Introduction

What This Game Is

(Fluff/context goes here: what makes this game unique, themes, tone, core ideas.)

Game Philosophy

- Fortune in the middle
- Fail forward
- Let it ride

What You Need to Play

(Placeholder: dice, character sheet, GM, players, etc.)

Core Terms and Assumptions

(Placeholder for explanation of Abilities, Pools, Beliefs, Talents, etc. in brief.)

Game Cycle

- Set the scene → Introduce conflict → Resolve conflict → Downtime (optional) → New scene.

The Core Procedure of Play

Game Cycle

- Set the scene → Introduce conflict → Resolve conflict → Downtime (optional) → New scene.

Downtime

Recovery, resource refresh, training, investments, and mechanical maintenance.

Pool Recovery

- Vigor: physical exertion / high-stakes activity

- Instinct: social, emotional, or adrenaline-driven activity

- Reason: intellectual, focused, or creative work

Recovering Consequences

- Minor: may expire automatically

- Moderate+: requires explicit Downtime actions, medical or technical attention

Resolution

Ability Tests

- Roll a number of **d6** equal to the relevant **Ability**. Each **4+ = 1 success (Degree of Success, DoS)**.
- Compare successes to a Target Number (TN) or opponent's DoS in a contest:
    - **DoS > TN** → success

    - **DoS = TN** → success **at a cost**

    - **DoS < TN** → failure

Difficulty & Target Numbers

Difficulty	Target Number (successes)
Easy	0
Simple	1
Moderate	2
Difficult	3
Very Difficult	4
Formidable	5
Nearly Impossible	6
Heroic	7

Edge & Modifiers

- Edge = situational advantage (max +3 dice).

- Opponents can cancel Edge through narrative means.

Notes

(Placeholder for narrative examples, minor/major stakes, how failures create drama.)

Pools and Pressure

What Pools Represent

Three default Pools: **Vigor**, **Instinct**, **Reason**.

Spending Pools

- Spend 1 Pool point → +1 die or activate a Talent.

- Recovered during Downtime.

Pools in Tests and Conflicts

(Placeholder for examples: human struggling through a collapsed world engine, troll using instinct to react.)

Running Out of Pool

When a Pool (Vigor, Instinct, or Reason) is reduced to 0, your character is exhausted in that aspect and cannot spend further points from that Pool until it is refreshed. This may also have narrative consequences—describe how your character is depleted, burned out, or emotionally spent.

Pool Advancement

To raise a Pool from N → N+1, you must record N marks. Each time you completely empty that Pool during play, record 1 mark. When you have enough marks, you may raise the Pool by 1 during Downtime. Only one Pool may be raised per Downtime unless the GM allows otherwise.

Temporary boosts from Talents or items do not change permanent maxima unless explicitly stated.

Example: If your Vigor is 3, you must empty your Vigor Pool 3 times (on separate occasions) to raise it to 4. Track marks for each Pool separately.

Refreshing Pools

- Vigor → physical activity

- Instinct → social/emotional activity

- Reason → intellectual/creative activity

Conflict

When a Situation Becomes a Conflict

(Placeholder: narrative escalation, stakes, combat or social confrontation.)

Structuring Conflicts

(Placeholder: sequence of actions, choices, pacing.)

Escalation, Withdrawal, and Outcomes

(Placeholder: Draw the Line, stakes, and optional player-driven resolution.)

Contests (Opposed Tests)

- Both sides roll relevant Ability dice + Edge + Pool dice.

- Higher DoS wins; margin of victory scales results:
  - 0 DoS → success at cost

  - 1–3 DoS → clean success

  - 4+ DoS → exceptional success

Draw the Line (Extended Contest)

1. Trigger: After a contest, either party may call **Draw the Line** to escalate.

2. Declare stakes before rolling.

3. Best two-out-of-three contests.

4. Pool points, Edge, and Talents may be applied before each roll.

5. First to win two contests wins Draw the Line.

6. **Win More:** victors may spend 1 Pool to add extra benefit.

Harm and Recovery

Physical Harm

Physical harm represents injuries, wounds, and bodily trauma. Harm is categorized by severity:

Severity	Example impact	Recovery
Minor	Bruised, winded, scraped	Until end of scene/session
Moderate	Sprained ankle, deep cut, mild concussion	1 Downtime action
Serious	Broken limb, internal injury, severe bleeding	Multiple Downtime actions
Lasting	Permanent limp, lost eye, chronic pain	Major effort or narrative action

Severity	Example impact	Recovery
Fatal	Death or irrevocable end state	Only avoided via Talents, Karma, or prior stakes

Example: After a failed leap across a chasm, a character suffers a serious injury: a broken leg. They take a -2 dice penalty to physical actions until healed, requiring multiple Downtime actions and medical attention.

Social and Mental Strain

Not all harm is physical. Characters may suffer social or mental consequences such as shame, betrayal, or loss of reputation. These are handled like physical harm, with severity determining the impact and recovery time.

Examples: - Minor: Embarrassed in public, -1 die to social actions for a scene. - Moderate: Betrayed by an ally, ongoing penalty to trust or teamwork until resolved. - Serious: Publicly disgraced, loss of a key contact or Circle, requires major narrative effort to recover.

Lingering Effects

Some consequences persist beyond normal recovery. Lingering effects can become story hooks, such as a lasting injury, a grudge, or a reputation that follows the character. These effects should be recorded on the character sheet and resolved through play, not just Downtime.

Example: A character who lost a duel may gain a rival who seeks future revenge, or a scar that marks them as a survivor.

Recovery and Downtime

Downtime is the phase between scenes or sessions where characters recover, train, invest, and pursue personal projects. Use Downtime to:

- **Recover Pools:** Refresh Vigor, Instinct, and Reason by engaging in appropriate activities (physical exertion, social/emotional engagement, or intellectual/creative work).
- **Clear Consequences:** Minor consequences may expire automatically at the end of a scene or session. Moderate or more serious consequences require explicit Downtime actions, medical or technical attention, or narrative justification to remove or reduce.
- **Train Abilities or Open Focuses:** Spend Downtime to train a skill, open a new Focus, or justify advancement. This can substitute for on-screen marks with GM approval.
- **Invest Wealth:** Attempt to grow Wealth by investing in businesses or ventures. Success marks an advance toward Wealth increase; failure may result in Debt or lost resources.
- **Grow Circles:** Forge relationships, do favors, attend events, or otherwise increase your reputation and social network. Success marks an advance toward Circles increase; failure may introduce new obligations or complications.
- **Learn Talents or Talents:** Acquire new Talents or Talents via study, finding a teacher, or other in-fiction actions. These still cost Karma to buy.
- **Pursue Personal Projects:** Work on long-term goals, research, or narrative arcs that matter to your character.

Only one Pool may be raised per Downtime unless the GM allows otherwise. Advancement in Wealth, Circles, or Abilities may also be limited by available time, resources, or narrative constraints at the GM's discretion.

Consequences

When a character fails a roll, consequences may occur. These impose narrative or mechanical weight until recovered. Debt is a special consequence that arises from failed Wealth rolls (see Abilities and Advancement) and represents obligations, enemies, or resource loss.

Severity	Example impact	Recovery
Minor	-1 die on one Ability, bruised, rattled	Until end of scene/session
Moderate	-1 die ongoing, bleeding, shaken, **debt owed**	1 Downtime action

Severity	Example impact	Recovery
Serious	-2 dice ongoing, broken arm, severe shame, dangerous enemy, **major debt**	Multiple Downtime actions
Lasting	Permanent penalty, scar, maimed, ruined reputation	Major effort or narrative action
Fatal	Death or irrevocable end state	Only avoided via Talents, Karma, or prior stakes

Debt as Consequence

Debt functions as a Moderate or Serious consequence depending on its severity. While in Debt, your character may face pressure from creditors, obligations to NPCs, or narrative complications. Debt is resolved by repaying what is owed, fulfilling obligations, or negotiating a way out—typically requiring one or more Downtime actions, roleplay, or in-fiction solutions. See the Wealth rules in Abilities and Advancement for more details. # Harm and Recovery

Physical Harm

(Include severity table, minor → fatal, with narrative examples.)

Social and Mental Strain

(Placeholder: consequences for shame, betrayal, loss of reputation.)

Lingering Effects

(Placeholder: long-term consequences and story hooks.)

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Karma

- Meta-currency for rerolls, buying Talents/Beliefs, opening Focuses, substituting advancement marks.

- From testing Beliefs or achieving story goals.

- Rerolls, Talents, Focuses, substituting missing advancement marks.

- Meta-currency for rerolls, buying Talents/Beliefs, opening Focuses, and substituting for advancement marks.

- Common uses:
    - Reroll a check — 1 Karma

    - Buy a new Talent — 2 Karma

    - Buy a new Belief — 1 Karma

    - Open a Focus — 1 Karma

    - Substitute for missing marks — 1 Karma each

Beliefs

Beliefs are player-chosen convictions, drives, or motivations that define what matters most to your character. When a Belief is tested in play—by creating conflict, risk, or meaningful choice—you earn Karma. Each Belief also has a "buyoff" condition: when you abandon or fulfill the Belief's buyoff, you remove the Belief and gain a burst of Karma.

Number at creation: Determined by Lifepaths. You may gain new Beliefs during play by spending 1 Karma and with GM approval.

Example Beliefs:
- **Belief of the Relentless**
    - *Trigger:* You pursue your goal despite obstacles or personal cost.
    - *Reward:* Gain 1 Karma when you take meaningful risks or sacrifice resources to stay on course.
    - *Buyoff:* Abandon your goal completely or admit defeat.
- **Belief of Compassion**
    - *Trigger:* You protect or aid someone vulnerable or disadvantaged.
    - *Reward:* Gain 1 Karma when doing so creates risk or inconvenience for you.
    - *Buyoff:* Let someone suffer when you could have helped them.

Buyoffs: When you satisfy a Belief's buyoff, remove the Belief and gain a burst of Karma (typically 2–3, as agreed with the GM). Players are encouraged to push Beliefs into play to earn Karma and drive the story.

Talents

Talents are special moves, techniques, or abilities that set your character apart. They are usually purchased with 2 Karma and require in-fiction justification (finding a teacher, study, discovery, or Downtime).

Many Talents require spending Pool points to activate and may have limited uses or costs attached.

Example Talents:

- **Talent of Expertise**
  - *Cost:* 2 Karma to learn.
  - *Effect:* Choose one Focused Ability. When you roll it, you may spend 1 Pool from the related Pool to gain +2 dice instead of the usual +1.
  - *Description:* This makes you exceptionally good at your chosen specialty.
- **Talent of Resilience**
  - *Cost:* 2 Karma to learn.
  - *Effect:* When you suffer a consequence, you may spend 1 Vigor to downgrade it (serious → minor, or minor → negated entirely).
  - *Description:* This lets you shrug off injuries or setbacks that would stop others.

Work with your GM to invent new Talents that fit your character's concept and the tone of the game.

Talents

- Purchasable special moves or abilities; often require Pool points to activate.

- Usually cost 2 Karma and need in-fiction justification (teacher, study, downtime).

Abilities and Advancement

Wealth

Wealth is an Ability (rated 0–10) representing your character's resources, assets, and ability to acquire goods or services. To make a significant purchase, roll your Wealth pool (d6s equal to your Wealth rating; each 4+ is a success). The GM sets a Target Number (TN) based on the size or rarity of the purchase:

Purchase size	TN
Everyday item	1
Expensive gear	2
Major property/asset	3–4
Exceptional/luxury item	5+

If you succeed, you can afford the item or service. If you fail, you may take on Debt (see below) or narrate how you scrape together the resources, possibly at a cost.

Advancing Wealth: To permanently increase your Wealth, you must accumulate a number of advancement marks equal to your current Wealth rating plus one. Marks are gained through in-fiction gains, successful investments during Downtime, or major windfalls. When you have enough marks, you may raise your Wealth by 1.

Debt: If you fail a Wealth roll and still want to proceed, you may take on Debt. Debt functions as a Moderate or Serious consequence (see Harm and Recovery) until repaid or resolved in play. Debt can lead to obligations, enemies, or narrative complications.

Downtime Investments: During Downtime, you may invest Wealth in businesses or ventures. A successful investment marks an advance toward Wealth increase. Failure may result in Debt or lost resources.

Circles

Circles is an Ability (rated 0–10) representing your character's social network, reputation, and ability to find or influence contacts. To locate or call upon a contact, roll your Circles pool (d6s equal to your Circles rating; each 4+ is a success). The GM sets a TN based on the rarity or power of the contact:

Contact rarity/power	TN
Familiar peer	1
Skilled professional	2
Influential figure	3
Powerful elite	4–5

Success means you find or influence the contact as needed. Failure means the contact is unavailable, reluctant, or demands a favor—this may introduce obligation or risk.

Advancing Circles: To permanently increase your Circles, accumulate a number of advancement marks equal to your current Circles rating plus one. Marks are gained by forging relationships, doing favors, or building reputation, especially during Downtime. When you have enough marks, you may raise your Circles by 1.

Downtime Social Growth: Use Downtime to grow your Circles by attending events, helping others, or investing in your reputation. Success marks an advance; failure may introduce new complications or obligations.

Abilities

Abilities represent your character's core aptitudes and skills. Each Ability is rated from 0 (untrained) to 10 (world-class). You may open (add) a new Ability to your sheet at any time, but it starts at 0.

Opening and Raising Abilities

- **Opening a new Ability:** Add it to your sheet at 0. To raise it to 1, you must record at least one success and one failure using that Ability in play (or with GM-approved Downtime training).
- **Raising Abilities (N → N+1):** Accumulate N advancement marks (successes or failures) with that Ability. At least half (rounded up) must be failures. When you have enough marks, you may raise the Ability by 1. Marks are then consumed.
- **Karma substitution:** You may spend 1 Karma to substitute for a missing success or failure, but you must complete the full requirement before raising the Ability.

Focuses

- Focuses flag Abilities for prioritized advancement and special options. Choose Focuses at character creation (free, limited by Lifepaths) or spend 1 Karma to open a new Focus during play.
- Opening a Focus does not change dice pools directly, but enables certain advancement and Karma options.

Pool Advancement

To raise a Pool (Vigor, Instinct, Reason) from N → N+1, you must record N marks. Each time you completely empty that Pool during play, record 1 mark. When you have enough marks, you may raise the Pool by 1 during Downtime. Only one Pool may be raised per Downtime unless the GM allows otherwise.

Temporary boosts from Talents or items do not change permanent maxima unless explicitly stated.

Talents

Talents are special moves, techniques, or abilities. They are usually purchased with Karma and may require in-fiction justification (teacher, study, discovery, or Downtime). See the Talents section for examples and details.

Changing Beliefs

Beliefs may be changed through play, especially after dramatic events or personal growth. Changing a Belief may grant Karma or trigger narrative consequences, as agreed with the GM.

Advancement Summary Table

What to Advance	Requirement to Raise
Ability (N→N+1)	N marks (≥½ failures, round up)
Pool (N→N+1)	N marks (empty Pool N times)
Wealth/Circles	Current rating + 1 marks
Focus	1 Karma (if not at creation)
Talent	2 Karma + in-fiction justification
Belief	Significant play, GM approval

Downtime and Advancement

Downtime is the phase between scenes or sessions where you recover, train, invest, and grow. Use Downtime to: - Recover Pools and clear consequences - Train Abilities or open Focuses (may substitute for on-screen marks) - Invest Wealth or grow Circles - Learn new Talents - Pursue personal projects or relationships

See the Downtime section for more details.

Character Creation

Overview

Defines starting Abilities, Pools, Focuses, Beliefs, Talents, Wealth, and Circles.

Steps

1. Choose character Stock
2. Choose number of Lifepaths (1–5)

Lifepaths	Beliefs	Talents	Focuses	Abilities	Pool Points	Karma
1	2	1	5	4	6	3
2	2	1	4	4	6	2
3	2	2	3	4	6	1
4	1	2	2	4	7	1
5	1	3	2	4	8	0

3. Assign Abilities

4. Assign Focuses

5. Distribute Pool points

6. Choose Beliefs

7. Choose Talents

8. Set Wealth & Circles

9. Gain starting Karma

10. Record any notable items, traits, or contacts

Notable Items, Traits, and Contacts

At character creation—and throughout play—record any unique items, traits, or contacts that set your character apart. These can be physical possessions, special relationships, or distinctive qualities. Notable items and contacts may be purely descriptive, or they may gain mechanical weight if tied to a Talent, Circle, or narrative development. Use these details to enrich your character's story and provide hooks for future adventures.

Choose a Stock

(Humans, Trolls; add Elves/Dwarves later if used.)

Choose Lifepaths

- Table of Lifepaths → Beliefs, Talents, Focuses, Abilities, Pools, Karma.

Assign Skills

- Open Abilities, open Focused abilities, assign points.

Assign Pools

- Allocate starting Vigor, Instinct, Reason.

Choose Beliefs

- Player-driven core motivations.

Choose Talents

- Narrative and mechanical benefits.

Starting Karma

- As per Lifepath.

Wealth & Circles

Set your starting Wealth and Circles as described in the Lifepaths table. For full rules on using, advancing, and risking Wealth and Circles, see the Abilities and Advancement section.

Downtime

Downtime is the phase between scenes or sessions where you recover, train, invest, and grow.

Use Downtime to:

- Recover Pools and clear consequences
- Train Abilities or open Focuses (may substitute for on-screen marks)
- Invest Wealth or grow Circles
- Learn new Talents
- Pursue personal projects or relationships

See the Downtime section for more details.

Lifepaths

What a Lifepath Is

(Placeholder: explanation.)

Lifepath Structure

(Table: Beliefs, Talents, Focuses, Abilities, Pools, Karma.)

Human Lifepaths

(Placeholder for examples.)

Troll Lifepaths

(Placeholder for examples.)

Optional Lifepaths

(Placeholder for high-power or variant lifepaths.)

Stocks

Humans

Riverfolk

Description: Born along rivers and canals. Children grow up navigating boats, managing nets, and trading along waterways. Storytelling and communal life are central, and bartering becomes second nature.

Suggested Focuses: Boating, Fishing, Observation, Bartering

Suggested Beliefs: - Protect the Family Boats - Respect the Waterways

Suggested Talents:

- **River Sense:** Instinctive awareness of currents, water hazards, or subtle environmental cues.
- **Early Bargainer:** Natural skill in negotiation from constant exposure to markets and trade.

Nomads

Description: Raised in wandering clans across steppe, desert, or forest. Mobility, survival, and clan loyalty define childhood. Children learn to track, hunt, and handle livestock from an early age.

Suggested Focuses: Survival, Tracking, Riding, Herding

Suggested Beliefs: - Clan Loyalty - Respect the Paths

Suggested Talents:

- **Endurance of the Road:** Accustomed to long marches, minimal supplies, and harsh weather.
- **Swift Learner:** Adapts quickly to changing terrain or situations.

Rural Peasantry

Description: Raised on farms or small villages. Life is labor-intensive and routine. Children assist with planting, harvesting, tending animals, and community obligations.

Suggested Focuses: Farming, Animal Husbandry, Crafting, Observation

Suggested Beliefs: - Duty to Family - Care for the Land

Suggested Talents:

- **Steady Hands:** Accustomed to repetitive, precise labor.
- **Community-Minded:** Skilled at cooperative work and understanding local dynamics.

Townsfolk

Description: Children of artisans, merchants, or small-town dwellers. Exposed to trades, markets, and urban social structures from early on. Literacy or numeracy may be present depending on local resources.

Suggested Focuses: Trade, Crafting, Observation, Literacy

Suggested Beliefs: - Uphold Family Reputation - Respect Guild or Local Authority

Suggested Talents:

- **Streetwise:** Early familiarity with local politics, gossip, and networks.
- **Apprentice's Precision:** Trained in careful, methodical work from childhood.

Urban Nobility (City-born)

Description: Children of city-based elites, schooled in etiquette, literacy, and social negotiation. Exposure to wealth and politics shapes understanding of power and influence.

Suggested Focuses: Diplomacy, Literacy, Strategy, Observation

Suggested Beliefs: - Family Honor - Maintain Social Position

Suggested Talents:

- **Polished Demeanor:** Naturally commanding or socially adept.
- **Political Awareness:** Instinctively notices alliances, rivalries, and influence.

Rural Nobility (Estate-born)

Description: Children raised on country estates, responsible for land, tenants, and military obligations. Learn riding, hunting, basic administration, and the rhythms of feudal hierarchy.

Suggested Focuses: Riding, Hunting, Administration, Observation

Suggested Beliefs: - Protect the Estate - Duty to Tenants

Suggested Talents:

- **Equestrian Grace:** Confident and skilled on horseback.
- **Land Stewardship:** Natural understanding of estate management and long-term planning.

Trolls

Nomadic Clans

Description: Born into wandering clans. Children grow up moving constantly, learning survival, tracking, hunting, and the cohesion of clan life. Memory and instinct are central; social bonds and continuity are carried through oral tradition.

Suggested Focuses: Survival, Tracking, Hunting, Clan Lore

Suggested Beliefs: - Honor the Clan - Respect the Paths

Suggested Talents:

- **Enduring Spirit:** Accustomed to long journeys, harsh conditions, and minimal comforts.
- **Instinctive Awareness:** Quick to notice danger, changes in environment, or subtle cues in others' behavior.

Crafting Clans

Description: Born into sedentary communities devoted to forging, building, and sustaining troll society. Children learn trades, rituals, and the meticulous work of craft. Continuity and preservation of knowledge are central.

Suggested Focuses: Crafting, Observation, Clan Lore, Maintenance

Suggested Beliefs: - Preserve the Craft - Honor Ancestral Work

Suggested Talents:

- **Hands of the Clan:** Naturally skilled at manual work, forging, or maintaining tools.
- **Attention to Tradition:** Strong instinct for following ancestral methods and preserving knowledge accurately.

Other Species

(Placeholder: Add other species' mechanical tendencies, common Beliefs, and Talents.)

Beliefs

What a Belief Is

A Belief is a core conviction, drive, or motivation that defines what matters most to your character. Beliefs guide your actions, create dramatic tension, and are a primary way to earn Karma when tested in play.

Beliefs and Player Intent

Beliefs help you make decisions in character. When your Belief is challenged—by risk, temptation, or conflict—describe how your character responds. If you act on your Belief in a meaningful way, you may earn Karma. If you abandon or fulfill a Belief's buyoff, you gain a burst of Karma and can replace the Belief.

Beliefs in Mundane Play

Examples: - "I protect the innocent, no matter the cost." - "Nothing is more important than loyalty to my clan." - "Knowledge must be shared, even if it's dangerous."

Beliefs Under Pressure

Examples: - You risk your safety to defend a stranger (testing your Belief in protecting the innocent). - You must choose between your clan and a new friend (testing loyalty). - You reveal a dangerous secret to help others (testing your commitment to sharing knowledge).

Changing or Resolving Beliefs

When you fulfill or abandon a Belief's buyoff, remove it from your sheet and gain a burst of Karma (typically 2–3, as agreed with the GM). You may then define a new Belief. Players are encouraged to push their Beliefs into play to drive the story and earn rewards.

Talents

What a Talent Is

A Talent is a special move, technique, or ability that sets your character apart from others. Talents provide unique narrative or mechanical advantages, and often require in-fiction justification to acquire (such as training, discovery, or mentorship). Talents are purchased with Karma.

Talents as Narrative Authority

Talents allow players to shape the fiction by granting permission to do things ordinary characters cannot. They may bend or break the usual rules, introduce new options, or provide narrative leverage in specific situations. When you use a Talent, describe how it changes the story or gives you an edge.

Using Talents in Play

Examples: - A duelist uses the Talent "Riposte" to counterattack after a missed attack. - A troll with "Stoneflesh" can shrug off minor injuries that would harm others. - A human with "Silver Tongue" can sway crowds or talk their way out of trouble.

Generic Talents

- **Riposte:** When you are attacked in melee and the attack misses, you may immediately make a counterattack.
- **Resilience:** Once per session, reduce the severity of a consequence by one step (serious → moderate, etc.).
- **Quick Study:** Learn a new Focus or Ability in half the usual Downtime.

Stock-Specific Talents

Humans: - **Silver Tongue:** Gain +1 die to social rolls when persuading or deceiving. - **Resourceful:** Once per session, find or improvise a useful item.

Trolls: - **Stoneflesh:** Ignore minor physical harm and reduce moderate harm to minor once per session. - **Memory of Ages:** Recall ancient lore or gain insight from ancestral memories.

(Add more for other species as needed.)

Magic

Magic always has a price blah blah blah.

Magic and the Resolution System

(Placeholder: link to Ability tests, Pools, Karma.)

Magic and Pools

(Examples of spending Pool points for magical effect.)

Magic and Karma

(Placeholder: Karma-fueled rituals or spells.)

Rituals and Extended Magic

(Placeholder.)

Consequences and Attention

(Placeholder: world and story consequences.)

Gods, Faery, and Other Powers

Divine Pressure and Mortal Action

(Examples: indirect influence, weather, fertility, magic.)

Faery as Temptation

(Stasis, escape, narrative danger.)

Spirits, Demons, and Outsiders

(Examples and Hooks.)

Dragons and Transcendence

(Rules notes for interacting with dragons and major forces.)

Running the Game

Framing Situations

Begin each scene by establishing the who, what, and where. Set the stakes clearly: what do the characters want, what stands in their way, and what might happen if they succeed or fail? Invite players to contribute details and ask questions to clarify intentions. Use strong imagery and sensory cues to ground the fiction.

Applying Pressure

Apply pressure by introducing complications, time limits, or moral dilemmas. Let the world push back: NPCs have their own goals, and situations evolve if left unattended. Use mechanical pressure (resource drain, consequences) and narrative pressure (threats to beliefs, relationships, or goals) to keep play dynamic.

Challenging Beliefs

Bring player Beliefs into the spotlight. Present situations that test their convictions or force hard choices. Reward players with Karma when their Beliefs drive action or create conflict. Use NPCs and events to question, affirm, or threaten what matters most to the characters.

Letting Consequences Stand

Let the outcomes of rolls and choices shape the story. Resist the urge to undo or soften consequences—let them stand, and use them as seeds for future drama. When players accept setbacks or complications, reward them with narrative opportunities, new challenges, or Karma. Trust the table to build meaning from both triumph and failure.

Optional and Advanced Rules

Alternate Pool Models

(Placeholder: example systems.)

Species-Specific Pools

(Placeholder: troll-specific, human-specific, etc.)

Mythic or High-Power Play

(Placeholder: expanded powers, magical systems.)

True Nature of the World

The World and Its Limits

The world is finite, structured, and incomplete. Its laws allow matter, causality, and time to persist, but they do not resolve into permanence. This incompleteness allows change, death, and creation to exist at all.

Existence is shaped by a boundary: the Threshold between Being and Not-Being. Most beings are shaped by it without awareness. Very few perceive it directly. Nothing in the world is entirely stable, though most things endure long enough to appear so.

The world has no corrective instinct. It does not heal, balance, or defend itself. When its limits are exceeded, consequences follow without intention or judgment.

The Rise of the First Men

The First Men were exceptional mortals, distinguished by their refusal to accept death as a final condition. Mortality was treated as a problem to be solved.

They built empires, but their true legacy lay elsewhere. They constructed world engines: vast, interlinked systems that reshaped reality. These engines stabilized regions, extended life, bound spirits, altered causality, and imposed continuity where none naturally existed.

The engines were not isolated artifacts. They were woven into landscapes, bloodlines, rituals, and institutions, forming an artificial order layered over the world's inherent instability.

For a time, the engines succeeded. The First Men approached a state that resembled immortality.

Trolls and the Early World

Trolls arose alongside the First Men. They are native to the world, bound by memory, instinct, and lineage rather than abstraction or belief. Identity among trolls is cumulative. Knowledge, emotion, and intent pass through generations, binding the clan into a continuous whole. Some matriarchs embody this continuity so completely that the clan itself functions as a single enduring presence.

Trolls watched the First Men closely. They witnessed ambition pursued without restraint and learned its consequences early. Distrust of humans took root during this age and has never faded. It persists in ritual, instinct, and custom. Trolls guard the deeper truths of their kind carefully; exposure would make them vulnerable in ways outsiders could exploit.

The Arrival of the Fey

Elves and dwarves are fey in origin, outsiders drawn into the world by different impulses.

Elves were drawn to intensity, experience, and transformation. They observed mortality, tested its limits, and in some cases embraced it. Their existence remains oriented toward the Threshold, never fully anchored in the material world.

Dwarves were drawn to structure and endurance. They bound themselves more deeply to the world, accepting aging, illness, and death on extended timescales. Their crafts and magic arise from careful understanding rather than illusion, shaped by a willingness to accept the world's weight.

Dragons and the Outside

Dragons are not native to the world. They originate beyond the Threshold, Outside existence as the world understands it. They are not subject to its tolerances, metaphysics, or proportional limits.

The world engines did not summon dragons. They made the world perceptible to them. By enforcing permanence, amplifying consequence, and concentrating meaning, the engines rendered the world significant enough to intrude upon.

Dragons enter as overwhelming presences rather than inhabitants. Their impact on land and history is incidental, a byproduct of existing where they do not belong.

The Fall of the First Men

The fall of the First Men unfolded over generations.

As the engines grew more complex, their interdependence increased. Localized failures began to propagate. Civil conflict, engine collapse, dragon incursions, and internal decay compounded until the imposed order could no longer sustain itself.

Most of the First Men died. Some endured, but endurance required alteration. Those who survived bound themselves to engines, rituals, or unnatural states of existence. Memory, knowledge, and ambition persisted, sustained by means no longer compatible with living flesh.

These survivors did not fade into myth. They remained present, hidden, and dangerous.

The Age of Enslavement

In the ruins of the old order, the survivors ruled.

They bred a second race of humans designed for utility. Mortal, short-lived, and constrained, these humans served as labor, sustenance, and infrastructure. Their cultures were shaped to support domination rather than continuity. All modern humanity descends from them.

Rule was uneven. Some survivors governed openly. Others withdrew and ruled through intermediaries. Many treated their territories as estates or experiments. Rivalry and conflict continued even as their dominion eroded.

The Second Cataclysm

The Second Cataclysm ended this age. Its causes were numerous: rebellion, sabotage of engines, divine intervention, dragon devastation, and the structural failure of systems already in decline.

The result was decisive. The dominance of the survivors collapsed. Many were destroyed. Others were bound, diminished, or driven into isolation. Numerous world engines were shattered or crippled, though few were completely eliminated.

Humanity was freed. The world that followed was not a restoration. It was narrower, harsher, and more fragile. Humanity emerged shaped by enslavement, collapse, and loss rather than inheritance.

Aftermath: The Undead Remnants and Vampires

Some of the First Men endured in altered forms. Bound to fragments of their world engines, rituals, or corrupted estates, these undead remnants survived the Cataclysm. They retained memory, will, and ambition, but no longer resembled living humans.

From these remnants, vampires arose. They are the deliberate offspring of the undead survivors, created to extend their existence. Vampires are fully dead; what moves in the world is a fragment of a remnant's identity, preserved through feeding. This preservation is not choice or sentiment—it is necessity.

Vampires retain only fragments of the mortals they descend from, enough to endure. Memory, cunning, and hunger are tools, not humanity. They are predators: deliberate, self-serving, and relentless, maintaining coherence by consuming the living and the world around them.

The World After

Humanity now exists fully within the world's limits. Humans age, die, forget, and rebuild. This volatility allows adaptation at a pace no other people can match.

Trolls persist as they always have, carrying memory forward through lineage and ritual, their suspicion of humans grounded in ancient observation rather than myth.

Faery remains adjacent to the world, oriented around the Threshold rather than place. It offers stasis and escape at the cost of consequence. Those who linger too long often lose the capacity to return unchanged, if at all.

Gods and demons exert influence through pressure rather than command. Their domains shape weather, fertility, magic, and fortune. Alignment is rewarded indirectly; refusal carries cost.

Magic reflects the world's instability. True Magicians are rare, distinguished by their ability to perceive the Threshold directly. Most interaction with magic remains partial and unexamined.

Dragons do not persist indefinitely. Continued presence eventually exceeds what the world can bear. Their departure, destruction, or transcendence leaves lasting scars.

The Present Condition

The world endures under accumulated strain. Broken engines remain embedded in its structure. Ancient ambitions persist in diminished forms. Long-lived beings act cautiously. Vampires feed to preserve what little remains of themselves.

Mortals continue to act, knowing that permanence is unattainable and that failure is inevitable. History advances not toward resolution, but through pressure, compromise, and collapse.