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Introduction

The world you knew is gone, conquered and corrupted. The rich feed – literally – upon the poor as bloodthirsty vampires. These terrible, immortal rulers used their supernatural power and the temptation of eternal life to bring the world to heel.

They have created a society of predator and prey, of owner and owned. A pyramid of blood, with those beneath taxed and exploited for their wealth, labour and their blood.

Not all submitted. You are among what could be the very last pocket of resistance, forced to live on the fringes of an ancient and terrible forest. For a time you were ignored. Beneath notice. But the thirsting tyrants and their armies are coming now, looking to extinguish the last embers of rebellion and hope.



The World at Twilight

"Son, the greatest trick the Devil pulled was convincing the world there was only one of him."

A Bloody History

Tales of blood-drinkers and immortals have existed since the dawn of time, but until the Empress they were merely stories. Fairy tales.

The future Empress appeared in the great city of Eupraxium overnight, a figure of glamour and unexplained wealth. Going by the name Amarande, she hid her true nature as a blood-drinking vampire, of course, yet she did not hide that she was an immortal being. Naturally she was met with scepticism and suspicion at first, especially when she offered to share her gift. Eventually some, curious or desperate, accepted. The aristocracy of Eupraxia watched with fascination as they returned to the prime of their lives, their youth and vigour returned. More of them accepted her gift and she travelled to other lands, establishing coteries of followers wherever she went.

> **A Note on Tone**
> This is a serious game with dark themes. It is first and foremost a tragedy. This does not mean there will be no hope, no joy, no jokes or levity.
>
> Don't be fooled, though. Just because there is light peeking through the clouds doesn't mean the storm isn't coming.

Of course, some baulked when they learned the true price. When they felt the dark thirst stirring within them. In addition to those who spurned Amarande's gift, it became more difficult to hide the truth as more and more of society's upper crust began to feed on their populace. As the truth was revealed, some were appalled. There were riots. Recriminations. Assassination attempts.

Amarande and her followers revealed their true power in a night of bloodshed, a decisive coup. Dissent was dealt with harshly, but the new aristocracy were keen to extol the virtues of their exalted state and to reframe the way they fed as no different from eating meat, providing an alternate way in which citizens could pay taxes and for criminals to be executed. Initial support was hardly overwhelming, but there was stability.

> **Magic and Technology**
> The world of *Sunset* is in a period of development vaguely analogous of the Renaissance, though some areas are more advanced than others. Firearms exist and are revolutionising warfare, but do not yet define it.
>
> Despite the presence of vampires and dryads that display supernatural power, magic is not something that is truly understood and, were it not for vampires, would likely be dismissed as superstition by most educated folk. There are no colleges of wizards or similar high fantasy tropes.

Before long Amarande and her new inner circle looked outwards. They wanted more land. More power. More subjects. More blood. They pointed to unrest in other states – and there was suddenly an explosion of banditry and strange murders. They would bring peace, unity. The Eupraxian Empire – the Empire of the Night – was born.

Villages, towns, cities and states were offered the opportunity to join. At first, those who refused were not forced, but these places faced crisis after crisis. Plague. Attacks on trade caravans. Waves

of theft and disappearances. The Empire offered to end these problems. This way no lie; for those who submitted, the murders and banditry disappeared overnight.

It was obvious to some what was being done, and Nachzeele was the first to declare war on the Empire. Now the mask was lifted and the Eupraxian Empire expanded by conquest. Vampires and their halfblood servants were stronger, faster than those who fought against them... and the temptation of joining them was too great for many to bear. Every nation and army faced treachery from within as some decided they would rather join the oppressors, hoping to turn back the clock and live forever.

Eventually the entire continent, the known world, was almost entirely under the Empire's jurisdiction save a few wild places on the fringes. Even these would likely have been conquered in time, but it was then the Empress disappeared. The story of how this happened was never entirely clear. Some said she was slain by an assassin. Others insisted she could, of course, not *die*; the Saint claims she transcended her physical form. The Sovereign said she was slumbering in a hidden chancel and would reawaken in a few centuries. The Empire's malcontents whispered that the Empress was murdered by her own inner circle, who resented the power she flaunted over them.

Her former monarchs and generals, the pureblooded nobility, balkanised the former empire. Now they rule rival fiefdoms according to their whims. They are in an uneasy alliance, arbitrating disputes and making shared decisions in a Council, tied votes broken by a Chancellor (a temporary figurehead elected by their Council and, in theory, easily dethroned).

The Dreadwood

The Dreadwood – a vast forest – was a rare place the Empire of Night could not touch; too wild, too dangerous. A crumbling mansion and an abandoned castle are relics of previous attempts. Now it is filled with refugees, exiles and rebels and the Council cannot ignore it. They have come to claim it, add it to their holdings, defeat the last holdouts... and compete with one another. Each has brought their own forces, from the pallid, inhuman wretches of the Ghoul King, the Baron of Rust's dripping technological horrors and the knights and coursers of the Sovereign.

The Dreadwood lies at the heart of the continent on a tripartite border between Vlaska, Nachzeele and Kurultai. For centuries the Dreadwood was shunned and feared, for it was said that beneath a canopy of branches and boughs some trees walked and hungered, preying on unwary humans who dared to enter their home. This is an exaggeration; the dryads who lived there seemed inscrutable and capricious, true, but locals learned a little about how to communicate and even trade with them. The dryads are spiritually, or perhaps magically, tied to the seasons and have strange powers to heal, harm and besides.

Dryads

Dryads – also called sylvans – are sapient, motile plants. They are the only known intelligent species in the *Sunset* setting other than humanity. Several PC options are dryads. These players will receive a handbook detailing dryad culture and secrets. Of course, humans players will have their own exclusive handbook as well.

As the Empire of Night spread, displaced refugees, political dissidents and deserters eventually found they had nowhere else to go and settled in and around the Dreadwood. The locals accepted them, to varying degrees. The diaspora did not go unnoticed by the dryads, but tales of the Abomination and the Empire appalled them and led to a *de facto* treaty between human and sylvan. While even locals have a poor understanding of their alien culture, human and dryad stand united against a common foe.

The dryads were not the only ones to notice dissidents and rebels flocking to the Dreadwood. War has come and the invaders, for all their advantages, will find the woods are as deep, dark and dangerous as every fairytale warning.

The Nature of Vampirism

In the setting of *Sunset,* vampirism is not especially contagious. If a vampire bites you, you don't turn into one. Drinking their blood does cause a person to become more vampiric but the process is reversible. Vampire blood is not innately addictive, but the benefits it provides are quite the draw.

Vampires are seemingly immortal; they don't age and are immune to illness. Their blood actually turns back the clock somewhat, rejuvenating as well as simply staving off the passage of time; Baron von Emrick was an elderly man but now appears in the prime of life. Full vampires heal at a prodigious rate, able to recover from grievous wounds in minutes or hours, though a mortal wound - such as beheading, destroying the heart or spine - will kill them as quickly, surely and permanently as any mortal. Even their enhanced healing doesn't entirely stop them from succumbing to multiple injuries, severe blood loss, drowning, or similar. Animals can be fed, and changed by, vampire blood as well.

Many vampires have inhuman strength and speed, though this does not seem to be universal. Many seem to possess excellent senses of smell, sight and hearing. They are particularly sensitive to the smell of blood and the sound of a heartbeat and, naturally, they see incredibly well in the dark. Some vampires exhibit more obviously supernatural abilities such as shapeshifting.

Traditional vampires have many weaknesses not present in *Sunset*. Religious symbols and faith do not repel them. They do not fear garlic, silver or running water. They have no compulsion to count poppyseeds and can enter homes uninvited without issue. Having stakes nailed into their hearts *does* kill them, but not because of any specific vulnerability to wood. Daylight does not burn them, but they do seem to experience some light sensitivity and it is widely believed their powers are more potent by night.

Whatever is required to make a person a full vampire is a closely guarded secret. It is not as simple as dying while filled with vampire blood; people who die in this manner sometimes return as a 'ghoul', an animalistic thing, seemingly without any memory of their previous life. Ghouls feed on blood but are easily cowed and commanded by actual vampires. They are markedly photophobic and struggle to see in bright light (which they loathe); they will hide and rest by day if possible, but the sun does not actually burn their flesh or harm them.



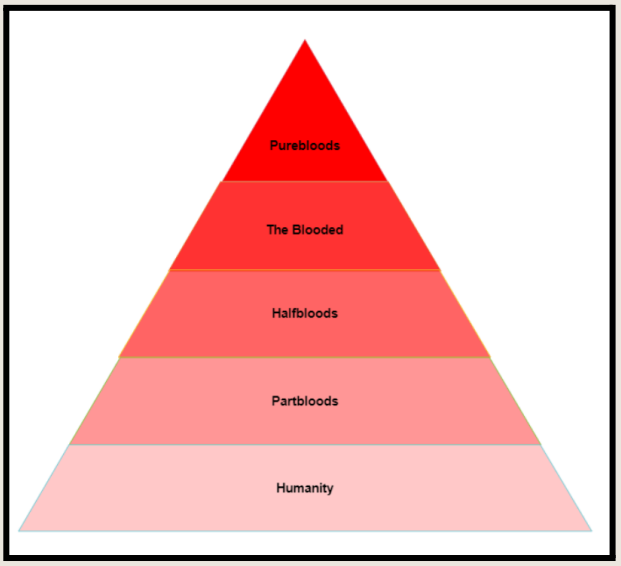
The Vampire Hierarchy

Vampire society is riven with divisions, castes, classes and serfs. Of course, the vast majority of the populace are impoverished and must spend all the silver they can rub together (or pay the tithe in crimson) for a few drops of life-extending vampire blood...

Partbloods

A person given a dose of vampire blood is largely unchanged, but their wounds heal faster and aches and pains fade. It is a highly effective panacea, treating most illnesses (though it does not actually cure chronic conditions). A single dose does not give a person any obvious supernatural abilities or cravings for blood. These doses are often purchased, at great expense, or given as a temporary gift.

Halfbloods



Halfbloods receive doses of vampire blood relatively regularly (fortnightly or monthly), enjoying arrested age, improved health and occasionally a few limited supernatural tricks. Their healing is rapid, though not to the degree that their wounds visibly close. They also experience a mild craving for blood. This is far from overpowering, but consuming blood does seem to help them to preserve their pseudo-vampiric state longer so many indulge. Some mild physical changes may occur at this stage. These vary depending on the individual and the source of their blood. Sharper teeth are almost universal, but eyes may change colour, become bloodshot or reflective. Those consuming the blood of the Grizzled Lady may find their nails hardening into claws.

Halfbloods make up the middle class; those valued enough to be given regular doses by patrons and/or wealthy enough to afford them. Their blood is not especially potent and even regular doses would not raise a person beyond partblood status, though some halfbloods sell or gift phials of their blood to the hopeful regardless.

The Blooded, aka Fullbloods

The Blooded are full vampires, though this is not a permanent state. They must feed – and receive doses of vampire blood from their superiors – regularly to maintain this state. They are ageless, heal incredibly rapidly and often exhibit a few unique supernatural powers, commonly similar to those exhibited by their patron. The Blooded are the upper crust of society, aristocrats, trusted lieutenants and administrators. At this level, each Blooded has a personal, pureblooded patron. Their own blood is potent enough to be gifted to others below them on the pyramid.

Purebloods

The apex of both the social pyramid and the food chain, whose vampirism seems permanent and irreversible. How a person becomes one – and if this is even still possible – is unknown. Their powers and capabilities are notably different from one another. Only seven are known to exist.

The Lords and their Holdings

Lucia Caelestis, the Saint. Ruler of Eupraxium.

Eupraxium – sometimes called the Silver City for its wealth and the colour of its stone – is a wealthy city-state by the sea. Before the Empress took power it was a democracy, politics dominated by wealthy merchant families and powerful guilds.

Lucia Caelestis was one of the Empress' first converts. She operated a mystery cult, extending tendrils of influence into all levels of society until the night of the coup. The Saint's main duty from this point was transforming the cowed obeisance of the city into actual loyalty. In Machiavellian terms, Saint Lucia ensured the regime was both feared *and* loved. Waves of conquest brought wealth to Eupraxium, at least to those in favour, and the Saint's mystery cult continued to spread.

This sect dropped its exclusivity and mystique in favour of a rigid hierarchy and orthodoxy when the Empress died, becoming the *de facto* state religion. The dead Empress, the avatar of the Holy Blood who now resides in all, became the focus of worship and the divisions between church and state fell away. Heresy and blasphemy are punished harshly. The faith grows daily, tendrils of influence spreading into other territories. Vampires, here, have become priests and avatars of all that is holy. Gods have always demanded sacrifice, after all.

The Saint is viewed by her worshippers as an angelic figure, unliving saint and prophet. Eupraxium's armies were once ordered legions, but now they are a rabble of lay fanatics, a core of devoted templars and vampiric warrior-priests.

Dietrich von Emrick, the Baron of Rust. Ruler of Nachzeele.

Dietrich von Emrick was born to nobility. He had little interest in politics and governance in his youth, instead earning fame and regard as an inventor. Nachzeele was ruled by the House of Saxe-Lówenstein. The Baron supported the Margravine against the vampires for several years. Firearms and other innovations served them well and they were able to fend off their enemies effectively before von Emrick unexpectedly turned on the Saxe-Lówensteins and switched sides.

As a reward the Baron was granted rulership of Nachzeele by the Empress, though he retained his old title. He set about industrialising. Now smoke belches from countless chimneys and mines bore into the earth. Pollution is omnipresent. Soot blackens trees and lungs. If it darkens the sky the Baron and his ilk likely see this only as a bonus. Workers endure terrible conditions, saving their meagre pay for precious drops of (often diluted) vampire blood as a treatment for the illnesses and injuries of a life filled with toil. The promise of wealth is, of course, dangled and for the brilliant and lucky there is advancement, an escape from drudgery into the ranks of the immortal. This hope sustains many, but for every person who ascends the blood-slick social ladder a thousand live and die in the dark.

The Baron's army is the most technologically advanced military the world has ever seen, armed with firearms and cannon in a world where such things are still novel, though they suffer from poor health

and morale. The Baron has no interest in military matters and the army is commanded by a trusted lieutenant, Field Marshall Eckardt Rune.

The Sovereign. Ruler of Kurultai.

Kurultai was always a feudal nation. The vampires were able to infiltrate its nobility and after a few mysterious deaths – including the former Khan – it willingly joined the Empire of Night. The Sovereign took power. Their former identity has been forgotten, but they were one of the aristocracy before they became a vampire. They are inhumanly beautiful; it is supernaturally difficult to refuse their commands. They rule in part because none can bear to oppose them.

The Sovereign values beauty and has established themself as a patron of art and culture. In their courts, far from the brutality of the lesser orders, they rule by the pen and the brush, constructing a fanciful image of their reign. Many are the naive artists who seek patronage at their court and become captivated by the Sovereign and their kin, but they all end their careers the same: a tragic "suicide," corpses conveniently drained of all blood, dead when their inspiration ran dry, for some perceived slight, or simple boredom.

It is widely believed the Sovereign will only feed on the most graceful, unblemished vessels. The Sovereign certainly likes to be surrounded by beauty, though a rare few useful servants who might otherwise offend their eye are allowed to wear a mask.

To live under their rule is to live in a feudal hierarchy where one's place in society is always abundantly clear. The Sovereign is the head of an undying aristocracy supported by a red pyramid of serfs. Taxation – both monetary and crimson – is high and the common folk are serfs, their incredibly limited rights regularly trampled by the nobility. The fiefdom has many fine country mansions and castles, its impoverished villages and townships tucked out of sight. Their military forces include knightly orders and civilian levies, though more than one battle has ended in total surrender to the majesty of the Sovereign and their inner circle.

Why don't they all just leave?
It's a valid question; things seem pretty bad under vampiric rule. Leaving isn't a simple thing, however, especially if you have a home, a community or loved ones.

In reality, people live under tyrannical governments every day. They could just leave, or revolt. But they don't because they're afraid of reprisal, change, poverty or uncertainty. They believe their situation could be worse. The tyrant's greatest tool is, ultimately, acceptance.

Éile Fúamnach, the Hushed. Ruler of Bisámhach.

There is a harsh beauty to Bisámhach. There are no distractions, no noisome dissent. Just order, pure and clean and radiant in its simplicity. It is easy to savour the peace such a stillness offers - to crave it, even. But what it takes to enforce this quiet is anything but idyllic. A subtle knife is just as deadly, after all, and even the barest murmurs of discontent are easily strangled when there is no other sound to shield them. This is the way of the Hushed. Her streets remain clean and her citizens dutiful - all because she knows that true power has no need to shout.

The Hushed was not always interested in power. Born the third and last child of the Crown of Bisámhach, Éile Fúamnach had neither the expectation nor the desire to rise to power. Known as a dour

and withdrawn young lady, she rarely left her father's tower. Though Bisámhach was, at its core, a monarchy, the Fúamnach family had maintained its position by keeping themselves exceedingly accessible to the population, inviting all the chaotic mess of humanity into their court to present disputes or suggestions or even to just chat.

The youngest Fúamnach despised this arrangement. Her hatred only grew when a tragic accident stole the lives of her family and her remaining sister met an untimely demise mere days after her assumption of the Crown, leaving her to lead. There were so many people with so many wants and all they did was talk and talk and *talk*. It was enough to drive a woman mad - to fill her head with fantasies of mouths without tongues and lungs stuffed with hay and hot coals. And those idle thoughts didn't have to remain so abstract after the Empress whispered an offer to Éile.

Éile Fúamnach became the Hushed. Should a citizen arrive in her court with a complaint regarding local politics, they would return to their village to find their well poisoned, their concerns silenced. Should a dissident arise, they would just as quickly disappear as the Hushed's legion of spies and assassins grew in number and skill. The people learned to fall into line, dully following the growing body of laws handed down by the increasingly reclusive and veiled Hushed, her face now only a distant memory. The only scant hope for resistance in Bisámhach was offered by a masked vigilante, defying edicts and terrorising the nation's secretive police force to inspire hope in the populace through acts of resistance. But even they disappeared in time.

Though the Hushed's forces are small, they are precise. Their strength is their stealth and anonymity. They are the scalpel to the broadswords of the other lords - the collectors of whispers and the dispensers of quiet death. They are trained. They are ruthless. And they do not stop until all is still. And quiet. And perfect.

Grigore Ardelean, the Ghoul King. Ruler of Vlaska.

Bilious, cadaverous, oozing; words such as these trickle from the trembling lips of those who have caught glimpses of the Ghoul King as it stalks, lonely and wretched, through the ruined halls of its keep. Offal and sweetmeats litter banquet tables, the squealing of pigs drowned out only by the wretched groans of the Ghoul King itself.

Vlaska was once a poor but prideful nation. Grigore Ardelean was one of the ruling *boyarin* nobility. The boyars would, in times of crisis, meet and elect one of their number as Voivode – temporary ruler of Vlaska. Naturally, the new Empire warranted such a meeting. Boyar Ardelean murdered all the heads of all other ruling families that would not bend the knee, hoping to seize power and turn Vlaska over to the Empress without a fight.

He was unsuccessful in every aim; a peasant woman named Mircaela Sandu led an uprising. She inspired the common folk and the few remaining lesser nobles alike, displaying an unexpected military brilliance. Despite the Empire's armies holding every advantage – numbers, equipment and experience – her insurgency lasted years. The people called her Voivode despite her common birth. Mircaela was a symbol of hope, but one morning she was found dead with her throat torn out. Without her, resistance crumbled. Most of her army deserted or surrendered. The remainder were massacred.

Their long war left Vlaska little better than a wasteland for the creature once called Grigore Ardelean to rule. Many believe the Ghoul King was cursed by the heavens or the Empress herself. While most view vampirism as a blessing, the Ghoul King reigns in quiet damnation and insatiable appetite. Madness and hunger radiate from him, infecting the land. The remaining human peasantry live in fear or in a strange state of delusion. It is the only thing that explains why they do not flee, for unlike most vampire lords the Ghoul King does not offer any hope of a better unlife, only the terror of madness and death.

The King creates swarms of ghouls, possibly by accident. These cannibalistic hordes are kept in check mostly by their habit of feeding upon one another. It would not be right to call them an army; they are a ravening horde, a plague of locusts wearing the stretched and emaciated forms of the dead. Some retain flickers of personality, however, bearing pennants of flayed skin and building thrones out of bone in honour of their lord.

Mathandra, the Grizzled Lady, Leader of The Wild Hunt

Mathandra's origins are unknown; there are rumours of her being a native of every nation or none. Opportunities to ask her the truth are scarce, and it seems unlikely she would answer. While the other Lords consolidate their holdings, the Grizzled Lady does not rule any nation or lay claim to any territory. She and her coterie are nomadic, often referred to as the Wild Hunt.

The Grizzled Lady appears to have free reign to travel across the holdings of the other Lords, helping to root out opposition as she and her coterie pass to wherever new fights and challenges may be found. The early signs of her arrival are marked by silence as prey animals flee or take cover. As her court rides they stir up a frenzy in the predators ahead of them, heralding their arrival. In more rural areas some villages have been attacked, even massacred, by local fauna when the Hunt passed by.

The Grizzled Lady, and many of those who drink her blood, are said to be able to change their forms. The Lady herself is said to wear the skin of a mighty bear, among other predatory shapes.

Quite why the other Lords tolerate her occasional massacres is unclear, although she is the first to offer aid when there are issues within their lands. Probably without being asked. One such example was the sack of the city-state Altai, a vassal of Kurultai that refused to surrender.

The Wild Hunt seem to want for and need little. They feast on the animals and humans they catch and defeat. Dressed in furs, if at all, with simple equipment they leave little trace of where they have been aside from clawmarks and blood soaking into the soil.

Cerise Ash, The Abomination. Ruler of Nothing

Not recognised as nobility in the manner of the other purebloods, Cerise Ash has no domain to call their own. They are called the Abomination by other dryads; if the dryads knew this creature by any other name they have so far refused to give it. Their precise origins are unknown but they were associated with – and changed by – the former Empress before her demise. While they may be looked down upon by the

other purebloods, their bloodied sap still raises them above all other humans or dryads, occupying a social niche all their own.

Cerise Ash has a small band of loyal followers. Though human, their skin is thickened, rough, and knotted with growths marking them as under the Abomination's literal and metaphorical protection. Cerise Ash sometimes travels with the Wild Hunt, although they seem to take less joy in carnage than the Grizzled Lady. The longer they remain somewhere the more the flora, the very land itself, seems to bend to their will. The sylvans seem loath to discuss what this could mean for the Dreadwood were they ever to return.



Player and Non-Player Characters

"I think that the good and the great are only separated by the willingness to sacrifice."

PCs

The following descriptions are intentionally brief; many of the characters have secrets and/or additional backstory elements that are not public knowledge. For those new to the medium, you will customise your character's name, gender and other elements once cast. Note that more PC archetypes are included here than the final player count. The intention is to decide which will be in the game based on questionnaire responses.

The Changeling: A human orphan taken in and raised by dryads, treated as kin and taught their secrets and magics.

The Executioner: An oathsworn servant of laws that no longer exist, now forging their own path to justice, punishment and upholding the vow that defines them.

The Falconer: A hardy newcomer to the Dreadwood, used to surviving in the wilderness and with an affinity with animals.

The Foundling: A dryad who sprouted far from all others of their kind, adopted and raised in Vlaska. They fought alongside Mircaela until her demise.

The Gifted: A strange newcomer, burdened with uncanny insight and a burning dislike of the undead.

The Gladiator: Born and reborn upon bloody sand, blessed and cursed with a terrible rage. The gladiator escaped their durance and, for the first time in their life, has a choice about how to spend their strength.

The Guide: A local who, unlike most, explores the forests without fear. They speak freely with dryads, know every glade, cave, ruin and secret place but they have not yet witnessed vampiric tyranny firsthand.

The Heir: The exiled scion of house Saxe-Lówenstein, shoulders heavy with a nation's legacy. Their relationship with their mother is strained after they saved her life... against her wishes.

The Merchant: A former trader and dealer who holds no loyalty to any city or state, now forced to the fringes by the grip of tyrants. Still, there is always a deal to be cut if the price is right.

The Mystic: A wanderer who offers arcane services to those willing to pay their price and accept their boons.

The Patient: A thoughtful dryad who carries the chill of winter in their roots and branches. They look to the long term, the big picture and the shape of the world to come.

The Player: A performer from a troupe that travels from place to place spreading sedition against the vampiric tyrants and smuggling other rebels, armed with an array of mystical masks.

The Scoundrel: A former criminal, their operation pushed out by the growing influence of the bloodsuckers, ready to land on their feet and perhaps get a little revenge.

The Servant: A former servant to a noble, radicalised as they watched their employer twisted into a monster. They listened and resisted in secret for years before leaving in a hurry.

The Songbird: Once prized and kept in a gilded cage due to their incredible beauty and voice, the former Songbird was being groomed for undeath before escaping to make their own destiny.

The Reaper: Heavy with Autumn's wrath, this dryad is a rose watered with blood, a terrifying and enigmatic force of nature.

The Vernal: A dryad with the joy of Spring and Summer in their heartswood, armed with the power to grow anew. They are a bright spot in the darkness, the voice of hope for the future.

The Veteran: An experienced and haunted soldier who has faced the horrors of the undead in battle and was forever changed by the experience.

NPCs

[Not included in the provisional rulebook. There will be 15 major NPCS – a cast of rogues, nobles, warriors, dryads, seers, polymaths, performers and stranger things – in total]

Rules

"There is no success without sacrifice."

A simplified one page summary of the rules can be found at the very end of this rulebook (page 29).

In *Sunset*, players have two actions per turn: A Defence Action and a Freeform Action.

Each turn, the Enemy attacks the strongholds and settlements that remain. Players may spend their Defence Action to defend one of these strongholds, choosing an Approach and writing a short summary of what they will do. Each Enemy attack has a numerical rating players must roll to defeat. There will be a scale from total victory to total defeat. The difficulty will get higher as the game continues.

Players can spend their Freeform Action on whatever they wish, other than Defending. This represents time spent outside of battle.

Turn Structure

Each turn lasts one week, both in and out of game.

Monday-Friday: Action Phase.

Use this time to plan your actions and email other PCs and NPCs. Try to avoid 'last minute' emails late on Friday where possible, as there is no guarantee players will see these emails before submitting actions.

Actions will be submitted and managed via our online system CANDI. The deadline for submitting your Actions is at 1am Saturday GMT/8pm Friday EST.

Saturday-Sunday: Resolution Phase.

Control will roll the dice and determine what happened in line with the rules and Control-only resolution guides. You can still email over this time. These emails will be chronologically *before* your Actions take place. Assume Control will not reply to emails sent over this period as they are focusing on writing your action resolutions.

The results of actions and each turn's news are usually shared late on Sunday. There is no set time, as some weeks Control will be busier than others, but we will try to release results as soon as possible. Once you have received your results the next turn of the game begins immediately.

A Game About War, Not A Wargame

This is primarily a roleplaying game. If you are reading the Defence rules, you might expect the game to be a map-based wargame with a tragic theme, but that's not the case.

If you are more interested in roleplaying a character and concerned about maps and wargaming, this game probably *is* for you. You really don't need to worry too much about optimal play and number-crunching.

If you like the sound of both, this game is likely to strongly appeal but try not to tell other players what to do, even if it seems obvious to you. Not everyone is focused on optimal play, especially if they have in-character reasons for their choices.

Defending a Stronghold

Each Stronghold is a settlement or landmark of value, one the Enemy seeks to destroy or possess. Some are more secluded than others; the lines connecting them on the map show the likely paths the Enemy might follow, the clear routes to reach, attack or support other Strongholds. They are not absolute; individuals and even armies can make their own path if they must.

Each turn the Enemy will attack a number of Strongholds; players will be told clearly which are under attack this turn as part of the game news, as the Enemy can't muster or move an army without it being noticed by scouts and spies.

Every Stronghold has a Defence and Support rating. Support cannot be raised above 3. There is no maximum Defence rating.

Injuries

Injuries may be acquired through the course of play. Injuries give -1 to Defence rolls only; they do not affect free actions. It is possible to acquire multiple injuries, however it is not possible to roll lower than 1 after modifiers. You will *always* contribute positively to the Defence - your presence will never be a penalty.

Injuries in this game are likely to be permanent and serious, for example losing a hand or eye. This is a game of tragic horror. You won't all survive unscarred.

Defence represents how defensible it is; fortifications, traps or favourable terrain might provide high Defence.

Support represents how much military power a Stronghold can contribute to neighbours if it is itself not under attack, modelling soldiers, logistical or arcane support.

When a Stronghold is attacked, every NPC and PC defender adds to this value. For NPCs this is a flat value, starting at 1 but potentially increasing throughout the game, and for players this is a single d6 (which may have positive or negative modifiers from injuries, character abilities and the like).

The success or failure of an attack is calculated by comparing the Defender Value to the Attacker Value.

Defender Value = Stronghold Defence Value + Support from neighbouring Strongholds + NPC bonuses + Player Dice

Attacker Value = Base Attack Value (Hidden) + Support from neighbouring Strongholds + Two Random D6.

This will be compared to the following table. In the event of a tie this is a Narrow Defeat.

	Dice Result	Consequences
Total Defeat	Attacker Value 5 or more above Defender Value.	The Stronghold falls, utterly, all of its resources turned to Enemy use. It now has a Support Value of 1 for the Enemy (regardless of previous Support Value)
Narrow Defeat	Attacker Value less than 5 higher than Defender Value.	The Stronghold falls, though the defenders make the Enemy pay for every inch. It has no Support Value for either side.
Narrow Victory	Defender Value less than 5 higher than Attacker Value.	The Stronghold remains out of Enemy hands, though at great cost. Its Support and Defence values are each lowered by 1 (to a minimum of 0).
Total Victory	Defender Value 5 or more above Attacker Value.	The Stronghold repels the Enemy assault handily. Its Support and Defence values are unaffected.

Note that players will not be given the raw numbers (overall values, what they rolled, what an NPC contributed, etc) during the game because this will detract from the theme and encourage a level of mechanical micromanagement we would rather you avoided.

Battle Approach

When you commit to defend a Stronghold you will select an approach. Three are available at game start; others may be unlocked by player actions or NPCs.

- Destroy Enemy.

- Preserve Forces.
- Protect Noncombatants.

Win or lose, your choice will be noted as part of your personal narrative journey. This will have consequences; for example if a character consistently chooses to focus on destroying the enemy, some NPCs may consider them callous or reckless and lose respect for them... while others will respect them *more.*

If a majority of players select the same approach additional mechanical consequences (positive and negative) will play out on a wider scale. If players 'balance out' no additional consequences will be imposed.

DESTROY THE ENEMY
"War isn't about being willing to die for your cause, it's making the other bastard die for theirs. If we don't focus on actually killing the enemy we can never win."

Focusing primarily on destroying the enemy inevitably leads to bloodier conflicts. Abandoning and booby-trapping a fortification, riding out in an attempt to reach the enemy backlines and kill their commanders (who will usually hang back in a traditional siege) and arming all noncombatants are examples of this tactic.

PRESERVE FORCES
"Are you familiar with the concept of a pyrrhic victory? If we win a battle at the cost of all of our fortifications and troops, we'll lose the next."

Ordering troops to avoid pursuing retreating enemies (often a trick to lure you into a pincer movement), conserving ammunition and avoiding reckless approaches (like booby-trapping fortifications) are examples of this tactic. It is focused on winning battles with minimal losses to ensure you are in a good position for the next. If you do not select an approach, this is the default assumption.

PROTECT NONCOMBATANTS
"Why are we fighting? To save lives. To live free. Remember that. Focus on that."

Placing your best troops to defend civilians, or deploying soldiery to distract the enemy while noncombatants flee are examples of this tactic. The focus of this tactic is preserving life, for moral or morale reasons.

The Detail Trap, Or Why You Shouldn't Write a 1000 Word Battleplan

Here's the thing: Control would love to read a really well-thought plan for your defence. We appreciate what it reveals about the character and the player. We'll enjoy a cool plan. There are two reasons to keep your details light and vague, however.

First and foremost, you're not alone. If you write a complex battleplan and another player does the same... and your ideas are utterly contradictory... That's quite a mess, isn't it? Does Control pick one over the other, possibly by choosing based on who rolled highest, and frustrate the losing player? Do we have the defenders do a messy job enacting two conflicting plans, likely annoying both players?

An unideal solution to this is players spending their week constructing a detailed plan, or worse insisting everyone follow *their* detailed plan. Does that sound enjoyable to you? It also may still not work; three players might agree on a course of action and then a fourth decides to join the conflict at the last moment and doesn't consult them. This is not an ideal solution and we encourage you to avoid making overly complex plans.

However, we *do* want to encourage players to bring a little creativity and character to the battle. Providing a few suggestions to Control we can roll with, or general approaches ("My character will focus on hit-and-run attacks and ambushes once they're inside the city.") will work wonders. Agreeing in character with other players that you'll stand together and vague ideas of how, and/or delegating ("You're the general. You focus on the big picture; I'll be the one on the walls rallying the troops!") is also strongly encouraged.

The other reason to keep your plans from being too specific is that you may be wrong. You might make assumptions, or work from faulty intelligence, and we don't want to punish you for that. For example, a player decides they want to focus on killing the Saint as part of a battle against her forces. They weren't told she would be there (she's in the Silver City; she didn't feel the need to lead the war personally) and made an assumption. Control would, in this example, likely resolve the action by having the player instead kill the actual general, an underling of hers, disrupting her forces considerably. Control would not rewrite the world or the character of the Saint.

At times, Control may confirm information that opens up more specific Defence Actions in combat, publicly or privately. Obtaining actionable intelligence is a great way to use your free action.

A Game of Choices and Consequences

You may have noticed that some of the mechanics are about player choice. There is very, very rarely a 'best' approach. Control isn't trying to punish you no matter what you do; almost all options will come with positives and negatives. Looking for the 'best' choice is natural, but it's unlikely to succeed. A better question to ask is what choice is best for your character or you find the most interesting or meaningful.

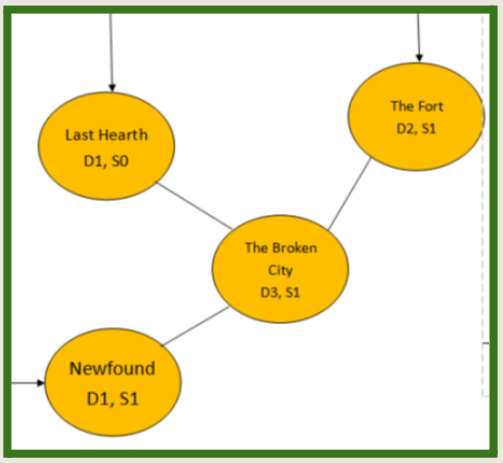
To use an example, you may notice no players are interested in defending a particular Stronghold. You may well reason that it's probably not worth defending on your own; the odds are likely heavily stacked against you, after all.

We can't fault that logic; pragmatic NPCs will likely agree with it. But choosing to defend it *anyway* is an interesting choice, and a worthy one. Not a wrong one.

Example Defences

[Please note this map is entirely for example purposes and will not be used in the game. The finalised map is still under construction]

Example Defence One



The Enemy attacks Last Hearth. Two players and two NPCs defend it. The players roll 2 and 5 respectively.

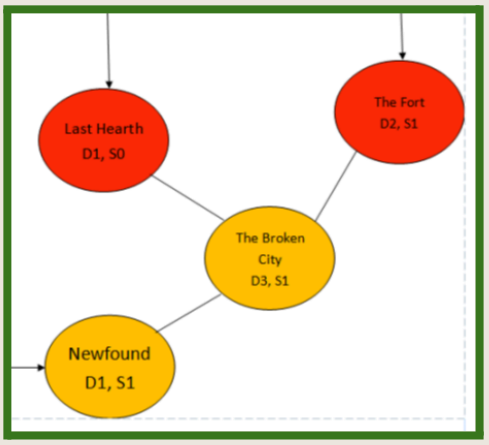
Last Hearth has a base Defence Value of 1. It receives Support from the Broken City.

Defender Value = Stronghold Defence Value (1) + Support from neighbouring Strongholds (1) + NPC bonuses (2) + Player Dice (2 and 5) Total = 11

Attacker Value = Base Attack Value (5) + Support from neighbouring Strongholds (0) + Two Random D6 (3,3). Total = 11

The end result is a draw. Sadly, the Enemy wins on draws. This is a narrow defeat.

Example Defence Two



The situation is grave. The Broken City is besieged and both Last Hearth and the Fort have fallen, with the Fort now providing Support to the Enemy. Newfound still stands and can support the Broken City. Five players resolve to make their stand in the city with four NPCs. One player is injured (-1 to their dice roll to a minimum of 1), one has an ability that adds +1 to their dice roll. Two NPCs have had their rating increased through player actions.

The players, after modifiers, roll 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7 (19 in total).

The Broken City has a base Defence Value of 3. Its own support value is not applied when attacked, but it does benefit from the Support of Newfound.

Defender Value = Stronghold Defence Value (3) + Support from neighbouring Strongholds (1) + NPC bonuses (6) + Player Dice (19). Total = 29

Attacker Value = Base Attack Value (15) + Support from neighbouring Enemy Strongholds (1) + Two Random D6 (2, 5). Total = 23

The end result is a Total Victory for the Defenders. The Broken City stands!

Freeform Actions

In simple terms, you may do whatever you wish with this action.

It's a little more constrained than that. Your Freeform Action is chronologically *before* Defence; you cannot use it to Defend a second Stronghold, or combine it with your Defend Action. If you wish you could use it to fortify a Stronghold prior to an attack, however.

Your Freeform Action will never be 'narrative only'. It will have some tangible mechanical impact and/or teach you something useful about the world. If players wish to work together using Freeform Actions they can; the mechanical impact will be increased and any consequences from poor rolls, such as injuries, will be resolved on an individual basis (ie, your poor dice roll will not hurt someone else or the overall task but might hurt you).

For your free Action a single d6 is rolled.

Number	Result
1	Weak success with cost. This might be a narrative complication or a mechanical consequence like an injury. The cost may be more severe for a 1.
2-3	Success with cost. This might be a narrative complication or a mechanical consequence like an injury.
4-5	Success without cost or consequence.
6+	Great success. You will receive an additional reward.

For example purposes, some possible Freeform Actions (and mechanical consequences) are shown below. You are in no way limited to these examples.

- Fortify a Stronghold. By rallying support, building fortifications or traps, this action will increase a Stronghold's base defensive value.
- Improve support network. By establishing a communication network, mustering troops or similar. This action will increase a Stronghold's base support value. Remember this cannot be raised above 3.
- Disrupt enemy stronghold. This might reduce the support value of an enemy-held Stronghold and/or reduce the strength of their next attack.
- Do something for an NPC. This might increase that NPC's defensive value or overlap with one of the above. The NPC may share secrets or unlock new options.
- Spy, research or otherwise obtain information. This might unlock new abilities, useful information to set up future actions or new Approaches and Actions.

As Freeform actions occur *before* the Defence, bonuses and maluses relevant to Defence are applied the same turn. For example, if a player spends their Freeform Action fortifying a Stronghold the bonus is applied before the attack is resolved on the same turn.

Attempting the Impossible

It is not normally possible to fail on the Freeform action. However, players may attempt to do something literally impossible or act on assumptions. If so, no matter how many successes are rolled, you may not achieve your end. Control will try to resolve your Action and give rewards as best they can.

In addition, some Actions may be so dangerous, controversial or unwise that it would break credibility not to receive some sort of complication regardless of dice rolled. We advise you not to worry too much about this; these Actions have, in previous play-by-email games, been extremely rare and unusual. A classic example of such an Action is jumping into molten rock.

Unexpected Outcomes

Sometimes you may receive an unexpected outcome from your Action resolution. Usually this is due to imperfect information or assumptions. In these cases Control may correct your information, offer consolation prizes or similar (when possible and logical) when resolving the Action.

Another common cause of unusual outcomes is when two players *think* they've agreed a plan of action and then both mention they're working together only to describe entirely different actions. Control will do their best with these actions but will try not to contradict what a player has written unless necessary.



Emails

"Letters are among the most significant memorial a person can leave behind them."

Your in-game communication with other PCs and NPCs will all be through emails. These might represent letters that your characters are exchanging, a face-to-face conversation, or even stranger/arcane methods of communication. You can also have group conversations (i.e. email threads that include 3 or more characters), but please be aware that large group threads can quickly become overwhelming and not everyone will have the time or inclination to participate in these.

All emails *must* be CC'd to Control. When emailing, ensure you have copied the relevant Controls. Remember to always hit reply all!

When emailing other players the following are not allowed:

- Forwarding emails to other players
- Sending screenshots of communications to other players
- Sending screenshots or copying the text of your briefing to other players
- Sending screenshots or copying the text of action resolutions to other players
- Copying and pasting the words of others *ad verbatim*
- Narrating how other characters act, react, and feel. Previously some players in face to face meetings have, in their narration, 'taken control' of other PCs or NPCs without asking. Please do not do this. Control may do this a little but hopefully not in a way that takes away player agency.

You are entirely free to quote, misquote, paraphrase and lie about what people have told you.

These rules are important in order to allow players to maintain some mystery about each other's choices and to give players room to misdirect if they wish. Your emails will *never* be intercepted, shared, or read by anyone other than their intended recipients and actions undertaken to access another player's emails will automatically fail. In addition, while the Control team reads all emails - and greatly enjoys them - their NPCs do not (unless, of course, the email was meant for them).

This helps make the game more immersive and fun. Repeated and/or deliberate violations of these rules may be cause for you to be removed from the game.

We would prefer players title email emails like so, including participants for Control clarity:

EMAIL TITLE [PLAYER CHARACTER NAME, OTHER CHARACTER NAME(S)].

Using this format is not required, but does make things much easier for Control.



Safety and Etiquette

"In protecting oneself, others are protected; In protecting others, oneself is protected."

The following tone and content guidelines are intended to provide a framework for play, as well as explicit instruction on the type of content that will not be part of the narrative and should not be included in player emails or actions.

Red Lines in Action Submissions

You are welcome to note "red lines" in action submissions - things within your character's control they would not do under any circumstance. For example, a player robbing a bank might note that physically harming anyone is a red line. This is helpful for Control to know, as this was a possible outcome, and they will respect this. This cannot be used to evade complications beyond your character's direct control ("My character would *never* fumble a catch and this is a red line for me" or "This NPC being offended by an action likely to offend them is a red line for me"); this rule is only there to ensure Control respects your character's volition, morality, and values.

If your character made certain choices, as part of your game ending they may lose control of themselves and perform actions you did not decide. Remember this game is a tragedy.

What to Expect

This is a game of tragic horror and will include potentially triggering content. We are classifying content as green, amber and red.

- Green content is a core part of the game and cannot be avoided. This game will go to darker places than most other megagames. As such, while we hope to handle matters with good taste, if you would rather avoid green-rated content this may not be the game for you.
- Amber content will be more uncommon and will be handled carefully by Control. While we cannot guarantee you will not encounter amber content (especially as other players or your own actions may force this upon you), you *can* ask for us to minimise or provide warning for specific examples (see the list below). We ask that players try to respect this same level of care and do not 'surprise' other players or Control with amber-rated content.
- Red content will *not* be detailed in the game, even if logically it is something that could or would occur within the setting.

Red Content

- Erotic content. Control insists players do not engage in any overt erotic roleplay or content in the body of their emails or actions.
- Sexual violence or assault. We ask that this not be included not only in your emails and actions but also in terms of backstory elements.

- Violence against children. We ask that this not be included not only in your emails and actions but also in terms of backstory elements.
- Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia. Players should come into this game with open minds and attitudes, and any attempt made at pushing discrimination out of character may be cause for expulsion from the game. While the world of *Sunset* has many problems, sexism, homophobia and transphobia are not among them.

Amber Content

- Torture may be mentioned but we will *not* describe this in detail (and we ask players to do the same).
- Body horror may come into play.
- Content that involves suicide is a possibility. We remind you not to spring this on another player without checking in or providing a warning first.
- Slavery in the setting is mostly closer to serfdom, but is present.
- Classism is present. Speciesism (not to be confused with racism, though in function similar) is not unheard of. Vampires certainly view humans as a lesser species. We do not encourage these attitudes in players, but they may encounter them from NPCs.

Green Content

- A degree of violence, injury and death are unavoidable during a war. We do not intend to dwell morbidly on details but some description is to be expected.
- Vampires drink blood, with or without the consent of the donor.

Please note this list is not exhaustive; Control reserves the right to specify if other actions cross the line. If you are considering saying or doing something which you are concerned could be viewed as inappropriate speak with Control about it before acting.

Checking in With Control

You will be assigned an official Control liaison at game start. If you have a question or concern, ask them. It is often quicker to do this via a private message on Discord but emails are acceptable. Mark such emails clearly so Control knows it is not an in-game email. Your Control may check in with you about your wellbeing, especially if your character suffers extreme hardship or distress or you have not communicated for several days. If you have an issue with another player please bring it to Control's attention so we can help resolve the issue.

Quarterbacking

Quarterbacking is a term used in board games and roleplaying games when players tell other players how to spend their turns 'optimally'. We recognise some of you will look at the map as a puzzle to be solved and try to make the best possible moves (as you see them) and you are welcome to suggest these to other players and even try to convince them in character. Pressuring players out of character will *not* be tolerated, however. Players will spend their actions however they wish.

While we will usually simply give a warning about violations of this rule – it's normal for people to get excited – particularly egregious or repeated violations of this rule may be cause for a player to be ejected from the game and possibly blacklisted from future games.



FAQ

Can my character die?
Yes, though we will not kill your PC right away and stop you playing the game. Player characters will not die in early weeks, with the exception of any players who leave the game. They may be injured, however.

Can my character *not* die?
Yes. This is a game of tragic horror, but death or an outright 'bad ending' is not guaranteed.

Can my character leave the Dreadwood during play?
No, unless you are told otherwise. The area is surrounded by enemy forces; you can't wander out to visit scenic Vlaska. In addition, many of the other nations and places mentioned would take weeks to reach.

Why is some information - the strength of enemy attacks, the value added by NPCs, dice results - hidden?
All battles involve a degree of uncertainty. This is primarily a roleplaying game; a game about living through a war, not a wargame. It will be obvious post battle if the victory or defeat was narrow or overwhelming.

Can I use my Freeform Action to Defend?
No.

Can I use my Defend action as a Freeform Action?
No, though you may unlock other uses for your Defend action as the game progresses.

Can I choose not to Defend?
Yes. Inaction also has consequences, of course; most PCs and NPCs are unlikely to be pleased by this.

Can I attack enemy held Strongholds?
Yes, with a Freeform Action. Note it is **not possible** to reclaim them unless you have been informed otherwise. In mechanical terms these are raids or surgical strikes. They might reduce the support provided by a Stronghold, reduce the strength of an enemy attack from this Stronghold or complete a more specific objective, but you can't take back what was lost.

If Support cannot be raised above 3, what if more than 3 players try to increase Support?
Any excess would be applied to the Stronghold's Defence instead.

The rulebook mentions unlocking new Approaches or uses for the Defend action. How can I do this?
We can't explain the details without spoiling the game, but this will happen in response to your actions, choices and conversations. As such, it's not guaranteed this will happen for every player and is unlikely in early weeks.

Many play-by-email games have players gain Assets and similar; is this possible here?
Generally no, by design. This is not a game where you get stronger over time.

SUNSET

ONE PAGE RULE SUMMARY

Turns

- Each turn lasts one week, both in and out of game.
- Monday-Friday is the Action Phase. Use this time to plan your actions and email other PCs and NPCs.
- The deadline for submitting your Actions is at 1am Saturday GMT/8pm Friday EDT.
- Saturday-Sunday is the Resolution Phase.

Defence Action

- You have a single Defence Action each turn.
- You must make two selections to complete your Defence Action:
  - 1) The Stronghold you would like to defend
  - 2) The Approach, specifying one of the following:
    - Destroy Enemy
    - Preserve Forces
    - Protect Noncombatants
    - Other Options Unlocked During Gameplay
- Should you choose, your character may also forfeit their Defence Action.
- Your character will add 1d6 to a Stronghold's Defence Value. Your character may possess a special ability that can be applied to this roll; this will be clearly stated as part of your character briefing.
- No matter what you roll or what modifiers are applied you will always contribute a minimum of +1 to a battle. You will never be a detriment.
- You will know in advance which Strongholds are under attack each turn.

Freeform Action

- You have a single Freeform action each turn.
- You may use this however you wish, with two limitations:
  - 1) You cannot use this to Defend a second Stronghold.
  - 2) This action takes place chronologically before the Defence action, meaning you cannot use it for actions during battle.
- A d6 is rolled for your action. The degree of success and consequences they face is determined by this roll (see page 21). Your character may possess a special ability that can be applied to this roll; this will be clearly stated as part of your character briefing.