weirdwood

Special thanks to the city of Helsinki for opening my eyes to the Weirdwood.

weirdwood

a roleplaying game of
dreams, nightmares, and the
darkness in between

by benjamin sperduto

step into the dark...

WEIRdWOOd is a different kind of roleplaying game.

The following pages contain everything you need to play, but it's up to you to provide much of the details. WEIRdWOOd provides only the basic outlines of a setting. By asking questions and brainstorming together, you and the other players will give the world its color and texture. Your WEIRdWOOd will be unique to your group, generated by the collaborative creative efforts of all players.
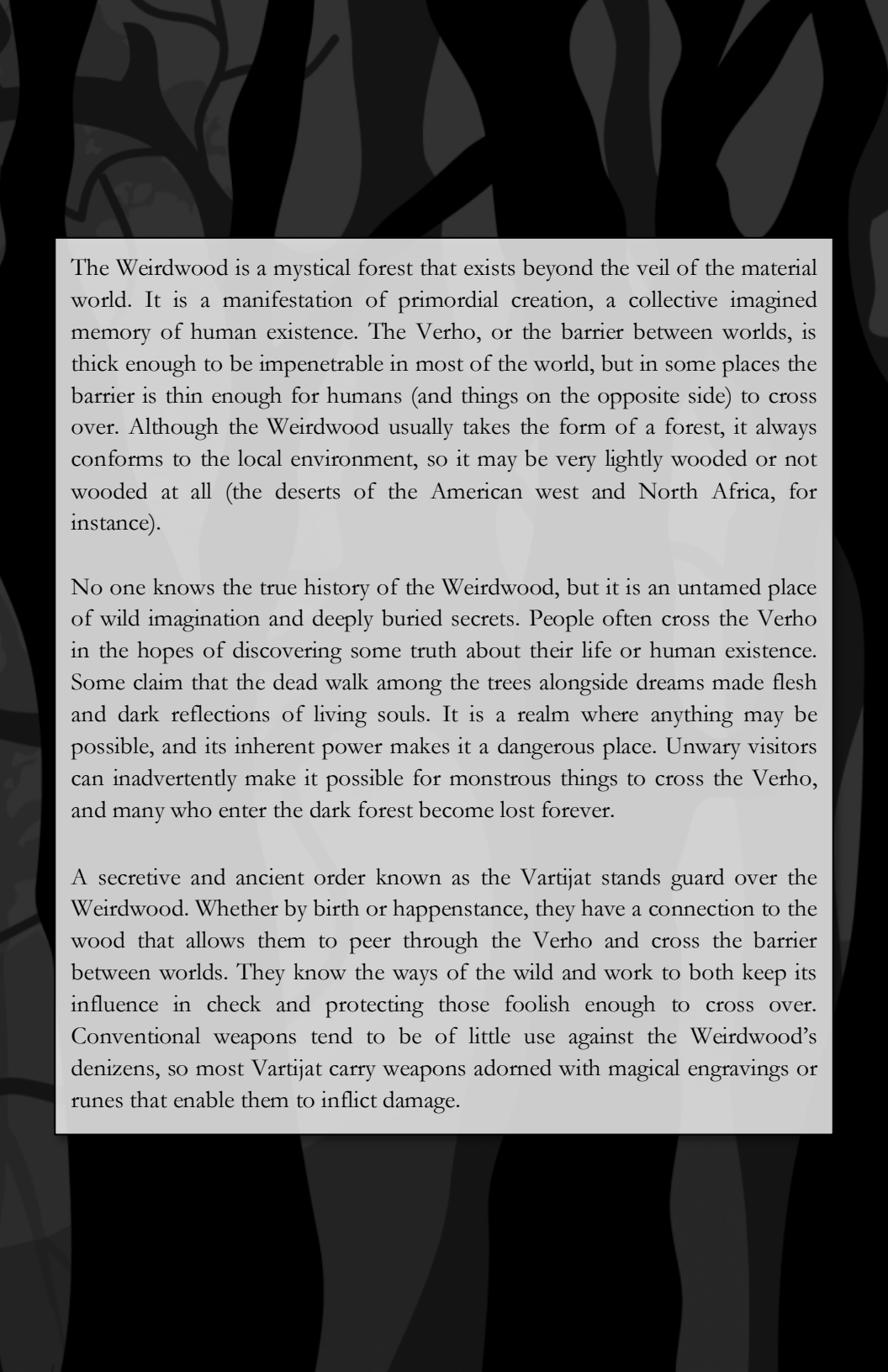
This game leaves gamemasters (GMs) and players alike a lot of open space to define. It provides a resolution mechanic and a few narrative tools, but it does not give the same level of structure you may be familiar with from other games. This is by design. It's your game, so take ownership of it. Do what makes sense. Once you set down the parameters of your game, be consistent. If there are disagreements over how to resolve a situation, take a quick vote or roll a die to resolve it and move on. WEIRdWOOd is a narrative game. Players should spend their time thinking about how their characters interact with the world they've helped to create rather than how to get the most bonuses in a combat encounter.

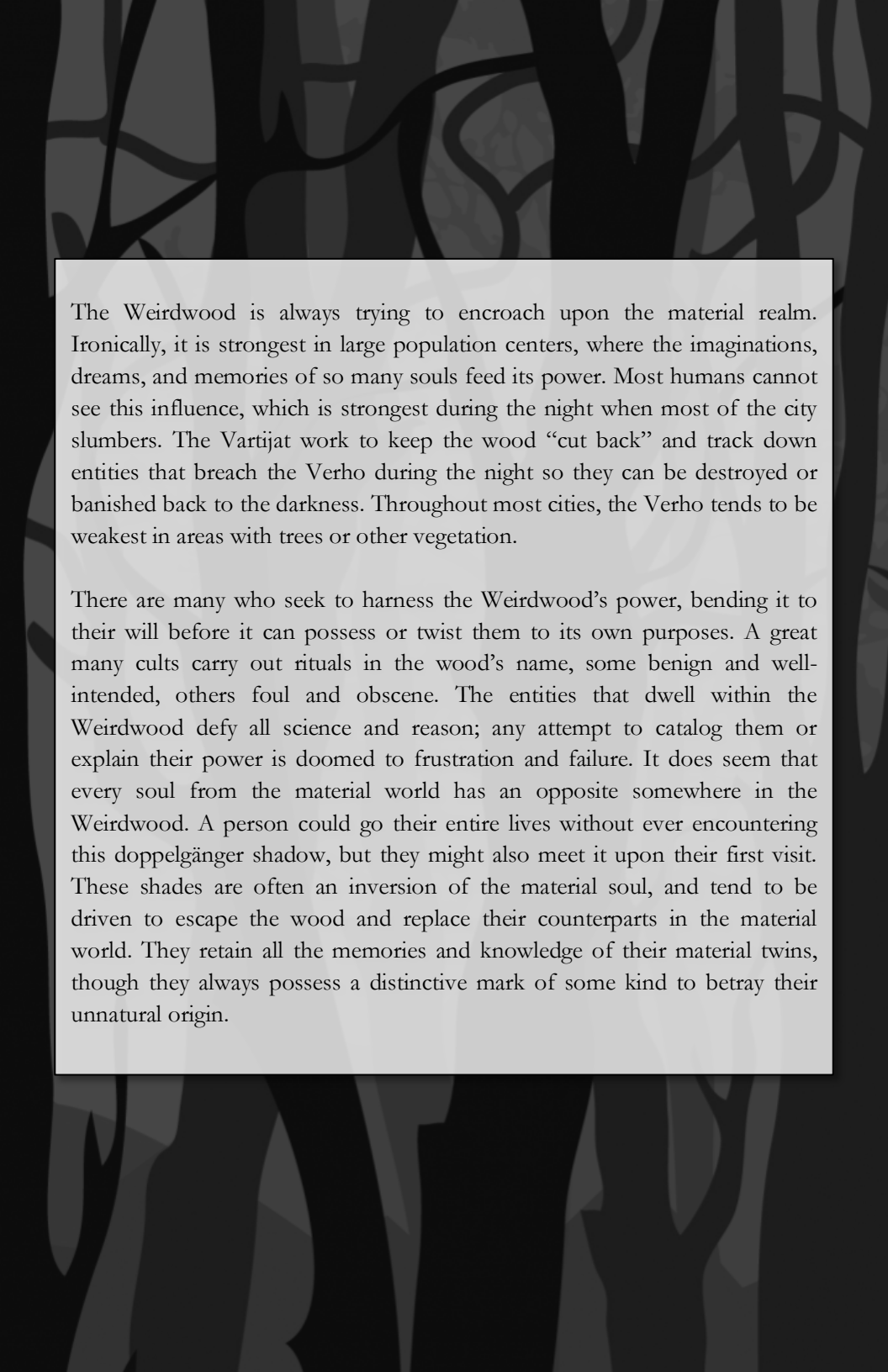There is only one right way to play WEIRdWOOd:

Your way.

the weirdwood

The Weirdwood is a mystical forest that exists beyond the veil of the material world. It is a manifestation of primordial creation, a collective imagined memory of human existence. The Verho, or the barrier between worlds, is thick enough to be impenetrable in most of the world, but in some places the barrier is thin enough for humans (and things on the opposite side) to cross over. Although the Weirdwood usually takes the form of a forest, it always conforms to the local environment, so it may be very lightly wooded or not wooded at all (the deserts of the American west and North Africa, for instance).
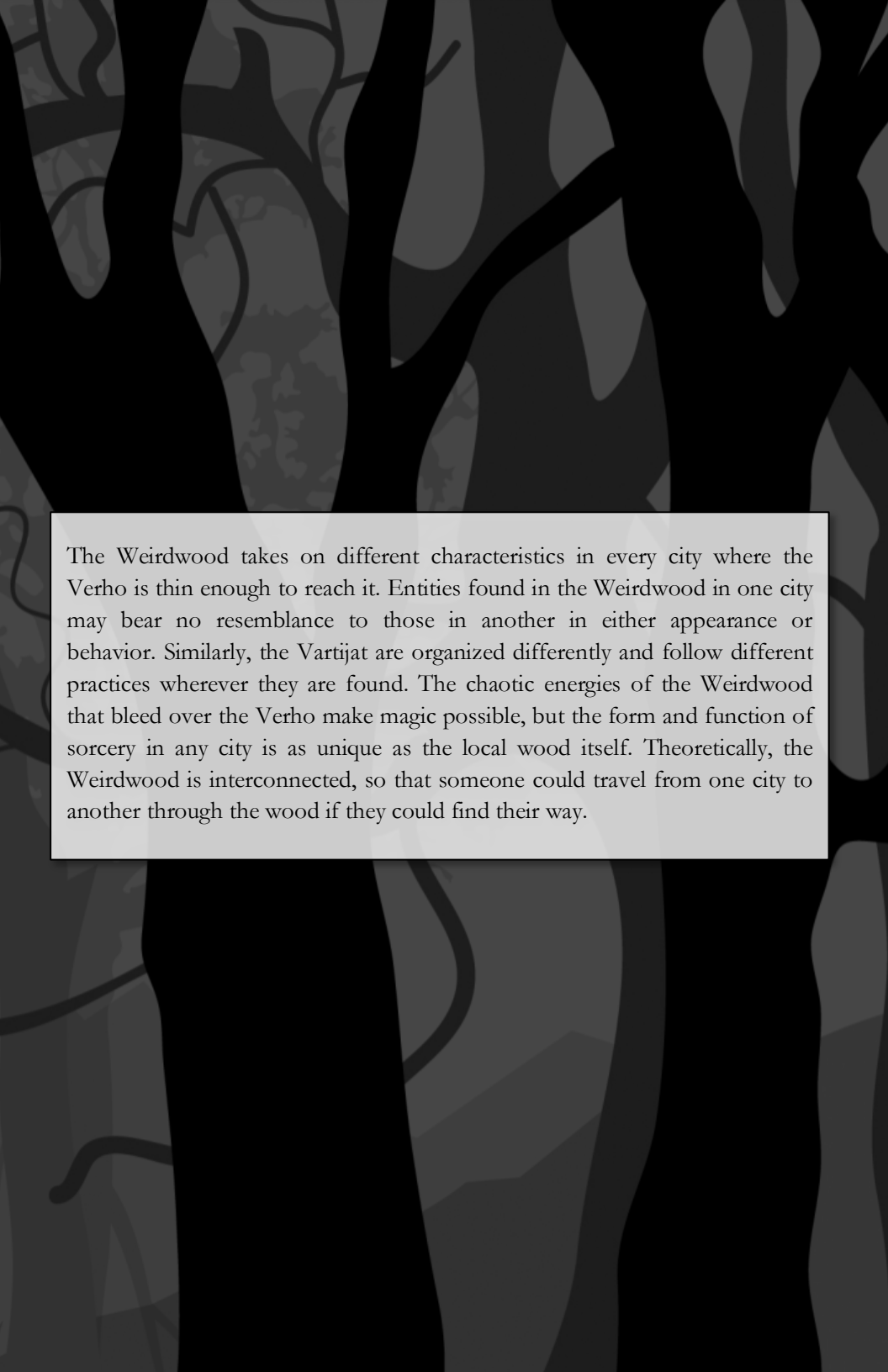
No one knows the true history of the Weirdwood, but it is an untamed place of wild imagination and deeply buried secrets. People often cross the Verho in the hopes of discovering some truth about their life or human existence. Some claim that the dead walk among the trees alongside dreams made flesh and dark reflections of living souls. It is a realm where anything may be possible, and its inherent power makes it a dangerous place. Unwary visitors can inadvertently make it possible for monstrous things to cross the Verho, and many who enter the dark forest become lost forever.

A secretive and ancient order known as the Vartijat stands guard over the Weirdwood. Whether by birth or happenstance, they have a connection to the wood that allows them to peer through the Verho and cross the barrier between worlds. They know the ways of the wild and work to both keep its influence in check and protecting those foolish enough to cross over. Conventional weapons tend to be of little use against the Weirdwood's denizens, so most Vartijat carry weapons adorned with magical engravings or runes that enable them to inflict damage.

The Weirdwood is always trying to encroach upon the material realm. Ironically, it is strongest in large population centers, where the imaginations, dreams, and memories of so many souls feed its power. Most humans cannot see this influence, which is strongest during the night when most of the city slumbers. The Vartijat work to keep the wood "cut back" and track down entities that breach the Verho during the night so they can be destroyed or banished back to the darkness. Throughout most cities, the Verho tends to be weakest in areas with trees or other vegetation.

There are many who seek to harness the Weirdwood's power, bending it to their will before it can possess or twist them to its own purposes. A great many cults carry out rituals in the wood's name, some benign and well-intended, others foul and obscene. The entities that dwell within the Weirdwood defy all science and reason; any attempt to catalog them or explain their power is doomed to frustration and failure. It does seem that every soul from the material world has an opposite somewhere in the Weirdwood. A person could go their entire lives without ever encountering this doppelgänger shadow, but they might also meet it upon their first visit. These shades are often an inversion of the material soul, and tend to be driven to escape the wood and replace their counterparts in the material world. They retain all the memories and knowledge of their material twins, though they always possess a distinctive mark of some kind to betray their unnatural origin.

The Weirdwood takes on different characteristics in every city where the Verho is thin enough to reach it. Entities found in the Weirdwood in one city may bear no resemblance to those in another in either appearance or behavior. Similarly, the Vartijat are organized differently and follow different practices wherever they are found. The chaotic energies of the Weirdwood that bleed over the Verho make magic possible, but the form and function of sorcery in any city is as unique as the local wood itself. Theoretically, the Weirdwood is interconnected, so that someone could travel from one city to another through the wood if they could find their way.

building the weirdwood

WORLd Creation

First, identify the city where the campaign will take place.

Next, the GM asks the group ten questions about the world. The GM may ask follow up questions for clarification or suggest alternatives, but may not overrule a majority of the players.

1. What does the Weirdwood look like in your city?
2. How do people pierce the Verho and enter the Weirdwood?
3. How is the Vartijat organized in this city?
4. What other factions are present?
5. Who knows about the Weirdwood's existence?
6. How does Weirdwood magic work in this city?
7. Can ordinary people interact with the Weirdwood?
8. Do the dead walk the Weirdwood in this city?
9. What threats does the Weirdwood pose to the city?
10. How do the dreams of the city's residents affect the Weirdwood?

Weirdwood Locations

For each player in the game, roll 1d20 on each chart to generate unique locations within the Weirdwood. The GM can also roll on this table to rapidly generation new locations as needed during play.

1d20	1d20
1: Black	1: Glade
2: Blood	2: Gulch
3: Stone	3: Garden
4: Silver	4: Vale
5: Shadow	5: Field
6: Ghoul	6: Tree
7: Twilight	7: Thicket
8: Grim	8: Vine
9: Dry	9: Swamp
10: Dead	10: Bog
11: Storm	11: Marsh
12: Shifting	12: Grave
13: Twisted	13: Sands
14: Iron	14: Rock
15: Bleak	15: Lake
16: Writhing	16: Stream
17: Blasted	17: Gloom
18: Dreaming	18: Heath
19: Broken	19: Mists
20: Riven	20: Glade

Next, ask the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of this location?
- What rumors have the characters heard about this location?

Weirdwood Inhabitants

For each player in the game, select two or more names from following list to generate noteworthy NPCs. The GM may select names as needed during play.

Jorily	Fenna	Ulgar
Harm	Thryn	Dace
Lenn	Brask	Maush
Weldum	Gale	Beign
Qarthen	Maral	Ryell
Zorel	Tanner	Denek
Olgash	Izara	Elishai
Paravio	Graven	Yegaul
Sezav	Dorn	Carvur
Bekar	Renish	Nurga

Next, ask the following questions:

- What is (character name)'s relationship to the Weirdwood?
- Is the character an ally of the Vartijat or an enemy?

Creatures of the Weirdwood

Select and answer five of the following questions to generate the creatures known to stalk this region of the Weirdwood.

1. What are Shades?
2. What are Hounds?
3. What are Raveners?
4. What are Blightlings?
5. What are Wisps?
6. What are Shriekers?
7. What are Grims?
8. What are Slinkers?
9. What are Trauls?
10. What are Glooms?

Entering the Weirdwood

No matter the local circumstances, interacting with the Weirdwood should always be a unique and frightening experience. It is a place shaped by imagination and nightmare, impossibly dark and horrible in places, but also with the potential to be serene and beautiful.

Every expedition into the Weirdwood should be memorable and potentially dangerous. If the players seem to be taking it for granted, the GM can give the players a prompt to write down something that has changed about the wood or describe an unusual event that is taking place either inside it or involving it.

Humans are not meant to visit the Weirdwood, so the GM may way to use a timer or countdown clock to gradually increase the threat players face while traversing the wood. Don't be afraid to make the Weirdwood a deadly place that keeps travellers on their toes.

CHARACTER CREATION

First, the player chooses a name for their character.

The GM then asks the player ten questions about their character. The GM may ask follow up questions for clarification or suggest alternatives, but may not overrule the player's wishes (although a majority of players can). Other players may offer suggestions or vote down answers that don't feel appropriate for the game.

1. What is something you do well?
2. What is your most distinctive personality trait?
3. What is your most identifiable feature?
4. How did you learn of the Weirdwood and come to join the Vartijat?
5. What power have you gained from your contact with the Weirdwood?
6. Who are the two people you are close to?
7. Who is the one person who wishes you harm?
8. What is your greatest accomplishment?
9. What is something you don't want anyone else to know?
10. What is your goal in life?
11. What are two flaws that you struggle with?

How these features, characteristics, backgrounds, and abilities play out in the game should be determined through a conversation with the GM and other players. There are no hard and fast rules. Do what makes sense in the moment and run with it.

PLAYING WEIRDWOOD

WEIRDWOOD uses a dice pool mechanic that requires players to build a collection of dice when making a test. Players can use any kind of dice they prefer. There are three types of dice pools:

- PLAYER POOL: Each player has their own dice pool. They begin play with 10 dice.
- TABLE POOL: These dice are available to all players and the GM. The supply is unlimited.
- ACTION POOL: This pool is created when players take an action or the GM calls for a test.

Players lose dice from their Player Pool when they succeed on a test. They can regain dice in one of three ways:

- When they add dice to the DM's Action Pool during another player's action (1D regained per die added).
- When they act out on a flaw, help an NPC ally in some meaningful way, confront their Shadow, protect a secret, do something to further a personal goal, or refresh the Player Pool completely (up to 10D regained).
- When they spend a Fate Point to refresh their pool (up to 10D regained).

WHEN A PLAYER TAKES AN ACTION:

I

The acting player declares their action and defines what success will look like.

II

The player to their left defines the consequences of failure (other players may overrule consequences if they are deemed irrelevant, too minor, or too serious).

III

The acting player creates their Action Pool by adding 1D from the Table Pool.

- Add 1D from their Player Pool for every trait, ability, power, or equipment the character possesses that could be relevant to the test.
- Add 1D from the Table Pool for every existing circumstance that could provide the character with an advantage.

IV

The GM creates their Action Pool by starting with 1D from the Table Pool.

- Add 1D from the Table Pool for every player Condition or Flaw that may apply to the test.
- For a Conflict, add 1D from the Table Pool for every Adversary rank (Minor 1D, Major 2D, Named 3D).
- The player to the acting player's left may add 1D from the Table Pool for every existing circumstance that could work against the character.

V

The acting player and the GM roll their Action Pools and compare results.

- Every even number counts as a success.
- If the player has as many or more successes than the GM, their action succeeds and they describe the outcome.
- For every extra success, the player may add one additional detail to their success.
- If the GM has more successes than the GM, the action fails and the player to the acting player's left describes the outcome.
  - For every extra success, the GM may add one additional detail to the failure.

VI

Return dice to dice pools.

- If the player succeeded, all of the dice from their Action Pool are placed in the Table Pool.
- If the player failed, all of the dice spent from their Player Pool are returned to their Player Pool.
- If the player to the acting player's left added any dice to the GM's Action Pool, those dice are placed in their Player Pool (regardless of whether the test succeeded or failed).

CONFLICT

Conflict is a special form of test involving an Adversary that functions slightly differently.

If a character attempts to cause harm and succeeds, the acting player may add a Condition to the Adversary. For every extra success, they may add another Condition.

If a character attempts to cause or avoid harm and fails, the GM applies one of the Adversary's Abilities to the character. A Standard Ability costs 1 success. A Special Ability costs 3 successes. Adversary Actions typically cause Conditions, but some are more severe than others. A player may spend a Fate or Weirding Token to avoid taking a Condition, but they must narrate how they do so.

A typical character has 5 Condition slots. If they suffer a Condition and have no Condition slots remaining, they are Defeated. The GM defines what Defeat looks like unless the player spends a Fate Token. Another player can also spend a Shadow Token to define an outcome involving the character's Shadow.

Conditions can be eliminated by seeking treatment within game or by using a Fate Token. When using a Fate Token, they must narrate how the Condition was eliminated.

tokens

Players begin play with 3 Fate Tokens and 1 Shadow Token.

fate token: Players can spend a Fate Token to take the following actions:
- Reroll any number of dice on any test (from either Action Pool).
- Refresh their Player Pool back to 10 dice.
- Avoid or Remove a Condition.
- Narrate the outcome of Defeat.

After using a Fate Token, the player must hand it over to the GM, who may use it in the following ways:
- Add dice to their Action Pool until it equals the player's Action Pool.
- Activate an Adversary's Special Ability, regardless of successes achieved.
- Narrate the consequences of failure when a player fails a test.

When the GM uses a Fate Token, they then hand it over to the player it was used against. Only a single Fate Token can be played at one time. If the player and the GM both have a Fate Token to use in a situation, whoever declares that they're using it first gets to apply the effects.

Shadow Token: When in contact with the Weirdwood, players can spend a Shadow Token to bring another character's Shadow into play. After spending the token, they gain a Weirding Token (best to use a coin and simply flip it over).

- A Shadow is the antithesis of a character. It typically embodies their worst impulses and features. Shadows are constantly seeking to escape the Weirdwood and take the character's place. While they are clever enough to fool some observers, they can rarely conceal their dark nature for long.
- When a Shadow is brought into play, it may be controlled by the player who played the Shadow Token or by the GM.

Weirding Token: When in contact with the Weirdwood, players can spend a Weirding Token to invoke the power of the wood and affect some aspect of the current narrative or conflict.

A single player may not use a Shadow Token and a Weirding Token in the same scene.

Rules Advice

WEIRDWOOD does not provide specific rules for positioning, initiative, or tactics during combat or other confrontations. Throughout the course of a game, the GM will have to make several "judgment call" rulings to resolve situations. This is normal. The basic mechanics of task resolution can accommodate almost any situation. Players and GMs are encouraged to think creatively when finding ways to add dice to their pools. The GM is not necessarily the final arbiter of what's appropriate. If the majority of the table thinks it makes sense to add a die, just add it and let chance take the wheel.

Most situations can be resolved without the use of dice. Since players lose dice on successful tests, they can quickly be caught in a situation where they can't take actions effectively. The GM should only call for a test when the outcome of the action is in doubt.

Don't forget that the player to the left of the acting player is responsible for adding dice to the GM's pool. This is the primary method of recovering dice. While there is no limit to how many dice can be added, spoiling another player's big moment just to recover a few dice will likely result in a frustrating experience for everyone else at the table. Weirdwood is a collaborative storytelling game. Players should always be thinking about how adding complications can enhance the narrative and push the story forward rather than simply scheming to accumulate as many dice as possible.

OPPOSITION AND GOALS

Adversaries

Any person or creature that comes into conflict with the characters is called an Adversary. When a GM makes an Adversary, they are classified as Minor, Major, and Named.

A Minor Adversary has 1 Standard Ability and 1 Condition slot.

A Major Adversary has 2 Standard Abilities, 1 Special Ability, and 3 Condition slots.

A Named Adversary is a noteworthy character in their own right and may have any number of Abilities and Condition slots. They may have characteristics that are not explicitly covered by these rules.

Depending upon the nature of the setting created by the group, it's entirely possible for a Named Adversary to be *far* more powerful than the players. A GM should use discretion when creating Named Adversaries to ensure they are memorable and formidable without overwhelming the players in ways that don't conform to the setting they've created.

Initial Story Goals

Although GMs are encouraged to come up with their own adventure starting points, you may also want to select one of the following adventure prompts.

- Someone must venture into the Weirdwood to locate a thing or place.
- The Vartijat must protect refugees from within the Weirdwood.
- A group of children have gone missing in the Weirdwood.
- The Weirdwood is expanding, pushing through the Verho to affect the material world.
- A blight is poisoning the Weirdwood and causing nightmares throughout the city.
- A cult has pulled some terrible entity through the Verho.
- A prominent public figure has been replaced by their Weirdwood shadow.
- Someone who ventured into the Weirdwood has returned twisted and corrupted.
- A sorcerer is channeling power from the Weirdwood.
- A group of smugglers is selling dangerous items retrieved from the Weirdwood.

Character Advancement

At the conclusion of each story arc (typically consisting of a few sections), the players and the GM should take a few minutes to discuss each character's role and actions throughout the course of the game. Based on those conversations, players may suggest one way their characters has learned, grown, or been changed by the experience. This could include things like learning a new skill, discovering a new way to use their powers, or gaining a new ally or piece of equipment. If the majority of the group agrees that the advancement is appropriate, the player adds it to their character sheet.

Weirdwood Character Sheet

Name:

Conditions

- one
- two
- three
- four
- five

Description

Traits / Flaws

Accomplishments / Secrets

Talents / Skills

Powers

Allies

Enemies

Equipment

Goals

Notes

Weirdwood Setting Sheet

Location:

Wood Characteristics

How to Enter the Wood

How Magic Works

The Värlival

Active Factions

Notable Locations

Local Creatures

Threats and Dangers

Local People

Other Notes

weirdwood adversaries

Name:	Minor adversary
Conditions one	**Standard ability** one

Name:	Minor adversary
Conditions one	**Standard ability** one

Name:	Minor adversary
Conditions one	**Standard ability** one

Name:	Minor adversary
Conditions one	**Standard ability** one

Name:	Minor adversary
Conditions one	**Standard ability** one

Name:	Major Adversary

Conditions	Standard Abilities
one	one
two	two
three	

	Special Ability
	one

Name:	Major Adversary

Conditions	Standard Abilities
one	one
two	two
three	

	Special Ability
	one

Name:	Major Adversary

Conditions	Standard Abilities
one	one
two	two
three	

	Special Ability
	one

name:

named adversary

conditions

one	
two	
three	
four	
five	

standard abilities

one	
two	
three	
four	
five	

other qualities

special abilities

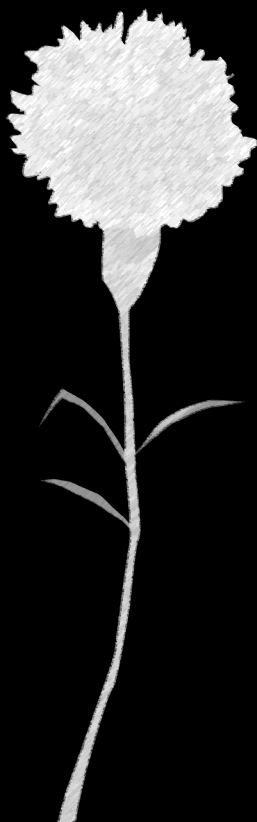|	
one	
two	
three	
four	
five	

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow

Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,

You cannot say, or guess, for you know only

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats

And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,

And the dry stone no sound of water. Only

There is shadow under this red rock,

(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),

And I will show you something different from either

Your shadow at morning striding behind you

Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;

I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

-T.S. Eliot
"The Waste Land"