

SOVEREIGN

a game of duty, loyalty, and power

PLAYER'S GUIDE



A Crayon Samurai Game

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Table of Contents

Section 1 - Setting

History of the Empire	Page 5
Realm of the Dead	Page 9
The Lands of Sovereign	Page 12
Crudely Drawn Map	Page 15
Religion in the Empire	Page 16
Sovereigns	Page 19
The Oath and Sects	Page 25

Section 2 – Rules

Rules System	Page 30
Combat System	Page 38
Rules for Devotions and Disciplines	Page 42

*Loyalty means nothing unless it has at its heart
the absolute principle of self-sacrifice.*

- - Woodrow Wilson

Welcome to Sovereign

Sovereign is a low-fantasy setting where you and your fellow players take the roles of warriors without match, sworn by oaths of loyalty and a debt that can never be repaid to a hereditary emperor who rules over a vast empire. Adopted into the Emperor's family, these warriors are granted the title "Sovereign." From that point forward they dedicate their lives to endless training and service. Chief among their duties is protecting the Empire and its people against foul sorcerers, people born with the ability to contact the forbidden realm of the spirit and enslave shades, the spirits of the dead, in order to gain great but unnatural power.

Due to a lifetime of intense training and discipline, Sovereigns have unparalleled martial abilities. Due to the backing of the Emperor, they have authority over all except the Emperor himself. Their authority and abilities, however, are tempered by a sacred oath and by responsibilities and debts they can never fully repay.

As a Sovereign, you are one of the known world's most powerful weapons. You are the first and best line of defense for the greatest nation in existence and, as a result, for the entire world. Only you stand a chance against the evils of sorcery, a chance to defend the people's right to live their lives.

Do you possess the strength to serve the Empire and fulfill your obligations?

Nation of the People

A History of the Empire

Before the Empire

Before the Empire was founded, the world was a land of darkness. Sorcerers whored their dark arts to unbelievably wealthy and unimaginably cruel warlords. The people toiled the fields for their lords and received pain, indifference, cruelty, and torture as their reward.

Irrevocably tainted by their contact with the Spirit Lands, the realm of the dead, sorcerers could not help but eventually turn their craft to evil deeds. Their greed drove them to sell themselves to the most powerful warlords. Already drunk on their own wealth and strength, these men fell even further into excess with the powers of the sorcerers at their whim.

Sorcerers and warlords enslaved the common people and used them to construct monuments to their greatness. Some sorcerers even set themselves up as warlords. As they became more and more jaded, they took amusement in their people's pain and suffering.

Warlords began holding contests to see who could come up with the most

inventive and painful tortures. These sadistic acts only served to increase the power of sorcerers, as they drew more and more power from the dead.

None could stand against the power of sorcery, making rebellion impossible. Those who attempted it were torn limb from limb after they were made to watch the murders of their family and friends.

For years upon years, this endured.

Until the First Emperor arose.

Rise of the Emperor

Born to one of the most cruel and powerful lords in the land, the First Emperor's mother was a slave that had caught the lord's eye. She foolishly thought her beauty made her special, and even held onto hope that the lord would marry her. The lord pretended to entertain the notion but in reality viewed her as nothing more than an object and as a means to produce an heir.

A son was born. The lord began to groom him to take over his lands, but the lord could not hide his evil from the boy. The boy witnessed his father

administer constant beatings to his mother as well as indiscriminate killing, torture, and greed.

The boy soon came to know the plight of the people, his father's evil and the tool of sorcery that allowed this abhorrent arrangement to continue. The boy knew in his heart that his father could not be allowed to continue. The final straw was when he saw his father, in a fit of rage, beat his mother to death. He began to take action.

In secret, he trained peasants in the basics of combat while making overtures to sorcerers outside his father's realm of influence. Although he abhorred sorcery as a corrupt ability used to subjugate and destroy, the First Emperor realized he needed that power to bring an end to his father.

Armed with a small handful of sorcerers he felt he could safely direct, if not trust, and the peasants he had won over, he made his first move while his father was waging war in a distant province. His army easily dispatched of the meager group of soldiers left to defend the palace.

Backed by mighty amulets crafted by his own sorcerers, the First Emperor dispatched his father's sorcerers himself, giving them no quarter and no chance to surrender. When his father's

army marched into the city weeks later, it was taken by surprise and, in a brilliant tactical maneuver by the emperor, all but wiped out. The First Emperor beheaded his father.

His army swept across the known lands, swelling its ranks with those brave enough to rebel against their lords. He offered freedom to any who joined him, including the lords themselves. To sorcerers, he offered life in exchange for complete and unquestioning obedience.

The First Emperor, who was crowned such by his own people, eventually eschewed sorcerous items himself and deferred to sorcerers only when absolutely necessary.

After eschewing the use of sorcerous items, the First Emperor began an intensive program of physical and mental discipline that honed him into a lethal weapon capable of cutting through dozens of skilled warriors without breaking a sweat. He passed on his skills to a select group of men and women who possessed the discipline to master them..

The Second Emperor

The First Emperor later had two sons; one grew into a warrior and tactician without match. Without him,

the war to solidify the Empire would have failed. The other son became an unparalleled statesman and administrator. With their help, the Emperor cemented his rule across much of the land. Before he could declare an heir, however, tragedy struck. On the way back from one of the war's last campaigns, the emperor was struck dead by a sorcerous arrow.

Shortly after, another tragedy befell the fledgling Empire as the warrior son died in a skirmish. With a heavy heart, his statesman brother accepted the mantle of Emperor.

Upon assuming the title, the Second Emperor made two moves that would forever shape the future of the Empire. First, he outlawed the use of sorcery. The First Emperor had no love of the craft but stopped short of outright criminalizing it. The people knew the truth of the world, that there is another land beyond the physical, the land of the dead, but the First Emperor vehemently argued that the two should be kept separate.

He pointed to the fact that the two worlds could not naturally interact as proof of his beliefs. When sorcerers draw power from the spirit lands into the physical world, they unbalance the

nature of the world which ultimately results in harm.

The Second Emperor's decree came with two major caveats. First, any sorcerer who willfully submitted to his rule would be allowed to practice sorcery... for a price. Their heads would be shaved and marked with garish tattoos singling them out as unclean and not to be trusted. And they would only be allowed to practice their craft with the explicit permission of the Emperor.

The second was an unofficial understanding that if a sorcerer did not use the craft to cause harm wasn't overt about it, he would be allowed to continue to use sorcery. In this way, so-called wise men and women continued as they had for years, brewing healing potions and creating minor amulets to help the people of their village.

Creation of Sovereigns

The Second Emperor's next act was to take the elite followers of his father and create a class of warriors dedicated completely to the word of the Emperor and to the defense of the Empire, specifically against sorcerers.

The Second Emperor expanded this group by recruiting orphaned children from lives of violence and destitution.

They were taken and given homes and trained relentlessly by the First Emperor's disciples. The majority were unable to obtain greatness and were given positions in the army. Those few men and women who showed themselves to be exceptional were adopted by the Emperor himself and named Sovereigns.

Sworn to uphold an oath of honor, duty, and loyalty, they were also given authority over all, their power second only to the Emperor himself. None were allowed to question them. All were expected to obey.

The Empire Now

Hundreds of years have passed and the Empire has continued to be a bulwark against the evils of sorcery.

It has remained the greatest nation in the known world and people worldwide respect the strength of the Empire. The current Emperor has shown himself to be a man worthy of the utmost respect. But one of his most recent edicts has raised eyebrows in some circles.

Six months ago the Emperor imposed a mandatory death sentence on any sorcerer operating outside of the Empire's purview. This broke with centuries of tradition allowing so called

“benevolent” sorcery to go without punishment. Even those using their craft in a seemingly beneficial manner have been sentenced to death.

There have also been stories, little more than whispers in the night, of shades, the spirits of the dead, seen in the physical world and of twisted beings living on the fringes of the Empire's borders...

Spirit Lands

The Realm of the Dead

Sorcery and Spirit Lands

Philosophers debate about the beginning of the world, but the Spirit Lands have been a part of it for as long as recorded history. Just beyond the physical world, just beyond touch, the realm of the shades, the spirits of the dead, dwells.

Normal people can not contact this world but echoes of it are occasionally felt. Sorcerers are the sole exception, they are born with the unnatural ability to contact this world and parlay with its inhabitants.

Binding

The easiest and most common form of interaction between a sorcerer and a shade is the act of binding, also called imbuing.

In this act, the sorcerer meticulously prepares an object to serve as a home for the shade since it can not cross over otherwise. Shades long to touch the living once again, and will only accept items made from living or once living materials.

An object housing a spirit gains awesome but extremely specific abilities that depend both on the object prepared and on the personality of the spirit.

A sword carved of bone that is imbued with the shade of a cruel warlord might be able to cut through the hardest substances like they were nothing more than hot butter.

The most difficult part of binding is preparing the object. Although spirits are drawn to the physical world they aren't going to reside inside of a hastily prepared item. They want the best, the finer the object prepared for them the better the chance they'll accept the sorcerer's invitation.

Leather sheaths, necklaces made of preserved internal organs, and knives carved out of human bone are all examples.

Offerings made from human flesh and bones are virtually irresistible to shades. Destruction of a bound object forces the bound spirit back to the Spirit Lands.

Dead bodies will be accepted without question, but when a spirit

infuses a body it is able to animate it, which brings a very unique set of problems with it. For one, the sorcerer has a difficult time controlling the inhabiting shade. When bound in an object, a shade can take only the most subtle of actions. An imbued dagger may be able to move an inch or slightly alter its target.

An imbued corpse, however, is able to take any action the body could when it was alive. A sorcerer can attempt to throw a shade out of a corpse, but barring that he has little to no control over that shade's actions.

Binding is by far the most common form of sorcery and many people recognize it as the only form. But it is whispered that extremely powerful sorcerers have even more avenues to channel their corrupting abilities.

Evils of Sorcery

Those born with sorcery will use it sooner or later. Once they use their in-born ability they will use it again. They will use this power to make life easier, to help a loved one. They will use it to help themselves. Eventually, they will succumb to the temptation to use it to help themselves as the expense of others. Once that step is taken, it's a quick, violent descent into the darkness

- jealous, greedy, egotistical, consumed with selfishness and drunk on their own power.

Those are the good ones.

The Spirit Lands are not meant to be touched by mortal hands. Some say that sorcerers themselves are shades who have managed to tear into the cycle of rebirth in the physical world. Others say sorcery is gifted by shades in hope of gaining loyal followers and tools to gain them entry into the world of the living.

By its very nature, sorcery is tainted and it stains the very soul of those who wield it. This was proven in the days of the feudal lords where sorcerers naturally gravitated towards the cruel and the powerful in exchange for personal wealth and power.

The curse knows no cultural, ethnic, or national borders. The afflicted typically discover their abilities in their mid to late teens. Younger children typically do not have the gall to use the craft. There are no "tells," no outward signs that show a sorcerer for what he is beyond the arrogant attitude that many adopt. This makes them even more dangerous.

In the past, those using sorcery for "good" were watched but left alone until they slipped. The First Emperor

himself recognized sorcery was a powerful tool, but he also recognized it was an ultimately corrupt one. Once the corruption becomes evident, the sorcerer must be killed for the good of the people. A sorcerer could avoid all of this by presenting himself to the Emperor, swearing his allegiance, and giving up his freedom in exchange for his life and a chance to practice sorcery.

Submission to the Empire

With the Emperor's new ruling, all sorcerers who do not submit have a death sentence hanging above their head. When a sorcerer submits himself, he is immediately disrobed; this is to teach humility.

His head is shaved and covered in garish tattoos meaning "corrupt" "danger" and "slave." He is given a simple brown robe made of coarse wool and a Sovereign is named his keeper. It is the Sovereign's duty to watch the sorcerer at all times, to accompany him on official business and, if need be, to end his life.

Known World

The Lands of Sovereign

A Brief Tour

Vast plains of waist-high grass blanket much of the peninsula Empire. The stronghold of imperial lands juts south of a gentle mountain range known as The Hills in the shape of a scythe with a fattened middle.

The Imperial city is in the center of the handle's fat middle and the point of the scythe is aimed northeast towards the archipelago nation of the Blue Kingdoms.

Near the coastal areas of the peninsula there are small rolling hills and several inlets where fishing is the main occupation. The Emperor also has fleets of small, swift, maneuverable boats to deploy soldiers past outlying coral reefs and to the nearby archipelago nation of the Blue Kingdoms (named so for the incredibly blue water surrounding the islands) where the backwards people revere sorcerers as healers and wise women and men.

The danger of the coral reefs surrounding the hundreds of islands that make up the blue kingdoms makes Sovereigns extremely vital to

monitoring the nation and making sure its natives don't get any foolish ideas of invasion or rebellion against the Empire.

To the northwest is a range of large rolling mountains thick with dense woodlands of large red oaks where small villages of hunters/gatherers live in primitive societies. Some traders within the Empire make a good business exchanging weapons and other modern commodities for traditional pottery and medicinal plants not found anywhere else.

These people are also known to harbor sorcerers both from their native lands and renegades from the Empire. Past this range of mountains are the Outlands, home to many varied cultures and people. The Empire rules some of these lands just beyond the mountains and maintains a presence in others, but past this small area lay wilds inhabited by savages and barbarians.

The Empire conjures images of ancient Rome and Greece. The average citizen wears simple, light clothing and sandals suited for the Mediterranean climate. Pillars and open buildings are

common, as are public bath houses and large marble statues realistically depicting the human form.

Cities within the Empire proper typically have sewer and water systems, including public baths, which are important social centers, and access to clean water. The farther one ventures from the Empire the less access there is to public services and, generally, the less amenities are available.

The Blue Kingdoms

Kingdoms is something of a misnomer. This archipelago nation is made up of several separate nations, but they are governed as a group by a council of elected officials, which handles mundane details regarding trade, taxes, etc., and a conclave of sorcerers, which acts as an advisory group but rarely steps in to offer opinions on matters other than diplomatic relations or matters of national security.

Sorcerers themselves are welcomed among the blue kingdoms. They are seen as being spiritually elevated above normal people and are often consulted by village leaders for help in everything from improving the soil for crops to curing sickness. They also serve as a sort of priest class as their connection

to the Spirit Lands is viewed as bestowing a deeper understanding of the afterlife.

The Hills

Closer to mountains, think Appalachia. No nations exist in the thick woods of elm and maple, but small bands of primitive tribes abound. These tribes form alliances with each other through marriages and trade, war on each other, and conduct business with each other.

Individually, these tribes are no match for the Empire, but it's easier for the Empire to tolerate them. Subjugating or wiping the tribes out borders on impossible as the tribesmen are experienced woodsmen and blend in and out of their land at will.

Good relations are also needed to secure the safety of the one road that goes through the hills, known as The Long Road, connecting the Empire to the outlands and providing the only reliable means of transporting large amounts of troops quickly back and forth.

The Grasslands

The majority of the Empire is covered in gently rolling plains thick with tall grasses and the occasional

smattering of woodlands. In the time of the feudal lords, eighty to ninety percent of the population were peasants forced to farm the land for wheat, olives, and grapes. That tradition has carried on, but there is now room for people to move up in social class.

The Empire is in theory a strict meritocracy where the poorest peasant can rise up to become the richest governor, but the reality of education being more readily available to those with money means the system isn't exactly fair to everyone. Still, those with skills and ability are able to work their way to powerful positions.

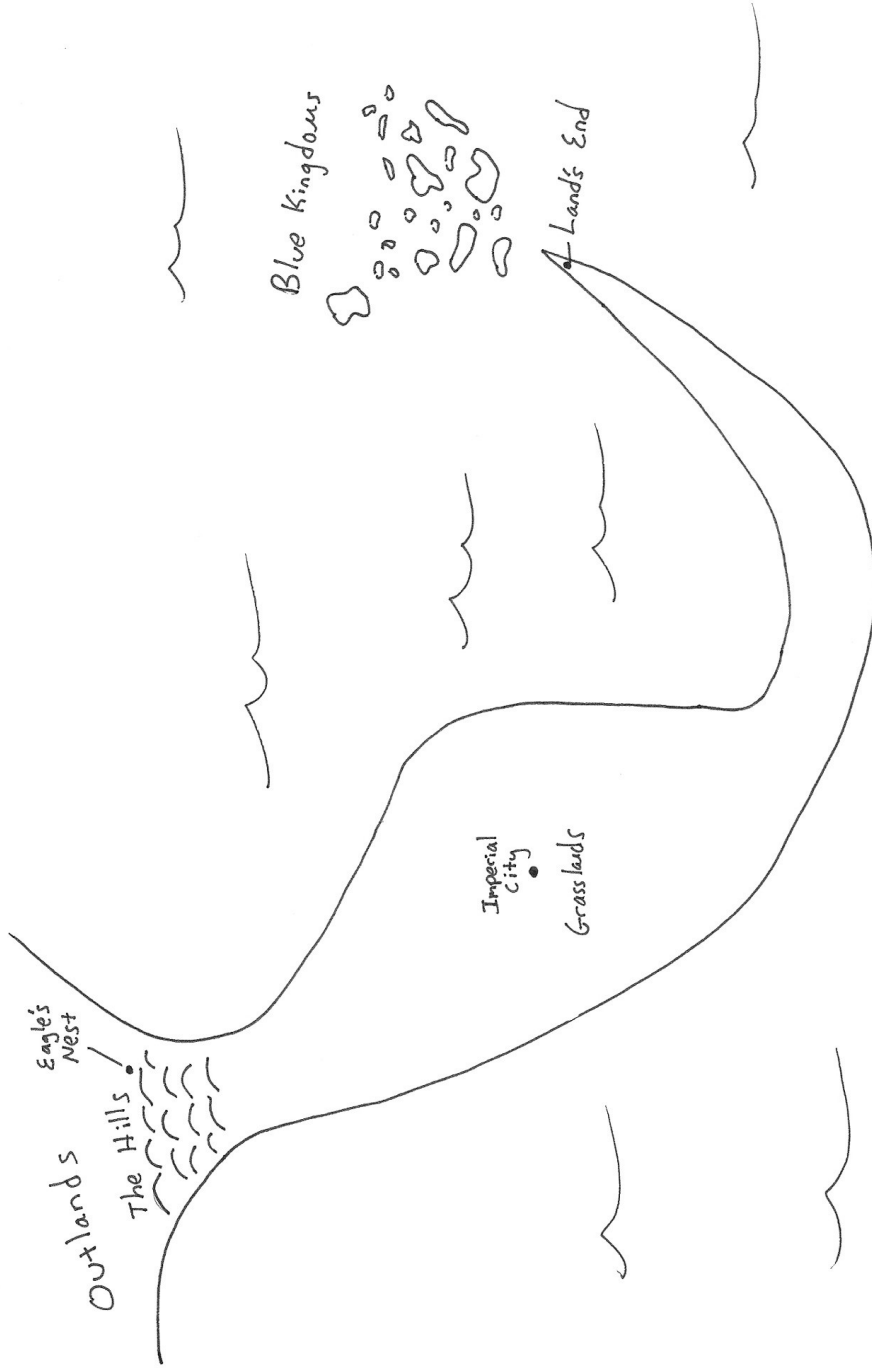
The Outlands

The area immediately surrounding the other side of the Hills is known as the Outlands. The Empire holds this swath of land but the people here often do not view the Empire as a savior. Although some welcome the Empire's stabilizing influence and the protection it offers, others resent being ruled over or in having sorcery outlawed.

Imperial City

Since the founding of the Empire five hundred years ago, the Imperial City has stood as the heart and soul of the Empire. Three quarters of a million

people call the city home. It has swollen more than five times its original size and buildings now spill outside of the 30-foot tall walls of gleaming white stone that Sovereigns helped construct. These walls have never fallen to an army. The city is located in the center of the Great Plains and sentries at the top of the walls can see for miles upon miles on clear days, making a surprise attack all but impossible.



The Empire - A Quick Sketch

(not drawn to scale)

The Living and the Dead

Religion in the Empire

Wardens of Apeus

Religion in the world has always centered on the Spirit Lands and its connection with the physical world. In the wake of the foundation of the Empire, the religion of the Holy Wardens of Apeus, or “Apeans,” flourished. The religion is not officially sanctioned by the Empire, but it is quietly encouraged.

The faith has a long history and was popular but suppressed among peasants during the time of the warlords.

According to Apean canon, the Spirit Lands are not a natural occurrence and were not meant to be. They were created at the dawn of civilization with the death of Apeus, the first man to die with such burning hatred in his heart that his soul refused to travel to its proper place in the afterlife. So intense was his hatred that his spirit clawed and struggled to remain in the mortal world.

This struggle tore the world apart and created the Spirit Lands. Apeus could not stay in this world, but his hate allowed him to create a festering wound in which to reside. Other mortals who

died with extreme pain, hate, bitterness, or other unresolved business in the world found pieces of their soul lingering in the spirit lands. It is an important part of Apean belief that the shades inhabiting the Spirit Lands are not the actual people who died. Instead, the shades are pieces of souls that were unable to properly let go of the world of the living.

Apean wardens preach from “The Book of Salvation from Apeus,” or simply “The Book.” It is said to have been written over a thousand years ago by the contemplative scholar Petrus, who spent many years speaking with philosophers, lore keepers, historians, and mystics. His years of study and insight led him to piece together the truth of the Spirit Lands and the world.

As long as the wound of the Spirit Lands exist, preach the wardens, the world will be in pain and at war with itself. Only by healing this wound can the world be returned to its rightful, harmonious state.

When all connections to the Spirit Lands are severed, the Spirit Lands will wither and die, the world will heal itself

and a harmonious balance will be reinstated. This belief leads to some zealots advocating complete destruction of all sorcerers, and even those who believe in ancestor worship as that practice is viewed as strengthening the Spirit Lands.

Aphean Tenants

The core philosophy of the Apehans boils down to three tenants.

1. The Spirit Lands are not natural and were created by hatred. They are a wound in the fabric of reality.

2. Sorcery is an unnatural side-effect of the wound of the Spirit Lands. Those cursed with sorcery must not touch wound or they will be forever damned.

3. In order for the wound to heal, all connections with the Spirit Lands must be severed.

Aphean Heresy

The Aphean Heresy is espoused by a sizable minority of citizens within the Empire. It is most popular among those settlements on the outskirts of the

Empire and among those who practice ancestor worship.

The heresy agrees that the Spirit Lands were created by the death of Apheus 10,000 years ago, but argues that they were created by Apheus' undying love and devotion of his family. Unwilling to leave his family without protection, Apheus' devotion created another world where he could dwell and continue to watch over his family. The Spirit Lands are not a place of evil, but of good where the shades of loved ones continue to guide and watch over their families.

The heresy is not strictly organized but followers occasionally group around a charismatic leader. Adherents revere sorcerers as blessed by Apheus himself to act as contacts between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

Ancestor Worship

Ancestor worship is not to be confused with the heresy. Some heretics are ancestor worshipers, but not all ancestor worshipers are heretics. Those practicing ancestor worship simply pay respects, pray, and give honor to their deceased relatives, including making offerings of food, incense, or valuables. They believe their ancestors can see these offerings and that they will in

return watch over the one making these offerings.

Ancestor worshipers' views on sorcery vary. Some agree with the Aphean Heresy and see sorcerers as holy men and women who were blessed with the ability to commune more directly with the dead. Others disdain sorcerers for enslaving their ancestors in imbued objects.

Ancestor worship is not technically outlawed, but the Empire does not look kindly on people who are very vocal about their beliefs or who begin to sympathize with or harbor sorcerers or who use sorcery.

Spirit Worship

Spirit worship is widely, although not universally, practiced among the barbarian tribes of The Hills. The major difference between ancestor and spirit worship is that spirit worshipers aren't necessarily honoring their dead. Instead, they worship strange and powerful spirits. Whether these are simply shades given odd names or actually something else is a matter of debate.

Sorcerers are often viewed as the physical manifestation of the will of the spirit they worship.

The Emperor's Chosen

Sovereigns

Saved by the Emperor

The Emperor's agents scour the furthest reaches of the land, searching for those who have the potential for greatness but who have been denied any chance of seeking it.

From the slums of cities, from the harsh wilds, they take in abandoned children whose parents did not want them or could not take care of them. They take in the starving, the abused, the sick, the enslaved... the unwanted, but only those who show an inner spark that could lead them to greatness.

From the lowest of the low, the Emperor finds his champions. These orphans are given a home, an education and, if not love, then at least people who care about what happens to them.

They are given training. From the moment of their rescue, they undergo relentless mental and physical tests by taskmasters whose only job is to determine whether an individual possesses the inner will required to seek perfection, to reach beyond the normal level of human achievement.

Most do not pass this test, but those who fail are not returned to the harsh conditions they were rescued from. Instead, they are groomed for service in the Empire according to their ability, whether that be military service, administrative duties, or specialized skills. After they serve the Empire for five years, they are allowed to seek other employment if they choose but by this time most have a good opinion of the Emperor, who essentially saved their lives, and continue to serve the Empire.

Training

Initial testing typically lasts three to four months. Those few who are found to possess the potential to exceed their peers are sent to a Cormancy to begin their training as a Sovereign. The average age of an orphan entering into this training is between four and six, but ages vary.

Some children are raised from birth to become Sovereigns, but no children are ever accepted who have already reached puberty. The training period typically lasts for ten to 15 years during which the initiate is put through a

rigorous training regimen honing the mind and body into lethal weapons.

The first period of training focuses on educating the child on the Empire's history, its neighbors, the nature of sorcery, and the Emperor's desire to keep the land safe for the people.

During this time the child is also instructed in the basics of self-defense and military strategy (through the use of games). Self-discipline and mental toughness is also introduced, children are discouraged from complaining, crying, or showing other weakness.

This phase also begins the child's education, with a decidedly pro-Empire bent. They are taught of the intrinsic evilness of sorcery and the benevolence and self sacrifice of the Emperor.

The next tier of training ups the mental and physical preparation while continuing education. Most orphans in this level of training are 12 to 15 years old. Masters of one-on-one combat teach the children all they know. Sparring matches are held on a regular basis and rare is the child who doesn't suffer at least one broken bone. Mental and physical toughness is combined.

Common exercises include forcing children to sit cross-legged in the middle of a light monsoon without moving or yelling out for any reason,

being stretched as far as possible by ropes, and working for days nonstop with no rest or sleep.

In addition to this, they are taught the art of politics and negotiating. They are taught the proper customs of both the Empire and the surrounding lands. And they are taught to learn how men think and where pressure can be applied to resolve situations without force.

Although the physical methods may seem cruel, it should be noted that the object of these trials is not to cause harm but to strengthen the initiates for the next and final tier of training.

Final level of training

The final level of training is the one that separates a Sovereign from even the best warriors in the world. The training is carried out by an experienced Sovereign and involves methods that are considered brutal by many but that are absolutely necessary to push an initiate's body beyond what is the considered the upper limits of the human body.

Initiates are taught to ignore pain by walking on hot coals and being beaten by wooden staffs. They are taught to focus their mind and body to such a degree that they can punch through walls of stone, leap from the ground

onto rooftops, and move faster than a wolf.

By the time they begin this training, most initiates are already the equal of any expert swordsman or military tactician. Although they were hand-picked from the initial pool of candidates, some do wash out of this level of training.

These individuals typically go on to achieve high ranks in the Empire's military force, but some leave, holding a grudge against the Empire for giving up

Elevated above the masses, but still human

Sovereigns are above and beyond even the best of the best. When thinking of Sovereigns think Achilles in Troy, Blade in Blade, Morpheus in the Matrix. They are elevated above mere mortals, but they are not invulnerable.

A Sovereign may be harder to hit and may take a hit better, but can be brought down. A sword through the heart or arrow through the skull will kill a Sovereign as sure as it will any man... they just don't let that happen.

on them or refusing to acknowledge their abilities.

At this level, initiates are also taught blacksmithing, woodworking, and other skills necessary for crafting and repairing weapons. By the end of his training, a Sovereign is required to make a weapon or piece of armor of exceptional craftsmanship.

During the latter half of this training an initiate also usually discovers a particular skill or task she is exceptional at. This could be a martial talent such as unarmed combat, swordsmanship or archery, or could be a talent for diplomacy, leadership or combating sorcerers.

Initiates complete their training at their own pace, but instructors typically wait for a group of two to four to be ready before bringing them before the Emperor for their indoctrination.

Welcome to the family

After being deemed worthy, each of the initiates is brought before the Emperor, who welcomes each of them as a son or daughter of his family. Initiates approach the Emperor one by one, each dressed in full combat gear and carrying their forged item. The ceremony is short and to the point.

Each initiate goes to one knee before the Emperor and swears undying loyalty to his father, the Emperor, and to his father's Empire and people. He forsakes the evils of sorcery and vows to protect the people from its corrupting influence so that each man and woman may be free to choose their own path. After making this oath, each initiate has the mark of the Emperor branded onto their left wrist with a hot iron, is told to rise by the Emperor and is embraced by him and kissed on the cheek, officially adopted as a member of the royal family.

A Sovereign's Duty

Sovereigns are named such because their word and authority is second to only the Emperor himself. Sovereigns may order citizens to assist them, supersede a commanding officer's authority to take control of a battalion of soldiers, or sentence a governor to death.

To temper this power, Sovereigns are forbidden from serving in a permanent post. One may be required to govern an Outlands village until a replacement governor can arrive, or may take control of an army for a

What gives a Sovereign his abilities?

As fantastic as their skills may seem, a Sovereign's power comes directly from his own willpower. Theoretically, anyone in the world is capable of achieving a Sovereign's power.

It is no innate ability that allows a Sovereign to develop these amazing skills. Instead, it is the Sovereign's will and discipline, his ability to continue pushing his body when others would quit and walk away.

campaign, but these are always temporary positions.

Sovereigns are taught that amenities make the mind and body weak, so most eschew fine clothing and foods or expensive living quarters in favor of a simple life.

Although this lifestyle is not explicitly stated in their Oath, it is what they have been taught their entire lives. Sovereigns who seek to accumulate wealth and other worldly possessions are looked down upon by their brethren and watched for signs of corruption.

Sovereigns operate in one of two ways: they are either performing a duty or task specifically assigned by the Emperor or are serving the Empire as best they see fit. Sovereigns operating in the second mode typically travel across the breadth of the Empire until they find an area they feel is in need of their guidance.

They may also simply travel, seeking out information to report to the Emperor or stay in a particular city to simply maintain the Emperor's presence.

Combating sorcery is the most serious duty a Sovereign can perform as they are the only ones with a chance of standing up to a sorcerer. Even then, stopping a sorcerer often requires more than a single Sovereign.

Across the Empire and beyond, Sovereigns are given a wide berth. In the heart of the Empire, this is given as a sign of respect. Outside, it is a sign of fear.

Except for a brand of the imperial crest on their left wrist, there are few things that are true for all Sovereigns. The imperial crest is a simple circle with a hub and spokes. The Emperor is represented by the inner circle, Sovereigns by the spokes, and the

people of the Empire by the outer circle.

Men and women are accepted into the ranks and, although most dress modestly, styles in hair, clothing, and equipment vary widely. All Sovereigns are in superb shape, but some are lean, others are musclebound, others are solid.

Most Sovereigns eschew heavy armor in favor of mobility and speed. Bronze breastplates, skirts made of leather strips, and greaves are common but chain mail and helmets are not. Some forgo any type of protection at all, trusting their hard-earned skills to carry them through.

When a Sovereign takes part in combat, however, there is no mistaking what he is. They move with a grace and power unseen in any other man. Perhaps the Sovereign is so strong that he knocks a soldier in full armor out with a single blow to his helmeted head.

Or maybe he is so quick that he twists and turns out of the way of five men's attacks, not taking a scratch, before he spies an opening and drives his sword under the chin of one of his attackers. Another Sovereign may meet an opponent's blade with an open palm in such a way that the blade shatters

while his own hand suffers nothing more than a minor cut.

Sovereigns are lethal weapons on the field of battle and even the least-martially inclined is the equal of a dozen well-trained men.

The best combatants in the world might be able to hold their own against a Sovereign, but without tremendous luck they would fall, the only question would be how long they could hold out.

Combat is not their only duty. Sovereigns are also called in for diplomatic negotiations, rescue missions, information gathering in dangerous areas

The Emperor

In his early thirties, the current emperor is a man admired and revered by his subjects. He has been at the helm of the Empire for six years and in that time has expanded the Empire further into the Outlands, bringing his Empire a wide variety of food, clothing, and other luxuries.

Not only has he established himself as a sound military leader, but he has shown himself to be a compassionate leader as well, taxing at a fair rate and listening to the concerns of his people.

The First Emperor was the only ruler of the Empire to devote himself to

becoming a Sovereign and some say that even this was an embellishment - that the First Emperor was a strong warrior but pumped his reputation up to inspire fear in his enemies.

But the current Emperor is well-renowned for his impressive swordsmanship and some whisper that he has spent many hours with the best of his Sovereigns. Standing at a little over six feet with broad shoulders, the Emperor is an imposing figure.

His head is shaved to mere stubble, revealing a long white scar running the length of his head. Many Sovereigns shave their heads in a like manner to show their allegiance.

Way of the Sovereign

The Oath and Sects

The Oath

All Sovereigns, regardless of sect, are bound to the Emperor by the Oath. Its tenets appear straightforward but are not always so easily interpreted.

The following are the most common opinions held by Sovereigns on the Oath.

The Emperor is my father, the Empire my mother, its people my brothers and sisters.

This tenet boils down to respect. A Sovereign is adopted by the Emperor and is expected to treat his new family with love and respect.

There are many Sovereigns who view citizens of the empire as little brothers and sisters, however. The majority of citizens need to be looked after, protected, and shepherd, but not necessarily respected.

The Emperor and other Sovereigns are rarely going to intervene if a Sovereign treats the citizens of the empire as inferiors. A Sovereign can largely get away with having such an attitude towards the people of the

Empire. After all, every family has a pecking order and fights and squabbles.

I will protect my family against all enemies, guide and support them when I can, and respect them always.

An extrapolation of the first tenet that also lays the foundation for a Sovereign's duties. A Sovereign's role to serve the Emperor, and by extension the Empire. A Sovereign is further expected to help his adopted family in other ways whenever possible.

A Sovereign who turns a blind eye to the needs of citizens will be looked down upon by those who adhere to the Code. Likewise, a Sovereign who shows respect to the lowliest beggar is accorded respect by his peers.

This tenet starts with the most important aspect and works its way down. A Sovereign who does not protect the Empire and its citizens had better have a damned good reason for not doing so or he could face death or imprisonment. A Sovereign who fails to show respect to citizens will be thought poorly of, but is in no danger of

suffering any real consequences, at least not immediately.

**I will keep my body, mind,
and soul pure.**

A Sovereign's life is one of discipline and dedication. Without these a Sovereign is just a man. This tenet reminds a Sovereign of that fact and compels them to continue to strive for perfection in everything they do.

Pure body means exercise and training to keep it fit and refraining from drugs and other pleasures that harm or weaken the body.

Pure mind means adherence to the Code and being compassionate, reasonable, and truthful. To keep a pure mind a Sovereign must refrain from greed, pride, and jealousy.

Pure soul means to do good, especially it when it is difficult, and to refrain from dealings with the Spirit Lands.

This tenet is one Sovereigns live or die by. A Sovereign will not likely be executed by his peers if he develops alcoholism, for instance, but the condition will surely result in his downfall if he does not strive to defeat it.

**I will let the dead rest. Sorcery is
unnatural, gives unearned power
to the undeserving, and robs the
dead of their eternal judgment. I
will protect all peoples from its
corrupt grip.**

One of a Sovereign's most important duties is to combat sorcery. They are the only ones in the known world capable of directly confronting a sorcerer.

The Spirit Lands, the Empire teaches, are corrupt by nature. One can not use corrupt power and hope to remain uncorrupted.

The Empire teaches that everyone, from the Emperor himself to the poorest beggar, has a right to live their life and seek their destiny without unnatural intrusion from the Spirit Lands, the realm of the dead.

My life is the Emperor's.

The simplest and most important tenet of them all. The Emperor rescued all Sovereigns. Their lives belong to him.

If the Emperor asks it, a Sovereign must give up his life. Any Sovereign who refuses this is at the mercy of the Emperor.

Sects

The first Emperor had five chief disciples, each of whom sought perfection in a particular set of skills. When the second Emperor took over the fledgling Empire, he put these five in charge of training the first generation of Sovereigns.

These five sets of teachings have continued to this day. At the beginning of their third tier of training, Sovereigns are relocated to a cormancy that is focused on their particular sect where they further develop their skills.

All Sovereigns are matchless warriors. Sects serve to define their roles further.

Each sect description contains a brief quote that sums up what the sect's duty is to the Empire, a small paragraph providing further detail, sample character concepts, and a list of master skills.

Master skills are described later on, but they are basically areas in which members of the sect excel.

Duelists

"We are the weapons of the Emperor. He points, we kill."

In many ways, Duelists epitomize the core of what it means to be a

Sovereign. They, more than any other sect, concentrate on perfecting their bodies and minds to hone themselves into the perfect weapon.

This sect is home to some of the most skilled swordsmen, wrestlers and archers in all the world. Few can hope to match these warriors in one-on-one combat.

Duelists cormancies are relentlessly brutal, and it's unheard of for an initiate to pass through one without a broken bone, severed digit, torn ligament or other serious injury.

Duelists pride themselves on mastering both unarmed and armed combat and much prestige is given to anyone who invents a new way of fighting, especially if it is more effective than its predecessors.

This is by far the most prolific sect and cormancies are often dedicated to a particular aspect of combat such as marksmanship or breaking bones.

Example Character Concepts: Cocky sword-fighter, introspective master of combat, bruiser, marksman.

Master Skills: Any type of unarmed, armed, or ranged combat. Any type of mass combat skills such as battle tactics or command army.

Adjudicators

“We are the voice of the Emperor. Pay him his due or face the consequences.”

Sometimes the Emperor wishes not to obliterate his enemies but merely to cow them or to obtain tribute. Sometimes he needs to secure the help of one enemy against another. This is when he calls in an Adjudicator.

Adjudicators are masters of diplomacy, and they have the ability to put teeth into their requests, demands, and threats. Where a Duelist may be called in to kill the lord of an Outlands country who openly declares rebellion against the Empire, an Adjudicator would be sent to “negotiate” with a lord who had been lax in paying taxes to the Empire.

These Sovereigns are also periodically placed on judgment duty, traveling the Empire and holding courts, especially in matters where peasants have complaints against nobles.

Example Character Concepts: Wandering judge, jury and executioner; negotiator; foreign envoy.

Master Skills: Anything related to diplomacy, information gathering, persuasion, etiquette, foreign affairs, or intimidation.

Forgers

“We are the hands of the Emperor. Destruction is easy. Afterwards is where the real difficulty lies.”

All Sovereigns learn the rudiments of blacksmithing, but Forgers elevate that skill to an art form. Their weapons and armors are highly sought after by Sovereigns and citizens alike.

A sword created by a Forger is a one of a kind piece of art, lovingly crafted to fit its owner like an extension of his body. Although these weapons can’t compare to those imbued by sorcery, they don’t carry corrupting power either.

Forgers are also the pathfinders of the Empire. The world is a wild one, filled with harsh terrain and dangers. Even within the boundaries of the Empire, travel can sometimes be dangerous. It takes one with extreme discipline to be able to brave the wilds and forge new routes for the Empire.

Forgers also oversee the Empire’s larger construction projects, from aqueducts to fortresses. These Sovereigns also call upon their ingenuity to craft impressive war machines in large scale conflicts.

Example Character Concepts: Known world’s greatest sword smith;

demolitions expert; guide for the Emperor's legions.

Master Skills: Skills related to blacksmithing or other hands-on work, survival, traveling and navigation (including horsemanship).

Shadows

*"We are the mind of the Emperor. To save
The Empire from sorcery you must
understand sorcery."*

The smallest of the Sovereign sects, Shadows are looked upon with an odd mixture of respect and disgust from their comrades. Respect because they deal with the most dangerous threat in the known world, sorcery. And disgust for that same reason, for to work so closely with sorcery invites corruption of the self.

The few Shadow cormancies that exist are hidden in the shadows of the Empire, stone buildings secreted deep in the forest of The Hills and underground grottoes on the east coast.

Character Concepts: Shadow of Imperial Sorcerer; philosopher; fanatic hell bent on eradicating sorcery; closet heretic who believes sorcery is actually the key to the Empire's salvation.

Master Skills: Anything related to stealth, knowledge of sorcery.

The Faithful

"We are the soul of the Emperor. The Emperor is your father. There is no excuse for disobeying him, now accept your punishment with a modicum of dignity."

The Faithful are the most feared of all Sovereigns, both by citizens and by other Sovereigns. They are so devoted to the Emperor and the Oath that they make their fellows look like lax ingrates.

When a Sovereign neglects his duties, the Faithful are quick to step in to "correct" their brother. These fanatics are even more harsh on members of their sect and on themselves. A Faithful who breaks the Oath will punish himself with flagellation, branding, or other physical punishment.

These Sovereigns have even been known to disembowel themselves upon failing the Emperor or upon breaking the Code so badly that only death can recover their honor.

Character Concepts: Emperor's personal assassin; judge, jury, and executioner for fellow Sovereigns.

Master Skills: Anything related to perseverance, loyalty, intimidation, rooting out enemies of the Empire.

The Power of Focus

Rules System

Focus and Conviction

Focus is everything. It is the intense inner strength, the indomitable will, the unyielding spirit of the Sovereign that allows him to eclipse the uninspired masses of the Empire and beyond.

A Sovereign's Focus rating represents this inner reserve. A Sovereign has a number of Focus Chips equal to his Focus. These chips serve as the base dice pool for all of his actions.

So, a Sovereign with a Focus of 3 has 3 Focus Chips and 3 ten-sided dice to roll in any situation. Each die that shows a 7 or higher is a success. A single success is all that is required to successfully complete an action. In fact, unless otherwise noted, the number of successes rolled is irrelevant.

In other words, a warrior who rolls a single success in combat does just as much damage as one who rolled two successes.

Combat, stealth, diplomacy, every action flows from a Sovereign's inner reserve of strength. Dice pools may be augmented by skill ratings and situational modifiers, but these are small bonuses.

The unenlightened, normal people, have no Focus. They are nothing compared to the might of a Sovereign. They must rely solely on their skills and situational bonuses to accomplish tasks.

Those who completed part of their training at a cormancy, but were not able to pass the muster to become a Sovereign, have 1 Focus. This represents their unrealized potential. Such a man is head and shoulders above his peers but lacked the discipline to elevate himself to Sovereign status.

With a renewed sense of purpose and a dedicated teacher, such a person could increase his Focus, but it's a long and hard path.

A player's Sovereign begins play with a Focus of 3.

Going hand-in-hand with Focus is Conviction. Where a Sovereign's Focus represents his will to affect the world, Conviction represents his ability to deflect the will of others.

Any time a character tries to negatively affect a Sovereign they subtract the Sovereign's Conviction rating from their dice pool. If this

reduces the character's pool to zero then they fail in their action.

This applies to physical attacks as well as attempts to persuade or trick a Sovereign. It does not, however, always apply to sorcery, which deals in unnatural forces.

A player's Sovereign begins play with 1 Conviction.

As mentioned above, each player has a number of Focus Chips equal to his Focus rating and a number of Conviction Chips equal to his Conviction rating.

These chips represent a Sovereign's current Focus and Conviction as opposed to his permanent Focus and Conviction. Poker chips are an excellent way to represent both Focus and Conviction.

Use blue or red chips for Focus and white chips for Conviction. Each Focus chip represents a die that the player has to roll for every action.

The number of Focus Chips a Sovereign has at his disposal can be reduced by a number of actions.

Regaining Focus

Regaining Focus is a matter of rest and a renewed dedication of discipline. A Sovereign regains 1 Focus Chip for every half hour of rest. A Sovereign

rarely has to worry about regaining his Focus except in high pressure situations such as combat.

Spectacular Successes

A player may choose to risk a Focus Chip on an action in order to ensure success. If the action succeeds it is a spectacular success and the player keeps his chip. If the roll fails, the action still succeeds but the chip is lost, and his temporary Focus is reduced by one as a result.

EXAMPLE: Sovereign Barius is chasing a thief across the rooftops in the Imperial City. The thief races across a wooden plank spanning the 10-foot gap between two four-story buildings and then kicks it into the alley below.

Not wanting to lose any ground, Barius risks a Focus Chip, grits his teeth and pumps his legs as fast as a horse before leaping the distance. He rolls his Focus (4) and gets a 3, 4, 1, and 8. One success. Since he burned a Focus Chip, this is a spectacular success.

Barius keeps his Focus Chip and succeeds spectacularly. He leaps across the chasm easily and lands right next to thief. The gamemaster rules that Barius is also entitled to a free action so he can grab the thief or trip him.

If Barius had rolled no successes, he still would have leaped across the chasm, but he would have lost the Focus Chip (reducing his Focus to 3) and his success would have been minor. He would have to continue to chase down the thief, perhaps losing a turn as he struggled to maintain his balance..

Spectacular Failures

A Sovereign may also risk a Focus Chip to make an adversary spectacularly fail in his attempt to adversely affect the Sovereign. The Sovereign announces he is risking a Focus Chip, and the attacker rolls as normal. If the attacker fails then it is a spectacular failure and the Sovereign keeps his Focus Chip. If the attacker rolls any successes then he still fails. The Sovereign's will is too strong. But the Sovereign loses his Focus Chip.

EXAMPLE: Baron Arman of the Blue Kingdoms draws his wickedly curved scimitar and advances on Sovereign Barius. The Count dashes in and swings his sword at the Sovereign's neck, intending to decapitate him with a single blow. Not wishing to leave anything to chance, Barius risks a Focus Chip.

The Count rolls his Focus (0), swordplay skill (1), and bonus for his

well-made sword (1) against Barius' Conviction of 1. He rolls a single die and gets a 6. No successes. Barius keeps his Focus Chip and the baron has a spectacular failure. The baron swings wildly, misses the Sovereign, and buries his sword deep into the sandy beach.

If the baron had instead rolled a 10 then he still would have failed. However, Barius would have lost a Focus Chip and the baron would have had a minor failure, barely missing and perhaps having the opportunity to make another attack.

Investing Focus

Sovereigns have attained their amazing abilities by relying only on themselves. By rejecting the generally accepted limits of the human body, a Sovereign is able to elevate himself above the populace.

Some Sovereigns learn that relying on the outside world is not always a liability, though. By accepting a part of the outside world as an extension of himself, a Sovereign is able to empower that part of the world and make it stronger.

When a Sovereign risks a Focus Chip on a long-term effort and achieves a spectacular success he may choose to

permanently invest that chip into the fruits of his labor. The Sovereign uses his own formidable will to improve the subject of the investiture.

The Focus Chip is removed from the Sovereign's temporary pool, reducing his dice pool. However, whenever the Sovereign makes use of his invested subject he gains a bonus of two dice plus one die per every two successes made on his initial roll (odd numbers rounded down).

A Sovereign may invest in an inanimate object, an individual, or even a geographical area. He may not, however, invest Focus in himself. A Sovereign could not, for example, risk a Focus Chip on a training roll, succeed, and then choose to invest that Focus Chip into his fighting skills.

EXAMPLE 1: Having his seventh sword shattered in battle, Sovereign Lillana decides to construct herself a weapon as strong as its master.

Lillana spends three months at the cormancy's forge, working the finest metals into a four-foot length of death with a razor's edge. At the end of the third month, Lillana chooses to risk a Focus Chip and rolls her Focus (3) plus Blacksmithing skill (1). She rolls a 7, 4, 9, 6. Two successes.

Thanks to the spectacular success Lillana has crafted an excellent weapon with perhaps a minor benefit (keeps its edge longer, won't rust). But Lillana has poured her heart and soul into this weapon and chooses to invest that Focus Chip into the sword.

Lillana's temporary Focus drops to 2 and can not be raised as long as she keeps a Focus Chip invested in the sword (unless her permanent Focus is raised). But Lillana now adds 3 dice (two for investment plus one for two successes) to her pool whenever she uses the sword. She has sacrificed her overall effectiveness to become a holy terror with the blade.

EXAMPLE 2: The barbarians are only a day's march away and all that stands between them and an imperial village is Sovereign Hector and a small group of ill-equipped and untested conscripts.

Hector knows his impromptu army must succeed, no matter the cost. For the entire day, Hector walks among the men. He provides words of encouragement, advice, and training on how to properly use weapons. At the end of the day he makes a roll using his Focus (3) and Command skill (2) and chooses to risk a Focus Chip.

He rolls a 10, 4, 2, 2, 6. Hector keeps the chip, scores a spectacular success, and chooses to invest that chip into his army. Whenever Hector commands his army he now adds 2 dice to his roll.

This means every time the army goes into battle under the command of Hector, it gets a 2 dice bonus. The army also gets a bonus for foraging for food, making weapons, setting ambushes, or any other number of things.

EXAMPLE 3: Sovereign Julius has spent many weeks negotiation a peace treaty between a small imperial settlement on the edges of the Outlands and the hostile barbarians of the nearby steppes. He has managed to arrange a sit down between the two leaders. This is the end result of many weeks of work, and Julius decides to risk a Focus Chip to make sure the negotiations go well.

Julius rolls his Focus (4) and Peacemaker skill (1) and gets a 7, 7, 8, 10, 6. This is a spectacular success and the negotiations go well: there will be peace. Julius decides to invest a Focus Chip into the peace.

His Focus is reduced to 3, but now any time Julius engages in an action to maintain the peace of the area he gets to

roll a whopping 7 dice (3 for Focus, 4 for his investment – 2 base plus 2 for four successes on the peacemaking roll).

Regaining Invested Focus

A Sovereign may regain his invested Focus by completely rejecting the subject of his investment. This is not simply a matter of ignoring the subject – the Sovereign must actively destroy it.

This means smelting an invested sword into a puddle of metal, destroying the morale of an invested army, or completely badmouthing and trashing an invested assistant.

Skills

Because of their long and arduous training, Sovereigns are automatically assumed to be competent in most skills. Their high Focus represents this – a Sovereign adds Focus to any roll except for rolls based on skills explicitly listed under Restricted Skills and those exempted by the gamemaster before the start of the game.

Each player should select two skills their character is particularly good at, as good as any top professional, (giving them a 1-die bonus to roll involving that skill) and one skill that their character is exceptionally good at, a master skill ranking them among the

most skilled practitioners in the known world (giving them a 2-dice bonus to rolls involving that skill).

There is no comprehensive list of skills. Instead, the gamemaster should work with the players to select appropriate skills.

Since Sovereigns already have a pool of dice for almost all rolls (with their Focus), skills should be very specific. Characters should not be able to have the skill “combat,” for example, or even the skill “armed combat.” Instead, they should, at the very least, have “combat: swords,” “combat: knives,” or “combat: javelins.”

Sovereigns are restricted in what master skill they can select. Each sect has a broad group of skills a Sovereign may choose from for his master skill.

Restricted Skills

Sovereigns are assumed to have knowledge of almost every skill, but there are skills that are so specialized that a Sovereign is not assumed to have experience with them.

These are called restricted skills, and they are determined by the GM. Unless otherwise noted, a Sovereign may not begin the game with these skills and any Sovereign lacking these skills may not

roll Focus for them; that is, they can not attempt to use them.

Anything relating to the following should always be restricted skills: sorcery, the Blue Kingdoms, demolitions, surgery, and other subjects determined by the GM.

Demolitions, if allowed, should be very rudimentary and should only be allowed for Sovereigns of the Forger sect. Forgers may know how to create basic explosives equivalent to a stick of dynamite, but these are very time-consuming to make and quite dangerous.

Likewise the sorcery skill should be restricted to Sovereigns of the Shadow sect, at least starting out.

Social Rolls

In addition, a Sovereign does not add Focus to social rolls involving people liking him such as seduction or befriending. Intimidation, command, and other types of skills that require a more direct approach are fine.

The distinction to remember here is that Focus is a Sovereign’s inner will; it is his strength and the result of self-discipline. Focus is not added to seduction or other social skills that rely more on smooth talking, charisma, and, to a certain degree, false fronts.

A Sovereign must rely wholly on his skills and own words in these situations. In other words, it's up to the gamemaster to decide whether a player is convincing enough to succeed, unless you happen to have skills or situational bonuses in these areas.

When in doubt, use this guideline. If the social act relies on brute force or strength of personality, allow Focus to be rolled. If it relies on subtlety or trickery, do not allow Focus to be rolled.

Sample Character Creation

Dan is making a Sovereign character for the first time.

His gamemaster has already explained the relevant bits of the setting to him along with the fact that the game will largely be set on the growing impudence of the Blue Kingdoms.

The game will be centered around the city of Ocitania, a trade city popular with merchants from the Blue Kingdoms. That nation's recent refusal to pay tribute is leading to tensions, however.

First Dan picks a sect. He thinks about going with an Adjudicator because the situation clearly calls for diplomacy, but after looking them over

some more he decides that playing a Faithful would be more interesting.

He makes up a name that sounds pseudo Greco-Roman, Austanius.

Dan sees Austanius as a newly named Sovereign, having just taken the Oath and eager to prove he love of the Emperor.

Austanius, Dan decides, had a particularly brutal childhood, forced into slave labor and beat at a whim, which he still remembers well. The fact that he remembers being saved by the Emperor has strengthened his loyalty to a fanatical level.

Next, Dan records his starting Focus of 3 and Conviction of 1.

He then moves on to skills. He decides that Austanius is a Brutal Fighter, but the gamemaster declares this too broad of a skill.

So, Dan narrows that skill to Breaks Bones (he'll literally get an extra die any time he attempts to break someone's bones).

Thinking over his concept some more, Dan decides Austanius learned how to remain silent an unnoticed to avoid beatings. It was a skill his trainers encouraged him to develop.

He writes down Go Unnoticed for his second +1 skill.

For his master skill, Dan checks his sect and sees that he can select a +2 master skill from anything related to perseverance, loyalty, intimidation, rooting out enemies of the Empire.

Austanius endured a lot of pain and abuse in his early childhood, and Dan decides he had resigned himself to a life of pain until he was rescued.

The Emperor gave Austanius a new reservoir of will. Dan marks “Endure Pain for the Emperor” as his master skill. There are few people in the Empire who would suffer as much pain as Austanius would as long as it's for the good of the Emperor.

Next Dan moves on to the unique abilities of a Sovereign, disciplines and devotions.

For his disciplines, Dan chooses Unstoppable and Shrug Off the Pain from the Faithful sect powers. He could

have also chosen from the Common list of disciplines, but decides these two fit with his character concept.

For devotions, he chooses Good of the Empire and Family Ties from the Common list and Glory to the Emperor from the Faithful list.

For equipment, Austanius has a nearly breastplate he crafted from the finest bronze as part of the completion of his final phase of training. It serves as armor with a value of 1.

For the final step, Dan decides to give Austanius an extra point of Conviction, making him virtually untouchable by anyone not boosted with sorcery.

Character Creation Made Simple

1. Choose sect, name
2. Record Focus of 3, Conviction of 1.
3. Choose any two skills at +1, one skill at +2 (determined by sect)
4. Choose two disciplines and three devotions, determined by sect
5. Choose equipment (one weapon or armor at +1, rest up to gamemaster)
6. Add 1 to Focus or Conviction, or choose two additional +1 skills or two additional disciplines.

Breaking Bones

Combat System

Combat Basics

A successful attack roll, except for specific exemptions, results in one level of damage as long as at least one success is rolled; additional successes do not confer additional levels of damage. Successful attacks first deplete Conviction then Focus.

When a character is taken below 0 Focus they suffer grievous wounds and death or are knocked unconscious or otherwise incapacitated (attacker's choice). Needless to say, those without Focus are quick to fall.

EXAMPLE: Sovereign Orlando (Focus 3, Conviction 1) squares off against a sorcerer wielding a bone staff bestowing him unnatural strength. During the course of combat, before Orlando can dispatch him, the sorcerer wounds him three times. The first wound knocks Orlando's Conviction to 0, the second and third wounds bring his Focus down to 1.

The sorcerer's lackey (Focus 0, Conviction 0) arrives seconds too late to help his master. Orlando slices at the lackey with his blade, rolling his current

Focus (1) and Swordplay skill (0). He rolls an 8 and decapitates the lackey with ease.

Note that the undisciplined, those lacking Focus, are easy prey for Sovereigns. Their lack of Focus not only severely limits their dice pools but also means they will be taken out in a single successful attack.

Opponents without Focus are only really dangerous when encountered in mobs of five or more.

Mobs

Mobs as a whole gets 1 die to attack for every five people in the group.

EXAMPLE: Sovereign Tylus has been led into an ambush by the followers of a foul sorcerer. Fifteen of the crazed cultists glare at her menacingly before rushing to attack. None of the cultists have the Focus trait.

Individually, they would have no chance of hurting Tylus (Focus 3, Conviction 1). As a group, however,

they get to roll 2 dice to attack her (15 = 3 dice – 1 Conviction = 2 dice).

Mobs attack as a single force and are, in turn, attacked as a single force. A Sovereign can distinguish specific targets in a mob, or he can simply make one roll for the whole mob. In either case, each die that comes up a 7 or higher takes out one member of the mob.

Using the above example, if Sovereign Tylus rolls three dice and they come up a 7, 8, 8, then she kills or incapacitates three of the cultists, reducing their total number to 12 and their bonus dice for numbers to 2.

Restoring Conviction

Sovereigns can restore their Conviction rating by spending a Focus Chip. Sovereigns can face a tough choice during combat whether to sacrifice their attack ability for increased defense or to keep their Focus and risk the increased chance of getting hit.

EXAMPLE: Sovereign Solis (Focus 3, Conviction 2) suffers two hits in combat. Opponents attacking him now suffer no penalty for their attacks. Solis can restore his conviction by spending a Focus Chip. This brings his Focus

down to 2, but his enemies now once again suffer a -2 penalty to attack.

Suffering Wounds

But what does it mean when a Sovereign loses a Conviction Chip, or a Focus Chip, due to a successful attack? Losing Conviction may be translated in game as an attack that manages to catch the Sovereign off balance, throwing him off guard and causing him to stay off balance during the remainder of the fight.

Losing Focus may be translated in game as an attack that does physical harm to the Sovereign, enough to make him feel real pain. It's irrelevant how much "damage" the attack actually does to the Sovereign. What matters is it causes him to lose Focus. A Sovereign remains in a fight until he's below 0 Focus.

When a Sovereign is knocked down to 0 Focus he's hurting bad. An attack that brings him down to 0 Focus may very well cause a serious injury such as a broken bone or serious bleeding. Or it may just be a hell of a punch that sends him reeling and leaves him without much steam left.

A Sovereign taken down below 0 Focus is either dead or quickly on his

way there. The Sovereign may be kept alive if a character manages a successful medicine roll.

Thanks to their unnatural talents, sorcerers and those wielding imbued objects are not bound by the same rules as Sovereigns and the undisciplined. Sorcery may grant those who wield it the One for Two rule, the One for One rule, or the Two for One rule.

These rules are explained in more detail in the Gamemaster's Guide. To put it briefly, they allow those wielding sorcery to inflict more than one wound per attack.

Weapons, Armor, and Equipment

Focus is far more important than having a double-edged bastard sword or gleaming katana or gladius. Thus, weapons generally provide no bonus in combat. A Sovereign is deadly because of his Focus, not because he has a superior weapon. He is the weapon. A Sovereign is just as deadly with a small dagger as he is with a five-foot long sword.

If a weapon is masterfully made then it provides a +1 die bonus. Anyone using it adds one die to their attack rolls. By that same token, an

exceptionally made piece of armor grants one point of defense.

This is similar to a Sovereign's Conviction, but when a successful attack reduces the point of defense, it damages the armor. This renders it useless until it can be repaired. Attacks first take away from Conviction, then Armor, then Focus.

Weapons and other items can also provide situational bonuses. Using a long spear against cavalry, for instance, grants a +1 bonus. Cavalry chasing down peasants or basic infantry would gain a +1 bonus. A fully equipped medical station would provide a +1 bonus to healing rolls.

Situational Modifiers

Situational modifiers are things outside of a Sovereign or individual that can affect combat. The following are examples of situational modifiers that could impact combat. This is by no means meant to be a comprehensive list. No single modifier should provide a bonus or penalty of more than one die.

Sample Modifiers

- Weapon gives attacker a significant advantage – spear/pike vs. cavalry,

sword vs. dagger, dagger vs. unarmed, etc. (+1)

providing a sizable advantage to Sovereigns and others with Focus.

- Surprise attack (+1)
- Senses impaired – blinding sunlight thrown off an opponent's shield, temporary loss of hearing from explosion, fog (-1)
- Exhausted (-1)
- Has the high ground (+1)

Optional Initiative System

By default, there is no initiative system for Sovereign. Instead, the first player to dictate their actions should go first and so on.

Sovereigns should always be allowed to go before anyone lacking the Focus trait or sorcery. Against opponents practicing sorcery or who have Focus, the gamemaster should determine who goes first.

If you would like to use an initiative system, have each player and opponent (treat mobs as a single opponent) roll 1d10 plus Focus.

This provides a fair method for determining who acts first while still

The Virtue of Discipline

Rules for Disciplines and Devotions

Basic rules system

Disciplines are specific abilities honed by Sovereigns. Whereas Focus represents their overall superiority, disciplines are narrower and more amazing applications of that Focus.

Another way of looking at it is this: all Olympic athletes have amazing willpower and self-discipline (Focus), but they all have different ways they can Focus their overall athletic ability. A long-distance jumper can leap amazing distances, a weightlifter can lift huge amounts of weight, etc. These applications are analogous to disciplines.

Using a discipline requires a concentrated effort. In order to use a discipline, a Sovereign must always risk a Focus Chip. If a Sovereign fails his discipline roll, he still activates the discipline but loses his Focus Chip like he would during a normal risk roll.

In addition, he loses his next action as he tries to regain composure after failing to properly prepare his mind. His Conviction is also temporarily reduced to 0 for that turn. His Conviction is

treated in full, though, in regards to any damage inflicted on that turn.

Example: Sovereign Barius (Focus 3, Conviction 2) is facing a mob of angry citizens. With no choice left, Barius prepares for battle as six of the citizens rush him. Barius chooses to activate his Flurry of Blades discipline. He rolls Focus (3) plus his Swordplay skill (1) and gets a 5, 6, 3, 3. No successes.

Barius still activates his discipline and successfully attacks the six citizens near him, cutting them all down. Because he failed his Focus roll, however, Barius' current Focus drops to 2, he loses his next turn, and his Conviction is dropped to 0 for his next turn.

The next turn, Barius is on his knees trying to recover after overexerting himself. A citizen takes this opportunity to jab at Barius with a spear. The citizen has one die (+1 for attacking an exhausted opponent).

Normally, this would be reduced to zero by Barius' Conviction, but since the Sovereign is paying the price for

failing a discipline roll the citizen gets his full dice pool. The citizen rolls a 9 and does one level of damage. Barius' full Conviction of 2 is counted for damage effects, however, so this reduces his Conviction to 1 (and not his Focus to 1).

Unless otherwise noted, the activation roll for a discipline is always a straight Focus roll. Using a discipline is a matter of sheer willpower and focus.

Disciplines are broken up by sect. A small pool of common disciplines may be used by any Sovereign. These are the disciplines taught throughout all cormancies.

Sect-specific disciplines are taught exclusively at their respective cormancies. For the most part, it's not that these disciplines are closely guarded secrets but that the amount time required to master them is so large that most Sovereigns can not afford to dip into other sect's levels of expertise even if they had a willing teacher.

Common

Prodigious Speed – Upon success, the Sovereign doubles his top running speed to nearly 60 mph for a number of turns equal to his Focus. This applies only to movement and does not confer

extra attacks, although a Sovereign who tackles someone while running at this speed qualifies for an extra die to his attack pool.

Prodigious Strike – Upon success, the Sovereign is able to break through virtually any non-living object up to a foot thick (except metals) with his fists, feet, head, or body. If the object is thicker than a foot, he may still break through it, but this requires additional uses of Prodigious Strike in subsequent turns.

Prodigious Strength – The Sovereign with this discipline is a walking powerhouse. By using this discipline, he is able to lift items up to 2,000 pounds in weight. He must have the leverage necessary to lift such an item and can lift it no higher than his waist. The Sovereign could not, for instance, pick up a giant boulder that he could not reach around.

He could, however, push the boulder. Alternately, the Sovereign using this discipline may lift an item weighing up to 500 pounds over his head and toss it as if it weighed little more than a large sack of flour. This use of strength is good for only one turn.

Prodigious Leap – Upon success, the Sovereign may either double the distance of his vertical jump to 20 feet or double the distance of his horizontal jump to 60 feet for one turn.

Duelists

Flurry of Blades – Upon success, the Sovereign applies his combat roll to all opponents within striking distance. Flurry of Blades works only with an edged weapon. Instead of, or in addition to, Flurry of Blades a Sovereign may take Flurry of Fists, Arrows, etc.

Falcon's Flight – Upon success, the Sovereign triples his distance for one attack with javelins or other thrown weapons to around 1,000 feet.

Lightning Strike – Upon success, the Sovereign may interrupt an opponent's action in order to make a hand-to-hand or melee attack. Lightning strike does not work with ranged weapons.

Forgers

Man's Ruin – Upon success, the Sovereign is able to pinpoint any manmade object's weakness, and use it to destroy the object in a single turn.

The Sovereign must have appropriate tools to destroy the object, however.

A wooden wagon could be destroyed by hand, but a two-foot thick stone wall could not (unless the Sovereign combined it with the Prodigious Strike discipline). A Sovereign could, however, use a sledge hammer to cause a portion of the wall to crumble in one blow.

Master Craftsman – Upon success, the Sovereign is able to craft a weapon, piece of armor, or other item such as a tool or statue of exceptional value. The item in question gives a 1-die bonus to anyone who uses it. Bonus die for armor function as Conviction except they can not be replenished by spending Focus.

If a successful attack takes away the armor bonus, the attack damages the armor so that it is no longer usable. As with normal armor, attacks first reduce Conviction, then Armor, then Focus. Bonus die for other items apply at discretion of the gamemaster. A beautiful statue, for example, may provide a bonus to a diplomacy roll if offered as a gift.

Crippling Strike – The human body is just another tool, no matter how

complex. The Sovereign uses his knowledge of how that body is put together to maximum effectiveness.

Upon success, the Sovereign deals an unarmed attack that strikes a weak spot in the human body, causing intense crippling pain in the unfortunate subject. The subject can do nothing except writhe on the ground in pain and beg for it to stop. Characters with the Focus trait are crippled with pain for one turn.

On subsequent turns, they may roll Focus in order to block out the pain enough in order to take an action. This must be done each turn until the character has made two total successful rolls. The Sovereign can end the effects of Crippling Strike by striking the target once more in the pressure point.

Adjudicators

Lion Eyes - Upon success, the Sovereign lets his eyes reveal his true nature and that nature is dangerous and deadly. Anyone who locks eyes with the Sovereign this turn is cowed for the rest of the scene and can not take any physical action against the Sovereign without first making a successful Focus roll. Particularly brave or stupid characters may still verbally disagree or

argue with the Sovereign without a Focus roll.

True Intentions – The Sovereign focuses his perceptions on the target. By reading subtle physical tics and signs largely unnoticed by average citizens, the Sovereign is able to discern whether the target is lying or not. This is wholly reliant on what the target believes to be truth. This discipline is good for only one turn, which will encompass only one statement or two brief (yes/no) answers.

Listen to Reason - Sometimes a dangerous situation could be defused if only the people involved would take a moment to listen to reason. The Sovereign using this discipline forces people to take that moment.

The Sovereign makes such a display of power that everyone who can see him must halt whatever they are doing for one turn. The Sovereign has this turn to begin to convince the parties involved to listen to reason. Provided the Sovereign offers advice that makes sense, the parties involved will most likely acquiesce rather than face the might of the Sovereign. Characters with Focus are not affected by this discipline.

Shadows

Statue Still – The Sovereign has achieved such control of his body that, upon success, he is able to remain as still as a statue. He is even able to stop his eyes from blinking and although he still breathes, it is impossible to detect by the eye alone. The Sovereign may maintain this state for an entire scene.

If this discipline is used to hide in his surroundings, anyone searching for the Sovereign subtracts half of the Sovereign's Focus (rounded up) from their dice pool. This is in addition to the modifier provided by the Sovereign's Conviction. The Sovereign can not use this ability to "vanish" from someone who has already seen him, however, although he could use it to appear deceased.

Glimpse the Spirit Lands – The Sovereign is able to detect the corrupting influence of the Spirit Lands. This discipline can reveal sorcerous items, shades, or other phenomena dealing with the Spirit Lands.

It does not reveal sorcerers unless they are actively using sorcery. If multiple phenomena are present, this discipline reveals only the most powerful one.

My Mind is Pure – One of the most dreaded abilities a sorcerer can possess is the power to twist men's minds to their own nefarious purposes. Because of years of disciplining their mind, all Sovereigns are capable of resisting their evil influences to a certain degree.

Shadows are even more prepared. A Shadow who uses this power is not affected by any mind-altering sorcery for the entire scene.

Faithful

Answer Your Father – The Faithful use this discipline to force their enemies to pay for their sins against the Empire. This discipline is used in reaction to an attack.

The Sovereign who activates this discipline robs the attacker of his weapon in a spectacular fashion. The Sovereign can swat an arrow aside with a swift strike of his hand, break a sword with his forearm by tensing his muscles, or pluck a hurled javelin out of the air. The Faithful find this ability useful for intimidation as much as protection.

Unstoppable – The Sovereign using this discipline can not be stopped from reaching his goal, whether that's a cowardly assassin who has ran deep into

a crowded market or a child in a burning building that needs to be saved. For a single turn, nothing can stop the Sovereign from reaching that goal.

He bends and twists with amazing speed to weave through the crowd in order to reach the assassin. He leaps through the flames to reach the child, suffering little more than singed hair and superficial burns.

The Sovereign pushes his body beyond its normal limits. The Sovereign must have a clear goal in sight, however, to use this discipline.

Shrug Off the Pain – This discipline is a very powerful weapon for the Faithful, but if it backfires it can devastate them as well. The Sovereign activates this discipline after being hit with a successful attack.

If he succeeds on his Focus roll, the Sovereign keeps his risked Focus chip as normal and ignores all damage that he received. However, if he fails his Focus roll, he not only loses his risked Focus chip but also suffers the full force of the attack.

Devotions

Devotions are ritualized forms of practice and self-discipline that grant a small bonus to certain actions. All

bonuses terminate at the end of the day, either when the Sovereign goes to sleep or when the sun rises the next day, whichever happens first.

At the start of the day, before the sun rises fully in the sky, a Sovereign may choose to perform a single devotion.

No roll is needed, but the player must briefly describe the devotion he is performing and recite the brief statement listed (or an equivalent) that reinforces his training.

He must have the time to perform the devotion. If he is roused from bed, for instance, to defend the fortress then he can not perform a devotion.

All devotions provide a one-die bonus to a specific type of action. The Sovereign may use this bonus only once per day. At the start of a new day, he may perform the devotion again to once again gain the one-die bonus, or he may choose a different devotion.

The devotions a Sovereign can choose are determined by his sect.

Common

Peerless Warrior

“I fight for the Emperor.”

The Sovereign spends five minutes performing a simple series of strikes with his sword, hands, whatever. He

may add one die to any combat roll once that day.

Good of the Empire

“My life is the Emperor’s.”

The Sovereign stares towards the rising sun for a few moments, reflecting on his oath to give his life, if need be, to the Emperor. He may add one die to any action taken directly for the good of the Emperor or Empire.

Family Ties

“The Empire is my family.”

The Sovereign swears to honor his adopted family, the people of the Empire. He may add one die to any action taken to protect and aid citizens of the Empire.

Duelists

One with the Weapon

“I am the weapon. Where I point, this spear will kill.”

The Sovereign spends half an hour of arduous training with a specific weapon.

The Sovereign may add one die to an attack made with that type of weapon. (It doesn’t have to be the exact sword the Sovereign practiced with, but it must be a sword.)

Never Outnumbered

“Numbers mean nothing against true discipline.”

The Sovereign spends fifteen to twenty minutes practicing against multiple opponents.

This can involve sparring against imaginary enemies, facing off against peers in mock combat, or any other number of things. The Sovereign may add a single die to any roll when facing more than one enemy at the same time.

Deadly Spoon

“Even the lowliest of weapons is made mighty by the strongest of warriors.”

The Sovereign spends five minutes testing an everyday item out for combat.

He swings a broom around a few times like a staff, or twirls a spoon around in his hands like a makeshift knife. He gains a bonus die to any attack made with an improvised weapon.

Forgers

True North

“If you need to find your way home, look and listen.”

The Sovereign spends five to ten minutes surveying the surrounding area, testing the wind and looking at the terrain.

He must be outdoors to orientate himself. He gains a bonus die to any roll

made to find a geographical location or to tracking.

Skilled Hands

“There is no difference in craftsmanship and in cutting down a man. Both require resolve and skill.”

The Sovereign spends 10-15 minutes working with his hands (whittling, carving, fixing a broken door) or studying a book on craftsmanship. He gains a bonus die to any roll made involving building or fixing something.

Structural Weakness

“Anything built by man can be destroyed by man.”

The Sovereign spends few moments probing the weakness of a man made item and destroys it completely.

This could be striking a sword on a rock so it breaks, or slowly chipping away at the foundation of a stone statue until it cracks and crumbles. The Sovereign gains a one die bonus to any roll to destroy or damage a man-made item.

Adjudicators

He’s no Warrior

“I will know my enemy before I fight him.”

The Sovereign spends five to ten minutes studying a person or people. This could be watching a traveling

companion sleep, or sitting on a bench at a crowded market and watching shoppers pass by. By doing this he gains insight into how people move and where their strengths and weaknesses are.

The Sovereign gains a one die bonus to discern the measure of a person by simply watching the way he or she moves. This could reveal the person is a great warrior or not so great a warrior, or even if he’s generally honest or perpetually ashamed.

Show of Strength

“No one can face the strength of my will.”

The Sovereign gives a terrifyingly loud yell sure to strike fear in the hearts of his enemies. The Sovereign gains a one die bonus to any roll involving intimidation.

The Emperor is Merciful

“I am the voice of the Emperor.”

The Sovereign bows towards the capital of the Empire and recites a simple mantra describing how merciful and kind the Emperor is.

He gains a one die bonus to any roll involving showing the Emperor’s kindness or mercy or convincing someone of the Emperor’s kindness or mercy.

Shadows

Attunement

“To combat evil, you must first identify evil.”

The Sovereign sits very still, closes his eyes, and steadily slows his breathing to a halt. He continues this until he forces himself to pass out, bringing him into faint contact with the Spirit Lands, the realm of dead.

When he regains consciousness, he retains a slight memory of his contact. He may add one die to a roll involving knowledge of the Spirit Lands.

Shadow Walk

“...”

The Sovereign breathes slowly and spends five minutes taking three steps while concentrating on stifling all noise made from his movements. He gains a one die bonus to any roll involving stealth.

No Place to Hide

“None can escape my eyes.”

The Sovereign spends ten minutes sitting quietly as he observes the small movements around him. He gains a one die bonus to rolls involving perception.

Faithful

Glory to the Emperor

“Glory to the Emperor!”

The Sovereign loudly proclaims the greatness of the emperor and his undying loyalty to him. The Sovereign gains a one die bonus to any action done in service to the Emperor. The Sovereign must loudly proclaim this action before taking it.

Enemies are Everywhere

“I will not be fooled by fake smiles.”

The Sovereign spends ten to fifteen minutes meditating on his knees. He gains a one die bonus to any roll involving attempting to ferreting out enemies of the Empire.

Bow

“A single man is nothing compared to the might of the Empire.”

The Sovereign gains a one die bonus to any roll involving getting others to serve the Empire.