

## Zero Signal: Wastes

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### Core Concepts

- **Origins:** All characters are human, but where you come from changes everything. Examples include:
  - **Vaultborn** – Raised underground in the Old World's remains.
  - **Wasteborn** – Survivors raised under the sun and radiation.
  - **Mutants** – Twisted by the world but hardened by it.
  - **Nomads** – Roamers, traders, and scavengers.
  - **Uplifted** – Experimented on or artificially evolved.
  - **Freeholders** – Settlers trying to rebuild something lasting.
- **Resource Pools:**
  - **Grit** – Body, pain tolerance, brute force.
  - **Reflex** – Instinct, gut reaction, survival sense.
  - **Wit** – Cleverness, planning, verbal finesse.

All characters start with **1 point in each pool**. Each lifepath adds **+1 to one** of the pools.

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### Core Mechanic

- Roll a pool of **d6** equal to an Ability.
- **Each 4+ is a success:**
  - 1 = basic success
  - More = better outcome
  - 0 = failure or complication

### Gaining Edge

- **Edge** represents momentary advantage. Each point of Edge adds **+1 die** to a roll.
- Players can gain Edge by:
  - Using Secrets or special abilities that grant Edge.
  - Acting in accordance with a Key in a way that would clearly offer a temporary advantage.
  - Setting up the situation fictionally — creative positioning, ambushes, leverage, or help.
  - Spending Fate for a one-time Edge (at GM discretion).

### Contests

- Both sides roll; most successes wins.
- Tie: highest single die wins; if still tied, stalemate.
- **Loser suffers a consequence**—position lost, injury, exposure, etc.

### Draw the Line

- Each side declares a **goal** and a **risk**.
  - Win by 2+: You get both your goal and impose your risk.
  - Partial success: mixed result.
  - 0 successes: your risk becomes reality.
  - Losing **always has consequences** — these are usually proportional to the degree of failure, such as taking harm, losing resources, missing an opportunity, or exposing yourself to further danger. Consequences typically last for the rest of the scene, or in heavier cases, the entire session.
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## Character Creation

1. **Choose Origin** (Replaces species. Determines available lifepaths.)
  2. **Choose Lifepaths**
    - **Born, Adolescent, Early Career**
    - Each grants:
      - +1 to a relevant Ability
      - +1 to a Pool (Grit, Reflex, or Wit)
      - 1 starting Secret
  3. **Assign Abilities**
    - Start with 2 in one Ability, 1 two other Abilities.
  4. **Secrets & Keys**
    - Start with **3 Secrets** (one from each lifepath)
    - Choose up to **2 Keys**
  5. **Flesh Out**
    - Name, appearance, gear, relationships, notable scars
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## Advancement

- Gain **Fate** by triggering Keys.
  - Spend Fate to:
    - Improve Pools
    - Learn new Secrets
    - Tempt Fate (powerful one-off effects)
  - Abilities improve through both **success and failure**:
    - Track each result in meaningful situations
    - To raise an Ability, you need total checks = its current value (at least half must be failures)
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## Origins & Lifepaths

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### Vaultborn

#### Born: Lab Rat

- +1 Wit (Example Ability: Biotech, Diagnostics)
- **Secret:** *Clinical Cold* – Spend 1 Wit to shut down emotion and focus: ignore a consequence for one scene.

#### Adolescent: Reactor Runner

- +1 Reflex (Example Ability: Maintenance, Hazard Response)
- **Secret:** *Patch Job* – Spend 1 Grit to jury-rig a fix, bypassing a system or damage long enough to survive.

#### Early Career: Overseer's Aid

- +1 Grit (Example Ability: Bureaucracy, Crisis Management)
  - **Secret:** *Red Tape Cutter* – Spend 1 Wit to bypass social rules, forge clearance, or gain an audience.
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## Wasteborn

### Born: Dustborn

- +1 Grit (Example Ability: Endurance, Desert Survival)
- **Secret:** *Sun-Hardened* – Spend 1 Grit to shrug off the effects of heat, thirst, or exhaustion for a time.

### Adolescent: Scavenger Rat

- +1 Reflex (Example Ability: Foraging, Quick Hands)
- **Secret:** *Keen Eye* – Spend 1 Reflex to spot something hidden or valuable in a dangerous or filthy place.

### Early Career: Warlord's Scout

- +1 Reflex (Example Ability: Tracking, Stealth)
  - **Secret:** *Ghost Step* – Spend 1 Reflex to move unnoticed through hostile ground or avoid detection.
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## Mutants

### Born: Splicer Spawn

- +1 Wit (Example Ability: Mutation Lore, Improvisation)
- **Secret:** *Biohack Reflex* – Spend 1 Wit to push your body beyond limits for a single action.

### Adolescent: Pack Howler

- +1 Grit (Example Ability: Intimidation, Brawling)
- **Secret:** *Blood Bond* – Spend 1 Grit to take damage for an ally or strike back when they're hurt.

### Early Career: Corpse Diver

- +1 Reflex (Example Ability: Salvage, Nerve)
  - **Secret:** *Gut the Wreck* – Spend 1 Reflex to find salvage, intel, or a key item among death and ruin.
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## Nomads

### Born: Road Cradle

- +1 Reflex (Example Ability: Navigation, Animal Handling)
- **Secret:** *Never Stops Rolling* – Spend 1 Grit to ignore fatigue, terrain, or delay for a journey segment.

### Adolescent: Trade Whisper

- +1 Wit (Example Ability: Barter, Persuasion)
- **Secret:** *The Right Word* – Spend 1 Wit to sway a negotiation, disarm hostility, or open a trade.

### Early Career: Convoy Gunner

- +1 Grit (Example Ability: Gunnery, Alertness)
  - **Secret:** *Hardpoint* – Spend 1 Grit to anchor in position and gain advantage while holding ground.
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## Uplifted

### Born: Vat-Grown

- +1 Grit (Example Ability: Conditioning, Chemical Resistance)
- **Secret:** *Debug Pulse* – Spend 1 Wit to negate a malfunction, fear reaction, or foreign influence on you.

### Adolescent: Neural Fork

- +1 Reflex (Example Ability: Interface, Signal Sensing)
- **Secret:** *Cross-Talk* – Spend 1 Reflex to intercept, translate, or jam communications or signals.

### Early Career: Omega Asset

- +1 Reflex (Example Ability: Combat Protocols, Suppression Tactics)
  - **Secret:** *Last Protocol* – Spend 1 Grit to make one action unstoppable—regardless of damage or resistance.
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## Freeholders

### Born: Shelterborn

- +1 Wit (Example Ability: Organization, First Aid)
- **Secret:** *Fortify* – Spend 1 Grit to reinforce a position, structure, or shelter against an immediate threat.

### Adolescent: Farmhand

- +1 Grit (Example Ability: Agriculture, Toughness)
- **Secret:** *Harvest Blade* – Spend 1 Reflex to strike decisively against someone who never saw it coming.

### Early Career: Circuit Preacher

- +1 Reflex (Example Ability: Oratory, Crowd Reading)
  - **Secret:** *Firebrand Sermon* – Spend 1 Wit to stir a crowd or rally scattered allies.
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## Keys

### Ruin Keys

- **Trail of Cinders** – When you destroy something meaningful to others, gain Fate.
- **The Strong Eat** – When you take what you want through force or threat, gain Fate.
- **Break the Chain** – When you topple authority or end someone else's control, gain Fate.
- **No One Follows** – When you act alone to escape or succeed despite the odds, gain Fate.

### Reclaim Keys

- **Hands in the Soil** – When you create or restore something with lasting value, gain Fate.
- **We Build Together** – When you lead or collaborate to protect or improve a community, gain Fate.
- **Honor the Dead** – When you preserve memory or history in the face of destruction, gain Fate.
- **Fix What You Can** – When you repair what others would abandon or save someone others gave up on, gain Fate.

### Universal Keys

- **Scavenger's Pride** – When you uncover something lost and make it useful again, gain Fate.
- **Nothing's Free** – When you collect payment for something others would give away, gain Fate.
- **Ashes to Ashes** – When you destroy something others cling to — for good reason — gain Fate.
- **Blood and Bone** – When you protect or avenge someone close using brutal means, gain Fate.
- **Leave No Trace** – When you act without anyone knowing it was you, gain Fate.
- **Tool for Every Job** – When you solve a major problem using gear, scrap, or clever engineering, gain Fate.
- **Stay Unbroken** – When you survive something you shouldn't have, and don't back down, gain Fate.
- **Wired to Win** – When you trick, deceive, or outwit someone stronger than you, gain Fate.
- **Rolling Stone** – When you abandon safety or stability for the open road, gain Fate.
- **Echo of the Old World** – When you use ancient knowledge, tech, or memory to solve a problem, gain Fate.

- **Hard Bargain** – When you drive a brutal but fair deal, gain Fate.
  - **Not This Time** – When you break a cycle (violence, revenge, fear) others thought inevitable, gain Fate.
  - **Burn to Build** – When you destroy something to create something new, gain Fate.
  - **One Shot Left** – When you succeed with your final effort, resource, or moment, gain Fate.
  - **The Signal Lives** – When you send or interpret a message that shifts the direction of events, gain Fate.
  - **Blood in the Dust** – When you take revenge that feels like justice, gain Fate.
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## Secrets

Secrets are unique character abilities drawn from your lifepaths. Each one costs 1 point from a specific Resource Pool (Grit, Reflex, or Wit) to activate, and offers a powerful one-time effect. Here are examples from existing lifepaths:

- **Clinical Cold** (Vaultborn – Lab Rat) — *Wit*: Shut down emotion and focus; ignore a consequence for one scene.
  - **Patch Job** (Vaultborn – Reactor Runner) — *Grit*: Jury-rig a fix, bypassing a system or damage long enough to survive.
  - **Red Tape Cutter** (Vaultborn – Overseer's Aid) — *Wit*: Bypass social rules, forge clearance, or gain an audience.
  - **Sun-Hardened** (Wasteborn – Dustborn) — *Grit*: Shrug off heat, thirst, or exhaustion.
  - **Keen Eye** (Wasteborn – Scavenger Rat) — *Reflex*: Spot something hidden or valuable in a dangerous place.
  - **Ghost Step** (Wasteborn – Warlord's Scout) — *Reflex*: Move unnoticed through hostile ground.
  - **Biohack Reflex** (Mutant – Splicer Spawn) — *Wit*: Push your body beyond normal limits for a single action.
  - **Blood Bond** (Mutant – Pack Howler) — *Grit*: Take damage for an ally or strike back when they're hurt.
  - **Gut the Wreck** (Mutant – Corpse Diver) — *Reflex*: Salvage, find intel, or retrieve a key item from wreckage.
  - **Never Stops Rolling** (Nomad – Road Cradle) — *Grit*: Ignore fatigue, terrain, or delay during travel.
  - **The Right Word** (Nomad – Trade Whisper) — *Wit*: Sway a negotiation, disarm hostility, or open a trade.
  - **Hardpoint** (Nomad – Convoy Gunner) — *Grit*: Gain advantage while holding a defensive position.
  - **Debug Pulse** (Uplifted – Vat-Grown) — *Wit*: Negate a malfunction, fear effect, or mind-altering influence.
  - **Cross-Talk** (Uplifted – Neural Fork) — *Reflex*: Intercept or jam communication.
  - **Last Protocol** (Uplifted – Omega Asset) — *Grit*: Make one action unstoppable.
  - **Fortify** (Freeholder – Shelterborn) — *Grit*: Reinforce a position, structure, or shelter.
  - **Harvest Blade** (Freeholder – Farmhand) — *Reflex*: Strike decisively before someone can react.
  - **Firebrand Sermon** (Freeholder – Circuit Preacher) — *Wit*: Stir a crowd or rally allies.
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## Ruin & Reclaim

The Wastes don't just challenge your body — they test your beliefs. Over time, each character may shift toward **Ruin** or **Reclaim**, the two great forces pulling at the soul of every survivor.

### Ruin

- Destruction, dominance, selfish survival.
- Fire over foundation. Might over meaning. The world ended — why rebuild it?

## Reclaim

- Restoration, rebuilding, shared strength.
- Settlement, learning, and creation — building something new from what was lost.

## Tracking Alignment

- Characters may gain points in **Ruin** or **Reclaim**, from 0 to 5.
- Most begin at 0/0 and shift through actions.

## Gain a Point in Ruin or Reclaim by:

- Taking clear, intentional action in line with that force.
- Following a Key or Secret that reinforces that worldview.
- Making a meaningful choice in a Draw the Line scene.
- GM may award a point for symbolically powerful acts.

## Effects of Alignment

- **3+ Ruin:**
  - Gain **+1 Edge** when acting to dominate, destroy, or sow fear.
  - Once per session, you may **ignore a consequence** after unleashing violence or chaos.
- **3+ Reclaim:**
  - Gain **+1 Edge** when acting to protect, restore, or organize.
  - Once per session, you may **call on an ally or memory** to aid a task, even if distant.
- **Balanced (2+ in each):**
  - Gain **+1 Edge** when mediating between extremes, or when turning destruction into growth.
  - Once per session, treat a **3 as a 4** (success) when acting in pursuit of balance.

## Shifting Beliefs

- During Downtime, you may shift one point between Ruin and Reclaim if:
    - You experienced a belief crisis.
    - You acted against your alignment in a meaningful way.
    - You followed a Key that reflects your change.
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## Secrets: Ruin & Reclaim

These Secrets represent abilities drawn from alignment with either force.

- **Ashmaker** (*Ruin – Grit*): Spend 1 Grit to demolish cover, barricades, or structures in one explosive action.
  - **Terror Mark** (*Ruin – Reflex*): Spend 1 Reflex to brand a target with fear — they hesitate or flee the next time they face you.
  - **Loot Instinct** (*Ruin – Wit*): Spend 1 Wit to identify what's valuable and vulnerable in a chaotic scene — strike, steal, or exploit it.
  - **Beacon Spark** (*Reclaim – Wit*): Spend 1 Wit to inspire hope in a group, calming panic or uniting strangers around a cause.
  - **Patch and Brace** (*Reclaim – Grit*): Spend 1 Grit to quickly reinforce a crumbling structure or stabilize a wounded ally.
  - **Last Light** (*Reclaim – Reflex*): Spend 1 Reflex to reach someone or something in danger — even if the odds say you're too late.
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## Faction Example: The Ember Saints

*"The fire cleanses, but the flame can also warm."*

### Identity

- **Name:** The Ember Saints
- **Symbols:** Ash-covered robes, flame iconography, salvaged pre-fall relics
- **Belief:** Flame is sacred — it destroys what must fall and kindles what must rise
- **Power Base:** A fortified monastery built around a geothermal spring and ancient generator
- **Leader/Face:** Sister Flint, a war-priest who speaks in scripture and speaks softly — unless preaching
- **Leans Toward:** Reclaim
- **Agenda:** Convert a nearby warband or destroy them before they poison the land further

### Keys

- **Key of the New Soil** – When they bless and begin rebuilding a ruin
- **Key of Broken Chains** – When they liberate captives from tyranny

### Secrets

- **Ash and Light** (1 Influence) – Spread a vision of rebirth; turn a hostile crowd into listeners
- **Cauterize the Land** (1 Force) – Purge a corrupted site or threat with overwhelming force
- **Litany of Flame** (1 Reach) – Broadcast a ritual signal that draws in allies or inspires allies already on the field

### Resource Pools

- **Force:** 2 (Disciplined war-priests and flamethrower relics)
- **Influence:** 3 (Known among scattered settlements as protectors and judges)
- **Reach:** 2 (Pilgrims, scouts, and echoes of their broadcasts)

### Clocks

- **Agenda Clock:** Convert or destroy the Rustbacks (6-segment)
  - **Threat Clock:** PCs seen as heretical disruptors (4-segment)
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## Downtime

Between missions or major events, characters take downtime to recover, reflect, and regroup. Downtime offers a structured way to heal, resupply, and pursue personal goals.

### Core Downtime Rules

- After a session or story arc, each character gets **one Downtime action**.
- You may **refresh one Resource Pool** (Grit, Reflex, or Wit) by narrating how you tend to that part of yourself.
  - **Grit:** Training, fighting, enduring hardship.
  - **Reflex:** Scouting, hunting, navigating danger.
  - **Wit:** Research, scheming, solving problems.

### Other Common Downtime Activities

- **Learn:** Spend 1 Fate to open a new skill.
- **Recover:** Heal long-term wounds or trauma.
- **Craft or Repair:** Build gear, reinforce defenses, fix tech.
- **Gather Intel:** Investigate a threat, uncover a secret.
- **Forge Bonds:** Strengthen a relationship with an NPC or PC.

- **Shift Focus:** Change one of your Keys or pursue a new goal.

Use downtime to reveal who your character is between the fights — what they value, what they fear, and what they're willing to do to survive.