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## OVERVIEW

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**HURSAGMU** is a roleplaying game set in a young world of swords, sorcery, gods, gateways, aliens, monsters, and horrors.

Player characters are fairly simple: four primary attributes and a number of skills. Attributes represent the fundamental nature of the character. Skills measure learned abilities like fighting, sorcery, and craftsmanship.

Players begin with a certain amount of **character points** with which to build their in-game persona. The number of points players start with is up to the game master (known hereafter as "The Master"), and depends upon how powerful He wishes for beginning characters to be. The Master may wish to assign character points for attributes and skills separately if He wants the players to create naturally talented but inexperienced characters or journeyman adventurers with average attributes.

As the characters adventure, The Master will occasionally give out **experience points** for character actions. Experience points can be used to increase the character's attributes and skills just as character points were used to build them. This allows characters to grow more powerful over time.

More about character creation can be found in the following chapters.

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### The Skill Roll

Central to the rules of the game is the skill roll. All actions in the game are resolved in much the same way, whether one is building a table, picking a lock, swinging a sword, or casting a spell. The differences between various actions come from the attributes and skills of characters and situational modifiers. Here it is -- the fundamental roll of the entire game:

$$2d6 + \text{Attribute} + \text{Skill}$$

That is, roll a pair of six-sided dice, add them together, and add the result to the sum of the character's attribute and skill levels. If this roll is equal to or higher than the opposed roll, then the act is successful.

All skill checks in the game are performed as opposed rolls: if two characters are in conflict, both roll their appropriate skills as indicated above. The higher roll wins. Ties may mean equal success or may go to the defender, depending on the situation.

If a character is trying to perform some task not in conflict with another character, The Master must assign a challenge level to the task. This number is then rolled as if it were a skill. This is done to insure that the success probabilities stay the same across conflict and non-conflict skill checks.

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### Challenge Levels

The following table should give The Master some guidance on assigning challenge levels.

<b>Task Difficulty</b>	<b>Challenge Level</b>
Fair	0
Moderate	5
Great	10
Incredible	15
Inconceivable	20

This is a basic outline, and should only be used when the character is not in conflict with another and The Master is unsure about the difficulty involved. When two characters are conflicting, their skills are rolled against one another.

Note that high rolls are always better than low rolls.

The numbers above assume that the character has at least an average tool for the job in question - i.e., if a thief is trying to pick a lock, then he is using a standard lockpick. If the thief was trying to pick a lock with something nonstandard, like a dagger, then The Master should assign an appropriate penalty (make the challenge number higher). If the character has an exceptional set of tools at his disposal, then he should receive some bonuses (a lower challenge number).

The numbers also assume that the character is taking a normal amount of time to perform the task. What this amount of time is depends upon the task in question - perhaps six seconds for picking a lock or six days for smithing a weapon. The Master may wish to assign bonuses for extra time taken and penalties for rushed work. He may lower the challenge level if the character more time than necessary, or raise it if the character tries to rush. Most of the time, this should be -2 to the skill roll per halving of the time and +2 to the skill roll per doubling of the necessary time.

Example: Lanky the thief wants to pick a lock on a treasure chest. The lock quality is somewhere in between average and good quality, so The Master decided to assign a challenge level of seven to the task. Lanky has a Dex of four and a Burglary skill of six. To make the attempt, he rolls  $2d6+10$ . The Master then rolls  $2d6+7$ . If Lanky's roll is better than The Master's, he succeeds in picking the lock.

If Lucky wanted to be extra sure, he could take twice as much time to pick the lock and garner a +2 to his skill roll. Trying to pick the lock in one quarter of the usual time would give him a -4.

Example: Chuck the Barbarian wants to crush the skull of Lothar the Unlucky. Chuck has a Dex of two and a Striking skill of five. To attack, he rolls  $2d6+7$ . Lothar, not wanting to have his skull crushed, decides to dodge the attack. Lothar has a Dex of three and a Defense skill of six, so he rolls  $2d6+9$ . If Chuck's roll is higher than Lothar's, the attack hits. If Lothar's roll is equal to or higher than Chuck's, the attack misses. Fighting is one case in which ties go to the defender.

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## ATTRIBUTES

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Attributes are the basic building blocks of a character. They represent the fundamental nature of a person. They affect a character's proficiency with skills, combat ability, talent at sorcery, and overall performance as an adventurer.

There are four attributes:

**Strength** is a measure of physical power. The mass and muscle of the individual, the amount of weight he can carry, and the amount of damage he can inflict are all determined by strength.

**Dexterity** is a measure of physical speed. Quickness, perception, balance, and coordination are all facets of dexterity. It affects both how easily an individual can hit others in physical combat and how difficult it is for enemies to hit him.

**Willpower** is a measure of the strength of the mind. Courage, patience, and self-control are facets of will. It allows a character to resist interrogation, torture, and fear, and determines the amount of supernatural energy that a sorcerer can channel.

**Intelligence** is a measure of quickness of thought. Memory, IQ, and cleverness are facets of intelligence. It allows a character to learn quickly and to apply knowledge in useful ways. It allows a sorcerer to cast spells more effectively.

Attributes are measured on a logarithmic scale. Each +2 to an attribute makes the character twice as able in that attribute.

Average humans have levels ranging between -1 and 1 in each of the four main attributes. Small children, frail elders, and diseased individuals may have physical attributes lower than this, while fools and madmen may have lower mental attributes. Mythic heroes and villains may have attributes of five, six, or even higher. Monsters and horrors may have attributes of ten, twenty, or beyond.

The point cost of attributes gets higher as the level increases. The higher your attribute, the more difficult it is to make it better. The amount of character points necessary to achieve a particular level of a attribute is given by the following formula:

$$\text{points} = \text{level} * \text{level} * 10$$

So, if a starting character wants a strength of 3, it will cost him 90 character points ( $3 * 3 * 10$ ). If that same character later gains some experience and wishes to raise his strength to 4, he will need to spend an additional 70 points ( $4 * 4 * 10$ , minus the 90 points already spent to achieve level 3). Fractions are rounded down, so if the character spent only 50 additional points on strength, he would see no benefit until he spent the final 20 points to raise all the way to level 4.

Attribute levels are open-ended. There is no hard limit to how high a normal human character can raise his stats, only the limitation of cost in experience points. Most human beings will not have stats greater than 2, and almost none will be greater than 6.

Attribute level	cost	description
-2	-40	feeble
-1	-10	weak
0	0	average
1	10	good
2	40	great
3	90	heroic
4	160	
5	250	
6	360	
7	490	
8	640	
9	810	
10	1000	mythic
L	$L*L*10$	

The negative numbers in the table above indicate that a character may obtain points for use in other abilities by being particularly weak in one attribute.

Here is a table showing the amount of weight that a character can lift above his head.

Strength	Lift (lbs)
-2	50
-1	75
0	100
1	150
2	200
3	300
4	400
5	600
6	800

The following table should give players an idea of how many points a character should have in its combined attributes based on how much natural ability they have.

Ability	Points
Average	0
Good	100
Great	200
Heroic	400
Mythical	800+

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In addition to the four primary attributes, there are three secondary attributes that are the same for every player character. They are Stamina, Health, and Sanity.

**Stamina** measures how much punishment a character can take before falling unconscious. Player characters have a Stamina of 10.

**Health** measures how physically ill and/or injured the character is. Health has five levels: OK, Hurt, Wounded, Crippled, and Dead.

**Sanity** measures how mentally ill and/or injured the character is. Sanity has five levels: OK, Shaken, Disturbed, Insane, and Catatonic.

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## SKILLS

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Skills are areas in which a character has improved beyond his natural abilities in an attempt to master an art. They represent study and practice.

Physical skills are based on dexterity. Mental skills are based on intelligence.

The point cost of skills has a quadratic growth curve. The amount of character points necessary to achieve a particular skill level is given by the following formula:

$$\text{points} = \text{level} * \text{level}$$

Thus, a character who wants an archery skill level of 4 would need to use 16 character points ( $4 * 4$ ). If that same character later wants to raise his archery level to 5, he will need to spend an additional 9 points ( $5 * 5 = 25$ , minus the 16 points already spent to reach level 4).

Skill levels are open-ended. There is no hard limit to how high a normal human character can raise his skills, only the limitation of cost in experience points.

skill level	cost	title
1	1	apprentice
2	4	
3	9	
4	16	
5	25	
6	36	journeyman
7	49	
8	64	
9	81	
10	100	master
L	L*L	

Average peons generally have no skill level higher than five or six. Talented craftsman can have skill levels of ten or greater, making them very competent at their professions even if their attributes are completely average.

The following table shows the number of points that characters of different levels of experience should have in their skills.

Level	Points
Average Peon	50
Apprentice Adventurer	100
Journeyman Adventurer	200
Master Adventurer	400
Mythical Hero	800

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Below is a list of skills that players might wish to add to their characters, listed by attribute. The list is not exhaustive. It focuses on adventuring skills that many characters will wish to have, leaving others (such as job, art, or athletic skills) to the imagination of players.

Skill lists are volatile. The Master should feel free to add or drop skills from the list to make it fit their game world, and players who wish to have a skill not on the list should propose the new skill to The Master.

The list below is divided into Dex skills, Int skills, and Sorcery. Sorcery is listed separately from the other Int skills because only one who has been "touched" by the gods can use these abilities. Other than this, they function identically to other skills.

See the chapter on Gifts to find out how many points it takes to be touched with sorcery. This cost is in addition to the points put into the sorcerous skills. No one can simply "pick up" sorcery - it's either an inborn quality or a gift from the gods.

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### **Dex Skills**

Acrobatics  
Archery  
Burglary  
Climbing  
Craftsmanship  
Defense  
Grappling  
Perception  
Pickpocketing  
Quickness  
Riding  
Stealth  
Striking  
Throwing

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#### **Acrobatics**

This skill allows a character to perform flips, cartwheels, rolls, tumbles, and the like. At higher levels, a character can swing on trapezes and walk tightropes. Acrobatics also lets the character lessen the damage taken from falls.

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#### **Archery**

This is the ability to use missile weapons such as bows and crossbows.

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#### **Burglary**

This is a favorite skill of thieves and spies. It is used to gain unauthorized access to places that are normally forbidden.

This skill lets the character pick locks, whether ordinary keyed locks or fancier combination or puzzle locks.

It also allows a character to set or disarm small traps. This can be used to protect locked a chest with a poison dart, to protect a hallway with a cocked crossbow, or to protect a door with a levered scythe - or to disarm any protections set by others.

Last but not least, having this ability means that the character knows how to force doors or shutters in the most effective and quietest way possible.

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### Climbing

This covers a wide range of activity, from trees to cliffs to castle walls. The more difficult the surface (the less friction and handholds and whatnot), the higher the challenge. The higher the roll above the required difficulty, the more ground that has been covered. A failed roll usually means no progress, but a spectacular failure could mean a fall.

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### Craftsmanship

This is the ability to make, build, and repair useful items. It can allow the character to build a house, carve some arrows, or make minor repairs to damaged weapons and armor. It is a very broad skill.

Master craftsmen can create works of great beauty and utility. The Master may rule that the character must specialize in a particular field (such as blacksmithing, woodworking, etc) in order to realize this level of quality. Specialization trades breadth for depth.

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### Defense

This is the art of avoiding harm by blocking and dodging. It can be used to evade any physical attack that is possible to evade.

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### Grappling

This is the skill used in close combat, when opponents are locking limbs and most weapons are useless.

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### Perception

This skill represents both the quality of a character's natural senses and his general attentiveness to the world around him. This important skill can prevent the character (and his friends) from being taken by surprise.

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### Pickpocketing



This skill allows a character to filch keys and pick pockets. It is rolled against the Perception of the intended victim and, to a lesser extent, the Perception of others nearby.

This can also be used to less nefarious purposes, such as performing minor magic tricks through sleight of hand (like making small objects disappear up your sleeve).

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### Quickness

This skill represents the character's muscle speed and reflexes - the ability to act suddenly and before others. It determines who gets to go first during a round of physical combat. It is also used to determine how quickly a character can move and the outcome of "quick draw" duels.

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### Riding

This is the skill of using an animal for transport, usually a horse. Normal travel does not require riding rolls, though a completely inexperienced rider may find his travel slower than it could be. The riding skill is mainly for tricks, leaps, or mounted combat.

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### Stealth

This is the art of moving silently and without being seen. To move unseen requires some amount of shadow - the darker, the better. It also helps to have dark clothing.

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### Striking

This skill represents to ability to hit opponents in melee combat.

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### Throwing

This is the skill of hitting a target with hurled objects, such as rocks, knives, axes, or spears. It also covers the use of slings. A high skill level allows the character to juggle - to toss and catch rags, balls, and such. Skilled jugglers can use more impressive items such as knives and swords, but this can get ugly if a roll is failed. Multiple jugglers can work in tandem for a splendid show.

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## **Int Skills**

Animals  
Command  
Concealment  
Defiance  
Disguise  
Divination  
Engineering  
Forgery

Gaming  
Healing  
Navigation  
Observation  
Scholarship  
Shadowing  
Survival  
Tactics  
Tracking  
Trading

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### Animals

This skill represents how good the character is with animals. It can be used to train animals to perform work or tricks, and to effectively handle such domesticated animals. It can also be used, at higher levels, to befriend wild animals, or even to calm enraged beasts.

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### Command

This skill represents the character's quickness of thought and ability to react to the actions of others. It is the mental equivalent of the Quickness skill. It determines who gets to go first during a round of mental combat. It also represents the general decisiveness of the character. This can sometimes be used to inspire followers.

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### Concealment

Concealment is the art of hiding things, whether in a room or on one's person. Those trying to find the hidden objects will have to make Perception rolls greater than the concealment roll of the hider.

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### Defiance

This skill represents the ability of a character to resist attacks on his mind, such as fear, torture, or sorcery. It is the mental equivalent of the Defense skill.

It does not matter whether assaults are aimed directly at the character or at everything his general area. When using Defiance, the character does not actually move - he focuses his concentration to prevent the attack from harming him.

Any sorcery can be resisted, no matter how large or powerful. The defender need only roll higher on his Defiance than the attacker rolls with whatever sorcery he is using.

If a spell is of continuing duration, the Defiance roll must be made every round.

Defiance is not supernatural, nor is not limited to those who practice sorcery. Anyone with a quick mind can evade its effects.

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### Disguise

This skill lets a character appear physically different. It is rolled against the Observation of anyone who might see through the disguise. Minor cosmetic changes are simple, while major cosmetic changes are more difficult. A master of disguise could even pretend to be of a different race or gender, but it is almost impossible to change one's height by more than a few inches.

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### Divination

This is a catchall for mystical abilities that are used to learn the unknown. The diviner may hear the whispers of spirits of the dead, read the future in the stars, or simply **know** things that he has no business knowing.

Divination allows the user to know whether a person, place, or thing is supernatural - and, if so, what that nature might be. This is a passive power, a sixth sense. It serves the same purpose with regards to sorcery and the spirit world as the Perception skill serves in regards to the physical world.

If a spell is cast anywhere near a diviner, The Master should have the player roll his skill to see if he senses it. More powerful spells will be "louder" and "brighter," so The Master should subtract one point from the challenge level for each level of energy in the spell.

Note that this check is made the moment that any supernatural energy is channeled. A sorcerer who is trying to cast an enormous spell may take several hours to do so, during which time the amount of energy in the spell grows steadily. Any diviners in the area should get regular skill checks to see if they notice it (though if a spell is large enough, it really is more a question of "when" than "if").

Divination also allows a character to sense the presence of nearby disembodied spirits, and to communicate with them on a primal level. The diviner does not receive coherent thoughts from the ghosts, but urges, feelings, and desires.

This can also be used by The Master as a plot device. He could allow a character to sense danger, receive visions of the future, or anything else that he feels would add to the game.

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### Engineering

This is the skill used for constructing and operating siege engines such as catapults, ballistae, and trebuchet. It can also be used for undermining defenses through sapping. The skilled character does not have to do all of the building or digging; it is enough to draw up a plan and hand it off to skilled laborers.

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### Forgery

The art of forging documents, seals, crests, and the like. The skill is rolled against the knowledge of the person trying to determine the authenticity of the item. Scholarship can help with this.

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### Gaming

The gambler's skill, such as it is. It lets characters win at games more often, but luck is always a factor.

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### Healing

This is the skill of primitive medicine. A character can bind wounds, set bones, and move companions without doing further harm. The seriousness of the injury will determine the difficulty of the roll.

This skill also grants the possessor knowledge of useful plants and herbs that can be made into salves to speed healing, prevent infections, fight off diseases, or cure poisons.

Finally, this skill represents, at higher levels, the ability to perform acupuncture and minor surgery (namely, amputations). Acupuncture can be used to eliminate pain and certain types of disease, and to quicken the natural healing process. Minor surgery might be required to cut out an infection, in order prevent the spread of toxins to the vital organs.

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### Navigation

Navigation is the ability to determine location and heading by watching the sun and the stars. It is particularly useful at sea. Master navigators may even have a sixth sense about time of day and the direction they are heading.

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### Observation

This skill is similar to Perception. Whereas Perception is used to detect things that might go unheard or unseen, Observation is used to detect things that are obvious but may go unnoticed. A character's observation could allow him to notice that someone was wearing the wrong clothes, behaving strangely, etc. It is especially useful for spotting those in disguise. Bonuses can be given if the character has some reason to suspect that the disguised person is not who they appear to be.

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### Scholarship

This is a catchall for academic skills. It represents knowledge of subjects such as astronomy, cartography, geography, heraldry, history, languages, philosophy, politics, and religion. It also lets the character write with flourish, using proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation, and perhaps stylistic calligraphy.

Master scholars and sages are highly prized by their patrons, and a visit to one can be expensive. Many choose to specialize in one of the above subjects.

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### Shadowing

This is the art of following someone in a crowd without the subject realizing that they are being followed. It relies upon the shadower being inconspicuous in dress and behavior - if everyone in town wears white clothing, someone will notice a black-cloaked figure following them no matter what the shadowing roll.

To notice that he is being followed, a character must make an Observation roll versus the Shadowing roll of the follower.

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### Survival

Survival is the ability to live in the wilderness without much in the way of equipment or supplies. All that is usually needed is a trusty knife and some warm clothing. Additional items, such as a bow and arrow for hunting, make the task that much easier.

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### Tactics

This is the art of war. This skill can give a character a good idea of what local terrain is the most defensible, what formations are best for a battle, and what an opponent seems to be planning.

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### Tracking

Tracking lets a character follow another creature through the wilderness. Some creatures are easier to track than others, and some terrains are easier to track through than others (soft mud easier than packed ground). Some terrains, like rivers or solid rock, are impossible to track through - the only hope is to pick up the trail on the other side of the obstacle.

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### Trading

This skill allows a character to appraise the worth of non-obvious treasure, from simple earthenware pots to rare works of art. Exotic objects are more difficult to appraise. The higher the roll, the closer the character is to the real value.

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### Sorcery

Amelatu  
Mahasu  
Nekelmu  
Sabatu  
Seheru  
Talamu

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Amelatu

This sorcery allows the user to open supernatural gateways to other worlds. These gateways allow the sorcerer to observe events from afar, to journey to exotic places, or to gather allies from other realms.

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#### Mahasu

This sorcery is the art of manipulating the physical energies of the world, such as heat, light, sound, and lightning. It gives the user the power to destroy. It is the magical equivalent of the Striking skill.

These energies can cause fires to erupt. They can be used against people or obstacles. Mahasu spells have little in the way of direct force, as they rely on energy to cause damage.

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#### Nekelmu

This sorcery is for manipulating minds. It can be used to hear or project thoughts, to control automatons, or to shatter sanity.

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#### Sabatu

This sorcery allows the sorcerer to grasp or move physical objects with his mind. It can be used to attack persons or objects. It is the magical equivalent of the Grappling skill.

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#### Seheru

This sorcery allows a magician to diminish or destroy the sorcery of others. It functions much like Defiance, only it works at range, destroys spells instead of evading their effects, and is active instead of passive.

This is, in essence, anti-sorcery. It allows the user to nullify spells or to set up magical wards.

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#### Talamu

This sorcery gives the user control over the forces of life and death. It allows the transfer of Health and Sanity from one individual living creature to another.

It also allows the sorcerer to feel the emotions of creatures that are near. This is a sense, much like perception, observation, or divination.

Talamu is very limited in range.

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### **GIFTS**

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Gifts are special abilities. They are not universal like attributes, and cannot be learned like skills. A gift is either an inborn quality or something bestowed by the gods.

Gifts do not have levels like attributes and skills. A gift is either all or nothing, and therefore requires a flat number of points.

Below is a list of gifts that players might wish to add to their characters. The list is not exhaustive. Players may feel free to invent their own gifts, which the Master may then feel free to deny. The Master may add or drop gifts from the list to make it fit his game world.

Some of the listed gifts are useful for players who wish their characters to be from other worlds. The Master has the final say about whether he will allow particular gifts into his game. The list is a suggestion, not a promise.

Gifts should not usually give bonuses to skills or combat values except under particular circumstances determined by The Master. They can help to negate penalties in their domain of function, however.

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## **Sorcery**

To use sorcery, a character must be "touched" by a god. To be touched with sorcery requires 10 points per discipline. This does not include whatever points the player chooses to put into the skill associated with the discipline.

The six disciplines are:

Amelatu  
Mahasu  
Nekelmu  
Sabatu  
Seheru  
Talamu

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## **Senses**

The following gifts allow a character's senses to operate in an unusual way. This does not add anything to the character's Perception or Observation skills, but may cancel penalties caused by certain circumstances.

### **Improved Hearing**

This gift allows a character to hear sounds whose pitch is above or below the range of normal human hearing. Ultrasonic noises include sounds like dog whistles and the screeches used by bats for navigation. Subsonic sounds include subtle vibrations that humans might feel, but can't hear. Some large animals, such as elephants, communicate using subsonic frequencies. More exotic creatures, like monsters or horrors, might also communicate this way.

Improved hearing requires 20 points.

### **Improved Sense of Smell**

This gift allows a character to detect scents with fine detail. This can be used to tell individuals apart (which can be useful for seeing through a disguise) or to track someone like a bloodhound. The Master may require Perception rolls in either case.

Improved Sense of Smell requires 20 points.

### **Starvision**

Starvision allows a character to see at night as if it were broad daylight. This ability works even if the night is overcast. Starvision does not allow a character to see in pitch blackness, however. Deep caves and sealed rooms will be as dark to a character with Starvision as they are to anyone else.

Starvision requires 20 points.

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### **Immunity**

A character with this gift is immune to sickness, disease, and biological poisons. The character is still vulnerable to dangerous inorganic chemicals such as molecular poisons and acids.

Immunity requires 30 points.

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### **Longevity**

A character with longevity ages at a slower rate than normal human beings. How much slower is at the discretion of the player and The Master. A character could even be virtually immortal.

Longevity requires 10 points.

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### **Alien Biology**

The following gifts are meant for non-human characters from other worlds. Players should recognize that all of these come with a price beyond their cost in points - if a character looks strange and alien, he will be hated or feared by most humans he encounters. He can not enter civilization without an excellent disguise, so must often rely on the other party members to acquire simple needs like food and gear.

On the other hand, strange-looking characters are more likely to instill fear in their human opponents than normal human characters are.

### **Amphibious**

A character with this gift is equally at home in water or on land. The character does not have penalties to movement, skill, or initiative in water as other characters might.



Depending on the wishes of the player and the discretion of The Master, the amphibious character can either breath in water like a fish or hold his breath for hours like an aquatic mammal.

To be amphibious requires 20 points.

### **Extra Limbs**

This gift lets a character have additional arms, legs, tentacles, tails, etc. Different limbs give different advantages. Extra legs can provide better balance and stability, while extra arms allow the character to grasp more objects at once than a normal person.

Each extra limb requires ten points.

### **Improved Running**

This gift allows the character to run faster than normal humans due to alien biology (longer stride, four legs, or whatever). Players who want their normal human characters to run faster should up their Quickness skill rather than get this gift.

Human characters can run ten yards per round. Each 10 points put into this gift gives the character an additional two yards. It also gives the character a +2 to Quickness rolls when determining the outcome of a race or chase.

### **Improved Swimming**

This gift allows the character to swim faster than normal humans due to alien biology (scaly skin, fins, flippers, or whatever). Players who want their normal human characters to swim faster should up their Quickness skill rather than get this gift.

Human characters can swim six yards per round. Each 10 points put into this gift gives the character an additional yard. It also gives the character a +2 to Quickness rolls when determining the outcome of a race or chase in water.

### **Phosphorescence**

This gift allows a character's body to emit a soft glow like that of a firefly. This glow can only be used to see a few feet. It can be used for reading with some difficulty.

The player may choose whether the character's whole body emits this glow, or only certain parts.

The glow can be turned on and off at will.

Phosphorescence requires 10 points.

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## **EQUIPMENT**

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## Economics

Let us begin with the foundation of all nonprimitive societies: money.

In the game, money is usually in the form of precious metals, namely copper, silver, and gold. The reasons for this are simple: precious metals are useful, scarce, durable, portable, divisible into smaller parts, and homogeneous. This gives them significant advantages as money over things like oranges or cattle.

The price of a good or service will differ greatly from time to time, from place to place, and from person to person. This price depends upon the relative value of both goods to each individual, values which derive from individual desires and the relative scarcity of both goods.

The price lists in this chapter, therefore, should be taken as a reasonable estimate of prices in an average town at the junction of two or more trading routes. The Master should feel free to adjust prices to reflect the relative scarcity of goods as the players travel to different places. On the wild frontier, for example, gold and silver may be next to worthless compared to the necessities of survival. This would mean that the price of everything (as measured in gold) would be much higher than in a safer place.

The prices also assume that the quality of the item is good. Poor items can be found for half the cost, while items of excellent quality can be far more expensive.

Though not perfectly realistic, it is useful (for game purposes) to consider copper, silver, and gold as trading at fixed rates of ten to one: 1 gold coin = 10 silver coins = 100 copper coins. This will result in a stable monetary system, and keep both players and The Master from becoming confused.

Prices are listed in terms of copper coins (cc).

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## Food

quality	cost
peasant grub	5 per meal
decent meal	10 per meal
fine dining	50 per meal
drink	4 per serving

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## Clothing

<b>type</b>	<b>weight</b>	<b>cost (per change of clothes)</b>
peasant garb	2	10
travelling clothes	5	100
noble attire	10	1000

---

### Shelter

<b>type</b>	<b>cost (per person, per night)</b>
inn - common room	10
inn - private room	30
inn - high quality	100+

---

### Gear

<b>gear</b>	<b>weight</b>	<b>cost (cc)</b>
backpack	1	40
bedroll	5	20
blanket	3	60
caltrops (10)	1	100
candle	-	1
chest	25	200
flint and steel	-	10
grappling hook	4	50
lamp	1	10
lantern	2	120

lock	1	200
lockpicking kit	2	300
mirror (steel)	*	20 per square inch
musical instrument	3	400
oil flask	1	10
parchment	-	20 per sheet
pouch	1	10
rope	1 per 2 yards	10 per yard
sack	1	10
spike (5)	1	50
torch	1	1
trail rations (1 day)	1	50
waterskin	4	90
whetstone	1	2

---

## Weapons

Weapons allow the user to slay his enemies. Bows and melee weapons add to the strength of a character for purposes of determining the damage of an attack. Mechanical weapons, such as crossbows and catapults, do not gain damage from strength.

The exact particulars of a weapon are not very important for game purposes. An axe, sword, or flail can all do the same amount of damage, provided that they have the same disadvantages. Larger weapons do more harm, but are also heavier and more difficult to conceal. Spiked or bladed weapons should do significantly more damage than blunt ones.

The maximum damage of a one-handed weapon is 12. The maximum damage of a two-handed weapon is 16. The greater the damage, the larger the weapon.

Generally speaking, only weapons with damage bonuses of 10 or less can be thrown with any accuracy. The less damage a thrown weapon does, the smaller it is and the more of them a character can carry or conceal.

A character with a strength of 1 can use any regular melee weapon without difficulty. Weaker characters may be limited to smaller weapons at the whim of The Master.

Swords are more expensive than comparable weapons because they are more difficult to make. Wearing a sword is a sign of wealth or prestige.

The table below provides some guidance.

<b>type</b>	<b>damage</b>	<b>weight</b>	<b>cost</b>
light club	2	1	10
medium club	4	2	20
heavy club	6	3	30
two handed club	8	4	40
quarterstaff	8	4	40

light mace	10	3	100
light flail	10	3	100
morningstar	12	5	200
heavy mace	12	5	200
heavy flail	12	5	200
two-handed maul	16	10	400

handaxe	10	3	100
battleaxe	12	5	200
warhammer	12	5	200
two-handed axe	16	8	400
two-handed hammer	16	8	400

dagger	8	1	200
short sword	10	3	1000
long sword	12	5	2000
two-handed sword	16	8	4000

spear	10	3	100
glaive	12	3	100
halberd	16	8	400

shortbow	10	2	6000
longbow	12	3	9000
arrows (20)	-	3	100

light crossbow	12	6	12000
heavy crossbow	16	9	15000
bolts (10)	-	1	200

Note: light crossbows require an action to reload. Heavy crossbows require two actions.

---

## **Armor**

Armor protects the wearer from physical harm in combat. It adds to the strength of the character for purposes of enduring damage from attacks.

Armor can be a lifesaver in combat, but it is also heavy and uncomfortable. It adds greatly to encumbrance, which will slow the character down. It makes many actions very difficult (climbing, stealth) or even impossible (swimming).

The mass and material of the armor determines the protection. The type of the armor is not important for game purposes. If the character wants the highest protection possible, it does not matter whether he wants his character to be wearing plate mail or just extra-heavy chainmail, so long as the weight and discomfort are the same. The Master has the final say on this - a player should be hard pressed to explain how his character wears fifty pounds of padded cloth in order to get the best protection possible.

The list below is a general guideline.

type	endurance	weight	cost
padded	2	10	500
soft leather	2	10	500
hard leather	4	20	1000
scale mail	6	30	5000
chain mail	8	40	10000
plate mail	10	50	20000

---

## Shields

Shields help the user block incoming attacks. The defensive bonus is added to Defense skill of a character when he attempts to block with his shield. The prices assume that the shield is made of heavy wood banded with iron - solid steel shields cost ten times as much.

type	defense bonus	weight	cost
small shield	1	5	100
medium shield	2	10	200
large shield	3	20	300

---

## Foci

Foci allow sorcerers to channel more energy. The power of the focus is added to the willpower of the character to determine how much energy the character can channel per round.

A focus can be anything - a simple staff, an elaborate scepter, or even a sword. The larger the focus, the greater the power. Some magicians create massive foci out of their temples or towers.

Foci must be inscribed with numerous magical runes which glow brightly when the focus is in use.

Magical craftsmen are rare, and creating a focus is no simple task. Thus, they tend to be expensive. Most sorcerers contract with a craftsman for the physical object, then inscribe the runes themselves. Being "touched" with sorcery gives a character the instinctive knowledge needed to carve the mystical runes in the proper order.

type	power	weight	cost
small wand	6	1	10000
short staff	8	3	12000
long staff	10	4	16000
sanctuary	20+	immobile	100000+

---

## Charms

Charms protect the wearer from magics much like armor protects the wearer from physics. The power of the charm is added to the willpower of the wearer for purposes of enduring magical attacks. To be effective, the charm must be worn in plain view. Multiple charms do not work in tandem.

Charms are usually small trinkets, such as rings or amulets. The larger the charm, the greater the endurance.

Charms must be inscribed with numerous arcane runes to work. These runes glow brightly whenever the charm absorbs sorcerous energy.

type	power	weight	cost
ring	2	-	20000
amulet	4	-	30000
crown	6	-	50000
sanctuary	10+	immobile	100000+

To create a focus, charm, or sanctuary requires carving the necessary runes and symbols in the proper places in the right order. This action imbues the ready items with the supernatural energies necessary for them to perform their function. The items to be imbued should be sturdy and well-crafted, but there is nothing to prevent a nature-loving mystic from using a simple piece of rough-hewn wood for his staff.

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## Encumbrance

Adventuring gear and loot can get pretty heavy. Characters are limited in how much they can carry on their person by both weight and volume.

The strength score of a character determines the maximum amount of weight the character can lift. If a character is hauling a large amount, he will have penalties to movement and to any skills which require agility. He should be penalized by an amount similar to the ratio of how much weight he is carrying to how much weight he can lift.



For example, a character with a strength of 2 can lift 200 pounds. If the character is carrying one hundred pounds worth of gear or treasure, he can only move half as fast as if he were unencumbered. Furthermore, any skills requiring whole body agility should be penalized by a similar amount (-2 would be appropriate).

For purposes of simplicity, this rule should only be used if the character is carrying at least 20% of his maximum heft. Rough estimates of penalties are usually better than detailed accounting, but discretion is left to The Master.

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## ENCOUNTERS

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Encounters with other entities are an essential part of any story, game, or life. The world would be very dull without them.

All encounters in the game are resolved in a similar, simple manner. Conflict is resolved in one of two ways: **roleplaying...** or **dice**.

Depending on the game and The Master, some or all of the encounters in the story may be resolved without picking up a single die. Players simply interact with npcs and with each other to determine the outcome. Negotiations and conversations should always be handled through roleplaying rather than with dice. Combat can be handled with roleplaying as well if the players wish to sacrifice the tactical elements of the game for the sake of plot, continuity, or time.

A few notable exceptions aside, no roleplaying game is really complete without a few rolls of the dice. Ideally, dice should only be used when roleplaying is unable to solve conflicts to the satisfaction of the players. Skill use is the prime example of this.

How often dice are used compared to roleplaying is more a matter of personal preference than exact science. The rules are not designed to decide this to a great extent - this decision is up to the consensus of the players. Players and The Master should use roleplaying as much as possible - if conflict can be resolved through roleplaying alone, then it probably should be. Negotiation and conversation were mentioned above as areas where dice should never be used. Logic and reasoning are normally in this category as well, though exceptions could be made if the intelligence of a character is supposed to far exceed the intelligence of its player. Conflicts almost always resort to dice, though dice can be skipped on occasions when the odds are incredibly uneven and the outcome blindingly obvious to all involved.

In general, dice need only be used when a character is using a skill in opposition to some other force. Specific rules are laid out for these cases in the following sections.

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### Perception and Observation

Perception and Observation are important skills that deserve special mention.

Perception is used whenever The Master wants to see whether a character notices something, such as images, sounds, or smells that are hard to detect because they are small, faint, or far away. It is not used to determine whether a character notices the obvious, such as a person standing directly in front of him and

speaking. It is used to determine whether a character will notice subtle sensory input, like someone sneaking up behind him.

Various factors can affect a perception check. Bright light or pitch darkness could hamper vision, loud noise could hamper hearing. The challenge level for any given situation is up to the Master.

Unconscious characters get no perception rolls for anything -- they are senseless. Being asleep is not the same as being knocked out, however; sleeping characters get normal Perception rolls for hearing to see if they wake up if any unusual noises occur in their sleeping presence. If the noises are very soft, such as someone sneaking toward the sleeper, the perception roll is far more difficult.

Observation is used when the Master wants to see whether a character notices something subtle that is right in front of them, such as an enemy wearing a disguise or someone following them through a crowd. Factors that can affect an observation roll are similar to (but not identical to) those that affect perception rolls. Anything that distracts the character from paying careful attention to detail could cause a penalty (a higher challenge roll).

Shadowing is to Observation what Stealth is to Perception.

Divination functions as supernatural awareness. The divination skill can be rolled to sense the presence of sorcery in the area. More on this later.

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## **Conflict**

Special attention needs to be given to those times when characters are using skills in competition.

Conflict is handled by dividing time and space into discrete units. Time is measured in rounds, with each round being equal to about six seconds. Space is measured in yards (distance), square yards (area), or cubic yards (volume).

Each round of conflict has three distinct phases: Initiative, Action, and Recovery.

### **Initiative**

The first step in any round is to roll Initiative. This roll determines order of action that the combatants follow. Whoever rolls the highest Initiative gets to go first on this round, followed by the person with the second highest Initiative roll, then the third, and so on.

A character cannot use both Dex and Int skills during the same round - he must concentrate on one or the other. One side effect of this is that individuals engaged in physical combat will not have the concentration necessary to resist sorcerous attacks, and individuals concentrating on sorcery will not be able to evade physical attacks.

Characters engaging in physical actions use their Quickness skill for Initiative. Those performing mental actions use their Command skill. These skill checks do not count as actions. Players do not need to detail the exact actions of their characters during Initiative, but must decide whether the character will maneuver (for physical actions) or concentrate (for mental actions), as this determines which skill to use for the Initiative roll.

Environmental factors (such as surprise) or minor actions (such as darting a few yards or drawing a weapon) may give bonuses or penalties to Initiative, at the whim of The Master.

## **Action**

The next step is the action phase. Participants carry out their movement, attacks, or other actions in the order of their Initiative rolls. If a character is knocked out or killed before his turn, he gets no action.

There are two types of actions in combat: major and minor. Major actions are things that can have a great effect on the outcome of a conflict, such as attacking a foe, picking a lock, running across a battlefield, or casting a spell. Minor actions, on the other hand, are actions that are incidental to the situation, such as moving a few paces or drawing a weapon.

Normally, characters can perform only one major action per round. A character may perform multiple major actions, but at a price - any skills used during a round suffer a cumulative -2 penalty for each major action taken that round. In addition, each action after the first happens at an Initiative two lower than the previous action.

Example: Bob the Fighter has a Striking skill of 5 and a Defense skill of 6. He wishes to attack this round, but also to defend. For performing two actions, he has a -2 penalty to both skills for the round - his Striking becomes 3, and his defense becomes 4. If Bob had wished to attack twice, his skills would have had a -4 penalty to become 1 and 2. If his Initiative roll was 12, then his Defense skill would happen at Initiative 12, his first attack at 10, and his second attack at 8.

Multiple minor actions do not cause a loss of skill. At most, they might give a penalty to the character's Initiative.

The Master has the final say over whether an action is major or minor.

When it is a character's turn to act, he may choose to act or to wait with no penalty. Once a character is required to make a skill roll, however, he must then declare all of his actions for the round so that he knows how much to penalize his skills.

If a character is attacked before his turn, he may choose to make a defensive action. Regardless of Initiative. This can have one of two effects: if the defensive action needed is the same type of action that the character decided on in the Initiative phase, the character must simply declare all of his actions for the round and then make his defensive skill roll with any appropriate penalties.

Example: Bob the Fighter and Fred the Fighter are fighting with swords. Both combatants choose to maneuver, so both roll Quickness for Initiative.

Bob wins the Initiative. He decides to strike Fred twice and defend himself at the same time. This gives him a -4 to all skill rolls.

Bob attacks Fred. Because Fred declared physical action during the Initiative phase, he may defend himself against Bob's physical assault without sacrificing his turn. He decides to Defend and to attack once. Assuming he survives Bob's two strikes, he will get to strike back on his Initiative.

If, on the other hand, the defensive action required is a different type of action than the character had planned, the character must abort the rest of his turn if he wants to make a defensive action. That, or take the hit and hope to survive to his Initiative.

Example: Bob the Fighter attacks Marcos the Mad. Bob is going to try and hit Marcos with his sword, while Marcos is going to try and strike Bob down with a psionic blast. Bob rolls Quickness for Initiative, Marcos rolls Command.

Bob is more quick than Marcos is commanding, and so wins the Initiative and tries to swat Marcos with his sword. Marcos, fearing for his unarmored life, chooses to Defend. Because he had chosen to concentrate rather than maneuver during the Initiative phase, he must abort his spell and any other actions for the turn.

If Marcos had won the Initiative, Bob might have had to abort his sword attack to defend himself from the psiblast.

How defensive actions are handled will have a dramatic effect on the flavor of the game. Whereas each attack is considered a major action for purposes of multiple action penalties, The Master may opt to handle defensive actions (the use of Defense and Defiance) differently.

If The Master considers each defensive action to be a major action, then both heroes and villains will have a very difficult time defending themselves against more than one attacker. While this is somewhat realistic, a more cinematic game might be desired. To this end, The Master may wish to rule that the use of a defensive skill is only one major action per round, regardless of how many attacks are evaded.

If a character is performing some engrossing action, such as balancing a pot on his head or lifting something really heavy, he may get no defensive actions at all.

Some actions may require more than one round to complete. If the character is even slightly injured during this time, the action fails and must be attempted again.

### **Recovery**

If a character has taken no actions during the round and is OK on both Health and Sanity, then the character may recover one hit at the end of the round. If a character is injured during the round (takes even 1 point of damage), the character gets no recovery. See the chapter on pain and suffering for more.

---

### **Range Penalties**

The further away a target is from an attacker, the harder it is to hit. The following table gives a list of ranges and the suggested challenge numbers for each range. If the attack is against a living target, these challenge numbers will be added to the defensive roll.

point blank	0
short	5
medium	10
long	15
extreme	20

The meanings of each range differ depending upon what weapon or sorcery the attacker is using. The following table gives a basic guideline, showing the range increments for a number of weapons and spells (in yards). Each full range increment increases the range by one level.

Range penalties do not figure into melee combat.

<b>attack type</b>	<b>range increment</b>
thrown weapons	5 + strength
short bow	20 + strength
light crossbow	25
long bow	30 + strength
heavy crossbow	40

<b>sorcery type</b>	<b>range increment</b>
Talamu	1
Amelatu	1
Nekelmu	10 + will
Mahasu	30 + will
Sabatu	30 + will
Seheru	60

For example, a heavy crossbow has a range increment of 40 yards. Less than 40 yards from a target is point blank range, from 40 to 79 yards is short range, from 80 to 119 yards is medium range, from 120 to 159 yards is long range, and 160 yards and beyond is extreme range.

Senses are also limited in range.

sense	range increment
smell	1
hearing	10
vision	100
divination	1000 *

\* The range limitation on divination is for determining whether the diviner notices the use of sorcery in his immediate area.

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## **Movement**

The following are movement actions:

Standing from a prone position

Moving ten yards on foot

Mounting or dismounting a horse

Riding a horse twenty to forty yards \*

Making a leap

A character may perform up to four of these during a single round.

Movement is considered a use of the Defense skill for purposes of combat. If the character does nothing but move and defend, there are no penalties to skill. If the character takes additional actions, the skill penalties stack as normal with Movement/Defense counting as one action regardless of how many moves were taken.

However, each movement action reduces a character's Initiative for any actions performed after the movement. This just means that movement takes time - someone with an equal initiative roll will get to act before you if you have to move before you can act. The penalty is a cumulative -2 to Initiative for each movement action taken before other actions.

Example: Fred the Swift is lying prone on a battlefield. He wishes to stand up, run sixteen yards, jump a trench, and attack a foe on the other side. Standing up counts as one movement action.

Running sixteen yards counts as two movement actions (one for every ten yards or fraction thereof), and jumping is one more. These four movement actions combine to give Fred a -8 penalty to the Initiative of his attack. Because he has moved/defended and attacked (two major actions), he will have a -2 to all Strike and Defend rolls.

Falling to a prone position on the ground is a free action and gives no penalties.

If the ground is not level, the game master may give a character bonuses or penalties to his movement, depending on whether the character is going uphill or downhill. If the terrain is especially treacherous, the master may require an Acrobatics roll (base Dex for those without the skill).

The above assumes that the character is relatively unencumbered (carrying less than 10% of his maximum weight). The rate of movement for a character is inversely proportional to the amount of weight the character is hauling (see Encumbrance in the previous chapter). If a character were carrying 50% of his maximum lift, for example, he would move 5 yards per movement action rather than 10.

If the character is mounted, use the movement rate of the mount. Otherwise, the rules are the same, except that a Riding roll may be necessary in difficult circumstances.

Characters may sometimes need to jump over things. A character can perform a standing long jump for a number of yards equal to his Maximum lift / 50. A running start doubles the distance. Encumbrance lowers it at the same rate that it lowers running speed.

The Master may, as an optional rule, allow a character to add his momentum from a charge to the damage of an attack. This works both ways, however -- a charging character will take the same additional damage from any enemy melee weapon that hits him on that round. The character does (and takes) an additional +1 damage for every ten yards of movement.

Example: A knight charges a line of soldiers atop his mount. His lance does 14 damage (10 for the lance + 4 for Strength). He rolls a 6, giving him a damage of 20. The knight has moved 40 yards on horseback, however, and so adds his movement to the damage roll for a total of 24.

Unfortunately, the knight is hit by one of the braced spearmen, whose weapon gives him a damage of 11 (1 for Strength, 10 for the pike). He rolls a 5, giving him a damage roll of 16, then adds the knight's momentum to this to get a final damage of 20. Good thing the knight is wearing his shining armor.

Combat movement is considered to be the same for each participant (absent alien biology). For situations when more fine detail is required, such as a race or one character chasing after another, participants should roll their Quickness each round. For every point by which one character's roll beats another's, that character gains one yard of distance.

\* Depending on the quality of the horse.

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## Waiting

A character who is still unsure of what to do upon reaching his Initiative may wait to see what others are doing before declaring any action. He may choose to take his actions after the action of any individual whose initiative roll was lower than his own.

A waiting character may take his action at any time, even within the action of another character. Take the following example: Chuck the Barbarian sees Mace the Ugly on a hilltop across the battlefield. Chuck wins initiative for the combat round, but decides to wait and see what Mace will do before he acts. Mace chooses to charge at Chuck and attack. Chuck, however, won the initiative, so he may choose to attack first, even after Mace has covered the distance between them - he was only waiting for his enemy to get

close enough to strike. If Mace survives the attack, he may then take the rest of his action.

A waiting character may also choose to hold his action over into the next round, in which case he automatically gets the Initiative for that round without needing to roll. The character gets no extra actions, however.

---

### **The Waiting Game**

This rule simulates scenes in books and movies in which two opponents stop and stare one another down, taking no actions, right in the middle of a fight.

If two characters both decide to wait for the other to act and there are no other characters with actions left, the action passes to the next round. Characters who are OK will recover a hit of Stamina. This can even involve more than two characters, so long as everyone decides to wait at once.

All characters involved in the waiting game get the initiative over characters who acted in the previous round.

---

### **Round Zero**

Round zero marks the beginning of any conflict. Whoever acts first automatically gets the initiative, regardless of his speed or the speed of his opponents. This usually applies to a single individual, but can apply to a group if the action is set to occur on a prearranged signal. After the initial round zero activity, conflict progresses to round 1, and participants roll initiative as normal.

If the initiating individual or group has taken their opponents completely by surprise, then the opponents may take no actions at all on round zero - not even defensive ones. This simulates situations such as a knife thrown by a hidden assassin, or an ambush where the attackers were lying in wait. The only defense against such sneak attacks is to not be caught off-guard.

---

### **Haste**

A character may choose to sacrifice accuracy for speed. A character who is determined to go first may spend an action to get a +2 to his Initiative. This action counts toward the total for purposes of skill penalties.

A character may spend multiple actions in this way.

Example: Two swordsmen are facing off in an honorable duel. Both come from a school that emphasizes aggressive attack at the expense of defense. Winning the Initiative is paramount.

One of the swordsmen chooses to use three actions for Haste to insure that he gets to strike first. With his attack, this brings his total actions for the round to four, giving him a -6 to his Striking skill roll. If he chose to defend as well, he would have had a -8 to both Striking and Defense. On the other hand, he gets a +6 to his Initiative.



---

## Pushing Power

A character may choose to sacrifice a hit of Stamina for a temporary boost of Strength and Willpower. Each hit expended will give the character +1 Strength and Willpower for a single round.

Example: A mighty warrior with a strength of 5 is trying to keep open a massive door while his weaker friends slip through. He trades 2 hits for 2 extra points of strength, giving him a total strength of 7 for the round. At the end of four rounds of exertion, he is down 8 Stamina. He can continue this exertion until his stamina reaches zero, at which point he will collapse from exhaustion.

Example: An insane wizard with a Willpower of 4 is trying to keep open a massive portal to The Abyss so that one of the Great Old Ones can travel through. He trades 6 points of Stamina for 6 extra points of Willpower, giving him a total will of 10 for the round. At the end of the first round, he is down 6 hits. After two rounds of exertion, he is down 12 hits and falls to the ground unconscious.

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## SWORDS

This chapter describes the rules for physical combat.

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### Damage

The rules in this chapter will sometimes call for a player to roll damage. This is rolled much like a skill roll, only based on the Strength and/or weapon of the attacker rather than Dexterity and skill.

Punches, kicks, and grabs use base Strength for damage:

$$\text{Damage} = 2d6 + \text{Strength}$$

Melee weapons, thrown weapons, and bows use Strength and weapon for damage:

$$\text{Damage} = 2d6 + \text{Strength} + \text{weapon}$$

Mechanical weapons, such as crossbows, ballista, and catapults do not benefit from strength:

$$\text{Damage} = 2d6 + \text{weapon}$$

After the attacker rolls damage, the victim gets to roll to endure the attack:

$$\text{Endurance} = 2d6 + \text{Strength} + \text{armor}$$

This endurance roll is subtracted from the damage of the attack.

---

Every character in the game has a number of "hits" of Stamina. Player characters have 10. NPC monsters may have more or less than this.

Each point of damage that gets past a character's endurance roll subtracts one hit of Stamina. When a character's Stamina reaches zero, he falls.

In addition, every five points of damage done by a single attack moves the character down one Health level. This damage is not cumulative - a character's Health level is affected only by the largest attack to hit that character.

Max Damage taken from a single hit	Health Level
0 - 4	OK
5 - 9	Hurt
10 - 14	Wounded
15 - 19	Crippled
20+	Dead

So, ten attacks that each do 1 point of damage will knock a character out, but not hurt him very much. One attack that does 6 points of damage will not knock him out, but will make him Hurt. Two attacks that do 6 points of damage each will knock him out, but will not make him more than Hurt. A single attack that does 11 points of damage will knock him out and make him Wounded.

Effects of the various Health levels are explained in the chapter on Pain and Suffering.

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## Combat Maneuvers

There are a number of combative actions that a character may perform during a round.

To determine whether an attack hits, the attacker rolls his effective skill level with whatever attack he is using. The skill to be used for the attack is simple to determine (a fist or sword uses Striking, a bow uses Archery, etc).

If the character is attacking a stationary person or object, the Master should assign an appropriate challenge level based on the range, plus or minus any random environmental factors (favorable wind, cover, etc). If aiming at a living target, this same challenge level should be added to the defensive roll before it is compared to the attacker's skill roll.

To avoid an attack, the target must make a Defense skill roll. A character who is attacked automatically gets the chance to defend, even if he has not yet reached his Initiative. If the character has already acted, however, and one of his actions was not to use Defense, then the character gets no chance to evade. If the attacker rolls well enough to hit at the range, the attack hits.

If the adjusted roll of the defender is equal to or higher than that of the attacker, then the attack is unsuccessful and the defender takes no damage.

If the attacker rolls higher than the defender, then the attack hit home.

The effect of the attack depends upon the skill used. Below is the list of combat maneuvers.

Maneuver	Description
Strike	Attack another character with force
Grapple	Grab and hold a foe, initiate close combat
Defend	Evade an attack by blocking or dodging
Augment	Sacrifice skill for extra damage

---

## Strike

A strike is a direct attack. It can be done with melee weapons, thrown weapons, missile weapons, or bare hands.

If the strike is successful, then the attacker gets to roll damage.

Thrown weapons and melee attacks use the strength of the attacker plus the power of the weapon. The simplest thrown attack is a good-sized rock, which does the base Strength damage of the attacker (like a punch, only farther). Larger rocks will add more damage, but have less range.

Strength may not be a factor if all of the power comes from machinery, as with crossbows. Bows may or may not take the Strength of the user into account, depending on their craftsmanship.

Any object may be thrown, but most are not designed for that purpose and thus have limited range and penalties to hit. Those that are designed to be thrown, such as knives, spears, hand axes, and warhammers, have a normal chance to hit and do the same damage as they would in melee.

A strike can also be used to disarm an opponent. The attacker makes a normal attack roll, but directed at the object in his opponent's hand rather than at the opponent's body. This attack can be defended against as normal. If the attacker's roll is higher, the defender is disarmed and the object is knocked a few yards away. If the defender rolls equal to or higher than the attacker, he keeps the object. Note that an object may be destroyed by this action.

If one of the characters in melee is far stronger than the other (like an ordinary man fighting a giant monster), The Master may rule that certain methods are not useful. It may not be physically possible for the weaker combatant to disarm the iron grip of his foe, to to block an earth-shattering attack with his shield.

Ideally, The Master should assign an appropriately difficult challenge level rather than rule out the action altogether.

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## **Grapple**

A grab is used to initiate close combat. To make a grab, the attacker must roll his Grappling skill versus the defensive skill of the target. If the grab succeeds, the attacker can restrain the target, preventing him from performing any actions, and may choose to do some damage as well. This damage can be either base Strength, or damage from a small weapon such as a blackjack or dagger. Larger weapons are useless in close combat.

Skills that can be used to defend against a grab are Defense and Grappling. If the target successfully defends Grappling, close combat is still initiated. If the character defends with Defense, the attacker has been warded off and melee combat continues.

Once opponents are locked in close combat, Grappling skills are all that matter. Grappling is used for both offense and defense. Upon reaching his Initiative while engaged in close combat, a character can attempt to either gain control of an opponent or to escape from the grapple. Either case is handled by rolling Grappling vs. Grappling.

To attempt an escape does no damage to an opponent. If successful, the character has escaped the fracas and melee combat resumes.

If a character has successfully grabbed an opponent or gained control over him in close combat, he may attempt to use elements of the surroundings as weapons. Slamming an opponent into a solid floor or wall can be worth anywhere from +1 to +8, depending on just how solid the material is (a wooden floor should hurt less than a stone one). Slamming an opponent into a sharp corner could give an extra +1 to +4 on top of this. The exact bonuses for any situation are up to The Master. Throwing an opponent off of a high cliff or structure is a good way to end a fight.

A grab can also be used to disarm an opponent, rather than harm. If this type of grab is successful, the attacker manages to wrench an object out of an opponent's grasp. This action does not initiate close combat.

Optional rule: The Master may wish to give bonuses to a grappler if his mass is greater than his opponents. The more massive combatant should receive a +2 to all Grappling rolls for each doubling of mass between he and his opponent, with an additional +1 if the more massive character is approximately halfway to the next doubling.

Example: A 200 pound man is wrestling an 800 pound gorilla. The gorilla is four times as massive as the man. This is two doublings, so the gorilla gets a +4 to all grappling rolls.

Example: The same 200 pound man tries to wrestle a 2400 pound giant. The giant is twelve times the mass of the man, which is in between three and four doublings. The giant gets +7 to all grappling rolls.

Logic trumps game mechanics, of course. Even if a character is a master wrestler and able to out-wrangle a giant monster despite the mass bonuses, he is still not going to be able to move the thing very far. He will not be able to slam it into the ground for damage bonuses or toss it off a cliff. At best, he can cling to it as it moves around, ignoring him.

The extra mass rule can also be used when multiple characters are trying to work together to pin a single character. Simply add all of the masses together and give the bonus to the character with the best Grappling skill.

---

## **Defend**

This maneuver uses the Defense skill to avoid harm in combat. There are two ways to defend: blocking, or dodging.

To block is to stop an attack with force.

Not every attack can be blocked. Melee attacks can be blocked by most other melee equipment, though The Master may assign a penalty to a warrior who tries to block a sword with his bare hands. The Master may also assign bonuses or penalties if the weapon of one fighter has a significantly longer reach, depending on the flavor of the game.

One can not generally block thrown weapons, arrows, or crossbow bolts without a shield. This, again, depends on the flavor of the game. Shields can be used to block almost any attack, save those that are just too huge to be withstood. If facing siege engines or an axe-wielding giant, characters are advised to dodge instead.

Characters can also choose to block attacks aimed at a friend, so long as that friend is not more than a few steps away. Each one of these "assisted blocks" count as a major action, however, penalizing all further actions during that round.

To dodge is to evade an attack with speed (by moving out of the way).

Dodging requires no particular equipment and is useful against any attack, so has less limitations than blocking. The only requirement for a dodge is that there is actually room to move out of harm's way. There may be rare occasions where a character could use a block to evade harm, but not a dodge (a hail of arrows, perhaps).

Whether a character is blocking or dodging is usually not important, in game terms - the character simply rolls his Defense skill. It only matters when one type of defense is possible, and not the other.

---

## **Augment**

A character may opt to increase the damage dealt by an attack by using an extra action. Each action used in this way counts toward the total for purposes of skill penalties. Each Augment action gives +2 damage to a single attack.

This extra force can be rationalized however the player likes - it can come from a carefully placed shot or a powerful haymaker.

Example: Jot is fast, but weak. He gets into a scrap with Mung, who is strong, but slow. Jot has no trouble landing or dodging punches, but finds that his jabs do little harm. He decides to Augment his next punch twice, costing him two extra actions. This gives him +4 damage, but costs an extra -4 to all skill rolls for the round. If Jot both attacks and defends, this comes to a total penalty of -6 to both skills.

---

### **Area attacks**

Most attacks are directed at a single individual. The attacker aims, fires, and hits or misses based on rolling his offensive skill versus the defensive skill of his target. Some attacks, however, are not directed at any person in particular, but at a certain place. Attacks such as these are called area attacks.

To hit a particular area, an attacker need only roll greater than the range level (plus any random bonuses or penalties) to hit.

If a character is hit by an area attack that covers more than one square yard, one of two events can occur: If there is an area adjacent to the character that is not hit by the attack, then the character may attempt a Defense roll to dodge out of the way and avoid damage. The challenge of the roll is 5 for every yard that must be dived in order to avoid the attack (6 yards maximum).

This assumes that the attack was directed at the general area, not the individual - area attacks directed at an individual are resolved as normal attacks, but with bonuses to the attack roll for the size of the area.

A character who is entirely surrounded by an area attack (greater than six yards on all sides) gets no chance to dodge -- there is simply nowhere to go. The attack hits him, and damage is rolled.

Note that, while normal land-based creatures can be engulfed by any attack that affects a wide enough area, creatures with three dimensional movement (flying, swimming) would be able to dodge an attack unless the areas above and below it were hit as well.

---

### **Animals and Mounted Combat**

Animals are characters just like any other. They have stats, maybe skills, and natural weapons. They often have better movement rates than humans.

Animals are controlled by The Master, even those that are on the side of the player. If a character with the Animals skill has spent time training an animal, then it should obey his commands in most cases. Combat, however, is a chaotic environment, and it may be necessary to make Animals skill rolls in order to get the animals to do what you would like. It helps if the animal has been specifically trained for fighting.

Mounts, namely horses, allow characters to move much faster than they could on their own two feet. Movement rules are the same for mounted characters as running characters, except that horses can move twice as fast as human beings, and can haul much more gear without being slowed.

If a horse is spooked or otherwise reluctant to obey, The Master may require an Animals roll to be made.

The Riding skill is equally important, but for different reasons. Whereas the Animals skill lets the character persuade his mount to do what he wants, Riding allows a character to stay on his mount in difficult circumstances (leaping, bucking, being attacked).

If a character is hit by an attack while mounted, he must make a Riding roll to keep his seat. The challenge level should be equal to the amount of damage done by the attack (before defenses are applied).

Note that it is very difficult for a mounted person to perform any acts that require whole-body agility. This makes dodging impossible unless the character wishes to dive out of the saddle. If the character is unable to block an attack, he may opt to use Riding as a substitute for dodging, but should have a substantial penalty based upon the room to maneuver and the contrariness of the animal.

Note also that a mount can be attacked as easily as the rider. This is a useful tactic for foot soldiers facing mounted opponents. For this reason, riders often purchase armor for their horses.

---

## **Tactical Combat**

When two generals square off, it is tactics and numbers that matter.

Rounds do not necessarily last six seconds in tactical combat. The length of a round depends largely upon the sizes of the armies involved. When two armies of 100 face off, a round might be a full minute; when two armies of 1000 face off, a round might be six or ten minutes; two armies of 10000 might take an hour to fight a full round. Exact timekeeping is left to The Master.

The first step on any round of tactical combat is to decide on the relative strength of the armies. The most obvious metric for this is numbers - if one side has three times the soldiers as the other, it will be three times as strong. There are other factors, however.

The **power** of the opposing sides is determined as follows:

Set the power of the smallest army equal to 0.

Set the power of larger armies relative to the smaller one: +2 power for each doubling in size. If the larger army is halfway in between a doubling, give it an extra plus one.

Example: two forces of equal training and equipment are facing off. One side has 120 soldiers, the other has 350.

The power of the side with 120 soldiers is set to 0. The larger army is approximately 2.9 times the size of the smaller, so is assigned a power of 3 (+2 for being twice the size of the smaller, and +1 for being halfway between double and quadruple the size).

If one side has superior equipment, training, or morale, this should be reflected. The Master may rule that, though an undisciplined barbarian horde is five times the size of a group of disciplined, armored, and mounted knights, it has only twice the power when all variables are accounted for.

After power ratings are decided upon, the Intelligence and Tactics of each general are added to the power rating of their armies.

To determine damage, each side rolls  $2d6 + \text{power} + \text{skill}$ . The result is the points of damage done to the enemy. Each army has 100 "hits" - when these are gone, the army has been routed.

The battle is over when one or both armies have been beaten down to a strength of zero. This does not necessarily mean that the losing generals are killed or captured, however. Once their army has been defeated, the action returns to a more personal level of roleplaying and combat. Individual characters may still have the opportunity to fight or flee.

If multiple tacticians are cooperating, all of them may make tactics rolls each round. Whoever is in charge can then choose which roll to use. Obviously, the wisest choice would be to use the tactics roll that is highest, but this may not always happen - personal pride (if the leader is one of the tacticians) or favoritism may lead the commander to make foolish decisions.

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## **SORCERY**

This chapter describes the rules governing sorcery.

There is symmetry between magics and physics. Physical actions use Dexterity for skill and Strength for power; magical actions use Intelligence and Willpower, respectively.

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### **Foci and Charms**

Spellcasters often use a focus to channel magical energy. A focus is an enchanted object covered with runes that glow when energy is channelled through the focus (the runes must be uncovered for the focus to work). This is usually a wand or staff of some sort, but it could just as easily be a place of power, such as a church, a tower, or a circle of stones. Such enormous foci must have a focal point of some kind, such as an altar or a pentagram, where the runes are inscribed. This is where the magician must stand in order to use the focus. If this focal point is damaged or desecrated, the place of power ceases to act as a focus.

A focus is not required for the use of sorcery, any more than a weapon is required for a warrior to hit an enemy - it simply makes the act more effective.

In addition to foci - the magical equivalent of weapons - sorcerers can use charms, which are the magical equivalent of armor. More on foci and charms can be found in the chapter on Equipment.

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### **Power and Energy**

Every sorcerer has a power level. This is based on his willpower and on any focus he is using, and represents how much supernatural energy the sorcerer can channel in a single round.



Every spell has an energy level. To cast a spell of a certain energy, the sorcerer must channel that amount of energy and make a skill roll. This may take more than one round, if the energy level of the spell is higher than the power level of the sorcerer.

Some spells use the base willpower of a character:

$$\text{Energy} = 2d6 + \text{Will}$$

Some spells are aided by the use of enchanted foci:

$$\text{Energy} = 2d6 + \text{Will} + \text{focus}$$

If a spell is directed at an opponent, the victim gets to roll to endure the attack:

$$\text{Endurance} = 2d6 + \text{Will} + \text{charm}$$

This endurance roll is subtracted from the energy of the attack.

The effect that any remaining energy has upon the target depends upon the type of spell that was thrown.

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## Spell Difficulty

Most spells are cast by rolling the appropriate sorcerous skill of the caster against the Defiance of the target (if any) plus a range modifier. This is fine when the sorcerer wants to cast a spell of energy less than or equal to his power level in a single round.

If a sorcerer wishes to cast more powerful spells, he must take extra time to channel the additional energy. Each +2 energy above his power level requires a doubling of the time required to cast the spell. In addition, there is a -1 penalty to the caster's skill roll for each +1 energy.

Failing to hit a target with sorcery usually means nothing more than a gasp and puff of smoke. However...if the character rolls so poorly that his total comes up negative, very bad things can happen. The Master is encouraged to be creative with such failures.

Example: Nik the Wise has a Willpower of 4 and a staff of power 8. His total power level is 12 (will + focus).

Nik wants to cast a spell of energy 4. With his willpower of 4, he can cast this spell in one round even without his staff. With the staff, he can cast a spell of energy 12 in a single round.

If Nik wants to throw a spell of energy 18, it will take him eight rounds and penalize his skill roll by -6.

---

## Extra Time

If a sorcerer is not confident in his ability to complete a spell successfully, he may choose to take extra time and precaution to gain bonuses to his skill roll (as with any other skill). +2 for taking twice as long as required, +4 for taking four times as long, +6 for taking eight times as long, etc.

A caster may take as long as is necessary to complete a spell, even hours or days (at least, until the Master rules that he collapses from exhaustion). The skill roll for the spell is performed at the end of the casting.

If Nik wants to cast a spell of energy 18 but is not confident that he will succeed with the -6, he can choose to cancel the penalty by taking eight times as long as required: 64 rounds. If he takes 128 rounds, he will get a +2 bonus to his skill roll.

If Nik wants to cast a massive spell of energy 24, he must make his skill roll at a -12 penalty - a daunting task for the most learned master. With his staff, this spell takes a minimum of 64 rounds (over six minutes).

If Nik is not confident in his ability to succeed, he could opt to take even more time in the casting. For each doubling of the time, he gets a +2. If he opts to take 1024 rounds to cast the spell, he will reduce his penalty to -4 (+8 for four doublings of the required time).

---

### **Sensing the target**

In order to use sorcery against a person or object, the user must be able to sense the subject in some way. This usually means being able to see or touch the target.

The Master may also allow a sorcerer to affect anyone who is currently using sorcery on him, even if the sorcerer has no way of sensing his attacker.

---

### **Multiple Targets**

Most spells are directed at a single individual or location. This is not mandatory, however. A sorcerer may choose to divide a spell amongst two or more individuals or locations. He may double the number of targets for each -2 to the energy of the spell. Targeting two individuals or locations would be -2 power, four would be -4, eight would be -6, etc.

The sorcerer makes only one skill roll, which each target then gets a defensive roll against (including separate range modifiers).

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### **Area Attacks**

Most spells occupy only a small amount of space, less than one square yard. This area can be doubled for each -2 penalty to the energy of the spell. A spell two square yards in area would be -2, four square yards would be -4, eight would be -6, etc.

Spell areas must be simple shapes, such as a cone, ellipse, or circle.

Such attacks can be defended against in multiple ways. The attack can be evaded with Defiance or Seheru or endured with Willpower and charms, just as with any other spell. If the attack is aimed at a particular individual, these are his only options.

Those who were not the direct targets of the spell but find themselves caught within the area of effect have a choice - they can use mental means of defense as above, or they can try to dodge out of the area before the spell takes effect. In this case, the results are dictated as described in the "Area Attacks" section of the Swords chapter.

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### **Duration**

Most sorcery is fleeting - spells are thrown, defended against, endured, and effected instantaneously.

If the sorcerer wishes to cast a spell that lasts for longer than a single round, he simply decides upon the duration of the spell at the beginning of casting. He may double the rounds of duration for a -2 to the power of the spell. A two round spell would have -2 power, a four round spell would have -4, an eight round spell would have -6, etc.

Alternatively, the sorcerer may choose to cast a spell continuously rather than choose a set duration ahead of time. With this option, the caster must constantly supply the proper amount of skill and energy - skill rolls are made every round. This is functionally the same as casting individual spells on each round for most types of sorcery, but can be useful for Amelatu, Sabatu, and Seheru.

---

### **Physical effects of sorcery**

The defense against direct supernatural attacks is always mental, but such attacks may have physical side effects that require physical defenses. A fireball created by Mahasu could be evaded by the Int and Defiance of a character, yet turn the forest around that character into a very physical inferno. A telekinetic Sabatu attack can be evaded Defiance, destroyed by Seheru, or endured by willpower and charms; but if the attack were made against a nearby boulder instead, the target might have to use Dexterity and Defense or Strength and armor.

Magical forces do not allow for fine control, however. A physical phenomenon created as the result of a magical force cannot be aimed at a character with any sort of precision. Most should be easier to avoid than a direct assault, having a challenge level of 0 or 5 except in unfortunate circumstances (such as the caster using Sabatu to drop a big rock down a well where a character is hiding).

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### **Group Rituals**

It is possible for multiple sorcerers to cooperate in the casting of a single spell. This is uncommon, as it requires all of the spellcasters to voluntarily subordinate their will to that of the one chosen to lead the casting. This is dangerous, as it gives the leader the power to control the subordinates like automatons until he chooses to relinquish command. To engage in a group ritual is to have limitless faith and trust in the leader.

Needless to say, this activity is more common among hierarchical religious orders or restless cults than among individualist scholars or adventurers.

When conducting a group ritual, the leader will receive a +2 to his power level for each doubling in the number of followers - one follower gives +2, two followers gives +4, four followers gives +6, etc.

Group rituals give the leader access to vast amounts of power, but do not add anything to the leader's skill. Thus, leaders must be very cautious in their casting - a particularly bad failure could very well erase the leader, all his followers, and his immediate area from the map.

For this reason, group rituals are usually scheduled as full day (or night) events.

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### **Blood Sacrifice**

In addition to the ability possessed by every character to sacrifice Stamina for extra Willpower, a sorcerer may choose to sacrifice his very Health or Sanity for extra energy. Each level of Health or Sanity sacrificed will give the caster +2 to the energy of a spell.

Health and Sanity can be sacrificed at the same time.

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### **Sorcerous Conflict**

There are a number of ways that a sorcery may be used to harm a foe.

To determine whether an attack spell succeeds, the attacker rolls his skill level with whatever sorcery he is using. The skill to be used for the attack is simple to determine (a lightning bolt uses Mahasu, a telepathic invasion uses Nekelmu, etc).

If the character is attacking an unaware person or an object, The Master should assign an appropriate challenge level, perhaps equal to the range level plus or minus any random environmental factors (fatigue, cover, unexplained supernatural activity in the vicinity, etc). If aiming at a living target, this same challenge level should be added to the defensive roll of the target.

To avoid an offensive spell, the target must make a defensive skill roll. A character who is attacked automatically gets the chance to choose to defend, even if he has not yet reached his Initiative.

There are two ways to evade sorcery. The usual way is Defiance, a non-sorcerous skill that measures mental defenses. Another method is Seheru, a type of sorcery that nullifies other kinds. Seheru can be used to protect one's friends as well as one's self. The disadvantage is that, unlike Defiance, each use of Seheru is considered a major action.

Once the offensive and defensive skills as decided upon, attacker and defender make their skill rolls.

If the adjusted roll of the defender is equal to or higher than that of the attacker, then the attack is unsuccessful and the defender is not affected by the spell at all. The spell may still have an effect on others or on the environment, however, unless destroyed entirely by Seheru.

If the attacker rolls higher than the defender, then the spell hit home. The effect depends upon the type of sorcery used.

Below is the list of the branches of sorcery, with details on the things that can be done with each kind.

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### **Amelatu**

This sorcery allows the user to open mystical doorways to other realms.

A portal must have a simple shape, like a circle or an ellipse. The amount of energy required to create a portal is determined by the size of the portal and the duration for which the portal will stay open. Size is a measure of area - a portal one yard across would be size 1, a portal two yards across would be size 4, a portal three yards across would be size 9, etc.

An energy level of zero can create a portal one yard in diameter that lasts for one round. Each +2 energy can be used to double the area or the duration of the portal. The diameter of a portal doubles for every two doublings of the area.

Power	Area	Diameter
0	1	1
2	2	1.5
4	4	2
6	8	3
8	16	4
10	32	6
12	64	8

The size of a portal must be large enough for whatever the magician wishes to transport. Sights and sounds require only small portals. Normal humans can squeeze through a portal of size 1 or walk upright through a portal of size 4. Larger objects or creatures will require larger portals.

Upon casting, the sorcerer may choose the size of the portal and the realm that it will connect to. If the caster chooses to keep the portal open continuously, he can vary the size of the portal from round to round. The worlds connected, however, are fixed when the spell is cast.

The difficulty of an Amelatu spell depends not only on the energy of the spell, but also on the "distance" between the two worlds connected by the spell. This distance is not physical, but metaphysical and metaphorical. This distance is ultimately decided by The Master, as he must choose how much travel between worlds he wishes to allow in his campaign.

When creating a portal, the caster can easily connect the portal to any world with which he is familiar (i.e., he has been there). To connect the portal to a realm that he has never visited, he will face a greater difficulty - the less familiar the realm, the higher the challenge. In order to shift the farside of a portal to a completely unfamiliar place, the caster may have to first seek answers through research or divination.

Amelatu portals are symmetric. When a portal is created, individuals in both worlds will see a glowing gateway and a glimpse of what lies on the other side, and anyone who can physically reach the portal in either world may travel through it. Not only that, but the portal in each world is two-sided -- this means that if a portal is opened from dry land to a place that is underwater, water will begin to spew in two opposite directions, not one.

Portals can be affected from either side. Sorcerers on either side of the portal may try to take control of it using their Amelatu skill. Whoever rolls the highest on any given round gains control of the portal, and can decide its size the next round, but they are then required to supply the skill rolls and supernatural energies necessary to maintain the spell.

Portals can also be dispelled, from either side, by Seheru.

Amelatu can be used to gather allies from other worlds. The ability to locate exotic creatures, however, does not automatically allow the sorcerer to make friends with them. If one wants an otherworldly servant, then one should be prepared to bribe, bully, or beg - and things from another world do not often speak the sorcerer's language.

Note that these portals are not very useful for travelling from place to place within a single world. If a sorcerer steps through a portal into another world, walks ten miles, and then steps through another portal to get back to the first world, he will find himself ten miles from the spot where he stepped through the first portal, in the same direction that he was walking in the other realm. Thus, Amelatu may be used to avoid certain physical barriers or known dangers of our world, but it will not save much time - and other worlds have barriers and dangers of their own.

Note also that this sorcery does not confer any special life support upon a traveller - if the user opens a portal to a place filled with a harmful substance (lava, acid, or the pressurized water at the bottom of an ocean), he will probably destroy himself and his immediate area.

There is an infinite number of realms parallel to our world. The sorcerer who plans on exploration ought to have some knowledge of the place to be reached (gained from books, fellow travellers, or divination) before attempting to travel there - to open a portal to a random world that the caster knows nothing about is suicidal.

---

## **Mahasu**

Mahasu is the art of manipulating the energies of the world, such as heat, light, sound, and lightning. It allows the sorcerer to unleash destruction with a thought.

This can be used to blast a foe from afar. This can come in the form of heat, cold, lightning, or anything else that the caster can come up with, so long as it is only a change in energy - Mahasu can not be used to create matter.

The amount of energy channeled into the spell will determine the amount of damage rolled against the enemy. Each point of energy represents 1 level of damage that will be applied against an opponent's willpower (plus any charms) if the spell is successful. This is the magical equivalent of a smack in the face, doing damage to an enemy's Stamina and Health.

Mahasu can also be used to create blinding light or deafening noise. Each point of energy represents one level to be rolled against an opponent's will. For every point of energy remaining after the victim subtracts his endurance roll from the energy roll of the attacking sorcerer, the victim's targeted sense is neutralized for one round.

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## **Nekelmu**

Nekelmu is the art of manipulating minds. It can be used to read minds, to project thoughts, and to control lesser beings.

The user can read the surface thoughts of intelligent creatures with a successful skill roll. The challenge level depends upon how familiar the mind is to the mentalist.

<b>Familiarity</b>	<b>Challenge Level</b>
a good friend	0
an acquaintance	5
a complete stranger	10
an alien creature	15+

Anyone who is aware that his mind is being read may try to use Defiance to stop it from happening. The challenge level should be added to the target's Defiance roll.

The user can read surface thoughts - thoughts that the target is having at the present moment - without the subject being aware of the intrusion. Reading deeper, like into the subject's memory or subconscious, is more intrusive and instantly makes the subject aware that his mind is being probed.

The user may also project thoughts into the minds of others with a successful skill roll (determined and resisted much like mind reading). This allows the sorcerer to communicate things to others without speaking. The recipient knows that he is being contacted by another mind, but does not automatically know who the mind belongs to. Only the use of his own Nekelmu or Divination can tell him for certain who sent the message.

Users of Nekelmu may charge up their thought projection to a level that causes pain and damage to their subjects mind. This is like any other magical assault - roll the energy level of the spell versus the Willpower and charm of the intended victim. Each point of damage leftover takes off one hit of Stamina. In addition, every five points of damage done by a single attack moves the character down one Sanity level. This damage is not cumulative - a character's Sanity level is affected only by the most powerful spell to affect that character.

Max Damage taken from a single hit	Sanity Level
0 - 4	OK
5 - 9	Shaken
10 - 14	Disturbed
15 - 19	Insane
20+	Catatonic

The use of Nekelmu to cause suffering is far less subtle than using it to read minds, so the penalties for using it against an unfamiliar subject do not apply in this case.

It is not uncommon for two enemy masters of this skill to resolve their hatred by an honorable duel - the two sit down across from one another (perhaps in comfortable chairs), and simply stare until one of them is unconscious or catatonic. The average person would not notice that anything was happening unless the masters used foci in their duel.

Finally, Nekelmu can be used to control mindless automatons. If more than one user is vying for control of the same automaton, the higher roll wins for the round.

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## **Sabatu**

This gives the sorcerer the power to move physical objects with his mind. This can be used to grab, push, or throw things (including enemies). It functions, for most practical purposes, like Strength that can be used at a distance.

If the user wishes to attack a foe directly, he rolls his Sabatu skill versus the defensive skill of his opponent (Defiance or Seheru), with penalties for range, cover, etc. If the attack is successful, the aggressor does physical damage to his opponent based on his willpower and whatever focus he is using. Armor does not protect against this damage, but charms do.

Once a character has been successfully attacked by Sabatu, the character is paralyzed. He will not be able to move or perform any physical actions until he breaks the hold or the aggressor ends the spell. Defiance or Seheru can be used to break out, of course, but the victim could also use his own Sabatu skill. This is the magical equivalent of close combat. Thus, if the victim has an enormous Willpower, then the Sabatu aggressor may not be able to affect him at all (it would be like a man trying to hold down a giant).



If a user of Sabatu wishes to attack a foe indirectly, by throwing a rock or tipping over a pillar or something similar, he may do so. The target then faces a choice: he may try to prevent the attacker from succeeding in his spell via Seheru or his own Sabatu skill, or he may let the attacker complete his task and then try to avoid the physical danger with his Dexterity and Defense skill. The first case is resolved as any normal sorcerous contest. In the second case, the defensive roll required of the victim is independent of the skill roll made by the attacker. The Master should simply assign a challenge level appropriate to dodging a large boulder or falling tree or whatever.

Such indirect attacks are widely considered by sorcerers to be foul, like a swordsman kicking sand in an opponent's face. An honorable Sabatu sorcerer will not use them.

Note that being held by Sabatu does not prevent a character from using sorcery of his own.

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## **Seheru**

This is the skill of magical protection. It allows the user to nullify spells or to set up magical wards.

Seheru cannot be used to negate the physical effects of spells that have already taken place. If a magical fire has roasted a character, Seheru will not heal the burn. If a sorcerer has blinded a foe with Mahasu, Seheru will not restore the person's sight.

To nullify an existing magical spell, a magician must make a Seheru skill roll that is higher than the skill roll that was used to create the spell. If successful, the spell is nullified and immediately disappears.

Seheru can be used as a defensive action, the mental equivalent of a block. If the sorcerer sees a magical attack in progress, he can attempt to dispel the attack before it has any effect. The attack need not even be aimed at the user himself (though range penalties may apply if the attack is aimed at a friend who is at a distance).

Seheru can be used to set up magical wards. This is nothing more than a normal dispel with additional area and duration. Any magical spell or entity that enters the area will be hit with the dispel. The skill roll, made when the spell is first cast, is then compared to the skill roll of whatever magic has entered the area. If the Seheru roll is higher, the other magic is nullified (at least for the duration of the Seheru spell, or for as long as the invading magic remains in its area).

The Master may wish to rule that Seheru can only be used to dispel magic that is of roughly equal in power to, or less powerful than, that of the user. This is similar to the limitations placed on melee fighters when blocking - The Master may allow a fighter to block a massive sword with a small dagger, but will probably not let the fighter block a catapulted boulder even with a large shield. Alternatively, He may rule that larger magics are weakened by an amount equal to the energy of the Seheru caster, but not totally destroyed. This option should only be used when the sorcery in question is far greater than that of the Seheru user.

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## **Talamu**

This sorcery gives the user control over the forces of life and death. It allows the transfer of Health or Sanity from one individual living creature to another.

Such transfers may be voluntary or involuntary. Those who transfer their own life force to willing recipients are regarded as compassionate healers, while those who steal the lifeforce of others for their own purposes are seen as vile necromancers.

Talamic transfers are rolled as normal attacks, the Talamu skill against the Defiance or Seheru of the target. If the aggressor succeeds in overcoming the target's Defiance, he rolls the energy of the spell versus the Willpower and charm of his victim.

For every five points of energy remaining in the spell after the intended victim's endurance roll, the victim loses one level of Health or Sanity (at the discretion of the sorcerer - Talamu can be used against either, but not both at the same time). These levels are then transferred to the Talamu user's chosen beneficiary (which may be himself).

Nothing can absorb more Health or Sanity than it normally has, however - if a user drains life from a victim without transferring it to a suitable beneficiary, then the extra lifeforce is lost to the winds.

Note that creatures are not required to resist Talamic sorcery. An individual could volunteer to sacrifice some of his lifeforce to aid a dying friend, thus lowering his defenses for the purpose of the spell. Conversely, an injured person could choose to try and resist receiving help (for whatever reason).

A Talamu user must be cautious when stealing life force from others. If the provider of the life force is not healthy, any illnesses or infections possessed transferred to the sorcerer and to any other beneficiary of the transfer.

Transfers of lifeforce between sentient and non-sentient beings are not possible. Beasts and monsters do not possess the same life force as intelligent humanoids. Talamu is useless against such creatures.

It is possible to transfer between similar species, such as humans and non-human (but intelligent) aliens.

Talamu also allows the user to feel the emotions of creatures that are near, human or not. This is a sense, much like Perception or Divination.

Talamu is very limited in range. In addition, if the user is trying to transfer life energy from one individual to another (not himself), then the ranges from the empath to each individual are added together to determine the total range penalty.

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## **PAIN AND SUFFERING**

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### **Injury**

There are three measures of injury: Stamina, Health, and Sanity.

A character loses Stamina by taking damage or through heavy exertion. When the Stamina of a character is reduced to zero, he falls unconscious. Stamina can fall to negative numbers. This makes recovery time longer, but has no other ill effects.

An unconscious individual is senseless and can take no action whatsoever. Any attacks directed against him need only hit the spot where he is lying (which means that melee attacks nearly always hit). The character gets no defensive actions, but does get the benefits of his Strength and armor (or Willpower and charm, in the case of sorcerous assaults).

A character loses Health levels through serious injury or disease. Health levels below "OK" give penalties to a character's Strength and Dexterity according to the following table:

<b>Health Level</b>	<b>Penalty to Strength and Dexterity</b>
Hurt	-1
Wounded	-2
Crippled	-3
Dead	NA

These attribute penalties affect all physical skill, damage, and endurance rolls. They last until the character recovers.

If a character falls to the "Dead" Health level, he is gone forever.

A character loses Sanity levels through serious psychological shocks or certain sorcerous attacks. Sanity levels below "OK" give penalties to a character's Willpower and Intelligence according to the following table:

<b>Sanity Level</b>	<b>Penalty to Willpower and Intelligence</b>
Shaken	-1
Disturbed	-2
Insane	-3
Catatonic	NA

These attribute penalties affect all mental skill, damage, and endurance rolls. They last until the character recovers.

If a character falls to the "Catatonic" Sanity level, he is effectively dead - though the body still lives, the mind is gone.

---

## Recovery

A character recovers from harm through rest.

Stamina is the easiest to recover. How quickly a character recovers depends upon the Health and Sanity of the character, according to the following table:

Health Level	Sanity Level	Difficulty of Recovery
OK	OK	1 per round
Hurt	Shaken	1 per minute
Wounded	Disturbed	1 per hour
Crippled	Insane	1 per day
Dead	Catatonic	NA

Characters use the worst of their Health and Sanity. For example, a character who is physically OK but mentally Disturbed will recover one hit of Stamina per hour.

An unconscious character recovers Stamina at a normal rate and wakes up when it is greater than zero. However, there is no limit to how far negative Stamina can fall. A character who has taken massive amounts of damage may go into a coma and take a very long time to recover.

Health and Sanity levels are more difficult to recover. Unlike Stamina, they do not return automatically - the injured character must make Strength (for Health) or Willpower (for Sanity) rolls in order to improve. The difficulty of the roll is based on this table:

Health Level	Sanity Level	Difficulty of Recovery
Hurt	Shaken	0
Wounded	Disturbed	5
Crippled	Insane	10
Dead	Catatonic	NA

Recovery checks are made once per day, usually when the character wakes up from a decent amount of sleep. It is possible to recover from being Hurt in a single day, while recovering from Crippled takes at least three days (and probably much longer due to the difficulty of the roll).

The penalties to Strength and Willpower caused by Health and Sanity damage should be ignored for the purpose of recovery. Use the character's original Strength and Willpower attributes.

If a character recovers a Health or Sanity level before he has recovered all of his Stamina, then his Stamina will begin to recover at the increased rate for the better Health or Sanity level.

Rest must be in a comfortable environment with adequate warmth, sleep, and nourishment. Less than comfortable circumstances will slow the rate of healing, increasing the difficulty of the roll. Light exertion, such as walking or moderate lifting, will increase the difficulty of healing rolls as well. The increase in difficulty is at the discretion of The Master.

Strenuous activity, such as fighting or spellcasting, will prevent any healing at all.

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### **Healing**

The aid of a skilled healer can make recovery much easier. Once per day, a healer may make a roll versus the same difficulty as the injured character's recovery check. If the roll is successful, the character gains one level of Health or Sanity (depending on what condition the healer spent the day treating).

If this roll fails, the character may still make normal recovery checks. This does not allow a character to improve by two levels per day, however.

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### **Poison**

A poison is a harmful substance that does damage to a character internally.

How a character becomes poisoned varies. Some poisons must be eaten, injected, or inhaled. Others take effect simply by direct contact with the skin.

In game terms, a poison is an attack that does damage to a character at regular intervals (once a round, minute, hour, day, etc) for a certain duration. This damage is resisted as an other attack, except only base Strength is used. Armor does not help against poison.

If a character survives until the duration runs out, he fought the poison off.

Some poisons (drugs) may work against Sanity rather than Health. These work the same as the others except that they are resisted with Willpower.

Some poisons work more slowly than others. Most diseases can be treated as poisons with very long durations.

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### **Darkness and blindness**

Characters who cannot sense their opponents will find themselves at a distinct disadvantage.

When characters are unable to see, any skill that requires sight will have a -2 penalty to the skill roll. This applies whether a character is somehow blinded or just surrounded by darkness.

For situations that are dim, but not completely dark, The Master should assign a difficulty number - the lower the light, the higher the number. Any character who can make a Perception roll higher than this number is able to see for that round.

These rules apply also to other senses - any skill that requires hearing will be at -2 if the character cannot hear.

Of course, these rules do not apply to Perception itself - if a character is blinded or deafened, he cannot perceive anything with that sense.

---

## **Falling**

The Master should ignore damage from any falls of less than four yards. A hero is not likely to injure himself falling such a short distance unless he lands on something unpleasant.

For more significant falls, characters should take an amount of damage equal to the number of yards fallen. A character who falls six yards (18 feet) should take 6 damage, a character who falls 15 yards should take 15 damage, and so on up until the maximum of 20 (terminal velocity).

This damage is rolled against the character's strength. Armor does not help protect against falling damage, though it may help to protect the character from any extra damage if he falls on something sharp like spikes or broken rock.

Characters may use an Acrobatics roll to help lessen the pain. The roll can be added directly to the character's Strength for purposes of enduring the damage.

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## **MONSTERS AND HORRORS**

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Monsters are any creatures that are not natural to the world. Wolves and bears would be natural creatures, but Hellish demons and Abyssal horrors would not. Unlike many fantasy games, HURSAGMU does not contain any intelligent nonhuman races by default. If creatures such as elves, dwarves, goblins, orcs, dragons, and the like exist, then they are outsiders who travelled to this world from other realms. Their worldview should be very alien to that of humans.

If a player wishes for his character to be such a creature, great. He will have no tribe or homeland to go to for help, however. He will be virtually unique in the world. While it is not impossible that some others of his race also travelled to this world and set up a colony somewhere, such activities are difficult and rare. Such places would need to be well hidden to protect themselves from humankind.

For example: if a player wants his character to be creature known as a "dwelf," then that is fine. He should construct the character as he would any other. The player may argue that dwelves should get a bonus to strength or dexterity or something, but this is unnecessary - if dwelves are supposed to be stronger or

faster or smarter than human beings, the player just needs to put more of his points into these stats than he would have otherwise. If the player thinks that dwellers should fly and have infrared vision and regenerate wounds, The Master can feel free to tell the player to go to Hell. If he wishes to allow it, however, he can simply require an amount of points that seems fitting for the level of advantage granted by the power, with the promise to revise it upward if the power seems to give more of an advantage than initially thought.

Whether any particular breed of monster is native or alien is up to the discretion of The Master.

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## **Monster creation**

When creating monsters, The Master should not feel restrained by the character creation rules. Monsters and horrors are often far larger and more powerful than the heroes, and there is no reason why otherworldly creatures cannot have powers unavailable to the players.

Below are some pointers for creating interesting monsters.

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## **Size and density**

Normal player characters are considered to be human, or at least vaguely so. The size and density of monsters is measured relative to this standard, with humans being of Size and Density 0.

Monsters, on the other hand, are often very big and tough. This makes the monsters more frightening to the players, which is a good thing.

Size is used to reflect the fact that having great strength does not necessarily make one any less vulnerable to harm - an elephant may be very strong, but can still be chopped into small pieces if hit with an axe enough times. Strength is multiplied by Size for purposes of lifting or doing damage, but not for purposes of enduring damage.

Note that Size is a measure of volume, not height. A creature twice as tall as a human would have roughly eight times the mass, assuming similar density. Such a creature would be a size 8, not a size 2.

Example: The Master creates a giant that is human in most respects, only twice as tall. This giant should have roughly eight times the mass of a normal human, and thus eight times the strength. The Master assigns a strength of 2 and a size of 8. The giant has a strength of 16 for lifting or doing damage, but only a 2 for enduring damage.

By the same token, one does not want a giant monster to be easily killed. In order to make creatures tough without making them invulnerable, The Master can give the creature a large Size attribute for the sake of damage and a large Stamina attribute for the sake of endurance. The Master could even alter the Health or Sanity levels of a monster so that it takes more powerful attacks to really hurt them.

Sometimes a monster is made of sterner stuff than humans. A stone golem could be the same size as a normal human, yet made of rock and thus far stronger and tougher. Increased density is usually represented simply by making a monster with massive strength without taking any sort of size modifier.

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## **Armor**

Some creatures have tough outer shells, while others are tough through and through. If The Master wishes to create a monster that can take damage even better than it can dish it out, he can make armor a natural part of its anatomy. This is effectively the opposite of spending points on size.

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## **Extra limbs**

There is no reason why extraplanar horrors need to be limited to two arms, two legs, and one head. Use your imagination. Nothing wrong with making your players fight an otherworldly octopus monster with eight heads and sixty-four tentacles. How this translates into game terms (such as improved dexterity and multiple attacks per round) is up to you.

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## **Extra senses**

There is no reason why monsters have to be limited to normal human sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste. Monsters could very well see infrared light, "see" via ultrasonic waves (like a bat), or even have some sort of supernatural spatial awareness. A thing that cannot be blinded has a great advantage over things that can.

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## **Flight**

Monsters need not be earthbound like the heroes. A monster could have great wings that allow it to glide or fly, or it could levitate via unknown forces.

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## **Immortality**

The rate at which monsters age is also up to The Master. He could even rule that certain creatures are virtually immortal.

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## **Regeneration**

Monsters and horrors may have rates of recovery far superior to the natural healing of a human. A monster could recover Health or Sanity once per round instead of once per day, perhaps even without rest. This makes monsters harder to kill, which makes them more frightening to the players (which is a good thing).

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## **Sorcery**

There is no reason why monsters need to be limited to the same magics as humans. While some monsters may indeed have Mahasu or Nekelmu powers, some might also have special abilities such as shapeshifting, invisibility, or mind control. Some monsters may even be immune to physical or magical attacks (but not both, unless The Master wants a monster to be literally unbeatable).



For that matter, there are supernatural arts appropriate for human antagonists that are not listed in the chapter on sorcery. This is because these skills are not available to player characters. It may seem unfair that npcs can have magical abilities that players cannot, but the fact is that certain activities are not well-suited for adventure roleplaying. Skills such as alchemy and necromancy are classic fantasy fare, but are usually the province of strange cults or hermetic mages working feverishly in isolation for weeks and months at a time. This fact makes them better suited as skills for foes or plot devices than as skills for player characters.

It is fine for The Master to make use of golems, undead, potions, and the like - players simply should not be able to make them. In a way, this puts the mystery back into sorcery, as players don't know quite how these things are done.

Example: The Master wishes for his players to be attacked by a horde of undead terrors. These creatures are immune to reason or passion and obey orders without question.

He decides on two types: ghosts and skeletons. Ghosts are immune to physical attacks, and attack the players with Nekelmu sorcery. Skeletons are immune to sorcery, and attack the players with rusted swords and armor. Both ghosts and skeletons can be driven away or destroyed by the Seheru skill, which affects undead much like Mahasu does the living. Of course, the players don't know this.

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### **Alien sorcery**

Humans are not the only creatures who can use sorcery to travel between worlds. Some monsters encountered may have come to this world of their own ability, rather than having been summoned. A monster who travels to this world by its own power is the most frightening of opponents - it is alien, it understands sorcery, and it has its own reasons for being here.

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## **THE WORLD**

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### **Myth and Legend**

In the beginning, the world was quiet. There were fish and birds and beasts, but no men or monsters. Then the gods came.

First came the great god UR, the creator. He mixed his own blood with the blood of the beasts who walked the land to create a new race of being, part god, part beast - the race of men.

Men worshipped UR as father and master, and served him for a time. When UR was finished with this world, he left his children to care for themselves.

Life was peaceful for a time, for there were no gods, few men in the world, and plenty of wealth and bounty for all. This was not to last, however, for other gods soon came and discovered what UR had done.

Some thought the work of UR monstrous - that men should never have been created. Others thought it fine that men were made, but thought that they should have been destroyed when UR was finished with them. These gods dedicated themselves to the annihilation of mankind.

Others thought the work of UR to be useful, and set about claiming various tribes of men for their own.

Still others thought the work of UR to be wondrous, and thought it vile for men to be made into slaves to serve the whims of gods. They demanded that the gods reward men for their service, and a war was fought in heaven.

Mankind's benefactors won the war. From this time on, man would have free will. Gods would have to offer their own services in exchange for those of men.

This is what the legends say. Accurate or not, gods exist today. Their influence is felt in every aspect of world affairs.

Gods have the ability to raise men above their station, to bring the godhood out of the beast. Those who have been "touched" in this way have access to the powers of sorcery.

Some gods touch their favored followers, who are then expected to serve faithfully for the rest of their days.

Some gods demand sacrifices of gold or other wealth in exchange for their touch.

Some gods give their touch freely to anyone who is capable of passing a test.

Some gods are tricksters, and give their touch to newborn children at random.

Being risen by a god is not a simple thing. The process is painful and dangerous, and some do not survive.

Even contacting a god is an act requiring great amounts of effort and patience. The most devoted follower may spend a lifetime speaking to his god and get nothing in reply.

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## **History and Geography**

After the Firmament War, gods began to make deals with men for various reasons of their own. Some wanted gold, some wanted service, some wanted to encourage the development of certain kinds of men, and others wanted only the unconditional love of devoted followers.

Competing for scarce numbers, some gods began to order their followers to go forth and convert other men to their cause - or, failing this, to kill them. Many wars were fought in the name of faith.

There was a lesser god who was jealous of the wealth in followers of others, and his name was UTUK XUL. Desperate for servants, UTUK XUL was the first god to lay his touch upon a man and grant him the use of sorcery. This man was named Telal, and he became the first priest of UTUK XUL.

This action horrified many of the gods. In their eyes, it gave to men powers that should be possessed by the gods alone. UTUK XUL was made a pariah, and attacked by a host of enemies in heaven and on earth. He lost the war in heaven, but, thanks to the powers of Telal, won the war on earth. UTUK XUL came down from heaven to form the kingdom of Keph, and reigned over it in physical presence for hundreds of years before he was able to reclaim his place above.

To oppose the armies of UTUK XUL, other gods were forced to grant similar powers to their followers. So began the ascendance of sorcery in the world.

North of Keph was a cold and rugged land, and in this land dwelled a tribe called the Kothans. The Kothans valued discipline, order, hierarchy, and uniformity. This value system caught the eye of a patron god, JURA, who set up a system whereby any man who passed a rigorous test would be touched by the god and receive great power.

The test was designed so that it could only be passed by men of great mental fortitude. It was also designed to destroy any challenger who did not believe in the value of order in all things.

Thus would the philosophy of the Kothans come to dominate the sorcerers of the region and, through their power, the land itself. This land would become the kingdom of Koth.

Many wars have been fought between Koth and Keph. It is not a great difference in philosophy between the gods or peoples that causes the conflict, but more the shared belief that there is room for only one religion and one culture in the world.

Some wars are won by Keph, some by Koth. Territory is gained and lost, but the borders never vary by much. The land between the two kingdoms, south of the Dergroll river and north of the Lalassu, has become known as The Midlands, or just Midland. Though claimed by both kingdoms, it never stays in the hands of either for long. It has its own people and culture, a mix of Kothan, Kephite, and a dozen smaller tribes, all hardened by centuries of war and deprivation. It is a land of xenophobic clans, bandit gangs, and outlaws.

East of the old kingdoms is a tormented ocean called Tiamatu. Sea travel is difficult and dangerous, making trade with the outside world uncommon. There is one island, however, whose inhabitants are skilled enough in seamanship to travel all over the world. They are merchants and explorers, and their skill has made their island very prosperous. This has led to the island being called Richland by the outside world. It lies sixty miles from the mainland, closer to Koth than to Keph.

Large portions of the Tiamatu remain uncharted by even the Richlanders. The ocean is vast and barren, but contains untold numbers of rocky islands populated by isolated peoples, strange cults, misplaced monsters, and other mysteries.

West of the old kingdoms lies a range of enormous mountains known as the Hursagmu, a Kephite word that means "Mountains of the Sky-Chambers." These massive grey cliffs are all but impassable. Legends say that many gods made their homes in these mountains, on high peaks beyond the reach of mortal man. Rumors persist of strange things lurking in lonely places.

The river Darrow flows out of the Hursagmu, running southeast from the far northern wastes to join the Dergroll halfway between the mountains and the sea. Between these two rivers and the Hursagmu is a small, heavily forested land. It was originally settled by a tribe called the Kirks, so became known as Kirkland. The Kirks mixed with other tribes, as well as outlaws and dissidents from the Eastern lands, to create a unique culture.

North of the Darrow and west of Koth, in the foothills of the Hursagmu, is a land called Vor. Within Vor are numerous small towns that have maintained their independence from Koth only because they are too remote to concern the old kingdom. This may change as Koth grows Westward.

To the west of Keph is an arid land populated by nothing but scattered tribes of nomadic savages. These tribesmen use tools of wood and stone and live in tents made from animal skins. They are able horsemen, skilled hunters, and fierce warriors. They continue to exist only because the priests of Keph have yet to desire their territory. The easternmost tribes have learned that raiding towns of the civilized lands will be met with swift and harsh retribution, so armed conflict is uncommon.

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## **Religion and Politics**

This section describes some of the churches and states of the world.

### **Koth**

Koth is a highly ordered society. Everyone is assigned a specific rank and station, from the highest lord to the lowest serf.

Beneath the veneer of order, however, lies a little chaos. To most Kothans and outsiders, the land is ruled by a hierarchy of nobles - the local lord runs day-to-day operations such as farming and mining, a higher lord oversees several local lords and is, in turn, controlled by an even higher lord, and so on all the way up to the king. Local titles are hereditary, but higher honors are appointed by superiors based on merit. Kings are chosen by an assembly of all lords in the land, and are granted their title for life.

The true rulers of Koth, however, are the sorcerers. They control the nobles, and compete for them like the gods compete for followers. The sorcerers like to keep their machinations in the shadows, acting as the secret controllers. This way, they are never subject to acts of vengeance such as an assassin's dagger or a commoners' revolt.

Worship of the god JURA is the official religion of Koth, and observance is strictly enforced. Believers are expected to attend service once per week and to donate ten percent of their income to the church (this is on top of what is already taken by the nobles).

### **Keph**

Keph is a society organized around a religion. UTUK XUL ruled the kingdom in person for centuries, and this direct contact left a mark on the land.

The priesthood rules Keph. Priests are leaders of the material as well as the spiritual. The Kephite order is hierarchial, much like the Kothan, but with priests and temples in place of lords and estates.

Some priests are granted the use of sorcery. These are generally the ones of higher rank and stature. The high prest of UTUK XUL has great power, especially in his own temple.

Observance of worship is lax. The priesthood does not concern itself with the spiritual development of its subjects, so long as they pay their tithes. Wealthy Kephites tend to live hedonistic lifestyles.

## **Midland**

The Midlands are home to uncounted individual clans. These clans are based on roots and family ties, and tend to be distrustful of outsiders. Some are outright hostile. The clans work the land for whatever wealth they can manage, and often war with their neighbors over borders or water rights. Clans band together only when there is a threat large enough to unite them, and then only until the threat is finished or some clans find that they can benefit more by siding with the outside threat against their neighbors.

The armies of Koth and Keph move through the Midlands with impunity, taking what they want from the locals and killing anyone who opposes them. Clans survive by taking the side of whatever force is nearest, or by living in areas so remote or unwanted that they are beneath notice.

In addition to the clans and warring armies, there are large gangs of brigands that roam the countryside. Most of these men are deserters from one side or another, though some were simply locals who lost all they had or found that the life of a thug was preferable to an honest living.

The religions of Midland are as varied as the people. Each clan tends to have its own patron god, real or imagined, and paganism is the rule rather than the exception.

## **Richland**

Richland (or Havlande, as the locals call it) is a society based on exploration and trade. Farming is difficult on the cold and rocky island, so the people must rely on the outside world for much of their needs. This has benefited them, however, as it has forced them to master the sea to such an extent that they now act as merchants and go-betweens for a large part of the known world. This has brought the island great wealth.

The government of Richland is informal. Order is maintained in the major cities by councils of the richest merchants, who raise money for the city watch by taxing commerce. The countryside is sparsely populated, so order here is maintained by the people themselves. It is a relatively free and peaceful society.

Religion is not a large part of life in Richland, as most people are too busy engaging in material pursuits to concern themselves with the spiritual. There are occasional houses of worship dedicated to various gods, but religion does not permeate life to the extent that it does on the mainland.

## **Kirkland**

Kirkland is bordered by the Hursagmu on the west, the river Darrow on the northeast, and the river Dergroll on the south. These natural barriers protect Kirkland from the expansionism of Koth and the clan wars of Midland.

The society of Kirkland is unique. The distinct differences between the various peoples who settled the area required that they devise a different form of governance than the hierarchical model. Kirkland is a federation of independent city-states, rather than a bureaucratic empire. Each mini-state governs its own affairs in its own way - some with influence from the old kingdoms, some based on barbarian tribalism, and others based on individuality and equality. They join together only for the purposes of free trade and common defense.

Kirkland has no official religion. Some of its states do, while others allow each individual to follow their own conscience.

### **Others**

The independent towns of Vor are generally quiet and peaceful. Disputes are usually settled by negotiation. Armed conflict between towns is rare.

Each town has its own forms of society, culture, and government. Most tend toward law and order, but not to the extreme that Koth takes such concepts.

The lands to the west of Keph are uncivilized. Numerous small tribes compete against one another for the resources of survival.

Some tribes have advanced beliefs based on honor, generosity, kinship, or courage, while others are little better than predatory animals.

Tribesmen do make great hunters and warriors, and those of the plains are excellent horsemen.

These lands have no societies to speak of, save the familial society of the local tribe. Religion generally consists of primitive nature worship, though some tribes are known to commune with gods.

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### **Other Realms**

An uncounted number of worlds exist parallel to the world of men. These worlds are reached via Amelatu sorcery.

Each world is distinct from all others. The flora, the fauna, the climate, and even the colors of the sun and sky can vary from one to the next. Most, however, are not instantly toxic to humans, though some are harsh enough that prolonged exposure can have serious consequences.

The topography is different for every realm. Some are covered in forests, others deserts; some are nothing but water broken only occasionally by rocky islands. One feature, however, remains constant: the HURSAGMU mountain range seems to be identical in every world.

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## **Faerie**

Faerie is a world much like our own, only brighter. It is home to all manner of elves, goblins, sprites, giants, and other creatures of folk tales. Some of these creatures are kind and generous, some are mischievous, and some are malevolent. All are of an alien character to humanity.

Some faeries are willing to travel to our world out of curiosity or spite, while others would prefer to lure humans into their realm for their own purposes.

Faerie is not so distant from our world. The challenge level required for sorcerers to open a portal to Faerie should be around 10.

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## **Hell**

Hell is a hot and barren realm. A huge, dim red sun takes up a third of the purple sky. The air here is thick and dry, and the rocky deserts are inhabited by some of the most savage creatures in existence. Brutal demons, cruel devils, immense dragons, and hordes of strange, vicious beasts roam about in this infernal prison.

Those who have intelligence are often willing to take any opportunity to leave. Such creatures are known to make deals with sorcerers in exchange for their freedom, though this means setting their evil loose upon the world.

Hell is not close to our world. The challenge level required for sorcerers to open a portal to Hell should be around 15.

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## **The Abyss**

The Abyss is a black void at the very edge of creation. Cold, slimy things slither here in wet darkness lit only by faint stars. The creatures of the Abyss, called "horrors" by sages, are powerful and alien beyond comprehension. There is no communicating with such things - they take no more notice of humans than humans do of insects or germs.

Only fools or madmen attempt to bring creatures of The Abyss into the world. Fortunately for humanity, this is a very difficult task. Horrors are so immense that it is almost impossible to create a portal large enough to allow the passage of more than a fraction of one. Even this, however, can be grave - a single appendage of a horror can wreak vast destruction upon an area.

There are rare lunatic cults that dedicate their lives to bringing Horrors into the world.

The Abyss is far from our world. The challenge level required to open a portal to the Abyss should be around 20.

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There are other worlds than these. The Master should feel free to be creative.

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## **The Spirit World**

The spirit world is not a separate realm, but rather a metaphor for that subset of the physical world that is hidden from the perceptions of normal humans. The restless ghosts of dead beings travel within our world alongside other, more exotic nonphysical entities. Some of these spirits can manifest themselves in the physical world to communicate with the living, while others cannot be contacted without the aid of divination.

Spirits are not constrained by walls or borders, and so can often obtain information unavailable to the living. Getting this information from them, however, can be a daunting task. Aside from the difficulty in communication, there is no reliable way to determine the identity or honesty of any particular spirit. One must take them at their word.

For this reason, most diviners find them to be unreliable and do not bother with them.

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## **DESIGNER NOTES**

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### **Introduction**

I began designing my own roleplaying games because I was not satisfied with what was available for fantasy. Fantasy is the most overdone genre in the world of RPGs, yet no fantasy game that I had played did exactly what I wanted.

I want a fantasy game that is in the middle of the great RPG debates. I want a balance between realism and heroism. I want a balance between roleplaying and hack-n-slash. I want a game that is easy to learn, with minimal mass and implementation complexity, but has plenty of variety in character type and actions. I want players to have a number of different tactical options without having to deal with too much detail - no exact maps, no long lists of spells or maneuvers, minimal bookkeeping. I wanted a game that felt like low fantasy, but where sorcerers could still deal out some whoopass.

I claim no originality in my mechanics. I have taken elements from all of my favorite games (HERO, WEG d6 Classic, D&D), some that I haven't even played (FUDGE), and some that I don't even like (GURPS, D&D). I started by trying to combine the best parts of AD&D 2e and Champions 4e, yet wound up with mechanics that look more like WEG d6 than anything else. Go figure.

The setting, likewise, is nothing more than a mishmash of things I like. It began with two basic premises: Arthur C. Clarke's assertion that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" and the various fringe theories about ancient astronauts creating the human race by combining their DNA with that of apes. I leave it vague - are the gods really gods, or merely powerful aliens? Is there a difference? Is magic really magic, or just transhuman technology? Does it matter?



Take these premises, throw in elements of Conan, Cthulhu, Paradise Lost, Sumerian mythology, and The Twilight Zone, and you get my setting. It wound up looking a little like Stargate, which is another thing that I never intended. Go figure.

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## **Character Generation**

I always loved the character generation of HERO. I loved the fact that I could place my points anywhere I wanted to create exactly the character I had in mind.

I wanted something similar in my game, but I didn't want quite the level of customization that HERO is capable of. I wanted my fantasy world to have at least a few distinct niches that reflected the particular flavor of the setting. I also wanted character creation to be much simpler - I don't find HERO's charge mechanics to be that daunting, but many fellow gamers have fled in terror at the sight of fractions.

I wanted to distill the core attributes into only those that were most necessary to describe an adventurer. I decided to make attributes very broad because most players I have known tend to choose basic archetypes for their fantasy characters - rarely does anyone create a fighter who is strong but not tough, or a rogue who is quick but not perceptive. I decided to leave specialization to the skills.

I wanted there to be symmetry between physical and mental attributes. I wanted them to be equal in number, and reflective in purpose. I chose Strength to represent physical power, Dexterity to represent physical speed, Willpower to represent mental strength, and Intelligence to represent mental quickness.

My decision to leave out attributes and skills related to social dynamics was deliberate. I have never liked stats such as Charisma, Presence, or Beauty. At best, they interfere with the roleplaying aspect of the game. Some players use them as a crutch - why try to convince someone of something through roleplaying when a Charisma roll can make the whole scene pass by? At worst, players simply ignore them in favor of more adventure-worthy skills, which forces those players who want to be charismatic to be less effective at adventuring.

I chose to ignore them. If you want to be beautiful and dashing, fine. If you would rather be ugly and intimidating, good. There are advantages and disadvantages to both.

I wanted skills to be broad. I dislike games with too much mass in the rules. I dislike hyper-specialized characters. It never made sense to me that someone could be the best swordsman in the world, yet completely useless with any other weapon. With broad skills, even characters that choose to specialize in just one or two skills are at least specialists in a field, rather than a subset of a subclass of a profession.

The skill list focuses on adventuring skills while greatly abstracting non-adventuring skills. I did this because I wanted those who wished for their character to be a talented craftsman or scholar to still be able to compete in the adventuring arena. All craft skills, from blacksmithing to shoemaking, are considered part of a single skill: Craftsmanship. All academic skills are considered part of Scholarship. This is not realistic, but I think it's fun.

Note that this is meant primarily for player characters - most NPCs will be specialists.

I wanted sorcery to be skills just like any other. I didn't accomplish this entirely - I found it necessary to require Gifts for the use of sorcery simply to prevent every character from having the ability. Gifts also allow for alien abilities that cannot properly be called skills.

Attributes had to be much more expensive than skills to prevent players from ignoring skills. Why improve one's Archery, when improving your Dexterity will improve that and all of your other physical skills at once? I chose a ratio of 10:1, which means that players will only improve their attributes to the point that they wish for at least ten of their skills to be, and will specialize thereafter. This is especially true during a campaign, as experience is given out in smaller doses that players will want to use right away.

I claim in the text that every +2 to an attribute or skill makes that stat twice as effective. This is mostly for flavor (though the probabilities are not entirely inaccurate). The point in calling +2 "twice as effective" is to make it so that the probabilities between two conflicting characters are the same if the ratios of their skills are the same, regardless of the absolute numbers involved.

What this means, in English, is that the probabilities of a contest between two characters of skills 2 and 4 are the same as those of a contest between two characters of 4 and 6, or 6 and 8, or any other difference of two, because in each case one character is "twice as effective" as the other. Similarly, the probabilities of 2 vs 8 are the same as 8 vs 14. This allows the mechanics to scale to godlike proportions if necessary.

The cost of attributes and skills increases faster as the levels get higher (specifically, it follows a quadratic growth curve). The reason for this is simple - I wanted for attributes and skills to be open-ended, limited only by the number of points the players were willing to put into them. At the same time, I didn't want annoying players to put every last point they got into a single skill. Such actions would result in the character being a god at exactly one thing and worthless at everything else.

The current cost scheme does not mesh perfectly with the geometric progression of effectiveness spoken of in the flavor text. This is because a geometric progression cost would quickly lead to ridiculously high costs for everything. As it is, the costs increase at a rate that gives diminishing returns, but not so dramatically that all characters will be generalists.

This cost scheme also means that it is painless for a character to learn a small amount about any skill. Mastery, on the other hand, requires dedication.

Finally: some may be confused by the secondary attributes. Some players might think it unrealistic that their big brawny warrior has the same Health and Stamina as a scholar. Those who think this should look at the secondaries from the opposite direction to see what actually occurs when characters get hurt.

It is easiest to illustrate by example. Take two characters, Bob and Fred. Bob has a Strength of 0 - completely average. Fred has a mighty Strength of 4. What happens when either character is hit by an attack that does 5 damage? After one hit, Bob will be at the Hurt level of Health and down 5 Stamina. After two hits, he will be unconscious. Fred, on the other hand, will have to be hit ten times by the same attack before he will fall, and even then he will still be at the OK Health level. An attack that does 10 damage will knock Bob out in one hit and make him Wounded - Fred will take two such hits before falling and will only be Hurt.

So, though secondary attributes are the same for every character in absolute numbers, different characters are still able to take more or less punishment based on their Strength, Willpower, and any armor or charms they might be wearing.

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## System Mechanics

I wanted the mechanics of my game to be easy to learn and simple to execute, yet powerful in possibility. I wanted a quick core mechanic that could be used for everything. I wanted the core mechanic to contain enough randomness that characters would have a chance against more powerful opponents, but not so much randomness that skill levels wouldn't matter.

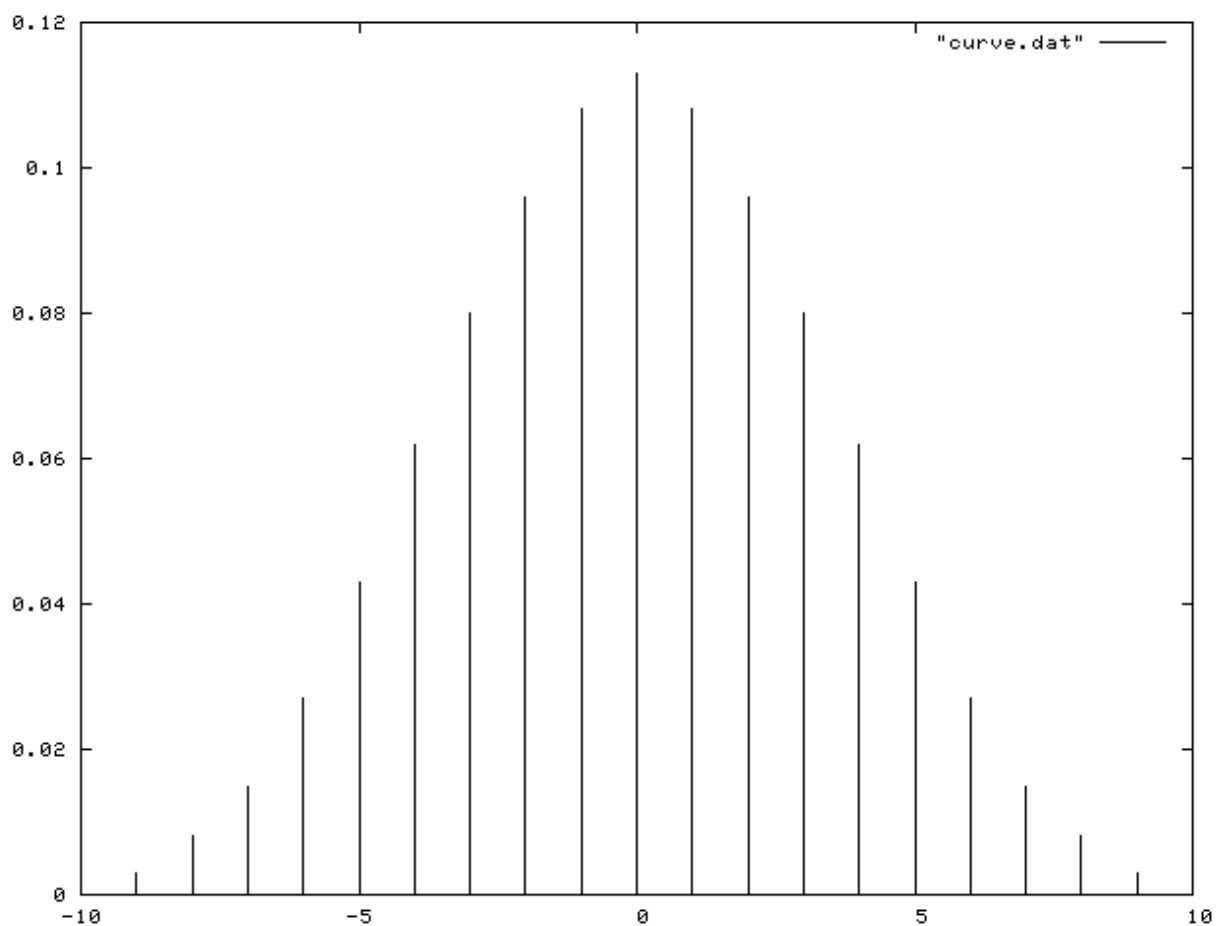
I chose opposed rolls of  $2d6 + \text{Attribute} + \text{Skill}$  as the core mechanic for several reasons:

- I like rolling 2d6. It's my favorite die roll.
- I like opposed rolls. They give both players involved in the conflict something to do.
- Attribute + Skill is simple and intuitive. It makes natural talent and acquired skill equally valuable.
- This mechanic gives a nice bell curve of probabilities.

The last point may need some justification. Those who have studied dice probabilities in the past will object that the distribution of two dice added together is triangular, not bell-shaped. So it is. However, this core mechanic uses four dice, not two!

Run the numbers and you will find that opposed rolls of 2d6 are functionally equivalent to rolling  $2d6 - 2d6$  or  $4d6 - 14$ . All three methods involve four dice and give a probability distribution ranging from -10 to 10, centered on zero, with 89% of the rolls falling between -5 and 5. This means that a character has barely a five percent chance of besting an opponent whose ability level is five points higher. Since a +5 is supposed to mean that a character is between four and eight times as able as the other, this does not seem extreme.

Here is what the graph of probabilities looks like for an opposed roll where the skill levels are equal (zero would mean a tie):



This graph is the reason why opposed rolls are required even for unopposed tasks such as climbing a cliff or picking a lock. If they were not - if the player simply rolled 2d6 and tried to beat a target number - the probability density graph would be much different.

Here is a brief table showing the probability of rolling greater than an opposing skill. Negative numbers mean that the opposing skill is inferior to yours, positive that the opposing skill is greater than yours, and zero that the skill is equal to yours. Example: to find out the probability of a skill level of 6 beating a skill level of 9, look at the probability of +3.

Multiply the probabilities  $p(x)$  by 100 to get percentages.

Skill	p(x)
-10	0.99923
-9	0.99614
-8	0.98843
-7	0.97299
-6	0.94599
-5	0.90278
-4	0.84105
-3	0.76080
-2	0.66435
-1	0.55633
0	0.44367
1	0.33565
2	0.23920
3	0.15895
4	0.09722
5	0.05401
6	0.02701
7	0.01157
8	0.00386
9	0.00077
10	0

Enough on the core mechanic. Let's examine the conflict system.

I decided not to worry much about the particular detailed differences between types of weapons or armor. I didn't want a player to have to choose a sword for tactical reasons if he really wanted to play an axe-wielding barbarian. At the same time, I didn't want players to be able to do the damage of a greatsword with a dagger. That would be unfair, as daggers have other advantages over larger weapons (they can be thrown, they are easily concealed). I settled on having the damage of a weapon determine its size.

I wanted there to be a reason why sorcerers would use foci such as wands, staves, and charms. I also wanted a rationale for why a priest or wizard is more powerful in his tower or temple than outside of it. To this end, I made all of these foci the sorcerous equivalent of weapons and armor - you can do your craft without them, but they make you more powerful.

Some games have fixed initiative - whoever has the greatest dexterity or agility or perception or whatever **always** gets to go first. I'm not fond of this. I prefer rolling for Initiative. In fact, I'm fond of the phrase itself: "Roll for initiative." It's cool. It's threatening. It leaves no doubt about your intentions - someone is about to get hurt.

Having a skill dedicated to Initiative in particular adds some variety to the types of fighters possible in the game. Players could create a samurai-like warrior by putting emphasis on aggressive initiative and striking, to the detriment of defense, or a fencer who concentrates on fending off an opponent while looking for an opening.

Most games have fixed character actions as well - every character gets a certain number of actions per round or turn based on their stats, skills, or level. I prefer the method used by WEG's d6 system - dynamic speed. Characters may take as many actions as they wish, but multiple actions give penalties. This adds another tactical element - do I want to do one thing as well as possible this round, or would it be better to attempt several things at once with a greater chance of failure?

Range Increments for missile weapons, types of sorcery, and senses were lifted directly from a popular fantasy game. I think they work well, so I stole them.

One design decision that hard-core wargamers will dislike is the lack of detailed movement rules. I have never been fond of using detailed maps in my roleplaying game sessions. I sometimes use maps to show the general location of characters relative to one another and to their surroundings, but I dislike games that require the game master to map things in excruciating detail. I enjoy a balance of tactical play (as determined by the characters decisions and actions) and fast-and-loose cinematics. Tactics-lite.

I also tried to stay away from lists of combat maneuvers. Such lists often seem arbitrary even when they are functional. I think it better to have a formula that allows players to design their own, and even better to have maneuvering built into the basic mechanics. I have tried to do the latter. If the player wants to "All-Out Dodge", his character simply takes a Defense action and nothing else. If the player wants to "Ferociously Attack", he simply makes one or more attack actions with no defensive ones. If he wants a balanced approach, he can make one attack action and one defend.

The "Augment" action should cover most of what is left out. It gives a player extra damage at the expense of skill, which can be explained as a called shot, a wild swing, or a nerve strike. The rationale for the extra damage is up to the player.

The rules for large-scale battles are not perfect. I wanted to throw something in that would allow large conflicts to be decided quickly, and wanted the Tactics skill to have a concrete effect on the outcome. Still, the mechanics of this section don't mesh with the rest of the game as nicely as I would like. Players can opt to ignore this in favor of playing out the large battles.

I chose to have a mix of different damage types to simulate the very different ways that characters can be harmed. I wanted it to be possible to defeat a character without killing him. This is what Stamina is for - to represent the cumulative wearing down of a character when he is beaten repeatedly. Wound levels are there to represent real damage - the kind that threatens one's life. I have seen studies that suggest there is no cumulative effect of wounds other than blood loss, so the mechanics reflect this. Your wound level, and associated penalties, is based only on the maximum amount of punishment you have taken from any single hit.

Sanity levels work like wound levels, but are meant for attacks based on overwhelming fear or mental powers.

I wanted sorcerers to have a lot of options when casting a spell. Much like initiative and speed, I did not want spell intensity, duration, area, or casting time to be permanently fixed. The rules are designed so that sorcerers may trade one for another in various ways, which I hope will lead to many different tactics and trade-offs.

I wanted players to be able to make a powerful sorcerer without needing the character to be strong or quick. To this end, all of a sorcerer's abilities are based on his mind. I also wanted sorcerous duels to be as fun as those of swordsmen. The ability to dodge or deflect spells without physically moving is part of this.

The types of sorcery were chosen to fit the setting - wild, unsubtle powers granted to mortals by gods for their own purposes. The rules for group rituals and the sacrificing of physical or mental health exist mainly to add flavor.

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### **Setting Notes**

Though my vision is a low fantasy world focused on humans and their gods, I didn't want to strictly limit other elements of classic fantasy. Amelatu sorcery (the ability to open gateways to other worlds) allows game masters to introduce non-human elements into a campaign. The fact that sorcery is required for such elements means that they can be as much or as little a part of a campaign as the game master wishes.

The otherworldly cosmology described in the text is a grab-bag of various fantasy realms that I like. I deliberately stated that there were other worlds than these so that game masters could bring in whatever manner of weirdness they desired. One could even bring in elements of the modern world, or science fiction. I wouldn't, but it could be done.

The mundane setting of the old kingdoms versus the frontier is left open by design. I gave just a brief description of various places so that game masters would have a framework on which to hang plots. There is no overarching metaplot. The details are up to you.

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