DRAW STEEL

STARTER RULES

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Join the Discord

If you want to play and chat with other gamers interested in *Draw Steel*, head on over to the MCDM Discord server at mcdm.gg/discord

Cze and Peku

Gameplay Diagrams use art from Czepeku. Visit czepeku.com for a wonderful collection of Fantasy and Sci-Fi maps for your table.

WHAT IS THIS GAME?

This is a game about fighting monsters. About larger-than-life, extraordinary heroes plunging into battle against terrifying, monstrous enemies.

That covers a lot! So let's get specific and talk about what this game is, and what it is not.

This game will absolutely feature dungeons. Ancient underground complexes filled with ravenous undead or creeping oozes. But it isn't a dungeon crawler. It's not about "clearing rooms." It's not a survival horror game where you must track light and food and the weight of every object you carry.

You can fight monsters in a dungeon, but the game is not *about* dungeons. Lots of games focus on that gameplay and do it really well! Like *Shadowdark*.

It's not a wilderness exploration game, aka a hex crawl. It's not about surviving in extreme weather, getting lost, or trying to navigate your way back to safety.

You can fight monsters in the wilderness, even run a whole campaign in the wilderness, but this game is not about the wilderness. We love games that focus on that fantasy, like *Forbidden Lands*.

You can run adventures with horror themes, but this is not a horror roleplaying game like *Call of Cthulhu*. Your sessions can and will feature comedy, but this isn't a comedy RPG like *Paranoia*.

Draw Steel is definitely a game about creating amazing stories in which the heroes fight monsters and villains using strategy and tactics. *Draw Steel* has a lot of other tools! But fighting monsters is sort of non-negotiable. If you're looking for a game featuring extraordinary heroes overcoming dramatic villains without the focus on tactical combat, maybe check out *Daggerheart*! Just right next door alphabet-wise!

We genuinely love all those games. But we love them because they focus on specific genres of gameplay and deliver on them really well.

Our game is heroic fantasy. That's its genre. Extraordinary people fighting dragons and necromancers.

But "heroic fantasy" is still a little too broad for our purposes, so we added two other keywords to explain how our game might be different from other games in this genre: tactical and cinematic.

These terms are just guidelines. A vibe. But we find them useful when trying to choose between different features. "Both of these ideas are cool, but which is the most cinematic? The most heroic?"

So let's talk about what we mean when we use these terms.

Tactical

Strategy is: "What are we trying to do?" Break a siege, free a prisoner, rescue a captive, steal a tome of ancient lore. Strategy is about long-term goals.

Tactics is about: "How are we going to do that?" We're going to … surround them! Sneak around them! Pick them off one by one! Kill their leader first! Kill their priest first! "No resurrections!"

In a tactical game, *positioning matters.* So our game is played on a grid. Effects and distances are measured in squares. This means all players are focused on the same problem, and there is no ambiguity regarding where the heroes and villains are in relation to each other. The hobgoblin troopers are setting themselves up in a line to stop our tactician and fury from getting into melee with the hobgoblin war mage. We're all aware of what's happening, and we can talk about what we're going to do to stop it.

That means *teamwork matters.* That's why the order of combat works the way it does—to encourage the players to plan! "Okay, you use Concussive Slam on that trooper, it'll push him back, and on my turn, I can use Squad! Forward! to get us all into melee with the death captain." We think focusing on teamwork also makes the game more heroic!

In a tactical game, you have many choices each combat round. You are never reduced to just swinging your sword. You have options. If we do a good job, you don't feel as if you outlasted your opponents because you wore their Stamina down before they could reduce yours to 0—you feel like you *beat* those hobgoblins! Through stealth and sorcery, coordination and ferocity!

As you play with the same group of characters, you learn what they can all do. You discover synergies, "combos." Some of them intended by the designers, some not! You start to learn these unique characters, and to rely on them to do their cool things. It's a great feeling when another player comes up with a cool plan that relies on your unique abilities.

You learn which characters are the "squishies" who need to be protected or healed. You learn which characters can push themselves right to the edge and keep fighting. "Don't worry about healing Barlaca. She's our fury. She's happier with 3 Stamina." Our game is not *about* tactics. It's not a wargame. But it is tactical.

Heroic

Our game is *definitely* about heroism! For us, this means a couple of things. It means we don't assume your character is primarily motivated by greed. They might be! But we don't *assume* that. Instead we assume you're going to do the right thing. It might take some convincing, and there might be some reluctant heroes in your party, but that's part of the fun!

You should absolutely be able to run a *Chain of Acheron*-style campaign where the heroes are hard-bitten mercenaries in a morally ambiguous world. But that's not the baseline assumption. The fiction and adventures that inspire us feature epic villains trying to remake the world in their image, and the dashing, unyielding heroes who strive against them even in the face of impossible odds.

So that's one component of the heroic keyword. But another component, equally important, is what kinds of things happen "on-screen," so to speak. This is closely related to the cinematic keyword.

For instance, you never see Indiana Jones having to find a local sporting goods store because he needs to stock up on ammo. You never see Katniss Everdeen have to stop and take a shower because she stinks.

These things do happen. No one watching *Raiders of the Lost Ark* thinks that Indy's gun is magic and doesn't need bullets—but we simply don't need to see Indy doing that stuff. We don't need to waste time on it.

Likewise in our game, we don't worry about stuff that heroes in fiction tend not to worry about. We don't worry how much everything you're carrying weighs. If you try to lift a bear, you might have trouble, sure. But nowhere on your character sheet are you tracking the weight of every item.

You don't track food such as rations, and you don't worry about how many torches you have. Light might factor into a specific environment, because that can be a fun tactical challenge, but the game doesn't expect that everyone is always worried about running out of light.

Basically, we worry only about those things you'd see your characters doing in a movie, or a comic, or a novel about their adventures. Assume all the tedious stuff happens off-screen. Speaking of things happening on-screen …

Cinematic

Closely tied to the heroic keyword, the cinematic keyword is about how we like abilities and features to be strongly evocative. You can imagine your character doing or saying these things. "In All This Confusion" is a good name for the shadow's ability to slip out of melee and retreat to safety. The text of the ability says how it works, but the name creates an awareness that explains *how* it's working.

When Sir Vanazor the dragon knight fury leaps onto a goblin war spider, cleaving through the goblins riding the creature in a single turn, you *experience* that action in your mind. It feels like a movie. It doesn't feel simply as if you rolled well, but like an epic scene, complete with slow motion and a Carpenter Brut soundtrack.

You should imagine your tactician character leading the battle, granting your allies free strikes, extra maneuvers. *Coordinating* the battle. That's what the name implies. And if we've done a good job, when you read through your character's abilities, you think, "Yes! This is what I was imagining! I can't wait to do this!"

Fantasy

Just ... you know ... it's got dragons and stuff.

It's worth mentioning—while everyone basically already knows what fantasy means in this context, we do imagine it a little more broadly than your average classical medieval fantasy. We like that stuff! Vasloria is our medieval European fantasy analog with knights on horseback and wizards in towers. But we also like high fantasy urban intrigue, and so we're developing Capital, the City of the Great Game, the Greatest City in This or Any Age. Vasloria is mostly humans and elves and orcs and dwarves, but Capital has dozens, *hundreds* of different ancestries in it.

Looking back at movies like *Star Wars* and the work of artists like Chris Foss, that '70s stuff now seems explicitly fantastical. There's nothing scientific or even plausible about a lightsaber or a John Berkey spaceship. But damn, they look cool!

So our setting includes the timescape—our multiverse, of which the world of Orden containing Capital and Vasloria is only one part. The timescape is more explicitly "space fantasy."

These core rules mostly cover the classic fantasy stuff. But we think Capital and the timescape will help us deliver a game where more people can see their fantasy in our worlds.

For us, fantasy includes magic, like wizards casting spells, and psionics, the natural and focused ability some creatures have to manipulate and warp reality with their minds. You know, telekinesis and telepathy! Jean Grey style!

If You're Coming From D20 Fantasy

We know that many folks are coming to this game having only experienced d20 fantasy RPGs. This section details a few key distinctions between this game and typical d20 fantasy that you'll notice right away. These aren't the only distinctions, but they're the most obvious.

Smaller bonuses and penalties. *Draw Steel* is built around the roll of two ten-sided dice to produce three possible outcomes—tier 1, tier 2, or tier 3. On the surface, this might not seem that different from rolling a twenty-sided die and having two outcomes—success or failure. But we've run the math. A lot. A bonus of +1 or penalty of −2 is significant in *Draw Steel*, much more so than in a typical d20 fantasy game. That means you should feel pretty good attempting most power rolls—the rolls you make to determine success both in and out of combat—if you have a decent characteristic bonus to add to those rolls. And if you have a specific skill that applies to a power roll made as a test outside of combat, you'll do even better.

Abilities automatically deal damage. When you use an ability—one of the unique combat features that defines your character—you can still have a bad turn! A tier 1 outcome with minimal damage and effects is the worst outcome you can obtain with an ability. It's not awesome. But you're still always making progress. The question is: Who's making progress faster? You or the monsters? Since there's no, "I miss, who's next?" in this game, fights typically last 3 or fewer rounds. A fight that lasts 5 rounds is a *long* fight. Because everyone's always doing damage!

You don't need to rest all the time. Most d20 fantasy games are games of attrition. Your spell slots and other features dwindle as the adventuring day goes on. In *Draw Steel*, you need to rest to regain your Stamina and Recoveries—the stats that determine how robust you are in combat. But all characters earn the capability to use their magic and other awesome abilities as they adventure, encouraging you to press on heroically.

Our game has a lot of skills. Your character can make use of a long list of skills, but we don't expect you to memorize that list. We get into why the Tests section features so many skills, but the short version is that we think having a lot of skills allows you to create more distinct and specialized heroes, which supports the sort of gameplay we want to see in *Draw Steel*. And skills in the game aren't tied to characteristics. If you're trying to lose someone in a crowd, you can use Presence—the characteristic that represents your character's force of personality—to try to hide! Why not?

We won't be able to point out every difference. Beyond what's noted here, don't assume that these rules work like any d20 fantasy game you've played. We don't have the space to point out every exception. So if you're in doubt about how something works, put d20 fantasy out of your mind and read our rules without those assumptions, and you'll find that things make better sense. If you're still confused, stop by the *MCDM Discord* and ask. We've got tons of awesome community members ready to help!

We don't expect you to do everything to the letter. This is actually one thing *Draw Steel* does have in common with d20 fantasy. This is a big book of rules! Don't stress if you need to look something up or make a ruling about an edge case on the fly. If everyone's having fun, you're doing it right.

THE BASICS

The flow of playing *Draw Steel* is like playing any other tabletop roleplaying game with a Director (also called a Game Master or GM in other games). Play is a conversation between the Director and the heroes that describes the story. The Director sets the scene, describing the important elements of the environment that the heroes would notice.

Director (Willy): *You stand in the doorway of the top level of the ruined necromancer's tower. The air is stale and reeks of death. A pale full moon shines through a broken ceiling, illuminating six sarcophagi upon a raised dais, each with a lid carved in the likeness of a devil. Broken flasks, beakers, and other laboratory glass covers the floor.*

After the Director sets the scene, each player describes how their character interacts with the area. The Director then describes how the environment and any creatures in it respond to the heroes' actions.

Alyssa (playing Jorn, a tactician): *I'm going to hang out at the back of the group with my warhammer drawn. I want to be ready in case any of those skeletons we snuck by on the lower levels make their way up the stairs.*

Matt (playing Linn, a talent): *Linn uses her Minor Telekinesis ability to sweep up the glass on the floor and form a path free of glass that goes from the door to the dais.*

James (playing Korvo, a shadow): *I'll light a torch as I step into the room. Is there anything new we can see now?*

Director: *With the glass cleared away and brighter light glowing in the room, you can see that the floor is covered in faded sigils.*

At some point, a player will have their hero attempt a task that has a risk of failing in a way that is narratively interesting. In such cases, the Director calls for some dice to be rolled! Don't worry—the rules outline when and how to do this.

Grace (playing Val, a conduit): *Before anyone steps on them, I want to examine the symbols and figure out what they mean.*

Director: *Okay, well for that, I need you to make an easy Reason test.*

Grace: *I got a 12! What do I know?*

Director: *You can tell these old sigils are part of a necromancy spell that has been woven into the stone floor. Also, Jorn can hear something coming up the steps. It's the clicking and clacking of bone on stone.*

Alyssa: *Uh, let's make a decision here, folks. We got boneheads incoming!*

Matt: *Linn has had enough of this dillydallying. She moves to the dais and ushers everyone inside the room so we can shut and barricade the door.*

Grace: *Uh-oh.*

Director: *Before anyone else can move, Linn's foot connects with one of the sigils. A burst of red lightning cracks from the place where her foot touched the floor, running to the walls and up to the ceiling.*

Matt: *Oh, right. Necromancy.*

Grace: *Yeah. Should have warned you.*

Director: *The whole tower starts to sway as the sarcophagus lids crash to the floor and clawed undead hands emerge from within. Six decaying devils, each tattooed with glowing green runes, rise. They're eager for violence.*

James: *I think we found the Rotting Lords of Hell.*

Director: *Draw steel!*

When combat starts, it's time to use a square-gridded map and miniatures to represent the position of the heroes relative to their enemies and the environment. The rules become a little more granular during combat to keep things interesting and fair, but the idea that the game is a conversation between the Director and the other players remains the same.

Characteristics

Each creature in the game has five characteristics that represent their physical and mental prowess.

Might

Might (represented by **M** in abilities and other features) represents strength and brawn. A creature's capability to break down doors, swing an axe, stand up during an earthquake, or hurl an ally across a chasm is determined by Might.

Agility

Agility (**A**) represents coordination and nimbleness. A creature's capacity to backflip out of danger, shoot a crossbow, dodge an explosion, or pluck keys from a guard's belt is determined by Agility.

Reason

Reason (**R**) represents a logical mind and education. A creature's capacity to solve a puzzle that unlocks a door, recall lore about necromancy, decipher a coded message, or blast a foe with psionic power is determined by Reason.

Intuition

Intuition (**I**) represents instincts and experience. A creature's capability to recognize a faint sound as the approach of a distant rider, quickly read the tell of a bluffing gambler, calm a rearing horse, or track a monster across the tundra is determined by Intuition.

Presence

Presence (**P**) represents force of personality. A creature's capacity to lie to a judge, convince a crowd to join a revolution, impress a queen at a royal banquet, or cast a magic spell by singing a song is determined by Presence.

Characteristic Scores

Each characteristic has a score that runs from –5 to +5. The higher a score, the more impact a creature has with that characteristic. A baby bunny rabbit would have a Might score of –5, while an ancient dragon would have a Might score of 5. The average human has a score of 0 in all their characteristics. Characteristic scores are added to power rolls—the dice rolls you make whenever your character attempts a task with an uncertain outcome (see Power Rolls below).

> ### Sapient Creatures
> All creatures in the game are sentient, capable of sensing and reacting to the world around them. But only some creatures are sapient, possessed of advanced intellect and consciousness. Being sapient has nothing to do with a creature's Reason score, but is determined solely by whether a creature is capable of human-like levels of thought and emotion. The Director decides whether creatures are sapient for the purpose of being affected by abilities and features that affect only sapient or nonsapient creatures.

Dice

This game uses ten-sided dice (also called d10s). Each player (including the Director) should have two of these. Some ten-sided dice are numbered 0 to 9 while others are numbered 1 to 10. In the case of the former, a 0 counts as 10.

The game also makes occasional use of six-sided dice (called d6s), so it's helpful if each player has one or two of those as well.

D3s

On rare occasions, the rules ask a player to roll one or more three-sided dice (also called d3s). If you don't have a d3, you can roll a six-sided die instead, treating a roll of 1–2 as a 1, a roll of 3–4 as a 2, and a roll of 5–6 as a 3.

D100s

Some tables in the game call for a d100 roll. To roll a d100, grab two ten-sided dice. Decide which die represents the tens digit, with the other die representing the ones digit. For instance, if you roll a 5 for the tens digit and a 3 for the ones digit, the number rolled is 53.

Some ten-sided dice are numbered 0 to 9, while others are numbered 1 to 10. For the latter type of dice, a 10 counts as a 0 for the purpose of rolling a d100. For instance, if a 10 is rolled for the tens digit and a 9 is rolled for the ones digit, the number rolled is 09, or 9.

If both dice rolled show a 0 or 10, then the number rolled is 100!

Power Rolls

Whenever a hero or other creature in the game attempts a task with an uncertain outcome, such as attacking a foe, sneaking by a guard patrol without being seen, or persuading a queen to provide military aid, the creature makes a power roll to determine the outcome of their actions.

Types of Power Rolls

The game uses two types of power rolls. An **ability roll** is used when you use certain abilities to determine their impact. For instance, if a fury uses their Brutal Slam ability to strike an enemy, their ability roll determines how much damage the enemy takes and how far back the enemy is pushed. See Abilities for more information.

A **test** is a power roll you make outside of using your abilities to affect or interact with the world around you. A tactician might not have an ability that lets them climb up the face of a cliff, so climbing is an activity they can attempt with a test. An elementalist doesn't have an ability that lets them automatically intimidate a cultist into backing down from a fight, but they can make a test if they want to try. See Tests for more information.

Making a Power Roll

When you make a power roll, you roll two ten-sided dice (usually noted as 2d10 in the rules) and add one of your characteristics. The characteristic you add depends on the kind of roll you're making, as outlined in Abilities and Tests.

POWER ROLL OUTCOMES

The total of a power roll determines your outcome tier—three levels that determine how successful your power roll is.

Tier 1: If your power roll total is **11 or lower**, it is a tier 1 outcome. This is the worst outcome a power roll can have. If you're using an ability, a tier 1 outcome means you still do something, but the impact of what you do is minimal. With this outcome, a strike ability might deal a little bit of damage and not do much else. For a test, a tier 1 outcome might mean you fail at what you set out to do, and you might also incur a negative consequence.

Tier 2: If your power roll total is **12 to 16**, it is a tier 2 outcome. This is the average outcome of many power rolls, especially for heroes who are 1st level. When using an ability, a tier 2 outcome means that what you do has a moderate impact. With this outcome, a strike ability deals a decent amount of damage and has an effect that briefly helps allies or hinders enemies. For a test, a tier 2 outcome means you might succeed at what you set out to do—though depending on the difficulty, success might have a cost.

Tier 3: If your power roll total is **17 or higher**, it is a tier 3 outcome. This is the best outcome a power roll can have. When using an ability, a tier 3 outcome means you deliver the maximum impact possible. With this outcome, a strike ability deals a lot of damage and has a powerful or lasting effect on enemies or allies. For a test, a tier 3 outcome means you succeed at what you set out to do. If the test has an easy difficulty, you also get a little something extra in addition to your success.

The specific outcome of any power roll is determined by the effect or ability that requires the roll (see Abilities) or the rules for tests (see Tests).

DOWNGRADE A POWER ROLL

Whenever you make a power roll, you can downgrade it to select the outcome of a lower tier. For instance, if an ability has a tier 3 outcome that lets you impose the restrained condition on a creature, but the tier 2 outcome for that ability lets you impose the slowed condition, you can use the tier 2 outcome if you would rather have the creature slowed than restrained.

If you downgrade a critical hit, you still get the extra action benefit of the critical hit (see Critical Hit).

NATURAL ROLL

The total of your power roll before your characteristic or any other modifiers are added is called the natural roll. The rules often refer to this as "rolling a natural X," where X is the total of the roll. For example, if you get a 20 on a power roll before adding your characteristic, this is called rolling a natural 20.

When you roll a natural 19 or 20 on certain types of power rolls, this is a critical hit (see Critical Hit).

Edges and Banes

An archer standing on a castle wall fires down into a throng of enemies, hitting the mark each time thanks to their high ground. A drunken bandit struggles to land blows on sober opponents as alcohol clouds their senses. Under certain circumstances, you need more than just a characteristic to represent the advantages and disadvantages that heroes, their enemies, and their allies might have.

EDGE

An **edge** represents a situational advantage a hero or an enemy has when making a power roll. For example, a standing hero who makes a melee strike against a prone creature gains an edge on the power roll for their strike. A pair of magic gloves that makes your hands sticky might grant you an edge when making a power roll to climb walls!

When you make a power roll with an edge, you gain a +2 bonus to the roll. If you make a power roll with two or more edges, you have a **double edge**. With a double edge, you don't add anything to the power roll, but the outcome of the roll automatically improves one tier (to a maximum of tier 3).

BANE

A **bane** represents a situational disadvantage a hero or an enemy has when making a power roll. For example, if you make a strike while prone, the power roll for the strike takes a bane. A rainstorm might give you a bane on a power roll made to climb an outdoor wall because the weather makes the stone surface extra slick.

When you make a power roll with a bane, you take a –2 penalty to the roll. If you make a power roll with two or more banes, you have a **double bane**. With a double bane, you don't subtract anything from the power roll, but the outcome of the roll automatically decreases one tier (to a minimum of tier 1).

ROLLING WITH EDGES AND BANES

Under certain circumstances, you might have one or more edges and banes on the same roll. For instance, you might take a bane when weakened by poison, even as you gain an edge for striking a prone creature. In general, edges and banes cancel each other out, resolving as follows:

- If you have an edge and a bane, or if you have a double edge and a double bane, the roll is made as usual without any edges or banes.
- If you have a double edge and just one bane, the roll is made with one edge, regardless of how many individual edges contribute to the double edge.
- If you have a double bane and just one edge, the roll is made with one bane, regardless of how many individual banes contribute to the double bane.

WHEN TO USE EDGES AND BANES

The rules tell you when to modify a roll with an edge or a bane. The Director can also modify rolls with edges and banes as a response to narrative or environmental circumstances. For instance, no rule specifically says that rain imposes a bane on power rolls made to climb a stone wall. But it makes sense that rainy conditions should make climbing that wall harder, so a Director should absolutely do so!

> **Why Cap?**
>
> We capped edges and banes at a maximum of two each for several reasons, including thinking about the narrative of those penalties. Every little advantage or disadvantage in a heroic story has diminishing returns, acknowledging that a creature can benefit or be hindered by short-term circumstances only so much. For example, a character who is prone and weakened by poison already finds it difficult to attack—so that becoming restrained by a net can't really make it harder.
>
> We also liked capping edges and banes at two because it keeps play quick. It's nice to not need to count beyond two positive or negative circumstances in a battle with a lot of effects flying around.

Bonuses and Penalties

While edges and banes cover most circumstantial effects that can have an impact on a power roll, a few rules add numeric bonuses or penalties to power rolls. Bonus and penalty values are specified in the rules that impose them, and are calculated independently of edges and banes, and before edges and banes are factored into a power roll. There is no limit to the number of bonuses or penalties that can apply to a power roll, and bonuses and penalties always add together.

Though it might sound as if the math with bonuses and penalties can get confusing, fear not! Bonuses and penalties are rare except in the case of skills, which appear on your character sheet (see Skills for more information).

Automatic Tier Outcomes

Effects in the game sometimes allow a creature to obtain an automatic tier 1, 2, or 3 outcome on a power roll. Such effects supersede any edges, banes, bonuses, or penalties that might affect the roll. If you obtain an automatic tier outcome and the power roll would have an additional effect if you get a specific roll, such as scoring a critical hit in combat, you can still make the roll to determine if you obtain the additional effect in addition to the automatic outcome.

If you are under multiple effects that each grant you a different automatic outcome, those effects cancel each other out and all automatic outcomes are ignored. If multiple effects grant you the same automatic outcome, you obtain that outcome.

Bags of Rats Ain't Heroic

Some players might think that quickly starting a fight with some bar patrons or carrying around a bag of rats is a good way to gather up those sweet, sweet Victories and Heroic Resources. Those strategies don't work! The rules of the game exist to help you tell a cool heroic fantasy story, not so you can try to be clever and exploit them by harming innocent rats to "win." In order to generate Victories and Heroic Resources, you must face and overcome challenges worthy of a hero!

Hero Tokens

In all great heroic stories, luck favors the protagonists, giving them that little bit of extra fortune they need to win the day. In these stories, fate is often on the side of the righteous. To represent that tiny bit of karma, players have access to hero tokens, a special resource that they can rely on when all else fails.

Hero tokens are a group resource that is tracked by the players and kept in a pool accessible to all their characters. Hero tokens can be tracked using poker chips, stones, or other markers, or can be tallied numerically on a piece of paper or written off to the side in a virtual tabletop.

Earning Hero Tokens

At the start of a new game session, the heroes have a number of hero tokens equal to the number of heroes in the party.

Heroes can earn more tokens through play by taking big risks to save others. A hero who leaps off a cliff to reach the bottom and aid a friend, who crosses a burning bridge to save a stray cat, or who wagers their most prized treasure as part of a negotiation to get shelter for a group of refugees might earn a hero token for the group. The Director has the final say regarding which heroic acts earn hero tokens.

Players can also be awarded hero tokens as part of a test's outcome when they succeed on the test with a reward (see Tests).

Spending Hero Tokens

Whenever hero tokens are available, you can spend them in the following ways:

- You can spend a hero token to gain 2 surges, allowing you to increase the damage or potency of an ability (see Surges).
- You can spend a hero token when you fail a saving throw, letting you succeed on the save instead.
- You can spend a hero token to reroll a test. You must use the new roll.
- You can spend 2 hero tokens on your turn or when you take damage (no action required) to regain Stamina equal to your Recovery value before taking the damage.

You can use only one hero token benefit per turn or per test. Unless the Director decides otherwise, unused hero tokens disappear at the end of a session.

Optional Rule: Hero Tokens Don't Reset

A Director can decide that hero tokens don't refresh at the start of each session and don't disappear at the end of one. This style of play serves many groups who play short sessions consisting of only 2 or 3 hours of play, since it makes hero tokens less abundant and reliable. To use this option, one of the players must note the number of hero tokens available at the end of each session so everyone remembers how many are available the next time you play. The Director should take particular care to remember to award hero tokens for heroic behavior, since the heroes won't get any automatically.

Game of Exceptions

This game has a fair number of rules. But it also has plenty of character options, specialized equipment, and other game elements that let you break those rules. This is on purpose! Breaking the rules allows heroes to feel special and makes their foes feel extra dangerous.

If you're not sure what to do when two rules come into conflict with each other, remember that a specific exception always beats a more general rule. The Director has the final say in how rules are adjudicated.

Always Round Down

Sometimes the rules tell you to divide a number in half. Whenever you divide an odd number in half and it results in a decimal, round the result down to the nearest whole number. For instance, if a tactician takes 7 damage and uses the Parry ability in response—a triggered action that halves the damage—then the damage is reduced to 3.

Creatures and Objects

Draw Steel uses the terms "creature" and "object" when referring to the targets of abilities and other effects. Creatures are living or unliving beings such as animals, elves, humans, dragons, giants, zombies, and valok. Objects are inanimate matter such as walls, carriages, cups, swords, ropes, coins, paintings, columns, and buildings.

When a creature dies, their body becomes an object, and is affected by abilities and other effects as an object, not a creature. For example, an elementalist can't use their Return to Formlessness ability to set an enemy cult leader on fire. But if that leader dies, the elementalist can immolate their body to prevent them from being raised as a powerful undead by the temple's magic.

Unattended Objects

The game sometimes refers to "unattended objects," which are objects that aren't held, worn, or controlled by a creature. Whenever an ability or other effect targets objects, it affects only unattended objects unless the Director determines otherwise. Among other things, this prevents abilities from being used to damage a foe's armor, weapons, clothing, treasures, and so forth while those objects are worn or held.

Supernatural or Mundane

The word supernatural is used to describe abilities, creatures, objects, and effects that are magic or psionic in nature. The word mundane is used to describe abilities, creatures, objects, and effects that aren't magic or psionic.

PCs and NPCs

Two types of characters inhabit the world of the game—the player characters (also called PCs or heroes) who are created and controlled by the players, and nonplayer characters (NPCs) created and controlled by the Director. NPCs can include any of the game's monsters, but when the rules refer to NPCs, they generally do so in the context of interacting with them outside of combat.

Building a Heroic Narrative

The game takes place in a series of scenes with the heroes as the main characters. An adventure is a collection of scenes that make up a story, with a beginning, middle, and end, and a campaign is a collection of adventures that tell the entire epic tale of a group of heroes. You can think of each adventure as a movie in a saga of films, a book in a series of novels, or a season of a television show. While many heroes have their stories told over the course of a campaign, some wrap up their careers in a single adventure that takes place in one game session, called a one-shot. You can think of a one-shot as a great stand-alone novella or movie.

This game is built so that each adventure you play and each battle you fight gets more exciting as it goes on. In fantastic tales, the heroes and their foes both grow in power over the course of an adventure. But it isn't time alone that grows a hero's capabilities. Rather, it's the adrenaline that comes from battle, the danger of the hero's profession, and the pressure to save the world—or at least some small part of it— that pushes a character to do the impossible. Each small act of heroism gives a hero the confidence and bravery to perform legendary feats against all odds.

The things a hero can achieve at the end of the story are far more daring and impactful than what they do at the start, and the final showdown against a villain's forces is more deadly and desperate than the first. The rules of the game help build a heroic narrative in this same fashion, making use of the four most important mechanics for building heroic narratives: Victories, Experience, Heroic Resources, and Recoveries.

Victories

Victories measure your hero's increasing power over the course of an adventure, as they overcome battles and other challenges. At the start of an adventure, your hero has 0 Victories.

VICTORIES FOR COMBAT

Each time your hero survives a combat encounter in which the party's objectives are achieved, you earn 1 Victory. The Director can decide that a trivially easy encounter doesn't earn the heroes a Victory, and can award additional Victories for particularly challenging encounters.

VICTORIES FOR NONCOMBAT CHALLENGES

When your hero successfully overcomes a big challenge that doesn't involve combat, the Director can award you 1 Victory. Such challenges can include things such as a particularly complicated and deadly trap, a negotiation, a montage test, a complicated puzzle, or the execution of a clever idea that avoids a battle. Especially difficult challenges might earn you more than 1 Victory.

VICTORIES RESET

Whenever you finish a respite (see Respite below), your Victories are converted into Experience.

Experience

Victories temporarily increase a hero's power during an adventure, but Experience (abbreviated "XP") permanently improves their capabilities. Each time you finish a respite (see below), you gain XP equal to your Victories, then your Victories reset to 0. In other words, your Victories are converted to XP when you finish a respite.

Heroic Resources

Your hero has a Heroic Resource determined by your class, and which you manage during play. Earning your Heroic Resources can increase your hero's power, and you spend your Heroic Resources to activate your most powerful abilities.

Your hero's class description has more information about how to use your Heroic Resource.

Recoveries

Recoveries represent the number of times your hero can take a breather and keep fighting. Spending Recoveries lets you regain Stamina—the measure of any creature's physical vitality and capacity to shrug off or avoid damage (see Stamina in Combat). Running out of Recoveries means your hero has reached their uttermost limit.

When you spend a Recovery, you regain Stamina equal to your **recovery value**, which is one-third your Stamina maximum. You can spend your Recoveries with a special maneuver (see below), or you might do so with a little supernatural help from a conduit, a boost of adrenaline from an allied tactician, or inspiration from your party's troubadour.

SPENDING RECOVERIES

During combat encounters and similarly dangerous situations when time is tracked in rounds (see Combat), you can use the Catch Breath maneuver to regain Stamina. (See Catch Breath in Maneuvers for more information.) Some heroes have abilities that allow them or their allies to spend more Recoveries without using the Catch Breath maneuver.

Outside of combat and other dangerous situations, you can spend Recoveries freely.

REGAINING RECOVERIES

You regain all lost Recoveries when you finish a respite (see below).

Respite

A respite is a focused period of rest and recuperation that allows heroes to regain Stamina and Recoveries. During a respite, you must spend 24 hours uninterrupted and doing nothing but sleeping, eating, dressing your wounds, and recuperating. You can also undertake one respite activity, such as making a project roll (see Downtime Projects).

After 24 hours, your respite ends. When you finish a respite, you regain all your Recoveries and Stamina, and your Victories convert to Experience. You can take as many respites as you like in a row to keep accomplishing respite activities. Just keep in mind that while you're resting, your enemies are still scheming and carrying out their dastardly plans.

It is best to take a respite in a safe place where you aren't in a hostile environment or at risk of being attacked. If your respite is interrupted by enemies attacking, an earth tremor, swarms of biting insects, and similar serious distractions, the respite ends early and you don't gain the benefits for finishing it.

The standard 8-or-so hours of sleep one gets at night doesn't count as a respite. The rules assume that all heroes take the time to sleep, eat, and take care of all the other functions necessary for life even if they aren't engaged in a respite.
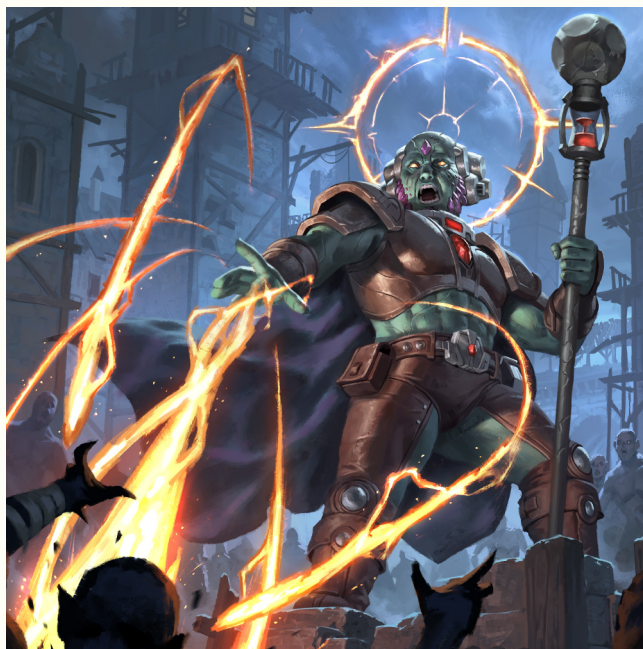
LANGUAGES IN ORDEN

The languages granted by your hero's culture shape their understanding of the world and their relationship to the creatures within it. The following section details the languages of Orden, the baseline world of the game, but the Director can use these languages in their own campaign world or can swap this list with their own list of languages.

If your hero knows a language, they can speak, read, write, and understand it.

Caelian Empire

The Caelian Empire dominated five of the eight regions of Orden 3,000 years ago. During the height of this most recent human empire, all humans (including folks from Vanigar in the far north, but not folks from the islands of Ix). learned to speak the Caelian tongue. For many, especially the noble classes and the well-to-do, Caelian effectively replaced their native language.

Some 1,300 years after the fall of the Caelian Empire, the languages of the different regions of the empire are enjoying a resurgence. Still, the Caelian tongue is spoken by most humans in most regions to one extent or another.

Most people in Orden can speak and understand some Caelian, simply because the empire was so powerful and so widespread. Anyone trading with the empire or living near its borders or under its influence eventually learned to speak Caelian, including dwarves, dragon knights, elves, hakaan, orcs, polders, lizardfolk, and goblins. If a person speaks more than one language in Orden, the second language is almost always Caelian. All player characters know Caelian! As a result, that language of empire is now colloquially referred to as "the common tongue"—the language that most folk of Orden have in common.

Extant Languages

Folk have been speaking, signing, and writing in Orden for at least thirty thousand years, but most of the world's ancient languages are now dead. Many have been forgotten. Others were spoken by peoples who never developed writing, preventing those languages from being preserved. And many languages that were preserved in writing left no related descendants, so that no one now knows what sounds that writing represented.

The languages on the Languages by Ancestry table are the most common languages actively spoken and signed by significant populations of people in Orden. The Vaslorian Human Languages table shows the dominant languages in that region's human-centric territories. Most languages are associated with a specific ancestry and its culture, but being a member of an ancestry doesn't automatically make you part of the associated culture the language is tied to. For example, if your orc hero was raised in a culture of elves, you probably speak one of the elf languages, and might never have learned Kalliak.

Most languages have colloquial or casual names. For instance, many people in Orden call Kalliak "Orcish" and Hyrallic "Elvish," but any sage knows there are lots of orcish and elf languages, just as there are multiple human languages.

Each extant language has a spoken, signed, and written version. When you learn a language, you know how to speak, sign, and read it.

Vaslorian Human Languages

Region	Language
The Gol	Uvalic
Higara	Higaran
Ix	Oaxuatl
Khemhara	Khemharic
Koursir	Khoursirian
Phaedros	Phaedran
Rioja	Riojan
Vanigar	Vaniric
Vasloria	Vaslorian

Language Usage

Hyrallic is the primary language of the high elves in Orden. Although young for an elf language, Hyrallic is older than almost all other modern cultural languages, save those of the dwarves. As a result, while anyone who lives near or trades with a human culture probably speaks at least a little Caelian, most nobles across all ancestries make sure their children or offspring speak Hyrallic. Caelian is new from many cultures' point of view, while Hyrallic as a language for diplomacy is considered cultured and traditional.

Yllyric is the cultural language of wode elves, and also the common language among those who defend and protect the natural forests of Orden.

Within any document concerning the workings of machines, masonry, or geology, you are likely to find a healthy supply of jargon using **Zaliac**, the most popular dwarf language. Even when such texts aren't fully written in Zaliac, they use a lot of dwarf language when describing esoteric, complex ideas.

Just as Zaliac is used in engineering, contract law isn't written purely in **Anjali**, the dominant language of the Seven Cities of Hell. But a lot of the legal jargon in any contract, as well as some of the language of trial courts, features many Anjali words. People are sticklers for detail in the Seven Cities, and this makes their language popular among lawyers.

In the same way that intelligent creatures in Orden who live near or trade with other cultures use Caelian as a common language, the denizens of the World Below, the Dark Under All, often speak **Variac**, the language of the voiceless talkers.

Languages by Ancestry

Language	Ancestry	Notes
Anjali	Devils, hobgoblins	Language of contract law
Axiomatic	Memonek	Native language of Axiom, and the common language of the timescape by trade
Caelian	Orden denizens	Common language of Orden
Filliaric	Angulotls	
The First Language	Elder dragons	Language of magic
Hyrallic	High elves	Language of interspecies diplomacy
Illyvric	Shadow elves	
Kalliak	Orcs	Offshoot of Zaliac
Kethaic	Kobolds	Patois of Vastariax and Caelian
Khelt	Bugbears, fey	Offshoot of Kheltivari
Khoursirian	Polder, humans	Distant offshoot of Khamish
High Kuric	Bredbeddles, giants, ogres, trolls	
Low Kuric	Elementals	
Mindspeech	Voiceless talkers	A symbolic language shared among native telepaths
Proto-Ctholl	Lower demons	Incomplete precursor of Tholl
Szetch	Goblins, radenwights	
Tholl	Higher demons, gnolls	
Urollialic	Olothec	
Variac	Olothec, trolls, voiceless talkers	Common language of the World Below
Vastariax	Dragons, dragon knights	
Vhoric	Hakaan	Offshoot of the stone giant dialect of High Kuric
Voll	Time raiders	
Yllyric	Wode elves	Language of druids
Za'hariax	Overminds	
Zaliac	Dwarves	Language of engineering

Dead Languages

For an adventuring hero with an ambition to create great works or unlock deep lore, being able to read ancient writing is most useful. Much deep lore is attested only in ancient tomes and scrolls written in languages that no modern culture uses.

Most of these ancient writings were written by people who expected other people to read it. The lore might have been kept secret by not sharing it with anyone outside the college or cult whose members originally wrote it, but the actual writing was not intended to be difficult to read or understand. It wasn't written in code—just in a language that people stopped speaking long ago.

Sages can reconstruct many of these languages by learning which modern languages descended from them, then comparing them to related languages from the same time period that might have survived. Translating such ancient languages has been extremely useful for crafting and research.

The Dead Languages table shows some of the dead languages of Orden, and the modern languages related to those ancient languages.

Dead Languages

Language	Ancestry	Related Languages	Common Topics
Ananjali	Old hobgoblin	Anjali	Zodiakol, the bloodmetal
High Rhyvian	Sun elf	Hyrallic, Yllyric	Liannar, the sunmetal
Khamish	Beast lord	Khoursirian	Beast magic
Kheltivari	Old fae	Yllyric, Khelt	Using a wode to travel through time
Low Rhyvian	Sky elf	Hyrallic	Flying castles
Old Variac	Olothec, voiceless talkers	Variac	Kollar, the sinmetal
Phorialtic	Old elemental	Low and High Kuric	Moving between manifolds
Rallarian	Steel dwarf	Zaliac	Valiar, the truemetal
Ullorvic	Star elf	Hyrallic, Yllyric	Rovion, the starmetal

Khamish is still spoken by lizardfolk and other creatures connected to the beast lords. However, the forms spoken today only vaguely resemble their original tongues and have been adapted for use within their speakers' own circles.

RENOWN

As you accomplish heroic deeds, your fame allows you to influence NPCs and attract followers. Your infamy among your enemies also grows. Every hero has a Renown score that represents how they can use their reputation to influence others. The higher the score, the greater your impact with those who know of your legend.

Influence Negotiation

Renown changes the way NPCs respond to heroes during negotiations (see Negotiation), whether that renown takes the form of fame or infamy.

Attract Followers

Your Renown score allows you to attract and employ followers who perform different duties or favors for you. The Renown and Followers table shows how many followers a hero can have at one time based on Renown. You can always let go of a follower in your employ to hire a new one.

You can recruit followers up to the maximum your Renown allows as a respite activity, provided you are in a place or have a means of communication that allows you to recruit such followers.

Renown and Followers

Renown	Number of Followers
3	1
6	2
9	3
12	4

Follower Types

When you attract a new follower, you decide on their name and ancestry, and choose what role they play in their service to you.

ARTISAN

Artisans are crafting experts who can contribute to your research and crafting projects (see Downtime Projects). An artisan can contribute one project roll per day to a downtime project you choose, whether you spend those days in respite, adventuring, or other activities. They must remain at your stronghold or at the site where the project is undertaken, and must have access to the necessary materials.

When you recruit an artisan, choose four skills from the crafting skill group that they know (see Skills in Tests). An artisan has a Might or Agility score of 1 (your choice), a Reason score of 1, and a 0 in all other characteristics. They know Caelian and two other languages of your choice.

RETAINER

Retainers are heroic NPCs who adventure alongside the player characters. They are controlled by players in combat and are both simpler to run and less powerful than player characters. A hero can have only one retainer in their service at a time unless the Director deems otherwise. Because retainers and their stat blocks are combat focused, the Director can also decide that a large party can have only one retainer in total—or can't have any retainers at all—to keep combat from getting long and tedious.

Rules for retainers are found in Retainers.

SAGE

Sages are research experts who can contribute to your research and crafting projects. A sage can contribute one project roll per day to a downtime project you choose, whether you spend those days in respite, adventuring, or other activities. They must remain at your stronghold or at the site where the project is undertaken, and must have access to the necessary materials.

When you recruit a sage, choose four skills from the lore skill group that they know. A sage has a Reason and Intuition score of 1, and a 0 in all other characteristics. They know Caelian and two other languages of your choice.

WEALTH

Draw Steel isn't about accumulating and counting every piece of copper you acquire. Instead of tracking a bank account, the amount of stuff your hero can purchase is based on their Wealth score. As you accomplish more deeds, you acquire more treasure and rewards from grateful NPCs that allow you to be an even more effective hero.

The Hero Wealth table shows the types of items, gear, services, property, and more that you can purchase in the game. For a hero to make a purchase, the item must be available to them. Being able to afford a suit of armor or a stay at an inn doesn't do much good in the middle of a trackless forest, an empty desert, or a remote dungeon ruin. As well, the Director can also decide that a hero can afford only a limited number of purchases. For example, a hero with Wealth 3 can easily buy a small house, but that Wealth doesn't mean they can buy up every available small house in the local area to become a landlord.

The table isn't meant to be an exhaustive list, but you and the Director can use it to judge what your character can and can't purchase. For instance, the relative value of an ox isn't on the table, but you can reasonably assume that if you can buy a horse, you can probably afford an ox as well. (Don't @ us, farm nerds.) And if you can't afford something you want, fear not! You might still be able to acquire a specific good or service through negotiation, or by trading your heroic services instead of spending cash.

Treasures such as magic swords, psionic crowns, and even healing potions are rare to the point where they don't appear on the Hero Wealth table. Such items typically can't be purchased, and are instead found on adventures, traded for other treasures, given as rewards by NPCs, or crafted by the heroes.

Earning Wealth

Your hero earns Wealth whenever you find and keep a massive amount of monetary treasure, such as a hoard of coins and gems from a dragon's lair, or several unique and valuable paintings gifted by a monarch as a reward for a job well done.

Heroes Don't Do It for Gold

In *Draw Steel*, being a hero isn't a transactional job—it's a calling. As such, using the promise of treasure to motivate the players to accept quests comes up much less often than in many other games. Sure, the heroes need money to live, and some might even enjoy getting rich from their adventures. But money isn't the reason they put their lives on the line. Each time you create a hero, think about why your character answers the call to adventure—and make it about something more than gold.

Hero Wealth

Score	Affordable
1	Mundane clothing, gear, armor, implements, and weapons; meals or drinks at a common tavern; a stay at a common inn; passage on a boat
2	Horse and cart; dinner at a fine tavern; a stay at a fine inn
3	Catapult; small house
4	Library; tavern; manor home; sailing boat
5	Church; keep; wizard tower
6	Castle; shipyard

ABILITIES

Abilities are special actions, maneuvers, and more that allow you to affect creatures, objects, and the environment. They represent the main activities your character can undertake when the game is in combat or some other time-sensitive scenario. All characters have access to a few basic abilities, including free strikes and maneuvers such as Grab and Knockback (see Maneuvers in Combat). But your class, ancestry, titles and treasures, and other heroic options give you access to more powerful abilities that make your hero stand out.

Abilities are presented in a special format that first describes the ability, then summarizes its mechanical details, and finally breaks out the ability's power roll (if it has one) and effects.

Name and Story Text

Each ability has an evocative name that sets up what it does in the game, followed by a line or two of flavor text that provides a sense of how the use of the ability might appear if described in an action scene in a story.

The name and story text for abilities sometimes refers to specific ways in which the ability plays out—particularly combat abilities whose names imply specific types of weapons or tactics. However, that narrative flavor has no effect on how an ability can be used. For example, the fury's Impaled ability allows you to grab a target, setting up the idea of harpooning your monstrous foe with a sword to keep them close. But you can use that ability with an axe, a mace, a hammer, or any other weapon.

Heroic Resource Cost

Each class has a Heroic Resource that your hero earns during combat, with some of your class's abilities—typically your most potent abilities—having a Heroic Resource cost to use them. When you use one of these abilities, you spend some of the Heroic Resource bestowed by your class, then activate the ability.

The nine Heroic Resources in the game are:

- The censor's wrath
- The conduit's piety
- The elementalist's essence
- The fury's ferocity
- The null's discipline
- The shadow's insight
- The tactician's focus
- The talent's clarity
- The troubadour's drama

Heroic Abilities

If an ability has a Heroic Resource cost to activate—as in, you can't use the ability at all without spending some of your Heroic Resource—then it is a heroic ability. If an effect allows you to use a heroic ability when it isn't your turn, you must still pay its Heroic Resource cost to use it unless the effect says otherwise.

Some abilities don't cost your Heroic Resource to use but allow you to spend your Heroic Resource to enhance or add effects to the ability, such as the conduit's Healing Grace. These abilities are not heroic abilities unless the baseline ability can't be used without spending your Heroic Resource.

Signature Abilities

The rules specifically state when an ability is a signature ability. Signature abilities don't require your Heroic Resource to use, but sometimes let you spend your Heroic Resource to enhance or add to their effects.

Ability Keywords

Each ability has one or more keywords that explain how the ability functions. Keywords appear in the first line of the ability beneath the flavor text, on the left side, and can include any of the following entries. (An ability that has no keywords is noted as "—".)

Area

Abilities with the Area keyword create an area of effect. Many area abilities deal damage to targets in their area, but such abilities are treated differently than strikes made against specific targets. (See the Distance sidebar, as well as Strike and Area Abilities below for more information.)

Charge

Abilities with the Charge keyword can be used with the Charge main action instead of a melee free strike. (The Charge main action is described in Main Actions in Combat.)

Magic

Abilities with the Magic keyword are used by characters who can cast spells, have innate magical features, or wield magic treasures. Such abilities do magical things such as create rays of fire, open swirling portals, or summon creatures.

Melee

Abilities with the Melee keyword can be used only over very short distances, typically within a character's reach, because they require a character to make contact with a creature or object with their body, a weapon, or an implement.

Psionic

Abilities with the Psionic keyword are used by characters who can manifest psionic powers, have innate psionic features, or wield psionic items. These abilities might create blasts of psychic energy, move objects with telekinesis, or slow down time with chronopathy.

Ranged

Abilities with the Ranged keyword can be used to affect creatures who are too far away to make contact with.

Strike

Abilities with the Strike keyword (often referred to simply as "strikes") deal damage to or impose a harmful effect on specific creatures or objects.

Weapon

The Weapon keyword is used in abilities that must be used with a blade, a bow, or some other offensive weapon. Weapon abilities also include strikes creatures make with their own bodies, such as a character's unarmed strikes or a monster's punches, kicks, bites, tail slaps, and more.

Type

Each ability notes the type of activity required to use it, on the right side of the first line beneath the flavor text. Most abilities require you to use a main action, a maneuver, a move action, a triggered action, a free maneuver, or a free triggered action (with all those terms explained in Taking a Turn in Combat). For instance, if you use an ability that has "Main Action" as its type entry, you must use your main action to activate the ability.

Trigger

If an ability requires a triggered action or a free triggered action to use, a "Trigger" entry is part of the ability. For example, the trigger for the tactician's Parry ability is: "A creature deals damage to the target." A tactician can use their Parry ability only when that specific triggering event occurs.

Distance

An ability's "Distance" entry, represented by this symbol ◣, indicates how close you need to be to a creature or object to affect that target with the ability.

Melee

Melee abilities have a distance of "Melee X" and require you to make contact with a creature with your body, a weapon, or an implement. The number X is the maximum distance in squares at which you can physically make contact with another creature or object targeted by the ability. For instance, a distance of "Melee 2" can be used to target creatures or objects within 2 squares of you, while "Melee 1" limits you to adjacent targets (those within 1 square).

Ranged

Ranged abilities have a distance of "Ranged X" and can be used to target creatures or objects too far away for you to make contact with. The number X is the maximum distance in squares at which a creature or object can be targeted by the ability. For instance, a distance of "Ranged 5" can be used to target creatures or objects within 5 squares of you.

If you make a ranged strike while any enemy is adjacent to you (within 1 square), you have a bane on the strike's power roll. (See Edges and Banes in The Basics.)

Melee or Ranged

Some abilities have a melee distance and a ranged distance. When you use such an ability, you choose whether to use it as a melee or a ranged ability.

An ability never has both the Melee and Ranged keywords at the same time.

It's Not All Strikes!

The Strike keyword and phrases such as "makes a strike" are reserved for abilities that have a creature targeting specific creatures or objects (not affecting creatures or objects in an area) and harming those targets in some way by making a power roll. The many abilities in the game that target areas of effect are not strikes. They instead use the Area keyword. That means if a feature distinctly interacts with a strike, that feature has no effect on abilities with the Area keyword.

Self

If an ability has a distance of "Self," that ability originates from you, and often affects only you. The ability's description specifies how it works.

Area Abilities

Area abilities cover a number of squares on the battlefield at once, creating an effect within that area that lets you target multiple creatures or objects. When an ability creates an area of effect, it sometimes notes a distance for the effect in the form "within X." The number X tells you how many squares away from you the area can be. If an area ability doesn't have this distance, it originates from you and you are at the center of the area.
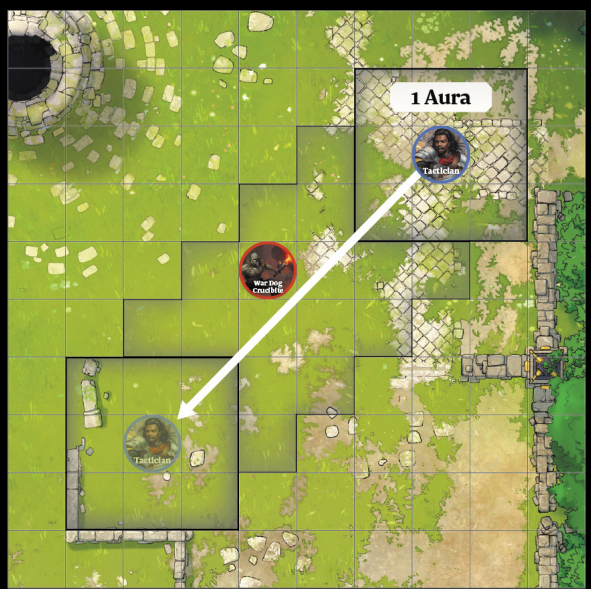
If an area ability originates a distance away from you, then one square of the area of effect must be within that distance, and must also be within your line of effect (see below). This square is referred to as the **origin square** of the area of effect. The area of effect can spread from the origin square however you choose, according to the rules for the shape and arrangement of that particular area.

You can place an area of effect to include one or more squares where you don't have line of effect, as long as you have line of effect to the origin square. Unless otherwise noted, area abilities don't pass through solid barriers such as walls or ceilings, and they don't spread around corners.

An area ability might use any of the following areas of effect.
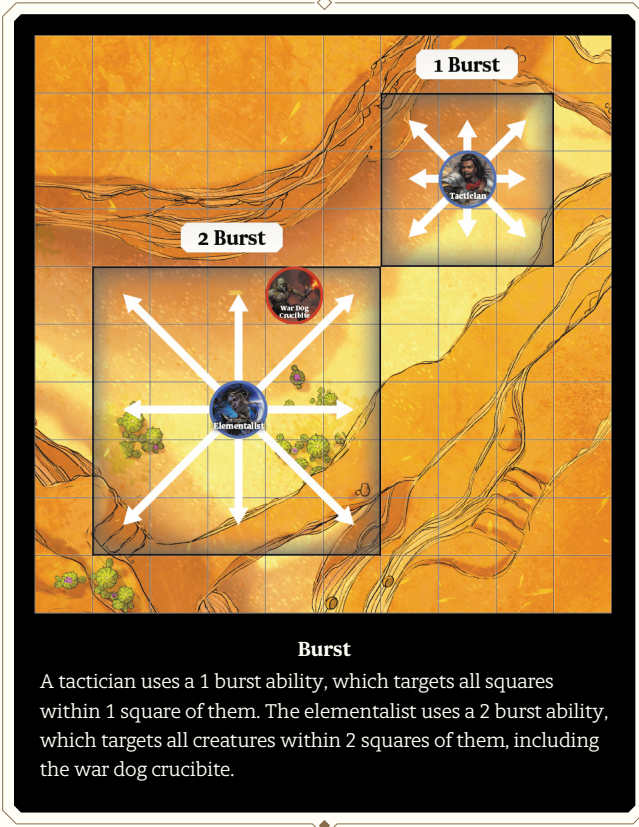
Aura

When an ability creates an aura, that area is expressed as "X aura." The number X is the radius of the aura, which always originates from you and moves with you for the duration of the ability that created it. A creature or object must be within X squares of you to be targeted by an aura ability.


Aura

The tactician's 1 aura emanates 1 square in every direction from them. If the tactician moves, the aura moves with them. Any creatures the tactician comes within 1 square of during their move enters the aura's area of effect.

Burst

A tactician uses a 1 burst ability, which targets all squares within 1 square of them. The elementalist uses a 2 burst ability, which targets all creatures within 2 squares of them, including the war dog crucibite.

Cube

The talent uses a "2 cube within 5" ability. The cube is 2 squares on all sides and must target an area that includes at least 1 square within 5 squares of the talent.

If the talent uses a "2 cube within 1" ability, that ability must target an area that includes at least 1 square that is adjacent to the talent.

Burst

When an ability creates a burst area, that area is expressed as "X burst." The number X is the radius of the burst, which always originates from you and lasts only for as long as it takes to affect its targets. A creature or object must be within X squares of you to be targeted by a burst ability.
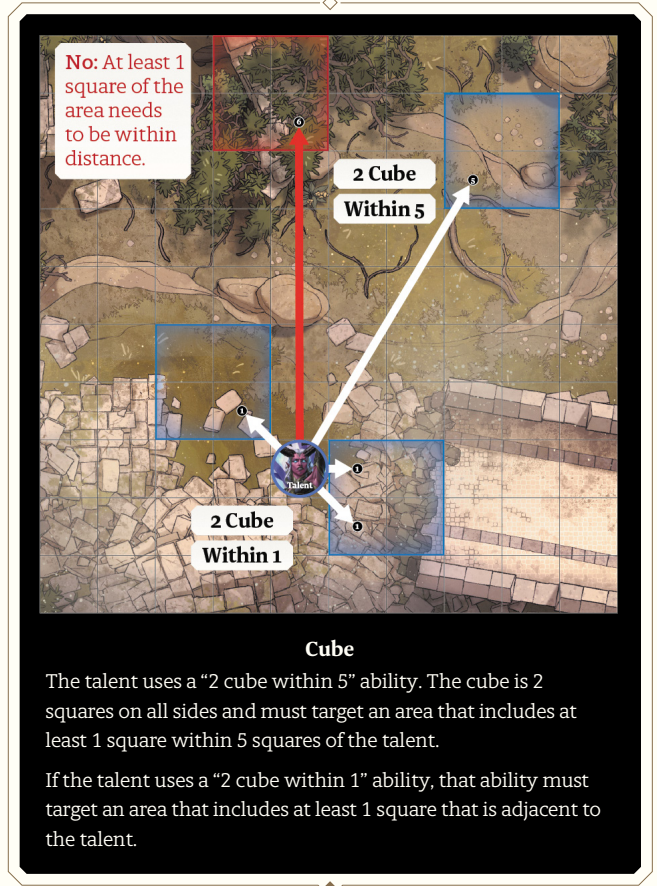
Cube

When an ability affects a cubic area, that area is expressed as "X cube." The number X is the length of each of the area's sides. A creature or object must be within the area to be targeted by a cube ability.

5 × 1 Line

Select the line one square at a time, with each new square further away from the point of origin.

No: Line direction cannot bend back.

The quickest and easiest way to choose a line is to pick a cardinal direction and affect a row of squares.

Line

The elementalist uses a "5 × 1 line within 1" ability. Each blue-highlighted area abides by the rules for lines. The line must only move in one direction.

4 Wall

Within 10

No: Wall squares must share at least one side and not just a corner.

No: Wall cannot be placed in occupied square.

Wall

The elementalist uses a "4 wall within 10" ability. The blue squares indicate a few different placements of the wall that abide by the rules. The red squares show ways in which the wall can't be placed.

Line

When an ability affects a linear area, that area is expressed as "A × B line." The number A denotes the line's length in squares, while the number B equals the line's width and height in squares. When you create a line area of effect, the squares in that area must be in a straight line. A creature or object must be within the area to be targeted by a line ability.

Straight Lines

Talking about a straight line area of effect on an encounter map doesn't mean the line can only be a straight vertical or horizontal line of contiguous squares. It means each square in the line's length must move in the same direction without bending back in an opposite direction. To make a line area quickly, pick your line's origin square, then pick each subsequent square in the line one at a time in a single direction without bending back in an opposite direction.

Likewise, abilities and effects that require a creature to move in a straight line, such as the Charge main action or forced movement that is a push or a pull, don't have to take the form of a straight series of squares on the grid. Simply move the creature one square at a time in a single direction without ever bending back in a direction opposite to where they've already moved.

Wall

When an ability creates a wall, that area is expressed as "X wall." The number X is how many squares are used to make the wall. When you place a wall, you can build it one square at a time, but each square must share at least one side (not just a corner) with another square of the wall. A creature or object must be within the area to be targeted by a wall ability.

You can stack squares on top of each other to make the wall higher. Unless otherwise stated, a wall can't be placed in occupied squares, and a wall blocks line of effect.

Target

The "Target" entry of an ability, represented by this symbol ⦿, notes the number of creatures, objects, or both who can be targeted by that ability. You can always affect fewer targets than the number indicated by this entry.

Creature

If an ability targets one or more creatures, it can affect creatures within the ability's distance or area. You aren't an eligible creature target for your own abilities unless those abilities also have "self" as a target (see below), or unless the ability indicates otherwise.

Object

If an ability targets one or more objects, it can affect any object within the ability's distance or area. Unless otherwise noted, objects have poison immunity all and psychic immunity all. ([Damage](#) in [Combat](#) has information on damage immunity.)

When an ability can target creatures and objects, the ability can damage objects. However, unless otherwise noted (as with the talent's Minor Telekinesis ability) or if the Director allows it, objects are immune to an ability's other effects. If an ability forces an object to make a test, the object automatically gets a tier 1 result on the test.

Enemy

If an ability targets one or more enemies, it can affect only creatures who are hostile to the creature using the ability. Typically, you decide who counts as an enemy for the purpose of using your hero's abilities, though the Director has the final say.

Ally

If an ability targets one or more allies, it can affect only willing creatures who are friendly to the creature using the ability. Typically, you and any other player whose character you target with an ability decide who counts as an ally, though the Director has the final say.

You aren't an eligible target for your own abilities that target allies unless those abilities also have "self" as a target, or unless the ability indicates otherwise.

Self

If an ability targets "self," it can affect only the creature using the ability. Your own abilities can affect you only if they target "self."

Each [Target]

If an area ability doesn't provide a number of targets but instead says it applies to each creature, object, enemy, or ally in the area, then all eligible targets for the ability are affected.

Telling Friend From Foe

There might be times when a foe disguises or obscures themselves so that they're temporarily seen as an ally—or at least not seen as an enemy. Until the effect ends, such a creature can't be targeted by abilities that would usually target them by targeting enemies. Fear not, though. All classes have access to at least one ability that targets creatures, whether friend or foe.

Ability Roll

If an ability requires a power roll, it has a "Power Roll" entry that tells you which characteristic to add to the 2d10 roll you make when you use the ability. ([The Basics](#) talks about power rolls.)

Unlike power rolls made as tests (see [Tests](#)), ability rolls always do something useful. You're rolling to determine the impact of the ability, including how much damage it deals and any other effects it imposes based on the tier outcome of the power roll. For instance, the fury's Brutal Slam ability is a melee strike that targets one adjacent creature (within 1 square), and which has the following effects:

Tier 1 (11 or lower): The ability deals damage equal to 3 + your Might score, then pushes the target back 1 square.

Tier 2 (12–16): The ability deals damage equal to 6 + your Might score, then pushes the target back 2 squares.

Tier 3 (17 or higher): The ability deals damage equal to 9 + your Might score, then pushes the target back 4 squares.

Characteristics and Damage

Certain damage-dealing abilities note that damage as a number followed by a plus sign (+) and the letter **M**, **A**, **R**, **I**, or **P**. The indicated letter means you add your characteristic score—either Might, Agility, Reason, Intuition, or Presence—to the damage dealt by the ability. Certain abilities let you use your highest characteristic score for the power roll.

Using the fury's Brutal Slam ability as an example again, that ability uses a Might power roll and features the following damage expressions in the three tier outcomes of the power roll:

≤11	3 + **M** damage
12-16	6 + **M** damage
17+	9 + **M** damage

For a fury with a Might of 2, the ability's damage breakdown would be:

≤11	5 damage
12-16	8 damage
17+	11 damage

The damage for these abilities increases at each echelon of play, since your characteristics improve each time you reach a new echelon.

Some abilities, including your free strikes, allow you to pick which characteristic score you add to their damage. Such abilities use a format similar to "7 + **M** or **A** damage," indicating that you can add your Might or your Agility to determine the damage.

([Combat](#) has more information on damage.)

Abilities With Damage and Effects

Strikes and area abilities can deal damage and have an additional effect on a target. The damage and the strength of the effect are determined by the ability roll.

To keep things moving quickly and to make abilities easy to read during play, damage and effects are separated with a semicolon in a power roll tier entry, with effects abbreviated whenever possible. An effect determined by a power roll always applies to the target unless otherwise specified. For example, the Brutal Slam ability mentioned above has the following power roll setup in the ability format:

Power Roll + Might:

- ≤11 3 + **M** damage; push 1
- 12-16 6 + **M** damage; push 2
- 17+ 9 + **M** damage; push 4

Unless otherwise indicated, any effects that are determined by a power roll's tier outcome occur after the power roll's damage has been dealt to all targets. If an ability roll deals damage to multiple targets but its effect targets the creature using the ability or the Director, such as Muse of Fire, then the effect only occurs once, not once per target. If different tiered outcomes affect multiple targets, the creature using the ability picks which tier of rolled effect applies to them or the Director. If an ability creates multiple effects, those effects resolve in the order in which they are presented.

"During the Move"

Certain ability effects allow you to move and affect other creatures or objects during that move, such as the shadow's One Hundred Throats ability. For such abilities, the move begins in the space you first leave when you start the move and ends in the last space you move into.

Rolled Damage

Certain effects talk about rolled damage, which refers to the variable damage determined by making an ability roll. If an ability or effect deals damage without requiring a power roll, that is not rolled damage, and effects that add to or are triggered by rolled damage don't apply.

Potencies

Many abilities and other effects impose conditions and unique statuses on targets. But creatures sometimes get a chance to resist such effects. After all, a monster with a high Might should be harder to knock prone most of the time than a creature lacking in that characteristic.

Ability effects that have a **potency** are applied to a target only if the effect's potency value is higher than the target's indicated characteristic score. The characteristic a target uses to resist a potency is based on the ability used, while the value of the potency for your hero's abilities is based on one of your characteristics and determined by your class.

Your character has a **weak**, an **average**, and a **strong** potency value, as follows:

- Your weak potency value is equal to your highest characteristic score – 2.
- Your average potency value is equal to your highest characteristic score – 1.
- Your strong potency value is equal to your highest characteristic score.

In abilities and other effects, a potency always appears as the single-letter abbreviation for the target's characteristic: **M** for Might, **A** for Agility, **R** for Reason, **I** for Intuition, or **P** for Presence. That characteristic is followed by a "less than" sign (<) and your potency value—for example, **M<WEAK** or **R<AVERAGE**—with the value indicating the minimum score in that characteristic that the target needs to beat the effect.

As an example, consider the conduit's Judgment's Hammer ability, which has the following power roll:

Power Roll + Intuition:
- ⟨≤11⟩ 3 + **I** holy damage; **A<WEAK**, prone
- ⟨12-16⟩ 6 + **I** holy damage; **A<AVERAGE**, prone
- ⟨17+⟩ 9 + **I** holy damage; **A<STRONG**, prone and can't stand (save ends)

At 1st level, a conduit uses their Intuition score to determine their potency values, and that score is 2. That gives the conduit the following potencies:

- Weak: 0
- Average: 1
- Strong: 2

When writing Judgment's Hammer on their character sheet, the conduit's player updates the damage and converts the weak, average, and strong potencies into their numerical values, knowing that those values won't change until the character hits 2nd echelon and their Intuition score becomes 3. That produces the following:

Power Roll + Intuition:
- ⟨≤11⟩ 5 holy damage; **A<0**, prone
- ⟨12-16⟩ 8 holy damage; **A<1**, prone
- ⟨17+⟩ 11 holy damage; **A<2**, prone and can't stand (save ends)

During a game session, the conduit uses Judgment's Hammer to target a bandit with an Agility score of 0. The ability thus has the following outcomes at each tier:

- With a tier 1 outcome (11 or lower), the ability deals 5 holy damage to the bandit. But the bandit resists the additional effect because they have Agility 0 (and therefore don't have an Agility of less than 0).
- With a tier 2 outcome (12–16), the ability deals 8 holy damage. But the bandit is also knocked prone, unable to resist the additional effect because they would need an Agility of 1 or higher to do so. If the bandit had Agility 1 or higher, they would have taken 8 holy damage but stayed standing.
- With a tier 3 outcome (17 or higher), the bandit takes 11 holy damage and is knocked flat and left struggling to stand, unable to resist the strong potency of the additional effect with a mere Agility 0.

If you're playing a pregenerated hero, we've already calculated the potencies on their character sheet for you

Potency Presentation

Potencies are presented in an abbreviated style in abilities so they don't take up too much space, and so you can read them by saying: "If the target's [characteristic] is less than [potency value], they [suffer effect]." If our 1st-level conduit obtained a tier 2 outcome when using Judgment's Hammer, the player would say, "I deal 8 holy damage, and if the bandit's Agility is less than 1, they fall prone."

Reading the ability this way prevents a lot of back and forth. You don't need to ask, "What's the target's Agility score?", wait for a response, and then give the outcome. You can simply say, "If they don't have an Agility of 1 or higher, they fall prone." Players can let the Director figure out whether the target is prone and keep the game moving, with the Director doing the same in reverse when monsters and other foes use abilities with potencies against the heroes.

Adjusting Potencies

Potencies are made for quick resolution at the table, but a number of triggered actions and other abilities—for example, the censor's Judgment ability and the null's Null Field ability—allow you to manipulate the value of potencies. If you build a hero who can adjust potencies, pay attention during combat! You might be able to help out a friend who needs a little boost to make their ability take full effect, or hinder an enemy about to lock down one of your allies.

Spending Resources on Potencies

If an ability or feature allows you to spend your Heroic Resource on an effect that is entirely dependent on a potency and the target is unaffected because their characteristic is high enough to resist the potency, then you don't spend the Heroic Resource.

This rule also applies to Director-controlled creatures who spend Malice on abilities and features that affect a target using a potency and have no other automatic effects.

Critical Hit

Whenever you make an ability roll as a main action and the roll is a natural 19 or natural 20—a total of 19 or 20 before adding your characteristic score or other modifiers—you score a critical hit. A critical hit allows you to immediately take an additional action after resolving the power roll, whether or not it's your turn and even if you are dazed (see Conditions below).

You can't score a critical hit with an ability roll made as a maneuver or any other action type, but you can score a critical hit with a main action you use off your turn. For example, an opportunity attack made as a triggered action or a signature ability used as a free triggered action with the assistance of the tactician's Strike Now ability can be critical hits.

Roll Against Multiple Creatures

When an ability has multiple targets (whether a strike with more than one target or an area affect), you make one power roll and apply the total to all targets. If you have edges or banes (see The Basics) against some but not all of your targets, you might apply a different tier outcome to individual targets.

For example, if you target three creatures with a strike ability and the power roll totals 11, each of the targets should be affected by the tier 1 outcome of the ability. However, if you gain an edge on strikes against one of the targets to add 2 to the power roll, your total against that target is 13, and they are affected by the tier 2 outcome of the ability.

Surges

A troubadour's battle song, a fury's building ferocity, and a shadow's patient insight can all make a hero more effective in a fight. These advantages are represented by surges, with many abilities granting heroes surges during a battle.

When you gain surges, you keep track of them on your character sheet. Surges can be used in combat to deal extra damage to your foes and increase the value of your potencies, as follows:

- Whenever you deal rolled damage, you can spend up to 3 surges to deal extra damage to one creature or object targeted by the ability. Each surge you spend deals extra damage equal to your highest characteristic score.
- Whenever you target one or more creatures with an ability that has a potency, you can spend 2 surges to increase the potency by 1 for one target. You can't increase a potency by more than 1 using surges, though you can spend additional surges to increase the potency for multiple targets.

You lose surges as you spend them. At the end of combat, you lose any surges you have remaining.

Effect

Many abilities that require power rolls also have effect entries describing additional effects or rules for how the ability is used. If an ability doesn't require a power roll, it has an effect entry that describes how it works.

Actions Within Actions

If an ability's effect allows you to take a main action, a maneuver, a move action, or a triggered action, the cost of doing so is subsumed in the ability's type entry on the first line below the flavor text. You never need to spend additional time to use an ability. For example, the shadow's Black Ash Teleport ability is a maneuver that allows you to teleport and then use the Hide maneuver as its overall effect. Using the Hide maneuver is part of the maneuver to use the ability, so that you don't need to have another maneuver available to do so.

Spend Heroic Resource

Some abilities have a "Spend X [Heroic Resource]" entry in the body of the ability. These grant additional effects to an ability, where X is the amount of your Heroic Resource you must spend to activate those effects. If an entry reads "Spend X+ [Heroic Resource]," you can spend as much of your available Heroic Resource as you like in multiples of X to increase the effect's impact, as described in the entry's details.

Stacking Unique Effects

The unique effects of different abilities are combined—effectively stacking on top of each other—if their durations and targets overlap. However, the effects of the same ability used multiple times don't stack. Instead, the most impactful effect—such as the highest bonus—from each use of the ability applies. The most recently used ability applies for determining duration.

For example, the null's Null Field ability reduces the potencies of enemies within the field by 1. If two allied nulls each have their Null Field ability active and an enemy cultist is targeted by both abilities, that cultist's potencies are reduced by 1, not by 2.

Different effects that impose the same condition (see Conditions below) don't stack to impose the condition twice. For instance, if a hero is targeted by numerous creatures whose abilities cause a target to become weakened (imposing a bane on the target's power rolls), the target isn't weakened twice to impose a double bane on those rolls. A character who is grabbed by an enemy can't be grabbed again by another enemy. The same holds true for game effects that aren't conditions. For example, if a hero is targeted by multiple abilities or effects that can halve their recovery value, the hero's recovery value is halved only once.

Ending Effects

When a creature suffers a lasting effect, whatever ability, feature, hazard, or other mechanic imposed the effect specifies how long the effect lasts. Unless otherwise noted, all effects and conditions that are imposed on heroes during a combat encounter end when the encounter is over if the hero wants them to, except for being winded, unconscious, or dying. After combat, effects and conditions imposed on other creatures end when it's convenient for the heroes, allowing characters to easily bind or slip away from unconscious foes. However, the Director is free to decide that an unconscious dragon doesn't stay that way long enough to be tied up.

End of Next Turn (EoT)

Many effects last until the end of the target's next turn, abbreviated as "(EoT)" in the tier outcomes for an ability's power roll. A creature suffers from such an effect until the end of their next turn, or the end of their current turn if the effect was imposed on their current turn.

Saving Throw (Save Ends)

If an effect has "(save ends)" at the end of its description, a creature suffering the effect makes a saving throw at the end of each of their turns to remove the effect. A saving throw represents the sheer luck involved in shaking off an effect. Because a target typically had a chance to avoid a "save ends" effect using a characteristic score to resist a potency, it's now down to fate.

To make a saving throw, a creature rolls a d10. On a 6 or higher, the effect ends. Otherwise, it continues.

End of Encounter

Some effects last until the end of the encounter. If such an effect is used outside of combat, it lasts 5 minutes.

Creature Ends an Ability Effect

A creature who imposes an effect on another creature using an ability can end that effect as a free maneuver unless the ability says otherwise.

Adjacent

Many abilities and other options refer to creatures, objects, or spaces that are adjacent to a specified creature. Something is adjacent to a creature if it is within 1 square of that creature.

Line of Effect

To target a creature or object with an ability or effect, including making a strike against them, you must have line of effect to that target. If any solid object, such as a wall or pillar, completely blocks the target from you, then you don't have line of effect.

If you're not sure whether you have line of effect to a target, imagine drawing a straight line from any corner of the space you occupy on an encounter map to any corner of a space the target occupies. If one or more corners of your space connect to any corner of the target's space with no obstruction in between, you have line of effect to the target.

At the Director's discretion, flimsy or fragile obstructions such as a glass window or linen curtains don't block line of effect, and might be automatically broken or torn by strikes or other abilities used through them.

If you use an ability that creates an environmental effect, such as a portal, you must have line of effect to the space where you create the environmental effect. If you want to create an area of effect in a specific area, you must have line of effect to at least one of the squares in that area. See Area Abilities above.

Straight Line

Whenever a creature moves or is subjected to forced movement—a push, pull, or slide (see Combat)—that movement is typically in a straight line. Abilities that allow you to move or to force move another creature often talk about moving straight toward or away from a creature or an object. But even when movement must be in a straight line, it doesn't have to be a horizontal or vertical line on an encounter map. (See the Melee sidebar earlier.)

Ground and Ceiling

Some abilities and other effects refer to a hero or their targets being "on the ground." Unless otherwise indicated, "ground" means any surface a creature could typically stand, sit, or lie upon, whether a castle's stone floor, the dirt of a road, the deck of a ship, or a metal platform suspended high in the air.

Likewise, if an effect refers to a "ceiling," that means any solid surface above a creature, whether a wooden tavern ceiling, the rocky roof of a cave, or an invisible wall of force.

Conditions

Some abilities and other effects apply specific negative effects called conditions to a creature. The following conditions show up regularly in the game and can be tracked on your character sheet when they affect your hero.

Bleeding

While a creature is bleeding, whenever they use a main action, use a triggered action, or make a test or ability roll using Might or Agility, they lose Stamina equal to 1d6 + their level after the main action, triggered action, or power roll is resolved. This Stamina loss can't be prevented in any way.

You take damage from this condition when you use a main action off your turn. For example, a signature ability used as a free triggered action with the assistance of the tactician's Strike Now ability triggers the damage from the bleeding condition.

Dazed

A creature who is dazed can do only one thing on their turn: use a main action, use a maneuver, or use a move action. A dazed creature also can't use triggered actions, free triggered actions, or free maneuvers.

Frightened

When a creature is frightened, any ability roll they make against the source of their fear takes a bane. If that source is a creature, their ability rolls made against the frightened creature gain an edge. A frightened creature can't willingly move closer to the source of their fear if they know the location of that source. If a creature gains the frightened condition from one source while already frightened by a different source, the new condition replaces the old one.

Grabbed

A creature who is grabbed has speed 0, can't be force moved except by a creature, object, or effect that has them grabbed, can't use the Knockback maneuver (see Maneuvers in Combat), and takes a bane on abilities that don't target the creature, object, or effect that has them grabbed. If a creature is grabbed by another creature and that creature moves, they bring the grabbed creature with them. If a creature's size is equal to or less than the size of a creature they have grabbed, their speed is halved while they have that creature grabbed.

A creature who has another creature grabbed can use a maneuver to move the grabbed creature into an unoccupied space adjacent to them.

A creature can release a creature they have grabbed at any time to end that condition (no action required). A grabbed creature can attempt to escape being grabbed using the Escape Grab maneuver (see Combat). If a grabbed creature teleports, or if either the grabbed creature or the creature grabbing them is force moved so that both creatures are no longer adjacent to each other, that creature is no longer grabbed.

A creature can grab only creatures of their size or smaller. If a creature's Might score is 2 or higher, they can grab any creature larger than them with a size equal to or less than their Might score.

Unless otherwise indicated, a creature can grab only one creature at a time.

Prone

While a creature is prone, they are flat on the ground, any strike they make takes a bane, and melee abilities used against them gain an edge. A prone creature must crawl to move along the ground, which costs 1 additional square of movement for every square crawled. A creature can't climb, jump, swim, or fly while prone. If they are climbing, flying, or jumping when knocked prone, they fall.

Unless the ability or effect that imposed the prone condition says otherwise, a prone creature can stand up using the Stand Up maneuver (see Maneuvers in Combat). A creature adjacent to a willing prone creature can likewise use the Stand Up maneuver to make that creature stand up.

Restrained

A creature who is restrained has speed 0, can't use the Stand Up maneuver, and can't be force moved. A restrained creature takes a bane on ability rolls and on Might and Agility tests, and abilities used against them gain an edge.

If a creature teleports while restrained, that condition ends.

Slowed

A creature who is slowed has speed 2 unless their speed is already lower, and they can't shift.

Taunted

A creature who is taunted has a double bane on ability rolls for any ability that doesn't target the creature who taunted them, as long as they have line of effect to that creature. If a creature gains the taunted condition from one source while already taunted by a different source, the new condition replaces the old one.

Weakened

A creature who is weakened takes a bane on power rolls.

TESTS

When you want your hero to rifle through a desk and locate a specific document, scale a castle wall, negotiate a treaty with a monarch, or undertake any other activity with a chance of failure, you'll need to make a test to determine how successful you are at the task. A test is any power roll that has failure or consequences as an option.

When to Make a Test

The Director should ask a player to make a test only when the player's hero attempts a task where the consequences of failure are interesting or dramatic, and where failure won't grind the story to a halt. For example, if a hero wants to leap over a waist-high wall while casually walking through a peaceful city neighborhood, the worst case for failure is probably that the hero falls on their butt, takes no damage, and can stand up to either try again or walk around the wall. As such, no test is required. But if the hero were being chased by enemies, failing to leap over the wall means the pursuers can catch them, so the Director might decide to call for a test to determine what happens.

The advancement of a story shouldn't be halted by failing a test. For instance, the heroes might need to know the color of a dwarf king's crown to solve a puzzle, with that puzzle opening the only entrance to a tomb they must enter to stop a world-ending ritual. It could be that a successful Reason test allows the heroes to recall that lore, but the test shouldn't be their only option to get the information. If the test fails, perhaps the heroes need to go to a flying library to do research, or they might be able to delve into a ruin to find the ancient monarch's portrait. A failed test should always result in a story becoming more interesting, not in the action coming to an end.

It Just Works!

When a hero attempts to solve a task that typically requires a test with clever, outside-the-box thinking, the Director can instead decide that no test is required and the attempt automatically works! For example, if a hero who wants to climb a wall first covers their hands and feet in giant strands of sticky spider webs, the Director might decide that they can climb up the wall without needing to make a test.

That said, such clever ideas often work for free the first time, but the Director could decide they require tests if they are used again.

How to Make a Test

Each test has the following steps:

The Director decides that a hero's activities call for a test and asks the hero's player to make a power roll using an appropriate characteristic (see Characteristics and Tests below). The Director then selects a difficulty for the power roll, either secretly or publicly (see Test Difficulty below).

The player makes the power roll. If the character has a skill that applies to the test (see Skills), they can ask the Director if the skill applies and justify the use of the skill. If the Director agrees the skill applies, the hero gains a +2 bonus to the roll.

The player reports the total of the roll, and the Director interprets its success or failure.

Characteristics and Tests

When you describe a task you want your hero to undertake and the Director determines that a test is necessary, they then determine which characteristic the test uses based on the nature of the task. For instance, if you're scaling a wall, the Director could ask for a Might test to determine how far and how quickly you're able to climb. If you're attempting to plead your innocence in court for a murder you didn't commit, the Director might ask for a Presence test if you're attempting to win over the jury with your personality, or a Reason test if you're laying out a logical argument to support your innocence.

Though the Director can decide to call for tests in any circumstances, a number of tasks that heroes routinely undertake are commonly set up as tests.

MIGHT TESTS
You make a Might test whenever a risky task calls for the use of physical strength. Might tests are most often used for breaking down doors and other structures, hurling heavy objects, pulling your body up a sheer wall, swimming against a mighty current, and other feats of physical power.

AGILITY TESTS
You make an Agility test whenever a risky task calls for the use of your physical coordination and nimbleness. Agility tests are most often used for tumbling, sneaking quietly, picking locks, and engaging in sleight of hand.

REASON TESTS
You make a Reason test whenever you attempt a risky task that requires the use of your mental acumen and education, formal or otherwise. Reason tests are most often used to recall lore, deduce information based on clues, complete a puzzle, forge counterfeit items or documents, break a code, convince others of a logical argument, or make an estimation.

INTUITION TESTS
You make an Intuition test whenever you attempt a risky task that requires the use of your powers of observation and instinct. Intuition tests are most often used to notice hidden creatures or details, discern another person's motivations or honesty, calm and reassure others, and train animals.

PRESENCE TESTS
You make a Presence test whenever you attempt a risky task that requires the use of your force of personality. Presence tests are most often used to gain trust, project confidence, and influence and lead other creatures.

Test Difficulty

The Director decides how difficult a task that requires a test is: easy, medium, or hard. If a task seems as though it's easier than easy, then no test is necessary. The hero simply accomplishes the task. If the task seems harder than hard, then the Director is free to decide that it's impossible to complete with a test.

On a test-by-test basis, the Director can share the difficulty of a task before the player makes the test, which makes interpreting the outcome faster at the table. The Director can also keep a test's difficulty secret until after the player rolls the test, for dramatic effect.

The Test Difficulty Outcomes table shows all the possible outcomes of the different difficulties of tests. The Director will keep this information handy so as to be able to compare the different difficulties and their outcomes during play.

Whenever the rules talk about obtaining a success on a test, that includes a straight success, a success with a consequence, or a success with a reward. Whenever the rules talk about a failure on a test, that includes a straight failure or a failure with a consequence.

Whenever you make a test whose outcome you don't like, you can spend a hero token to reroll the test. You must use the new roll.

EASY TESTS

An easy test has some risk of consequence, but most heroes will likely overcome it. The power roll you make for an easy test determines the outcome (see Test Outcomes below):

- ≤11 You succeed on the task and incur a consequence.
- 12-16 You succeed on the task.
- 17+ You succeed on the task with a reward.

Influencing Player Characters With Tests

The things player characters do can't be influenced by any creature making a test, whether a monster, an NPC, or another player character. Many players feel that their agency is taken away if they're compelled to jump into a pile of gold filled with hidden scorpions because an NPC convinced them to do so with a Presence test. For most players, it's not fun to be in control of a hero and lose some of that control.

Instead, Directors should do their level best to have an NPC suggest that a character dive headlong into the gold like a billionaire duck, then let the player decide what their character does. Similarly, a Director might decide that one player character can't make an Intuition test to discern another PC's motivations or honesty.

That said, if everyone in your gaming group decides to lift one or more of these restrictions after talking about it, go for it! There's no wrong way to play as long as everyone is having fun. The MCDM Safety Toolkit (available for download at *https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit*) discusses how to talk about potentially problematic topics such as limiting character agency at your table.

MEDIUM TESTS

A medium test has some risk of failure that most heroes will likely overcome—but with a cost. The power roll you make for a medium test determines the outcome:

- ≤11 You fail the task.
- 12-16 You succeed on the task and incur a consequence.
- 17+ You succeed on the task.

HARD TESTS

A hard test has a greater risk of failure, and most heroes are likely to suffer some hardship while trying to overcome the intended task. The power roll you make for a hard test determines the outcome:

- ≤11 You fail the task and incur a consequence.
- 12-16 You fail the task.
- 17+ You succeed on the task.

NATURAL 19 OR 20: SUCCESS WITH A REWARD

Whenever you get a natural 19 or 20 on the power roll for a test—a total of 19 or 20 before adding your characteristic score or other modifiers—you score a critical success. This critical success automatically lets you succeed on the task with a reward, even if the test has a medium or hard difficulty.

Test Difficulty Outcomes

Power Roll	Easy Test Outcomes	Medium Test Outcomes	Hard Test Outcomes
≤11	Success with a consequence	Failure	Failure with a consequence
12–16	Success	Success with a consequence	Failure
17+	Success with a reward	Success	Success
Natural 19 or 20	Success with a reward	Success with a reward	Success with a reward

Test Outcomes

Depending on a test's difficulty and the power roll made to accomplish the task represented by the test, you can obtain one of the following outcomes.

FAILURE WITH A CONSEQUENCE

If you fail a hard test and incur a consequence, you don't do what you set out to do—in addition to which, you suffer an impactful setback. The Director determines the exact nature of the consequence, which is typically related to the specific task.

For instance, if a hero suffers a consequence while trying to climb a wall, they might make it halfway up the wall and then fall, taking damage and landing prone. A hero trying to sneak by cultists might be spotted by those foes, who immediately attack. If a consequence strikes when a hero attempts to bribe a prison guard, the guard might decide to arrest the hero or lead them into a trap. If a hero suffers a consequence on a Reason test made to recall lore about the king's favorite meal, they might confuse it for a dish to which the monarch is deathly allergic.

Not all consequences need to be immediate or apparent. For example, a hero might fail with a consequence on a test made to cheat at a high-stakes game of cards with a noble. The failure means the cheating is noticed, but the Director decides that the noble doesn't say anything. This consequence isn't made apparent until later in the evening, when the noble has guards surround the hero, intent on taking the cheater down to the dungeon for stacking the deck.

Common consequences for failing a test include the following:

- Making an NPC so upset that they storm off, or betray, attack, or otherwise attempt to harm you
- Drawing the attention of a group of foes
- Triggering a trap or hazard that captures or significantly harms you or an ally
- Breaking an important piece of equipment that is difficult to replace or repair
- Thinking you know something that you don't
- Getting stuck in a situation that must be resolved with a negotiation or a montage test you didn't need to make before

In lieu of other consequences, the Director also has the option to gain 2 additional Malice—a resource that creatures run by the Director use in combat—at the start of the next combat encounter.

FAILURE

If you fail a test without incurring a consequence, you simply don't do what you set out to do. A hero attempting to climb a wall finds no purchase. A hero trying to recall lore can't remember the desired facts. If a hero attempts to bribe a guard, they don't take the bait.

On a failed test, the Director can decide that there might still be a small penalty for failure, depending on the circumstances of the test. This penalty shouldn't be as harsh as rolling a failure with a consequence, though. For instance, a hero who gets this outcome on an Agility test made to sneak by a group of cultists might draw the attention of one cultist with their failure. Now that cultist is coming to investigate, but they haven't raised the alarm ... yet.

When a hero rolls a failure without a consequence, the Director can offer to let them succeed with a consequence instead. For instance, when a hero rolls a 10 on a medium Might test to break down a locked door, that's a failure and the door stays closed. But the Director could suggest to the player that instead of not breaking down the door, they can break down the door and lose 1d6 Stamina from being injured in the effort.

SUCCESS WITH A CONSEQUENCE

If you succeed on a test and incur a consequence, you do what you set out to do, but with an added cost. A hero might succeed in climbing up a wall, but the surface of the wall crumbles and becomes unstable as they do, making the climb more difficult for the ally ascending after them. When trying to sneak by a cultist, a hero successfully does so, but leaves footprints or other evidence of trespassing behind. If a hero bribes a guard to be allowed to sneak into a prison, the guard lets them in—but then demands a gemstone the hero needs for an important crafting project before they let the hero out.

Just like failure with a consequence, the consequences accompanying success don't need to be immediately apparent. In lieu of other consequences, the Director has the option to gain 2 additional Malice at the start of the next combat encounter.

When a hero rolls a success with a consequence, the Director might give them a chance to fail instead. For instance, when a hero rolls a 10 on an easy Agility test to pick the lock on a chest, that's a success with a consequence. The Director could suggest that the character has opened the lock but broken their lockpicks in the process (knowing the picks can't be replaced until the hero returns to town), but can also give them the option of failing to pick the lock but keeping their lockpicks intact.

SUCCESS

If you succeed on a test without consequence or reward, you simply achieve whatever you set out to do. A hero climbs that wall, sneaks by those cultists, or bribes that guard just as they planned. Smooth.

SUCCESS WITH A REWARD

If you succeed on a test with a reward, you accomplish whatever you set out to do. But you also gain a little something extra, in the form of momentum or luck that makes the immediate future easier for you or your friends.

The Director determines the reward for a success, which is most often related to the task at hand. For instance, if a hero succeeds with a reward while climbing a wall, they might find a ladder at the top they can lower so that any allies climbing up after them can do so without needing to make a test. A hero trying to sneak by cultists who succeeds with a reward might be able to dose the cultists' nearby water barrel with sleeping poison as they pass by unseen. Succeeding with a reward while bribing a prison guard could mean that the guard unlocks a door for the hero in addition to forgetting they were ever there.

As with consequences, the reward that comes with a success doesn't need to be immediate or apparent. For example, a hero succeeds with a reward on an easy test made to cheat at a high-stakes game of cards with a noble. Not only does the hero win the game, but the Director decides that their reward comes from a servant watching the game who's impressed with the character's performance. After the game, the servant approaches the hero, offering magic from the noble's private stash in congratulations and admiration.

Common rewards accompanying success on a test include the following:

- Automatically accomplishing a related follow-up task that would typically require a test
- Allowing an ally engaged in the same task to accomplish the task without needing to make the test as well
- Obtaining a consumable treasure or useful piece of mundane equipment
- Learning a piece of helpful information
- Impressing or ingratiating yourself with someone who grants you a small favor
- Noticing a hidden danger well before it strikes, giving you time to avoid or prepare for it

In lieu of other rewards, the Director can also decide that a hero who succeeds on a test with a reward earns the players a hero token (see Hero Tokens in The Basics).

Optional Rule: Pitching Consequences and Rewards

Coming up with consequences and rewards for tests can be a big part of the fun for many Directors, but even the best Directors occasionally run low on ideas. That's why the game gives the default option of consequences and rewards in the form of Malice and hero tokens. However, a Director who prefers narrative consequences and rewards can ask the players to pitch different consequences and rewards when they make a test. The Director can reject, add to, or modify the players' ideas as they choose, and will remind the players that they need to pitch real consequences, and not minor rewards disguised as consequences.

How Long Does It Take?

The amount of time required for a task involving a test is determined by the Director. A task such as recalling lore with a Reason test might take no time at all. Ducking behind a barrel to hide with an Agility test might require a maneuver or a main action, while tracking a band of voiceless talkers through the World Below could take hours or even days.

TESTS DURING COMBAT

Many (but not all) tests that a hero might make during combat are made as maneuvers. See Maneuvers in Combat for more information.

Can I Try Again?

In many cases when you fail a test, you can't attempt the test again unless the circumstances of the test change. For instance, if you attempt an Agility test to pick a lock and fail, you can't attempt to pick the lock again unless you get better lockpicks, oil the lock, have someone demonstrate how to pick a similar lock, and so on.

The Director decides when the circumstances have changed enough to allow a new attempt at a test.

Heroes Make Tests

If a hero attempts to sneak by an enemy guard unnoticed, should the hero make an Agility test to sneak, or should the guard make an Intuition test to catch the hero in the act? If a cultist lies to a hero about the location of a secret temple, does the cultist roll a Presence test to conceal the truth, or does the hero roll an Intuition test to discern the cultist's honesty?

Except in certain scenarios (explored at NPCs Roll for Deceptive Tasks and Opposed Power Rolls below), heroes make tests and NPCs do not. Heroes are the stars of the story, and the consequences and rewards of tests have longer-lasting implications for them. There are exceptions to this rule, of course. If a hero travels with an NPC retainer or companion, that NPC will almost certainly make tests from time to time. But for the most part, NPCs and other creatures never need to make tests when what they do opposes what the heroes do.

To quickly assess the difficulty of a task opposed by one or more creatures and the test made to attempt it, the Director can use the following guidelines (though these are not hard and fast rules):

Easy Test: A test is easy if only one creature opposes the hero, and that opposed creature would have a lower bonus to their test roll for the task than the hero does. If a hero with an Agility score of 2 attempts to sneak by a guard with an Intuition score of 0, the test is easy.

Moderate Test: A test is moderate if multiple creatures oppose the hero and those creatures would have lower bonuses to their test rolls than the hero, or if only one creature opposes the hero and has the same test bonus as the hero.

Hard Test: A test is hard if an opposed creature would have a higher bonus to their test roll than the hero, or if multiple creatures with the same test bonus as the hero oppose the hero.

The failure consequences of opposed tasks are some of the easiest to create on the fly. Fail to hide from someone, and they notice you. Fail to lie to someone, and they catch your duplicity. Fail to arm wrestle someone for a free ale, and you're picking up the tab. The consequence is that the opposition bests the hero.

NPCs Roll for Deceptive Tasks

At times, the Director might choose for an NPC to make a test when engaged in a deceptive task, rather than having characters attempt to note the deception. By having the NPC roll in these scenarios, the Director doesn't tip their hand to the players that subterfuge is afoot.

For example, when an assassin attempts to ambush the heroes while they sit around a campfire, if any player says their hero is on the lookout for danger, that hero would make an Intuition test to notice the danger. But if no one is keeping watch, the assassin makes an Agility test to sneak up on the heroes unnoticed. If the assassin fails the test, the heroes notice immediately as their assailant loudly steps on a twig. If the assassin succeeds, the heroes don't notice until the assailant is right on top of them.

An NPC might also make a Presence test if they lie to the heroes, as long as the heroes have no reason to believe the character would be deceptive. The Director knows if the heroes are wary in that way because the players will ask if they can make a test to discern the NPC's honesty.

As an optional rule, the Director is also free to ask the heroes to make a reactive test to a deceptive NPC instead (see Reactive Tests below) whenever they choose.

Opposed Power Rolls

When two creatures are engaged in a particularly dramatic struggle that requires them both to make tests, the Director can have all the creatures involved make a test. The creature with the highest power roll wins. You can't earn a reward as part of these opposed power rolls, and they don't follow the typical difficulty structure or have three different tiers of possible outcomes.

For example, if your hero attempts to sneak by a demon lord, you make an Agility test to move stealthily while the demon makes an Intuition test to notice you. If your hero gets the higher power roll, you sneak by without the demon noticing. If the demon gets the higher roll, they catch you in the act of sneaking. If multiple sneaking heroes attempt to get by multiple demons, then each creature makes a test and all the totals are compared to determine which demons notice which heroes.

In the event of a tie in an opposed test, the state of the scene doesn't change. In the previous example, a tie means that if a demon on guard duty didn't know a sneaking hero was there, the demon remains oblivious. If the demon did know the hero was out there somewhere while trying to avoid being noticed, a tie means the demon still knows the hero is there but hasn't determined their location.

Since opposed power rolls don't use tiers, when you make an opposed power roll, a double edge provides a +4 bonus to the roll, a double bane provides a -4 penalty to the roll, an automatic tier increase counts as a +4 bonus to the roll, and an automatic tier decrease counts as a -4 penalty to the roll.

Reactive Tests

At certain times when a hero isn't engaged in overcoming a task, the Director might ask the player of the hero to make a test without context, explaining the test only after the power roll is made. This often happens when a hero has a chance of knowing or noticing something of significance that the player doesn't know to look for or ask about.

Reactive tests are typically made in the following circumstances, though the Director can call for them in any appropriate scenario:

Hidden Environmental Features: The Director asks for an Intuition test to notice a secret door, a hidden trap, or some other disguised environmental feature.

Hidden Foes: The Director calls for an Intuition test to notice a hidden foe (or they could use the rules in NPCs Roll for Deceptive Tasks above).

Hidden Motives: The Director can ask for an Intuition test during a conversation to gauge how well a hero can read an NPC, judging whether they're lying, withholding information, or concealing an emotional response. (The Director could also use the rules in NPCs Roll for Deceptive Tasks.)

Recall Lore: The Director might ask a hero to make a Reason test when dealing with a new object, a piece of information, or an event to determine what history or details the hero might already know about it.

Creature and DTO Tests: Some creatures and dynamic terrain objects have features and abilities that require heroes to make reactive tests. These tests can't be modified by skills.

Optional Rule: Secret Reactive Tests

Some Directors prefer to make the power rolls for reactive tests for the heroes rather than asking the players to do so. This allows the Director to make the rolls when appropriate for hidden objects, creatures, motivations, and information without tipping off the players that there is information to be gained. Having the Director roll requires the Director to have everyone's characteristics and skills recorded (whether physically or digitally) for easy reference.

Skills

Skills represent the different specializations a hero has outside of attacking, defending, and using their ancestry features, class features, and equipment. Whenever you make a test, having a particular skill associated with the test increases your chance of success.

Applying Skills

If you have a skill that applies to a test you make, you gain a +2 bonus to the test. For instance, if your hero has the Hide skill, you have a +2 bonus to any test you make that involves hiding yourself. This might include an Agility test to hide behind a barrel, or a Presence test to disappear into a crowd.

The +2 bonus gained for a skill isn't an edge. A player can make a test that has both the +2 bonus for a skill and the +2 bonus for an edge.

You can't apply more than one skill to a test.

JUSTIFY THE SKILL

It's not the Director's job to know every task potentially covered by the skills in the game, or to know the specific skills your hero has. Instead, the Director asks you to make a test using a characteristic and you tell the Director if you think you have a skill that applies. If it's not obvious why the skill applies, tell the Director how your hero is approaching the task and justify why that approach uses the skill. The Director then decides if you get the +2 bonus the skill represents. If the Director disagrees with you, that's the final word.

Approaching problems creatively while remaining reasonable can help you get the most out of your skills. For example, if you're making a Presence test to impress a noble at a party, using the Brag skill is an obvious choice. But what if you don't have that skill? Maybe you could instead try to impress the noble with a brief but exciting lecture about the nature of the elements, making a Presence test using the Magic skill that you do have!

Sometimes you won't have a skill that applies to a test. That's okay! If your characteristic score is decent, you likely have a good chance of success without a skill.

MIXING CHARACTERISTICS AND SKILLS

Although certain skills are often paired with one characteristic more than others, a skill can apply to a test made using any characteristic that makes sense. The Director has the final say on which characteristic is used to complete a task, and can call for a different characteristic based on the circumstances.

For example, intimidating someone with a purely verbal threat is a Presence test. But if a player describes their character tearing a log in half with their bare hands to intimidate a foe, the Director is likely to call for a Might test instead. The Intimidate skill can apply to both tests. In the same way, scaling the side of a building is covered by a Might test, but if a hero does a series of leaps from one balcony to another to reach a roof, the Director could call for an Agility test instead. The Climb skill applies to both of these tests.

Many Specific Skills

Draw Steel includes a big list of skills, and each is fairly specific. For example, instead of one Athletics skill that covers climbing, jumping, swimming, and lifting heavy objects, your character might use separate Climb, Jump, Lift, and Swim skills. Instead of a Thievery skill that covers picking locks, picking pockets, and disabling traps, the game has three skills: Pick Lock, Pick Pocket, and Sabotage.

Having a wide range of specific skills means you'll frequently make tests that don't use one of your character's skills, simply applying a characteristic. By not having a few broader skills, it means that having a character who covers the spread of every skill is actually impossible. Luckily, the math of the game doesn't require you to have a skill to have a decent chance of success on a test. That means heroes can attempt tasks without the help of a skill just because someone needs to do it, and that's pretty darn heroic!

Since you don't need to worry about your character covering a wide spread of skills, you're free to choose the skills you think fit your hero best and are the most fun to work with. Maybe you're thinking about an elementalist who has a gymnastic background in jumping and tumbling, and who also studied religion and blacksmithing. Having that kind of specific backstory is a big part of cinematic storytelling.

The rules for skills allow for them to be flexibly applied to any test that is appropriate for the skill. This encourages clever thinking. A player can ask the Director, "I want to impress the duke with a story about how I ascended the sheer Cliffs of Azgahnan. Can I use my Climb skill for a +2 bonus to my Presence test?" Getting creative like that is a lot of fun. It paints a visual picture, and it's good tactical thinking! However, if the skills in a game are too broad in the kinds of activities they represent, players inevitably end up applying the same skill over and over again to as many tests as possible. This isn't fun for anyone, and doesn't make a very compelling story.

> ### Edges on Tests With Specific Skills
>
> Certain features and abilities grant a creature an edge on tests made with a specific skill. A creature making a test where the specific skill would apply gains an edge on the test even if they don't have the skill. For example, the conduit's Blessing of Fortunate Weather can create foggy weather that grants creatures who make tests using the Hide skill an edge on those tests. Any creature who attempts to hide in the fog gains an edge on the test as long as the Hide skill would apply to that test, regardless of whether they have that skill or not.

Skill Groups

Skills are broken down into five skill groups: crafting, exploration, inter-personal, intrigue, and lore.

CRAFTING SKILLS

Skills from the crafting skill group are used in the creation and appraisal of goods and for jury-rigging contraptions. They are especially useful during rests and downtime.

Rewards for tests made with crafting skills typically include having leftover rare material used in the creation process, knowing a buyer willing to pay extra for goods or items you're appraising, or making a jury-rigged device so amazing that it lasts for more uses than it should.

Consequences for tests made with crafting skills typically include wasting rare materials used in the creation process, greatly overesti-mating or underestimating an item's value, and poorly jury-rigging a contraption so that it harms people (or at least the wrong people).

EXPLORATION SKILLS

Skills from the exploration skill group are used to physically explore the environment around the characters, and to overcome physical obstacles.

Rewards for tests made with exploration skills typically include helping another creature engaging in the same task succeed without needing to also make a test, automatically succeeding on a follow-up test while engaged in the same task, reaching a destination faster than anticipated, and learning about or avoiding an upcoming hazard.

Consequences for tests made with exploration skills include harming yourself, your gear, or your allies; becoming lost; or stumbling headlong into a hazard or a place you were trying to avoid.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Skills from the interpersonal skill group are used to socially interact with other creatures, and are particularly useful during negotiations (see Negotiation). Aside from the Handle Animals skill, you can generally only use interpersonal skills when you attempt to influence creatures who have emotions and who can understand you.

Rewards for tests made with interpersonal skills typically include gaining an extra favor, item, or piece of information from the people or creatures you interact with.

Consequences for tests made with interpersonal skills include making the creature you're interacting with angry, sad, embarrassed, offended, or otherwise upset or uncomfortable. This might cause them to ignore you, storm off, spread rumors about you, attack you, betray you, blackmail you, or otherwise attempt to harm you.

Crafting Skills

Skill	Use
Alchemy	Make bombs and potions
Architecture	Create buildings and vehicles
Blacksmithing	Forge metal armor and weapons
Carpentry	Create items out of wood
Cooking	Create delicious dishes
Fletching	Make ranged weapons and ammunition
Forgery	Create false badges, documents, and other items
Jewelry	Create bracelets, crowns, rings, and other jewelry
Mechanics	Build machines and clockwork items
Tailoring	Craft clothing of cloth or leather

Exploration Skills

Skill	Use
Climb	Move up vertical surfaces
Drive	Control vehicles
Endurance	Remain engaged in strenuous activity over a long period of time
Gymnastics	Move across unsteady or narrow surfaces; tumble
Heal	Use mundane first aid
Jump	Leap vertical and horizontal distances
Lift	Pick up, carry, and throw heavy objects
Navigate	Read a map and travel without becoming lost
Ride	Ride and control a nonsapient mount, such as a horse
Swim	Move through deep liquid

Interpersonal Skills

Skill	Use
Brag	Impress others with stories of your deeds
Empathize	Relate to someone on a personal level
Flirt	Attract romantic attention from someone
Gamble	Make bets with others
Handle Animals	Interact with nonsapient animal wildlife
Interrogate	Obtain information from a creature withholding it
Intimidate	Awe or scare a creature
Lead	Inspire people to action
Lie	Convince someone that a falsehood is true
Music	Perform music vocally or with an instrument
Perform	Engage in dance, oratory, acting, or some other physical performance
Persuade	Convince someone to agree with you through use of your charms and grace
Read Person	Read the emotions and body language of other creatures

INTRIGUE SKILLS

Skills from the intrigue skill group are used in tasks centered around investigation, thievery, and spycraft.

Rewards for tests made with skills from this group typically include helping another creature engaging in the same task succeed without needing to also make a test, automatically succeeding on a follow-up test while engaged in the same task, discovering helpful information in addition to what you set out to learn, and performing an extra bit of clandestine activity in addition to what you set out to do.

Consequences for tests made with intrigue skills include getting caught in the act or failing to notice a detail that places you in danger, such as triggering a trap or walking into an ambush.

LORE SKILLS

Skills from the lore skill group are used to research and recall specific information. They are especially useful during rests and downtime.

Rewards for tests made with lore skills typically include learning an extra piece of useful information.

Consequences for tests made with lore skills typically include learning an incorrect piece of information that seems useful, but which actually works against your interests or wastes time. (It's fun to roleplay these kinds of moments, so lean in!) Alternatively, the Director can make medium and hard tests with lore group skills for each hero in secret, then let the players know the narrative outcome without revealing the outcome of the power roll (see the Optional Rule: Secret Reactive Tests).

Intrigue Skills

Skill	Use
Alertness	Intuitively sense the details of your surroundings
Conceal Object	Hide an object on your person or in your environment
Disguise	Change your appearance to look like a different person
Eavesdrop	Actively listen to something that is hard to hear, such as a whispered conversation through a door
Escape Artist	Escape from bonds such as rope or manacles
Hide	Conceal yourself from others' observation
Pick Lock	Open a lock without using the key
Pick Pocket	Steal an item that another person wears or carries without them noticing
Sabotage	Disable a mechanical device such as a trap
Search	Actively search an environment for important details and items
Sneak	Move silently
Track	Follow a trail that another creature has left behind

Lore Skills

Skill	Use
Criminal Underworld	Knowing about criminal organizations, their crimes, their relationships, and their leaders
Culture	Knowing about a culture's customs, folktales, and taboos
History	Knowing about significant past events
Magic	Knowing about magical places, spells, rituals, items, and phenomena
Monsters	Knowing monster ecology, strengths, and weaknesses
Nature	Knowing about natural flora, fauna, and weather
Psionics	Knowing about psionic places, spells, rituals, items, and phenomena
Religion	Knowing about religious mythology, practices, and rituals
Rumors	Knowing gossip, legends, and uncertain truths
Society	Knowing noble etiquette and the leadership and power dynamics of noble families
Strategy	Knowing about battle tactics and logistics
Timescape	Knowing about the many worlds of the timescape

For the Director: Make Your Own Skills

Directors should feel free to make their own skills that they feel are relevant and useful to their campaigns and adventures. For instance, the game doesn't have a Brewing skill for brewing ale or a Painting skill for making art because those aren't tasks that typically come up in a game about fighting monsters and saving the world. However, a Director could decide that their campaign involves poisoned barrels of ale and large amounts of counterfeit art, and that adding these two new skills to the game would make it more fun for the players. The Director simply needs to pick a group for these new skills—in this case, crafting makes sense. They then let the players know that they can swap out any crafting skill they have for these new skills.

Example Tests

In this scenario, a trio of adventurers want to scale the 40-foot-high walls surrounding a castle known as the Star Chamber, hoping to covertly obtain information about their enemy, Lady Morgant.

Director (Matt): *The towering walls that surround the Star Chamber stand before you, the single iron gate closed and locked, with a platoon of armed guards outside.*

James (playing Korvo, a shadow): *Let's move to the side of the wall opposite the gate and make our ascent there.*

Grace (playing Val, a conduit): *Agreed.*

Director: *Okay. It'll be a Might test to get up to the top of the wall.*

The Director knows that the walls around the Star Chamber, the head-quarters of the evil knights Lady Morgant leads, are smooth and hard to climb, designed to repel invaders. The test's difficulty is hard, but the Director keeps that information a secret for now.

Alyssa (playing Jorn, a tactician): *Let me go first. I've got good Might and can throw the others down a rope once I'm up there. And I've got the Climb skill.*

Director: *For sure. Okay, roll it up.*

Alyssa rolls 2d10 and gets a 13. She then adds her Might score of 2 and her +2 bonus for having an applicable skill to the roll, for a total of 17.

Alyssa: *A 17! That's tier 3, baby!*

The Director checks the Test Difficulty Outcomes table to confirm that a tier 3 outcome is a success on a hard test.

Director: *Okay, you're on top of the wall. You notice a few guards patrolling atop the opposite side of the wall in the distance, but they're looking out at the city right now.*

Alyssa: *Great! I toss down a rope. Val, you're next.*

Grace: *So it's a Might test. Would you let me use Endurance? It's a lot of physical exertion to climb.*

Director: *It's not a climb that would take you hours, so I don't think Endurance applies here. But hey, the rope does make this an easier test.*

Grace: *Fair. Okay, dice. Let's do this.*

Given the rope, the Director decides that this second climb attempt is an easy test. Grace rolls 2d10 and gets an 11. With her Might score of 2, that's a 13.

Grace: *13! That's a tier 2 outcome for Val.*

The Director checks the Test Difficulty Outcomes table once more, confirming that a tier 2 outcome is a success on an easy test.

Director: *Good news! You make it to the top of the wall alongside Jorn.*

James: *Ah, crap. I have a Might of –1 and no skills to use. Unless I can Intimidate the rope into lifting me up?*

Director: *Wishful thinking.*

Alyssa: *What if Korvo grabs onto the rope and I lift him up while he just hangs on for the ride?*

Director: *Sure. That'll be a Might test if Korvo's down for it.*

James: *Nothing risked, nothing saved. Let's do it. Just be careful. Any loud noises could attract those guards.*

Alyssa: *Please. I'm a pro. Since I'm lifting this polder off the ground, does the Lift skill apply?*

Director: *Yes, it does. Roll it up. That's a medium difficulty test.*

Lifting the diminutive polder, Alyssa rolls 2d10—but gets a 2! With her Might score and Lift skill bonus of +2, the total is 6.

Alyssa: *A 6! Oof. That's tier 1.*

Director: *Which is a failure, but with no consequence. You realize you just can't lift Korvo off the ground without making a lot of noise.*

The Director then decides to make the failure potentially more interesting, by allowing the players to decide if they want a failure without consequence or a success with a consequence.

Director: *I'll give you a choice, though. You can leave Korvo on the ground, or pull him up and suffer the consequence of making some noise while doing so.*

Grace: *Ah, pull the polder up.*

Alyssa: *Yeah. We have to face these guards sometime.*

James: *Thanks for not leaving me behind!*

Director: *As Jorn yanks Korvo off the ground and pulls him up to the top of the wall, a guard turns a bullseye lantern your way, calling out, "Who goes there?"*

Assist a Test

You can attempt to assist another creature with a test they make, provided you have a skill that applies to the test, the other creature isn't using that same skill on the test, and you can describe how your character helps to the Director's satisfaction. In other words, your attempt to help has to make sense, and you have to bring some useful expertise to the table. Helping another creature sneak by shouting encouragement at them isn't going to make them stealthier.

When you attempt to assist another creature, make a test using the skill you choose, and using a characteristic chosen by the Director based on the activity you use to help. The outcome of that test determines the bonus applied to the test you're assisting:

- ≤11 You get in the way or make things worse. The creature takes a bane on their test.
- 12-16 Your help grants the other creature an edge on their test.
- 17+ Your help gives the other creature a double edge on their test.

For example, when an ally tries to pick a jailer's pocket, you might attempt to assist by using the Flirt skill to distract the jailer. The Director accepts this, and asks you to make a Presence test using Flirt. The outcome of that test determines the bonus you provide to the other hero's Agility test to pick the jailer's pocket—or whether you fumble the distraction and potentially draw attention to the attempt.

Hide and Sneak

Hiding and sneaking are important tools for heroes and their foes. You might want to avoid another creature's notice to eavesdrop on conversations, steal items, set up an ambush, or avoid a combat encounter.

What Does It Mean to Be Observed?

Most of the time, if a creature has line of effect to you, they're able to observe you—especially if you're an active threat to them, such as in a combat encounter. However, the game leaves what it means to be observed open to interpretation, because there are circumstances where a creature might have line of effect to you but isn't observing you, giving you a chance to hide. For example, a guard in a crowded marketplace likely isn't able to observe every creature within their line of effect, so slipping away to hide in that situation is probably easier than hiding from them in an otherwise empty street. The Director has the final say on who is observing you, and who you are able to observe.

Hiding

To hide from a creature, you must have cover or concealment from that creature (see Combat), who can't observe you attempting to hide. A creature is observing you if they're aware of your specific location before you attempt to hide. This means they can pinpoint you with their senses and point a finger (or paw or tentacle) at you as if to shout, "There they are!" If you duck behind a barrel to hide from a foe, your attempt to hide has a chance of succeeding only if your foe doesn't notice you doing so. If you're being chased by a hungry dragon, you can hide only if you first move to a location where the dragon can't observe you—for instance, by turning a sharp corner into a tunnel full of giant stalagmites before the dragon does. You then make your hide attempt.

When you use the Hide maneuver to hide during combat while you have cover or concealment from a creature who isn't observing you, you are automatically hidden from them unless the Director deems otherwise. If you hide outside of combat, the Director might ask you to make a test using the Hide skill to determine how well hidden you are.

While you are hidden from another creature, the creature can't target you with abilities that don't have the Area keyword. This benefit ends as soon as you are no longer hidden from that creature.

Additionally, while you are hidden from another creature, you gain an edge on ability rolls made against that creature. This benefit lasts until the end of the turn in which you are no longer hidden. This means you can be hidden from another creature at the start of your turn, move out of cover or concealment toward them and use an ability against them, and still gain an edge on ability rolls made against the creature as long as you use the ability before the end of that turn.

You are no longer hidden from a creature if you don't have cover or concealment from them. If you use an ability, interact with an enemy, move without sneaking, or otherwise make noise or reveal yourself while hidden, you are no longer hidden once the activity that reveals you resolves. For instance, if you are hidden and then make a strike, you resolve the strike first, then are no longer hidden.

SEARCHING FOR HIDDEN CREATURES

You can search for creatures who are hidden from you as long as those creatures are within 10 squares and you have line of effect to them. To do so, you use a maneuver to make an Intuition test using the Search skill, and any hidden creatures within 10 squares of you each make an opposed Agility test using the Hide skill (see Opposed Power Rolls earlier in this section). At the Director's discretion, different characteristics and skills can be used in this opposed test. For example, your foe might make a Presence test using the Handle Animals skill to hide among a flock of sheep without disturbing them, or you could make a Reason test using the Eavesdrop skill to pick out the breathing of a creature hidden in the dark.

If the total of your test is higher than that of a hidden creature, they are no longer hidden from you. Otherwise, they remain hidden from you. As part of the maneuver used to search for hidden creatures, you can point out any creatures you notice to allies within 10 squares of you, making those creatures no longer hidden from those allies.

If a creature is hidden from your allies but not from you, you can use a maneuver without making a test to point that creature out to your allies.

Sneaking

While you are hidden from another creature and not in combat, you can attempt to sneak—avoiding the senses of other creatures as you move around them in the open—to remain hidden. While sneaking, your speed is halved. To sneak, you make an Agility test using the Sneak skill with a difficulty set by the Director. If you succeed, you remain hidden during your movement. This test can use another characteristic at the Director's discretion, such as using Presence to blend in with a crowd on a packed city street.

Group Tests

Whenever two or more heroes attempt to overcome a single, simple task together that calls for them to make the same test, the Director can call for a group test. For example, if several heroes are all attempting to climb the outside of a tower at the same time, giving each other assistance and advice, they could be asked to make a Might group test. If a group of heroes attempt to sneak by a sleeping ogre, they might make an Agility group test.

Group Test Difficulty

The Director determines the difficulty of a group test the same way they do for individual tests. Group tests can be easy, medium, or hard.

Making a Group Test

Each hero participating in the group test makes the test individually as usual, but the Director waits until all the tests have been made to interpret the outcome. A hero who is participating in the group test can't assist another hero participating in the test.

Group Test Outcome

When interpreting the outcome of a group test, the Director first determines if the task succeeded or not before figuring out rewards and consequences. If half or more of the heroes making the group test succeed, then the group test succeeds. Otherwise, the group test fails.

If the heroes succeeded and half or more of them obtained a reward from the test, the Director gives the group a collective reward and ignores any consequences incurred in the test. This collective reward should be equivalent to earning two individual rewards. In fact, it could be two consumable items, juicy pieces of information, or hero tokens. However, it could also be something more tailored to the task. For instance, if the heroes earn a collective reward while sneaking through the camp of an enemy army, the Director might allow them to sabotage a bunch of war engines or steal a few horses on their way out.

If the heroes failed the group test and more than half of them incurred a consequence as a result, the Director gives the group a collective consequence and ignores any earned rewards. This collective consequence should affect everyone. An easy option is for the stress of failing the test to cause each hero to take a bane on their next power roll, or for the Director to gain 2 Malice per hero at the start of the next combat encounter. But the consequence could also be tailored to the task. For instance, if the heroes fail in their attempt to sneak through the camp of an enemy army, they're spotted and the camp immediately goes on alert as waves of enemies attack them.

If fewer than half the heroes incur a consequence or earn a reward on their individual tests, then the group test simply succeeds or fails.

Montage Tests

When a group of heroes works together over time to accomplish a common goal that requires more than a single characteristic, the Director can call for a montage test. Such tests typically take place over a prolonged period and focus on collective or shared activities. Navigating a vast desert, convincing farmers to rise up against a tyrannical leader, and performing a ritual to open a magically sealed gate can all be accomplished with montage tests.

In a montage test, the players take turns making tests as their characters tackle a task together in a montage test round. Each hero has a chance to make a test (or to assist another hero's test; see Assist a Test above) intended to influence the outcome of the task.

A hero can also spend their turn using an item, ability, or other option they have available that they believe can help in the montage test. For example, if a group of heroes want to cross an ocean on a sailing ship before a storm begins, one hero might make use of a magic fan that creates wind to keep the sails full day and night. The Director decides that this clever action gives the heroes 2 automatic successes in the montage test, with no individual tests necessary (see Total Successes and Failures below).

Once a hero makes a test, assists with a test, or uses an ability or other option, they can't do anything else as part of the montage test until each other hero involved in the montage test does so as well. A hero can also choose to do nothing, most often if they have no one to assist and fear that their actions might make the situation worse (see Montage Test Outcomes below). Once every hero has had a chance to act, the montage test round ends and a new one begins.

Time and Stakes

As the name suggests, montage tests create a kind of cinematic montage in the action of the game. A montage test can take place over the course of several hours or days, with each individual test or other activity set up as a brief vignette within the montage that stars one of the heroes. Combat encounters, negotiations, and other challenges and scenes can break up a montage test (see Sample Montage Test below).

The Director should deploy montage tests only when the players are engaged in overcoming a goal that has stakes for the story and some sort of pressure, such as a looming deadline or impending harm. A montage test is great for a race to get to another location before an enemy army does, a chase to escape or catch up to a foe, weathering a hazard, preparing a village for war, or similar activities. Low- or no-stakes activities such as travel through a forest with no time pressure, or training during a respite to use a new kit, can be narrated in montage style, but they don't require a montage test.

Director Sets the Scene

At the start of a montage test, the Director should describe the scenario underlying the task at hand, and the various challenges the heroes might face as they attempt to collectively accomplish it. For example, if the heroes are chasing down a pickpocket through a crowded market, the Director might talk about the throngs of innocent people blocking the way forward, obscuring the characters' vision, and making noise that complicates attempts to hear the thief's nimble footsteps. There are also traveling carts to dodge, the speed and dexterity of the pursued character to contend with, and a pack of stray dogs who chase after anyone who sprints through the market. Describing these obstacles gives the heroes ideas about what they're trying to overcome as they attempt to achieve their goals.

Individual Tests in Montage Tests

The difficulty of each individual test in a montage test is set by the Director and can vary from test to test. For instance, if the heroes are preparing the defenses of a village threatened by a band of approaching raiders, the Director might decide that a character who wants to dig a trench around the village needs to make an easy Might test. Another hero wants to train the untested farmers of the village in the ways of war, and the Director decides this is a hard Reason test.

The same rules and guidelines that apply to all individual tests apply in montage tests. If a hero has a clever, out-of-the-box idea that the Director thinks should automatically succeed without rolling dice, it does. If the circumstances of the test should grant an edge or a bane, they do. Individual test outcomes shouldn't halt the story.

The Director should couch each success or failure as it relates to the overall goal of the montage test. If the heroes are trying to reach an ancient temple, failing a Might test to ford a river in their path doesn't mean they don't cross the river and are stuck on the other side. But it could mean that failing to cross the river in a timely manner gives a rival group of villains the chance to beat the party to the temple.

The rewards and consequences of individual tests made during a montage test are handled on an individual basis. The Director can use the default of gaining additional Malice in the next combat encounter for consequences and having the party gain hero tokens for rewards to keep the montage moving.

Can't Use the Same Skill Twice

An individual character can't use the same skill more than once in a montage test. Though multiple heroes can use the same skill, a test or an assist with a specific skill represents each characters' entire contribution to the montage test with that skill. At the Director's discretion, this restriction can be lifted for prolonged montage tests, or for montage tests that are limited in scope and have only a small number of skills that apply to them.

New Challenges for Each Test

In general, when a hero makes a test as part of a montage test, they should choose new obstacles to overcome that haven't already been overcome as part of the test. If the heroes are chasing a thief through the marketplace and one of them has already distracted the pack of stray dogs with a deft hand and a piece of meat, additional tests made to distract the animals don't count toward the outcome of the montage test.

When it fits the scenario, the Director can adjust this restriction. If part of a montage test involves searching for people trapped in a burning building, the Director is likely to allow multiple tests to fight or avoid the fire, since this will happen throughout the montage test, not just once.

INTRODUCING MORE CHALLENGES

During a montage test, a Director can introduce new challenges for the heroes to face. While attempting to run out of a burning building from the top floor, the characters might discover that by the time they reach the second floor, beams are starting to fall and glass windows are exploding as the structure starts to collapse. These new challenges can be incorporated into the tests the heroes subsequently make.

Total Successes and Failures

The Director or another player will track the total number of successes and failures the heroes earn during a montage test. Every montage test has a success limit and a failure limit. When the number of successful tests equals the success limit, the montage test ends and the heroes achieve total success (see Montage Test Outcomes below). The montage test can also end when the number of failed tests equals the failure limit, and the heroes suffer total failure.

Limited Rounds

A montage test should last only 2 montage test rounds. If the heroes don't end the montage test by achieving the success limit or failure limit, the montage test ends when the second montage test round is over. This time limit helps to keep a montage test from becoming a slog, and prevents heroes from simply using their turns to assist the one hero with the best chance of success. This can inspire each hero to be a more active participant in the montage test. That said, the Director can increase the number of rounds a montage test lasts if they wish to create a particularly grueling challenge.

Montage Test Difficulty

The Director determines the success limit and failure limit of a montage test. They can share this information or keep it secret, depending on what feels the most fun and dramatic for the situation and the players.

In general, the higher the success limit, the harder and more complicated it is for the heroes to overcome the montage test, since a hero can't make the same test twice. The Montage Test Difficulty table gives a recommended success limit and failure limit for easy, moderate, and hard montage tests for groups with five heroes.

Montage Test Difficulty

Difficulty	Success Limit	Failure Limit
Easy	5	5
Moderate	6	4
Hard	7	3

For larger or smaller groups, the Director can make the following adjustments to keep montage tests achievable but challenging:

- For four or fewer heroes, decrease the success limit and failure limits by 1 (to a minimum of 2) for every hero fewer than five. For example, if a group has only three heroes, an easy montage test has a success limit and failure limit of 3.
- For six or more heroes, increase the success and failure limits by 1 for every hero more than five.

Montage Test Outcomes

A montage test can have three different outcomes:

- If the heroes hit the success limit before hitting the failure limit or before the time runs out for the test, they achieve total success.
- If the heroes hit the failure limit or time runs out, and if they've achieved at least two more successes than failures, they achieve a partial success.
- If the heroes hit the failure limit or time runs out, and if they don't have at least two more successes than failures, they suffer total failure.

TOTAL SUCCESS

If the heroes earn a total success, they achieve what they set out to do without complication. For instance, if the heroes engaged in a montage test to cross a desert and reach a city before a tyrant's army arrives there and levels the place, a total success sees them arrive at the city gates with plenty of time to warn people of the impending assault.

The heroes earn 1 Victory when they achieve total success on an easy or moderate montage test, and 2 Victories on a hard montage test.

PARTIAL SUCCESS

If the heroes earn a partial success, they succeed at what they set out to do, but there is a complication or a cost involved. For instance, when crossing the desert to reach and warn the city of the tyrant's army, a mixed success sees the characters arrive at the city gates with the enemy forces just behind them. Alternatively, the Director might allow the heroes to arrive well before the army, but they don't cover their movements well enough. The tyrant realizes the city has been warned and decides to call in a favor to have a powerful dragon join the siege.

The heroes earn 1 Victory when they achieve partial success on a hard or moderate montage test.

TOTAL FAILURE

If the heroes suffer total failure, they don't achieve what they set out to do. Just as with standard tests, failure on a group test shouldn't bring a story to a halt. Total failure should make things more interesting and challenging! With a total failure in a montage test to cross the desert and warn the city, the characters arrive at the city to find it already under siege by the tyrant.

Sample Montage Test

Four heroes must cross the vast and inhospitable Infinite Desert to warn the city of Ahset that the tyrannical Empress Vardo is coming to conquer them. If the characters arrive in time, they can organize the defenses of the city, giving its people a greater chance of defeating the tyrant.

The Director determines that crossing the desert is a montage test of hard difficulty. With four heroes involved, the success limit is 6 and the failure limit is 2 as the montage test begins.

MONTAGE TEST ROUND 1

When the test begins, the Director sets the scene. They tell the players that the desert has extreme temperatures, sudden sandstorms, high dunes to cross, deep sand, chasms, and quicksand lakes. The Director decides that the challenges of dunes, deep sand, and quicksand can be tackled multiple times in the test, since the Infinite Desert is filled with these hazards.

Urdoncara, a fury, starts things off by asking to make an Intuition test using the Nature skill to predict the best times of day to travel and rest. She wants the party to avoid the worst of the desert's extreme temperatures and any sandstorms or other weather phenomena, so that the journey is quickened. The Director decides this is an easy test. Urdoncara makes the test and gets a total of 12, earning 1 success for the montage test.

Jorn, a tactician, wants to make a Reason test using the Climb skill to lead the party over dunes and other hazards with minimal effort. The Director allows the attempt, but says that knowing what makes one dune easier to climb than another is tricky, setting the difficulty at hard. Jorn gets a 9 on the test and fails with a consequence, which the Director decides will cause him to take a bane on his next power roll due to the exertion. The montage test has 1 success and 1 failure.

Karrel, an elementalist, thinks the group might cross the desert faster if they have specially modified sandshoes that distribute their weight and prevent their feet from sinking into the sand. The Director loves the idea, and decides that making four pairs of the shoes while traveling the desert is a medium Reason test. Karrel gets to use their Tailoring skill and winds up with a total of 13—a success with a consequence. The Director decides to gain an additional 2 Malice at the start of the next combat encounter as a consequence, but the group now has 2 successes and 1 failure on the montage test.

Val, a conduit, offers to scout ahead for the group with an Intuition test, using the Navigate skill to find the best path forward and avoid hazards such as chasms and quicksand. The Director thinks that acting as lookout in a vast desert is an easy task. Val smashes it with a 21—a success with a reward—and the Director decides to get creative. Val's lookout skills grant the next hero to act in the montage test an edge on their test. At the end of the first montage test round, the heroes have 3 successes and 1 failure.

INTERLUDE

Before the next montage test round, the Director pauses the montage test to run a battle with a kingfissure worm, who attacks the heroes as they cross over an ancient ruin partially buried in the sand. After the heroes defeat the kingfissure worm, the test continues.

MONTAGE TEST ROUND 2

Urdoncara wants to make a Might test using the Lift skill to carry most of the group's equipment as they cross the desert, allowing her allies to move more quickly while she keeps up with her superior fortitude. The Director thinks this arduous task has a hard difficulty. Urdoncara gets a 17 on the test thanks to the edge from Val's earlier success. The montage test has 4 successes and 1 failure.

Jorn, eager to prove himself after his last failure, asks to make a Might test using the Lead skill, representing tying a rope around his waist to drag his weaker friends over the tallest dunes. The Director likes the idea but doesn't think the Lead skill applies to the task. They tell Jorn that Lift is more appropriate, since the tactician is using his physical skill to aid his friends and not really doing anything interpersonal. Jorn agrees, and the Director sets the test at medium difficulty. Making the test with a bane because of his previous failure, the tactician rolls a 15, which is a success with a consequence. The montage test has 5 successes and 1 failure, but the consequence gives the Director another 2 Malice at the start of the next combat encounter.

Since the group needs only one more success to achieve total success, Karrel says she'd like to assist Val in whatever task she decides to take on. Val wants to recall lore about the Khem-hor—the inhabitants of the Infinite Desert—to remember their time-honored travel techniques using the History skill. Karrel has the Culture skill, which she can use to assist by providing information about the lives and society of the Khem-hor. She makes a Reason test to assist and gets a 16, granting Val an edge on her upcoming test.

Val attempts to recall lore about the Khem-hor, wanting to know if she can remember any of their travel from her studies of the history of the region. The Director has her make a hard Reason test with an edge, thanks to Karrel's input on the current state of Khem-hor culture. Val gets a 17, and the Director decides that the conduit recalls a shortcut through a canyon tunnel that leads directly to Ahset, avoiding a vast lake of quicksand. The heroes get their sixth success in the montage test, achieving total success, and earn 2 Victories.

OTHER OPTIONS

The heroes could have attempted other tests during their travels, such as an Agility test using the Sneak skill to lead the group through dangerous shortcuts in the desert without being seen or waylaid by predators, a Reason test using the Nature skill to find enough food and water to keep the group hydrated and fed, or a Presence test using the Music skill to inspire allies to travel faster with song.
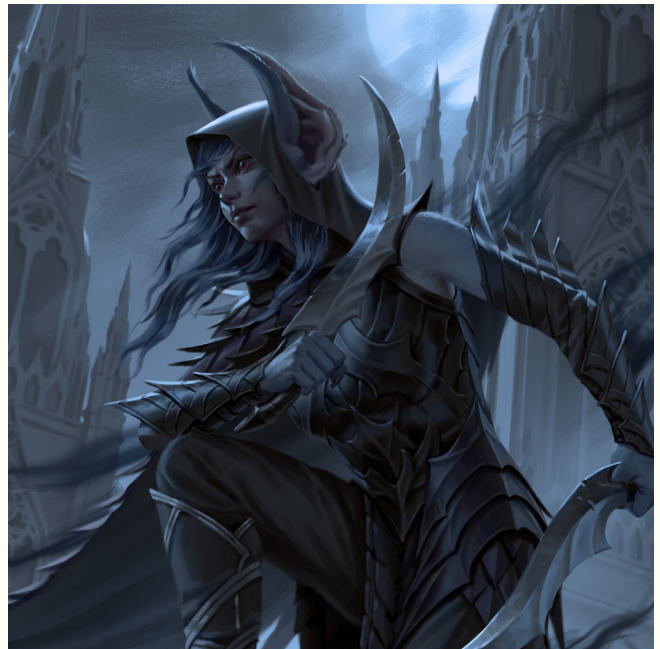
COMBAT

When the heroes face a problem that can be solved only with action, or when they come up against creatures who want to harm them, it's time to throw down!

Set the Map

When combat begins, the Director should position miniatures or tokens on a gridded map to represent the environment, the heroes, their foes, and any other creatures in the battle.

Size and Space

A creature's size indicates how many squares they occupy during combat, which defines the creature's space. If a creature's size is 1, they occupy a space of 1 square. If a creature is larger than 1 square, their size equals the number of squares they take up in length, width, and height. For example, a horse has a size of 2, which means that during combat, they occupy a space that is 2 squares long, 2 squares wide, and 2 squares high. You could also think of that space as a cube that is 2 squares on all sides.

The minimum amount of space a creature can take up during combat is 1 square, but size 1 creatures can run the range from tiny pixies to small polders, medium humans, and large hakaan. As such, for creatures of size 1, that size is further broken down as 1T, 1S, 1M, or 1L—abbreviations for tiny, small, medium, and large. Size 1T is one size smaller than size 1S, two sizes smaller than 1M, three sizes smaller than 1L, and four sizes smaller than size 2. If a mechanic mentions size 1 creatures, that mechanic applies to all creatures of size 1.

Objects also have a size rating, which usually indicates how many squares they occupy. Some objects are identified as having an irregular size, with that size instead representing the object's mass and weight relative to a creature of the same size. If a mechanic mentions objects of a certain size, that mechanic includes all objects of that size, including irregular objects.
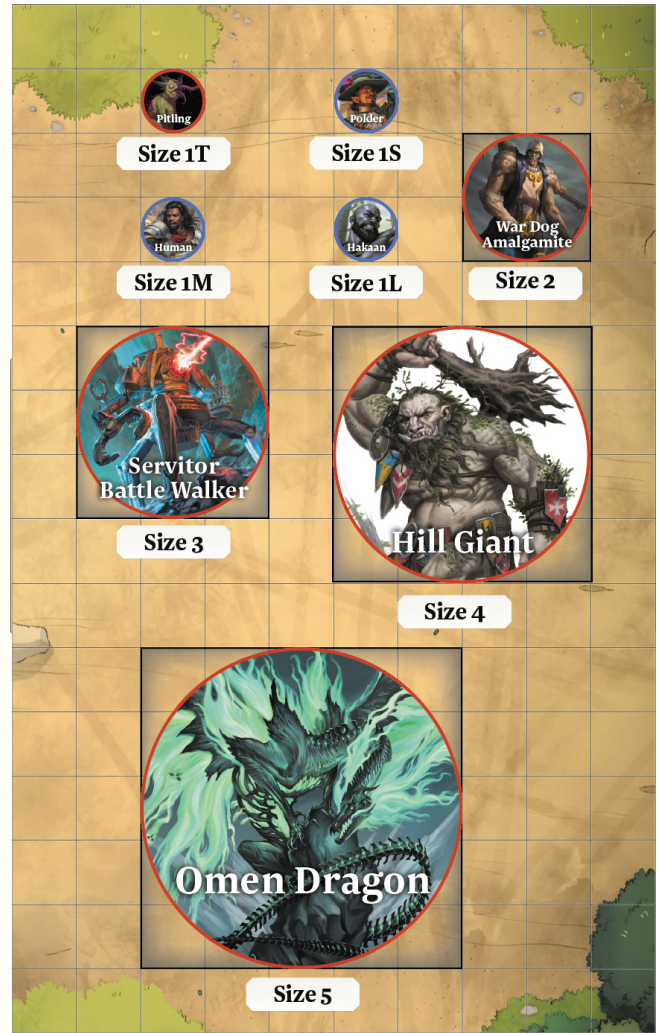
The Creature Sizes table shows example sizes for creatures up to size 5, but larger sizes are possible. There is no limit to what a creature's size might be.

Sides

Every combat encounter is a conflict between two sides. The heroes and any of their allies are one side, controlled by the players. Any creatures who oppose the heroes are the other side, controlled by the Director. All creatures who oppose the heroes are on the same side, even if those creatures also oppose each other. For example, if the heroes are battling a group of bandits when a kingfissure worm suddenly bursts into the fray to devour player characters and brigands alike, the worm is still on the side of the bandits for the purpose of the game's combat rules.

How Big is a Square?

It's helpful to know how big a square is for abilities and features that heroes and NPCs can use outside of combat. By default, a square is 5 feet on all sides. But the Director can change this measurement to 2 yards, 2 meters, 1 meter, or any other measurement you prefer, as long as that scale stays consistent throughout your game.

Size 1T · Size 1S · Size 1M · Size 1L · War Dog Amalgamite Size 2 · Servitor Battle Walker Size 3 · Hill Giant Size 4 · Omen Dragon Size 5

Creature Sizes

Size	Example Creature
1T	Pixie
1S	Polder
1M	Human
1L	Hakaan
2	Ogre
3	Shambling mound
4	Hill giant
5	Omen dragon

Combat Round

Combat takes place over a series of combat rounds. During a combat round, each creature in the battle takes a turn. Once every creature has taken a turn, a new round begins.

When Does Combat Start?

Combat starts as soon as one creature intends to harm another, or when some environmental effect is in a position to deal damage to or impose other negative effects on one or more creatures. This means that even before the action happens, a hero can't use a heroic ability without spending their Heroic Resource on it, because combat has already begun!

Determine Surprise

When battle starts, the Director determines which creatures, if any, are caught off guard. Any creature who isn't ready for combat at the start of an encounter is surprised until the end of the first combat round. A surprised creature can't take triggered actions or free triggered actions, and ability rolls made against them gain an edge.

For example, if the heroes sneak up unnoticed on a camp of marauders and attack, each marauder is surprised. Likewise, if the heroes fail to notice that all the cloaked figures in a tavern are actually brain-devouring zombies, then the heroes are surprised. If one of the heroes notices the disguised undead before the zombies attack but has no opportunity to warn their allies, that hero isn't surprised but the rest of the characters are.

Determine Who Goes First

Sometimes figuring out who gets to take the first turn in combat is automatic. If all the creatures on one side are surprised, then a creature on the other side gets to act first. But if both sides have creatures who aren't surprised, the Director or a player they choose rolls a d10. On a 6 or higher, the players determine who goes first—the heroes' side or the other side. Otherwise, the Director decides which side goes first.

Creatures Take Turns

Whichever side goes first chooses a creature (or sometimes a group of creatures on the Director's side) to act at the start of combat. Whenever the rules talk about a creature acting in combat, that creature gets to take their turn. When that turn is over, the other side chooses a creature to act. Play continues back and forth this way as each creature takes their turn.

Unless an ability or special rule allows them to do so, any creature who has taken a turn during a combat round can't act again until a new round begins. To help track which creatures have already acted in the current round, each creature can have a coin, token, or card they flip over on the table, or some kind of flag they set on their virtual tabletop token, once they've taken a turn. That way, all the players know who has already acted and who hasn't.

In many encounters, a point comes when one side has creatures who haven't acted yet but all the creatures on the other side have. The creatures who have yet to act get to take their turns in any order they choose, without turns in between from the other side. For example, consider four heroes taking on six enemies. When all four heroes have taken their turns and four of the enemies have taken theirs, the two enemies who are left take their turns one after the other to end the round.

DETERMINING WHO ACTS NEXT

When it comes to the heroes' side, the choice of who should act next is intended to give players the opportunity to comment, strategize, and plan. Some tables, in some encounters, might find that the choice of who should act next isn't obvious, leading to debate. That's fine. Deliberating about what the group should do next is classic roleplaying.

In general, though, most groups find that it's usually only one or two players in a given round who think it best if they act next. And as soon as those players explain why they want to act next and what they plan on doing, the issue is quickly resolved.

ARGUMENT TIMER

If the players do end up arguing in circles about what to do next, the Director can place a timer on the discussion. Usually, giving the players a warning and 30 seconds to decide who goes next does the trick. If they can't choose by the end of that time, the Director chooses a hero to act.

> ### Alternative Turn Order
>
> If planning everyone's turn order isn't fun for your group, you can leave it to the dice instead. At the start of combat, have each hero, enemy, and group of enemies make an Agility test, then record the totals. When it's time for someone on the heroes' side to act, the hero with the highest total goes first. On the next hero turn, the hero with the second-highest total takes their turn, and so on. The Director-controlled creatures act the same way. Creatures on the same side should reroll tied Agility tests to determine who among the tied creatures acts before the others.
>
> At the Director's discretion, a hero can swap their turn in the order with another willing hero at the start of a new combat round. This allows certain abilities that interact with the core turn order system, such as the shadow's Hesitation Is Weakness ability, to better work with this alternative system.

ENEMIES ACT IN GROUPS

Director-controlled creatures act in groups. When a group of enemies acts, the Director chooses a single creature or minion squad to take a turn. Once that turn is over, the Director chooses another creature in that group to take a turn, continuing until all members of the group have taken their turn.

End of Round

Once all creatures on both sides of a battle have acted, the combat round ends and a new combat round begins. The side whose members acted first during the initial combat round goes first in all subsequent rounds.

Taking a Turn

Each creature in combat—whether hero, adversary, or something in between—gets to take a **main action**, a **maneuver**, and a **move action** on their turn (explained later in this section). Each combatant can perform their maneuver and main action in any order, and can break up the movement granted by their move action before, after, or between their maneuver and main action however they like. You can also turn your main action into a move action or a maneuver, so that your turn can alternatively consist of two move actions and a maneuver, or two maneuvers and a move action.

The Movement section below breaks down how your move action works, while the Maneuvers and Main Actions sections break down the baseline maneuvers and main actions your character can undertake. For any activities not specifically covered in those rules, such as cutting down a chandelier to drop on enemies, the Director decides whether such an activity is a maneuver or a main action.

Triggered Actions and Free Triggered Actions

Your hero might have one or more unique triggered actions, each of which has a specified trigger that allows the action to be used. You can use one triggered action per round, either on your turn or another creature's turn, but only when the action's trigger occurs. For instance, a fury hero can use the Lines of Force triggered action to force move a target, but only after an enemy has first tried to force move the fury or another nearby creature.

A free triggered action follows the same rules as a triggered action, but it doesn't count against your limit of one triggered action per round. For instance, a shadow hero can use their Hesitation Is Weakness ability to take their turn in response to the trigger of another hero ending their turn. But because that ability is a free triggered action, the shadow can still use their In All This Confusion triggered action later in the round.

If multiple triggered actions occur in response to the same trigger, any heroes and other player-controlled creatures taking a triggered action or a free triggered action decide among themselves which of those triggered actions are resolved first. Then the Director decides the same for creatures they control.

Any effect that prevents you from using triggered actions also prevents you from using free triggered actions.

Free Maneuvers

Boring stuff like opening an unlocked door, picking up an arrow from the ground, giving an object to an adjacent ally, or drawing a weapon doesn't require a maneuver or a main action. Rather, you can undertake such straightforward activities as free maneuvers on your turn. A free maneuver follows the same rules as a regular maneuver, but you can typically take as many free maneuvers as you like.

At the Director's discretion, circumstances could make something that is typically boring more impactful and exciting. For instance, if you need to pick a magic arrow up off the ground during a violent earthquake, what would otherwise be a free maneuver could require a maneuver or a main action to accomplish.

Likewise, the nature of an activity might make it too complicated for a free maneuver. For example, picking up the body of an unconscious talent ally to carry them to safety can probably be done as a free maneuver. But if your Might is lacking and you need to pick up a tactician ally decked out in the Shining Armor kit, the Director might determine that you need to use a regular maneuver to hoist their armored form over your shoulders.

Any effect that prevents you from using maneuvers also prevents you from using free maneuvers.

No-Action Activities

Free maneuvers cover most of the simple activities you might want to undertake on your turn. When it isn't your turn, you can typically undertake even simpler activities requiring no action with the Director's approval. For instance, shouting out a warning to an ally or dropping an item so another creature can pick it up require no action.

The Director can limit what kinds of no-action activities you can attempt when it isn't your turn. For instance, shouting out a warning about an unseen foe to an ally on the ally's or the foe's turn requires no action. But the Director might stop you from giving that ally complex tactical advice when it isn't your turn, saying that doing so instead requires a free maneuver on your turn.

Movement

During combat, creatures can employ multiple mechanics that allow them to move around the battlefield. The most common of those mechanics is the Advance or Disengage move action (detailed under Move Actions below), but abilities granted by your class, equipment, ancestry, title, or other options might allow you other ways to move.

Your hero starts with a speed granted by their ancestry—usually 5. This represents the maximum number of squares you can move when you take the move action or when another effect allows you to move. Your speed can be increased by your kit and other game options.

All squares adjacent to your character cost 1 movement to move into. No, there's no Pythagorean theorem on the grid. It's a game, don't overthink it.

Your hero can move freely through an ally's space. You can move through an enemy's space, but that space is difficult terrain (see below). You can't stop moving in any other creature's space, including to make a strike or use a main action or maneuver while in that space and then continuing your move, unless that creature's size is two or more sizes greater or smaller than your own.

At the Director's discretion, you can be forced into the same space as another creature whose size is within 1 of yours, such as by falling down a narrow shaft with such a creature already at the bottom. When you are squeezed into the same space as another creature whose size is within 1 of yours, your ability rolls and tests take a bane.

Can't Exceed Speed

A single move or other effect can never allow a creature to move more squares than their speed, unless the effect states otherwise. For example, a creature with speed 5 might have that speed reduced to 2 by the slowed condition (see Conditions). If an ally then targets them with an effect that allows them to move up to 3 squares, the creature can move only 2 squares because that's their current speed.

Can't Cut Corners

A creature can't move diagonally when doing so would involve passing through the corner of a wall or some other object that completely fills the corner between the creature's space and the space they are moving to. This rule applies only to moving past objects, not moving past other creatures.

No: The diagonal path cuts a corner of the building.

Cut Corners

The tactician moves 3 squares to exit the building without cutting corners. The war dog eviscerite can't move around the side of the building in just 2 squares of movement, since they'd have to cut a corner to do so.

Shifting

Shifting is a careful form of movement that allows a creature to move safely past dangerous foes. Certain abilities, features, and other rules allow you to shift a specific number of squares, sometimes up to your speed. Whenever you shift, creatures can't make opportunity attacks against you triggered by that movement (see Grabbed later in this section).

You can't shift into or while within difficult terrain or damaging terrain (see below). If a rule allows you to shift, you can choose to instead move up to the number of squares you would have shifted (for example, to get out of difficult terrain). However, you can't combine moving and shifting within that movement.

Movement Types

Creatures in the game can use eight types of movement: walk, burrow, climb, swim, jump, crawl, fly, and teleport.

WALK

Walking is the most common movement type, whether it refers to ambulating on legs, rolling, slithering, or some other default method of movement. Unless specified otherwise, all creatures can move over solid horizontal ground without any problem.

BURROW

A creature who has "burrow" in their speed entry, or who gains the temporary ability to burrow, can move through dirt horizontally, and either has the means to breathe while doing so or doesn't require air to live. Such creatures can't move through more solid ground, such as stone, unless their stat block or the effect that lets them burrow says otherwise. Similarly, a burrowing creature doesn't leave a tunnel unless the rules say so.

Dig Maneuver

It takes extra effort to dig vertically through the ground as opposed to tunneling horizontally, requiring a creature to use a special maneuver. To use the Dig maneuver, a creature must have "burrow" in their speed entry, they must have a speed that is equal to or greater than their size, and they must be touching terrain that can be burrowed through.

When a creature uses the Dig maneuver, they can move vertically up to a number of squares equal to their size. If a burrowing creature has a creature who is not unconscious grabbed, they can't willingly move deeper into the ground. It's too difficult to dig with a flailing enemy in your claws.

Targeting Burrowing Creatures

If you are on the ground, you have line of effect to a burrowing creature if that creature occupies 1 or more squares of terrain that can be burrowed through and that touch the ground, and if you have line of effect to any of those squares. The burrowing creature gains the benefit of cover from you.

If you are completely beneath the ground while burrowing, you don't have line of effect to any creature on the surface unless a rule states otherwise.

If you are completely beneath the ground while burrowing and are adjacent to another creature who is burrowing, you have line of effect to that creature, though you both have cover from each other.

You can't gain the benefit of high ground (see below) against creatures who are completely beneath the ground while burrowing.

Non-Burrowing Creatures

If you are on the ground and adjacent to a creature who is beneath the ground while burrowing, you can use a maneuver to pull that creature up 1 square out of the ground, provided the creature is willing.

If a creature who can't burrow wants to dig into the ground, they can use the following ability provided their speed is 2 or more.

Claw Dirt
—   Maneuver

▶ Self   ↻ Self

Power Roll + Might:

- **≤11** You can move 1 square into, out of, or through ground you are touching that can be burrowed through, and you are slowed and weakened (EoT).
- **12-16** You can use your main action this turn to move 1 square into, out of, or through ground you are touching that can be burrowed through, and you are slowed (EoT).
- **17+** You can move 1 square into, out of, or through ground you are touching that can be burrowed through.

Burrowing Forced Movement

While a creature who is completely beneath the ground while burrowing is force moved by movement that isn't vertical, they aren't moved, and they take 1 damage for each square they would have been force moved. If the forced movement is vertical, the creature is moved through the dirt as is if were air.

CLIMB OR SWIM

A creature who has "climb" in their speed entry, or who gains the temporary ability to automatically climb, can climb across vertical and horizontal surfaces at full speed. Likewise, a creature who has "swim" in their speed entry, or who gains the temporary ability to automatically swim, can swim in liquid at full speed.

Creatures without those types of movement can still climb or swim when a rule allows them to move, but each square of climbing or swimming costs 2 squares of movement. If a surface is difficult to climb (for instance, a sheer cliff or ice-covered wall) or a liquid is hard to swim through (a raging river or whirlpool), the Director can call for a Might test. On a failure, a creature can't climb or swim but wastes no movement in the attempt. The Director can also impose other consequences to failure, such as being caught in the spinning current of a whirlpool.

Climbing Other Creatures

You can attempt to climb a creature whose size is greater than yours. If the creature is willing, you can climb them without any trouble. If the creature is unwilling, you make the following test:

Power Roll + Might or Agility:
- **≤11** You fail to climb the creature, and they can make a free strike against you.
- **12-16** You fail to climb the creature.
- **17+** You climb the creature.

While you climb or ride a creature, you gain an edge on melee abilities used against them. The creature can use a maneuver to attempt to knock you off, forcing you to make the following test:

Power Roll + Might or Agility:
- **≤11** You fall off the creature into an unoccupied adjacent space of your choice, taking falling damage and landing prone as usual (see Falling below).
- **12-16** You slide down the creature into an unoccupied adjacent space of your choice and don't land prone.
- **17+** You continue to hold on to the creature.

If you are knocked prone while climbing or riding a creature, you fall and land prone in an adjacent space of your choice, taking damage as usual from the fall.

JUMP

Whenever an effect allows you to move (including using the Advance move action), you can automatically long jump a number of squares up to your Might or Agility score (your choice; minimum 1 square) as part of that movement. The height of your jump is automatically 1 square as part of that movement.

If you want to jump even longer or higher than your baseline jump allows, make a Might or Agility test:

Power Roll + Might or Agility:
- **≤11** You don't jump any farther than your baseline jump allows.
- **12-16** You jump 1 square longer and higher than your baseline jump allows.
- **17+** You jump 2 squares longer and higher than your baseline jump allows.

You can't jump farther or higher than the distance of the effect that allows you to move. You can't jump out of difficult terrain or damaging terrain (see below).

CRAWL

If you are prone (see Conditions), you can remain prone and crawl on the ground. Doing so costs you 1 additional square of movement for every square you crawl. If you intentionally want to crawl, you can fall prone as a free maneuver. While voluntarily prone, you can choose to stand as a free maneuver.

FLY

A creature who has "fly" in their speed entry, or who gains the temporary ability to fly, can move through the air vertically or horizontally at full speed and remain in midair. If a flying creature is knocked prone or has their speed reduced to 0, they fall (see Falling below).

HOVER

A creature who has "hover" in their speed entry (most commonly alongside "fly" or "teleport"), or who gains the temporary ability to hover, can remain motionless in midair. They don't fall even if they are knocked prone or their speed is reduced to 0.

TELEPORT

When a creature teleports, they move from one space to another space instantaneously. The following rules apply to teleporting:

- Teleporting doesn't provoke opportunity attacks or other effects that are triggered by a creature moving.
- When a creature teleports, they bypass any obstacles between the space they leave and their destination space.
- A creature teleporting themself must have line of effect to their destination space. A creature teleporting another creature must have line of effect from the space the teleported creature leaves and to their destination space.
- A teleporting creature's destination space can't be occupied by another creature or object.
- The effect that lets a creature teleport indicates how far they can teleport. That distance can be greater than the creature's speed.
- If a creature can teleport as part of their usual movement, they can use the Advance move action to teleport a number of squares up to their usual speed, unmodified by conditions or effects.
- If a creature teleports while prone, they can be standing when they reach their destination space provided they are able to stand. If a prone creature is teleported by another creature, it is up to that creature whether the teleported creature remains prone or stands if they are able.
- If you teleport while affected by the grabbed or restrained conditions, those conditions end for you.
- When a creature teleports, they must leave the space where they start and enter a new space. A creature can't teleport to and from the same space.

Falling

When a creature falls 2 or more squares and lands on the ground, they take 2 damage for each square they fall (to a maximum of 50 damage) and land prone. A creature who falls can reduce the effective height of the fall by a number of squares equal to their Agility score (to a minimum of 0). Falling into liquid that is 1 square or more deep reduces the effective height of a fall by 4 squares (to a minimum of 0).

Falling is not forced movement, but being force moved downward is considered falling (see Falling below). Movement from falling doesn't provoke opportunity attacks (see Grabbed below).

FALLING ONTO ANOTHER CREATURE

A creature who falls and lands on another creature causes that creature to take the same damage from the fall. The falling creature then lands prone in the nearest unoccupied space of their choice. If the falling creature's size is greater than the Might score of the creature they land on, that creature is knocked prone.

FALLING FAR

When a creature first falls from a great height, they fall 100 squares in the first round. At the end of each subsequent round that they remain falling, they fall another 100 squares.

Difficult Terrain

Areas of thick underbrush, rubble, spiderwebs, or other obstacles to movement create difficult terrain. It costs 1 additional square of movement to enter a square of difficult terrain.

Damaging Terrain

Areas of acid, fire, sharp rocks, lava, or any other terrain that causes damage to creatures within it is damaging terrain. The damage dealt by damaging terrain is noted in the terrain's description or in the description of the effect that creates the terrain.
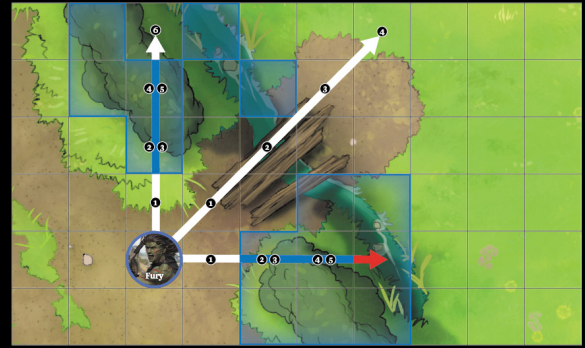
Difficult Terrain

A fury with speed 6 takes the Advance move action across a field with water and bushes that create difficult terrain (indicated by the blue squares on the map). Each highlighted path indicates how many squares of movement they must use while moving through or avoiding difficulty terrain. Their movement can't exceed 6 squares.

High Ground

Whenever a creature uses an ability to target a creature or object while standing on the ground and occupying a space that is fully above the target's space, they gain an edge on the power roll against that target. To be fully above a target, the bottom of a creature's space must be higher than or bordering on the top of the target's space.

A creature can gain this benefit while climbing only if they have "climb" in their speed entry or can automatically climb at full speed while moving.

Forced Movement

Some actions and maneuvers allow a creature to push, pull, or slide a target creature or object a specific distance across the battlefield. Collectively, these types of movement are called forced movement.

Push X: The creature moves the target up to X squares away from them in a straight line, without moving them vertically. Each square the creature moves the target must put the target farther away from them.

Pull X: The creature moves the target up to X squares toward them in a straight line, without moving them vertically. Each square the creature moves the target must bring the target closer to them.

Slide X: The creature moves the target up to X squares in any direction, except for vertically. Unlike a push or a pull, a slide doesn't need to be a straight line.

When you force move a target, you can always move that target fewer squares than the number indicated. For example, when the conduit obtains a tier 3 "push 3" outcome with their Call the Thunder Down ability, they can push targets any distance up to 3 squares, including choosing to not move certain targets at all.

Forced movement ignores difficult terrain and never provokes opportunity attacks. When you force move a target into damaging terrain or into terrain that produces an effect, they are affected as if they had moved into it willingly.
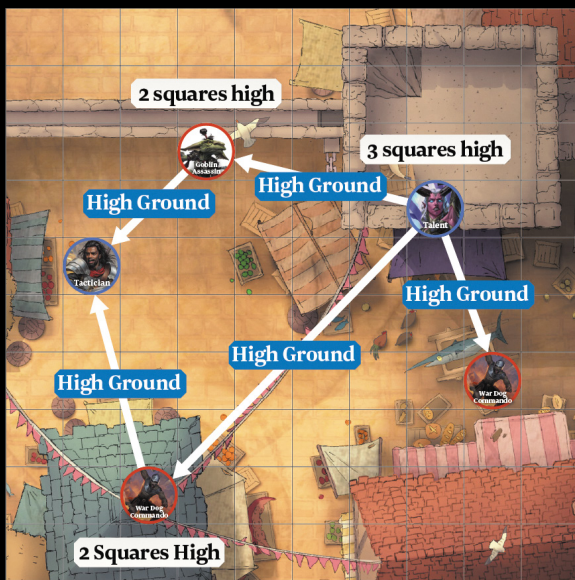
High Ground

The talent stands atop a 3-square-high tower, which is higher than any other creature. They gain an edge on all power rolls made against their enemies in the diagram. The goblin assassin and war dog commando stand on structures that are 2 squares high. They gain an edge on ability rolls against the tactician, who is standing on the ground, but not against the talent.

Forced Movement

The fury pushes a war dog commando 2 squares. The censor pulls a commando 2 squares. The elementalist slides a commando 2 squares. Each commando can end up anywhere in the indicated area of their forced movement on the diagram.

Multitarget Abilities and Forced Movement

Some creatures can force move multiple creatures or objects with a single ability. Unless the ability specifies otherwise, the creature using the ability determines the order in which the targets are force moved. The creature should select each target individually and complete their forced movement before force moving the next target affected.

Vertical

If a forced movement effect has the word "vertical" in front of it, then the forced movement can move a target up or down in addition to horizontally. For example, if a forced movement effect says "vertical push 5," then a creature targeted by the effect can be pushed up to 5 squares in any direction, as long as the forced movement is a straight line.

If a creature who can't fly is left in midair at the end of a vertical forced move, they fall. Forced movement made against a creature who is flying is always a vertical forced move, whether or not the effect specifies it.
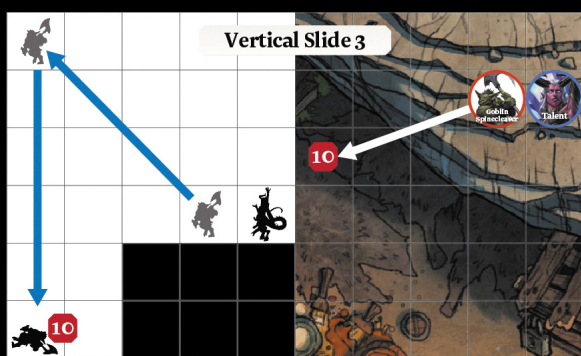
Though you can't freely push, pull, or slide a target up and down unless that forced movement specifies "vertical," you can move them along a physical slope such as a hill or staircase. For a target to be force moved along a slope, each square of the slope can be no more than 1 square higher or lower than the previous square.

Big Versus Little

When a larger creature force moves a smaller target with a melee weapon ability, the distance of the forced movement is increased by 1. If a smaller creature force moves a larger target with a melee weapon ability, the distance doesn't change.

Slamming into Creatures

When you force move a creature into another creature, the movement ends and both creatures take 1 damage for each square remaining in the first creature's forced movement. You can also force move an object into a creature. The object's movement ends, and the creature takes 1 damage for each square remaining in the object's forced movement.

It's possible to move a creature or object of a larger size into several creatures of a smaller size at the same time. When this happens, the larger creature in the collision takes damage only once, not once for each smaller creature they slam into.

If a creature is killed by damage from an ability or effect that also force moves them, a second creature they are slammed into still takes damage unless the Director deems otherwise.

You can force move another creature into yourself with a pull or a slide.

Vertical Forced Movement

The talent vertically slides the goblin spinecleaver 3 squares up into the air and off of a cliff. The goblin falls 5 squares, taking 10 damage and landing prone from the fall.

Slamming Into Creatures

The null slides a war dog commando 5 squares. The null force moves the commando 1 square and then slams them into another adjacent commando. The forced movement ends, and both commandos take 4 damage, since the forced movement still had 4 squares remaining when the commandos collided.

SLAMMING INTO OBJECTS

When a creature force moves a target into a stationary object that is the target's size or larger and the object doesn't break (see below), the movement ends and the target takes 2 damage plus 1 damage for each square remaining in their forced movement.

If you force move a creature downward into an object that doesn't break (including the ground), they also take falling damage as if they had fallen the distance force moved and their Agility score was 0 (see Falling above).

Tracking Object Forced-Movement Damage

At the Director's discretion, mundane objects that are force moved into creatures or other objects take damage as if they were creatures. Sturdy objects can take damage as follows before they are destroyed:

- Wood object: 3 damage for each square it occupies
- Stone object: 6 damage for each square it occupies
- Metal object: 9 damage for each square it occupies

More fragile objects are destroyed after taking any damage.

HURLING THROUGH OBJECTS

When you move a creature into a mundane object, the object can break depending on how many squares of forced movement remain. The cost of being slammed into an object is tied to the damage a target takes for being hurled through it:

- It costs 1 remaining square of forced movement to destroy 1 square of glass. The creature moved takes 3 damage.
- It costs 3 remaining squares of forced movement to destroy 1 square of wood. The creature moved takes 5 damage.
- It costs 6 remaining squares of forced movement to destroy 1 square of stone. The creature moved takes 8 damage.
- It costs 9 remaining squares of forced movement to destroy 1 square of metal. The creature moved takes 11 damage.

If any forced movement remains after the object is destroyed, you can continue to move the creature who destroyed the object.
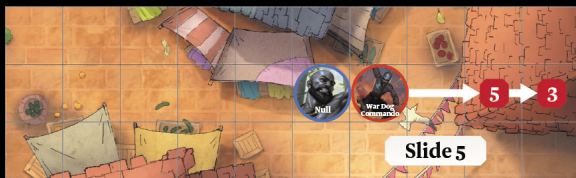
Slide 5

Hurling Through Objects

The null slides a war dog commando 5 squares. The null force moves the commando 1 square and then slams them into a thick wooden wall. The null forces the commando through the first square of the wall by using 3 squares of forced movement, resulting in the commando taking 5 damage. The commando still has 1 square of forced movement left, so they are pushed into the next square of the wall, which doesn't break but does result in the commando's forced moment ending and them taking another 3 damage: 1 for the square of forced movement leftover and 2 for colliding with an object.

FORCED INTO A FALL

If you can't fly and are force moved across an open space that would cause you to fall, such as being pushed over the edge of a cliff, you continue moving the total distance you were moved first. If you are still in a position to fall when the forced movement ends, you fall.

STABILITY

Each creature has a stability that allows them to resist forced movement. When a creature is force moved, they can reduce that movement up to a number of squares equal to their stability. Heroes start with stability 0 and can increase their stability through ancestry, class, and kit options.

A creature's stability can't be less than 0, even when reduced by a penalty.

"WHEN A CREATURE MOVES …"

Certain abilities and effects trigger when a creature moves into a particular area. Forced movement triggers these options unless otherwise noted, including an effect stating that a creature must willingly move to trigger it.

DEATH EFFECTS AND FORCED MOVEMENT

Some creatures have traits or abilities that trigger when they die or are reduced to 0 Stamina. If such a creature is reduced to 0 Stamina by damage from an ability or effect that also force moves them, the forced movement takes place before the triggered effect.

Move Actions

A move action allows a creature to move around the battlefield. Sometimes you'll already be exactly where you want to be so that you don't need to use a move action on your turn. That's okay! The decision to not move is just as tactical as the decision to move.

Advance

When a creature takes the Advance move action, they move a number of squares up to their speed. They can break up this movement with their maneuver and main action however they wish.

Disengage

When a creature takes the Disengage move action, they can shift 1 square. Certain class features, kits, and other rules allow a creature to shift more than 1 square when they disengage. A creature who does so can break up their shift with their maneuver and main action however they wish.

Ride

A creature can take the Ride move action only while mounted on another creature (see Mounted Combat below). When a creature takes the Ride move action, they cause their mount to move up to the mount's speed, taking the rider with them. Alternatively, a creature can use the Ride move action to have their mount use the Disengage move action as a free triggered action. A creature can use the Ride move action only once per round. A mounted creature can only have this move action applied to them once per round. This movement can be broken up with the rider's maneuver and main action however they wish.

Maneuvers

A maneuver typically involves less focus and exertion than a main action (see below). It can be an opportunity to move other creatures, drink a potion, or undertake similar activities.

Sometimes you might not have anything you can do with your maneuver. That's totally fine! Often, the best thing to do on your turn is take a main action and move on.

Aid Attack

A creature who uses the Aid Attack maneuver chooses an enemy adjacent to them. The next ability roll an ally makes against that enemy before the start of the aiding creature's next turn gains an edge.

Catch Breath

A creature who uses the Catch Breath maneuver spends a Recovery and regains Stamina equal to their recovery value. (See below for Stamina. See Recoveries in The Basics.)

A creature who is dying (see Dying and Death in Stamina below) can't use the Catch Breath maneuver, but other creatures can help them spend Recoveries in other ways.

Escape Grab

A creature who is grabbed by another creature, an object, or an effect (see Grab below) can attempt to escape by using the following ability.

Escape Grab

—	**Maneuver**
🗡 Self	🎯 Self

Power Roll + Might or Agility:

- **≤11** No effect.
- **12-16** You can escape the grab, but if you do, a creature who has you grabbed can make a melee free strike against you before you are no longer grabbed.
- **17+** You are no longer grabbed.

Effect: You take a bane on this maneuver if your size is smaller than the size of the creature, object, or effect that has you grabbed.

See Conditions for information on the grabbed condition.

Grab

A creature seeking to keep a foe close and locked down can attempt to grab a creature using the following ability.

Grab

Melee, Weapon	**Maneuver**
🗡 Melee 1	🎯 One creature

Power Roll + Might:

- **≤11** No effect.
- **12-16** You can grab the target, but if you do, the target can make a melee free strike against you before they are grabbed.
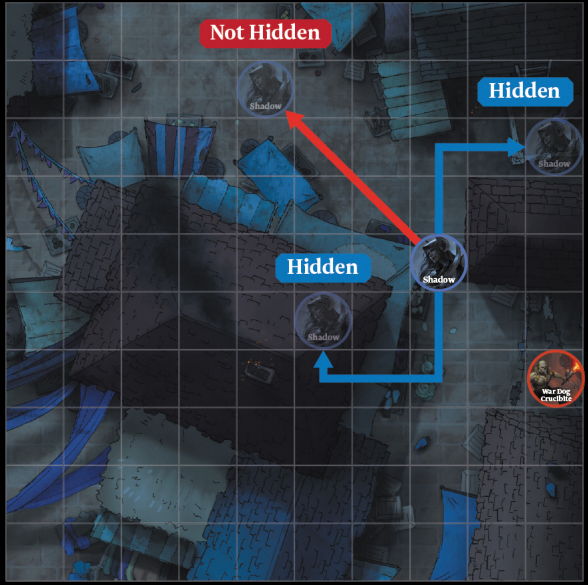- **17+** The target is grabbed by you.

Effect: You can usually target only creatures of your size or smaller. If your Might score is 2 or higher, you can target any creature with a size equal to or less than your Might score.

Unless otherwise indicated, a creature can grab only one creature at a time.

See Conditions for information on the grabbed condition.

Hide

Using the Hide maneuver, a creature attempts to hide from other creatures who aren't observing them while they have cover or concealment. See Hide and Sneak in Tests for full details.

Hiding

To become hidden, the shadow can't be observed by the war dog crucibite, so they must get out of the crucibite's line of effect. In this situation, the shadow could do this by moving to put a wall between them and the crucibite or moving up onto a roof.

Knockback

A creature wanting to push an adjacent creature away from them can attempt to shove that creature using the following ability.

Knockback

Melee, Weapon	**Maneuver**
🗡 Melee 1	🎯 1 creature

Power Roll + Might:

- **≤11** Push 1
- **12-16** Push 2
- **17+** Push 3

Effect: You can usually target only creatures of your size or smaller. If your Might score is 2 or higher, you can target any creature with a size equal to or less than your Might score.

Make or Assist a Test

Many tests are maneuvers if made in combat. Searching a chest with a Reason test, picking a door's lock with an Agility test, or lifting a portcullis with a Might test would all be maneuvers. Assisting a test is also a maneuver in combat (see Assist a Test in Tests).

Complex or time-consuming tests might require a main action if made in combat—or could take so long that they can't be made during combat at all. Other tests that take no time at all, such as a Reason test to recall lore about mummies, are usually free maneuvers in combat. The Director has the final say regarding which tests can be made as maneuvers.

Search for Hidden Creatures

The Search for Hidden Creatures maneuver allows a creature to attempt to locate creatures hidden from them (see Hide and Sneak in Tests).

Stand Up

A creature can use the Stand Up maneuver to stand up if they are prone, ending that condition. Alternatively, they can use this maneuver to make a willing adjacent prone creature stand up.

Use Consumable

Unless otherwise noted in its description, a creature can activate a consumable treasure such as a potion with the Use Consumable maneuver. A creature can use this maneuver to administer a consumable treasure that benefits the user either to themself or to a willing adjacent creature.

Main Actions

When you take a main action, you most often do so to use a unique ability granted by your class, kit, or a treasure (see Abilities). These abilities represent the most unique, flavorful, and impactful things you can do with your main action.

You can also use your main action to catch your breath, help another creature regain Stamina, charge into battle, defend yourself, or make a free strike.

You can convert your main action into a maneuver or a move action, allowing you to take two maneuvers or move actions on your turn.

Charge

When a creature takes the Charge main action, they move up to their speed in a straight line, then make a melee free strike (see Free Strikes below) against a target when they end their move. If the creature has an ability with the Charge keyword, they can use that ability against the target instead of a free strike.

A creature can't move through difficult terrain or shift when they charge. They can fly or burrow as part of the Charge main action if they have that movement available to them, but they can't climb or swim while charging unless they can automatically use that movement at full speed.

Defend

When a creature takes the Defend main action, ability rolls made against them have a double bane until the start of their next turn. Additionally, you have a double edge on tests when called for to resist environmental effects or a creature's traits or abilities. A creature gains no benefit from this action while another creature is taunted by them (see Conditions).

Free Strike

A creature can use this main action to make a free strike (see Free Strikes below). Most of the time, you'll want to use the more impactful main actions granted by your class, kit, or other feature, just as the Director will use the main actions in a creature's stat block, but free strikes are available for when all else fails. For instance, a fury who has no other options for ranged strikes might use the Ranged Weapon Free Strike ability with an improvised weapon when battling a flying foe.

Heal

A creature who uses the Heal main action employs medicine or inspiring words to make an adjacent creature feel better and stay in the fight. The target creature can spend a Recovery to regain Stamina, or can make a saving throw against one effect they are suffering that is ended by a saving throw.

Free Strikes

Every creature can use a free strike ability as a main action on their turn, though doing so typically isn't the most effective choice. Most of the time, you'll use free strikes when the rules call for it. Specific rules let you use free strikes as part of an action that allows you to also do something else impactful, such as how the Charge main action lets you move and use a melee free strike in one main action (see Charge above).

Many rules and abilities allow heroes to make free strikes when it isn't their turn, such as the tactician's Overwatch ability. As well, all characters can make an opportunity attack free strike.

Granted Abilities

Some abilities, such as the tactician's Strike Now or I'll Open and You'll Close abilities, allow another creature to use a signature ability or heroic ability when it isn't their turn. Unless otherwise stated, a creature can always use a free strike instead of a granted signature ability or heroic ability.

Opportunity Attacks

Whenever a creature has an enemy adjacent to them and the enemy willingly moves to a space that isn't adjacent to the creature without shifting, the creature can take advantage of that movement to quickly make a melee free strike against the enemy as a free triggered action. This is called an opportunity attack.

If a creature has a bane or double bane on the power roll against the enemy, they can't make an opportunity attack.

Standard Free Strikes

Every hero has two standard free strike abilities available to them. Your class might give you additional free strike options, and your kit can improve the standard options.

A melee weapon free strike is a melee strike made with an unarmed strike or an improvised weapon. A ranged weapon free strike is a ranged strike made with an improvised weapon. At the Director's discretion, the damage type of an improvised weapon can change based on the object used. For example, if you use a burning torch as an improvised weapon, it could deal fire damage when used for a free strike.

Melee Weapon Free Strike

Charge, Melee, Strike, Weapon — Main action
⚔ Melee 1 — ⦿ One creature or object

Power Roll + Might or Agility:
≤11	2 + **M** or **A** damage
12–16	5 + **M** or **A** damage
17+	7 + **M** or **A** damage

Ranged Weapon Free Strike

Ranged, Strike, Weapon — Main action
⟡ Ranged 5 — ⦿ One creature or object

Power Roll + Might or Agility:
≤11	2 + **M** or **A** damage
12–16	4 + **M** or **A** damage
17+	6 + **M** or **A** damage

Opportunity Attacks

The tactician can't make any opportunity attacks against these adjacent war dogs as they move. Despite moving, the commando never stops being adjacent to the tactician, and the crucibite shifts away instead of moving.

Opportunity Attacks: Moving Out

A war dog crucibite moves out of a space that is adjacent to the tactician and into a space that isn't adjacent. The tactician can make an opportunity attack against the crucibite.

Opportunity Attacks: Moving With Banes

The war dog eviservite has a bane on strikes against the adjacent censor, so the censor can freely move away from the eviservite without worrying about the war dog making an opportunity attack.

Flanking

When you and one or more allies are adjacent to the same enemy and on opposite sides of the enemy, you are flanking that enemy. While flanking an enemy, you gain an edge on melee strikes against them.

If you're unsure whether your hero and an ally are flanking a foe, imagine a line extending from the center of your space to the center of your ally's space. If that line passes through opposite sides or corners of the enemy's space, then you and your ally are flanking the enemy.

You must have line of effect to the enemy and be able to take triggered actions to gain or grant the flanking benefit.

Flanking

The censor flanks the war dog commando with the fury, since they are on directly opposite sides of their enemy. The troubadour isn't flanking the creature with the censor though, since they aren't on directly opposite sides. The shadow can't flank the crucibite with the conduit because the conduit is dazed, which prevents them from taking triggered actions.
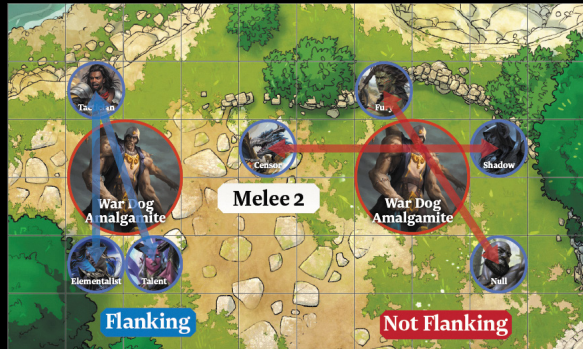

Flanking

The tacitician flanks the war dog amalgamite with the elementalist and talent, since they are on directly opposite sides of their enemy. No heroes flank the other amalgamite. The censor, using an ability with a distance of melee 2, isn't adjacent to the amalgamite and so can't flank with the shadow. The fury and null aren't on directly opposite sides of the amalgamite, and so they aren't flanking their enemy either.

Cover

When you have line of effect to a creature or object but that target has at least half their form blocked by a solid object such as a tree, wall, or overturned table, the target has cover. You take a bane on damage-dealing abilities used against creatures or objects that have cover from you.
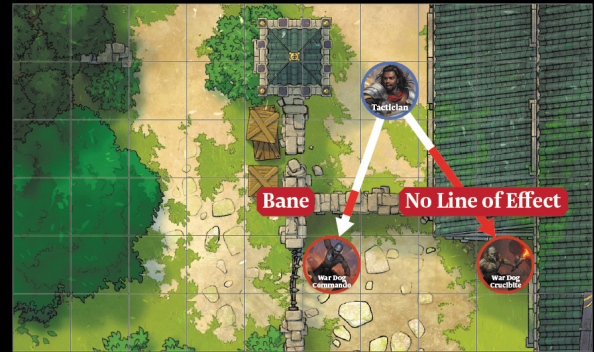
Cover

The war dog commando has cover against a strike from the tacitician, since a low wall between them covers half of the commando's body. The tacitician can't attack the crucibite, since much higher walls completely block the crucibite's body, and therefore the tacitician does not have line of effect to the crucibite.

Concealment

Darkness, fog, invisibility magic, and any other effect that fully obscures a creature or object but doesn't protect their physical form grants that creature or object concealment. Even if you have line of effect to such a target, a creature or object has concealment from you if you can't see or otherwise observe them. You can target a creature or object with concealment using a strike, provided they aren't hidden (see Hide and Sneak in Tests). However, strikes against such targets take a bane.

Concealment

The tacitician is shrouded in fog, which provides them with concealment against a strike from the war dog crucibite. The crucibite's strike takes a bane as a result.

Invisible Creatures

Invisible creatures always have concealment from other creatures. If an invisible creature isn't hidden, they can still be targeted by abilities. The test made to find a hidden creature who is invisible takes a bane.

Damage

Strikes, area attacks, environmental effects, and other hazards can all deal damage to the heroes and their foes. Whenever a creature takes damage, they reduce their Stamina (see below) by an amount equal to the damage taken.

Damage Types

Typical damage, such as that caused by weapons, falling, traps, and monstrous claws, has no type associated with it. That's because for most creatures, there's no difference in the amount of harm caused by being run through with a pike, dropped from a height onto a stone floor, slashed by a pendulum scythe, or skewered on a minotaur's horns.

However, when it comes to elemental and supernatural damage sources, some creatures might have an immunity or weakness to that damage. As such, abilities and effects note when they deal any of the following damage types: acid, cold, corruption, fire, holy, lightning, poison, psychic, or sonic.

DAMAGE IMMUNITY

Damage immunity means that a creature can ignore some or all of the damage they would usually take from certain attacks or effects.

Damage immunity might have a damage type associated with it, expressed as "[damage type] immunity." Damage immunity often has a value associated with it, so that one creature's stat block notes "damage immunity 5" (representing immunity to all damage), while another creature has "lightning immunity 5." Whenever a target with damage immunity takes damage of the indicated type, they can reduce the damage by the value of the immunity (to a minimum of 0 damage). If the value of the immunity is "all," then the target ignores all damage of the indicated type.

Damage immunity should be the last thing applied when calculating damage. For instance, if your hero has fire immunity 5 and takes 8 fire damage, they take 3 damage. But if an ally first halved the damage with a triggered action, your hero would take 4 damage before immunity is applied, with immunity then reducing the damage to 0.

If multiple damage immunities apply to a source of damage, only the immunity with the highest value applies. For instance, a creature with damage immunity 5 and fire immunity 10 who takes 12 fire damage reduces the damage by 10 points.

DAMAGE WEAKNESS

Damage weakness works like damage immunity, except that creatures take extra damage whenever they take damage of the indicated type. For instance, if a creature has fire weakness 5 and is dealt 10 fire damage, they take 15 fire damage instead.

A creature who has "damage weakness X" with no specific type or keyword indicated has weakness of the indicated amount when they take damage of any type.

If a creature has both damage immunity and damage weakness for a source of damage, apply the weakness first, then the immunity.

If multiple damage weaknesses apply to a source of damage, only the weakness with the highest value applies.

Stamina

Your hero's survivability is represented by your Stamina. Think of Stamina as a combination of a creature's physical vitality and their overall energy for dodging and resisting incoming blows, spells, and other violence. It's not that every instance of damage deals a bleeding wound to you, but that each one chips away at your ability to fight effectively. One attack might make you sweat as you leap back to avoid an arrow, while another might graze your elbow with a dagger nick, leaving a dull, distracting pain. Eventually, this draining of energy leaves you open for bigger blows that can truly harm your body—or possibly kill you.

After any damage you take is reduced by damage immunity or other effects, your Stamina is reduced by an amount equal to the remaining damage. Some effects can also reduce your Stamina maximum, limiting the amount of Stamina you can regain.

Recoveries and Recovery Value

Each hero has a number of Recoveries determined by their class. A hero also has a recovery value that equals one-third of their Stamina maximum, rounded down. When you use the Catch Breath maneuver in combat (see Maneuvers above), you spend a Recovery and regain Stamina equal to your recovery value. Outside of combat, you can spend as many Recoveries as you have remaining. Some abilities, items, and other effects allow you to spend a Recovery to regain Stamina equal to your recovery value plus a little extra (as described by the effect), or to regain Stamina without spending a Recovery.

Winded

Your winded value equals half your Stamina maximum. When your Stamina is equal to or less than your winded value, you are winded. Although being winded has no effects on its own, certain ancestry, class, item, title, and monster abilities affect winded creatures.

You can tell when other creatures are winded and vice versa.

Dying and Death

When your Stamina is 0 or lower, you are dying. While dying, you can't use the Catch Breath maneuver in combat. Additionally, you are bleeding, and this instance of the condition can't be negated or removed in any way until you are no longer dying. While you are dying, you can still act, your allies can help you spend Recoveries in combat, and you can spend Recoveries out of combat as usual.

While your Stamina is lower than 0, if it reaches the negative of your winded value, you die. When you die, you can't be brought back to life without the use of a special powerful item, such as a Scroll of Resurrection.

Director-Controlled Creatures

In most circumstances, Director-controlled creatures die or are destroyed when their Stamina drops to 0.

NO RECOVERIES

Director-controlled creatures don't have Recoveries or a recovery value. Any such creatures who regain Stamina during a battle do so by way of a special item or an ability in their stat block. However, there are times when a hero might wish to use an ability that allows another creature to spend a Recovery or to regain Stamina equal to their recovery value on an injured NPC. In such cases, a Director-controlled creature regains Stamina equal to one-third of their Stamina maximum.

Knocking Creatures Out

If you damage a creature with an ability that would kill them, you can choose to instead knock them unconscious. If a creature takes damage while unconscious in this way, they die.

Director-controlled creatures remain unconscious for 1 hour if no one does anything to wake them. They then gain 1 Stamina and are no longer unconscious.

Heroes remain unconscious for 1 hour if no one does anything to wake them. After 1 hour, they can spend a Recovery and are no longer unconscious. If the hero has no Recoveries left, they can't wake up until they finish a respite.

UNCONSCIOUS
While you are unconscious, you can't take main actions, maneuvers, triggered actions, free triggered actions, or free maneuvers; your speed is 0; you are unaware of your surroundings; and you are prone. Ability rolls against you have a double edge. If you wake up from being unconscious, you can stand up from prone as a free maneuver.

Temporary Stamina

Some abilities, treasures, and other effects grant a creature temporary Stamina. Temporary Stamina shouldn't be included in a creature's Stamina total when figuring out a creature's recovery value or winded value. If you have temporary Stamina while winded, dying, or dead, the temporary Stamina doesn't change those states.

Whenever you take damage while you have temporary Stamina, the temporary Stamina decreases first, and any leftover damage is applied to your Stamina as usual. For instance, if you have 10 temporary Stamina and take 16 damage, you lose the temporary Stamina and then lose another 6 Stamina.

There is no maximum to how much temporary Stamina you can have. Regaining Stamina can't restore temporary Stamina. If you have temporary Stamina and then gain more temporary Stamina, you get whichever amount of temporary Stamina is greater, rather than adding the two pools together. For instance, if an ability grants you 10 temporary Stamina when you already have 5, you have 10 temporary Stamina, not 15.

Unless otherwise indicated, temporary Stamina disappears at the end of an encounter.

Object Stamina

Mundane objects in the game have Stamina based on the material they're made of. When an object's Stamina is reduced to 0, the object is destroyed. Objects have poison immunity all and psychic immunity all, though the Director can remove one or both of these immunities in the case of living objects, such as plants. A size 1 object or 1 square of a larger object made of common materials has Stamina as follows:

- Glass: 1 Stamina
- Wood: 3 Stamina
- Stone: 6 Stamina
- Metal: 9 Stamina

The Director can decide that a well-made or poorly made object has more or less Stamina. Destroying a supernatural object often (but not always) requires a specific quest, such as throwing a magic ring back into the volcano where it was forged.

Underwater Combat

If a creature is fully submerged in water, they have fire immunity 5 and lightning weakness 5. If they can't automatically swim at full speed while moving, their power rolls take a bane.

Suffocating

During combat or under similarly stressful circumstances, you can hold your breath for a number of combat rounds equal to your Might score (minimum 1 round). At the end of each combat round after that, you take 1d6 damage while holding your breath.

Out of combat, you can hold your breath for a number of minutes equal to your Might score. Being unable to breathe after that time counts as a stressful condition, causing you to run out of air as above.

Mounted Combat

A willing creature with the Mount role (see Creature Roles) can serve as your mount as long as their size is greater than yours. You can climb onto your mount freely (see Climbing Other Creatures above). You determine which space you occupy. While mounted, you can take the Ride move action, but a mount can only be ridden this way once per round. Both mount and rider each take a turn during combat.

If a creature riding a mount is force moved, they are knocked off the mount and must make a test to determine how they land (see Climbing Other Creatures). If a mount is force moved, they carry any riders with them. Riders and mounts teleport separately.

If your mount dies, they fall prone, and you fall off them and land prone in the nearest unoccupied space of your choice.

End of Combat

At the end of combat, the Director determines if the heroes earn any Victories. Any effect or condition on you that you suffered during combat (except for being winded, unconscious, or dying) ends if you want it to.

NEGOTIATION

Negotiation gives the heroes a chance to get what they want without combat ... or at least without further combat! You might negotiate with a king to obtain military support against an incursion of demons in a neighboring country. You could enter into talks with a bandit leader to convince her to stop attacking merchant caravans on the road, and instead target nobles loyal to a tyrant. You might attempt to convince an archmage to allow you access to their secret library so you can research the location of a dragon-slaying axe. Negotiation covers all these scenarios and more.

Think of negotiation as something like learning a new system for combat, exploration, or investigation in an RPG. This set of rules provides a framework for roleplaying. The negotiation rules are meant to be read by players and Directors, so that both understand the rules of negotiation. If you've never played a game with a dedicated negotiation system like this, you might need to run it once or twice before you master it, similar to learning any new subsystem in an RPG. If a player hasn't read these rules, the Director and other players who have can explain them to that player during their first negotiation.

Negotiation is a framework for important roleplaying encounters in which the heroes want to convince an NPC to take a particular course of action, such as lending the heroes an artifact or pardoning a prisoner. This framework tracks the NPC's interest in the hero's arguments and their patience, so that the Director know what the NPC is willing to offer and when it's time to end the scene. This framework shouldn't replace roleplaying (though it certainly can if your group doesn't enjoy that part of RPGs). It's here to help players and Directors understand the structure of a give and take conversation and give some rules that can make a high-stakes conversation even more dramatic!

When to Negotiate

In order for a negotiation to occur, an NPC must have an interest in negotiating with the heroes—but must also have a reason to not simply jump on board with whatever the heroes propose. Negotiations happen only when an NPC has that internal tension between interest and reluctance. For example, if the characters ask a king to send his army into a neighboring kingdom to battle a demon incursion, the king needs to be conflicted. He wants to stop the incursion, but he doesn't want to risk the lives of his soldiers defending a foreign nation while leaving their own people unprotected. If the heroes want the help of the king's army, they need to negotiate.

Heroes aren't expected to use the negotiation rules every time one character tries to convince an NPC to see things their way. For instance, if a hero wants information about a cult leader from a captured cultist, a single Presence test using the Lie skill or a Might test using Intimidate is likely all that's needed. A character who wants to flirt with the local alchemist to obtain a free Healing Potion likely just needs to make a Presence test using the Flirt skill.

By contrast, negotiations typically involve all the heroes interacting with one or more important named NPCs who can provide information, items, or services that dramatically change the course of an adventure. Often, this involves the heroes seeking an item of great power, a retainer or companion, the services of an influential organization or nation, or a plot-twist-worthy piece of information. Convincing a lich to lend the party the legendary *Codex Mortis*, trying to convince a dragon to halt an attack on a wizard's tower, or talking the leaders of an enemy army into standing down means that a negotiation is in order.

To negotiate successfully, the heroes must make persuasive arguments to convince NPCs to do what they want. "Do it or we kill you" is a threat that might well accompany a single Might test using the Intimidate skill, but it's not a negotiating tactic.

Limits of Negotiation

Some players might instinctively feel that the negotiation rules should give them something akin to mind-control superpowers. They're not used to imagining NPCs complexly, and might attempt to negotiate in situations where negotiation is either completely unreasonable or literally impossible. No matter how persuasive or well-spoken a hero is, there's no argument to be made that might convince the vile Lord Syuul to give up his pursuit of evil and become a gardener. A negotiation typically can't convince a queen to hand over her crown to the heroes and name them the new rulers of the land, or inspire a dragon to fork over every piece of treasure in their hoard. Negotiations only work when the heroes ask for something from an NPC that the NPC is willing to seriously consider giving them.

Negotiation is not a process that changes an NPC's character. Rather, the heroes are trying to make an NPC understand how behaving differently would be in character. You might well be able to get the hitherto loyal lieutenant of an evil boss to reconsider the error of their ways. That's a classic dramatic trope. But even then, you're not changing their character—you're convincing them that their current evil ways are out of character. "Is this who you are? Is this how you want to be remembered?!"

If some players want to use the negotiation system as a means to an end by having their characters say, "Just do what we tell you, or else!", you can remind them that that's not how most people, including NPCs, work. Any heroes who open with that attitude are likely to lose the negotiation before it begins.

The Threat of Violence

In the real world, negotiations rarely come with a threat of immediate violence. Ambassadors don't usually get into fistfights. But this is a heroic fantasy RPG, featuring heroes who are armed to the teeth and able to alter reality with their minds. The threat of violence is already implied. Everyone involved knows that the characters could draw steel at any moment.

The Director typically assumes that the underlying potential for events to turn violent is already factored into every negotiation. However, if the heroes decide to bring that threat to the forefront, then they've exited the realm of negotiation and have entered into a different type of relationship—and it's probably time to draw steel.

Negotiation is about persuading someone to help you willingly because you've convinced them that meeting your objectives is a good idea. Working with you is wise or logical, or might make them look good. A hero can absolutely threaten someone with violence and force them to do what they want, but this is an incredibly temporary state. A threatened NPC isn't willingly doing what they've been asked. They're doing it on threat of violence, and will comply only while that threat is evident—after which, they'll likely go back to their previous behavior as soon as they think they can get away with it.

Negotiation Stats

During negotiation, the Director assigns NPCs four temporary statistics and features—interest, patience, motivations, and pitfalls. The heroes can strike a favorable deal if they maximize an NPC's interest by making arguments that invoke the NPC's motivations and avoid their pitfalls—but they have to do all that before the NPC's patience wears out.

Interest

An NPC's interest represents how eager they are to make a deal with the heroes. Interest is graded on a scale of 0 (no interest) to 5 (the most possible interest). When a negotiation begins, an NPC's interest is between 1 and 4. If the NPC's interest goes to 5, they make a final offer and the negotiation ends (see Keep Going or Stop, below). If the NPC's interest drops to 0, they end a negotiation without offering the heroes any deal.

Interest increases and decreases during the negotiation based on the arguments the heroes make.

Patience

An NPC's patience represents how much time and effort they're willing to devote to a negotiation. Patience is graded on a scale of 0 to 5, with each NPC starting a negotiation with their patience higher than 0. If an NPC's patience reaches 0, the NPC makes a final offer and negotiation ends (see Keep Going or Stop).

Patience can decrease each time the heroes make an argument during a negotiation.

Language and Patience

If one or more heroes negotiating with an NPC can communicate in the NPC's native language (not including Caelian), then the NPC's patience increases by 1 at the start of the negotiation (to a maximum of 5). If three or more heroes negotiating with an NPC can communicate in the NPC's native language, the NPC's patience increases by 2 (to a maximum of 5).

Motivations

Each NPC has at least two motivations the heroes can appeal to with their arguments. Arguments that appeal to an NPC's motivation require an easier power roll to increase the NPC's interest. Arguments that don't appeal to a motivation require a more difficult power roll. See Making Arguments below for more information.

Each motivation can be successfully appealed to only once during a negotiation. To successfully appeal to a motivation, the heroes must use the motivation in an argument without mentioning one of the NPC's pitfalls or being caught in a lie.

Pitfalls

Pitfalls are motivations that spark ire, discomfort, shame, fear, or some other negative response in an NPC. Using a pitfall in an argument causes an NPC's interest and patience to wane. Each NPC has at least one pitfall, and many have at least two.

Pitfalls and motivations are two sides of the same concept. They're presented below as a single list, because what might be a motivation for one NPC is a pitfall for another. Whenever the heroes make an argument, they risk stumbling into one of an NPC's pitfalls unless they do their research beforehand or read the NPC well.

List of Motivations and Pitfalls

An NPC can have any of the following twelve motivations or pitfalls.

Benevolence

An NPC with the benevolence motivation believes in sharing what they have with others. However, an NPC involved in a negotiation must be limited in their benevolence, so that they don't just give the heroes what they need.

Sometimes an NPC's benevolence might extend only to a specific group of people, so that a benevolent pirate captain might share their plunder freely with the rest of their crew—but they're still plundering! Other times, an NPC's charity might be limited by the fact that they don't have much to give. A benevolent NPC might be hesitant to give the heroes help because they believe their limited resources are more necessary or could do more good somewhere else.

An NPC with the benevolence pitfall has a cynical view of the world, believing that no creature has a right to anything just by being alive. The idea of helping others because it's the right thing to do is a preposterous, immature, or inexperienced idea to be laughed off or snuffed out.

Arguments that appeal to a benevolence motivation contend that if the NPC strikes a deal with the heroes, the people the NPC cares about will benefit from the deal. Example arguments include the following:

- "If you lend us the Sword of Agathor, we can make Capital safer for your guild by using it to lay your enemies low."
- "If you can teleport us into the dragon's cave, we'll give you half the wyrm's hoard once we cut off the creature's head. That could benefit generations of students at your academy!"

Discovery

An NPC with the discovery motivation wants to learn new lore, explore forgotten places, break ground with new experiments, or uncover artifacts lost to time. Their curiosity and quest for knowledge might be driven by a specific goal, such as seeking the cure for a rare disease or a portal to a specific far-off world. Or they could be a naturally inquisitive person who simply wants to understand all they can about the timescape.

An NPC with the discovery pitfall has no interest in finding new places, peoples, or ideas. It might be that the unknown scares them or makes them so uncomfortable that they'd rather remain ignorant. Alternatively, a previous pursuit of discovery might have turned out poorly for them.

Arguments that appeal to a discovery motivation contend that striking a deal with the heroes will allow the NPC to gain new knowledge or acquire unique property. Example arguments include the following:

- "Allow us to use your cipher to translate the only copy of the *Codex Mortis*, and then we'll let you read the book when we're done."
- "We know the journey to Decant Isle is dangerous, but we're going into uncharted territory. We thought that your crew of sailors might want to be among the few mortals to lay eyes on the place."

FREEDOM

An NPC with the freedom motivation wants no authority above them and desires no authority over others. They might already have personal freedom and wish to maintain that status quo, or they might wish to liberate themself or others from someone else's authority.

An NPC with the freedom pitfall believes that a world without authority is one in turmoil and chaos. They might even believe that they are the right person to rule, and that their ideals should be the ones that become the law of the land.

Arguments that appeal to a freedom motivation contend that by helping the heroes, an NPC will maintain or grant freedom to themself or other people. Example arguments include the following:

- "I know you want to have the queen's authority revoked forever. She has no heirs. Give us the key to her study so that we can prove her corruption and give you a chance to topple the monarchy henceforth."
- "If you promise to give us ten vials of Assassin's Kiss, we'll see to it that the baron's prison is emptied."

GREED

An NPC with the greed motivation desires wealth and resources above almost anything else. Sometimes these NPCs are misers, much like wyrms who hoard coins and gems but never spend or donate them. Others flaunt their wealth, viewing it as a sign of their station in life.

Greed-driven NPCs might share their wealth with a select group of people they love, such as a noble lord who indulges his children's every desire. Some NPCs might be greedy for resources other than money, such as a demon who wants to collect and devour souls, or a troll lord who hungers endlessly for the flesh of others.

An NPC with the greed pitfall has no interest in accumulating wealth or other resources, and becomes offended if anyone tries to buy their partnership. They hold their ideals above material desires.

Arguments that appeal to a greed motivation contend that helping the heroes will increase the NPC's wealth or assets. Example arguments include the following:

- "You should help us battle the overmind. Xorranox's wealth is legendary, and we'll see to it that you get your fair share."
- "Give us a week to do research among your private collection of books, and we'll give you another ten unique tomes we found in an ancient star elf sanctuary."

NPCs Change Over Time

Just like the heroes, NPCs in negotiations are complex individuals who can change over time. It's possible that the heroes might have to negotiate with the same NPC for several different favors during the course of a campaign, over which time the NPC's motivations and pitfalls might change. If the heroes turn a bandit captain with the greed and power motivations into a temporary ally, that criminal might learn from them, changing their ways to rob only those who exploit the poor and giving those earnings to people in need. The next time the heroes negotiate with the bandit captain, they have the benevolence and protection motivations.

HIGHER AUTHORITY

An NPC with the higher authority motivation remains staunchly loyal to a person or force they perceive as more important than themself. This higher authority could be an organization, a deity or being of great power, a formal leader such as a noble or monarch, a mystical presence or force the NPC might not fully understand, or a person the NPC sees as an informal authority figure (an older sibling, a personal hero, and so forth).

An NPC with the higher authority pitfall scoffs at the idea of serving another. The NPC might not believe that all people should be free, but they certainly believe that they personally shouldn't have to answer to anyone.

Arguments that appeal to a higher authority motivation contend that it's in the interest of the higher authority for the NPC to strike a deal with the heroes. A hero might even tell the NPC that if the higher authority were in the NPC's position, they would take the deal. Example arguments include the following:

- "All great creations honor your god, Malus. If you teach me to forge the Hammer of Azdul, that will be a great honor to bestow upon your god."
- "You know what Jarith the Bold would do? He'd guide us through the vast wasteland of the desert to reach the tower. Will you be our Jarith?"

JUSTICE

An NPC with the justice motivation wants to see the righteous rewarded and the wicked punished, however subjective their sense of who or what is good and evil. A priest who venerates a god of nature might believe that all who protect plants and animals are righteous, and that those who harvest natural resources as miners and lumberjacks do must die. Having a justice motivation doesn't necessarily make an NPC kind or charitable.

An NPC with the justice pitfall doesn't believe that the timescape is an inherently just place, and has no interest in making it one. The world is eternal conflict, there is no such thing as justice, and anyone who thinks otherwise is a naive fool.

Arguments that appeal to a justice motivation position the heroes on the good side of an NPC's sense of right and wrong. Example arguments include the following:

- "You despise those who steal from nature. Allow us peacefully into your wode so we may bottle the Blessed Spring's water. We're going to use it to stop an army from felling every tree and tearing up the earth wherever they go."
- "You think nobles are lazy barons who get rich off the backs of peasants. We want to dethrone Lord Saxton. Lend us your crew of thieves, and we'll make sure that when Saxton falls, the people can choose their own leaders."

LEGACY

An NPC with the legacy motivation desires fame while alive and acclaim that lasts long after their death. They hope others will know and remember their deeds, great or terrible. Some of these NPCs might even seek immortality through deification or undeath, so that the eventual shedding of their mortal coil doesn't prevent them from continuing to make history.

An NPC with a legacy pitfall cares nothing about leaving a personal mark on the world. To them, such vain thinking is nothing but a waste of time.

Arguments that appeal to a legacy motivation contend that striking a deal with the heroes increases the likelihood that people will talk about the NPC for centuries to come. Example arguments include the following:

- "If you give us the vizier's itinerary, I'll compose a song about your bravery in defying him, then sing it in every tavern from here to Ix!"
- "Yes, losing the battle is a possibility. If we do, the gnolls will still come for you eventually. But if we crush our foes, imagine the honors, the histories, the poems, the statues—all of it created for you because your siege engines turned the tide."

PEACE

An NPC with the peace motivation wants calm in their life. Under typical circumstances, they want to be left alone to run their business, farm, kingdom, criminal empire, or whatever small slice of the timescape is theirs. Some such NPCs don't have peace and need help obtaining it, while others want their peaceful status quo to be maintained.

An NPC with the peace pitfall hates being bored. They want excitement, drama, and danger in their life. For them, there's nothing worse than the status quo.

Arguments that appeal to a peace motivation contend that helping the heroes will earn the NPC some peace, at least for a little while. Example arguments include the following:

- "You have a good thing going here. A little burgling of nobles, some alcohol smuggling, and some illegal gambling dens. No one's getting hurt, but Constable Cofax is closing in on you. We could redirect him toward some real danger to the community, if you can help us set a trap for the Watchmaker."
- "I know you don't sell to outsiders, but we need that helm. I'm going to use it to turn back a group of hobgoblins marching this way. They're not going to be as friendly as us."

POWER

An NPC with the power motivation covets the authority of others. They want to increase their influence, no matter how great it already is, and maintain their domain. They might seek power through conquering others, the collection of artifacts, or through the infusion of supernatural rituals—though why choose one method when all three together achieve the best results? Some such NPCs are world-traversing tyrants, but the petty administrators of village organizations and shrines can covet power just as hungrily.

An NPC with the power pitfall has no interest in authority for themself. They might respect the authority of others, but they hate the thought of ruling over other people and roundly reject any suggestion of the idea.

Arguments that appeal to a power motivation contend that working with the heroes will increase or protect the NPC's power. Example arguments include the following:

- "Everyone knows you should be running the watch, Percy. The old lady's retiring, and our friend Baron Kuglar is naming the replacement. Now, you let us into the restricted armory, and we'll put in a good word."
- "We know he's your brother, Your Highness, but he's older—first in line for the throne. If you help us prove he's in a cult, you become the favorite son."

PROTECTION

An NPC with the protection motivation has land, people, information, items, or an organization they want protected above all else. Keeping their charge safe is a duty they hold dear, and aiding in that protection earns their favor. Most people have friends or family they wish to protect, but an NPC with the protection motivation believes in doing so at any cost.

An NPC with the protection pitfall is happy to leave others to fend for themselves. They don't believe it's their responsibility to protect anyone other than themself, and might be outright disgusted at the thought of risking their life or their property to protect others.

Arguments that appeal to a protection motivation contend that helping the heroes allows an NPC to better protect their charge. Example arguments include the following:

- "Dead soldiers grow the necromancer's ranks. Total annihilation is the only way to defeat her. March with us now, while her army is small, and we'll defeat her. Or you could gamble that someone else tries, fails, and suddenly she's at the border, ready to overrun your kingdom with an army tenfold larger than what it is now."
- "I understand your grandchild is hell-bent on joining the service. I happen to have a magic suit of armor that could help them ward off the blows of monsters and ruffians. I'd be happy to give it to you, in exchange for borrowing your griffons for a few days. After all, I won't need the armor if I can simply fly over the marsh's monsters."

REVELRY

An NPC with the revelry motivation just wants to have fun. They enjoy socializing at parties, thrill-seeking, or indulging in other hedonistic activities. Getting pleasure out of life while spending time with people they like is paramount to such NPCs.

An NPC with the revelry pitfall sees social encounters and hedonism as a waste of time. They take pleasure only in work or in building their own skills and character. Others who suggest immature debauchery are not worth their time.

Arguments that appeal to the revelry motivation contend that striking a deal with the heroes will allow the NPC to get back to reveling sooner, longer, or harder. Example arguments include the following:

- "How would you like to have the most exclusive songs for your exclusive birthday celebration next week? I'll write you a whole original set list, free of charge … provided you extend me and my band here an invitation."
- "I know you don't want to forge five Chronokinesis Crowns. How's this instead? You do that for me, and I'll give you the fourteen kegs of whiskey we found in a steel-dwarf ruin. This stuff is old, unique, and forget-your-first-name potent. You can crack a keg with your friends to celebrate a job well done."

VENGEANCE

An NPC with the vengeance motivation wants to harm another who has hurt them. Their desire for revenge could be proportional to the harm that was inflicted upon them, or they might wish to pay back their pain with interest. In some cases, a desire for vengeance can be satisfied only by the death of another, but an NPC might wish to pay back their own suffering with embarrassment, career failure, or some other less permanent pain.

An NPC with the vengeance pitfall believes that revenge solves nothing. They might have gained this belief firsthand, or they might simply not have the ambition to seek revenge—and they take a dim view of others who do.

Arguments that appeal to the vengeance motivation contend that the NPC can gain payback for their pain by helping the heroes. Example arguments include the following:

- "The servants of Ajax killed your sister as she scoured the city for his cults. The Black Iron Pact works for the Overlord. Give us her diaries, and we might uncover the pact's hideaway and deal a great blow to your hated foes."
- "That prankster Huckable made your trousers tear at the last council meeting. Don't you want to pay him back? We can arrange a delicious prank at the next gathering, but we need you to guarantee the safety of the orc refugees."

Opening a Negotiation

A negotiation begins when the heroes ask something of an NPC and the Director deems that the circumstances require a negotiation. Those circumstances always involve the heroes requiring assistance that could change the course of the adventure, and having the NPC conflicted about working with them. Unlike combat, which can be thrust upon the heroes by violent allies or unexpected circumstances, the heroes must be the ones to willingly start a negotiation. Characters must want something from an NPC. Otherwise they have no reason to negotiate!

The Director can decide that an NPC who has something the players want could show up at their door and ask if the heroes want to negotiate. But it's always okay for the characters to say, "Not interested," and refuse to do so.

Stop Combat, Start Negotiation

If a hero wants to halt hostilities to negotiate with the other side, they can use a maneuver to make a hard Presence test (or another applicable test, as the Director determines) in an attempt to stop combat and start a negotiation. The test has a chance of success only if the Director believes the other side is willing and capable of negotiating. A foe who has the upper hand, who hates the heroes beyond measure, or who lacks sapience is unlikely to negotiate.

Starting Stats

An NPC's starting negotiation stats depend on their attitude toward the heroes, as shown on the Negotiation Starting Attitudes table, and can be adjusted by the Director as they see fit. A naturally irascible NPC might have lower patience, while a hostile NPC with a greater-than-expected stake in the negotiation topic might have a higher-than-typical interest.

◆ Negotiation Starting Attitudes ◆

Attitude	Description	Interest	Patience
Hostile	Openly opposed to the heroes. Barely willing to listen.	1	2
Suspicious	Doubts the heroes' motives but is willing to listen.	2	2
Neutral	Doesn't feel one way or the other. Would probably rather be somewhere else, but doesn't want to be rude.	2	3
Open	Willing to listen, willing to help, as long as the heroes aren't asking too much.	3	3
Friendly	The heroes seem like the NPC's people. The NPC is willing to give them the benefit of the doubt.	3	4
Trusting	The NPC has reason to take the heroes at their word and will help if the characters don't screw this up.	3	5

Uncovering Motivations

If a hero wishes to figure out an NPC's motivations, they can begin by simply asking, "What do you want out of this deal?" In response, the NPC can willingly hint at or reveal one of their motivations, usually by asking for something. For instance, a monarch NPC with the greed motivation and a penchant for collecting rare animals might suggest that the heroes retrieving a griffon egg would earn the monarch's gratitude. The Director can also decide that during the natural course of the negotiation, the NPC might offer up similar suggestions without the heroes asking, provided the NPC already has an interest of 3 or higher.

If an NPC isn't as forthcoming, or if the heroes want to learn one of the NPC's pitfalls, a hero can make a Reason, Intuition, or Presence test while interacting with the NPC during the negotiation, based on the tactics used to draw out the NPC. The test has the following outcomes:

Power Roll + Reason, Intuition, or Presence:

- ≤11   The hero learns no information regarding the NPC's motivations or pitfalls, and the NPC realizes the hero is trying to read them and becomes annoyed. As a consequence, the NPC's patience is reduced by 1.
- 12-16   The hero learns no information regarding the NPC's motivations or pitfalls.
- 17+   The hero learns one of the NPC's motivations or pitfalls (their choice).

After this test is made, the heroes can't make another test to determine the same NPC's motivations or pitfalls until they make an argument to the NPC or the negotiation ends.

Outside of Negotiation

While the heroes can discover an NPC's motivations or pitfalls through tests made during negotiation, they can employ other methods of investigating motivations or pitfalls before negotiation. Research or a little reconnaissance (for instance, reading the NPC's diary or talking to their closest friends) can reveal quite a bit about a person!

Everyone Can Participate

Since Reason and Intuition with creatively applied skills can be used to make arguments, all heroes can actively participate in the process of negotiation. The hero with the highest Presence who has the Persuade skill doesn't automatically have to be the one who makes all the tests.

Making Arguments

As part of their initial request to an NPC in a negotiation, a hero makes an argument as to why the NPC should give the heroes what they want. The hero might offer to do something in exchange as part of their argument, such as clearing bandits from a forest, handing over a piece of treasure, or slaying a dragon for the NPC. Or instead of offering something, the hero could attempt to convince the NPC that it's in their own best interest to help—or even that it's a moral imperative. For example, a hero could appeal to a knight's sense of duty, the potential wealth a mercenary could make, or the final wish of a queen's dearly departed grandmother as part of an argument. NPCs who admire the heroes are more likely to respond to compliments and buttering up, while those who fear the heroes are more likely to respond to intimidation and awe.

Arguments need a justification as to why they're true. "Helping us defeat Lord Saxton is good for you in the long run," is half an argument, but the hero also needs to explain why this is the case. "Helping us defeat Lord Saxton is good for you in the long run, because we know he's coming for your kingdom after Bedegar falls!" If a hero makes half an argument, the NPC might follow up with questions such as, "Why do you say that?" or "What makes you think that's true?" to get the full argument from them.

One hero makes an argument to an NPC, but the players can discuss the details of the argument out of character beforehand. It's up to the group to decide how much discussion to have before making an argument, and to decide what argument the players think will best sway the NPC.

This is a good topic for discussion before a group actually gets into a negotiation, so everyone knows the other players' thoughts. Some groups have the most fun without any around-the-table discussion, while others prefer being able to strategize as often as possible.

Appeal to Motivation

If an argument doesn't include a pitfall and appeals to one of the NPC's motivations that hasn't already been appealed to, the hero making the argument can make an medium test to attempt to sway the NPC with the argument. Depending on the argument, this can be a Reason, Intuition, or Presence test using any applicable skill—most commonly a skill from the interpersonal skill group. The test has the following outcomes:

Power Roll + Reason, Intuition, or Presence:

- ≤11 The NPC's patience decreases by 1.
- 12-16 The NPC's interest increases by 1, and their patience decreases by 1.
- 17+ The NPC's interest increases by 1, and their patience doesn't change.

At the Director's discretion, a particularly well-roleplayed or well-reasoned argument automatically counts as a tier 3 outcome without a test. Good roleplaying should be rewarded!

If the heroes attempt to appeal to a motivation that's already been appealed to, the NPC's interest remains the same and their patience decreases by 1.

> ### Appealing to Multiple Motivations
> If a hero makes an argument that appears to appeal to more than one of an NPC's motivations, the Director can ask for clarification. After listing the motivations it seemed as though the player was trying to appeal to, they can ask the player to pick one from the list. If the player had another motivation in mind, it's up to the Director whether the argument appealed to that specific motivation or not.

No Motivation or Pitfall

If an argument doesn't include one of the NPC's motivations or pitfalls, the hero who makes the argument must make a more difficult test to appeal to the NPC. The test has the following outcomes:

Power Roll + Reason, Intuition, or Presence:

- ≤11 The NPC's patience decreases by 1, and their interest decreases by 1.
- 12-16 The NPC's patience decreases by 1.
- 17+ The NPC's interest increases by 1, and their patience decreases by 1.

Effect: On a natural 19 or 20, the NPC's patience remains the same.

If the heroes try to use the same argument without a pitfall or motivation twice, the test automatically obtains a tier 1 outcome.

Caught in a Lie

If a hero lies to an NPC with an argument that fails to increase the NPC's interest, the Director can decide that the NPC catches the lie and is offended by it. The NPC's interest decreases by 1, in addition to any decrease imposed by the failure.

Pitfall Used

If an argument uses one of the NPC's pitfalls, it automatically fails and the NPC's interest and patience each decrease by 1. The NPC might also warn the heroes not to treat them in such a way again.

Renown and Negotiation

Renown determines whether a hero's fame (or infamy) has any sway over an NPC. A hero's reputation can make a negotiation easier, provided that hero knows how to capitalize on it.

During a negotiation, an NPC has an **Impression score** that determines the amount of Renown needed to influence them with fame alone (see Renown). This score matters only if the NPC knows of the heroes. A dragon who slumbered away the last hundred years and was just woken up to negotiate can't be influenced by a hero's Renown. (By the way, it's a terrible idea to wake a dragon, even if they do know you're famous.) If the NPC does know of the hero and has an Impression score that is equal to or lower than the hero's Renown, the NPC can be influenced by that hero's reputation.

The higher an NPC's Impression score, the harder they are to influence with Renown. A small-time brigand has a lower Impression score than a monarch who meets with powerful and famous people all the time. The NPCs and Impression table provides examples of different archetypical NPC Impression scores. If a creature has a level, then their Impression score equals their level unless the Director deems otherwise.

FAME OR INFAMY?

If a hero has enough Renown for their score to influence an NPC during negotiation, the Director decides if the hero is famous or infamous to the NPC. If the NPC appreciates a character's deeds and views them as a hero who makes the world a better place, that hero is famous to them. If the NPC believes the hero's accomplishments make the world worse and views them as an enemy, the hero is infamous to the NPC.

INFLUENCING TESTS

If a hero is famous to an NPC, they gain an edge on tests when making arguments to which the Flirt, Lead, or Persuade skill could be applied. If they are infamous to the NPC, they gain an edge on tests when making arguments to which the Brag, Interrogate, or Intimidate skill could be applied. A hero gains this edge even if they don't have the appropriate skill.

NPC Response and Offer

After a hero makes an argument, an NPC responds in one of three ways:

- An NPC responds positively if the heroes increase the NPC's interest. "That's an excellent point." "You've given me much to consider." "Fair enough." "Makes sense to me."
- An NPC responds negatively if the heroes decrease their interest. "I don't buy that." "Poppycock!" "I hear you, but I disagree." "That's not going to sway me."
- An NPC responds with impatience if the heroes fail to increase or decrease their interest. "I've heard that before." "Are you going to offer me anything real?" "This debate is tiresome." "BORING!"

Unless the NPC is deceitful, it should be clear to the heroes if their argument helped convince the NPC, if they need to take a new approach, or if the argument actually did more harm than good.

The initial response should come with an offer (or a refusal to make an offer) based on the NPC's current interest. If a hero's argument reduces an NPC's patience to 0, the NPC lets the heroes know that this is their final offer.

Interest 5 ("Yes, and …")

If the NPC's interest is 5, they offer everything the heroes initially asked for—and then sweeten the deal. This represents the best possible outcome for the heroes. If they offered to perform any services or make payments as part of the deal, the NPC might waive those obligations, allowing the heroes to get what they want for free. Alternatively, the NPC might hold the heroes to any offers they made and instead offer an extra service or item on top of what was asked for.

For example, if the heroes asked the boss of a thieves' guild for that organization's help in standing against Lord Saxton, the guildmaster might pledge to send a unit of elite assassins to aid in the battle against that tyrannical noble, and then offer the heroes a quiver filled with explosive arrows to give them an additional advantage in the fight.

The NPC should let the heroes know that this is the best offer they can make.

Interest 4 ("Yes.")

If the NPC's interest is 4, they offer the heroes everything they asked for but won't sweeten the deal. The NPC also accepts anything the heroes have offered as part of the deal with this outcome.

For example, if the heroes offered to help spring a guild thief from prison in exchange for the elite assassins of the thieves' guild standing against Lord Saxton, the guildmaster agrees to those terms without attempting to adjust anything. This likely ends the negotiation, but it's possible that the heroes could push for a little more, provided the NPC has the patience for another argument. A Director could prompt the heroes to push for more by having the NPC ask a leading question, such as, "Is there anything else?" or "What else do you want from me?"

Interest 3 ("Yes, but …")

If the NPC's interest is 3, they offer the heroes what they want in exchange for everything the heroes offered … then they ask for a little extra, such as a favor or a payment from the characters. If the heroes offered to free a thieves' guild member from prison in exchange for the service of the organization's assassins, the guildmaster might ask them to free an additional prisoner, or to grant the prisoner they rescue a sum of cash or a magic weapon.

Interest 2 ("No, but …")

If the NPC's interest is 2, the NPC can't give the heroes what they want. However, they are willing to offer other less impactful goods or services in exchange for whatever the heroes have promised. The guildmaster might not be willing to spare any troops to fight Lord Saxton, but could instead offer the latest spy reports on Saxton's movements in exchange for the jailbreak.

Interest 1 ("No.")

If the NPC's interest is 1, they outright reject the heroes' idea without a counteroffer. If the NPC still has patience, they might press the heroes for a better deal, saying something like, "Why should we risk our necks to help you fight Lord Saxton? What's really in it for the thieves' guild, other than a short, brutal end when you inevitably fail?"

Interest 0 ("No, and …")

If an NPC's interest is 0, they offer nothing, refuse to negotiate further, and seek to harm the heroes. The NPC might attack immediately, or they could take a different approach, perhaps spreading malicious rumors about the characters, sending assassins after them, or otherwise making their lives difficult. If the heroes don't want to be at odds with the NPC, they'll need to offer a valuable gift or undertake a quest just to make amends.

It is impossible to continue a negotiation when an NPC's interest drops to 0.

Keep Going or Stop

If an NPC still has patience after making an offer and their interest is between 1 and 4, the heroes can make another argument to attempt to improve the deal. Alternatively, they can accept the offer and end the negotiation. Let the players drive this decision. You can always have an NPC show they have patience remaining by asking, "Is there anything else?"

If the NPC's patience is 0 or their interest is 5, then the offer the NPC makes is their final offer to the characters. The heroes can accept the offer or not, but either way, the negotiation ends.

If the NPC's interest is 0, the NPC ends the negotiation without accepting a deal. The heroes can walk away from a negotiation without accepting a deal at any time.

NPCs and Impression

Impression	Example NPC
1	Brigand leader, commoner, shop owner
2	Knight, local guildmaster, professor
3	Cult leader, locally known mage, noble lord
4	Assassin, baron, locally famous entertainer
5	Captain of the watch in a large city, high priest, viscount
6	Count, warlord
7	Marquis, world-renowned entertainer
8	Duke, spymaster
9	Archmage, prince
10	Demon lord, monarch
11	Archdevil, archfey, demigod
12	Deity, titan

Sample Negotiation

After killing the true lord of Bedegar, the tyrannical Lord Saxton took over the barony's capital, and is presently gathering forces to march on the rest of Bedegar's settlements. The heroes recently saved Edmund, the true heir to Bedegar's throne, and are now attempting to build an army that can stand against Saxton and defeat the tyrant.

The heroes are engaging in a negotiation with Zola Honeycut, the human guildmaster of the Clock—a thieves' guild whose headquarters is located in Bedegar's capital. The guild openly opposed Saxton when he first seized power, but the tyrant was quick to crack down on all known members of the Clock, forcing them into hiding or hanging them as a warning to others. The heroes' hope is that they can convince Zola to support their armed resistance.

Zola's Negotiation Stats

Zola is neutral toward the heroes when the negotiation begins. She knows them only by reputation, though she understands that they too believe Saxton is a tyrant who must be stopped. However, standing up to that tyrant has cost her people dearly, and she's not sure she's ready to rejoin the fight. One wrong move could spell the end of the Clock!

Zola Honeycut Negotiation Stats

Interest: 2   **Patience: 4**   **Impression: 3**

Motivations

Benevolence: Zola's name, Honeycut, comes from the fact that she always gives her fellow thieves a bigger cut than her own on jobs.

Protection: The members of the Clock are the only family Zola's ever known. The guild's motto is "The Clock is always ticking," because they're always planning the next job and their ever-richer future. Zola doesn't want to be the guild's last master.

Pitfall

Higher Authority: Zola has no interest in serving anyone other than herself, and she scoffs at the suggestion of taking orders.

Revelry: Zola is all business and has no time for frivolity, especially while living under Saxton's threat.

Roleplaying Zola

Zola is glad that people are finally opposing Lord Saxton, but is angry that no one rose up with the Clock months ago when the tyrant first staged his coup. She's passionate about protecting her people, quick to call out dangerous plans in arguments she doesn't like, and fast to praise statements she agrees with. She's not afraid to speak her mind to the heroes, knowing that they share her desire to see Saxton gone. She's just not sure she can risk more of her found family in the current fight.

Negotiation in Action

Here's how the negotiation with Zola might play out.

Director (Djordi): *The windows are boarded up, allowing no light to enter the seemingly abandoned Goat's Eye tavern. The whole place smells of charred wood, evidence of the fire that burned most of the building's interior three years ago. As the door shuts behind you, light from a hooded lantern on the opposite side of the tavern suddenly fills*

the room. Amid the blackened walls and pillars, you note where six burly ruffians flank your group on both sides. The human holding the lantern smiles. "Welcome. I'm Zola. Willoughby told me you were coming. Have a seat." She motions to a few crates arranged in a circle around a wide barrel.

James (playing Korvo, a shadow): *I have a seat and say, "Korvo at your service, Ms. Honeycut. And these here are the finest companions a polder could ask for: Linn, Jorn, and Val."*

Director: *Zola nods to each of you in turn, then says, "You'll excuse me if I dispense with more pleasantries. These days, no place is safe for the Clock. We keep moving. So tell me, what are you here for?"*

Alyssa (playing Jorn, a tactician): *"We're building an army to take down Saxton once and for all."*

In this scenario, all the heroes have a Renown of 2 except for Jorn, who has a Renown of 3 and is therefore famous to Zola.

Director: *Zola gives a mirthless chuckle as she shakes her head. "Oh is that all? I have to tell you, I don't think the four of you stand much of a chance. Unless you're hiding a legion or two of dwarves in your pockets. Yes, you have Jorn the Mighty with you, but you'll need more than one famous warrior to win the day."*

Alyssa: *Ah! So she has heard of me at least! Thanks, Renown.*

Grace (playing Val, a conduit): *"We don't. But we do have Lord Edmund—the true heir to the Bedegar throne."*

Director: *Zola nods, impressed. "I'm glad the boy is safe, but that's all he is—a boy, not an army."*

Matt (playing Linn, a talent): *"He's a boy people will rally around. We have no army, but that's why we're here. We're planning on changing that. Can you spare any soldiers for our cause?"*

The negotiation officially starts. The heroes have stated what they want from Zola. The Director begins by prompting them to make an argument.

Director: *Zola leans back on her crate. "There it is. The Clock has sacrificed much against Saxton. Why should we risk more to help? No one was here to help us months ago when we stood up to tyranny."*

Alyssa: *I nod along as Zola speaks, listening before I say, "We didn't hear of your struggle until after Saxton had already hanged many of your brave people. We're here now. How can we help?"*

Before making an argument, Alyssa is attempting to learn what Zola's motivations are by simply asking. The Director decides to reveal one of Zola's motivations: protection.

Director: *"If I were to make a deal with you, and that's a big 'if,' I'd need assurances that you can end this. Proof would be even better. The protection of my people is my top priority. We can earn freedom from Saxton once we regain our strength."*

James: *Aha! I got this, folks. I stand atop my crate and say, "Well, we can surely offer that, Ms. Honeycut. We have convinced Lord Edmund to grant amnesty to any who swear to serve him." I'd like to roll a Presence test to convince her.*

Director: *Hold it there, champ. Zola's eyes narrow as you speak, and she holds up a hand to cut you off. "I will not swear to serve any ruler, no matter how benevolent. I'll consider being a partner, but even that outlook is grim if you tell me again that I need to bend the knee."*

Korvo inadvertently made an argument using a pitfall by appealing to a higher authority. The Director notes that Zola's interest drops to 1 and her patience drops to 3. Zola gave a pretty firm "No" response

here, which is what an NPC with an interest of 1 would say. However, the Director phrased Zola's response in such a way that the heroes know they can keep making arguments if they wish, since her patience hasn't run out.

James: *Sorry! I thought that'd work. Seems like higher authority is a pitfall for her.*

Grace: *Let's try to avoid any others. Val says, "We're sorry, Zola. We don't want to do anything else to offend you." I'd like to make an Intuition test and use my Read Person skill to gauge her reaction and try to discern any other pitfalls.*

Director: *Cool. Hard difficulty.*

Grace: *I got a 17! Success.*

Director: *Zola sits back, chuckling. "There's two things I can't stand—anyone telling me to kiss a ring and merry fools who would rather go drinking than fight for their freedom. Luckily, you're not the latter." You can tell that revelry also won't go over well with Zola.*

The heroes now know both of Zola's pitfalls: higher authority and revelry.

Matt: *Linn is going to say, "We're recruiting more than just the Clock. We have a good chance of recruiting the elves of the wode and the orcs of Forest Rend, and we're already training the people of Gravesford to put up a fight. If we strike before Saxton can fully build his forces, we all stand a better chance of survival. If you don't stand with us, Saxton will still come for you. He's already coming for you. The Clock stands less of a chance alone."*

Director: *I think that's a Reason test, since you're using logic to point out that you have a better chance together than on your own. It's easy too, since you're appealing to one of her motivations.*

Matt: *Great! Can I use Lead here, since I'm demonstrating our ability to bring people together?*

Director: *I'll allow it.*

Matt: *That's a 14!*

Because Linn appealed to a motivation, Zola's interest increases to 2, and her patience drops to 2. The Director gives a "No, but …" response based on Zola's interest. At this point, the heroes haven't promised anything, so she offers them something for free.

Director: *Zola nods along as you speak. "You're correct, but I'm not sure I can spare the people. I'll tell you what I can do. I have spies watching Saxton still. I can give you information about his troops' movements. Will that suffice?"*

The Director makes it clear in Zola's response that the negotiation can still continue if that's what the players want.

Alyssa: *I don't think so, right?*

James: *No. We need an army.*

Matt: *Yeah, let's push it.*

Grace: *Agreed.*

Alyssa: *I wonder if we can try to figure out another one of her motivations.*

James: *Is there anything I know about Zola's reputation? I have the Criminal Underworld skill.*

Director: *Make a Reason test.*

James: *That's an 18! Success!*

Director: *Korvo would know that Zola got the name Honeycut because she's generous with the guild's earnings. She gives all her fellow thieves a nice cut of every job.*

Korvo's success has revealed Zola's benevoence motivation.

James: *Brilliant! I think I probably would've shared that with the group before this.*

Director: *Yeah, that makes sense.*

Alyssa: *Great. Jorn will say, "It would be worthwhile in other ways for your crew if you joined our side."*

Director: *Zola's interest is piqued. "What makes you say that?"*

Alyssa: *"Even before his coup, Saxton had a considerable amount of wealth. If he's deposed, those riches need to go somewhere. The Clock will get a cut—a honey of a cut, you might say. Edmund has also promised to share his family's fortune with any who stand with him against Saxton—no oath of fealty necessary. After the young lord reclaims the throne, that is."*

Director: *You're appealing to one of her motivations, so make a Presence test.*

Alyssa: *Can I use my Persuade skill too?*

Director: *Absolutely. And you gain an edge because you're famous to her.*

Alyssa: *I needed that edge. I got a 12!*

Because Jorn appealed to a motivation, Zola's interest increases to 3, and her patience is reduced to 1. The Director gives a "Yes, but …" response while making it clear that the negotiation can still continue.

Director: *Zola contemplates this for a moment. She nods, "I'm starting to see the benefits. I think I can spare some folks to help you, but you have to help them first. See, my best warriors are locked up in Bedegar Keep. They're supposed to be hanged in two days. If you free them, I'll see to it they stand with you against Saxton. We were making a plan to free them ourselves but could frankly use the help."*

Grace: *We could push the Clock to do it themselves, but I can't see Val turning her back on people in need.*

James: *Hear, hear. I'm done pushing my luck on this one.*

Matt: *It'll mean less time to recruit the other troops, so we'd better work quickly.*

Alyssa: *Then we're in agreement. I offer a handshake to Zola. "You've got yourself a deal."*

The heroes could have pushed for a better deal, but they're satisfied with the offer from Zola, so they accept her terms. The negotiation ends.

DOWNTIME PROJECTS

As a team, you and your fellow heroes can achieve great things. But the time between adventures gives you a chance to pursue your own individual goals: uncover forbidden lore in ancient tomes, forge weapons of great power, build ships that can sail the skies, and more. *Draw Steel*'s rules for downtime projects allow heroes to use their time during respites to obtain important information, make new equipment, and engage in other activities to support their adventuring.

Tracking Projects

You start a downtime project during a respite. You can start as many projects as you like, but you can't work on more than one project at a time during a respite. Eventually, you'll be able to hire creatures who can work on additional downtime projects for you.

You track project progress on your character sheet. As you work on a downtime project, you might look over old books that you've found in your travels, perform experiments, converse with experts and scholars, or work with tools to create something.

Pregen Project Points

Some pregenerated heroes that come with this adventure start with unspent project points on their character sheet, which represents time spent on a project that occurred before they went on this adventure. Anytime such a hero finishes a respite, they can spend any number of these project points on a project that they have all the other prerequisites for.

Project Prerequisites

All downtime projects have prerequisites you must meet before you can undertake them.

Item Prerequisite

Many downtime projects have one or more special items you must possess or obtain before you can start the project. For instance, you can't build an airship without first finding a Wind Crystal of Quintessence, a rare and key component in that vehicle's construction. Other projects have a prerequisite that involves undertaking certain activities during the project process.

Project Source

To start a downtime project, you must have access to specific lore detailing how the project is to be undertaken. This can take the form of written information (a book, scroll, schematic, and so forth), an expert tutor with wisdom to share, a master artisan with skills to teach, a supernatural manifestation of the project's scope and secrets, or any other form of the Director's determination. This project-focused lore is referred to as a project source. Not only do you need project sources to start a downtime project, but you must have access to those sources whenever you make a project roll for that particular project (see Project Roll below).

Some project sources are relatively easy to find. Building a castle doesn't require tomes filled with ancient lore, but it's also not something every stonemason knows how to do. However, the location of the tomb of Ashrya, the mummified protector of one hundred slumbering sorcerer-sovereigns, might exist only in a single tome that requires an accompanying adventure to unearth.

The language with which project sources are set down or can be shared is chosen by the Director. The sample projects below have suggestions using languages in Orden (see that in Languages in Orden), though you might be able to find a version of a source in other languages as well.

Whenever the Director determines that a creature with needed knowledge can be used as a project source, another hero can serve as this source of knowledge. However, they must use a respite activity to be your project source whenever you make a project roll related to the project.

SEARCH FOR COMMON PROJECT SOURCES

If you need a project source for a particular project, ask your Director if the source is common enough that it might be found in a substantial library, among a group of sages or guild artisans, and so forth. If the Director says yes, then the next time you take a respite in a place with a library or access to creatures with the knowledge you seek, you can locate the project source you need as a respite activity.

Project Roll

As a respite activity (see Respite in The Basics), you make a project roll for one of your own projects. Alternatively, you can make a project roll to contribute to another hero's project. A project roll is a test with a special outcome that isn't divided into tiers. The characteristic used in the test is determined by the project.

When you make a project roll, the total—no matter how low—becomes project points that are accrued by the project. Even if you have a penalty on a project roll, the minimum total for the roll is 1. If you obtain a critical success—a natural 19 or 20—on a project roll, this is called a **breakthrough**, and you can make another project roll for the same project as part of the same respite activity.

A downtime project is complete when it accrues project points equal to or greater than its **project goal**—the number of points it takes to complete the project, noted in each project's description.

Project Roll Edges and Banes

Since project rolls don't use success tiers, they don't follow the usual rules for double edges and double banes. If you gain an edge on a project roll, you add 2 to the roll, as usual. But if you have a double edge, you add 4 to the roll. Likewise, you subtract 2 from a project roll that takes a bane, and you subtract 4 from a roll that has a double bane.

Skills and Project Rolls

You can apply skills from either the crafting or lore skill groups to project rolls that directly relate to a downtime project (see Skills in Tests). For example, you could use the Tailoring skill for project rolls related to making a magic cloak, and you could use the History skill while attempting to research the location of an ancient battle where a magic crown was lost. At the Director's discretion, you can also use skills from other skill groups, but a skill used for a project roll must be directly related to the project.

Language and Project Rolls

If you know the language of a project source, you can make a project roll without any issues. If you don't know the language of the source but you know a related language, the project roll takes a bane. If you don't know the source's language or a related language, the project roll has a double bane.

Crafting Projects

Crafting projects enable heroes to create vehicles, supernatural treasures, and more. When you start a crafting project, other creatures can also work on the project, using their respite activity to contribute a project roll in order to get the work done faster.

Craft Treasure

You can craft the items found in your adventures. Each treasure handout contains its item prerequisite, project source, project roll characteristic, and project goal.

Find a Cure

Item Prerequisite: Varies (see description)
Project Source: None
Project Roll Characteristic: Reason or Intuition
Project Goal: Varies

You research a cure for a disease, curse, or supernatural affliction whose text states that it can be ended by the Find a Cure downtime project. If the affliction was caused by the innate feature of a creature, you need the remains of that creature or another creature of the same kind as an item prerequisite for crafting the cure. For example, you can research the cure for the affliction of a werewolf's Accursed Bite by studying the corpse of any werewolf, not just the one who did the biting.

The number of project points it takes to complete this project is equal to 50 times the level of the creature who caused the affliction. If the affliction was created by an environmental or supernatural effect, that effect notes the item prerequisite and project points required to complete this project.

When you complete this project, you craft one dose of an alchemical cure for the affliction. Once the project is completed, you can craft subsequent doses for the same affliction for half the number of project points required for the initial project.

Research Projects

Heroes can undertake many different types of research downtime projects, which can involve seeking out new lore, improving existing knowledge with study, uncovering rumors or secrets, and more.

Discover Lore

Item Prerequisite: None
Project Source: Texts or knowledge related to the subject you wish to research
Project Roll Characteristic: Reason
Project Goal: Varies (see the table)

If you want to track the location of a lost treasure, decipher a ritual, or trace the lineage of a royal family to find the next heir to the throne, you can start a downtime project to delve into whatever mysteries you seek to unravel. You might start a project to discover lore because the information can't be discovered through a single test, or you could do so because you failed a test to recall information and now want to learn it through research.

When you start a downtime project to discover lore, you choose the lore you want investigated and the questions you want answered. The Director tells you if the lore you seek amounts to common, obscure, lost, or forbidden knowledge. The more esoteric the knowledge, the more project points are required to find the answers you seek.

◆ Discover Lore Project Goals ◆

Project	Goal
Common knowledge	15
Obscure knowledge	45
Lost knowledge	120
Forbidden knowledge	240

COMMON KNOWLEDGE

Common knowledge is generally easy to discover with a day or so of research. It's not known by every passerby and takes time to uncover, but with plentiful local sources for the information, you don't need to spend a lot of time searching. It could be that you need to question several members of a rumor mill to figure out who a noble is not-so-secretly courting, or you might need to spend a few hours in a temple to find the particular religious text that carries a seldom-used alternative name for a deity.

OBSCURE KNOWLEDGE

Obscure knowledge is known only to specialized sages and is typically of interest only to those scholars. As such, precious few tomes are written on obscure subjects. Finding the right expert to interview or the best book to read typically requires several days of research. Uncovering the details of a ritual used to open and close a portal to the Sea of Stars isn't easy information to come by, but there are people out there who know how to do it—and who wrote the instructions down.

LOST KNOWLEDGE

Lost knowledge is so esoteric that even among a field's most dedicated scholars, there might be only one or two individuals who have dug deep enough to know that lore. Lost knowledge could come from a time so long ago that only a single text in a dead language now holds the lore you seek. Such lore often takes more than a week to hunt down. The location of a legendary steel dwarf's workshop is most likely lore that is lost—except for one map hidden in a private collection.

FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

Forbidden knowledge is lore that a powerful individual or organization is attempting to keep secret. Those who know the secrets speak of them in whispered codes after passwords are exchanged, and write texts using ciphers. Hunting down leads and making sense of them typically takes weeks. The location of the dagger that slit the throat of the god of death is hidden behind layers of encoded text and written in a dead language known only to that god's most devout followers.

Learn New Language

Item Prerequisite: None
Project Source: Texts or instruction that teaches the language you want to learn
Project Roll Characteristic: Reason or Intuition
Project Goal: 120

When you start this project, choose a language taught by the project source. When the project is complete, you understand the language.

Learn New Skill

Item Prerequisite: None
Project Source: Texts or instruction that teaches the skill you want to learn
Project Roll Characteristic: Reason or Intuition
Project Goal: 120

When you start this project, choose a skill taught by the project source. When the project is complete, you have that skill.

MONSTER BASICS

This section should be used by the Director to run monsters. Monsters follow a lot of the same rules as heroes, with a few key differences that are noted in this section.

Languages

If a monster in your adventure can speak and understand a language, they speak Caelian. They also speak the language associated with their ancestry as shown in Languages in Orden. Human NPCs in this adventure speak Vasloiran.

Keywords

Each stat block has one or more creature keywords. These keywords don't necessarily mean anything on their own, but special rules might apply to them. For instance, a creature with the Goblin keyword benefits from and can contribute to goblin Malice features. (See Malice later in this introduction for information.)

General Keywords

While many keywords are specific to a group of creatures, such as Gnoll or Human, other keywords are found across different monster groups.

ABYSSAL
Creatures with the Abyssal keyword, such as demons and gnolls, can trace their origins back to the Abyssal Wasteland—a chaotic manifold whose denizens hunger for the souls of mortals.

ACCURSED
Accursed creatures, such as medusas and werewolves, are under the effect of powerful supernatural curses that change their essential nature.

ANIMAL
The Animal keyword is an easy one! It covers bears, wolves, and really big spiders! Aside from the animals of the real world, fantasy creatures with a similar level of sapience and who are part of the natural world have the Animal keyword. Animals have only natural defenses.

BEAST
Creatures with the Beast keyword have animal-level sapience, but also possess supernatural abilities or traits. Basilisks and chimeras are examples of beasts. They don't have a society, but one has eye beams that can turn you into a statue, while the other has three heads—each belonging to a different species and one of which breathes fire!

CONSTRUCT
Construct creatures, such as the ashen hoarder and valok, are man-ufactured, with magic or psionics playing a role in giving them life. A construct's level of sapience is determined by the will and skill of their creator. Some function entirely on their own, while others serve as mindless drones who take action only if given orders. Unless otherwise noted, constructs don't need to eat, drink water, sleep, or breathe to survive.

DRAGON
Dragons, the giant reptilian creatures with breath weapons, wings, claws, and jaws, aren't the only creatures who take the Dragon keyword. Creatures related to dragons, such as draconians, also have this keyword.

ELEMENTAL
If a creature can trace their origin back to Quintessence, the Manifold of Elements, they have the Elemental keyword. This includes creatures of raw elemental power, such as the crux of fire, and creatures who merely trace some part of their origin back to Quintessence, such as meteor dragons.

FEY
Fey creatures can trace their origin back to Arcadia, a manifold of nature and magic that is the place of origin of all elves. Creatures from this plane often have an innate connection to nature, magic, or both.

GIANT
Creatures with the Giant keyword include ogres and trolls, as well as fire giants, frost giants, hill giants, and stone giants. Giants have similar body shapes to humanoids, but they're much larger. Despite that similar appearance, these creatures have no relation to most humanoids (other than the mighty hakaan).

HORROR
Horror creatures, including overminds and voiceless talkers, are creatures who appear unnatural on most worlds, particularly Orden. Everything about them is alien, and most have potent psionic abilities.

HUMANOID
Humanoid creatures, such as dwarves and time raiders, are size 1 creatures who have similar limb arrangements to and sapience on par with humans. Humanoids often gather in communities and form societies to survive and prosper.

INFERNAL
Infernal creatures, such as devils and hobgoblins, can trace their origins back to the Seven Cities of Hell—an ordered manifold where the natives make plans to tempt mortals into contracts for their souls.

OOZE
Ooze creatures, such as the gummy brick, are semisolid masses of moisture and malice who take shape in dark, damp environments. Their forms range from loosely congealed puddles to more hardened and calcified shapes.

PLANT
Plant creatures, such as the shambling mound, are made of vegetation. Like other creatures (and unlike plant objects), they can move and interact with their environment.

SWARM
Swarm creatures are actually more than one creature! When a whole bunch of creatures get together, whether a swarm of spiders or a swarm of minotaurs, they move and act together as if they were one creature.

UNDEAD
Undead creatures, such as ghosts and zombies, are the reanimated flesh and spirits of once-living creatures who have died. Their level of sapience is determined by the creator or effect that brought them back from the dead. Some undead function entirely on their own, while others mindlessly seek to harm the living if given no other instruc-tions. Unless otherwise noted, undead don't need to eat, drink water, sleep, or breathe to survive.

Encounter Value

Each Director-controlled creature has an encounter value (abbreviated EV) that is used in building encounters. You don't have to worry about this statistic if you're just running the encounters provided by the adventure.

Creature Free Strikes

When a Director-controlled creature makes a free strike (see Combat), they don't roll. Instead, their stat block notes a Free Strike value representing the amount of damage they deal with either of the following:

- A melee free strike with a distance of melee 1 or the melee distance of the creature's signature ability (see below), whichever is higher.
- A ranged free strike with a distance of 5 or the ranged distance of the creature's signature ability, whichever is higher.

A creature's free strike has the Strike keyword, as well as the Magic, Psionic, or Weapon keywords if those keywords are found in the creature's signature ability. Additionally, if the creature's signature ability deals damage of a specific type, the free strike also uses that damage type. If the creature's signature ability deals more than one type of damage, you decide which damage type the creature's free strike uses when the strike is made.

Creature free strikes are a static number for two reasons. First, it keeps gameplay fast. You don't have to stop play to roll dice, and there's no chance of a creature rolling a critical hit and bogging things down further when it isn't their turn. Second, by keeping these static values relatively low, heroes are encouraged to take more risks when it really counts, even if that might result in them taking damage from a free strike.

Creature Opportunity Attacks

Even though a Director-controlled creature doesn't have to roll when they make a free strike, if that creature takes a bane on strikes against a target, they can't make an opportunity attack against that target.

Signature Ability

Every creature has a signature ability. This is the first action that appears in their stat block and is noted as "Signature Ability."

Traits

Many creatures have traits, which are features that don't require a main action, a maneuver, or a triggered action to activate, such as the Crafty trait possessed by many goblins. (Combat talks about action types.)

Malice

Many creatures have abilities and features that require a Director's resource called Malice to activate. See Malice later in this introduction for more information.

End Effect

Certain creatures have the ability to take damage in order to end one effect on them that can be ended by a saving throw. The damage the creature takes to end an effect can't be reduced in any way.

Villain Actions

The solo and leader creatures presented in this book are designed to be fought in climactic battles at the end of an adventure or campaign. Because of this, they have special abilities called villain actions.

A creature with villain actions always has three. Each villain action can be used only once per encounter, and no more than one villain action can be used per round. (This holds even if you have two or more creatures with villain actions in an encounter, though such an occurrence should be rare.)

A creature can use a villain action at the end of any other creature's turn during combat. Villain actions are numbered and intended to be used in a specific order that creates a logical encounter flow and cinematic arc, but you can use them in any order you choose.

The first villain action is an opener, which shows the heroes they're not battling a typical creature. Openers generally deal some damage, summon a lackey or three, buff the leader, debuff the heroes, or move the creature into an advantageous position. They're a taste of what's to come.

The second villain action provides crowd control. It typically activates after the heroes have had a chance to respond once or twice to the villain, move into position, and surround the villain. This second action helps the villain regain the upper hand. Like an opener, this action comes in many flavors, but it's even more powerful than an opener.

The third and final villain action is an ultimate move or "ult"—a showstopper that the villain can use to deal a devastating blow to the heroes before the end of the battle.

Creature Organization

A level 1 ghoul isn't necessarily as strong as a level 1 orc! Most creature types have an overarching organization that determines the power level and encounter value of the monsters within it. Some modes of organization are built around large numbers of weaker creatures in encounters, while other modes prefer fewer but more formidable threats.

A creature's mode of organization appears after their level in a stat block. For example, most gnolls are organized as a horde, while shadow elves have the platoon organization. Some creatures have a main mode of organization and a handful of minions, while other creatures use a few different organization types.

Monsters are organized as follows.

Minion

Minions are weaker enemies who are made to die fast and threaten heroes en masse. A battle with minions is one where the heroes are outnumbered and can experience the joy of cutting through fields of their enemies. Creatures organized as minions are meant to support monsters organized in other ways, and have a special set of rules for doing so (see Using Minions below).

Minions die quickly! In fact, some might die before they have a chance to act. That's okay!

Horde

Monsters organized as hordes are hardier and work in smaller groups than minions, but it still takes more than one of these creatures to effectively threaten a single hero of the same level. A battle against creatures all belonging to a horde sees those creatures outnumbering the heroes about two to one. Creatures who are part of a horde organization can be especially effective when brought into encounters alongside other horde creatures.

Horde creatures are more fragile than any other monsters except minions, so be sure to double or triple up on their stat blocks if they're key to a combat encounter. There's a chance that if the heroes act first in combat and have a lot of Victories, they can kill a number of key horde creatures before those creatures can act.

Platoon

Monster platoons are highly organized and usually self-sufficient armies. Platoons are well-rounded organizations well equipped to handle most combat objectives. A single platoon creature is a decent threat to a hero of the same level, so an encounter consisting entirely of these creatures typically has one per hero.

Elite

Elite creatures are the functional opposite of minions. A creature noted as an elite is hardy and can usually stand up to two heroes of the same level. Elites also have a high encounter value.

Leader

A leader is a powerful monster who buffs their allies and grants them additional actions. They utilize villain actions and can stand toe-to-toe with two or more heroes of the same level by themself. Typically, only one leader appears in a battle at a time, alongside minions, horde or platoon creatures, and elites. Leader creatures have no additional creature role (see Creature Roles).

Solo

A solo creature is an encounter all on their own. They have a special set of rules within their stat block and can be deployed ... well, solo! A solo creature can typically stand toe-to-toe with six heroes of the same level. Solo creatures have no additional creature role.

Creature Roles

A creature's role appears after their level and organization in their stat block, and describes that creature's function in combat in a general sense. Roles are descriptive, and most don't follow special rules. They simply help you use creatures effectively in combat.

Ambusher

Ambushers are melee warriors who can slip by beefier heroes to reach squishier targets in the back lines.

Artillery

Artillery creatures fight best from afar, and can use their most powerful abilities at great distance.

Brute

Brutes are hardy creatures who have lots of Stamina and deal lots of damage. They have abilities and traits that make them difficult to ignore and hard to get away from, and that let them push enemies around.

Controller

Controllers are creatures who change the battlefield, often with magic or psionics. They reposition foes and alter terrain to make it advantageous for their allies. Controllers are often on the squishier side, so they need protection!

Defender

Defenders are tough creatures able to take a lot of damage, and who can force enemies to attack them instead of squishier targets. Defenders often act in squads with allies who have lower Stamina, such as controllers and hexers.

Harrier

Harriers are mobile warriors who make definitive use of hit-and-run tactics. Their traits allow them to make the most of their positioning on the battlefield.

Hexer

Hexers specialize in debuffing enemies using conditions and other effects. They are generally squishy and rely on others to defend them.

Mount

Mounts are mobile creatures meant to be ridden in combat, and who make their riders even more dangerous.

Support

Support creatures specialize in aiding their allies by providing buffs, healing, movement, or action options.

Creatures Who Defend

A creature who takes the Defend main action (see Combat) can't take additional main actions on their turn. This means that if a creature has already taken a main action on their turn, they can't also take the Defend main action. This applies even if the creature is granted an additional main action on their turn, unless they are specifically granted the ability to take the Defend main action.

Creatures Who Grab

If a creature has an ability or trait that allows them to grab a target, they can have only one creature or object grabbed at a time unless their stat block specifies otherwise. If a creature has grabbed the maximum number of targets, the ability or trait they used to grab can't be used against another target unless the creature releases an already grabbed target.

Creatures Who Summon

Unless otherwise specified, a creature or object summoned into a combat encounter by another creature takes their turn immediately after the summoner. Once a creature summons another creature, they can't do so again until the start of the summoner's next turn.

Creatures Who Heal Via Damage

Some creatures have abilities that deal damage and allow the creautre using the ability to regain Stamina equal to the damage dealt. Unless otherwise specified, if this ability deals damage to multiple targets, the creature only regains Stamina equal to one instance of the damage, not the total damage dealt to all targets.

Malice

Just as every hero has a Heroic Resource determined by their class, so too do the heroes' foes need their own juice to fuel their strongest threats. Malice is a resource gained and used by the Director. You use Malice to let enemies in the game activate their most powerful abilities and throw surprises at the heroes during combat.

Earning Malice

At the start of combat, you gain Malice equal to the average number of Victories per hero. Then at the start of each combat round, you gain Malice equal to the number of heroes in the battle, plus the combat round number. For instance, if five heroes with three Victories each are just starting their first combat round, you begin that combat with 9 Malice—3 for the average number of Victories, 5 for the number of heroes, and 1 for the first round of combat. At the start of the next round, provided all the heroes are still alive, you gain 7 Malice—5 for the number of heroes plus 2 for the second round. As long as none of the heroes is taken out of the fight, you gain 8 Malice in the third round, 9 Malice in the fourth round, and so on.

If a hero dies, they stop generating Malice for you. At the end of an encounter, any unused Malice is lost.

It's up to you whether you want to show the players how much Malice you have. Some Directors feel that the tension of watching Malice creep up can create great drama, while others like to keep the players guessing about what Malice-fueled mayhem might come next. Do whatever is the most fun for your group, and if you're not sure, ask your players what they would prefer!

Spending Malice

Monsters can spend Malice the way heroes spend their Heroic Resource, activating and enhancing their abilities. Abilities that make use of Malice have their Malice cost noted in a creature's stat block.

Specific types of monsters sometimes have other ways they can spend Malice once per turn, typically on features that affect an entire group of enemies, additional main actions or maneuvers they can take during their turn, or events that affect the encounter environment. Such features appear in a special **[Creature] Malice** stat block entry that precedes individual stat blocks in a creature's overall section.

You won't be able to spend Malice on every single option a given encounter has to offer. It's totally up to you how you deploy Malice. You can spend it on smaller but still impactful features each combat round. You can save it up and use it on a small number of extremely dramatic abilities. You can spend it on the same feature that uses all available Malice each combat round and then forget about it until the next round. Do whatever creates the most fun for you and makes the most narrative sense in a given encounter.

That's So Much Malice!

You often need to prepare only three Malice features for any given encounter, or four if you're running an encounter making use of multiple monster types or bands (for example, orcs and goblins). Just pick a feature costing 2 to 3 Malice, a feature costing 5 Malice, and a feature costing 7 to 10 Malice and you should be covered.

Basic Malice Features

All monsters have access to the following Malice features, in addition to any "[Creature] Malice" features they might have.

Basic Malice	Malice Features
At the start of any monster's turn, you can spend Malice to activate one of the following features:	

👤 **Brutal Effectiveness** — **3 Malice**
The monster digs into the enemy's weak spot. The next ability the monster uses with a potency has that potency increased by 1.

👤 **Malicious Strike** — **5+ Malice**
The monster pours all their animosity into their attack. Their next strike deals extra damage to one target equal to the monster's highest characteristic score. The extra damage increases by 1 for each additional Malice spent on this feature (to a maximum of three times the monster's highest characteristic). This feature can't be used two rounds in a row, even by different monsters.

Using Minions

What they lack in power, minions make up for in flexibility and their ability to let you control the battlefield. Creatures organized as minions work a little differently from other creatures because they're multiple monsters who function as a single unit under your control.

The knowledge of how minions work isn't a secret and shouldn't be kept from the players. Share the information in this section with them! They'll have a lot more fun battling minions a shaping narrative around taking out multiple foes at once if they understand how the rules work.

Organized as Squads

Minions with the same name (for instance, goblin sniper) can be organized into squads of up to eight creatures. All members of a minion squad act together on the same initiative, and can make squad attacks (see Acting Together below).

Shared Low Stamina

Minions have low Stamina and fall quickly in battle. They allow heroes to feel extra heroic, since a hero might kill several minions at once depending on those minions' level and encounter value!

Each squad of minions shares a Stamina pool, with initial Stamina equal to each individual minion's Stamina multiplied by the number of minions in the squad. For example, a goblin spinecleaver has 5 Stamina, so a squad of eight spinecleavers has a Stamina pool of 40. Whenever a minion in a squad takes damage, the squad's Stamina pool is reduced by a number equal to the damage taken. Because minion Stamina is tracked as a pool, minions can't be winded, can't regain Stamina, and can't gain temporary Stamina during a battle.

Dropping One Minion

Whenever a minion squad's Stamina pool is reduced by an amount equal to an individual minion's Stamina, one minion dies or is otherwise taken out of the fight. If a squad of goblin spinecleavers has its Stamina pool reduced from 40 to 35, the minion who took the damage that reduced the pool dies. When the Stamina pool hits 30, 25, 20, 15, 10, 5, and finally 0, another minion in the squad dies each time. If multiple minions take the damage that results in the pool dropping low enough to kill one minion, the creature who dealt the damage to the minions decides which of those minions dies. When a minion is taken out of the fight, they count as being reduced to 0 Stamina for triggering effects.

Dropping Multiple Minions

If a minion takes damage from any source except an area effect (including abilities with the Area keyword) and that damage reduces a minion squad's Stamina pool by an amount of damage equal to the Stamina of two or more minions, multiple minions are taken out by the damage. After dropping any minions who took the damage first, the minions nearest to those taken out suffer the same fate.

Allow the player to narrate how their hero takes out additional minions killed by a single attack. For instance, if a goblin spinecleaver takes 12 damage from a fury's Brutal Slam ability, maybe the minions surround the hero, who makes a brutal weapon strike that cuts through multiple targets with a single action. Maybe the body of the original target is hurled into an unfortunate ally. Maybe additional minions affected by a single-target strike pass out from fright! Taking out multiple minions is a chance to play up the cinematic aspect of the game.

Minions and Area Effects

Minion squads are particularly susceptible to damage-dealing area abilities that target multiple creatures, because the minion squad's Stamina pool takes damage each time an individual minion takes damage. However, such area effects can kill only those minions who are in the area. For example, a tier 3 outcome for the talent's Incinerate ability deals 6 fire damage to each target in its area. If three goblin spinecleavers with Stamina 5 are caught in the area, the minion pool loses 15 Stamina instead of 18, leaving the other minions in the squad unscathed.

Minion Weakness and Immunity

If a minion has either a damage immunity or a damage weakness for a source of damage, apply the effects to the minion's squad once, even if multiple minions share the same immunity or weakness. These effects are the last things applied when calculating damage and can drop (or save!) multiple minions from any source of damage, including area effects.

Prepping Minion Stamina Pools

When you're preparing a battle with minions, it helps to take a moment and write out the different amounts of damage at which a minion squad suffers a loss of one of their minions. For instance, a squad of eight goblin spinecleavers loses a minion when they take a total of 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, and 40 damage. If you do the math before combat starts (or take a quick moment to jot it down during a pause in combat), it'll help your game run smoothly.

Acting Together

When minions act, each minion in the squad uses their main action in concert. This is because minions have squad actions (see below) that require participation from all minions, requiring all attacks by a squad to happen at the same time. Individual minions can choose to waste their main action doing nothing when the rest of their squad uses their main action in concert, or can use a maneuver only to alleviate their own circumstances (see Minion Maneuvers).

Minion Action Economy

Minion turns are meant to be short. On their shared turn, each minion can take only a move action and a main action, a move action and a maneuver, or two move actions.

Individual minions can also make opportunity attacks. That said, minions usually don't have bespoke triggered actions, keeping them easy to run.

SQUAD ACTION

Each minion has a signature ability that is typically a strike targeting one creature or object. When multiple minions in a squad use their signature ability on a turn, you make one roll for the whole squad.

Each target of a minion's signature ability is affected by only one instance of the ability. But when two or three (at maximum) of a squad's minions attack the same creature or object simultaneously, each additional minion causes the signature ability to deal extra damage to the target equal to the minion's free strike value. Because a minion's free strike value is typically lower than the average damage of their signature ability, it's usually more effective to have each minion target a different hero.

As an example, a squad of three demon pitlings are attacking a shadow and a conduit with their Spit signature ability, with a tier 2 outcome on the power roll. One pitling targets the shadow, dealing 4 poison damage. Two pitlings target the conduit, dealing 4 poison damage plus an extra 2 poison damage for the additional pitling.

If a minion squad scores a critical hit with their signature ability, all the minions who participated in using the ability can take another main action.

MINION MANEUVERS

Minions in a squad use the Grab, Hide, Knockback, and Search for Hidden Creatures maneuvers together. For Grab, Knockback, and Search in particular, you make one roll for the whole squad, and each target of a minion's maneuver is only affected by one instance of the ability.

A minion can take any other maneuver individually, usually to alleviate their own circumstances like standing up from prone or escaping a grab. If they do, they can't participate in their squad's main action or maneuver during the turn.

FREE STRIKE TOGETHER

If several minions in a squad make a free strike at the same target at the same time, such as from a hero provoking an opportunity attack by moving away from several minions surrounding them, the damage from each minion's free strike is added together and treated as one strike.

TRACKING SQUADS

If you use multiple squads made up of the same type of minions in an encounter—for instance, two squads of goblin spinecleavers—it's important to make it easy for the players to tell the squads apart. You can use different miniatures for each squad, or give each squad's miniatures or tokens an indicator (a colored magnet, ring, sticker, and so forth) to help keep track of which minions are part of the same squad as they start moving around on the battlefield. Many online virtual tabletops have tools for adding colors or textures to icons that make tracking different squads easy.

Attached Squad Captain

Any non-mount, non-minion creature, who speaks a language that a squad of minions can understand can be attached to that squad as a captain. Captains aren't necessarily strategic leaders with brilliant tactics. Sometimes they're just powerful creatures who bully, inspire, or have some supernatural influence that drives other creatures to action.

A squad of minions can have only one captain, and a creature can't be captain to more than one squad of minions.

SEPARATE ACTIONS AND STAMINA

A captain takes their turn at the same time as the minion members of their squad but isn't limited in their action options as minions are. A captain's Stamina isn't added to a minion squad's Stamina pool, and is tracked as for any other creature in combat.

CAPTAIN BENEFITS

While a minion squad has a captain, each minion in the squad gains the benefits noted at the "With Captain" entry on their stat block. Usually, this benefit is either a damage boost, a bonus to speed, or additional Stamina.

I AM THE CAPTAIN NOW

If a squad of minions loses their captain, a new allied creature can become that squad's captain at the start of the next round (no action required).

Stat Block Icons

The stat blocks in this book contain multiple different icons that allow quick scanning for just the right trait or ability for the situation. The following list provides examples of the most common icons you'll come across.

⬟ The **distance** of the ability

◉ The **targets** or affected area of the ability

★ A **trait** of the creature, often a feature that is always in effect

⚔ A **melee** ability

⬚ A **ranged** ability

✕ An ability that is **melee** or **ranged** (your choice)

👤 A **self** ability that only targets the user

▦ A **cube**, **line**, or **wall** area ability

(•) An **aura** or **burst** area ability

◎ A **special** ability with a unique distance, often the entire encounter map

‼ A **triggered action**

☠ A feature or ability specific to a leader or solo creature, such as **villain actions**

RETAINERS

A retainer is a type of NPC follower who fights alongside the heroes.

A retainer is a follower of a specific hero. This hero is called the retainer's mentor, and their player controls that retainer in battle. Each player can control only one retainer at a time. If a hero ever acquires more than one retainer, all but one of those are considered to be working at the party's stronghold or performing some function at the periphery of any battle, not contributing meaningfully to its outcome.

Sidekicks, Not Stars

Retainers are useful allies, but the heroes are always the stars of the show! Retainers are simply there to pitch in and make the heroes look good.

Retainers are simpler to run than heroes. They have fewer abilities and fewer resources to manage. Usually, a retainer makes one power roll per turn and then gets out of the way. But while a retainer's turn is quick, it can be tactically interesting! Besides dealing damage, a retainer's abilities often benefit their mentor or allow the mentor to do interesting things.

Because a retainer acts on their mentor's turn, they allow the heroes' side of an encounter to have two characters act in sequence without having to use any special abilities, providing a significant tactical advantage.

Gaining Retainers

The events of the story can dictate that a retainer joins the party. When the heroes rescue a prisoner or befriend a former rival, you might decide that the NPC joins the party, becoming a retainer of one of the characters.

Retainers in Combat

When using retainers in combat, a number of special rules should be kept in mind.

Part of a Mentor's Turn: A retainer takes their turn as part of their mentor's turn. For the purpose of effects that end at the end of the retainer's turn, or any other rules elements that depend on the start or end of a creature's turn, the start and end of the mentor's turn is also the start and end of the retainer's turn.

Hero Can't Act: If a hero can't act on their turn (because they are unconscious, for example), their player can still control the hero's retainer.

Retainer Action Economy: On their turn, a retainer can take a move action, a maneuver, and a main action, just like a hero.

Recoveries: A retainer has 6 Recoveries.

Death: A retainer can become dying at 0 Stamina and die at negative half their Stamina, just like a hero.

Surges: Whenever a retainer gains surges, those surges are gained by their mentor, with the mentor and retainer sharing surges. The retainer spends surges the same way a hero can, but the extra damage granted to them by spending a surge is equal to their mentor's highest characteristic score.