

Blood & Spice | Red Canyon Player R

Public mission, character checks, captains, officers, and allied squads



PLAYER-SAFE | No truths, enemy deployment, faction hands, or endings

Shortest Reading Order

1. Read **Public Mission and Contract** together.
2. If this is your first game, read **How Play Moves at the Table** and its dialogue example.
3. Keep **Shared Player Guide** and **One-Minute Character Check Reference** on the table.
4. Read only the captain or officer you portray. In Cross-Portrayal, cover any card section the card tells you to hide.
5. Look up squad combat, aid, and seven-die exceptions only when they arise.

For a spoiler-free taste of the setting, read [*A Name Owed to the Wind*](#). The Groundkeeper should keep the [complete English rulebook](#) nearby for questions.

Public Mission and Contract

Player-Known Premise

Red Canyon is the greatest source of Red-Crown Saffron. After war broke out, House Hesar imposed a new spice tax on the local Red Spring Alliance. Red Spring refused, so the House blockaded the East Gate.

The Gray Scale guild hires the mercenary captains to deliver the canyon's last cartload of spices to the East Gate fortress before the third sunset. The guild calls it an ordinary escort, but military seals on the cart, deliberately ruined roads, and each faction's unnaturally precise interest in particular chests show that this cargo can decide Red Canyon's next war.

The captains must answer not merely "Can we deliver it?" but:

Who should ultimately possess this spice-and who has the right to decide for Red Canyon?

2. The opening contract

Ida Copperpalm, representative of Gray Scale, offers:

- 2 gold on signing.
- 6 more if at least four chests reach the East Gate.
- 2 extra if all six seals remain intact.
- If fewer than four arrive, the company owes 4 gold and is blacklisted.
- Failure to arrive before the third sunset is breach of contract.

The guild will say that "the East Gate has lawful wartime requisition authority," but will not volunteer what House Hesar intends to do with the spices.

How Play Moves at the Table

See what happens at the table first

A session of Blood & Spice is not a chain of tests, and no one rolls for every sentence. The Groundkeeper describes the situation. A player says what their hero wants to change and how. If nothing meaningfully resists the attempt, it simply happens. Roll only when the outcome is uncertain **and** failure would create a change worth playing.

A normal exchange has six steps:

1. **The Groundkeeper describes the situation.** State what is happening, who is acting, and which time or resource pressure matters.
2. **The player states an aim and method.** Describe what the hero actually does before naming mechanics.
3. **The Groundkeeper decides whether to roll.** If there is no meaningful risk, the action succeeds. If a check is needed, state difficulty, the basic effect, the likely Scatter consequence, and any fixed cost that happens regardless of success.
4. **The player chooses and rolls.** Choose one Thought for the hero's attitude and method, then one relevant Expertise to set the number of random dice.
5. **The table reads the result together.** Gather matching faces. The player chooses which Thought Group the hero ultimately follows; the Groundkeeper applies the effect and consequences already established.

6. **The fiction moves forward.** A door opens, an ally changes position, cargo is spent, troops move, or a debt returns. The Groundkeeper presents the next changed situation.

A whole contract often follows this larger arc:

Accept or rewrite a contract → gather intelligence and leverage → choose roads and allies → face personal or military conflict → bear costs → decide who finally holds the goods, land, and promises.

Players decide what their heroes say, do, and willingly endure. They also issue orders and deploy forces in squad combat. The Groundkeeper controls the outside world, non-player characters, enemy forces, announced risks, and consequences. Remember the first division of authority: **players choose; the Groundkeeper lets the world answer honestly.**

A complete table conversation

This example uses a new hero with no bloodline, spice, or Fate effects in the pool. Yan Ge has Calculation 0 and Investigation 2, so this check receives no Root Die and no Attunement. The player rolls 2 + 2, or four six-sided dice.

Groundkeeper:

"The second rain bell sounds. The city gate is descending. The witness you are escorting lies across the wagon, blood soaking through their cloak. Soon the gate-and the city's only infirmary-will be closed to you."

Yan Ge's player:

"I run to the gate first. Is that a roll?"

Groundkeeper:

"No. Nothing in the street can stop you, so you arrive in time. The ordinary guards see your mercenary badge and prepare to let you through, but the night officer raises a hand. Rumours of plague reached the city. No wounded person and no sealed cargo may enter."

Player:

"I show him the guild pass and ask him to follow the written order."

Groundkeeper:

"He can read it and knows the seal is genuine. The document alone is not enough to make him violate tonight's new order. Try another method, or tell me how you force him to decide now."

Player:

"Is there a night ledger beside the gate? I ask him to write his name, the time, and his reason for refusing medical care to a witness. I say, 'When someone investigates tomorrow, they will not see only that we were late. They will see who closed the gate.' I use Calculation to put procedural responsibility on him, with Investigation."

Groundkeeper:

"That works as a method. This is Standard difficulty. A matching pair gets the wagon into the city. If you roll no matching pair, the gate closes and the officer records you as attempting a forced entry. Do you proceed?"

Player:

"Yes. Investigation 2 gives me four dice."

Roll: 4, 4, 5, 5.

Player:

"The two 4s form one group and the two 5s another. Four is my Acting Thought, Calculation. Five is Drive, right?"

Groundkeeper:

"Right. Both Paths can succeed. Stay with Calculation and you make him answer to procedure. Choose Drive and describe how this becomes a direct contest of will. The groups are tied. If you Hold Fast to Calculation, Gloom rises by 1, and the unchosen Drive group leaves a minor Echo in the scene."

Player:

"I do not threaten him. I push the pen across, recite the accountability clause, and wait for him to choose. I take Calculation."

Groundkeeper:

"The officer stares at the pen, then orders the gate raised. The wagon and witness enter. You kept your original method, so Gloom rises by 1. The unchosen Drive pair also matters: he remembers that you looked ready to force the gate, and sends a guard to follow the wagon. You have a chance to save the witness--and another pair of eyes watching. Do you go to the infirmary first, or hide the wagon before its cargo is registered?"

The exchange used four principles:

- The player stated a concrete aim and method; the Groundkeeper first decided whether a roll was needed.
- Before the roll, the Groundkeeper stated the basic effect and the failure consequence.
- Matching faces formed groups; a pair was already a viable Path.
- The player chose how the hero succeeded. The result changed the situation instead of merely answering "pass or fail."

Your first character check

For a first check, use five actions:

1. **State the aim.** What should be different if the hero succeeds?
2. **State the method.** Choose one of the six Thoughts as the Acting Thought and one relevant Expertise.
3. **Take dice.** Begin with 2 + Expertise random d6s. Later rules may add Root, bloodline, aid, spice, Fate, or Transgression dice.
4. **Gather matching faces.** Two matching dice form a basic success; three or four matching dice give the Path more force. If no face appears twice, the attempt normally fails.
5. **Choose a group and describe it.** Follow the Acting Thought if it formed a Path, or follow another viable group and change the method. The Groundkeeper translates the group through difficulty, effect, and the consequences stated before the roll.

For now, learn five names: the facilitator is the **Groundkeeper**; the Thought declared first is the **Acting Thought**; matching dice form a **Thought Group**; two matching dice are a **Formed Thought**; training in a kind of work is **Expertise**.

The sixty-second core: state aim and method → choose Thought and Expertise → roll 2 + Expertise dice → find two or more matching faces → choose one group and change the situation.

One sentence: the pool decides possibility; faces decide direction; groups decide force; collisions decide cost.

Ask four questions of every rule

Question	Plain meaning	Who answers?
When is it used?	Which trigger must exist; if it does not, set the rule aside.	The rule and Groundkeeper
What do we do?	What must be declared, taken, spent, or chosen?	The acting player, following the rule
What happens?	What changes on success; how do failure, cost, and side effects enter play?	The Groundkeeper, following what was announced
What does it sound like at the table?	A concrete exchange that identifies when each person speaks, rolls, and chooses.	The rule's examples and the group

Small example - Borrowed Heart: Another character can genuinely help and share the risk. Before rolling, that character describes the help and adds one random aid die. On Scatter, the helper may also be exposed to the original danger. An officer braces a falling shelf while the captain examines its broken seal; once the Groundkeeper confirms that both can be struck by the collapse, the aid die enters the captain's pool.

If a rule gives only a name and number but cannot answer these questions, consult the full text rather than guessing from the name. Temporary rulings should use the same order.

Shared Player Guide

Shared Player Guide

Sixty-second start

1. Say **what you want and how**, then choose Acting Thought and Expertise.
2. Read Thought value: 0 none; 1 Attunes one eligible random die; 2 adds a fixed Root Die and Attunes. Wonder/Gloom use current absolute track value.
3. Roll **2 + Expertise**; after Attunement, group matching faces. A pair forms a successful Path; larger is stronger. Hard cap seven.
4. In plain language, choose the original method, persist with it despite an equally strong or stronger alternative, change to another Thought, or accept/reject failure. Formally these are Natural Path, Hold Fast / Hold Fast Against the Tide, Turn Thought, Scatter, and Self-Scatter.
5. Groundkeeper states effect and cost. Hold Fast and Hold Fast Against the Tide: Gloom +1; Turn Thought: Wonder +1; Scatter or Self-Scatter: choose Wonder or Gloom -1. At an endpoint, draw immediately and reset.

Use these five steps for the first check. Look up aids and exceptions only when they appear.

Shared facts

- Session/scene/round/contract use the timing definitions in Part 3; once/session and once/scene refresh only at their stated boundaries.
- Earth, Water, Fire, Air form reality. Wonder/Gloom are two unstable aether directions, not accepted fifth elements.
- Dragons truly existed; blood, bones, covenants, and changed lands still support dynasties and spice sources.
- “Arcana” is power and political classification. Protected ancient arts may be renamed rite, spicecraft, astrology, ancestral craft, or court secret; without patronage, the same art can again be prosecuted.
- Blood permits a claim, never automatic obedience. Deed, contract, local law, and actual control matter.
- A captain usually leads 60-120 people. Two listed squads are those on the key line; others sustain camp, transport, scouting, care, and logistics.
- Thoughts are heroic philosophy in the fiction; dice/cards are table tools. Characters see omens, not cards. Groundkeeper is a role, not an omniscient god.

Advanced exceptions

Random dice = **2 + Expertise**. Ordinary random dice, Borrowed Heart, Spice Aid, and circumstance dice may be rerolled; Root, bloodline, Fate, and Transgression dice may not. Order: own dice → Pending Fate → optional aid → Transgression; cap seven.

Overflow source	At seven
Pending Fate	earlier cards first; excess becomes Fate Echo
Manifest Blood	fix one hero-owned ordinary random die to C element; Debt still gained
Aid	information, side effect, absorb one lighter non-fixed consequence, or reduce Echo; never shift fixed cost
Spice	cancel unspent, or cast without die while scene effect, Dream movement/omen, and deflection remain
Transgression	on Formed gain 1 Transgression Momentum; announced cost remains

General Aid/Borrowed Heart: one present willing helper with relevant method adds 1 random die and shares risk; one helper per check. In battle, a captain aiding another spends their action; an officer joining the commander’s existing check does not open a separate action.

When your character acts

State intended change. Groundkeeper announces difficulty, Formed effect, likely Scatter, limited compromise, and fixed costs. Raising effect removes only built-in compromise.

Battle uses five shared phases: Situation; Orders (one Captain Action each, with officer actions determined by mode); Movement, alternating by initiative; Engagement, alternating squads; and Morale and resolution. The encounter check is **2 + Mobility**; ordinary movement is free, while difficult movement requires a roll and spends the squad' s action. Protection is a reaction. Support with Cluster 2+ grants +1 die to one relevant check before round end. At Disorder 2, retreat one zone and return to Disorder 1; with no legal route, surrender or make a Last Stand check (**2 + Morale -1**, minimum 2): No Cluster routs with Casualties +1, Cluster 2 remains at Disorder 1, Cluster 3 clears Disorder, and Cluster 4+ also grants +1 to the next Protection or Morale check by the end of the next round.

Eight Expertises

Expertise	Covers
Combat	personal clashes, weapons, subdue, disengage
Command	orders, formation, discipline, morale, coordination
Travel	march, ride, track, navigate, dangerous terrain
Investigation	search, identify, infer, interrogate, notice anomaly
Negotiation	bargain, calm, persuade, relate, openly mediate
Trade	value, purchase, transport, smuggle, read markets
Intrigue	deceive, threaten, manipulate factions, secrets, long schemes
Spicecraft	identify/cast spice, control Mirage, complete spice rites

Thought is direction; Expertise is problem type. Pair freely when method fits.

Marks: Injury ☐☐☐; write names for Debt/Mirage, not only boxes; Deeds belong mechanically only to Blood-and-Sweat Exemplar; circle current Fate tracks and reset at endpoint; personal spices are separate from sealed cargo. Put Pending Fate above the sheet; use a red Transgression Die outside the reroll area; put acted and temporary bonus markers directly on character/squad cards.

Full check example: Sarei uses Outreach + Negotiation 2 to promise passage. Random **2,4,5,5** plus fixed Outreach 2 gives Outreach **2,2** and Drive **5,5**. Choosing Outreach is Hold Fast: the gate opens, Gloom +1, and promise becomes worldly duty. Choosing Drive is Turn Thought: Wonder +1 and she rallies public pressure; the aim may still succeed but relationships differ.

One-Minute Character Check Reference

This is a table reference, not a replacement for the full rules above.

The pool determines possibility; faces determine direction; Groups determine force; collisions determine cost.

Do these five things

1. **State the aim.** What should change on success? The Groundkeeper first decides whether a roll is needed.
2. **State the method.** Choose Acting Thought and Expertise. The Groundkeeper announces difficulty, Formed effect, Scatter consequence, and fixed costs.
3. **Build the pool.** Start with 2 + Expertise random dice. Acting Thought 2 adds a fixed Root Die. Then add Pending Fate, chosen aid, and Transgression, never exceeding seven.
4. **Roll and Attune.** Acting Thought 1+ may reroll one eligible random die not showing it. Never reroll Root, bloodline, Extra Fate, or Transgression dice.
5. **Choose a Path.** Gather matching faces, choose one group, move Fate tracks, calculate effect, and resolve the core result before secondary costs.

Dice and result

Face	1	2	3	4	5	6
Thought	Gloom	Outreach	Composure	Calculation	Drive	Wonder

Acting Thought means only the Thought declared for this check; **Drive** is the name of face 5. Rating 0 gives no special die. Rating 1 permits the Attunement reroll. Rating 2 also adds one fixed Root Die before rolling. For Wonder or Gloom, use the track's absolute value.

Matching dice	Result	Immediate rule
None	Scatter	Fail; choose Gloom -1 or Wonder -1.
2	Formed Thought	Take the Formed effect for difficulty.
3	Strong Thought	Gain 1 Momentum.
4+	Obsession	Momentum equals group size -2.

Path	Fate movement
Natural Path	None
Hold Fast / Hold Fast Against the Tide	Gloom +1
Turn Thought	Wonder +1
Scatter / Self-Scatter	Choose Gloom -1 or Wonder -1

Difficulty in one line: Standard Formed gives Full effect; Hard Formed gives Limited effect; Extreme Formed produces only **Create an Opening**. Strong and Obsession add Momentum that may raise effect or buy scope, speed, information, or protection.

Fate endpoints

Endpoint	Name	Interpretive direction
Wonder +3	Dream Made	New possibility, creation, or an omen fulfilled
Wonder -3	Dream Eaten	Hopelessness, illusion, mistaken identity, or reality collapsing
Gloom +3	Darkness Bound	Truth, oath, responsibility, and cost crystallise
Gloom -3	Light Lost	Detachment, isolation, identity, or worldly connection fades

On reaching an endpoint, draw immediately, place the card face up, reset that track to 0, and then finish the current result. It becomes Pending Fate until the hero's next risky character check. Consult the expanded reference for suit and special-row handling.

Resolve in this order

1. Move tracks and draw at endpoints.
2. Read the difficulty's Formed effect.
3. Allocate Momentum once.
4. Establish success or failure.
5. Apply fixed cost, Scatter consequence if applicable, Echoes, Transgression, Blood Debt, Mirage, and consumption.

Printable Captain Sheets

The four complete captain records below repeat the play-critical ratings, secrets, equipment, spices, squads, and opening questions so these pages can be printed without Part 4. Record Fate tracks, up to three named Debts and Mirages, current Injury, and bonds directly here.

Sarei Springmark - Print Page

Road Blood Heir; C Precious Blood/Water 2; Q Warden/Air 3; Injury □□□; Debt ■□□; no Deed. Thoughts Drive 1, Outreach 2, Calculation 1, Composure 0, Gloom/Wonder 0. Expertises Combat 1, Command 1, Travel 1, Investigation 2, Negotiation 2, Trade 0, Intrigue 0, Spicecraft 2.

Fate: Wonder -3 -2 -1 [0] +1 +2 +3; Gloom -3 -2 -1 [0] +1 +2 +3. Debt: "Spring-field covenant may not be privatized" ; two blanks. Three Mirage blanks: "I want..."

Once per session, Manifest Springmark before a roll: add a fixed Water 2 bloodline die, or at seven fix one hero-owned ordinary random die to Water; gain one named Blood Debt. Belief: a contract protecting only the strong deserves no obedience. Problem: Sarei wants blood to matter but fears claiming power by birth. Secret: as a lost child, she gave the altar one drop of blood for rain and it spoke her name. Opening question: when did you learn people feared the name in your blood rather than you? Equipment: short spear, old round shield, waterskin, contract cord, field medical kit; Mistsilver Cardamom 1, Cedar 1. Squads: Springmark Guard 2/3/1/2, **Defend Water**: Protection +1 while guarding water, wounded people, or civilians; River-Path Scouts 1/2/3/1, **Shallow Ford**: ignore movement penalties in dry riverbeds, streams, and wetlands.

Officer ___; first trust ___; unpaid ___; forbidden order ___.

Grann Furnace-Scar - Print Page

Road Blood Heir; C Hearth-Cauldron/Fire 5; Q Maker-Mother/Earth 4; Injury □□□; Debt ■□□; no Deed. Thoughts Drive 2, Outreach 0, Calculation 1, Composure 1, Gloom/Wonder 0. Expertises Combat 2, Command 2, Travel 1, Investigation 1, Negotiation 0, Trade 1, Intrigue 0, Spicecraft 2.

Fate: Wonder -3 -2 -1 [0] +1 +2 +3; Gloom -3 -2 -1 [0] +1 +2 +3. Blood Debt: "Hesar's old masters claim the furnace blood" ; two blanks. Three Mirage blanks: "I want..." Once per session, Manifest Furnace-Scar before a roll: add a fixed Fire 5 bloodline die, or at seven fix one hero-owned ordinary random die to Fire; gain one named Blood Debt. Equipment: forge hammer, heavy shield, armour tools, thick apron; Red-Crown Saffron 1, Tobacco 1. Squads: Furnace-Scar Heavy Shields 2/3/1/3, **Iron Wall [Reaction; once/battle]**: at a choke point or the cart, ignore one mixed consequence; Ember Crossbows 2/2/2/1, **Fire Bolt [Attack; 1 Fire Waking Spice]**: +1 attack die, and on a win create a fire zone or disable cover through the end of the next round.

Belief: only strength that stands before others deserves the name. Problem: Grann equates obedience with reliability but knows reliable people serve wrong orders. Secret: his riot-control devices remain in the East Gate armoury, and he knows their weak points. Opening question: for whom unworthy did you forge a weapon, and where is it now? Officer ___; first trust ___; unpaid ___; forbidden order ___.

Mirei Broken Scale - Print Page

Road Blood-and-Sweat; C Heart-Jade/Earth 4; Q Divine Attendant/Water 2; Injury □□□; Debt □□□; Deeds □□□□□□. Thoughts Drive 0, Outreach 2, Calculation 2, Composure 1, Gloom/Wonder 0. Expertises Combat 0, Command 1, Travel 0, Investigation 2, Negotiation 2, Trade 2, Intrigue 1, Spicecraft 1.

Fate: Wonder -3 -2 -1 [0] +1 +2 +3; Gloom -3 -2 -1 [0] +1 +2 +3. Blood Debts: three blanks. Mirages: three blanks, "I want..." Once per session, embody the Divine Attendant by reconnecting people or interests through Outreach, paying a real cost, leaving a witnessed result, and earning one named Deed. Heart-Jade fictionally detects deliberately hidden contract costs. Equipment: folding scale, contract case, false-seal tools, travelling coat; Stillnight Clove 1, Mousewort 1. Squads: Broken Scale Cart Guard 2/2/2/2, **Escort [Reaction; once/battle]**: while in the cart's zone, cancel one instance of Cart Damage +1 or one chest seizure and take Disorder +1; Contract Engineers 1/2/2/2, **Field Repair [Action]**: a Mobility Cluster 2+ reduces Cart Damage by 1 or restores/creates a road or fieldwork, and is not free after moving.

Belief: every price tells a story; ask who was forced to pay. Problem: Mirei can price affection but cannot repay trust with no price. Secret: she copied proof that Gray Scale destroyed the west road; Ida holds the original. Opening question:

whose familiar name in the ledger made you unable to trust them again? Officer ____; first trust ____; unpaid ____; forbidden order ____.

Luodi Grey Banner - Print Page

Road Blood-and-Sweat; C Heavenly Resonance/Air 3; Q Hero/Fire 5; Injury ☐☐☐; Debt ☐☐☐; Deeds ☐☐☐☐☐☐. Thoughts Drive 2, Outreach 1, Calculation 0, Composure 2, Gloom/Wonder 0. Expertises Combat 2, Command 2, Travel 2, Investigation 1, Negotiation 1, Trade 0, Intrigue 1, Spicecraft 0.

Fate: Wonder -3 -2 -1 [0] +1 +2 +3; Gloom -3 -2 -1 [0] +1 +2 +3. Blood Debts: three blanks. Mirages: three blanks, "I want..." Once per session, embody the Hero by confronting through Drive a threat that makes others retreat, paying a real cost, leaving a witnessed result, and earning one named Deed. Heavenly Resonance fictionally reads troop numbers and direction from canyon echoes. Equipment: curved sword, short lance, windworn cloak, grey banner with its old badge cut away; Windcry Cinnamon 1, Vetiver 1. Squads: Grey Banner Light Horse 2/2/3/1, **Flank:** +1 Force when entering from another zone to attack an enemy already engaged by allies; Canyon-Wind Rangers 2/2/3/1, **Disperse:** +1 Protection against ranged attacks.

Belief: banners do not determine loyalty; those who bleed beside you may. Problem: action outruns thought, so Luodi chooses sides before learning the whole truth. Secret: Orfan once commanded her and still holds evidence of her disobedience. Opening question: who failed to return after the last order you obeyed from Orfan? Officer ____; first trust ____; unpaid ____; forbidden order ____.

Officer and Squad Cards

Part 6 | Officer and Squad Cards v0.5

Print on A4 in portrait orientation at 100%, then cut horizontally. In Cross-Portrayal, the Creator secretly reads and folds away the secret, then names the Commanding Player and Portraying Player. In Paired Play, give the complete card to the officer player. In Single-Team Play, the player or Groundkeeper holds it by agreement. Record all three roles. Squad cards go to their captain or delegated officer.

Four Officer Cards

An officer is a full character, not a bonus waiting for orders. They may investigate, negotiate, cast, tend relationships, or command a delegated squad. C is origin and Q is ideal; officers do not gain Manifest Blood, Exemplar, or Deed abilities from a captain's Blood Road unless a trait says otherwise.

Seif Cold-Cedar | Physician, Dream-Spice Compounder

First action: Outreach + Negotiation to ask what wounded people need, or Outreach + Spicecraft to inspect medicine and Dream Spice. She may instead Aid her captain; she need not wait for the captain to act first.

C		Q		Drive	Outreach	Calculation	Composure	Gloom/Wonder
Precious Blood/Water		Divine Attendant/Water		0	2	1	1	0/0

Combat	Command	Travel	Investigation	Negotiation	Trade	Intrigue	Spicecraft
0	0	1	1	2	0	0	2

- **Cold-Cedar First Aid [Action; once/scene]:** spend one Water spice; one co-located person treats Injury as one grade lighter for hindrance this scene. It does not clear Injury or stabilize the patient; an unstabilized Dying person cannot resume ordinary risky actions. In Cross-Portrayal, this spends the Commanding Player's Captain Action; in Single-Team or Paired Play, it spends Seif's own action.
- **Wish:** care not denied for inability to pay. Limit: never abandon treatable wounded. Secret: Cedar restored a dying companion's memory, but the returning voice may not be wholly theirs. Relationship: when did the captain entrust their safety to you, and why did you not fail them?

Creator ____ Commanding Player ____ Portraying Player ____ ☐Single ☐Paired ☐Cross | Aid used ☐ Trait used ☐ Independent action/consequence ____

Thun Notch-Ear | Former Hesar Rider, Scout

First action: Composure + Travel to scout the road, ambushes, and retreat routes, or ask to handle a mobile squad. Thun may warn the captain whenever an order would leave everyone without a retreat.

C		Q		Drive	Outreach	Calculation	Composure	Gloom/Wonder
Heavenly Resonance/Air		Warden/Air		1	0	1	2	0/0

Combat	Command	Travel	Investigation	Negotiation	Trade	Intrigue	Spiccraft
2	1	2	1	0	0	0	0

- **One Step Ahead [Reaction; once/scene]:** after an ambush or pursuit appears, move one guided friendly squad in the same or an adjacent zone by one adjacent zone along a scouted route. It cannot cross a blockade or waive a required terrain check. This costs no action, but Thun becomes exposed or isolated.
- **Wish:** land beyond conscription. Limit: no hunting deserters for discipline. Secret: owes Orfan a life and may save a doomed garrison. Relationship: why trust a former enemy with your back?

Creator ___ Commanding Player ___ Portraying Player ___ ☐Single ☐Paired ☐Cross | Aid used ☐ Trait used ☐ Independent action/consequence ___

Leika Black Ledger | Quartermaster, Seal Forger

First action: Calculation + Investigation to examine seals and books, or Calculation + Trade to recalculate the contract's risk.

C	Q	Drive	Outreach	Calculation	Composure	Gloom/Wonder
Heart-Jade/Earth	Maker-Mother/Earth	0	1	2	1	0/0

Combat	Command	Travel	Investigation	Negotiation	Trade	Intrigue	Spiccraft
0	1	0	2	0	2	1	0

- **One Hidden Share [Preparation; Action in battle; once/scene]:** reveal one small ordinary supply from reasonable preparation. Rare spice, military seals, and large sums of money cannot appear from nothing. With Groundkeeper consent, name an established source, deduct the item from it, and record a favour debt. In a Cross-Portrayal battle, this spends the Commanding Player's Captain Action; in Single-Team or Paired Play, it spends Leika's own action.
- **Wish:** a public pay ledger that no mercenary dares skim. Limit: never erase the dead or their pay. Secret: holds the other half of Mirei's ledger, which names an old friend paid by Gray Scale. Relationship: what secret expense did you hide-kindness or complicity?

Creator ___ Commanding Player ___ Portraying Player ___ ☐Single ☐Paired ☐Cross | Aid used ☐ Trait used ☐ Independent action/consequence ___

Ash-Smoke | Demolitionist, Fire Spice Practitioner

First action: Calculation + Spiccraft to identify blast residue and fuses, or Drive + Combat to guard the loading. In keeping with his personal limit, Ash-Smoke still decides whether to burn spice, roads, or cargo.

C	Q	Drive	Outreach	Calculation	Composure	Gloom/Wonder
Hearth-Cauldron/Fire	Hero/Fire	2	1	1	0	0/0

Combat	Command	Travel	Investigation	Negotiation	Trade	Intrigue	Spiccraft
2	0	1	0	0	0	1	2

- **Carry the Flame [Action; once/scene]:** spend one Fire spice to set a delayed fire or blast in an adjacent zone. It has a discoverable fuse, smell, or smoke. In Cross-Portrayal, this spends the Commanding Player's Captain Action; in Single-Team or Paired Play, it spends Ash-Smoke's own action.
- **Wish:** free Red Canyon from tax and guild debt. Limit: no fields burned, wells poisoned, or civilians used as leverage. Secret: radical leader is his sister; she demands two saffron chests burned. Relationship: which blast did the captain answer for, and how will you repay it?

Creator ___ Commanding Player ___ Portraying Player ___ ☐Single ☐Paired ☐Cross | Aid used ☐ Trait used ☐ Independent action/consequence ___

Officer Aid card rule

Once per scene, a present officer with a relevant Expertise gives the captain +1 random die, still capped at seven. This occupies the only general Aid/Borrowed Heart slot, and the officer shares the risk of Scatter. An independent action uses the officer's own Thoughts and Expertises without the captain's Blood Road. Cross-Portrayal spends the Commanding Player's Captain Action; Single-Team and Paired Play spend the officer's own action; Reactions are exempt.

Eight Friendly Squad Cards

Mixed consequence: a squad completes its action or holds its objective but also takes Disorder +1, becomes exposed, loses position, takes Casualties +1, or suffers Cart Damage +1 from limited effect, terrain, or an event. Ignoring it cancels only that incidental harm, never a direct enemy win or No Cluster.

Springmark Guard | Sarei

Force	Morale	Mobility	Protection	Casualties	Disorder
2	3	1	2	□□	□□

Defend Water: gain +1 Protection die while guarding water, wounded people, or civilians.

Order bonus □ · Acted □ · Zone ___ · Carried chests ___

River-Path Scouts | Sarei

Force	Morale	Mobility	Protection	Casualties	Disorder
1	2	3	1	□□	□□

Shallow Ford: dry riverbeds, streams, and wetlands impose no movement penalty on this squad.

Order bonus □ · Acted □ · Zone ___ · Carried chests ___

Furnace-Scar Heavy Shields | Grann

Force	Morale	Mobility	Protection	Casualties	Disorder
2	3	1	3	□□	□□

Iron Wall [Reaction; once/battle]: while defending a choke point or escorting the cart, ignore one mixed consequence.

Order bonus □ · Acted □ · Zone ___ · Carried chests ___

Ember Crossbows | Grann

Force	Morale	Mobility	Protection	Casualties	Disorder
2	2	2	1	□□	□□

Fire Bolt [Attack; 1 Fire Waking Spice dose]: spend one Fire Waking Spice dose to add +1 die to this attack. On a win, create a fire zone or disable the target's cover through the end of the next round.

Order bonus □ · Acted □ · Zone ___ · Carried chests ___

Broken Scale Cart Guard | Mirei

Force	Morale	Mobility	Protection	Casualties	Disorder
2	2	2	2	□□	□□

Escort [Reaction; once/battle]: while in the cart' s zone, cancel one instance of Cart Damage +1 or one chest seizure; the Cart Guard takes Disorder +1.

Order bonus □ · Acted □ · Zone ___ · Carried chests ___

Contract Engineers | Mirei

Force	Morale	Mobility	Protection	Casualties	Disorder
1	2	2	2	□□	□□

Field Repair [Action]: spend this squad' s action to make a Mobility check. Cluster 2+ reduces Cart Damage by 1 or restores/creates one road or fieldwork. This is not a free extra effect after moving.

Order bonus □ · Acted □ · Zone ___ · Carried chests ___

Grey Banner Light Horse | Luodi

Force	Morale	Mobility	Protection	Casualties	Disorder
2	2	3	1	□□	□□

Flank: gain +1 Force die when entering from another zone to attack an enemy already engaged by allies.

Order bonus □ · Acted □ · Zone ___ · Carried chests ___

Canyon-Wind Rangers | Luodi

Force	Morale	Mobility	Protection	Casualties	Disorder
2	2	3	1	□□	□□

Disperse: gain +1 Protection die against ranged attacks.

Order bonus □ · Acted □ · Zone ___ · Carried chests ___

Cluster corner: roll 2 + rating, usually ±1, minimum 2 and maximum 7. The largest matching group is No Cluster, Cluster 2, Cluster 3, or Cluster 4+. Ties go to the defender. An attack win gives Disorder +1; Cluster 3+, or a defender already at Disorder 1, also gives Casualties +1; Cluster 4+ also pushes, seizes, inflicts Cart Damage +1, or adds Disorder +1. At Casualties 2, the squad loses organized strength. At Disorder 2, retreat and return to Disorder 1, or surrender/make a Last Stand if no route exists. Rally: Cluster 2 clears 1 Disorder, Cluster 3 clears 2, and Cluster 4+ also clears 1 from an adjacent ally.

Look Up Only When Needed | Glossary and Detailed Character Checks

Complete rules glossary (safe to skip on a first read)

Core glossary

You do not need to memorize these terms before playing. If you can state an aim and method, choose a Thought and Expertise, and find two matching dice, you can make an ordinary character check. **Acting Thought**, **Thought Group**, **Formed**, and **Hold Fast / Turn Thought** are formal names for those table actions. Look up Root Dice, Momentum, Echoes, Pending Fate, Transgression, Blood Debts, and Mirages when those situations first arise.

Characters, facilitation, and scale

Term	Meaning
Groundkeeper	The game's name for its facilitator or GM. The Groundkeeper describes the world, portrays non-player characters, announces risks in advance, and rules on consequences; this is not an omniscient god within the setting.
Hero	A player's principal character. A hero may adventure personally and may command squads as a captain.
Captain	A hero who commands a mercenary company. In squad battle, each captain has one Captain Action per round, while each squad still has its own Movement and Engagement activation.
Officer	An important hero who shares a captain's contract. An officer may aid, act independently, and form Bonds, but does not automatically gain the captain's Road powers. In Single-Team Play, portray the officer as agreed before play; in Paired Play one player portrays the officer; in Cross-Portrayal the officer is portrayed by a player other than their Commanding Player.
Commanding Player	The player of the officer's captain. They decide mission, deployment, equipment, office, and orders, but cannot directly decide the officer's speech, emotions, or choices.
Officer Creator	The person who establishes an officer's origin, secret, important relationships, wish, and personal limits. They may reveal the past at an appropriate moment, but cannot use authorship to seize control of the officer's present choices.
Portraying Player	The person who decides the officer's present speech, emotions, and choices, and rolls their checks. This is normally neither that officer's Commanding Player nor the Groundkeeper; Single-Team Play may assign either one by opening agreement because of player count.
Squad	An abstract military unit of roughly twenty to forty people, represented by Force, Morale, Mobility, Protection, Casualties, and Disorder rather than by simulating each soldier.
Contract	A mercenary mission or adventure arc, beginning when the company accepts a commission or declares its own goal and ending when it delivers, breaches, abandons, or rewrites that goal.
Risky character check	A check a hero personally resolves with the six Thoughts. A Key Order is a character check; a pure squad Cluster roll is not.

Character checks and dice

Term	Meaning
Thought	One of six directions through which a hero understands the world and acts: Gloom 1, Outreach 2, Composure 3, Calculation 4, Drive 5, and Wonder 6.
Acting Thought	The formal name for the Thought declared before this check: the method the player first intends to use. It must not be confused with Drive , the Fire Thought.
Expertise	Learned ability such as Combat or Command, rated 0-2. It determines the number of ordinary random dice and is not permanently paired with a Thought.
Dice pool	Every die actually assembled for one check. A character begins with 2 + Expertise random dice, then adds an applicable Root Die, Fate, bloodline, aid, Spice Aid, circumstance, or Transgression Die, to a hard maximum of seven.
Random Thought die / fixed die	A random Thought die is rolled to discover which Thought appears. A Root, bloodline, or Extra Fate Die is placed on a specified face before the roll. A Transgression Die is random but explicitly cannot be rerolled.
Three hearts, two minds	The fifth random die gained when aid, spice, or a clear situational advantage adds a third “heart” beyond the two base “minds” and up to two Expertise “hearts.”
Borrowed Heart	One random aid die from a hero, officer, or important ally who can genuinely help and shares exposure to the risk. Only one helper can supply one per check.
Root Die	A fixed die added when the Acting Thought is rated 2. It shows that Thought’s face and cannot be rerolled with Attunement.
Attunement	When the Acting Thought is rated at least 1, reroll one eligible random die that does not show it. Attunement changes a face; it does not itself move Wonder or Gloom.
Thought Group	A group of dice showing the same face. Its size determines whether that Path can succeed and how much force it carries.
Scatter / Self-Scatter	Scatter is failure because no two dice match. Self-Scatter is choosing failure despite having a Formed Path. In either case, choose Wonder -1 or Gloom -1.
Formed Thought / Formed	A chosen group of two matching dice: enough for basic success, with actual effect still adjusted by Standard, Hard, or Extreme difficulty.
Strong Thought / Strong	A chosen group of three matching dice: Formed success plus 1 Momentum.
Obsession	A chosen group of four or more matching dice: Formed success with Momentum equal to group size minus 2.
Natural Path	The Acting Thought is Formed and is the unique largest group, or there is only one viable group. The player succeeds by the declared method and moves neither Fate track.
Hold Fast / Hold Fast Against the Tide	The Acting Thought is Formed but tied with another group, or smaller than another group, and the player persists with it. Gloom +1; a larger unchosen group creates an Echo.
Turn Thought	Choose a Formed group other than the Acting Thought and change the actual method. Wonder +1.

Term	Meaning
Momentum	Force beyond the first two dice in the chosen group: group size minus 2. Spend it only on this check to improve effect, widen scope, act faster, extend duration, gain information, or resist a lighter consequence. If the difficulty table already spends it to raise effect, it cannot be spent again.
Echo	A strong unchosen group' s secondary desire, opportunity, or cost. An Echo may complicate or extend the fiction, but cannot cancel the established core result.
Mixed consequence	A squad completes its action or holds its objective but also suffers one attached disadvantage of the same scale, such as Disorder, exposure, displacement, Casualties, or wagon damage. Ignoring one mixed consequence does not cancel an enemy' s ordinary attack victory or turn No Cluster into Cluster 2.
Fixed cost	A cost announced before rolling that is paid whenever the hero proceeds, whether they succeed or fail: using the only medicine, alerting guards, or taking a light injury from falling stone. Momentum and improved effect cannot erase it; change method or stop before rolling if it is unacceptable.
Scatter consequence	The main risk announced before rolling that occurs only on Scatter or Self-Scatter, such as advancing a clock, losing position, or letting an opponent act first. Formed success avoids it unless it was separately announced as a fixed cost.
Standard / Hard / Extreme	The three difficulties announced before rolling. They do not change how many matching dice are needed; they translate the same Thought Group into a higher or lower effect. Do not roll for the impossible or the riskless.
Transgression Die	One red random die gained by using Blessing, excessive spice, forbidden Arcana, or a Great Rite to exceed mortal scale. It cannot be rerolled, and its chosen, pre-announced cost applies whether or not the die helps.

Fate, blood, and spice

Term	Meaning
Wonder / Gloom	Two Fate tracks from -3 to +3 and the Thoughts on faces 6 and 1. Wonder concerns possibilities beyond current reality; Gloom concerns worldly duty, erosion, and passing away. As an Acting Thought, each uses the absolute value of its current track.
Fate endpoint	Wonder or Gloom reaches +3 or -3: Dream Made, Dream Eaten, Darkness Bound, or Light Lost. Draw immediately, reset that track to 0, then finish the current check.
Fate Card	A playing card whose endpoint, suit, and rank describe a fate event. The character experiences the omen and world change, not the table's physical card.
Pending Fate	A drawn Fate Card left face up before the hero until their next risky character check. It may remain across scenes, sessions, and interrupted contracts.
Extra Fate Die	The fixed suited face that Pending Fate adds to the next risky character check. It counts toward seven, cannot be rerolled, and is not a Transgression Die with an automatic cost. O / Lightless has no suit and instead fixes Gloom 1 or Wonder 6 according to the triggering track.
C / Generation; true blood	Inherited power flowing into the body: Hearth-Cauldron, Precious Blood, Heart-Jade, or Heavenly Resonance. Bloodline gives standing and supernatural means; it does not prove a claim true.
Manifest Blood	Once per session, a Blood Heir actively calls on C / Generation, adding or fixing one bloodline die and taking one named Blood Debt. It may also provide means to attempt something beyond ordinary mortals.
Blood Debt	A named debt owed by blood to reality after blood power, deflected spice, or Transgression. It may fall on body, mind, relationship, the uncanny, or fate; it is not merely money owed to a person.
Q / Exemplar; blood and sweat	Earned power flowing out of the body through the roads of Hero, Divine Attendant, Maker-Mother, or Warden. A hero earns Deeds through public responsibility and real sacrifice.
Deed	A named, witnessed achievement rather than a bonus-die resource. Three related Deeds may buy a title, claim, contact, item, squad improvement, or foothold between contracts.
Waking Spice	The four material spices that can be produced, traded, and militarized: Red-Crown Saffron, Mistsilver Cardamom, Stillnight Clove, and Windcry Cinnamon.
Dream Spice	The elemental spices that extend effects into memory, ancestors, visions, and omens: Tobacco, Cedar, Mousewort, and Vetiver. Casting one moves Wonder and creates an immediate dream sign.
Aligned casting	The final chosen elemental Thought Group matches the element of the spice. The spice works normally without a deflection cost.
Elemental Deflection	Use a spice of one element to support a different elemental Thought Group or squad action. The caster takes one Blood Debt that preserves a trace of the original element.
Aether Deflection	Cast an elemental spice but finally choose Gloom or Wonder. The caster takes one formal Mirage.
Mirage	A player writes "I want to experience / see / know ..." as an invitation for a future uncanny theme. The Groundkeeper must provide a real encounter and choice, but a Mirage guarantees neither victory nor escape from cost.
Great Rite	A T / Completion campaign-scale public ceremony requiring spice, an officiant, an irrecoverable sacrifice, and witnesses. It can change a throne, bloodline, territory, contract, or other world state.

Term	Meaning
Blessing	Named fictional permission granted by a god, temple, oath, rite, or sacred office. Only invoking it beyond mortal scale provides extra power and a Transgression cost.

Combat and squads

Term	Meaning
Captain Action	Once per captain during each battle round' s Orders phase: issue a Key Order, act personally, independently cast spice / Manifest Blood / conduct a Great Rite, aid another captain, or let an officer act independently. Officer abilities marked as reactions are not limited by this use.
Squad Action	One squad activation used to attack, make difficult movement, Rally, Support, Guard / escort, repair, or interact. A Protection reaction does not spend it.
Key Order	A character check using one of the six Thoughts and Command Expertise to support a squad. It triggers Hold Fast, Turn Thought, Scatter, Echoes, and Fate tracks normally.
Force / Morale / Mobility / Protection	A squad' s four main ratings. Force attacks; Morale rallies and endures pressure; Mobility crosses difficult ground and disengages; Protection resists attack and guards ground, people, or cargo.
Cluster	The largest matching set in a squad roll, recorded only as No Cluster (0), Cluster 2, Cluster 3, or Cluster 4+. Faces are not Thoughts, and squad rolls do not use Formed, Strong, or Obsession.
Injury	A hero' s bodily state, normally tracked as Unhurt, Light, Severe, and Dying; distinct from squad Casualties.
Casualties	Losses of squad personnel, equipment, and organizational capacity. At Casualties 2, the squad can no longer fight in formation and withdraws, surrenders, routs, or is destroyed according to circumstances.
Disorder	Temporary collapse of formation, orders, and spirit. At Disorder 2, retreat one zone and return to 1; without a legal retreat, surrender or make a Last Stand.
Encounter check	At battle start, each side chooses a lead squad and rolls 2 + Mobility d6, comparing largest Clusters. The winner gains initiative for the battle.
Initiative	Determines which side activates a squad first during Movement and Engagement each round. It normally lasts for the battle unless a scenario or ability explicitly changes it.
Last Stand	When a squad at Disorder 2 refuses surrender and has no legal retreat, roll 2 + Morale - 1 d6, minimum two dice. Cluster 2+ remains in battle.
Rout	No Cluster on a Last Stand: Casualties +1 and leave the battlefield. Survivors scatter, hide, or are captured; it does not automatically mean every member dies.
Engaged / reserve	Squads within a zone' s per-side capacity can effectively fight, Support, and contest objectives. Excess squads are reserves and can only Rally, repair, prepare, or do rear-line work for themselves.
Support	A squad forgoes a direct attack to give one ally +1 die on its next related pool before the end of this round. Remove it after use or at round end; one pool can receive at most one Support.
Rally	A Morale action that clears Disorder: Cluster 2 clears 1; Cluster 3 clears 2; Cluster 4+ also lets one adjacent ally clear 1.
Zone control	A side controls a zone only if it has a squad still capable of fighting there and no enemy squad still capable of fighting there. Both sides present means contested; one character cannot control an entire military zone in the face of an enemy squad.

Six faces are Six Thoughts

Face	Thought	Correspondence	Face	Thought	Correspondence
1	Gloom	Ethics, responsibility, transcendence	4	Calculation	Earth, strategy, knowledge
2	Outreach	Water, affinity, influence	5	Drive	Fire, courage, will
3	Composure	Air, patience, inducement	6	Wonder	Miracle, hope, illusion

Three Hearts, Two Minds

Random pool = fixed Two Minds + relevant Expertise 0-2. One outside Third Heart can create Three Hearts, Two Minds.

The pool determines possibility; faces determine direction; Groups determine force; collisions determine cost.

Expertise	Random dice	Name
0	2	Two Minds
1	3	One Heart, Two Minds
2	4	Two Hearts, Two Minds

Expertise 2 plus a Borrowed Heart, spice, or another explicit Third Heart makes a five-die **Three Hearts, Two Minds** pool. All sources together have a hard maximum of seven dice.

Do not confuse the terms: **Drive** is the fire Thought. **Acting Thought** is the Thought declared for this check. “Drive as the Acting Thought” simply means using the fire approach now.

A **Transgression Die** is one additional red random die supplied by a Blessing, forbidden art, excessive spice, or major rite. It cannot be rerolled or changed. The Groundkeeper proposes two source-appropriate prices; choose one involving Blood Debt, track movement, harm to body or property, harm to others, or a major Echo. The price occurs whether or not the red die helps. Pending Fate supplies a fixed Extra Fate Die, not a Transgression Die. All sources share the seven-die cap. At seven dice, Transgression instead grants 1 Transgression Momentum when the result is Formed; its price still occurs.

When seven slots are full, never place an eighth die. Resolve the excess source:

Excess source	Handling at seven dice
Pending Fate	Cards have draw-order priority; a card that cannot fit becomes a Fate Echo.
Manifest Blood	Fix one of the hero’s own ordinary random dice to the C element instead; gain Blood Debt normally.
Aid	Improve a side effect, reveal information, take one lighter non-fixed accompanying consequence, or reduce an Echo. It cannot transfer a fixed cost.
Spice	The user may refrain and consume nothing. If used, add no die, but keep its scene effect, Dream Spice movement, dream sign, and Deflection price.
Transgression	On Formed, gain 1 Transgression Momentum; the announced price still occurs.

Borrowed Heart

Before rolling, another hero or officer who can materially help and accepts the same risk may add one random aid die; at most one per check. At seven dice, instead choose one: improve a side effect, reveal information, bear one lighter non-fixed accompanying consequence, or reduce an Echo. A fixed cost remains with its original target. On Scatter or Self-Scatter, the helper is also drawn into the original consequence as fiction permits.

Thought rating

Rating	Effect
0	No Root Die; cannot Attune.
1	After rolling, reroll one eligible random die that is not showing the Acting Thought.
2	Before rolling, add one Root Die fixed to the Acting Thought; afterward, the same Attunement reroll remains available.

When Wonder or Gloom is the Acting Thought, use the absolute value of its track. Reaching ± 3 triggers Fate and resets to 0; ± 3 is not a persistent rating.

One complete check

1. Disclose the **goal, difficulty, Formed effect, built-in compromise of Limited effect, Scatter consequence, and any separate fixed cost.**
2. Declare **Acting Thought and Expertise**; take **2 + Expertise** ordinary random dice.
3. At Thought rating 2, add the fixed Root Die.
4. Add sources in order: **Pending Fate** → **bloodline / Borrowed Heart / Spice Aid / circumstance** → **Transgression**, never beyond seven dice.
5. Roll random dice. At rating 1+, Attune by rerolling one eligible random die not showing the Acting Thought.
6. Group every equal face.
7. Choose Natural Path, Hold Fast, Turn Thought, Scatter, or Self-Scatter and mark Echoes.
8. Move Wonder or Gloom first. On an endpoint, draw immediately and reset; the new card does not enter this pool.
9. Read the Formed column for the current difficulty, then allocate Momentum. Listed Strong and Obsession results already assume spending 1 and the first 2 Momentum.
10. Establish the principal result, then narrate Echoes, consequences, costs, and resource consumption.

Thought Groups and degree

Matching dice	Name	Effect
1	Scatter	Not enough to succeed
2	Formed Thought	Standard success
3	Strong Thought	Gain 1 Momentum; the listed Strong effect is its default use
4+	Obsession	Momentum = Group size -2; the listed Obsession effect spends the first 2 by default

Momentum = dice in the chosen Group -2 and must be spent before the check ends. Begin with the Formed column for the difficulty. Each point normally raises effect one level, affects one additional similar target, works faster or longer, obtains one extra piece of information or follow-up advantage, or prevents one lighter accompanying consequence. The Strong and Obsession columns are the default allocation of 1 or the first 2 points. If Momentum buys another use, do not also take those higher columns. Momentum cannot be saved and cannot cancel a fixed cost disclosed before the roll.

Final choice

Final pool and choice	Result	Track
Acting Thought is Formed, is the sole largest Group, and is chosen	Natural Path	No movement
Acting Thought ties for largest and is chosen	Hold Fast	Gloom +1
Acting Thought is a smaller Formed Group and is chosen	Hold Fast Against the Tide	Gloom +1; larger unchosen Groups become Echoes
Choose any other Formed Group	Turn Thought; method must change	Wonder +1
No Formed Group exists	Scatter and fail	Choose Gloom -1 or Wonder -1
Reject every Formed Path	Self-Scatter and fail	Choose Gloom -1 or Wonder -1

"Largest" means number of dice in a Group, never face value. Natural Path, Hold Fast, Turn Thought, Scatter, or Self-Scatter moves at most one track by one step. Dream Spice, rites, Fate Cards, or another explicit effect may move a track afterward.

Echoes

- An unchosen Group tied with the chosen largest Group creates a **Minor Echo**.
- An unchosen Group one die larger than the chosen Group creates a **Significant Echo**.
- An unchosen Group two or more dice larger creates a **Major Echo**.
- Echoes may create a secondary result, lost benefit, NPC response, Mirage, Blood Debt, relationship change, or battlefield consequence.

Difficulty and effect

- **Standard:** character-scale opposition; suitable tools, time, or position; one ordinary obstacle.
- **Hard:** prepared enemy or existing advantage; one of tools, intelligence, time, or position is lacking; success first resolves only the principal portion.
- **Extreme:** an evident difference in scale; a crucial qualification, resource, or opening is absent; one action should not solve the whole problem.

A major disadvantage normally raises difficulty one step. A genuinely effective lever, tool, intelligence, or ally lowers it one step. Do not roll for the impossible or the risk-free.

Difficulty	Formed	Strong	Obsession
Standard	Full effect	Powerful effect	Decisive effect
Hard	Limited effect	Full effect	Powerful effect
Extreme	Create an Opening	Limited effect	Full effect

The Strong column spends 1 Momentum by default; Obsession spends the first 2. A player may keep the Formed column and buy range, speed, information, or protection instead. Only a Group of five or more has points left to purchase further benefits after reaching the listed top result.

- **Create an Opening:** obtain a real entry, qualification, or foothold; the original intent is not yet complete.
- **Limited:** complete the principal portion, constrained in scope, duration, quality, or safety.
- **Full:** achieve the stated goal within its scope, without Limited effect's built-in compromise.
- **Powerful:** Full plus an important gain in speed, scope, duration, information, or position.
- **Decisive:** resolve a larger conflict within reasonable scope so the same obstacle cannot return during this scene.

Raising effect removes the lower effect's own limitation. It does not cancel a separately disclosed fixed cost. Fixed costs occur regardless of success. A Scatter consequence occurs only on Scatter or Self-Scatter. Echo, Transgression, Blood Debt, and Mirage resolve after the principal result.

Wonder, Gloom, and Fate

Wonder: -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3

Gloom: -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3

Endpoint	Trigger	Direction
Wonder +3	Dream Made	New possibility, creation, or an omen fulfilled
Wonder -3	Dream Eaten	Hopelessness, illusion, mistaken identity, or reality collapsing
Gloom +3	Darkness Bound	Truth, oath, responsibility, and cost crystallise
Gloom -3	Light Lost	Detachment, isolation, identity, or worldly connection fades

At an endpoint, immediately draw a Fate Card face up and reset that track to 0. Then finish the present action. The card does not join dice already rolled and does not overturn their result.

The card becomes **Pending Fate**. The hero's next risky character check adds one fixed Extra Fate Die: Clubs = Drive 5, Hearts = Outreach 2, Diamonds = Calculation 4, Spades = Composure 3. It counts toward seven dice and cannot be rerolled or changed. Choosing a Group containing it is Following Fate; choosing another Path turns the card into a Fate Echo. Pending Fate persists across scenes, rests, sessions, and interrupted contracts until that next risky character check. Remove the die after that check, but keep all world changes.

Special Fate ranks

Rank	Fire / Clubs	Water / Hearts	Earth / Diamonds	Air / Spades	System position
T / Completion	Presentation	Revel	Great Sacrifice	Burnt Offering	Four Great Rites
J / Dream	Tobacco	Cedar	Mousewort	Vetiver	Four Dream Spices
C / Generation	Hearth-Cauldron	Precious Blood	Heart-Jade	Heavenly Resonance	Sources of essence and bloodline
Q / Exemplar	Hero	Divine Attendant	Maker-Mother	Warden	Blood-and-Sweat roads
K / Symbol	Red Dragon	Arcana	Dawn Elephant	Azure Folk	Four elemental world archetypes
O / Lightless	-	-	-	-	Suitless Joker; supplies Gloom 1 or Wonder 6 according to the triggering track

Mark the two Jokers C and O. On C, turn one ordinary card for its suit and use that suit for Hearth-Cauldron, Precious Blood, Heart-Jade, or Heavenly Resonance. O takes no suit: a Gloom endpoint gives fixed Gloom 1, a Wonder endpoint fixed Wonder 6. With one Joker, use it as C.

Eight Great Spices

Element	Waking Spice	Dream Spice
Fire	Red-Crown Saffron	Tobacco
Water	Mistsilver Cardamom	Cedar
Earth	Stillnight Clove	Mousewort
Air	Windcry Cinnamon	Vetiver

After casting, compare the final chosen Group with the spice element. The same element is aligned. Another elemental Thought is **Elemental Deflection**: in addition to normal Hold Fast or Turn Thought movement, gain one named Blood Debt. Gloom or Wonder is **Aether Deflection**: also gain one formal Mirage. Scatter is not Deflection, but the spice is still consumed. The player writes a Mirage as "I hope to experience / see / know..." ; the Groundkeeper later makes that invitation appear with real opportunity and cost.

Table dialogue: Turn Thought when the original route does not hold

Groundkeeper:

"The seal on chest five was changed, but the warehouse shift changes in three minutes. Formed identifies one handler. Scatter lets the true culprit learn that you are investigating."

Mirei's player:

"I do not arrest anyone yet. I compare seal wax, duty records, and carrying marks to learn who changed it. Calculation and Investigation 2."

Groundkeeper:

"Calculation is 2. Place a Root Die fixed at 4; Investigation 2 adds four random dice."

Roll:

fixed 4; random 2, 4, 5, 5.

Player:

"Calculation has two 4s, Drive has two 5s, and Outreach one 2. May I reroll?"

Groundkeeper:

"Calculation is at least 1, so you may Attune one rerollable random die that is not 4. You can reroll the 2 or one 5, but picking up a 5 breaks the ready Drive Path first."

Player:

"I do not reroll. Both Calculation and Drive can succeed?"

Groundkeeper:

"Yes. Choose Calculation to Hold Fast and raise Gloom by 1. Choose Drive to Turn Thought and raise Wonder by 1, but you must truly change method."

Player:

"Drive. Mirei stops looking down at the wax, calls the three porters under the lamp, and says aloud: 'I already know it was one of you. Confess now and I leave you a way out.' "

Groundkeeper:

"That is Turn Thought. Wonder +1. The youngest porter breaks and names the night foreman; you get the Formed effect and identify one handler. The unchosen Calculation pair is a Minor Echo: marks in the wax show someone behind the foreman knows guild seals better. You catch the immediate hand, but the case continues."

The final Groups are Calculation 4×2 , Drive 5×2 , and Outreach 2×1 . Turn Thought is not merely a track operation: the method changes from documentary proof to public pressure. Drive completes the immediate goal; Calculation leaves a clue as an Echo. Had the player chosen Calculation, it would be Hold Fast, Gloom +1, with a Drive Echo such as the suspects feeling cornered.

Memory line

Acting Thought Formed and sole largest: Natural Path. Acting Thought Formed but tied or smaller and still chosen: Hold Fast. Accept another Formed Path: Turn Thought. After Attunement, no Path: Scatter.

Table layout

Place Pending Fate face up above the character sheet. Keep the red Transgression Die physically separate. Use markers for each Captain Action and squad action; place Support +1, Disorder, and Casualties on the squad card. Remove Support after use or at round end.

Character-Check Record

Session data

Date	Groundkeeper	Players	Start/end	Total time	Battle time
Player	Character	Officer mode / Road	Partner	Rules familiarity 1-5	
		Single/Paired/Cross; Blood Heir/Blood-and-Sweat			

Important character checks

Pool notation: 4 random + 1 Root, 5 + Aid, 6 + Transgression. Attunement: none / saved Scatter / pursued Acting Thought. Groups: Acting/other largest after reroll, e.g. 2/3. Opportunity: Natural Path / may Hold Fast / may Hold Fast Against the Tide / must Turn Thought / Scatter. Chosen: Natural Path / Hold Fast / Hold Fast Against the Tide / Turn Thought / Scatter / Self-Scatter. Record settlement time in the final column.

#	Scene / intent	Thought + Expertise	Pool	Attunement	Acting/other	Opportunity	Chosen	Result / tracks / Echo / time
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
11								
12								

Character-check subtotal

Total	Natural Path	Hold Fast	Hold Fast Against the Tide	Turn Thought	Scatter	Self-Scatter
Opportunity		Natural Path	May Hold Fast	Must Turn Thought		Scatter
Count						
Formed		Strong	Obsession		No Path	
Attunement saved Scatter		pursued Thought		available unused	Officer Aid	Transgression Die

PT1.4-rc1 observation	Count / answer
When Hold Fast was available, chose Hold Fast / Hold Fast Against the Tide / Turn Thought / Self-Scatter	___ / ___ / ___ / ___
When Turn Thought was required, chose Turn Thought / Self-Scatter	___ / ___
Wonder +1 / Gloom +1	___ / ___
Echo after Hold Fast	minor ___ / significant ___ / major ___
Standard / Hard / Extreme checks	___ / ___ / ___

PT1.4-rc1 observation	Count / answer
Before roll: difficulty / Formed effect / Scatter / fixed cost stated	___ / ___ / ___ / ___; omissions ___
Limited compromise mistaken for fixed cost	yes/no; ___ times
Average character-check minutes / slowest	
Character rule lookup over 30 sec	
Borrowed Heart die / seven-die conversion	___ / ___

Transgression log

#	Source	Pool already 7?	Two costs offered	Chosen	Red die selected?	Cost occurred?
1	Shelter/excess/Arcana/rite	☐			☐	☐
2	Shelter/excess/Arcana/rite	☐			☐	☐
3	Shelter/excess/Arcana/rite	☐			☐	☐

Blood and Fate

Manifest Blood	New Debts	Debts invoked	Deeds gained	Deeds spent	Exemplar triggers

Debt	Source / landing	Omen within 2 scenes	Invoked	Repay/refuse/retain
1		☐	☐	
2		☐	☐	
3		☐	☐	

Mirage invitation	Gained scene	Planned deviation	Entry deadline	Delivered/chosen
I want ___			after this/by 2 scenes/across session	☐ / ☐
I want ___			after this/by 2 scenes/across session	☐ / ☐
I want ___			after this/by 2 scenes/across session	☐ / ☐

#	Endpoint	Suit/rank	Pending until	Follow/defy	Auto-Formed?	World change
1	Dream Made/Eaten/Darkness Bound/Light Lost					
2	Dream Made/Eaten/Darkness Bound/Light Lost					
3	Dream Made/Eaten/Darkness Bound/Light Lost					

Individual Player Feedback

Each player completes one copy. If a rule did not appear, mark Not experienced / N/A rather than guessing.

Player ____ Captain ____

Quick rating: 1-5

Question	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I understood how to build a pool	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I understood how to find Thought Groups	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attunement reroll was meaningful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hold Fast and Turn Thought created an interesting choice	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Changing Path or failing when the Acting Thought did not form mattered	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Alternative Paths offered by the dice were interesting rather than a loss of character control	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Standard/Hard/Extreme effect differences were clear	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Choosing between two Transgression costs felt tense	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Wonder and Gloom affected decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fate Cards were worth waiting for, remembering, and answering	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Blood Heir / Blood-and-Sweat felt different	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Officer felt like a trusted companion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Political leverage mattered more than one high roll	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Spice felt both commodity and magical materiel	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Squad battle was comprehensible and well paced	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I want to continue with this character	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

One sentence each

- Rule I most want to keep: ____
- Rule I most want removed or simplified: ____
- Most memorable choice: ____
- Moment that most felt like Blood & Spice: ____
- Blood Debt or Mirage that was answered-or never answered: ____
- Transgression cost that was too light, heavy, or unrelated to power: ____

Setting Fiction Appendix | A Name Owed to the Wind

Version: v0.5 · PT1.4-rc1

Spoiler level: spoiler-free

Translation source: website/app/fiction/copy-en.ts

The Ashen Ember Company escorts an ancient spice cauldron and four sealed jars across the Salt-Mirror Waste. Every claim of blood, order, and mercy must answer who pays its price.

This story conveys the setting and themes of Blood & Spice. It reveals no Red Canyon secrets and is not a rules precedent. This English text is a website translation of the Traditional Chinese original.

How to read this story

This complete seven-chapter story introduces the world and themes of **Blood & Spice**. It is optional reading and does not establish rules precedent. For rules, use the formal English rulebook or the searchable English web SRD; the Traditional Chinese manuscript remains authoritative if the translations differ.

- [English release index](#)
- [Start Here](#)
- [English translation glossary](#)
- [English rulebook](#)
- [Current English web SRD](#)

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I | Before the Rain Bell

In cold rain, the Ashen Ember wagons carry an ancient spice cauldron and four sealed jars while Cenya guards a contract bearing three seals.

Before the north wind turned, an ancient spice cauldron and four sealed jars had to reach the Frost River treasury. The contract had been written three times—in guild black, frontier vermilion, and a ritual script no one could read. Its three seals waited like mouths ready to swallow the name of anyone who broke it.

Cenya tucked the contract back beneath her breastplate. One heavy wagon carried the cauldron, shaped like a bronze heart under lock. Another carried one jar each of Red-Crown Saffron, Mist-Silver Cardamom, Quiet-Night Clove, and Wind-Weeping Cassia. Oilcloth could not contain their scents; they quarrelled through the dusk of the Salt-Mirror Waste.

The Copper Scales called the cauldron an expensive device for safely blending the four true spices. Miners said it warmed by itself whenever someone cried for help beneath a cave-in. Cenya did not know which account was worth more. She knew both sides would kill for it.

“Ten gold crowns if the cauldron and all four jars reach the treasury intact,” said her officer, Lorn, reciting the clauses from horseback. “Six if the cauldron and at least two jars arrive. If the cauldron is damaged or only one jar remains, we owe twelve. The company flag and horses become guild property.”

“You missed the last clause.” “Which one?” “The guild accepts no responsibility for deaths on the road.” Lorn looked along the company. Ninety-seven soldiers remained: wagon veterans, skirmishers on both flanks, spears in the rear. Each had a line in the pay ledger. The contract gathered them all into the phrase necessary escort labour. “That is not a clause,” he said. “That is how merchants breathe.”

A copper whistle sounded ahead. The skirmishers had found a barefoot child beside a broken marker, hands raised, white wrist cloth grey with sweat. The Throat-Stone mine to the north had collapsed. More than forty rescued miners now burned with fever, and the well tasted of rust. A little Mist-Silver Cardamom could cleanse the water; Quiet-Night Clove might quiet whatever heat had awakened below.

The company cursed-not because the villagers were unworthy, but because every mercenary understood the arithmetic. Break a seal and lose the intact-delivery bonus. Deliver too little and the living had no winter boots, the dead no compensation. The child pressed his forehead to the salt earth. "We will pay." The amount would not buy the copper clasp on a jar.

Cenya looked northwest. An unnatural red stained the horizon, as though something behind the hills breathed slowly. She ordered the child to travel with them as far as the waystation. She promised nothing and refused nothing. The first lesson a mercenary learns is not how to kill. It is how to make an answer arrive later.

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II | The Rider of Bloodright

!Fur uses ancestral blood and an ancient covenant to prove that the spice cauldron remembers the Springward family, while she and Cenya face one another as equals.

Before nightfall, riders in white-scaled cloaks overtook the wagons. Their horses wore cloth around their hooves and raised almost no salt dust. Their leader, Fur, named herself the daughter of the last Springward bloodline in Salt-Mirror Valley. She carried no military writ-only a vial of ancestral blood and a cauldron covenant older than the kingdom.

"The cauldron is not guild cargo," she said. "The Springwards used it to blend spice and divide water for the whole valley. The guild repaired its wheels and declared ownership. The frontier army means to brew a season of war spice without asking those buried in the spring fields."

Fur pricked a finger and let blood fall upon the covenant. Faded lines shone like roots. The bronze cauldron answered with a low note. Some spearmen knelt to the miracle itself; others gripped their weapons, afraid the miracle would next demand obedience. The Copper Scales would call it an unregistered mechanical response. A temple might call it blood-witness. Once different people gave the same sound different names, it grew different laws and armies.

"The blood proves standing," Cenya said. "Is that not enough?" "Enough to prove the cauldron remembers you. Not enough to prove everyone who ever used it belongs to you." Cenya herself had no surname. A wind bell spoke a forbidden family name on the night of her birth; her mother fled with her and died at the hands of a blood-tithe officer. Cenya had always treated bloodline as stolen property she could neither sell nor return.

Fur looked toward the jar of Wind-Weeping Cassia. All seven seals swelled toward Cenya as if a face behind the clay listened to her breathe. "Blood of the Sky-Chime," Fur said. "All the more reason to return the cauldron. The army will widen the war with red spice. The Scales will turn every shortage into a price. You know whose blade this contract is sharpening."

Lorn laid the delivery contract between them. "If we surrender the cargo, we become raiders. The next city will not ask why. It will read the warrant." Fur offered an exchange: bring the cauldron to the ancestral spring before the rain bell. If her blood received no answer, she would withdraw. If the cauldron acknowledged her, guild, army, and valley folk must meet and read the old covenant again rather than let mercenaries decide ownership beside the road.

"You trust the land to judge?" Cenya asked. "No," Fur said. "I trust it to remember who bled first."

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III | The Third Flag

!Tobacco in a captured scout's mouth magnifies a handful of real ambushers into an army and an impossible third banner in the smoke.

A contrary wind rose that night. Cenya dreamed that someone beneath the earth struck a bell; with each stroke, a banner that did not exist fell from the sky. When she woke, Lorn had captured a scout with tobacco packed in his cheek.

Tobacco burned fear into zeal and taught the eye to manufacture evidence for desire. The scout swore a thousand saints waited beyond Salt Ridge. The skirmishers saw only a dozen hired killers employed by a Copper Scales factor. They meant to burn the cauldron covenant and the cardamom, then blame Fur. The cauldron could still reach the army while healing spice became a scarcity sold only at guild prices.

Cenya ordered the veterans to lock shields between the wagons, the skirmishers into a dry gully, and the spears to remain visible by the fire. "Use the cassia?" Lorn asked. Opening it forfeited the sealed bonus. Leaving it closed meant the contrary wind would swallow their signals. "Use people first," Cenya said.

The first flag narrowed the shield wall. The second drew the spears back. The third should have sent the skirmishers into the enemy flank-but an arrow dropped the standard-bearer. As oil jars crossed the ridge, Cenya cut her palm and pressed blood to the witness seal on the Wind-Weeping Cassia.

It was an old seal from the cauldron covenant, not a general art by which any blooded heir could command spice. She never opened the jar. The seal borrowed her blood and sounded once. Wind rose from cart beds, shield gaps, and dead

horses' manes. Cenya heard the flag ropes, the breath of nine skirmishers below, and the slosh of oil in the enemy jars. She struck the flagstaff down, and the wind carried the command into bone.

The skirmishers sprang from the right. Spears drove forward. Veterans opened their wall just enough to admit enemies who could advance but not turn. The wind blew fire back across the ridge; tobacco smoke revealed every hiding place. Victory was not clean. Kemo took an arrow in the neck. A recruit stepped into flame. The skirmisher captain was speared through the thigh. Some enemies knelt; others kept calling to saints that existed only in smoke.

When weapons fell, the wind began reporting names to Cenya: Kemo. Ivan. Little Cape. Morrel, the enemy soldier dying on a spear, whose daughter in Westport had just learned to walk. Nanja, once a Salt-Mirror miner, who took the killing contract to pay a debt. The names could not be proven and would not be refused. They were not wounds, but remained more certainly than wounds.

Lorn bound her hand. "What does the blood demand?" "That I remember where an order lands." She could have called it an ancestral gift and let the soldiers own the victory. Lorn knew that any tale speaking only of gifts and never of price was usually preparing a lie for the next levy. "For how long?" Cenya looked at the quiet seal. "It did not say I may forget."

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IV | What Can Be Sold and What Can Be Saved

!Friendly and enemy wounded lie on the same oilcloth as a surgeon apports Mist-Silver Cardamom and a paymaster records both lives saved and wages lost.

By morning, the red light above the mine was closer. The wounded lay side by side on oilcloth: eleven from Ashen Ember, seven from the enemy. The surgeon had only common styptic herbs. The skirmisher captain's leg was blackening. A prisoner with lungs full of tobacco smoke clawed at the air and called for his mother. The dead needed no medicine, but still needed shrouds, graves, and money sent home.

The jar of Mist-Silver Cardamom stood thirty paces away. The paymaster set an abacus on the wagon: break the seal and lose four crowns; use half the cargo and the buyer might reject the rest. Money was not another word for greed. It was winter boots, compensation, arrow shafts, fodder-the promise that ninety people might stand beneath the same flag next time.

"Save only ours," a veteran said. "No one could blame us." "Save those who can still walk," said the surgeon. "The badly wounded may not survive even if-" He stopped. The captain was awake and heard him.

"You do not have to make the same merciful decision for everyone," Lorn told Cenya. "A captain makes decisions for everyone." "No. A captain decides and then cannot pretend someone else chose the cost." People watched the wounded, the abacus, or Cenya, waiting for her to turn an impossible choice into an order. If a captain stayed silent, infection, price, and time made the decision instead.

She ordered the accounts recalculated in public. Open the cardamom. Prepare twelve doses. Treat company and prisoners by injury, not flag. Send the remainder to Salt-Mirror Village in return for mine maps, two mule carts, and hands to carry the wounded. If the guild withheld pay, Cenya would surrender her captain's share. The rest became a named Blood Debt held by the company against the Copper Scales, supported by testimony, prisoners, and ledgers.

No one cheered. The paymaster cut the seal and placed the wax-worth four crowns-into an evidence pouch. He recorded each dose twice: one ledger named the life it saved; the other named the pay the company lost. The first kept mercy from becoming legend. The second kept sacrifice from becoming free.

Cardamom filled the air like the first mouthful of winter well water. The wounded did not rise healed, and the red light did not vanish. When magic is truly needed, it often does no more than leave one more step possible.

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V | The Ancestral Spring Does Not Decide Ownership

!Fur awakens boundary marks beneath the ancestral spring with blood while villagers, riders, merchants, soldiers, and mercenaries hold five competing positions.

At noon the wagons reached the ancestral spring. Springward riders, villagers, and guild clerks waited west of the altar. The northern commander's crossbows held the eastern bridge. No one drew first. Every side believed its paper, blood, cargo, or bows should make the others withdraw.

Fur poured ancestral blood onto black stone. Old boundary marks lit beneath it. The dry spring sighed underground and the cauldron trembled. "Under the cauldron covenant, the Springwards must oversee it for the valley." The commander raised a requisition writ: "Under wartime law, anything that can brew war spice belongs in the arsenal." A Copper Scales clerk opened a ledger: "The guild paid to excavate, repair, and transport it. Investors possess the right of sale."

Each claim held part of the truth. Blood remembered the oldest oath. The army had defended the north bank. The guild had rescued the cauldron. Yet every account turned miners, carters, spice growers, and the dead into scenery, as though only those who applied seals had ever touched it.

Fur asked Cenya to witness the covenant with Sky-Chime blood and offered the Ashen Ember Company land, pay, and permanent place as its guard. It was good enough to be frightening. Lorn did not answer for her; an officer is not a captain's conscience speaking by proxy. He asked, "If we accept, do we guard one bloodline or everyone who needs the cauldron?"

The wind reported more names, including people not yet dead but who might be written into it by a season of war spice. Cenya laid the delivery contract, cauldron covenant, opened medicine jar, and arson testimony upon the altar. "My blood can witness the old covenant. My flag can deliver the cauldron to the army. The prisoners can prove the guild broke faith. Each lets me choose a master. None gives mercenaries under drawn bows the right to decide generations of ownership forever."

She proposed a Winter Inquest Deposit. Cardamom and clove would treat the wounded and seal the mine heat. A neutral Stone-Bell temple would hold the cauldron until a public winter hearing. Blood evidence, requisition, repair accounts, miner testimony, and the Ashen Ember casualty roll would all be copied openly. Saffron and cassia would remain sealed; any faction seizing them first would lose its right to speak at the hearing.

It was not eternal peace. It narrowed what swords could decide today and preserved what testimony might change in winter. The temple could be bribed. Witnesses could disappear. Ashen Ember still had to survive long enough to deliver the copies.

"By what right do you withhold what is not yours?" the commander asked. "By standing between the cauldron and your bows," said Cenya. "That is not ownership. It only keeps today from sentencing forever. Refuse, if you like, and see who can first afford the battle." The crossbows did not move. The mercenaries held no unbeatable formation, but no one could wipe last night's blood from the negotiating table.

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VI | A Deposit Covenant Must Use Old Ash

[!Each faction marks the deposit covenant differently: Fur burns one line of the old covenant and clear water runs when its ash enters blood.](#)

The deadlock lasted until the sun crossed the altar. The Copper Scales clerk yielded first—not from conscience, but after calculating what the arson testimony would cost three northern trade roads. He offered compensation if the record said a local factor exceeded his authority rather than the guild hired killers. The village accepted this incomplete truth in return for water carts, miners' compensation, and three years of public repair accounts. No one mistook compromise for innocence.

The northern commander withdrew the bridge crossbows and sealed his requisition at the Stone-Bell temple until the inquest. He had not surrendered the cauldron. He had only made the army tear its own royal seal in public if it chose to seize it.

Fur spoke last. "If I accept the deposit, the covenant acknowledged by my blood must stand trial beside merchant accounts and military writs." "The cauldron has already been touched by army walls, guild roads, miners' graves, and spice growers' hands," Cenya said. "Keep the covenant. Admit that blood must answer other testimony."

Root-shadows still glowed beneath Fur's feet. One refusal would draw every white-scaled sword, yet none of the miners' families behind her asked for war merely to possess the cauldron now. Fur put one corner of the covenant into the altar's cold flame and burned only the line that said no outsider might question its witness. Ash sank into blood. Clear water rose from the dry spring and ran around their boots toward the village. The altar named no righteous owner. It accepted a real sacrifice.

They wrote until dusk. Lorn converted elegant promises into clauses that could be pursued: which road the cauldron would take, how the four jars would be sealed, who could copy testimony, which soldiers must stay away before winter. Villagers used fingerprints, soldiers sword rings, Fur ancestral blood, the commander his royal seal, and the guild clerk a lead mark signifying credit rather than innocence.

Every mark left a crack through which responsibility might escape. Lorn did not pretend parchment could abolish betrayal; he made betrayal something that might later be named with a person, date, and price.

The commander asked under which title Cenya would sign: Sky-Chime heir, Ashen Ember captain, contracted carrier, or witness of the Winter Inquest? Each title offered one future and told others how to pursue her. She wrote only Cenya, for the ninety-four names still alive in the pay ledger, and required every identifiable dead soldier from both sides in an appendix.

"One is missing," said the paymaster. "The prisoner who could still speak this morning. No one knew his name." The wind supplied it. The cardamom had not saved him in time. Cenya wrote the name into the appendix.

VII | The Wind Still Keeps Accounts

[!The ancient cauldron and two sealed jars enter the Stone-Bell temple while wind draws a grey company banner toward the next contract.](#)

When the rain bell rang, the ancient cauldron and two sealed jars entered the Stone-Bell temple. The cardamom and clove had been opened for the wounded and the mine.

Under the first contract, Ashen Ember had defaulted. Under the deposit covenant, the army did not immediately receive war spice; the Copper Scales preserved a claim at the inquest; the Springwards placed their covenant into public evidence; Salt-Mirror Village received medicine and water carts. Ashen Ember won compensation, winter boots, and a new escort clause that no longer wrote deaths as no responsibility accepted.

No faction received everything it first demanded, so each declared itself wronged. The commander called the temple an obstacle to war. The guild said public repair accounts injured business. Fur said an ancient covenant had been forced to sit beside bills of sale. Lorn said that usually meant the deposit had survived its first day.

As the company left, the child who had begged beside the road brought a sack of dried cardamom husks. They were worth nothing and retained only the faintest cool sweetness. "The well is drinkable," the child said. "The mine still burns, but Fur and the miners are preparing to seal it. At the winter hearing, they will ask who first fed the cauldron's fire."

Cenya tied the husks to her saddle. The Wind-Weeping Cassia was now evidence locked in the temple, commodity and restraint at once. The inquest might award the cauldron to Springwards, army, guild, or the workers who maintained it. The deposit promised no victorious ending.

She did not even know whether she would return to testify. Blood required her to remember names. Contracts required her to leave one. A mercenary life kept urging her toward the next person able to pay. The wind continued to report names—real dead, unborn possibilities, or a tormenting voice in her blood. Lorn gave her a small book: find families for names that could be verified; leave blank pages for those that could not. Do not call uncertainty a prophecy, and do not pretend an uncertain voice was never heard.

"This account will never balance," Cenya said. "A Blood Debt is not meant to balance," Lorn replied. "It makes power unable to pretend it was free."

The wagons crossed the last salt rise. Behind them, the Stone-Bell temple closed the cauldron vault. Ahead, another messenger waited with another contract. Soldiers guessed at pay, camp, and battle; complained that their new boots were stiff; stitched fallen companions' badges to the flag; and calculated how much wine the spent cardamom might have bought. Cenya let them.

Blood enters the body and carries names no one chooses. Blood leaves the body and writes into the world what people have earned together. Between them, spice is weighed, sealed, burned, used to heal, used to kill—and valued by whoever holds it.

Wind caught the Ashen Ember flag. This time it neither rose nor fell. It stretched toward a road not yet travelled, and everyone still alive had to follow.

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