

THE ELDER

Rite of initiation

You are the eldest child of the long hill, the guardian of its most intimate memories. You have seen many leaders come and go, but none as arrogant as the last Chief. In spite of the looming danger, you are almost grateful to the people of the vale, the enemies who felled him in battle.

Even when he still lived, you had always tried to use your high standing within the community to oppose the Chief. You believed the Offering would be worthy of succeeding him, and a far better man to follow: You had seen him grow, protected him, imparted your wisdom onto him. With his sacrifice on midsummer's eve, one demanded by the Seer to the gathered village, all your work was undone.

Now that the Chief is dead as well, the people of the long hill are left without a guide in the time of greatest need. With the favour of the gods, you intend to use the Seer's request to summon the Circle to find the new leader you desperately need. The Youth is strong, the Herder beloved, the Tiller cunning. The Seer and the Crafter are elders like you, and both could draw you in a battle of wills. The Virgin, the Chief's only daughter, could be the key to this succession... But she herself has been claimed by a god. What should be done about that?

Rite of passage

■ The Youth has lived in the shadow of the Chief, and always saw the Offering as a rival. Yet he has always listened to you. On midsummer's eve, you were chosen to meet with the enemy and set the terms for a honourable battle on the next day. But you were embittered by the sealed fate of the Offering, and took your resentment out on the Youth. It was short-sighted of you: Now many of the surviving warriors see the Youth as a guide and you fear you have lost your influence over him.

■ You and the Seer have lived your lives on parallel paths, their gaze always turned to the gods, yours fixed on men. But on midsummer's eve, your eyes met. After learning of the Offering's fate you sought out the Seer, certain that the Chief had forced them to make a sacrifice out of his rival. You found the Seer kneeling behind a hut, their eyes white even in the dark of night. Their lips started moving, foretelling the defeat that would come on the next day. So you found yourself coping with those grim tidings, together.

Rite of propitiation

In the eyes of the gods, people must prove themselves far-sighted and cunning. To immolate the best among you was foolish, and it must not happen again. Each life has different worth: The gods will look favourably upon the sacrifice of one who can do nothing else to win this war.

