their troops died that day before the Crimson Horde retreated. The Furian capital city, Mount Furia, was saved and a new type of soldier was cemented in history.

Dreadnoughts are tough offensive powerhouses. They are clad in heavy armour and the weapons they choose are always focused on inflicting the greatest damage possible. They forgo a cautious and defensive fighting style for a reckless and unrelenting onslaught. The more a Dreadnought fights, the stronger he gets.

Dreadnoughts thrive in battle and use their Class Resource Fury to power their attacks and defenses. Heavy armour provides a measure of protection, but the ability to outright ignore pain in the thick and thrill of their bloodlust is the hallmark of a Dreadnought's defense.

Dreadnought attacks are brutal and massive. Unlike the Phantom, they are most at home when knee-deep in enemies. Dreadnoughts are veritable wrecking balls on the battlefield. They can be found wading through throngs of enemies, their gigantic weapons cleaving through bone and sinew.

With adrenaline coursing through the Dreadnought's veins like liquid fire, even the most grievous strikes against them are mere flesh wounds in the chaos of battle.

When it comes to pressing the attack, Dreadnoughts know of only one creed: "Keep moving forward."

WHY PLAY A DREADNOUGHT?

Play a Dreadnought if you like:

- The idea of a heavily-armoured warrior that charges headfirst into the thick of things and is the embodiment of raw intensity and bone-crushing might
- Finding the biggest, baddest weapon(s) you can get your hands on
- Throwing caution to the wind
- Causing pure physical trauma and having an unquenchable thirst for battle

Dreadnoughts make excellent vanguards as their powers work best when they are actively fighting and taking damage. They have efficient ways of getting into the thick of things and dealing with multiple enemies in melee.

When supported by teammates, Dreadnoughts can become unstoppable death-dealing machines. A smart opponent will attempt to cut off the Dreadnought's support system before confronting the monstrous fighter head on.



DREADNOUGHT

“They’ve got us outnumbered and completely surrounded. How unfortunate for them.”



CLASS TRAITS

STARTING HP: 14+MIGHT

RECUPERATION DIE: d10

ARMOUR: Light, Heavy

WEAPONS: Medium Melee, Heavy Melee

RESOURCE: Fury [6] 1d4 Recharge

MAIN ATTRIBUTE: MIGHT

CLASS FEATURES

All Dreadnoughts come with the following features as part of their baseline powers

While lacking in options for ranged attacks, Dreadnoughts have powers that allow them to charge into battle, enabling them to stick to their targets.

SHIELDBREAKER

PASSIVE

You strike with such force that even the thickest steel bends before your might.

EFFECTS

Your Melee attacks gain +1 Armour Penetration allowing you to ignore 1 AV when calculating damage. Shieldbreaker does not provide additional physical damage if the target has no AV, it only ignores what AV the target has.

Bonus increases to:

- +2 at level 5
- +3 at level 9

CLEAVE

STANDARD

Wild swings and sweeping strikes are the hallmarks of the Dreadnought fighting style. What could be better than slicing through your enemy? Slicing through a bunch of them.

COST

2 Fury

TARGET

Up to 1d4

RANGE

Adjacent

EFFECTS

Roll your Basic Attack. Roll 1d4 to determine how many ADJACENT enemies are struck by your attack.

Success. You deal 1d10+HL damage.

Failure. You deal half damage.

PICK 1 PERK FROM BELOW

FEROCIOUS PRESENCE

QUICK

Your world is one of blood and rage. The fury that burns in your heart emanates from your very pores, creating a fearsome aura around you.

EFFECTS

When you attempt an action that involves intimidation or threats, you may spend 1 Fury to receive Benefit on your roll.

Dreadnoughts honour their fallen by incorporating a piece of their comrade’s armour or weaponry into their own. That way even in death, they still fight on.

DESTRUCTIVE TENDENCIES

PASSIVE

The training of a Dreadnought emphasizes physicality and raw strength. You tend to take the direct approach to problems rather than finesse your way through.

EFFECTS

Attempts to break or force things open receive a +1 bonus.

Bonus increases to:

- +2 at level 3
- +3 at level 6
- +4 at level 10

Perks stack with Core Paths and Attribute bonuses when it comes to skill checks, making them very powerful even if the value is minute.

TIER I POWERS

Use Furious Charge liberally on easy-to-hit targets to exploit the power's Fury refund mechanic.

Combining Reckless Assault or Mighty Cleave with the Tier 2 power Relentless and its upgrade, Composed, can give your Dreadnought the potential to spring back from the edge of death in a massive way.

Brace for Impact can be used to blunt the damage taken from a failed Reckless Assault attempt. This can become a costly combo if used too often.

FURIOUS CHARGE

STANDARD - MOVEMENT

You lower your head, steel your gaze, and launch yourself explosively at your target.

COST	TARGET	RANGE
2 Fury	Single	Nearby Only

EFFECTS

Instead of moving to a NEARBY target and attacking, you may charge at them and then make a Basic Attack, increasing both your AR and damage by your Shieldbreaker bonus. You cannot use Furious Charge on an ADJACENT target, only one that is NEARBY.

Fury cost is refunded immediately if the Attack roll is successful.

UPGRADES

Juggernaut. Become unstoppable. If currently ADJACENT to an enemy (or enemies), you plough through everyone with bullheaded determination. Gain your +MIGHT to your AV against all Provoked Attacks as you charge towards your target.

War Cry. You let out a ferocious battle cry as you explode across the battlefield. If your Attack roll after your charge is successful, you are not only refunded the Fury cost, but gain 1 additional Fury as well.

BRACE FOR IMPACT

REACTION

Steeling your body, only the heaviest of blows will give you pause.

COST	TARGET	RANGE
2 Fury	Self	Self

EFFECTS

Upon being struck, you receive your +MIGHT as universal Damage Resistance against that single attack. You must declare Brace for Impact before rolling Damage. Can also be used outside of combat.

BRING IT ON

PASSIVE

When the odds are stacked against you, a little jolt of adrenaline gives you the edge you need to take care of business.

EFFECTS

If more than 1 enemy is ADJACENT to you, add +1 to your damage for each extra enemy. Increase to +2 per enemy at Level 6. This bonus can never exceed HL.

MIGHTY CLEAVE

PASSIVE

Your countless hours of practice identifying effective angles and developing your follow-through power allow you to cut through more foes with ease.

EFFECTS

Your basic Cleave power is improved and now strikes up to 1d4+1 targets. If one or more targets die to Mighty Cleave, 1 Fury is refunded.

RECKLESS ASSAULT

STANDARD

You throw caution to the wind, forgoing your defenses, and launch an absolutely massive attack on your foe.

COST	TARGET	RANGE
2 Fury	Single	Adjacent

EFFECTS

Roll your Basic Attack.

Success. Your attack lands with such force that you deal an additional 1d4+MIGHT+HL damage on top of your Basic Attack damage (or power's damage if you have the Channelled Fury upgrade).

Failure. You miss your blow and are caught completely off-balance and wide open. You suffer an immediate retaliation from your target that automatically hits you and you effectively have 0 AV when receiving that attack. You are also refunded 1 Fury.

UPGRADES

Channelled Fury. Instead of being a separate attack on its own, Reckless Assault can be used as a Quick action to combine its additional bonus damage with other powers. For example, you can now combine the effects of Reckless Assault with Furious Charge for a higher chance of success or combine Reckless Assault with Cleave (you will take a retaliation for each miss, though). Channelled Fury does not work with Overdrive powers and only deals half of its bonus damage on non-single target powers.

Broadside. You no longer lose your AV when you take the immediate retaliation on a failed attack.

IMPALE

STANDARD

With grim determination you thrust your weapon through your enemy. If using a blunt weapon, you swing for the kneecaps instead.

COST	TARGET	RANGE
2 Fury	Single	Adjacent

EFFECTS

Roll your Basic Attack.

Success. You deal Basic Attack damage. The target will suffer Hindrance on any action if they attempt to move from their current position for 1 round.

Failure. You deal half Basic Attack damage.

UPGRADES

Pin. On a success, you may spend another 1 Fury to lower you target's AR by your +MIGHT for 1 round.

THRIVE ON CHAOS

QUICK - OVERDRIVE

You revel in the chaos of battle as you surge with adrenaline. Each blow you land reinvigorates you.

COST	TARGET	RANGE
1 Fury	Self	Self

EFFECTS

You are healed for half the damage you inflict after mitigation. Lasts 3 rounds.

BATTLE-HARDENED

PASSIVE

When the battle becomes dire, your own resolve strengthens.

EFFECTS

When you drop below half your Max HP (rounded down), your AV value now counts as universal Damage Resistance and reduces any type of damage you receive (except True damage) as long as you are below half your Max HP. This effect doesn't apply to the initial blow that took you below half your Max HP. This effect is momentarily disabled for Reckless Assault's failure condition unless you also have Reckless Assault's Broadside upgrade.

UPGRADES

No Pain. When Battle-Hardened is active, your AV is increased by your Shieldbreaker bonus, along with the universal Damage Resistance granted from it.

LET'S ROLL

STANDARD - MOVEMENT

Crushing bones and hacking off limbs is more fun if you have someone to share the experience with. Bring along a friend.

COST	TARGET	RANGE
2 Fury	Special	Special

EFFECTS

You grab an ADJACENT Ally and launch yourselves across the battlefield to a NEARBY enemy or location. Your Ally does not expend their Movement action when travelling this way. Both of you are still prone to Provoked Attacks.

If your destination/target is an enemy, roll your Basic Attack as you barrel into them with your body. If successful, the target takes no damage but is Staggered for 1 round.

UPGRADES

Battering Ram. Upon successfully smashing into your target, you now deal your Basic Attack damage on top of Staggering them.

RAMPAGE

STANDARD

Swept up in the madness of battle, your mighty blows play a melody of death as each successful strike reverberates louder than the last.

COST	TARGET	RANGE
2 Fury	Single	Adjacent

EFFECTS

Roll your Basic Attack.

Success. You deal Basic Attack damage and an additional +1d4 damage. This additional damage stacks if you continue to use Rampage the next round (+2d4 then +3d4, etc.), or else it falls off at 1 stack per round.

Failure. You deal half Basic Attack damage. If you have a stack(s) of Rampage, you lose 1 stack as if you had not made a Rampage Attack (+2d4 becomes +1d4).

UPGRADES

Cadence. Rampage's Fury cost is now 1.

Encore. Expend 1 additional Fury to immediately re-roll a failed Rampage Attack. Usable once per round.

Maestro. Rampage's bonus damage die is increased to 1d8.

Impale is a useful power for controlling the battlefield and reducing the threat of enemies for your squishier party members.

Rampage is an incredibly potent power only if you can maintain your Rampage stacks. If there is no one in the party to boost your Attack Rating, consider grabbing both the Cadence and Encore upgrades.

Thrive on Chaos embodies the fantasy of the Dreadnought: a berserker warrior that never says die. While it is a powerful survival tool, be wary of any disabling abilities an enemy might throw at you while you are under the effects of Thrive on Chaos—if you can't swing your weapon, you can't leech health back.

PRIMALIST

Before the Skyfather and the Ivory Queen placed their mark upon Unity, the world was a wild, roiling landscape, brimming with primal energy and untamed life. The elemental forces clashed constantly in a beautiful chaos. Fire, earth, wind, and water were the constituents upon which the physical world was built. Their unending dance gave birth to the teeming wildlife, the churning oceans, the mighty volcanoes, and the lush forests. Many that look upon nature take its splendor for granted. It has always existed and is simply there.

But there are those that have an innate connection to these primal forces. They hear the whispers of the land—whispers that have grown into cries as civilization's burning ambitions continue to take more than what is given, and the unnatural energies of the Drift continue to spill forth unabated into the world, disrupting the ordained rhythm that maintains balance. The dead rise as metal cities spew perpetual black clouds into the sky and poison everything around them. The very land cries out for a champion to bring balance and restore natural law.

That champion is the Primalist. The Primalist is attuned to the chaotic elemental forces. These forces come to the Primalist in the form of Primordial Spirits. They are the physical world's answer to the encroaching of the Drift into Unity. The very earth itself rises up in defiance of the unnatural merging of two worlds. These Primordial Spirits are conduits of its rage made manifest. Now they channel their rage—unrestrained—through the Primalists as a means of taking back a piece of the world that has been robbed.

Unlike the Driftwalker who coerces and makes bargains with the dark forces of the Drift, or the Mystic who forcibly manipulates the strands of reality, the Primalist communes and beseeches with the Primordial Spirits for a portion of their power. It is a relationship of respect and reverence and never strictly a business transaction.

The elements are not the only thing at the Primalist's disposal. The wild beasts that live off the land and owe their existence to natural causes rather than divine providence willingly lend their aid to the Primalist. With the ferocity of nature's creatures and the blessing of the Primordial spirits on their side, the Primalists are a true force to reckon with.

In one moment, a Primalist may be summoning gale force winds to cast aside a storm of arrows; in another sending a stream of soothing waters to rejuvenate a wounded ally; and in the next instant, they have leapt across the battlefield to rend their foes limb from limb by channeling the ferocity of an Adraxian tiger.

The call of the Primordial Spirits is strong, and Primalist dispositions are as varied as the creatures of nature. Some see the role as an honour, while others reluctantly take up the mantle. Then there are those that hear nature's call as the very reason for their existence.

WHY PLAY A PRIMALIST?

Play a Primalist if you like:

- The idea of a hybrid caster and melee combatant
- Nature and its many creatures
- A more savage and wild side to your character

The Primalist is a versatile class able to call upon the elements to cast spells and then imbue themselves with the strength of nature's creatures for a physical edge. With the option to specialize further through power choices, the Primalist can be built to suit different playstyles.

Primalists also utilize two resources similar to the Priest, who manages both Faith and Healing Charges. Primalists use Spirit to cast their spells and in doing so power their Ferocity, which allows them to activate and maintain their Aspects. Learning to flow from one resource into the other and back again is the key to playing the Primalist to its fullest potential.



RESOLUTION MECHANIC

The main resolution mechanic in *Unity* is rolling **2d10** and adding up all appropriate bonuses or penalties and checking that against a **Target Number (TN)**. Meeting or exceeding the TN results in success for the given action, whereas falling below the TN generally results in failure. There are often unique failure effects attached to given actions in the game.

Target Numbers are used as a representation of difficulty, with a higher number indicating an increased difficulty. Within combat, TNs are the enemy's **Defense Rating** or a certain Attribute that your character must overcome in order to land a successful hit. Outside of combat, TNs can be selected by the GM based on the **Difficulty Table** that can be found on pg. 30.

The main resolution mechanic is used both outside of and within combat situations. You would roll **2d10 + Modifiers** for stealing some bread, charming the local bartender, trying to scale a wall, or attempting to cleave a savage beast in half. Most of the time, when the main resolution mechanic is used outside of combat, these are referred to as skill checks. The first three examples above from stealing some bread to scaling a wall can be considered skill checks.

IN-COMBAT EXAMPLE

Arathmis the Vallan Phantom attempts to backstab the burly thug who's currently fighting his friend.

The thug is wearing nothing but a pair of ale-soaked pants and boots. He's a bit on the rotund side and seems overly drunk. His Defense Rating (DR) is only 11.

Arathmis rolls [2d10] + his Attack Rating (AR) of [4]. His total is 14, exceeding the thug's DR of 11 (which is the Target Number for the attempted action in this case). A solid hit.

Arathmis drives his blade deep into the soft flesh of the surprised thug. He rolls his damage and adds bonus Backstab Damage on top of it. It's more than enough to end the poor thug's life. The blade finds its way in between the thug's vertebrae and severs his spine.

NON-COMBAT EXAMPLE

Loxana the Sentinel is interrogating a captured prisoner for more information on the whereabouts of the rest of his gang. Every moment spent trying to squeeze an answer out of this uncooperative cur is another moment that someone else might get hurt.

Running out of patience, Loxana decides to physically intimidate the prisoner for some answers. The prisoner is a scrawny yet smug man who, while somewhat spineless, is still the captain of his gang. The GM takes this into account as he looks at the Difficulty Table to determine how challenging it will be to make the prisoner cough up some answers. He settles on "Demanding—Requires both focus and skill." The TN is set to 14.

Loxana's player knows that PRESENCE is used as a base Attribute for social interactions and she has +1 PRESENCE. She checks her Core Paths to see if any are applicable to the situation. One of her Core Paths, Horrors of War, will definitely count for intimidation. The last area to check is her Class Perks. As a Sentinel, she has chosen Grizzled Soldier as her Class Perk which grants her a +2 bonus at her Level wherever intimidation or threats are concerned.

She rolls [2d10] + [1] PRESENCE + [1] Horrors of War Core Path + [2] Grizzled Soldier. She gets a total of 17.

Loxana grabs the bound man by the throat, lifting him clean off the ground. Her eyes narrow, full of intensity: "I'm only going to ask you one more time. Where are they?" she growls as her fingers slowly tighten their grip.

The dangling man spills the beans, but not before spilling something else in his pants.



BENEFIT & HINDRANCE

Throughout the game, your character may receive various bonuses and penalties. One of the more common conditions that will crop up is Benefit/Hindrance. As mentioned earlier, all tasks, combative or otherwise, are resolved through rolling **2d10** and adding the appropriate modifiers. A state of Benefit or Hindrance affects the roll as follows:

BENEFIT: Roll **3d10** and discard the lowest die.

HINDRANCE: Roll **3d10** and discard the highest die.

Benefit/Hindrance do NOT stack with each other or with powers granting similar effects. These effects also cancel each other out on a one-to-one basis. If you have 2 Benefits and 1 Hindrance, the first Benefit cancels out the single Hindrance and you still have Benefit.

SPARK POINTS

Part of the wonder of role-playing is being transported to a different world and really feeling immersed in the moment, whether that's sitting in a cozy tavern slamming down a tankard of ale with your friends or battling a horde of wild ratmen in a rain-soaked forest.

A lot of this immersion relies on strong imagery and vivid descriptions of what's currently going on in the scene. By the default nature of role-playing games, this responsibility tends to fall on the GM's shoulders. In *Unity*, players are encouraged and provided a strong incentive to take part in picking up a brush and painting a more cinematic scene alongside the GM.

This incentive comes in the form of **Spark Points**. Spark Points are awarded when players take the extra step to vividly describe their actions and elevate the experience at the table for everyone. When a certain amount of points are acquired, players may expend part of the pool to have a **Moment of Glory** where they receive **Benefit** on their next action.

Spark Points are accrued in a communal pool, allowing players to utilize them as a team and ensuring that less articulate players do not feel penalized compared to their more flamboyant peers.

This communal pool for Spark Points is represented by a single die placed somewhere visible on the table. The die goes up by 1 every time a Spark Point is awarded.

DETERMINING THE SPARK DIE

At the beginning of every game, the GM will determine the die used to keep track of Spark Points. This determination is based on the number of players and the difficulty of the campaign.

SPARK RULES FOR 4 PLAYERS

*12 Maximum Spark capacity (1d12)
Requires 4 Sparks for 1 Moment of Glory*

Number of Players. The more players a game has, the faster Spark Points might be generated and used. You may want to increase the Moment of Glory threshold along with the maximum Spark Points capacity (use a die with more faces).

Difficulty. Moments of Glory are incredible boons for player-characters. They increase the chance of a successful action significantly. While you might want to encourage your players to take part in vividly describing their actions and perceptions, the game may become a bit too easy if you have a particularly imaginative and talkative group of players.

By lowering the max capacity for Spark Points and increasing the threshold for attaining a Moment of Glory, you may effectively balance the mechanic to find the right level of effort vs. reward to maintain the difficulty you intend for your campaign.

RUIN

The barrier separating physical reality from the energetic dimension of the Drift is a fragile thing. Stretched taut and splintered by the force of the Great Calamity when the Skyfather sundered the world, the barrier has the tendency to wane and tear, allowing minor breaches to open momentarily. These cracks allow ominous energy to leak in from the ethereal ocean that lies beyond. The energy can manifest itself in many ways, but its most subtle influence is one of doom and ruin.

In a world that stands on the brink of apocalypse, survival has taken precedent over virtue and the hearts of the people have grown cold from loss and tragedy. It is a vicious cycle, however, as immoral acts, fear, and pain continue to fuel the darker emanations from the Drift. These emanations often leak through into reality invisibly, manifesting themselves as misfortune and karmic retribution.

Mechanically, the ebb and flow of bad luck or unfortunate events represents itself as a GM Resource called Ruin. Ruin provides a way for the GM to create tension and consequence for unsavoury actions or shortcuts to power.

Gaining and using Ruin. GMs will accumulate Ruin points based on two factors: the passage of time and player action. These Ruin points will be stored and carried over between sessions. GMs may then spend Ruin points to enact certain effects and events. Please see pg. 360 for a guide to using Ruin as a GM.

Difficulty is what you make it. While there is a list of typical difficulties and their target numbers as a baseline for the average party, feel free to adjust upwards or downwards to tailor to your specific audience. Pushing all the numbers up or decreasing them by 1 or 2 can make a significant difference between making characters feel heroic vs. mortal.

FAILING FORWARD

What happens when you roll under the TN and fail a roll?

In *Unity*, failing doesn't always mean that nothing happens. In fact, failing can lead to some very interesting situations that would not have otherwise happened. The spirit of the game encourages players to explore possibilities and GMs to facilitate alternatives to "you miss."

Outside of combat, there are rules that provide some flexibility in the TN vs. the player's roll. If a player's roll result is barely under the designated TN, the GM is encouraged but not forced to make the failure interesting. The **GM's Guide section** of this book has guidelines on how to handle these situations and provides multiple examples to inspire your own play.

While *Unity's* design encourages failing forward, there will be situations where forcing such mechanics don't really make sense. It can also become mentally exhausting for the GM to constantly come up with interesting outcomes for tasks that are fairly straightforward and lack the potential to spiral into something more.

The general philosophy on failing forward is to engage the guidelines when it's easy and it makes sense. There is no point in wracking your brain to figure out what happens if Bob barely rolls under the TN for picking the lock of a box in an empty room. In this situation, it's okay to say "You fail to pick the lock."

Within combat, there are rules that dictate what happens on Basic Attacks when you fail to overcome your opponent's defenses. Many of the powers available to the classes have failure conditions tied to them as well. There is a strong emphasis on constantly moving things forward and avoiding stagnation. See the **Combat section** and **Classes section** of the book for extensive write-ups.

ALWAYS ROUND DOWN

Whenever you come across a result that doesn't equal a whole number but a fraction, **always round down** to the nearest whole number. For example, many powers will call for you to use "half of XX," such as a power that calls for you to receive half your total hitpoints as a shield. If you have 13 hitpoints, the shield's result would be a 6 rounded down from 6.5. If you are asked to halve something that is 1 (which would become 0.5 halved), always just use 1 instead. There may be some exceptions to rounding down, but they will be explicitly stated in that specific mechanic when the exception occurs. Especially if they've been expending themselves for a while without break.

DARIUS FAILS FORWARD

Brother Darius is a holy man, having found the faith in his later years. Those that have come to know him respect him as their local Priest. Those that have known him before he found his calling remember his years as a teenage ruffian and street rat.

Passing through the marketplace on a sunny morning, Darius is drawn to the tantalizing aroma of fresh meat pies being sold by the town's baker. The temple has been a bit tight on money lately and Darius doesn't have enough to purchase a pie. He looks around slyly, his eyes shiftily darting left and right. "It's just a pie, no one will miss it" he thinks to himself, as his chubby fingers dart out to snatch one.

Some old habits die hard. It's a busy marketplace with lots of eyes and Darius is out of practice while being a good deal heavier than when he was a spry young man. Darius barely fails his roll for attempting to steal the meat pie.

The GM's eyes light up at the possibilities she can spin this situation into:

1. Maybe Darius, in his nervousness and lack of practice, squeezes a bit too hard and crushes part of the pie. Sure, he gets a piece but now his hands and some of his clothes are stained with meat sauce. He better think fast because this situation might escalate if someone notices.
2. Maybe Darius gets the pie but as he's moving it into the folds of his robe, it drops to the ground. It sits there in the hot sun, caked in dirt, bugs, and possibly dung. The entire table leans in a bit closer, wondering if this gluttonous man of the cloth will decide to shovel the pie into his mouth regardless. It's a bit of a character-defining moment and could potentially be a running joke among the group.
3. Darius manages to get the whole pie safely concealed and into the folds of his robe. Success! Or is it? The GM begins to describe a small street urchin with a ruddy face and disheveled hair pointing at Darius. A large smirk crosses the urchin's face: "I know what you did mister and I'm telling."

What's Darius going to do? Perhaps bribe the child? Share some of the pie with her? Or maybe he'll threaten her. Whatever happens, the choices can continue to spiral and lead to the possibility of something interesting. Darius's choice might reveal a bit of his past to the players around the table, engaging everyone on an emotional level. The street urchin, troublesome as she may be, is still a kindred spirit as Darius might recall the feeling of being hungry and cold in his younger years wandering the streets alone as well. Maybe engaging the street urchin will lead to a new side-quest about a certain gang in the city bullying and using the homeless children for their own ends. Who knows where failure will take you?

CHAPTER V

COMBAT RULES

Steel yourselves! For the enemy comes and it knows no fear, feels no pain, and has no soul. Set aside your differences! Tonight, we say: Enough! Tonight, we will fight as one. Together, we will make them remember the day they challenged our unity!

—Mobius Stormsong, High Commander of the Taloran Alliance

Whether it's fighting tooth-and-nail to save the world from a demonic Fell horde or busting up giant rats in the cellar of the local tavern, combat is a staple part of the *Unity* experience.

The combat system is focused on working together and combining your powers within your own class and with those of your teammates to create some spectacular plays.

Simultaneous turns and powers designed with synergy in mind will provide a fast-paced and exciting fighting environment for your characters. In *Unity*, players are encouraged to discuss, plan, and strategize their approach. GMs will have more room to turn up the intensity of certain encounters knowing that the players have the proper tools to fight back.

Embrace the joy of discovery as you find powerful new combos and creative ways to battle your enemies.

COMBAT CHAPTER PREVIEW

- **Combat Sequence:** Calculating rounds and how to facilitate simultaneous turns.
- **Your Turn:** Explore the different types of Actions you can take: Standard, Quick, Movement, Free, Reaction, Maintain, Overdrive, and Ultimate.
- **Moving Around in Battle:** Moving around the battlefield, Provoked Attacks and range rules.
- **Attacking and Defending:** Selecting targets, linking up powers, making Attack and Defense rolls, how Armour Value (AV) and Resistances work to mitigate damage.
- **Contesting:** Situations where you and your target push or pull against each other in a contest of strength, speed, or wits.
- **Recharging Resources:** How to regenerate and manage class resources.
- **Incapacitation & Death:** What happens when you run out of hitpoints.
- **Status Effects:** Some attacks leave more than just a wound and can immobilize, impair, stun, and do much more.



COMBAT SEQUENCE

A combat encounter entails two parties to be at odds with each other to the point that they come to blows. Melee and ranged physical combat, along with spellcasting, are all staples of a combat encounter. Combat is broken up into rounds. Within each of these rounds, there are turns that are based on teams and not individuals. When both teams have used their turns, the round turns over and becomes a new round. The majority of encounters will always consist of two teams: the players and the GM.

Round timing. For in-game timing purposes, a combat round lasts roughly 10 seconds.

Players hesitant to go when there's no clearly defined turns? See the GM Guide Section on pg. 362 for how to handle this.

SIMULTANEOUS TURNS

As mentioned earlier, turns are based on teams and not characters. This allows an entire team to plan their approach and execute it in tandem, or in any order that they like.

When the turn falls to the players' team, all the players are able to discuss and strategize, then act together. Here's an example:

During the first round, Elrath, Mogo, and Lillian are facing off against two unsavoury thugs in a dark alley in the port city of Greenwater. The two thugs got the jump on our party of three and therefore took their turn first. The GM has both thugs gang up on Mogo and attack him. Luckily for Mogo, the thugs had a bit too much to drink earlier and their attacks clumsily miss him.

The GM is now finished with her turn and the players are up. Elrath, Mogo, and Lillian are free to act as they choose and do not need to adhere to an order of action unless the players are attempting to set up a combo attack of sorts. The players want this encounter to end quickly and quietly, as they are trying to curry favour from the Lords of Greenwater. Starting a fight in town is the last thing they want.

Mogo is a Phantom and knows that he shines the most when his enemies are distracted and he can land some dirty hits that will strike harder than if he has to play fair. Elrath agrees with his friends that it's best to put these thugs down as quickly as possible. He sees that even though they are typical thugs, they have some semblance of armour in the form of ragtag bands of metal and rough leather. He tells his friends he's got a spell that'll make their already meager protection non-existent. Lillian smirks and tells Mogo she'll provide him the distraction he needs and that Elrath should go ahead and cast his spell because she wants to get a nice hit in as well.

With their plan agreed upon, they set the wheels in motion. Elrath conjures a blast of frost that renders the thugs' armour brittle. Lillian charges at them, bashing her shield against the head of one of the thugs hard

enough to shatter his brittle helmet and knock him out cold. The other thug stares at his buddy's unconscious body on the ground in drunken surprise. Mogo sees his chance and slams the hilts of both of his daggers into the thug's kidneys, causing the poor bastard to seize up and let out a painful yelp. The thug's eyes roll up into the back of his head and he falls limply into Mogo's arms.

Had the thugs survived, the round would turn over to Round 2 and the GM would get to act again.

FIRST STRIKE

Which team gets to go first when a combat encounter begins? There is a priority list to go through when approaching this question.

1. The narrative of the current situation dictates the team that gets to go first. If the players are surprised by their assailants, the GM (and therefore the enemies) gets to go first. The same can apply if the players are able to sneak up on their enemies. If the narrative is able to easily decide which team goes first, combat begins immediately.

2. In a situation where the narrative isn't clear about which side gets the upper hand, the GM always goes first—but the players have a chance to roll a Speed check for a First Strike. A First Strike simply means that the players that successfully complete their Speed check have the choice of going before everyone else. Players that win First Strike are not forced to go first and may forfeit this advantage.

SPEED CHECKS

Every NPC has a Speed value. The higher the value, the faster the NPC is at reacting and the more difficult it is to win a pre-emptive bonus round against them. In groups where multiple NPCs have different Speed values, the GM, by default, can pick the highest Speed value for the players to roll their Speed check against. Another option is that the GM takes the **average** Speed value of the NPC group.

Players perform their Speed check by rolling **2d10 + SPEED**. A player's Speed value is usually their **AGILITY** bonus plus any applicable bonuses from their powers or perks.

SUCCESS. The Player's Speed check is greater than or equal to the Speed value of the enemy group. The player gets to act first alongside other players that were also successful on their Speed check.

FAILURE. The Player's Speed check is less than the Speed value of the enemy group. The player's turn will come after the GM is finished with her turn.

ARTIFACTS

The world of Unity is littered with secrets and treasures waiting to be discovered. Amongst these forgotten wonders are powerful Artifacts that can potentially be wielded by anyone lucky enough to find them.

While discovery is but one way to acquire these special items, there may be some merchants that sell rare items they've come across in their travels.

RE-FLAVOURING ARTIFACTS

The following pages will contain wondrous items waiting for a worthy adventurer to wield them. While these powerful pieces of equipment are steeped in Unity's history, it doesn't mean you cannot re-skin them to fit the lore of your campaign or custom setting. If you like the mechanics behind an Artifact but the fantasy of that particular Artifact doesn't jive with a character concept or the confines of your campaign, you are encouraged to change the flavour of the Artifact or even mix and match concepts.

Maybe one of your players is a gunslinger and has little training in archery but you know that Courier, a magickal longbow listed here, would be perfect mechanically for the character. Change Courier to a rifle. Maybe go a step further and take liberties with Courier's history and change Valaris Hawkwind from Vallan forest ranger to technophile marksman.

While these Artifacts were created to be plucked out of the box by a GM and ready to use for a campaign, they can also be viewed as a template and used as a launching pad for your own custom items.

UPGRADING ARTIFACTS

Artifacts have the capacity to receive upgrades that increase their power and potentially open up new dimensions of play for the character using that Artifact. The sample Artifacts provided in the following pages will often have a secondary effect listed as: UPGRADE: XXXXX. This new Artifact ability/effect will become active once a character completes a quest or acquires the appropriate materials to upgrade their Artifact.

The existence of upgrades allows you to tie a coveted mechanical award to the story and the world in an organic way. Perhaps your player has a character that possesses a Sword of Undying Flame which starts off with the ability to deal Fire damage every time they roll 18–20 on the 2d10 portion of their Attack roll. After a few adventures and many charred enemies, the Sword of Undying Flame might not seem as exciting anymore to them. Their character might then be introduced to a NPC who notices the Sword of Undying Flame and mentions a legend about it being born in the molten heart of a sacred mountain. The NPC might go on further

to explain that she heard the sword was cast out of the mountain long before it was ready and that if it had a chance to be reunited with the fiery core of that mountain, it could become the weapon it was truly meant to be. How this would play out would be up to your discretion, but there is great freedom in seamlessly spinning new quests and explorable tangents which are driven by a mechanical reward that most players would cherish.

The scope of achieving an Artifact upgrade is up to you. In the example of the Sword of the Undying Flame, an entire adventure could be created about discovering the identity of this secret mountain, journeying to it, defeating the Eternal Guardian that stands watch over the entrance, and then discovering a buried forge city in the centre of the mountain and all the secrets and horrible creatures that have taken residence there. At the end of this journey, the character wielding the Sword of Undying Flame might now be able to launch fireballs from the sword once per Full Rest.

If you decide to use the sample Artifacts provided in this book, wherever you see that an upgrade is available, think about how you would want the characters to go about achieving that upgrade. If you find your players veering from the main campaign's quest and want to put them back on track, blend these mechanical rewards into the main storyline and use them to entice players to circle back to the central quest. If you are playing in a sandbox world, pepper the quests or materials required for these upgrades into various corners of the world to promote exploration and provide paths for players to choose from.

CONSUMABLES

There are some standard staple items aside from Artifacts that exist in the world of Unity that are also coveted by adventurers. These items, which are referred to as Consumables, can be used once and require a Quick action in combat to use. While these Consumables are usually purchased, they can be acquired as loot from exploration or rewards from quests.

CONSUMABLES		
NAME	EFFECT	COST
HEALTH POTION	Restores Level × d4 HP	30 D
ENERGY POTION	Grants Recharge roll + 2	30 D
REJUVENATION ELIXIR	Restores Level × d4 HP Grants Recharge roll + 2	80 D
LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE	Restores 10 Power to Titan Rig	500 D
PANACEAN SEED	Instantly removes all Status Effects	100 D

Consumables exist to help give PCs an edge and to also shore up weaknesses that their party may have. A party without a Primalist or Priest to provide healing might need to invest in Health Potions.

Remember, nothing is set in stone. If your PCs need help, maybe they'll "discover" a cache of potions along their journeys or the local merchant is feeling generous and gives them a steep discount. Consumables provide another avenue for you to decrease difficulty for a struggling party, without directly modifying encounters or enemy stats.

Common sense would dictate that a Stunned PC will require an Ally to feed them the Panacean Seed.

NIGHTMARE, THE SHADOW'S WAKE**TYPE**

Heavy Melee. Giant Hammer.

DESCRIPTION

The Furian blacksmith Morin Danzag had much to atone for. A loving father and a doting husband, Morin gave his all to his family. His only vice was enjoying a good brew a bit more than he should have. One night, stumbling home drunk, Morin entered into a heated argument with his wife. Already heavily intoxicated, Morin's control spiralled away from him as he entered the Red Rage. Upon waking, he found the mutilated corpses of his family strewn about him, and his hands covered in their blood. They say Nightmare is a hammer he forged to remind himself of the demons that live inside of him: one side of the hammer shows a face of rage and madness, the other of composure and solemnity.

EFFECTS

Enhanced. +2 to damage.

Two-Faced. The duality of the Red Rage is a curse the Furian race continues to struggle with. Nightmare, the Shadow's Wake symbolizes their internal struggle. Stare into one of the faces of Nightmare to empower it. Staring into the raging face causes your AR to increase and your DR to decrease by up to half your Level (you choose the degree the longer you stare into the face). Staring into the composed face causes your AR to decrease and your DR to increase by up to half your Level. You may decide not to stare at all, which means Nightmare becomes a mundane Heavy Melee weapon. Once you make your choice, you cannot change the empowerment until you take a Full Rest.

UPGRADE: Weight of the World. *Passive.* Morin's guilt lives on inside of Nightmare. The heaviness of his sorrow carries through with each strike you deal, sometimes even knocking down its victim. When your damage dice roll their maximum value (in this case, double 6's or a 12), your target is Rooted for 1 round. Elites are immune to this effect.



NIGHTMARE,
THE SHADOW'S WAKE

If you want to upgrade the Murkwalker into a Twisted version of itself:

- Use the "Severe" modifiers in the Difficulty Increase table on pg. 309.
- Increase the Murkwalker's size to Massive.
- Remove "Swarm" ability.
- Give it the "Consume Essence" ability that Fellspawn possess on pg. 321.
- A Twisted Murkwalker's Danger Level should be increased by +2.

Murkwalkers formed the amphibious corps of the Crimson Horde's army during the Age of Unity. They were created by the Ivory Queen shortly after the Crimson War began between the Children of Unity and her savage Horde. Hastily made to answer the power of the Children's naval forces, the Ivory Queen emphasized function over form when it came to the Murkwalker's creation. The creature is terrifying to behold, with little in the way of redeeming aesthetic qualities. This stands in stark contrast to the rest of the Crimson Horde who, despite their savage looks, often carry an air of cunning or nobility. The Murkwalker has none of these traits and its unblinking empty eyes reflect its single-minded purpose: to feed.

The body of a Murkwalker is heavily muscled, with taut glossy skin that ranges from grey to green. Its back is lined with deadly spines that culminate in a large dorsal fin. Gills provide the ability to breathe underwater and when coupled with a mammalian airway and lungs, allow the Murkwalker to function efficiently both on land and in water. When attacking prey, the Murkwalker uses its sharp claws and razor teeth to tear into its victims. This deadly creature is able to secrete an acidic toxin that dissolves matter from a gland in its mouth. Many ships, even ones lined with Furian steel, were sunk during the Crimson War due to a pack of Murkwalkers chewing through the underbellies of the ships.

Murkwalkers often live in communes of 5 to 15 and share a language that consists of different types of gurgles. They hunt together as a pack and often divvy up responsibilities such as nest building and cache guarding. While they are fairly simple-minded creatures, Murkwalkers have a fascination for shiny objects. They have been known to hoard treasures lost at sea in their lairs. Many adventurers have set off into the Dreadmarsh or Seething Swamps in search of a Murkwalker treasure trove, but few ever return and those that do are often missing limbs. The amount of Denerim that has been lost over time at sea is said to be countless. There is speculation that much of it now lies hidden in some marshy hole that is home to a Murkwalker.

After the Great Calamity, a great deal of Drift energy spilled into the physical world. Much of this energy was tainted by the darkness of the Fell and warped everything it touched. The Murkwalkers in certain parts of the land were no exception to this twisted fate. Murkwalkers that were located near what is now the Dreadmarsh were affected the most. The waters that they lived and breathed in had become saturated with Fell energy and the effects became extremely apparent for the Murkwalkers as they were submerged for the majority of the time. These Murkwalkers' bodies and appe-

tites would grow uncontrollably, amplifying their strength and viciousness many times over. Unlike normal Murkwalkers, these new Twisted Murkwalkers descended into cannibalism and live alone instead of in communities. They still have a strong penchant for shiny objects but have an even stronger drive to consume flesh.

All Murkwalkers, twisted or not, require at least 2 hours of complete submersion in salt or fresh water once a week or they will weaken and eventually die.

8
MURKWALKER
Large, Humanoid, 300 XP

COMBAT STATS					
+					
75	4	16	18	21	19

ATTRIBUTES			
Might	Agility	Mind	Presence
8	6	4	2

ATTACKS

Claws (2): *Melee. Adjacent. 1d12+8 damage.*

Spines: *Ranged. Nearby. 2d8+8 damage.*

TACTICS AND ABILITIES

Corrosive Chomp: *Standard. Adjacent. 1 Ruin.* Biting viciously into its target, the Murkwalker releases a corrosive toxin through special glands in its mouth. Deal 1d20+4 damage immediately and the target is Poisoned (1d12 True damage at TN 17) for 3 rounds.

Oily Secretions: *Quick. 1 Ruin.* The dorsal fin on the Murkwalker expands fully as a thick and slimy secretion with a pungent odour oozes forth all over the Murkwalker's body. The Murkwalker receives +4 DR against all Melee attacks until the start of its next turn.

Swarm!: *Standard. Adjacent. 2 Ruin.* The Murkwalker attempts to jump and wrap its limbs around its target. If successful, the Murkwalker releases a potent dose of pheromones onto the target that whip all the Murkwalkers on the battlefield into a frenzy, increasing their damage against the target by +4 for 1 round.

Like a Fish: *Passive.* When fighting underwater or in areas where the water is at least 1m high, the Murkwalker's Movement action carries it two range bands instead of one and Provoked Attacks against it also suffer Hindrance.



MURKWALKER

If the Fell are twisted, violent, and evil, it takes one equally perverse—if not more so—to worship them. The Cultist is that someone.

Shortly after the Great Calamity, the Children of Unity were exposed for the first time to the horror of the Fell legions. Demons that poured out through the Tempest of Terror and various breaches across the land attacked the cities and settlements of all the major races. They destroyed for the sake of destroying and there was no other purpose to their carnage than the pleasure that these godforsaken monsters derived from watching the world burn. The majority of civilization was taken aback by the senseless devastation, but there were a handful of fanatics that saw “beauty” in the arrival of the Fell.

Over time, these deranged few banded together to form various cults dedicated to an Infernal King

or the Demon Queen. They believed that their dedication would be rewarded with dark gifts from their patron masters. Unlike the Driftwalkers who shrewdly bargain for their power and recognize the great cost of each deal they make with the entities that lurk in the Drift, Cultists freely give themselves to corruption and revel in the twisted souvenirs granted to them for spreading destruction in the name of the Fell.

Most Cultists are Humans or Afflicted, but there have been instances of Vallan and Furian members, albeit rarely. Cultists lurk in the dark corners and underbellies of cities, although some cults have begun to spring up in villages and settlements. Rituals of sacrifice are frequent. Virgin blood or the decapitated heads of the righteous are some of the offerings that Cultists use to appease their dark lords.

A Cultist’s fanaticism can border on the delirious; they run shrieking into battle, protected by nothing but tattered robes or leather strappings. Usually malnourished or physically mutated, Cultists are a harrowing sight to behold. The Cultists’ strength lies in their numbers and their ability to rile each other up. A mob of Cultists is incredibly deadly despite their frailty as individuals. When a group of them reach a fever pitch, the orgy of the destruction they can visit upon their victims is remarkable.

Followers of Vorath the Devourer differ from the typical, emaciated Cultist. They follow their patron lord’s example and exemplify gluttony, often gorging themselves on food. Cultists are abhorred by society and are often shunned; people and businesses alike refuse to help, serve, or exchange goods with them. Cultists, especially the followers of the Devourer, have had to improvise and often live off a diet of rodent flesh and garbage. These disgusting meals are further accented by the occasional bout of cannibalism involving unfortunate victims of Cultist kidnappings.

Followers of Irathmus the Everburning are the most short-lived of all Cultists. They seek out violence in any form they can as appeasement to their wrathful lord. They are often identified by their bloodshot eyes and the bulging veins running across their shaven heads.

Those that follow Tala’zim the Wicked are recognizable by the myriad scars across their bodies and faces. The creed of this particular Infernal King is “Pain is pleasure.” His faithful show their dedication through self-mutilation, and the upper echelons of Tala’zim cults consist of leaders who cut out their own tongues to show the depth of their loyalty to the tenets of their sadistic lord.

Cultists work best in large groups. Their standard attack damage is fairly low and they depend on their Mob Rule ability to become a threat.

The Mark of Irathmus can be particularly nasty if a dying Cultist can set off a chain reaction with multiple Cultists who possess the Mark of Irathmus as well. PCs caught in these consecutive blasts will be in for a world of hurt.

The Mark of Tala’zim can cause a snowball effect if a single PC gets struck down. All Cultists bearing this mark on the battlefield are healed and can act again even if they’ve attacked that round already.

3

CULTIST

Medium, Humanoid, 50 XP

COMBAT STATS

+	🛡️	🏃	🗡️	🛡️	🧠
24	0	14	15	13	11

ATTRIBUTES

Might	Agility	Mind	Presence
2	2	2	1

ATTACKS

Melee Attack: *Melee. 1d8+3 damage.*

TACTICS AND ABILITIES

Mob Rule: *Passive.* For every Cultist on the battlefield, increase Cultist damage by +1.

The Last Laugh: *Passive.* When a Cultist suffers a killing blow, they make an instant Melee Attack at an ADJACENT target before they die.

Marks of the Infernal Kings. *Passive.* A Cultist may only bear one mark from this list:

Mark of Vorath: Quick. 1 Ruin. The Cultist’s next attack is empowered by the hunger of the Devourer himself. The Cultist is healed for twice the amount of damage they inflict from this attack.

Mark of Irathmus: Passive. The fires of Irathmus burn inside the Cultist. When the Cultist’s flesh is too weak to contain it anymore, it bursts in a fiery explosion. When the Cultist dies, anyone ADJACENT to the Cultist automatically suffers 1d8 Fire damage. Replaces **The Last Laugh**.

Mark of Tala’zim: Passive. The Cultist revels in the pain of others and is invigorated by their downfall. When a PC becomes Incapacitated, the Cultist is healed for 10 HP and regains their Standard action.



CULTIST

The image is a book cover for 'The Golden Empress'. It features a woman on the left wearing ornate golden armor with a fur collar and a crown with sharp points. She is looking towards the right. On the right, a man in dark, heavy armor and a helmet is shown in profile, looking towards the woman. The background is dark and atmospheric. A red banner at the top right contains the title and subtitle. Large, semi-transparent text in the center reads 'VIII' and 'Free Sampler' below it.

THE GOLDEN EMPRESS
A SHORT STORY

VIII
Free Sampler

SHORT STORY

THE GOLDEN EMPRESS

It was a hot day in Avalon, capital of the Human Empire. Down the vaulted corridor leading to the throne room, the sound of bickering echoed. Empress Carine scowled as she closed the last few feet to the oaken doors. Her winded attendants scurried forward to haul the heavy doors open. Voices broke into the corridor like ocean surf.

“—don’t see how any of this is relevant! Who is she going to heed—some flea-bitten mongrel or her own kind?” came Magistrate Duncan’s unmistakable baritone.

“Magistrate, you will tender your apologies to Ambassador Guresh Stonehammer,” Empress Carine commanded.

An uncomfortable hush fell over the antechamber. The cluster of border magistrates turned to face her with the rustle of silk. Despite the impoverished region from whence they hailed, they were all dressed in proper courtly livery. At a glance, Carine recognized the crests from the five cities dotting the edge of Human territory: Coalwerth, Swift Current, Red Brink, Bellrook, and Chaltom Pass.

Just beyond them, a single Furian stood at rigid attention. His black mane was streaked with grey, his eyes piercingly bright against his dark fur. Despite the distance, Carine could see tension in his formidable muscles as the Furian Ambassador kept control despite the insults hurled at him. More than simply towering over every Human in the room, there was grace to his calm, like a boulder unmoved by a raging river. She had only met Guresh Stonehammer a handful of times, but his presence always humbled her.

The Empress brought her cool gaze back to Duncan. Though she was satisfied by the blanching of his ruddy features, it still took a few heartbeats longer than it should have before he obeyed.

“Apologies, Ambassador. I meant no disrespect,” Duncan offered. It was a formality only, both Carine and Guresh knew it, but the Furian was gracious enough to bow his shaggy mane in acceptance.

“Now then,” Empress Carine resumed, striding to her throne and tossing herself back against its unyielding iron. “What is all this about?”

The Human delegates exchanged glances; more than half were looking toward Duncan. Carine pretended not to notice. The first rule of governance the previous emperor, Thaddeus, had taught her was: *never let them suspect how much you know*. So, she turned her attention to the Furian first.

“Ambassador Guresh, thank you for coming all this way. Please, what is your grievance?”

“I demand justice for my people, Empress.” The growl of the Furian’s voice tickled at a primal fear. Two of the Human delegates—Jarvis of Bellrook and Melissa of Red Brink—shuffled uneasily away.

Head held proudly high, Guresh continued, “In Mehzard, beyond the southern Wastes, these past six months... Humans have been assaulting Furians in the night and stealing them away.”

“Of all the preposterous—” Magistrate Tabitha began with a scoff, but the Empress held up a gloved hand and the crone fell silent.

“This is a serious claim, Ambassador. Have you proof that this breach of the treaty has been carried out by Humans?”

“True, it could have been the Afflicted! They live all along that—” Magistrate Duncan cut in.

“Magistrate, if you cannot keep that tongue still, I will cut it out.” In her periphery, Carine saw the paunchy man wilt. She did not allow her attention to waver from the Furian. He was her focus; to him she had asked the question. His people held honour in high regard. If she was to settle this dispute peaceably, she needed to show that not all Humans were as inconsiderate as some of these representatives.

“We found a survivor, Empress.” Guresh’s hackles rose and his lip curled back from his long incisors. He paused, setting his composure, then continued. “She was barely older than a pup, so weak she couldn’t walk. Experiments had been done, horrible crafts no honourable creature would dare inflict upon an innocent.” Guresh rumbled a growl with the slightest flick of a glance towards Duncan, as if to say: for this man Guresh might make an exception.

“Experiments?” The Empress’ brow furrowed.

“Yes, your Majesty. These captors had forced the Red Rage from this poor child—Red Rage from one who had been innocent of that affliction. They drew on it, she said. These Humans had pulled it from her with blood and pain and magicks. They had many of our kind bound into some infernal contraption, deep underground. As if they were no more than kindling! We demand these atrocities cease at once!” As the Furian spoke, his hackles rose, making him seem to grow, filling the space with his wrath as if the very Red Rage he spoke of might pour forth at any moment.

The Empress was silent as the rumble of Guresh’s demand faded away. There was no doubt the Furian

was in earnest, and that he fully believed the allegations he was making. Empress Carine resolved to uncover the truth here, no matter the cost.

Avalon was a long way from the Wastes. The Empress paid well to be kept informed, but her couriers were not omniscient and Humanity covered a vast distance, comprised of myriad different cultural factions. There was no telling what secrets might be lurking in the distant corners of the Human Empire.

She turned her attention towards the delegates. Duncan was still blanched, his nostrils flared. It was difficult to tell if it was from outrage or fear. Tabitha looked horrified. Jarvis and Melissa were both sullen but patiently waiting their turn. Fedor looked as though he might be sick. She needed to push them. These five magistrates governed the border towns along the Wastes. If they were involved in this dark business, she needed to rout out who—and why.

“This is disturbing news, to say the least.” Empress Carine chose her next words with care. “I give my solemn vow that these atrocities have not been committed for the throne, nor will I sanction such behaviour in Unity.” She shifted slightly in the throne, looking to Magistrate Tabitha. “Have you seen nothing in Chaltom Pass?”

“N-no, Your Majesty,” Tabitha replied, spreading her hands. Her weathered face was open and sincere. “We are simple quarrymen in Chaltom. We’re too simple to ever conceive of such a horror as this...”

“And you, Fedor? Any news from Swift Current?” the Empress asked next.

Fedor jolted, looking to the Empress, then at the others. He wiped his fingers against his sandy moustache. “It does sound wretched, I’ll admit,” he began nervously. “But... could not this survivor give testimony? Perhaps tell us something more useful than ‘underground’? If she... er... saw the ones who did this, might it not...?” Fedor trailed off, thin hand fluttering around his mouth like a restless moth.

The Human delegates looked expectantly at the Furian Ambassador. Again, Carine noted the raising of hackles as he strained to maintain his composure in the face of such flippancy.

“She told us all she could before her spirit escaped this coil.” For the first time since Carine had entered the room, the ambassador turned his full attention on the magistrates. He took a step forward, looming over them. All but Duncan shrank in his shadow. Fedor squirmed beneath the penetrating yellow-eyed stare.

There was something more to this than simple xenophobic lynching. Unraveling the truth required subtlety. It required perception. Though she was steeped now in policy and governance, Empress Carine found herself reaching back into the days of her youth. Before she came to Avalon, back to when perception was the razor’s edge between life and death. Back to a life on the streets.

“Carine, come! You must try harder,” Danforth coaxed. He was leaning over the edge of the tiled roof, his care-worn face backlit by an unrelenting sun.

“I’m not tall enough!” Carine called from the pavement. Her palms were scraped and stinging in the dirt.

“It has nothing to do with your height or your strength. Every wall has a chink in it, if you look hard enough. Come, try again. Use the light, use your breath, and climb up to me.”

She had already tried and failed six times. She was not particularly keen to further bang up her knees and tear her one set of clothes, but she knew Danforth didn’t quit. He would never give up on her, so what right had she to give up on him?

She climbed back to her feet, eyes scanning the wall. *Use the light, he’d said, use her breath.* Carine breathed deeply, and her rattled heartbeat settled down once more. She took a step forward, coming into the shadow of the building. She caught the slightest flicker from the corner of her eye, almost a ripple in the old wash on the wall.

“That’s it!” called Danforth from up above.

Carine grinned, her determination welling inside her. Despite all her bruises and scrapes, she took a run at the wall. Her foot caught on the plaster, vaulting her higher. She managed to scabble over that subtle ripple, and then she was scrambling up the wall. She slapped her hand down on the cold tile and hung for a moment, breath coming fast and heart once more racing. One last effort and she’d be sitting safe on the rooftop beside her mentor.

With a grunt, her skinny arms quaking, Carine hauled herself up. Danforth sat mere inches away and waited for her to manage. He encouraged her, taught her all his tricks, but he wouldn’t ever do it for her. In the gritty streets of Venroth, everyone lived or died by their own tenacity.

“Are you ready for today’s lesson?” Danforth asked as Carine caught her breath.

“What?” she asked, sitting up a little taller, still working to slow her breathing. “Climbing the wall wasn’t the lesson?”

Danforth chuckled, scratching at his stubbly jaw. “Physical skills will only take you so far, Carine. All bodies have limits, and there will come a time when you can push yourself no further. In those times, the only thing that will keep you alive is a sharp mind.”

As he spoke, Carine couldn’t stop her glance from lingering over the ragged scars that laced his cheek and jaw. She knew there were many more beneath his patched-up clothes. Danforth had defied death more times than years Carine had been alive; he spoke with authority that was hard won.

“Look down there,” Danforth began, nodding to the courtyard on the other side of the wall. “What do you see?”

Carine let her glance roam over the milling people—craftspeople and farmers, milliners and flower-cutters. “A marketplace,” she answered.

Danforth arched a shaggy brow at her. “You can tell it’s a marketplace by the sounds of haggling, the smells of their wares, feel it in the rumble of their carts. Tell me what you *see*.”

Carine looked back at the crowd. The flower-girls were darting between milling bodies, raising their posies to everyone that passed. Light glinted off the hand-mirror the milliner held up so a prospective customer could admire herself in the glass, one of his creations perched atop her carefully arranged curls. The weaver-woman and the tailor bickered over prices, rubbing squares of fine fabrics between their fingers, so caught up they paid no heed to a tinker pilfering a handkerchief from her basket of wares.

“There is much to see,” Carine answered slowly. “What am I looking for?”

Danforth grinned. “Tell me which of them are married. Which of them have children, and how many? Which of them are having an affair?”

Carine gaped. “You can tell that by looking at them?” She squinted back into the crowd. The very same individuals she had seen before took on new dimensions. The flush of their faces seemed to hold new meaning. She found herself scanning their hands for marriage-bands, assessing the shapes of their bodies to find the answers to her mentor’s questions.

“Those are the easy questions,” Danforth said. “By the time we have honed your perception, Carine, you’ll be able to spot a liar from across a crowded square. Which patrol guards are crooked with bribes or drink. Which gentlemen wear their purses loose in their pockets—and due to their mistresses will never report a petty theft.

“Urchins like us, my girl, we survive by knowing our marks better than they know themselves.”



It had been many years since those days scrounging in the alley, but the skills Danforth had taught her had proven invaluable. In moments like these, Empress Carine was ever cognizant of how much his tutelage had prepared her for a life in court. Her rise to empress had been sheer defiance of fate. Only those who rise so far above their hopes can truly appreciate how easy it is to fall from grace. She had traded in the dusty laneways and haggling merchants of Venroth for the gleaming cobblestones of Avalon, with the capital’s many districts of elite crafters. She might now have power, but Carine knew Danforth’s

rules were truer than ever: she must know her courtiers better than they knew themselves.

The deference the other magistrates paid to Duncan pointed him out as their ringleader. There was some plot between them, and the others looked to him for cues. She needed to uncover how much of their scheming was connected with the abduction of the neighbouring Furians, and whether all of the magistrates shared equally in that plot.

Fedor, while the youngest of them, was too clever to betray his purposes in such company. He would spin pretty lies and waste precious time. Duncan still held too much control to press, and his popularity in Coalwerth made him a risky man to antagonize. Tabitha was venerable and proud; doubting her loyalty or embarrassing her before the others would make an enemy Carine could not afford in these volatile times. That left Jarvis and Melissa, magistrates of Bellrook in the craggy hinterland and of Red Brink in the mud flats southeast of Bellrook.

“Magistrate Jarvis,” Empress Carine began, scanning the cluster of magistrates for the clues old Danforth had taught her to find. “Bellrook is closest to the Wastes. If these abductors were to cross the border, your bastion would be the easiest place to do so. Surely, as magistrate of Bellrook, you know what passes in your city?”

Jarvis squared his jaw. Secrecy did not sit well with proud men. “Your Majesty, may I remind you that Bellrook stands as the first line of defense for the Empire.”

“Then, you are taking full responsibility for these abductions,” Empress Carine replied. The Empress keenly noted Magistrate Melissa’s hands go white-knuckled despite the rigid stillness of her posture.

Jarvis opened his mouth in protest, his eyes flashing. “I never said—”

“Correct, you did not answer a question from your Empress. I suggest you do so, sir, before I charge you with treason.”

“My loyalty is first and foremost to *Humans!*” Jarvis barked with an edge of panic. His face had heated nearly as red as his hair.

Empress Carine gave him a cold look. “Was my Imperial Decree not clear, Magistrates? If Humanity is to thrive in this world, we *must* have peace. There are greater dangers hungry to destroy us—the Fell, the Risen—that we cannot afford to be bickering amongst ourselves. The Furians are our allies. The Afflicted are our lost brethren. We must have unity and I will not have any petty interests endanger that.”

Barely allowing a heartbeat to pass, the Empress turned on Melissa, tall and beautiful and vain. “This is not the first complaint I’ve received about matters in Red Brink. What has led you astray this time:

bribery or coercion?”

It was a risk to so publicly shame Magistrate Melissa, especially with an ambassador from another nation present. Empress Carine did not do so lightly; she needed to show them that she was firm in her decrees. Her goal was ironclad, and she would not be swayed by racial prejudice when an atrocity had been committed.

“Your Majesty,” the magistrate of Red Brink began. Already, Carine could see the sweat beading on the woman’s upper lip. “The deal was already in action when I was brought into it; it wasn’t my idea.”

“Then you admit you were party to this brutality! I will have justice!” Ambassador Guresh snarled. Clearly, he had heard enough. In one smooth motion, he drew his sword, his claws extended on his other paw, his fangs bared for combat. Magistrate Melissa swung her warhammer free from the brace on her hip, setting her feet into a warrior’s stance.

Instantly, the Empress launched herself forward from her throne, seizing *Requiem’s* scabbard as she dove between the Human delegates and the attacking Furian. She unsheathed her legendary longsword in one smooth motion and swung it up in both hands. The magistrates scrambled for whatever defenses they carried, leaving Fedor brandishing a pitiful penknife and Tabitha cowering behind nothing more than her gnarled worker’s hands.

With a roar that shook the floor, Guresh charged in. Empress Carine spun forward, bringing the edge of her blade up to intercept the Furian’s blow. Her cape flared around her, a symbolic barrier between her delegates and the bestial fury before them. It was as if she was back on the battlefield, shielding Emperor Thaddeus, this same blade fending off a lethal adversary.



With an effort, Carine thrust the Afflicted woman back. The woman’s body was a ruin patched up with gleaming metal and alchemical enhancements. She was deceptively strong, but it was the vicious hate in her remaining eye that posed the real danger.

“Sire, get to safety!” Carine bellowed, but Emperor Thaddeus did not rise.

“Fate will give me justice!” the Afflicted soldier cried. There was triumph in the woman’s grotesque smile that Carine could not abide.

Carine swung *Requiem* low, cutting harshly up against her enemy. With a crash, her longsword cut into the metal of the Afflicted’s prosthetic arm. A spurt of alchemical fluid painted a glowing green trail through the mire of battle. Here was Carine’s chance.

She pivoted, swinging the blade down with the force of gravity tempered with conviction. The Afflicted woman let out a gurgle as she crumpled, her

mechanical arm twitching spasmodically.

Carine planted one sollar on her foe and hauled *Requiem* free with the screech of metal on metal. There was no time to waste. Panting, she knelt before her emperor.

“Sire, can you stand?”

“I must try,” Emperor Thaddeus grunted, gathering his strength to rise onto his knees.

Carine looped an arm under his cape to brace her wounded monarch. As her gauntlet slid against the Emperor’s backplate she realized just how much he was bleeding. “We have to get you to the medics,” she rasped, pressing her weight into him as together they stood.

Hampered by the burden of his weight, and with only one arm to swing her longsword, she was aware of how much danger they were in.

“Your bravery...” Thaddeus was wheezing, “I shall not forget it, Carine...”

“Hush, sire. Save your breath to walk,” Carine managed, out of breath herself. She swung out at a passing Afflicted warrior, cutting the man off at the knee and hurrying on before he could retaliate with whatever enhancements his desperation had fashioned. Ahead she saw a cluster of their own and hollered to them. “Here! We need the medics!”

She staggered to close the distance as a burst of explosives erupted to her right. A cloud of mud and chemicals spattered down and she squeezed her eyes shut, fearful to inhale lest it was more of the toxic gas the Afflicted had used to break the Emperor’s ranks. She fought the urge to freeze. Hunching into her shoulders, she ran the last few steps, all but carrying Emperor Thaddeus on her back.

On shaking legs, she reached the other knights, and passed off their wounded leader.

“By the blood! Is—is that the Emperor?” one of the knights stammered.

Carine nodded. “Get him to safety.”

“Carine,” Emperor Thaddeus croaked, barely able to keep his eyes open.

“The lines are broken. If we don’t rally, we will be overrun. Go!” Carine continued, knowing there was little time to salvage the battle.

Two of the knights hurried off, supporting the Emperor between them.

“The rest of you, with me!” Carine brandished *Requiem* high, catching a glint of sun through the ash-heavy clouds. She sent up a cry and the soldiers joined in. The survivors of the broken lines flocked to her, cutting across broken ground and leaping the corpses of the fallen—Human and Afflicted alike.

Carine led the charge that turned back the tide that day. The Emperor reached the medics and his wounds were patched enough to have the healers brought to his aid.

Afterwards, Emperor Thaddeus had summoned

Carine to his side and told her: in that moment he had known she would be the next to rule. She must finish what he had started. Humanity must be preserved.



“Patience!” the Empress bellowed, her sword glinting in the lamplight. “Ambassador, I share your outrage, but you are in my nation. If there is rot amongst my delegates, it is I who must judge them.”

For a tense moment, she stood toe to toe with the Furian. He easily towered over her, and she knew that in a contest of direct strength, she could not win. As old Danforth had said: physical skills will only take you so far. No, if she was to preserve the tenuous peace between their nations, this meeting required subtlety and truth, not combat.

Guresh huffed, breaking his glance, and settled his stance. He put up his blade with a slight incline of his head in concession.

“Thank you, Ambassador,” Empress Carine said, keeping her glance direct and steady. “You demanded justice, but for that to be possible, we must first understand why your people were abducted.”

Guresh nodded. His hackles at last began to settle. He brushed a paw over his mane, smoothing the thick fur back into place.

Empress Carine turned towards her delegates. She deliberately left her longsword unsheathed. She saw Fedor’s eyes linger on it, his penknife still clutched in his hand. Melissa made a show of settling her warhammer back into the brace on her hip, leaving both hands spread and up in surrender. Tabitha was pale as a ghost; her normally regal composure had slipped, revealing how old and frail she had become.

Which of these magistrates would be the one to confess?

Empress Carine pointed her sword at Jarvis. “So, tell me: why have you been stealing Furians? For what purpose?”

Jarvis tore his attention from the scowling Furian Ambassador with a conscious effort. “I...” His watery gaze did not seem able to meet his Empress’ eye. He looked instead to Duncan, their ringleader. “I didn’t know where they were coming from...”

“You did not know because you were too afraid to think on it,” Fedor grumbled from behind him.

“You must understand,” Jarvis rushed on, his pitch rising with desperation. “It was for a good purpose! If we could find a...a *cure* for the Risen, would not the sacrifice of a few be worth it? We did it for the good of the Empire!”

Melissa snorted, shaking her head. “Are you truly that stupid?”

“I just transported them! I didn’t know what was being done to them!” Jarvis squealed. “Besides, I thought, since there were Necromancers involved, that—”

“Shut up, you fool!” Duncan hissed.

“Magistrate Duncan,” the Empress swivelled her blade to point at the portly man. “You have been uncharacteristically quiet through all of this. Please do explain what your scheme was meant to achieve.”

Duncan seemed to be weighing his options. Before him was a tightly-wound Furian, easily capable of tearing him limb from limb. His Empress had *Requiem*, that famous longsword, levelled at him, steady and merciless. His co-conspirators were crumbling beneath the pressure. Throwing his shoulders back proudly, Magistrate Duncan made his choice.

“We are close to a breakthrough, Your Majesty. The Red Rage is a gift from the Mad God. Properly harnessed, that power source could revolutionize our position, with the clout and technology to reclaim what has been lost. If you had the vision of Emperor Thaddeus, you would see that!”

“That is not your choice to make!” For the first time since entering the throne room, the Empress raised her voice. “You may feel powerful, ruling over the blighted swamplands of Coalwerth, but be reminded that you are merely a small portion of the Empire. Can you be ignorant of the damage you have caused? Emperor Thaddeus began a dream of unification, and that remains my goal. Lasting peace requires longer sight than you are capable of, Magistrate Duncan. It requires steadfast conviction. Your sedition will *not* be tolerated.”

“But Your Majesty,” Duncan protested, imprudently standing his ground. “The power generated by the Red Rage could enable us to resurrect the old machines. You yourself decreed that efforts were being made to reclaim lost technologies...”

“If you truly believed that, Magistrate,” the Empress sneered, “you would have presented this venture to the throne for approval. No, do not delude yourselves with lofty goals. This was purely for your own profit.” In her periphery, Melissa flinched, confirming the Empress’ hunch.

“You mean to tell me you were abducting Furians to use them as... fuel?” Magistrate Tabitha asked her fellow delegates. Young Fedor would not meet her gaze, and Melissa merely spread her hands again in surrender. It seemed only one had been unaware of the plot. “What monsters would do such a thing...?” Tabitha asked, her expression ashen.

“An excellent question,” Empress Carine agreed, turning her attention on Fedor once more. “If your loyalty is not with the throne, who were you working for?”

“I did not know their names... but they were Afflicted,” Fedor answered. There was enough fear in his posture that Carine believed him. At first, she said nothing.

Then Duncan began to laugh. “Not so keen to condemn us now, are you, Majesty? It poses a problem

that your new pets might come at the cost of the old allies!”

Empress Carine pressed the point of her sword against Duncan’s belly, just hard enough to cut short his laughter. “Seeing that there are traitors among the Humans, I find it easier to believe there might be those equally thoughtless among the Afflicted. So long as I rule the Empire, I will not allow a few fools to destroy the better world we are so close to creating.

“Mark me: the Furians are our allies and neighbours. The Afflicted strike out only because they have been so long mistreated. We must make reparations with them if we hope to end this cycle of bloodshed.”

Magistrate Duncan curled his lip. “While you waste time with pointless treaties, we have been living in the broken cities left behind by your dream of expanding the Empire to all of Unity. We have had to contend with orphanages full to bursting, with starving families, with infrastructures in need of repair. You know nothing of sacrifice!”

“Duncan...” Magistrate Melissa whispered.

The room was deathly still. No fidgeting now. Even the Furian froze.

Empress Carine wore a dangerous smile.

“I know nothing of sacrifice?”



It had only been a year since Emperor Thaddeus had died, leaving Carine his appointed heir. She had been elevated to the most powerful position among Humanity, and there were many noblemen and courtiers slighted and bitter at her appointment. In the months after her coronation, Carine had swiftly learned that there were no longer any mentors to teach or guide her. Old Danforth had died years before, and now too Thaddeus was gone.

In her new position, she was constantly observed in a way she had never before experienced. In the orphanage, she had been merely one more faceless child in the crowd. Hungry, dirty, without a family name, she had known neither hope nor attention. After the fire, when she had fled into the streets with only the rags on her back, the citizens of Venroth had been only too happy to ignore one more child begging for scraps. Danforth had been the first person to see her, truly see her.

With his cluster of vagabond foundlings, they had been a small nation of want within the larger, unforgiving city. She had had no inkling of the scope of the world then, or the breadth of its problems.

After a turn in the army, and later in the emperor’s guard, Carine had seen the state of Humanity. They were a people divided and desperate. They needed a common cause. They needed allies. They needed security if they were to pull the world back from the brink.

Suddenly given the power to lead, Empress Carine knew immediately what her quest must be. She dedicated her focus to fighting back the monstrous dangers that had been leaching hope from the common people. She spent much of her first year travelling the expanse of Unity, fighting evils and injustices wherever she went.

Her entourage seemed more than happy to see her fail. They were always keen to point out how little progress she had made, what small impact each skirmish had. For every village she saved, it seemed there were untold more infected by the Phage or the influence of the Fell. The difficulty of her decisions became more and more anchored in a dreamlike future, while the present was too fragmented to be held together.

“Empress, Tanbridge Village is just over the ridge.”

“Thank you, General,” the Empress said. She allowed her horse to slow, the better to take in the nuances of the surrounding landscape. The trees were thin and sparse, the hillside mostly covered in scrub. Any signs of wildlife were at least weeks old. The air held a metallic tang that stung the nostrils and made the eyes water. The horses began to shake their heads, snorting and stamping.

It was not hard to see why. Over the ridge, directly ahead, the sky was boiling. A column of swirling cloud filled the horizon over Tanbridge. A sullen crimson glow was awash over the landscape, like a bruise from where a breach had opened.

“Everyone stay sharp. There is no telling how many of the Fell are still in Tanbridge. Weapons free. Mystics at the ready.”

There was no cry of assent as they had given to Emperor Thaddeus in years past. Carine might be their empress now, but there were many who thought her untested, who doubted the prudence of her judgments. Every undertaking she had led since taking the throne, her subordinates behaved as if she were still merely a general. It was as if they all silently hoped that when they returned to Avalon, Emperor Thaddeus would still be there, awaiting their reports. There were moments when even Carine wished that were true.

“With me!” And with that, Empress Carine kicked her horse into a charge.

The knights fell into line. As Carine reached the ridge she drew her sword and brandished it high. Along the line, the others were raising their swords, courageous cries rising into the crimson sky.

Then they were thundering down on the village of Tanbridge, once such a simple hamlet. The citizens were tanners and cattle herds, nothing that could resist the onslaught of the Fell when a breach opened over their simple thatched rooftops.

As the Empress careened down what served as the main street, the flies rose in clouds. Mangled corpses



had been dumped to rot in the streets, the splatter of blood on nearly every wall. There were slight traces of life: shutters that snapped fearfully shut when the riders passed, dogs scrounging in alleys, the muffled sounds of survivors trying to hide.

The Empress allowed her horse to slow to a trot, and a cluster of her followers drew up around her. The narrowness of the street prevented a proper assembly, so she led the way carefully forward, *Requiem* lowered but at the ready.

As they came out into the ruin of what once was city square, she turned her steed around. The cobbles were shattered and long furrows had been gouged up. A couple of burst cadavers lay in the dust, so brutally mangled that it was impossible to confirm they were Human, let alone identify them.

“Chaucer?” Carine asked.

The Fell Hunter sniffed the air, eyes glimmering beneath his hood. “Nearby, Your Majesty.”

“Take your hunters and rout the demons,” the Empress commanded.

Chaucer nodded once and gave a sharp whistle. Eight of the riders dismounted, tethering their horses to a fallen beam. Like shadows, the Fell Hunters slipped down the radiating streets.

While they hunted for demons, Carine and the others needed to assess how much damage had been done. She let her eyes wander over the shutters and singed thatch. Three of the buildings were little more than skeleton frames. This was no fire or storm, this was the work of demon magick. She cast a glance towards her Prime Mystic, and the woman nodded. With a litany of incantations, the Mystic drew up a barrier of glittering runic bands.

No sooner had the shield come into view than a sharp cry warbled out from behind the caved-in well that had stood in the centre of Tanbridge. Carine turned sharply, just in time to see a small child mid-flight.

“Wait! We are here to help!” Empress Carine called.

The child stumbled and fell and picked herself up again. Halfway between the shelter of the well and

the shadow of the nearest gutted house, the girl whirled about. She took in frantic breaths through clenched teeth, her eyes so wide the whites gleamed from her grimy face.

“Don’t be afraid,” Carine soothed, holding out her offhand, allowing her sword to dip below the neck of her horse, out of sight. “What’s your name, child?”

The girl was trembling. Her glance darted from the Empress to the Mystic at her side, tracing the lines of the protective runes. At last she brought her focus back to the Empress. She showed no understanding of who this woman was, or why she had arrived in Tanbridge, but she grew bashful just the same. Worrying her ragged skirt between her hands, she cast her eyes down.

“S-Susanna...” she answered at last.

“Susanna, where are your parents?” Carine asked, her voice gentler than any of her delegates had before heard. But the girl flinched, her face screwing up under the weight of terrible memories. “It’s alright, Susanna,” Carine hurried on. “You will be safe now. We are here to help you.”

The girl looked up with a face full of hope.

The Empress reached her hand forward, offering it. “Come here. We’ll protect you.”

Susanna came forward cautiously, equal parts relief and terror. She crossed the cobbles with difficulty, as if her shaking legs could barely hold her.

It was only when she was a few feet away that Carine felt something wasn’t quite right. The instinct had only just begun to hum in the back of her brain, when her Prime Mystic hissed, “It’s the Taint! Get back!”

Susanna reached out to take the Empress’ hand. Her fingers scraped the edge of the protective barrier and a burst of crimson light washed out, buffeting everything in the square. The Empress fought against her rearing horse, while with an inhuman shriek Susanna flipped back and away. The little girl landed on all fours, face contorted into a hissing maw full of jagged teeth.

Heart pounding, Carine sat riveted, soothing her shaken horse. She stared at the monster rolling through the body of this little girl. As swiftly as it surfaced, the demon receded, leaving Susanna sobbing on the cobbles. Her cries were broken from days of weeping, voice scratchy and hoarse, her young muscles wearied and barely able to hold her up.

“P-please!” she cried between gulping sobs, “Please help me!”

The Empress could not tear her glance away. This child was innocent. The demon that was clawing its way through her was truly at fault, but Carine knew better than to think that the two could be so simply separated. To tear the demon out with magick would only leave Susanna a comatose husk, soul pitted and dead. The girl, through no fault of her own, was lost to them.

“Please help me!” Susanna cried again, looking up from the broken cobbles. The child could not be more than seven or eight. Carine had been about that age when Danforth had found her in the alleys, starving and terrified.

“Your Majesty?”

“Yes, General?” the Empress responded automatically, still watching the little girl, unblinking.

“With the Taint already spreading, we cannot leave Tanbridge unpurged...” the General said.

Empress Carine squeezed the hilt of *Requiem* until her knuckles ached. She swallowed hard and tore her glance away from Susanna. She made sure to look directly at the general. She could not let herself look anywhere else lest she lose the conviction for what must be done. For the greater good.

If the Taint was allowed to remain in Tanbridge, it was only a matter of time before more Fell burst through, before the region was overrun with demons.

Empress Carine pulled sharply on her bridle and turned her horse away from the well. Head held high, her face controlled in a perfect marble mask, she gave her command.

“Burn it to the ground. No trace of the Taint can be permitted to escape. Whatever magicks you must use. Erase Tanbridge from the world.”

“P-please help me!” came Susanna’s plaintive voice from somewhere behind her. The Empress had made her choice. She rode back up the main street towards the ridge, leaving the memory of Tanbridge and its blasted sky behind her.

As her knights fell into line behind her, they held their positions as befitted attendants to an Empress. Never again would they doubt the iron will of the woman who led Humanity. Never again would they forget what she was capable of in pursuit of her dream of a peaceful world.



Empress Carine knew of sacrifice. She had experienced hunger, suffering, and loss. She knew just how desperate Humanity could become under duress. And looking at the paunch of Duncan’s well-fed frame, at the richness of the fabrics he wore, at the jewelled talisman hanging about his fat neck—callousness hung about him like musk.

“There are times when we must sacrifice a few to save the world,” Empress Carine began. She sheathed her sword and stepped back towards her throne but did not retake her seat.

Magistrate Duncan gave a smug nod to Jarvis, but the redhead nervously looked away.

“In these moments, heavy choices must be weighed with care. You have forced such a choice upon the throne now. Humanity strives for peace with all her neighbours—including the Furians and the Afflicted.

We all have a common enemy in the Phage, in the Crimson Horde, in the Fell. This sort of division will only make us weak to their Taint. If we stand not united, we will lose what little of the world has survived the calamities of our forebears.”

The Empress turned her attention to Guresh. She gave a slight incline of her head and was gratified by his returning the gesture. “You have my solemn pledge that so long as I hold the throne, I will not sanction any manner of slave trade—of any people. A wrong has been done to Furia, Ambassador, a breach of our treaty that I vehemently condemn.” The Empress allowed a brief pause. “You still seek justice?”

“I do, Your Majesty,” Guresh rumbled, rolling his shoulders.

“Then you shall have it,” she said with a nod. “Leave the rest to me, and I will have those involved captured and punished. I give my word.”

“What? You can’t possibly be siding with this flea-bitten—” Duncan began, waving a dismissive hand towards the Furian Ambassador beside him.

“Magistrate Duncan, I do not take kindly to repeating myself. You will tender your apologies to Ambassador Guresh Stonehammer.”

Duncan fumed, nostrils flared, but said nothing. The Empress levelled her gaze on him, her face a perfect, marble mask.

“I recommend you do so quickly, Duncan, for your own sake.”

Once more, the portly man offered the barest sketch of an apology, even less convincing than the one he gave when the Empress first entered the antechamber. His arrogance would be his own destruction. Empress Carine had no inclination to stretch herself any further to repair his faults.

“Magistrate Tabitha, you will accompany me. I would like to discuss the region along the Wastes. Who would you esteem for elevation to the posts of magistrate for Red Brink, Bellrook, Swift Current, and Coalwerth?”

“M-Majesty?” Tabitha stammered, still rather in shock at the revelations of the morning’s audience.

“Now, wait a moment!” Fedor called, pushing past

the other delegates to try to stay her decision, but she coolly ignored him.

The Empress looked only at Tabitha, and indicated for the older woman to fall into step beside her. Remembering herself at last, Tabitha tottered forward, pressing her grey curls back with both hands. Empress Carine had the impression that the sole remaining magistrate from the Wastes was trying to shield her face as she left their ranks.

With Tabitha at her side, Empress Carine led the way towards the doors. Her attendants sprang to life from their posts and hauled at the oaken doors once more. As they swung open, the Empress bowed a last time to the Furian Ambassador.

“I leave justice to you, Ambassador Guresh. My only request is if you learn anything further about who their accomplices might be, please share this intelligence with my office that we may better coordinate in our efforts to shut down this operation completely.”

She saw the light of understanding glimmer in the yellow eyes, his snout twitching at the fear in the air. The Furian swung his sword to limber up his wrist, flexing the claws on his offhand with relish.

“Furia will not forget the honourable Empress Carine,” he vowed.

The Empress gave a final nod and led Tabitha out of the antechamber. The last thing she saw was the vicious grin on Guresh’s face as he turned towards the remaining four delegates.

The oaken doors were swung shut, muffling the screams and tear of bodies. Tabitha stumbled, pausing on the tiled floor. She swayed slightly, and for a moment, Carine wondered if she might be ill.

“We cannot allow such behaviour to go unchecked,” the Empress noted.

“N-no, of course not. Such terrible things they did to those poor people..” Tabitha said, still shaken.

Empress Carine nodded, satisfied. She resumed her stride down the hall, and Magistrate Tabitha swiftly fell into step just behind her. This was the empress Unity needed. Only iron rulings could save such a bleak world.