



LONG KNIVES



NAME					
TAGS					

HISTORY AND AVAILABLE LEVERAGE

INTENT TOWARDS / LEVERAGE OVER (INTENT TOWARD SELF IS AMBITION)

NAME						PCs

LONG KNIVES

HIGH PRIESTESS SARIT BLACKMAILED GENERAL AXAN INTO LAXITY, WHILE FALSA DETHRONED THE KING!

...Wait. What?

Campaigns involving significant intrigue can contain enough elements that slipping here and there while trying to track them can lead to minor slips or moments where there's a need to reference notes - and it's possible to forget to create some element that might be critical. This is a means of creating the most crucial elements of such a situation and keeping them on a single page where they can be easily referenced. While a serious intrigue will likely have *even more* going on than you'll create and record here, this is a framework everything else can spin out of.

YOU'LL NEED THE PDF

The PDF for this article contains the article text (including this paragraph, for no real reason), but has a fillable, saveable form as it's first page. The small example snippets of "filled" form shown here are reductions of the form, which is built to handle up to five 'powers'.

THE POWERS AND THEIR TAGS

Firstly, make up 'the powers' in the situation. These are the real leaders plotting and planning against one another, though they may act under cover of agencies they control or influence. They may be anything appropriate to the setting - the political leads of an ancient city-state fighting for power, alien elder beings waging an endless war through strange followers in modern Detroit, the heads of vampire families feuding in the dark ages, you name it. There's room for five; in an extended game, you'll want to use all the slots. Once you have those, brainstorm stuff about each one, and note down fast notes as 'tags'. Tags can include attitude, resources, followers, weaknesses, just about anything - and remember, your notes don't need to make sense to anyone else; these are fast reminders for you about what the power has and is.

NAME	High Priestess Sarit	General Axan
TAGS	Sorceress, Eunuch Guards, Temple, Daily Rituals, Jackal god of the city, Mad prophet anchorites.	Warrior, Debauched, Pious, Gypitian Blood, Jackal Shapeshifter, Fanatic troops.

HISTORY & LEVERAGE

The history of events, as given, has room for eight different events. These events should never be a dry recitation of the timeline. Instead, these spaces are for making notes on how the powers have already done bad things or stupid things, making it possible for others to have a hold on them. A good 'history' event is one that hurt another power in some way (though they might not yet know it), and which, if it came out or was used, would cause some kind of a reaction. So, dirty secrets, hostages held against good behavior, bribery, illicit liaisons and duels, blasphemies, crimes, errant and embarrassing children. There should be at least one way to get leverage on each and every one of the powers listed, and possibly more than one, if they have every plotted together in the past.

In addition, at least one (and two if possible) of these events should somehow involve the player characters, even if it's only in a sidelong or completely fabricated way. You're in the town guard? Well, one of the powers thinks you might be useful, and has decided to pin the Lourdan Square massacre on you, unless you cooperate. One of the hostages taken in an earlier event happens to be a relative of yours. And, for parties of unconnected characters with no real outside resources to threaten or strong friends... Such characters make perfect scapegoats; after all, nobody knows anything about them at all, and society can generally be convinced to pin just about anything on an outsider (at least, in the kind of settings that foster situation like the one being built). Getting arrested for a crime you didn't even know about, and being made an ugly offer in the cells? That's good times.

If it's possible, set things up so that different and opposed powers are attempting to 'leash' different characters, in addition to having a power that the characters will naturally sympathize with (which may or may not be one of those attempting to control a player character).

Before you gleefully set this up, however, make very sure in advance that your players will be cool with this kind of game *as players* (never mind their characters).

HISTORY AND AVAILABLE LEVERAGE

The Bandit Lord and Sarit are lovers; he's hooked her on opium.

Sarit helps outlander temples smuggle in illicit troops. Joe's warrior *is* one.

Falsa smuggles for Sarit *and* Axan *and* the Bandit Lord, under varied names.

Uzior has promised the King her full support if the roads can be made safe.

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INTENT AND LEVERAGE

Next, write the names of your powers down the side of the big grid of spaces at the bottom, and then again across the top. The grid squares can then be filled in; each of the squares has two lines. The first line is for intentions, and the second line for leverage. So, if the pirate Roberts wants a pardon from the governor, and has the governor’s daughter held hostage, you’d look in the row for Roberts, find where it meets the column for the governor; the top line would be “Get a Pardon”, and the bottom would be “hostage daughter”.

Where a character’s own row and column meet, that’s where you put in their intentions for their own person. Which is to say, their *ambition*. You may well want to fill these lines of the grid first. The line on leverage can be left blank; a character doesn’t need leverage over their own person (optionally, you can use that lower line to mark in the “general” leverage they have outside of the intrigues of the powers, which they’re using on the general populace).

Some intention and leverage boxes should be left blank, since not everyone will have designs or leverage on everyone else. The gaps are important, since they show the imbalances that make for action, and because there may be bits of history or of later action that could be plugged in there, changing the landscape.

THE “PCs” COLUMN

Each power might have some kind of an existing grasp on one or more of the characters. These are given in the PCs column, in short form, as shown in the block below. Again, remember; this is a reference, and your notes don’t need to make sense to anyone but yourself.

MAKING IT MARCH

All this preparation doesn’t really start to shine until it hits the table. So, once you have this reference filled up, your next likely step will be to decide on an attempted action or two that will be happening next. Pick a power that has (or wants) leverage over the characters, decide which of it’s intentions it wants to go after, and then figure out a quick way to get the characters hooked into that. That’s a ‘foreground’ event; while it’s running, to keep the impression of there being a whole lot going on in the setting, you’ll likely also want a different power to be attempting something that either doesn’t involve the characters, or only in a minimal way.

As characters work on understanding and resolving whatever they’ve just gotten hooked into, hint at the bits of history through spokespeople and mouthpieces; while they may not catch it at first, work to make it clear that these are opportunities for them to get some leverage of their own, as more intentions become active around them, and more and more of the powers attempt to either drag them into various plots or get rid of them in different ways.

HOW MUCH CHICANERY?

It’s very possible, in a truly ‘long game’ setup, for all of the actions of the powers to be cloaked behind resources, underlings, and the like. In such a campaign, it might not be until events are really heating up and secrets are starting to come out that the players will even piece together just who the powers are. In shorter, simpler campaigns, it might be common knowledge on the street that if the Black Guard did it, Kervil the Bleak was behind it. Or somewhere in between; this depends very much on how much of a ‘fog’ you want everyone operating in, and how long you want this kind of thing to help fuel your campaign.

INTENT TOWARDS / LEVERAGE OVER (INTENT TOWARD SELF IS AMBITION)				
NAME	High Priestess Sarit	General Axan	Falsa The Smuggler	PCs
High Priestess Sarit	To Be Queen	Spy On, Find Lever	Just Business	Use Joe as Assassin
	-	-	(He’s a criminal)	(Illegally in city)
General Axan	Find a way to kill.	Serve the King	Just Business	Get Leverage
	-	-	(He’s a criminal)	-
Falsa The Smuggler	Sell her out to Axan	Feed his habits	Become a Lord	Hire Kim against Sarit
	(Services given)	(Services given)	-	(Her record as a spy)

NOTE: This block is just an example. A full sheet has more space...

