

For The Realm

A game of fantasy espionage.

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Part 0: The Fool

He who is the innocent, seeking new experiences.

Espionage, spycraft, skullduggery, some call it the Great Game, and everyone who plays it has their reason. There are those who play for the money, some for personal advancement, others for the thrill or for vengeance. You are a spymaster, one who plays the Great Game professionally in service to a higher cause. You have trained to spy, steal, manipulate and, if need be, kill for most of your life at the hands of the finest tutors in the land as well as your own master, the last spymaster to serve your cause. Your master dead or broken, it is up to you to fulfil his legacy, carry on the cause and, though you may suffer the same fate in the end, see it through to completion no matter the cost.

The last of the Burgin emperors lies dead, his throne cold and empty, the land shattered by the falling of a crown. The realm of Vangalis is torn apart by vultures and poisoned from within by its own rot, but still hope remains that the realm might live again. There are those who still hold to what Vangalis once was and with the right help, what it can be once again. But there are dangers in the shadows waiting to prey upon the good, their claws are long and their venoms potent and if virtue is to prevail it too must have its own hunters in the dark. Fortunately, your order was born in the shadows and the things that dwell there would do well to fear your scrutiny.

Everyone who plays the Great Game has their reason. You? You do it for the realm, because someone has to.

Introduction

For The Realm is a game of espionage in a fantastical setting which in accordance with the ancient and most holy precepts of the Game Fu was created using the following design elements;

Shared Narrative Control - Players gain the ability to influence the narrative through the use of trumps and consequences that they can inflict upon those defeated in contests.

All Decked Out - The use of a tarot card-based system immediately fired my enthusiasm and helped to build in the first element through the divinatory associations of the major arcana cards.

Dynastic Adventures - There is a high probability of character death and/or retirement during the course of play, with that in mind, each spymaster keeps a protégé - an apprentice spymaster who will one day inherit their duties, their legacy and, most importantly, their secrets.

Fantasy without dungeon crawls, spies without guns - Few things buried beneath the earth for more than a hundred years in monster-haunted warrens at the most are likely to be of interest to a Vangalian spymaster, not while there are far more politically expedient secrets fluttering through the halls of every city in the realm. Meanwhile, while the sorcerer-sages have experimented widely with explosives and incendiaries of many kinds all but the crudest of cannons are beyond current Vangalian technology and what firearms there are are currently outclassed by the tried and trusted ballista and bow.

Inspirations

The first and most obvious inspiration is of course George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* for the low-magic high-politics fantasy world, the TV series rather than the books, which I have not yet had the pleasure of being acquainted with. Lord Varys, Lord Baelish, Maester Pycelle and Tyrion Lannister are all examples of spymasters who favour cunning and behind-the-scenes manipulation, though Varys has at least on one occasion shown that he can play the stealthy rogue when he needs to as well.

In addition to this the portrayal of the character Seregil from Lynn Flewelling's *Nightrunner* series played a significant role in determining the broad range of abilities a spymaster would have, as well as several Sleights such as Hidden Cache's which he seems to have *everywhere*. Seregil is the archetypal spymaster; skilled in stealth, burglary, disguise, politics and the sword.

Finally, while Vangalis has far less to fear from monsters than the Pontar Valley, *The Witcher 2* depicts a world that is just as rife with political upheaval and unrest. The La Valette rebellion, Saskia's struggle to create the world's first attempt at an egalitarian society in Aedirn, even Iorveth's Scoia'tael movement are all great examples of the type of causes that a spymaster might throw their skills into supporting, all for the good of the realm, of course.

Playing the Game

To play For The Realm you will need;

A Tarot deck.

A pot or cup to set the tokens in for bids.

2+ players and one Games Master.

A set of tokens or counters.

Paper and pencils.

Part 1: The Magician

He who takes stock of the powers at his disposal.

Creating Your Spymaster

1. Give Them An Identity

What is your spymaster's name? What other names does he go by?

What cover identity does your spymaster have? No spymaster openly advertises their true profession.

What cause, lord, country or other master does he serve and what are their goals?

What is his style of spymastery? Is he a cunning burglar, a hidden manipulator, a callous assassin? To some degree this will be dependant on your choice of Minor Arcana and Sleights, so best decide now.

Who is your protégé? How did you find them? What background did they have before coming into your employment? Do they have any personality quirks? Almost as much thought needs to be put into your protégé as your spymaster - they may one day replace them!

2. Distribute Minor Arcana and Assets

Your minor arcana all start at 1, you have 4 further points to distribute amongst them.

Your Assets all start at 10, you have a further 30 points to distribute between them, your rating in each Asset cannot exceed your rank in its associated minor arcana x 10.

3. Choose Sleights

Each player gains 2 Sleights.

4. Equipment

For the most part, equipment is not something your spymaster needs to concern themselves with, they are assumed to have been outfitted with all they need for their role by their employer, including a comfortable lifestyle befitting a noble on par with a baronet. Instead, whenever you leave on business write a list of equipment you are taking with you that you think you may need on the job, you automatically have it. You may not, however, acquire new items of equipment on the fly unless you are in a setting where you reasonably could (such as a market) or can find what you need while on the job, which is up to the GM to decide. However, a spymaster may start with a number of Significant Tools equal to their Pentacles score. Significant Tools provide a +1 bonus to draws based on its use. Attempting a task without a suitable tool is either impossible (e.g. picking a mechanical lock with no pick) or applies a -1 penalty to your draw (fighting an armoured opponent with fisticuffs).

Side Note: Unbefitting Equipment

By default any equipment chosen will be assumed to be something befitting the character's station as a spymaster; a fine longsword or dagger rather than a hefty zweihander or halberd, an easily concealed and unobtrusive leather jack or finely-wrought chain shirt rather than a knight's fullplate, etc. A spymaster may of course still use such equipment if they wish, and may even have to if they mean to fill a certain disguise, but such crude instruments are not entirely suited to playing the Great Game. Unbefitting equipment provides a +1/+2 draw bonus on actions associated with it, just as a Significant Tool does, but also inflicts a -1 draw penalty when performing some other action; avoiding attention is somewhat more difficult with a greatsword strapped across your back, as is climbing and leaping rooftops in fullplate, for example.

5. Bid For Opening Trumps

Each player starts with a number of bid points equal to the number of players, including themselves. It is easiest to use tokens of some sort to represent them, poker chips are particularly fitting. Draw cards from the Trumps pile, if a player wants the trump drawn they may bid for it by placing their tokens in a pool. Whoever places the most tokens for the bid gets to keep the trump. After each successful bid, all points in the pool are distributed evenly amongst the players who have not yet won a bid. Continue bidding until all characters have a trump. If only one player wants to make a bid, the trump is automatically theirs and they keep their bid. Each player's remaining bid points at the end of this round carries on into the main game itself when bidding for new trumps as they are drawn.

Creating the Conspiracy

Who do you serve?

The first stage is deciding who the great players in this game are. Each spymaster can create a person, cause or country they serve, which they are free to define however they wish. If they wish, all players can be members of a fraternity of spymasters all serving the same entity, or they can be rivals each with their own cause to champion.

What do you want?

Most importantly, decide what the ultimate goal of the entity you serve is. A king who wishes to finally reunite Vangalis and retake the Imperial throne? A movement of rebels who wish to recreate Vangalis as a democratic nation? An independantly minded lord who chafes under the yoke of the current king, and wishes only that his land be sovereign once more? This is up to you to decide. In a competitive game the only limitation is that all sides must have some design on the same portion of the realm and that while there may be opportunities for some of them to ally, if they do then neither side will get entirely what it wants.

Where are you going?

Once you know what your goal is, it is now important to know how you get there. Depending on the length of game your GM wishes to run they can mandate anywhere from one to a dozen or more tasks that will need to be completed to see your plan to fruition, all dominoes that have to be lined up before your plan can succeed. In a competitive game, the first spymaster to complete the requisite number of tasks and bring their plan to fruition is the 'winner', which is not to say that the game cannot go on, there's always a Plan B!

Part 2: The Wheel of Fortune

That which is the turning point, bringing sudden change.

Core System

Take a deck of tarot cards and separate the 4 suits into individual decks, take the Major Arcana cards and place them in a fifth deck. Each character has a rating on their sheet for each of the 4 minor arcana, this is the number of draws they get from each deck at the start of a related contest.

Suit	Associated Contests	Asset
Wands	Creativity, craft, engineering and practical sciences, will.	Inspiration
Pentacles	Physical strength, endurance, material wealth, precision.	Coffers
Cups	Empathy, spirituality, intuition and perception, charisma.	Conviction
Swords	Martial prowess, logic, theoretical sciences, intelligence.	Mettle

When ever a character undertakes an action where they must make a contest against another they both draw cards appropriate to the type of contest. This can be a direct contest, in which two characters pit their skills against eachother face-to-face, or an indirect contest fought through some manner of proxy, such as a swords draw to try to crack a code written by another.

A contest is conducted as so;

1. Both sides draw a number of cards equal to their minor arcana score closest to the kind of challenge.
2. One player is the 'attacker' and the other the 'defender', in a direct contest the player with the highest score in the relevant minor arcana chooses which stance they take.
3. On the first round the attacker declares whether they are going 'high' or 'low', i.e. whether they are trying to get above or below the defender's card value.
4. Each turn both sides play a card from their hand face down, and turn both over at the same time.
5. If the attacker succeeds in getting above (if high) or below (if low) the defender's card value with their own card, the difference is added to their victory score. If not, the difference is added to the defender's victory score.
6. When one side no longer has any cards in their hand to play, the contest is over. Compare the two victory scores. The player with the higher victory score can apply the difference between the two scores as damage to the asset appropriate to the contest. If this is an indirect contest, such as picking a lock or breaking a code, they instead either succeed or fail in their attempt and take Asset damage. Alternatively, a failure at an indirect contest may still be broadly successful, if the GM wishes, but also suffers some form of consequence that complicates matters in addition to the Asset damage.

At the end of a direct contest, return all cards to the deck and reshuffle. If both players agree and still have remaining Assets they may make another draw and play another hand, or either one can choose to break the contest and depart the scene, bloodied but unbroken. A player who has one or more Assets reduced to 0 during a contest suffers a Consequence chosen by the victor.

Card Value

A card's value is, quite simply, it's number. The face cards are valued as so; Page - 11, Knight - 12, Queen - 0, King - 13. The Ace can be valued at either 1 or 12, at the player's choice.

Assets

Your Assets are your reserves of strength, be it literal physical vigour, wealth, political power or mental fortitude. They are also your ability to avoid danger, your luck and how close you are to it finally running out. As you lose contests your Assets will deplete, should any of them reach 0 something unfortunate has occurred to you and you will suffer the Consequences. The four assets are Inspiration, Coffers, Conviction and Mettle, corresponding to Wands, Pentacles, Cups and Swords, respectively.

Inspiration measures your mental strength, the spark of genius that allows you to think your way out of the toughest problems and overcome the impulse to give in to frustration. In organisations Inspiration represents its coordination and access to individuals with technical accumen.

Coffers is an abstract representation of your reserves of physical wealth and access to medicine, education, leisure and other goods and services that make life easier. In organisations it is simply its access to funding and the means by which to employ it.

Conviction measures your emotional strength, the ability to overcome temptations that might sway you or humiliations that threaten to crush you and carry on in the face of adversity. In organisations Conviction is a measure of the zeal and loyalty of its employees.

Mettle is a measure of your physical resilience, how much raw punishment you can endure before succumbing to your injuries, both through trained endurance and stubborn grit. In organisations Mettle represents the number and quality of its personnel, particularly its military and security.

Regaining Assets

At the end of each session, any assets that have taken any damage are restored 5 points. Other ways of restoring lost Assets includes spending secrets and certain trumps and Sleights.

Consequences: Woe to the Vanquished

Being reduced to 0 in an Asset is a bad thing, possibly representing the end of your spymaster's career and maybe their life along with it. Upon reaching 0 in an Asset you suffer a Consequence appropriate to the Asset and the situation. Wands, Pentacles and Cups Consequences are chosen by the defeated player, Swords Consequences are chosen by the victor. The Consequence chosen must make sense in the narrative context and they must narrate what actually occurs, but as long as it makes sense the Consequence is final. While it is possible to use a Consequence to force another spymaster into retirement or even murder them, it bears reminding that a living spymaster tells more secrets than one who is dead or no longer playing the Great Game.

Wands Consequences

Desperate Ploy

Thwarted at every turn, you finally confront your rival and bargain with them, trading your secrets for theirs in hope of tricking them into revealing too much, a sure sign of desperation. Give up at least one secret to the character that forced the Consequence, you regain 5 Inspiration. You may give up as many or as few secrets as you wish, but after you have decided your opponent may force another contest if they wish.

Retirement

Losing faith in your own abilities, you decide you can no longer play the Great Game any longer. Retire your current spymaster and pass his crimson files on to his protégé.

Pentacles Consequences

Sellout

Left in ruins, you decide that maybe gold really is a truer currency than secrets after all. Give up at least one secret to the character that forced the Consequence, you regain 5 Coffers. You may give up as many or as few secrets as you wish, but after you have decided your opponent may force another contest if they wish.

Ruin

Left destitute, your coffers empty and your health shattered, unsteady of hand and empty of purse, you give up the Great Game and leave to die in peace. Retire your current spymaster and pass his crimson files on to his protégé.

Cups Consequences

Crisis of Faith

Your convictions teetering on the brink, you confront your opponent intending to get their measure, perhaps giving away too much in the process but reaffirming your belief that they must be stopped. Give up at least one secret to the character that forced the Consequence, you regain 5 Conviction. You may give up as many or as few secrets as you wish, but after you have decided your opponent may force another contest if they wish.

Disillusionment

You no longer have the heart to believe in the cause any more, broken and beaten you leave the Great Game behind. Retire your current spymaster and pass his crimson files on to his protégé.

Swords Consequences

Capture

Locked in your foe's dungeon, you have no choice but to bide your time and give them a little of what they want while you wait for an opening to escape. Give up at least one secret to the character that forced the Consequence, you regain 5 Mettle. You may give up as many or as few secrets as you wish, but after you have decided your opponent may force another contest if they wish.

Death

You die. Your crimson files pass on to your protégé, who now has a master to avenge and 1 bonus secret; the killer's name.

Trumps

The Major Arcana cards, also known as trumps, allow their holder to introduce a specific significant change in the plot simply by playing it, which may be done at any time. The trump's effect needn't be on the player's character, any character they are interacting with in the current scene may be targeted by a trump. There is no contest to see if a trump is successful or not- the player who uses it simply declares the terms under which the trump's effects manifest and as long as everyone at the table agrees it is at least a possible scenario, it automatically occurs as described. After a trump is played, return it to the deck and reshuffle.

As many trumps may be played at once as the player wishes, as long as they hold them. Furthermore, any player may play a trump whenever they wish, providing they are interacting with the scene in some way, even indirectly such as sending an agent or lackey to intercept an assassin and playing a Hanged Man to ensure that they catch the assassin's blade at a cost to their own life. In a case where multiple trumps are played whose effects would cancel each other out (such as countering a Tower with a Strength, or vice versa) the last trump played takes precedence.

Drawing Trumps

At the beginning of each scene, as defined by the GM, a new trump is drawn from the deck and a new round of bidding commences if any player wishes to take ownership of it. The trump remains in the player's hand until played.

If a tree falls in a plot hole does it still make a retcon?

If someone at the table later recognises and points out a plot hole that would have prevented a particular trump from making sense in context after it has already been played, ignore it - the trump still takes effect.

The Fool - Somehow manage to make an escape when trapped - a jail cell, a chase, a boring conversation, whatever.

The Magician - Gain perfect insight into some esoteric or otherwise impenetrable subject, such as a code or piece of mystic symbolism.

The High Priestess - Act as though unencumbered by any physical or emotional handicap you may have.

The Empress - Guess the answer to a problem based on gut instinct alone, this does not necessarily give you the means or ability to solve the problem, only an understanding of what must be done.

The Emperor - Ignore any temptation that would sway you from your duty.

The Hierophant - Befriend anyone who is not explicitly your enemy or gain enough grudging respect from an enemy that they will choose to spare you if they have you at their mercy.

The Lovers - Present someone with an ultimatum and force them to make a decision right now, and make no attempt to delay it.

The Chariot - Automatically succeed in an aggressive contest with another person, be it a literal battle or a contest of wills, as if you won the hand with a margin of 10.

Justice - Successfully use the law in your favour in such a way that it cannot be denied by legitimate authority.

The Hermit - Find the trail that will guide you to whatever you are searching for.

The Wheel of Fortune - Play during any contest, everyone reshuffles their hand back into the deck and draws a new hand.

Strength - Played after a failure, negate the consequences - the wound is a mere scratch, the fine is negligible, the fall sprains your ankle rather than breaking your neck, etc. Reduce any asset damage to 1, if this drops you Asset to 0 your opponent does not get to declare a Consequence this round.

The Hanged Man - Whoever the card is played against makes a heroic sacrifice - taking an arrow for someone, holding a last stand, shouting "No, I'm Spartacus!"

Death - A long-held conviction or belief is shed, possibly even reversed.

Temperance - A dispute is settled amicably, with both sides coming out with some of what they wanted.

The Devil - Acquire a strong devotion or crippling obsession with something; a person, a cause, a vice, whatever.

The Tower - Played after a failure, the consequences are much worse than expected - the wound is mortal, the financial loss bankrupting, the rout humiliating. Double any asset damage.

The Star - When facing a calamity, something brings a shred of hope to avoid it, it's still up to you to seize this opportunity, however.

The Moon - Struck by a moment of confusion, overlook some important detail and fail to react to it. This could be something as small as a clue in a mystery or as large as an assassin in the room.

The Sun - Overcome by a surge of optimism and quiet assurance, restore one of your Asset scores to its natural maximum.

Judgement - Played during a contest, reverse whether the play is to be conducted 'high' or 'low'.

The World - Make it on time to participate in a particular scene. No matter what distance or hazards separate you, as long as there is even the slimmest chance you can be there on time, you make it.

Sleights: Tricks of the Trade

Spy mastery is a demanding profession, and one which requires its journeymen to master diverse and esoteric skills. While a normal man who lives in the light might spend his life learning a single skill; locksmithing, combat, statecraft, acrobatics, acting, etc. a spymaster must know them all, and more besides, if he is to move deftly and

invisibly through the steps of the Great Game. It is only natural then that spymasters would acquire a large repertoire of 'trade secrets', special tricks and skills passed down from master to student known collectively as 'sleights'.

Armsmen

You keep a number of soldiers, thugs and mercenaries on retainer to call upon when needed. You may summon a number of NPC armsmen to aid you with equivalent statistics to a Guard (pg. XX) equal to the higher of your Pentacles or Cups Suit. This Sleight may be taken multiple times, increasing the number of armsmen you may call upon by the same amount each time it is taken. Armsmen who are killed or suffer another debilitating Consequence may be replaced at the beginning of the next session.

Assassin's Art

If you can approach a target without them becoming aware of your presence you can initiate a Swords contest opposed by the target's Cups, if you are the winner then do not roll damage; instead, the target is immediately dropped to 0 Mettle and suffers the Death Consequence unless saved by a trump.

Flash of Genius

When you succeed in a Wands draw, for every full 3 points of difference you score add another 1 for purposes of determining the final Asset damage you deal. This additional difference is not subsequently calculated as part of this Sleight.

Hand and Foot

You have been trained in one of the myriad unarmed fighting arts practiced and perfected by successive generations of spymasters into a thing of beautiful and efficient deadliness. With this Sleight you no longer take a -1 penalty when fighting either as the attacker with no weapon or the defender with no armour, taken twice you take no penalty under either circumstance.

Hidden Cache's

You obsessively maintain hidden stores of equipment throughout the realm, distributed either by yourself or by agents and their locations painstakingly memorised. When in need you can find sealed casks, chests and pitch-covered oilskin sacks in sewer alcoves, on ropes at the bottom of wells, behind false walls or simply buried nearby. You may acquire a needed piece of equipment you did not bring with you on the job a number of times per session equal to your Pentacles suit. In addition, your Hidden Cache's will always contain a set of fine clothes, a purse of coin and a weapon of your choice, should you find yourself in need of them (such as after a prison escape).

Hostile Takeover

When you succeed in a Pentacles draw, for every full 3 points of difference you score add another 1 for purposes of determining the final Asset damage you deal. This additional difference is not subsequently calculated as part of this Sleight.

Master of the Ploy

You are a master of a particular tactic, and few ever get the chance to use it against you. Pick a trump card, on any bids made to determine ownership of it you gain an automatic +1 to your bid that does not cost a bid point. You may acquire this Sleight more than once, either applying to a different trump or stacking an additional +1 bonus to your bid, up to a maximum of +3.

Poisoned Words

When you succeed in a Cups draw, for every full 3 points of difference you score add another 1 for purposes of determining the final Asset damage you deal. This additional difference is not subsequently calculated as part of this Sleight.

Press The Attack

When you succeed in a Swords draw, for every full 3 points of difference you score add another 1 for purposes of determining the final Asset damage you deal. This additional difference is not subsequently calculated as part of this Sleight.

Strength In Victory

Success emboldens and restores you as surely as any panacea. When you are victorious in a contest against a Player, you may choose to deal half the amount of Asset damage to your opponent in order to recover half your victory total in Asset loss yourself.

Secrets: The Truest Currency

As every spymaster knows, a realm runs not on gold and steel alone and the most valuable currency of all are not those carried in the purse or coffers but in the mind and heart and, ultimately, the crimson files; secrets. As a spymaster accumulates secrets he gains leverage over the world of the Great Game, growing in influence and prestige, and so the number of secrets a spymaster has uncovered is a good metric of his overall power.

Whenever a spymaster uncovers a particularly useful piece of information, the GM should award them a number of secrets appropriate to its importance, from 1-3.

Increase Suits

Increasing your rank in a particular suit costs a number of secrets equal to its current rank.

Increase Assets

Increasing one of your Assets costs 1 secret per 5 points added, up to a maximum of your rank in it's associated suit x10.

Acquire New Sleights

Learning a new Sleight costs 3 secrets.

Acquire a Significant Tool

Purchasing a new Significant Tool costs 1 secret. Alternatively, at a cost of 2 secrets you can increase the bonus from one Significant Tool to +2, though no higher - anything beyond that is more than just excellent craftsmanship, it's *magic*.

Crimson Files

All spymasters worthy of the title keep a record of the secrets they have acquired in their crimson files, hidden away safely in the most devious manner they can fathom (and a good spymaster can fathom a lot when it comes to deviousness) somewhere only their protégé will be able to locate. As a spymaster, your crimson files are your life, your greatest treasure and your legacy. As a spymaster's protégé, they are the last and greatest gift your master will ever give you. When creating a new spymaster, any unused secrets your last character had are passed on to the new character. In addition, if the previous spymaster was retired while in possession of any trump cards the new spymaster may add a number of them to his hand equal to the number of secrets passed on.

Part 3: Justice

He who is impartial and objective of mind.

Time and Scenes

Time in For The Realm is measured in scenes, which it is important to keep track of as the beginning of each scene is the cue for the GM to draw a new trump card from the Major Arcana deck and for bidding to commence. Abstractly, a scene is defined as however long it takes for any current challenges to be resolved

Players and Pawns: NPC Contests

There are two kinds of NPC's: Players and Pawns. Players are those who play, or at least influence, the Great Game, who can command legions of soldiers and the wealth of nations, or at least the attention of those who do which is often more valuable, and safer. Pawns are those who are either ignorant of the Great Game or who have no power to influence it, most commonly both.

Contests with Players are resolved exactly as you would versus another spymaster, as described in *Part 2: The Wheel of Fortune* (pg. XX).

Contests with Pawns are somewhat simplified. Because Pawns lack Assets, a spymaster (or, indeed, another Player) need only win a single round in a draw against them to force a Consequence.

Sample NPC's

Below are presented a few stock characters that a spymaster might encounter during the course of their illustrious career;

The Guard (Pawn)

A simple man doing a simple job, he stands, he marches, he brutalises anyone who gets too close to his employer's secrets.

Suits

Wands	1
Pentacles	2 (-1 for wealth related draws)
Cups	1
Swords	2 (-1 for science related draws)

Sleights

None

Equipment

Weapon and Armour (no penalty on combat related Mettle draws).

Tabard bearing employer's colours (+1 on disguise related Cups draws to impersonate employer's staff).

The Knight (Pawn)

A soldier more by birth than by profession, born from a long line of minor nobles who distinguished themselves more on the field of battle than the court. Many still hold to the old ways of chivalry and honour and though that makes them noble it also makes them eminently unsuited to play the Great Game.

Suits

Wands	2
Pentacles	4 (-1 for athletics and stealth related draws)
Cups	2
Swords	5 (+1 for combat, -2 for science related draws)

Sleights

Press The Attack

Equipment

Fullplate Armour (Significant Tool)

Greatsword (Significant Tool)

The Rebel Leader (Player)

Unkempt, dishevelled, his body and raiment bearing the harsh marks of suffering and deprivation, a peasant in form... until you look in his eyes, and oh what terrible fire burns there. Fire fit to burn the old ways to the ground, fire to warm the heart of the oppressed, fires of revolution.

Suits

Assets

Wands	2	Inspiration	10
Pentacles	1	Coffers	10
Cups	3	Conviction	30
Swords	3	Mettle	20

Sleights

Poisoned Words (fiery rhetoric)

Armsmen (x2 or more, fellow believers in the Cause)

Equipment

Weapon and Armour* (no penalty on combat related Mettle draws).

*One of which will be a Significant Tool.

The Sorcerer (Player)

He is a master of the esoteric, the mystical and the invisible things. He cares not for the petty affairs of state but nonetheless rulers will court his council. His mind is sharper than any blade, his wits quick and his hands quicker, ready to mesmerise with a word and a gesture or throw scalding noxious powders to blind those who would look to close at things which do not concern the uninitiated.

Suits		Assets	
Wands	3	Inspiration	30
Pentacles	1	Coffers	10
Cups	2	Conviction	10
Swords	4	Mettle	30

Sleights

Press The Attack (Thrown incendiaries and toxins)

Poisoned Words (Hypnotic voice)

Magic - Special*

*The Magic Sleight is only available to Sorcerer NPC's and permits the GM the ability to take control of a trump card when it is drawn in a scene where the sorcerer takes part. If no player's bid exceeds 3 when the sorcerer is present, they gain control of the trump. A sorcerer NPC may however only ever hold one trump. The GM needs not give a logical explanation for how the trump's effects manifest in the context of the scene when it is played by the sorcerer, instead it takes the form of a magical spell.

Equipment

Amulets and Potions (no penalty on combat related Mettle draws, cannot be used by non-sorcerers).

Part 4: The World

That which is wholeness and fulfillment.

Land of a Thousand Thrones

Vangalis is a land that has never entirely been at ease with itself, the Great Revolution that brought an end to the last of the Burgin-dynasty emperors left the sprawling empire fractured into a tapestry of independent and jealous nation-states. The noble houses which ruled each of these disparate realms have never ceased vying for the Imperial throne, however, and new claims to its ownership have been made on an almost monthly basis ever since. In the place of a single emperor, numerous 'kings' have sprung up in his place. A relatively recent innovation, a king is any man who can claim the fealty of a number of dukes, and their respective lands, beneath his own aegis. Every one of these new kings are players in the Great Game through their armies, agents and, of course, spymasters, but they have upset the board somewhat. Once, the imperial order of spymasters served the realm without ambiguity by serving the will of the emperor, the realm's living embodiment. For generations without count they rooted out corruption and conspiracy, invisible guardians who struck from the shadows and could bring the powerful to their knees with a word. Even in the last days of the empire when they turned their attention to seditionists and rebels who had the temerity to speak out against the increasingly corrupt and power-mad Burgins the spymasters believed they were still doing their duty to the realm. The Great Revolution changed all that. Where once there was but one ruler and the path of serving the realm was a clear and easily distinguishable one, now it is upon the shoulders of every spymaster to pick his master, to decide by proxy what and who is best for the realm. Many resigned, cashed in their chips and retired to lives of quiet anonymity rather than continue to ply the craft of spymastery in such turbulent waters, those who remained were usually those who were either the most skilled, the most devoted to Vangalis or, most dangerous of all, those who had their own designs as to what the realm's future should hold.

The State of the Realm

With the realm fractured it is the right and duty of every spymaster who still holds to the greatness that once was Vangalis to pick a side according to their own convictions. It is true that all spymasters serve the realm, but the ways in which they do so are as many as the stars in the sky, and what one considers the true way to restore Vangalis to glory another may see as throwing the realm headlong into annihilation. This allows players to create spymasters with a wide spectrum of beliefs, all while staying true to the code of the order of spymasters; serve the realm.

Magic In The Realms

Magic is a present, potent and fearsome force in the realms, but rarely is never a common one. The fact is that while magic is undeniably powerful and even occasionally useful it is seldom ever practical. If only because magic always comes with a steep price more mundane solutions to life's problems are almost always preferable. Sorcerers are respected and much-courted individuals but it is more for their utility as men of learning than as thaumaturges and wonder-workers. Indeed, even most sorcerers themselves will admit if pushed that nine tenths of what people commonly call 'magic' is simply knowing something others don't. The road to magical power is one that requires intense study of the material realm, the depths of the mind and the mysteries of the heavens and the body's functions, and very often the knowledge acquired along this road is more useful than the prize at the end. A sorcerer might be able to construct in a single night an invincible wall that no invader's siege engine can topple, but only at a cost of sacrificing the firstborn children of three royal lines, something which is hard to condone for even the most callous ruler and guaranteed to mean that those walls will see some use in the immediate future. On the other hand, a sorcerer placed in charge of the construction of a keep's defences can create structures with perfectly mundane, if esoteric, techniques of engineering and architecture that can seem almost as magical, though not quite as dramatically impregnable or speedily built. As men of extreme learning and intelligence, sorcerers are also in high demand as councilors and advisors to rulers of all stripes and are just as adept at turing their intellects to matters of state when they deign to. However, the majority of sorcerers display an institutional distain for politics; they cast a disproportionate influence the Great Game, but they rarely play it themselves, loftier matters concern them.

Using Magic

Magic in For The Realm is best used as a goal, a single spell can be the masterstroke that will lead to the ascendance of a dynasty but actually gathering the resources that make the spell possible is rarely straightforward, and that's where the spymasters come in. The completion of a magical spell serves as a useful plot hook in other ways too; perhaps a spell that restores the life to a dead monarch also curses his realm as the supernatural forces that govern heredity take exception to such a blatant breach of the rightful succession, and only the monarch being restored to the earth and his rightful successor put in his place can break the curse. Besides this, sorcerers make valuable contacts. As they are usually heavily involved in many civil enterprises, a sorcerer can be a valuable source of building schematics, troop movement reports, state project plans and other information that can be of use to a spymaster, to say nothing of their facility with the crafting of poisons and explosives... Sorcerers are also well known for their facility with hypnosis and tricks of the mind, a sorcerer of sufficient skill can add, remove or edit memories with enough congruity that the subject at least will believe the validity of their own thoughts, even if they don't stand up to scrutiny by a trained questioner.