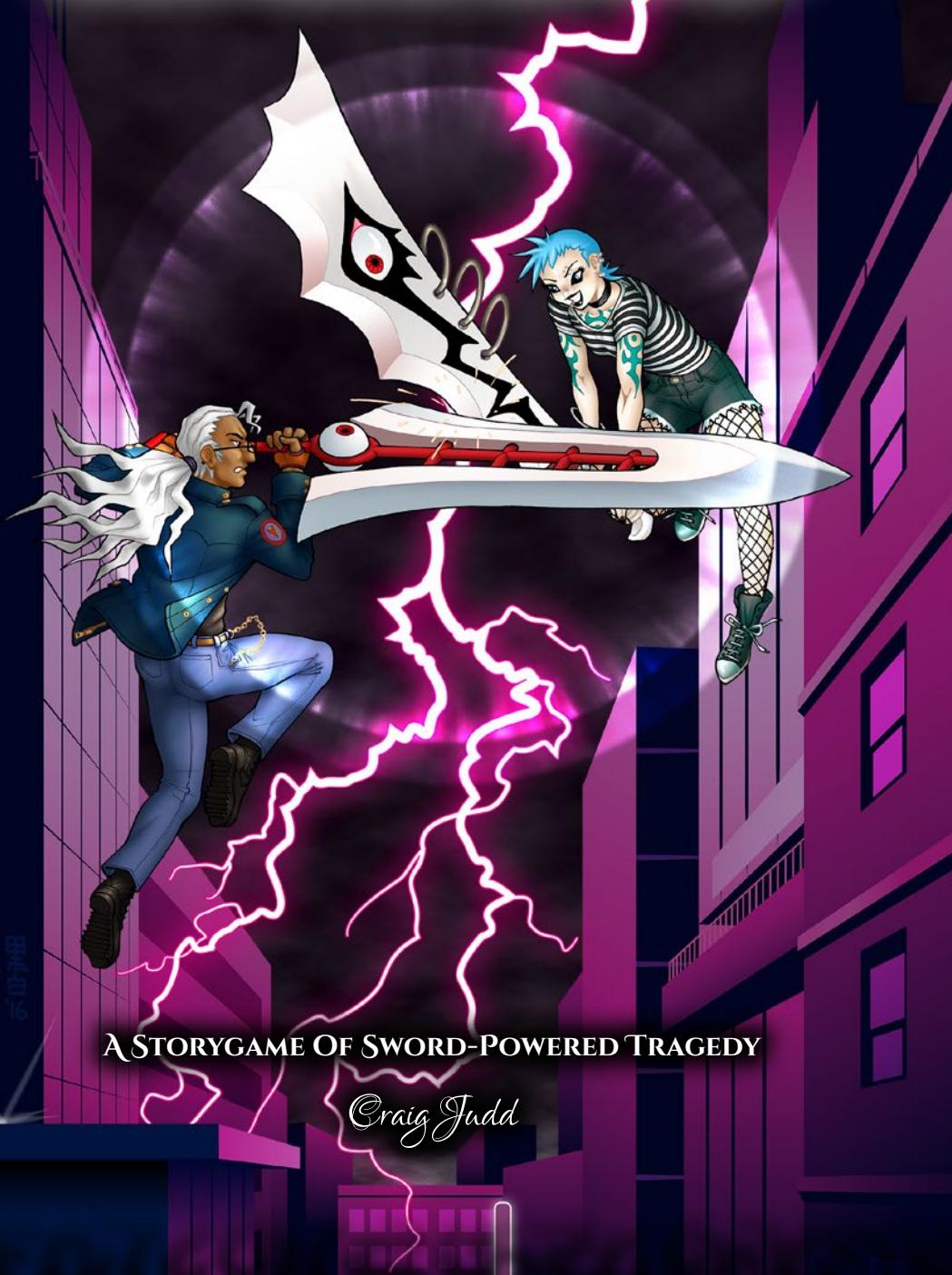


BLADE BIND



A STORYGAME OF SWORD-POWERED TRAGEDY

Craig Judd

“Cowards and faint-hearted runaways
look for orations when the foe is near:
Our swords shall play the orators for us.”
—Christopher Marlowe, ‘Tamburlaine the Great’



The Blades are ancient supernatural entities that seek out those with strong purpose and motivation, promising the power to achieve their goals.

As one of the Chosen, you have forged a pact with such a Blade. With it, none can stand before you — save another of the Chosen.

What will happen when the Chosen are set at cross-purposes?

Dare you wager your soul against the will of the Blade?

What will happen if the Blade takes control?



**POWERFRAME
GAMES**



**STORY
GAME**



**2–6
PLAYERS**



**GM
LESS**



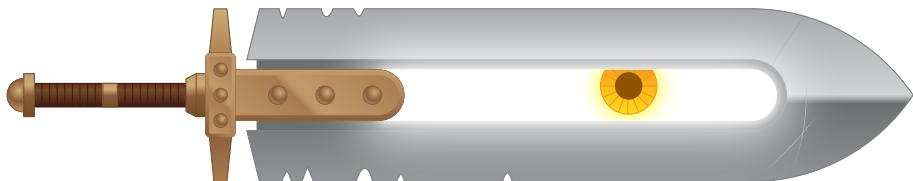
**CARD
BASED**



**3–6
HOURS**

Most weapons were once tools, used for hunting or agriculture.
But a sword is a tool with only one purpose.

To kill human beings.



BLADE BIND

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OVERVIEW





OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Ever since one human took up a tool and struck down another, **they** have been here. Powerful entities, forged by our desire to fight amongst ourselves, lurking in the shadow of humanity — the Blades.

Each Blade seeks out an individual who burns with dedication and purpose, its essence drawn from the spirit-world like a moth to a flame. It is your will that calls it forth, gives it form. The Blade offers you the power to achieve your goals, and you accept the bargain.

You are Chosen.

The Blade is always with you, hovering just out of sight until called to your hand. With it, you are invincible, unstoppable. You gain superhuman senses and prowess, and shrug off the effects of lesser weapons. Only another of the Chosen can stand in your way.

Yet power comes with a price. It always does. If your resolve should falter, you may lose yourself to the will of the Blade. Acting on ancient enmities forged into its very being, your Blade will not hesitate to use you as the instrument of its own vengeance.

But the risk is worth it. You have purpose. You have the strength of will.

All you need is a little more power...

EXPECTATIONS OF PLAY

In **BLADE BIND** you take on the role of Chosen warriors, using powerful supernatural Blades to fight for your goals and beliefs!

BLADE BIND is about setting up an unstable situation and seeing how it unfolds. It sets the Chosen at cross-purposes, which means the characters will be in conflict from the very beginning. The players, however, aren't in conflict — they are collaborating to produce a rich experience for everyone at the table.

The Chosen are trying to achieve their personal goals as best they can, but are drawn towards tragedy and loss. It is likely that one or more of them will succumb to the will of their Blade and become Bladebound — a self-destructive demon of battle.

The players are here for the glorious mess of fighting, recrimination and revenge, and must be okay with seeing their character not only triumph but suffer defeat and be changed by the rules. For the players, **BLADE BIND** isn't about winning or losing, but experiencing the unfolding drama and getting into lots of awesome sword-fights!

- † **Play hard!** When the game begins, there is no gradual warm-up period. Go for your goals right out of the gate, regardless of who stands in your way. The game is more fun when it spirals into a mess of recrimination and revenge. If you try to play nice, you may find yourself drawn into the fray on someone else's terms.
- † **Game the system!** Doing so will lead to a complex, dramatic, vicious experience. Think about the current state of play, who you have a better chance of defeating, and how you can manipulate the situation to your advantage.
- † **Build on the contributions of others!** Everyone can introduce new characters, locations, and other fictional details to the game. Unless a contribution is offensive or the majority deem it inappropriate, don't block other people's creative input, but instead build on or riff off it.

GAME FEATURES

- † **GMless:** Each player controls one of the Chosen.
- † **Player-Guided:** Players take turns establishing scenes.
- † **Card-Based:** The Duelling system uses regular playing cards.
- † **One-Shot:** A complete game takes one or two sessions.
- † **End-Game:** The game ends when one of several conditions is met.

WHAT YOU NEED

- † Two to six players.
- † Around three to six hours, depending on the number of players, which can be split over multiple sessions.
- † One pack of regular playing cards with two Jokers.
- † A record sheet for each player (or a blank sheet of paper), and a few index cards or similar.
- † Something for each player to write and erase with.
- † Optionally, some counters or tokens for tracking points.

INSPIRATIONAL MEDIA

- † **Roleplaying Games:** Shinobigami, Eternal Contenders, Wield, Fiasco, Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying, Tenra Bansho Zero
- † **Manga & Anime:** Shadow Star, Silent Möbius, Claymore, Hellsing, My-HiME, Shakugan no Shana
- † **Computer Games:** God Eater, Monster Hunter, Soul Blade/Soul Calibur

SUMMARY

*“Those who cannot remember the past
are condemned to repeat it.”*

—George Santayana, ‘The Life of Reason’

GAMEPLAY SUMMARY

Each game of **BLADE BIND** follows the same basic procedure, although the experiences and outcomes will differ every time.

PRELUDE

- † Establish the basics of the **Setting** (p. 13).
- † Define your **Chosen** (p. 17) and select a **Blade** (p. 20).
- † Link the characters together with a web of **Relationships** (p. 20), and conflicting goals in the form of **Threads** (p. 24).
- † Lastly, assign **Enmities** (p. 30)

The prelude usually takes about an hour.

MAIN CYCLE

- † Players take turns framing **Scenes** (p. 41) and fighting **Duels** (p. 47) to achieve their goals.
- † As each scene wraps up, the spotlight moves to the next player around the table.
- † Play continues in this way until something happens to trigger the **Epilogue** (p. 45).

The main cycle usually lasts between two and five hours.

EPILOGUE

- † Narrate an **Epilogue** for your Chosen, and wrap up the game!

CHOSEN SUMMARY

The Chosen are defined by their concept, relationships, goals, and the Blade they wield.

- † Players define **Knots** (p. 22), which are characters or things important to their Chosen.
- † Each Chosen begins play with three **Threads** (p. 24), which are goals targeting **Knots** and other Chosen.
- † Depending on their state of completion, **Threads** provide a number of points of **Will** (p. 28).
- † Blades grant points of **Power** (p. 29), which defines their Chosen's strength in battle.
- † If *Power* ever becomes higher than *Will*, the Chosen becomes **Bladebound** (p. 61) — a destructive demon of battle.
- † Blades gain points of **Resonance** when they *Bind* with another Blade (see the Duelling Summary below).
- † *Resonance* is used to activate special **Techniques** (p. 33), which are unique to each Blade.

DUELING SUMMARY

- † When drawn in anger, each Blade offers a **Bargain** (p. 47) to increase its Chosen's *Power*. Each combatant then **Draws** (p. 48) a number of cards equal to their *Power*.
- † To **Engage** (p. 51), the combatants each play a card — high card wins **Initiative**.
- † The Chosen with *Initiative* may *Attack* or *Disengage*.
- † To **Attack** (p. 51), the Chosen plays a face-up card at their target. The defender must play a *Defence*, or be **Hit** (p. 55) and lose the fight.

- † There are several **Defence** options (p. 52); the basic ones are as follows:
 - Playing a card higher than the *Attack* is a **Parry** (p. 52). The defender gains *Initiative*.
 - Playing a card equal to the *Attack* is a **Bind** (p. 53), which generates *Resonance*. After a Bind, a special play called a **Wind** (p. 53) decides who claims *Initiative*.
 - Playing multiple cards that add up to the *Attack* or more is an **Evasion** (p. 53). This results in a *Disengage*.
- † When combatants **Disengage** (p. 55), they draw extra cards and prepare to *Engage* again.
- † At the **end of a Duel** (p. 56), the Victor gets to decide the fate of a *Knot*, or rewrite a *Thread* belonging to either themselves or one of the Vanquished.

CARD VALUES

You normally use the card value; high card wins.

- † **2–10:** *face value*
- † **JACK:** 11
- † **QUEEN:** 12
- † **KING:** 13
- † **ACE:** 14

Jokers don't have a value; instead, you draw a new card and then play a card from your hand on top of the Joker. The suit is wild.

In a **Wind** (p. 53), cards are ranked by suit. If suits match, the high value wins. From high to low:

- ♠ *Spades*
- ♣ *Clubs*
- ♦ *Diamonds*
- ♥ *Hearts*

You can use ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ instead if you prefer, or any other suit order agreed upon by all players.

FACILITATING

Although **BLADE BIND** is GMless, it may help to have one player act as facilitator — someone who guides the group through each stage of the game and acts as the main authority on the rules. The facilitator is usually the person who owns and has read the book. If the group has played before, then you may not need a facilitator.

Encourage the rest of the group to read the book as well, but recognise that you'll probably end up explaining things during play. Make sure you have a good grasp of the basics, and know where to look things up.

- † The facilitator is also often the host. Make sure you have all the materials you'll need (p. 7).
- † Once everyone is assembled, summarise what the game is about and discuss the expectations of play (p. 6).
- † New players are likely to be a bit lost when it comes to defining a setting (p. 13), so be prepared to go with one of the example settings and encourage people to add their own details.
- † Help everyone create their Chosen (p. 17). Lead by example, using the random card-draws as inspiration and demonstrating that they are not hard-and-fast results. Invent some peripheral details. Discuss the nature of the emerging relationships. Offer suggestions for Threads (p. 24), since this step often slows down new players. Don't be afraid to go with straightforward, obvious choices.
- † Offer to take the first scene (p. 42), unless someone else is keen. Play hard right out of the gate, and go straight for one of your goals.
- † You'll probably need to adjudicate the first few Duels (p. 47) until people get the hang of it. Also offer commentary and suggest narrative details to get people into the habit of visualising the fights.
- † Keep an eye on people's Will and Power scores (p. 28), and make sure they are updated after each Duel (p. 56).
- † Once the game ends, guide everyone through the Epilogue (p. 45) and draw the session to a close!



SETTING



SETTING

*“The world may end up
under a Sword of Damocles...
on a tightrope over the abyss.”*

—Andrei Gromyko, ‘Time Magazine’

BLADE BIND takes place in any world where ancient blades form pacts with those who are driven to achieve greatness.

The following two setting outlines are only suggestions. The world is but a backdrop for melodrama writ large; the focus is on the characters and their conflicts, and the setting only matters insofar as it supports that aim. You can set your game pretty much anywhere and any time — talk it over as a group, and pick a milieu that appeals. Everyone then builds on that basic idea, adding details as the game develops.

Assume that either your Chosen all know each other, or can identify other Chosen on sight. The Blade grants supernatural senses, and the Chosen are also connected by the web of fate. In most settings, Blades remain hidden until summoned, but in some worlds they may be permanently manifested.

MODERN DAY: THE SHADOW WORLD

Since time immemorial, the Blades have shaped human history from the shadows. They appear when ambition calls them, and vanish in the aftermath of blood and ashes once their influence plays out. Even now, hidden from the world at large, secret societies and mystical cabals strive to harness their ancient power and change the world.

SACRED SEAL

Blades normally exist in a shadow-dimension outside our world. Whenever a Chosen summons their Blade, they can choose to create a mystical Seal around the area. Within the Seal, time is frozen for all but the Chosen and the objects of their desires. They may unleash the full force of their fury, but any damage caused — even to people — only exists within the Seal. Once the Blades are dismissed and the Seal falls, the world continues as though nothing had happened. But of course, it has. After a duel, everything changes.

The Sacred Seal is the main reason the general public remains ignorant of the Blades and the impact the Chosen have on the world.

ORGANISATIONS

Many seek to use the power of the Chosen for their own ends.

- † **Governments** covertly recruit and field Chosen, waging a new Cold War against their international adversaries.
- † **Corporations** and **organised crime syndicates** thirst for influence. Harnessing the power of a Blade would make them unstoppable.
- † **Mystical orders** and **ninja clans** hoard forbidden lore and seek to manipulate the flow of history.
- † The **Church** sends sanctified Chosen to crusade against the demonic Blades. It is rumoured that many Blades lie dormant in the Vatican's vaults.

FANTASY: KING OF SWORDS

A kingdom is carved by the sword, and there are no swords more powerful than the Blades of old. They say the Chosen who wield them have the power to defeat entire armies and raze cities to the ground! None can stand before them — save another of the Chosen.

Yet violence begets violence, and calamity follows conquest. Built upon shattered ruins and sundered thrones, Valendra is a land in constant turmoil. Farmers eke a pittance from the soil while bandits and opportunists leech off the work of others, and a wealthy few hoard their treasures in fantastic citadels. Can a hero seize the moment and unite the realm, or will it fall once more to the cycle of destruction?

ORGANISATIONS

The Blades are forces of nature that shape the face of the world, and many do not even bother to conceal themselves. The Chosen are legendary figures, spoken of in fear and awe.

- † **Guardians:** An ancient and mystical order seeks to protect the realm from the Blades' fury, and tries to steer the Chosen onto the path of peace. But what happens when a Guardian is Chosen?
- † **Lost Knights:** Once a proud martial order, the Lost Knights now wander the land seeking purpose. Some will stand as champions for the oppressed, some seek the security of a rich patron, and others strive for power in their own right.
- † **Lord Heron:** This Lord's influence dominates the people as his citadel dominates the countryside. With one of the Chosen by his side, none can oppose him as he drains the citizen's wealth to fill his coffers.
- † **Bandits:** Many soldiers from defeated armies turn to banditry, preying upon the weak. But sometimes the oppressed take arms and rise up as well, fighting to claw back their due. For the lords and merchants, the end result is the same.

CHOSEN





“Confront them with annihilation, and they will then survive; plunge them into a deadly situation, and they will then live.

When people fall into danger,
they are then able to strive for victory.”

—Sun Tzu, *‘The Art of War’*

OVERVIEW

Each player takes the role of a Chosen, a character who wields one of the supernatural Blades.

Chosen are defined by their concept, their Blade, their relationships with others, and their goals. The following game terms relate to the Chosen:

- † Each player creates a **Knot** (p. 22) — something in the game world such as a character, item, or organisation — that represents an important focus or motivation for their Chosen.
- † Players then create **Threads** (p. 24), which are goals tying their Chosen to *Knots* and other Chosen.
- † *Threads* provide the Chosen with points of **Will** (p. 28). The more complete a Thread is, the more Will it provides. If a Thread becomes impossible to achieve, it ceases to be worth any Will.
- † Blades grant points of **Power** (p. 29) to the Chosen. All Chosen start with 2 Power, but this increases as the game progresses.
- † If Power ever becomes higher than Will, the Chosen becomes **Bladebound** (p. 61). They lose themselves to the will of the Blade, and become implacable monsters bent on destruction.

If you want to skip the setup and jump straight into a game, the **Forbidden Lore** chapter includes two quickstart setups (p. 72)

As an example, we'll follow the creation of a Chosen named Siân.

FLESHING OUT THE WORLD

Players are free to introduce new characters, organisations and locations to flesh out the world and provide context to their concept, relationships, Threads, and Knots. Adding details to the world may be useful for creating new Knots and Threads later in the game. It could be said that a Knot is just a thing that happens to be important to one of the Chosen at a particular moment.

CONCEPT

The only thing that unites the Chosen is their determination. Besides that, virtually anyone in the world may be Chosen — young or old, rich or poor, strong or frail, it matters not. Race, gender, sexuality, personality and ideals — all are equal. The Blade is but a tool, and one that only the Chosen have the power to wield.

Firstly, you will need a name and a rough concept for your Chosen. Describe their appearance and personality in a few words. Discuss your ideas with the other players. You don't need much detail at this point, as the rest of the creation process will help you figure out who they are.

If you're having trouble finding inspiration, you can either wait and see what develops, or draw a card to decide your Chosen's basic archetype and approach.

Siân is a young woman with a punk aesthetic — slight of build, with short dyed hair, multiple piercings, and tattoos.

For her archetype, she draws 4♠. She sees herself as an agent in the service of a powerful leader or organisation; she is determined, aggressive, and merciless in carrying out her patron's wishes.

CONCEPT

- 2** *Follower*
- 3** *Fool*
- 4** *Agent*
- 5** *Socialite*
- 6** *Wanderer*
- 7** *Teacher*
- 8** *Rebel*
- 9** *Devout*
- 10** *Neophyte*
- J** *Warrior*
- Q** *Protector*
- K** *Leader*
- A** *Ascetic*
- JK** *Trickster*

APPROACH

- ♠** *Violent, volatile, antagonistic*
- ♣** *Selfish, needy, corruptible*
- ♦** *Professional, cool, analytical*
- ♥** *Caring, considerate, self-sacrificing*

BLADES

Blades are ancient, powerful supernatural entities that each take the form of a large sword with a giant eye. It is bound to the soul of its Chosen, existing just outside reality until summoned to their hand. It grants the wielder astonishing physical prowess, and only another of the Chosen can hope to stand in their way. Yet the Blades have their own agendas, ancient enmities lying beneath the surface. If the Chosen falters on their path, the Blade may seize control and turn them into the instrument of its own vengeance.

BLADES

- 2** *Vagr*
- 3** *Kunlun*
- 4** *Oni*
- 5** *Miko*
- 6** *Devil Wing*
- 7** *Michael*
- 8** *Glass Edge*
- 9** *Buluc Chabtan*
- 10** *Set*
- J** *Claiomh Solais*
- Q** *Brass Dragon*
- K** *Templar*
- A** *Laozi*
- JK** *Your choice, or create a custom Blade (p. 66).*

Each Blade has a set of special *Techniques* (p. 33) that are activated by spending *Resonance* (p. 32). You gain Resonance by *Binding* with other Blades in a Duel (p. 53), and when you are *Vanquished* (p. 56).

Choose a Blade, or draw a card at random and see the list. Refer to the *Blades* chapter (p. 32) for full details. Write down your Blade's name and Techniques on your record sheet or an index card. Your Blade and Techniques are public knowledge, so don't hide them if a player wants to know.

Siân chooses Vagr, a bestial Blade that matches her aggressive personality.

RELATIONSHIPS

The lives of the Chosen tend to be intertwined. Each player draws a card, and uses it to define a relationship between their character and another Chosen. The other player may opt to decline the relationship, unless everybody else has declined it already.

You can establish two relationships between a pair of characters, so long as both players agree on how they work together. Unless all players at the table agree, a pair of relationships cannot include more than one Face card, Ace, or Joker.

For example: Parent and Child + By Reputation may be a long-lost child or absent parent.

Once the relationships are established, discuss how the characters are connected. Sometimes the initial relationships infer other connections. Write down the details of all your relationships on your record sheet.

For example: A and B are Siblings, while B and C are Parent and Child. Therefore, A is C's aunt or uncle, even though they didn't use a card to establish a relationship.

You don't need to connect everyone to everyone else. It's alright if some characters don't have many connections — everybody will have at least one.

Siân draws K♦. She and another player decide that she is Esteban's daughter, and that they have a fairly cool, detached relationship. They don't hate each other, they just don't get along all that well.

Maya's player establishes a "codependent work colleagues" relationship with Siân. Obviously they both serve the same master, but they decide Maya encourages Siân's violent side to avoid getting her own hands dirty.

RELATIONSHIPS

- 2** *By Reputation*
- 3** *Acquaintance*
- 4** *Neighbour*
- 5** *Vendor and Client*
- 6** *Students*
- 7** *Work Colleagues*
- 8** *Rivals*
- 9** *Companions*
- 10** *Childhood Friends*
- J** *Relatives*
- Q** *Siblings*
- K** *Parent and Child*
- A** *Lovers*
- JK** *Twins*

TONE

- ♠** *Violent, volatile, antagonistic*
- ♣** *Selfish, needy, codependent*
- ♦** *Professional, civil, detached*
- ♥** *Protective, fond, supportive*

KNOTS

Each player creates a unique Knot related to their Chosen. In essence, a Knot can be anything you think is worth fighting over. They most often represent characters, items, organisations, locations, or even information — however, you can't pick a Chosen or Blade as your Knot. While your own Knot is often something you want to protect or control, you need not have a positive relationship with it — you might be highly motivated to destroy it, for example. You are free to define any other information about your Knot, such as relationships with characters, an organisation's charter, or the true nature of an artefact.

Knots motivate the Chosen to fight, but they don't usually have any other effects. If you want to introduce a Knot that has a specific game-effect, see the *Forbidden Lore* chapter (p. 64).

If you're stuck for inspiration, you can draw a card on the Quickdraw Knots table to come up with a random Knot.

Write your Knot's name and any details on an index card or a blank sheet or paper, and put it in the middle of the table. Once created, Knots become playing-pieces that anyone can try to influence. You decide whether you are in control of your own Knot to begin with, but it can change hands or be destroyed as the game progresses.

Since she's an agent in the service of an organisation, Siân creates a Knot to represent her patron — Vance, head of a mystic cabal. Siân sees him as a leader and visionary, and will act on his orders.

TWO-PLAYER GAMES

If you only have two players, create a third Knot that both Chosen can be invested in. These make good targets for Possess Threads (p. 24), where control can swing back and forth, although neither Chosen may control this Knot at the start of the game.

QUICKDRAW KNOTS

CHARACTERS

- 2♥** Pet or animal companion
- 3♥** Sidekick
- 4♥** Celebrity
- 5♥** Diplomat or mediator
- 6♥** Test subject or experiment
- 7♥** Liar or manipulator
- 8♥** Mentor or teacher
- 9♥** Young heir
- 10♥** Dark omen
- J♥** Leader or visionary
- Q♥** Prophet or prophecy
- K♥** Head of an organisation
- A♥** Supernatural entity

LOCATIONS

- 2♣** Underground or concealed
- 3♣** Abandoned or ruined building
- 4♣** Private home or fortress
- 5♣** Safe haven or refuge
- 6♣** Shop, restaurant, nightclub
- 7♣** Academy or training ground
- 8♣** Library or museum
- 9♣** Ship or other large vehicle
- 10♣** Laboratory or test facility
- J♣** Landmark or natural feature
- Q♣** Church or temple
- K♣** Organisation headquarters
- A♣** Place of power

ORGANISATIONS

- 2♦** Charity
- 3♦** Club or association
- 4♦** Secret society
- 5♦** Academic group
- 6♦** Guild
- 7♦** Martial order
- 8♦** Mystic cabal
- 9♦** Family
- 10♦** Gang
- J♦** Organised crime
- Q♦** Religion or cult
- K♦** Government department
- A♦** Corporation

ITEMS

- 2♠** Locket or ring
- 3♠** Chalice or dish
- 4♠** Orb or gem
- 5♠** Piece of armour
- 6♠** Memento
- 7♠** Key
- 8♠** Shield
- 9♠** Artwork
- 10♠** Deck of cards
- J♠** Contract
- Q♠** Forbidden knowledge
- K♠** Weapon
- A♠** Book

RED JOKER: Rift between worlds

BLACK JOKER: Dormant Blade

THREADS

The Chosen are connected by the threads of fate, creating a web of conflicting motivations. Threads represent goals and ambitions, and provide the Chosen with points of Will (p. 28).

Each Chosen defines three Threads. Everyone first comes up with a Thread that connects to the Knot they created, but once those are defined, the other two can connect to any other Knots or Chosen.

Threads are made up of a **Subject** (who will or will not achieve the goal), an **Intent** (the outcome, to be achieved or avoided), and an **Object** (the Knot or Chosen that is at stake). The options are summarised in this table, with full descriptions of each possible combination on the following pages.

SUBJECT	INTENT	OBJECT
<i>I will</i>		
<i>Nobody will</i>	<i>Destroy</i>	
<i>Anybody will</i>	»	»
<i>[CHOSEN] will</i>		<i>[KNOT]</i>
<i>[CHOSEN] will not</i>	<i>Control</i>	
<i>I will</i>	»	<i>Defeat</i>
		»
		<i>[CHOSEN]</i>

Each Thread may be **Loose** (not currently achieved), **Secured** (achieved, even if temporarily), or **Cut** (impossible to achieve). Depending on their strength and current state, Threads provide the Chosen with points of Will. The Thread descriptions opposite summarise the conditions that must be met, and how much Will the Thread is worth (each ● represents a point of Will, and ○ means no Will), for each possible state.

If you're unsure what to pick then go with a Protect or Possess Thread for your own Knot, a Vendetta or Possess Thread for someone else's Knot, and a Rival Thread with another Chosen. If in doubt, choose a Strong Thread.

You choose whether you control your own Knot at the start of the game. This choice affects the state of any Control-type Threads that target it. You cannot start with control of someone else's Knot.

STRONG THREADS

VENDETTA — *I will Destroy [KNOT]*

- **Secure:** You destroy the Knot.
- **Loose:** The Knot exists.
- **Cut:** Someone other than you destroys the Knot.

PROTECT — *Nobody will Destroy [KNOT]*

- **Secure:** The Knot exists.
- **Cut:** The Knot is destroyed.

POSSESS — *I will Control [KNOT]*

- **Secure:** You control the Knot.
- **Loose:** You don't control the Knot.
- **Cut:** The Knot is destroyed.

LIBERATE — *Nobody will Control [KNOT]*

- **Secure:** Nobody controls the Knot.
- **Loose:** Someone controls the Knot.
- **Cut:** The Knot is destroyed.

RIVAL — *I will Defeat [CHOSEN]*

- This is a special Thread. It starts at 2 Will, and is considered **Loose**.
 - +● Each time you score a Hit on the named Chosen, this Thread gains 1 Will (to a maximum of 3, when it is considered **Secured**).
 - Each time the named Chosen scores a Hit on you, this Thread loses 1 Will. If it reaches 0, the Thread is **Cut**.

WEAK THREADS

ELIMINATE — *Anybody will Destroy [KNOT]*

- **Secure:** The Knot is destroyed.
- **Loose:** The Knot exists.

ALLY — *[CHOSEN] will Destroy [KNOT]*

- **Secure:** The named Chosen destroys the Knot.
- **Loose:** The Knot exists.
- **Cut:** Someone other than the named Chosen destroys the Knot.

FOIL — *[CHOSEN] will not Destroy [KNOT]*

- **Secure:** The Knot exists, or is destroyed by someone other than the named Chosen.
- **Cut:** The named Chosen destroys the Knot.

SECURE — *Anybody will Control [KNOT]*

- **Secure:** The Knot is controlled.
- **Loose:** Nobody controls the Knot.
- **Cut:** The Knot is destroyed.

SUPPORT — *[CHOSEN] will Control [KNOT]*

- **Secure:** The named Chosen controls the Knot.
- **Loose:** The Knot is controlled by someone other than the named Chosen.
- **Cut:** The Knot is destroyed.

OPPOSE — *[CHOSEN] will not Control [KNOT]*

- **Secure:** The named Chosen doesn't control the Knot.
- **Loose:** The named Chosen controls the Knot.
- **Cut:** The Knot is destroyed.

Write each of your Threads on your record sheet, also noting their current state and how much Will each is worth. Threads belong to you, but they are public knowledge.

Siân chooses these three Threads. Her Will is discussed on the next page.

- † **PROTECT:** Nobody will Destroy Vance
- † **SUPPORT:** Maya will Control the Staff of Light
- † **RIVAL:** I will Defeat Nat

PRIMING CONFLICT

When assigning Threads, look for ways to oppose the other Chosen's goals. If someone takes a Protect or Possess Thread, consider taking a Vendetta or Eliminate Thread against the same Knot. Several Chosen could fight to Possess or Liberate a Knot. If someone wants to Destroy a Knot, consider Protecting it.

By deliberately looking for opportunities to place yourself at odds with the other Chosen, you'll be priming the game for conflict. A variety of Thread types also prevents the game from stagnating.

REVENGE THREADS

A Cut Thread can be instantly rewritten as a **Revenge** Thread, seeking retribution against the Chosen who Cut your Thread by destroying something they care about. You may need to take a Revenge Thread to avoid becoming Bladebound (p. 61).

If a Revenge Thread is Cut, you cannot replace it with another Revenge Thread.

REVENGE — *I will Destroy [KNOT]*

- **Secure:** You destroy the Knot.
- **Loose:** The Knot exists.
- **Cut:** Someone other than you destroys the Knot.

WILL / POWER

The fluctuation of Will and Power dictates whether it's the Chosen or the Blade that's in charge. So long as Power is no greater than Will, the Chosen remains in control. However, if Will slips below Power, then the Chosen becomes Bladebound — the Blade takes over and uses the Chosen to lay waste to everything in its path in pursuit of its Enmity.

The game works a little differently for the Bladebound. See the *Bladebound* chapter (p. 61) for details.

WILL

All Chosen start with some free points of Will, plus the Will granted by each of their current Threads — which vary from 1 to 3 depending on their types and current states. Each Chosen can have up to three Threads at a time, so they will start with between 4 and 12 Will.

FREE WILL

- † For a two-player game, Chosen start with 1 free point of Will.
- † For three players, the Chosen start with 2 points of Will.
- † With four or more players, the Chosen start with 3 Will.

THREAD STATES

- † **Secured:** 3 Will (strong) or 2 Will (weak)
 - The Thread is completed or currently being held.
- † **Loose:** 2 Will (strong) or 1 Will (weak)
 - The Thread is in progress, striving for completion.
- † **Cut:** 0 Will
 - It is no longer possible to complete or maintain the Thread.

Vendetta, *Eliminate*, *Ally*, and *Rival* Threads always begin play Loose. *Protect* and *Foil* Threads always start off Secure, but also have no Loose middle ground — they are either Secure or Cut. All of the Control-based Threads can start as either Loose or Secure, depending on whether each Knot is Controlled by its creator or not. No Threads start play Cut.

Siân's Threads are currently worth 6 Will, plus her 3 starting points for being in a four-player game, for a total of 9 Will:

† **PROTECT:** Nobody will Destroy Vance

(Since Vance is alive: Strong, Secure — ●●●)

† **SUPPORT:** Maya will Control the Staff of Light

(Since Maya doesn't Control the Staff: Weak, Loose — ●○○)

† **RIVAL:** I will Defeat Nat

(Since it's a starting Rival Thread: Strong, Loose — ●●○)

POWER

Power dictates the effectiveness of your Blade. A higher Power lets you draw more cards when you draw your Blade at the start of a duel, and accumulate more Resonance to activate your Techniques.

All Chosen begin with 2 Power.

- † If your Power is less than your Will, you may voluntarily increase Power by 1 at the start of each Duel. If you decide not to, but then cross Blades against your Enmity, your Power increases by 1 anyway.
- † When you are Vanquished (p. 56), your starting Will drops by 1 until your initial points are gone; after that, your Power increases by 1 each time you are defeated.
- † You cannot voluntarily decrease Power.
- † If Power becomes higher than Will, then you become Bladebound (p. 61). You no longer gain Power in the same way, and follow a set of special rules.

Note your current Power on your record sheet by shading in the dots. The first two dots have been filled in for you.

As with all Chosen, Siân begins play with 2 Power.

ENMITY

Each Blade feels Enmity towards one of the other Blades — an ingrained hatred forged into its very being, leading to bloody battles throughout the centuries. Blades always want to defeat their Enmity Blade, but so long as their Chosen is in control the Blade's desire can be held in check.

ASSIGNING ENMITY

After you've defined all the Relationships and Threads, pick a card to represent each Blade. You can use their index or reference cards, or simply assign each Blade a regular playing card. Shuffle these cards together to form a deck of Blades.

Deal a card out to each player. The card you are dealt indicates your Blade's Enmity.

- † If one player is dealt their own Blade, they swap cards with the player to their left.
- † If two or more players are dealt their own Blades, each of those players passes their card around to the left until it reaches one of the other affected players.

Note your Blade's Enmity on your record sheet.

Sian gets dealt Maya's Blade, Miko; ironically, if she becomes Bladebound she'll try to destroy her co-worker. Nat's Blade, Kunlun, ends up with Enmity towards Vargr.

ENMITY IN PLAY

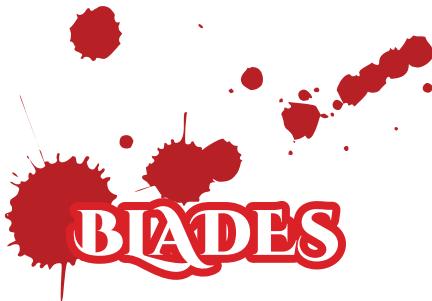
In any Duel where you did not voluntarily increase your Power, if you cross Blades with your Enmity your Power automatically increases by 1 and you draw a card straight away.

In addition, a Blade gains 2 points of Resonance any time it **Binds** (p. 53) against its Enmity.

Enmity also determines which character a Chosen will attempt to destroy if they become **Bladebound** (p. 61).

BLADES





*“The sword – the first, for a time the only force:
the force of iron.”*

—John Lothrop Motley, ‘The Rise of the Dutch Republic’

RESONANCE

Blades start with 0 Resonance, and gain it as the game progresses. You spend Resonance to activate your Blade’s special *Techniques*.

- † Each time a pair of Blades *Bind* (p. 53), they both gain a point of Resonance.
- † If a Blade Binds against its *Enmity* (p. 30), it gains an extra point of Resonance.
- † You also gain a point of Resonance if you lose a Duel (p. 56).

A Blade may not hold more Resonance than the Power of its Chosen. If it would gain more than that, the excess is lost.

Once earned, points of Resonance stay with the Blade until spent. It can also be lost due to the effects of some Techniques. The Chosen decides when and how to spend the Resonance in their Blade.

TECHNIQUES

Each Blade has a Technique that costs 1 Resonance, one that costs 2 Resonance, and one that costs 3 Resonance.

TECHNIQUE DESCRIPTIONS

Each Technique is written in a standard format:

«COST» Technique Name (*When you can use it*) — Effects.

TIMING NOTES

- † **Any:** At any time.
- † **Once per Exchange:** At any time, but only once per Exchange.
- † **Before a Motion:** Just before cards are played for an Engage, Attack, or Wind.
- † **Engage/Attack/Bind/Defend/Parry and such:** When *you* perform the listed action.
- † **Defended/Parried and such:** When *your opponent* responds in the specified manner.

BLADE DESCRIPTIONS



LAOZI

«1» **Renew** (*After an Exchange*) — Discard any number of cards and draw an equal number.

«2» **Immutable** (*Vanquished*) — The Victor may not rewrite any of your Threads.

«3» **Executioner** (*You Hit a Bladebound*) — Kill the Bladebound and end the game.

VARGR



- «1» **Marauder** (*Bind*) — You gain Initiative.
- «2» **Vigour** (*After an Exchange*) — Draw a card.
- «3» **Reaper** (*Attack*) — Your Attack targets all combatants in the fight.

KUNLUN



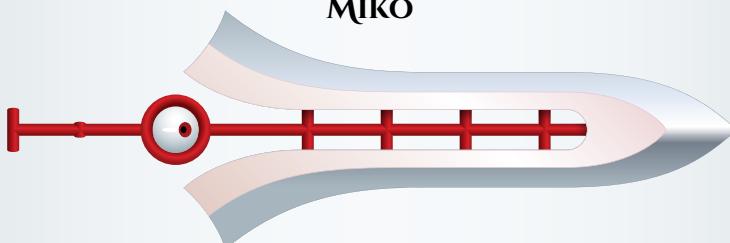
- «1» **Implacable** (*Engage*) — Engage any opponent, even if already Engaged.
- «2» **Second Sight** (*Any*) — Look at a combatant's hand for up to ten seconds.
- «3» **Negate** (*Any*) — Cancel one use of any Technique.

ONI



- «1» **Direct** (*Engage*) — Skip the Engagement and gain Initiative.
- «2» **Disharmony** (*Parry/Parried or Bind*) — Your opponent loses all their Resonance.
- «3» **Ultimate Attack** (*Attack*) — Play two cards and add their total together.

MIKO



- «1» **Grapple** (*Parry/Parried or Bind*) — This Exchange, your opponent may not Disengage while they have Initiative.
- «2» **Counterattack** (*Parry*) — Your Parry becomes a Counter.
- «3» **Ward** (*Before a Duel*) — Name one Knot; it cannot be Destroyed this scene.

DEVIL WING



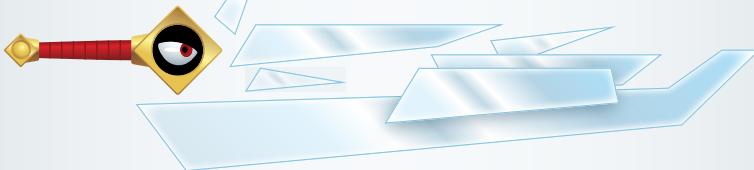
- «1» **Blur** (*Defend*) — Evade with any two cards.
- «2» **Retreat** (*Before an Engagement*) — Leave the scene. You do not count as Vanquished.
- «3» **Vampire** (*Parry/Parried or Bind*) — Steal a card from your opponent's hand at random.

MICHAEL



- «1» **Harmony** (*Once per Exchange*) — One combatant gains or loses 1 Resonance.
- «2» **Seal** (*Once per Exchange*) — Name a suit. This Exchange, one combatant may not play cards where the final result matches that suit.
- «3» **Silence** (*Any*) — All other combatants lose all Resonance.

GLASS EDGE



- «1» **Nimble** (*Defend*) — Dodge with any low card.
- «2» **Whirlwind** (*Attack*) — Your Attack affects all combatants who are Engaged with you.
- «3» **Reflect** (*Defend*) — Bind with any card.

BULUC CHABTAN



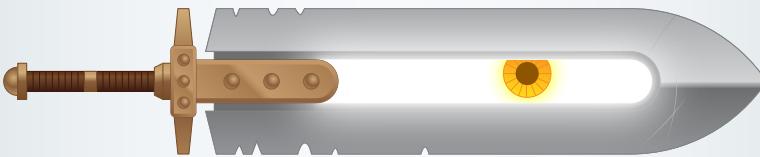
- «1» **Augur** (*Engage or Wind*) — Before revealing cards, name a suit. If any other combatant reveals that suit, draw a card.
- «2» **Stealth Attack** (*Attack*) — Your opponent must play their Defence card first. They may React.
- «3» **Blood Sacrifice** (*When you Hit*) — Draw two cards.

SET



- «1» **Wary** (*Parried*) — Disengage.
- «2» **Deception** (*Defended*) — Change your Attack to any suit.
- «3» **Shadow Step** (*Defend*) — Defend and Disengage without playing a card.

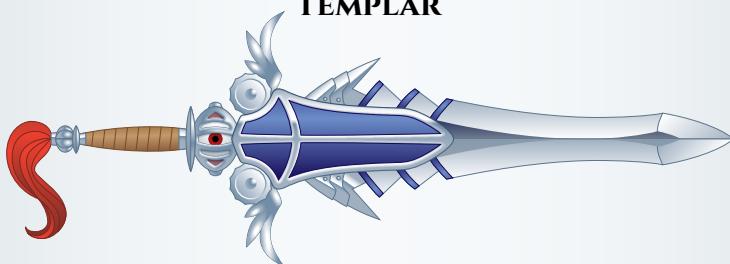
CLAÍOMH SOLAIS



- «1» **Call of Battle** (*Before a Duel*) — Enter a scene in which you do not have a relevant Thread.
- «2» **Heavy Hitter** (*Parried*) — Your opponent discards a card.
- «3» **Relentless** (*Your hand is empty*) — Draw two cards.

BRASS DRAGON

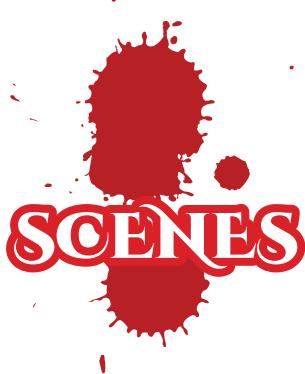
- «1» **Bolt** (*Attack*) — Attack a combatant you aren't Engaged with.
- «2» **Blindness** (*Before a Motion*) — Your opponent must play their cards at random this Motion.
- «3» **Take the Lead** (*Before a Motion*) — You gain Initiative.

TEMPLAR

- «1» **Shield** (*Any*) — You may play any number of cards to help Defend other combatants.
- «2» **Hunter** (*Opponent Disengages*) — Cancel the Disengage and gain Initiative.
- «3» **Invincible** (*You are Hit*) — You are not eliminated, and instead Disengage.

SCENES





“When the sword is once drawn, the passions of men observe no bounds of moderation.”

—Alexander Hamilton, ‘The Federalist Papers’

OVERVIEW

- † Players take turns framing scenes for their Chosen.
- † When it's your scene, you can try to influence a Knot or another Chosen in some way.
- † If any Chosen stand in your way, you must either back down or fight a Duel. The winner of a Duel gets to change the situation to their advantage.
- † Several different events can trigger the Epilogue, where everybody narrates what happens to their character. The game then draws to a close.

FIRST PLAYER

Deal one card to each player; high card gets to frame the opening scene. Split ties in suit order (♣♦♥♦).

Before the opening scene begins, gather up all the cards used during the setup and shuffle the deck.

SCENES

Players take turns framing and playing out scenes that focus on their Chosen striving to achieve their goals, fighting for what they believe in, and struggling to maintain control over their Blade. When it's your turn, you and your character are called the Focus.

CHOOSE A SCENE TYPE

There are three types of scene: *Decisive*, *Manipulative*, and *Wavering*.

DECISIVE SCENES

Like a decisive bolt of lightning, the Chosen strikes at one of the Knots in play (which includes other Chosen) with the intent to destroy, defeat, control, or liberate it. Most often, the aim is to Secure one of your own Threads, but you might also be attempting to aid or sabotage another Chosen.

The Focus player declares their intent and describes where, when, and how the attempt is taking place. The nature of the Thread will likely decide which Knots or minor characters are present.

The souls of the Blades call out to one another. Any Chosen with a Thread that refers to either the Focus Chosen or the targeted Knot may choose to join the scene by describing their arrival.

If none stand in their way, then the Focus player can simply narrate how they Secure the Thread. No mundane force can hope to oppose the power of the Chosen, and those that try may be swept aside as easily as toy soldiers.

MANIPULATIVE SCENES

Sometimes you may want to try and convince one of the other Chosen to join your cause, stop them acting against you, or find out what their true aims are. You can also use a Manipulative scene to simply get to know the characters better without necessarily having an ulterior motive.

The Focus player describes the location and other circumstances, and also decides which other characters are present. They may select one key character who cannot refuse the invitation, but others may decline if they wish.

Manipulative scenes are played out in character. The Focus can propose a change to one Thread belonging to another Chosen in the scene, and that Chosen can negotiate terms and conditions. In the end, if they agree to the change then their Thread is rewritten as agreed. If they refuse, then the Focus can either accept their decision or force the issue by drawing their Blade and triggering a Duel.

In addition to negotiating a Thread change, anyone present may freely trade or liberate any Knots that are under their control. This may lead to other Chosen joining the scene in order to contest the exchange.

If at any point the Focus decides to strike at a Knot that's present, then it becomes a Decisive scene instead. Any Chosen not yet present, but with Threads that refer to the Focus or the Knot, may make a sudden appearance.

WAVERING SCENES

If the Focus player doesn't have any good ideas for their scene, they should open it up to the table for suggestions.

If the Focus still doesn't know what to do, one other player can seize the initiative and frame a Decisive or Manipulative scene for their own Chosen so long as it also involves the current Focus. If more than one player wants to frame such a scene, then the one closest to the Focus player's left has precedence.

PLAY IT OUT

Play out the scene in-character. Describe the location, the time of day, the weather, and the people present. Even if everyone knows it's going to go straight to a Duel, take the time to exchange challenges, taunts, justifications and recriminations.

If two or more characters cross Blades, a Duel takes place. That's no reason to stop roleplaying, though — describe how your Blade manifests, narrate the over-the-top action as you trade blows and pull off narrow escapes, and keep the dialogue flowing as you vie for supremacy! The scene ends once you've resolved the Duel.

If there's no Duel, draw the scene to a close once the main point has been addressed. Try not to meander; if the scene doesn't seem to be going anywhere, the next Focus player can call for it to wrap up within a minute or so. If something is left unresolved, you can always frame a new scene on your next turn and lunge straight for the heart of the issue.

DUELLING

Duels occur when two or more Chosen draw Blades and stand opposed. The complete Duelling rules are in the next chapter (p. 47).

In order for a Knot to be at stake, it must clearly be part of the scene. The Threads of all Chosen involved in a Duel are always at stake. You don't need to declare your intentions before the fight, but they often come up during roleplay. There's nothing stopping you from changing your mind and claiming an unexpected prize once you achieve Victory, however.

Once a Duel is declared, all Chosen present must decide whether to join in or sit out. If any sit out but decide to join in later, they draw one fewer card for each Exchange already fought. If a Chosen is the target of a Duel but doesn't want to fight, they are automatically considered Vanquished.

Duels continue until one Chosen emerges as the Victor. The Victor gets to destroy, claim, or liberate a Knot that's at stake; rewrite or author a Thread belonging to one of the Vanquished; or rewrite or author a Thread of their own (p. 56).

Duels usually cause changes to Will and Power scores. If a Chosen's Power exceeds their Will, they will become Bladebound (p. 61) and vanish at the end of the scene along with their Blade.

The end of a Duel always marks the end of a scene.

NEXT SCENE

Play proceeds to the left around the table, with each player framing a scene for their character in turn. This process continues until the Epilogue is triggered.

EPILOGUE

“If you wait by the river long enough, the bodies of your enemies will float by.”

—Sun Tzu, ‘The Art of War’

The Epilogue signals the end of the game, and can be triggered in three ways:

- † **Tragedy:** One Bladebound slays another.
- † **Stability:** All Chosen have nothing but Secured Threads, and none are Bladebound. They have miraculously reached a state of equilibrium.
- † **Champion:** One Chosen has three Secured Threads and a Power of 9 or higher without being Bladebound. The Champion achieves ultimate power, and may modify or embellish the Epilogues of any other Chosen.

Go around the table, with each player summarising their character's achievements and losses, and narrating what the future holds for them.

Once the Epilogue is complete, the game draws to a close. While you're clearing up, chat about how it went, any memorable moments, and if there's anything you'd like to see (or not see) the next time you play.

DUELS





“The only reason a warrior is alive is to fight, and the only reason a warrior fights is to win.”

—Miyamoto Musashi, ‘A Book of Five Rings’

Duels occur when one Chosen steadfastly opposes another. Chosen are Vanquished if they are Hit, and as the Victor you can impose your will on them or seize the goal they were preventing you from achieving.

A “Duel” is literally a fight between two people. If three or more Chosen are involved, it’s called a Melee — the basics of combat are the same, but Melees have a few extra rules to manage the additional combatants (p. 57). The rules are written with both Duels and Melees in mind.

BARGAIN

At the start of a Duel, your Blade offers to grant you more Power. You may opt to increase your Power by 1 or refuse the offer. You cannot accept the offer if it would cause you to become Bladebound.

Crossing swords with its Enmity causes your Blade’s power to surge. If you refused the Bargain but then Engage with your Blade’s Enmity, your Power immediately increases by 1 and you draw a card. This does not apply if you accepted the initial Bargain, or if your Power is equal to Will.

DRAW

Blades only appear when called by their Chosen. Once you have accepted or rejected the **Bargain**, describe how your Blade manifests. Some appear in a flash of light or a flickering shadow; some grow out of their wielder's body; others may plunge from the sky or erupt from the ground.

When you manifest your Blade, draw cards equal to your Power.

If you are joining a Duel that's in progress, draw one fewer card for each Exchange that's already been fought. You may only join at an Engage.

FIGHT!

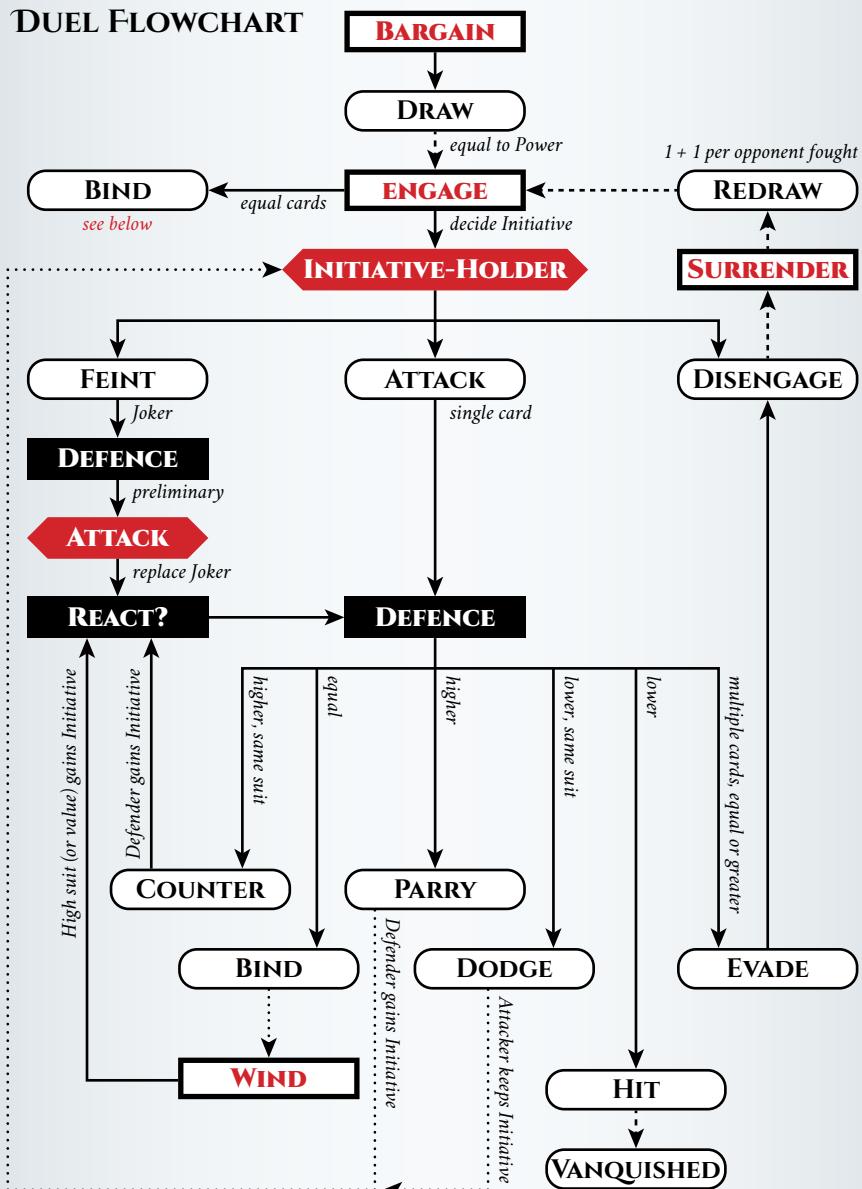
Once Blades are drawn, Duels are fought over one or more Exchanges (where combatants come together and trade blows) by following these steps:

- 1 Engage:** At the start of an Exchange, combatants reveal hidden cards to decide who wins Initiative (p. 51).
- 2 Attack:** The combatant with Initiative chooses whether to Attack by playing a card (Step 3/p. 51), or to Disengage (Step 5/p. 55).
- 3 Defence:** When Attacked, the defender must play one or more cards in Defence (p. 52). Different plays can result in a Disengage, a change in Initiative, or the Defence suddenly becoming the Attack!
 - If they can't play a successful Defence, the defender is Hit (p. 55), ending the Exchange and removing them from the fight. This will end a Duel (p. 56), but may not end a Melee (p. 57).
- 4 Next Motion:** If the Exchange hasn't ended due to a Disengage or Hit, return to Step 2.
- 5 Disengage:** If the Duel hasn't ended, the combatants discard all the cards that were played to the table, draw cards, and return to Step 1.

See p. 71 for a quick-reference summary of the duelling manoeuvres.

† Combatants may also spend **Resonance** (p. 32) to activate **Techniques** (p. 33) whenever the activation conditions are met.

DUEL FLOWCHART



DECISION POINTS

ATTACKER

DEFENDER

BOTH

TIMING

Between Motions
 Between Exchanges

DUELING TERMS

- † **Duel:** An entire fight, from start to finish. It's a *Melee* (p. 57) if there are more than two combatants.
- † **Engage:** When two combatants come together and begin an *Exchange*.
- † **Disengage:** When two *Engaged* combatants break apart and recover.
- † **Exchange:** A sequence of manoeuvres, from an *Engage* until the *Disengage*.
- † **Initiative:** The combatant with Initiative may choose to *Attack* or *Disengage*.
- † **Motion:** One pair of cards played as part of an *Exchange* (an *Engage*, *Attack/Defend*, or *Wind*).
- † **Attack:** An attempt to *Hit* an opponent.
- † **Defence:** A card played in response to an *Attack*.
- † **Bind:** When two Blades lock together.
- † **Wind:** A struggle for leverage and control when two Blades are locked together. Rhymes with "bind".
- † **Parry:** A *Defence* that turns aside the opponent's Blade and shifts *Initiative* to the defender.
- † **Riposte:** An *Attack* performed after a *Parry*.
- † **Counter:** A *Defence* that strikes at a weak point in an incoming *Attack*.
- † **Feint:** A "fake-out" *Attack* that attempts to lure the defender into committing to a *Defence* too early.
- † **Evade:** A *Defence* that involves losing ground and just getting out of the way.
- † **Dodge:** A *Defence* that keeps pace with the attacker but cannot gain the advantage.
- † **Hit:** The result of an inadequate *Defence*. It only takes one Hit to knock a combatant out of the fight.

ENGAGE

Circling each other, seeking an advantage, the combatants are drawn inexorably together...

Each combatant chooses a card from their hand and plays it face-down. When everyone has made their selection, flip the cards face-up.

- † Highest card gains **Initiative** and becomes the attacker. They may choose whether to play an **Attack**, or to **Disengage**. The other combatant is the defender.
- † Equal cards between two Engaged combatants results in a **Bind**.
- † If a combatant reveals a Joker, they draw a card and then replace the Joker with a card from their hand. If both play Jokers, then the replacement cards are both played face-down and flipped.

ATTACK

The combatant with Initiative must play a card to Attack, or else the Exchange ends with a **Disengage**.

ATTACK – any card

Seizing the initiative, the attacker swings at their opponent with deadly intent!

The attacker plays a card face-up.

- † The defender must play one or more cards against it or take a **Hit**.

FEINT – Joker

The attacker attempts to draw out their opponent's defence.

The attacker plays a Joker and draws a card.

- † Once the defender plays a card, the attacker replaces the Joker with a card from their hand. The suit is wild — they may declare it to be any suit of their choice.
- † The defender may **React** if necessary to bolster their Defence.

DEFENCE

When Attacked, the target must play one or more cards in Defence or be **Hit**, losing the fight.

Essentially, Defence cards may be higher than, equal to, or lower than the Attack. You can get better results by playing a matching suit.

- † Defender's card is higher — they **Parry**, or may **Counter** if the suit matches the Attack.
- † Defender's card is equal — the Blades **Bind**.
- † Defender plays two or more cards that add up to the Attack or higher — they **Evasive**.
- † Defender's card is lower, but the suit matches the Attack — they **Dodge**.
- † Defender's cards are lower or they play no card — they are **Hit**.

PARRY — *single card higher than Attack*

The defender turns aside or sidesteps the attack, gaining the upper hand.

The defender plays a card higher than the Attack. They gain Initiative, and may then:

- † **Riposte:** Play their own **Attack**.
- † **Counter:** If the Parry is the same suit as the Attack.
- † **Disengage.**

COUNTER — *single card higher than Attack and same suit*

Taking advantage of an opening, the defender turns the tables by striking first!

If Parry and Attack are the same suit, then the defender may turn the Parry card into an **Attack**.

- † The original attacker can use their Attack card to **React** in Defence, but it can't be used as a *Dodge* even though it's the same suit.
- † All cards played as part of a Counter (including Countering a Counter) are part of the same Motion.

BIND — *single card equal to Attack**Both Blades come together with a resonating blow.*

The Defence card is the same value as the Attack.

- 1 Shuffle the discard pile back into the deck.
- 2 Both combatants draw a card, and gain 1 Resonance if their Blade has the capacity (Resonance can't be higher than Power).
 - When you Bind against your Enmity, you gain 1 extra Resonance.
- 3 For their next Motion, both combatants must play a **Wind**.

WIND — *single face-down card**With Blades locked together, the two combatants struggle for dominance on the razor's edge!*In the Motion following a *Bind*, both combatants play and reveal a face-down card. The high **suit** is the **Attack** card (♠♣♥♦, then split by high value); low suit (or value) is the **Defence** card.

- † The defender may **React** if necessary.

EVADE — *multiple cards totalling Attack or higher**The defender avoids the blow but loses ground.*

The defender plays multiple cards totalling the Attack card or higher.

- † Number cards use their face value. Face cards have the following values — **J**=11, **Q**=12, **K**=13, **A**=14.
- † Evading triggers a **Disengage**.

REPLACING CARDS

To **replace** a card, play a new card from your hand on top of the old one. The old card is ignored, and you use the new card's value. This lets Jokers remain as a reminder that a card's suit may have changed.

DODGE – *single card lower than Attack but same suit*

The defender avoids the blow but does not gain the advantage.

The defender plays a single card lower than the Attack but of the same suit.

- † The attacker keeps Initiative.
- † Note that when *Reacting* to a *Counter*, you can't use your original card to *Dodge*!

REACT – *single card, or one or more cards added to original*

Split-second reaction time means the difference between life and death!

Sometimes in a *Wind*, *Counter*, or *Feint*, a combatant may suddenly discover that their Defence is inadequate. In these cases, they have two options:

- † Use their existing card as part of a Defence. If the suits match then they can **Dodge** on a *Wind* or against a *Feint* (**but not against a Counter**), or else they may add one or more cards to form an **Evade**.
- † Replace their existing card with a single card from their hand. This may allow them to **Dodge**, **Bind**, **Parry**, or **Counter**.

FLOW – *Joker*

The defender matches their opponent's rhythm and frustrates their attacks.

The defender plays a Joker and draws a card, then replaces the Joker with a card from their hand. The suit is wild – they may declare it to be any suit of their choice.

DODGING A COUNTER

When you play an Attack and your opponent Counters, **you can't use your original Attack card to Dodge** when you React. That's because the Counter **already** matches your Attack suit, so every Counter would automatically be Dodged. However, **you can** React with a new single card of the same suit to Dodge a Counter.

OUTCOMES

HIT — defender Vanquished

The attacker's Blade strikes true, vanquishing their foe!

The defender is Vanquished (p. 56), ending the Exchange and knocking them out of the fight.

DISENGAGE — end Exchange, draw cards

The fighters separate and catch their breath before diving back into the fray.

Discard all the cards that were played to the table during the Exchange. Players keep the cards that are in their hands.

The combatants draw 1 card, plus 1 card for each opponent they just exchanged blows with. For an opponent to count, there must have been at least one *Attack* or *Wind*; Disengaging straight after the *Engage* doesn't grant an extra card.

If you Disengage straight after the Engage, you only draw 1 card.

In a one-on-one Duel, you'll normally draw 2 cards.

In a Melee (p. 57), you draw 1 card plus 1 for each opponent that you resolved at least one Attack/Defend or Wind against.

If someone needs to draw a card but the deck is empty, shuffle the discards to form a new deck.

BETWEEN EXCHANGES

- † If there are still enemies on the field, combatants may surrender; doing so means they are considered Vanquished.
- † In a Melee, if only allies remain and a combatant does not wish to claim Victory for themselves, they may stand down peacefully. They are considered neither Victors nor Vanquished.
- † If more than one combatant remains, play another Engagement. There can be only one Victor.

VICTORY AND VANQUISHMENT

VICTOR

Once the Duel is over, the Victor may claim **one** of the following prizes:

- † Destroy, control, or liberate a Knot that was at stake.
- † Rewrite a single Thread, or create an entirely new one, for either a Vanquished Chosen or yourself. Remember that each Chosen cannot have more than three Threads at a time.

You must describe how your prize comes to pass. Dealing with Knots is usually fairly obvious. Rewriting or creating a Thread may mean demanding obedience or convincing the Vanquished to take a different path. Authoring your own Thread usually means you've found something new worth fighting for, so take the time to explain your motivation and reasoning.

Rearranging Threads and Knots may change the Will scores of multiple Chosen. Make sure everybody checks the new state of all their Threads.

VANQUISHED

- † **All Vanquished gain 1 Resonance and decrease their starting Will by 1.** This is from their free points of Will, not the Will from Threads. The Blade uses the moment of weakness to exert greater control.
 - If you have already lost all your starting Will, then you increase your Power by 1 instead.
- † If a Thread is Cut, its Chosen may rewrite it as a *Revenge* Thread (p. 27), unless it was a Revenge Thread to begin with.
 - If the Victor opts to rewrite one of your Threads, they do so after you define your Revenge Thread (this usually only happens if your Rival Thread gets Cut).

RESHUFFLE

At the conclusion of each Duel, gather all the cards and shuffle the deck.

MELEES

When more than two combatants are involved in the fight, the same basic rules apply. The fighting procedure works as follows:

- 1 All combatants choose and play an Engage card.
- 2 From highest to lowest Engage cards, each combatant chooses a target to fight an Exchange against. Each Exchange is between a pair of combatants, although a combatant may be in multiple Exchanges.
 - If you're already Engaged when it gets to your turn, skip this step.
 - If the value of your Engage card matches your chosen opponent's Engage card, you immediately Bind.

*Siân plays a **K**♠, Nat a **10**♦, and Maya an **8**♣. Siân Engages Nat. Since Nat is now Engaged, he can't choose to Engage anyone else. Maya also Engages Nat. This creates two Exchanges — Siân/Nat and Nat/Maya, with the first name in each pair currently holding Initiative.*

- 3 Next, fight one Motion in each Exchange. Go through the combatants in order of Engage cards. When it's your turn, consider each of the Exchanges you are currently Engaged in:
 - If you are the defender, or if you've already played a Motion in this Exchange, ignore this Exchange for now.
 - If you had a Bind last Motion, you must now play a Wind.
 - If you have Initiative, you may Disengage (end and discard this Exchange), or Attack as normal.
- 4 Once all Exchanges have played a single Motion, go back to Step 3 and resolve the next set of Motions.
- 5 Once all Exchanges have reached a conclusion (Disengage or Hit), deal with combatants who want to surrender or stand down. If more than one combatant remains, draw cards and Engage again at Step 1.

Once Disengaged, a combatant cannot Engage again until the start of the next Exchange.

EXAMPLE DUEL

Siân, wielding Vargr, faces off against Nat, wielding Kunlun. They describe their Blades manifesting — Vargr whirls through the air and bites into the ground in front of Siân, while Nat extends his hand to grasp Kunlun's hilt as it erupts straight up from the earth like a monolith.

Both Chosen currently have 8 Will and 4 Power. Siân accepts Vargr's **Bargain**, increasing her Power to 5. Vargr is Kunlun's Enmity, so Nat will have no choice — his Power increases to 5 as well.

Both players **Draw** 5 cards (equal to Power), and prepare to fight!

FIRST EXCHANGE

To **Engage**, both players secretly choose a card and then reveal them at the same time. Siân plays **8♣** and Nat plays **6♥**. With the high card, Siân wins **Initiative**.

When you have Initiative, you may choose to Attack or Disengage. Siân **Attacks** by playing a face-up **10♦**. Nat plays **Q♥** in Defence; since it's higher than the Attack, it's a **Parry** — he defends successfully and gains the Initiative.

*Each set of Engage or Attack/Defence cards is called a **Motion**. For each new Motion, play the cards to the side of the old Motions to form a line.*

Now that he has Initiative, Nat Attacks with **A♦**! Luckily Siân was holding an Ace in reserve, so she Defends with **A♦**. Since the two cards are equal value, this results in a **Bind**. There aren't any discards to shuffle back into the deck yet, so both players draw an extra card and gain a point of **Resonance** (except Nat gains 2 Resonance because the Bind was against Kunlun's Enmity).

In the Motion following a Bind, both combatants must play a **Wind**. They play face-down cards and reveal them like an Engage, but the card with the highest suit (**♠♣♦♥**) immediately becomes the Attack. Siân plays **J♣** and Nat plays **9♦**, so Siân's card is the Attack. Nat must **React** to Defend himself, either adding cards to his **9♦** or playing a new single card. Nat plays **4♠** which combines with his **9♦** to beat the Jack's value of 11, so he **Evades** and this **Exchange** ends with a **Disengage**.

An Exchange is made up of all the plays between an Engage and a Disengage.

Since both characters fought against one foe, they both draw two new cards. All the cards played to the table are discarded. Neither player wants to surrender, so they prepare to Engage again. Siân has four cards and Nat only has three.

SECOND EXCHANGE

Siân Engages with **2♠**, and Nat with **7♥**, so Nat gains Initiative.

Nat Attacks with **K♣**. Siân plays a **JOKER**, which is a **Flow** — she draws a card, then plays a card from her hand on top of the Joker and gets to choose its suit. She plays **5♦** but declares it a **5♣** — a low card that's the same suit as the Attack is a **Dodge**. She defends, but Nat keeps Initiative.

However, since he only holds one card to Siân's two, he plays it safe and Disengages. Both players draw two cards and discard the previous Exchange.

THIRD EXCHANGE

Nat Engages with **6♠** against Siân's **4♥**, and gains Initiative.

Nat **Feints** by playing a **JOKER** as his Attack. He draws a card, and waits to see Siân's Defence. She plays **10♣**, and Nat plays **K♦** on his Joker to replace it (he doesn't change the suit). Siân must now React to bolster her Defence; she replaces her **10♣** with a **3♦**, and Dodges. Nat keeps Initiative.

Both players now only have one card. Nat Attacks recklessly with **Q♠**, but Siân Defends with **K♣**. This would normally be a Parry, but because it's the same suit as the Attack it's a **Counter**. Nat must now Defend against the **K♣**, but he has no cards left. He isn't allowed to use his **Q♠** as a Dodge (because a Counter must be the same suit as the original Attack), and so he is **Hit**. The Duel comes to an end.

AFTERMATH

While dealing with the aftermath, they gather up all the cards and shuffle the deck.

As the **Victor**, Siân chooses to Destroy a Knot that she has a Vendetta against, increasing her Will to 9. Unfortunately, Nat had a Protect Thread to the same Knot. As the **Vanquished** he loses one of his starting Will (or would have gained 1 Power if he had no starting Will left), but losing the Thread reduces his Will by a further 3. He's now at 5 Power and 4 Will, meaning he becomes **Bladebound**.

BLADEBOUND





BLADEBOUND

*“By the sword you did your work,
and by the sword you die.”*

— Aeschylus, ‘Agamemnon’

When Power surges higher than Will, the Blade fuses with the wielder and they become Bladebound — a demon on the battlefield. Their ultimate goal is to destroy the Blade to which they have Enmity.

Typically, the eye on the Blade closes or disappears, instead manifesting where the Chosen’s face should be. Their head becomes a dark blur of flickering heat-haze, and the Blade becomes an extension of their body.

SCENES WHILE BLADEBOUND

When you are Bladebound, your will is not your own. When a Bladebound is the Focus character:

- 1 If their Enmity is also Bladebound, the two must face off in a Duel to the death. If one Bladebound strikes down another, then the Vanquished Blade shatters and its Chosen is slain. This ends the main phase of the game, and leads to the Epilogue.
- 2 If their Enmity is not Bladebound, and the Bladebound character still has any Loose Protect, Ally, or Control-type Threads, they must

make every effort to Cut them instead of completing them. They will not act to complete any other Loose Threads. This is the Blade making it harder for its Chosen to recover from the Bladebound state.

3 If their Enmity is not Bladebound and the Bladebound character has none of the above Loose Threads left, they must instead attempt to Cut a Thread belonging to their Enmity's Chosen. If that is not possible, they must Duel their Enmity. The aim is to force their Enmity to become Bladebound.

When not the Focus character, Bladebound will not join other scenes unless the Focus character seeks them out.

DUELS WHILE BLADEBOUND

- † Any time a Bladebound draws cards, they may then discard any number from their hand and redraw an equal number. This includes the initial Draw, Binds, Disengages, and some Techniques.
- † While Bladebound, each Victory increases Power by 1 and each Vanquishment reduces Power by 1. Bladebound cannot increase their Power voluntarily before a Duel.
- † In Victory, a Bladebound can only choose to Destroy a Knot. They cannot opt to Control Knots or write Threads.

SEPARATING

If a Bladebound's Power is ever reduced so it's equal to or lower than their Will (through losing Power, or gaining Will from new Threads imposed upon them), then the Chosen recovers from their Bladebound state and regains control of their Blade.

When a Chosen and Blade separate in this way, draw one card:

- † **Number:** Reduce Power by 1.
- † **Face or Ace:** Regain one of your initial points of Will.
- † **Joker:** Both of the above effects.

FORBIDDEN LORE





FORBIDDEN LORE

*“Ignorance is the curse of God;
knowledge is the wing wherewith we fly to heaven.”*

— William Shakespeare, ‘Henry VI, Part 2’

This chapter houses optional rules, additional content, resources, and information.

SIDESTEP

Once you have mastered the Duelling system, you may decide to include this additional Defence option.

SIDESTEP

The defender evades the attack and outmanoeuvres their opponent.

The defender plays multiple cards all of the same suit, totalling the Attack card or higher. They gain Initiative, and may then:

† *Attack*

† *Disengage*

ACTIVE KNOTS

Knots are usually MacGuffins — they motivate the Chosen to action, but don't actually do anything themselves. This option gives one or more Knots another function in the game, and provides other reasons to fight for their control or destruction.

- † **Tool:** One or more Chosen may need to control this Knot to move their plans forward.
- † **Key:** This may be a literal key, or something else — a sacrificial dagger, secret knowledge, or the chosen one.
- † **Lock:** This may be a literal lock, or something else — a sacrifice, puzzle or guardian, or a place of power. When the Key and Lock are brought together, the Chosen who controls them will receive some grand prize.
- † **Power:** Controlling the Knot grants the Chosen +1 Power. This bonus cannot make them Bladebound.
- † **Will:** Controlling the Knot grants the Chosen +1 Will.
- † **Prize:** This may be a title or ultimate artefact of power. In addition to the regular ending, whoever Controls this at the end of the game is considered the Champion.

CUSTOM BLADES

You can design your own unique Blades simply by choosing a set of 1-, 2-, and 3-Resonance Techniques. Describe your Blade however you like.

The following lists include some additional Techniques not used by the pregenerated Blades.

I-RESONANCE TECHNIQUES

- » **Augur** (*Engage or Wind*) — Before revealing cards, name a suit. If any other combatant reveals that suit, draw a card.
- » **Blur** (*Defend*) — Evade with any two cards.
- » **Bolt** (*Attack*) — Attack a combatant you aren't Engaged with.
- » **Call of Battle** (*Before a Duel*) — Enter a scene in which you do not have a relevant Thread.
- » **Direct:** (*Engage*) — Skip the Engagement and gain Initiative.
- » **Grapple** (*Parry/Parried or Bind*) — This Exchange, your opponent may not Disengage while they have Initiative.
- » **Harmony** (*Once per Exchange*) — One combatant gains or loses 1 Resonance.
- » **Implacable** (*Engage*) — Engage any opponent, even if already Engaged.
- » **Marauder** (*Bind*) — You gain Initiative.
- » **Nimble** (*Defend*) — Dodge with any low card.
- » **Renew** (*After an Exchange*) — Discard any number of cards and draw an equal number.
- » **Reset Destiny** (*Any*) — Shuffle the discards into the deck.
- » **Shield** (*Any*) — You may play any number of cards to help Defend other combatants.
- » **Shift** (*Evade*) — You gain Initiative instead of Disengaging.
- » **Wary** (*Parried*) — Disengage.

2-RESONANCE TECHNIQUES

- » **Blindness** (*Before a Motion*) — Your opponent must play their cards at random this Motion.
- » **Counterattack** (*Parry*) — Your Parry becomes a Counter.
- » **Deception** (*Defended*) — Change your Attack to any suit.
- » **Disharmony** (*Parry/Parried or Bind*) — Your opponent loses all their Resonance.
- » **Heavy Hitter** (*Parried*) — Your opponent discards a card.
- » **Hunter** (*Opponent Disengages*) — Cancel the Disengage and gain Initiative.
- » **Immutable** (*Vanquished*) — The Victor may not rewrite any of your Threads.
- » **Kite** (*Engage*) — Draw a card. You cannot Engage or be Engaged this Exchange.
- » **Lure** (*Disengage straight after an Engage*) — Draw a card.
- » **Manoeuvre** (*Dodge*) — You gain Initiative.
- » **Prayer** (*Any*) — Play the top card from the deck.
- » **Retreat** (*Before an Engagement*) — Leave the scene. You do not count as Vanquished.
- » **Seal** (*Once per Exchange*) — Name a suit. This Exchange, one combatant may not play cards where the final result matches that suit.
- » **Second Sight** (*Any*) — Look at a combatant's hand for up to ten seconds.
- » **Stealth Attack** (*Attack*) — Your opponent must play their Defence card first. They may React.
- » **Vigour** (*After an Exchange*) — Draw a card.
- » **Whirlwind** (*Attack*) — Your Attack affects all combatants who are Engaged with you.

3-RESONANCE TECHNIQUES

- » **Blood Sacrifice** (*When you Hit*) — Draw two cards.
- » **Executioner** (*You Hit a Bladebound*) — Kill the Bladebound and end the game.
- » **Invincible** (*You are Hit*) — You are not eliminated, and instead Disengage.
- » **Negate** (*Any*) — Cancel one use of any Technique.
- » **Omniscience** (*Once per Exchange*) — One opponent must play the rest of this Exchange with an open hand.
- » **Prescience** (*Any*) — Change your card to any suit.
- » **Reaper** (*Attack*) — Your Attack targets all combatants in the fight.
- » **Reflect** (*Defend*) — Bind with any card.
- » **Relentless** (*Your hand is empty*) — Draw two cards.
- » **Shadow Step** (*Defend*) — Defend and Disengage without playing a card.
- » **Silence** (*Any*) — All other combatants lose all Resonance.
- » **Take the Lead** (*Before a Motion*) — You gain Initiative.
- » **Time Shift** (*Any*) — Discard a card and pick up any one card from the discards.
- » **Ultimate Attack** (*Attack*) — Play two cards and add their total together.
- » **Vampire** (*Parry/Parried or Bind*) — Steal a card from your opponent's hand at random.
- » **Ward** (*Before a Duel*) — Name one Knot; it cannot be Destroyed this scene.

0-RESONANCE TECHNIQUES

These Techniques are unusual because you don't need to spend Resonance to activate them — instead, they have some other cost, drawback, or special circumstance that must be met.

You may choose a 0-Resonance Technique instead of a 1-Resonance Technique.

- » **Absorb** (*You Hit*) — Steal 1 Resonance from your opponent.
- » **Madness** (*Draw*) — Lower your starting Will by 1 to draw one extra card.
- » **Tune** (*Draw*) — Draw one fewer cards to gain 1 Resonance.

DUELING QUICK REFERENCE

ENGAGE

ENGAGE (*Start of an Exchange*)

— Everyone plays a face-down card and reveals. High card gains Initiative, and may *Attack* or *Disengage*.

DISENGAGE (*End of an Exchange*)

— Everyone draws a card, plus one for each opponent they just exchanged blows with.

ATTACK

ATTACK (*Any single card*) —

Defender must play a successful *Defence* or be *Hit*.

FEINT (*Attack with Joker*) —

Replace Joker once you see *Defence*. Defender may *React*.

DEFENCE

PARRY (*Single card higher than Attack*) —

Defender gains Initiative, and may *Attack* or *Disengage*.

COUNTER (*Parry same suit as Attack*) —

Parry becomes an *Attack*. Previous attacker may *React*.

BIND (*Single card equal to Attack*)

— Both combatants draw a card and gain 1 Resonance. Next Motion must be a *Wind*.

WIND (*After a Bind*) —

Both combatants play a face-down card and reveal. High **suit** becomes the *Attack*. Defender may *React*.

EVADE (*Multiple cards equal to Attack or more*) —

The Exchange ends with a *Disengage*.

DODGE (*Single card same suit as Attack but lower*) —

Attacker keeps Initiative.

OTHER

REACT (*Sudden Defence*) —

Defender may use original card, or add one or more cards to it, or play a single new card.

JOKER (*Any play*) —

Draw a card, then replace the Joker with a card from your hand. The suit is wild.

QUICKSTART SETUPS

Choose characters and then spend a little time fleshing out the details.

THREE-PLAYER SETUP

SIÂN

- † **Concept:** Violent Wanderer
- † **Relationships:** Nemo's antagonistic childhood friend, Rocco's reluctant companion
- † **Knot:** Order of Omega
- † **Threads:**
 - I will Destroy the Abbey ●●○
 - I will Control the Order ●●●
 - I will Defeat Rocco ●●○
- † **Blade:** Miko
- † **Enmity:** Michael

ROCCO

- † **Concept:** Aloof Wanderer
- † **Relationships:** Siân's reluctant companion, Nemo's civil acquaintance
- † **Knot:** The Holy Grail
- † **Threads:**
 - I will Control the Grail ●●●
 - Nobody will Control the Order ●●○
 - I will Defeat Nemo ●●○
- † **Blade:** Templar
- † **Enmity:** Miko

NEMO

- † **Concept:** Selfish Ascetic
- † **Relationships:** Siân's antagonistic childhood friend, Rocco's civil acquaintance
- † **Knot:** Abbey of Nothing, Venice
- † **Threads:**
 - Nobody will Destroy the Abbey ●●●
 - Siân will not Control the Order ●○○
 - I will Control the Grail ●●○
- † **Blade:** Michael
- † **Enmity:** Templar

FOUR-PLAYER SETUP

SIÂN

- † **Concept:** Violent Agent
- † **Relationships:** Esteban's emotionally distant daughter, Maya's codependent colleague
- † **Knot:** Vance, head of Cabal
- † **Threads:**
 - Nobody will Destroy Vance ●●●
 - Maya will Control the Staff of Light ●○○
 - I will Defeat Nat ●●○
- † **Blade:** Vargr
- † **Enmity:** Miko

MAYA

- † **Concept:** Professional Devout
- † **Relationships:** Siân's codependent colleague, Nat's antagonistic sister
- † **Knot:** Ouroboros Cabal
- † **Threads:**
 - I will Destroy the Runestone Forest ●●○
 - I will Control the Staff of Light ●●○
 - Nobody will Control the Cabal ●●●
- † **Blade:** Miko
- † **Enmity:** Brass Dragon

NAT

- † **Concept:** Caring Neophyte
- † **Relationships:** Esteban's supportive companion, Maya's antagonistic brother
- † **Knot:** Runestone Forest
- † **Threads:**
 - Nobody will Destroy the Runestone Forest ●●●
 - I will Destroy Vance ●●○
 - I will Defeat Maya ●●○
- † **Blade:** Kunlun
- † **Enmity:** Vargr

ESTEBAN

- † **Concept:** Selfish Protector
- † **Relationships:** Siân's emotionally distant father, Nat's protective companion
- † **Knot:** Staff of Light
- † **Threads:**
 - Anybody will Destroy Vance ●○○
 - I will Control the Staff of Light ●●●
 - I will Control the Runestone Forest ●●○
- † **Blade:** Brass Dragon
- † **Enmity:** Kunlun

KICKSTARTER BACKERS

BYSTANDERS

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KNOTS

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