
OVERVIEW

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

A player character (PC) is described by four attributes, three damage metrics, and a number of skills and gifts. Attributes represent the fundamental nature of a person. Damage metrics measure the harm done to a person's body or mind. Skills measure learned abilities such as fighting, sorcery, or craftsmanship. Gifts are special abilities that cannot be learned.

Players begin the game with a number of **character points**. These are used to build the player's in-game persona. The number is chosen by the game master (known hereafter as "The Master") based on how powerful He wishes for beginning characters to be. The Master may assign different numbers of points for attributes and skills; this can force players to create characters with natural talent but limited experience or journeyman adventurers with average attributes.

As characters adventure, The Master will occasionally give out **experience points** for their actions (usually at the end of a game session or three). Experience points may be used to increase attributes or skills just like the character points that were used to build them. This allows characters to grow more powerful over time.

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

The Skill Roll

Central to the rules of the game is the skill roll. All important actions are resolved with a skill roll; the same roll is used whether one is building a table, picking a lock, swinging a sword, or casting a spell. Here it is, the fundamental mechanic of the game:

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

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. High rolls are always better than low rolls.

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 a meager success for one of the opponents, depending on the situation.

If one is trying to perform a task unopposed, The Master must assign a **challenge level**. This number is then rolled against the acting character as if it were a skill.

The difference between the result of the winner and that of the loser is the **degree of success** (known hereafter as the Dos). This number represents the quality of the action. A Dos of 1 is a mild success; a Dos of 10 is incredible.

If a situation does not require a skill roll (because success is easy), then the character's skill level is the Dos.

Challenge Levels

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

Task Difficulty	Challenge Level
Fair	0
Moderate	5
Great	10
Incredible	15
Inconceivable	20

The numbers above assume that the acting person has the necessary tools 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 a penalty (make the challenge level higher). If the character has an exceptional set of tools at his disposal, then he should receive a bonus (or 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 is depends upon the task - perhaps six seconds for picking a lock or six days for smithing a weapon. The Master may assign bonuses for extra time taken or penalties for rushed work. He may lower the challenge level if the character takes more time than is necessary, or may raise it if the character tries to rush. Most of the time, this should be -2 to the skill roll per halving of the required time and +2 to the skill roll per doubling (to a maximum of +10).

Example:

Lanky the thief wants to pick a lock on a treasure chest. The lock quality is somewhere between average and good, so The Master decides to assign a challenge level of seven to the task.

Lanky has a Dex of four and a Burglary of six. To make the attempt he rolls 2d6+10. The Master rolls 2d6+7. If Lanky's result is higher than The Master's, he succeeds in picking the lock.

If Lanky wants to be extra sure, he can take twice as much time to 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).

If Chuck gets a total of 17 and Lothar (the Unlucky) gets a total of 11, the attack hits with a Dos of 6 (a great success).

ATTRIBUTES

Attributes are the basic building blocks of a character. They represent the fundamental nature of a person.

There are four attributes:

STRENGTH is physical constitution and power. It determines the amount of weight the individual can lift or carry. It affects the amount of physical harm one can inflict and endure.

DEXTERITY is physical speed. Quickness, perception, balance, and coordination are all facets of dexterity. Physical skills are based on Dex.

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

INTELLECT is both general knowledge and quickness of thought. Mental and sorcerous skills are based on Int.

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

The point cost of an attribute is based on the level. The higher the attribute, the more difficult it is to improve. The amount of points required to achieve a particular attribute level is given by the following chart and formula:

Attribute level	cost	description
-2	-20	feeble
-1	-10	weak
0	0	fair
1	10	good
2	20	great
3	30	heroic
4	40	
5	60	
6	80	
7	120	
8	160	
9	240	
10	320	mythic
11	480	
12	640	
L	$10 * 2^{(L / 2)}$	

So: to give a new character a Str of 3 requires 30 character points. To later raise that same character's Str to 4 will cost 10 experience points (40 for level 4, minus the 30 points already spent for level 3).

Fractions are rounded down. Putting only 7 experience points into the above character's strength would give no benefit until 3 more points were added to raise the total to 40.

Attribute levels are open-ended, but most human beings do not have attribute levels greater than 2. Few have attributes greater than five.

The negative numbers in the table above show that a player may obtain extra points for use in other abilities by being particularly weak in an attribute.

This table gives the amount of weight that different Str levels can lift:

Strength	Lift (lbs)
-2	50
-1	75
0	100
1	150
2	200
3	300
4	400
5	600
6	800
7	1200
8	1600
9	2400
10	3200
11	4800
12	6400
13	9600
14	12800
15	19200
16	25600
17	38400
18	51200
19	76800

20	102400
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In addition to the four attributes, there are three damage metrics:

STAMINA measures how much punishment one can take before falling unconscious. A character with zero Stamina is barely conscious; a person in this state has -10 to all skill rolls. If Stamina falls below zero, the character is knocked out.

HEALTH measures physical illness and injury. If Health falls to zero, the victim is incapacitated and will die without assistance. If Health falls below zero, the character is dead.

SANITY measures mental illness and injury. If Sanity falls to zero, the character becomes a raving lunatic who acts at random. If Sanity falls below zero, the character is catatonic - the body lives, but the mind is gone forever.

A character's maximum Stamina is limited by its current Health and Sanity. If either is damaged, the maximum Stamina is equal to whichever is lower. Example: a character who has taken 5 points of physical damage and 9 points of mental will have Health 15 and Sanity 11; that character's maximum Stamina is 11 until Sanity is recovered. If Sanity is healed but Health is not, the character's maximum Stamina will be 15.

Every PC has twenty points of Stamina, Health, and Sanity.

SKILLS

Skills are specific fields of knowledge or ability. They represent study and practice.

Below is a list of skills. It is not exhaustive - it focuses on adventuring skills, leaving others to the imagination of players.

The Master should feel free to add or drop skills to make the list fit their campaign world. Players who wish to have an unlisted skill should propose the new skill to The Master.

The skill list is divided into physical and mental. Physical skills are based on Dexterity. Mental skills are based on Intellect.

Physical Skills

Acrobatics
Archery
Athletics
Burglary
Climbing
Craftsmanship

Defense
Grappling
Perception
Pickpocketing
Quickness
Riding
Stealth
Striking
Throwing

Acrobatics

This skill allows one to perform flips, cartwheels, rolls, and tumbles. A high level may let one swing on trapezes and walk tightropes. It can also be used to lessen the damage taken from a fall.

Archery

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

Athletics

This skill allows one to run, swim, and jump.

Most characters can run ten yards per movement action. Each level of this gift gives the character an additional yard. It is rolled to determine the progress of a race or chase, with each point of Dos being one yard of distance gained or lost.

It also allows one to swim faster than others, though the rate is halved.

Leaping over obstacles or chasms requires a roll against a challenge level set by The Master.

Burglary

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

Burglary lets one pick locks, whether ordinary keyed locks or fancier combination or puzzle locks.

It also allows one 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 such protections set by others.

Last but not least, having this ability means that the character knows how to force doors or shutters quickly and quietly.

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), the higher the challenge level.

A failed roll usually means no progress, but a spectacular failure could mean a fall.

Craftsmanship

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

Master craftsmen can create works of great beauty and utility. The Master may rule that a 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.

Defense

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

Grappling

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

Perception

This skill represents both the quality of one's natural senses and general alertness. This important skill can prevent one - and one's friends - from being taken by surprise.

Pickpocketing

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

This can also be used for less nefarious purposes, such as performing minor "magic" tricks through sleight of hand.

Quickness

This skill represents muscle speed and reflexes. It determines who goes first during a round of physical combat.

Riding

This is the skill of using an animal (usually a horse) for transport. Normal travel does not require riding rolls - the skill is used for tricks, leaps, and mounted combat.

Stealth

This is the art of silence and invisibility. To move unseen requires shadow, the darker the better. Dark clothing and soft shoes help.

Striking

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

Throwing

This is the skill of throwing and catching objects. It covers hitting a target with hurled objects (rocks, knives, axes, spears) and the use of slings. A high skill level allows one to juggle 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 badly failed. Multiple jugglers can work in tandem for a splendid show.

The simplest thrown attack is a good-sized rock. This does the base strength damage of the attacker (like a punch, only farther). Larger rocks add more damage, but have less range.

Mental Skills

Animals
Command
Concealment
Defiance
Disguise
Engineering
Forgery
Gaming
Healing
Mysticism
Navigation
Observation
Scholarship
Shadowing
Sorcery
Survival
Tracking
Trading

Animals

This skill is used to train animals to perform work or tricks and to effectively handle such domesticated creatures. It can also be used, at higher levels, to befriend wild animals. A master can even calm enraged beasts.

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 the initiative of one using sorcery. It also represents the general decisiveness of a character; this can be used to inspire followers.

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.

Defiance

This skill represents the ability to resist mental attacks (sorcery). It is the mental equivalent of the Defense skill.

It doesn't matter whether an assault is aimed directly at the character or at everything in the general area. A Defiant character does not move - he focuses his concentration to prevent hostile sorcery from harming him.

Any sorcery can be resisted, no matter how large or powerful. The defender need only roll higher with Defiance than the attacker does with Sorcery.

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. Anything with a mind can defy its effects.

Disguise

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

Mysticism

This is a catchall for supernatural abilities used to learn the unknown. A mystic may hear the whispers of spirits, read the future in the stars, or simply **know** things without reason.

Mysticism allows one 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 regard to sorcery and the spirit world as the Perception skill serves in the physical world.

If sorcery is used anywhere near a mystic, The Master should have the player roll Mysticism to see if the character senses it. More powerful spells are "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 mystics in the area should get regular skill checks to see if they notice.

Mysticism also allows one to sense the presence of nearby disembodied spirits and to communicate with them on a primal level. A mystic does not receive coherent thoughts from ghosts, only urges, feelings, and desires.

Finally, Mysticism can be used by The Master as a plot device. He can allow a character to sense danger, receive visions of the future, or anything else that adds to the game.

Engineering

This skill is used to construct and operate siege engines such as catapults, ballistae, and trebuchet. It can also be used for undermining defenses through sapping. The engineer does not need to do all of the building or digging; it is enough to draw up plans for skilled laborers to follow.

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.

Gaming

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

Healing

This is the skill of primitive medicine. A character can bind wounds, set bones, and move companions without doing further harm.

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 (lancing boils, amputating limbs). Acupuncture can be used to eliminate pain, to cure some types of ailments, and to quicken the natural healing process. Minor surgery might be required to cut out an infection to prevent the spread of toxins to the vital organs.

Navigation

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

Observation

This skill is similar to Perception. Perception is used to detect subtle things that may go unheard or unseen; Observation is used to detect things that are obvious but may go unnoticed. Observation can allow one to notice that someone is wearing the wrong clothes, behaving strangely, etc. It is especially useful for spotting disguises. Bonuses can be given if the character has some reason to suspect that the disguised person is not who they appear to be.

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, trading breadth for depth (as with Craftsmanship).

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 one is being followed, one must make an Observation roll versus the Shadowing roll of the follower.

Sorcery

Sorcery gives mortals godlike powers. One can create force at a distance, cause things to burst into flame, read a person's thoughts, relieve someone of suffering, or open gateways to alien worlds - all with but a thought.

Sorcery cannot be learned; it's a gift. For those with the gift, this skill measures both knowledge and ability. For those without, it measures only knowledge.

See the **Gifts** and **Sorcery** chapters for more.

Trading

This skill allows one to appraise the value of items. It is used for everything from earthenware pots to rare works of art. Exotic objects are more difficult to appraise. The better the roll, the closer the appraisal is to the real value.

Trading also represents knowledge of markets. Skilled traders can tell where markets will be by the layout of a town. They can also locate black markets and information peddlers.

Wilderness

This is the ability to survive in the wild with minimal equipment and supplies. A master of the wilderness can live indefinitely with nothing more than a good knife and some warm clothes. Additional items, such as a bow and arrow for hunting, make life easier.

This skill also lets a character discover and follow tracks. Some creatures are easier to track than others. Different types of terrain increase or lessen the challenge. Some, 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.

Cost

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

The point cost of a skill is based on the level. The higher the skill, the more difficult it is to improve. The amount of points required to achieve a particular skill level is given by the following chart and formula:

skill level	cost	title
1	1	apprentice
2	2	
3	3	
4	4	
5	6	
6	8	journeyman
7	12	
8	16	
9	24	
10	32	master
11	48	
12	64	
L	$2^{(L / 2)}$	

Thus: to give a new character an Archery skill level of 6 requires 8 character points. To later raise that same character's Archery to 7 will cost 4 experience points (12 for level 7, minus the 8 already spent to reach level 6).

As with attributes, fractions are rounded down.

Skill levels, like attributes, are open-ended.

GIFTS

Gifts are special abilities possessed by few.

Gifts cannot be learned. A gift is an inborn quality, a random mutation, or a divine blessing.

Gifts do not have levels; they are all-or-nothing and require a flat number of points.

Below is a list of possible gifts. It 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 the game world.

Some of the listed gifts are useful for players who wish for 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 give bonuses to attributes or skills except in particular circumstances (determined by The Master). They can help to negate penalties in their domain of function, however.

Sorcery

Cost: 10 per dicipline

To use sorcery, one must be "touched" by a god. To be touched with sorcery requires 10 points per dicipline.

Amelatu
Mahasu
Nekelmu
Sabatu
Seheru
Talamu

Amelatu

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

Mahasu

This sorcery lets the user manipulate the physical energies of the world, such as heat, light, sound, and lightning. It gives the user the power to destroy.

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, however.

Nekelmu

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

Sabatu

This sorcery allows the user to project force at a distance. It can be used to attack persons or objects.

Seheru

This sorcery allows the user to diminish or destroy the sorcery of others. It functions much like Defiance, but works at range and destroys spells instead of evading their effects.

Seheru is, in essence, anti-sorcery. It is used to nullify spells or to set up supernatural wards.

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 mysticism.

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 situations.

Improved Hearing

Cost: 10

This gift allows one to hear sounds whose pitch is above or below the range of normal human hearing. Ultrasonic noises include things 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 might also communicate this way.

Improved Sense of Smell

Cost: 10

This gift allows one to detect scents with fine detail, like an animal. 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.

Starvision

Cost: 10

Starvision allows one to see at night as if it were broad daylight. This ability works even when 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.

Immunity

Cost: 20

This gift makes one immune to sickness, disease, and biological poisons. The character is still vulnerable to dangerous inorganic chemicals.

Longevity

Cost: 10

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

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 - a character that looks strange and alien will be hated or feared by most humans. It can not enter civilization without an excellent disguise, so must often rely on others 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.

Amphibious

Cost: 10

A character with this gift is equally at home in water or on land. The character has no penalties to movement, skill, or initiative in water.

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

Extra Limbs

Cost: 5 per limb

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 one to grasp more objects at once.

Phosphorescence

Cost: 5

This gift allows a character's body to emit a soft glow like that of a firefly. This glow can be used to see only a few feet. It can be used for reading unless the writing is faint.

The player may choose whether this glow emits from the entire body or specific parts.

The glow can be turned on and off at will.

EQUIPMENT

Economics

Let us begin with the foundation of civilized society: money.

In the game, money is usually in the form of precious metals such as 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 over things like oranges or cattle.

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

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 worthless compared to the necessities of survival. This will mean that the price of everything (as measured in gold or silver) will 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; items of excellent quality can cost far more.

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 (gc) = 10 silver coins (sc) = 100 copper coins (cc). This will result in a stable monetary system and keep players and The Master from becoming confused.

Prices are listed in terms of copper coins (cc) - the common man's metal.

Food

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

Clothing

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

Shelter

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

Gear

gear	weight	cost (cc)
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 are used to slay enemies.

The details of a weapon are not important for game purposes. An axe, sword, or flail can all do the same amount of damage provided that they have the same disadvantages. Players are free to call their characters' weapons whatever suits them.

The base weapon damage is 10. This may be increased or decreased by selecting from the following options:

Size

Larger weapons do more harm than smaller ones, but are heavier and more difficult to conceal.

By default, a weapon is considered to be medium-sized: one to three feet long and around five pounds in weight (including belt, scabbard, etc); small enough to use one-handed, but too large to be easily hidden on one's person.

A weapon may be smaller or larger. Small weapons have -2 damage, but no concealment penalty; large weapons have +2 damage, require two hands and cannot be concealed.

Size	Length (ft)	Weight (lbs)	Damage	Concealment	Hands
small	less than 1	1	8	0	1
medium	1 to 3	5	10	-6	1
large	greater than 3	10	12	NA	2

Throwable

A weapon with this option is designed to be thrown. A weapon without this option has a -6 penalty to hit a target when thrown; a weapon with this option has no penalty, but has -2 damage.

A weapon with this option cannot be missile or mechanical.

Missile

This option gives -2 damage.

Missile weapons use leverage to launch projectiles. The benefit is range: 60 yards per point of damage. The drawback is the need for ammunition - a missile weapon is usually limited to around twenty shots per battle. It is assumed that ammunition can be recovered or recreated between battles, given sufficient time.

Missile weapons require two hands regardless of size.

Mechanical

This option usually applies to missile weapons (it is designed to simulate crossbows). Weapons with this option do not add the user's strength to their damage. They do get +2 damage by virtue of their construction, but with a price: mechanical weapons require an action to reload (other missile weapons, such as slings and bows, reload and fire in one action).

This table gives examples of weapons created with the above options:

Name	Size	Throwable	Missile	Mechanical	Damage
Dart	Small	yes	no	no	6
Sling	Small	no	yes	no	6
Knife	Small	yes	no	no	6
Dagger	Small	no	no	no	8
Hatchet	Medium	yes	no	no	8
Bow	Medium	no	yes	no	8
Sword	Medium	no	no	no	10
Spear	Large	yes	no	no	10
Longbow	Large	no	yes	no	10
Crossbow	Large	no	yes	yes	12
Halberd	Large	no	no	no	12
Maul	Large	no	no	no	12

These are only suggestions. Use whatever combinations and names that you like. If you want to make the halberd Throwable and call it a Giant Flying Axe, have fun.

Another important aspect of weaponry is cost. Cost is based partially on the mechanics used above, but not entirely - there is a roleplaying element as well. Weapons that are used in farming or hunting - bows, spears, axes, flails - are much easier to get than those designed exclusively for war. Swords and crossbows should be ten times more expensive than weapons of similar attributes because they are rare and difficult to create. Owning one is a sign of wealth or prestige.

Here is an idea of what to charge:

- Size: 100cc for small, 200cc for medium, 400cc for large
- Throwable: x2 cost
- Missile: x10 cost
- Mechanical: x10 cost
- Noble (swords): x10 cost

So, a large crossbow would cost 400cc for size, x10 for being a missile weapon, and x10 for being mechanical, for a total of 40000cc (400gc). A medium sword would cost 200cc for size and x10 for being noble, for a total of 2000cc (20gc).

On the other hand

Shields are used to block attacks. Most are made from heavy wood banded with iron and cost 200cc. Solid steel shields are rare and cost 2000cc.

The user of a shield gets +2 to Defense. There are benefits to fighting without one, however (see the **Swords** chapter).

Armor

Armor protects the wearer from physical harm in combat. It adds to the strength of the character when enduring damage from a physical attack.

Armor can be a lifesaver, but is heavy and uncomfortable. The encumbrance will slow a character down and make many actions difficult (acrobatics, climbing, stealth) or even impossible (swimming). The value of the armor should be subtracted from any skill checks that require agility or quiet.

The mass and material of the armor determines the protection. The type of the armor is not important for game purposes. Players may call their characters' armor plate, chain, or boiled hide, so long as the weight and discomfort are the same.

The Master has the final say on this. A player should expect to explain how his character wears fifty pounds of pigskins in order to get the best protection possible.

The list below is a general guideline. Each point of protection requires ten pounds of material.

type	endurance	weight	cost
padded cloth	1	10	100
soft leather	2	20	200
boiled hide	3	30	400
mail	4	40	8000
plate	5	50	16000

Note: mail and plate are given such high prices for the same reason as swords - they are rare and difficult to make.

Foci

Foci allow sorcerers to channel more energy. They act as both weapons and armor for a sorcerer.

The power of the focus is added to the willpower of the character to determine how much energy he can channel per round. The negation of the focus is added to the willpower of the sorcerer whenever he endures the effects of a detrimental spell. These values are fixed when the focus is created.

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 temples or towers. A two-foot long focus has 4 levels to divide among power and negation; each doubling of length or width gives +2.

A focus must be inscribed with numerous magical runes. These runes flare when the focus is in use.

Creating a focus is no simple task. Most sorcerers contract with a craftsman for the physical object, then inscribe the runes themselves. Being touched with sorcery gives one instinctive knowledge of how to carve the mystical sigils in the proper order.

type	size	weight	power	negation
wand	2	1	4	0
holy symbol	2	1	1	3
scepter	4	2	6	0
cane	4	2	4	2
staff	8	4	8	0
temple	128	immobile	10	6
tower	128	immobile	16	0

The names are examples; a staff may have power 4, negation 4 if the player likes.

Encumbrance

There are limits to the amount of gear and loot one can carry.

The strength score of a character determines the maximum amount of weight that person can lift. A large haul gives penalties to movement and to any skills requiring agility. The penalty is based on the ratio of weight carried to maximum lift:

Weight : Max Lift (%)	Movement	Skill
50%	halved	-4
75%	quartered	-8
100%	0	NA

Example: Bob has a strength of 2. He can lift 200 pounds. When carrying one hundred pounds worth of gear or treasure, he can move only half as fast as normal. Furthermore, any skills requiring whole-body agility have a -4 penalty.

For purposes of simplicity, this rule should only be used if a character is carrying at least 50% of maximum heft. Rough estimates are better than detailed accounting.

ENCOUNTERS

Encounters are an essential part of any story. The world would be dull without them.

In-game conflict is resolved in one of two ways: **talk** or **dice**. Negotiation and conversation should be resolved through talk. Logic and reasoning should be as well, though exceptions can be made if the intellect of a character exceeds that of the player. Dice are needed when characters use skills in conflict with opposing forces.

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 can hamper vision. Loud noise can hamper hearing. The challenge level for any situation is up to The Master.

Unconscious characters get no perception rolls - they are senseless. Being asleep is not the same as being knocked out, however; sleeping characters get normal hearing perception rolls when unusual noises occur in their presense. If successful, they awaken. If the noises are very soft, such as someone sneaking toward the sleeper, the perception rolls are 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).

Mysticism functions as supernatural awareness. It can be rolled to sense the presence of sorcery. More on this later.

Conflict

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) or square yards (area).

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

Initiative

The first step in any round is to roll initiative. High initiatives act before low ones.

A character cannot use both physical and mental skills during the same round - he must concentrate on one or the other. Before rolling initiative, each character must decide whether to maneuver (take physical actions) or concentrate (take mental actions). Those who maneuver use their Quickness skills for initiative; those who concentrate use Command.

An important effect of this choice: those who chose to maneuver are unable to defy sorcerous attacks, while those who chose to concentrate are unable to defend against physical attacks.

Though characters must choose between maneuver and concentration, they need not detail their exact actions until their turn.

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.

Any skill bonuses or penalties that result from a character's actions last until the character's next turn - i.e., the character's initiative on the next round.

Action

The next step is the action phase. Characters take their turns in order of initiative. A character that is disabled before its turn gets no actions.

Some actions are free. Drawing a weapon, shouting to a comrade, moving a few paces (2 yards or so), and the like; these take little time and require no skill roll. If such actions must be done before more important ones, the character might have a penalty to Initiative (-2 or so per minor act).

Other actions do require a skill roll or take significant time; these are important. Characters are normally allowed one important action per round of conflict. More may be taken, for a price: one can perform up to five actions on a single round for a penalty to all skill rolls that round. The penalty is equal to the number of actions taken:

Actions	Penalty
1	0
2	-2
3	-3
4	-4
5	-5

Example: Bob the Fighter has a Striking skill of 5 and a Defense skill of 6. He wishes to attack twice this round. For performing two actions, he has a -2 penalty to all skills for the round - his Striking becomes 3, his defense becomes 4. If Bob wishes to make four attacks (or four moves, or two moves and two attacks, etc), his skills will be lowered to 1 and 2. He will also be at -4 Perception.

Those who opt to take no actions on a round get a +4 bonus to all passive skill rolls they are forced to make. For those who maneuver, this means +4 to Defense and Perception; for those who concentrate, it's +4 to Defiance, Observation, and Mysticism.

A character can choose to focus his energies on one skill to the detriment of others. Doing so gives a +1 or +2 (the player's choice) to that skill for the round, but a corresponding -1 or -2 penalty to all other skills.

A character that is attacked before his turn may take defensive actions. This can have one of two effects: if the defensive action needed is the same type of action that the character chose in the initiative phase - for example, the character decided to maneuver and is attacked by a swordsman - the character makes a defensive roll with any bonuses or penalties due to actions on his previous turn. He then gets to act on his Initiative.

If, on the other hand, the defensive action required is a different type of action than the character had planned - for example, the character decided to maneuver and is attacked by a sorcerer - the character must abort the rest of his turn to take a defensive action. That, or take the hit with no defensive roll.

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. Bob attacks Fred.

Because Fred decided to maneuver during the initiative phase, he may defend himself against Bob's physical assault without sacrificing his turn. Assuming he survives Bob's strike, he will get to strike back on his initiative.

Example: Bob the Fighter attacks Marco the Mad. Bob chooses to maneuver; Marco chooses to concentrate. Bob rolls Quickness for Initiative. Marco rolls Command.

Bob is more quick than Marco is commanding, so wins the Initiative and tries to swat Marco with his sword. Marco, 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 sorcerous attack and any other actions for the round.

If Marco had won the Initiative, Bob might have had to abort his sword attack to defend himself from Marco's sorcery.

A character is not required to act on his initiative. He can wait to see what others (with lower initiatives) will do without penalty.

A waiting character may take its action at any time, even within the action of another character.

Example: Chuck the Barbarian sees Mace the Ugly on a hilltop across the battlefield. Chuck wins initiative, but waits to see what Mace will do.

Mace charges. Chuck won the initiative, however, so he may choose to attack first 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 hold action until the next round, in which case that character automatically wins initiative for that round without rolling. He gets no extra actions, however.

Some actions may require more than one round to complete. If the character is injured during this time, the action fails.

Recovery

A character that takes no actions or damage during a round recovers one hit of Stamina.

Round Zero

Round zero marks the beginning of any conflict. Whoever acts first automatically gets the initiative regardless of skill. 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.

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 ambushes or knives thrown by hidden assassins.

Movement

Each move is an important action.

The following are movement actions:

Standing from a prone position

Moving (10 + Athletics) yards on foot

Mounting or dismounting an animal

Riding an animal for one length of its movement rate *

Making a leap

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

Falling prone is a free action; it gives no penalties.

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 plus the attack combine to give Fred a -5 penalty to all skill rolls until his next turn.

If the ground is not level, The Master may give a character bonuses or penalties to his movement, depending on whether he is going uphill or downhill. If the terrain is especially treacherous, The Master may require an Acrobatics roll (on foot) or a Riding roll (mounted).

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).

Individuals 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.

Characters may add their 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. Momentum gives (and takes) +1 damage for every ten yards of movement.

Example: A brave knight charges a line of soldiers atop his mount. His lance does 14 damage (10 for the lance + 4 for Strength). The knight has moved 40 yards on horseback, however, so adds 4 for a total of 18.

Unfortunately, the knight is hit by one of the braced spearmen, whose weapon gives him a damage of 13 (1 for Strength, 12 for the pike). Adding the knight's momentum to this gives a total of 17.

Good thing the knight is wearing his shining armor.

Combat movement is automatic. When finer detail is required - for races or chases - participants should roll Athletics. Each level of the Dos gains the victor one yard of distance.

* Mounts have better movement rates than humans. A horse can move from twenty to forty yards per movement action, depending on its athletics.

Range

The further away a target is, the harder it is to hit. Ranged attacks have challenge numbers based on distance (zero at point-blank range). Against an evading target, these numbers are added to the defensive roll.

Each ranged ability has an "increment" of a number of yards. The challenge is +1 for every increment between the attacker and the target.

Example: bows have a range increment of 10. If a target is within ten yards, the challenge number is zero. If a target is between ten and twenty yards, the challenge number is 1. Between twenty and thirty yards, it is 2. Targets will have these numbers added to their Defense scores (which are zero for fixed objects).

A range increment of zero means that the attacker must be within touching distance of the target.

attack type	range increment
melee weapon	0
thrown weapon	2
missile weapon	10

sorcery type	range increment
Amelatu	0
Talamu	0
Nekelmu	2
Mahasu	10
Sabatu	10
Seheru	10

Senses are also limited in range.

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

* The range limitation on mysticism is used to determine whether the mystic notices the use of sorcery in his immediate area. The prophetic aspects of mysticism have no limits.

The Waiting Game

This rule simulates scenes in books and movies in which two opponents stop and stare one another down, taking no actions, 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, then the action passes to the next round. If the characters involved have not acted or taken damage, they get to recover a hit of Stamina.

The waiting game can even involve more than two characters.

All characters involved in the waiting game get the initiative over characters who acted in the previous round. They roll initiative only against one another.

Haste

A character may choose to sacrifice accuracy for speed. A character who is determined to go first may add a bonus to his initiative roll, but that same number must be subtracted from all skill rolls that round. The maximum is 10. The decision to haste must be made before anyone rolls initiative.

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 initiative is paramount.

One of the swordsmen chooses to haste to insure that he gets to strike first. He decides to add a +6 bonus to his Quickness roll. All skill rolls suffer a -6 penalty for the round.

Push

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 to both for a single round.

Example: A mighty warrior with a Strength of 5 is trying to hold open a massive door so his weaker friends can 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 hold open a massive portal to The Abyss so that one of the Great Old Ones can enter the world. He trades 6 points of Stamina for 6 extra points of Willpower, giving him a total of 10 for the round. At the end of the first round, he is down 6 hits. After four rounds of exertion, he is down 24 hits and falls to the ground unconscious.

WORDS

This chapter describes the rules for physical combat.

Damage

Attacks are skill rolls like any other. Damage is determined by the attacker's strength (except when using mechanical weapons), the weapon, the Dos of the skill roll, the defender's strength, and the defender's armor.

The basic formula goes like this:

1. Add the attacker's strength, weapon, and Dos to get the Health.
2. Add +4 to the above to get the Stamina.
3. Subtract the defender's strength and armor from both values.
4. Whatever remains is applied to the Health and Stamina of the victim.

Though damage to Health is cumulative, players should keep track of each wound separately. Note the amount of Health done by each attack, adding them together only to determine if the character is dead. This is important for later healing (healing ten minor wounds is easier than healing one serious wound. See **Pain and Suffering**).

Weapons

Weapons not only add damage, but also a small amount of skill. On the other hand, grasping objects makes grappling more difficult.

Using one weapon by itself (one-handed or two-handed) gives +2 to hit.

Using two weapons gives +1 to hit, +1 to defend.

Using a shield gives +2 to defend.

Having only one free hand gives -2 to grappling.

Having no free hand gives -4 to grappling.

A person who is grappled can drop their weapons to remove the penalties.

Combat Maneuvers

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

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 a character is unable to defend for any reason, he gets no chance to evade.

For melee attacks, this means an attack roll vs a challenge level of 0. For ranged attacks, this means an attack roll at the challenge level of the range.

The effect of an attack depends upon the skill used.

Strike

A strike is a direct attack. It can be done with melee weapons, thrown weapons, missile weapons, or bare hands. Roll skill vs skill and determine damage as given above.

In hand-to-hand combat, a fighter may choose to trade skill for damage or vice-versa. One level of skill may be traded for two levels of damage; two levels of skill may be traded for four levels of damage. One cannot trade more than two levels of skill this way.

Skill	Damage
+2	-4
+1	-2
+0	+0
-1	+2
-2	+4

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. An object may be destroyed by this action.

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. The attacker has the option to do damage as well, but only with base strength or small weapons. 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 with Grappling, close combat is still initiated. If the character successfully defends with Defense, the attacker has been warded off and melee combat continues.

Once opponents are locked in close combat, Grappling skill is all that matters; it is used for both offense and defense. Upon reaching his initiative in close combat, a character can attempt to gain control of an opponent or to escape from the grapple. Either case is handled by rolling Grappling vs. Grappling.

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

A character who has successfully gained control over an opponent in close combat can use elements of the environment as weapons. Slamming an opponent into a solid floor or wall can be worth anywhere from +1 to +6 depending on the hardness of the material (a wooden floor should hurt less than a stone one). Slamming an opponent into a sharp corner might 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 a great height is a good way to end a fight.

A grab can also be used to disarm an opponent. 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 Grappling rolls for each doubling of mass between he and his opponents, 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 between three and four doublings. The giant gets +7 to all grappling rolls.

Logic trumps game mechanics, of course. Even if a master wrestler is 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

There are two ways to defend: blocking and 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.

Missiles cannot normally be blocked without a shield. This, again, depends on the flavor of the game.

Shields can be used to block almost any attack except those that are enormous. 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 an action for purposes of skill penalties, however.

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. The only requirement for a dodge is that there be 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, but not the other.

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 directed not at a person, but at a place. Attacks such as these are called area attacks.

To hit a particular area, an attacker need only roll greater than the ranged challenge level 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) are able to dodge an attack unless the areas above and below it are hit as well.

Animals and Mounted Combat

Animals are characters just like any other. They have attributes, 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, is a chaotic environment, however; it may be necessary to make Animals skill rolls in order to get creatures to obey. It helps if the animal has been specifically trained for fighting.

Mounts, namely horses, allow characters to move much faster than they can 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.

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.

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.

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; however, a sorcerer can affect anyone who is currently using sorcery on him even if he has no way to sense his attacker.

Foci

Sorcerers often use a focus to channel supernatural energy. A focus is an enchanted object covered with runes that glow when energy is channelled (the runes must be uncovered for the focus to work). This is usually a wand or staff, but it can also be a place of power, such as a church, a tower, or a circle of stones. Such enormous foci must have a focal point, such as an altar or a pentagram, where the runes are inscribed. This is where the sorcerer must stand in order to use the focus. If this focal point is damaged or desecrated, the place of power ceases to function.

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.

Power and Energy

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

- $\text{Power} = \text{Will} + \text{focus power}$

Every sorcerous spell has an energy level. To cast a spell of a certain energy, the sorcerer must channel that amount of energy and make a Sorcery roll vs a challenge level based on the range. If a spell is resisted by Defiance or Seheru sorcery, the Sorcery check is made against that skill plus the range modifiers.

A sorcerer has no trouble casting spells equal to his power level. He can cast spells beyond his current power, but must take extra time to channel the additional energy. Each +2 energy beyond his power level requires a doubling of the time required to cast the spell.

In addition, a sorcerer who stretches his power this way must make an additional Sorcery roll vs a challenge level equal to the amount of extra energy channelled. Failing this roll is bad - the sorcerer takes a hit of Stamina, Health, and Sanity for every level in the Dos (the degree by which the spell "defeated" him). There is no defense against this damage - it could even kill the sorcerer if he were trying to cast an enormous spell.

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

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 - one round for 12, two for 14, four for 16, eight for 18. He must then make a Sorcery roll vs a challenge level of 6. If he fails this roll, he takes an amount of Stamina, Health, and Sanity equal to the amount by which he failed the check.

Defiance

Sorcery cast at an unwilling target may be resisted. Defiance is used to evade sorcery much like Defense is used to evade physical attacks. To make the spell work, the sorcerer must roll higher than the defiant target. If successful, the Dos of this roll is added to any damage done by the spell.

For destructive spells (those that use Mahasu or Sabatu), the formula goes like this:

1. Add the energy of the spell to the Dos to get the Health.
2. Add +4 to the above to get the Stamina.
3. Subtract the defender's willpower and his focus's negation from both values.
4. Whatever remains is applied to the Health and Stamina of the victim.

The formula is similar for Nekelmu attacks, but replace Health with Sanity.

Though damage to Health and Sanity is cumulative, players should keep track of each injury separately. Note the amount of Health or Sanity done by each attack, adding them together only to determine if the character is dead or catatonic. This is important for later healing (recovering from ten minor injuries is easier than recovering from one serious injury. See **Pain and Suffering**).

Other types of sorcery do not use this formula. Details below.

Extra Time

If a sorcerer is not confident in his ability to complete a spell successfully, he may choose to take extra time 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, he can gain a +6 bonus by taking eight times as long as required: 64 rounds. If he takes 128 rounds, he will get a +8 bonus.

For Nik to cast a massive spell of energy 30 would take a minimum of 64 rounds (over six minutes). This would require him to roll over 22 on his Sorcery - a daunting task for the most learned master.

If he opts to take 4096 rounds (nearly 7 hours) to cast the spell, he will have a bonus of +12 for four doublings of the required time.

Space

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

Spell areas must be simple shapes like cubes, cones, cylinders, or spheres.

Such attacks can be defended against in multiple ways. The attack can be evaded with Defiance or Seheru, or endured with Willpower and focus negation, 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.

Duration

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

If the sorcerer wishes to cast a spell that lasts for longer than a single round, he 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.

Multiple Targets

Most spells are directed at a single individual or location. This is not mandatory. 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 is -2 energy, four is -4, eight is -6, etc.

The sorcerer makes only one skill roll, which each target defends against separately.

Multiple Spells

A sorcerer need not put all of his power into a single spell; he can divide this into multiple spells in the same round. The number of spells can be doubled for each -2 energy. A sorcerer with a power of 10 could cast one spell of energy 10, two of energy 8, four of energy 6, eight of energy 4, etc.

The sorcerer makes only one skill roll. If this roll is less than the energy of the spells, he takes damage for only one of them.

Multiple spells can be directed at the same target or at different ones.

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 Intellect and Defiance of a character, yet turn the forest around that character into a very physical inferno. A telekinetic Sabatu attack can be evaded by Defiance, destroyed by Seheru, or endured by willpower and negation; 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 to 5 except in unfortunate circumstances (such as the caster using Sabatu to drop a big rock down a well where a character is hiding).

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 leader. This gives the leader the power to control the subordinates like automatons until he chooses to relinquish command. In addition, any spell failures will cause damage to everyone involved. To engage in a group ritual is an act of faith and trust.

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 add nothing to the leader's skill. Thus, leaders must be cautious in their casting - a particularly bad failure could kill the leader and all his followers.

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

Blood Sacrifice

In addition to the ability possessed by every character to sacrifice Stamina for extra strength and willpower, a sorcerer may choose to sacrifice his Health or Sanity for extra energy. Each point 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.

Types of Sorcery

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

Amelatu

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

Portals are elliptical or circular in shape. 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, two yards across would be size 4, 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 sorcerer 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.

Upon casting, the sorcerer chooses 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 its size 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 chosen by The Master, as he must decide how much otherworldly travel He wishes to allow in his campaign.

A sorcerer can connect a 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 will increase the 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 mysticism.

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. Anyone who can reach the portal, in either world, can go 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 may try to take control of it with Sorcery if they have the Amelatu gift. 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.

The plane of a portal is always perpendicular to the controlling sorcerer; that is, one of the portal's two apertures directly faces the caster. If a one sorcerer takes control of a portal from another, the portal will rotate to face the new master.

Portals can 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. One who wants an otherworldly servant should be prepared to bribe, bully, or beg - and things from another world may not speak the sorcerer's language.

Amelatu portals are less useful for travelling from place to place within a single world. If a sorcerer steps through a portal into another world, walks ten miles, 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 parallel realms. The sorcerer who plans on exploration ought to have some knowledge of the place to be reached (gained from books, fellow travellers, or mysticism) 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.

Mahasu can also be used to create blinding light or deafening noise. This can be used to distract and terrorize opponents. This use of Mahasu gives the sorcerer (and any allies who were forewarned of his plan) a bonus to initiative on the next round. This bonus is equal to the energy level used.

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.

Familiarity	Challenge Level
friend	0
acquaintance	5
stranger	10
alien	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 Mysticism can tell him 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 can knock someone unconscious or drive them insane.

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

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.

It is not uncommon for two enemy Nekelmu masters 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.

Sabatu

Sabatu lets a sorcerer move things with his mind. It functions like Strength, but can be used at a distance.

In addition to direct attacks, Sabatu can be used to paralyze. This requires the sorcerer to cast the spell continuously (see **Duration**). A character so held cannot move or perform any physical actions until freed. Freedom can come from Defiance, from Seheru, or because the sorcerer has to stop the spell to do something else.

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

A user of Sabatu may also attack a foe indirectly by hurling a big rock, tipping over a pillar, or something similar. If target is a sorcerer, he may try to prevent the attacker from succeeding via Seheru. Otherwise, the target must try to avoid the physical danger with the defense skill. The first case is resolved as a 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 based on the size of the incoming object (usually fair to moderate).

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

Seheru

Seheru is anti-sorcery. It allows the user to nullify spells and create 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 sorcerer must make a Sorcery roll vs that of the other caster. If successful, the spell is nullified.

Seheru can be used as a defensive action, the mental equivalent of a block. If the sorcerer sees a supernatural attack in progress, he can attempt to dispel it before it takes effect. The attack need not even be aimed at the sorcerer himself. Range penalties apply if the sorcerer is trying to dispel something aimed at a distant target.

Seheru can be used to set up magical wards. This is nothing more than a normal dispel with additional area and duration. Any supernatural 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 sorcery 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 sorcery remains in its area. Instantaneous spells disappear, but entities or spells with high duration may exist after the ward ends.

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 spells are weakened by an amount equal to the energy of the seheru. This option should be used only when the sorcery in question is far greater than that of the Seheru caster.

Talamu

This sorcery gives the user control over the forces of life and death. It allows the transfer of Health or Sanity between living creatures.

The individuals to be affected must be within touching distance of the sorcerer. He need not actually touch them; he just needs to be close enough to run his hands through their supernatural auras.

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

Voluntary transfers happen automatically. The sorcerer can transfer an amount of Health or Sanity (or some of both) equal to the energy level of the spell plus his sorcery skill level.

Involuntary transfers are resolved as follows:

1. Add the energy of the spell to the Dos to get the amount of Health or Sanity transferred.
2. Subtract the defender's willpower and his focus's negation.
3. Whatever remains is subtracted from the Health or Sanity of the victim and added to the Health or Sanity of the receiver.

Nothing can absorb more Health or Sanity than it normally has. If a completely healthy and sane sorcerer drains life from a victim without transferring it to a suitable beneficiary, the extra lifeforce is lost to the winds.

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 are transferred to the sorcerer and to any other beneficiary of the transfer. The same goes for mental illnesses.

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

Talamu also allows the user to feel the emotions of creatures that are near, human or not. This is a sense, like perception or mysticism; it has a range increment of 2.

PAIN AND SUFFERING

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 below 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. Any attacks directed against him need only hit the spot where he is lying. The character does get the benefits of his strength and armor (or willpower and focus negation, in the case of sorcerous assaults).

A character loses health through serious injury or disease. If health falls below zero, the character dies.

A character loses sanity through serious psychological shocks or certain sorcerous attacks. If sanity falls below zero, the character becomes permanently catatonic. The body still lives, but the mind is gone.

Recovery

A character recovers from harm through rest.

Stamina is the easiest to recover. One hit of stamina is recovered for each round of inaction. The maximum stamina of a character is limited by its current health and sanity.

An unconscious character recovers Stamina at the 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 may go into a coma and take a very long time recover.

Health and Sanity levels are more difficult to recover. Unlike Stamina, they do not return automatically.

To recover Health, a character must make a Strength roll against the amount of Health taken from each wound. If successful, that wound is reduced by the Dos. When the amount of Health lost in that wound goes to zero, the wound is healed.

Sanity works the same way except that the character must roll Willpower.

Recovery checks are made once per day, usually when the character wakes up from a decent amount of sleep. Only one roll is made (or two, if the character has taken damage to both Health and Sanity), but this roll is checked against each injury.

Rest must be in a comfortable environment with adequate warmth, sleep, and nourishment. Sanity recovery also requires peace and quiet. Less than comfortable circumstances will slow the rate of healing, increasing the difficulty of the roll. Light exertion, such as walking or moderate lifting (or thinking, in the case of Sanity), will increase the difficulty of recovery 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.

Healing

The aid of a skilled healer can make recovery much easier. Once per day, a healer may make a Healing roll for the injured character. This roll is compared to every injury, mental and physical. Every success heals an injury by a number of points equal to the Dos.

Healing rolls are made **after** the injured character's normal recovery checks.

Poison

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

Some poisons must be eaten, injected, or inhaled. Others take effect upon 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 any other attack, except only 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.

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 -4 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 -4 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. The same goes for Observation.

Falling

The Master should ignore damage from 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 applied 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 break a fall. This roll is made against a challenge level equal to the number of yards fallen (maximum of 20). The Dos of this roll (if successful) can be added directly to the character's Strength to help endure the damage.

MONSTERS AND HORRORS

Monsters are creatures that are not native to the world. Wolves and bears are natural creatures; Hellish demons and Abyssal horrors are 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 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. He will be virtually unique. While it is possible that some others of his race also travelled to this world and set up a colony somewhere, 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 dwelves 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, he can make the ability a Gift and require an amount of points that seems fitting - 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 depends on The Master's campaign world.

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.

Size

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 different. This makes the monsters 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 added to 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 6, not a size 2.

Mass	Size
x2	2
x4	4
x8	6
x16	8
x32	10

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 6. The giant has a strength of 8 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 them large Stamina and Health attributes instead of great strength.

Sometimes a monster is made of sterner stuff than humans. A stone creature 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.

Armor

Some creatures are tough, but not strong. If The Master wishes to create a monster that can take damage better than it can dish it out, he can make armor a natural part of its anatomy. This is the opposite of spending points on size.

Extra Limbs

There is no reason why extraplanar horrors need to be limited to two arms, two legs, and one head. There is 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 or hundreds of attacks per round) is up to you.

Extra Senses

Monsters need not be limited to normal human sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste. A monsters may 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 an advantage over things that can.

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.

Immortality

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

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).

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 for plot devices, than for skills for player characters.

It is fine for The Master to make use of golems, undead, potions, and the like, but players should not know where they come from. In a way, this puts some mystery back into sorcery.

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.

Alien Sorcery

Humans are not the only creatures who can use sorcery to travel between worlds. Some monsters may come to this world of their own ability. One that does is the most frightening of opponents - it is alien, wields sorcery, and has its own reasons for being here.

THE WORLD

Myth and Legend

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

Then came gods.

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

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: there were no gods, few humans, and plenty of wealth and bounty for all.

It was not to last. Other gods soon followed and discovered what **UR** had done.

Some thought the work to be monstrous - that human beings should never have been created. Others thought it fine that they were made, but 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. These gods dominated and enslaved many tribes.

Still others thought the work of **UR** to be wondrous. They thought it vile for humans to be made into slaves to serve the whims of gods. These gods demanded that mortals be rewarded for their service.

The destroyers, the dominators, and the defenders were divided. A war was fought in heaven.

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

This is what legends say. Accurate or not, divine influence on the world cannot be denied.

Gods have the ability to raise a mortal above its station, to bring the godhood out of the beast. Those who have been touched in this way have the power 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 material wealth in exchange for their touch.

Some gods give their touch to any person who passes a test.

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

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

Even contacting a god requires great patience and dedication. The most devoted follower may spend a lifetime calling to his god and get nothing in reply.

History and Geography

After the Firmament War, gods began to make deals with men for various reasons. Some wanted gold. Some wanted service. Some wanted to encourage the development of certain kinds of men. Some wanted the unconditional love of devoted worshipers. Some wanted random mischief. Some wanted to destroy.

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

Utuk Xul was a lesser god who was jealous of other gods' wealth in followers. Lusting for servants, he was the first to lay his touch upon a man and grant him the use of sorcery. This man was named Telal. He became the first priest of **Utuk Xul**.

This action horrified many gods. In their eyes, it gave powers to mortals that should have been possessed by gods alone. **Utuk Xul** was made a pariah and attacked by a host of enemies on Earth and in Heaven. He lost the war in heaven, but - because of the powers he granted to 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 anyone who passed a rigorous test would be given great power.

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

Kothan sorcery rose to dominate the region. Kothan philosophy followed. This land would become the kingdom of Koth.

Many wars have been fought between Koth and Keph. It is no 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 culture and religion 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, became known as The Midlands, or just Midland. Though claimed by both kingdoms, neither can hold it 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, mad wizards, misplaced monsters, and outlaws.

East of the old kingdoms is a tormented ocean called Tiamatu. Sea travel is difficult and dangerous. The old kingdoms have few ships or sailors. There is an 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 prosperous. This has led to the island being called Richland by outsiders. It lies sixty miles from the mainland, closer to Koth than to Keph.

Large portions of the Tiamatu remain uncharted. The ocean is vast and barren, but contains untold numbers of small, rocky islands populated by isolated peoples, bizarre cults, forgotten temples, and other mysteries. Sudden storms and humongous sea-monsters add to the terror of ocean travel.

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 mortals. 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 kingdom filled with gigantic trees. It was originally settled by a tribe called the Kirks, so became known as Kirkland. The Kirks mixed with other tribes, plus outlaws and dissidents from the East, 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 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 with Keph is rare. War between tribes is common.

Religion and Politics

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

Koth

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

There is anarchy beneath the order, however. 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 the landed lords when the reigning monarch dies.

The true rulers of Koth, however, are the sorcerers. They control the nobles and compete for them like gods compete for followers. The sorcerers like to keep their machinations secret - the nobles suffer assassinations and peasant revolts while the sorcerers reap the rewards of power.

Worship of **Jura** is the official religion of Koth. Observance is strictly enforced. All 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; 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, with priests and temples in place of lords and estates.

Priests of high rank and stature are sometimes granted the use of sorcery. The high prest has great power, especially in his 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 live hedonistic lifestyles.

Midland

The Midlands are home to uncounted clans. These clans are based on roots and family ties and tend to be distrustful of outsiders. Some are hostile. The clans work the land for whatever wealth they can manage, often warring 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. Clans often change sides in the middle of a conflict if they feel the betrayal can benefit them.

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 armies, large gangs of brigands roam the countryside. Most of these are deserters from one kingdom or the other, but some are simply locals who lost everything 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 gods, real or imagined, and paganism is the rule.

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 most 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; there, order 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 a few houses of worship dedicated to various gods, but religion does not permeate life the way 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 various peoples who settled Kirkland had radically different cultures. Rather than destroy each other, they devised a way to live in peace. Kirkland is a federation. Each mini-state is governed in its own way - some are hierarchies based on the old kingdoms, some are governed by barbaric tribalism, some are experiments in individuality and democracy. They join together only for common defense.

Kirkland has no official religion. Some of the states do, while others allow individuals 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 the concept.

The lands to the west of Keph are uncivilized. Numerous small tribes compete for scarce resources.

Some tribes have advanced ethical beliefs based on honor, generosity, kinship, or courage. Others behave like predatory animals.

Tribesmen 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 is usually limited to primitive nature worship, though some tribes are known to commune with gods.

Other Realms

Numerous worlds exist parallel to the world of human beings. These worlds are reached via Amelatu sorcery.

Each world is distinct. The flora, the fauna, the climate, and even the colors of the sun and sky can vary from one to the next. Most 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.

Faer

Faer is a world much like our own, but 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 alien.

Some Faeries are willing to travel to our world out of curiosity or spite. Others prefer to lure humans into their realm for various purposes.

Faer is close to our world.

Idimmu

Idimmu is a hot and barren realm. A dim red sun engulfs a third of the dark blue sky. The air is dry and thick. 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.

Sentient natives often wish to leave their infernal prison. These creatures have been known to make deals with sorcerers in exchange for their freedom.

Idimmu is far from our world.

Uggae

Uggae is a black void at the edge of creation. Cold, slimy things slither in wet darkness lit only by faint stars. The creatures of Uggae, 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.

Only fools or madmen attempt to bring abyssian horrors to their own worlds. Fortunately for humanity, this is an arduous task. Horrors are so immense that it is almost impossible to create a portal large enough to allow more than a fraction of one to pass. Even this can be grave - a single appendage of a horror can wreak vast destruction over a significant area.

Though rare, there are lunatic cults that dedicate their lives to bringing Horrors into the world.

Uggae is distant from the realm of human beings.

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

The Spirit World

The "spirit world" is not a separate realm like Idimmu or Faer but a metaphor for that subset of the physical world that is hidden from the perceptions of normal persons. The restless ghosts of dead beings travel within our world alongside more exotic ethereal entities.

Some spirits can manifest themselves in the physical world to communicate with the living. Others cannot be contacted without the aid of mysticism.

Spirits are not constrained by walls or borders, so can often obtain information unavailable to the living. Getting this information from them can be daunting, however: 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.

Furthermore, it is difficult for the unaware to tell the difference between the whispers of the dead and their own thoughts.

DESIGNER NOTES

Introduction

Fantasy is the most overdone genre in the world of RPGs. I designed **Hursagmu** because my system and setting tastes are unusual.

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, but has variety in character type and actions. I want players to have a number of different tactical options, but few nitpicking details, no long lists of spells or maneuvers, and minimal bookkeeping.

I want a game that feels like low fantasy.

I claim no originality in my mechanics. I have taken elements from the Hero System, West End Games's classic d6 system, Dungeons and Dragons, GURPS, FUDGE, and many others.

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 amazing 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.

Character Generation

Character creation is point-based because I like to create characters according to my desires rather than the whims of fate. Giving all players the same amount of points lets them begin the game on equal footing.

The costs of attributes and skills increase with level to prevent munchkins from placing all of their points into a single skill. Such characters are gods at one thing and useless at everything else. The system is designed to discourage this.

The exponential cost increases allow attributes and skills to be open-ended without fear that some joker will have a Sorcery of 700.

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

Attributes are 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. Specialization is left to the skills.

The symmetry between physical and mental attributes is deliberate.

The decision to leave out attributes and skills related to social dynamics was deliberate. I prefer for such situations to be resolved through roleplaying rather than dice. If you want to be beautiful and dashing, fine. If you would rather be ugly and scary, good. There are advantages and disadvantages to both.

Skills are broad because I dislike games with too much mass in the rules. Chargen is simpler with a small number of broad skills than with a large number of narrow skills. I also dislike hyper-specialized characters. With broad skills, even characters that choose to specialize in just one or two skills are at least specialists in a field, rather than in a subset of a subclass of a profession.

The skill list focuses on adventuring skills; trade skills are abstracted. I did this because I wanted those who wished for their character to be a talented craftsman or scholar to be still 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 a skill just like any other. I didn't accomplish this entirely - I found it necessary to require Gifts for the use of sorcery to prevent every character from having the ability. Gifts also allow for alien abilities that cannot properly be called skills.

Attributes are much more expensive than skills to prevent players from ignoring skills. Why improve your 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 - if AN, great god of the heavens, is twice as strong as UTU, god of the sun, and UTU has a Strength of 20, then AN will have a Strength of 22.

Finally: some may be confused by the damage metrics. 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 metrics from the opposite direction to see what actually happens when characters get hurt.

It's 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 6 damage? After one hit, Bob will be down 6 Health and 10 Stamina. After two hits, he will be unconscious and fairly hurt. Fred, on the other hand, will have to be hit four times by the same attack before he will fall, and will still be less injured than Bob.

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 equipment.

System Mechanics

The mechanics are meant 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.

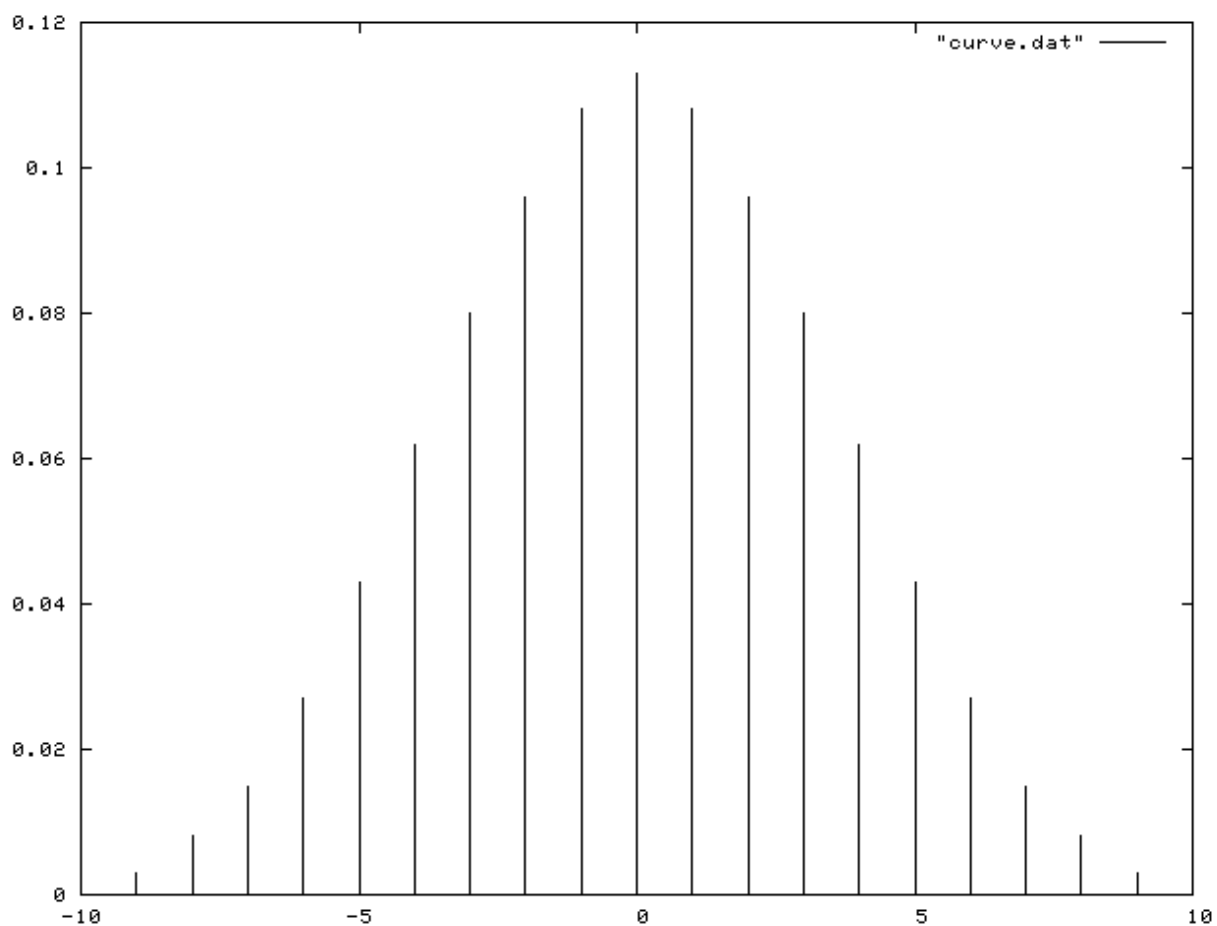
I chose opposed rolls of $2d6 + \text{Attribute} + \text{Skill}$ as the core mechanic for several reasons:

- I like rolling 2d6.
- 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 - then unopposed actions would be more random than opposed ones.

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

The degree-of-success mechanic takes care of several things at once - there is no need for damage rolls, hit locations, special maneuvers that let weaklings do more damage, or techniques to allow a knife fighter to get through plate armor. It's all there in the Dos. It also means that skill checks are not just pass/fail; you get information on the quality of the success or failure.

Enough about 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 don't want a player to have to choose a sword for tactical reasons if he really wants to play an axe-wielding barbarian. At the same time, I don't want characters 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 and letting players design their own weapons.

I wanted there to be a reason why sorcerers would use wands and staves. 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.

I've 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 defends and does nothing else. If the player wants to "Ferociously Attack", he makes one or more attack actions and focuses on Striking for the round.

I chose to have a mix of different damage metrics to simulate the 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. Health is there to represent real damage - the kind that threatens one's life. Sanity is there to represent Lovecraftian shocks to the psyche.

I wanted sorcerers to have options when casting a spell. As with initiative and speed, I wanted spell intensity, duration, area, and casting time to be flexible. 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 sacrificing physical or mental health exist to add flavor.

Setting Notes

Though my vision is a low fantasy world focused on humans and their gods, I don'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 state that there are "other worlds than these" so that game masters can bring in whatever manner of weirdness they desire. 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 give 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.
