

Embers Among Ashes

I will withstand the tide of darkness, standing steadfast in the face of despair.

I will become a bastion of strength for the weak, a blazing beacon of hope.

I will preserve the Faith at all costs, for it is my sword and shield.

I will rekindle the flame and lead us to the Age of Light.

Written By Austin Tinkel

The World Weeps

It is the Age of Darkness. The barriers between worlds have been torn asunder. The sun has been shattered, civilization has fallen, and great kingdoms have withered into dust.

It is a time of corruption and desperation. People live in isolated communities, carving out what meagre existence they can, regularly assailed by monstrosities from beyond.

It is a time of hope. You are a guardian of the Faith, the first and last line of defense for the scattered remains of what came before.

Embers Among Ashes is a tabletop roleplaying game about despair, hope, and keeping your head above water in an endless ocean of darkness hellbent on dragging you down. You are part of a group of priests traveling through dying kingdoms, working to preserve your faith and protect those who follow it.

In this game, you will:

- Struggle between keeping the tenets of the Faith and doing what is necessary to survive.
- Bring hope to the followers of the Faith, even when the future is bleak.
- Ensure that other followers don't succumb to despair, while staying hopeful yourself.
- Consecrate holy sites, exorcise demons, and perform your sacred duties.

This is a game for 5-6 players. You'll need character sheets, pencils, and 10-15 six-sided dice (preferably with 3 different colors) per player. Decide one player to be the Game Master.

You are Nothing Without the Faith

The Faith guides all creatures. It permeates the world of the living and guides souls to the world of the dead. The corruption of the Age of Darkness is antithetical to the Faith, its light is your sword and shield against the horrors of this new world. Losing your faith is like losing your arms and armor, you are defenseless, ripe for the influence of the darkness.

In your first session of *Embers Among Ashes*, you work with the other players to create the tenets of the Faith that your characters must follow for the rest of the game. Record your answers to these questions on the Faith sheet.

The Tenets.

List three rules that a follower of the Faith is expected to follow at all times. Violating one of these tenets carries dire consequences. A tenet should be an absolute sentence, use *always* and *never*. It should mandate something of the follower, push them towards a specific path.

Some examples are:

- Never tell a lie
- Never abandon a follower of the faith
- Never kill in cold blood
- Always bring a gift when visiting a holy site

Disobeying the Tenets.

If you disobey any of the tenets of the Faith, there are immediate and dire consequences. Upon this act of defiance, set your hope score to 0 and increase your despair by 1. You also lose the ability to channel prayer effects or participate in rituals until you atone.

Atonement.

If you have disobeyed the Faith, you must atone for your transgressions. Spend an hour in quiet prayer and burn an offering of something that you hold dear in order to atone.

You Must Act Against the Darkness

A priest must be ready to defend followers of the faith from anything. The darkness could manifest in many forms, large dogs, hulking troll-like creatures, or even a facsimile of humanity. To combat these horrors, you have six virtues and eleven skills. To perform an action, determine which skill works best for the situation, then add the related virtue and roll that many six-sided dice. Count the number of results that are 5 or 6, these are your successes. If you get more successes than the target number (usually defense, social score, or some number set by the GM), you accomplish that task.

Result = Virtue + Skill, count 5s and 6s

The Six Virtues.

Followers of the Faith are expected to try to embody as many of the six virtues as possible: cunning, empathy, fortitude, grace, essence, and strength. However, as a priest, you are expected to be a paragon of all six.

Cunning is sharpness of mind and quickness of wit. You please the Faith by being alert and thoughtful. To an average follower, it is the difference between getting ripped off at a shop or manipulated into a cult. But to a priest, it is the difference between spotting the shadow beast waiting in ambush and remembering the best way to deal with it.

Empathy is the practice and skill of relating to other people and reading their intentions. Relating to others enables a better perspective on life, and therefore a deeper understanding of the Faith. A follower would display this virtue by settling disputes between neighbors and convincing their nephew not to go crusading (or convincing them to go). To a priest, practicing empathy is essential in ascertaining the intentions of a suspected friend of shadow or negotiating with the local despot for protection for a nearby temple.

Fortitude is mental willpower and physical endurance. Withstanding the brutal landscape as well as the insidious whispers of the dark is essential to surviving in the Age of Darkness. A normal follower needs to be hardy enough to weather a short famine or keep going after watching a shadow beast tear apart a loved one. A priest needs to withstand the rending claws of the dark and endure the creeping despair that threatens to drown them.

Grace is being quick on your feet and precise with your hands. It is balancing on the roof of your house to repair a leak before the steady drip of acidic water rots your grain stores. It is braiding a rope to keep the door shut when the mayor comes knocking. A priest that inhabits this virtue

often finds themselves sneaking up on an unsuspecting enemy, creating clever contraptions, or dropping a rope with a precise arrow shot.

Essence is connection to the Faith. Every follower has their own connection to the Faith, priests' connections are just more visible; and practical. Calling down divine punishment on the minions of shadow and consecrating a temple in the name of the Faith are both common uses of this virtue.

Strength is required from all in this Age of Darkness. The ability to stand up and defend your own right to exist is a daily trial for every person in the kingdom. Plowing your small, barely arable field in the torrential rain, killing a wolf threatening your flock, or heaving huge stones into place for a defensive wall are all ways to exhibit this virtue. Priests use this to strike down their enemies and overcome physical obstacles blocking their holy mission.

The Eleven Skills.

Every skill has at least one associated virtue. This is the virtue you add to the skill rank when creating your dice pool. If there are multiple virtues listed, choose the one you are using to perform the action.

Channeling (Essence).

The channeling skill is used for calling upon the power of the Faith in the form of prayers.

Crafting (Cunning or Grace).

The crafting skill is used to create new items or repair existing ones, provided you have the right materials at hand. Roll this skill when creating or repairing.

Close Combat (Strength or Grace).

The close combat skill is used for getting up close and personal with your enemies, whether you use a weapon or weapons the Faith gave you: your hands. When attacking at close range, roll this skill against your target's defense.

Influence (Cunning or Empathy).

The influence skill is for deceiving, intimidating, or persuading someone to do what you want. See the *negotiation* rules for details.

Insight (Cunning or Empathy).

Insight is for reading a situation, figuring out someone's motives, or seeing through lies. See the *negotiation* rules for details.

Lore (Cunning)

The lore skill is used for researching or recalling information about the world or its inhabitants. Based on the number of successes, you learn the following:

Successes	Result
<1	Nothing. Rumors at best.
1-2	Surface level knowledge.
3-4	Basic knowledge.
>5	Esoteric knowledge.

Pathfinding (Cunning).

Pathfinding is used to find your way when traveling through the world, or tracking something else. See the *travel* rules for more uses of this skill.

Perception (Cunning).

The perception skill is used to spot what is hidden. You may spend successes to ask some of the following questions, 1 for 1:

- What is the greatest threat?
- What is hidden to me?
- What is the safest way forward/out?
- Who is in the greatest danger?

Ranged Combat (Grace).

Ranged combat involves bows, firearms, and throwing weapons. When attacking at long range, roll this skill against your target's defense.

Ritualism (Essence).

Ritualism involves the use of the Faith to perform extended rites such as consecrating ground or converting new followers to the Faith.

Stealth (Grace).

Stealth is for sneaking or hiding from enemies. When attempting to sneak past someone or hide from them or do an otherwise stealthy action, roll against their awareness rating or perception skills.

You Must Fight the Darkness Within

Lurking inside of every mortal are the shreds of darkness that slowly sap away at a person's resolve, drawing them closer to the edge. These tendrils of darkness take the form of self-doubt and despair, clawing away at the mind. Even a priest of the faith is susceptible to the corrupting influence of the dark.

Despair Score.

Your *despair score* represents the hold the darkness has on your soul. The higher the score, the closer you are to breaking. When rolling any sort of check, replace a number of dice in your pool with despair dice. These dice are usually a different color to help distinguish. If you roll a one on a despair die, you must roll on the *despair effects table*, adding your *fortitude* to the result and subtracting your current *despair*. You can only roll on the despair table once per check.

Roll	Effect
<=1	You collapse, overwhelmed by the darkness. You cannot move, you cannot perform any actions. The person nearest to you must make a despair roll.
2-3	Your resolve breaks; you need to get away, and fast. Run your full distance away from your allies and danger. Everyone near you increases their despair by 1.
4-5	You lash out, attacking the nearest thing to you, no matter if they are friend, foe, or unaligned. Everyone near you increases their despair by 1
5-6	A crushing weight is on your chest, you move in slow motion. You may only perform one action per turn and it has a -2 penalty.
7-8	You are shaken, your next action will be taken with a -1 penalty.
>8	You hold it together, this time.

Gaining Despair.

The world is a bleak and desolate place. Your mental fortitude will be on trial constantly, and these trials take many forms. You automatically gain one despair whenever one of the following events happens:

- You witness the death of a follower of the light.
- You come into contact with a creature of the dark you have never encountered before.
- You are suddenly plunged into complete darkness.
- You encounter a despair trigger as described in character creation.

Reducing Despair.

There are several ways that you can reduce your despair, a few of them more effective than others. Resting on *consecrated* ground will automatically set your despair to 0 upon waking (see the *rituals* chapter for consecrating ground). Another way to reduce despair is by spending time in contemplation or prayer for an hour. For each hour you spend practicing these rituals, reduce your despair by 1.

Hope Score.

Your *hope score* represents the small shred of hope inside every follower of the light. The higher the score, the more confident and determined you are. You cannot have a higher hope score than 3. When rolling any sort of check, replace a number of dice in the roll equal to your hope score. Replace despair dice before normal dice. When you roll a 6 on a hope die, roll on the *hope table*. You may only roll on the hope table once per check.

Roll	Effect
1	Gain +1 momentum.
2	A burst of radiant energy pushes close enemies to far range.
3	Regain an expended prayer effect.
4	Add a success to the result of your roll.
5	You and everyone near you decrease their despair by 1.
6	Restore a condition level.

Gaining Hope.

Despite the darkness around you, there is still a chance to fight back. You automatically increase your hope by 1 when one of the following happens:

- You rescue a follower of the Faith from danger.
- You consecrate an important location such as a temple, holy site, or a defensible location.
- You strike a major blow against the forces of darkness.

Using Hope.

You may also expend a point of hope in order to count 4s as successes for one roll. You may use it in this way after you make the roll, but before the result is known.

You Must Destroy the Darkness Without

The darkness does not just manifest within, it also has physical manifestations in the world itself. Creatures of this corruption stalk the night, hunting the faithful, hoping to begin their reign of terror in earnest. Priests must be ready to take up arms against the beasts, protecting your faith from those who would see it destroyed.

Defense.

A priest defends themselves in a variety of ways. Whether it be by encasing themselves in the glimmering armor of the Faith, or by dancing out of the way of danger. The enemies of the Faith rip and tear with serrated claws and razor-sharp teeth, and can corrupt with a single scratch. They are made partially of mist, partially of flesh, and yet another part shadow. Not getting hit is difficult yet necessary to stay alive. A priest's defense value is calculated by taking the average of your *fortitude* and *grace*, rounding up.

$$\text{Defense} = \text{Fortitude} + \text{Grace} / 2, \text{ rounding up}$$

Condition.

No one lives forever; we all return to the Faith at some point in time. For a priest in the Age of Darkness, you are likely to meet the Faith faster than you intend to.

As you take damage, you move down the condition track. You increase your condition by an amount equal to the damage you take. If your condition is 4 or above, you take a -1 to all actions. When you reach condition 6, you die.

Damage	Condition
1	I am healthy. We will banish the darkness.
2	I am bruised. The darkness fights back.
3	I am covered in cuts and scrapes. I'll make it. Onward.
4	A broken bone or two, but they'll heal. Let's stop for a minute.
5	I am on the verge of death. The darkness closes in.
6	My soul has been claimed by the darkness.

Restoring Condition.

You restore condition by resting on *consecrated ground*, restoring 2 condition levels per night. See the *rituals* chapter for information about how to create consecrated ground.

Channeling the Faith.

Your faith rewards its followers with power and the ability to wipe out the forces of darkness. However, its power is not easily given. You must perform an elaborate series of rituals and prayers to gain even a portion of this power. These rituals are similar in nature to the ones you defined when creating your religion.

Preparing Prayers and the Holy Vessel.

Every morning, or whenever you wake up, you may pray and perform the necessary rituals to store a portion of the Faith's power in a *holy vessel*. Everyone's vessel is different. For some, it is a reliquary holding sacred texts; for others it may be elaborate tattoos placed in specific places throughout their body. Either way, the prayers physically manifest in or on the vessel. Maybe certain tattoos glow, or new entries appear in your book of prayers.

This ritual takes about a half hour to perform. At the end of the ritual you store an amount of effects in your vessel equal to your *channeling* skill divided by 2, rounded up. You can have a minimum of 1 effect stored.

$$\text{Number of Stored Effects} = \text{Channeling} / 2, \text{ round up}$$

You may choose these effects from the list for a class which you have levels in. These can be found in the description for the class. An effect can be chosen more than once.

Unleashing Effects.

As an action, you may call upon the stored power in your vessel to unleash one of the effects stored therein. If the effect targets an enemy, use your channeling skill for the attack roll.

Rituals.

Rituals are rites of the Faith that require a lot of preparation and time to perform correctly. Some require specific materials or actions to be undertaken. Multiple people can participate, contributing their successes to the ritual.

Ritual Materials.

All rituals use a holy vessel as a *focus*. It can be one belonging to a priest, or one specifically made for the ritual. Any other materials specified by the ritual are consumed upon completion, regardless of if it was successful or not.

Performing a Ritual.

To perform a ritual, one must have the proper materials as specified by the ritual. At least one holy vessel is required to act as a focus. To commence the ritual, everyone participating rolls their *ritualism* skill, adding their successes together. You must obtain a number of successes equal to or greater than the ritual's *complexity* for it to be completed correctly. A ritual takes a number of hours equal to its *complexity divided by 2*, rounding up to the nearest half hour.

Ritual Duration = Complexity / 2, round to nearest half hour

Failing a Ritual.

If you fail to properly perform a ritual, the vessel used as the focus is rendered inert until the next day. No prayers can be stored in it, and no rituals may be performed with it. Any prayers currently stored in it are lost. If the target of the ritual was a human, they are ravaged by unfiltered divine power; if their condition was below 4, it now becomes 4. The leader of the ritual and all people involved increase their *despair* by 2.

Consecration. Complexity: 3

You call upon the faith to sanctify a 30 foot diameter circle for a short period of time. For every success over the complexity, increase the diameter by 10 feet. Terrain inside this circle is considered *sanctified ground* for all purposes. Creatures of the darkness cannot enter sanctified ground. This lasts for 8 hours. This effect ends immediately if the focus is destroyed.

Greater Consecration. Complexity: 10

You sanctify the entirety of a small village, up to a 1 mile diameter circle. All terrain inside this circle is considered *sanctified ground*. Successfully performing this ritual in the same location every day for 7 days makes this effect permanent. This effect ends immediately if the focus is destroyed, no matter if it has been made permanent or not.

Conversion. Complexity: 1

You induct a willing human into the Faith. They now count as a follower of the Faith for all purposes.

Exorcism. Complexity: 3

You banish the influence of the Darkness from a human. The darkness is expelled in the form of a creature of darkness, which is immediately hostile to everyone it can see. The complexity of this spell increases by the level of the creature influencing the target.

Scenes.

Scenes are contained events, such as a battle, negotiation, exploration of a ruin, or overland travel. The GM determines when a scene is over. For example, when all enemies are defeated or all unknown locations have been searched. A travel scene ends when the party reaches their destination or enters a battle or exploration.

Momentum.

When a character succeeds at a task, others are inspired by this success. Successes from a check can be added to a pool that all players can access. During any roll, a player can take any number of dice from the momentum pool to add them to their roll. At the end of every round, remove one die from the momentum pool. You may only build momentum during a scene. The momentum pool is cleared at the end of a scene.

Combat.

When necessary, a priest must resort to physical violence to destroy the forces of darkness and protect the faithful.

Actions.

In combat, every character can take 2 actions. An action can be used to move or make a skill check. Actions can be used outside of your turn to do reactions. Actions refresh at the beginning of every round.

Turn Order.

The players always go first, they can decide which character goes first among themselves. From then on, the person whose turn it is decides who goes after them, choosing from the PCs and enemies. The round ends when no one has any actions left.

Attacking.

An attack is the same as making a skill check. Common skills for combat are *close combat*, *ranged combat*, or *channeling*. If you get a number of successes equal to or greater than the *defense* of your target, your attack hits. Subtract the target's defense from your successes. The difference is the amount of net hits you have. You can put these net hits into the *momentum pool* or add them to the damage of your attack.

Dealing Damage.

Subtract the target's *armor rating* from the damage of the attack. Whatever is left is dealt to the target as damage.

Creatures of darkness attack and deal damage to players in the same way.

Step-By-Step.

- Player rolls *virtue + skill*, counting the number of dice that come up 5-6.
- If the number of successes is equal to or greater than the *defense* of their target, the attack hits.
- The difference between the number of successes and the target's defense are *net hits*.
- You can put net hits into the *momentum* pool or add them to the damage of your attack.
- Subtract the target's *armor rating* from the damage of the attack. Whatever is left over is dealt to the target.

Range.

There are 3 ranges, Close, Near, and Far. Weapons and attacks include their range in their description.

Range	Distance
Close	Within 10 feet
Near	Within 30 feet
Far	Over 30 feet

Reactions.

A reaction is an action made outside of your normal turn. When you use a reaction, you have one less action available on your next turn. Actions refresh at the end of your turn.

Combat Actions.

There are several possible things that a priest can use their actions to accomplish. As a general rule, one skill check is one action. Here are the actions available to your in combat:

Defend. Prepare to take or dodge a hit.

- Spend an action to ready a defense against the next attack targeting you.
- Make a *close combat* check and add the successes to your defense until the beginning of your next turn.

Move. Reposition.

- Move one range. For example, if you are far from an enemy you can move to near.

Shove. Push an enemy away.

- Range: Close.
- Roll a *close combat* check against the target's defense.
- The target is pushed to near.

Unleash a Prayer. Expend an effect stored in your vessel.

- If the effect requires an attack, use your action to make a channeling check against the target's defense.

Weapon Attack. Attack with a weapon such as a mace or a ceremonial knife.

- Range: Close, Near, or Far. Depends on the weapon.
- Roll a *close combat* or *ranged combat* check against the target's defense.

You Must Resolve Internal Conflict

With the end of the world in sight, people will start to become selfish and hostile. Bands of bandits and raiders plague the land, taking what they need from those who can't defend themselves. Despots and leaders will set themselves up in positions of power, ruling over the unfortunate with an iron fist. Fighting these people might not always be an option. The world must unite against the darkness, not kill itself through petty squabbles.

Negotiation.

Sometimes, priests must act as mediators to a conflict, or participate in one themselves.

Defining Intent.

The NPC and priest must define what they want to get out of the conversation. This is their *intent*. The discussion should be working towards this goal.

Concessions.

Each character must be willing to make a number of *concessions* equal to their *fortitude*. As each character makes an argument or offering, they must roll an Influence check against the other character's *insight* or *influence* skill. Or, if they are an NPC, their *social score*.

If the check succeeds, the character must make one concession to the other character's point. A concession should work towards the character's intent. Offering a smaller discount, delaying an action by a day, or just continuing to listen to the character.

Just because a character gives up a concession does not mean that they have to be wholly convinced. A character can walk away from the negotiation at any point. The GM should use the NPC's goal(s) to judge when, or if, they will concede the point or stand their ground. The GM can also use the NPC's social skill to judge how resolute they are in conversation.

Convincing a Follower to Abandon the Faith.

When trying to convince someone to go against any tenets of the Faith, the targeted person gains a +2 to their insight and influence checks (if they are a player) or their social score (if they are an NPC).

An Example.

Fennec is arguing with the local despot, trying to convince her that she needs to send her forces to the nearby village to prepare for an invasion of the darkness.

Step 1.

- Fennec decides that they want to convince Bell, the despot, to send her army to the village.
- Bell decides that she wants to convince Fennec to leave her the hell alone. She has gold to count, after all.
- Fennec has a fortitude of 2
- Bell has a fortitude of 3

Step 2.

Fennec opens with telling Bell that without her help, dozens of villagers will die and that she will receive a lesser tribute next month. They roll their influence skill and get a respectable 4 successes. Bell's social score is 3, so she must make a concession to her argument.

Step 3.

One of Bell's desires is respect, so she decides to put on a good show for her guards and actually listen to what Fennec has to say, rather than just dismissing them outright. She has 2 concessions left.

Step 4.

Bell tells Fennec that if she sends her guards, her own compound might also be attacked and then she will die. She rolls her social score and gets 2 successes. Fennec sees right through that, their insight skill is 3.

This back-and-forth continues until one side runs out of concessions, or one side capitulates.

Another Example.

Duluth, a keeper, is talking to the local general store owner. He is trying to obtain information about a supposed friend of the dark that passed through the town. Duluth's goal is to find where his target is hiding. The store owner, Holth, is trying his best to not reveal the location of Paula, the person Duluth is looking for. His goal is to misdirect Duluth to the next town over.

Duluth: *You need to tell us what you know. Your town is in danger of being attacked if we don't root out this spy.* They roll 4 successes on their influence. Holth's social score is 4, he must make a concession.

Holth: *Look, I don't know where they are now, she left a week ago. I saw her heading over to Shalebridge though.* Holth is trying to lie here. He rolls an unlikely 4 successes. Duluth's insight skill is only 3. He does not catch the lie and must make a concession. He chooses to believe the lie and goes on with his business; he thinks he got what he needed.

Travel

The darkness has spread across the entire world, consuming a variety of environments. Black ice corrupts the wildlife in the north. The deserts of the south are ravaged by possessed sandstorms of pure darkness. The jungles of the west are overgrown beyond recognition, nature itself is hostile to humans. The oceans are filled with unspeakable horrors that drag ships down into their inky depths. To survive in these environments is a test of planning, resource management, and skill.

Planning.

Before the journey, the characters all work together to gather resources and plan the journey before setting out. This is done by making a series of skill checks related to the journey. Every success contributes to a communal dice pool in the center of the table. Each character can only make one check.

For example, Fennec could plan the route that the party will take by making a Pathfinding check. Valsith wants to create a sled to make trudging through the snow easier by making a Crafting check. The amount of successes each character gets from the roll will go into the resource pool.

Traveling.

The number of dice in your pool is how many days you can travel. Subtract one die from the pool for each player for every day of travel.

For example, if there are 5 people traveling with you, subtract 5 dice from the pool every day.

Unfortunate Occurrences.

At the beginning of every day, roll the entire pool. If you get below the safety rating for the region, something bad happens. The GM decides what kind of encounter happens.

Safety Ratings.

Each region that the characters travel through has a safety rating that represents how strong the forces of darkness are or how dangerous the environment is. A 1 safety is an extremely hostile environment. A 10 safety is almost impossible, it is an Edenic hope for the world. The GM determines the safety rating for each region.

Arriving.

The journey ends when you have traveled the appropriate distance to your destination. This is usually measured by the number of days of travel getting there requires. At the end of a journey, all dice gained from planning or other sources disappear.

You Must Specialize to Succeed

No one can do everything themselves. Priests of the faith must choose specialties and work together if they ever hope to overcome the darkness plaguing the world.

Class Ranks.

Each class has 5 ranks, giving you different benefits at each tier. When you level up, you may pick an ability from any class that you meet the level requirement for.

The Bastion.

A man clad in shining gold armor plating drags himself to a kneeling position, one mailed gauntlet clutching his hammer, the other placed out to the side, pushing a young child back. He mutters words of encouragement before heaving himself to his feet, facing down the twisted visage of what remains of the cobbler. The hunched figure circles the room, bloody spines jutting out from its joints. With a shriek, it flings itself at the child, but is blasted back by a thunderous hammer strike. The Bastion grimaces as he pulls his hammer from the remains of the cobbler's skull. He clutches his chest as pain flashes from a dozen wounds. He can hear the skittering of claws on the pavement outside. He pushes the child into the cellar, locking the door. The Bastion stands in front of the hallway, his hulking form filling the doorframe with a wall of steel and resolve. He holds up his hammer, tearing off a piece of the bar to use as a shield. He stands his ground, praying to the Faith that his allies can reach him in time.

The bastion is the shield of the faith, a protector of the weak. They stand by their allies and protect them from danger.

Abilities.

Rank 1: Protect the Faithful.

- Whenever an ally near you is hit by an attack, you may use a reaction to interpose yourself between them and the danger. You suffer any damage they would have taken, and they take none.
- In a negotiation, whenever an ally is forced to give a concession, you may use your action to intercede and offer one of your own instead.

Rank 2: Endure Suffering.

- You may lower your hope by 1 to take no damage from an attack.
- Once per day you may ignore the effects of a despair roll.

Rank 3: Divine Citadel.

- You project an aura of strength. Allies within near range of you may reroll any failed despair dice on a roll once per scene.
- Allies within close range of you gain a +1 to defense.

Prayer Effect Options.

- Increase target's defense by 1.
- Mark an ally. The next time they take damage, reduce it by 2.
- Push target back one range. Range: Close

1d6 Bastion Ornaments	
1	Awards and honors from a long-dissolved military.
2	Pieces of holy scripture written on parchment.
3	Symbols of the Faith stamped into the metal.
4	Trophies from vanquished creatures of Darkness.
5	Flowers you've collected during your travels to distant lands.
6	Various lengths of chain, representing your unbreakable will.

The Inquisitor.

A hooded woman walks among rows of tents, the sounds of hopelessness filling the air around her. The smell of cooking meat and rotting vegetation hangs over the camp, almost entirely covering up the stench of corruption. She scans the people huddled around small fires and bubbling pots. She sees fear in all of them, save one. The usual glaze of fear and doubt is replaced with fiery hate and determination. To the inquisitor, the man reeks of sulphur and pine, the scent of the darkness. She draws her vessel, a small clay pot, out from under her robes. Maintaining line of sight with the man, she mutters a prayer under her breath and blows powder out of the pot. It streaks towards the man, highlighting him in an outline of burning silver. The inquisitor shouts for everyone to get down and extends her staff, giving chase to the friend of the dark.

An inquisitor works from the shadows, rooting out insidious influence from the Darkness.

Abilities.

Rank 1: Purge Darkness.

- When you strike an enemy associated with the Darkness, you may banish a piece of its protection. Their armor and defense decrease by 2. Only one enemy can be affected by this at a time. Striking a new enemy applies this effect to them and removes it from the original.
- You may also strike someone being influenced by the darkness (but not possessed) and roll a channeling check against their defense. On a success, you instantly banish its

influence. On a failure, you still banish the influence, but the person suffers great harm in the process. Their condition becomes one less than their maximum.

Rank 2: Shadow's Bane.

- You gain +1 defense against creatures of the dark when standing in bright light.
- The target affected by Purge Darkness has -2 to checks against people other than you.

Rank 3: Become the Predator

- Once per day, you may enter a state of ultimate focus. You automatically detect all creatures of darkness within near range, and they cannot be hidden from you.
- While in this state, you attack and damage rolls increase by 2.

Prayer Effect Options

- Immediately identify the closest ally of darkness and visibly mark them.
- Weaken a target, giving them a -1 penalty to their next skill check.
- Pull the target toward you one range. Range: near

1d6 Inquisitor Tells	
1	You smell sulfur and pine needles.
2	Birds of prey visible only to you gather nearby, watching.
3	Butterflies flutter in the air around you, their origin unknown.
4	Trails of unnervingly bright colors twist across your vision.
5	Your entire body tingles, a shiver passes over you.
6	You taste dust and rot, your mouth fills with a sour flavor.

The Keeper.

The candles flicker as the 10th book of the night slams shut. A graying man leans back in his chair, rubbing his eyes. As his vision clears, a thought occurs to him. Of course it would work, he already knew which rites to use. As the keeper leaves the library, he notices a small child crying outside of the temple. Falling to one knee, he asks the child what ails him. The boy of barely six years tells the keeper that his parents fell in the last raid against the village. The keeper looks down, holding up the amulet engraved with the symbols of the Faith. He tells the boy a story of a great hero of the Faith, weaving a prayer into his words. The amulet glows, and he hands it to the child. The boy's eyes light up as he grabs the amulet, its shimmering glow reflecting in his eyes. He thanks the keeper and runs off, renewed with hope. The keeper allows a small smile as he heads back to the temple. There is still much to do.

The keeper is the living repository of knowledge and the one most in contact with the divine.

Abilities.

Rank 1: **Rekindle the Flame.**

- You reawaken the spark in a character, a fragment of the Faith's power. Do one of the following:
 - Your target gains a +2 to their next skill check. Range: near
 - Your target increases their hope rating by 1 for their next roll. Range: near

Rank 2: **Divine Precognition.**

- You look into the future, predicting certain outcomes. At the beginning of the day, roll your ritualism skill, storing any successes. At any time throughout the day, you can expend one of these stored successes to add it to the result of any roll.

Rank 3: **Beacon of Hope.**

- Once per day, a burst of divine inspiration emanates from you, bolstering your allies and demoralizing your enemies. Any allies within near range increase their hope by 2. Any enemies within near range of you change their goal to "flee".

Prayer Effect Options.

- Gain information about a topic as if you rolled 4 successes on a lore check.
- Restore 1 condition level. Range: close
- The next ritual you lead takes half the normal time.

1d6 Keeper Implements	
1	A long metal rod inscribed with important scripture verses.
2	A stone orb carved with a record of every book you've read.
3	A thick tome containing your collected notes.
4	A pair of crystal spectacles.
5	Two calligraphy sets and a sheaf of high quality parchment.
6	A box of various inks and bookbinding supplies.

The Ravager.

The horde of beasts claimed by the darkness swarm toward the makeshift palisade the villagers struggled to put up throughout the night. Everyone knows it won't hold for more than an hour. A few dozen villagers stand behind the walls, brandishing pitchforks and sickles tied to long sticks. They would not let the darkness take them easily. As the first wave slams into the wooden wall,

a robed figure strides up to the gate. Everyone cries out a warning as the person throws open the gate, but they are pushed back by a brilliant flash of light. Shining silver bolts of divine energy fly up into the air, plummeting down onto the beasts below. Several are blasted to dust, but more keep running. The ravager tells the villagers to step back as they trace a complex pattern in the dirt. Glowing tattoos appear over their body as a swarm of bolts shatter the remaining forces. The village would stand for one more night.

A ravager is the artillery of the group, one who rains divine fury onto the forces of evil.

Abilities.

Rank 1: **Rain Fury.**

- When you channel, you send multiple bolts out, splitting the effects between them. You may target as many enemies as your channeling skill.

Rank 2: **Divine Artillery.**

- The range of your prayer effects is now far.
- You may lower your hope by 1 to double the amount of bolts gained from Rain Fury.

Rank 3: **Wrath of the Faithful.**

- When you channel, your attacks hit harder. Each bolt you create deals an extra 2 damage, even if it originally didn't deal damage.
- You may store a number of effects equal to your channeling skill instead of half of it.

Prayer Effect Options.

- Deal 3 damage. Range: near
- Mark an enemy, your next attack against them has +2. Range: near
- Shred the enemy's armor. They have -1 armor until the end of their turn.

1d6 Ravager Tattoos	
1	A fox's head and jagged lines, for cunning.
2	Waves and leaping fish, for empathy.
3	A bear and square lines, for fortitude.
4	A swan and various birds, for grace.
5	The symbols of the Faith, for essence.
6	Spirals twisting around your arms, for strength.

The Seeker.

The seeker hangs from the tree by one arm, holding the spyglass to her eye with the other hand. Three creatures surrounded a corpse, tearing chunks of flesh off of it. Black rain began to fall, obscuring her vision. She closes the spyglass against her thigh and swings back onto the branch. The seeker runs across the branches, moving closer to the creatures. The rain is heavy now, she can barely make out their shifting forms in the dark. As she approaches, they lift their heads and scurry off into the shadows. But they will not escape, she can see their path in her mind. She will be relentless in her pursuit.

The seeker finds information about the world, political climate, and forces of darkness.

Abilities.

Rank 1: Second Sight.

- The Faith gives you extended insight into the world around you. When you make a perception or pathfinding check, you gain supernatural insight. When asking the GM questions using your successes, you gain the following options:
 - What influence does the Darkness have in this area?
 - Are there enemies of the Faith here?
 - What direction is the nearest sanctuary?
- When you attempt to track a creature of darkness, you can do so by a sixth sense alone. No physical signs need to be present.

Rank 2: Insightful Observation.

- When you make an insight check, you see deeper into the situation, gazing at your target's very soul. You may ask one of the following questions about the target per success you roll:
 - What is currently weighing on them?
 - What are they hiding?
 - How closely do they follow the Faith?
- When you observe a creature of darkness for an extended period of time (longer than 1 minute), you measure its strength and sense any weaknesses. You do not take despair from getting hit by it and know its armor, condition, defense, attack, and any special abilities it might have.

Rank 3: No Escape

- Once you gain a creature's trail, you can track them flawlessly. You never lose the trail.
- When negotiating with someone, they cannot back out. They must stay in the conversation until one side gives up all of their concessions.

Prayer Effect Options.

- Your movement increases by one range until the end of the scene.
- Determine if a statement recently made is a lie.
- Relay one sight you've seen to another person you've met within a mile of you.

1d6 Seeker Instincts	
1	You sleep with your back to a wall or tree, one eye open.
2	You never enter a room without first checking every corner.
3	Every night, you sharpen your weapons and repair your armor.
4	Smell all food before eating to check for poison.
5	Assume an ulterior motive in every request or statement.
6	Plan an escape route for every situation.

Progression.

As a priest travels throughout the world and defeats the forces of darkness, they grow stronger in both body and connection to the faith.

Marking Experience.

At the end of the session, if your character did any of the following, mark experience:

- Chose to act according to the tenets of the Faith over personal interest.
- Made a significant personal sacrifice.
- Brought the light of hope to a place that needed it.
- Accomplished a quest mandated by the Faith.
- Your temptation caused you trouble.

Advancing.

You can spend 3 experience to increase one of your skills by 1. For every 3 skills you increase, you gain a rank in your current class or another of your choosing and may increase one of your virtues by 1. You cannot increase a virtue or skill above 5.

Creating Your Character.

Virtues.

You have 8 points to distribute among your virtues. You cannot have a virtue higher than 3 at character creation.

Defense.

Calculate your defense by doing: *fortitude + grace divided by 2*, rounding up.

Skills.

You have 10 points to distribute among your skills. You cannot have a skill higher than 3 at character creation.

Class.

Choose what class you want to be. Gain 1 rank in that class.

Temptation.

Everyone has a vice they turn to for comfort. In a world of darkness, where creatures of the night read your desires and prey on them, succumbing to these temptations can be deadly. On top of that, the Faith may prohibit the one thing that soothes you.

Choose a temptation, something that you are always enticed by. Be it alcohol, food, or a warm embrace, your character could lust after many different things.

Despair Triggers.

Choose two events that cause your character great distress. It could be innocents in danger or seeing powerful people take advantage of the weak. Whenever you experience one of these events, your despair goes up by 1.

Hope Trigger.

Choose one event that gives your character hope for the future. It could be witnessing a successful harvest, converting another follower to the Faith, or whatever else you can think of. Whenever you experience this event, your hope goes up by 1.

Equipment.

Create two weapons and one armor. Choose a keepsake from your past that reminds you of better days.

Equipment.

Creating a Weapon.

Weapons are the physical tools of destruction that a priest wields for defense against those who would harm them. Follow these steps to create a weapon.

Step 1. One hand or two hands?

Determine if the weapon you wield requires one hand or two hands to wield. If the weapon requires one, you may also use a shield. A priest wielding a two handed weapon cannot use a shield.

- One handed weapons have a weight of 2 and a base damage of 2.
- Two-handed weapons have a weight of 3 and a base damage of 3.

Step 2. Choose the range.

Determine the weapon's range. A melee weapon will always have a range of close. A ranged weapon can have a range of either near or far. If the range is near or far, increase the weight of the weapon by 1.

Step 3. Choose tags.

Choose two tags for your weapon. Exceptional weapons (as determined by the GM) can have more. These weapons can be discovered in the world, or your own weapons can be upgraded by skilled craftspeople.

Here are the available tags:

- **Deadly.** Increase the damage by 2.
- **Staggering.** When you strike a creature you may also attempt to *shove* them. Weight increases by 1.
- **Precise.** When making an attack with this weapon, gain +1 to your attack roll.
- **Vessel.** Your weapon also acts as a divine vessel.
- **Defensive.** While wielding this weapon, increase your defense by 1.

Creating Armor.

Armor is the only thing standing between a beast of shadow's claws and your delicate flesh. When choosing how protective your armor is, consider that the higher the defense, the heavier it will be. For every point of armor, increase the weight by 1. For example, an armor with a rating of 5 will have a weight of 5.

Creating Charms.

A priest may also create a protective charm. To make a charm, make a crafting check. The resulting charm will have an *effectiveness* equal to the amount of successes you get. A charm absorbs damage for you in combat; when you would increase your condition, reduce the

charm's effectiveness by that amount instead. The charm breaks upon absorbing damage equal to its effectiveness. A priest may only create a number of charms per day equal to their *essence*. A charm has a weight of 1.

Encumbrance.

All priests can carry weight equal to their *fortitude* + 4. If you carry more than your weight capacity, you take a penalty to all rolls equal to the amount of weight over your maximum you currently carry.

Game Mastering

This section will teach you how to be a game master for *Embers Among Ashes*.

Game Master Principles.

The game master has a list of principles that they must strive to express throughout the game.

Create an Atmosphere of Crushing Despair.

The game should feel oppressive. Darkness around every corner, people struggling to scrape out an existence in a dangerous world. Be sure to consult with your players about what kind of “darkness” will be in your game. Discuss the kinds of things that will happen off-screen and the kinds of things that will *never* happen in your game under any circumstances. Just because the game is meant to be dark does not mean that it should make your players uncomfortable.

Test the Characters’ Faith.

Force the characters into situations where the right thing to do is at odds with what their religion demands. Pay attention to the tenets of the Faith and use them against the players. Do not do this all the time, as the players will quickly become frustrated that they are being mercilessly inhibited by their choices at the beginning of the game. If the situation would be more annoying than interesting or dramatic, don’t do it.

Leave a Faint Glimmer of Hope.

Despite the bleak future of the world, there is still a chance for humanity to hang on. Even though you are to *Create an Atmosphere of Crushing Despair*, this can lose its effect if you invoke it too much. Include moments of quiet respite between gruesome monsters and iron-fisted despots. A brief interlude at a family’s farm, a quiet, clear night in the bell tower of the local temple, or even a feast following a believer’s coming-of-age ceremony are all good examples of ways to break the tension and show the human side of the Age of Darkness.

Failing Forward.

When a player character attempts an action and doesn't meet the required successes for the roll, it is sometimes not a good idea to just say that they fail. This can grind play to a halt while the party tries to figure out a way forward without getting any new information from their failure other than closing off one pathway. Instead of just saying "you fail", try to change the situation in a significant way following a failure. Or the character succeeds at the task, but there are more dangerous consequences to their actions.

Maybe the person they were trying to sneak up on pretends to not see them so that they can get the drop on them later. Or they fail to recall any relevant information, but they do remember who would know. Or they don't succeed on their roll to leap across the chasm, but still make it anyway. However, their sloppy execution has made the jump even more difficult for the next person to attempt it. Or the party fails an *influence* roll and the NPC plays along with what they want for the time being, all the while harboring a grudge that will resurface at an appropriately inconvenient time.

Not every failure needs to be an opportunity for success, but they should all be opportunities for drama. Nothing is more boring than just failing without any further consequences. If they fail to kick in the door, at least make something on the other side notice the noise.

Creating Non-Player Characters.

The people of the world are known as non-player characters, or NPCs. As the game master, you create and control these characters. An NPC is a human character, one of the survivors in the Age of Darkness. Creatures of the Darkness are different, and are discussed later.

NPCs have the following characteristics, each derived from the NPC's tier:

- Condition
- Armor
- Defense
- Attack and Damage
- Social Score
- Awareness.

Tier.

Every NPC is of a certain tier, from which all of their other attributes are calculated. A tier 1 character is a commoner, someone with almost no chance of survival outside of their current enclave. A tier 5 character is formidable.

Condition.

The condition of an NPC represents their physical health. When they take damage, their condition goes up. When an NPC's condition reaches its maximum, they die.

$$\text{Condition} = \text{Tier} \times 2$$

Every time an NPC takes damage, their condition increases equal to the amount of damage sustained. When an NPC is above half of their maximum condition, they have a -1 to every roll.

Armor.

NPCs, like player characters, can also create and wear armor for protection against physical threats.

$$\text{Armor} = \text{Tier}$$

When an NPC takes damage, they reduce it by their armor rating.

Defense.

Defense for NPCs works the same way as defense for player characters.

$$\text{Defense} = \text{Tier} + 1$$

An attacker must get at least as many successes as the defender's defense score in order to hit them.

Attack and Damage.

An NPC's attack value is how many dice they roll when making an attack.

$$\text{Attack} = \text{Tier} + 2$$

$$\text{Damage} = \text{Tier} + 1$$

As usual, NPCs can add their net hits to the damage of the attack.

Social Score.

The social score of an NPC represents their proficiency in navigating human interactions. Persuading someone, lying, or bartering all use the social score.

$$\text{Social Score} = \text{Tier} + 1$$

This is used when running social interactions between NPCs and the player characters.

Awareness.

Awareness is how attentive the NPC is to their surroundings.

Awareness = Tier + 1

This is often used to detect characters or creatures trying to remain hidden.

Desire.

Every NPC has a goal that they want to accomplish, something they need or want to do. Come up with what makes your NPC tick, what do they work toward every moment they can? This is useful in determining how they react to different situations.

Creating Creatures of the Darkness.

The beings that came after the Darkness descended on the land can take many different forms; some are even known to change their shape at will. When creating creatures of the Darkness, you don't have to have a perfect idea of what they can do. Since the creatures are manifestations of the Darkness, they can change dramatically at will.

Threat.

Threat measures a creatures' level of danger to the player characters.

Threat	Recommended Savagery/Cunning
1	3
2	4
3	5
4	6
5	8

Savagery.

Represents the raw power and aggression of the beast. Use this value for aggressive actions like attacking or chasing down prey.

Damage.

When dealing damage as a creature of Darkness, use threat + 1 as a baseline. For particularly savage or clever attacks, add 1.

Cunning.

Cunning is the beast's penchant for deception and trickery. The higher this value, the better they are at shapeshifting, influencing humans, and keeping their true nature hidden. Use this when

the creature is in a social situation or is otherwise trying to hide their presence or corrupted nature.

In Combat.

Creatures of the Darkness can take the same actions as player characters in combat, except for *Unleash a Prayer*.

Purpose.

Every creature of Darkness was created to serve a purpose. Whether it be to hunt down humans, infiltrate their power structures, or to just destroy, each beast has its own function. Their physical appearance often reflects this; they could range anywhere from monstrous amorphous blobs to unnervingly humanoid shapes. The creature should attempt to fulfill its purpose at all costs, using whatever methods are available to them. Creatures intended only to kill will recklessly fling themselves into the fray, while the more subtle ones will wait and bide their time, fleeing from any unfavorable situation.

Influences

- Alien RPG
- Apocalypse World 2e
- Genesis of Shannara series by Terry Brooks
- Blades in the Dark
- Bloodborne
- Conan 2d20
- Dark Souls series
- Darkness by Lord Byron
- Dungeons and Dragons 5e
- Nine Inch Nails
- Shadow of the Demon Lord
- The Last of Us

Thank You.

Thank you for taking the time to read my game, I hope you enjoyed it.

Check out my website for my blog and more of my games:

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