

Writing: Ben Dutter
Design: Ben and Jessica Dutter
Art: Dean Spencer and Per Folmer
Editing: Joshua Yearsley
Layout: Evan Rowland

Inspired by and based on games by John Harper,
Amít Moshe, Vincent and Meg Baker, Gary
Gygax, Dave Arneson, and Tom Moldvay

© Sigil Stone Publishing 2018

VAGABONDS OF DYFED is Powered by the Apocalypse,
and its design was heavily informed by
Apocalypse World and *World of Dungeons*

Playtesting and contributors: Maria
Rivera, Michael Prescott, Charles Gatz,
Richard Ruane, Patrick, Alex Scheibe, Wayne
McEachren, Mischa Krilov, Jason D'Angelo

VAGABONDS OF DYFED

CONTENTS

BASICS

11

WHAT IS THIS 12

IN A NUTSHELL 12

PRINCIPLES 13

CHALLENGE AND
IMPARTIALITY 13

IMPACT AND INGENUITY 14

MEANINGFUL CHOICES 14

Roll Result 15

CORE MECHANIC 15

CHARACTER CREATION

17

CHARACTER CREATION 18

TRAITS 20

Approach to conflict 20

Goal, cause, or ethos 20

Gimmick or
memorable quality 20

Background,
who you used to be 21

Foreground,
who you are now 21
Weakness 21

LINEAGES 22

Human 22

Elf 22

Dwarf 22

Beastkin 23

Smallfolk 23

TECHNIQUES 24

ADEPT 24

Distill Azoth: 24

Hand of Force: 24

Illuminate: 24

Inaudible Whisper: 24

Legerdemain: 25

Transfer Heat: 25

ARCANIST 25

ARMORBORN 25

ASSASSINATE 25

BEASTSPEAK 25

BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY 26

BOTTOMLESS LUNGS 26
CONTROL VEGETATION 26
CURE 26
CUTPURSE 26
DEVOTED 26
 Augury: 27
 Bolster: 27
 Cleanse: 27
 Holy Ward: 27
 Invigorate: 27
 Restore: 27
EAR TO THE GROUND 27
EYEBALL IT 27
FAVORED ENEMY 27
FAVORED ENVIRONMENT 27
FAVORED TACTIC 28
FAVORED WEAPON 28
FROTHY RAGE 28
HEALING TOUCH 28
HELLRIFT 28
INNER COMPASS 29
IRON STOMACH 29
JELLYBONES 29
LAST WORD 29
LIGHT SLEEPER 29



LINGUIST 30
MAGICAL HEALING 30
MIGHTY LEAP 30
NOSE FOR EVIL 30
OATHBOUND 30
PATHFINDER 30
PRACTICED SHADOW 31
PROVIDENT GUIDANCE 31
PYROMANCER 31
SCRY 32
SHADOWMELD 32
SOULSNARE 32
STRONG 32
TOUGH HIDE 32
TRACKER 33
TRAPCUNNING 33
UNDEAD THRALL 33
WALLCLIMB 33



GAMEPLAY 35

HOW TO PLAY 36

ROLL RESULT 36

**IMPACT SCALE
AND STANCE 38**

**ADVANTAGE AND
DISADVANTAGE 39**

CONCENTRATION 40

PERMISSION 40

**ENGAGING WITH
YOUR CORE FLAW 41**

YOUR CHARACTER 43

EQUIPMENT AND SPEED 44

DAMAGE AND HP 45

Healing and Restoring HP 45

Treating and
Removing Injury Tags 45

GAINING LEVELS 46

XP REQUIREMENTS 47

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS 49

ENEMIES AND NPCs 50

**HIRELINGS, HORSES, AND
HOUNDS 50**

NPC Loyalty 51

NPC Ability 51

COMBAT 53

SURPRISE 54

**INITIATIVE AND
TURN ORDER 54**

MOVEMENT 55

PCS DEALING DAMAGE 55

Critical Hits 55

Defeating Enemies
Without Damage 55

PCS TAKING DAMAGE 56

Separate Enemy Damage
Roll (Method 1) 56
Enemy Damage Determined
by PC Roll (Method 2) 56

STANCE, RISK, AND DAMAGE 57

ARMOR AND DAMAGE 57

OUTSIDE OF ADVENTURE 59

DOWNTIME SCENES 60

SOCIAL SCENES 61

TRAVEL AND DUNGEONEERING 63

TRAVEL AND DUNGEONEERING 64

WEATHER AND HAZARDS 65

POTENTIAL TRAVEL TURN CALAMITIES 65

Weather as an Obstacle 66
Weather as Enemies 66
Special Rules for Weather 67

PREPARATION AND PLANNING 67

The Planning Roll 68
The Preparation Roll 69

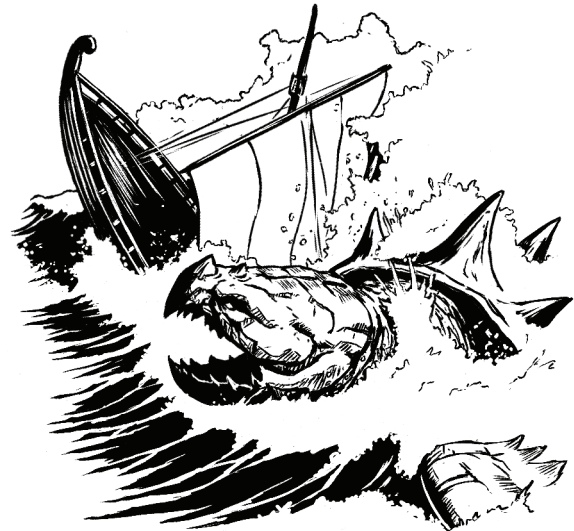
TRAPS 69

DECAYS: HUNGER, THIRST, DISEASE, AND POISON 70

Hunger and Starvation 70
Thirst and Dehydration 70
Snake Venom
(Example Poison) 71
Zombie Rot
(Example Disease) 71
Zombie Rot effect 71

OVERLAND TRAVEL 72

Magic from Techniques 73
Magical Items 73
Elvish Magic 73



MAGIC 73

Divine Intervention or
Magical Bestowment 74
Magic from Traits or
Other Sources 74

AZOTH:

DISTILLED MAGIC 74

Finding Azoth 74
Azoth's Uses 75
Azoth in Spells and Rituals 75
Azoth Augmentations 75
Azoth Rejection Mutation 75

EQUIPMENT

77

Adventuring
Gear and Tools 78
Examples of Weapon Tags 78
Examples of Equipment 79
Currency Conversion 81



MAKING ENEMIES

83

SPEED 84

HP 84

DAMAGE MODIFIER 84

ARMOR 85

TRAIT TAGS 85

ABILITIES 85

Alter environment: 85
Breath / Blast / Gas: 85
Charge: 86
Critical weakness: 86
Disarm: 86
Drain: 86
Gargantuan: 86
Hit and run: 86
Immune to [type]: 86
Invisible: 86
Knockback: 86
Morph: 87
Multiattack N: 87
Paralysis: 87
Pin: 87
Poison: 88
Reaction attack: 88
Reaction movement: 88
Resistant to [type]: 88
Special movement: 88
Stun: 88
Swallow: 88
Swarm: 88
Trip: 88



Record HP as is. 89

Ignore to-hit bonus. 89

Roll damage as listed. 89

To convert descending AC: 89

To convert ascending AC: 89

CONVERTING ENEMIES 89

Note saving throws. 90

Note special abilities
or resistances. 90

EXAMPLE ENEMIES 91

Acolyte 91

Amorgobbler 91

Bandit 91

Bear 91

Beetle, Giant 91

Berserker 92

Bugbear 92

Cat, Great 92

Doppelganger 92

Dire Ants 92

Digestive Jelly 92

Dragons 93

Ghoul 93

Giant 93

Gnoll 93

Goblin 94

Hydra 94

Lizardkin 94

Lycanthrope
(Werewolf, etc.) 95

Medium 95

Medusa 95

Minotaur 95

Orc 96

Pixie 96

Scavengipede 96

Soldier 96

Spider, Giant 97

Shrieker Shroom 97

Wraith 97

Zombie 97

CHARACTER ARCHETYPES



BASICS

WHAT IS THIS

◇ PbtA/WoDu inspired

◇ 2d6 + mod

◇ Gradient successes

◇ One core “move”

◇ Sum of freeform traits instead of attributes

◇ Supplemental moves as “techniques”

VAGABONDS OF DYFED is an extensive hack of several Powered by the Apocalypse games — namely John Harper’s *World of Dungeons* and *Blades in the Dark* mixed in with a dash of some others (especially *City of Mist*) — with the aim of being compatible with OSR systems, modules, and supplements.



IN A NUTSHELL

I took my favorite parts of lots of other games — some small and some large, some old and some bleeding edge new — and kludged and cobbled and sewed them together into a game my friends and I enjoy playing.

The core mechanic is the same from *World of Dungeons* and many other PbtA games (sum 2d6 + mod). There’s only a single basic “move” with the familiar split between failure, complication, and success. There aren’t any playbooks. Characters are built off of a series of free-form descriptors and mechanically-defined widgets.

It’s quick and dirty. But it works with old-school B/X, OSRIC, and a bunch of other stuff I had in my book case without offending my story gamer sensibilities.

PRINCIPLES

CHALLENGE AND IMPARTIALITY

This game is as much, if not more so, about challenging the players as it is about creating a shared story. Rather than collaborating to tell an interesting tale, you're inhabiting the minds of characters who believe their world to be very real; that world behaves with internal consistency, some measure of predictability, and the cold hard impartiality of our own reality.

It's brutally fair, even to a fault. This means that the world exists whether or not the player characters ever show up; factions rise and quarrel and wither; ecosystems evolve and creatures feast upon each other; player characters die from the unlucky roll of the dice. Such is the cold hand of fate.

The world and its antagonists don't exist solely to challenge the player characters. They don't scale to match PC interests nor do they exist as some form of "balanced encounter." If the star characters wander into a dungeon or swamp with creatures far more powerful than they can survive — so be it.



All of this is to say that GMs should treat the world like a carefully cultivated ant farm, only to introduce a cadre of termites in their midst and shake the hell out of the box. The characters should fear the danger, as it is real. But they should also respect the internal logic (and chaos) of the world; it may be cruel but it is absolutely, inexorably fair.

IMPACT AND INGENUITY

As the proverbial agitators in the world, the PCs want to *feel* their impact. Things should naturally and rapidly escalate. The characters' slaying of the corrupt necromancer should leave a power vacuum that is filled by some other foul thing. In turn, that leaves a gap somewhere else; on and on it goes.

Likewise, the more clever and ingenious the *players'* ideas are (embodied through the personalities and approaches of their characters) the more a GM should reward this type of behavior. The players don't want to be arbitrarily bested at every opportunity, outmaneuvered and out-strategized by their enemy simply because the GM's out-of-universe knowledge unfairly benefited the NPCs.

No, the GM-run characters in the world are just the same as the player-run characters. They're limited by their in-world knowledge and can *absolutely* be outsmarted by the PCs. A common saying is that games such as **VAGABONDS** treat combat as war rather than as sport. The challenge and threat of an adversary can only be consistently overcome if every tactic — no matter how vicious or apathetic — is deployed.

There are always layers that can be pulled back; a bigger fish; a more powerful sorcerer; a crueller lieutenant waiting in the wings of every mercenary company; an even more insatiably greedy prince lurking in the shadows of every throne.

MEANINGFUL CHOICES

The player character's decisions — their players' choices — are all that really drive the “story” of this game. There is no metaplot, no three act structure, no pending climax or deus ex machina. There is a simple input-output of choice-action-reaction-choice.

To ensure that these choices are meaningful and significant demands complex and interesting situations. No “right” option or single solution — everything comes at the expense of something else, everything requires sanding down the layers, nothing is for certain. Good people can exhibit evil and cruelty, just as despots can display great acts of kindness or malevolent sorcerers can weep honest tears of sorrow.

Likewise, *how* the characters solve a particular problem or approach a situation is just (if not more so) important than the details of the scene itself. They want to feel clever, they want to win. And a hard-fought, bloody victory is all the sweeter and more valuable if it is earned rather than given.

In order for them to make those choices, the players have to know — have to *understand* — the world. It has to be revealed to them as inhabitants of that universe; fill their senses with meaningful details, realistic and ugly truths. Let them immerse.

CORE MECHANIC

When you attempt an action that's difficult, relevant, and may cause an unwanted outcome, roll 2d6 and add your **aptitude**, the sum of relevant positive and negative tags (max +3, min -3). Tags are discussed more in **Character Creation** (page 17).

- ◇ You and the GM work out which tags are relevant.
- ◇ Helpful tags give +1 aptitude each.
- ◇ Harmful tags give -1 aptitude each.

You can only roll **once per action** until circumstances change.

ROLL RESULT

- ◇ **6 or less** is a miss (things get worse or turn out bad).
- ◇ **7 to 9** is a partial success (some good with a complication).
- ◇ **10 to 12** is a complete success (you do it without issue).
- ◇ **13 or more** is a critical success (you do it with an added benefit).

More comprehensive gameplay rules are covered in **Gameplay** (page 35).





CHARACTER CREATION

CHARACTER CREATION

18

CHARACTER CREATION

1. Define your character **concept**.
2. Write a short phrase for each of the following **trait tags**.
 - a. Your **approach** to conflict
 - b. Your **goal**, driven by a cause or ethos
 - c. Your **gimmick**—a unique and memorable trait
 - d. Your **background**—what you used to do or be
 - e. Your **foreground**—what you are, do, or have skill in
 - f. Your **weakness**—a gap in your abilities

These will affect your **aptitude** on various rolls, described more in **How to Play** (page 36).

3. Write at least a short phrase for your **core flaw**: a lie about the world that you believe; a fear that you can't get over; a selfishness or vice that you can't ignore or resist.

4. Pick one **technique**: a knack or special advantage. A list of techniques is on page 24.
5. Pick one **lineage**, a species, bloodline, or background that affects your body and culture. A list of lineages is on page 22.
6. You start with 8 **HP** and gain +4 HP per level. If one of your trait tags shows you're especially tough or lucky, the GM can grant you +1 HP.



Creating Shorjahl

Concept: a traveling mage with a penchant for fire. Has a past that they're ashamed of. Seeks attunement and knowledge in nature and "raw" power.

Trait tags:

Approach: a slow, logical boil until a burst of wrath

Goal: to undo my profane magic, learn natural magic

Gimmick: a bit of a pyromaniac, smells like smoke

Background: apprentice of a powerful necromancer

Foreground: a wandering pyromancer

Weakness: a terrible temper

Core flaw: I seek to understand the world and magic through immersing in "raw" and "natural" magic, and doing so will cleanse my former involvement with the profane and foul and unnatural.

Technique: Pyromancer

Lineage: human

HP: 10 (8 + 2 from human)



TRAITS

Characters are essentially the sum of their traits. Trait tags make up the character's description, purpose, role, and approach, and will affect how likely they are to succeed at a given task. Below is a list of common trait tags sorted by category.

APPROACH TO CONFLICT

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| ◇ Aggressive | ◇ Stealthy |
| ◇ Violent | ◇ Prepared |
| ◇ Direct | ◇ Pragmatic |
| ◇ Patient | ◇ Measured |
| ◇ Calm | ◇ Diplomatic |
| ◇ Cautious | ◇ Manipulative |
| ◇ Deceptive | ◇ Pensive |
| ◇ Guileful | |

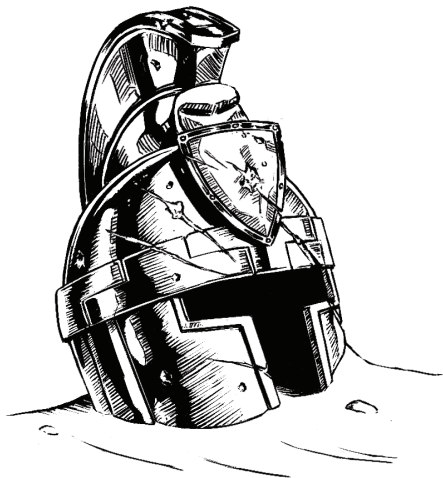
GOAL, CAUSE, OR ETHOS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ◇ Honorbound | ◇ To overthrow the emperor |
| ◇ Family first | ◇ Money controls everything |
| ◇ Obey the law | ◇ Live life to the fullest |
| ◇ Chaos is natural | ◇ Vengeance |
| ◇ Might is right | ◇ Restore peace |
| ◇ Liberty for all | ◇ Kill all goblins |
| ◇ Knowledge is power | ◇ Find the Truth |
| ◇ 37 Treatises of Wisdom | |



GIMMICK OR MEMORABLE QUALITY

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ◇ Flips a coin to kill or release | ◇ Cuts their arm before combat |
| ◇ Always smells of smoke | ◇ Everything is a joke |
| ◇ Collects strange widgets | ◇ Demonic features |
| ◇ Multifaceted eyes | ◇ Slightly magnetic skin, hair |
| ◇ Tattoos of slain foes | ◇ Flirtatious with all |
| ◇ Quick to argue and contest | ◇ Devotion to logic |
| ◇ Lists all their titles | ◇ Has to be in charge |
| | ◇ Speaks in rhymes |



BACKGROUND, WHO YOU USED TO BE

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| ◇ Born a slave | ◇ Guildmaster |
| ◇ Career soldier | ◇ Trained as assassin |
| ◇ Acolyte of Hynam | ◇ Baron of Venmotte |
| ◇ Merchant sailor | ◇ Street vagrant |
| ◇ Blacksmith | ◇ Heir to vast fortune |
| ◇ Court jester | ◇ Dishonored monk |
| ◇ Royal Guard | ◇ Nomadic hunter |
| ◇ High Councilor | |

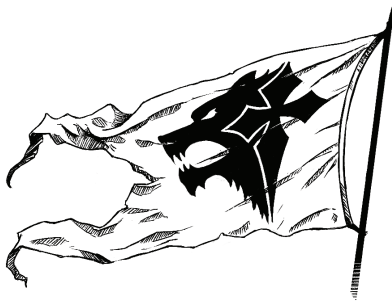
FOREGROUND, WHO YOU ARE NOW

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| ◇ Bounty hunter | ◇ Hospitaller |
| ◇ Protector of Rhys | ◇ Champion of Ghor |
| ◇ Dragonslayer | ◇ Fabled gladiator |
| ◇ Pyromancer | ◇ Artifact hunter |
| ◇ Arcanist | ◇ Visceralist |
| ◇ Thieves' Guildster | ◇ Commander of the Iron Legion |
| ◇ Mercenary | ◇ Boundary warden |
| ◇ Ordained warrior | |

WEAKNESS

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| ◇ Irrational temper | ◇ Ugly |
| ◇ Poor eyesight | ◇ Poor fortitude |
| ◇ Claustrophobic | ◇ Overconfident |
| ◇ Gullible | ◇ Dreadfully boring |
| ◇ Closed-minded | ◇ Weak-willed |
| ◇ Afraid of the dark | ◇ Hedonist |
| ◇ Naive | ◇ Weak to the sun |
| | ◇ Clumsy |

LINEAGES



Lineages will vary greatly from game to game in **VAGABONDS**, and can easily be left out without affecting play. Lineages can also be used as a relevant tag in some instances, but this isn't recommended unless extremely relevant.

HUMAN

- ◇ Gain +2 HP at creation.
- ◇ Gain +1 XP when you take an injury tag.
- ◇ Gain +1 bonus XP when you Train during a downtime scene.
- ◇ Gain +1 bonus XP when you Succumb during a downtime scene.
- ◇ When doing something creative or innovative, you get a critical success on a 12+ (instead of 13+).

ELF

- ◇ You have permission to attempt otherwise impossible tasks to remember esoteric facts or specific information, or to solve puzzles.
- ◇ You have permission to attempt to use arcane magic even without the proper training or implements.
- ◇ You never fail (treat 6- as 7-9) when attempting something in a painfully patient or cautious way (e.g., when in the low-risk stance).
- ◇ Deal +1 damage with bows and magic.

DWARF

- ◇ Select a chosen craft or art form—you never fail (treat 6- as 7-9) when attempting to execute this craft.
- ◇ When attempting something in an obstinate, stubborn, and direct way, you get a critical success on a 12+ (instead of 13+).
- ◇ You can see thrice as far as a human in dark or dim light.
- ◇ You are immune to most minor poisons and toxins.



BEASTKIN

- ◇ Select a creature or order of creatures (feathered, furred, scaled, tentacled)—you resemble this creature, whether through magic or natural hybridization.
- ◇ Gain +1 speed, and gain another +2 speed when operating in terrain that is native and endemic to your bloodline.
- ◇ Treat your unarmed attacks as light weapons, capable of rending, cutting, and stabbing far greater than a human can.
- ◇ You never fail (treat 6- as 7-9) at actions directly related to your bloodline (wolves at hunting, chameleons at hiding, etc.).

SMALLFOLK

- ◇ You're little—you can always squeeze into tight spaces, escape from most bonds, slip through bars, etc.
- ◇ When attempting an action that is selfless and brave, you get a critical success on a 12+ (instead of 13+).
- ◇ Deal +2 damage to creatures that are larger than you.
- ◇ You have permission to attempt impossible tasks when determining the “correct” route, even in unfamiliar territory.

TECHNIQUES

Every character starts with one technique, and gains one new technique per level. The technique selected must have been reasonably acquired—through learning, providence, infestation, or magic.

ADEPT

When you take this technique, pick spells from the list below equal in number to your level. Each time you gain a level, pick another spell. You don't need to roll to cast one, but you can use them as part of a roll.

DISTILL AZOTH:

Through magical concentration and meditation, you can convert items of value into pure azoth, a crystalline metal of iridescent aesthetic and magical power. Precious metals, gems, and other magical items can be distilled in this way (converting roughly 50sp of value into one use of azoth per hour).



HAND OF FORCE:

You can mentally project a weak telekinetic force within close range. This force subtly distorts the air and vision around it, and makes a very quiet reverberation. It can lift or manipulate things that you reasonably could with the strength of your hand. Doing this requires your concentration and attention.

ILLUMINATE:

You can cause any one small object you touch to glow with dim light, roughly equivalent to a lantern. It produces no heat, and lasts until you lose line of sight. If you illuminate another object, the first object ceases to glow.

INAUDIBLE WHISPER:

You can send a very weak, terse, and abstract bit of telepathy to someone with whom you make eye contact or otherwise create mutual awareness. They do not have to speak your language to understand, nor can they resist this effect without magical or supernatural protection.

LEGERDEMAIN:

You can perform subtle, weak, and crude illusions, such as making small things momentarily disappear, teleport between your hands, or change colors. This effect dissipates once out of your line of sight or you break concentration.

TRANSFER HEAT:

You can concentrate or manipulate the flow of heat. Light or snuff a torch, heat or freeze a cup of water, make a brass key too hot to comfortably hold, etc. This effect takes time and concentration, and only works on objects in close range.

ARCANIST

You know how to read magical runes, interpret scrolls, use wands, and identify sundry other magical items without issue. Truly complex artifice that requires magical mastery to produce still requires a roll.

ARMORBORN

You ignore two points of speed reduction from wearing armor (e.g., -3 speed becomes -1 speed).

ASSASSINATE

Roll to attack. On a 10+, you kill the creature, as long as their current HP is less than yours and the creature is unaware of your incoming attack.



BEASTSPEAK

Pick one environment (jungle, forest, mountain, desert, ocean, etc.) or one type of creature (furred, feathered, scaled, etc.). You can speak with the beasts and creatures of this environment or type.

BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

You never fail (treat 6- as 7-9) when attempting to trigger, disarm, or avoid a trap. However, your party may not be so lucky.

BOTTOMLESS LUNGS

You can hold your breath, without rolling, for minutes equal to five plus your level.

CONTROL VEGETATION

You can use magic to command plant-life and vegetation as part of another action. Roll if you have specific, difficult goals. The larger and more impressive the effect, the more dangerous or exhausting it might be.

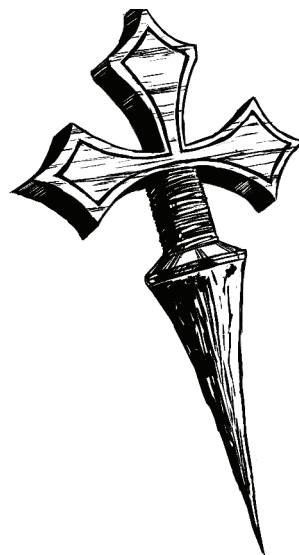
CURE

Roll to remove a disease, poison, or curse from yourself or an ally.

- ◇ On a 6-, the target suffers damage equal to your aptitude.
- ◇ On a 7-9, the affliction will be cured after the target's next long rest.
- ◇ On a 10-12, the affliction will be cured by the end of the scene or combat.
- ◇ On a 13+, the affliction is cured immediately and the target heals HP equal to your aptitude.

CUTPURSE

You never fail (treat 6- as 7-9) when attempting to pick a mundane or non-magically secured pocket, so long as your target is unaware of you.



DEVOTED

Your devotion to a certain cause, deity, or existential meditation allows you to marshal supernatural energy and abilities. When you take this technique, pick devotions from the list below equal in number to your level. Each time you gain a level, pick another devotion. Using a devotion does not require a roll, but may be used as part of a roll to overcome a challenge or complete a noteworthy action.

AUGURY:

Pray or concentrate for several moments, asking the source of your power a simple question (yes or no, left or right, more or less, etc.). You will receive an abstract sign that will lead you to one answer or the other.

BOLSTER:

You speak Words and concentrate upon one ally. They make their next roll at advantage. You can only bolster one ally at a time, and it requires your concentration (preventing you from taking other actions or rolls yourself).

CLEANSE:

Concentrate on a desecrated or tainted object. The larger the object and the fouler its profanity, the longer it will take to sanctify (minutes for a small cursed item, hours for a town's well, days for a cursed mausoleum). This affects both magical profanity and mundane rot or infestation.

HOLY WARD:

Mark a visible circle (or another simple shape) no greater than a few steps across. While you concentrate at its center, tiny beasts and insects cannot cross this threshold. Evil creatures, demons, and sentient beings will feel resistance and trigger your awareness, though you must roll against their crossing.

INVIGORATE:

Heal +1 HP to yourself or one touched ally. You can only do this once per target until they rest.

RESTORE:

Concentrate on a small, mundane object in your hand. As you speak Words, you're able to repair, clean, or mend the object back to perfect and new condition.

EAR TO THE GROUND

You have a friendly NPC ally or asset in every urban center or stronghold nearby. As part of Acquire in a downtime scene, you can meet with one without rolling, as if you rolled a 7-9.

EYEBALL IT

You can always determine near-exact lengths, weights, and other measures by simple observation.

FAVORED ENEMY

Pick one type of enemy (demon, orc, human, bear, etc.). You know how this enemy behaves, where it sleeps, what it eats, and you have a solid idea of its combat abilities. In addition, you never fail (treat 6- as 7-9) when attempting to determine the weakness of a creature of that type.

FAVORED ENVIRONMENT

Pick one environment or ecosystem (forest, jungle, desert, mountain, coastal, urban, etc.). When in this environment, you never fail (treat 6- as 7-9) when attempting to find rations, useful supplies, or shelter.

FAVORED TACTIC

Pick a combat tactic (flanking, ambush, high ground, charging, etc.), subject to GM approval. When deploying this tactic in a fight, you deal damage based on your highest rolled d6 + aptitude.

FAVORED WEAPON

Pick a weapon type. When fighting with this weapon, you deal damage based on your highest rolled d6 + aptitude.

FROTHY RAGE

While in the high-risk stance during a fight, you get a critical success on a 12+ (instead of 13+).

HEALING TOUCH

Anytime you heal HP on yourself or another, heal another +2 HP. (This additional healing does not trigger this technique.)



HELLRIFT

You can attempt to summon a demon by rolling. The longer the time spent concocting the ritual and the greater the sacrifice, the more powerful the demon summoned (e.g., one hour and some blood calls a weak imp, twelve hours and an innocent's soul might manifest a greater fiend). The demon may obey until the end of the scene or combat (or might break free).

- ◇ On a 6-, a horrifically powerful demon breaches the summoning circle and attacks you and your allies.
- ◇ On a 7-9, an appropriate demon appears, but it's guileful, disobedient, and capricious. It might answer questions with riddles, or require additional payment before completing a task. At its first opportunity, it might still attack or attempt to escape your binding.
- ◇ On a 10-12, an appropriate demon appears and will do your bidding for a short while. It will take this as hostile imprisonment and hold a grudge.
- ◇ On a 13+, an appropriate demon appears and will obey you out of fear of your power.

INNER COMPASS

You innately understand the cardinal directions, even if blindfolded, underground, lost, or otherwise non-magically disoriented.

IRON STOMACH

You can eat anything and gain sustenance from it. Yes, anything—so long as you can fit it in your mouth and swallow.



JELLYBONES

Your body and bones are soft and flexible. You can squeeze yourself out of most restraints, through bars, and into similarly confined spaces.



LAST WORD

You can touch the head of any corpse that could communicate while alive (most creatures with skulls), and ask the corpse one question. It will answer the question as long as it relates to something that it could have experienced or observed while alive or since it died (e.g., what killed it, whether someone passed by recently, or what danger lurks ahead). After answering, the corpse crumbles to dust.

LIGHT SLEEPER

You always become alerted to danger while sleeping, so long as the approaching threat is mundane or moving by natural, non-magical means.

LINGUIST

You fluently speak five languages of your choice. Work with your GM to determine relevant languages. You gain a new fluent language per level (if reasonable).

MAGICAL HEALING

You can attempt to magically heal someone else by rolling.

- ◇ On a 6-, you deal damage to you or your target (your choice) equal to your aptitude.
- ◇ On a 7-9, you heal damage from you or your target equal to your lowest d6 + aptitude, but you gain the [exhausted] injury tag.
- ◇ On a 10-12, you heal them equal to your lowest d6 + aptitude.
- ◇ On a 13+, you heal them equal to your highest d6 + aptitude.

MIGHTY LEAP

You can naturally jump twice as high or as far as normal for your lineage.

NOSE FOR EVIL

You can physically smell the vile, evil, and murderous by rolling. Sometimes your nose can be fooled or misdirected, though.

OATHBOUND

Roll 1d6 or select (PC or GM choice) from one of these oaths:

1. Integrity: avoid lies and dishonorable conduct
2. Devotion: dedicate yourself to your faith and principles
3. Restraint: forgo hedonism, gluttony, and alcohol
4. Selflessness: sacrifice your personal desire or gain for others
5. Sympathy: comfort those in need, give benefit of the doubt
6. Valor: protect the innocent, destroy the wicked

While observing your oath, you don't need to eat, gain +1 armor with no penalty to speed, and deal +1 damage on attacks.

PATHFINDER

You never fail (treat 6- as 7-9) when attempting to find a trail or path, no matter how small or overgrown.

PRACTICED SHADOW

You never fail (treat 6- as 7-9) when attempting to hide or move with stealth against non-magical creatures of similar sensory ability to humans.



PROVIDENT GUIDANCE

Concentrate as part of a ritual for at least one hour, whether you're devoting yourself to your deity, listening to the cosmos, or achieving enlightenment through meditation. You must sacrifice something of significant value to you. After such sacrifice and ritual, you can ask your deity (or whatever) one question. The GM answers your question in a helpful and directional way.

PYROMANCER

You can spark small flames and subtly manipulate fire without rolling. Roll if you're using fire magic to significantly affect the scene.

- ◇ On a 6-, you fail to control the flames, potentially causing collateral damage to allies, structures, or yourself. You also lose permission to attempt pyromancy until you take a long rest.
- ◇ On a 7-9, you produce the fire as intended, but it is just barely out of your control, causing minor collateral damage.
- ◇ On a 10-12, you produce the fire without issue.
- ◇ On a 13+, you produce the fire, but do it easily and fiercely. Any damage dealt is doubled as normal for a critical hit.

SCRY

You can attempt to produce visions of distant places, people, or times by rolling. Such spells require a one-hour ritual; a reflective surface, crystal, or intense flame; and one dose of azoth (a luminous liquid most magical in nature, commonly used in alchemy).

- ◇ On a 6-, you lose yourself to the omens and visions, burning up your components and taking the [delirious] injury tag until someone can calm you down.
- ◇ On a 7-9, you just barely direct your visions. Ask the GM one specific question about the sight you seek. They may answer in vague and abstract ways.
- ◇ On a 10-12, you can direct your vision. Ask the GM two questions about the subject of your scrying. Their answers might be enigmatic, but are helpful and directional.
- ◇ On a 13+, you can easily locate your envisioned target. Ask the GM three questions, and their answers must be clear and direct.

SHADOWMELD

You can roll to fold into and teleport between shadows that have line of sight to each other and are within 30 feet. When melded with a shadow, you cannot be harmed or affect the physical world at all, such as making an attack. Any major change to the shadow (such as shining a light upon it) promptly expels you from it.

SOULSNARE

During or promptly after a battle, if you concentrate in still prayer or meditation for a minimum of ten minutes, you can attempt to raise the dead by rolling.

- ◇ On a 6-, you revive one enemy of the GM's choice, likely either at full HP or as a mindless undead.
- ◇ On a 7-9, you revive a killed ally and an enemy (neither your choice) with 1 HP.
- ◇ On a 10-12, you revive one killed NPC of your choice with 1 HP.
- ◇ On a 13+, you revive one killed NPC of your choice with full HP.

STRONG

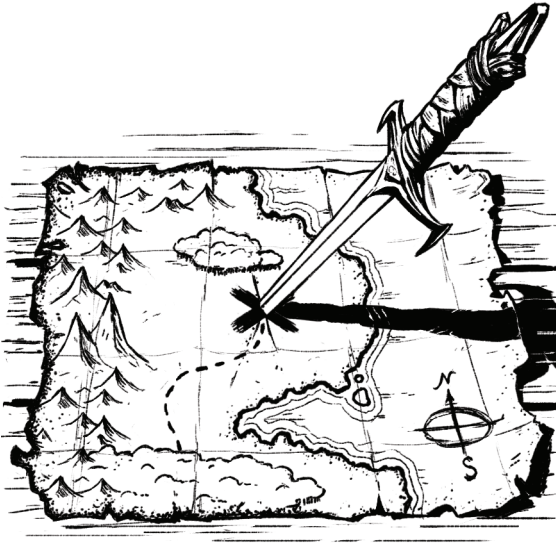
You can lift up to 500 pounds and push up to 1000 pounds of dead weight without rolling or expending any significant effort. This is useful both in and out of combat, but doesn't work against most combatants or mobile objects that can resist your focus and thews, and doesn't add to your damage.

TOUGH HIDE

You can ignore the detriments of inclement weather, heat, rain, or snow up to reasonable levels—magical blizzards and the flaming pits of hell still require protection.

TRACKER

You never fail (treat 6- as 7-9) when attempting to locate non-magically hidden tracks, be they from beast or man.



TRAPCUNNING

You have a great nose for where traps are likely to be and how they might be triggered. The GM will always prompt you to roll to notice a trap nearby, as you get a “funny feeling.”

UNDEAD THRALL

You can attempt to raise an undead thrall by rolling. The more powerful the corpse raised, the more time and concentration this spell requires (e.g., one minute to raise a weak zombie of a fresh goblin corpse, or an hour to take full command of a slain ogre). You can only have one thrall at a time.

- ◇ On a 6-, you fail to raise the corpse and gain the [horrificed] injury tag.
- ◇ On a 7-9, you raise the thrall but have weak command over it. It will vaguely follow your orders until the end of the scene or combat.
- ◇ On a 10-12, you raise the thrall and have strong control over it. You can give it commands or use it as a weapon, which it will attempt to follow to the best of its ability until the end of the scene or combat.
- ◇ On a 13+, as a 10-12 but you retain control over it until you break line of sight or dismiss it.

WALLCLIMB

You can walk or run on walls and ceilings as if they were the ground, rolling as normal. Doing this outside of a tense or dangerous situation doesn’t require a roll, but still takes a moment.



GAMEPLAY

HOW TO PLAY

36

GAMEPLAY



When you attempt an action that's difficult, relevant, and may cause an unwanted outcome, roll 2d6 and add your **aptitude**, the sum of relevant positive and negative tags (max +3, min -3).

- ◇ You and the GM work out which tags are relevant.
- ◇ Helpful tags give +1 aptitude each.
- ◇ Harmful tags give -1 aptitude each.

You can only **roll once per action** until circumstances change.

ROLL RESULT

- ◇ **6 or less** is a miss (things get worse or turn out bad).
- ◇ **7 to 9** is a partial success (some good with a complication).
- ◇ **10 to 12** is a complete success (you do it without issue).
- ◇ **13 or more** is a critical success (you do it with an added benefit).

Shorjahl is attempting to use magic to burn down a fortification. The GM calls for a roll. Shorjahl's been fighting this group of traitorous soldiers long and hard, and is getting angry. Their relevant trait tags are their weakness (-1) [terrible temper], background (+1) [necromancer's apprentice], foreground (+1) [pyromancer], and gimmick (+1) [loves fire]. So that's an aptitude of +2.

Shorjahl rolls and gets an 11, complete success. The fort is set ablaze as the pyromancer contorts their flames around it until it is little more than charcoal.

UNDER THE HOOD: TAGS

Vagabonds is designed to simplify and unify the mechanics of PbtA games and OSR games. Basically anything can be treated as a tag, which acts as a mechanical and narrative modifier. Rolls should never get modified by more than -3 or +3 aptitude, since that's about the limit of what makes sense on a 2d6 roll.

If things are really severe, the GM can just say that something is impossible or happens without a roll. If you're not sure how to handle something, the game is designed to revert to its simplest engine: roll 2d6, add some tags, and interpret the results based on the normal split of 6-, 7-9, 10-12, and 13+.

The GM (and even the players) can sorta eyeball the math for tags and aptitude; it's easy for the GM to just say, "You've got -2 aptitude and advantage because of XYZ circumstances." Don't get too hung up on every crunchy widget unless you enjoy that type of thing, and even if you do, don't let it slow down play so much that people start pulling out their phones and stop paying attention.



IMPACT SCALE AND STANCE

Your character can change the degree to which their actions affect the scene by changing their **stance**—how much risk they’re willing to take. You’ll default to normal stance unless you choose otherwise, though some situations force a particular stance.

- ♦ **High risk:** greater benefits and consequences
- ♦ **Normal:** no change to benefits and consequences
- ♦ **Low risk:** lesser benefits and consequences



Once you take a stance, you’re in that stance until you take a new stance or are forced into a new one. You can only take or change stances when you’re acting on your turn, not as part of a reaction (such as when defending yourself).

In the previous example, Shorjahl is attempting to use fire magic to burn down a fort filled with enemy soldiers. In that example, Shorjahl took a normal stance—no modification. The worst that could happen (6-) might be that they get surrounded by enemy soldiers, or the fire spreads to a dangerous location and escalates the situation.

If instead Shorjahl chose a high-risk stance, a 6- result might have meant that they’re outright attacked amid flaming timbers and enemy arrows. However, a 13+ would produce a much more powerful outcome, allowing Shorjahl to more quickly and efficiently destroy the building.

Inversely, a low-risk stance might have meant that Shorjahl could have at best started a fire which might have destroyed the fort eventually, and at worst might have only caused their enemies to notice the magical attack and start to chase after the mage.

ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

Sometimes you might have advantage, which means you roll 3d6 and take the two highest dice. Likewise, you might have disadvantage, which means you roll 3d6 and take the two lowest dice.

Advantage and disadvantage are granted by the GM due to external factors, enemy abilities, or when a PC or NPC helps or hinders your action, using up their action in turn.

Advantage and disadvantage cancel each other out, so if you have equal advantages and disadvantages, you roll at neither. If you have more advantages than disadvantages, you simply roll at advantage, and vice versa.

If Shorjahl was trying to light the traitor's fort on fire during a terrible rainstorm, they'd roll at disadvantage. Instead, if the enemies were foolish enough to have left their fort untreated for fire and left hay bales out for their horses, Shorjahl would roll at advantage. If both cases were true at once, they'd cancel out and Shorjahl would roll as normal.



CONCENTRATION

Certain circumstances, such as when using a technique or casting a spell, require the character's full **concentration**. A PC can't meaningfully act or speak while concentrating, and can only concentrate on one activity at a time (concentrating on maintaining two distinct spell effects would be impossible).

The GM can require a PC's concentration to perform a specific task or maintain an ongoing effect. The effect ends once the PC's concentration is broken, even for only a moment. A character's concentration breaks if they're hit by an attack or shaken so vigorously so as to lose their line of sight to the object of their concentration.

Shorjahl must concentrate on shaping and directing a twisting orb of pyromancer's fire. They want the orb to burn a particular path through some ruins, and must maintain focus in order to do so. When a ghoul rushes the mage and bites onto their ankle, the pyromancer's concentration breaks. The orb of fire dissipates into a wave of searing heat.

PERMISSION

Certain mechanics or situations grant or deny **permission** to attempt a particular task, action, or ability. The GM can grant permission based on the circumstances, what your characters can achieve, and what matters in the narrative.

Permission keeps the game grounded and aligned with the group's agreed-upon level of realism and verisimilitude. Just because a player shouts out that they conquer the kingdom and roll a 13 doesn't mean that they do so.

*Shorjahl's pyromancer technique gives them **permission** to control fire through concentration and magical energy—a sort of pyrokinesis or fire-bending. The GM could perfectly well block permission of other PCs that didn't have this technique or some similar widget, whether mechanical or narrative.*

At one point, Shorjahl attempts to use pyromancy to melt a stone castle. The GM thinks this would break the internal consistency of the world and make Shorjahl far too powerful of a mage. The GM blocks Shorjahl's permission to attempt this—mechanically, at least. If Shorjahl wants to try it and have it fail, that's fine, but their player can't just roll to "make it so."

ENGAGING WITH YOUR CORE FLAW

Once per session, you or the GM can get you *into* or *out* of a terrible spot by engaging with your core flaw. Doing this gives you distinct authorial control. While the GM can always get you into trouble, doing this makes the situation even more legitimate. You don't have to engage with your core flaw every session (and probably shouldn't).

When you engage with your core flaw, the GM frames a scene and you describe how your character wriggles in or out of the nasty situation. Your allies are likely hindered or harmed, or you'll suffer some consequences down the road.

Shorjahl's core flaw is that they haven't faced their problem directly, and that they believe their current actions will atone them for their lifetime of evil and grotesque magic.

During a session, the GM decides to pull on this flaw, and frames a scene in which Shorjahl comes across a battleground full of corpses being defiled by a necromancer's thrall. This brings up bad memories and forces Shorjahl to make a choice: challenge the thrall or run away in shame and fear.

In another session, Shorjahl and their party are surrounded by a cadre of slavers. The pyromancer uses their former master's reputation to intimidate the slavers away, preventing a fight. But word will spread, and Shorjahl's former master may even hear of their whereabouts.

UNDER THE HOOD: FICTIONAL POSITIONING

Following context is more important than following rules. If the GM thinks something is reasonable, it is. If something just seems impossible or obvious, it is. Just because a character *can* roll and get a 13+ doesn't mean that they *should* roll.

All of this is to say that fictional positioning—the details and trappings of the scene or narrative—are the ultimate guideline for using the rules. This is to encourage the players to try to *win*, to overcome the challenge, as intelligently and carefully and deviously as possible. If they come up with a particularly clever way to ensnare and kill their enemies, they might roll at advantage or even succeed without rolling at all.

Likewise, if their strategy could *never* conceivably succeed regardless of their characters' skill, then they don't need to roll. They'll just fail, or die, or get captured.

Caution: This can quickly devolve into a "mother may I" style of authoritarian GMing. This game isn't freeform roleplay; the GM is there to objectively adjudicate and make rulings in the spirit of verisimilitude and the game's principles. But with this responsibility comes a high demand for trust; misuse that trust, and the game and group will quickly fold.



YOUR

CHARACTER

EQUIPMENT AND SPEED

Every PC and NPC has a **speed**, or how fast they're able to move and react. A PC's speed starts at 0, but gains +1 per level. The more you carry, the slower you are. Big and bulky items are especially cumbersome. The worse you're encumbered, the more negative tags the GM can bestow on you.

Loading down a limb gives you a -1 penalty to speed. Armor further lowers speed equal to its armor rating (3 armor is -3 speed). Those with the highest speed tend to go first in a fight or win in a foot race, but other factors may apply (e.g., a technique).

When you reach -5 speed, you're **encumbered** and can't move with any agility or alacrity. At -7, you can't move at all.

Shorjahl is level 3, so they have 3 speed when completely unencumbered. Their backpack gives a -1 speed penalty, their light armor another -1, and their assorted magical equipment another -1, for a total of 0 speed.

When Shorjahl is firing a bow at a group of goblins, their speed takes a -2 penalty (using two arms), bringing their speed down to -2. Since the goblins' speed is 1, they would act before Shorjahl.

Another time, Shorjahl attempts to cast a spell before a demon attacks them. Shorjahl's speed is 0, while the demon's is -2, so Shorjahl's spell fires before the infernal creature can touch them.



DAMAGE AND HP

PCs start with 8 HP (hit points) and gain +4 HP every level. Adversaries range from 1 to 50 HP, though exceptions may exist (see **Making Enemies** on page 83).

HEALING AND RESTORING HP

Characters naturally restore all lost HP after a **long rest**, characterized by comfort, safety, and provisions. This requires a camp or stronghold free of danger or stress. A long rest is not a downtime scene (page 60), though it may prompt one.

Additionally, a conscious character can attempt to heal themselves by rolling—on a 7+, healing damage equal to the lowest d6 result + aptitude. Likewise, a character can attempt to heal another character, healing damage equal to the *highest* d6 result + aptitude. A character can only be healed by a given type of healing (magical or non-magical) once between long rests.

Shorjahl has lost some HP and wants to heal it. They roll to heal themselves (Shorjahl uses some magical energy to invigorate themselves) and get a 10 (complete success). The lowest d6 was 3, with +2 aptitude, healing 5 HP. Shorjahl can't attempt this method of healing again until they rest.

Later, Shorjahl attempts to heal an ally and rolls. Their highest d6 is a 4, with +2 aptitude, healing 6 HP.

TREATING AND REMOVING INJURY TAGS

Injury tags, if left untreated for more than one day, can become **permanent**. Some injuries are immediately permanent—dismemberment, maiming, etc. One non-permanent tag can be healed per long rest, or per healing roll (limited to one per long rest). Magical healing is up to the nature of the magic, the injury, the roll, and GM fiat.

Shorjahl takes enough damage to fall below 0 HP. The attack was enough to seriously mangle their hand, bestowing the injury tag [crippled hand] upon the pyromancer.

Any time [crippled hand] is relevant to a roll, Shorjahl will suffer a -1 penalty. Likewise, the GM might reason that certain actions are just not possible with a [crippled hand], denying certain permissions.

Eventually, Shorjahl is able to make it to Ft. Grondle and see the physician. He sets their bones and bandages their hand up tightly. After one day of full rest in the fort, Shorjahl's [crippled hand] tag is removed. If the wizard hadn't received such care and rest, they'd have to suffer continuously. If such suffering lingered much longer, their hand would become a [permanently crippled hand].

GAINING LEVELS

Your character gains a level when they've accumulated sufficient XP. Increase their level by one, clear their XP, and gain the following:

- ◇ A new **tag** that encapsulates the previous level's activity
- ◇ A new **technique** of your choice, so long as reasonably learned or acquired by magic or metamorphosis
- ◇ +4 HP
- ◇ +1 speed

If you wish, you can also rewrite any of your tags that no longer fit your character.

At the end of a session, your character gains XP as follows:

- ◇ Killed a meaningful enemy (+1 XP to all PCs)
- ◇ Made a meaningful discovery (+1 XP to all PCs)
- ◇ Approached a goal or a cause (+1 XP to each PC who did)
- ◇ Downtime scenes (+1 to +3 XP depending on the situation and character, see **Downtime Scenes** on page 60)
- ◇ Acquired meaningful loot (+1 to +3 XP, based on its value, to all PCs)
- ◇ Completed a quest, mission, or major objective (+1 to +3 XP, based on its significance, to all PCs on this mission)
- ◇ Shared a meaningful social scene (+1 XP to each PC who shared it)



XP REQUIREMENTS

LEVEL	XP REQUIRED
2	5
3	10
4	15
5	20
6	25

Shorjahl completes a session in which they made a significant discovery (+1 XP), killed a significant enemy (+1 XP), and engaged with their core flaw by Succumbing in a downtime scene (+4 XP, 3 + 1 from being human). This 6 XP is enough to advance Shorjahl to level 2, resetting their XP to 0.

Shorjahl's player makes their selections, and gains:

- ◇ +4 HP (now at 14 HP)
- ◇ +1 speed (now at -1 speed when fully loaded)
- ◇ New tag: magically burned Hillspike Fort
- ◇ New technique: Frothy Rage

To get to level 3, Shorjahl will have to gain 10 more XP (for a total of 15 XP from character creation).





NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

ENEMIES AND NPCs

Enemies and NPCs have several attributes:

- ◇ Speed (typically +5 to -5)
- ◇ HP (typically 1 to 50)
- ◇ Damage modifier (+0 to +10)
- ◇ Armor (0 to 4)
- ◇ Trait tags (1 to 5)
- ◇ Abilities (0 to 5)

Speed and armor can often be ignored if in a lesser fight. Most mundane humanoids have 0 to +2 damage modifier and at most 1 armor. Trait tags describe how the creature behaves and reacts to the characters (e.g., sneaky, brute, archer, demon). Some traits can give disadvantage to a PC's roll.

Abilities function much like a PC's techniques or the spells, moves, and supernatural abilities of other, compatible games. A common ability is an NPC being invulnerable to certain methods of attack or damage (e.g., a wraith being invulnerable to non-magical, non-silver weapons). Likewise, many abilities can give disadvantage to a PC's roll when relevant.

Read more in **Making Enemies** on page 83.

Helltopod: A demonic octopus creature. Speed -2 on land, speed 0 in water, speed 3 in liquid fire. 20 HP. +2 damage. Armor 0. Traits: eight tentacles; ambush predator; drown and burn. Abilities: immune to fire damage; snatch and grapple; multiattack 4 (make four attacks per turn).

HIRELINGS, HORSES, AND HOUNDS

PCs can employ NPC allies—hirelings, beasts of burden, hunting hounds, etc.—which function as a combination of NPC enemies and PC equipment.

If the NPC ally has its own state of mind (such as an intelligent hireling), the GM controls it and notes its stats like any other NPC, adding a **loyalty tag** rated from -3 to +3. Using an ally as a weapon may cause the roll to have advantage or disadvantage.

However, when a PC gives a command to an ally NPC or uses them as part of another action, the hireling acts as a piece of equipment, complete with tags, abilities, permissions, and ranges.

Shorjahl hires a man-at-arms to help them travel along the dangerous road. When they're confronted by a horrific bog hag, Shorjahl rolls 2d6 + 1 (the guard's loyalty) to see if the guard runs away; they get an 11, so the guard stands their ground.

Later, Shorjahl and the man-at-arms are fighting some deserted soldiers turned bandits. The GM is controlling the man-at-arms, and grants Shorjahl advantage to an attack roll as the man-at-arms is in the thick of things against the bandits.

Finally, Shorjahl commands the man-at-arms to attack an enemy archer from a flank. This requires Shorjahl to roll, adding an aptitude of +2, derived by combining Shorjahl's traits and those of the man-at-arms.

NPC LOYALTY

Every NPC hireling and ally has a **loyalty tag**, a combination of a word and a number that depends upon their morale and opinion of the party and especially their PC “commander.”

- ◇ Mutinous: -3
- ◇ Grumbling: -2
- ◇ Suspicious: -1
- ◇ Neutral: 0
- ◇ Accepting: +1
- ◇ Committed: +2
- ◇ Zealous: +3

This loyalty can be used when the PC commander attempts to order the NPC hireling, or when the hireling is confronted with something truly horrifying or frightening. It works the same way for both intelligent creatures and beasts.

Most hirelings begin with [neutral] (0) loyalty, but the PC commander can attempt to influence it (especially at initial hiring) by rolling. NPC loyalty also changes every mission based on:

- ◇ Their pay and share of loot
- ◇ Their conditions, treatment, and rations
- ◇ The amount of danger and nature of their work, compared to their expectations
- ◇ How well-informed they feel, if they have a choice
- ◇ The behavior and leadership of their commanders

When a PC forces a hireling to act in a way that tests their loyalty, the PC commander must roll, adding the hireling’s loyalty as aptitude.

- ◇ On a 6-, the hirelings disobey as befitting their loyalty and skillset.
- ◇ On a 7-9, they follow their orders, but take -1 loyalty.
- ◇ On a 10+, they follow their orders.
- ◇ On a 13+, they follow their orders exemplarily and gain +1 loyalty.

Shorjahl has hired a mercenary with [committed] (+2) loyalty. The pyromancer orders the mercenary to attack a pack of goblins, and the GM calls for a loyalty test. They roll and get a 14; the mercenary charges in and goes up to +3 loyalty.

Later, Shorjahl orders the mercenary to hand over a powerful artifact that they looted. The mercenary wants to keep it, so the GM calls for a loyalty test. Shorjahl rolls and gets an 8; the mercenary hands it over but loses 1 loyalty, going down to +2.

NPC ABILITY

As with a PC, the skillset of an NPC ally affects what it can and can’t do; likewise, a highly competent NPC can grant advantage (or an unskilled one disadvantage) to a PC if the ally is being used as a weapon.

Shorjahl’s hired mercenary is quite good at combat. When the mage orders the ally to face off against some bugbears, the GM grants advantage to Shorjahl’s roll due to the mercenary’s ability.



COMBAT

SURPRISE

If one side of a fight is unaware of the enemy, they're **surprised**. PCs rolling to attack a surprised enemy do so at advantage. PCs rolling to defend while being surprised do so at disadvantage. If someone is *completely* unaware and at ease, though, no roll is needed to attack them.

Ambush is not assumed from situation—you'll always need to roll to ambush an enemy. Likewise, whenever an enemy is attempting to ambush you, you'll always get to roll to avoid it. GMs can couch or abstract this language if they desire.

Once an ambush is sprung, the surprise ends and the combatants engage as normal.

Shorjahl sees a distant retinue of enemy soldiers on the Alpine Road. They decide to hide and lay an ambush. Shorjahl rolls to hide and gets a 10 (complete success). The cadre marches right past Shorjahl's hiding space in the forest, none the wiser. Shorjahl rolls an attack using their pyromancer technique to alight the road in flames. They roll at advantage (3d6, drop lowest).

Later, Shorjahl is exploring some ruins. A pack of goblins hides in the shadows. Shorjahl actively keeps up their guard, rolling to spot any threats, but gets a 5 (failure). When the goblins spring their trap, the mage rolls to defend at disadvantage (3d6, drop highest).

INITIATIVE AND TURN ORDER

In general, the most fitting combatant acts when most relevant, at the GM's discretion. However, if everyone is engaged in a fracas, the combatants act in turn order from highest speed to lowest. Combatants with the same speed are acting simultaneously, but PCs act before NPCs.

Shorjahl is fighting a necromancer and their pack of zombies. The mage unleashes some fiery death, and the GM doesn't call for a specific turn order; several zombies disintegrate and the necromancer has to move away.

As the fight gets closer to the end and every second starts to count, the GM writes down everyone's speed. Shorjahl has -1, the necromancer 0, and the zombies -3. The necromancer acts first, raising some new zombies. Shorjahl acts next, blasting some of the undead spawn with magic. Those zombies that survived the assault get to act last, and shamble toward the pyromancer, hungry for flesh.

MOVEMENT

A character's movement depends on their speed, terrain, any injury tags, and how they're moving.

In combat, most participants can move roughly 30 feet per round. Rough terrain reduces this by 10 feet, and harsh terrain by another 10 feet. If the GM thinks it relevant, each point of speed adds 5 feet of movement (e.g., +2 speed adds 10 feet of movement per round).



Shorjahl has a base movement of 30' per round. When they're running through some dense jungle thicket, they can only move 20'. When they come across a bog, their speed is reduced to 10'. If Shorjahl was unladen and had +2 speed, their base speed is now 40' per round (or 30' in the thicket or 20' in the bog).

PCS DEALING DAMAGE

If a roll to attack or otherwise deal damage succeeds:

$$\text{Damage dealt} = \text{lowest d6 result} + \text{aptitude}$$

Shorjahl fires a bow at a goblin. They roll 2d6 + 3 (from three relevant trait tags). The d6s comes up as 5 and 2, a hit (5 + 2 + 3 = 10). Shorjahl deals 5 damage to the goblin (2 from the lowest d6 result + 3 aptitude).

CRITICAL HITS

When you get a critical success (13+) on a roll for damage, double the damage dealt.

Shorjahl attacks and hits an enemy, rolling a 14 (d6 results of 6 and 5, with +3 aptitude). Normally this would only deal 8 damage (5 + 3), but since Shorjahl rolled a critical success, they deal 16 damage.

DEFEATING ENEMIES WITHOUT DAMAGE

The GM can always declare that an NPC is defeated due to narrative circumstances rather than sufficient damage to HP.

Shorjahl rolls, but rather than dealing damage they intimidate an enemy with a show of magical force. The GM declares that this enemy is defeated, though not killed or even harmed.

SS

COMBAT

PCS TAKING DAMAGE

Enemy attack damage is determined in one of two ways (GM's choice):

1. The GM rolls separately for enemy damage
2. The player's defense roll also determines enemy damage

If your character takes damage but still has 1+ HP, they're fine. If they drop to 0- HP, roll to see how bad it is.

- ◇ On a 6-, they're **dead** if it's a lethal attack. If not, they're at 0 HP and incapacitated, but will die in 10 minutes if left untreated.
- ◇ On a 7-12, they remain conscious with 1 HP, but gain an injury tag.
- ◇ On a 13+, they remain conscious with HP = lowest d6 + aptitude, and don't gain an injury tag.

Multiple injury tags stack penalties to aptitude.

SEPARATE ENEMY DAMAGE ROLL (METHOD 1)

In this method, the damage roll is often sourced from another game that is compatible with these rules (e.g., D&D BECM I or other modules). I recommend an upper limit of about 4d6 for the greatest foes.

If you're not referencing another game, you can often roll as follows:

- ◇ Weak enemy: 1d6 - 2 (minimum 1 on a hit)
- ◇ Normal enemy: 1d6
- ◇ Strong enemy: 1d6 + 2
- ◇ Very strong enemy: 2d6 (or even more if higher level)

Anything above 2d6 is very capable of killing any level-1 or level-2 character in a single roll, so fair warning!

ENEMY DAMAGE DETERMINED BY PC ROLL (METHOD 2)

This method is basically the reverse of determining how much damage a PC deals. When the PC rolls to defend, they take damage as follows:

- ◇ On a 6-, the PC suffers damage equal to their highest d6 result + any enemy damage modifier (usually +0 to +10).
- ◇ On a 7-9, the PC suffers damage equal to their lowest d6 result
- ◇ On a 10+, the PC suffers no damage.

Shorjahl rolls to fight a goblin in melee, and gets a 6- (a 1, 3, + 2 aptitude). Shorjahl misses, and then suffers 4 damage (3 from their highest d6 result + 1 from the goblin's damage mod).

Later, Shorjahl rolls to dodge out of the way of a falling boulder. They roll a 7-9 (a 3, 4 + 1). They get clipped and suffer 3 damage (their lowest 1d6 result).

STANCE, RISK, AND DAMAGE

When you take a stance, the GM can reason that it modifies your damage dealt or taken:

- ◇ **High risk:** +2 to damage dealt and/or taken
- ◇ **Normal:** no change
- ◇ **Low risk:** -2 to damage dealt and/or taken

Shorjahl attacks an enemy and takes a high-risk stance, calling it out verbally to the GM. They roll and deal 4 base damage +2 from the high-risk stance (for a total of 6). An enemy bandit attacks back and Shorjahl has to roll to defend themselves; since they're still in the high-risk stance any damage they take would increase by +2.

ARMOR AND DAMAGE

Characters, NPCs, and enemies can wear (or possess natural forms of) **armor**. Armor reduces incoming damage in equal number (10 damage - 3 armor = 7 damage suffered), and reduces speed (5 speed - 3 armor = 2 speed).

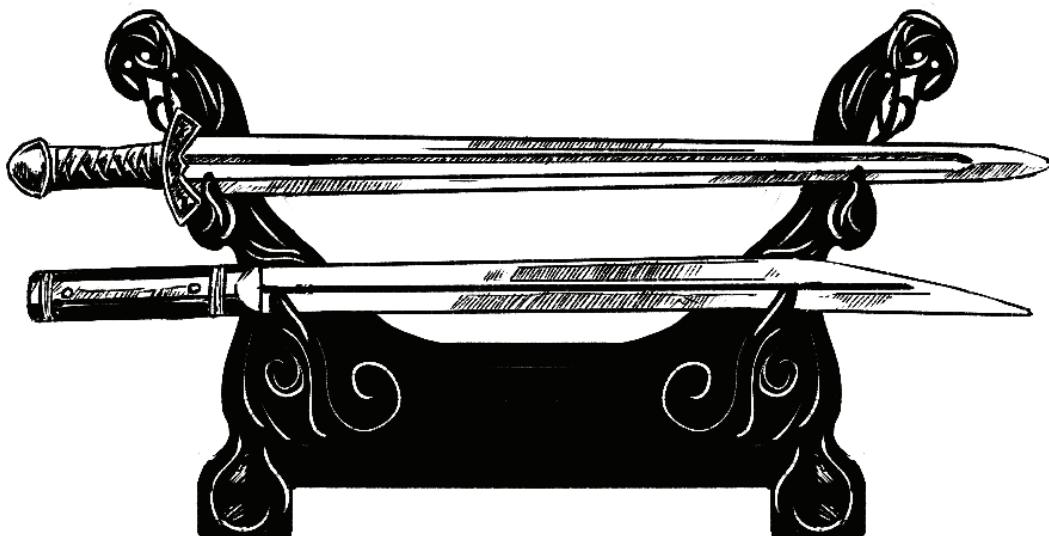
Armor cannot exceed 5.

Some weapon types are **armor piercing** and ignore some amount of armor (e.g., armor piercing 2 ignores 2 armor).

Shorjahl thrusts their spear at a bandit with 1 armor. Shorjahl rolls 5 damage, but only deals 4 (5 - 1 armor = 4). Later, Shorjahl uses some fire magic and rolls 3 fire damage. The GM reasons that the fire magic ignores the bandit's armor, so they deal the full 3 damage.



OUTSIDE OF
ADVENTURE



DOWNTIME SCENES

Downtime scenes are those in between action-packed sequences of adventure and combat. During such scenes, characters work on long-term projects, train, or pursue personal interests. They require the relative safety of an uninterrupted period of reprieve (such as in between sessions or quests).

During each downtime scene, each player picks one of the following activities:

- ◇ **Acquire:** Gain something—info, help, or an item. Roll to determine its quality.
- ◇ **Succumb:** Engage with your core flaw and suffer its repercussions, but gain +3 XP.
- ◇ **Train:** Gain +1 XP.

- ◇ **Treat:** Remove one non-permanent injury tag.
- ◇ **Work:** Work toward a long-term goal or project. Roll to determine how much progress is made.

After their victory, Shorjahl and their party relax back at Count Gribald's castle for several days. During this time, Shorjahl wishes to Acquire some information about local areas known to be natural sources of powerful magics.

Shorjahl rolls and gets a 7-9: a success with some complication or cost. The count's head alchemist knows of such a place, but will only tell Shorjahl if the young pyromancer agrees to bring back some rare ingredients from their travels. Shorjahl can choose to agree or not.

SOCIAL SCENES

Social scenes are those in which one or more PCs reveal something meaningful about their character, the narrative, or a significant NPC. These scenes usually involve in-character roleplay between multiple PCs.

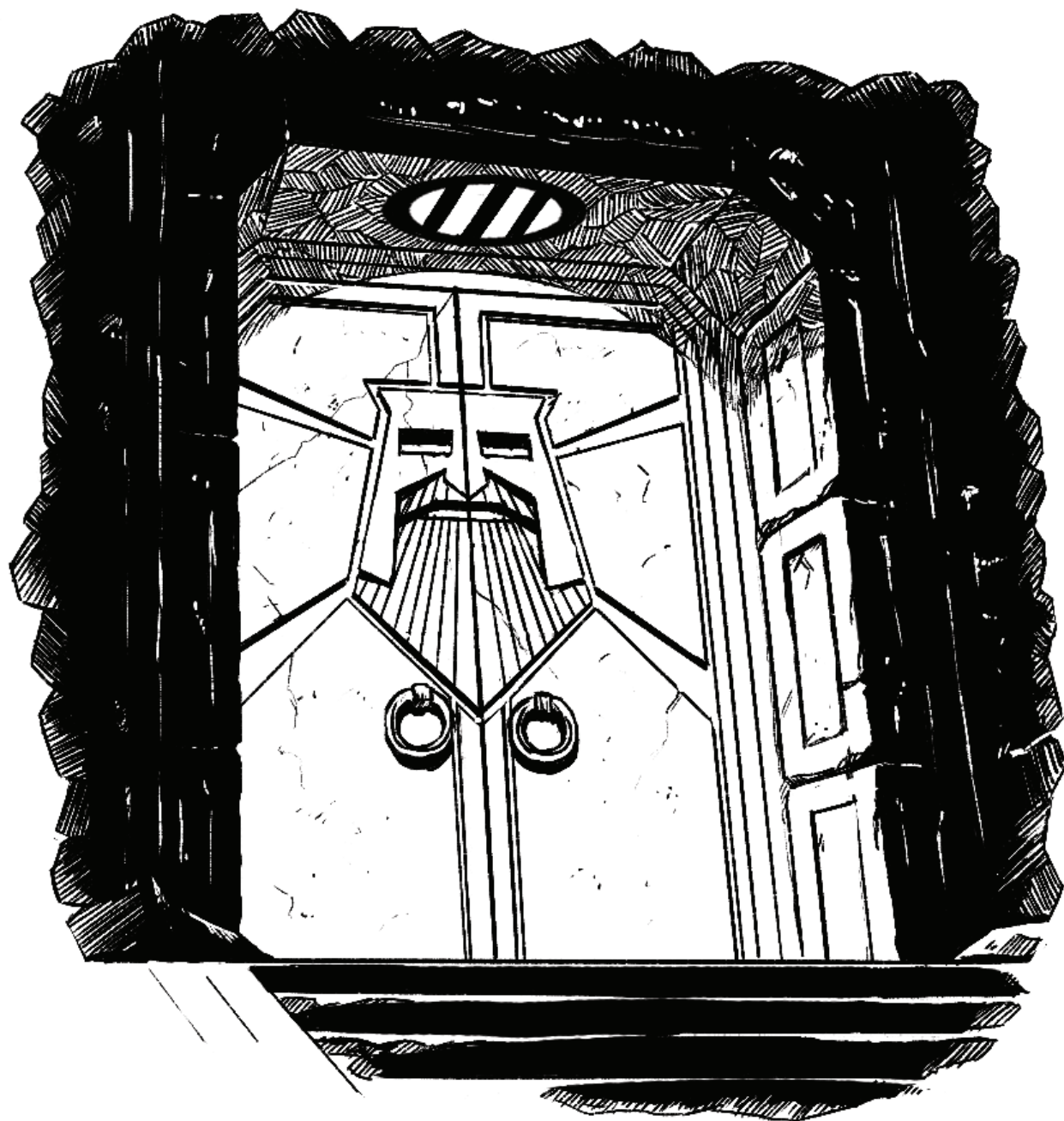
Each PC involved in a social scene gets +1 XP.

A social scene can happen as part of a downtime scene or in the free play of the game. It's just an interesting interaction that isn't about stabbing something.

Shorjahl is a guest at a feast at Gribald Castle. They have a conversation with several NPCs, one of whom questions Shorjahl's sordid past as a necromancer's apprentice. Shorjahl flies into a righteous rage and storms out of the feast, making a massive impression.

This revealed something about Shorjahl's character, and suggests that the game might focus on their necromantic past, so Shorjahl gets +1 XP.





TRAVEL AND DUNGEONEERING

TRAVEL AND DUNGEONEERING

Travel through safe areas should largely be ignored or abstracted. It's fair for the GM to say, "You travel for four days across the Orangespring Plains without incident."

When traveling through dangerous wilderness, hostile territory, ancient ruins, dungeons, or similar places, split time into **travel turns**. Each travel turn is three hours aboveground or ten minutes underground.

At the start of a travel turn, each PC describes their actions (or their role) and how it might help the party. Here are some examples:

- ◇ Torchbearer
- ◇ Scouting ahead
- ◇ Surveying / map-drawing
- ◇ Rearguard
- ◇ Hidden reaction force (following in stealth)
- ◇ Quartermaster (keeps track of rations, etc.)

Then, the GM selects one PC to be the focus of this turn (PCs should rotate focus). The focus PC rolls, keeping in mind their action:

- ◇ On a 6-, there is a calamitous event (avalanche, loss of food, ambush, separation, capture, etc.).
- ◇ On a 7-9, there is a problem, but the focus PC can see it coming, warn the party, or affect its onset.
- ◇ On a 10-12, everything goes as planned.
- ◇ On a 13+, everything goes very smoothly because of the focus PC's perception or quick thinking.

Over longer journeys in which the GM has nothing particularly interesting planned, a travel turn can be zoomed out from several times a day to just once a day, or even once for the entire journey. The more often the party rolls for travel turns, the more dangerous, time-consuming, and narratively important the area they're traveling through is.

POTENTIAL TRAVEL TURN CALAMITIES

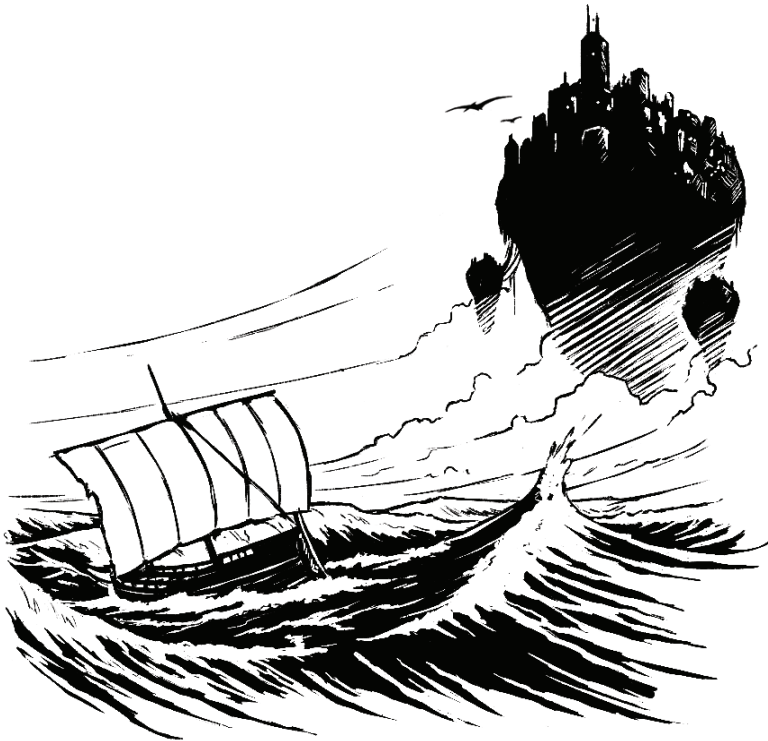
PC ROLE	DUNGEON CALAMITY	WILDERNESS CALAMITY
Scout	Falls into or triggers a trap	Loosens precarious hazards
Torchbearer	Plunges party into freezing darkness	Burns up fuel, starts a wildfire
Surveyor	Misses key danger, like a pit	Gets lost, turned around
Guard	Alerts nearby monsters	Triggers an ambush
Stealth force	Gets snatched up by monsters	Gets separated due to terrain
Quartermaster	Leaves a trail to be followed	Loses all of the supplies

WEATHER AND HAZARDS

If your game prominently features wilderness exploration (e.g., a hexcrawl or military campaign), weather and environmental hazards will be significant in your party’s challenges and experience.

Weather events or hazards can be handled in several ways:

- ◇ As an **obstacle** for each PC to roll through
- ◇ As **combat**, treating hazards or elements as enemies
- ◇ Using the custom **Weather rules** below (page 66)



WEATHER AS AN OBSTACLE

The PCs can deal with weather by rolling as if they were doing any other action. If they roll well, they make it through begrudgingly; if not, they don't. Death is perfectly valid as a consequence (freezing, drowning, heat exhaustion, etc.).

Weather challenges should pay special heed to the nature of the environment, how much the party has prepared, and how they're equipped and fed. An underprepared party rolls at disadvantage. Detrimental equipment or lack of experience applies negative tags toward aptitude.

Shorjahl must travel through the freezing alpine forest on their way to Ft. Grondle. Shorjahl lacks winter-wilderness clothing and supplies, so they roll at disadvantage. They have armor 1, which applies a penalty to aptitude when traveling.

The pyromancer rolls 3d6, drops the highest d6, and applies -1 aptitude. They get a 7, just barely enough to survive, but get the injury tags [frostbite] and [exhausted].

WEATHER AS ENEMIES

Especially inclement weather can be treated as an enemy, with special abilities (e.g., trip or knockback or paralysis; see **Making Enemies** on page 83), a speed, a damage modifier, and so forth.

Namely, weather can have HP representing how much preparation is necessary to overcome or defend oneself against it. The PCs can deal preparation damage to this weather by rolling to attack, as normal. Once the weather has been reduced to 0 HP, it is no longer a threat.

Shorjahl is facing freezing snow. It has 10 HP, drain, and paralysis. Shorjahl describes how they use their fire magic to keep themselves warm, lighting several goat bladders full of water and packing them beneath a bearhide wrap they took from a dead bandit. Shorjahl rolls a 12, a complete success. They deal 9 preparation damage to the freezing snow (6 from highest die, +3 from aptitude).

However, since the pyromancer didn't defeat the freezing snow, it gets to act, attempting to drain or paralyze Shorjahl.

SPECIAL RULES FOR WEATHER

When the party is in a situation where wilderness or similar environmental hazards may harm them, the GM can force the focus PC to roll for the party. This key member might be the trailblazer, the scout, the cartographer, or the local with the most knowledge of the environment.

If you can't decide who the focus PC is, give it to whoever has the highest aptitude in this situation. If that still doesn't settle it, assign someone randomly by a roll of the dice.

- ◇ On a 6-, everyone in the party takes 6 damage (ignores armor), gains an appropriate injury tag ([frostbite], [dehydrated], [fatigued], etc.), and gets lost, trapped, or blown off course.
- ◇ On a 7-9, everyone gains an injury tag, as above, but takes no damage. Also, the GM chooses between everyone losing some equipment or everyone getting lost, trapped, or blown off course.
- ◇ On a 10-12, everyone gets through the weather without incident.
- ◇ On a 13+, everyone gets through the weather, and the focus PC picks one benefit:
 - Discover a shortcut or faster route.
 - Find a useful bit of unrelated information.
 - Find a bevy of helpful resources that cut down on ration loss and uses of other equipment.



PREPARATION AND PLANNING

VAGABONDS emulates OSR-style play and so encourages granular and detailed preparation, planning, mapping, and resource management.

However, sometimes people just want to get straight to the goblin-butcherer and dungeon-crawling without having to detail every torch and ration and bundle of equipment. The abstracted “kits” in **Equipment** (page 77) are a great start, but here are some more rules on how to quickly handle preparation and planning in a few broad strokes.

THE PLANNING ROLL

Select or randomly choose one PC (usually with the highest aptitude or the “leader” of the party) to be the planner. They quickly describe their general approach to the party’s upcoming journey (e.g., exploring a dungeon, attacking an enemy fort, sailing across a stormy sea, etc.) and roll.

If they have all the time they need and a cache of resources and intelligence, they roll at advantage. If they have little time or must contend with other obstacles, they roll at disadvantage.

- ◇ On a 6-, the plan fails. When the party cuts to the action or arrives at the start of their quest, they’re already in trouble, generally due to foreseeable circumstances.
- ◇ On a 7-9, each PC can roll at advantage once during this quest, at a time of their choosing, so long as the plan is relevant.
- ◇ On a 10-12, as 7-9 but each PC can roll at advantage twice.
- ◇ On a 13+, the party can circumvent one minor and one major obstacle (GM’s discretion) due to the brilliance of their plan, and each PC can roll at advantage twice, as in 10-12.

Shorjahl plans their attack on an enemy fort. They have plenty of time and the assistance of an allied mercenary commander, so the GM grants them advantage on the planning roll.

Since the plan largely involves burning the fort to the ground, the pyromancer has three relevant trait tags: [slow and logical approach], [loves fire], and [pyromancer].

Shorjahl rolls 3d6 + 3, drops the lowest d6, and gets a 14 (circumvent a minor obstacle and a major obstacle, and can roll twice at advantage).

Shorjahl is able to slip by the outer perimeter of guards (circumventing the minor obstacle). They roll at advantage to locate the most flammable area of the fort (the stables), and succeed. Then, they start the fire without rolling (circumventing the major obstacle), catching the whole foundation of the fort ablaze. Finally, Shorjahl rolls at advantage again to quickly escape before the enemy soldiers catch them.

If Shorjahl had rolled a 6 instead of a 14, they would have arrived at the fort and been confronted with an unassailable situation. Perhaps the guards at the fort heard of the mage’s approach and set an ambush, they took precautions to prevent fire damage, a new garrison or cadre of reinforcements have arrived, etc.

THE PREPARATION ROLL

Preparation is distinct from planning, as preparation has more to do with equipment, supplies, and other tangible goods that will aid in the quest or mission.

As with planning, select one focus PC (with the highest aptitude or relevance). The focus PC rolls, at advantage with significant information and resources to draw upon, or at disadvantage with little to nothing to aid them in their prep.

- ◇ On a 6-, the supplies they thought they'd bring are ruined, damaged, or lost in some way. The GM can select one thing from each PC that isn't key to their abilities at the moment they attempt to use it.
- ◇ On a 7-9, the party gets one **prep use** that they can call upon at any time during the quest. This prep use produces an item, map, or other good that could conceivably be acquired before going on the quest.
- ◇ On a 10-12, as 7-9 but two prep uses.
- ◇ On a 13+, as 7-9 but three prep uses.

Shorjahl rolls to prep for traveling the Alpine Road. They roll at disadvantage due to the short timeline, and only have one relevant trait. They get a 5, so Shorjahl has to sacrifice their winter clothes at the onset of their journey (as chosen by the GM).

Later, Shorjahl rolls to prepare for a sea voyage. They get an 8, and so gain one prep use for the trip. While out at sea the ship gets blown off course; Shorjahl burns the prep use to produce a sextant, which helps steer them back on track.

TRAPS

Handle a triggered trap as a single roll, usually rolled by the PC triggering it. Traps function much like enemies or hazards—they can deal damage, apply injury tags, cast spells, use abilities, etc. The exception is that traps fire once (usually) and are spent until reset or reloaded.

Most traps are triggered by a PC getting too close, stepping on a pressure plate, kicking a tripwire, touching a piece of treasure, or being detected magically. Even if one PC triggers the trap, the whole party might suffer, depending on its effect.

Characters can attempt to detect and disarm a trap by rolling. The GM may feel that it is appropriate to tell the players, out of character, that there are traps around, but it is recommended to telegraph or forewarn of this danger in the fiction (or somehow grant this knowledge by preparation rolls, killing an NPC hireling, etc.). PCs can't just roll to look for traps in every chamber or area they cross; they must have reason to suspect that traps are present.

Shorjahl wanders into a cave to seek shelter, paying little heed to a bear trap placed under some old pine needles. Shorjahl rolls and gets a 7 and triggers the trap, getting their leg free but taking the injury tag [busted ankle] in the process.

Deeper in the cave, Shorjahl is more careful, and rolls to detect and avoid any traps. They get a 10, so the GM describes how they notice a goblin spike trap before stepping in it and losing a foot.

DECAYS: HUNGER, THIRST, DISEASE, AND POISON

Any effect that kills over time—such as lack of food or an insidious poison—can be treated as a **decay**, which has the following components:

Trigger: What causes the decay? It might be an action, the consumption of a particular item (e.g., poison), or the outcome of a roll.

Timeframe: How quickly does the decay begin and escalate? Is it a matter of minutes (lack of air), hours (poison), days (lack of water), weeks, or some much longer period? At each such interval, trigger the **effect** (see below), and the PC, if able, might attempt to resist the decay by rolling.

Effect: Most decays cause an injury tag (which can penalize actions or block permissions). Some deal damage (which can kill the character). Certain effects stack (e.g., damage), while others may not (e.g., paralysis—you can't become any more paralyzed). Decay effects often have special clauses, and can only be healed or removed by meeting specific criteria (e.g., starvation is only removed by eating, etc.).

Shorjahl hasn't eaten in several days, traveling through rugged and freezing temperatures, and is beginning to starve. Each day the wizard doesn't eat deals 1 damage (ignores armor), and while starving they have the [starving] injury tag. This damage is cumulative and can only be healed by eating.

HUNGER AND STARVATION

- ◇ **Trigger:** No food for one week of typical activity, no food for three days of laborious activity (e.g., adventuring), or insufficient food over a longer period (e.g., a crust of bread per day over a few weeks as a prisoner).
- ◇ **Timeframe:** Once per day.
- ◇ **Effect:** You gain the [starving] injury tag, which causes exhaustion, delirium, and eventual paralysis. You can resist these negative effects with sufficient rolls or healing. Each day, you take 1 cumulative damage, which ignores armor and all forms of resistance. Healing does not affect this HP loss. Eating is the only cure.

THIRST AND DEHYDRATION

- ◇ **Trigger:** No water for three days of typical activity, no water for one day of laborious activity (e.g., adventuring), or insufficient water over a longer period.
- ◇ **Timeframe:** Once per hour.
- ◇ **Effect:** You gain the [dehydrated] injury tag, which causes exhaustion, hallucinations, slowness, and eventual paralysis. You can resist these negative effects with sufficient rolls or healing. Each hour, you take 1 cumulative damage, which ignores armor and all forms of resistance. Healing does not affect this HP loss. Drinking is the only cure.

SNAKE VENOM (EXAMPLE POISON)

- ◇ **Trigger:** Bitten or otherwise injected.
- ◇ **Timeframe:** Every three hours, escalate the effects.
- ◇ **Effect:** Roll to resist. Each failed roll to resist deals more damage and gives a new injury tag: [feverish, 3 dmg] -> [vomiting, 6 dmg] -> [paralysis, 9 dmg] -> [death].

ZOMBIE ROT (EXAMPLE DISEASE)

- ◇ **Trigger:** Failure to resist once exposed to the touch, bite, or other magical miasma of the undead.
- ◇ **Timeframe:** Every two weeks.
- ◇ **Effect:** Roll to resist. Zombie Rot can be cured with sufficient magic or sanctified healing.
 - On a 6-, roll twice on the below table.
 - On a 7-9, roll once on the below table.
 - On a 10-12, the effects do not worsen.
 - On a 13+, you're naturally cured of the rot, but retain all of the injuries sustained while ill (until healed).

ZOMBIE ROT EFFECT

ROLL	EFFECT
1	One of your hands falls off.
2	One of your feet falls off.
3	Patches of skin slough off.
4	Your tongue falls out.
5	One of your eyes falls out.
6	You suffer double damage.



OVERLAND TRAVEL

Open terrain: three miles per hour, or roughly twenty miles per day assuming a break for food and camp at night

Rough terrain: two miles per hour, or about ten miles per day due to the greater exertion required

Harsh terrain: one mile per hour, or about five miles per day due to back-tracking and likewise

The GM can estimate the party's daily travel distance by using the above as a baseline and modifying it with the slowest PC's speed. For example, a party whose slowest character has -2 speed will cover 18 miles per day over open terrain.

Wagons, litters, pack animals, or similar don't necessarily increase speed but can reduce strain, risk of injury, or penalties to the slowest PC's speed. A typical pack mule suffers only -1 speed for every -3 speed that a human would (e.g., a mule carrying -9 speed's worth of supplies would only be at -3 speed).

Shorjahl marches for six hours; two hours across open terrain, three across rough terrain, and one in harsh terrain. Shorjahl is of average speed and is able to cover 13 miles during the course of the day (3 mph for 2 hrs + 2 mph for 3 hrs + 1 mph for 1 hr).



MAGIC



Characters can acquire and use magic in several ways:

- ◇ Techniques (see page 24)
- ◇ Magical items (scrolls, wands, rings, swords, etc.)
- ◇ Belonging to the elf lineage
- ◇ Divine intervention or supernatural bestowment

Optionally, the GM can allow PCs to use magic if it makes sense with their character concept and is represented by one of their traits. Characters without a magic-related trait would be unable to use magic.

MAGIC FROM TECHNIQUES

You can attempt to use magic as described in a given technique, and no more. How you acquired this technique might inform your ability to use or recognize magic (GM discretion), though usually not.

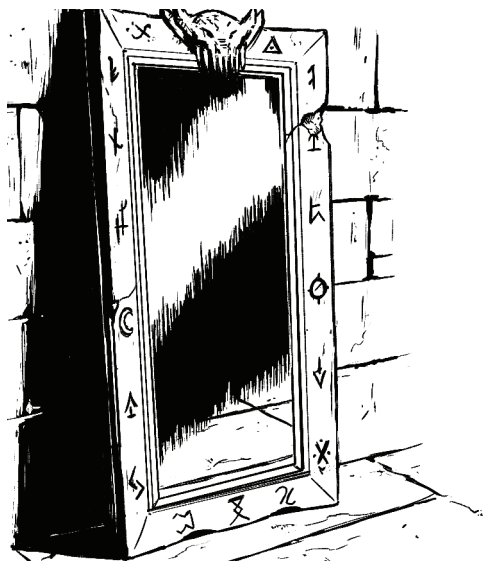
MAGICAL ITEMS

Magical items only grant their power while their specific criteria are met, usually when being wielded or otherwise connected with the PC using it.

ELVISH MAGIC

As an elf, you have subtle arcane control. You can open your mind to and concentrate upon latent magical energies, even marshaling them to do your bidding. This affords you very weak magical powers, such as the ability to detect magical items and portals, read scrolls, use wands, etc.

In addition, you can use magic as part of a roll. The more you rely on magic, and the more supernatural the intended effect is, the more dangerous it is for you (perhaps represented by stance). A roll of a 6- likely means you take damage or a significant injury tag, cause unforeseeable consequences, or even activate unintended (and dangerous) magical maelstroms.



DIVINE INTERVENTION OR MAGICAL BESTOWMENT

Sometimes a PC can acquire magical powers—even temporarily—by communing with some great spirit, making dark pacts with powerful entities, or furthering their god's cause. Usually, the GM will grant a magic-focused technique to the PC until this effect expires (if ever).

MAGIC FROM TRAITS OR OTHER SOURCES

You can simply treat magic as another character trait. Traits related to physical strength enable a PC to use their might, and the same goes with dexterity or intelligence. So too can it be with magic, yet with greater repercussions for failure and a more limited impact than magic from techniques. In other words, magic can simply be a narrative tool that's used when relevant.

AZOTH: DISTILLED MAGIC

Arcane magic and similar artifice is powered by azoth, a crystalline, iridescent metal with a very low melting point. It appears as fractal cubes of pearlescent mirrors, casting a dizzying array of rainbows within and without. Check out solid bismuth for some real-world inspiration.

FINDING AZOTH

Azoth runs deep within the arteries of the world, pumps in the hearts of dragons, and drips from the twisted fist of every foul sorcerer king. It is purified, raw magical power. Azoth can be distilled from items of magical or commercial value, such as:

- ◇ Gold and other precious metals
- ◇ Gemstones
- ◇ Scrolls, wands, and magical artifacts
- ◇ The visceral components of magical or mythological beings

Collecting and using azoth is a prime reason why many arcanists go adventuring, as it is far more valuable than equal weights of gold. It's arguably more practical too, as it's needed in any permanent or stable form of magic, such as the forging of a magical sword or staff.

AZOTH’S USES

Many component requirements of rituals, spells, and incantations can be replaced with azoth, or demand azoth in and of themselves. It can also be melted down and combined with other metals to produce magical-quality steel.

When in powder or liquid form, it burns so fiercely that it can explode, sear the vision out of someone’s eyes, or light a lantern so bright so as to be seen from a hundred leagues away.

Despite its intensity, azoth is incredibly stable and difficult to cause a reaction with. Neither fire nor force can cause it to combust or to waste; only other magical sources can affect it. Because of this, some mages have taken to ingesting, injecting, or tattooing azoth into their own bodies. While this does indeed have augmentative powers, it can also produce violent and unintended mutations.

AZOTH IN SPELLS AND RITUALS

The GM can require the use of azoth for a particular spell, especially in large rituals that greatly affect the area or narrative.

Each use of azoth is a crystalline nugget about the size of a fingernail, worth roughly 50sp or 5gp. The more powerful the spell, the more uses of azoth it requires.

Many ritual-based techniques list a required use of azoth. Likewise, the GM can convert OSR spell components into quantities of azoth based upon their value.

AZOTH AUGMENTATIONS

A PC can attempt to gain augmented powers through the assimilation of azoth by rolling. Magical, will-based, or fortitudinous traits add to aptitude as relevant. You can only attempt this type of augmentation once per level; any additional attempts cause damage, injury, and possible mutation.

- ◇ On a 6-, gain no power and acquire one of the below mutations as a permanent injury tag.
- ◇ On a 7-9, gain one technique (without proper ritualized focus, random or GM choice), and suffer one below mutation as a permanent injury tag.
- ◇ On a 10-12, as 7-9, but with no mutation.
- ◇ On a 13+, gain one technique of your choice and +10 XP.

AZOTH REJECTION MUTATION

ROLL	EFFECT
1	You go blind and are plagued by horrific nightmares.
2	You go deaf and hear constant, foreboding drumming.
3	You lose a limb of the GM’s choice (roll if you must).
4	You have endless hunger. You must eat every two hours or die.
5	You’re near rabid, and can only act in a high-risk stance.
6	Re-roll twice. You gain both mutations. (This can prompt more re-rolls if you roll a 6, giving three or more mutations.)



EQUIPMENT

Equipment is made up of a series of tags which inform how it works. Each piece of equipment reduces your speed by 1, while a piece that requires two hands to carry reduces it by 2.

Equipment tags function as:

- ◇ Mechanical **modifiers** (+1 / -1 when [something relevant])
- ◇ Granters or deniers of **permission** (you can or can't attempt [relevant action] when using this [in this way])
- ◇ Character-separable **techniques** (gain [relevant technique] when wielding this)

Additionally, some equipment have:

- ◇ **Requirements** (to [activate / use / benefit from] this item you must [do / sacrifice] [this relevant thing])
- ◇ **Limited uses** (such as ammo, potions, fragile things, etc.)

ADVENTURING GEAR AND TOOLS

Most gear, gadgets, tools, and kits grant a +1 to a relevant action, and grant permission to attempt actions that would be impossible without the aid of said tools.

Shorjahl has a climbing kit. When appropriately adorned and used, they get +1 to climbing. Later, the GM blocks permission to climb an especially daunting peak without such a kit, but Shorjahl may attempt it with a +1 bonus.



EXAMPLES OF WEAPON TAGS

- ◇ **Ammo / Fragile N:** on a 6-, the item breaks or loses one of its *N* uses. At zero uses, it is permanently broken or needs to be replenished
- ◇ **Arm:** works as a weapon up to arm's length away
- ◇ **Armor N:** gives *N* armor, which reduces incoming damage. Doesn't stack, only equipment with highest armor counts
- ◇ **Armor +N:** gives *N* armor, stacks with other armor
- ◇ **Armor piercing N (APN):** ignores *N* enemy armor

- ◇ **Bane vs [type]:** +1 damage versus a particular type of target
- ◇ **Long range:** works as a weapon up to about a hundred steps
- ◇ **Magic:** bound and forged with magic. Most magic items grant the effects of a technique, but other OSR magic items and weapons work too.
- ◇ **One-handed (1h):** can use with one hand, quickly doffed and donned, -1 speed
- ◇ **Reach:** works as a weapon up to several steps away
- ◇ **Reload / Charge:** once used, takes some time to use it again
- ◇ **Short range:** works as a weapon up to about twenty steps
- ◇ **Slow / Heavy / Clumsy:** extra -1 speed, +1 damage
- ◇ **Special:** silver, cold-iron, skysteel, blessed, etc. Treated in a unique way or forged out of a unique material. Some enemies can only be dealt damage by special weapons, and likewise with some armor being penetrated.
- ◇ **Spray:** spreads damage on hit across all targets in a close cluster (usually about a ten-foot area)
- ◇ **Step:** works as a weapon up to a step or two away
- ◇ **Two-handed (2h):** must use with two hands, -2 speed
- ◇ **Weak vs [type]:** -1 damage versus a particular type of target
- ◇ **Worn:** only works while being worn (e.g., armor)

EXAMPLES OF EQUIPMENT

Armor, Weapons, and Shields

- ◇ **Axe, heavy:** 2h, step, clumsy
- ◇ **Axe, light:** 1h, arm, clumsy
- ◇ **Azoth bomb:** 1h, thrown, close range, spray, AP5 (magic), 1 use
- ◇ **Bow, heavy:** 2h, long range, ammo 1, bane vs unshielded, AP1
- ◇ **Bow, light:** 2h, short range, ammo 2
- ◇ **Crossbow:** 2h, long range, ammo 1, reload, bane vs unshielded, AP2
- ◇ **Caltrops:** 1h, thrown, close range, spray, anyone moving through affected area takes damage equal to attacker aptitude
- ◇ **Dagger:** 1h, arm, can be thrown (1 use, short range)
- ◇ **Gambeson:** armor 1, worn
- ◇ **Mace:** 1h, arm, AP2
- ◇ **Mail:** armor 2, worn
- ◇ **Plate harness:** armor 3, worn, heavy
- ◇ **Polearm, long:** 2h, reach, AP2
- ◇ **Polearm, short:** 2h, step, AP1
- ◇ **Shield:** 1h, +1 armor
- ◇ **Spear:** 1h/2h (+1 damage if 2h), reach, fragile 2, can be thrown (1 use, close range)
- ◇ **Sword, heavy:** 2h, heavy, step, bane vs unarmored
- ◇ **Sword, light:** 1h, arm, bane vs unarmored

Gear and Kits

- ◇ **Adventuring kit:** 5 uses. Contains a backpack, rope, chalk, lanterns, and sundry other items. When you need something, pull it out, define it, and mark off a use.
- ◇ **Cartographer's kit:** 5 uses, fragile 1. Contains sheets of vellum, ink, a quill, sextants, a protractor, and similar equipment for surveying and recording topography and geography. Whenever you want to record a detailed map of an area, you'll have to stop and take a short rest (5–10 mins in relative safety). Roll if the area is complex, in bad weather, or you're under duress. Mark off one use per region recorded (one region is roughly equivalent to a day's overland travel).



- ◇ **Climbing kit:** worn, fragile 1. Contains 200 feet of rope, pitons, a climbing hammer, and a climbing harness. Gives permission to climb up sheer cliffs, castle walls, and similar. Roll if under duress.
- ◇ **Craft kit:** fragile 2. Contains the portable items necessary for you to execute your craft (small hammers, chisels, high-temperature crucible, etc. for blacksmithing; paint and paintbrushes and canvas for painting, etc.). These crafts can be used pragmatically or sold if a willing buyer is around.
- ◇ **Hospitaller's kit:** 5 uses. Contains a bandolier and harness, bandages, surgical equipment, salves, antitoxins, and other medicines. When you need something (such as to heal someone), pull it out, define it, and mark off a use.
- ◇ **Thief's kit:** 5 uses, fragile 1. Contains lockpicks, weights, an hourglass, and other equipment for burglars. Gives permission to attempt disarming complex, mechanical traps and picking complex locks.

Other Equipment

- ◇ **Bandages:** fragile 2. Grants advantage when healing someone through mundane means.
- ◇ **Lantern:** 1h/worn, reload. Illuminates well to close range, dimly to far range. Last as long as there's fuel (tallow, wax, oil, etc.).
- ◇ **Rations:** 1 use. Food for a day.
- ◇ **Torch:** 1h, 1 use. Illuminates well to close range. Lasts about an hour.

Common Currency and Values

The default currency of VAGABONDS is the silver piece (sp).

CURRENCY CONVERSION

10 copper pieces (cp)	=	1 silver piece (sp)
10 silver pieces (sp)	=	1 gold piece (gp)
10 gold pieces (gp)	=	1 platinum piece (pp)

A typical nugget of azoth is worth about 50sp or 5gp.

Gemstones vary in value and rarity depending on the setting, though most gems’ value scales quadratically with raw size and clarity. A fist-sized diamond might be worth 1000gp, whereas ten small diamonds of the same overall volume would be worth a total of only 250gp.

Rather than list prices for weapons, armor, and kits, VAGABONDS assumes that the price will always be haggled, negotiated, and altered as suitable for your setting. When determining the price of an item, think of the following based upon the locale in which the PCs are purchasing it:

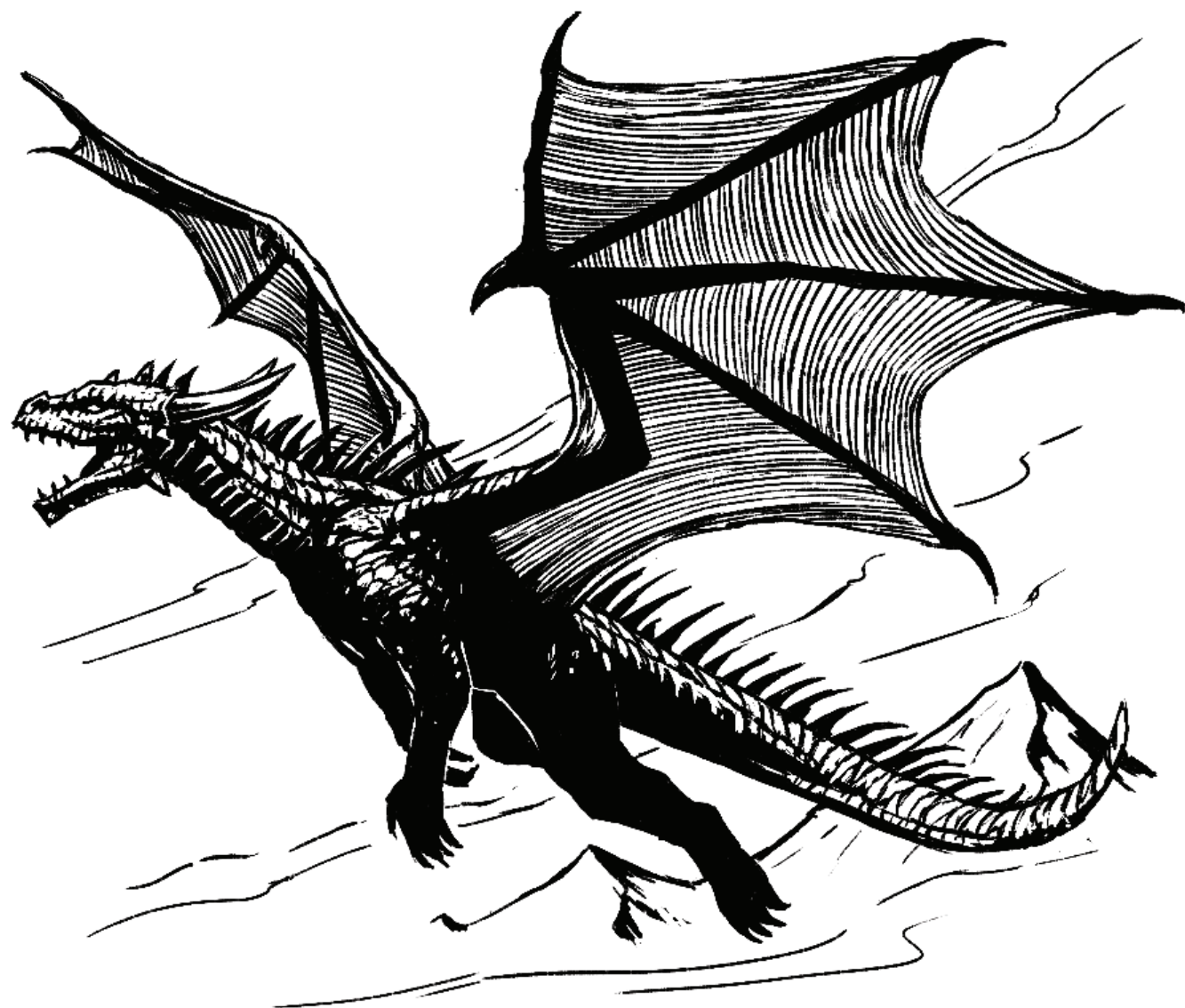
- ◇ The finished product’s rarity
- ◇ The amount of resources and logistics necessary for its construction or transport (e.g., an area bereft of iron will cause steel swords and armor to be doubly expensive than an area outside of an iron mine)

- ◇ The comparative isolation of the locale (the more isolated, the more inflated the prices)
- ◇ The amount of recycled or second-hand product available (e.g., decent quality swords, bows, and spears will be in cheap abundance at a recent battlefield or abandoned military fort)
- ◇ Is the item unique or customized in some way, or is it able to be relatively “mass produced” (custom, such as armor, can multiply the cost of an item by as much as ten times its average)

Another way to gauge prices in an area is to determine how many days’ worth of skilled labor are required to create it and bring it to sale. An average worker makes 2 copper pieces per day of labor, while a skilled craftsman can make up to 2 or 3 silver pieces per day.

A masterfully crafted, custom-fitted harness of armor might take several hundred hours of skilled work. This means that even on the low end it could cost upwards of 500sp if bought from the smith who crafted it.





MAKING
ENEMIES

The GM can convert or create an enemy based upon its qualities below. If you're converting from OSR games, you can ignore AC and to-hit, as the players make all rolls. There's more information on this in **Converting Enemies** (page 87).

- ♦ **Speed** (typically -5 to +5)
- ♦ **HP** (typically 1 to 50)
- ♦ **Damage modifier** (typically +0 to +10)
- ♦ **Armor** (0 to 4)
- ♦ **Trait tags** (1 to about 5)
- ♦ **Abilities** (0 to about 3)

Each of these stats can depend on meeting requirements—for example, an enemy's speed could favor certain environments, while its damage modifier will depend on its weapon.

SPEED

Speed depends on the enemy's agility and the equipment they carry. Most beasts and unintelligent creatures carry nothing, so their speed tends to be higher.

SPEED	EXAMPLE ENEMIES
-5 to -3	Very slow: crabmen, dungeon slimes, pack oxen
-3 to -1	Slow: armored humanoids, orcs, dwarves, dragons
0	Normal: most creatures and unencumbered people
1-3	Fast: goblins, swimming sharks, wolves, elves
3-5	Very fast: horses, cheetahs, giants, supernatural sprinters

HP

HP measures how hard an enemy is to defeat, and signifies morale, luck, endurance, and fortitude.

HP	EXAMPLE ENEMIES
1 to 9	Fodder: most humanoids, deer, most goblins
10 to 19	Rugged: grizzled soldiers, wolves, orcs
20 to 29	Tough: hardened mercenaries, undead
30 - 39	Sturdy: bears, ogres, giant insects, dinosaurs
40-50	Epic: giants, dragons, greater swarms, liches

DAMAGE MODIFIER

The damage modifier signals how deadly an enemy's attacks are. This modifier is added to any damage rolled.

DMG +	EXAMPLE ENEMIES
0	Normal: most untrained humanoids and wild beasts
+1-3	Threatening: trained conscripts, goblins, bandits
+4-6	Dangerous: experienced soldiers, orcs, most undead
+7-9	Severe: fiends, giants, dinosaurs, mythical monsters
+10	Deadly: assassins, sorcerers, dragons, demons

ARMOR

Armor reduces incoming damage, and reflects how ablative the enemy’s hide is or how well-protected it is.

ARMOR	EXAMPLE EQUIPMENT AND ENEMIES
0	Unarmored: most humanoids and thin-skinned beasts
1	Light: gambeson, standalone shield, only a helmet
2	Medium: chainmail, giants, crocodiles
3	Heavy: plate harness, hydras, greater demons
4	Impenetrable: articulated full plate, dragons

TRAIT TAGS

An enemy’s traits largely inform how it behaves and define situations in which the PCs would roll at disadvantage.

TRAIT	EXAMPLE EFFECT
Sneaky	PC disadvantage to detect the enemy while it’s in stealth
Feral	The enemy attacks in a bestial, unrelenting way
Calculating	The enemy will deploy ambushes, flanks, tactics
Grappling	PC disadvantage when trying to escape this enemy’s bonds
Elite Soldier	The enemy fights as a soldier, holds the line, is calm

ABILITIES

Enemies can have abilities that grant them special actions, permissions, movements, or maneuvers. They function like techniques, but in reverse—the PC rolls to defend or counter these abilities (in most cases) or else suffer their consequences.

Most enemies have no abilities, moderately powerful enemies have one or two, and powerful enemies have three. Few have more than three. See below for a list of example abilities, but the GM can feel free to invent their own or use PC techniques (page 24).

ALTER ENVIRONMENT:

The enemy can smash walls, reveal pits, trigger traps, produce fog, or apply any number of other environmental effects that don’t affect the characters themselves. Such abilities generally apply disadvantage to certain rolls, or force reactions (e.g., when smashing down a building with the PCs inside).

BREATH / BLAST / GAS:

The enemy attacks a wide area in front of it or in a blast zone. The more area covered, the weaker its effect. Examples:

- ♦ **Blinding gas:** disadvantage to perception and combat
- ♦ **Flame breath:** deal damage mod to all in zone, AP2
- ♦ **Forceful gale:** strong gust of air that knocks PCs prone and prevents missile attacks

CHARGE:

The enemy rushes toward its target and deals +2 damage if the target PC fails to defend.

CRITICAL WEAKNESS:

The enemy cannot die or resurrects (or may not even be able to take any form of damage) unless its critical weakness is exploited. This weakness must be telegraphed to the party, or must be something known to those who are learned about this enemy. Examples:

- ◇ Wraiths must be captured within a prison ward spell.
- ◇ Zombies must be decapitated or burned.
- ◇ Liches must have their phylactery destroyed.

DISARM:

On a 9- to defend, the PC is disarmed and the weapon drops to the ground.
On a 6- to defend, the enemy takes the PC's weapon.

DRAIN:

On a hit, the PC takes 1 damage per turn (ignores armor) until healed or cured.

GARGANTUAN:

The enemy is massively large, large enough for one or multiple PCs to stand atop it. Some gargantuan creatures are so large that they can house a structure or two on their back.

Such enemies are actually constructs of multiple enemies added together, each able to be targeted and defeated. If one such component is central to the creature's function (e.g., its head), destroying it will often kill all of the connected bits.

Example: The Gargantuan Golden Wyrms of Akzoth is actually made of four enemies—its head, body, wings, and tail. Though they are part of the same creature, each of these enemies has its own set of abilities. The wings grant permission to fly, the claws grant pin, the tail trip, and the head fire breath.

HIT AND RUN:

On a 9- to defend, the enemy deals damage as normal and then moves to a range relevant to its speed (usually short range).

IMMUNE TO [TYPE]:

Select a type of weapon, attack, or magic. The enemy is completely immune to this.

INVISIBLE:

Impossible to detect the enemy by non-magical visual means.

KNOCKBACK:

On a 9- to defend, the PC is forcibly moved around by the enemy to a reasonable location within short range.



MORPH:

Upon reaching a certain threshold (e.g., an HP value), the enemy can morph into something else. Its abilities may change, or it may simply add to its existing suite.

MULTIATTACK N:

This enemy can attack *N* times in one action, either targeting the same PC multiple times, or targeting many of them within range. Most such enemies have multiattack 2, very powerful ones 3, and nemeses 4.

PARALYSIS:

On a 7-9 to defend, the PC is temporarily [paralyzed], which reduces speed by -1 per turn until -7. During this time, the PC struggles to fight and make physical actions. On a 6- to defend, the PC immediately goes to -7 speed. If they reach 0 HP, the [paralyzed] injury tag becomes permanent.

PIN:

On a 9- to defend, the PC cannot move until they succeed at another roll or until the enemy is sufficiently distracted or damaged.

POISON:

If an attack deals damage to a PC, the PC rolls to resist the poison. On a 7-9, the PC takes the injury tag [poisoned], which can cause slowness, vomiting, or dizziness. On a 6-, the PC takes damage each turn equal to the enemy damage mod. If they hit 0 HP, the [poison] injury tag becomes permanent until cured.

REACTION ATTACK:

This enemy gets an immediate attack as a reaction to any PC who attacks them and rolls a 7-9.

REACTION MOVEMENT:

As reaction attack, but can move about the battlefield instead of attacking.

RESISTANT TO [TYPE]:

Select a type of weapon, attack, or magic. The enemy has +1 armor against this.

SPECIAL MOVEMENT:

This enemy can fly, burrow, swim, teleport, phase, or move in another special way. Each form of special movement requires a speed and counts as its own ability.

STUN:

Any PC that takes damage from this enemy takes the temporary injury tag [stunned], and loses their next action. Each PC can only be [stunned] once in this way.

SWALLOW:

On a 7-9 to defend, the PC is caught in the enemy's jaws, and can't move but can still attack. On a 6-, the PC is swallowed and takes damage equal to the enemy's damage mod each turn until they extricate.

SWARM:

An aggregate of many smaller enemies collected into one. Swarms are treated as a regular enemy except that their armor and damage modifier depend upon how "full" they are. As they take damage, their armor and damage modifier decrease in proportion. Spray attacks are treated as armor piercing against a swarm. Once a swarm has been reduced to one-quarter its original HP, it breaks into several individual creatures.

TRIP:

On a 9- to defend, the PC is knocked prone and is vulnerable to a more lethal strike. Additionally, the PC can't move except to crawl or stand up, and attacks at disadvantage until standing.

CONVERTING ENEMIES

To convert OSR enemies and monsters:

RECORD HP AS IS.

HP, or HD times 4.

A creature with 3 HD has 12 HP.

IGNORE TO-HIT BONUS.

High to-hit (above +4) can be treated as the PC rolling to defend at disadvantage.

Enemy with +5 to-hit instead forces PC disadvantage on defend rolls.



ROLL DAMAGE AS LISTED.

For PC-rolled enemy damage (method 2 in **PCs Taking Damage**, page 56), maximize the monster damage and divide by three to determine its damage modifier (max +10).

Roll 3d6+3, or convert to +7.

TO CONVERT DESCENDING AC:

Every two points of AC below 10 is converted to 1 Armor, rounded down (max 4 armor). Additionally, any AC less than 0 causes PCs to roll attacks at disadvantage.

*A creature with 5 AC will have 2 Armor.
A creature with -1 AC will have 4 Armor
and force PCs to attack at disadvantage.*

TO CONVERT ASCENDING AC:

Every two points of AC over 10 is converted to 1 Armor, rounded down. Also, any AC greater than 18 causes PCs to roll attacks at disadvantage.

*A creature with 15 AC will have 2 Armor.
An enemy with 19 AC will have 4 Armor
and force PCs to attack at disadvantage.*



NOTE SAVING THROWS.

Extreme saving throws (good or bad) can inform an enemy's trait tags and abilities. A creature with a very high "CON save" can force PCs to roll at disadvantage against poison or similar attacks that involve the enemy's fortitude or health. Saving throws of -2 to +2 can be ignored.

The Archmage enemy has a +5 Will save in an OSR game. This enemy in VAGABONDS instead has the [willful] trait and forces PCs to roll at disadvantage when trying to affect the Archmage's mental acuity or willpower.

NOTE SPECIAL ABILITIES OR RESISTANCES.

These abilities can largely be lifted wholesale. Otherwise, most can be easily converted into the abilities listed in the previous section. Weak or uninteresting abilities that aren't core to the creature's qualities can be disregarded.

The dragon's immunity to fire can be ported over as is. The giant scorpion's resistance to poison (half damage from all poison attacks) can instead be treated as resistant 3 to poison.

Adjust movement speed. Enemy speeds of 30 feet per movement turn will start with 0 speed. For every +10 feet per move, add +1 speed. For every -10 feet per move, subtract 1 speed. A creature that is heavily armored reduces speed as normal (1 armor = -1 speed) unless that creature also has special movement or massive size (e.g., a dragon). An enemy that wields a weapon(s) in two hands loses 2 speed.

The bandit has 40 feet of movement, wields a bow, and wears a light gambeson for armor. The bandit's speed is -2 = 0 (start) + 1 (10 feet up) - 2 (bow) - 1 (armor).

EXAMPLE ENEMIES

The enemies below are simply examples, and can be easily tweaked or changed as befits your game. Note that adding more HP, armor, or abilities will significantly amplify an enemy's power and threat level. They are listed with a **damage mod** here rather than dice-rolling, as listed in method 2 in PCs **Taking Damage** (page 56).

ACOLYTE

HP: 5 SPD: 0 DMG: +1 ARMOR: 0

A junior priest, cleric, or disciple

Trait tags: pious acolyte, minor divine magic, zealous

Abilities: magical healing (restore 3 HP to one target, short range)

Combat Notes: 1h mace (arm), sanctified (or profane) oils

AMORGOBBLER

HP: 5 SPD: 0 DMG: +0 ARMOR: 4

Armadillo-like, ten feet in length, with slavering, drill-like teeth

Trait tags: hungry for metal, defensive creature, quick to retreat

Abilities: immune to metal weapons, disarm (also works against armor), swallow (only vs weapons and armor)

Combat Notes: unlikely to damage people, but will eat their weapons and armor (even attached to their body)

BANDIT

HP: 8 SPD: 1 DMG: +2 ARMOR: 0

A humanoid who'll cut your throat for a piece of copper

Trait tags: dirty fighter, strength in numbers, stealthy, craven

Abilities: none

Combat Notes: dagger (arm), light bow (short range), light axe (arm)

BEAR

HP: 30 SPD: 2 DMG: +4 ARMOR: 1

A hulking beast surprisingly difficult to kill

Trait tags: powerful beast, scent tracking, tough hide

Abilities: charge, multiattack 2

Combat Notes: charges and focuses on a single target until dead

BEETLE, GIANT

HP: 15 SPD: -1 DMG: +2 ARMOR: 2

Iridescent, clacking, and about fifty times bigger than the garden variety

Trait tags: pincers, hard carapace, drops from dark ceilings

Abilities: wallclimb, spit acid (breath, AP1)

Combat Notes: hide, acid spray from ceiling, then drop and attack as dagger (arm)

BERSERKER

HP: 12 SPD: 2 DMG: +5 ARMOR: 1

A warrior possessed by feral rage and wonton slaughter

Trait tags: battle rage, careless, aggressive, willing to die

Abilities: knockback, hit and run

Combat Notes: 2h axe (step), javelin (thrown, close range)

BUGBEAR

HP: 14 SPD: -2 DMG: +3 ARMOR: 1

A stealthy, stinking, furry goblin of unusual size and strength

Trait tags: foul, stalking predator, bloodthirsty, cave-dweller

Abilities: none

Combat Notes: axe (arm), shield, smelly hide armor

CAT, GREAT

HP: 10 SPD: 1 DMG: +5 ARMOR: 0

Lions, tigers, and jaguars oh my

Trait tags: stalking predator, fangs and claws, cautious, camouflaged

Abilities: pin, multiattack 3, special movement (ignore difficult terrain)

Combat Notes: focuses on a single isolated target, multiattack (step)

DOPPELGANGER

HP: 5 SPD: 0 DMG: +1 ARMOR: 0

A humanoid shapechanger capable of near-perfect facsimile

Trait tags: shapechanger, gains pleasure from deceit, hungers for flesh

Abilities: mimic (after touch contact, can morph into any humanoid)

Combat Notes: will separate and mimic one, then try to eat PCs

DIRE ANTS

HP: 6 SPD: 1 DMG: +1 ARMOR: 1

Giant ants roughly a foot or two in length

Trait tags: insectoid, great strength, pheromones, highly mobile

Abilities: poison, special movement (wallclimb, burrow)

Combat Notes: attempt to swarm a single target, arm range

DIGESTIVE JELLY

HP: 40 SPD: -4 DMG: +7 ARMOR: 0

A corridor-filling ooze, largely transparent, deadly to touch

Trait tags: transparent, massive, digestive, unaware, inexorable

Abilities: swallow, poison, immune to non-magical weapons, AP4

Combat Notes: it eats all in its path, it can't do anything proactively

DRAGONS

HP: 50 **SPD: 1 / 4 (FLY)** **DMG: +10** **ARMOR: 4**

A single, younger dragon. Greater wyrms and ancient beasts should be given the Gargantuan ability, and therefore serve as multiple conjoined creatures

Trait tags: dragon, terrifying, wings of death, fire and smoke

Abilities: hit and run, pin, swallow, special movement (flight), fire breath (breath, long range, AP4), immune to fire

Combat Notes: seeks to hoard azoth, will stay flying if possible, uses fire breath as often as possible, will land and swallow (long range)



GHOUL

HP: 12 **SPD: 3** **DMG: +4** **ARMOR: 1**

A bestial, humanoid undead; a feral vampire

Trait tags: vicious, terrifying, hate the sun, bloodthirsty, unintelligent

Abilities: paralyze, drain

Combat Notes: will attempt to paralyze and then drain (reach)

GIANT

HP: 30 **SPD: -3** **DMG: +8** **ARMOR: 2**

A hulking creature no less than twelve feet in height and breadth

Trait tags: massive, strong, smashing, charging, slow, near-blind

Abilities: knockback, blast attack (throwing stones, long range)

Combat Notes: throws stones, then uses tree-trunk club (short range)

GNOLL

HP: 15 **SPD: 2** **DMG: +1** **ARMOR: 1**

A hyena-like humanoid, foul and violent

Trait tags: howling, pack animal, strong, fast, crude, gullible

Abilities: reaction attack

Combat Notes: heavy bow (long range), axe (step), shield

GOBLIN

HP: 4 SPD: 1 DMG: +1 ARMOR: 0

*A craven, evil, skulking creature
akin to a profane smallfolk*

Trait tags: small, cruel, skulking,
subservient, thieving, stinking

Abilities: reaction movement

Combat Notes: spear (reach), dagger
(arm), react to retreat

HYDRA

HP: 15 PER SEGMENT SPD: -4 / 0 (SWIM) DMG: +9 ARMOR: 4

*A multiheaded serpentine beast
of mythological power*

Trait tags: four-headed, giant,
serpentine, thickly scaled

Abilities: gargantuan, five segments
(four heads, one torso).

- ◇ Each head: bite (short range), poison, swallow. Special: once each head is killed, a new one grows back into its place
- ◇ Torso: regeneration stops if torso is destroyed. Knockback

Combat Notes: lurks in watery caves, uses heads to protect torso, will swim away if badly wounded and to regenerate heads



LIZARDKIN

HP: 10 SPD: 0 / 2 (SWIM) DMG: +2 ARMOR: 0

*Lizard-like swamp things of
humanoid intelligence*

Trait tags: swamp natives, pack predators,
amphibious, brutal

Abilities: knockback, drown (pull into
water on knockback ability)

Combat Notes: spear (reach), sling (short
range), claws (step)

LYCANTHROPE
(WEREWOLF, ETC.)

HP:	SPD:	DMG:	ARMOR:
3 / 25	-2 / 4	+0 / +3	0 / 4

A twisted amalgamation of beast and man, driven to kill sentient prey

Trait tags:	Feral, strengthened by the moon, mighty, fast
Abilities:	morph (post / is in wolf form), multiattack 2, silvered weapons ignore 4 armor. Lycanthropy (any PC reduced to 0 HP from the lycanthrope gains the affliction. If not cured before the next moon—usually through ritual magic—it is permanent)
Combat Notes:	A typical civilian or weak humanoid. When morphed, unaware of its actions, claws (step), fangs (arm)

MEDIUM

HP: 5	SPD: -1	DMG: +1	ARMOR: 0
-------	---------	---------	----------

An apprentice mage

Trait tags:	neophyte, academic, physically inept, basic magic
Abilities:	javelin of air (short-range magical attack), one spell from adept technique
Combat Notes:	accompanied by thugs or their master

MEDUSA

HP: 16	SPD: 0	DMG: +6	ARMOR: 0
--------	--------	---------	----------

An ancient creature of magical power, capable of paralyzing any with a look

Trait tags:	mythological fiend, serpentine, powerful sorceress
Abilities:	paralysis (with eye contact), control stone
Combat Notes:	Attempts to paralyze, uses former paralyzed stone statues as minions

MINOTAUR

HP: 22	SPD: 0	DMG: +6	ARMOR: 0
--------	--------	---------	----------

Cursed to forever wander labyrinths and kill those who enter its domain

Trait tags:	Maze master, raging bull, semi-intelligent
Abilities:	special movement (maze chase, multiple angles of attack), resistant to non-magical attack (armor +2 vs non-magical), hit and run
Combat Notes:	2h axe (step), gore (arm), uses maze chase and hit and run to come from multiple dizzying angles to attack and disappear again

ORC

HP: 10 SPD: 1 DMG: +2 ARMOR: 1

A hulking, slightly more intelligent, much bigger goblin

Trait tags: Barbaric, monstrous, death from combat, strong, dumb

Abilities: charge, trip

Combat Notes: 2h axe (step), heavy bow (long range)

PIXIE

HP: 1 SPD: 5 DMG: +1 ARMOR: 0

A tiny fairy capable of fluttering flight and invisibility

Trait tags: tiny, fae, fluttering, trickster

Abilities: invisibility, the legerdemain spell

Combat Notes: can remain invisible until coated or magically dispelled

SCAVENGYPEDE

HP: 25 SPD: -3 DMG: +2 ARMOR: 2

A twenty-foot tentacular centipede that feasts on corpses and carrion

Trait tags: disgusting, one hundred legs, constricting, poison bite

Abilities: wallclimb, speed 2 digging through refuse, paralysis

Combat Notes: Hide and paralyze (reach)



SOLDIER

HP: 10 SPD: -1 DMG: +3 ARMOR: 2

A grizzled killer trained in the art of war

Trait tags: disciplined, tactical, armored, battle-hardened

Abilities: formation (if three or more soldiers fight together in formation, their dmg mod increases to +4, armor to 3, and speed reduces to -2 for the entire group)

Combat Notes: spear (reach), shield, heavy bow (long range), sword (step), dagger (arm)

SPIDER, GIANT

HP: 6 **SPD: -2 / 2 (WEB)** **DMG: +2** **ARMOR: 0**

An eight-legged horror capable of ensnaring a small horse in its web

Trait tags: spider, insectoid, web-slinger, poor eyesight, fragile

Abilities: paralysis, poison, affect environment (webs)

Combat Notes: will only fight and ambush from its lair or feeding grounds, webs are difficult terrain, bite (arm, delivers poison and paralysis)

SHRIEKER SHROOM

HP: 12 **SPD: 0** **DMG: +2** **ARMOR: 0**

A human-sized, semi-sentient mushroom creature

Trait tags: cave-dweller, fungal, easily startled, afraid of light

Abilities: release spores (Stun, long range, gas zone attack, loud shriek)

Combat Notes: generally non-aggressive, but will release spores and shriek when startled by light or violence, and fight if necessary



WRAITH

HP: 5 **SPD: -1** **DMG: +1** **ARMOR: 0**

An ethereal, shadow-like spirit of deadly power

Trait tags: massive, strong, smashing, charging, slow, near-blind

Abilities: special movement (phase through walls), critical weakness (immune to damage not dealt atop ground with warding glyphs), drain

Combat Notes: will phase through a wall, kill one, and escape (focus on magical PCs to prevent weakness)

ZOMBIE

HP: 8 **SPD: -4** **DMG: +1** **ARMOR: 0**

The shambling, rotten undead

Trait tags: undead, shambling, hungry for living flesh

Abilities: critical weakness (immune to any damage not struck against the head, usually measured by a 13+ on an attack)

Combat Notes: operates under the direction of a necromancer, and can't travel far from such control, unarmed bites and claws (arm)



CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

These archetypes are designed to resemble common character classes from D&D and similar RPGs, or playbooks from PbtA games such as *Dungeon World*.

You can grab them and use them wholesale as premade characters. Or you can pick and choose pieces of them to mix and match as you see fit. The purpose of these is to give easy guidelines for genre conventions as well as quick pick-up-and-play characters.

ADVENTURER

A capable explorer, well versed in overland travel and wilderness survival.

AVOWED

A divine and devoted scholar, capable of great concentration and calling upon cosmic powers.

MAGE

One learned in the arcane and ancient, capable of usurping the natural power of the universe.

ROGUE

A dexterous thief, assassin, and dungeon-delver.

WARRIOR

The knight, the brawler, the soldier.

VAGABONDS OF DYFED

ADVENTURER

LEVEL

1

TRAITS GAIN ONE PER LEVEL

Sum relevant positive and negative traits to determine **aptitude** (max +3, min -3)

MY APPROACH TO CONFLICT:

Run today, fight another day

MY GOAL:

Plunder, pillage, and profit

MY GIMMICK:

Relentlessly overeager

MY BACKGROUND:

Grew up in the ship's galley

MY FOREGROUND:

A procurer of artifacts

MY WEAKNESS:

Highly risky

Survived Castlebrook Siege

Stole the Great Diadem

Traversed the Frostfang Peaks

Waged war against pirates



CORE FLAW

Once per session, use to wriggle into or out of trouble, or **succumb** for +3xp

I never have to suffer my problems so long as I keep moving and running away from them.

LINEAGE

Human

EQUIPMENT

-1 speed for each loaded-down limb and point of armor; at -7, you are immobilized

cutlass (1h, arm)

climbing kit
(worn, fragile)

shortbow
(2h, short
range, ammo)

gambeson (1
armor, worn)

**1 potion of
gillbreath** (1
use, breathe
underwater)

**adventuring
kit** (5 uses)

TECHNIQUES

PICK ONE, GAIN ONE PER LEVEL

Ear to the Ground

Favored Environment

Inner Compass

Iron Stomach

Linguist

Pathfinder

Tough Hide

Tracker

INJURIES

VAGABONDS OF DYFED

AVOWED

LEVEL

1

TRAITS GAIN ONE PER LEVEL

Sum relevant positive and negative traits to determine **aptitude** (max +3, min -3)

MY APPROACH TO CONFLICT:

Plodding and determined

MY GOAL:

[Quest] for their [belief]

MY GIMMICK:

[Pray] before and after battle

MY BACKGROUND:

A bloodthirsty sellsword

MY FOREGROUND:

A devout [cleric] of [Good]

MY WEAKNESS:

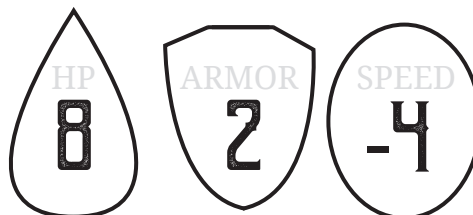
Susceptible to lies

Battlefield medic

Cleansed a profane evil

Saved a friend's life

Witnessed a great miracle



CORE FLAW

Once per session, use to wriggle into or out of trouble, or **succumb** for +3xp

The plights of the world are due to people's lack of discipline, devotion, or piety.

LINEAGE

Dwarf

EQUIPMENT

-1 speed for each loaded-down limb and point of armor; at -7, you are immobilized

chainmail
(1 armor, worn)

with holy magic)

light shield
(1h, +1 armor)

hospitaller's kit (5 uses)

mace (1h, arm)

divine totem
(+1 to damage dealt or healed)

adventuring kit (5 uses)

TECHNIQUES

PICK ONE, GAIN ONE PER LEVEL

Cure

Magical Healing

Devoted

Nose for Evil

Healing Touch

Provident Guidance

Last Word

Soulsnare

INJURIES

VAGABONDS OF DYFED

MAGE

LEVEL

1

TRAITS GAIN ONE PER LEVEL

Sum relevant positive and negative traits to determine **aptitude** (max +3, min -3)

MY APPROACH TO CONFLICT:

Proper application of leverage

MY GOAL:

I will acquire true Power

MY GIMMICK:

Embrace the wizard cliché

MY BACKGROUND:

Former diplomat and leader

MY FOREGROUND:

I am a master of the arcane

MY WEAKNESS:

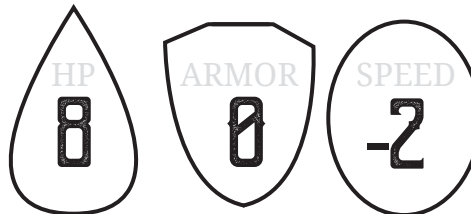
Sheer hubris

I tamed a greater fiend

Melted hordes of soldiers

I've learned magical mysteries

Spell over sword



CORE FLAW

Once per session, use to wriggle into or out of trouble, or **succumb** for +3xp

I will not be corrupted by Power, I can control the magic better than those who have failed before me.

LINEAGE

Elf

EQUIPMENT

-1 speed for each loaded-down limb and point of armor; at -7, you are immobilized

orb of focus
(magical implement, permission for short-range force attacks, ammo)

bound scrolls
cartographer's kit

adventuring kit (5 uses)

TECHNIQUES

PICK ONE, GAIN ONE PER LEVEL

Adept

Hellrift

Arcanist

Pyromancer

Beastspeak

Scry

Control Vegetation

Undead thrall

INJURIES

VAGABONDS OF DYFED

ROGUE

LEVEL

1

TRAITS GAIN ONE PER LEVEL

Sum relevant positive and negative traits to determine **aptitude** (max +3, min -3)

MY APPROACH TO CONFLICT:

Only when the time is right

MY GOAL:

Coin, pure and simple

MY GIMMICK:

Always slinking in and out

MY BACKGROUND:

Heir to a mighty business

MY FOREGROUND:

Cutthroat and sneakthief

MY WEAKNESS:

Bit of a coward

I stole the crown jewels

Assassin of kings

Sly cutpurse

Plumbed the dungeon deep



CORE FLAW

Once per session, use to wriggle into or out of trouble, or **succumb** for +3xp

Finders keepers isn't wrong, so long as nobody else knows about it.

LINEAGE

Smallfolk

EQUIPMENT

-1 speed for each loaded-down limb and point of armor; at -7, you are immobilized

gambeson
(1 armor, worn)

daggers
(1h, arm, ammo
when thrown,
short range)

**adventuring
kit** (5 uses)

climbing kit

thief's kit
(3 uses, fragile)

TECHNIQUES

PICK ONE, GAIN ONE PER LEVEL

Assassinate

Practiced Shadow

Better Safe than Sorry

Shadowmeld

Eyeball it

Trapcunning

Jellybones

Cutpurse

INJURIES

VAGABONDS OF DYFED

WARRIOR

LEVEL

1

TRAITS GAIN ONE PER LEVEL

Sum relevant positive and negative traits to determine **aptitude** (max +3, min -3)

MY APPROACH TO CONFLICT:

Kill first, question later

MY GOAL:

I seek vengeance

MY GIMMICK:

War stories for every occasion

MY BACKGROUND:

Won my freedom from the pits

MY FOREGROUND:

I perfect myself through war

MY WEAKNESS:

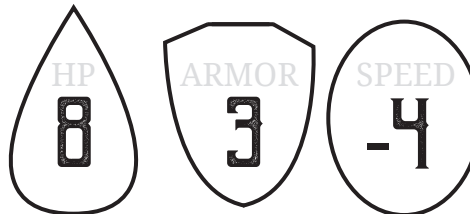
Tunnel-visioned

Won an impossible battle

Slayed hordes of beasts

Survived the Skinmelt Plague

Led the Adamantium Legion



CORE FLAW

Once per session, use to wriggle into or out of trouble, or **succumb** for +3xp

Violence is the root of all power, and often is the best and only solution to conflict.

LINEAGE

Beastkin

EQUIPMENT

-1 speed for each loaded-down limb and point of armor; at -7, you are immobilized

full armor harness (armor 3, heavy, worn) vs unarmed)

adventuring kit (5 uses)

poleaxe (reach, 2h, effective vs humanoid)

potion of battle brew (1 use, +3 damage and +1 armor until end of scene)

longsword (2h, step, effective)

TECHNIQUES

PICK ONE, GAIN ONE PER LEVEL

Armorborn

Frothy Rage

Favored Enemy

Light Sleeper

Favored Tactic

Mighty Leap

Favored Weapon

Strong

INJURIES

