



T&EM
DEEPER
BONES

THE PLAYER'S BOOK

Beta 1.5.2

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THEM DEEPER BONES

a delve into the dark to discover a forgotten history

Petri Leinonen, 2022

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Thanks for joining the Beta

Thank you for opening the Beta (playtest) version of ***THEM DEEPER BONES***. A retro adventure game hugely inspired by the play experiences the author had with role-playing games as a kid. TDB is set in a post-post-apocalyptic fantasy world where adventuring archeologists try to piece out their homeland's history and maybe carve out a name for themselves in the histories to come. If you like to solve problems through your own wits and role-playing instead of dice-rolling and character optimisation, this is the game for you.

Some key features:

- **Role-playing** as the primary problem solving tool. Think using your wits in escape rooms, but where the sky's the limit on how strange the puzzles can get.
- Streamlined **d20-based system** of summing up dice instead of bonus and penalty mathematics.
- Emphasis on the **exploration and archeology** parts of dungeon crawling, with treasure serving as a tool, not the end purpose.
- Magic system that allows individual spells to be both **relevant and unpredictable**.
- Tense and **fast-paced combat system**. The players have all the information they need to act thanks to **the decide first initiative**. And things escalate quickly and the **innovative Grit Dice** method used stops it from ever becoming a grind.

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Guard Down

I'm looking at the ancient massive statue looming tower-like over us. The journey here has taken days and been full of unexpected twists. The old stone soldier, or maybe a knight, stares vigilantly in the distance as we approach its base. Letti spots an old door beneath some vines and approaches it with caution, spear in hand. I'm left supporting old Anou all alone. She got bitten pretty bad earlier by that cockatrice in the woods.

“Runes around the door seem to say we need to be humble in the presence of ... the king .. when we enter. What do you think that means?” Letti comments, waving their hand at the symbols around the old stone archway when we get there.

I lower Anou down and walk over to the door to take a look. My sight slips to see the ebb and flow of magical currents around us.

“Whatever it is, there's nothing out of the ordinary about it when it comes to the energies. Just a lot of stone and other mundane things. You ok? I know you two are close and that bird did quite a number on her.”

Letti shrugs. Typical. So stubborn.

“I guess we can just go in then. I don’t want to stay out here any longer than necessary in case that bird-snake comes back,” they mutter.

I turn around to get Anou, and a heartbeat later hear the sound of a heavy spring-loaded blade trigger when Letti pushes the door open.

Aimed at neck level, if you’re standing proud.



THE PLAYER BOOK

The Dice

The **dice** help with resolving conflicts where just talking through the outcome would be overly complicated, or if the character's skill is needed to save them in a situation where the player's knowledge, decisions and descriptions don't clearly tell us what is going to happen.

To play, you'll need a basic roleplaying set of dice to play: a d4, d6, d8, d10, d12 and d20. More than one d6 is recommended, and an extra d20 could be useful.

Basic dice mechanic: Roll a d20 and try to roll high.

If the roll is for the character to avoid a detrimental effect, it is called a **Saving Throw** (pg. XX); otherwise, the roll typically is a **Fortune Roll** (pg. XX).

Other dice rolls exist, such as Attack Rolls, Magic Rolls and Damage Rolls. These specific ones are usually tied to subsystems used where it would be difficult, cumbersome or impossible to model or determine what happens with just conversation or a single simple die roll, and thus have some more steps to them. Most notable of these are the chaotic nature of combat (pg. XX), and the unpredictability of magic (pg. XX).



Player Creeds

If a player comes from a background of playing other TTRPGs and wonders how they should act to get the intended results out of *THEM DEEPER BONES*, here are four player creeds that help click with the rules presented in this game.

- To do something, say how you do it.
- Keep the game rolling.
- Pretend to take it seriously.
- The character sheet is not there to limit you.

To do something, say how you do it

1.

Play in *Them Deeper Bones* is not limited to a few select actions the player chooses from. Instead they choose for the character to act in any way they want. Because the game relies on the guide being able to have the world react in an appropriate way to the character's action, the player has to vocalise not only what the character does, but how they go about doing it.

This explanation can be detailed (“Gi goes to the panel and gently presses his right hand against the top-right corner hoping to feel a click”) or more abstract (“Fynn tries to appeal to the inquisitor’s vanity in order to get out of the situation”), and the guide can always ask further clarifying questions.

Magic, combat, and a few other details fall outside the realm of this creed as they are abstracted and rely more on the dice and game mechanics, but even in those situations, actions stem from the player’s decisions.

2.

Keep the game rolling

Them Deeper Bones is a game. A voluntary collaborative attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles. The players are presented with situations and challenges designed or improvised by the guide, that they then try to solve through role-play, wit, and a bit of luck.

And it's ok to remember this while playing. There are countless ways to deal with each situation, and almost any interaction with the game mechanics is a risk. So, considering the odds and weighing the options is a good idea. Coming up with clever solutions, listening before acting, going around things, choosing to nope out of a dangerous place, are all valid things to do as well. As long as the players make active decisions, the game moves forward.

Pretend to take it seriously

The act of play is the most important part of a *THEM DEEPER BONES* experience. A player needs to walk a fine line between taking the game seriously enough to get a “real” experience, but not focus too much on the prize at the end to miss what's happening right now. It's not a matter of succeeding at any cost, but playing in a way that reads the temperature of the table and plays along that accordingly.

One wouldn't bring lockpicks to an escape room or solve a Rubik's cube with a hammer and glue, and the same reading the room applies to a role-playing game as well. The “magic circle” of the game should be respected.

3.

4.

The character sheet is not there to limit you

In the game, the character sheet acts as a safety net for the character. Grit Dice, Ability Scores and such mechanical values help the character survive problems, not dictate what they can or cannot try. Rolls of dice and other game mechanics come into play when the conversation isn't enough, and as a way for the character to have a second or third chance in a perilous situation.

A character with low Physique can very well push a heavy bookshelf aside if it is possible to push it by a single person. In the conversation it might come up how the character is out of breath afterwards, but that's up to the player.



THE CHARACTER

A character is the player's avatar in the world. At the beginning of play, characters are generated through a combination of luck and player choice:

- **Roll Ability Scores**, (pg. XX) note them down on your character sheet along with the bonus die they give to rolls.
- **Choose Role**, (pg. XX) note it down along with benefits it gives you. If you chose magic-user: **Roll spells** (pg. XX).
- **Determine Background** (pg. XX), note it down along with the items it gives you.
- Note down the rest of the standard **starting equipment** (pg. XX), roll how much silver you have, (pg. XX) and if you want, **buy extra equipment** (pg. XX) with it.
- Calculate and note down your initial **Defense Value** (pg. XX) based on your Reflex score and the armour type you have bought.
- Come up with what the character **looks like** and what their **name** is and mark these on your character sheet.

Abilities

Physique (PHY): Bodily power, athletic ability, and general physicality. Used for physical attacks (both melee and ranged), athletic endeavours, carrying capacity, and feats of strength like forcing doors open.

Reflex (REF): Speed of movement and how quick one is to react. Affects the character's Defense Value, initiative order, and ability to dodge out of the way of danger, or where reaction speed would save the day.

Stamina (STA): Quality of metabolism, the measure of life-force, general indicator of healthiness. How long one can hold their breath, combat poisons or diseases, or stay focused without a proper night's rest. High Stamina is the most reliable way to survive near-fatal wounds.

Knowledge (KNO): Book-wisdom, folklore, and their practical applications. Healing skills. Knowledge is also the Ability that determines the number of starting spells for a magic-user.

Insight (INS): How in tune one is with the world and interacts with it with precision. Perception, intuition, and common sense fall under Insight. Also, nerves, and steadiness, when hand-eye coordination is needed.

Power (POW): Force of will, force of personality. Ability to resist mind-affecting magics or stand their ground against something frightening. Power allows a caster to weather through casting taxing spells.

Saving Throws

When the role-playing (pg. XX) in the game has put the character at peril — a situation where they would come to suffer some dangerous and immediate consequence that they nevertheless could avoid with their skills, the player gets to roll a **Saving Throw** based on the relevant Ability to see if the character manages to avoid their grisly fate.

A Saving Throw has a **Target Number (TN)** — A dice roll total equal or higher to the TN is a **success** and they avoid all or at least the worst of the consequences. A result lower than the TN is a **failure** with everything that entails.

The Target Number for a Saving Throw is **20** unless otherwise specified by the situation. A roll of 20 on the d20 of the roll result always means the Saving Throw succeeds. And on the other hand a roll of 1 on the d20 always fails.

Examples of Saving Throws: Try and avoid the blade of an activated trap, grab hold of the ledge when falling to a pit, dodge out of the way of a dragon's fiery breath, or attempt to resist an ancient spell's horrible effect.

Advantage

If the character is positioned in a way there's a good reason for the Saving Throw to succeed, the player rolls the Saving Throw with **Advantage**. A roll with Advantage is rolled with two d20s instead of a single one, and the **player chooses** which one of those two dice is used. Multiple advantages do not stack.

Characters automatically gain Advantage on Saving Throws when what is rolled has something to do with their **background** (pg. XX) or one of their **tales** (pg. XX). Also, each **role** (pg. XX) automatically grants Advantage on all Saving Throws made with a particular Ability Score.

Ability Score Modifiers

The dice rolled in a Saving Throw depend on the character's current Ability Score that best describes the situation. Consult the table below what to roll:

Ability Score	Saving Throw	Saving Throw w/ Advantage
9 or less	Roll d20	Roll 2d20, keep higher
10-14	Roll d20+d4	Roll 2d20, keep higher; +d4
15-17	Roll d20+d6	Roll 2d20, keep higher; +d6
18 or more	Roll d20+d8	Roll 2d20, keep higher; +d8

Fortune Rolls

From time to time, the guide will find it useful to delegate some of the responsibility to the dice, just to see if something goes well or poorly. This is a **Fortune Roll**. It informs the guide on how to interpret the unclear or uncertain situation in the game. Fortune Rolls are often rolled with Ability Scores and Advantages just like Saving Throws.

When Fortune Rolls are made and how they are read is up to the individual guide, and is a way to set the tone for their game. But **consistency** in how the results are interpreted is important, as the players should learn to trust that a roll of 15 on a d20 Fortune Roll is interpreted one way while a 5 another by the guide. For reference, the 50/50 point of a d20 roll is at 11 or higher.

Ranking with Fortune Rolls

Fortune Rolls can also be used to see the order of characters' success in a competitive situation — everyone makes the same type of Fortune Roll and compares the results to each other. Combat Initiative (pg. XX) in combat is an example of such a Fortune Roll. Another example might be to see the results of a foot race between various characters, as the mechanics for movement are too abstract to inform how such a race would go.

Role

The **role** determines a character's focus in the game. The three roles are **expert**, **fighter**, and **magic-user**. Experts are rounded characters with tricks up their sleeves for several situations. Fighters are characters with abilities related to, as the name suggests, fighting. And magic-users have access to a variety of magical spells from the get-go and the means to make their spells work more reliably.

Expert

Each **expert** has a particular set of skills they are extremely good with. They provide access to information and clues the group might otherwise miss. An expert benefits most from a well-rounded mix of physical and mental Ability Scores.

Grit Dice: d6 per level

Experts **always** roll all Reflex Saving Throws with Advantage.

Experts have access to the following expert skills:

Expert Maneuvers — When the expert makes a melee Attack Roll to damage the opponent of their size or smaller, they can perform a combat maneuver **in addition** to the damage. If they successfully hit with the attack, the enemy has to make the appropriate Saving Throw with the TN of the number rolled on the expert's **Attack Roll's d20**, or suffer the consequence of the combat maneuver.

Exploit weakness — When they're not wearing full armour the expert can as an action prepare an attack against a target that has discernable anatomy or some weakness they are aware of. The next successful attack they make against that target, they add +d6 to their Damage Roll roll. This ability can only bring one extra dice to the Damage Roll. On the third level, the extra dice becomes a +d8, on the sixth a +d10, and on the ninth, the dice becomes a +d12. If they make the attack with a small weapon, the weapon has a d6 Damage Dice, no matter the target's DV.

In perfect control — The first time initiative is determined in a situation, the expert is placed on the top of the order. Only when the initiative is determined the second time and onwards they have to roll and get placed in the initiative order regularly.

Uncanny expertise — When they roll a Fortune Roll or a Saving Throw that directly relates to their background (pg. XX) or a tale (pg. XX), the expert can add an additional +d4 to the roll. At the 4th level this increases to a +d6, and at the 9th level to a +d8.

Understand the world — The expert can try to decipher the idea of any text they come across, even if it is in a language they've never seen before. If the game is in the Tactical Frame or otherwise highly stressful situation (for example a chase), they can make a Knowledge Saving Throw to see if they grasp the very basic meaning of what is written. In other frames, the expert makes a Knowledge Fortune Roll instead, which tells how detailed information can be gained from the text.

Background

The roles are game mechanical categories for the characters. But a fighter might be a hunter, a barbarian, a pirate or a knight. A magic-user could as well be a witch, a cleric, a wizard or even a scholar. Experts come from all walks of life as well — Archeologists, students, thieves, spies and more. This is the character's **background**.

The background is written in freeform. It represents where the character comes from and what things they can do better. In game terms, whenever a character's background would be relevant to the situation, it should be taken into account. Specifically, if it directly relates to a Saving Throw, it **always** grants Advantage to that roll. With Fortune Rolls and other rolls such as Attack Rolls, it's up to the guide to decide if a background can give an Advantage to a roll or not.

A character also gets a practical item that reflects their background, and the medium melee weapon they possess should be indicative of where they come from.

Expert Backgrounds

Here are 20 example backgrounds with items that could suit an expert character.

#	Background	Weapon	Practical Item
1	Actor from the Theatre of Thorns	Rapier	Face paints (10 uses)
2	Alchemist with a clue for Aer's stone	Club	Oil (2 vials)
3	Last of the Wyrnwood Bandits	Short spear	Heavy leather coat
4	Cat burglar cursed by an amulet	Short Sword	Climbing harness
5	Gambler and a known cheat	Sword Cane	Deck of cards
6	An engineer obsessed with traps	Crowbar	Bag of marbles
7	Court jester bearing the owl's mark	Sceptre	Bells (10), String (7m)
8	A bored locksmith's apprentice	Staff	Lockpicking set
9	A travelling minstrel returning home	Longsword	Musical instrument
10	Navigator of the lost Red Armada	Cutlass	Compass
11	Master of a burned down farm	Colichemarde	Signet ring, bag of ash
12	Pickpocket trying to go legit	Short Sword	Relaxing herbs
13	A student of a false prophet	Flail	Vial of poison
14	Sailor returning from far-away seas	Rapier	Spyglass
15	Wood-carver haunted by loss	Flail	Parchment (5), charcoal
16	Smuggler of items of faith	Ball-n-chain	Symbol of a strange god
17	Spy without a master	Sword Cane	Fine pipe and tobacco
18	Stonemason looking for a cause	Hammer	Chisel, spirit level
19	Archaeologist seeking The College	Machette	Old Map
20	A thief of hearts and gold	Staff	Camouflaged tent



CHARACTER GROWTH

Character growth is measured in levels. Levels run from 1st (starting career dungeon delver) to 10th (mighty veteran).

The guide grants characters Experience Points (XP) when the characters explore their world, make new discoveries, find treasures and overcome challenges. Once a character's XP total reaches a threshold, the character can spend a downtime action (pg. XX) to **level up**. This costs no money.

When they level up to a new level, the character **gains a Grit Die** (of the type defined by their role), some of the **role-based skills get adjusted** by the level they are at, they **gain a tale**, and depending on the level, the character gets one or more of the following: A **general perk**, a **role-specific perk** or an **Ability Score increase**.

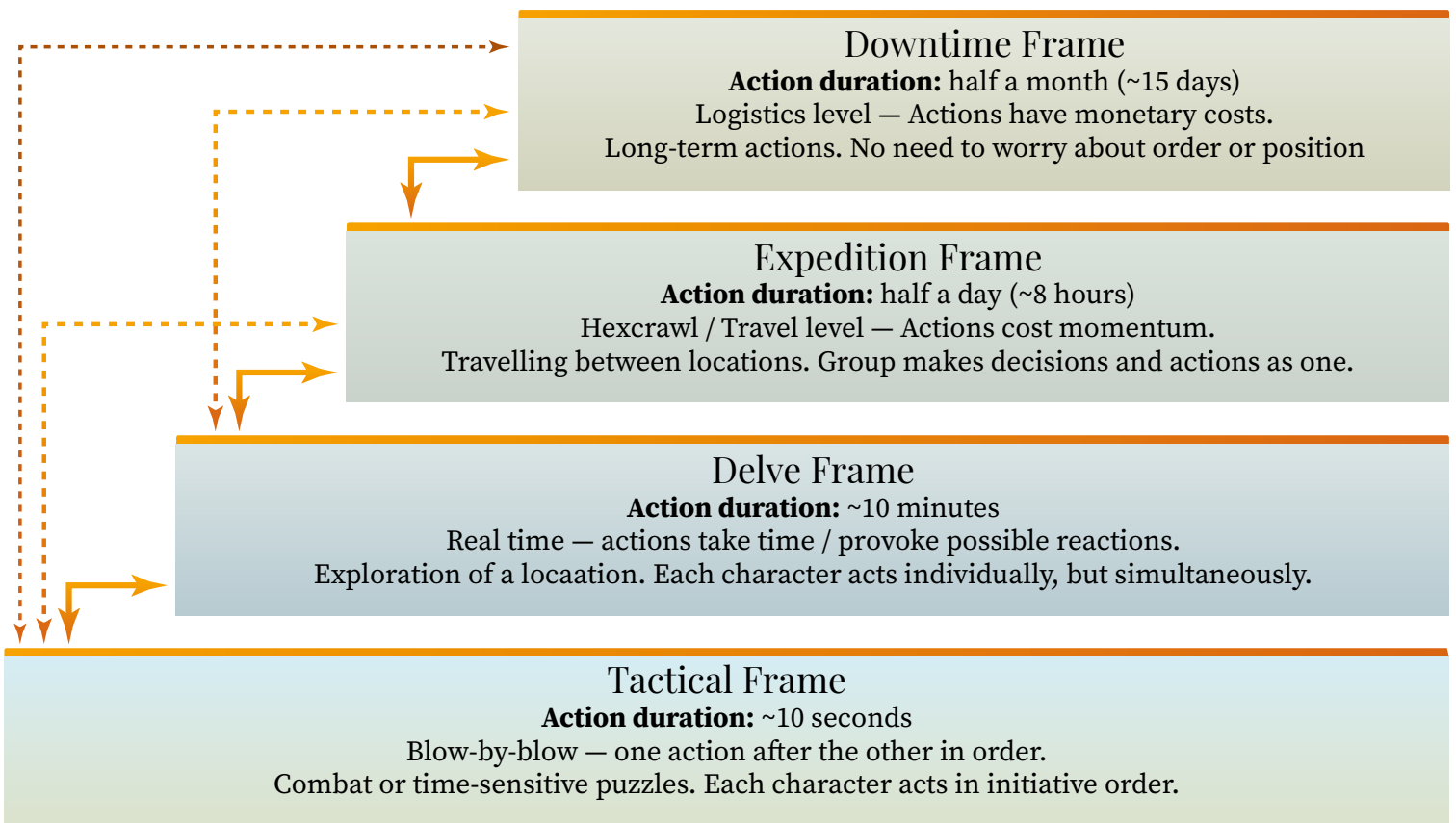
LVL	XP Needed	No. of GD	Changes on leveling
1	0	1	-
2	1,500	2	General Perk
3	3,000	3	Ability Score increase
4	7,000	4	General Perk
5	15,000	5	Role Perk
6	40,000	6	Ability Score increase, General Perk
7	100,000	7	Role Perk
8	250,000	8	General Perk
9	600,000	9	Ability Score increase, Role Perk
10	1,000,000	10	2x Ability Score increase, General Perk



GAMEPLAY FRAMES

In *THEM DEEPER BONES* sessions, the flow and rhythm vary from one situation to the other. At times, the gameplay is extremely focused on details, examining each step and choice the characters make with scrutiny. And during others, days and weeks pass in a heartbeat and the big picture is painted in the broadest of strokes. To facilitate these changes in the level of detail, there are **four game-play frames** the game focuses on for its actions: Downtime, Expedition, Delve, and Tactical.

Zooming between frames





COMBAT

When the characters clash with enemies who want to cause them harm, it is the archetypical Tactical Frame situation, **combat**.

When the characters enter combat with opponents, the game follows these steps:

- The guide decides and announces the actions of their characters with sapient and lower levels of sentience to the players.
- The players decide and announce what their characters do.
- The guide decides and announces the actions of their characters with an alien level of sentience.
- Initiative is rolled.
- The declared actions and movement are resolved in initiative order.

These steps are then repeated in order until the combat ends — Usually, because one side is defeated, runs away, or surrenders.

Attack Rolls

When a character attacks to defeat an enemy, they make an **Attack Roll** against the Target Number of the opponent's **Defense Value**. If the Attack Roll is a success, a Damage Roll is made to see the effect. If the Attack Roll fails, the attack doesn't connect.

An Attack Roll where the result of the d20 of the roll is a 20 is always successful.

The dice rolled in an Attack Roll are affected by the character's Physique score, just like in a Physique Saving Throw. Defense Value for characters is typically determined by their Reflex score and the armour they wear.

Physique	Attack Roll	Reflex	Base Defense Value
		3 or less	7
		4	8
		5-6	9
9 or less	Roll d20	7-10	10
10-14	Roll d20 + d4	11-14	11
15-17	Roll d20 + d6	15-17	12, 11 in full armour
18 or more	Roll d20 + d8	18 or more	14, 12 in full armour

Damage Rolls

When an attack is a success or something else causes damage to a target, a **Damage Roll** is made to see what the hit's effects are. The attacker rolls the **Damage Dice** of the attack (and any Threat Dice, see below) and the defender rolls their Grit Dice. The attacker then looks at **each individual dice** they rolled and must remove dice from the defender's Grit Dice that sum to that number or less **as efficiently as they can**.

If the defender has no Grit Dice left after an attack, they are out of the fight and **dying** (or **apparently dead** if this is not in Tactical Frame).

A character's Damage Dice is by default a d6 if they're wielding a weapon.

Threat Dice

If a Damage Roll doesn't remove any Grit Dice from the target, the Damage Dice of the attack used in the roll are given to the target as **Threat Dice** afterward. These Threat Dice are rolled in **addition** to the attack's Damage Dice the next time the target suffers a Damage Roll. Only when a Damage Roll causes the character to lose Grit Dice are the Threat Dice they have removed.

These Threat Dice represent close calls, minor hits, battle fatigue, and other things that bring the character closer to their end without seriously injuring them.

Grit Dice

Grit Dice show a character's capacity to keep on fighting. It's a term indicated either as dice annotation ("Grit Dice of 4d8") or for simplicity's sake, just a single number ("2 Grit Dice" or "2 GD", which means "two of the type of Grit Dice they have"), as there are many cases where the type of the dice doesn't matter. Characters who take damage, lose their Grit Dice accordingly, and if brought down to 0 GD, are down and out of the fight. If not otherwise stated, a Grit Die is a d8. Lost Grit Dice are regained through rest or magical healing.

Upped Stakes

When combat drags out, everyone eventually makes mistakes. The **stakes of the combat are raised** as the defenses of everyone start to wear out, and someone eventually lands a crucial blow. This inevitability of the end is represented by upped **Stakes Die**.

The Stakes Die by default is 0, or “no dice”. If the Stakes Die is upped, increase it on the following ladder: 0 - d4 - d6 - d8 - d10 - d12 - d20.

The Stakes Die is added to everyone’s Attack Roll.

The Stakes Die is upped when all the following are true:

- There were more than two Attack Rolls made since the last action determination of this combat.
- No one gained any Threat Dice.
- No one lost any GD for any reason.

Stakes Die resets to 0 when the combat ends.



MAGIC

Memorised spells

A character can hold a limited amount of the complex formulas of spells active in their **memory** at a time. The maximum number of different spells a character can have in their memory at a time is limited by the value of their current Knowledge score. The player should write down the spells in their character's memory. If the character's Knowledge score falls under the number of spells in the character's memory, they lose the ones marked last on their list first. The character can choose which of the spells they have in their spellbook they have memorised during each good night's rest.

Magic Roll

To cast a spell they have memorised, the character makes a **Magic Roll** to see what the precise effect of the spell they cast is. This is a straight **d20 roll**, with a possible penalty if the character wears medium or full armour (Pg. XX). Like a Fortune Roll, the Magic Roll has no one Target Number, but what happens depends on the result. The Magic Roll result is compared to a table that has specific outcomes to what happens on that particular result. This table is found next to each spell and is unique to each one. Each spell has a **catastrophic result**, a worst-case result that also causes the caster to forget the spell from memory until restudied during rest.

Beginner Spells

To determine a spell a beginner magic-user has (pg. XX), roll on the table with a d20. If the roll is a spell already in the magic-user's spellbook, the player may choose freely another spell from this list instead. These are spells that are still "known" in modern civilisation, so to cast one of them is something that a wizard or a witch is "assumed" to be able to do these days.

#	Spell	#	Spell
1	Call Upon the Earthbound Spirit	11	Healing Touch
2	Close Portal	12	Imbue
3	Disrupt Magic	13	Legerdemain
4	Elemental Burst	14	Light / Darkness
5	Endure Nature	15	Mending
6	Energy Bolt	16	Protective Circle
7	False Friendship	17	Safe Landing
8	Fangs of Frost	18	Shielding
9	Feast	19	Sleep
10	Growth	20	Spider Crawl

Energy Bolt

Spell type: Elemental (any)

Bolts created from pure magical energy appear around the caster's head as a result of this spell for $d4 * 10$ minutes. As an action, the caster can point at a target and the Energy Bolt hits them for a Damage Roll of $d6$ (no Attack Roll necessary). If Energy Bolt is cast again while the caster has old missiles ready, the old missiles disappear before the Magic Roll is made.

- 1-:** Catastrophe. The force of the magics burst forth inside the hand of the caster and force them to suffer a Damage Roll of $2d4$ points of pure magic damage.
- 2-3:** Failure. The spell disappears from the caster's mind and cannot be cast again until restudied from the spellbook
- 4-9:** Failure. The spell disappears from the caster's mind and cannot be cast again until restudied from the spellbook, unless they take a 1 point unpreventable harm to their Power.
- 10-14:** The caster conjures an Energy Bolt that hover around their head, waiting to be fired.
- 15-19:** As above, but the caster conjures two Energy Bolts.
- 20-23:** As above, but the caster conjures three Energy Bolts.
- 24+:** As above, but the caster conjures four Energy Bolts.

Spider Crawl

Spell type: Elemental (Air, Earth, or Water)

The caster's body tingles as a magical unseen webbing covers them that allows them to climb surfaces with surprising ease. They have to keep at least one hand and foot on the wall while they climb at all times, and cannot hold anything in their hands while they do so.

- 1-:** Catastrophe. The ethereal spiders that spin the webbing suddenly manifest on the natural plane and keep on building the webbing around caster for $d6 * 10$ minutes. The caster is unable to observe what's around them as they are surrounded by a swarm of magical spiders and they move at half their normal speed.
- 2-4:** Failure. The spell disappears from the caster's mind and cannot be cast again until restudied from the spellbook
- 5-9:** Failure. The spell disappears from the caster's mind and cannot be cast again until restudied from the spellbook, unless they take a 1 point unpreventable harm to their Power.
- 10-14:** The caster can climb any surface they would have a realistic chance to climb normally (surface with some form of hand/foot-holds). They firmly cling to the wall while the spell is active, without a risk of a fall. The spell lasts for a single action.
- 15-19:** As above, but the caster can transfer the effect to another target by touch. The spell duration is increased to $d6 * 10$ minutes.
- 20-23:** As above, but the caster can climb sheer vertical surfaces without any visible holds. The spell duration is increased to $d6$ hours.
- 24+:** As above, but the caster can also climb ceilings and other upside down surfaces. The effect lasts until the next sunrise.



T8EM
DEEPER
BONES

THE GUIDE BOOK

Beta 1.5.2

Petri Leinonen

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THE GUIDE BOOK

And an important thing for the guide to remember is that in almost all of the cases, *THEM DEEPER BONES* is a game played amongst friends. And that the topmost priority everyone should have at the table is to make sure that everyone is enjoying the experience.

The Guide's Creeds

Like the players, there are some creeds that the guide should look into when playing a retro adventure game that might differ from other role-playing games.

- No gotchas
- Respect the dice
- Reward being clever
- Err on the side of the players
- Apply pressure through procedures
- Be consistent and telegraph change
- Serve each player according to their needs

1.

No gotchas

More than a mere creed, the first **rule** of the guide is:

No gotchas.

The guide needs to keep the players able to make informed, meaningful choices that have an impact on the game. To have them be in control of their “win state,” at least to the extent possible in a game where luck plays some role.

A player should, when faced loss or demise, be left with the feeling that what just happened was because of their own **decisions**.

Respect the dice

The guide does **not call for dice rolls** when the conversation is enough. If the dice are rolled, the guide needs to respect the results. A deadly result is a deadly result and success is a success. Even when using the dice in a more vague way, such as with a Fortune Roll, they will have an impact on what happens in the game, even if will not provide a hard yes/no result.

2.

3.

Reward being clever

The guide's job is to enable and **encourage creative problem** solving when presenting challenges. This means that if the players Gordian Knot through the elaborate puzzle planned for them, more power to the players!

Communication is key to a successful role-playing game and as they are the only true window to the game world, it is on the guide to paint the picture in as clear a way as possible. That gives the players more ways to interact with their environment.

4.

Err on the side of the players

When there is a miscommunication or misunderstanding of what the situation in the game is, as the authoritative voice **the guide must be the one who backs down**. If a player says "oh, that's not at all what I meant my character does," the guide's task is to ask for clarification and gauge how the player had meant for their actions to go down and then let the situation play out as the player intended.

5.

Apply pressure through procedures

As informed decision-making is at the core of the game, there needs to be a **dynamic element** to it to keep the decision-making from becoming stale. A reason why the players cannot spend an infinite amount of time just coming up with the perfect solution to every problem.

The gameplay frames and procedures provide an easy solution. There is a chance of an encounter every two actions during a delve, and if the characters spend 10 minutes discussing things, that's one of their actions depleted (delve frame equals real-time). In the tactical frame, the information when making decisions is incomplete, so no plan survives contact with the initiative roll intact. And in exploration and downtime, things are abstracted to a level where discussing minutiae should already be meaningless.

Be consistent and telegraph change

The guide needs to be **consistent**. They should decide what sort of game they are running and stick to their decision. Players come to assume the guide's behaviour based on past events, so a good through-line needs to be maintained.

Telegraphing any change in established consistency is important. If it is not done, the players eventually adopt a paranoid stance where they cannot trust established truths, which just bogs the game down unnecessarily.

6.

Serve each player according to their needs

7.

The game has a strong challenge element that's directed at the player. And as **enjoyment** is one of the goals, the guide's task is to **tune the experience** to the players in a way it challenges them "just right." More generous descriptions and clarifying questions help a first-timer get to the right mode, while a guide can expect an experienced player to be able to handle a bit more challenge.

The guide needs to keep up the tension at the table, be aware of the players' skill levels, and match their increasing talent at the game with more challenges suitable for their levels.

Being the Guide

While the creeds serve as a throughline for the guide, the main task of the guide is listening to the players and letting them have fun while playing the game. Fun as a goalpost is a very fickle one and finding the most satisfying way for each individual table of players is something that is most easily achieved through open discussion.

Role-playing

As the bulk of the gameplay and tackling the challenges is done through **role-playing**, the guide has an important role to act as an **evaluator** to the players' descriptions and decisions. And based on their evaluation, narrate the **results** of said role-playing back to the players.

The success or failure stems from player decisions, not the roll of a dice.

This means that the guide wields a lot of power. And thus they need to be **fair** in their decisions, both with the skill of the characters and the consistency of the world.

The guide considers role-playing through the simple question “what should happen in this situation?” But coming to a fair and honest conclusion is not always simple. The starting point in a murky case like this should be the **viability** of the task, how would an “average person” fare with it, or if they could do it at all. Then the guide looks at what **leverage** the character has in the situation, and adjusts the result accordingly.

The **viability** of the action is simply determined on the following scale: “Impossible” — “Theoretically possible” — “Given time/attempts” — “Possible.”

Leverage means anything that the character could use in their favour, and should at least include the character’s **role**, their **background**, and their **tales**, as well as any relevant **events** that have happened in the game in addition to what the player is **describing**.



GAMEPLAY PROCEDURES

General Procedures

These are procedures not directly tied to a certain game-play frame.

Awarding experience points

The characters gain **experience points (XP)** as they reflect on the experiences they've had. They do this automatically after each game session.

The players **write down** what their characters encountered and discovered during their expedition, either during the session or as a summary afterward. The guide awards the players XP based on what was written down. This further emphasises the game being about discovering a forgotten history instead of doing just heroic things.

XP is awarded for the following things:

- Any **new hex** the characters travelled through is worth 5 XP if it was patrolled, 10 XP if was a known hex and 25 XP if it was an unexplored hex.
- Discovery of new map **features and locations** they didn't know of beforehand: 50 XP for a landmark, 100 XP for a historically significant landmark or a small interesting location to visit, and 200 XP for a full-blown future delve location.
- **The name** of the most important new historical figure they discovered: from 50 XP if they discovered any name, to up to 500 XP or more for the name of a powerful sorcerer or a queen. The guide may choose to award XP for other names discovered as well if they were significant.
- Every new **facet of history** – a historical event, a nation, a faction, a power: again, from 50 XP from a historical event of minor importance to 100-200 XP for a faction or a nation, or up to 500 XP or more for grand historical facts uncovered.
- **Cultural artifacts** that reveal their own homeland's history and habits – from 5 XP if they discover mundane items that tell of old customs to up to 1000 XP or more for culturally significant art objects important to understanding the canton's history.
- Every **new kind of creature** the characters encounter is worth their “study XP” value when first encountered. If they only gain glimpses or do not witness the creature's powers, they only gain a part of the XP, filling up the rest when they finally do encounter it for real.

Quick Delve Design

One way to quickly generate a setting for a delve is for the guide to grab a sudoku from a newspaper or the internet. The harder the sudoku, usually the easier the dungeon.

The guide then generates a nine area map from the numbers on the puzzle's 9 segments and connects these in a pattern they find most interesting. If the guide wants a little less eventful delve, they can remove the top rows of each segment. In general, the sudoku should serve as an oracle and the guide should not feel too constrained by what is given.

The numbers on the puzzle correspond to the following features in the delve:

- 1:** Open entrance to the Delve
- 2:** Terrain feature (water, elevation) that requires an alternate type of movement
- 3:** Hazardous or otherwise interesting terrain
- 4:** Blocked, hidden, or locked path.
- 5:** Location of historical relevance
- 6:** Treasure
- 7:** Puzzle
- 8:** Passive danger (trap)
- 9:** Active danger (enemy)

Quick Delve Design example

For example this Wikipedia example sudoku

5	3			7				
6			1	9	5			
	9	8					6	
8				6				3
4			8		3			1
7				2				6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

It contains the following features:

NW: Historically relevant location that has hazardous terrain, treasure, a trap, and an enemy

N: Historically relevant location with an open entrance, puzzle, and an enemy

NE: Treasure

W: Hidden path, trap, and a puzzle

M: Treasure, trap, hazardous terrain, and some form of alternate movement

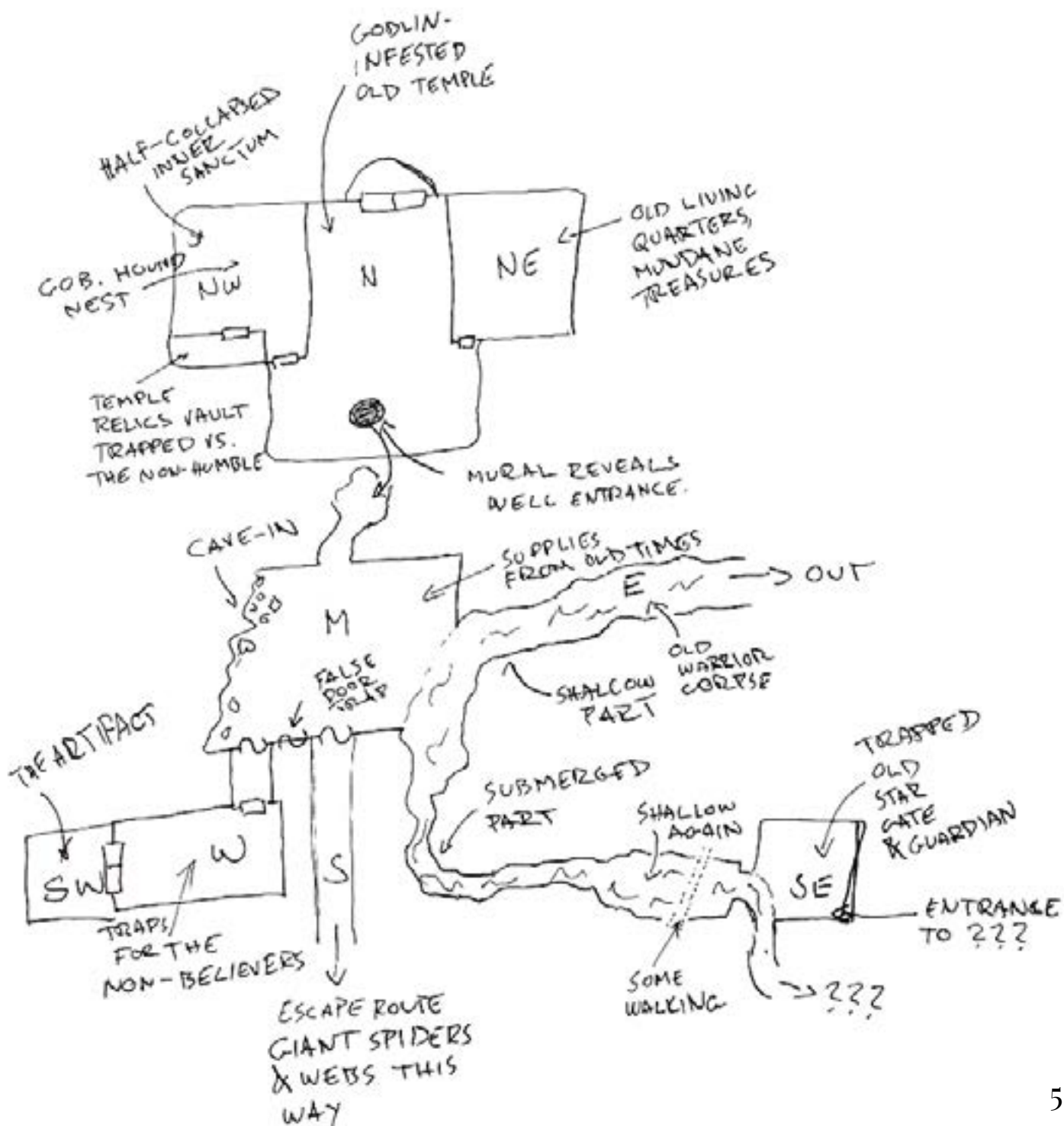
E: Entrance with interesting terrain and treasure

SW: Treasure

S: An entrance with a hidden path, an enemy, and a trap

SE: Terrain requiring alternate movement, historically relevant location, puzzle, trap, and an enemy

These, with some tweaking, become the following ruined temple infested with goblins and its basement that contains a religious artifact.





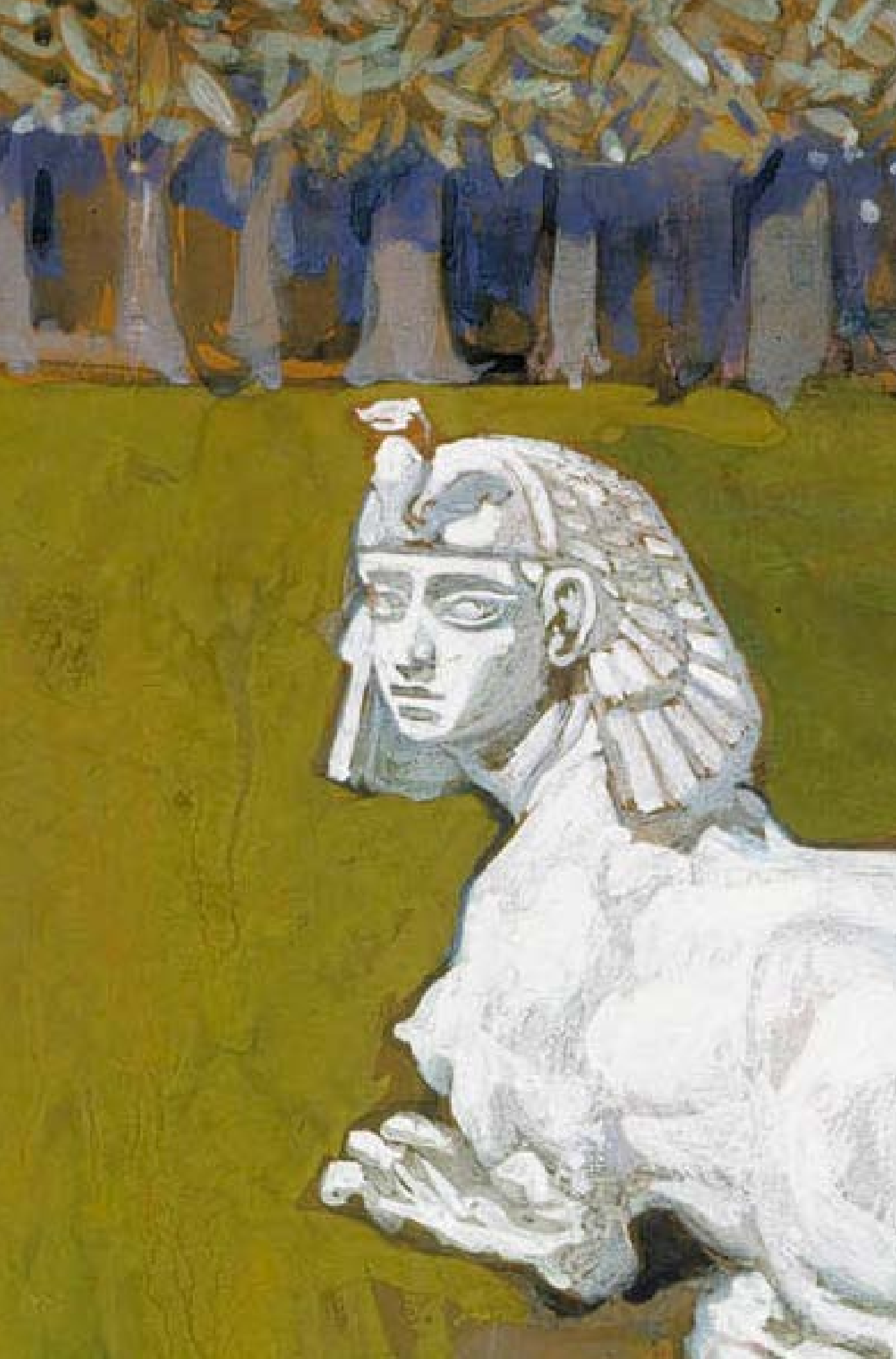
TREASURES

Wand of Disintegration

When the target is struck by the Wand, they immediately take a Damage Roll of d20 accompanied by a loud melodic sound of glass breaking. If the target goes down from the hit of the ray, they and all their non-magical possessions disappear for good. If the target is non-animate, the disintegration effect removes all non-magical matter in a sphere with a diameter of 1.5 meters. A Shield spell (pg. XX) works to protect from the effects of a Wand of Disintegration.

Wand of Cloning

When the ray from the wand hits the target, an identical copy of them and their equipment appears at a seemingly random spot within 5 meters of them. This copy shares their goals and by all purposes, their soul (and if they are a player's character, the same player can control both the clone and the original). All magical equipment they possess is similarly linked, and if one of them uses a wand, both of them lose a charge from their wands, or a cloned potion of healing used by one of them causes both of their potions to be used. After $d8 * 10$ minutes, the original and all the equipment cloned disappear, and only the clone remains. The wand of cloning can only affect creatures of rational sentience or higher, and cannot be used at a single target more than once during a 24 hour period.



OPPONENTS

Sentience

Opponents are crudely divided to five categories according to their sentience in combat situations:

Non-sentient opponents are constructs, non-thinking undead and such. They are single-minded and predictable in their actions and cannot be reasoned with.

Instinctual opponents are wild animals and other beings that react to situations on a case by case basis without any consideration to the bigger picture. Even when they work in a group, each individual acts as a reaction to the opportunities that are presented to it.

Reasoning opponents have an understanding of the current situation on a tactical level and can position themselves in a way that might benefit others in the group instead of just themselves. They are capable of advanced teamwork and coordination, but lack strategic, long term view for situations.

Sapient opponents are fully self-aware and work on a human level of tactics, strategy and coordination.

Alien opponents do not follow conventional logic in the way they operate. They might seem cold and callous, or completely random. They have high intelligence, but it's not something we can necessarily comprehend. To represent this, opponents with Alien level sentience declare their actions only after the players do.

Goblin

Goblins are strange and malicious fey creatures usually no taller than a meter in height. Round, cabbage-like bodies sport four short limbs and a wide mouth filled with crooked teeth. They like the darkest corners of cold and damp places, often found in and near dungeons. Tales of gaggles of goblins that spawn out of the mold and dust in root cellars that have been left unattended for too long have led to folk traditions that make people clear out the contents of cellars at least once a year.

Defense Value:	11
Grit Dice:	d6
Movement:	10m
Attacks:	1 claws/bite/improvised weapons
Damage Dice:	d4
Morale:	5
No. appearing:	d20 or 3d20 (infestation)
Sentience:	Reasoning
Saving Throws:	+d4 REF, 2d20, keep lower PHY
XP (face):	4
XP (study):	6

Combat Maneuvers — While goblins rarely do clever strategies, they do love fighting dirty. Throwing sand in opponents' eyes, tripping them over, disarming them (and running away with the stolen blade) and many other annoying tricks are a part of the goblin repertoire.

Iron Vulnerability — A goblin as a fey creature is vulnerable to cold iron, and if attacked with a weapon made out of it, even if there is no Damage Roll, has to make a Morale Roll in addition to the possibility of the more dangerous damage.

The Pike Snake

A true dragon, even if slight in form, the Pike Snake is a 15m long, snakelike creature of darkness and nightmare, varying number of long, spidery legs producing in and out of its sides as it needs, and a violently trashing head of a pike instead of anything serpent-like. The Pike Snake is highly intelligent, although it cannot communicate with anything else than other true dragons.

Defense Value:	15 (soft underbelly 12)
Grit Dice:	2d12
Movement:	10m
Attacks:	bite or cold breath
Damage Dice:	d8 or special
Morale:	8
No. appearing:	1
Sentience:	Sapient
Saving Throws:	+d4 All
XP (face):	55
XP (study):	75

Dragonoid Terror — A pike snake, like all true dragons, is a creature of pure terror. Anyone seeing it for the first time in a situation must make a Power Saving Throw with TN of 14, and if they fail, they must either immediately attack the Pike Snake, run away from it as fast as they can, or freeze in place, unable to move. Following the decided behaviour until something changes in the situation that snaps them out of it.

Breath Weapon — The Pike Snake can exhale a blast of freezing cold shards at its enemies. If it does so, it has to rear its head up high (revealing the soft underside) and not move during its action. The blast starts from the Pike Snake's mouth and travels forward 30m, expanding to a 5m radius at the end. Anyone getting caught in the blast area has to make a Reflex Saving Throw against a TN of 14. If they fail, they are subjected to a d12 Damage Roll. Even if they succeed, they take a d4 Damage Roll.

Zombie

Whatever is the cause, the dead walk. They are driven by the need to consume the flesh of intelligent creatures.

Zombies spread their condition to those they kill and don't fully consume, and if not kept in check, a few zombies can quite easily turn into an apocalyptic plague.

Defense Value:	11
Grit Dice:	1
Movement:	5m
Attacks:	1 bite
Damage Dice:	d6
Morale:	12
No. appearing:	3d4
Sentience:	Non-sentient
Saving Throws:	2d20, keep lower REF
XP (face):	14
XP (study):	20

Living Dead — A zombie is immune to anything that affects only living creatures, or the mind. They can only be destroyed by severing the neck or destroying the brain and thus at the start of their action, they remove all Threat Dice on them as the minor hits they've received don't really matter. A character can spend their action to line their next attack to hit the head on purpose — if they do, they roll that attack with an Advantage, and if that lined attack hits, instead of a Damage Roll, the zombie is instantly destroyed.

Zombie Plague — The true danger of a zombie comes from the fact the condition spreads. First, anyone killed by a zombie but not fully devoured by them (usually because of a distraction) rises as a zombie themselves the next nightfall. But also anyone who loses a Grit Dice because of a zombie bite becomes automatically infected with the zombie plague (disease: onset 1 hour, potency 15, effect: d4 STA harm) and anyone who dies from that instantly becomes a zombie themselves. Even those who don't lose a Grit Dice, but are successfully bitten by a zombie might be infected. A successful Stamina Saving Throw after the battle with TN of 15 means the character isn't infected.

work in progress
(I.S.I)

TÆM
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BONES

THE BLACK SHIELD CANTON

Petri Leinonen

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THE WORLD

Welcome to the Black Shield Canton. This is the default setting for *THEM DEEPER BONES*. It's the northrenmost corner of a post-post-apocalyptic world, filled with potential of adventures and wonder.

The Basic Premise

The world as we know is has survived a magical cataclysm. The people had gotten too arrogant and powerful without understanding the costs associated with wielding such tremendous power. As everything was crumbling down, the Nine Cantons of the Confederation turned to the Sun God Aurelius begged it to save them. Aurelius agreed to shield mankind in return of allegiance, humility and focus on rebuilding instead of expanding.

The end of the world stopped for those inside the Confederation's borders and destroyed everything outside of them. This was generations ago. The Nine Cantons thrive and the state of things have settled to a nice equilibrium. Life is simpler, magic is rare and controlled, and the borders hold.

The Post Post-Apocalypse

The apocalypse means the end of the world. As a fiction genre it's usually one of disaster fiction. People dealing with the world ending around them. The post-apocalypse genre is the aftermath. The world as the characters know it is gone and now it is about survival in the reality the end of the world has left behind.

The post-post-apocalypse is a much more varied sub-genre. It is set in a time when the apocalypse is a thing in the distant memory, and the new status quo has been formed on top of the ruins. There are countless examples in film like *The Planet of the Apes*, and in computer games, such as *Horizon Zero Dawn*. Some are bleak, many are hopeful. Many have a sense of grand adventure in them where individuals rediscover fantastic details about how things were before and during the apocalypse.

That is the part of the genre *The Black Cantons* and ***THEM DEEPER BONES*** in general wants to embrace. A sense of grand adventure where a world opens its secrets to the main characters slowly and with a sense of wonder. The fantasy realm that managed to nearly destroy itself through magic has so many secrets and untold tales to explore, and endless opportunities for the explorers to turn into their own story.

The Official History of The Nine Cantons

The holy texts of The Shining Temple tell this tale of what was before: The **world ended** because of hubris. It was devastating. The nations fell to a magical cataclysm of elemental devastation that spread from the outside in. In a desperate plea, the nine nations of the world made a pact with the Sun Drake itself to protect them from the wave of devastation. They formed a Holy Confederacy under spiritual guidance of The Pontifex, the Sun God's manifestation. And thus managed to survive.

After a while, the **end of the world ended**. And humanity first survived, then rebuilt, and now prospers once again, united as one whole instead of nine dispartate nations. Under the guidance of the Pontifex of the Sun, ruling from Anardi, the main temple in the center of the Central Canton.

The most crucial clause of the deal with the Sun God and their pantheon was that humanity would remain **within their new borders** for 108 years. If they rebuilt in their place, they would enjoy the stability they needed. And that's what humanity did. They built on top of their molten cities, made new bridges and roads to replace those that had been turned into dust, started up commerce and rebuilt civilisation, and thrived.

The Black Shield Canton

The Black Shield, or Northlands, is a canton of lush forests, clear lakes and wide rivers running in between. The winters are harsh affairs of snow and cold, while the summers bring warmth and green to the land. There are lone not tall mountains and tall hills on the northern and western borders, but for the most part the canton is quite flat, making it excellent for lumber and fields, even if the weather doesn't fully support the latter. The major export of the canton is lumber and the slightly darker grain, such as rye or oats. Lambs and goats are common livestock along with cows and pigs.

Foodwise, the canton is known for its hearty root vegetables, sour apples, stonefruit, and various stews and pies. In the fall, the forests are lush with berries and mushrooms and those bring their own addition to the harvest-time palette. The lakes and the rivers mean that fresh water fish is abundantly available and a main protein for many. While coffee doesn't grow anywhere near the canton, it has become almost a national drink, dark coffee enjoyed by almost all of the adult population, while the younger tend to drink it with milk or sugar. Other than coffee, a lot of fruit gets imported from the neighbouring Central Canton and The Crossroads Canton.

The Cataclysm

The world as we know it is defined by its ending generations prior. The official texts still left tell a tale of mankind growing too powerful and destruction. There were great wizards who tried to become like gods, and who fell into strife and war with each other. This war escalated with each passing cycle seeing more powerful magics getting used, until a cascade point was reached, which couldn't be contained anymore, and the whole tapestry of the world started unraveling. The nine nations that now form the confederation now called upon the mighty Sun God Aurelius and asked for their protection, no matter the price, as long as humanity could live through the end. The Sky Drake responded and a pact was formed. They raised a protective border around the nations and as the world around fell and was annihilated, these lands remained.

The Pact

The Pact between the Sun God Aurelius and what remained of the nine nations was quite straightforward. Aurelius demanded fealty and humility, and was offering protection from the surrounding apocalypse.



CHARACTERS

Masculine first names

The ones in the first two columns are modern-sounding names. The third column is best for older, but living people and the last column are slightly archaic names. For a totally random name, roll a 1d100. For a younger character, a d66 should get you a good-enough name. For a mature person, a 5d20. For an ancestor, maybe roll a 3d10 and just count from the end backwards.

#	Name	#	Name	#	Name	#	Name
1	Adilf	26	Adrien	51	Adilfber	76	Aiden
2	Alde	27	Alek	52	Erik	77	Baerli
3	Aron	28	Ben	53	Bevyn	78	Boern
4	Brani	29	Eikan	54	Camin	79	Carl
5	Cervi	30	Cyril	55	Dany	80	Dyetr
6	Dirk	31	Brenni	56	Ekhart	81	Elan
7	Elija	32	Elijat	57	Basyl	82	Etkar
8	Fabian	33	Falk	58	Felik	83	Fiete
9	Finne	34	Fin	59	Fynn	84	Fraen
10	Fitre	35	Gall	60	Gyan	85	Gaesti
11	Gethart	36	Hilte	61	Gi	86	Guiti
12	Letti	37	Haesli	62	Han	87	Hennil
13	Henri	38	Gert	63	Kjan	88	Jaquim
14	Janik	39	Jannik	64	Jaron	89	Jerik
15	Jerman	40	Jilari	65	Jina	90	Jivan
16	Luis	41	Jorik	66	Jorik	91	Julya
17	Jusin	42	Karl	67	Hinni	92	Kyliani
18	Guj	43	Niah	68	Lenny	93	Leandro
19	Levin	44	Levi	69	Levyn	94	Ly
20	Jokken	45	Oliv	70	Lyam	95	Mattei
21	Mil	46	Mitti	71	Myssi	96	Natjel
22	Nelio	47	Lein	72	Nika	97	Nyl
23	Orik	48	Lyka	73	Nittyn	98	Pauli
24	Otto	49	Pelle	74	Raffe	99	Smav
25	Sven	50	Tarii	75	Teylen	100	Tym

Feminine first names

The ones in the first two columns are modern-sounding names. The third column is best for older, but living people and the last column are slightly archaic names. For a totally random name, roll a 1d100. For a younger character, a d66 should get you a good-enough name. For a mature person, a 5d20. For an ancestor, maybe roll a 3d10 and just count from the end backwards.

#	Name	#	Name	#	Name	#	Name
1	Ada	26	Agata	51	Agne	76	Adelae
2	Alba	27	Anelie	52	Eleonora	77	Baerbel
3	Anna	28	Beata	53	Borta	78	Bianca
4	Bice	29	Eva	54	Catarina	79	Cordula
5	Clara	30	Coline	55	Jelena	80	Crescentia
6	Dana	31	Delia	56	Diana	81	Dagmar
7	Edda	32	Eika	57	Anou	82	Desiteria
8	Elka	33	Cata	58	Elke	83	Febe
9	Felicia	34	Hanna	59	Hanno	84	Franzi
10	Jerna	35	Ilda	60	Itala	85	Irmhilt
11	Jati	36	Jaia	61	Dafne	86	Jerda
12	Herta	37	Jete	62	Jia	87	Joertis
13	Jisella	38	Karla	63	Rossa	88	Leonie
14	Laure	39	Lena	64	Livi	89	Luisa
15	Matja	40	Marji	65	Melo	90	Moa
16	Nicolo	41	Oria	66	Paola	91	Sakha
17	Petra	42	Rita	67	Larissa	92	Sejlinda
18	Sara	43	Shila	68	Shirika	93	Susana
19	Uski	44	Vanna	69	Shiska	94	Sveva
20	Ulla	45	Sole	70	Susi	95	Tamara
21	Tanja	46	Tea	71	Steffa	96	Waltraut
22	Sigira	47	Telda	72	Sonja	97	Wanta
23	Uta	48	Siria	73	Tekla	98	Vikotria
24	Wilha	49	Vera	74	Ursela	99	Vinkenja
25	Vita	50	Yanna	75	Viola	100	Virginie

Magical birthrights

Humanity has changed, possibly because of the cataclysm, or just because the world has been such a magical place even before that. Every single human living today has been infused with the various magical energies of the cosmos (pg. XX). **Everyone** in the world shows signs of mystical presence, at least in the shades of color of their hair, eyes or skin, and in harsher ways, having wings, tails, horns, halos or other features that show what sort of magics run through their veins. In the common parlance people are referred to as “blooded” or “born”, so “light-blooded”, or “earth-born” depending on where their nature comes from.

The Temple uses this mingling of human blood with magic as an ever-present reminder of how far and bad things got before the cataclysm.

To determine a character’s magical birthrights, roll a d4 twice and take the lower result. Then roll that many d8s on the table below to determine a type for the character’s magical birthright or birthrights. If you roll the same result twice, it just means that there are more features of that type present in the character. (optional: Make a Fortune Roll to see how intense each feature is)

Roll	Birthright	Roll	Birthright
1	Air	5	Water
2	Earth	6	Light
3	Fire	7	Darkness
4	Spirit	8	Void

Air Birthright Traits

If a character is born to the air birthright, they typically display attributes of air and creatures of it display — lightness, speed and bird-like qualities. Air birthright characters tend to have turquoise to eggshell white skin-tone. When some parents have an air-born child, they feel they've been granted a gift as a child of air is said to bring joy to those around them, and some put the young child on a pedestal for this, having unreasonable expectations of them.

Here are 20 example features a air birthright character could have:

#	Air Birthright Trait	#	Air Birthright Trait
1	Touch is incredibly soft	11	Arms and/or legs are of different color and covered in thicker skin than rest of the body
2	Fingernails curve like talons	12	Tears and sweat evaporate quickly
3	Eyes don't have any whites in them	13	Eyes are beautiful turquoise
4	Character's shadow is in a slightly wrong place	14	Their hair has the appearance of feathers
5	Skin has a translucent quality to it, with veins and muscles showing clearly underneath	15	Skin-tones form a cloud-like texture on it
6	Knees bends the opposite way than expected, leading to a bird-like stance	16	No external ears
7	Body odor smells cool and fresh	17	Eyes are huge and round
8	Skin has pure white wavy lines decorating it	18	Their lips have a beak-like rigidity to them
9	Eyes look translucent, showing a sky-like space behind them	19	Arms and fingers are longer than usual
10	Skin is covered partly in feathers	20	Voice sounds like it has an ethereal echo

Light Birthright Traits

Those infused with light magic at birth appear fey-like — quite pleasant to look at, but somehow in the uncanny valley of being “too much” something. A light-touched’s skin often takes on a golden or yellowish color. And it is common for parents of light birthright children to feel they have been blessed with the Sun God’s touch, and often place unrealistic expectations on their child for this reason.

Here are 20 example features a light character could have:

#	Light Birthright Trait	#	Light Birthright Trait
1	Soft glow around fingertips when touching someone else	11	Eyes have starlight patterns
2	Voice has a slightly metallic echo	12	Tiny down feathers decorate shoulder blades
3	Geometric golden patterns on the skin	13	Hair that grows fast and long
4	Body odor has a touch of baked bread to it	14	No body hair besides hair
5	Their tears have the appearance of blood, that disappears when wiped off their skin	15	Tiny mouth with no lips
6	Their sweat glitters like there would be golden flakes in it	16	Elongated features
7	Skin has a golden, metallic hue	17	Skin has a marbled appearance
8	Skin is unnaturally smooth	18	Long pointed ears
9	Fingernails resemble talons	19	Pitch black eyes
10	The character’s shadow is weaker than other shadows present	20	Halo of light seen around their head during sunny days

Void Birthright Traits

Those who have been infused with the non-magic of the void are best described as “creepy” – quiet, distant, hard to read. A void touched typically has monochromatic skin-tones of light to dark greys. To a parent, a void-touched child is a blessing, as they are generally viewed to be easy growing up, and some of them end up as the favorite children of the family for this..

Here are 20 example features a void birthright character could have:

#	Void Birthright Trait	#	Void Birthright Trait
1	Clear white eyes	11	Face looks like it is a blank mask of some sort
2	Grey hair	12	Skin has a dull hue
3	Extremely straight and flat hair	13	Hair looks very dry and brittle
4	Voice seems to lack any depth	14	Eyes reflect light and darkness from right angles
5	Body odor has a slight stale twist to it	15	Long, spidery fingers
6	Skin feels leathery to touch	16	Character’s blood is darker and thicker than usual
7	Eyes are sunken in	17	Skin and fingernails appear older than they should
8	Skin color varies by contour, making shadows darker and highlights lighter	18	Upper canines are slightly elongated and sharp
9	Skin appears dusty	19	Body hair is spider silk like
10	Colors around the character feel muted	20	Joints of bones are very apparent and protruding



PROCEDURES

Here are some world-specific procedures for a Black Shield Canton campaign.

Winter

The months of winter in the Black Shield Canton are cold and dim as the dark moon slowly moves over the sun, hiding it completely during the midwinter days.

When fall turns to winter, in the Black Shield canton area this means that the rains start to turn to snow as the temperatures drop below freezing point. Light snow covering and the ground becoming frosty makes foraging slightly harder. This means that an average foraging/hunting roll covers only one third, not half, of the party's rations, but a good roll works normally. This reflects the fact that hunting works just fine.

As the winter progresses, rivers and lakes start to freeze over, usually from the end of morning month of winter onwards until morning month of spring. Smaller lakes and rivers become quite safe to travel over and can speed up travel that has required a boat or going round a water feature before. In midwinter, even larger lakes are frozen in a way that travel over them is safe.

Languages

Each of the cantons of the Holy Confederacy has their own regional language that the locals speak amongst themselves. The language of the Central Canton, or “**High Common**”, serves as a lingua franca of the whole confederacy, and player characters can be assumed to know it as well as the regional language, unless there is a clear reason why they wouldn't.

Beyond these nine languages, there are many languages that exist outside the known borders, but due the nature of the absolute isolation of the Holy Confederacy from what lies beyond, characters cannot start the game knowing these.

Learning new languages should be a multi-step downtime action, requiring a tutor or good source materials, and a standard cost of 50sp per action, maybe 100sp if the language is really obscure. The roll to check boxes from the multi-step action should be Knowledge based.



METAPHYSICS AND MAGIC

Gods of the Pantheon

Each canton has their own local interpretation of the Pantheon and which lesser gods serve under **Aurelius**, the Sun Drake, and the guide should feel free to customise these servant deities to fit the needs of the community the characters belong to. The Black Shield canton's roadside might have a shrine for the **Road Tack**, a god of open roads and sunny skies, while the Great Rise canton has never heard of it, instead offering a prayer to **The White**, god of the light breeze on a bright sea.

All these lesser deities should have a connection to Light — the magic of hope and wishful thinking. Something for the common folk to send thoughts and prayers to in their daily lives. And while miracles are rare, they do happen. Usually because a large enough crowd of people have strong enough faith in the gods, and this should be reflected by blessings and communal prayers to the sun gods giving characters Advantage on some Saving Throws, such as a Stamina Saving Throw if they see a large group of townspeople praying for their wellbeing while fighting an illness.

Many characters who use Light type spells associate their powers with those of the Sun Drake and their brood, and in these cases, tenets and a moral code should be workshopped with the player to form a good base for their beliefs.

Gods of the Forest

In the Black Canton area, there is a strong trend in believing the gods of the forest, even if it is very much shunned by the Temple. The three main gods worshipped are The Bear (the chief god of the forest), The Lynx (the keeper of secrets) and The Squirrel (death). While there's no open worship of these or temples or even shrines, people still leave out small presents to the gods of the forest when they venture beyond the light of the hearth. Approximately half of the population does this.

The Bear God

The Bear is the god known by many names, as it is one to crave attention. Should you speak its name, it will turn its attention to you. Speak it often enough and you'll cross paths. Thus there are many euphemisms for the bear — “The King of the Forest,” “The Honey-Paw,” etc.

The Bear is a god mostly aligned with Elemental Magic, which many who study divinities find odd, but stems from the very physical nature of it. It has a strong influence over the element of Earth and a minor one on Spirit and Water. Also, as a god, it naturally has some leaning toward Light and Dark magics.

Magic

Magic is a reality in this world — it's viewed with suspicion and sometimes with superstition. While everyone knows there is magic in the world (all you need to do is look around), not everyone understands what it does and how it behaves. While it's clear to everyone that the girl with strangely flowing hair is touched by water magics, the odd creature in the woods is still a terrible mystery to many.

Using magic is considered dangerous, not only has the Temple hammered into the public consciousness the fact how magic-use was the reason for The Cataclysm, but also in practice any actual magic use is extremely volatile. Even the most seasoned casters can fall to the ill effects of their own spells with disastrous results, and typically the people who take upon themselves to harness magical might are not the most seasoned specialists.

The Temple tolerates magic-users as long as they use their abilities for good, but keeps an extremely close eye on the wizards and mystics. Study too much of the commonly “known” spells, and you'll eventually end up taken to one of Anardi's many monasteries and never return, as you are from the point of view of the Temple, walking down the exact path that led to the world ending. Casting unknown, especially powerful spells is an excellent way to get an inquisitor looking into your affairs. With a blade.



REDISCOVERY COMPANY

At the heart of the characters' actions in the Black Shield campaign is the **Rediscovery Company**. It is a legal entity that's governed by a pact from the Shining Pantheon that both allows and asks it to go beyond the borders of the Holy Confederacy. Something that the ancient pact made by humans and the sun gods 298 years ago clearly forbids everyone else to do.

The characters are all members of one of the eight non-central cantons of the Confederacy who have acquired one of these legal documents and have invested their former wealth in starting the fledgling Company. The Company serves as a **holding environment** for the game: It's probably best to think that the **game follows the history of the Company** instead of the history of individual characters.

From a cultural standpoint, the Company has a very specific religious purpose in that it plays the role of the cosmic rulebreaker. They are the ones that are allowed to travel outside the heaven-set borders, so that the common folk don't have to wonder what's out there. This role gives them a long leash in what they are allowed to do, but the temple keeps a tight eye on the characters as many Companies of the past have come to open conflict with the church for crimes of **heresy and rebellion** as they've returned from the outside with new, revolutionary points of views and ideas.

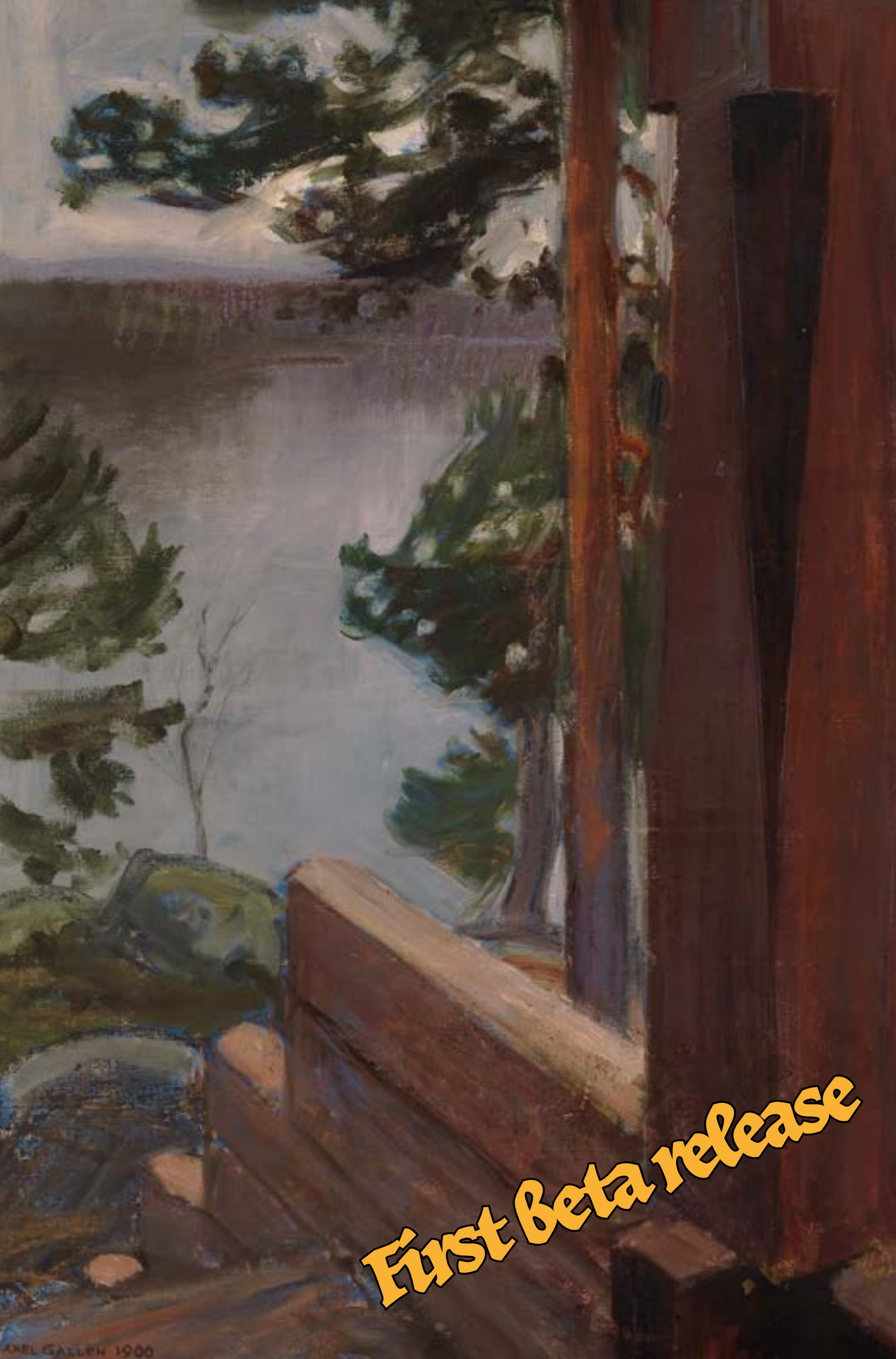
From a game mechanics standpoint, the Company serves as a framework for the characters' progression and ability to influence the world and progress. They need to invest their hard-earned coin in the Company to make it grow, but in return, a wealthy Company allows the characters to conduct proper research, improve themselves on downtime, and level up (pg. XX).

The Company has two notable properties: The Company Notes and the Company Ledger.

In the Downtime, the characters have a chance to reflect on what has happened and get their affairs in order. This means that in addition to taking actions, during the downtime, the characters get to do the following:

- Record their findings to the **Company Notes** (pg. xx) and get rewarded the appropriate XP for what they have discovered.
- Decide how much of their discovered wealth is invested in the **Company Ledger** (pg. XX) and pay the canon their tenth of that.

A character can spend a maximum of **the amount coin the company has on the Company Ledger** on a single downtime action. Payment is made out of their own pocket, not the Ledger.



First Beta release

THE OLD BEAR HOUSE

An example adventure for ***THEM DEEPER BONES***, for a starting Rediscovery Company.

The Old Bear House is a delve location that is the family home and farmstead of the ancestors of Jian Karru, an influential merchant who operates out of Omenalaakso, a small village near the Black Shield Canton's northern border. The house itself is stuck in a powerful magical stasis, leaving it standing exactly as it was that midsummer day, until a member of the family comes looking for it.

The farm, a few days' trek from the border of the Confederation, was a stage to a fatal skirmish between Alexander of Weriss, a proud Knight of Aurelius' cadre and Jian Karru's ancestors Dagmars, an arms dealer, and Moas, a devout follower of the Bear God. Thanks to a petrifying magical effect Moas' god conjured, the Old Bear House stands as if almost nothing has happened in the years gone by. The closer to the masters of the house one gets, the more potent the effects are, and time itself stands still to various degrees on the grounds, the house locked on a neverending midsummer moment.

A Starting Hook: Jian Karru hires the Company could head to the Old Bear House and to find the family crest that Jian has read was left behind when his ancestors had to evacuate the house before the cataclysm. He first offers 20sp as a reward, but if pushed, will up the monetary reward to 30sp and is willing to fully fund the expedition the Company does after the Old Bear House (loan horses and a cart, or a rowboat, and pay for the travel rations and such).

Because this is Jian, a descendant of Moas and Dagmars, who sends the Company out there, they can actually make their way to the house, thus breaking the first part of the spell's effect.

