then I should say: this man has a touch of the kingly nature in him. And this, in my judgment, is the greatest thing in every operation that makes any demand on the labor of men.

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XENOPHON

From *Hellenica*, ca. 400–350 BCE

Xenophon (ca. 430 BCE–354 BCE) also wrote a history of Athens, *Hellenica*, that picks up where Thucydides’ history left off. The following excerpts present the events leading up to the moment our game begins, in particular the reign of terror set in place by the Thirty Tyrants and the fighting of the democratic exiles to regain Athens. The excerpts begin with the conflict between two of the Thirty—Critias (a relative of Plato) and Theramenes—which ends with Theramenes’ execution.

Solonian Aristocrats in the game may find Theramenes an appealing figure: a man who opposed both democracy and the excesses of the Thirty. Democrats may find inspiration in the leadership of Thrasybulus. All should note that the fighting described here is a civil war, one that pitted fellow citizens, relatives, and friends against one another.


The Thirty had been chosen almost immediately after the long walls and the fortifications round Piraeus had been razed [following Athens’s defeat by Sparta in 404 BCE during the Peloponnesian War]. They were chosen to compile a code of laws for the future constitution of the State. These laws were never published, and the Thirty appointed a Council and other magistrates as suited them. They then turned their attention to those who were known to have made their living as informers under the democracy, particularly those who had attacked aristocrats. These they seized and condemned to death.

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But the Thirty did not stop there. Soon they began to consider how they might gain absolute control. They sent Aeschines and Aristoteles to Sparta, and persuaded...
Lysander1 to support them in having a Spartan garrison sent to Athens—just until they had the “malignants” out of the way, and had established the constitution; and they would maintain these troops at their own cost. Lysander agreed, and a bodyguard, with Callibius as governor, was sent.

Once they had got the garrison, they began to flatter Callibius in order that he might support their doings. Thus he allowed some of the Spartan garrison to accompany the Thirty while they proceeded to seize whomever they wanted. They no longer confined themselves to criminals and those of no importance, but seized those they thought would oppose them or could command the largest number of supporters.

At first, Critias was of one mind with Theramenes, and the two were friends. But when Critias began to rush headlong into wholesale carnage, like one who thirsted for the blood of the democracy which had banished him, Theramenes opposed him. It was barely reasonable, he argued, to put to death people who had done nothing wrong, simply because they had enjoyed influence and honor under the democracy.

* * *

Critias would retort (for they were still friends), “We have no choice, since we intend to take power, but to get rid of those who are best able to stop us. If you think because we are Thirty instead of one our government requires any less careful guarding than an actual tyranny, you must be very innocent.”

So things went on. Day after day the number of persons put to death grew longer. Day after day resentment grew till Theramenes spoke again, protesting that they must bring more persons into the conduct of affairs or the oligarchy would certainly come to an end.

Critias and the rest of the Thirty, alarmed that Theramenes might become a dangerous popular leader, drew up a list of three thousand citizens, fit and proper persons to have a share in the government. But Theramenes objected, seeing it as ridiculous that in their effort to bring the best men into the government, they should fix on just that particular number—three thousand—as if that figure had some necessary connection with the exact number of good men in the State.

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So he spoke, but his colleagues instituted a military inspection. The Three Thousand were drawn up in the Agora, and the rest of the citizens—those not included in the list—elsewhere in the city. The order to take arms was given; but while the men’s backs were turned, the Thirty sent the Spartan guards to take

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1. Lysander was the Spartan general commanding the soldiers who eventually occupied Athens.
away the arms of all except the Three Thousand, carry the arms to the Acropolis, and deposit them in the temple.

Once this was done, they felt they could do what they pleased, and began to kill people in great numbers, whether because they were disliked or because they were rich. Soon the question rose: How were they to get money to pay the garrison? To meet this difficulty they decided that each should seize one of the menics, put him to death, and confiscate his property. Theramenes was told to seize one of them, to which he replied that it was hardly honorable for “the best men” to behave more badly than the informers. “At least the victims of the informers were allowed to live; our innocents must die that we may get their wealth. Their method was innocent compared with ours.”

The Thirty now regarded Theramenes as an obstacle to any course they might wish to adopt and proceeded to plot against him. They spoke to members of the Council in private and denounced him as an opponent of the government. Then they issued an order to the young men, picking out the most unscrupulous characters they could find, to be present, each with a dagger hidden under his arm, and called a meeting of the Council. When Theramenes had taken his place, Critias rose and addressed the meeting:

“If,” said he, “any member of this council imagines that too much blood has been shed, let me remind him that in periods of revolution such things cannot be avoided. It is inevitable that we should find many sworn foes toward oligarchy in Athens, for two reasons. First, because the population of this city is the largest in Greece; and also, because the people have grown fat on liberty for such a long time.

“We are clear on two points. The first is that democracy is an oppressive form of government for persons like ourselves and like you; the next is that Athenian democracy could never be friends with our saviors, the Spartans. But the Spartans can count on the loyalty of the better classes. And so we are establishing an oligarchical constitution with their approval. That is why we do our best to rid us of anyone opposed to the oligarchy; and, in our opinion, if one of ourselves should undermine this government of ours, he would deserve punishment.

“And the case,” he continued, “is no imaginary one. The offender is here present—Theramenes. He is intent on destroying you and us by every means in his power. These are not baseless charges, but are amply shown by his criticism of our present state, and by his persistent opposition to us, his colleagues. . . . This is the very man who originated our friendly and confidential relations with Sparta. This is the very man who authorized the abolition of the democracy, who urged us on to inflict punishment on the earliest batch of prisoners brought before us. But today all is changed; now you and we are unpopular with the people, and he accordingly has ceased to support our proceedings. The explanation is obvious. In case of a catastrophe, how much pleasanter for him to run free, and leave us to render account for our past performances.
"This man is not just an ordinary enemy, but a traitor to you and to us. And treason is far more dangerous than open war, since it is harder to guard against a our confidence forever. But to show you that these are no new tactics of his, to prove to you that he is a traitor in essence, I will recall some points in his past history.

"He began by being held in high honor by the democracy; but taking a leaf out of his father’s book, he next showed a most headlong anxiety to transform the democracy into the Four Hundred [in 411], and, in fact, for a time held the first place in that body. But soon, detecting the formation of rival power to the oligarchs, round he shifted; and we find him next a ringleader of the popular party in attacking them.

* * *

"The case is clear. We therefore cite this man before you as a conspirator and traitor against yourselves and us. Consider one further point. No one, I think, will dispute the perfection of the Spartan constitution. Imagine one of the ephors there in Sparta, instead of devoted obedience to the majority, finding fault with the government and opposing all measures. Do you not think that the ephors themselves, and the whole state besides, would hold him worthy of punishment? So, too, by the same token, if you are wise, show no mercy to Theramenes. His preservation would cause the courage of your opponents to rise; his destruction will cut off the last hopes of all your enemies, both within and without the city."

With these words he sat down, but Theramenes rose and said: "Sirs . . . I must say, I do agree with Critias on one point. Whoever wishes to end your government or strengthen your enemies should be severely punished; but who is actually doing this? You will best discover that, I think, by looking more closely into the past and the present conduct of each of us.

"Up to the time when you became members of the Council, when the magistrates were appointed, and certain notorious informers were brought to trial, we all held the same views. But later on, when our friends began to arrest respectable honest men, I began to differ from them. From the moment when Leon of Salaminis, a man of well-deserved reputation, was put to death, though he had committed no crime, I knew that all his equals must tremble for themselves, and, so trembling, turn against the government. And when Niceratus, son of Nicias, was arrested—a wealthy man, who, no more than his father, was in any way a leader of the democrats—it did not require much insight to discover that his friends would become our enemies. When it came to Antiphon being put to death—Antiphon, who during the war contributed two triremes out of his own resources—it was

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2. Ephors were members of the ruling elite in Sparta.
then clear that all who had ever been enthusiastically patriotic must eye us with suspicion.  

"Once more I could not help speaking out in opposition to my colleagues when they suggested that each of us ought to seize some metic. For what could be more certain than that their death-warrant would turn all the metics into enemies of the government? I spoke out again when they deprived the people of their arms, since I did not think we should remove the strength of the city.

* * *

"I might prove the truth of what I say in many ways, but consider this. Which condition of affairs here in Athens will make Thrasybulus and Anytus and the other exiles happier? That which I recommend, or that which my colleagues are producing? As things now are, they [the exiles] must be saying to themselves, 'Our allies are growing quickly.' But if the best people in the city supported us, our enemies could scarcely gain any foothold.

"Then, with regard to what he said of me and my tendency to change sides... So I have tried to please both parties. But what of the man who pleases neither? What in heaven's name are we to call him? You—Critias—under the democracy were the greatest hater of the people, and now under the aristocracy you are the bitterest enemy of everything respectable. I have always been opposed to those who think a democracy cannot reach perfection until slaves and those who must get their drachma a day take part in the government. But I am no less an opponent of those who think a perfect oligarchy demands the despotism of a few. On the contrary, my own ambition has been to combine with those who are rich enough to possess a horse and shield, and to use them for the benefit of the State. That was my ideal in the old days, and I hold to it still.

Theramenes expresses support for a moderate oligarchy as opposed to democracy.

Theramenes ceased, and the applause that followed revealed the Council's support. Critias realized that if the Council voted, Theramenes would escape, and this was intolerable to him. And so, he stepped forward and spoke a word or two in the ears of the Thirty. He then went out and gave an order to the attendants with the daggers to stand close to the bar separating the Council from the public. Again he entered and addressed the Council: "A good president, when he sees his friends deluded, will intervene, and that is what I propose to do. Indeed our friends standing here by the bar say that if we acquit a man openly doing harm to the oligarchy, they will not let us do so. There is a clause in the new code forbidding any of the Three Thousand to be put to death without your vote; but the Thirty have power of life and death over all outside that list. Thus, with the approval of the Thirty, I strike this man, Theramenes, off the list. And now," he continued, "we condemn him to death."
Hearing these words Theramenes sprang to the altar, shouting: “I ask only for justice. Let it not be in the power of Critias to strike from the list anyone he wishes. But in my case—in what may be your case as well—if we are tried, let our trial be in accordance with the law. I know,” he added, “that this altar will not protect me, but I will make it plain that these men respect the gods no more than they do men. Yet I wonder, gentlemen, that you will not help yourselves, when you must see that each of your names may be erased as easily as mine.”

At this point the herald gave the order to the Eleven to seize Theramenes. They entered with their attendants—at their head Satyrus, the boldest and most shameless of the body—and Critias exclaimed, “We hand over to you Theramenes there, who has been condemned according to the law. Take him away to the proper place, and do what is necessary.” As Critias spoke, Satyrus dragged Theramenes from the altar, who called upon gods and men to witness what was happening. The Council members meanwhile kept silence, seeing the companions of Satyrus at the bar, who they knew were armed with daggers, and the whole front of the Council house was crowded with foreign guards.

And so Theramenes was dragged through the Agora, as he shouted out the wrongs he was suffering. One notable thing he said. When Satyrus told him, “Be silent, or you will regret the day,” he answered, “And if I be silent, shall I not regret it?” Also, when the time was come to drink the hemlock, they tell how he playfully threw the dregs from the bottom of the cup, like one who plays cottaías, with the words, “This to the lovely Critias.” These are sayings too trivial, it may be thought, to find a place in history. Yet I think it admirable that when death was near, neither his wits nor his playfulness abandoned him.

So Theramenes met his death, and the Thirty, feeling they could exercise power without fear, issued an order forbidding all whose names were not on the list [of the Three Thousand] to enter the city. Retirement in the country districts was no protection, since the prosecutor followed them there and evicted them, so that the Thirty and their friends might gain those farms and properties.

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Soon Thrasybulus, with about seventy followers, marched out from Thebes, and seized the fortress of Phyle. The weather was brilliant, and the Thirty marched out against them with the Three Thousand and the cavalry. When they reached the place, some overconfident young men attacked the fortress, but without effect.

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3. The Eleven were a group of men who carried out punishments under the Thirty.
4. Executions were carried out by forcing the condemned man to drink hemlock, a poison. Cottaías was a drinking game in which men would toss the dregs of wine from their cup towards a target and dedicate it to their boy love.
5. Phyle was a fortress on the northern border of Athenian territory (see map on page 24).
The Thirty now intended to blockade the place. By shutting off all avenues of supply, they thought to force the garrison to capitulate. But a heavy snowfall that night and the following day halted their plans, and they retreated to the city—but not without the loss of many of their camp-followers, who fell prey to the men in Phyle. The government in Athens realized they must now secure the farms and country houses from plundering, and so they sent out most of the Spartan garrison and two divisions of cavalry to protect the boundary estates, about two miles south of Phyle.

But by this time there were now about 700 men collected in Phyle; and Thrasybulus descended with them one night. When he was not quite half a mile from the enemy's encampment he grounded arms, and they waited in silence until the enemy were beginning to rise at dawn. At this moment Thrasybulus and his men grabbed their arms and charged the enemy. They killed some on the spot and routed the whole body, pursuing them for nearly a mile, and killing some 120 hoplites.

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After this the Thirty, who had begun to realize the insecurity of their position, were anxious to take over Eleusis, as a refuge for them should they need it. They ordered out the cavalry; and Critias and the rest of the Thirty visited Eleusis. There they held a review of the townspeople in the presence of the cavalry; and, on the pretext of wishing to learn how many they were and how large a garrison they would need, they ordered the townsfolk to enter their names. As each man did so he went out by a gate leading to the sea. But there were lines of cavalry drawn up in waiting, and as each man appeared he was seized by the accomplices of the Thirty. When all were seized, Lysimachus, the commander of the cavalry, took them off to the city to deliver them over to the Eleven.

Next day they summoned to the theater the hoplites and cavalry who were on the list. Critias rose and addressed them, saying: "Sirs, we are organizing this government in your interests as well as ours. You, too, must participate in its dangers, even as you benefit from its honors. We expect you therefore to vote for the death of these men of Eleusis, so that our hopes and fears may be identical." Then, pointing to a particular spot, he said, "You will please deposit your votes there within sight of all." Armed Spartan guards were present at the time, filling one-half of the theater. These proceedings pleased those members of the State (besides the Thirty) who thought only of their advantage.

But Thrasybulus at the head of his followers (by now 1000 strong) descended from Phyle and reached Piraeus in the night. The Thirty, when they learned this, hurried to the rescue with the Spartan garrison and their own cavalry and hoplites, advancing along the carriage road leading into Piraeus. The men from Phyle at first
tried to prevent their passage, but as the wide circuit of the walls needed a larger defense force, they retreated to Munychia.7 The troops from the city poured into the Agora of Hippodamus. Here they formed in line, stretching along and filling the street leading to the temple of Artemis. This line was at least fifty shields deep; and in this formation they at once began to march up.

The men of Phyle also blocked the street at the opposite end but they presented a thin line, not more than ten deep, though behind them were light-armed javelin men, supported by stone-throwers—a great number from the people of the port. While the enemy was advancing, Thrasybulus gave the order to ground their heavy shields, and he stood among them, saying: "Men and fellow-citizens, of the men advancing beneath us there, the right division are the very men we routed only five days ago; while on the extreme left there you see the Thirty. These are the men who have robbed us of our city, though we did no wrong; who have driven us from our homes; who have killed and confiscated the property of our dearest friends. But now what they never expected, and what we have prayed for, has come about. Here we stand with our swords in our hands, face to face with our foes, and the gods themselves are with us, seeing that we were arrested in the midst of our peaceful pursuits. At any moment, while we supped, or slept, or marketed, sentence of banishment was passed upon us: we had done no wrong and many of us were not even in the city.

"Today, the gods clearly fight on our side, the great gods, who raised a snowstorm even in the midst of calm for our benefit, and when we begin to fight, will enable our little company to set up the trophy of victory over our many foes. Today they have brought us to a place where the steep climb will prevent our enemies from reaching with lance or arrow further than our foremost ranks; but we with our volley of spears and arrows and stones cannot fail to inflict casualties. Had we been forced to meet them vanguard to vanguard, on an equal footing, who could have been surprised? But as it is, let fly your missiles with a will. No one can miss his mark when the road is full of our enemies. To avoid our darts they must hide beneath their shields; but we will rain blows upon them in their blindness; we will leap upon them and cut them down.

"Now, friends let me call on you to act so that each knows that victory was won by him and him alone. Victory, God willing, shall this day restore to us the land of our fathers, our homes, our freedom, and the rewards of civic life. Thrice happy will be those among us who as conquerors look upon this gladdest of all days. Nor less fortunate the man who falls today. Not all the wealth in the world will purchase him a monument so glorious. At the right moment I will strike the battle cry; then, with an invocation to the God of battle, let us avenge ourselves for the wrongs these men have inflicted on us."

7. Munychia was the citadel of Piraeus, Athens's port. The marketplace in Piraeus was often called the "agora of Hippodamus."

Xenophon, Hellenica, ca. 400–350 BCE
Having spoken, he turned round, facing the enemy, and kept quiet, for the seer had told them not to charge before one of their side was slain or wounded. "As soon as that happens," said the seer, "the victory shall be yours; but for myself, I see that death is waiting." He spoke truly, for they had barely taken up their arms when he himself, as though driven by fate, fell upon the enemy and was slain, and lies now buried at the passage of the Cephisus. But the rest were victorious, and pursued the enemy down to the level ground. Two of the Thirty, Critias himself and Hippomachus, fell, and with them Charmides, the son of Glaucon, one of the ten archons in Piraeus, and another seventy men. The arms of the slain were taken; but, as fellow-citizens, the conquerors did not despoil them of their coats. Afterward, they gave back the dead under cover of a truce, when the men on either side stepped forward and conversed with one another.

Then Cleocritus (a truly sweet-voiced herald), called for silence, and addressed the combatants as follows: "Fellow-citizens—Why do you drive us forth? Why would you slay us? What evil have we done to you? or is it a crime that we have shared with you in the most solemn rites and sacrifices and festivals? We have been companions in the chorus, the school, the army. We have braved a thousand dangers with you by land and sea in behalf of our common safety, our common liberty. By the gods of our fathers and mothers, by the hallowed names of kinship and marriage and comradeship, those three bonds which knit the hearts of so many of us, bow in reverence before God and man, and cease to sin against the land of our fathers. Cease to obey these most wicked Thirty, who for the sake of private gain have in eight months slain almost more men than the Spartans did in ten years of warfare. We can live as citizens in peace; it is only these men who bring upon us this horror of fratricidal war, loathed of God and man. Be well assured, that we as well as you have wept for many of your men fallen today."

So he spoke, but the surviving officers of the defeated army, not wanting their troops to listen, led them back to the city. The next day, the Thirty, down-hearted and desolate, sat in the Council chamber. The Three Thousand began to quarrel with one another. Those who were frightened because of the crimes they had committed objected to yielding to the party in Piraeus. Those who had faith in their own innocence tried to convince their neighbors that they should end their present evils. "Why give obedience to these Thirty?" they asked, "Why give them the power of destroying the State?" In the end they voted to depose the government and elect another. This was a Board of Ten, elected one from each tribe.

The Thirty now retired to Eleusis; but the Ten, assisted by the cavalry officers, had enough to do to keep watch over the men in the city, whose anarchy and mutual distrust were rampant. The cavalry did not return to quarters at night, but slept out in the theater, keeping their horses and shields close beside them. Indeed the distrust was so great that from evening onwards they patrolled the walls on foot with their shields, and at break of day mounted their horses, at every moment fearing some sudden attack upon them by the men in Piraeus. The Piraeus men
were now so numerous that it was difficult to find arms for all, and some had to be content with shields of wood or wicker-work.

Within ten days, the men at Piraeus gave oaths that all fighting with them would secure full citizenship, with equality of taxation and tribute to all, even foreigners. Thus they soon took the field with large numbers of hoplites and light-armed troops, and about 70 cavalry. They would send foraging parties for wood and provisions, returning at nightfall to Piraeus. No one from the city ventured to take the field under arms; except the cavalry, who would capture stray pillagers from Piraeus or inflict some damage on their opponents.

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But it was to Sparta that men's eyes now turned. The Thirty sent ambassadors from Eleusis, as did the men on the list of Three Thousand in the city, asking the Spartans for aid, on the grounds that the democrats had revolted from Sparta. Lysander, thinking he could force the democrats in Piraeus to terms through a blockade, supported their application. . . . And so proceeding to the scene of action at Eleusis, he got together a large body of Spartan hoplites, while his brother, the admiral, kept watch by sea to prevent provisioning of Piraeus by water. Thus the men in Piraeus were soon again in difficulty, while the hopes of the city folk rose.

At this stage, Pausanias intervened. Jealous of Lysander—who seemed about to achieve fame and Athens as his own property—the king persuaded three of the ephors to support him, and called out the army. With him marched contingents of all the allied States, except the Boeotians and Corinthians.

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Still, his feelings were not embittered against his adversary. On the contrary he sent secretly and instructed the men of Piraeus what sort of terms they should propose to himself and the ephors in attendance. They followed his advice, while Pausanias also fostered a division in the party within the city. He advised men in the city to approach him and the ephors, and to say they had no wish to make war on the men of Piraeus, and that they would prefer a general reconciliation and the friendship of both sides with Sparta.

8. At that time, Pausanias was one of the kings of Sparta. Sparta was unusual in having two kings of equal importance and with equal responsibilities.

9. Omitted is a skirmish between Pausanias's troops and the democrats in Piraeus.

Xenophon, *Hellenica*, ca. 400–350 BCE