

*The Perfected city*

*The Perfected City* is a game for 4-6 people where you create stories about an ancient island city ruled by powerful noble families, their ceaseless vendettas, and the duels of word and blade they use to resolve them. Guns and electricity are not known here, but the people have a mystical discipline which allows them to do impossible things.

# Sagrea

In time lost to memory, noble Families of the mainland fled to establish Sagrea, ageless city of wonders. There are many tales about why they fled, but truth is long lost and records from the **Crossing** are scattered and crumbling.

The **First Families** who undertook the Crossing—also known as the **Tretagi**—rule a city unparalleled in the known world. Bastard offshoots of Tretagi (and Families ennobled after the Crossing) make up the lesser seed of the **Low Families**, or **Barandi**. Nobles find their diversions in art, running city bureaucracy, military leadership and adventurism, and duelling.

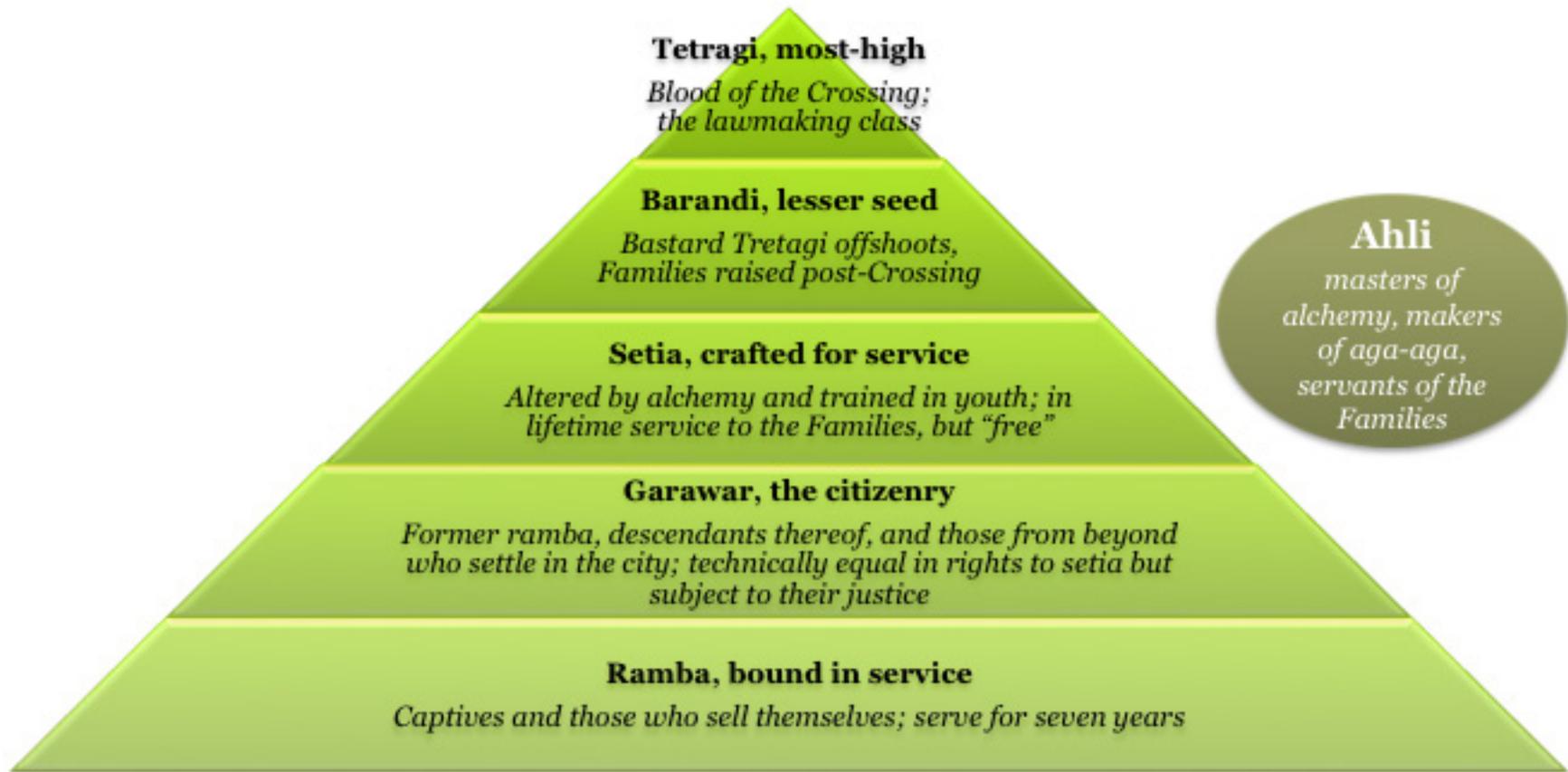
Even the poorest Sagrean counts herself lucky that she is spared the squalor of mainlander life. The only souls from off-island most Sagreans see are **ramba**, accused criminals who are sold to those of means at Market, pledging themselves to 7-year terms of slavery.

Besides ramba, Families of Sagrea have two other, nominally-free servant classes who nonetheless usually serve for life: the ahli and the setia.

The first, the **ahli**, are a sect of people who have mastered **alchemy**, altering people and creating chimerical beasts called **aga-aga** to serve their patrons. Ahli sometimes change allegiance, but, strangely, it is rarely noted when they do.

The second group, the **setia**, are people who are molded alchemically and trained from youth to be tough and fanatically loyal. Though most think of them as Family guards, and they often are, setia are modified for many varieties of tasks and skills. Setia are made into whatever Families may find useful (or, especially

## The Order of The Perfected City



among those of great wealth, have whim to see created). There is but one legend in Sagrean history of a setia who left her Family despite being conditioned from youth to loyalty.

The second class of citizenry—the **Garawar**—descend from those who did not make the Crossing. Some were native to the island, some are freed ramba (or their descendants) who embraced the Mother City upon tasting freedom, some are of fallen Families that lost their nobility. Garawar often work as merchants, though they are found throughout Sagrean life.

For Sagreans, family is primary. Ask a Sagrean where he is from, and most sooner name family than place. Those without blood relations create families, binding them with ceremony and common name.

## Building a Family

- Get a **Family** sheet, found in the following pages.
- **Blood**
  - Circle **Tretagi** if your Family made the Crossing.
  - Circle **Barandi** if your Family is born of bastard Tretagi lineage or ennobled after the Crossing.
- **Legacy**
  - Circle **Ancient** if your name predates the Crossing.
  - Circle **Old** if your name's birth predates living memory.
  - Circle **New** otherwise.
- **Order**
  - Record **your family's organization**. Is it ruled by a tyrannical matriarch? Is it an oligarchy of the eldest? Is it anarchic and egalitarian? Are there internal factions? Is it tight or loose? Large or small? Is it something else entirely?

**Family Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Family**

**Blood:** Barandi or Tretagi

**Legacy:** Ancient, Old, or New

**Order:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Domain:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Face**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Looks:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Essence:**

Arrogant	Faithful
Angry	Irreverent
Blunt	Lazy
Cold	Lusty
Cunning	Petty
Curious	Serene
Deceitful	Smart
Extravagant	Violent

**People**

<b>Name:</b> _____	<b>Name:</b> _____	<b>Name:</b> _____
<b>Looks:</b> _____	<b>Looks:</b> _____	<b>Looks:</b> _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
<b>Essence:</b> _____	<b>Essence:</b> _____	<b>Essence:</b> _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**Relations**

**Amities:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Enmities:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Details:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

***Other Characters***

<b>Name:</b> _____	<b>Name:</b> _____	<b>Name:</b> _____
<b>Family:</b> _____	<b>Family:</b> _____	<b>Family:</b> _____
<b>Looks:</b> _____	<b>Looks:</b> _____	<b>Looks:</b> _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

<b>Essence:</b> _____	<b>Essence:</b> _____	<b>Essence:</b> _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

<b>Name:</b> _____	<b>Name:</b> _____	<b>Name:</b> _____
<b>Family:</b> _____	<b>Family:</b> _____	<b>Family:</b> _____
<b>Looks:</b> _____	<b>Looks:</b> _____	<b>Looks:</b> _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

<b>Essence:</b> _____	<b>Essence:</b> _____	<b>Essence:</b> _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

<b>Name:</b> _____	<b>Name:</b> _____	<b>Name:</b> _____
<b>Family:</b> _____	<b>Family:</b> _____	<b>Family:</b> _____
<b>Looks:</b> _____	<b>Looks:</b> _____	<b>Looks:</b> _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

<b>Essence:</b> _____	<b>Essence:</b> _____	<b>Essence:</b> _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

# Ahli

Tales of this shadowy sect are numerous and contrary: they were Tetragi servants before the Crossing, they were island natives, they are only loyal to one another, they are worms burrowing closer to the heart of the most high. They are not trusted; they are fully embraced.

The only way Families may acquire new to ahli serve them is to speak need to ahli in service. One may appear, one may not. None outside the ahli know how they are trained, nor have any idea of what families they come from. Even very firm and bloody questions put to ahli yield no clear tale. But none can turn aside what they offer.

**Ahli do the impossible.** What they do is not gaudy, nor swift. Producing one impossibility can take hours or years. Histories sing the Great Beast of Pemim's tale, created hundreds of generations ago for Pemim the Great (also known as The Tretagos). Gruelling decades were spent in its crafting. The same histories also tell of Pemim's great rage when their beast was not to their liking, and the way the creature burned up the ahli who made it for them.

Ahli claim their arts will be capable of much more in time, and new applications of alchemy appear with each morning's dew.

Two impossibilities are known by most: the aga-aga and alchemy.

## Aga-aga

Long ago, ahli discerned how to combine the essences of animals to create hybrid beasts, called aga-aga. These beasts are often **crafted for Families' menageries**. Most changes are merely cosmetic; winged horses are common to Tretagi menageries, but crafting one that can fly requires much talent, time, and money, and very few such beasts are known.

Aga-aga are also made as **pets for children** of the blood and for **specific needs in society**. For example, carts that bring goods between settlements are drawn by formic oxen, ungulate beasts covered in chitin, following scent trails laid down by their predecessors. Families also use aga-aga for **duelling**, pitting them against one another to decide a quarrel or, rarely, one will face a human opponent with bloody results.

Longevity is expensive and difficult to ensure, so lower-quality aga-aga are often short-lived. At times their life essences are linked to their owner, such that when she dies, they die. However, some are quite ancient indeed.

Long-lived aga-aga are fairly simple to generate if human essence is added. However, by law and custom, aga-aga are not permitted to include any human features or traits. Those that do are considered **monsters**. In Sagrea's long history ahli have broken with law many times. When monsters are discovered, beasts and creators both are destroyed. Dire consequences follow for Families who host such forbidden births.

However, some monsters escape justice. Packs of them have haunted wild places between settlements for unknown years, interbreeding and multiplying in wild lands. Occasionally, refugees arrive at the city gates fleeing villages wiped out by roaming obscenities. Young Sagrean nobles sometimes gather small groups of war-crafted setia and, without their parents' knowledge, take off on midnight rides to rescue the meek. While this makes great fodder for stories, monsters who are crafty enough to escape the city and survive render "quests" into slaughters. Despite this, overweening young Tretagi have begun to argue that competitive monster hunting ought to be considered honorable duelling stakes.

## Alchemy

Alchemy, reportedly discovered after the Crossing, is where mainlanders believe most Sagrean power comes from. Alchemy is most often used as arcane path to **healing wounds and sickness**. Very few Families, especially among Tretagi, ever lose someone to such simple complaints. Alchemy can also **prolong life**. It's common for Tretagi elders to have been born in prior centuries. Tuan Minjko, eldest in the city, is rumored to have 500 years behind him. And legend tells of a leader who briefly ruled all Sagrea whose name is now forgotten, but whose title remains: The Ancient One. He is rumored to have been 1129 years old when his children murdered him in his sleep, after first killing all of the Family's ahli to make sure he wouldn't be revived.

Another common way alchemy works is by **changing people**. Nobles rarely alter themselves, but are quite happy to modify their servants and associates into setia. Setia are normal people who are "hired" at very young age by Families or, rarely, rich Garawar. In their youth, they are conditioned with training and alchemy to put their Family above all else. Their bodies and minds are also alchemically shaped so they will be exactly suited to their tasks.

Each Family has its own ideals for how setia should be trained and molded; some more-extreme setia are scandalously close to monsters. Setia are most-often trained as warriors, tougher and quicker than any unaltered person can hope to be. However, setia are also made for music, cooking, dance, and many of other purposes.

Alchemy is used for other things as well. For example, recreational drugs brewed through alchemy are capable of psyche-shattering results. Burned-out, lesser-seed Barandi, squandering Family wealth on ever-more-baroque internal experiences are lately seen as scourge to honor and threat of Sagrea's eventual dissolution.

## **Building a Family, continued**

- Take out your Family sheet.
- **Domain**
  - Where does your Family **get its power from**?
  - Is it wealthy? Does it excel at one of the duelling arts? Is it ancient? Is it unified and working well together? Does it hold great sway among the Garawar? Are its ahli especially skilled? Does it provide some crucial service?

## Religion

Most Sagreans **worship their ancestors**. They keep exacting ancestral records, and much of Sagrean known history is gleaned from these texts. People of the island frequently invoke ancestors in everyday life, and especially in duels. Many in the city share foremothers and forefathers, and some of these ancestors have evolved over the years into archetypes, nearly gods. For example, everyone knows Wanna Indang was beautiful but her temper was wildfire.

Many among the Garawar share the ancestral faith of the nobles, but some retain their own original culture's religions, or have new faiths developed within the walls.

## Sexuality & gender

**Gender equality is the norm in Sagrea.** People of all genders are equally highborn leaders, wise teachers, learned historians, crafty ahli, mighty setia, and so on.

Sagreans are also sexually-open and -adventurous people; for example, few are entirely monogamous. Given how intricate

the society and its manners are, *who* you choose to have sex with is extraordinarily important, but no-one makes any special note of *what gender* your partners are. While individuals have preferences, Sagrean language lacks words to describe sexual orientations. Who you *marry*, though, is a matter of wide interest, debate, and perhaps blood.

Some people choose to employ alchemy to make their bodies conform to the gender they identify within themselves. The uncountable generations of experience that Sagreans have with this has rendered a wide variety of gender expressions something all are familiar with.

## Ramba

Ramba life is hard, but not completely without rights. Indeed, rarely, some sell themselves into service for coin. The Market records when their period of servitude begins and they are released after seven years. Law theoretically protects ramba from arbitrary abuse and the most-extreme forms of cruelty at the hands of their masters. Behind the doors of a Family's villa, though, anything can happen. When such brutality is witnessed or made public it's often cause for duelling, and frequently occasions loss of prominence for Families who are found to be so cruel.

## Law & order

A select and rotating group of Tretagi is chosen by their Families each year to set and interpret law. This is largely ceremonial; most laws have remained unchanged for generations.

Openly carrying weapons is seen as affectation of the rich, as the setia keep brutal peace remarkably well.

**Disputes between nobles** result in duels. Duels are often public

debates; tens of thousands may be drawn to the arena by those addressing matters of great public interest or by the participation of popular debaters. Bloody, formal fights are another way Families resolve disputes. Fights are an ancient custom; debates were initiated to staunch flow of blood.

The incidents that can spark duels vary widely. There are extensive, byzantine laws, crafted over generations beyond knowing. In all that, finding reason to challenge someone is of little difficulty.

**Disputes between Garawar** are beneath notice of Sagrean law; Garawar resolve their problems among themselves. For many, the sole path to redress grievance is to employ or seek protection from violent gangs. Two main systems of justice exist beyond the gangs. First, there is a distinctively-different duelling system maintained by Garawar. Also, some Garawar have ceremonies where representatives argue actual merits and logic of the case to an impartial third party, who then decides the issue.

**Disputes between Garawar and Families (including servants)** are more-clouded situations. Warrior setia will often settle any problem between Garawar and their Family in a violent and decisive manner when the offense occurs. Most of the blooded don't care about the murder of a Garawar as long as it isn't someone with personal connections, and slaughter isn't too extreme or public. Garawar families are nominally permitted to challenge Families to duels. Any family within Sagrean walls may challenge any other, but families and Families almost never stand across dust from each other. It would doom the Garawar and shame the Family.

Ramba are considered property of their Families; any problem involving them is treated as any legal problem involving Families is.

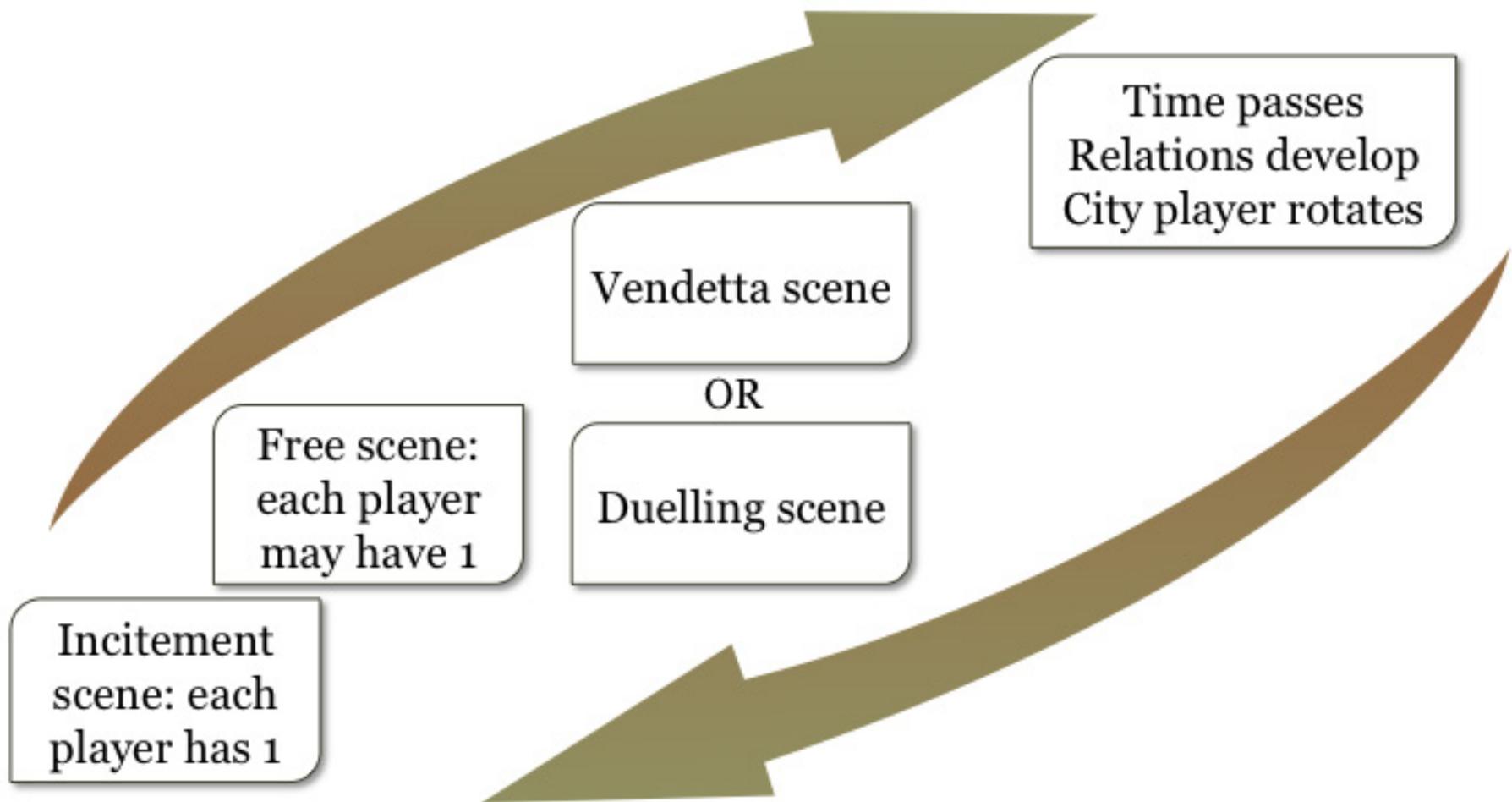
# Face and inter-Family relations

- Take out your Family sheet.
- **Name your Family** if you have not already done so.
- The **Face** is a **blood member of the Family** who is **involved in duels**, either in the arena or behind the scenes, and who is the member of the lineage you will get to know best. For **Looks**, write the first three things people notice about this person, and for **Essence**, circle (or write) 1-3 traits.
- **People**
  - **Come up with some people** who are in or who are vassal to your Family.
  - Setia, ahli, ramba, loyal Garawar, a monster in the basement, etc.
  - You need only come up with 2 Looks and 1-2 choices for Essence for these characters.
- Now go around the table and **read your Family's details aloud**.
- **Relations**
  - Your Family or your Face is an **ally** of the Family or Face of the **player to your right**.
    - Add that Family name to the **Amity** list on your sheet.
  - Your Family or your Face is in **conflict** with the Family or Face of the **player to your left**.
    - Add that Family name to the **Enmity** list.
  - **Talk to these players**. Work out why your Families get along or don't.
  - Summarize your relationships under **Details**.

- **Create a member of the Family on your Amity list**.
  - Choose one of the characters from People on the Amity Family's sheet, or create one of your own. Both players, write it down on their sheets, you in the section marked **Other Characters**, the other player in their list of People.
  - You need only give these characters 2 Looks and 1-2 Essence choices if you wish.
- **Create a member of the Family on your Enmity list** with the same restrictions.
  - These additional characters can be cast into scenes whenever it's appropriate.

## City player

- **Choose someone to play the City** for the first turn; a turn is a series of scenes about rising tensions between families, usually culminating in a duel. As City player, you will have a unique role. You are responsible for depicting and reacting for the world. The other players will focus on playing their noble Families. You will not focus on yours until next turn, when the **City player rotates**.



# Weaving stories

This is how play works: You have a few **Incitement scenes** where Families come into conflict with one another, those offenses firm into vendettas, which are then “resolved” in a duel. Interspersed with these are optional scenes where you explore the characters, families, and world.

## Framing scenes

Whenever you’re starting a scene:

- **Describe a setting**
  - Say when it is, where it is, and who is there.
- **Casting**
  - Make up characters on the spot or use established ones (such as those in the People or Other Characters sections of Family sheets) to be present in the scene.
  - At least one Face must be in each Family’s first scene of the game.
  - Most scenes should include a Face.
  - Note that only characters that have been previously-established may participate in duels.
  - You need only give these characters 2 Looks and 1-2 Essence choices if you wish.
- Give an overview of what the **purpose of the scene is**. Do not indicate how it should turn out, but rather what’s at stake.
  - *“This is a scene where caravan guard setia Sukkar is abused and ridiculed by the young scion of the Bodoh family.”*
- Tell everyone about a **hidden element in the scene**. A knife

may be hidden, only to come out later; a lie may be hanging over the scene.

- Ask Family players who are not in the scene if they have any details they’d like to add before play begins.

## Incitement scene rules

- City player, review the Family sheets and **pick the inter-Family conflict** that seems most interesting to you, the one you can most easily imagine a scene or story about.
- Frame a scene using the rules above about the moment when things went bad between the Families.
- At any point in this scene, a **challenge to duel** may be issued by either side.
- Play out the **scene where the conflict between the Families is born** in a freeform way.
- The **City describes the input of everyone else in the world**, and may embody more than one character.
- While the scene is playing, the **City may cast other players** into the scene.
  - Each player invited into the scene plays only one character and that character is the same until the City ends the scene.
- Scenes **do not focus on City characters**, but they may be extremely important to the outcome.
  - Avoid casting the characters from your Family in scenes if possible; if not, have someone else play them.
- When taking action for a character, make sure to **indicate only the intended outcome of the act** rather than its successful completion.

- *You might say you swing your sword at someone's throat, but you wouldn't say you cut someone's throat.*
- **The subject then describes the result of that act**, which could include anything up to and including the death of the subject. If the character is a Face, the death may not be depicted in this sort of scene. Faces can die in other kinds of scenes.
- When the inciting incident has played out, the **City calls an end to the scene**.
- Now have another Incitement scene with each of the other inter-Familial tensions.
  - Every established Enmity must have an Incitement scene before moving to the next phase.

## Free scenes

Once every Family player has had an Incitement scene, move to the **Free scenes** phase. Think of **people or things in the world you'd like to see explored**. Frame a scene around that, and run it the same way the City did Incitement scenes. The only restriction is **it is not a duel** (or a scene that leads into one).

## Free scene rules

- These scenes work substantially similarly to Incitement scenes, except for what they're about.
- **Faces may die** in these scenes.
  - If a Face dies, make a new one. If necessary, create new Amities and/or Enmities, if those were with or about that Face as opposed to the Family generally.
- The Family player may also cast the City into a role, in the same way that the City casts Family players into other scenes.

## Debating strategies

The game rules for a verbal debate and a bloody fight work the same way, but they look and feel different. Below, you will see some things you can use for inspiration during your duels.

Here are some examples of **what you might do in debate**:

- **Obfuscate**: Using language that confuses rather than clarifies
- **Lie**: Crafting credible-sounding falsehoods
- **Excoriate**: Employing the most-vicious cruelty possible
- **Allude**: Artfully associating concepts and poetically binding them in the audience's mind
- **Divert**: Doggedly forcing argument onto your chosen path
- **Ancestral assumption**: An art that involves invoking—in stance, voice, and word choice—venerated common ancestors
- **Propagandize**: Manipulating and controlling audience emotions
- **Persuade**: Convincing your opponent to your point of view

- **These scenes must be brief, and may not depict inter-family conflict.**
- Once everyone has had a chance to have such a scene, or passed on the chance, move to the next phase.

## Vendetta or Duelling

- Each Family player gets to have one scene in this phase.
- **Pick either an Vendetta or Duelling scene.**
- The first person who has an idea for one goes first.

**Vendetta scenes** operate the way Incitement scenes do. We see a feud, which has not yet boiled over into a challenge, develop further.

## Duelling scene rules

- If you feel like the feud has developed enough for you, or if you have already issued or been issued a challenge, you can **ask for a Duelling scene** instead of an Vendetta scene.
- **Faces may die** in these scenes.
- **Building the duel**
  - **Who will partake in the duel?** The character who is duellist for your Family may be the Face, and must be a character previously-established.
  - Now you decide, is this a **fight or a debate?**
    - You may wish to review the two tables below for ideas on what to do in a debate or fight before building the contest.
  - The other Family in the duel **chooses who will compete** for her with the same restrictions as you had.

## Tactics of battle

These are some of the **common fights** that duellists engage in. Use, adapt, or combine:

- **Reenactment:** Replication of ancient, well-known battles
- **Race:** Violent races around the arena, either between human competitors, their mounts, or both.
- **Sea battle:** Combatants fight on boats, rafts, or beasts in a flooded arena
- **Melee:** Many duellists; the sides may be even or not
- **Blind:** Both combatants are alchemically blinded; alternate versions exist where hearing or pain are suppressed
- **Nobles:** Most-ancient form of duelling from which all duelling culture is derived
- **Setia:** Most often when fighting duels happen, it is in this form
- **Ramba:** Forcing slaves to fight one another usually damages both Families' standing
- **Cross-class battle:** Two people who are not of same class battle; scandalous but legal
  - *A Garawar merchant son may fight to defend the honor of his trading caravan against the setia of a Family that cheated them.*
- **Creatures**
  - **Handlers** are considered duellists for battles using beasts
  - **Aga-aga:** Combat between aga-aga, or one featuring people fighting one
  - **Monsters:** Strictly illegal and held only in secret, some fights use monsters (aga-aga with human traits or features)
  - **Beasts:** One or both sides' combatants are natural animals

- Everyone who's not in the duel is the **Audience**.
- Decide as an Audience if this will be a **short, medium, or long duel**.
- The City player needs at least 32 chips.
- Each member of the Audience gets **1 chip for a short duel, 3 for a medium one, or 5 for a long one**. Note that the City will always be in the Audience, but may not be alone in it depending on how many players there are.
- The City player **describes the arena**.
- Each other player who isn't involved in the duel takes a turn **adding a detail**. This can continue until no one has any more ideas.
  - After everyone else has had at least one turn, the City may start adding details, too.
  - It is in this step that the kind of contest it will be is determined. For example, you will decide by your choices here if the duel a mounted water battle or an argument on the rights ramba possess outside of Sagrea's walls.
- The round begins
  - Player who called for the scene, you now make your **first move**.
  - **Describe what you're doing** to either make your point or to attack your opponent.
  - As with other scene types, don't describe a successful action, describe an attempt.
  - If you **use one of the elements the Audience placed in the arena**, you get one chip from the extras not given to the Audience.
    - No matter how many things you use in the arena for this round, you can only get one chip for them.
  - **The defender reacts**.
- The defender describes how she reacts, but not yet how she acts.
  - That is, take the blow or don't, but don't yet counterattack.
- If the defender uses something in the arena, she gets one chip from those not given to the Audience.
- Now the **Audience votes**.
  - Each member may **give a chip** to the competitor they think got the best of this round, described the most interesting thing, or was the most entertaining.
  - Audience members do not have to give a chip for a given round.
- Once per round, **one Audience member may take one chip from one duellist and give it to the other**.
  - Only *one* Audience member may do this per round.
  - First-come, first-serve.
  - Only chips can be stolen, not points (see below).
  - The Audience member who transferred the chip says why. Maybe the recipient had an incredibly good round. Maybe the one who lost the chip went too far.
- **Accounting**
  - Duellists, count up the number of chips you have. Add them to your existing points from earlier rounds of the fight, if any, and write the number on your Family sheet.
  - Return the chips to the City.
- **The round ends**.
- **Now the defender attacks**. A new round begins.
- Continue, each duellist taking turns, **until the Audience is out of chips**.
- The duellist with the **highest point total wins**.
- Sagrean law now considers the offense resolved, and by

custom Families are to dissolve their tensions.

- Each player, state if your Family is **satisfied or sustains animus**.
- If both Families are satisfied, **erase Enmities**.
- If *both* are not, they remain, and you may **update the reasons**.

## Future turns

- Once all the Vendetta and Duelling scenes for a given turn are done, the **City says how much time passes** in the world.
- Take turns **recounting your Family's activities** during that time.
- Any Families that have had a duelling scene can **gain a new Enmity**.
  - If you do, you may **add another Amity** as long as it doesn't conflict with any existing Enmities, and the player of the Family you are allying with agrees.
  - If you have Amity with all the other Families, then you may **gain an Enmity** with one.
    - Once play starts, we will have to **see how this Enmity began**, per the beginning of play.
- **If your Family has no Enmities**, you may either retire your Family or create a new Enmity.
- **Pick a new City player** for the next turn.
  - You may want to volunteer if you resolved an Enmity or have all Amities.
- **Play continues from this point**, mixing Incitement, Free, Vendetta, and Duelling scenes.