OVERVIEW

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

Characters

Game characters are described by traits and gifts. Traits represent both inherent qualities and acquired skills. 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 or She wishes beginning characters to be.

- Average person: 25
- Apprentice adventurer: 50
- Journeyman adventurer: 100
- Master adventurer: 200

The Master may also limit the maximum level of beginning traits to prevent one-trick ponies.

As characters adventure, The Master may 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 traits. They can also be used to obtain gifts if the player has a good explanation. This allows adventurers to grow more powerful over time.

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

Conflict

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 traits in conflict with opposing forces.

Time and Space

Conflict is handled by dividing time and space into discrete units.

Time is measured in rounds. Each round is six seconds in duration.

Space is measured in spaces. Each space is an area two yards/meters across.

The Trait Roll

Central to the rules of the game is the trait roll. All important actions are resolved with a trait 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 + Trait**

Roll a pair of six-sided dice, add them together, and add the result to the character's trait level. High rolls are always better than low rolls. A roll if two is an automatic failure; a roll of twelve is an automatic success.

When a task is unopposed (such as climbing a cliff face or picking a lock), The Master assigns a **challenge level**. The player's trait roll must equal or surpass this number to succeed.

If two characters are in conflict, the active character makes a trait roll vs a challenge level equal to the opponent's trait plus seven. If both characters are equally active (such as two diving for the same weapon), let the player roll. If both are player characters, they may split the difference - both may roll 1d6 + Trait instead of 2d6. Highest roll wins.

The difference between the trait roll and the challenge level is the **degree** of success or failure (known hereafter as "dx" for short). This number represents the effectiveness of the action. A dx of 1 is a moderate success or failure; a dx of 10 is an incredible success or a horrible failure. A dx of 0 could be a partial success, a partial failure, or a tie.

If a situation does not require a roll (because succeeding is trivial), then the character's trait level is the dx.

In the case of automatic success or failure, the dx is resolved normally. If the dx would be negative on an automatic success (because normal success is impossible for the character), then the dx is 1.

Characters may have bonuses or penalties based on tools and time. More on this in the **Encounters** chapter.

Examples

1.

> 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 14 to the task.
>
> Lanky has a Burglary level of eight. To make the attempt he rolls 2d6+8. If Lanky's result is greater than or equal to 14, he succeeds in picking the lock.

2.

Juk the Barbarian wants to crush the skull of Lothar the Unlucky. Juk is a level 7 warrior. Lothar is a level 5 Athlete. To attack, Juk rolls 2d6+7 versus a challenge level of 12 (Lothar's Athlete + 7). If Juk rolls an 11, the attack misses with a dx of 1 (a slight failure); if he rolls a 17, the attack hits with a dx of 5 (a solid success).

3.

Emo the Small swings frantically at Mace the Ugly. Emo's Warrior trait is 3. Mace's Warrior trait is 10, giving Emo a challenge level of 17. Emo rolls a 12 for a total of 15. This would normally result in a failure with a dx of 2, but a roll of 12 is an automatic success. He hits with a dx of 1.

TRAITS

Traits measure a character's attributes, skills, knowledge, and ability.

The point cost of a trait is based on the level. The higher the trait, the more difficult it is to improve.

Level	Cost		Level	Cost		Level	Cost
1	1		5	6		9	24
2	2		6	8		10	32
3	3		7	12		11	48
4	4		8	16		12	64

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

Average persons have zero levels in most traits and four to six in those related to their work. Levels of ten or greater represent awesome ability.

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

The list is divided into Talents and Professions. Talents are inherent qualities; Professions are learned skills. The two are identical for game purposes.

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

Talents	Professions
Command	Archer
Constitution	Artisan
Intellect	Athlete
Perception	Burglar
Strength	Healer
Willpower	Ranger
	Rider
	Scholar
	Sneak
	Trickster
	Trader
	Warrior

Talents

Command

This trait represents ego, charisma, and presence. A character with a high Command is a stunning person; he moves armies with a word, she crumbles nations with a glance.

Command determines the amount of supernatural energy a sorcerer can channel.

Constitution

Constitution is health and toughness. It lets the character resist injury and disease.

Intellect

Intellect is a person's capability for abstract reasoning, critical thinking, and analysis. It is used to solve problems and puzzles. Sorcery relies on Intellect. Intellect also allows one to evade sorcerous assaults.

Perception

This trait represents quality of one's natural senses, reaction time, and general alertness. This important trait can prevent one - and one's friends - from being taken by surprise by stealth or guile.

Perception is used to detect subtle things that may go unheard or unseen and things that are obvious but may go unnoticed. It may allow one to notice that someone is wearing the wrong clothes, behaving strangely, etc. It is used to see through lies and disguises. It allows one to find hidden things.

Perception can be used to determine who goes first during a round of conflict.

Strength

This measures how much raw power one can exert. It is used to lift and carry great loads or to move heavy objects. It adds to damage in combat.

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

Strength	Lift (lbs)	Strength	Lift (lbs)	Strength	Lift (lbs)
0	100	10	1000	20	10000
1	125	11	1250	21	12500
2	160	12	1600	22	16000
3	200	13	2000	23	20000
4	250	14	2500	24	25000
5	320	15	3200	25	32000
6	400	16	4000	26	40000
7	500	17	5000	27	50000
8	640	18	6400	28	64000
9	800	19	8000	29	80000

The formula should be apparent if one needs to go beyond 29.

Willpower

Willpower is mental fortitude. Courage, patience, and self-control are facets of will. It allows one to resist interrogation, torture, and fear. It lessens the effect of harmful sorcery.

Professions

Archer

Archers are proficient with bows and crossbows.

Artisan

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

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.

Athlete

This profession allows one to run, swim, climb, throw, and jump.

Most characters can run ten spaces per action. Each level of this skill gives the character an additional space. It also allows one to swim faster than others, though the rate is halved.

Athlete is rolled to determine the progress of a race or chase, with each point of dx being one space of distance gained or lost.

Athletes may attempt to climb anything, from trees to cliffs to castle walls. The more difficult the surface (the less friction and handholds), the higher the challenge level. Ropes and grapples help. A failed roll usually means no progress, but a spectacular failure could mean a fall.

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

Athletics 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.

This is also the skill of throwing and catching objects. It covers hitting a target with hurled objects (rocks, knives, axes, spears) and the use of slings. 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.

This trait also represents muscle speed and reflexes. It can be used to determine who goes first during a round of conflict. It can also be used to dodge attacks.

Burglar

This is the profession 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 a locked 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, the character knows how to force doors and shutters quickly and quietly.

Healer

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

This profession 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, a talented healer can perform primitive surgery such as lancing boils or amputating limbs.

Ranger

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 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.

Rangers can train animals to perform work or tricks and to effectively handle such domesticated creatures. At higher levels, they can befriend wild animals. A master may even calm enraged beasts.

Finally, Rangers have the ability to determine location and heading by the heavens. Master navigators may even have a sixth sense about the time of day and the direction they are facing.

Rider

This is the skill of using animals for transport. It covers everything from horseback riding to driving a sleigh pulled by a team of dogs.

Normal travel does not require trait rolls - the skill is used for difficult circumstances, tricks, leaps, and mounted combat.

Scholar

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.

Sneak

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

A sneak can follow someone through a crowd without the subject knowing. The sneak must be 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 sneak roll.

Finally, this trait allows one to filch keys and pick pockets.

Trader

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.

Trickster

Tricksters hide things, craft disguises, forge documents, and tell bold-faced lies. They can also perform minor "magic" tricks via sleight of hand.

Warrior

Warriors are skilled in close combat.

GIFTS

Gifts are special abilities possessed by few. They are inborn qualities, random mutations, or divine blessings. They cannot be learned.

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 traits except in particular circumstances. They can help to negate penalties in their domain of function, however.

Gift	Cost
Sorcery	6 per discipline
Senses	6 per sense
Immunity	6
Longevity	4
Amphibious	4
Extra Limbs	4 per limb
Natural Weapon	6
Natural Armor	6
Phosphorescence	4

Sorcery

Sorcery is the power of gods given to mortals. There are six disciplines:

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

Mahasu 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.

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.

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, but may cancel penalties caused by certain situations.

Superior Hearing

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.

Superior Olfaction

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

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.

Intuition

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.

Intuition 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 trait serves in the physical world.

If sorcery is used anywhere near an intuitive, The Master should have the player roll Perception 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 intuitives in the area should get regular trait checks to see if they notice.

Intuition 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, Intuition 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.

Empathy

This gifts allows one to feel the emotions of creatures that are near with a successful Perception check. The challenge level of the roll depends upon how familiar the creature is to the empath.

Familiarity	Challenge Level
friend	4
acquaintance	8
stranger	12
beast or alien	16+

Immunity

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

Longevity

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

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

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.

Natural Weapon

The character has claws, fangs, or some other natural attack. This gift gives the character a bonus to unarmed damaged equal to a small weapon.

The Master may allow normal humans to take this gift to represent amazing prowess in unarmed combat.

Natural Armor

The character has armored scales or a tough hide. This gift gives the character a bonus to endurance equal to light armor.

Phosphorescence

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. Such metals are scarce, durable, portable, divisible, and homogeneous; this gives them significant advantages over things like grain 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 prices in this chapter, therefore, should be taken as a reasonable estimate for an average town at a junction of trade 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).

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. They can add to defense or damage.

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.

Melee Weapons

Melee weapons are constructed with a number of weapon points (wp) based on their size. Larger weapons do more harm than smaller ones, but are heavier and more difficult to conceal.

Small weapons have four points.
Medium weapons have six points and are difficult to conceal (+6 to any Perception check).
Large weapons have ten points, require two hands, and cannot be concealed.

A character who uses a single one-handed weapon may add +2 damage or +1 defense.

A character who uses two one-handed weapons will get the defense bonus of both, but only the larger damage bonus.

Size	Length (ft)	Weight (lbs)	Points	Concealment	Hands
small	less than 2	2	4	0	1
medium	2 to 4	5	6	-6	1
large	greater than 4	10	10	NA	2

Options

Option	wp cost
Throwable	2
+1 Defense	2
+1 Damage	1

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.

Defense

Weapon defense bonuses are added directly to a character's Defense score (based on Athlete or Warrior). Small weapons cannot add more than +1. Medium weapons are limited to +2. Large weapons have a maximum of +3.

Damage

Weapon damage bonuses add directly to a character's Strength to determine the damage inflicted on a successful hit.

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

Name	Size	Throwable	Defense	Damage
Dagger	Small			4
Buckler	Small		1	2
Knife	Small	X		2
Sword	Medium			6
Rapier	Medium		1	4
Shield	Medium		2	2
Hatchet	Medium	X		4
Battle Axe	Large			10
Halberd	Large		1	8
Glaive	Large		2	6
Staff	Large		3	4
Spear	Large	X	1	6

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.

Missile Weapons

Missile weapons use leverage to launch projectiles. The benefit is range: 30 spaces 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 add damage to Strength as melee weapons do. Small weapons add +4; medium weapons add +6; large weapons add +8.

It is assumed that characters have weapons appropriate to their power - bows with a strong enough pull to take advantage of it or crossbows with enhanced heft. This means that characters may be unable to use a missile weapon built for a stronger person or unable to take full advantage of their strength when using one built for someone weaker.

Missile weapons require two hands regardless of size.

Name	Size	Damage
Sling	Small	4
Bow	Medium	6
Longbow	Large	8
Crossbow	Large	8

Cost

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 a sword 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).

Armor

Armor protects the wearer from physical harm in combat.

Armor can be a lifesaver, but is heavy and uncomfortable. The encumbrance will slow a character down and make many actions difficult (running, climbing, jumping, sneaking) or even impossible (swimming). The value of the armor should be subtracted from any trait checks that require movement, 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	penalty	weight	cost
quilted cloth	1	-1	10	100
soft hide	2	-2	20	200
boiled hide	3	-3	30	400
mail	4	-4	40	8000
plate	5	-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

A focus allows a sorcerer to channel more energy.

The power of the focus determines how much energy he can channel per action. This energy can be added to Command to increase the power of spells or to Willpower to improve resistance to them. The sorcerer must decide how to divide the power at the beginning of his turn.

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 three-foot long focus has a power of 4; 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. Being touched with sorcery gives one instinctive knowledge of how to carve the mystical sigils in the proper order.

type	size	weight	power
wand	1	1	2
scepter	3	3	4
cane	3	3	4
staff	6	6	6
tower	100	immobile	14
temple	400	immobile	18

Foci should not double as weapons - the impacts of strikes and parries will damage a focus beyond repair.

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 traits requiring agility. The penalty is based on the ratio of weight carried to maximum lift:

Weight : Max Lift (%)	Penalty
50%	-4
75%	-8
100%	-12

Encumbrance penalties stack with armor penalties.

> Example: Bob has a strength of 2. He can lift 200 pounds. When carrying one hundred pounds worth of gear or treasure, he has -4 to his movement and to any traits requiring agility.

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.

Challenge Levels

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

Task Difficulty	Challenge Level
Fair	8
Moderate	12
Great	16
Incredible	20
Inconceivable	24

The numbers above assume that the character 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 make the challenge level higher. If the character has an exceptional set of tools at his disposal, The Master should lower the challenge level a notch or two.

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. Characters can obtain bonuses for extra time taken or penalties for rushed work. If the character takes more time than is necessary, he gets +2 to the trait roll for each doubling of the required time. If the character tries to rush, The Master should increase the challenge level by 2 for for each halving of the required time. The maximum bonus or penalty for time is 10.

Perception

Perception is an important trait.

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.

Perception is also 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. Anything that distracts the character from paying careful attention to detail could cause a penalty (a higher challenge roll).

Intuition functions as supernatural perception. A person with this gift can roll Perception 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; each round is six seconds in duration.
Space is measured in spaces; each space is an area two yards/meters across.

Combat Values

Characters have a number of combat values based on their traits.

- Initiative is equal to Perception or Athlete, whichever is higher.
- Offense is based on the type of attack.
    - Bows and crossbows use Archer.
    - Thrown weapons and slings use Athlete.
    - Hand-to-hand attacks use Warrior.
    - Sorcerous attacks use Intellect.
- Defense is equal to 7 + Athlete or Warrior, whichever is higher.
- Defiance is equal to 7 + Intellect.

Initiative

At the beginning of each round, characters roll initiative to determine who acts first. High initiatives act before low ones.

Environmental factors (such as surprise) or minor actions (such as darting a single space or drawing a weapon) may give bonuses or penalties to initiative.

Any trait 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 disabled before his turn gets no actions.

Some actions are free. Drawing a weapon, shouting to a comrade, moving a single space, and the like; these take little time and require no trait 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 trait roll or take significant time; these are important. Characters may take two important actions per round of conflict. A character can move and attack, attack and move, move twice, attack twice, pick a lock and move through the door, jump off a ledge and tackle someone, move and cast a spell, cast two spells, etc.

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

Injury

There are three types of damage: stuns, wounds, and shocks.

Stuns are temporary damage.
Any attack that inflicts wounds or shocks inflicts an equal number of stuns.
A character who takes ten stuns falls unconscious.
Characters recover from stuns quickly.

Wounds are damage caused by fists, weapons, fire, poisons, falls from great heights, and the like.
A character who takes a total of twenty Wounds falls and will die unless aided by a healer.
Recovering from Wounds takes days or months.

Shocks are caused by psychological trauma.
A character who takes a total of twenty Shocks goes stark raving mad and will become catatonic unless aided by a healer.
Recovering from Shocks takes days or months.

Some sorcerous attacks cause wounds; others cause shocks.
A sorcerer can inflict shocks on himself by pushing his power too far.

Round Zero

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

Surprised characters get no trait added to their defense. The challenge level to hit a surprised character is a flat 4 plus any range modifiers. Sneak attacks can be deadly - the only defense is a good Perception.

Movement

Characters may move a single space per round without using an action. Characters can move [10 + Athlete] spaces per action. The character's armor value is subtracted from this.

Other moves - standing from a prone position, mounting an animal, making a leap, etc - take one action.

A mounted character uses the mount's movement in place of his own. Horses and such generally have twice the movement of a humanoid, or more.

Falling prone is a free action.

If the ground is not level, The Master may give a character bonuses or penalties to his movement. If the terrain is treacherous, The Master may require an Athlete roll (on foot) or a Rider roll (mounted).

Individuals may sometimes need to jump over things. The Master should require an Athlete roll based on the distance - two challenge levels per space on average.

Charging characters may add their momentum 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 four spaces of movement.

> Example: A brave knight charges a line of soldiers atop his mount. His lance does 10 damage (6 for the lance + 4 for Strength). The knight has moved 28 spaces on horseback, however, so adds 7 for a total of 17.

> Unfortunately, the knight is hit by one of the braced spearmen, whose weapon gives him a damage of 9 (1 for Strength, 8 for the pike). Adding the knight's momentum to this to gives a total of 16. 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 Athlete. Each level of dx gains the victor one space of distance.

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). These numbers are added to the Defense of the target.

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

> Example: bows have a range increment of 5. If a target is within five spaces, the challenge number is 0. If a target is between five and ten spaces, the challenge number is 1. Between ten and and fifteen spaces, it is 2. Targets will have these numbers added to their Defense (four 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	1
missile weapon	5

sorcery type	range increment
Amelatu	0
Talamu	0
Nekelmu	1
Mahasu	5
Sabatu	5
Seheru	5

Senses are also limited in range.

sense	range increment
smell	1
hearing	5
vision	10
intuition	1000 *

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

Advanced Options

The following rules exist for those who want more tactical flavor in combat.

Extra Time

A character can sacrifice an action for a +2 bonus to one thing for the round.

This leads to a number of combat maneuvers.

One action:

- Aim: +2 to the next attack
- Block / Dodge: +2 to Defense
- Concentrate: +2 to the next spell
- Resist: +2 to Defiance
- Look: +2 to Perception
- Exert: +2 to Strength
- Endure: +2 to Constitution

Two actions:

- Defend: +4 to Defense
- Defy: +4 to Defiance
- Watch: +4 to Perception

Et cetera.

The Master may allow players to divide their bonus among multiple traits. A character facing both swords and sorcery may want +1 Defense and +1 Defiance instead of +2 to one or the other.

A character attacked before his initiative may sacrifice actions for bonuses in response to the attack. This intent must be declared before the dice are rolled.

Wait

A character is not required to act on his initiative. He can wait to see what others with lower initiatives will do.

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

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

Mace charges. Juk 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 gets +10 to initiative for that round. He gets no extra actions, however.

The Waiting Game

This rule simulates scenes in books and movies in which two opponents stop and stare one another down, taking no actions, 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. This can even involve more than two characters.

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

Haste

A character may choose to sacrifice accuracy for speed. A character who is determined to go first may add +2 to his initiative roll, but that same number must be subtracted from all trait rolls that round. 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 +2 bonus to his roll. All other trait rolls suffer a -2 penalty for the round.

SWORDS

This chapter describes the rules for physical combat.

Damage

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

The basic formula goes like this: roll the attacker's Offense and subtract the target's Defense to get the dx. If the dx is greater than or equal to zero, the attack hits.

To get the damage, add the dx of the attack roll to the attacker's Strength and weapon and subtract the victim's Constitution and armor. The result is the number of the wounds inflicted. The victim takes an equal number of stuns.

A character who wishes to knock an opponent unconscious without doing serious harm may declare that damage from the dx is stuns only. Damage from strength and weapons still inflicts wounds. A character is not required to use his full strength or weapon value when attacking - he may use the hilt of a dagger or flat of a sword blade to decrease the damage if desired.

Any reasonable attack that hits with a dx greater than zero does a minimum damage of 1 regardless of traits or equipment.

The definition of "reasonable" is up to the players and The Master to work out. In most games, this is any attack with the force of an average adult's punch or greater - pillows and feather dusters don't count. If a high-powered game is desired, "reasonable" might mean any attack from a named character. In a gritty game, swarms of little girls with pillows might be terrifying.

Example: Juk attacks a common thug with his huge sword. Juk's Warrior trait is level 7. He rolls 2d6 and gets a 5, giving him a total of 12. The thug's Defense is only 10, so the attack hits with a dx of 2. This is added to Juk's Strength (6) and weapon (10) for a total of 18. Subtracting the thug's Constitution (2) and armor (2) results in 14 wounds and 14 stuns. The thug crumples.

Example: A brave but foolish youth throws a rock at Juk. The youth's weak Offense and Strength would normally be no match for Juk's Defense and Constitution, but the youth rolls a 12 for an automatic success (Juk was tired from his fight with the thugs). Juk takes 1 wound and 1 stun. He then chases the boy and delivers a beating.

Stealth

Surprise attacks can be ugly. If an attacker manages to ambush his target via stealth or guile, the victim does not get the benefit of his Defense. The attacker rolls his Offense versus a challenge level of 4. Add this to the challenge number for the range, if any.

The Master may occasionally give a bonus for a surprise action. A character using a sword could gain a +2 for throwing a punch with his off hand rather than stabbing with the weapon, for example. This shouldn't work more than once against the same opponent unless said opponent is a fool.

Combat Maneuvers

Strike

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

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 attack succeeds, the defender's object is knocked away and will require an action to retrieve. The object may be destroyed.

In hand-to-hand combat (striking or grappling), 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.

Maneuver	Attack Roll	Damage
Jab	+2	-4
Thrust	+1	-2
Strike	+0	+0
Swing	-1	+2
Haymaker	-2	+4

Grapple

Initiating a grapple takes one action. To grab an opponent, make a Warrior attack roll versus the target's Defense. If successful, the attacker restrains the target. The dx of this roll is used for later damage calculations.

The target's weight is added to the attacker's encumbrance for purposes of movement and trait rolls. A strong character may be able to pick up an enemy and run; a weaker one could move a maximum of one space per round, dragging his enemy along.

Once an attacker has successfully grappled a target, he may use subsequent actions to do damage using the dx of the initial grappling roll.

Squeezing or choking an opponent does damage based on the attacker's Strength.

The attacker can use a small weapon on the restrained victim. Larger weapons are useless in close combat.

The attacker can use elements of the environment as weapons. Slamming or throwing an opponent into a solid floor or wall can be worth anywhere from +1 to +4 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 +2 on top of this. The exact bonuses for any situation are up to The Master.

Throwing an opponent ends the grapple. If the attacker is throwing his victim at something in particular (a bed of spikes, another enemy) he may need to make an attack roll. Throwing an opponent off a great height is a good way to end a fight.

Upon reaching his initiative, a grappled character may use an action to escape by rolling Strength, Athlete, or Warrior against the Offense of the grappler plus 7. The Attacker's Offense is based on Strength, Athlete, or Warrior - whichever is highest. An attempt to escape does no damage to the opponent. If successful, the character breaks free of the fracas.

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. The target may use Strength for Defense in this case. This action does not restrain the target.

Optional rule: The Master may wish to give bonuses to a grappler if his mass if 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 escape the man's grapple or to maintain a grapple on the man. The gorilla gets no bonus to initiate the grapple.

> Example: The same 200 pound man tries to wrestle a 2400 pound monster. The monster is twelve times the mass of the man, which is between three and four doublings. It 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 Offense.

Defend

There are two ways to defend: blocking and dodging.

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

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, 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).

Area attacks

Most attacks are directed at a single individual. The attacker aims, fires, and hits or misses based on his offensive trait and the defensive trait of his target.

Some attacks, however, are directed not at a person, but at a place. 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 space, he may attempt an Athlete roll to dodge out of the way. The challenge level is based on how far the victim must move to get out of the affected area - 5 per space moved.

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.

Note: 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 traits, damage metrics, and natural weapons. They often have better Strength and movement rates than humans.

Mounts 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.

Animals are controlled by The Master, even those on the side of the player. If a Ranger 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 roll Ranger to make creatures obey. It helps if the animal has been specifically trained for fighting.

The Rider trait is important for different reasons. Whereas Ranger lets the character persuade his mount to do what he wants, Rider 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 Rider roll to keep his seat. The challenge level should be equal to the amount of damage done by the attack before defenses are applied.

It is difficult for a mounted person to perform any acts that require 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 Rider as the basis for his Defense, but may have a penalty based upon the room to maneuver and the contrariness of the animal.

Note that a mount can be attacked as easily as it's rider.

SORCERY

This chapter describes the rules governing sorcery.

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.

Skill

Skill at sorcery is based on Intellect. The character rolls this trait to determine if a spell succeeds.

Power and Energy

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

- Power Level = Command + focus

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 an Intellect roll vs a challenge level based on the range. If a spell is resisted by Defiance, the sorcery check is made against that trait plus the range modifier.

Using sorcery of an energy level less than or equal to one's power level is safe. Failure means only that the target is unaffected.

The energy required by a spell is based on its intensity, area, and duration.

Intensity

Intensity is the raw force of a spell. For attacks, this translates into damage.

Each level of intensity adds one to the energy level to a spell.

Area

By default, spells are directed at a single individual or location. A sorcerer may choose more targets: adding two to the energy level of a spell doubles the number.

+Energy	Area
0	1
2	2
4	4
6	8
8	16
10	32
12	64
etc...	

The caster makes only one Intellect roll.

Duration

By default, sorcery is fleeting - spells are thrown, defended against, and resisted instantaneously. Spells may last longer: adding two to the energy level of a spell doubles the duration.

+Energy	Actions
0	1
2	2
4	4
6	8
8	16
10	32
12	64
etc...	

The caster makes only one roll. Targets defend against this roll twice per round for the duration of the spell.

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 - trait rolls are made every round. This is functionally the same as casting individual spells on each round for most types of sorcery.

Example Spells

Energy	Intensity	Area	Duration
6	6	1	1
6	2	4	1
6	2	1	4
6	2	2	2
8	4	4	1
8	2	8	1
8	2	2	4
12	12	1	1
12	6	8	1
12	4	1	16
etc...			

Players should name the spells they use most often. This way, the player can tell the Master "I'm casting Lightning Fork" instead of having to say "I'm casting a Mahasu spell of Intensity 10, Area 2, and Duration 1" every time.

Defiance

Sorcery cast at an unwilling target may be resisted. Defiance is used to evade sorcery in the same way Defense is used to evade physical attacks. To make an attack spell work, the sorcerer must roll his Intellect versus the Defiance of the target. If successful, the dx of this roll is added to the intensity of the spell.

Subtract the victim's Willpower from the intensity of the spell. If the target is a sorcerer who applied his focus to Willpower on this round, subtract that value as well. The final result is the intensity that affects the target (minimum of 1 if the dx is greater than zero).

For destructive spells, this means a number of wounds and stuns equal to the intensity. Nekelmu sorcery attacks sanity rather than health; it does shocks rather than wounds.

> Example: Vunata, a Kephite priest, has the initiative and wishes to make Juk and Tam suffer. He has a Command of 6 and a focus of power 8, giving him a total power level of 14. He likes fire, so he decides to attack with Mahasu sorcery; he chooses a spell of intensity 8, area 2 (to hit both enemies), and duration 4 (he wants them to suffer longer).
>
> Vunata rolls a seven and adds this to his Intellect (5) for a total of 12. Juk has an Intellect of 2, giving him a Defiance of 9 - the dx is 3, so the spell affects him with an intensity if 11. Tam has an Intellect of 6, giving her a Defiance of 13 - she is unaffected.
>
> Juk subtracts his Willpower (6) from the intensity of the spell (13) to get 5. This would cause 5 wounds and 5 stuns, but Juk opts to forego one action this round in order to concentrate, improving his Willpower by 2 and reducing the damage to 3. Had he foregone both actions, he could have improved his Willpower by 4 and reduced the damage to 1.
>
> Juk will continue to be affected by the intensity 5 spell for the next three actions unless the spell is nullified.
>
> Frustrated by failure, Vunata uses his second action to cast a spell of intensity 14 at Tam alone. He hits with a dx of 1. Fortunately, Tam has her focus applied to resistance rather than sorcery at the moment; she adds her focus power (8) to her Willpower (7) and subtracts this from the attack's intensity, leaving zero. Because the attack had a dx greater than zero, however, she still takes 1 wound and 1 stun.

Extra Power

A daring sorcerer can cast spells beyond his power level. He 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.

Wielding sorcery beyond one's power level is dangerous.

When a sorcerer pushes himself this way, he must roll greater than the amount of extra energy channelled plus seven. If he fails, the spell fails and he takes a number of shocks equal to the dx (the amount by which the spell defeated him). There is no defense against this - it could even leave the sorcerer catatonic.

> Example: Nik the Wise has a Command 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 Command of 4, he can cast this spell in one action even without his staff. With the staff, he can cast a spell of energy 12 in a single action. Failure has no secondary consequences.

> If Nik wants to throw a spell of energy 18, it will take him four rounds - one action for 12, two actions (one round) for 14, two rounds for 16, four rounds for 18. He has channelled 6 more points of energy than his power level, so must roll greater than 13 on his attempt.

> Nik rolls a five. Adding this to his Intellect (6) gives 11 - two less than was needed. The spell fails, and Nik takes 2 shocks and 2 stuns.

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 Intellect roll. He gets +2 for taking twice as long as required, +4 for taking four times as long, +6 for taking eight times as long, up to a maximum of +10.

A caster may take as long as is necessary to complete a spell, even hours or days (until the Master rules that he collapses from exhaustion). The trait 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: 32 rounds. If he takes 64 rounds, he will get a +8 bonus.

> For Nik to cast a massive spell of energy 24 would take a minimum of 32 rounds (over 3 minutes). This would require him to roll vs a challenge level of 19 on his Sorcery - a daunting task for the most learned master.

> If he opts to take 1024 rounds (nearly 4 hours) to cast the spell, he will have a bonus of +10 for six doublings of the required time.

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 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; but if the attack were made against a nearby boulder instead, the target would have to use Athlete or Constitution 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 8 or less 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 causes the subordinates to be entranced and helpless until the leader relinquishes command or has his concentration broken. In addition, any spell failures 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.

Harnessing such power is difficult. The leader must roll greater on his Intellect check than the extra energy channeled plus seven. Failure has the same consequences as Extra Power above - the leader and all of his followers will take a shock of level equal to the dx.

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 destroy the leader and all his followers. For this reason, group rituals are often scheduled as full day (or night) events.

Blood Sacrifice

A sorcerer may choose to sacrifice his health or sanity for extra energy. He gains an amount of energy equal to the level of the wound or shock taken. Health and sanity may be sacrificed at the same time, but the stuns will add up.

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.

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

Energy	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 2.

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 on the "distance" between the two worlds. 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 world. Sorcerers on either side may try to take control of it 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 trait rolls and supernatural energies necessary to maintain the gateway.

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 untold numbers 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 to distract and terrorize opponents. The intensity of such a spell is applied as a penalty to the targets' Initiative on the following round.

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 trait 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.

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 trait 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 Intuition 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 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 spell to be cast continuously or with an extended 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.

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 Athlete trait. 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 trait 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.

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 spell, a sorcerer must roll his Intellect vs the other caster's Defiance. 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. Using Seheru in this way takes an action.

Talamu

This sorcery gives the user control over the forces of life and death. It allows the transfer of health and 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 lifeforce 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 a wound or shock of a level equal to the intensity of the spell. Only one wound or shock can be affected per action.

Involuntary transfers are resolved as follows:

1. Roll Intellect vs Defiance to determine if the spell succeeds.
2. If successful, add the dx to the spell's intensity and subtract the defender's Willpower (and focus, if applicable).
3. Whatever remains is applied to the target as a wounds or shocks.

4. The sorcerer may repair up to that number of wounds or shocks in himself or a voluntary subject.

Like heals like - wounds cannot be used to heal shocks; shocks cannot heal wounds.

Nothing can absorb more health or sanity than it naturally 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 taking lifeforce from others. The sorcerer may drain a foe without risk, but transferring the lifeforce to himself or another is dangerous. If the provider of the lifeforce 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.

Transferring lifeforce between beasts and thinking creatures is just asking for trouble. Such acts create monsters.

PAIN AND SUFFERING

Unconsciousness and Death

A character who takes ten stuns falls unconscious.

A character who takes twenty wounds is incapacitated. He will suffer one additional wound per round until healed. If wounds reach 30, the character dies.

A character who takes twenty shocks goes insane. He will suffer one additional shock per round until healed. If shocks reach 30, the character becomes permanently catatonic.

An incapacitated or insane character may still be awake if he has taken less than ten stuns - possible only if the character were injured earlier and recovered the stuns but not the wounds or shocks.

Recovery

A character recovers from harm through rest.

Stuns are the easiest to recover. One stun is recovered for each round of inaction.

An unconscious character recovers stuns at the normal rate and awakens when they stuns fall below ten. There is no limit to the number of stuns one can take, however; one who has taken massive amounts may go into a coma and take a very long time recover.

Wounds and Shocks are more difficult to recover. They do not return automatically.

To recover Wounds, a character must make a Constitution roll against the number of wounds possessed. If successful, the number of wounds is reduced by the dx. When a character's wounds reach zero, he is fully healed.

Shocks work the same way, but 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 both Wounds and Shocks).

Rest must be in a comfortable environment with adequate warmth, sleep, and nourishment. Recovery from Shocks 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 deep thinking, in the case of Shocks - 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.

Example:

Juk, Constitution 6, takes 10 wounds on Monday. He makes a Constitution roll when he awakens Teusday morning: 2d6+6 for a total of 13. This gives a dx of 3, reducing his number of wounds to 7. He makes another Con roll Wednesday morning: 2d6+6 for a total of 14. This gives a dx of 7, reducing his wounds to 0.

Juk gets into a fight with a large bear on Thursday. He takes 19 wounds. Friday morning, he rolls a 7 and adds his Con for a total of 13. This is below the number of wounds, so his condition remains dire. Saturday morning, however, he gets lucky and rolls a 12 - though 18 is still less than the number of wounds, the natural 12 gives him a dx of 1, reducing his wounds to 18.

Healing

The aid of a skilled healer can make recovery much easier. Once per day, a healer may make a Healer roll for the injured character. This roll is compared to both wounds and shocks. Success heals a number of wounds/shocks equal to the dx.

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

Example:

Sarah, a level 10 Healer, spends Saturday tending to Juk. After hours of treatment, she rolls her Healer trait and gets 20. This bests Juk's wounds by 2, reducing them to 16.

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 Constitution 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 others except that they are resisted with Willpower and inflict shocks rather than wounds.

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 action that requires sight will have a -4 penalty to the trait 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 challenge level - 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 action 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 the affected sense.

Falling

The Master should ignore damage from falls of less than two spaces. 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 twice the number of spaces fallen. A character who falls three spaces (18 feet) should take 6 damage; a character who falls eight spaces should take 16 damage, and so on up to a maximum of 20.

This damage is applied against the character's Constitution. 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 Athlete roll to break a fall. This roll is made against a challenge level equal to the amount of damage the character faces. The dx of a successful roll is added to the character's Constitution to help endure the damage.

MONSTERS AND HORRORS

Monsters are creatures that are not native to the world. Wolves and bears are natural creatures; dragons, demons, and horrors are not. Whether any particular breed of monster is native or alien depends on The Master's campaign world.

A player may play an unusual race or creature with The Master's approval. This character is an outsider who travelled to the campaign world from another realm. Its worldview should be alien to that of humans. It will have no tribe or homeland. It 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 or fortified to protect themselves from mankind.

Example: a player wants his character to be creature known as a "dwelf." He should construct the character as he would any other. The player may argue that dwelves should get a bonus to Strength or Archer 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 the appropriate traits. If the player thinks that dwelves should fly and throw lightning bolts 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 gives more of an advantage than initially thought.

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.

A creature twice as tall as a human would have roughly eight times the mass, assuming similar density. This is important to note for the sake of grappling or weak floors.

Great Strength does not necessarily make one any less vulnerable to harm - an elephant is very strong, but can still be chopped into small pieces if hit with an axe enough times. Constitution should be limited unless the creature is made of sterner stuff than most.

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 allow them to take larger amounts of stuns and wounds before falling.

Some creatures may have proportions that make their strength different for different purposes. A long-limbed creature might have greater strength for striking than for lifting. A creature could have a powerful grip, but a weak punch.

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 by giving the critter different Constitution traits for resisting damage, healing wounds, and resisting poisons.

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 Initiative or hundreds of attacks per round) is up to The Master.

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.

Flight

Monsters need not be earthbound like the heroes. A monster could have great wings that allow it to 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 wounds and shocks 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. This is a good thing.

Sorcery

There is no reason why monsters need to be limited to the same sorcery 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 supernatural attacks (but not both, unless The Master wants a monster to be indestructable).

For that matter, there are supernatural arts appropriate for human antagonists that are not listed in the chapter on sorcery. This is because these abilities are not available to player characters. It may seem unfair that NPCs can have magical abilities that players cannot, but certain activities are simply not well-suited for adventurers. 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 player character traits.

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 the supernatural.

> 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 Seheru sorcery, which affects undead much like Mahasu does the living. Of course, the players don't know this.

Alien Intellect

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 supernatural powers, and has its own reasons for being here.

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.

Goals for the system:

- A balance between realism and heroism
- A balance between roleplaying and hack-n-slash
- Simple character generation, but a wealth of possible characters
- Mechanics that are easy to learn
- Meaningful tactical options - but only for those who want them

- Minimal bookkeeping

In my eyes, combining the above makes a fun game.

The mechanics are unoriginal. Hursagmu takes elements from the Hero System, West End Games's classic d6 system, Dungeons & Dragons, GURPS, Fudge, and many others.

Character Generation

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

The exponential increases also allow traits to be open-ended without fear that someone will have an Intellect of 700.

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

Traits are broad for the sake of simplicity. I have tried to group different abilities together under single traits in ways that make sense. Characters are less customizable than in games with hundreds of skills, but I think the ease of character building is worth the trade. Chargen is simpler with a small number of broad traits than with a large number of narrow ones.

The division of traits into Talents and Professions is purely aesthetic. Talents describe what you are. Professions describe what you do.

The trait list focuses on adventuring abilities; trade skills are abstracted. I did this so that talented craftsmen and scholars can compete in the adventuring arena. All craft skills, from blacksmithing to shoemaking, are considered part of a single trait: Artisan. All academic skills are considered part of Scholar. This is unrealistic, but I think it's fun.

This is meant primarily for player characters - most NPCs will be specialists with professions like Farmer or Carpenter.

Traits can be added. If a player wants their character to have Singer or Sailor as a profession, let it be done.

The decision to leave out traits 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.

Gifts exist to add arbitrary rules and abilities to the game. One could add a gift called Bondage that allows one to control minds with a Command roll or a gift called Illusion that lets one do damage with a Perception roll. Taken to the extreme, one could even use gifts to emulate magic systems like those found in other games, where every spell is a rule unto itself.

Gifts are required for the use of sorcery to prevent every character from having the ability.

Some may be confused by the damage metrics. Some players might think it unrealistic that a scrawny scholar can take as many stuns as their big brawny warrior. Those who think this should look at the metrics from the opposite direction to see what actually happens when characters get hit.

It's easiest to illustrate by example. Take two characters, Bob and Fred. Bob has a Constitution of 0 - completely average. Fred has a mighty Constitution of 5. What happens when either character is hit by an attack that does 6 damage? After one hit, Bob will have 6 wounds and 6 stuns. After two hits, he will be unconscious and fairly hurt. Fred, on the other hand, will have to be hit ten times by the same attack before he will fall.

So, though damage metrics are the same for every character in absolute numbers, tough characters are still able to take more punishment based on their Constitution, Willpower, and equipment.

System Mechanics

The mechanics are meant to be easy to learn and simple to execute, yet powerful in possibility.

Goals:

- A single core mechanic
- Fast resolution
- Enough randomness to make the game gripping, but not so much that trait levels don't matter
- Optional details for tactics and sorcery

Hursagmu uses rolls of 2d6 + Trait as the core mechanic. The probability distribution looks like this:

x	p(roll = x)	p(roll >= x)
2	0.028	1.000
3	0.056	0.972
4	0.083	0.917
5	0.111	0.833
6	0.139	0.722
7	0.167	0.583
8	0.139	0.417
9	0.111	0.278
10	0.083	0.167
11	0.056	0.083
12	0.028	0.028

On average, players should roll a 7 about 17 percent of the time. 45 percent of rolls should fall between 6 and 8; 67 percent of rolls should fall between 5 and 9; 83 percent of rolls should fall between 4 and 10.

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

The system is unconcerned with the detailed differences between types of weapons and armor. Players don't need to choose swords for tactical reasons if what they really want is axe-wielding barbarians. At the same time, a dagger shouldn't do the damage of a longsword; daggers have other advantages (small, lightweight, easily concealed, useful in grappling). Therefore, the size of a weapon determines its benefits; Players choose the characteristics and cosmetics.

It's common in fantasy literature for sorcerers to use wands and staves. It's also common for them to be more powerful in their towers and temples than outside them. To this end, the system treats these foci as the sorcerous equivalent of weapons and armor. Sorcery can be done without them, but they make one more powerful.

Random initiative adds some variety to the types of tactics possible in the game. Players can create a samurai-like warrior by putting emphasis on aggressive initiative and striking or a fencer who concentrates on fending off an opponent while seeking an opening.

I have tried to avoid lists of combat maneuvers, opting instead for rules that allow players to create their own.

There are a mix of damage metrics to simulate the different ways characters can be harmed. It should be possible to defeat a character without killing him - this is what Stuns are for. Wounds exist to represent real damage - the kind that threatens one's life. Shocks are there to represent damage to the psyche.

Sorcerers ought to have options when casting a spell so that supernatural duels are as exciting as physical ones. Spell intensity, duration, area, and casting time should be flexible. The rules are designed so that sorcerers may trade one for another in various ways. This will hopefully lead to interesting tactics.

Powerful sorcerers need not be strong or quick - those in stories are often old and feeble. Thus, all of a sorcerer's abilities are based on his mind. The ability to defy 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 appendix is a grab-bag of various fantasy realms. It states that there are "other worlds than these" so that game masters can bring in whatever manner of weirdness they desire.

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

CHARACTER TEMPLATES

Knight

You are a noble warrior and scholar, strong of body and mind.

Talent	Level	Cost
Command	6	8
Constitution	6	8
Intellect	4	4
Perception	4	4
Strength	6	8
Willpower	6	8

Profession	Level	Cost
Athlete	6	8
Healer	4	4
Ranger	4	4
Rider	8	16
Scholar	7	12
Warrior	8	16

Gift	Cost
No Gifts	

Traits Total	100
Gift Total	0
Grand Total	100

Weapon	Size	Throwable	Missile	Defense	Damage
Dagger	Small				4
Sword	Medium				6
Shield	Medium			2	2

Armor	endurance	penalty	weight
Mail	4	-4	50

Ranger

You are creature of the wild, in tune with nature, aware of her beauty and her cruelty.

Talent	Level	Cost
Command	2	2
Constitution	7	12
Intellect	2	2
Perception	8	16
Strength	2	2
Willpower	2	2

Profession	Level	Cost
Archer	5	6
Artisan	5	6
Athlete	6	8
Healer	5	6
Ranger	8	16
Rider	5	6
Sneak	6	8
Warrior	6	8

Gift	Cost
No Gifts	

Traits Total	100
Gift Total	0
Grand Total	0

Weapon	Size	Throwable	Missile	Defense	Damage
Dagger	Small				4
Bow	Medium		X		6
Spear	Large	X		1	6

Armor	endurance	penalty	weight
soft leathers	2	-2	20

Giant

You are enormous and strong. Few dare oppose you.

Talent	Level	Cost
Command	6	8
Constitution	10	32
Intellect	0	0
Perception	4	4
Strength	10	32
Willpower	4	4

Profession	Level	Cost
Artisan	6	8
Athlete	4	4
Warrior	6	8

Gift	Cost
No Gifts	

Traits Total	100
Gift Total	0
Grand Total	100

Weapon	Size	Throwable	Missile	Defense	Damage
Maul	Large				10

Armor	endurance	penalty	weight
boiled leather	3	-3	30

Rogue

You are sneaky and deceptive. You get by on wits and luck.

Talent	Level	Cost
Command	0	0
Constitution	0	0
Intellect	4	4
Perception	8	16
Strength	0	0
Willpower	0	0

Profession	Level	Cost
Archer	2	2
Athlete	8	16
Burglar	8	16
Rider	2	2
Scholar	2	2
Sneak	8	16
Trader	6	8
Trickster	8	16
Warrior	2	2

Gift	Cost
No Gifts	

Traits Total	100
Gift Total	0
Grand Total	100

Weapon	Size	Throwable	Missile	Defense	Damage
Dagger	Small				4
Knives	Small	X			2
Sling	Small		X		2

Armor	endurance	penalty	weight
No Armor			

Mystic

You are a mysterious wanderer, dangerous and wise.

Talent	Level	Cost
Command	2	2
Constitution	4	4
Intellect	4	4
Perception	6	8
Strength	2	2
Willpower	4	4

Profession	Level	Cost
Artisan	2	2
Athlete	6	8
Healer	6	8
Ranger	4	4
Scholar	4	4
Sneak	5	6
Warrior	6	8

Gift	Cost
Superior Hearing	6
Starvision	6
Intuition	6
Empathy	6
Immunity	6
Longevity	4

Traits Total	66
Gift Total	34
Grand Total	100

Weapon	Size	Throwable	Missile	Defense	Damage
Staff	Large			3	4
Sling	Small		X		4

Armor	endurance	penalty	weight
No Armor			

Priest

You are chosen. You wield sorcery in service of a god.

Talent	Level	Cost
Command	10	32
Constitution	0	0
Intellect	4	4
Perception	4	4
Strength	0	0
Willpower	8	16

Profession	Level	Cost
Scholar	5	6

Gift	Cost
Mahasu	6
Sabatu	6
Seheru	6
Talamu	6
Immunity	6
Longevity	4
Phosphorescence	4

Traits Total	62
Gift Total	38
Grand Total	100

Focus	size	weight	power
holy symbol	3	3	4
temple	400	immobile	18

Armor	endurance	penalty	weight
No Armor			

Sorcerer

You have acquired sorcery by way of fate or accomplishment. The world is yours.

Talent	Level	Cost
Command	4	4
Constitution	2	2
Intellect	8	16
Perception	6	8
Strength	0	0
Willpower	4	4

Profession	Level	Cost
Artisan	2	2
Healer	4	4
Scholar	6	8
Sneak	2	2
Trickster	2	2

Gift	Cost
Amelatu	6
Mahasu	6
Nekelmu	6
Sabatu	6
Seheru	6
Talamu	6
Starvision	6
Intuition	6

Traits Total	52
Gifts Total	48
Grand Total	100

Focus	size	weight	power
staff	6	6	6
tower	100	immobile	14

Armor	endurance	penalty	weight
No Armor			

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 gods came.

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 believed the race should have been destroyed when **UR** was finished with it. 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 that day 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.

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 other 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 Yothans. The Yothans valued discipline, order, hierarchy, and uniformity. This value system caught the eye of a patron god, **Yurda,** 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.

Yothan sorcery rose to dominate the region. Yothan philosophy followed. This land would become the kingdom of Yoth.

Many wars have been fought between Yoth 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 Yoth. Towns changed hands, territory is gained and lost, but little progress is made. 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 Yothan, 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 the 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 Yoth 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 colossal 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 Yoth, in the foothills of the Hursagmu, is a land called Vor. Within Vor are numerous small towns that have maintained their independence from Yoth only because they are too remote to concern the old kingdom. This may change as Yoth grows Westward.

To the west of Keph is an arid land populated by scattered tribes of nomadic savages. These tribesman 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.

Yoth

Yoth 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 Yothans 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 Yoth, 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 **Yurda** is the official religion of Yoth. Observance is strictly enforced. All are expected to attend service once per week and to tithe ten percent of their income to the church.

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 hierarchical, much like the Yothan, 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 priest 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 taxes. 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 Yoth 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 Yoth 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 liberty. They join together only for common defense.

Kirkland has no official religion.

Others

The independent towns of Vor are 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, though not to the extreme that Yoth 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.

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.

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 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.

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.