



PSYCHEDELIC METAL RPG

# SEACAT

R U L E S

L u k a R e j e c

# RULES

/ 'rülz /

■ “Actually, they’re more like guidelines.”

Source unknown, possibly a priest of the skull and crossbones goddess of the Lower Sixty Floating Islands.

## TO DO

### RULES AND THINGS

estimating at 40% complete

> add 1-spread rules overview - missing

> add cleaned up basic mechanics 50% done

> add cleaned up conflict and combat rules - still missing

> add scene and encounter section - still

missing

> add cleaned up XP mechanics - still

missing

> add abilities, skills, spells - getting there!

> add equipment! - still missing



*for ULTRAVIOLET heroes*

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Sincere thanks to all the heroes who made this booklet possible.

# SEACAT IN ONE SPREAD

## OVERVIEW

1. Classic multi-player analogue rpg with one player as the referee and other players running heroes.
2. Inspired by retro science fantasy, heavy metal magazine, and a lot of psychedelic vibes.
3. Resolves most actions with a d20.
4. Encourages all the players to participate in co-creating the game world on the fly.
5. Moderately crunchy system with advancement, items, abilities, modifiers, and other levers and switches for the players.
6. Compatible with *UVG* and similar minimalist modules and settings.

## CAMPAIGN PLAY LOOP

1. Group of players agrees to play.
2. Session zero to determine scope, logistics, and duration of play.
3. Players meet to play a session.
4. Interlude. During this downtime players may or may not continue a correspondence, world-building or plotting the next session.
5. Steps 3 and 4 repeat (ir)regularly with more-or-less coherent cast of heroes and extras. Exact players attending may vary from session to session.
6. Campaign ends with a planned finale or peters out with a whimper.
7. Players start new campaign or not.

## SESSION PLAY LOOP

1. Players assemble for a ~1–4 hour session.
2. Pleasantries.
3. Players recap what happened last session.
4. Referee kicks action off with first scene or encounter. Players respond and roleplay.
5. Scene ends. Interlude as focus shifts to next scene.
6. Steps 4 and 5 repeat. Possibly with players playing different characters in different scenes.
7. Referee ends session with a wrap up, return to safety, cliff-hanger, or even just a fade to black.
8. Players clean up play area and disperse.

## SCENE PLAY LOOP

1. Referee briefly sketches out the scene, painting the most memorable elements with words: characters present, prominent props, general environment.
2. A player asks a question or states what their hero or extra does.
3. Referee responds.
4. Steps 2 and 3 repeat in a dialogue.
5. When outcomes are unclear, referee asks players to roll dice and test if their characters succeed.
6. If a conflict breaks out, the conflict play loop begins.
7. Players end a scene by deciding how and where to move on.
8. Referee sketches out the interlude.

## CONFLICT PLAY LOOP

1. Referee sketches out the conflict arena, the different zones (if any), the obstacles (if any), and the antagonists (opponents).
2. The referee may invite other players to add details and props.
3. Players describe how their heroes and extras (protagonists) are setup.
4. If it makes sense for one side to be surprised, this is narrated. The opposing side gets a free round.
5. A round begins.
6. An initiative roll determines which side acts first, or if both sides act simultaneously and all actions resolve at the end of the round. If there are more than two sides, the process is the same.
7. Each side acts and resolves its actions. When it is the protagonist's turn, the players decide in what order their heroes and extras act. Players may ask the referee questions to clarify details and odds before attempting their actions.
8. Steps 5 to 7 repeat until one, more, or all sides flee, surrender, back off, or are defeated.
9. Referee describes the aftermath, starting a new scene.

## CORE ACTION MECHANIC

1. Each player takes two actions on their turn in the round.
2. A player declares both their actions at the same time.
3. Some actions require the player to test if they can beat a target.
4. To test a player rolls  $d20 + \text{stat} + \text{skill}$  over target for heroes and simply  $d20 + \text{sum}$  over target for extras.
5. Natural 1s are always failures, natural 20s are always successes.
6. Critical successes and failures, as well as marginal successes and successes at cost, are sometimes possible.
7. Results for both actions are resolved at the same time.
8. Next player takes their turn.

## CREATING A HERO

Players choose a character sheet depending on how many sessions they expect to play a hero. A simpler (smaller) record will work better for a one-shot adventure, while the full 9-level sheet is more suited to a campaign.

1. Invest xp.
2. Determine level.
3. Determine life.
4. Determine proficiency (pro).
5. Determine hero dice.
6. Determine magic cost.
7. Determine skills.
8. Determine abilities.
9. Determine stats.
10. Determine gear.

# WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

*This toybox for roleplaytime.*

Mercenary merchants embarking into half-forgotten wastelands to trade or scavenge, machine humans awakening from aeons of sleep to seek lost masters, cultists determined to end this latest godless age, telepathic cats and body-stealing ghosts. Pompous nobles and revolutionary activists in a battle to define the future of their small civilization. Motes of dust in the eyes of Time and Space, the twin deities that make all people small.

This book is one third of the Seacat toy-box for friends [role]playing games of heroes exploring strange worlds. Each of the books is for every player. This one covers the core mechanics of gameplay, how they function, and suggests some ways of expanding the games to fit your table.

## ROLEPLAYTIME

Seacat is written for the social games of roleplay. It assumes the players are a group of friends (or people who might want to become friends) gathered together to spend time running unexpected heroes, imagining strange worlds, using different games to explore those worlds, to survive and thrive in them, to struggle against challenging threats, and be surprised by the the stories that grow out of the interplay of ideas and dice, successes and failures.

That is why it is arranged as a toy-box of rules and games that fit together loosely, giving space for improvisation, communication, and invention.

Breve Seacat is a miniseries subset of Seacat. It covers the equivalent (with some jiggery-pokery) of levels 3–6 in Old School Essentials or The Most Famous Fantasy Game. It is suitable for adventures in the anti-canon worlds of the Ultraviolet Grasslands or Witchburner or Longwinter or Red Sky | Dead City. It also works with other fantascientific settings that handle odd abilities, strange items, and ridiculous technologies.

## INCOMPLETE AND DISCONNECTED AS FEATURES

No set of rules and mechanics and tables and games can cover all the possibilities of roleplaytime. This book proposes that they should not even try. The players will, in the course of play, come across situations that are not covered by any rule or table. Rather than shy away, players should improvise and adapt. Take existing mechanics and bend and break them until they fit. The players will, in the course of play, realize that some parts of the game aren't useful or are even hindering their fun. They should throw them away. Finally, players will find cool bits and pieces of other games they want to try. Bring them into your roleplay sessions. The games and rules you use will naturally evolve from session to session. This is fine. There is no way to break roleplaying games.

Expand. Design. Change. Every player in a roleplaying session becomes a game designer, and that is part of the fun.

# GENERAL TERMS

This is a reference. No player needs to read through it, the terms are simply here to make some of the rpg terminology that follows a little clearer. No player should feel they need to master arcane jargon and language to roleplay.

ABILITY: inherent attribute of a character that lets them perform in unusual ways.

ADVANTAGE, BOON, [+]: situational bonus to a roll. The player rolls an additional die and takes natural result they prefer.

ARCHETYPE, SKIN: a hero type, a bundle of attribute and advancement tables.

ATTRIBUTE: all the things describing a fictional character in play: proficiency, stats, skills, abilities, inventory, life, hurt, hero dice.

CAMPAIGN: a series of inter-connected meetings of players, featuring a similar cast of heroes. Similar to a show's season.

CHARACTER: imaginary person or thing run by a player at a session.

D20, D12, D8, D6, D4: the polyhedral dice with different numbers of faces.

DISADVANTAGE, BANE, [-]: situational penalty to a roll. Player rolls additional die, takes worse result.

EXTRA: sketched out background character, usually run by referee.

HERO, PROTAGONIST: excessive. A primary character.

HERO DICE (HD): d6s that can modify a hero's natural rolls, recover life, and fuel some other abilities.

HURT: serious injuries. Cumulative penalties that accrue as life, stats and other resources run out.

INVENTORY: how much a character can carry. Inventory is filled with gear, weapons, armor, tools, spells, burdens, fears, woes, and treasure.

LEVEL (L): a creature's relative power.

LIFE: once upon a time called hit points.

MAGIC, FANTASCIENCE: anything sufficiently advanced to be indistinguishable from magic.

NATURAL RESULT, NAKED ROLL: the number on a rolled die, before any modifiers. E.g. a natural 20.

PLAYER: a sentient creature partaking in a roleplaytime session.

PROFICIENCY, PRO: modifier used by skilled and expert characters.

REFEREE, CAT [GM]: the player running the game session and antagonists.

ROLL: rolling any polyhedral die.

ROUND: during a conflict, esp. combat, a sufficient amount of time for every character to take their turn.

RUNNER [not-GM]: player running protagonists (heroes and sidekicks).

SCENE, ENCOUNTER: a basic unit of roleplay when and where the characters interact with the shared imaginary objects.

SESSION: one meeting of all or some of the players at their table to play. Similar to a show's episode.

SIDEKICK: secondary character or pet with simplified attributes.

SKILL: trained attribute of a character. A profession. First rank (skilled) applies proficiency to relevant tests, second rank (expert) doubles this.

SPELL: recipe for altering reality. A kind of

gear.

STATS: S.E.A.C.A.T.: the six game stats represent natural aptitude and modify most natural rolls.

SUM: total modifier (stat + skill) applied to a test.

TABLE: the physical or virtual space where the players meet.

TARGET: a number between 3 and 19 representing the difficulty of a test.

TEST: a d20 roll to overcome a target number. Often modified by a character's stat and skill.

TOKEN: a physical object to show which player has already acted, or whose turn it is, to ensure everyone gets a share of the limelight.

TURN: part of round, time unit when a character takes their actions.

XP, EXPERIENCE: points or currency a player collects through play and invests in their heroes and sidekicks. Xp represent characters' successes and experiences.

## DESIGN GOALS

1. Quick setup, low prep, and short campaigns of 3–12 sessions.
2. Melodramatic, cinematic, and unexpected outcomes.
3. Imagination stimulator, players co-create the world on the fly.
4. Moderately crunchy system with advancement, items, abilities, modifiers, and other fiddly knobs and switches.
5. Compatible with UVG and similar minimalist modules and settings.

# 7 CORE CONCEPTS

## 1. CO-CREATION

Players co-create the game world through play. The player (referee or cat) running the game has different tasks from the players running heroes and sidekicks (runners). The referee moves play forward and wields a soft veto to maintain a measure of consistency.

## 2. EVERYTHING IS A RESOURCE

Every attribute on a character sheet is a resource which may change, deplete or increase through play.

## 3. NATURAL LANGUAGE

The players use natural language to describe the game world: its time and space, quantities and qualities. If the outcomes of a test are consequential and uncertain the referee describes the difficulty of the challenge while assigning a target number between 3 (very easy) and 20 (very hard) behind the scenes. Challenges may have binary or multiple possible outcomes. If the runners ask what number they should roll, the referee tells them, but if they prefer to not break immersion and rely on the referee's descriptions, this is fine.

## 4. MODULAR RULES

The rules are designed to interlock only loosely. Even if the players forget specific rules, modify them or replace them altogether, the roleplay and the fun should continue. A key function of the rules and mechanics is to help generate new situations and unpredictable outcomes. So long as the games at the table achieve this, everything is fine even if the players decide to replace every mechanic, one-by-one.

## 5. POLYHEDRAL DICE

Players roll polyhedral dice. They use a d20 to test their heroes against challenges. Tests succeed when a player rolls over the target number. The number a die rolls is its natural or naked roll. Modifiers (stats, skills) sometimes apply. High rolls are almost always better. Rolling a natural 20 is always a good thing.

## 6. HARD NUMERICAL LIMITS

Heroes face mechanical limits. The maximum level a hero can reach is 9. The maximum sum (stat + skill) they ever add to any d20 roll is +13. The highest target number a hero can ever possess or set is 19—this includes defense.

## 7. RULES BREAK

Monsters and obstacles set by the referee may break all the the hero rules and limits. Specific abilities and variants may supersede all these core rules. The players together can decide to change any rules.

## WHY IS THE REFEREE CALLED THE CAT?

This player role is called the ref, or more humorously, the cat, to emphasize that terms like “dungeon master” or “game master” are misleading. The game runner is no master—maybe a game host or referee. But even more than that, they're the member of the band that gets the evening organized, prepares a few hooks, and sets the beat for the game. They're like the bass player of the roleplaying group. Cool, sure, but coolest when they make everyone play and shine together.

## SPECIAL REFEREE TITLES [D12]

If the players agree, they can assign the ref a special title and power each session. Each power gives a slightly silly meta-game effect to liven up the session and, sometimes, encourage friendlier roleplay.

### 1. Catspaw

If there is a cat in the house, it's the referee's nominal boss. They can use its name as part of their title.

### 2. Cat Lady or Lord

Gift other players 50 xp for lasagna or a tin of tuna.

### 3. Game Golem

Once per session they can move a random location on the game map due to a reality glitch.

### 4. Dog Duke

Can grant 1d4 re-rolls to players who bring food, snacks, and music to the game session.

### 5. Caître D'

Can give a player 100 xp if they help clean up the kitchen and table after the game session.

### 6. Dyeus Katter

Can have a hero's mildly annoying ancestor ghost appear to give advice or present the moral lesson of the session.

### 7. Sky Cat

Like Ceiling Cat, they can invoke epic

atmospheric effects in-game at any time, from rain to lightning. And nobody may groan at the cliché.

### 8. Bass Player

Can give a player 1d6 x 10 xp every time they choose an apt background song. They can veto annoying songs, of course.

### 9. Hazeraiser

Can open one travel portal for heroes per session. Demand sacrifices at will.

### 10. Prismatic Lady

Randomly recolours in-game locations. It becomes (roll d6): (1) monochrome, (2) desaturated, (3) all cool hues, (4) warm hues, (5) bright, harmonious colours, (6) a brutal riot of neon and day-glo.

### 11. Hero Herder

Draws a great big (abandoned?) railroad linking prepped quantum locations on the big map in the middle of the table (there is one, right?). The heroes don't have to take it, but ... it's there.

### 12. The Cat

Nine times during the campaign, they can bestow an extra life on a character of their choice.

## WHY ARE THERE NO PCS AND NPCS?

Because the cat or ref is specifically presented as a specific kind of player, not some kind of “master” outside the playing group, it makes no sense to split the characters into those that belong to players and those that do not. The characters are instead split according to how prominent they are within the session and how mechanically detailed they are.

While the heroes, the main protagonists of play, remain in the runners' hands throughout, the sidekicks and extras can shift around among players as the scenes require. For example, if a single hero goes to reconnoitre a town, the cat may well assign extras like guards, townspeople, and the jeering mob to other runners who would otherwise have little to do during the scene.

# PLAYING

■ “Alliteration makes everything at least 15% better.”

—AdamB



## TWO PLAYER ROLES

In a classic tabletop roleplaying game, which this mostly is, each session has two kinds of player. There is the player running the playtime (aka. the cat or referee) and there are the players running the protagonists (aka. the runners).

Neither of these terms is perfect, but they will do for now. A game table can choose other terms.

The referee player sets the stage for the playtime, prepares the sandbox, lays out the narrative hooks and themes, then runs the games and arbitrates the interactions of the heroes with the world through a mix of common sense, rules, and rulings.

The runner players take control of the protagonists of the playtime: heroes, sidekicks, and sometimes even extras. They play their various characters and use them to explore the world, overcome challenges, win against the odds or die, and in the process discover their stories through a mix of blind luck (dice)

and fate (decisions).

One thing to reinforce: all the players in a roleplaying game are playing. The referee isn't an official outside of the game, like in football, or a master in control of the narrative. This is play time, not work. If someone forgets a rule or fails a quest, if players abandon a story arc or switch genres, it's no big deal. Dust the story off and keep playing.

Also, a group of players can switch around who is the cat and who are the runners from session to session. Or even during a game, maybe from scene to scene. The referee doesn't have to complete an immense, epic arc for it to be a proper roleplaying experience. A one-shot or five good scenes in a row may be enough.

Finally, it is possible to play a session with multiple referees or just a single player. It's just not as common.

## TASKS AT THE TABLE (OR ONLINE)

Players perform multiple tasks during a roleplaytime session. Traditionally many systems bundle them together with the roles of referee (game master or what have you) and runner (player, protagonist). Often this means that the referee is tasked with much more work than the other players, which can lead to exhaustion, burnout, and failed roleplaying groups. It's also a big reason why many players avoid refereeing sessions. By unpacking the tasks and talking about them it might be easier to divide the labor fairly.

### 1. ORGANIZING A SESSION

Finding a time and place for the group to meet. This can be any player, but it's good to make sure somebody is responsible for making the call.

### 2. HOSTING A SESSION

Often roleplaying takes place at somebody's home. This can be any player, but it's important to realize that as the host, they are also have a special social role beyond just play. Thus, while the host has an obligation to make the group feel welcome, the other players also have a responsibility to be good guests and not abuse the host's hospitality. If playing outside of a home, say at a cafe, the player organizing the session takes on some of the social role of a host. Playing online, somebody will usually be responsible for setting up the digital tools used to play and track events in the game.

### 3. TAKING CARE OF FOOD AND DRINKS:

Roleplaying is a social event that often involves eating and drinking. Whether there will be food and drinks at the table is a group decision, but it's worth respecting the host player's preferences. Some groups make every player responsible for their own food, others do potlucks, yet others prepare communal meals like the traditional frozen pizza. The players should decide who will bring what, who (if anyone) will handle preparation during the sessions (e.g. who's handling the frozen pizzas and making sure they don't burn in the oven, who's making sure the glasses don't run dry), and it's absolutely a good idea to collect food money up front so nobody's left holding the tab. Online this task tends to disappear.

## SPECIAL PLAYER TITLES [D14]

If the players want, they can all take on special titles and powers each session. Why leave that fun just to the referee? Each title covers some tasks along with some mild meta-game effects. Roll twice to mix up tasks and powers for more variety.

### 1. Time Maker

Task: organizes the session.

Power: once per real-time hour gives another player an extra action to spend on one of their characters.

### 2. Lady or Lord of Hosts

Task: hosts the session.

Power: once per session discovers a safe location for the characters or introduces a host of extras in the distance. The host does not need to be friendly.

### 3. Chef of Gods

Task: provides food for the session.

Power: once per session discovers a delectable meal that restores one character's health or life total. One of their heroes also gains 50 x level experience points.

### 4. Senior Hygiene Technomancer

Task: oversees cleanup.

Power: once per session removes poison or curse from a character.

### 5. Maker of Heroes

Task: helps players make characters.

Power: once per real-time hour grants another player a boon [+].

### 6. Gatebreaker

Task: explains rules to new players.

Power: once per session adjusts a rule just this once.

### 7. Villain's Secret Friend

Task: beefs up the antagonists.

Power: once per session gives an antagonist a boon on all tests in exchange for doubled xp from that scene. If the boon is not given, the cat gains two boons to use in one scene of their choice next session, doubling xp from that scene.

## 4. CLEANING UP AFTER A SESSION

Especially if there is food involved, there will be cutlery and things to clean up. All the players should pitch in to help the host clean up after a session. Ideally, the players won't leave until the home is as clean as they found it.

## 5. GENERATING CHARACTERS

New heros and sidekicks regularly come into play. There should be one player who knows the rules for making new characters well enough that they can help others. It is helpful if this is not the referee, letting them focus on keeping the session rolling along.

## 6. INTRODUCING NEW PLAYERS TO GAME RULES

When a new player joins the group, it helps if there is another player who is not the referee who can guide them through the rules.

## 7. ROLEPLAYING THE HEROES

This is the primary task of the runners. The referee should absolutely not roleplay their heroes or make their decisions for them.

## 8. ROLEPLAYING THE ANTAGONISTS

This is a primary referee task, since obstacles to the heroes' desires is where stories are born.

## 9. ROLEPLAYING THE EXTRAS AND SIDEKICKS

Any player can take over the extras or sidekicks in a scene. Usually, a runner will roleplay their hero's sidekicks, but they can assign them to other players too. Likewise, a referee can assign an extra along with a one or two-line description to a player not directly involved in a scene. The referee can call for tests to determine the extra's reactions, but beyond that sharing them out keeps all the players playing and makes outcomes unexpectable for everyone, including the referee themselves. Who knows, maybe the runner will suddenly turn the stat-less invented-on-the-spot shopkeeper into a beloved recurring character?

## 10. PREPARING HOOKS, PLOTS, AND MODULES FOR A SESSION

This is almost always the referee's task. Ideally it should be fun, not a chore. As a rule of thumb, the preparation should not take more time than running the session itself, and ideally less. The more a referee listens to the other players during a session, and riffs off that, the more dynamic it should be.

## 11. MAKING UP LORE, NAMES, AND BACKSTORIES

A large part of the fun of roleplaying is invention and imagination. Any player can and should do this. Traditionally, this task falls almost entirely on the referee (or on pre-written tomes), however it's a good idea to share it out among all the players. When the group encounters something new in the game the referee can take an exquisite-corpse improv approach. The referee roughly describes the new encounter, then point to another player and asks them to add some detail, then the next and asks them to add some contrast, and so on, varying the questions a little bit. The runners may pass an improv token from one to another to make sure each of them gets their fair turn adding to the

world's lore. Additionally, the referee can declare players to be experts in things related to their heroes, so the runner of a dwarven hero takes the driver's seat when it comes to describing dwarven lore.

If the referee takes this approach, they should wield a soft veto to maintain some consistency in the shared world and to keep it roughly balanced, so that one player's ideas don't steamroll everybody else's.

## 12. RUNNING THE ENVIRONMENT, SANDBOX, AND ADVENTURE MODULE

This is another primary referee task. Keeping the imaginary world ticking over, setting the stage for the heroes.

## 13. RUNNING ANTAGONISTS IN COMBAT

This task usually falls to the referee, but they could outsource it to a runner whose heroes aren't present, or even a secondary referee player.

## 14. REFEREEING CONFLICTS AND COMBAT BETWEEN HEROES AND ANTAGONISTS

This is a primary referee task, but insofar as it deals with rules, an impartial runner whose heroes are not involved, could also handle this task.

## 15. KEEPING TRACK OF THE HEROES' RESOURCES

This is a task for each runner individually when it comes to their own heroes, but one player might also handle the resources of the whole group, for example their caravans or possessions.

## 16. RULES ARBITRATION

This task usually falls to the referee, but it is easy to outsource to any player so long as they are fair and impartial.

## 17. REFERENCING EXISTING BOOKS AND LORE

Another task that usually falls to the referee, but could be assigned to anyone.

## 18. KEEPING A CAMPAIGN JOURNAL

Again, a task that often falls to the referee, but could go to any player. A group can even decide to skip it altogether, and the sessions will still be fun. Ideally, the player taking on this task likes to write.

## 19. DRAWING CHARACTERS, SCENES, AND MAPS

This is a task that really helps bring the game alive and every group should encourage as many players as possible to participate. In practice, many groups will usually have one or two players really get into the craft aspect of play. That's fine. Having a session art journal is a fun activity in itself.

## 20. STAYING ON THE SAME PAGE

This isn't really a task, but a useful for every player. A group meets to play together and it's important for all the players to read the room, make sure nobody is getting uncomfortable, and that everyone is enthusiastically on-board with a course of action. Splitting the party could be fun, but it might leave a lot of players pretty bored. Introducing a terrifying spidercat character might have been a good idea, if two of the players weren't arachnophobic.

### 8. Inventor of Names

Task: invents names for locations, items and extras.

Power: once per session discovers the true name of an antagonist, advantaging a few harmful spells.

### 9. Loremaker

Task: lore about places and things.

Power: once per session sneaks a useful feature into the environment.

### 10. Quartermaster

Task: tracks party resources.

Power: once per session discovers a useful mundane item in the stores.

### 11. Keeper of References

Task: tracks in-game lore.

Power: once per session changes one item of lore to benefit the party.

### 12. The Journalist

Task: keeps campaign journal.

Power: once per session may forget to record an event, "inadvertently" helping the party.

### 13. Catkin Cartographer

Task: keeps the party's maps.

Power: once per session discovers a shortcut or secret route.

### 14. Adventure Artist

Task: illustrates the party's adventures and encounters.

Power: once per session spots a weakness or vulnerability on a creature or object.

# ROLLS, TESTS, AND TARGETS

■ “lacta alea est.”

—JC according to Suetonius

A hero from another time awakens in their nanomagical sarcophagus. Researchers marooned on a mountain struggle to win the trust of the local yeti-analogues. Savages being transported to a new battle-world run amok on a void ship. Godlike lings on their ring-habitat argue about which of the local flora and fauna would make the best uplift candidates. A sentient motorcycle possesses their rider like a puppet of flesh and bone. A crowd of bystanders looks on, perplexed.

Players run all of these characters. The runners handle the protagonists who take center stage: the heroes, their sidekicks, and attendant extras. The referee(s) handle the antagonists: the villains, minions, creatures, and bystanders.

Most of the time, running any and all of these characters involves only dialogue. The referee presents a situation. The runner says what their hero does. The referee narrates the outcome.

But sometimes the outcome is unclear and consequential. That is when the dice come out. They serve as oracles, as random number generators. Until the dice fall, anything could happen, once they fall, players use them to narrate outcomes.

## WHO ROLLS WHEN

Every player will probably end up rolling at some point during a session. During fights, everybody will almost certainly be rolling. A good rule of thumb is that the cat shouldn't roll more often than the runners.

## WHO CALLS FOR A ROLL OR A TEST

The cat. It's always the ref who calls for a roll. A runner can suggest a roll, and a ref can accept it. But they don't have to.

**Exception:** any player can decide to roll when it only affects their protagonist.

■ “Lovesick, Ponderosa Pearplanter contemplates whether she should just throw prudence to the winds and spend her last satrap dollars at the Evershadowed Tavern. She's making a hard aura test.”

## WHO ROLLS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The ref should include the runners in determining the world around them. When a runner asks whether the rain is strong enough to soak the gunpowder, the ref asks another player to find out using an 'I don't know' roll. When it's time to roll for random encounters, to figure out how well-stocked a market is, or to determine how dutiful a local enforcer is, this method takes some pressure off the ref and shares out the world-building duties.

The group can introduce a token to pass around the table, so a player can't roll twice in a row. Every group will figure out how much or how little they like to use this sort of distributed setting generation.

## WHO TESTS FOR THE GROUP

When the whole group of heroes is trying to climb a wall, or a caravan checks for misfortune during a long journey, an interesting probabilistic problem occurs. Even if the likelihood of success is high for an individual test, the probability of all the tests being successful rapidly decreases.

Since every 1 rolled on a d20 is a critical failure, this means that every time a test is rolled there is at most a 95% chance of success and a 5% chance of failure.

After ten rolls there is a 40% chance that at least one of those rolls was a critical failure. The more tests are rolled, the more the chance of catastrophe predictably (though asymptotically) approaches 100%.

In play, this means that rolling multiple times for a single action (for example sneaking past a guard) reduces randomness and makes the rolling, essentially, pointless.

The solution is to **only test once per action, even if a whole group of characters is attempting an action**. Each time a runner tests for the whole group, they take an action token (or note in some other way that they have tested). A runner cannot test for the whole group until all the other runners have also tested. Once every runner has tested for the group, all the action tokens are returned to the table and the cycle begins again.

This means that every player will roll tests affecting the whole group at some point. If the only runner who can test when the party needs to sneak past a vigilant guard is the clumsy tourist in golem armor, this might present difficulties.

**Clarification:** what about combat? In combat each hero is usually taking their own action, so they all roll their attacks individually. However, mobs of poorly trained goblin-bots or hordes of space-fungus infested villagers can be treated as single (rather dangerous) opponents, getting a single roll.

## TOKENS

An improv token was already mentioned as a way to track who's turn it is to talk when co-inventing lore, names, and backstories. A single token is enough for that, because the co-invention is a discrete game that starts and finishes with the ref. Something large and obvious works best, perhaps a miniature totem or pedestal.

Action tokens behave differently, since they're tracking which player has taken an action for the whole group. The group could use a bowl of stones, glass beads, wooden meeples, or even just a set of small dice of the same color to track these kinds of actions.

Or, a group could just rely on making marks on paper or even their memory. The reason to use a token as a physical prop is to make the game more tangible and to make it instantly clear who has acted ahead and who hasn't.

In digital play emoji temporarily appended to the player's name or visibly displayed somewhere else could perform the same function.



# ROLLING TO FIND OUT

Sometimes a player simply doesn't know an answer. What is the in-game weather like? How would their hero react in a given situation? What is a sidekick's favorite color? Dice can be every player's best friend when they have to quickly invent something or making a decision.

These can be improvised on the spot, but it's good to have a few probabilistic defaults to drop back on.

## BINARY DECISIONS

With coins or any dice.

(heads or odds) "yea" (50%)  
(tails or evens) "nay" (50%)

*"Heads Elfsayer lets the pumpkin goblin run wild, tails she takes it to the witch."*

## PREFERENCES AND HUNCHES

With a d6 (six-sided die).

(1-3) the common outcome,  
(4-5) the unusual outcome,  
(6) the rare outcome.

And flipped:

(1) it's horrible,  
(2-3) it's annoying,  
(4-6) it's bearable.

*"The weather's usually fine in the Levelling Heights. Let's see what it's like today."*

## AVERAGES AND BELL CURVES

With 2d6 to see whether things are as expected or not.

(2) very bad and unlikely (1/36, 2.8%),  
(3-4) bad and unlikely (5/36, 13.9%),  
(5-6) bad and likely (9/36, 25%),  
(7) bland and likely (6/36, 16.7%),  
(8-9) good and likely (9/36, 25%),  
(10-11) good and unlikely (5/36, 13.9%),  
(12) very good and rare (1/36, 2.8%).

*"Let's find out how kindly and well-disposed the hedge witch is to us!"*

With 2d10 for the same purpose if rarer edge events are required.

(2) very bad, very unlikely (1%),  
(3-4) bad, unlikely (5%),  
(5-6) not good, quite unlikely (9%),  
(7-9) kinda not great, likely (21%),  
(10-12) average and likely (28%),  
(14-15) kinda ok, likely (21%),  
(16-17) pretty good, quite unlikely (9%),  
(18-19) good, unlikely (5%),  
(20) very good, very rare (1%).

Players should be sparing with bell curve type rolls. Two dice give a rather triangular bell curve distribution, but the more dice are added, the more results will cluster around the mean.

Most scenes (and sessions and campaigns) don't last long enough for bell curve distributions to make play interesting. Yes, they make play more "realistic" in that a more competent character will almost always win, but the dice will usually not be rolled often enough to make this fun or interesting.

## FLAT ROLL WITH POSSIBILITY OF CATASTROPHIC MISTAKE

With a d20, as with an ordinary test. Leaves space to add or subtract modifiers, and possibility of consecutive roll makes for the possibility of some extremely rare and lucky events.

(1) catastrophic failure (5%),  
(2-11) common outcome (50%),  
(12-16) uncommon, slightly above average (25%),  
(17-19) rare, very good (15%),  
(20) very rare, excellent (5%),  
(20/20) extremely rare (0.25%).

*"Turpingore will spend the year trying to make a go of the new turnip farm."*

*"Felicitious the Catlord will snuffle around the bazaar to see if they can find a functioning rod of dominance."*

If circumstances are particularly good or bad, the player should roll with [+] or [-].

# THE DEFINED ROLL

The war axe strikes the orcbot and deals d8 damage. The caravan leader rolls d12 for an encounter check. The glum-faced quarterling rolls a d20 for their misfortune check on their week-long trek through Sevenrivers Forest.

All these rolls are defined by the rules, the module, prior invention, or the referee's planned game notes.

## APPROXIMATING DICE AND NUMBERS

Sometimes the players find themselves without a pre-defined roll. Either the players have forgotten a rule, perhaps nobody feels like opening a book and finding the precise damage for a weapon, or a new and unexpected situation has come up and the ref has to define a roll then and there. In these situations it helps to understand the numbers seacat plays with.

### D1 (AVERAGE = 1, OPTION: D3-1)

Not a die. Just a flat number. Minimal life or stat damage. Useful for when inventory gets damaged. A suitable life total for disposable mooks in large combat scenes. To get a "d3" just roll a d6 and divide by 2.

### D4 (AVERAGE = 2.5)

The smallest, pointiest die. It's used for the damage of small or weak weapons and creatures. It can generate life totals for level 0 antagonists. Useful for moderately powerful attacks against heroes' stats.

### D6 (AVERAGE = 3.5)

The classic die. Average civilian weapons, improvised weapons. Unpleasant trips and falls. Good for generating life totals for thugs, goblins, or other annoyances.

### D8 (AVERAGE = 4.5)

### OR D10 (AVERAGE = 5.5.)

Most common military weapons. Good for generating life totals for opponents up to level 4 or 5. Roll one die for each level.

### D12 (AVERAGE = 6.5)

The die for big weapons. Life totals for bigger monsters and traps.

### D20 (AVERAGE = 10.5)

The big die. Used for tests. Used for attacks by very large monsters or scary traps and weapons. This die can destroy any 3rd-level hero in a single roll. Scary.

### D30 (AVERAGE = 15.5)

A big, chunky die. Rarely used and entirely optional. Unless the referee is aiming for a very impressive roll.

### 5D8 (AVERAGE = 22.5, VERY CLUSTERED RESULTS) OR D8 X 5 (AVERAGE = 22.5, NICE AND SWINGY)

For really scary monsters, big traps, explosives, massive damage, and the like, there are two options. Rolling a bunch of dice and adding them together, which gives results closely clustered around the average, or multiplying the result of a single die. Rolling multiple dice is good for reliable effects, while multiplying a single die is excellent for terrifyingly unpredictable outcomes.

### D6 X 10 (AVERAGE = 35)

This can blow up any seacat hero. No matter their level.

# THE D20 STAT TEST

This is the core mechanic of the game for determining when a hero succeeds or fails at whatever they are attempting.

For heroes it always means:

## Roll d20 + stat + skill over target

This means rolling a d20 then adding a relevant stat and a relevant skill to beat the target set by the ref. What's a relevant stat or skill? Anything that makes sense in the context. Archaeology and thought might help with deciphering old runes in a tomb while tea-leaf reading and charisma might well apply when trying to impress with a tea ceremony.

For sidekicks and extras it usually means:

## Roll d20 + sum over target

These are simplified characters with just one single number used to modify their rolls when relevant. When is the sum relevant? Whenever it makes sense from their description. A goblin (L1, attentive) might apply it when searching for tracks or listening for breathing in the shadows, while a lion (L3, lazy) might struggle to apply it when doing anything other than direct lion business (biting and scratching and pouncing).

## ONES FAIL, TWENTIES SUCCEED

In every test, if the die rolls and turns up a natural 1 or 20, this is an automatic failure or success. The referee can never call for a roll if failure or success are impossible.

## TEST STEP BY STEP

1. Runner describes what their hero tries to do.
2. Ref decides it's unclear whether success or failure would be automatic.
3. Ref assigns the test a target number between 3 and 19. They can describe the target with adjectives (easy, moderate, hard) to preserve the narrative fiction, or use numbers. Whichever is easier.
4. Runner rolls d20 and adds the sum of their hero's relevant stat and skill.
5. Based on the result, the ref narrates the success or failure.
6. Play proceeds.

### HARD SUM LIMIT

Remember: the maximum sum (stat + skill) a character ever adds to any d20 roll is +13.

There is a little bit of maths behind this limit. Since the average roll of a d20 is 10.5, adding a modifier much larger than the average makes rolling the die practically meaningless or requires inflated target numbers.

### EDGE ROLLS (OPTIONAL)

When a player's test precisely equals their target, they or the ref can suggest some sacrifice that will allow success at a cost. Ideas include:

- i. In combat, take a hit or break their weapon as they push through an enemy's defences.
- ii. In a social conflict, pay a bribe or give a personal item as a gift to convince the other character to help them.
- iii. When casting a spell, set themselves on fire or create a weaker effect rather than suffering corruption.
- iv. When breaking and entering, destroy their tools or trigger the alarm as they disable the lock mechanism.

### DOUBLE OR NOTHING (OPTIONAL)

Sometimes a player really wants their hero to succeed, even if they failed a test. They can buy a re-roll by paying a high price, pushing their luck beyond the bounds of good sense and reason. The ref may want to exercise a little discretion with this option, as used too often it can slow the game down, but it is fun for boss fights and high stakes casino scenes.

- i. In combat, they take a point of strength or endurance damage and take a hit or break their weapon as they try to strike their foe again.
- ii. In a social conflict, they suffer a point of charisma or aura damage as they are forced to pay a humiliating bribe in order to attempt to secure assistance for their cause.
- iii. When casting a spell, they suffer a point of thought or agility damage and give up a beloved souvenir to try and successfully cast a terrible, corrupting spell, despite their obvious ineptitude.

This isn't turning a failure into a success. The odds don't improve. The player is, frankly, gambling that their hero can pull off a stunt even as they get themselves deeper and deeper into trouble.

# TARGETS

When something is obviously possible or impossible, or when there are neither consequences for failure nor success, it's not necessary to make tests. But when success is unclear and danger imminent, a target number is needed to make a test.

How hard is it to leap over a burning fence? While carrying a large bucket of gasoline? Without spilling any of it? While blindfolded?

Distilling infinite narrative possibilities to a single number, determining the difficulty of a task is one of the ref's vital tasks at the game table. The point isn't to give a precise, realistic target, but to supply the odds and let a runner decide whether or not to roll the dice and try for success.

Practically, the referee assigns a **target number between 3 (very easy) and 19 (very hard)**, then describes the probability. Leaping over a burning fence might be routine, with a target of 7. Doing it while carrying a bucket of is moderately hard, (target 10). But doing it without spilling anything? Rather difficult (target 16). More so while blindfolded (target 19).

## FIXED TARGET NUMBERS

The basic approach is to use a fixed spread of target numbers. A d20 has twenty identical faces and each result has a 5% probability. A probability difference of just 5% (the equivalent of +1) is too small to grasp viscerally, which is why the default target numbers are split into 20% (+4) steps. That most of the target numbers are primes is a happy coincidence.

## RANDOMIZED TARGET NUMBERS

Often a referee won't know precisely what number to assign. Two similar tasks are never identical. Circumstances and actors change. Language is unclear. What one professional calls easy, another might call moderately challenging. Two free climbing routes might both be classified as relatively easy 4b (or 5.6 or what have you) ascents, but different climbers in different weather conditions might well rate them differently.

In such situations a little randomness goes a long way.

## ADJECTIVES AND EXAMPLE TARGETS

Some players might prefer rolling dice blindly, unsure of what targets their referee had set, how likely they were to succeed or fail. However, as a rule referees should freely share targets—hiding them rarely achieves much and often consumes more time, particularly when playing online. That said, it's good to have a handy list of adjectives and situations that fit different targets.

### TRIVIAL TARGET = 3

(roll 1d6 to set random trivial target)  
Situations that are routine, but have a small risk of serious, catastrophic, or hilarious failure.

### EASY TARGET = 7

(1d8+3 or 2d6)  
Situations that are a bit unusual, but should normally present no obstacle to a professional. An untrained hero faces a real risk of failure.

### MODERATE TARGET = 11

(1d10+6 or 3d6)  
Situations that only professionals should attempt, and even they risk failure. Untrained heroes have better than even odds of failure.

### DIFFICULT TARGET = 15

(1d12+9 or 4d6)  
Even professionals face poor odds. Smart heroes will avoid these kinds of tests or seek to stack advantages in their favor before attempting them.

### EXTREME TARGET = 19

(1d12+12 or 5d6)  
These are odds that only a desperate professional would even attempt. Untrained heroes only succeed by pure luck.

### Trivial Examples:

A hero rushes to the masquerade ball across a slippery bridge. Better not fall.  
*or*  
A terrified thief tries to start their car engine as zombies crawl towards them.

### Easy Examples:

A knight uses their sword to explain to some peasants why feudalism exists.  
*or*  
A plumber seals a pipe from which fire-spitting toothy plants keep erupting.

### Middling Examples:

A watchmaker attempts to stop a ticking time bomb.  
*or*  
A war driver rams a doubledecker battlebus with their heavy rig.

### Difficult Examples:

A duelist rolls under a golem spider's legs to stab their soft(er) belly.  
*or*  
A climber solo free climbs a familiar sheer cliff face.

### Extreme Examples:

A swashbuckler tries to pry out the gorgon's eye with a thrown knife.  
*or*  
A mountaineer attempts a solo ascent of a deadly, unscaled mountain.

### Trivial Adjectives:

*paltry, trifling, petty, negligible, minor, piddling, super easy, puny, barely an inconvenience, tiny, frivolous, laughable, pathetic, unnoticeable, slight, peanuts.*

### Easy Adjectives:

*accessible, simple, effortless, straightforward, uncomplicated, basic, cinch, elementary, facile, undemanding, no trouble, piece of cake, pushover, mostly harmless.*

### Moderate Adjectives:

*mediocre, ordinary, fair to middling, average, regular, common, general, boilerplate, humdrum, standard, everyday, intermediate, run of the mill, usual, tame, neutral.*

### Difficult Adjectives:

*challenging, hard, demanding, onerous, laborious, tough, strenuous, exacting, trying, no picnic, bit of a rum do, arduous, galling, taxing, dangerous, formidable, dangerous.*

### Extreme Adjectives:

*dire, supreme, utmost, extraordinary, stupendous, unprecedented, remarkable, torturous, grueling, excruciating, backbreaking, herculean, colossal, rather a bother.*

### HARD TARGET LIMIT

The minimum proficiency a hero can ever possess is +2. The maximum total bonus (sum of skill, stat, and any other incidental modifier) a hero can ever apply to a test is +13.

Targets are limited to a range between 3 and 19 to avoid edge cases where no skilled hero could ever fail (targets of 1 or 2) and situations where heroes might attempt tests (targets of 20 or more) they could never win.

The referee is encouraged to use boons [+] and banes [-] where circumstances (or player ingenuity) call for better or worse odds of success.

# ADVANTAGE [+] AND DISADVANTAGE [-]

An advantage or boon [+] means the player rolls an extra die and takes the better result, a disadvantage or bane [-] means they roll an extra die and take the worse result.

Advantage [+] and disadvantage [-] work with all kinds of rolls, not just tests.

Runners are encouraged to try and figure out how to use all the tools at their heroes' disposal to their advantage. Props, scene dressing, other characters, items, assistance and more could all be used to advantage. The final decision, whether advantage applies, comes down to the referee, but they should reward creativity and ingenuity. After all, even in the best case scenario, an advantage is not a certainty.

The referee can always rule that in the fictional circumstances a character's situation is better or worse than usual and have them roll with advantage or disadvantage. Various modules, abilities, skills, spells, items, or situations may also instruct players to roll with advantage or disadvantage. An axe might deal damage with advantage. A spell might give players a boon when they roll encounter dice.

Advantages and disadvantages cancel each other out. Usually boons or banes do not stack. In combat a hero doesn't gain one [+] for higher ground and a second [+] because their opponent is careless. If circumstances are so very advantageous, the referee could just rule that an action succeeds.

**Exception:** heroes can spend hero dice to gain boons, granting additional [+] to their rolls.

A hero is trying to leap across a great crevasse. They spend three hero dice so they roll four dice on the test and choose the best result out of four.

## EXAMPLE BOONS [+] [D20]

1. Terrain advantage.
2. Helpful props (chandelier, trees, statue, stage).
3. Assistance from another character.
4. Blessings from strange AI gods.
5. Superior alien weaponry.
6. Magic and enchantments.
7. Surprised or unaware opponents.
8. Cover of darkness or invisibility.
9. Convincing evidence.
10. Teamwork or flanking.
11. Cunning plans.
12. Lots and lots of cash.
13. Cover or fortifications.
14. Mutation or bio-augmentation.
15. Fancy titles and social standing.
16. Significantly greater ability.
17. Incredible mastery of a specific skill.
18. Cheating and foul play.
19. Magical potions and meals.
20. Good luck.

## EXAMPLE BANES [-] [D20]

1. Hindering terrain.
2. Obstacles (rubble, tables, chairs).
3. Obstruction by another character.
4. Curses from ultracosmic spirits.
5. Inferior barbarian tools.
6. Enchantments and magic.
7. Keen, watchful, ready opponents.
8. Bright spotlights and neon paint.
9. Isolation and vulnerability.
10. Laughably falsified evidence.
11. Stupid plans.
12. Poverty.
13. Exposed ground or restrictions.
14. Corruption or bio-degradation.
15. Dirty jobs and no social standing.
16. Significantly inferior ability.
17. Incredible clumsiness.
18. Naiveté and deluded honesty.
19. Illness, poison, or fatigue.
20. Bad luck.

# EXPLODING\* AND CONSECUTIVE/ ROLLS

There are two related and slightly unusual rolling situations: consecutive rolls (20/20) and exploding dice (d6\*). These rolls appear almost entirely as a way to add a little bit of mechanical spice to some items and random tables. Both involve the player rolling again when their natural roll matches an initial result.

Some items and random tables use **consecutive rolls** for rare results. 18/18 means that when a player rolls a natural 18, they roll again and if the second result is also a natural 18, a special result occurs. This mechanic is a call out to the days of 18/00 Strength.

Other items, spells, situations and monsters use **exploding dice**. These are marked with an asterisk. d4\* means that every time a player rolls a 4 they roll an extra d4\* and add the result. They repeat this process as long as they keep rolling 4s. This mechanic allows for theoretically open-ended damage rolls, in practice it serves to further reduce the predictability of encounters.

# SPECIAL NUMBERS

Natural rolls of 1 and 20 during tests always have special effects. A natural roll of 1 is always a failure of some sort, possibly a drastic, catastrophic, and/or hilarious failure. A natural 20 is always a success and will usually give some kind of bonus or exceptional outcome. Particularly in combat, a natural 20 always results in a critical hit dealing double damage or more.

Some other numbers may sometimes have special effects. A natural 13 means that after the rolled test the hero has run out of a resource (such as ammo). A natural 7 represents a silver lining or positive outcome (for example, on misfortune, carousing, or encounter tables), even if the hero has otherwise failed their test.

Players can decide to assign special effects to other numbers. They can choose whichever numbers they like, but here are some ideas. These effects could apply for just a single session (strange celestial alignments affecting reality) or some special location, or the players could decide to make them permanent. Remember that these special effects apply to the referee's characters too.

## NATURAL 2 (OPTIONAL)

Doubles or nothing. Player can spend 2 life to reroll, but the effect of the outcome is doubled.

## NATURAL 3 (OPTIONAL)

Trinity fulcrum. Player can assign a boon to one ally and a bane to a second ally.

## NATURAL 5 (OPTIONAL)

Quintessence. The player's target is compelled to focus on them, suffering disadvantage [-] if it does not.

## NATURAL 11 (OPTIONAL)

Roll swap. Player gives their natural 11 and action to another player. That player reciprocates next round by giving their roll and action.

## NATURAL 17 (OPTIONAL)

Advantage hereafter. Player rolls effects with advantage (e.g. damage rolls).

## NATURAL 19 (OPTIONAL)

Maximum reliability. Player does not roll for effects but automatically deals the maximum possible (e.g. damage).

## INFRARED DESERT ENCOUNTER TABLE (CONSECUTIVE ROLL EXAMPLE) [D12]

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 1/1   | Silver <b>machine demon</b> (L14, tempting) promises a peek behind the curtain of reality.                                  |
| 1     | Glittering <b>metal dragon</b> (L9, mirroring) dances, feeding on sunbeams.   |
| 2     | Life-eating <b>blackbody lions</b> (L5, glutinous) prowl the blastrock.   |
| 3     | <b>Water-stealing sandpike</b> (L2, tunneling) parasites await.   |
| 4     | Grand <b>humped quadrodons</b> (L5, familial) forage for tubers.  |
| 5     | Burrowing <b>hive armadillos</b> (L1, telepathic) scrounge seeds and insects.   |
| 6     | Cloud of <b>EMP locusts</b> (L2, buzzing) hunt for cellulose.   |
| 7     | Migrating <b>pseudo-cactids</b> (L0, bulbous) soak in the heat.   |
| 8     | Forests of great <b>funnel mushrooms</b> (L1, thermovores).   |
| 9     | Pack of <b>post-civilized feraloids</b> (L2, bandits), alloyed and reforged in the heat of the Light.                       |
| 10    | <b>Neohuman traders</b> (L2, wary) from the scar farm communes.   |
| 11    | <b>Neohuman sandcasters</b> (L3, golem-armored) in slaved full-synthetic suits.   |
| 12    | Rogue <b>full-synthetic knight</b> (L5, hollow) seeking to overturn the order of the world.                                 |
| 12/12 | Whirling <b>karmic wheel</b> (L15, reassembling) dislocated from an engine of creation, trapped within the infrared bubble. |

## FERALOID GUN-SYMBIOTE (EXPLODING DICE EXAMPLE)

**Veil-shredder**  
Bound machine demons strip illusions from their victims in a flickering rainbow cascade. It drinks 1d4\* life from its master every time it needs to 'reload' itself.  
#agi #void #machine #symbiote  
Damage: 2d4\* madness, Reload: 4  
Range: short, Size: 1 stone

# CHARACTERS

“Middle English *character*, from Latin *character* mark, distinctive quality, from Greek *charaktēr*, from *charassein* to scratch, engrave.” (*Merriam-Webster*)

“But this hinders not that there may be more shining characters in the Play.”

— John Dryden, *Of dramatic poesie*, 1668 (*also via Merriam-Webster*)

Protagonists and antagonists, heroes and villains, sidekicks, extras, animals, and monsters. All these imaginary characters are gristle for the games of roleplay. At the table players take on their roles, running them across obstacles and against foes towards sunlit victories and happy endings (or not).

## TYPES OF CHARACTERS

The game divides characters somewhat arbitrarily into categories depending on how much play time they see and hence how fleshed out they are mechanically.

### HEROES

The protagonists of sessions and campaigns. One player usually runs a hero exclusively. Though a player may have multiple heroes, they only run one during a given session. The other heroes are magically and conveniently “not there” that session. Because they see the most play, these characters also have the most detailed attributes.

### SIDEKICKS AND PETS

Secondary characters or pets run by players alongside their main hero(es). They have simplified attributes.

### EXTRAS

These are all the background characters, villain’s minions, civilians, wildlife, and other creatures usually run by the referee. To save everybody’s time their attributes are only sketched out.

### ANTAGONISTS AND MONSTERS

These are characters usually run by the referee that serve as obstacles to the heroes. They may be more detailed than extras, but this is not essential as the referee can generate the required attributes as required using a random creature table, their level and description. If an antagonist becomes a recurring character it is helpful to record their attributes so they remain consistent.

# HEROES

Heroes “transcend ordinary [people] in skill, strength, and courage” (*Britannica: hero*), but though they go beyond the ordinary, nothing is there to suggest that they are, in fact, good.

## TEN HERO ATTRIBUTES

This chapter details the ten core rules modules that create suitably excessive heroes for the Ultraviolet Grasslands and other fantascience worlds:

- i. Proficiency
- ii. Stats
- iii. Skills
- iv. Abilities
- v. Hero dice
- vi. Life (and hurt)
- vii. Magic
- viii. Gear
- ix. Experience
- x. Level (and advancement)

Before a player even starts creating a hero, they should consider how much time they have to make their hero and how many sessions they will play them.

## NO TIME, NO HERO SHEETS, NO READY-MADE HEROES

If there is nothing available, the player should just join the group and write “quantum hero” at the top of a sheet of paper when they have time. They can put a big +2 in a circle, that’s their proficiency (pro). Next they write a one-sentence description of their hero’s profession and a name. Finally, they should write down three mundane objects in the hero’s possession. When their turn comes up and they need a stat, they can generate it. When there is some slack time another player should help them figure out their level and life attributes (equal to the lowest numbers in the group). The hero can be completed later, between sessions. Don’t waste time, get them playing.

## NO TIME, NO READY-MADE HEROES

The player takes a hero sheet and fills that out with the above information.

## NO TIME

The player chooses a ready-made, pre-generated hero.

## ENOUGH TIME, ONE-SHOT GAME

If the hero will be played for just one or two sessions the players can take the smallest, simplest hero record sheet with space for just three skills, three abilities, and six gear. Even if the hero should start with more abilities or skills or equipment, unless they fit somewhere on the sheet, they’re not available. There won’t be enough time to use them anyway. If the game lasts longer, the player can upgrade to a bigger hero sheet.

## ENOUGH TIME, MINI-SERIES GAME

If the hero will be around for three to twelve sessions the player can start with the brève hero sheet with space for six skills, six abilities, and twelve gear. As before, this should suffice to start.

## ENOUGH TIME, FULL CAMPAIGN

If the hero is joining an indefinite campaign, the full hero sheet will work best and even that will probably run out of space as pets, vehicles, extras, spells, items, and properties proliferate over time. If the player is really enjoying themselves, they might consider investing in a dot-printed or gridded journal, and creating custom sheets and notes for their hero.

## PLAYING ONLINE

When playing online, using video or voice protocols, it’s a good to also use digital character records. This can be as simple as a plain text file or post in a discord channel reserved for characters, a neatly laid-out spreadsheet in the cloud, or even something more complex.

No matter which serves the players best, the plain text hero record is a good place to start.

# PROFICIENCY

Stripped down to the core of play, heroes make two kinds of tests. Those where they know what they’re doing and those where they don’t. Heroes who know what they’re doing add their **proficiency** (or **pro**) score when they roll, heroes who don’t ... don’t. Heroes always apply their stats to their rolls. The six stats represent their natural or innate aptitudes.

**Every hero starts with a proficiency score of 2.**

All of a hero’s different skills use this same proficiency score, which rises slowly with advancement. This score represents the value of being a professional or an expert.

Using a single pro score to represent a hero’s competence at different skills is an obvious simplification. The main advantage of this approach is that it saves time during play, since a player has to remember only one single number instead of a looking up a different number for every skill. Reworking this mechanic to use different scores for different abilities is quite simple, but it does require some fiddling with the advancement mechanics.

Antagonists, sidekicks, pets, extras and monsters do not have separate proficiencies and aptitudes. To keep things simple, they have a single sum score which they apply when they are doing something they are designed for.

## ALTERNATE STARTING PRO SCORES (OPTIONAL)

Perhaps the players have decided to start at different levels, or a pet has been uplifted to become a full hero, or the players have enjoyed playing a flashback as demigods so much they decided to explore those stories more, or perhaps a player just wants to gamble with all their stats. These are all valid reasons to generate proficiency scores.

LEVEL	PRO	1/1	ROLL D12 TO RANDOMIZE			
			1–2	3–10	11–12	12/12
0	1	0	0	1	2	3
1	2	0	1	2	2	3
2	2	1	1	2	2	4
3	2	1	1	2	3	4
4	2	1	2	2	3	4
5	3	1	2	3	3	4
6	3	2	2	3	4	5
7	3	2	3	3	4	5
8	3	2	3	3	5	6
9	4	3	3	4	5	7

## STRENGTH

The active physical stat. It does what it says on the tin. Lifting bars, bending gates, whacking heads, carrying mehirs.

## ENDURANCE

The passive physical stat. It represents how much pain and strain a hero can take. Marathons, freezing temperatures, disease.

## AGILITY

The dynamic physical stat. It's about applying the hero's body with precision and speed to dodge oncoming death hamsters and throw void bombs with razor precision.

## CHARISMA

The active mental stat. The name goes back to classical Greek *khárisma*, representing divine fortune and favor. The gods and reason hate the uncharismatic, so charisma also serves as a luck stat. When a hero tries to force through their arguments by force of personality, this is what they use.

When a player asks if their hero can find a war pig, greased lightning mobile, rod of doom, or simply the latest edition of *Burly Barbarians* at the newsmonger's, that's also a charisma test. Further, nine times out of ten, random effects or mindless creatures will target the least charismatic hero first (actually, this rule is optional).

## AURA

The passive mental stat. It indicates how much punishment the hero's soul, spirit, or psyche can take when faced by horror and stress. It correlates almost completely with endurance.

It is explicitly not wisdom. It does not show good judgement or shrewd insight. Those are character traits that players decide for their hero, much like they decide on the colour of the hero's hair or shoes, without affecting mechanics in any way.

## THOUGHT

The dynamic mental stat, correlated with how quickly the hero can process and manipulate information. Its naming is also a shout out to the Egyptian god Thoth.

# STATS

“You still don't understand what you're dealing with, do you? Perfect organism. Its structural perfection is matched only by its hostility.”

— Ash, *Alien*, 1979 (written by Dan O'Bannon)

Seacat plays with six stats: strength, endurance, agility, charisma, aura, and thought. **A stat of 0 is the minimum for heroes, 5 is the maximum for humans.** They represent the natural aptitude of a character (while skills are learned proficiencies) and map to the ability modifier bonuses of the stats of classical fantasy roleplaying games.

Heroes have no negative stats by default because they make the maths of rolling tests more annoying without adding anything interesting.

## GENERATING STATS

Different tables and referees have always figured out their own preferred ways of generating character stats, which is as it should be. This section is therefore more guideline than rule.

### DISTRIBUTE 7 POINTS

The most basic approach is to distribute 7 points among the six stats, with a maximum of 3 in any one stat at the start of the game. This makes for heroes significantly more competent than run of the mill humans and no glaring weaknesses. Statistically it is equivalent to rolling 4d6 drop lowest to generate stats in many classic fantasy roleplaying games.

### DISTRIBUTE 11 POINTS

11 points with no maximums gives heroes stat arrays that make them exceptionally talented at their specialties of choice.

### PER HERO SKIN

Each bundle presented in the hero book suggests custom rolling methods tailored to that character archetype.

### ROLLING A BUNCH OF DICE

The player rolls d20s and consults the following table to assign their six stats. For more epic stats, have the players roll each stat with advantage.

D20	STAT	DESCRIPTION
1–10	0	Close to the human mean.
11–14	1	A little above average.
15–17	2	Really quite good.
18–19	3	Excellent.
20	4	Exceptional.
20/20	5	The 18/00 of stats.

## STAT DAMAGE

Many dangers can damage heroes' stats, from starvation to disease to monsters. The minimum possible remains 0, however (this is both to keep the maths simpler and to prevent damage resulting in too vicious a circle).

All stat damage is temporary unless otherwise specified or a hero dies, in which case, well, it's permanent. Stats are one of the key attributes, along with life, that heroes recover by resting.

Any stat damage a hero suffers when their stat is at 0 gives them a point of hurt (formerly fatigue), but does not further reduce their stat. Whether a source deals one point or ten, the hero only takes a single point of hurt. If a hero has any stat points, overflow stat damage (for example, suffering 5 points of thought damage when they have a thought stat of 1) is ignored, their stat is reduced to 0, and they take no harm points.

## STAT DAMAGE AND EXTRAS

Extras do not have stats per se. When they take stat damage, they reduce their sum by that amount. If stat damage reduces an extra's sum to 0 they are out of the fight. Extras do not track hurt (fatigue) points to keep things simpler.

## HARDCORE MODE (OPTIONAL)

Players can decide as a group to let their heroes end up with negative stats through play. This makes the math of tests a little bit slower (subtraction!). In this case, any stat damage a hero suffers when their stat is at 0 or less gives them a harm (fatigue) point as well as reducing their stat.

## NO HEROES (OPTIONAL)

If the players decide they want to play ordinary, humdrum humans, they certainly can. They could consider modifying the default rules in the following ways:

- Heroes start at level 0, with 5 life and no invested experience.
- Heroes can have negative stats (to a minimum of -5).
- Players distribute no points among their hero's stats. Instead they adjust them from 0 (with a maximum of 3), subtracting a point from one stat for each point added to another stat.
- Heroes start with two skills and a proficiency score of 2.
- Heroes start with no abilities.
- Every time a hero gains a level, they can increase one stat by one point.

## ANATOMY OF A SKILL

**Street Magician** (title)

#thief #trickster #performer (tags)

*The sound of strange pipes wafting.* (fluff)

Bring joy to children. Perform magic tricks and sleight of hand. Use cold reading and cunning to dupe marks. (three sentences)

The **title** gives a first impression, a cliché to start roleplaying from.

The **tags** are useful for searching and categorization.

The **fluff** sets a bit of mood and setting. It's optional, to be honest.

The **three sentences** give a practical outline for using the skill in play.

## GIFTED AMATEUR (OPTIONAL)

The players may agree that a hero has dabbled enough in a certain field related to their normal pursuits that while they don't add their proficiency to their test, they also do not roll with disadvantage. It is simplest to adjudicate this situation ad hoc.

## PERFECT MATCH (OPTIONAL)

When a hero's skill **perfectly** matches the specific circumstances, the runner may allow the player to roll with advantage. For example, a plumber trying unblock a trash compactor's outlet before it crushes the party, or a soldier trying to figure out if their personal weapon has been tampered with.

This is a subjective matter and players should communicate clearly and be ready to compromise on whether a skill set is a perfect match or not.

# SKILLS

Skills are a descriptive bundle of learning, practice, and experience that represents **what a hero is good at**. A hero can always try to do something, but if they are **skilled**, they are good enough to make a living with their know-how (they're a pro), while as an **expert** is good enough to teach that profession.

There is no mechanical difference between what other games call professions, proficiencies, tools, and saves. This is a little fuzzy on purpose! There is overlap in the daily tasks of an accountant and a plumber, and there is difference. The same holds for a soldier and a spy, a tinker and a tailor.

## WHEN TO USE SKILLS

Players use their wits and imagination to figure out how their hero's skill might reasonably apply in given circumstances.

Usually dialogue between players will resolve the situation. When an outcome is uncertain and there are stakes to success or failure the dice should come out.

## HOW SKILLS WORK

A hero will find themselves in one of three possible situations when testing their skill.

### 1. No relevant skill.

If the hero has no relevant skill, they do not add their proficiency to the test and make the roll with disadvantage [-].

### 2. Skilled, Professional (they have one rank in a skill).

If the hero is skilled in a relevant skill, they add their proficiency to the d20 roll when they make a test.

### 3. Expert (two or more ranks in a skill).

If the hero is an expert in a relevant skill, they add double their aptitude to the d20 roll when they make a test.

The reason heroes test with disadvantage when they have no relevant skill is because the skills are designed to be broad and encourage creative interpretation. When even that fails, the hero must truly be in quite a pickle.

Imagine a hero who is a skilled *office worker*. They certainly know how to drive, commuting for hours every day on the red roads. Under normal circumstances they manage perfectly well. But ask them to execute even a simple wasteland ramming maneuver and they'll be in trouble.

Unless, of course, they have an exceptionally good vehicle which compensates for their ineptitude. This is the second reason for the default disadvantage: it allows both professionals and rank amateurs to benefit from high quality gear.

## WHAT COUNTS AS A SKILL?

When players **invent new skills**, consider:

1. Does it sound fun to roleplay?
2. Is it something a person could do for a living or as a hobby pursuit?
3. Can they describe it in three sentences?
4. Can they give it a memorable title?

If the answers are yes, it's probably a good skill to play with.

For example, 'Sleight of Hand' isn't a very good skill. It describes a very specific task, with very narrow application. 'Street Magician' or 'Party Clown' would be a better, broader and memorable skill.

'Melee Combat' would be a bit dull and mechanical. 'Gladiator' or 'Infantry Soldier' make for more vivid characters and better stories.

## LEARNING NEW SKILLS

When a player invests experience in a hero and advances them, they sometimes gain new skills automatically (and usually somewhat randomly). This represents a culmination of their off screen training and practice.

In most other circumstances, to **gain or improve skills** a hero must visit different locations and mentors and **collect successes**. At the end of a week of study at a location or with a mentor, they make a moderate thought test (that's a roll over 11). Each location or mentor can only provide one success, but a hero can keep studying at the same location if at first they don't succeed. After achieving four successes the hero gains their new skill.

Simpler or more difficult skills are certainly possible. Something like the 'Dark Arts of Irshe Dalgba' might require six locations and tests while learning to 'Drive [an automatic cargo wagon]' might require as little as two.

## LIMITED SPACE FOR SKILLS

The hero sheets have limited space for skills. This is on purpose, to discourage overflowing kitchen-sink heroes and encourage a little bit of specialization.

If a player runs out of space, they can:

1. Appropriate an ability or inventory slot for the new skill.
2. Replace an existing skill.

## ADJUSTING SKILLS

Players may discover that some skills just don't fit any more, that they are profoundly overpowered or underused. In that case, they should discuss with the other players and rewrite the three sentences skill description.

## TRACKING SUCCESSES

The simplest way to track successes is to jot down the desired new skill on the sheet and make a check mark, cross, or 'X' for every success accumulated. Until the skill is acquired, the player can mark it with a small asterisk or other symbol.



## ANATOMY OF AN ABILITY

**Death Hunger** (title)

#fighter #demon (tags)

Death awakens the blood demon within.

(poetic description)

*Rank 1:* Tracks enemies taken out of the fight

(or killed) in a battle scene. Each enemy the

hero takes out grants them a cumulative +1

to attacks until scene end. (rank and effect)

*Rank 2:* Also gains a cumulative +1 to

damage for every enemy taken out. (rank

and effect)

The **title** gives a colourful first impression of the ability.

The **tags** are, again, mostly for searching and categorization.

The **poetic description** gives a thematic idea of how the ability manifests in play. It can go into a bit of world-building and background, giving more hooks for roleplay.

The **rank and effect** give the mechanical effect of the ability at each rank. Abilities can have different numbers of ranks.

# ABILITIES

Perks, traits, mutations, divine gifts. The fire resistance of a salamander. An ur-plant-derived ability to feed on sunlight. Cyber-telekinetic augmentation. Folk hero celebrity status. A parasitic symbiote that grants superhuman strength.

Abilities can get weird and are a bit of a catch-all category. Still, whatever they are and however they are acquired, **they allow a hero to function outside the human norm** and are beyond the skills an ordinary human could acquire through theory and practice. They are all treated the same way and go in the same section of the hero sheet.

## HOW ABILITIES WORK

Abilities are thematically narrower than skills, but mechanically more powerful. Many are passive and beneficial, while others combine benefits and penalties. They change how a hero interacts with the rules and usually don't require tests, sacrifices, ammunition or other equipment. Indeed, each ability is fundamentally a small exception to the core rules of the game.

The most common types are:

1. Direct **augmentations** to a hero, for example increased stats or the ability to go without food.
2. Situational **modifiers or actions**, for example increased damage when cornered or advantage to tests when using cold iron items.
3. Social **status** that gives access to resources, sidekicks, and extras.
4. Miscellaneous **bonuses and resources** available to a hero at certain times or locations. For example, weapon drops or internal fabricators.
5. And **things that just sounded cool**, but might be a bit useless actually.

Some abilities have ranks. If a hero randomly generates the same ability multiple times, or chooses it again, they gain higher rank effects.

Social abilities increase a hero's resources and ability to influence the world around them, but these are not super powers. They are subject to a referee's soft veto, which demands dialogue and trust between referees and runners. Approached in good faith they are great fun.

## INVENTING NEW ABILITIES

When players invent a new ability, they should consider:

1. Does it have a one-line poetic description and memorable title?
2. Can its effect be described in one or two sentences?
3. Are they sure it's not completely overpowered or boring for players whose heroes don't have the same ability?

If the answers are yes, it's probably a good ability.

For example, 'Detector of Evil' isn't a very good ability. It makes a hero the ultimate arbiter of morality. This removes choices from the other players. Something like 'Desire Detective' would be more interesting. 'Gill Implants' is a bit basic, but fine. A water-breathing hero expands the group's reach, but can lead to solo adventures. If the referee is comfortable assigning extras to the other players, this can become more interesting. 'Biomechanical Intestinal Upgrades' is kind of cool. Maybe it lets the hero digest any organic matter. This reduces their dependence on food supplies, but makes for mildly humorous situations ("Hansel eats what? Again?").

## ACQUIRING NEW ABILITIES

When a player invests experience in a hero and advances them, they sometimes gain new abilities automatically. In-fiction this should be handwaved as the result of a longer process.

The other way heroes usually gain abilities is through exposure to strange technologies, weird radiation, horrifying augmentations, dangerous red buttons pushed, and terrifying elder lingish ruins explored.

There is no other way to train or study for new abilities, so they also make good rewards for completing quests, or as ways for heroes to burn a lot of resources (ahem, cash).

## LIMITED SPACE FOR ABILITIES

As with skills, the hero sheet has limited space for abilities. The reasoning is the same: keeping heroes simples and encouraging a little bit of specialization.

If a player runs out of space, they can:

1. Appropriate a skill or inventory slot for the new ability.
2. Replace an existing ability.

## ADJUSTING ABILITIES

Players may discover that some abilities just don't work for them. In that case they should discuss the problem with the other players and rewrite the ability's description and effects.

## THE ADJUSTED ARCHIVES

As players adjust skills, abilities, spells, items, mechanics and more to suit their table, they can consider compiling all their changes in a shared blog or even just a simple doc file. By the very act of roleplaying and changing their games to fit their table they are also doing game design. There really are very few better ways of figuring out how games work than taking them apart, modifying them, and putting them together again.

Sort of like clocks or washing machines.

### “WON’T BENNIES RUIN MY GAME?”

“I’ve heard game masters complain that hero dice ruin ‘their game.’ That the heroes become too powerful and there is no challenge left. That these ‘bennies’ are unearned and reward players simply for turning up.

Yes, they do reward players for turning up. As an adult in the 2020 I find it is a lot harder for a group to get together regularly than it was when I was a student, and quite possibly than it was back in the 1980s before the erosion of stable 9–5 jobs. Players deserve recognition for making it to the table.

Further, time is short and with less time there are fewer dice rolled, and hence fewer chances for critical hits. I like crits and I haven’t met many players who’ve complained about the chance to roll one or two more criticals per night.

Do hero dice make heroes too powerful? No. The deck is stacked and the ref is playing with a whole world of challenges. Hero dice do give players more control, encouraging them to go further and take more risks. But they are a limited resource that runs out, while the dangers they face do not.

Finally, the game doesn’t belong to game masters alone. The roleplaytime is shared by all the players together. Hero dice purposefully reduce the power of the game master and their pre-scripted plot. They are part of the toolkit for turning a game master into a referee or, more humorously, the cat.

Yes, they make it possible to end boss fights in a single round. Yes, they make it possible to stack a series of consecutive natural 20s, turning a x2 critical hit into a x16 critical hit. Yes, they make it possible to one-shot a dragon. Yes, that is the point. That is very, very precisely the point.”

—the author (L2, ranting)

# HERO DICE

One thing that sets heroes apart from sidekicks and extras is that they succeed at thousand-to-one odds nine times out of ten. They get this plot armor from d6s called hero dice.

Heroes acquire these d6s directly through play, from ancient magitech or space alien ‘gods’ pleased with their deeds. Players also accumulate hero dice by:

1. Attending a game session.
2. Playing for an hour or two (depending on how much die rolling happens).

A group can decide on other sources of these dice (e.g. for helping set up and clean up the play area, for arriving on time). Players assign these hero dice as they acquire them. If they have a stable of heroes, they choose how to distribute them.

## SIDEKICKS, EXTRAS AND HERO DICE

If they acquire hero dice during play, they can use them. Their runners might consider making them full heroes at that point.

## STORING HERO DICE

Generally, heroes can store **as many hero dice as they have levels**. If using advancement tables, the maximum number of hero dice will vary.

## USING HERO DICE

A hero die is a special d6. Players can get a small bowl to store these dice. This meta-game tool lets players adjust the odds in their heroes’ favor. Specifically:

### 3. ADJUST OTHER ROLLS

Immediately after rolling another die, a player can decide to roll a hero die and adjust the initial naked roll by up to that amount. So, if their d20 came up 17 on their attack roll, they can roll a hero d6 and hope to turn it into a natural 20—and thus a critical hit. They can also use the hero dice this way to explode other dice or make consecutive rolls.

### 4. GAIN A BOON

A player can spend one or more hero dice before rolling a die to gain a boon [+] on that roll. Multiple hero dice can be used together this way. This only applies to rolls for actions within a hero’s control, not when generating random stats or corrupting mutations.

### 5. REGAIN LIFE

A player can also roll a hero die at any time to regain that many life points.

### 6. REGAIN STAT POINT

And a player can spend a hero die at any time to regain one stat point.

# LIFE (AND HURT)

Life is an abstract resource that represents how much plot armor they have going for them. Every creature in the game has a life score, even things that are not technically alive. Players may translate those life totals to structural integrity or some snappy name in their heads. A character’s life is set by their advancement, abilities, and equipment.

In practice life is exactly like hit points in many classical games. Renaming hit points life helps to emphasize that combat does not necessarily entail spurting wounds, and that words can, indeed, also kill. Magic, artifacts, abilities, and other in-game objects are also powered by life. Poetically, magic and life are intertwined, both drawing from the same well-spring of cosmic creation.

## LIFE LOSS

Any life that is spent or lost is recovered by resting, just like stat points. Like stats, a hero’s life cannot be less than zero. When a character’s life score reaches zero, they might be out of play.

1. Extras, sidekicks, monsters, pets, and vehicles who run out of life are out of play. Whether they are dead or destroyed, or merely temporarily incapacitated is up to the kind of fiction the players prefer to play.
2. When a hero is reduced to zero life their narrative buffer is gone. Any damage they suffer while at zero life gives them one point of hurt, regardless whether they suffered 2 or 20 points of damage. If they have life points remaining and overflow damage would reduce them below zero life, they are are reduced to zero instead.

## HURT

All healthy heroes have no hurt points. The hurt track is the hero’s death spiral. It represents the point where the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune begin to really grind them down and swiftly make them less and less capable of continuing on their heroic journeys. Some scary monsters and spells deal out hurt points directly. Hurt points are removed by resting.

A hero’s hurt track may follow the standard progression on the supplied hero sheets, or a hurt track more narratively in keeping with the tone of play at the table and the heroic archetype the runner is aiming for. Players should have a discussion about what they prefer—different players at the same table may prefer to play heroes with different hurt tracks and that’s fine.

### STANDARD HURT TRACK

1. Fine, maybe a little grumpy. Close call.
2. In a lot of pain or otherwise off their game. Hero has [-] to every roll.
3. Slowed by a crippling strike. Hero can move only half as well as before.
4. Broken. The hero’s maximum life score is halved and can’t be restored until the hero has removed their hurt points.
5. The hero is out of the scene.
6. Defeat. The hero is out of the game.

### TRUE GROGNARD (OPTIONAL)

1. Grumbling.
2. Dark muttering.
3. More grumbling.
4. It’s just a flesh wound. Loses 1 stat point per round until they bandage themselves up.
5. Dead.

### OLDSCHOOL MODE (OPTIONAL)

The players can decide to run their game like it’s Lake Geneva in 1980. When a hero is reduced to zero life, that’s that. They’re dead. Time for the player to roll up a new hero.

### HURT: THE ATTRIBUTE FORMERLY KNOWN AS FATIGUE

Any kind of design is a step by step project, building off the shoulders of other giants. In the UVG hurt is referred to as fatigue, a nod to the classic fantasy game whence the idea was respectfully lifted, dusted off, and given a wee bit more prominence. It’s a great mechanic for adding a bit of risk and danger even to heroes well-endowed with life.

### COMIC RELIEF HERO (OPTIONAL)

1. Goes sprawling, loses next turn.
2. Whatever they were holding is lost. Likely destroyed for ever.
3. Something conveniently soft and pie-like hits them in the face. They are blinded and lose their next turn.
4. Loses 1d10 inventory items. If the hero has insufficient inventory items, they lose the shirt off their back.
5. Knocked out cold.

# MAGIC

Magic is everywhere in Seacat. The given world is enchanted. Awash in energies. Alive with *Ka*. Vibrating with *Lei*. Gushing with *Vir*. Threaded with radiations and information spheres and tiny wave-particle machines. Woven into the very structure of the universal simulation of reality.

Or, at the very least, the world is deep and old. Layers upon layers of misinformation and disinformation, reality alteration, and mad distortion coat the world like the filth of aeons. There are wheels and processes churning madly just beneath the skin of the ordinary and everyday. Where does the line between technology and magic and religion lie?

The line is a lie.

It is a truth: there are great powers waiting to be plucked free by a careless fool styling themselves wizard. But what are they? How do they work? Humans seek patterns. Invent explanations. Time passes. The theories are forgotten but the practices remain.

Those half forgotten powers promise so much. To overcome life and death, to ascend to the heavens like the prophets of old, to reawaken the glittering sky cities, to journey beyond the veil of night into the lands of Everlight and Neverfade.

So many promises. So many fools. So much pain, corruption, mutation, change, and death in their wakes.

## WHAT ARE SPELLS?

Spells are practical recipes, rituals for ripping mundane reality open and changing it to serve the hero.

At best, they are naive and flawed. At worst, they are dangerous, garbled mistakes, misused and misunderstood.

## CASTING SPELLS

Magic rips reality, imposing otherworldly wrongness on the mundane, so spells hurt. Heroes pay the spell price to begin casting a spell.

**Spell Price (in life or stat points) = Magic Cost × Spell Power**

Different types of hero incur different magic costs.

For example, an explorer with a magic cost of 2 summons a 3rd power *Thornstone Obelisk*. They pay 6 life or any mix of life and stat points. A witch, with a magic cost of 1, casting the same spell pays only 3 life.

The player whose hero casts a spell narrates the details of the procedure. Maybe the hero casts a spell by reading it out loud from a magic book, maybe it's a dance routine that summons a demon, maybe it's dribbly candles.

## ANYONE CAN CAST SPELLS

Any hero can try to cast spells, whether they have a relevant skill or not, so long as they pay the spell price.

If they lack a relevant skill, spell casting is harder. The spell price is doubled and all spell die rolls are made with disadvantage, including corruption rolls.

## SPELL POWER

Some spells are more powerful than others, or can be prepared in more effective (and expensive) ways. Higher power spells have a higher spell price and are more dangerous to cast. A hero can cast any spell of any power, but it is **dangerous** to cast a spell of a higher power than the hero's level.

## DANGEROUS MAGIC

When a hero casts a dangerous spell (marked with a #dangerous tag) or they cast a spell whose power is higher than their level, they must test their relevant magic skill to see if the magic **corrupts** them. Magic corruption twists a hero's body, abrades their soul, and changes their personality.

The spell price is the test target.

If the hero lacks a relevant skill, they test with disadvantage. If the hero's level is higher than the spell power of the spell they're casting, they test with advantage.

## SPELLS GO IN THE INVENTORY

Each spell a hero can cast goes in their inventory. This is the **spell burden** and is usually equal to 1 stone.

Most spells are not just recipes and bundles of words a hero carries in their head. They are a burden that weighs them down. This might be ritual equipment and manuals, warding charms and protective clothes, ancient tools and body paints. Maybe even creepy skulls and newt juice. Maybe just the weight of malign knowledge or the pain of an ontogenic nanite injection.

The burden isn't used up during casting. It can be stored elsewhere, for example in a library, but a hero can't cast a spell that is not in their inventory. Some rare tomes are valuable simply because they let a hero carry multiple spells in a single inventory slot.

## STARTING SPELLS

Starting spells are listed in the gear section of each hero generator.

## ACQUIRING NEW SPELLS

Heroes gain new spells by adventuring and studying strange artifacts, as treasure or payment for their work. Casting a new spell without studying it first is always dangerous.

Learning how to use a new spell somewhat safely requires a week's study. After that time, when the hero casts the spell for the first time, they make a moderate thought test. If they fail, they misunderstood how the spell works and it is now dangerous for them. The hero then makes a second test to see if the first trial casting of the spell has corrupted them. If the spell was already tagged as dangerous, the hero makes the corruption test with disadvantage.

## ANATOMY OF A SPELL

**Anastasiya's Charged Hand** (title)

#electric (tags)

The wizard rubs their hands together without rhythm and builds up an offensive electromagical charge. Their hands stay charged for several minutes or until they touch an object that conducts electricity. (casting description)

*Power 1:* Their next touch or unarmed attack deals 1d10 electric damage. (power and effect)

*Power 2:* Their touch also stuns the target for 1d4 rounds or knocks it back. (power and effect)

The spell **title** is like a song title. It's trying to be catchy and metaphoric, not a dry encyclopaedia entry.

The **tags** categorize the spell. Skills with matching tags can be used to cast a spell. If a hero's skills don't match a spell, they might still hack the spell and learn to cast it some other way. Alternatively, if a skill lacks suitable tags but feels like it could fit, that's perfectly fine, too. Some categories of spells also have specific game mechanics.

The **casting description** sets up the spell: what the hero does, how they prepare, and how long it takes.

The **power and effect** describe the effect of casting the spell based on how much life the hero pours into it. This section of the description also specifies whether spending more power changes how the spell is prepared.

## SPECIAL SPELL TAGS

Some spells are designed with mechanical quirks that change how they function. As players create their own spells, they are encouraged to try inventing and developing new mechanics of their own. If something doesn't work well in play it can always be changed later.

### #ANCHOR

The spell creates a physical anchor which the hero stores in their inventory to keep the spell active and controlled. Destroying or losing the anchor ends the spell (or worse).

### #ATTACK

The spell is cast as an attack action. A hero uses their relevant magical skill to test against their foe's defense and affect them.

If a spell targets other attributes than defense, this is usually spelled out.

### #DANGEROUS

The spell forces a test to avoid magical corruption every time it is cast.

Applying this tag to more spells is an easy way for the players to restrict certain kinds of magic within a setting.

### #FOCUS

The spell require focus to stay active. A hero must spend an action every turn, or the spell ends.

A hero can always pay double the spell price to imbue the spell with their vital essence, keeping it active without focus. This is usually dangerous and requires a test against magical corruption.

### #IMBUE

A spell that is kept active as long a hero imbues it with their vital essence (life or stat points). The imbued points are reserved, reducing the hero's maximum life or stat total, and cannot be recovered until the spell ends.

### #ITEM

When a hero creates a magic item they use the spell to lock their life force (life or stat points) within a physical object. They can only recover the locked attributes when the magic item is disenchanting or destroyed. This is similar to the imbue tag, except a hero cannot simply end the spell at will.

Simple examples of magic items are magic swords, rings, and wicker fetishes.

## CASTING PARAMETERS

Casting any spell involves multiple parameters. How long does it take to cast? How does it end? How long does it last? How far do the effects reach? What does it affect? Individual spells can, of course, deviate from these parameters in their specifics.

### CASTING TIME

Unless otherwise specified, a hero takes only a single action to cast a spell.

A hero cannot usually cast a spell with long casting time (a few minutes, an hour, etc.) in the heat of battle.

### ENDING A SPELL

Unless otherwise specified, a hero does not need to take an action to end a spell, even if it is focused or imbued.

Disenchanting a magic item always requires at least a single action.

### SPELL DURATIONS

Unless otherwise specified, a spell is nearly instantaneous in its effect.

Most other spells have durations described in minutes, hours, days, and other real-world units of time. The only exception are some combat spells with durations listed in rounds. Out of combat, a round usually lasts several seconds.

Some spells last until a specific condition is met (e.g. until the next sunrise, until the door is opened).

When a spell's duration runs out, the spell fades away with a mildly hallucinatory dissonance.

### SPELL RANGES

Spell ranges are abstracted to the same zones as the rest of the game. The phrasing in the description may vary.

- 1. Self, Zero, Nil**  
The spell only affects the hero themselves.
- 2. Melee, Touch, Adjacent**  
The spell only affects a space, object, or creature the hero touches or could touch with just a step or two (a short range of about 2 metres or 5–7 feet).
- 3. Close, Near**  
The spell has a middling range of about 10 metres or 30 feet. In an indoor environment, this is enough to cover most rooms or corridors.
- 4. Far, Long**  
The spell has a range of about 40 metres or 120 feet. Enough to roughly cover a smallish football pitch.
- 5. Distant, Extreme, Very Long, Other**  
The spell has a longer or somehow different range. A hero using this spell is outside the normal flow of most personal battles.

### CREATURES AFFECTED,

#### AREAS OF EFFECT

Since areas of effect are abstracted, just like ranges, the relevant question is usually how many creatures does a spell affect?

- 1. Single, One, Precise**  
The spell affects one creature.
- 2. Small Area, Adjacent**  
The spell affects 1d6 creatures in a small area (about 2–4 metres across) or surrounding the hero.
- 3. Middling, Medium**  
The spell affects 2d6\* creatures in a mid-sized area about 10 metres across.
- 4. Large, Big**  
The spell affects 4d6\* creatures in an area about 40 metres across.
- 5. Massive, Immense, X Targets**  
The spell has some other very large or very specific area or number of creatures.

A lot of parameters affect these numbers and the game runner will often have to adjudicate.

If creatures are tightly packed, the number affected might double.

If they are keeping their distance from one another, the number affected might be rolled with disadvantage.

If the target creatures are particularly small, a fireball might engulf more of them, while a storm of daggers would injure fewer. If they were particularly large, the effects might be reversed.

### TARGETS

Unless otherwise specified, a spell affects all creatures and inanimate objects in its area of effect.

### UNWILLING TARGETS

If a hero casts a spell on an unwilling target, they must always succeed at a suitable test for it take effect. In combat situations, this might be a test against the target's defense or warding, depending what makes sense from the spell description.

The exception is if the target is bound or restrained, for example a vampire bound in silver or a xeniform safely embedded in an artificial chest.

## HACKING SPELLS

If a hero has a skill which could potentially (with some explanation and hand-waving) also be used to cast a spell with a certain tag, they can hack the spell. This involves spending 2d4 weeks of game time tinkering with the spell, then a thought test to successfully adapt the spell to their skillset. A relevant ability, like fool's luck, may apply.

### D20 SPELL HACKING TEST

1	Hero fails miserably and will never succeed. They gain a random mutation from the corruption table.
2-3	Hero fails laughably and cannot try again. They must make a moderate test against corruption.
4-7	Hero fails and must make a moderate test against corruption.
8-11	Failure and an easy test against corruption.
12-15	Partial failure and trivial test against corruption. Hero rolls next spell hacking test with advantage.
16+	Success! Hero has hacked the spell and adapted it to work with their existing fantascientific skills! Player adds a new tag to the spell to fit hero's skills.

When a hero successfully hacks a spell their player should narrate how it works and how they have modified it. Each other player then suggests a quirk of the hacked spell. The hero's player chooses the best quirk (using popular acclaim as a guide) and writes down the new, modified spell.

The player may name the new, modified spell after their hero.

## CREATING NEW SPELLS

When inventing new spells players should consider:

1. Is it an idea that creates fun solutions and novel situations?
2. Is it something that isn't a universal 'I win' button?
3. Can it be described in three sentences?
4. Does it have a memorable name?

If the answers are yes, then it might be a good spell. Worth trying, anyhow.

To come up with ideas players can use a book or movie or song title for the initial creative jolt, then mix it with another title (or just their imagination) to reinterpret what kind of spell the titles could give.

For example, take an album title like 'Nonadaptation' and a song title like 'Enter Sandman'. The second title suggests elements silicon, sand. Not organic. Perhaps something like the spell just to the left.

This is an interesting spell because it lets the hero bypass the normal commonsense rules of being an organic creature. Instead, they function as a floating cloud of sand. On the other hand, there is a significant drawback: as the hero has to focus, they can only take one action per round. The spell is also quite expensive: it costs most heroes 6 life. Enough to think twice about overusing it.

### EXAMPLE INVENTED SPELL

#### Enter Sand Cloud

#elemental #focus #nature

The wizard rocks back and forth for several seconds, then decoheres into a silicate sand cloud held together by strange forces.

Power 3: The wizard can withstand severe heat and cold and survive without oxygen while in this silicon cloud form. They still get thirsty, tired, and hungry as normal.

## SETTING SPELL POWER FOR NEW SPELLS

Spell power determines at what level a hero can cast a spell safely and how much vitality (life and stats) it costs to cast. Since hero levels cannot exceed 9 and the combined life and stat points of a true wizard will usually not exceed 42, this makes adjusting the accessibility of spells quite easy

### POWER 0

This spell requires no sacrifice. It's equivalent to an ordinary action, like running or firing a pistol. A spell with a power of 0 can be used at will by any hero. Players should be a little bit cautious to keep it specialized (then again, they can always adjust it later!).

### POWER 1

A 3rd level wizard hero could use this spell about 20 times before running out of life. It can be a little bit more powerful or useful than mundane equipment or actions.

### POWER 3

A 3rd level wizard could use this spell just 6-7 times before running out of life. This is not an ability the wizard will use often, so it can be significantly more powerful than mundane actions and allow interesting local changes to the fundamental rules of reality.

### POWER 7

A 3rd level wizard could use this spell twice, and even a 9th level wizard might only pull it off six times. A spell this powerful could conceivably disable enemies automatically or make visible and semi-permanent changes to reality.

### POWER 11

A 3rd level wizard could cast this spell once. It would be dangerous to even a 9th level wizard. Such a spell might be the stuff of fairytales: decades of slumber, exploding mountains, small iron stars falling from the sky, drastic reality changes.

### POWER 21

A spell likely to corrupt any mortal. Power to rewrite histories and transforms aeons.

### POWER 42

A spell the mightiest half-god magus might cast once, giving their life in the process.

Note that the life and stat points are listed for wizard heroes. This is because their magic cost is 1, allowing them to cast the most spells. Most heroes' magic cost is 2, doubling the price of their spells. Even though an explorer might have combined life and stat points of 54 they could only pay for 27 points of spells. A fighter hero's magic cost is 3, tripling the price of their spells. Thus their average of 70 life and stat points only pays for 23 points of spells.

## ADJUSTING SPELLS

With descriptions that aim for natural language and poetry over technical precision, groups will invariably end up with spells that are mechanically too powerful or useful, reducing the creativity of roleplay and the utility of other characters. When that happens the players should discuss and decide what to do. There are a lot of simple options short of simply banning the spell:

1. Make the spell dangerous.
2. Increase the spell power.
3. Adjust the efficacy of the spell: reduce its damage, range, or number of targets.
4. Add an additional cost or drawback to the spell.

The in-game narrative rationale for this kind of change is simple. Spells are a half-understood mish-mash of fantascience requiring rare components, half-understood rituals, and goldilocks conditions to activate. Just like in the story of Jekyll & Hyde, the wizard discovers that something has changed and the experimental spell is no longer as effective. Or, perhaps, its dangerous properties only became apparent after a period of careless use. Just recall how radioactivity was prescribed as a cure-all in the early 20th century.

## WHY OPTIONAL GEAR RULES?

At many tables, or even just during some sessions, the players won't want to track inventory in detail. This is perfectly fine. Players can simply agree to use common sense and leave it at that.

Many gear rules are optional to emphasize this fact.

Accurate inventory records need not be kept in order to have a meaningful campaign.

# GEAR

A hero's inventory is a limited asset where the player notes all the things burdening their hero. It's not just for physical objects; woes, fears, illness, and magic spells, pets, extras all occupy inventory space. If heroes run out of space for abilities or skills, they can repurpose the inventory.

The rationale behind this obvious abstraction is to encourage players to make hard choices between what they want their heroes to bring along on their adventures and what they can.

Inventory space on the human scale is defined using the following units.

### 1 sack = 10 stones = 100 soaps = 2,500 cash

1. The sack is a basic inventory unit. As much as an average human can carry more-or-less unencumbered. It does not have to be a literal sack.
2. A stone is one tenth of a sack, also a generic significant item, like a sabre or spear or shield or shovel. About 5–7 kilos.
3. One soap is a hundredth of a sack, also a generic small item, like a signal whistle or signet ring or spike. Or bar of soap.
4. Cash (€) represents one standard unit of currency.

Most mostly human heroes can carry two sacks at once, but the second sack cumbersome. An encumbered hero has disadvantage to every physical test.

## SPECIAL INVENTORY BY METAHERO ARCHETYPE (OPTIONAL)

Players who want to use the archetypal metaheroes—the wizard (thoughtful), thief (tricky), and fighter (tough)—at their table can use special inventory rules to distinguish their heroes. With these rules:

1. Wizards gain a special **memory palace** where they can store spells. Their palace has one room per hero level.
2. Thieves gain a special mutual assistance **network** where they can list the extras who can help them with heists and other support. Their network has a number of members equal to their proficiency score.
3. Fighters gain a special beloved equipment **panoply** where they can store and level up gear. Somehow they always find the room to strap on their favorite sword or shotgun.

## INVENTORY BY SCOPE OF PLAY (OPTIONAL)

Depending on how many sessions players expect to play, the size of a hero's inventory can be modified to foreground the necessity to make hard choices about what will fit and what won't.

1. Full campaign (indefinite number of sessions). Use the default, with 10 stones per sack and the cumbersome second sack.
2. Miniseries game (three to twelve sessions). Each sack is only six stones.
3. One-shot game (one or two sessions). Each sack is only six stones. Each hero can carry only one sack (no cumbersome second sack).

## VARIABLE INVENTORY BY ENDURANCE (OPTIONAL)

Players looking to make the endurance stat more broadly useful can take advantage of this rule at their table.

Endurance modifies how many stones a hero can fit in their sack — effectively giving them a bigger inventory. For example, if a hero has an endurance score of 3, each of their sacks can carry three additional stones.

# CASH AND TREASURE

Cash is an abstraction of the liquid disposable wealth a character might have on their person. It does not necessarily represent a single coin. How much it is precisely worth also depends on the in-game fiction. By default, players may assume that one cash is equal to the daily income of an average laborer.

CASH	WHAT IT BUYS
~0.1	A common meal or ingredient. Knick knacks. Mass tourist souvenir.
~1	A day's food and lodging for two proletarian baseline humans. A basic tool. An uncommon ingredient. A fancy meal.
~10	A day's food and lodging for two middle-class mildly-enhanced humans. A professional tool. A rare ingredient. A ticket to a fine opera.
~100	A day's food and lodging for two betterfolk aesthetically-augmented humans. A rare or expert tool. Very rare ingredients. A basic vehicle. A hut. A small farm.
~1000	A day's food and lodging for two members of the abmortal neoimperial family. An uncommon vehicle. A small cottage. A middling farm.
~10k	An hour's rock-hitting trip by an imperial exectuive unit. A rare vehicle. A comfortable residence. A large farm or ranch.
~100k	A nearly super-heroic augment. A luxurious residence. An estate.
~1m	Abmortality. A seat on the neoimperial shadow parliament. A modest palace.

## HOW MUCH IS A TREASURE WORTH?

The default assumption is that the heroes will both earn and spend quite significant sums of cash and treasure. Referees or players can use this table to randomly determine approximately how much a given treasure is worth. It's up to the referee if they prefer a flat roll or one influenced by Charisma.

ROUGH RARITY	D100	CHA (D20)	CASH PER SACK
Uncommon	01–50	1–10	€50 (or €1d100)
Valuable	51–80	11–15	€250 (or €1d10 x 50)
Rare	81–98	16–19	€1000 (or €1d20 x 100)
Exceptional	99–00	20+	€5000 (or €1d100 x 100)
Unique	00/0	20/20	€25k (€1d10 x 5k)

If the players prefer to play poorer, more desperate adventures, then simply reducing the values of treasure and loot by a factor of 10 or 50 should suffice. For more variability, exploding dice can be used for the cash per sack column.

## DETERMINING SIZE BY COUNTING ADJECTIVES (OPTIONAL)

To determine the size of a treasure or item, the referee can count how many fancy words are used to describe it, counting a sack for every word. This does not represent mere weight and size, but also the care that has to be put into moving a valuable object without damaging it.

On the scale of stones the same idea can be applied to fine equipment or tools.

## HACKING OUT PORTABLE TREASURES (OPTIONAL)

A character can hack out 1d6 + level percent of a larger treasure's value in a few minutes. The hacked out fragments take one stone's worth of space. This reduces the value of the remaining treasure by 10x that amount in percent. For example, Pikker the Peng-Ling comes across a €6000 statue of the Angel of Decay and rolls 5%. They gouge out the gold bits for €300 and pocket them. The remaining defaced sculpture is now worth 50% less: €3000. Unsuprprisingly hacking apart treasures reduces their value.

## TYPES OF CASH (D20)

1. Luminous land cowries from the Forests of Mist and Stars.
2. Magic-infused scales of the sky dragons.
3. Memory crystals of the lost empire.
4. Stamped roud chunks of soft metal.
5. Whorled pearls.
6. Bronze knives.
7. Duraplast tokens from the decayed Casino Kingdoms.
8. Ritual trading bones from the Necromancer Republic.
9. Composite ferroceramic heptagons.
10. Debtwood from the half-elven Deeproader Consortium.
11. Solidified rainbow pucks.
12. Scripture fiches of ductile think-matter.
13. Gently glowing vidy orbs from the Reality Theatre Era.
14. Diorite rings and eyeteeth.
15. Semi-precious rods and wands.
16. Coralline bracelets.
17. Cards of unrusting metallo-plastic.
18. Small tinkling copper bells.
19. Tiny golden barges in acrylic orbs.
20. Polished

# EXPERIENCE

“Experiences are the lifeblood of heroes. They turn regular legume entrepreneurs into grotesquely over-powered extravagant tomb-robbers who hold a city to ransom in exchange for pretending to kill the dragon that they themselves summoned from the gate of fire.”

—Luka in the UVG

Experience is an arbitrary currency players can invest to advance heroes, sidekicks and pets, or to improve gear, spells, or other items. Players acquire experience points (xp) through play and store them on their active hero's sheet. Only heroes can store experience for investment in this way.

Players can invest experience every time their hero rests in a safe location. They can invest the hero's available xp in as many different characters and things as the hero has access to during their rest period, but only once for each individual recipient. Players can also invest experience in other players' characters and equipment.

The most experience that can ever be invested in a hero is 99,999. Sidekicks, pets, and equipment have lower maximums. The most experience a hero can ever store for later investment is 9,999.

If a hero is retired with uninvested experience, their player can immediately invest that entire amount in a new hero, or in a promoted sidekick.

## EXPERIENCE AS INCENTIVE

Before a campaign or series of sessions start the players should have some idea of the kind of game they want to play. They should decide, at least roughly, what kind of in-game achievements will be rewarded with experience. The sources of experience form an incentive structure for play and will *greatly* change the how play unfolds.

By default the Ultraviolet Grasslands awards experience for exploring new things, surviving conflicts, spending cash on wild parties, and completing travel quests. Other games can be wildly different with different incentives.

In the oldest versions of roleplaying experience was awarded exclusively for gold. Specifically, one piece of stolen ('found') gold was worth one piece of experience when dragged back to a safe town. In this kind of game, the focus is on getting in and out of a location fast and with as much loot as possible. This kind of game generally focuses very much on thievery, stealth, and trickery, with combat often treated as a rather expensive fail state.

Later editions added experience for defeating monsters or even awarded experience only for defeating monsters. This put the focus very much on tactics and combat. Gameplay became about finding high-value 'boss' monsters and slaughtering them.

Other versions went for simpler things. Experience for participating in the game, experience for making other players laugh, experience for being the instant-pizza-baker, experience for completing a quest, experience for failing tests. Some games even did away with experience entirely.

## SOURCES OF EXPERIENCE

There is no one right way to play, and so there is no one right way to assign experience. Players can even change up sources of experience from session to session depending on what kind of game they want to play that day. For a horror adventure, experience might be gained by sheer survival, a power metal heroic adventure might assign it for displays of valor and bravery, rousing speeches or guitar solos, and killing monsters, while an old school tomb-robbing module might be best suited by experience for gold. So long as players are on board with what their heroes are getting into during a given session, this is perfectly fine.

Many adventure modules can include their own specific victory conditions and experience sources.

### RANDOMIZED EXPERIENCE AMOUNTS (OPTIONAL)

Players may roll dice to determine precisely how much experience their hero earns from a given source. In-fiction this can be justified by the narrative conceit that no two people learn equally from the same teacher. Psychologically, this adds a small element of uncertainty which adds a little touch of variable ratio payoff to the experience mechanic. If this kind of operant conditioning isn't something the players would enjoy, they can skip it. But statistically speaking they are likely to enjoy it. Just saying.

### SHARING EXPERIENCE

Whenever experience points are listed for an achievement that amount is earned by each player attending and noted on their hero sheet. The players then decide how to invest the experience among their characters.

### EXPERIENCE AS REWARD FOR PLAYER SKILL

A popular style of play involves the referee distributing sources of experience unevenly through the game world. This is easiest to do with a generic source, like cash in a dungeon, but can be done with nearly every source.

A simple way to conceptualize it is with pareto's 80/20 principle. 80% of the locations are relatively easy to reach and account for about 20% of the total available experience. These might be poorly defended rooms in a dungeon or easy to find and explore natural sights. The remaining 20% of the locations hold 80% of the available experience. These might be secret chambers protected by traps and monsters, or they might be breathtaking wonders made inaccessible by grueling terrain, weather, and other misfortunes.

### POSSIBLE SOURCES (D20)

1. High stats rolled. Luck snowballs.
2. All cash earned, looted, or stolen. Hypercapitalist. Might add a monopoly board. Heists and murderhobos.
3. All works of art recovered.
4. All cash profligately wasted carousing. A pulp adventure vibe.
5. All enemies killed. Slaughterquest.
6. Monsters hunted. Murder quests.
7. Enemies defeated. Trickery rewarded.
8. Trophies collected. Big game hunting.
9. Encounters survived. Cowardice pays.
10. New creatures observed and studied. Biology and naturalism.
11. New locations visited and explored. Tourism. Natural geography.
12. New spells and anomalies found or activated. Archaeology. The pushing of red buttons.
13. Quests completed. Story mode.
14. Civilians saved. Valorous hero mode.
15. Loyal lackeys gained. Feudal lord mode.
16. Locations and creatures illustrated. Artist setting.
17. The episodic and colourful tales of the party written and recounted. Writerly encouragement.
18. Attendance. Showing up to play is its own reward.
19. Helping run the game. Encouraging pro-social behaviour.
20. Food prepared for the group. Play as social dining experience.

# LEVELS & ADVANCEMENT

“Experiences are the lifeblood of heroes. They turn regular legume entrepreneurs into grotesquely over-powered extravagant tomb-robbers who hold a city to ransom in exchange for pretending to kill the dragon that they themselves summoned from the gate of fire.”

—Luka in the UVG

## Levels

1. Hero levels are an abstraction of power and optional in Breve Seacat. A starting hero starts out about as powerful as a pulp hero like Conan: about the equivalent of level 3.

## LEVELS

1. Hero levels are an abstraction of power and optional in Breve Seacat. A starting hero starts out about as powerful as a pulp hero like Conan: about the equivalent of level 3.

2. Depending on the kind of game you want to play, all the players should decide beforehand precisely what in-game achievements they want to reward with experience. By default UVG awards XP for exploring new things, surviving conflicts, spending cash on wild parties, and completing travel quests. Your game can be different.

## TEN HERO ATTRIBUTES

This chapter details the ten core rules modules that create suitably excessive heroes for the Ultraviolet Grasslands and other fantascience worlds:

- i. Proficiency
- ii. Stats
- iii. Skills
- iv. Abilities
- v. Hero dice
- vi. Life (and hurt)
- vii. Magic
- viii. Gear
- ix. Experience



# APPENDIX: TOOLS FOR PLAY

“Reaching out to embrace the random  
Reaching out to embrace whatever may come.”

— Tool, *Lateralus*, Lateralus (2001)

What even is roleplaying without a profusion of papers and pencils? A digital savanna, studded with rollerbots perhaps?

## HERO RECORDS

For most players keeping a record of their protagonist is important. For players who want any kind of continuity, it is quite essential. Though playing without any kind of character record is possible, memories are fallible.

Depending on their requirements, players should decide how they prefer to record their characters in play. The text version of the hero record is provided to make it simple to play with digital tools. Only headings are formatted.

### TOOLS

- i. Hero records.
- ii. Plain text
- iii. Minihero sheet
- iv. Hero sheet
- v. Metahero sheet

## PLAIN TEXT HERO SHEET

### HERO:

Name:  
Friends:  
Enemy:  
Title:  
Species:  
Looks:  
Debt:  
Likes:  
Player:  
/\*adjust details as required\*/

### EXPERIENCE:

Invested:

### LEVEL:

### PROFICIENCY:

### STATS:

Strength:  
>Remaining:  
Endurance:  
>Remaining:  
Agility:  
>Remaining:  
Charisma:  
>Remaining:  
Aura:  
>Remaining:  
Thought:  
>Remaining:

### SKILLS:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (starting skill, rank: #)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ (starting skill, rank: #)
3. \_\_\_\_\_ (starting skill, rank: #)
4. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
5. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
6. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
7. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
8. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
9. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
10. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)

### ABILITIES:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (starting ability, rank: #)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
3. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
4. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
5. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
6. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
7. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
8. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
9. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)
10. \_\_\_\_\_ (rank: #)

### GEAR (NO PENALTY):

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

/\*each slot = 1 stone, includes spells\*/

### EXCESS GEAR (HALF SPEED & [-]):

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

/\*repeat as required\*/

### LIFE:

Remaining:

### HURT:

Fine {}  
Disadvantaged [-] {}  
Slow {}  
Half Life {}  
Out {}  
Defeat {}

### HERO DICE (D6):

Remaining:

### MAGIC COST:

### COMBAT:

Physical...  
>Defense:  
>Range Attack:  
>Melee Attack:  
Metaphysical...  
>Warding:  
>Magic Attack:  
>Social Attack:

### ATTACK MODES:

Tool:  
>Damage:  
>Range:  
>Tag:  
Tool:  
>Damage:  
>Range:  
>Tag:  
/\*repeat as required\*/

### PET OR SIDEKICK:

Name:  
Invested xp:  
Level:  
Defense:  
Sum:  
Life:  
Ability:

## TWO MINI HERO SHEETS

For those one or two session games.

HERO: \_\_\_\_\_ Player: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: ..... EXPERIENCE: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: ..... Invested: .....

Species: .....

Looks: ..... LEVEL: \_\_\_\_\_

Str End Agi **PRO** Cha Aur Tho

**SKILLS**

1. ....

2. ....

3. ....

**ABILITIES**

1. ....

2. ....

3. ....

**GEAR**

1. ....

2. ....

3. ....

4. ....

5. ....

6. ....

Excess: .....

HURT  fine,  bane[-],  slow,  ½ life,  out,

LIFE: \_\_\_\_\_

Remaining: ..... MAGIC COST:    HERO DICE:



HERO: \_\_\_\_\_ Player: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: ..... EXPERIENCE: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: ..... Invested: .....

Species: .....

Looks: ..... LEVEL: \_\_\_\_\_

Str End Agi **PRO** Cha Aur Tho

**SKILLS**

1. ....

2. ....

3. ....

**ABILITIES**

1. ....

2. ....

3. ....

Excess: .....

HURT  fine,  bane[-],  slow,  ½ life,  out,

LIFE: \_\_\_\_\_

Remaining: ..... MAGIC COST:    HERO DICE:

## A BREVE HERO SHEET

For three to twelve sessions or so.

HERO: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: ..... Friends: .....

Enemy: ..... Title: .....

Species: ..... Looks: .....

Debt: ..... Likes: .....

Player: .....

EXPERIENCE: \_\_\_\_\_

Invested: .....

LEVEL: \_\_\_\_\_

Str End Agi **PRO** Cha Aur Tho

**SKILLS**

1. ....

2. ....

3. ....

4. ....

5. ....

6. ....

**ABILITIES**

1. ....

2. ....

3. ....

4. ....

5. ....

6. ....

LIFE: \_\_\_\_\_

Life Remaining: .....

MAGIC COST:

HERO DICE:

HURT  fine,  bane[-],  slow,  ½ life,  out,  defeat

**ATTACK MODES**

Method: ..... Method: ..... Method: .....

Damage: ..... Damage: ..... Damage: .....

Range: ..... Range: ..... Range: .....

Tags: ..... Tags: ..... Tags: .....

**PET OR SIDEKICK**

Name: ..... Level: ..... Life: .....

Invested xp: ..... Defense: ..... Ability: .....

Sum: ..... Ability: .....

**COMBAT**

**Physical**

Defense: .....

Range Attack: .....

Melee Attack: .....

**Metaphysical**

Warding: .....

Magic Attack: .....

Social Attack: .....

# AN ULTRAVIOLET CAMPAIGN HERO SHEET

Until a hero gets a full journal to themselves.

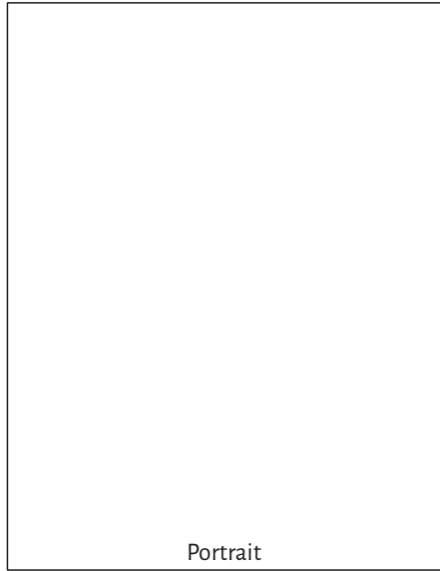
**HERO:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name: .....  
 Friends: .....  
 Enemy: .....  
 Title: .....  
 Species: .....  
 Looks: .....  
 Debt: .....  
 Likes: .....  
 Player: .....

**EXPERIENCE:** \_\_\_\_\_

Invested: .....

**LEVEL:** \_\_\_\_\_



Str End Agi **PRO** Cha Aur Tho

**GEAR**

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....
6. ....
7. ....
8. ....
9. ....
10. ....

**CUMBERSOME GEAR**

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....
6. ....
7. ....
8. ....
9. ....
10. ....

**ATTACK MODES**

<b>Method:</b> .....	<b>Method:</b> .....	<b>Method:</b> .....
Damage: .....	Damage: .....	Damage: .....
Range: .....	Range: .....	Range: .....
Tags: .....	Tags: .....	Tags: .....
<b>Method:</b> .....	<b>Method:</b> .....	<b>Method:</b> .....
Damage: .....	Damage: .....	Damage: .....
Range: .....	Range: .....	Range: .....
Tags: .....	Tags: .....	Tags: .....

**PET OR SIDEKICK**

Name: ..... Ability: .....  
 Invested xp: ..... Ability: .....  
 Level: ..... Ability: .....  
 Defense: ..... Capacity: .....  
 Sum: ..... Gear: .....  
 Life: ..... Likes: .....

**SKILLS**

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....
6. ....
7. ....
8. ....
9. ....
10. ....

**ABILITIES**

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....
6. ....
7. ....
8. ....
9. ....
10. ....

**LIFE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Life Remaining:** .....

**MAGIC COST:**

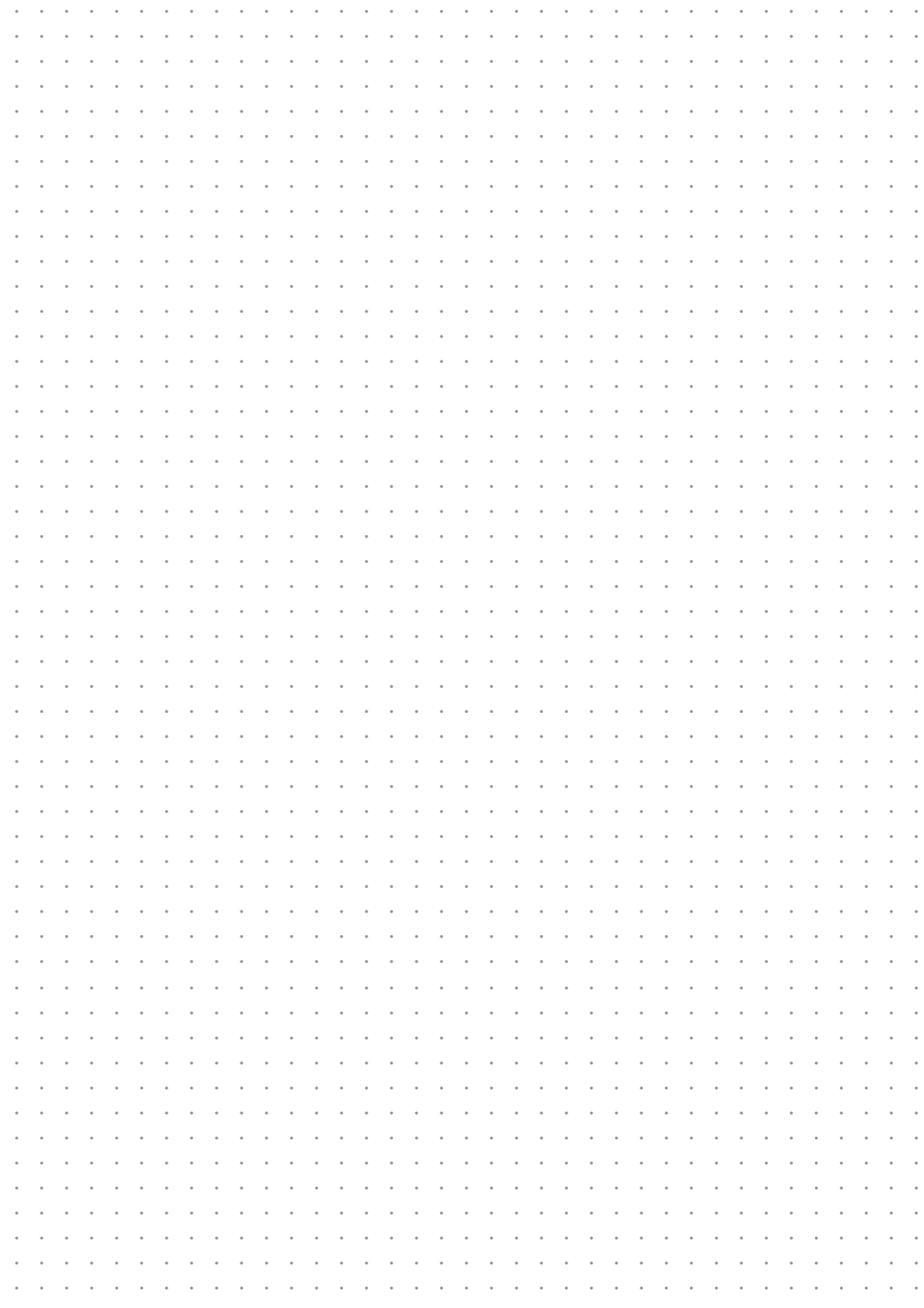
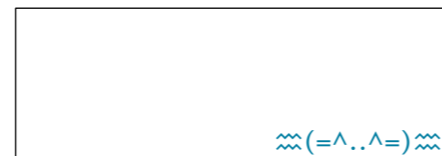
**HERO DICE:**

**HURT**  fine,  bane[-],  slow,  
 1/2 life,  out,  defeat

**COMBAT**

**⚔ Physical**  
 Defense: .....  
 Range Attack: .....  
 Melee Attack: .....

**🌀 Metaphysical**  
 Warding: .....  
 Magic Attack: .....  
 Social Attack: .....





# THE WORLD IS FLUX

But it is not chaos.

## STASIMORPHIC HERESY

In the seventh decade of the redirectoracy many engineer monks of the order of Santa Ruperta proclaimed a heretical doctrine that the quarterling myths are based on truth, that our world is not natural but rather created or built, and that the fluid nature of both the biotic and animic (spiritual) spheres of existence is a modified or artificial situation, maintained by some form of vast homeostatic apparatus underpinning our cosmos. The heresy was successfully eliminated in 84rd and most (67%) of the key proponents re-educated by a cogflower inquisition corps under the command of Puromente Ionatian.

Nevertheless, elements of stasi-morphism have proven useful for explaining the queerly static and conservative natures of several gate-accessible bubble worlds.

The heroes come from a world of swift, unceasing change. This is understood as the way and nature of things. There are so many layers of history that nobody can give a final accounting of when one civilization began and another ended. There are so many facets of space and place that one must simply shrug and accept that the Vastlands encompass both hunter gatherers and fantascientific would be god-wizards, and above, in the arc of glittering fast stars, there are still abmortal beings that might as well be gods to the short-lived humans trekking across the grasslands of the world. Climates change. Populations move. Jostle. Change. Adapt. Disappear.

But life goes on.

And where there is life, there is profit. There are niches. There is exploitation and growth and explosions and crashes. Mundane lives thrown into the grinding maw of opportunity and adventure.



## WHO IS THIS NATURALIST?

Perhaps there is an opportunity for a bit of humanity in this vast empty place.

### 1. THEIR BACKGROUND [D20]

- i. Wealthy dilettante naturalist.
- ii. Retired expeditionary force colonel.
- iii. Injured veteran turned painter.
- iv. Outcast academy heretic.
- v. Commissariat documentary maker.
- vi. Avantgarde artist lumographer.
- vii. Disgraced doctor changing career.
- viii. Redland revolutionary botanist.
- ix. Ambitious newly-freed golem butler.
- x. Greenlander big game hunter.
- xi. Failed Oranjist elf-touched trapper.
- xii. Avid corpocratic birdwatcher.
- xiii. Mercenary military virologist.
- xiv. Radical quarterling evolutionist.
- xv. Subversive catlord biomancer.
- xvi. Labor cartel prospector.
- xvii. Safranin institute musician.
- xviii. Bluelander post-human poacher.
- xix. Pharmacore scout zoologist.
- xx. Exiled graduate student wizard.

### 2. THEIR HOPES [D20]

- i. Name more creatures than rival.
- ii. Bring back prize specimen.
- iii. Win anti-turing painting prize.
- iv. Overturn the scientic paradigm.
- v. Film secret life of rare creature.
- vi. Make aurographs of zoo-vampires.
- vii. Discover cure for common ailment.
- viii. Liberate poor with new food crop.
- ix. Be accepted as a full sentient.
- x. Bring back prize trophy.
- xi. Make fur coat for Venus in Orange.
- xii. Discover target for servitor uplift.
- xiii. Isolate purely defensive bioweapon.
- xiv. Evolve self into a higher form.
- xv. Create a better pet.
- xvi. Find and license new labor units.
- xvii. Craft hit opera with natural sounds.
- xviii. Kill, sell, profit, invest, retire.
- xix. Find valuable new snake oil.
- xx. Complete convincing thesis.

### 3. THEIR SECRET WEAPON [D20]

- i. Friendly whispering daimon.
- ii. Quite safe vomish sensory implant.
- iii. Portable magic painting set.
- iv. Colourful enamelled golem servant.
- v. Mysterious zoology manuscript.
- vi. Far-seeing crystallized skull.
- vii. Empathic augmented burdenbeast.
- viii. Ancient full-spectrum electric torch.
- ix. Superlatively cool sun glasses.
- x. Unbearably comfy shoes.
- xi. Semi-sentient brass & crystal pistol.
- xii. Soothing neural lasso.
- xiii. Autonomous chemical synthesizer.
- xiv. High density electric notebook.
- xv. Archaic glyphed combat chainsaw.
- xvi. Vermin-repelling jade bracelet.
- xvii. Synthetic memory implant.
- xviii. High frontier energy rifle.
- xix. Symbiotic environment suit.
- xx. Magic towel.

