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Questers of the Middle Realms

The lighter side of fantasy roleplaying



SECOND EDITION

Tim Gray

Questers of the Middle Realms

Second Edition

The lighter side of fantasy roleplaying

By Tim Gray

Published by Silver Branch Games

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Based on PDQ Rules original text © 2005 Chad Underkoffler

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Credits

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The **Prose Descriptive Qualities (PDQ) System** has been designed for evocative simplicity, speed, and flexibility in play. Three levels of resolution, suitable for any type of situation. The **PDQ System** is used under licence from Chad Underkoffler; the following materials are not necessarily endorsed in any way by Chad Underkoffler, nor is he in any way responsible for the content of these materials unless specifically credited.

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Introduction

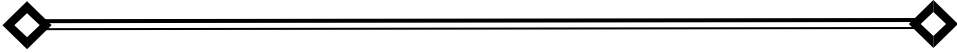
This game is written as a somewhat tongue-in-cheek reworking of common fantasy elements, poking affectionate fun at the conventions and stylings of fantasy games. Especially That One. So groups of characters with widely disparate backgrounds and personalities charge round the countryside, poking into Places Man Was Not Meant To Poke, slaying hapless Things and accumulating Stuff - but with a particular flavour.

That was the beginning of the first edition of *Questers of the Middle Realms*, published back in 2006. It was the first game I produced licensing Chad Underkoffler's very simple and flexible *PDQ system*. No-one had used it for a traditional fantasy game, and I wanted to give it a go.

So this book is a framework for traditional high fantasy games that's quick and easy to learn and use. It's great for pick-up games or conventions, when you don't want to work hard for your fun.

Questers is written with the aim of an affectionate skit on the loopier aspects of the genre, and it's packed full of smartypants cultural references (mainly aimed at middle-aged geeks).





The rules will also serve if you want to play more seriously. Of course you'll have to change a lot of the setting material: maybe you can plug in a setting you already have and would like to try with lighter rules. Many of the monster write-ups should be easy to tweak, turning the wackier Qualities into more serious ones. PDQ makes things pretty fluid.

Welcome to the second edition

I went on to use PDQ for a version of my *Legends Walk* setting about mythically-powered superheroes, and for *Jaws of the Six Serpents*, targeting the rather darker territory of sword and sorcery. I was pleased with *Questers*, but as my skills developed I saw the book could have been put together better. I started tinkering with a new edition several years back, having encountered people at conventions and online who were still enthusiastic about *Questers* and Chad's brilliantly simple PDQ system. That project fell between the cracks for a while, but now it lives!

I've called it Second Edition in homage to fantasy games of yore, but mostly it's a revision, reformatted for a smaller size so it makes a better print book (and is easier to read on portable devices). The text has had an editing pass and spruce up, and I've brought over the *Jaws* idea of separating basic PDQ and game-specific rules. The mini-supplements *Character Assistant* and *Ten Magical Thingies* have been pulled in. Oh, and the artwork has changed a little (mainly dropping pieces to suit the smaller size).

I hope you like it! Feel free to get in touch through silverbranch.co.uk.

– Tim Gray, June 2017

Introducing the Realms

The setting is the world of Median and the continent of Ludor. There are other continents, not detailed here, but Ludor is thought of (by its inhabitants at least) as the centre of the world, hence its lands are known as ‘the Middle Realms’, or often just ‘the Realms’.

It’s a world where people are flawed, from the gods on down, to be played in an atmosphere of cynical humour mixed with daring adventure. It also draws on the crazy, grab-bag side of fantasy, where a setting has multitudes of weird monsters drawn from any and all mythologies and the sugar-sozzled brains of the authors; ranks of gods directing people’s fates from on high; magic flying around on a routine basis and enchanted items under every rock; and various organisations and factions with different agendas.

The trick is to have the feeling of lots of wild and wacky stuff in the background, yet keep it manageable in actual play. We do this through the **‘build it yourself’ approach**.

There are multitudes of gods representing the many facets of the world, and much of its strangeness can be blamed on them. However, rather than going to the bother of making huge lists of them that players would have to wade through, there’s a small set group of greater gods and your play group will invent lesser gods as you go, so that the ones who become important in your stories are the ones you’re interested in having. Anybody can call for little bits of divine aid, so folk are careful about who they please and who they annoy. Similarly, there are many organisations out there but you will decide which are important in your game. There are some examples later to get you started.

This approach gives your group control of the level of detail: define a lot if you like complexity, or focus on a couple of important gods and organisations if you like simplicity. The “default” style is a sense, at least some of the time, of struggle against a fickle and increasingly complicated universe, for instance as you try to balance the desires of a growing

number of deities. Characters have a hard time, in a way that amuses the players.

Adventures published for other games can be dropped into QMR by taking a loose, qualitative approach to conversion. The setting will accommodate fairly grimy stuff as long as there's room for occasional tension release (which the players will probably provide), but also the whimsical monster melanges common in early fantasy adventures (if something seems weird just blame the gods, for they are petty and cruel and plague mankind with unsustainable ecologies).

What is a roleplaying game?

A roleplaying game (RPG) is basically a fun way for a group of people to sit round a table and play 'let's pretend' with rules in a fictional world. For Questers you'll need pencils, paper and two six-sided dice each.

The **players** (real people) each have a **character** (an imaginary person), with information about how good that character is at doing various things. The character is in a setting detailed by the **Game Master (GM)**, who describes events to the player. The player says what the character does, and the GM says what happens as a result. This often involves rolling one or more **dice** (the singular is 'die'), based on information about the character, to see whether the action succeeded. As the characters interact with each other and their setting a story is woven in which the players participate through their characters.

Player characters are often referred to as **PCs**, and non-player characters (the people they meet, controlled by the GM) as **NPCs**. A **session** is a real-world measure of time when the players get together to play, perhaps over an evening. A **scene** is a game-world measure of time when the characters pursue a set of actions at a particular location. A **story** or **adventure** is a set of scenes; a set of stories is sometimes called a **campaign**.

So it's like this...

Here's a quick run-down for getting started in **Questers of the Middle Realms**. GMs, use it as a handout to give to your players and save your voice!

The **setting** is the world called Median, and the continent of Ludor. It's a world with lots of weird creatures and magic and generally low technology.

The **rules** are developed from the PDQ system, which is simple, fast and flexible. Key aspects and abilities of characters are all defined as 'Qualities', with simple ways of deciding conflicts. You'll need two six-sided dice, and maybe a spare or two.

Build-it-yourself approach

The *Questers* book outlines the setting and encouraging game groups to fill in as much detail as they want to work with.

There are vast ranks of **gods**, powerful and capricious entities with their own spheres of influence and complicated relationships within the cosmic hierarchy. Fortunately we take the approach of only detailing the ones *you* want to focus on in your

game, invented by the players or GM. Lesser beings earn **Favour** for pleasing a god (or lose it for angering one), and anyone can draw on this for little bits of divine aid. Trained priests can do more impressive miracles.

There are also many different **organisations** pursuing agendas and providing skills to members.

Places

Ar-Karap - the great desert, with deadly sands, oases, nomads and the city-state of Veribah.

Arrganarr - bleak rocky land where evil creatures lair; runs the town of Shiny Gate for trade.

Dwarfholds - dwarf cities burrowed into mountains.

The League of Groth - central land of city-states with a taste for darkness, occultism, art and fashion.

Helongor - rolling grasslands in the east, ruled by the proud and warlike Weasel Riders.

Kadink - western land of dangerous swamps and shrewd, suspicious folk known as spies and traders.

Ko-Sha - the greatest city in the world, or at least the largest, on the west coast.

Logrin - an island nation off the west coast, noted for its class structure and mighty navy.

Murklemere - biggest lake, with distinctive wildlife.

Norwast - harsh, unlivable icy land in the far north.

Orthedia - a realm of hills and forests in the north-west, with feudal lords, knights, castles and ruins.

Plains of Plap - flat, grassy, things fall from the sky.

Plunder Port - an island pirate settlement that grew into a busy trading town.

Scata - north-eastern land of gloomy forests and hills, with dour people and many strange creatures.

The Snaggles - broken rocky landscape in the south-west, with rugged settlers and prospectors.

Tek Wei - the Amber Empire of the east, known for a love of intricacy in skills and etiquette.

Valharia - icy, mountainous land in the far north-west, inhabited by strong, tough barbarian hunters.

Wochilat - warm southern realm of plain and jungle, ruled by an ancient, cultured people.

Yrisiriel Forest - the ancient refuge of the elves; shunned by all right-thinking folk.

Races

We've provided several well-known fantasy races as the main options for your characters.

Humans - the majority species, a passionate-natured lot with no special talents or weaknesses.

Elves - too-perfect immortals, eternally regenerating, indulging in dubious "hobbies" to relieve the tedium.

Dwarves - stocky, resilient chaps sculpted from the very earth, sexless, with an affinity for crafts.

Orcs - animalistic, brawny, unsophisticated tribesfolk, great survivors, created to hunt elves.

Hoblings - small rodent-people with hearty appetites, talented at getting into and out of trouble.

Questers

Everyone has their place in society. Some people, by choice or accident, find themselves trekking to places avoided by folk with a keener sense of self-preservation, taking on toothy and peculiar creatures, fiendishly cunning traps and just plain unfriendly folk with sharpened ironmongery in pursuit of glory, power and - most of all - negotiable currency. That'd be you then.



Ways to play

You don't have to play in the 'default' style: apply what's here in the way that suits your group best. You could run a straightforward traditional fantasy game, or epic swords and sorcery, or tweak it to suit new gamers or youngsters. QMR is adaptable: it reflects back the flavour and detail you decide to put in.

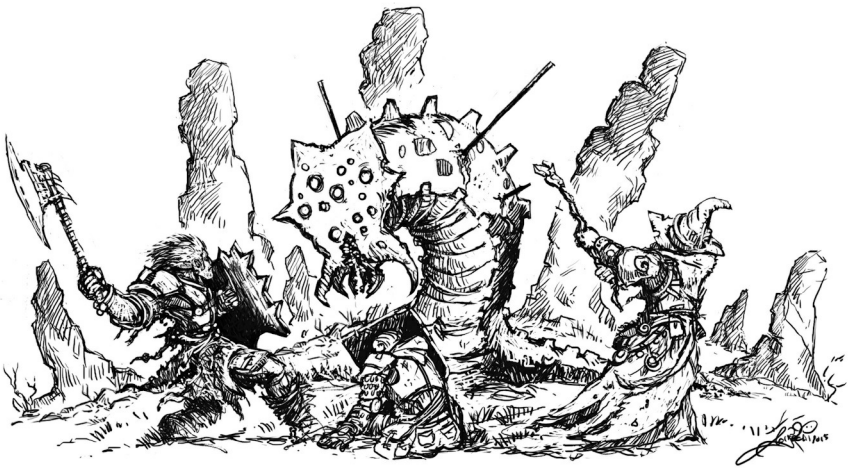
Most games will probably run in the setting provided here, with some degree of the humorous tone. You'll play a character fully immersed in the setting and cultures of Median.

You could alter the **setting**, using the rules with some other game world you like. You could alter the **tone**, from silly slapstick to serious epic to grim and gritty.

Or you might play with the very structure of the game. You could **play yourself** as a character, snatched from our world by strange metaphysical means and dropped into Median (on the Plains of Plap?) with some suitable changes and maybe some useful possessions. The overall quest of the campaign might be to get home if possible, and you could have loads of side-quests along the way.

Another option is to play fantasy characters who, on some level, **realise they're characters** in a story or game. This allows humorous metacommentary about how the rules affect the world, snarky comments about Certain Other Games, and a certain cracked perspective that can be fun for players.

PDQ Core Rules



Qualities

The **Prose Descriptive Qualities (PDQ) System** has been designed for evocative simplicity, speed, and flexibility in play. It has three levels of resolution, suitable for any type of situation.

The core element of PDQ is the concept of a prose, descriptive, do-it-yourself, wide-ranging **Quality** standing in as attribute, advantage, merit, flaw, skill, or incapability. They're rated on a simple scale of **Ranks**, and the rules provide tools for comparing these when characters compete against each other or their surroundings.

When you make a character you'll be able to buy a certain number of Ranks to split between Qualities as you wish. Whatever is important about a character is written down as a Quality; they should grow out of the character concept and game setting. This gives you great freedom to create the character you want.

Qualities are often drawn from five general areas.

- ‡ **Physical.** Having to do with the body, athleticism, or natural talents. *Examples:* Strong, Agile, Hardy, Climbing, Knife-fighting, Roguishly Handsome, Dancing, Perseverance.
- ‡ **Mental.** Areas of study, intellectual acuity, education. *Examples:* Quick-witted, Strong-willed, Observation, Knowledge of the Supernatural, Medicine, Craft Metal, Fine Food and Drink.
- ‡ **Social.** Groups the character is a member of or associates with, skills in dealing with people. *Examples:* Persuasion, Trickery, Intimidation, Alluring, Silversmiths' Guild, Conversationalist, Order of the Star.
- ‡ **Professional.** Knowledge and skills picked up on the job. *Examples:* Warrior, Thief, Street Urchin, Spy, Scholar, Bounty Hunter.
- ‡ **Other.** Esoteric skills, magical powers or physical resources.

Penumbra

Qualities represent a broad skill or field of knowledge: if a particular Quality is relevant at all to an action or topic, the character may apply that Quality when attempting that action or understanding that topic. This is called the **penumbra** (or ‘shadow’) of the Quality. Therefore, a player shouldn’t choose Qualities that are too narrow or its penumbra will cast too narrow a shadow; too broad, and identifying the sorts of things that should fall under the penumbra becomes pointless. The parameters for what’s too broad or too narrow are up to the individual GM.



Remember to make sure you and the GM have the same understanding of the abilities you choose. Write a sentence or two of description for ones that are ambiguous.

For example, the Quality ‘Swordsmanship’ would be useful not just in hacking away at things, but also in cleaning and maintaining swords, discovering the location of nearby swordsmiths and fencing trainers, and so forth. If the player had instead selected a Quality of ‘Rapier Fighting’ the Quality would only be useful in fighting with that kind of sword, and involve knowledge surrounding rapiers exclusively.

Overlapping Qualities. If a situation falls under the penumbra of more than one of your Qualities, all of them can help to accomplish the task. That doesn’t just cover skills, but personality traits and motivations too – for instance, in the right situation your ‘Loves Sister’ or ‘Protector of Tribe’ Qualities can make you a deadlier fighter.

Ranks

Qualities have **Ranks**, which indicate increasing proficiency. From lowest to highest, the Ranks are:

♣ Poor [-2]

♣ Average [0]

♣ Good [+2]

♣ Expert [+4]

♣ Master [+6]

The numbers in square brackets following the Rank of the Quality show the Rank's **Modifier** (MOD) – how much is added to or subtracted from a 2d6 dice roll (see *Task Resolution*). Characters have some things going for them (Strengths), and at least one thing working against them (Weakness). At everything else, characters are neither noteworthy nor inept – they have countless unspecified, invisible Average [0] Qualities. At character creation, buying the first Rank of a Quality lets you write it down at Good – you've effectively raised one of your invisible Qualities one Rank.

See the **PDQ Master Table** on the next page for the Ranks and Modifiers set out in more detail. You'll notice that the same Ranks are used to set difficulty for a task, and then they're represented by a **Target Number** (TN). The basic mechanic is to roll two six-sided dice (2d6), add the results together with your Quality's MOD, and try to beat the TN – but that will be explained more fully after we've covered Qualities.

Strengths and Weaknesses

A **Strength** is a positive aspect (benefit, skill, talent, attribute, or power) of a character. Come up with a word or a pithy phrase to sum up the

PDQ Master Chart

RANK	AS QUALITY RANK	MODIFIER TO 2D6 ROLL	AS DIFFICULTY RANK	TARGET NUMBER
Poor	Notably inept.	-2	A trivial task.	5
Average	Typical human capability.	0	Straightforward task.	7
Good	Better than usual; most professionals or talented newcomers.	+2	Complex task, requiring attention to detail.	9
Expert	Noted/famed professional; talent with skill to back it up.	+4	Intricate task, difficult and requiring sharp concentration, hard for an average person.	11
Master	Acclaimed genius: talent with substantial skill behind it.	+6	Extremely difficult task, hard for most professionals.	13

Strength. Examples include Fighting, Willpower, Fly Like A Bird, Find Bargains, and Run Away!

A **Weakness** is a negative aspect of the character, stemming from ignorance, flawed understanding, physical or mental incapability, or some other vulnerability. Pick something that will be fun or entertaining for you the player. Come up with a word or a pithy phrase to sum up the Weakness. Examples here include Glass Jaw, Weak-willed, Slow As Molasses, and Shy. Weaknesses are always Poor [-2] Rank.

Depending upon the character concept, *any* Quality can be a Strength or a Weakness. For example, suppose a character has ‘Hook-Handed’ as a Quality. If it’s ranked Average [0] or above, it’s a Strength: the character can use his hook as a weapon (in physical conflicts) or as a threat (in social conflicts) – or even more inventive things like picking a lock or sliding down a rope – with an increased chance of success. But if the character has ‘Poor [-2] Hook-Handed’, this is a Weakness: the character keeps getting his hook stuck into things, forgets about it when he tries to scratch his head, has problems holding on to things that require two hands, and so forth. It’s all in the way you spin it. It’s even possible to have the same Quality as a Strength *and* a Weakness, helping or hindering in different circumstances.

Notes on choosing Qualities

Broad vs deep. When buying Ranks of Qualities players can choose between having more Qualities at a lower level of competency or having fewer Qualities at a higher level of competency. If you throw everything into one area of expertise you’ll really shine when that type of action comes up, but you’ll be unimpressive for other things. You should also note that because of the way the system works (explained later), such prodigies are slightly less durable than their companions who are merely competent but more rounded. Shine bright, burn out.

Overlapping Qualities fill a similar role to ‘feats’, ‘edges’ or whatever in other RPGs: they let you boost your effectiveness at specific types of task

by picking Qualities that work in tandem, at the expense of broader expertise and flexibility as you use up precious Quality slots. For example you could take both Warrior and Swordsmanship to combine when fighting with a blade, but with all that training you probably didn't get out much.

Tweaking choices. Never fear: if, after play begins, a particular Quality sees no use and doesn't really add to the characterisation of a PC, a player should feel free to change it to something that fits better – but only after talking to the GM.

Gear

The baseline position for PDQ is that characters are assumed to have the equipment needed to perform the skills reflected in their Qualities, but this makes no difference to how effective they are. For instance, different weapon types don't, in themselves, make any difference to the damage you do in combat – having a sword just enables you to use your Sword Fighting Quality. The system defaults to focusing on the characters, not the equipment list.

However, you can assign Qualities to objects, making them important to the story. The simplest is just the general quality (small Q) of the thing, reflecting materials, workmanship, role in the grand tapestry of fate and the like – e.g. Good [+2] Ancestral Sword. This comes into play when the item performs its key function(s), adding on to any other Qualities that apply. Stuff that's unusual, rare or expensive in the setting needs to be taken as a Quality. In fact, any item that you want to give you a bonus for rolls needs to be specified. Gear is covered more fully later on.

Character items. These are objects that have been bought using the available Quality Ranks during character creation. They are effectively part of the character. Having invested in such an item, the player should not be permanently deprived of it – though the character might lose the use of it temporarily if it's lost, stolen or in need of repair (and will be

compensated by a Fortune Point – see later – for each scene they’re without it).

Props. These are objects that are not part of the character, but are available for character use for a while, like a Good [+2] Bag of Coins. You don’t start with any: they’re gained and lost in play.

Living beings as gear. This is certainly possible: you can have an Expert [+4] Warhorse or a Good [+2] Squire as character Qualities, for instance, and maybe even as Props.

Powers

These are supernatural and magical things beyond what ordinary people can do. They’re usually restricted to characters with particular sorts of background (like trained sorcerers) and supernatural creatures. They can also be attached to objects. *Examples:* Breathe Fire*, Move Objects*, Summon Insect Swarm*, Astonishing Leap*, Create Undead*, Holy Smiting*, Discerning Glance*. Powers for this game are explained in detail later on.

Notation. When listed, Powers are marked with an asterisk*; it’s wise to do this on the character sheet too, as sometimes it’s important to know whether something’s magical.

Active Powers. When you put the first Rank into a Power that lets you do something special like hurling lightning or changing shape you get it at Average [0], not Good [+2]: the benefit is gaining the ability to do it at all. (You’ll see later that this also means characters specialising in Powers are slightly less able to soak up damage. It’s a trade-off for being able to do fancy stuff in the story.)

Enhancements. Sometimes a Power enhances an existing capability, like improving one’s sense of smell or making a bow more accurate. The first Rank buys Good as normal, providing a MOD.

Task Resolution Basics

When your character tries to do something, the GM will determine if the situation is *simple*, *complicated*, or *conflict*. Let's take each in turn.

Simple Situations

These are applied when the task is clear-cut, there are no outstanding issues interfering with the attempted action, or randomness would bog down the game. The GM looks at the PDQ Master Chart and determines the Difficulty Rank of the task, then compares that to the character's most appropriate Quality Rank. If the character's Rank is higher they simply succeed in the task, with no dice roll required. Otherwise the task becomes a *complicated situation*.

Example: Janos wants to climb a Good [TN 9] cliff using his Expert [+4] Outdoorsman Quality. Because his Rank is higher, he simply succeeds.

Sometimes the GM might not allow a situation to be treated as simple and require a roll from everybody, for instance to inject some tension.

Complicated Situations

These involve a single dice roll to determine success or failure. Use them when a character's Quality isn't high enough to make the task routine, or when the story calls for a tension between success and failure.

To attempt a complicated situation roll two regular six-sided dice (2d6), add the two results together and add on the Modifier for your Quality Rank (zero if you don't have any relevant Qualities). To succeed, your

total must equal or beat the Target Number of the task's Difficulty Rank. The TN might come from the GM's assessment of abstract difficulty for a task, or it might come from an opposing character's Quality Rank.

Example: Following Janos up the Good [TN 9] cliff is Katryn, who only has Good [+2] Agile to help her. As that's equal to the difficulty she must roll for it. With her Quality that's 2d6 + 2, aiming for a total of at least 9. She rolls a 3 and a 5, giving a total of 10, and scrambles nimbly to the top.

You can use complicated situations when characters are opposed by minor non-player characters and you don't want to play through the exchange in detail - just resolve it with a single roll.

Conflict Situations

These involve active resistance from another character: trying to punch a guy in the face, out-thinking a chess player or running a race. Conflict situations include more than just the immediate success or failure of an attempted action. Conflict includes the back and forth of an active contest, out-maneuvring the competition and wearing down an opponent's resistance. Examples of conflict situations include combat, seduction, haggling and debating – the same rules apply in each case.

(Some gaming groups might not want to use the conflict situation mechanics to resolve social interactions, and will want to rely on pure roleplaying instead. This is fine – the rules structure is there if a group wishes to use it.)

Conflict situations progress through a series of exchanges where characters compare the results of 2d6 plus Modifier rolls; the higher successful result wins and does 'damage' to the loser. PDQ uses an abstract form of damage that reflects reducing ability to influence the course of the story rather than simulating cuts, bruises and other forms of harm. The conflict goes back and forth, with opponents wearing each

other down until one of them is out of the contest. There are more detailed rules for this in a couple of pages.

Upshifts and Downshifts

Sometimes the Rank of a Quality gets modified by circumstances or special abilities before determining the result of a situation.

Upshifts

These cause a roll to be made as if the Quality were one Rank higher, essentially giving an additional +2 to the roll.

If a player describes an attempt to perform an action in a particularly flavourful and entertaining way the GM can give an Upshift for that action. So, rather than 'I hit the sailor', the player says something like 'I grab the sailor's shirt with one hand and pull him closer to punch him in the face with my other fist!'. If the PC had a Good [+2] Pirate Quality this would change the roll from 2d6+2 to 2d6+4, as if he were Expert [+4].

Upshifts above Master Rank add *an extra die* to the character's roll – so instead of 2d6+6+2 you roll 3d6+6. A further Upshift would be 4d6+6, and so on. Once you get to these dizzy heights, results *should* be impressive.

Downshifts

These cause a roll to be made as if the Quality were one Rank lower, essentially giving -2 to the roll. (While functionally the same thing as a Weakness, the reasons behind them are different.)

Downshifts can work well to reflect changes in the complexity of a situation, but GMs should try not to overuse them as situational

modifiers. Games tend to run more smoothly if you just set the Difficulty Rank of a task appropriately. For example, if the PCs are climbing a Good [TN 9] cliff and it starts to rain, a Downshift makes sense – but if it’s already raining when they begin, make it Expert [TN 11] from the start.

Downshifts below Poor Rank mean *automatic failure* in that task.



Conflict Rules

Initiative

Conflicts proceed as a series of **Turns**, during which every character has chance to take an action and react to the actions of others.

Within each Turn, figure out who goes first – that is, who has **Initiative**. It follows a number of broad brackets, in the following order. (The order might adjust after the first Turn, but then usually stays the same.)

- ≠ It may depend on the situation. If a character attacks without warning – taking the victim by **surprise** – the attacker automatically goes first. (Some sort of stealth vs perception check is often used to see whether the target is surprised. If the target is caught totally unawares defence can only include passive Qualities, like Tough as Nails but not Fancy Footwork.) In many cases the initiator of a conflict goes first even without surprise, for the first Turn at least.
- ≠ Characters with a speed or reaction time Quality relevant to the situation (Fastest Sword in the East, Jumpy, Quick Wits) act in order of their Ranks.
- ≠ Characters with no special speed act.
- ≠ If any characters happen to be unusually slow, they act last of all.

Within each of these brackets the GM can count down from Master to Poor if necessary. Player characters go before non-player characters. If you need to break a tie, each party rolls one die and the highest number wins Initiative. Characters with a higher Initiative may hold their actions for as long as they want, in order to react to what happens, but after the last character has done something they need to take that held action or lose it.

After everyone involved has taken an action (or chosen not to), the characters can start a new Turn. This continues till the conflict is resolved.

Moment of Truth

The character whose turn it is will be called the *attacker*, the character who is the target of the attacker's action is called the *defender*. The attacker's player explains what the attempted action is, and the defender explains how they'll try to counter that action. Then both of them roll 2d6 and add the appropriate Modifier(s). PDQ looks at the overall 'goodness' of attack and defence in one go: accuracy, power, evasion, resistance to harm and whatever other factors might be in there. Throw all the MODs in together.

If the attacker gets a higher total, *damage* is applied to the defender; if the defender's result is higher, no damage is done. A tie is just that – nobody wins, nobody loses – but they are both slightly fatigued or discomfited.

Damage

Damage (be it physical, mental, emotional, or social) is the loss of capability. As a character takes damage, they are less likely to be able to perform at peak efficiency. This is shown by a number of **damage Ranks**, effectively downshifts to the character's listed abilities that last at least the length of the current conflict. If damage wipes out all of a character's Quality Ranks they '**zero out**' and lose the conflict, with whatever consequences might follow.

Failure and Damage Ranks

There are actually two types of damage: Failure Ranks and Damage Ranks, caused by different kinds of harm. A character can suffer both

types in the course of a conflict situation. They are functionally the same thing during a conflict, but Failure is recovered quickly and Damage can trouble the character for longer.

In mental, social, and some physical conflicts, loss of capability is usually temporary and is represented by **Failure Ranks**. Examples include a chess match, witty repartee, or running a race. Failure Ranks are almost always completely recovered at the end of a scene (and might be easier to recover within a scene).



In many physical conflicts loss of capability is more enduring and is represented by **Damage Ranks**, which can persist over several scenes. Examples here include not just combat with weapons, but also environmental damage taken by running through fire, falling off a roof, or starting to drown. (Non-physical conflicts might sometimes produce Damage Ranks for persistent effects, like a serious social setback.)

Applying damage

In a successful attack, the difference between the attacking and defending totals determines how many Failure or Damage Ranks are done to the defender. If the roll results are tied, *both* characters take a single Failure Rank.

Each point of damage reduces one Quality by one Rank: it will function at that lower Rank until the character recovers from the damage. The character's player selects which Qualities takes the damage, and can spread the damage out across several abilities at once. (It may only be applied to abilities listed on the character sheet, not to "default" Average Qualities.)

Example: Kortak has got into a bar fight with a local thug. He has Expert [+4] Brawling, and the thug also has Brawling, but at Good [+2]. Kortak, being a player character, gets his swing in first and rolls 2d6+4 for a result of 10. The thug's defence is 2d6+2 for a result of 8. The difference is 2, so the thug takes 2 Failure Ranks (as it's unarmed combat). If he allocates those to his Brawling Quality they'll take it down from Good to Average to Poor.

Whichever Quality is allocated the first hit of damage in a conflict generates a **Story Hook**, a complication for the character's life (see below).

Zeroing out

Characters eventually hit bottom in one of their Qualities and zero out. When all Qualities are reduced to Poor and there are more damage Ranks to allocate, one Quality gets dropped to a 'zeroed' level below Poor (any further damage is unimportant) and the character cannot continue the conflict. This means they lose the conflict they're in, or are at least uninvolved with the rest of the scene.

Zeroing out like this could mean the character has totally flubbed the seduction attempt, been knocked unconscious in combat, or run out of test-taking time and must put down his quill. If possible, the player describes how and why the PC is out of the scene; if unable or unwilling, the GM can depict the loss of the conflict. If the Scene continues after the character falls, for instance if there are other heroes yet fighting on, the GM lets the player know if/when they can return to the Scene (see below, *Recovering from Damage*).

Consequences. Just because a character zeroes out in a physical conflict doesn't mean they die. However, it does mean that they are unconscious or otherwise helpless, and at the mercy of an opponent. Sometimes zeroing out is just the prelude to a character being shoved into a villain's deathtrap! In situations other than physical battle an opponent might

Understanding PDQ damage

What it simulates. Just this: declining power to affect the direction and outcome of the action. It's abstract. There's no requirement for the allocation of damage to Qualities to 'make sense'. So if you're wondering why getting stabbed with a knife damages your relationship with your clan, don't worry about it. That said, if you *want* to come up with justifications to add a bit of colour you're entirely free to do so. ("My clan uses ritual knife-fights to settle disputes, so getting beaten means I lose face.")

Applying it. In any conflict Qualities can be thought of as useful for either attack, defence or absorption. Say your character has Good [+2] Rank in the Qualities of Brawling, Debating and Scribe. In combat (a physical conflict) you will probably opt to keep Brawling at Good [+2] and apply Damage Ranks to Debating and Scribe. In an argument (a social conflict), you will want to keep Debating high for as long as possible, and take Failure Ranks on Brawling and Scribe first. If being audited by the King's Revenue Service (could be a mental, social or professional conflict, depending on how the GM spins the situation), you would protect Scribe, try to keep Debating at Good [+2] as long as you could, and sacrifice Brawling.

inflict other kinds of harm on a helpless foe, like destroying their reputation.

Environmental damage

This comes from stuff like falling, jumping through a fire, drowning, or other complicated situations. The damage is assigned a Rank and the character attempts to resist its TN with a suitable roll. If they succeed they're unharmed; if they fail, the difference between roll and Target Number is the number of Damage Ranks taken. A hazard might take effect just once, or repeat at intervals – e.g. a poison or disease might

have to be resisted once per day until a week passes, the character resists three times, or some such.

Recovering from damage

At the end of a scene damaged characters begin to recover lost Ranks. How many they get back depends upon whether they are still in the middle of a dangerous situation or have completed that bit of the story.

‡ **Momentary Danger.** If nothing else is going on, and the character is otherwise safe, relaxed, and lacking any time constraints, *all* Failure and Damage Ranks are removed, restoring Qualities to their normal levels. In other words, the scene just gone was pretty much self-contained as a part of the story. *Examples:* a random bar-fight, a chase on horseback, a seduction attempt.

‡ **Continuing Danger.** If the scene just gone was part of an overarching situation that is risky, stressful, or under deadline, characters recover all lost Failure Ranks but roll 1d6 for the number of lost Damage Ranks. The player chooses which Qualities' Ranks are restored (and will probably pick those they think they're about to need most). The character will not recover any more Ranks until the next scene ends or some other factor comes into play (like supernatural healing). *Examples:* a difficult journey to get an injured person to a doctor, chasing down a monster, assaulting a villain's secret headquarters.

Judging which of the two applies can sometimes be tricky. If in doubt, allow automatic full recovery only at the end of a story (or perhaps story segment), or on reaching a place that's specifically designated as safe.

Special damage recovery

Intrinsic Qualities. In Continuing Danger, a Strength like Quick Healer should allow the character to gain back the standard 1d6 Damage Ranks

plus its Modifier between scenes. A Weakness like Poor [-2] Slow Healer would mean that the character rolls 1d6-2 (minimum of zero Ranks back).

Mundane aid. Another character can use appropriate Qualities to help. Because the system is so flexible the GM can allow anything that sounds right for the situation, like Healer to address wounds or disease, or Oratory to restore flagging spirits, or an item like a Good [+2] Herbal Salve. So these come into play at different times, e.g. if the situation is a tense negotiation with no physical injuries Healer wouldn't be any good.

≠ **Emergency aid** – the GM might sometimes allow things like First Aid and Oratory to help mid-scene in appropriate situations, healing up to MOD Failure Ranks but *not* Damage Ranks.

≠ **Thorough aid** – this takes at least several minutes, and perhaps equipment and facilities. It adds MOD to the number of Damage Ranks the helped character recovers between scenes.

Supernatural aid. Spells or items with suitable powers work the same as mundane aid, with the benefit that they take effect instantly (so potentially within a scene as well as at its end). Their use might have some sort of cost, or there might be a limit on how often they can be used.



Story Hooks

This feature of PDQ helps the players and GM come up with exciting or interesting subplots, complications, and events for their characters. They might manifest straight away, but the GM will usually store them up for after the current scene.

In conflict situations, whichever Quality the player selects to take the first hit of damage generates a Story Hook. Some GMs might also wish to use the ability that the PC chooses when zeroing out of a conflict (that is, when any one of the character's Qualities drops below Poor [-2] Rank) as a source of Story Hooks.

Examples:

- † “A young swashbuckler challenges you to a duel!” (Swordsman, Famous)
- † “A message arrives from your old teacher - he needs your help urgently!” (Organisation, Relationship with Teacher)
- † “Armed men step out of the shadows - the woman has led you into a trap!” (Amorous, Enemy of the Order of the Star).

Story Hooks are normally a cue for future events, but you can use them to trigger a flashback to past events instead. This can be useful when there are only one or two players, or if your game's story has only just got started. This inserted scene is played out with the GM and players temporarily taking over any involved NPCs. These characters interact until they hit a suitable point like a crisis of some kind, then the action returns to the original conflict.

Notes and Options

Overlapping and stacking

Characters can certainly have Qualities with overlapping penumbras, like Warrior and Axe Fighting. If a situation matches both, then both contribute to rolls. In fact, this is a very simple way to model specific areas of a skill or talent where the character performs particularly well. The downside, of course, is that fewer Ranks are available to buy other Qualities to round out the character.

All Upshifts and Downshifts on a given Quality are cumulative, possibly cancelling each other out or – if you Upshift beyond Master – giving extra dice. When combining *different* Qualities you could technically work out the Ranks and possible extra dice (e.g. adding a Good [+2] is effectively the same as an Upshift), but it's less fiddly to just add all the MODs together rather than working out how many extra dice to use. As a rule of thumb, apply shifts to the primary Quality you're using and add the MODs for any secondary, assisting Qualities – so you could end up with rolls like 3d6+10!

Characters working together

If multiple characters team up to perform a task, they can all chip in MODs from relevant Qualities. Only one of them actually makes the roll (usually the character with the highest Initiative).

Example: Zandra (Expert [+4] Merchant) and Birtol (Good [+2] Minstrel) decide to work together to try to convince an Expert [+4] Theatre Owner that Birtol is worth signing up as part of the entertainment. Zandra will make the roll of 2d6+4+2; she gets a 4 and a 6, for a total of 16 against the owner's TN of 11, and he's sold.

Ress options

The GM might, very rarely, use Difficulty Ranks of Improbable [19] and Impossible [25] for really challenging tasks where only the super-gifted have a chance of succeeding.

You can add fumbles if you want to increase the slapstick quotient. If the dice come up double 1s and you would have failed, something actively bad happens, like losing your sword or starting a fire.

Multiple targets

If you want to take on multiple targets in a single action you can split your attentions between them, but spreading yourself thin like this makes you less effective. For each additional target selected, apply a Downshift to the Quality Rank. Once you reach Poor you can't split any further.



You never need to split your defence this way, even if you face multiple attackers: you get the full thing each time you're attacked.

Example: Kortak (Expert [+4] Brawling) is fighting two eerily silent black-garbed assassins. If he tries to take them both out with powerful blows he'll only be at an effective Rank of Good [+2] for his attacks on each.

Time, Range and Movement

Time in Conflict

Scenes are an entire bit of action in a given location at a given time, often coinciding with working through a particular conflict.

Each character takes a **turn** or **action**: that's when they make their move, say their piece, throw a punch, etc. (If Turn is capitalized, it generally means the set of all characters' next actions and reactions.)

Other characters **react** during a character's turn – saying something back or performing a defence, usually – but their reactions can only be in response to the actions of the character whose turn it currently is. They cannot initiate actions until their turn.

Range in Conflict

In general, GMs can be really flexible with distance. Ranges are either **Near** (can punch it), **Middling** (can run up and punch it), **Far** (can throw or shoot at it), or **Too Far** (out of range). If one really wants to connect numbers to this, Near would be any distance up to a yard, Middling would be between 1 and 3 yards, Far would be between 3 and 60 yards, and Too Far is anything over 60 yards.

Movement in Conflict

PDQ tends to leave movement rates for characters abstract and up to the discretion of the GM (like requiring a character to make a roll using a speed or movement Quality vs. a reasonable Difficulty Rank).

If you want a concrete rate, characters can move 4 yards plus the sum of all involved Quality Modifiers per turn.

Poor Qualities in conflicts

If a Quality is reduced to Poor by damage, you can simply choose not to include it in rolls even if it would be relevant (unless it is specifically targeted somehow, e.g. as a difficulty for someone else's action).

This is different from a Weakness, which is a permanent Poor Quality for the character – these must always be figured into an applicable roll, reducing effectiveness. If applying the Weakness leads to damage that generates a Story Hook, you might wish to make it more intense than usual.

Downshift options

Sometimes you'll encounter an option to Downshift a particular Quality in order to do something special. This is a way of limiting the number of times that thing can be done per scene. You do it, and then temporarily reduce the Quality one Rank. Once it reaches Poor, you can't do that thing any more. So if the Quality is Good, one use takes it to Average, then a second use takes it to Poor and it's temporarily used up. At the end of the scene these Downshifts go away and it can be used again.

Although it's kind of like damage Ranks, you should record it differently as it doesn't behave quite the same as either Failure or Damage. For instance you might mark them as D, F and S (for Shift).

Conflict example

Let's get a clearer picture of how conflict works with a straightforward sword fight. Here are two characters, fully statted out. Some sort of cross purpose has arisen, and they draw steel.

Callum

Strengths: Good [+2] Warrior, Good [+2] Strong as a Bear, Good [+2] Agile as a Mountain Lion, Good [+2] Outdoorsman, Good [+2] Fiery Will, Good [+2] Seeks Renown as a Great Warrior

Weakness: Poor [-2] Hot-tempered

Kylar

Strengths: Good [+2] Cunning, Good [+2] Ambitious, Good [+2] Agile, Good [+2] Weapon Fighting, Good [+2] Assassin, Average [0] Alchemy*

Weakness: Poor [-2] Low Self-esteem

Turn 1. Initiative is straightforward. Neither has a Quality relating to reaction speed, so they roll a die each and Kylar goes first.

Kylar attacks. Weapon Fighting definitely comes into play. Assassin doesn't because there's nothing sneaky about the situation. This GM says Agile won't contribute to a straightforward attack but is likely to add to defence. (A different gaming group might have a different view.) So that's a total of +2 to the attack – with a roll of 8 that totals 10. Callum's player has been looking at defensive Qualities, and goes for Warrior and Agile as a Mountain Lion, giving $2d6+4=11$. Kylar just missed.

Callum attacks. Warrior [+2] and Strong as a Bear [+2], with a good roll of 10 gives 14. Kylar uses Weapon Fighting [+2] and Agile [+2] with a roll of 6 for a total of 10. Kylar takes 4 Damage Ranks. He looks at the Qualities he doesn't need right now: 1 Rank takes Alchemy* from

Average to Poor, 2 Ranks on Ambitious takes that to Poor, and 1 Rank on Assassin takes that to Average. The GM makes a note that Alchemy needs a Story Hook, as the first Quality that took damage. It would probably kick in later, but could be a broken potion bottle right now (with or without side effects).

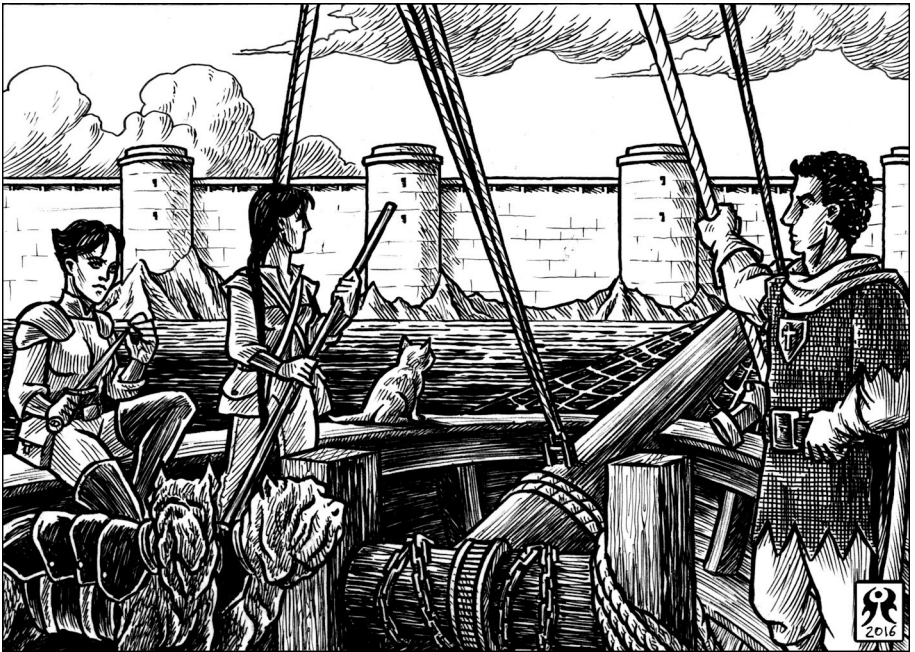
Turn 2. They roll dice again and Callum goes first.

Callum attacks. Not messing with a winning formula, Warrior and Strong as a Bear for $2d6+4=10$. Kylar's player is thinking hard about what more he can do, but only comes up with Weapon Fighting and Agile again for $2d6+4=8$ – a poor roll. That's another 2 Damage Ranks. He takes Assassin down to Poor and Agile from Good to Average.

Kylar attacks. Inspiration strikes, and he tries a manoeuvre of pretending to react to something behind Callum to distract the northerner. This brings in Cunning [+2] on top of Weapon Fighting [+2] – with a good roll of 11 that's 15. If this was a matter of willpower Callum could add in his Fiery Will for defence, but it's more about intelligence and insight to see through the ruse and he has nothing like that. So defence is still Warrior [+2] and Agile as a Mountain Lion [+2], with a roll of just 6 for a total of 10. Callum has to take 5 Damage Ranks. That puts Outdoorsman and Seeks Renown... at Poor, and he uses the last Rank to take Fiery Will to Average. Outdoorsman was the first to take a hit, so gets noted for a potential Story Hook.

Taking stock. Both characters have pretty much lost the Quality Ranks that they didn't need in this conflict. Now it gets serious, as damage is making them less effective in the fight. We've also seen that they're pretty evenly matched. Callum has a bit more attack power, but Kylar's better suited to coming up with clever moves to gain an advantage. It's likely to be decided on the luck of the dice and the inventiveness of the players.

Rules for Questers



Character Creation

What we're going for

The version of PDQ found in QMR has been adapted for a play experience reminiscent of Certain Well-known Fantasy Games, while keeping the simplicity and flexibility PDQ provides.

One of the common ideas in fantasy gaming is that characters start off as insignificant pond scum with low abilities and limited wealth and equipment, and develop over time to big fish with fearsome competence, extraordinary wealth and, strangely, lives no less beset by trouble and uncertainty.

Characters are in kit form: players create them a little at a time, aiming for an effective 'build', and each increment of character power is an exciting point in the game. Characters also build up a collection of loot – gold, gems, enchanted backscratchers, Wands of Ineffable Doom, grateful princesses and so on.

Notes on Quality types

Professional Qualities give a general cluster of the central abilities for a profession. They never give supernatural powers, even for ones like Mystic or Priest, though they certainly give knowledge of how such things work and probably the ability to detect them. Powers must be bought separately.

Personality. Remember that Qualities can also cover your demeanour, drives and relationships with people and organisations – for instance Joker, Taciturn, Virtuous, Loves Sister, Protector of Tribe, Be the

Greatest Swordsman. With the right motivation even modest skills can win the day!

Organisation memberships are the social Qualities measuring your standing in the organisations with which you train to progress your career. You can use them for knowledge about the organisation and social influence with other members. (They are not the same as the professional Qualities that give a set of skills for an occupation – make this clear when you write them down. For instance, being a highly skilled smith is not the same as being a high-ranking member of the Smiths’ Guild; the two usually go together, but one can imagine genius loners or mediocre politicians.)

Getting on to the lowest rung has its benefits, but further progress through the ranks is slow.

Wealth reflects your access to money and property. It’s singled out because of its special role in buying stuff, which has its own section later on. Ordinary working folk who are getting by alright have it at Average; merchants, nobles and the like have more.

Arcane Qualities are powers, so remember the first Rank bought is Average. Those trained in magic have them, and so do some beasts. The GM may choose to allow starting characters not connected to an Arcane organisation to have one relatively low-key Arcane Quality from an accident of birth, inheriting a magical sword or some such thing.



How to make a character

So, ready to make a new *Questers* character? Here are the things you need to sort out.

If you need a bit of help because the options seem confusing – perhaps if you’re new to the game – there are some tables a little later that let you use the dice to help you make choices.

You’ll need a **character sheet** to record your character’s abilities. To be honest, PDQ is so simple that a blank piece of paper will do fine. Check out silverbranch.co.uk if you’d like to download a character sheet.

Description. By the end of character creation you need a name for your adventurer, and at least basic impressions they’ll give to people who meet them for the first time. You can add much more information about their background if you like.

Race. Choose which of the intelligent species you want the character to be: the standard ones provided are human (the majority), elf, dwarf, orc and hobling. (The GM might agree to others becoming available.) Non-human races get a pair of Racial Qualities, one at Good and one at Poor – like Good [+2] Dwarf, Poor [-2] Dwarf. These cover a cluster of abilities and help or hinder in particular kinds of situation, as explained in the *Races* section below. Humans don’t get these: instead, take an extra personality-type Quality at Good.

Homeland. You must take Good [+2] in Homeland (specify, for example Homeland: Orthedia). Everyone is from somewhere. It reflects basic general knowledge of an area’s people, places, wildlife and so on. It might sometimes be useful for actions or personality traits common to those who live there, at the GM’s discretion, but this should be quite rare. Homeland often stays at Good throughout a character’s career.

Organisation. You must take Organisation (specify) at Good [+2]: everyone has done their initial training with someone. Invent an organisation (or use an existing one, like the examples later on) that the

character is a member of or has been associated with in the past, for instance Orthedian King's Guard or Chartered Magi of Logrin. At least some of your other Qualities should reflect this background. That organisation then exists for the purpose of the game. Characters can and should refer to it (as opposed to all the others we don't know about) and it should be the source of occasional story elements (like a rival, or agents trying to bring a PC back), especially if more than one player picks the same one. (If it's a temple you can invent a patron deity at start of play, or use an existing one. See *The Roll of the Heavens* later for more on this.)

Basic Qualities. Allocate 5 Ranks of Qualities as you wish – but see the *Limits* box on the next page. Buying a Quality at Good takes one Rank, buying one at Expert takes two and a Master Rank takes three. (Except for Arcane Powers, where Average costs one and so on.) Be sure to include Qualities that'll help in the main kinds of action for your game, like fighting monsters.

Limits

To reflect the idea of characters starting 'low level', some kinds of Qualities are limited in Rank at the start and must be built up gradually. In general:

- † Qualities that are learned or acquired through specific training or generally being out in the world, like skills or status in an organisation, can only have one Rank put in (giving Good for most, but Average for Arcane Powers)
- † Qualities that are innate aptitudes or part of who you are as a person – lightning reflexes, willpower, protectiveness toward your frail aunt – may be any Rank you can afford.

Make sure everyone in your group is on the same page about this. You could decide to waive it if you want to alter the style so that characters can start out more competent.

Weakness. You must also take one Quality at Poor [-2] for some area where your character's not so good. Find one that'll be interesting to play.

Fortune points. Everyone starts with 1 of these. You can spend them to do useful stuff, and get more in a number of ways. You can't hold more than 10 at once.

That's it: you're ready to start playing!



Races

These are the main intelligent species; the usual picks for player characters. Each is defined by description, and by certain racial abilities. They resemble common fantasy stereotypes, while still being a little bit different!

The non-human races have paired **Racial Qualities**, for instance Good [+2] Elf and Poor [-2] Elf. These are sort of cluster Qualities: the Strength gives them a number of advantages that apply in certain situations, and the Weakness gives a number of situations where the race can be a hindrance. The write-ups below spell out what these are. So you only need to write two Qualities on your character sheet, but damage to your Racial Quality affects all the associated advantages.

Rank. A character's Racial Strength always starts at Good. You can increase it if you really want, now or through experience in play. Old or powerful members of a non-human race often have higher Ranks in the Racial Quality. This is not essential though: if being an inventor is a more important part of the character than being a dwarf, those are the Qualities that'll get developed.

The race abilities work in these ways.

- † **MOD abilities.** The Racial Quality works a bit like a cluster of normal Qualities, adding its current MOD into the mix whenever the situation is appropriate. The GM should have a bit of flexibility to interpret this: usually it's limited to what's listed, but occasionally other applications will seem suitable.
- † **Downshift abilities.** You can do something special, but you have to take a temporary Downshift on your Racial Quality to do it. This regulates the role a non-human character's specialness plays in the story: for instance if they use up their funky elf powers doing something impressive those elf powers will be less prominent in the rest of the scene, leaving more room for others to show what they can do.

‡ **Innate abilities.** These are just on or off – they’re not even Qualities, just things you can do that most people can’t (or vice versa). They remain the same regardless of the Racial Quality’s current Rank, though that may be involved if you need rolls to see how well they do.

Making new player races. This system makes it easy to plug them into the character sheet. Just add (for instance) Good [+2] Lizard Person and Poor [-2] Lizard Person. The important thing is for the player and GM to come to an agreement about what sort of things it covers. To an extent you can wing it off a simple qualitative description of the race (like ‘Strong, with tough scaly skin, good at surviving in swampy environments’), but any really funky stuff needs to have some level of balance.

Humans

They are the most numerous intelligent species, spread across all the Realms. Humans have no special abilities, but they are a more diverse, adaptable and passionate lot than the other races. It’s more important to take account of the land of origin when choosing your Qualities, to differentiate groups of humans.

‡ Humans do not have a Racial Quality. Instead, they get one extra Good [+2] personality-type Quality, like Brave, Duplicitous or Hates Pixies. (There’s no corresponding Weakness.)

Elves

They look like tall, slim, well-proportioned, attractive humans with slightly pointed ears and a superior attitude. Elves were the first intelligent species created by the gods, and they are immortal. This turned out to be a very bad idea. The elves are not completely adapted to

their immortality, so as the years drag on they become desperate for any diversion to chase away the tedium. Most engage in debaucheries of all kinds, and they have a reputation for it.

Elves are also known for their knowledge and skills, which they generally keep from the 'lesser' races to maintain superiority. They can develop great technical ability in the arts, but are often lacking in passion. Archery is a favoured martial skill, as it lets them pick off opponents without having to risk their person or get in smelling range. In general they take great care to preserve their image as the perfect eldest children of the gods, with greater experience, poise and dress sense than those around them. And really good hair. It's profoundly annoying.

They have few children in their lives, but as they don't die off there was a time long ago when they existed in excessive numbers and the gods created the orcs to cull them. Elves find it hard to like orcs. They'd still be angry if they could be bothered.

Strengths

MOD:

‡ **Flawless** – maintaining your appearance and composure (eg resisting dirt or taunting).

Downshift:

‡ **Immortality** – elves return from death, knitting back together again, unless the body is destroyed sufficiently to make this impossible (minced, burned, dissolved, etc). The Downshift brings them back, usually within an hour, and raises zeroed Qualities to Poor. If *Elf* is too low to shift, they'll stay out of it till the normal recovery process gives some Ranks back.

‡ **Superior** – you can pull off occasional truly impressive feats due to your great age and experience, superhuman reflexes or maybe the aerodynamics of your pointy ears. Burn a Rank to use another Quality's Target Number instead of its MOD for one specified task.

It can't be a feat of physical strength or endurance and you can only do it if you have an audience, preferably of the lesser races.

Innate:

‡ **Night Vision** – you can see perfectly well in low-light conditions like moonlight or starlight, but not in total darkness.

Weaknesses

MOD:

‡ **Jaded** – resisting an opportunity to do something that'll provide interesting sensations.

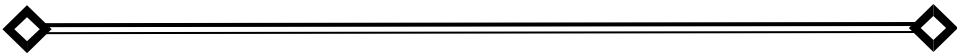
‡ **Reputation** – in social situations where morals or integrity are involved, like getting someone to trust you. (Even other elves. They *know* what you're like.)

Innate:

‡ **Luckless** – Fate is disinclined to give you any more breaks. Your maximum Fortune pool is 5 rather than the usual 10.

Dwarves

They are short (4-5ft tall), stocky people who are really made out of earth and stone. They live close to the earth that spawned them, in tunnel complexes bored into the rock. Each Dwarfhold is a colony ruled by two Provosts, selected by merit, who have the divinely bestowed ability to sculpt new individuals out of minerals. When finished they miraculously convert to living flesh (though unusually dense). The new dwarf is physically adult with a childlike mind, but efficient dwarven teaching systems will have him ready for his first apprenticeship by age 3 or so. Most dwarves live a couple of centuries before wearing out.



Dwarves are sexless creatures, lacking the relevant biological equipment and psychological drives. This gives them a lot of clear thinking time compared to most other species. They do have the impulse to create, and most of them are pretty good at working with stone, metal and jewels. As their minor works seem to be popular with other races they have built trade links.

They also like games of strategy and logic, crossrune puzzles and suchlike. Their society is practical and egalitarian, with an atmosphere somewhat like a gentlemen's club. Reports of hard drinking and rough fighting are based on misunderstanding: a fine dwarven liquor using select fungi and mountain spring water for a delicate flavour and pleasant buzz will blow the ears off many other species, and enthusiastic demonstration of competitive martial arts can break less rugged folk.

Strengths

MOD:

- ‡ **Born of Stone** – resisting most forms of physical harm and hardship.
- ‡ **Mineral Affinity** – tasks where affinity with stone, metal or gems might help, like craftwork or finding your way underground.
- ‡ **Mental Focus** – helps with concentration on extended mental tasks.

Downshift:

- ‡ **Endurance** – dwarves are tough and stubborn. Add your Dwarf Quality's current TN (before the downshift) instead of MOD to a roll to resist physical harm.

Innate:

- ‡ **Darksense** – you can 'see' in total darkness through a combination of heat and vibration, to a range of around 50ft.
- ‡ **Sexless** – you're flat-out immune to romance-based social interactions.

Weaknesses

MOD:

- ‡ **Dense** – you pack a lot of mass for your size and are a bit less flexible than a human, giving problems for jumping, staying afloat, squeezing through narrow spaces and so on.
- ‡ **Sexless** – hampers understanding of the interactions between the sexes in other species. That could include a *lot* of social interactions – not just romance, but parenting and different approaches to situations.

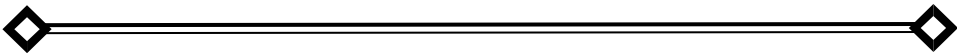
Innate:

- ‡ **Weight** – you're about half again as heavy as an average human (roughly in the range 200-300lb), and somewhat less flexible. This causes problems, for instance on fragile surfaces, or if a friend is dragging you to safety.

Orcs

They were created by a small group of gods concerned about the way the elf population grew over the centuries. Orcs were specifically designed to cull elves.

In appearance they combine aspects of human and beast: muscular, hairy, with a short snout and prominent canine teeth. They're not stupid, but their culture does not value academic education. They can track elves by scent, and are trained to fight opponents with centuries of experience and superior equipment. (As elves can only be killed by total destruction, orcs need techniques for making sure this happens once their quarry is downed. They would probably settle on the most simple, direct method – they eat them. If you don't like that, say elf flesh is considered tainted and have them burned instead.)



The Great Blood is long over and the gods are not concerned about elf numbers any more, so the orcs are largely forgotten. Their society is changing. Some stick to the ‘old ways’ of nomadic elf-hunting in small bands with evocative names.

Others are trying to build their own civilisation, merging bands together into ‘parties’ with ever-longer composite names and settling permanently in a territory. Some are even able to cooperate with elves for short periods. A party often adapts one or more elements that it perceives as being part of civilised culture, like all wearing hats and carrying umbrellas. Sadly, these never suit them at all.

Strengths

MOD:

- ‡ **Brawn** – applying muscle power over short and long hauls, and showing it off to influence others.
- ‡ **Keen Senses** – applies to most perception tasks. Adds TN rather than MOD when detecting or tracking elves.
- ‡ **Survival** – the skills and ruggedness to survive in a wilderness environment with a minimum of equipment.

Weaknesses

MOD:

- ‡ **Ignorant** – orcs are ill-equipped for cerebral tasks like solving puzzles or remembering abstract lore.
- ‡ **Uncouth** – orc manners and appearance mean attempts to fit into civilised society rarely pay off, such as making an impression or observing etiquette.
- ‡ **Vulnerable Senses** – orcs are easily affected by sensory overload like dazzling light or foul odours, and prefer to avoid full sun.

Hobblings

Long ago, a god forcibly evolved an entire unnamed species of rodent to humanoid form, and hobblings are the result. They stand about 3 feet tall, and look quite like humans except for extra body hair and liquid brown eyes. They have hearty appetites, easily eating as much as a human and rarely refusing food put in front of them. (They're also quite keen on *ahem* close personal relations.) They're curious, annoyingly cheerful and, in some ways, rather unworldly. They often get into trouble but then somehow manage to escape unharmed.

Perhaps in an attempt to redress their standing with other races, hobblings tend to have rather grand-sounding (though rustic) names. Their homes are built in burrows in banks and hillsides, usually in village groups – they have embraced the ways of civilisation as the surest route to being full and happy.

Strengths

MOD:

- ‡ **Small** – helps with stealth and dodging attacks (see the *Creatures* section for detail on Size).
- ‡ **Animal Instinct** – kicks in when a situation is like surviving in the wild, enhancing your senses or reactions – for instance locating food or avoiding danger.
- ‡ **Resilient Constitution** – throwing off baleful physical influences like poison, harmful magic or dodgy sandwiches (but not straightforward injury).

Downshift:

- ‡ **Lucky** – burn a Rank to use the equivalent of a free Fortune point to make a re-roll or dictate a coincidence.

Weaknesses

MOD:

- ‡ **Small** – a disadvantage for feats of strength and resisting physical damage (see the *Creatures* section for detail on Size).
- ‡ **Appetite** – you find it hard to resist indulging in food, drink and, er, stuff.
- ‡ **Naïve** – for seeing past interesting or impressive things to a potential source of harm. You tend to focus on the shininess and have trouble understanding scheming, treachery and violence.

Innate:

- ‡ **Tastes Like Chicken** – all intelligent people-eating species know that hobblings make a tasty snack, and this could affect negotiations or choice of targets in combat.

Halfbreeds

It's a fantasy staple that some races can interbreed (especially humans, who'll try anything once), producing half-elves, half-orcs and so on. If the player and GM agree on such a combination, that becomes your Racial Quality. Choose one Strength and one Weakness from the write-up of each parent race (halfbreeds vary a lot), only one of which can be a Downshift ability. If one parent is human, pick a personality trait (that you don't have separately) and no Weakness. The Racial Weakness also covers many social actions with members of the parent races, as halfbreeds are generally not well regarded.

A sample character

Let's work up a starting character so you can see how it goes. We're going for something straightforward and familiar: a brawny barbarian warrior called Jefferson (a name of great honour in his tribe!).

For a character concept, let's say that rather than majoring in fighting and posing in bearskin underwear like many of the men of his tribe, he's become a competent and rugged wilderness traveller – maybe a hunter or tracker. But he's still fairly big, burly and intimidating.

He's Human, so from *Races* that gives one Good personality-type Quality. Let's go for Superstitious. Sometimes players pick odd things! Perhaps this helps him to be aware of supernatural threats.

The obvious place for him to come from is Valharia (see more in the setting section later), so that's his Good [+2] Homeland. Organisation is a bit trickier. There are Valhar Rangers, but they're all women. Perhaps an enterprising retired Ranger has started the Wilderness Adventure Guides Guild, which takes money from soft southern travellers in return for routine tasks like navigating in a snowstorm or fighting off the narwalrus.

For basic Qualities I'll lead with Expert [+4] Barbarian, convincing my GM on debatable grounds that this is who he is, not what he's learned to do, so it's not limited (well, it still spends the Ranks, but the GM wouldn't let me take it at Master). I'll add Good [+2] Outdoorsman, Good [+2] Herbalist, Good [+2] Toughness. That accounts nicely for the 5 Ranks: each Good is one, and the Expert is two.

For Weakness we'll have Poor [-2] Reader. His people aren't big on the written word.

He'll have 1 Fortune Point to start. That's everything we need!

Jefferson the Barbarian

Race: Human

Qualities: Good [+2] Homeland: Valharia, Good [+2] Organisation: Wilderness Adventure Guides Guild, Expert [+4] Barbarian, Good [+2] Outdoorsman, Good [+2] Herbalist, Good [+2] Toughness, Good [+2] Superstitious

Weakness: Poor [-2] Reader

Fortune: 1

Character creation help

Questers of the Middle Realms leaves character creation very open for players to model whatever concept they like, using the setting as a framework and inventing Qualities to suit. That's great if you have a clear concept and a decent understanding of the system, but new players often find the lack of guidance daunting – and everyone has off-days.



So below are some tables to help you along the way. (This content originally appeared as the *Character Assistant* mini-supplement.)

‡ You can **skim the entries** to see if something kicks off some inspiration.

‡ Alternatively, you can just **roll randomly**. Most of the sections number the entries, but in a slightly odd-looking way so that you don't need any funky dice types, just your trusty six-siders. Roll two dice and read one as tens and one as units. If you get a result that doesn't make sense for some reason, roll again (or flip the digits).

Don't be afraid to change bits, or leave gaps to revisit later, in pursuit of a picture that finally hangs together.

The Golden Rule. If you can come up with a character entirely from your own imagination (and the GM's OK with it for your game), then do it. There's no intention to make standard QMR character creation less, well, creative; just to give it a bit of a prod when needed.

Cookie-cutter character process

- ‡ Come up with **occupation** and **race**. Take the occupation as a Good Quality and handle race in the normal way.
- ‡ Sort out the other compulsory Qualities: **homeland** and **organisation** at Good.
- ‡ You now have 4 Ranks to allocate as you like, and a decent framework to hang them on. Take one **personality trait** and one **talent**, both at Good.
- ‡ Use the final 2 Ranks to customise funky stuff, buying **possessions** or **magic** or **skills**.
- ‡ Identify a **Weakness** at Poor using the talents and personality traits boxes.



Occupation

What the character was spending their time doing before they started adventuring is a key choice - lots of other things can hang on this, like skills, organisation, maybe even homeland and personality.

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|
| 11 | Animal Handler | 24 | Entertainer – Acrobat, Dancer, Juggler, Knife Thrower, Conjuror |
| 12 | Beggar/Vagrant | 25 | Farmer |
| 13 | Crafter – Smith, Mason, Carpenter | 26 | Fisher |
| 14 | Crafter – Shoemaker, Tailor, Weaver, Dyer | 31 | Haulier/Wagoner/ Boatman |
| 15 | Crafter – Baker, Brewer, Butcher, Cook | 32 | Herder |
| 16 | Crafter – Tanner, Thatcher, Cooper, Ropemaker | 33 | Hunter/Guide |
| 21 | Crafter – Jeweller, Instrument Maker, Glassblower | 34 | Innkeeper/Bar staff |
| 22 | Doctor | 35 | Magus |
| 23 | Entertainer – Musician, Singer, Minstrel, Storyteller, Actor | 36 | Merchant/Trader |
| | | 41 | Miner |
| | | 42 | Mountebank/Con Artist/Gambler |
| | | 43 | Mystic |
| | | 44 | Noble |
| | | 45 | Official/Clerk |
| | | 46 | Pirate/Smuggler |
| | | 51 | Priest |
| | | 52 | Prospector/Beachcomber/ Scavenger |
| | | 53 | Sailor |
| | | 54 | Scholar |
| | | 55 | Servant |
| | | 56 | Soldier |
| | | 61 | Spy/Assassin |
| | | 62 | Thief/Burglar/Pickpocket |
| | | 63 | Thug/Enforcer |
| | | 64 | Tinker |
| | | 65 | Warrior/Knight |
| | | 66 | Watch Officer |

Race

- 11-36 Human
- 41-44 Elf
- 45-52 Dwarf
- 53-56 Orc
- 61-64 Hobling
- 65-66 Halfbreed (roll twice, reroll if duplicate, Dwarf or Halfbreed)

Homesland

Pick a land your character's from. (The summary sheet in the introduction has a one-sentence blurb for each.)

- 11-12 Ar-Karap
- 13 Arrganarr
- 14-15 League of Groth
- 16-21 Helongor
- 22-23 Kadink
- 24-26 Ko-Sha
- 31-32 Logrin
- 33-35 Orthedia
- 36 Plains of Plap
- 41-42 Plunder Port
- 43-45 Scata
- 46 The Snaggles
- 51-53 Tek Wei
- 54-55 Valharia
- 56-62 Wochilat
- 63 Yrisiriel Forest
- 64 Racial homeland (adventure start region for humans)
- 65-66 Adventure start region

Organisation

Here's a handy list of the sample organisation write-ups in the setting section. If you're stuck you could pick one of these from the setting section.

† The Tinkers' Guild (dodgy traders, menders and news carriers)

† Draymar's Dregs (mercenary company)

† The Houses of Finance (temples of the god of wealth and trade)

† The Phlogistonic Symposium (fire magi)

† Shiny Gate Watch (policing human/monster trade town)

† The Dark Candle Guild (gothy mediums and seers)

† Weasel Riders (warriors with fierce steeds)

† The Kadinkian Intelligence Service (canny spies)

† The Logrin Navy (sailors and officers)

† Chartered Magi of Logrin (state-approved thaumaturgy school and order)

† The Knights of the Argent Cube (upper class armoured cavalry)

† The Zar-Riy's Bogateers (tough monster-hunting agents)

† The Hidden Hand (eastern stealthy assassins)

† Valhar Rangers (young women teamed with large animals to guard the northern wilds)

† The Ancient and Dedicated Order of Custodians (staff of the Great Library in Wochilat)

Other obvious possibilities:

† Temple of (greater god)

† Military of (country)

† (Profession) Guild

Talents

These are some possible innate abilities for characters; Qualities that make them naturally good at *doing* certain kinds of things. (Remember, these aren't limited to Good at character creation.)

Some have obvious opposites, and some don't. In any case you can take a positive Quality at Poor to show that you're particularly bad at that thing *or* to show that it goes wrong for you, like being so strong that you break things by accident. Conversely, an apparently 'negative' trait could actually be a Strength – maybe Cowardly helps you to flee from danger. You can certainly take a paired Strength and Weakness in the same thing, showing that it helps and hinders in different situations. Just be sure, as usual, that you and the GM are clear about your intent for your Qualities.

11 Agile	Clumsy	41
12 Attractive	Ugly	42
13 Brave	Cowardly	43
14 Calm	Nervous	44
15 Charismatic	Insignificant	45
16 Charming	Obnoxious	46
21 Cunning	Guileless	51
22 Eloquent	Tongue-tied	52
23 Intelligent	Stupid	53
24 Knowledgeable	Uneducated	54
25 Nimble-fingered	All Thumbs	55
26 Perceptive	Oblivious	56
31 Quick	Slow	61
32 Rugged	Sickly	62
33 Shrewd	Gullible	63
34 Strong	Weak	64
35 Strong-willed	Weak-willed	65
36 Tough	Fragile	66

Skills

Here's a list of learned areas of expertise. It's not exhaustive, but it does cover most of the staples of fantasy gaming. The skills are loosely organised into thematic groups (so you could pick a group and just roll the units die).

- 11 Etiquette
- 12 Music (specify)
- 13 Oratory
- 14 Persuasion
- 15 Socialising
- 16 Trickery

- 21 Alchemy
- 22 Arcane Lore
- 23 Herbalism
- 24 History
- 25 Medicine
- 26 Natural History

- 31 Archery
- 32 Athletics
- 33 Brawling
- 34 (weapon) Fighting
- 35 Intimidation
- 36 Martial Arts

- 41 Forgery
- 42 Locks and Traps
- 43 Sleight of Hand
- 44 Stealth
- 45 Streetwise
- 46 Theft

- 51 Animal Handling
- 52 Climbing
- 53 Seamanship
- 54 Survival
- 55 Swimming
- 56 Tracking

- 61 Carousing
- 62 Craft (specify)
- 63 Gaming
- 64 Language (specify)
- 65 Notice
- 66 Riding



Personality traits

These are about what the character is *inclined* to do, not what they're *able* to do, but they can still give a bonus or penalty to actions. You could use these as a springboard for Strengths and Weaknesses, and for Virtue and Vice.

The list is a set of pairs of opposites or complementaries, each representing a scale of one aspect of personality. Go for middle ground, renaming and tangents if you like, and remember that any of these could be a Strength *or* a Weakness.

11	Addicted	Ascetic	41
12	Ambitious	Retiring	42
13	Authoritative	Submissive	43
14	Compassionate	Self-centred	44
15	Conventional	Eccentric	45
16	Disciplined	Disorderly	46
21	Fierce	Timid	51
22	Generous	Greedy	52
23	Honest	Deceitful	53
24	Honourable	Self-serving	54
25	Jolly	Gloomy	55
26	Logical	Passionate	56
31	Loyal	Independent	61
32	Prudent	Impulsive	62
33	Serious	Easygoing	63
34	Sociable	Reserved	64
35	Subtle	Forthright	65
36	Trusting	Suspicious	66

Possessions

Here's a quick and dirty guide to items you might have as a character Quality. If it's something magical you can look at the magic section below for inspiration.

- 1 Weapon
 - 2 Armour
 - 3 Clothing
 - 4 Jewellery
 - 5 Tool or utility item
 - 6 Creature
-
- 1-2 High quality (e.g. Good Sword)
 - 3 Magically enhanced (e.g. Good Sword*)
 - 4 Magical property (e.g. Flaming Sword)
 - 5 Magical power (e.g. Flamethrower Sword)
 - 6 Mechanical or alchemical property



Fortune Points

These are a kind of mixture of self-esteem, destiny and dramatic importance. They're used in play to make things more interesting and survivable. Most minor non-player characters don't ever have Fortune. Player characters have it because they're the protagonists. (Some of them might even be heroes, but in this setting that's not a strict requirement.) Other important characters might have it too, in varying amounts according to how important they are: a trusted lieutenant might have 2, a notable villain 5.

You start a new character with 1 Fortune for being important. You can gain more by acting in certain ways. Your maximum pot size is 10 (less for elves), and any beyond that are lost. You spend them to do various things. Once spent they're lost until you get some more. It's good to measure Fortune with some sort of tokens on the table in front of you – many gamers like coloured glass pebbles for this kind of thing – and only alter it on your character sheet as a note at the end of a session (otherwise the paper soon gets thin and messy).

Spending Fortune

You can spend a Fortune Point to do any of the following.

- ‡ **Fate Smiles** – make a dice roll again, rolling 1d6+6 instead of 2d6 and keeping the better of the two roll results.
- ‡ **Extra Effort** – an Upshift on a roll you're about to make (could turn a situation simple).
- ‡ **Pull Yourself Together** – take an action or reaction to recover 1d6 Failure ranks *or* 1 Damage.
- ‡ **That's Odd** – dictate a plausible coincidence that happens or a minor fact about the current situation (not including facts one would

expect to be true anyway, for instance no points are needed to find a hammer at a carpenter's workshop).

Gaining Fortune

You can gain a Fortune Point for any of the following.

- ‡ **Did It My Way** – doing significant stuff to demonstrate the character's personality as part of the story.
- ‡ **Flawless Victory** – succeeding in something that was a notable challenge, like a daring feat or overcoming a powerful opponent.
- ‡ **Fickle Finger of Fate** – the GM does something bad to your character that you can't avoid, in the interests of progressing the story (e.g. "The gas knocks you out and you awake in a dungeon").
- ‡ **GM Discretion** – miscellaneous impressedness with a *player*, like witty dialogue that makes everyone laugh, coming up with a cunning plan or maybe even paying for pizza!

In most cases you wouldn't expect to reward these more than once or maybe twice each per scene. Minor scenes shouldn't have much Fortune changing hands; in dramatic and important scenes it should flow more freely.

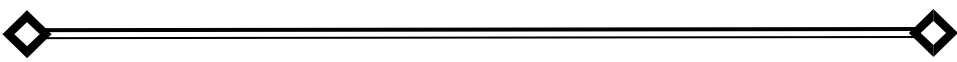


Improving Qualities

The GM decides when all the characters have the chance to 'level up' – after two moderately extensive and challenging adventures is a good rule of thumb. They then train appropriately, with an organisation they're already in or a new one they can persuade to accept them, and gain 2 Quality Ranks to add to their abilities, increasing existing Qualities or taking new ones at Good (or Average for Arcane powers).

- ‡ No Quality can be raised more than one Rank at a time. When a Quality reaches Master Rank it cannot be improved further.
- ‡ Qualities should be appropriate to your organisation.
- ‡ If you join a new organisation you must take an organisation Quality at Good.





Record the level on your character sheet, starting at 1 for new characters, for one-upmanship purposes and as a useful guide for the GM in setting the toughness of opposition. (Actually, starting characters could be higher than 1st level. For instance, if the group has got to 5th level and a new character joins you might find it appropriate to make them on par with the rest rather than eternally playing catch-up, though PDQ is probably more forgiving of this than most systems.)

Levelling ‘rogue’. You can level up outside an organisation if you wish, reflecting exercise of existing abilities through practice, research or personal development. However, not all Qualities are good candidates for this. The GM should certainly disallow Organisation Qualities, Arcane Qualities and, in most cases, new Skill Qualities. You might decide that only limited Ranks are possible without proper instruction. It’s mostly good for developing stuff you already have.

Judging organisation choice. Remember that they do have entrance requirements, looking at skills, personality traits like loyalty, and existing affiliations. Most organisations are happy to take on qualified trainees in good standing, but if it’s a bit dubious persuasion might be needed. The GM should certainly take a few minutes to play through this, including social rolls and such if necessary. (“Cannibal Necromancers of Glorm? Er, never heard of them. This is just an odd-shaped birthmark.”)

Then the character must spend a bit of time studying, typically a couple of weeks (which is unrealistic but keeps things moving along – maybe there’s magic involved!).

For optional entertainment you could have a standard test adopted by most organisations: to defeat a member of the new level (that is, the one above yours) in some appropriate contest like a fight, riddle game or debate before your new status is confirmed.

Loot

There's a long tradition in fantasy gaming of accumulating great piles of gold coins, jewellery and antique soft furnishings. Why characters do this is not entirely clear: some say they build nests with it. In any case, it's part of the genre so we need to include it, and in a setting like this wealth is often a great social lubricant.

That throws up some challenges in PDQ: everything is measured in Qualities; Qualities are part of characters; and ranks in Qualities make characters tougher. What we don't want is for a group going down a dungeon and returning laden with treasure to effectively lead to character improvement.

Props

To address this we need to add Props. These are Qualities characters can carry around and access, but they're not part of the character. That means three things:

- ‡ they won't take damage for you (but see Dramatic Exit below);
- ‡ they can be taken away from the character permanently;
- ‡ they're not a renewable resource (when depleted they don't recover).

So when PCs find the treasure vault in the dungeon what they get is a Prop Quality, Expert [+4] Gold and Jewels. Props might be "owned" by one character or, quite often in adventuring groups, held in common for use as needed. Well, obviously someone has to actually carry an item, but they can allow benefits to apply to a colleague.

In fact, in most cases the acquisition of a Prop should be a signal to the GM to come up with story developments that *will* take it away or use it up, generating new exploits for the characters in the process.

There are several main **types of Prop**.

- ‡ **Bonus** – the item has one or more Quality ranks that are there all the time. These generally aren't Arcane: more useful than flashy, like a Weatherproof [+4] Cloak or a Fast [+2] Horse. But it's possible to have items with Arcane bonuses to key functions.
- ‡ **One-shot** - you can use it once and that's it. That's certainly true of a Healing Potion that gets drunk or a Shiny Crown that gets spent in trade – these use their MOD as a bonus, once.
- ‡ **Plot Point** – the item can be used once per session (to distinguish it from character items that can be used once a scene) on an ongoing basis. Maybe it could 'really' be used more often, but it's a Prop so in story terms it only gets brought in when dramatically appropriate. This one's particularly used for items with active Arcane powers, like a Wand of Ass Frying.
- ‡ **Slow Burn** – the item gets depleted gradually, burning off one Rank at a time to give an Upshift on an appropriate roll. When it zeroes out (you use the Poor Rank) it becomes useless or unimportant. For example a Big Heap of Jewels, which you can spend a little at a time in trade. (A Shiny Crown couldn't be used this way because it's a single item.)

Dramatic exit

There is one way a Prop can help you avoid damage. Subject to a sensible narration of how it happens, you can use the Prop's Target Number to add to a defence in return for the Prop getting destroyed or lost to the character permanently. (This will often negate an attack entirely.)

You can add this on to a roll you've just made and don't fancy much. For instance, it looks like a magus' fireball is going to cook your goose, but

your flailing Wand of Lucrative Authorship intercepts it and is reduced to ash, phoenix feather and all. Or you manage to bribe or distract an opponent by forfeiting your Bag of Gold Coins.

Raiding the scenery for Props

Players might sometimes seek to use the described surroundings by grabbing an object for a one-off use, as a sort of ephemeral Prop. This can be done by:

- ƒ tapping into the GM's description of the area
- ƒ detaching one of your **shadow items** by taking a Damage Rank to an appropriate Quality for loss of effectiveness, e.g. selling your *Swordplay* sword
- ƒ using a **Fortune Point** for coincidentally discovering or possessing some plausible item.

Once grabbed, nobody can use that exact item type in that exact way again in that session. These ephemeral Props are Average quality, non-Arcane items, and cannot generate a benefit of more than Average Rank. Once they've served their purpose they dissolve back into the background. The entire process is, of course, subject to common sense and GM decision.

Investing in Props

Optionally, you may allow players to invest in a Prop when they level up, using character Ranks to buy its abilities. The item then becomes part of their character, but now only the Qualities and Ranks that have been bought are available for use – any others are simply not appearing in the story for a while, until the player buys them back up again (if ever).

Wealth Scale

This scale does a couple of things. It tells you what rank of Wealth various characters should have. It also tells you the value Rank items should have: see what sort of person would find it a significant but doable purchase, neither trivial nor astronomical.

- ∇ Poor – struggling to make ends meet, or with no property of one's own – beggar, slave, game designer
- ∇ Average – ordinary trader, artisan, farmer; getting by fairly well
- ∇ Good – prosperous trader or crafter, minor noble
- ∇ Expert – most nobles, successful merchant
- ∇ Master – kings, richest nobles, leaders of powerful merchant houses

Buying and selling

Trading can be any of the three types of situation, depending on circumstances. If it's a trivial transaction and everyone wants to move along quickly, it's simple. If it's a harder transaction, it's probably a complicated situation. If you're trading with a named NPC or the group fancies spending a bit of time for haggly fun, it might be a conflict situation of offer and counter-offer.

For any trading situation the GM can reflect the **attitude** of the other party with an Upshift or Downshift if they're particularly interested or uninterested in the deal. For instance, it's unlikely that the First Sword of the Great Merchant House of Swords in Sword City feels a pressing need to add your rusty scimitar to his stock.

Assigning **item value** works like this.

- ‡ If an item has a value-type Quality like Tastelessly Dripping With Pearls or Designer Runes, then that sets its position on the Wealth scale. (If there's more than one such Quality involved, use the highest and give a trading Upshift for each additional one.) Other items are counted as Average Wealth.
- ‡ Function-type Qualities like Good [+2] Sword add their MODs to any trading rolls so it's easier to talk them up.
- ‡ Arcane Qualities give Upshifts to value (as long as the other party believes they exist, which often requires a demonstration).

Buying. The key Quality for purchasing is Wealth, compared to the value of the item as a Target Number. Picking up items of value less than your Wealth is simple. More costly ones require a roll, adding in Qualities appropriate for trade. If you succeed take one Damage Rank on your Wealth as your resources are temporarily depleted (this will not come back in the current scene). If you wish, you may substitute a Prop for your Wealth – if the trade proceeds you lose the Prop. This is handy if you want something beyond your normal means but have just, er, acquired some loot.

Selling. You might sometimes want to convert an item you've found into cold, hard cash, or exchange it for another item. This is usually about an exchange of Props, and proceeds rather like buying. It's a simple situation to turn what you have into a value-type Prop of the next rank down, or a function-type Prop of lower Rank than yours. If you want to at least break even you'll have to do some rolling. (Asking for *higher* value than you're offering is really pushing it, and is a strong candidate for a conflict situation - possibly followed by Trouble.)

Magic

This section covers the various means by which characters can manifest powers and other funky stuff. It falls into three camps:

- † **miracles**, which draw down the power of the gods
- † **thaumaturgy**, which uses learned ways to manipulate universal forces
- † **mysticism**, which draws on the internal powers of mind and body.

These aren't always mutually exclusive. A temple to a particular god, for instance, might have an associated order of mystics or even thaumaturgists, but they would use different Qualities.

Spells

Each spell-type ability is its own Arcane Quality. The Rank is used for casting rolls, and also sets the maximum across all applicable properties on the Magic Effects Table (below).

Penumbra

Spells should be neither too broad nor too narrow, giving more than one possible application but limited to particular kinds of effect so that casters have to build up their arsenal gradually.

For instance Fold Clean Hobbling Laundry* has no application in an adventure story, but



Magic Effects Table

RANK, MODIFIER, TARGET NUMBER	TIME/DURATION	RANGE	AREA	NUMBER OF SUBJECTS	WEIGHT	FORCE	ENERGY
Poor [-2] [5]	1 action/ reaction (5 minutes)	Touch. (12 in.)	Closet (1sq yard)	1	Objects up to 1-hand weapon	Punch	Candle
Average [0] [7]	1 Turn (30 minutes)	Near (10 yards)	Room (25 sq yards)	10	Heavy person (250 lbs.)	Full tilt body check	Campfire
Good [+2] [9]	1 Scene (1 hour)	Unaided sight	Field	100	Bear, horse, small rowing boat	Sturdy club	Bonfire
Expert [+4] [11]	2 Scenes (6 hours)	A few miles	Square mile	1000	Laden wagon	Runaway wagon	Forest fire
Master [+6] [13]	4 Scenes (24 hours)	A few hundred miles	City and immediate environs	Entire city/country	Ship	Cannonball	Volcano

Rutkin's Invisible Domestic* performing all kinds of household tasks could have uses from endearing yourself to hosts to sweeping away signs of misdeeds in a hurry. A spell that only does one thing is alright if that thing is going to be really useful – Smite Monster*, perhaps. A spell that does several really useful things is probably overpowered, like Control All The Elements*. A small number of fairly useful things is the ideal.

Casting

You don't always need a casting roll: the GM can decide what's merited by the situation. But if you need to know how well the caster did, or to look at whether a target resisted, make a roll using the spell Quality's Rank. This might include other Qualities too. The different types of magic have more notes on how casting works.

It's usually a complicated situation, or perhaps a conflict if you're whittling down opponents in detail. You might even use the spell Quality's TN for an opponent to resist. It's all pretty freeform.

Fatigue

For thaumaturgy and mysticism, after you cast a spell, you must make a separate fatigue check roll. (Divine miracles work a little differently.) If you fail you take a Failure Rank. This limits the number of spells a character can cast within a short period.

The fatigue check uses the spell's Quality against the Target Number of the Rank you actually cast it at, and it's always classed as a complicated situation. If you use your full power (see *Casting options* below for other possibilities) you're rolling your Quality against itself, for a 50/50 chance of success. You might have other Qualities, different from those used for casting, that help you resist this fatigue. A die result of double 1s is *always* a failure, leading to fatigue, even if your MOD(s) would make it a success.

Example. The magus Thanazimo is caught in an alley by an impertinent rogue with a crossbow. He responds by using his Good [+2] Summon the Universal Fire* to hurl a ball of flame. He whips out a piece of sulphur and a gold-tipped wand, incants words of power, and rolls a 2 and a 3. Because it's thaumaturgy he can add Expert [+4] Intelligent to the cast, for a total of 11. The rogue can use Good [+2] Nimble to dive out of the way and gets a total of 8, so he takes 3 damage ranks. Thanazimo must check for fatigue and has no endurance-type Qualities to help: he's using his Good [+2] magical ability against a TN of 9. Unfortunately he rolls 4 and 1 for a total of 7, so applies a Failure Rank to his Connoisseur of Tek Wei Cuisine. (If he spent a Fortune Point to reroll he'd be sure of making it.)

Customised conjurers

If you want to improve particular aspects of *using* Arcane Qualities, like being able to cast a spell more quickly or Upshifting particular properties like area or duration, those work like normal Qualities in that they start at Good rather than Average, but you can still only learn them from an Arcane organisation.

A tactical note

Contests in PDQ come down, substantially, to matching attack and defence: you want to have abilities that can be put into play to defend against your opponent, and abilities against which your opponent cannot defend.

One big advantage of Arcane powers is that it's much less likely that an opponent will have Qualities that can defend. If you wallop someone with the Invisible Telekinetic Fist of Doom their Agility and Lightning Reactions are no use because they can't see it coming. So that's why magic is dangerous (and gives the GM plenty of adjudication to do).

Divine Aid

This is the type of magic used by priests and other servants of the many gods. It brings in the crucial concept of Favour.

In the setting section coming up soon you'll see how your group introduces known, named gods that you decide will feature in your stories – the Roll of the Heavens. If you play in the Middle Realms setting and style, the idea is that this turns into an amusing form of bureaucracy, with opportunities for wheeler-dealing and getting into trouble.

Most priests in the setting devote some effort to keeping track of how much they've pleased and offended different deities. Coupled with the maze of political and personal relationships between the deities and their followers, this can get very complicated.

In the game we measure Favour as numerical pools of points for each of these deities. Building up this 'credit' allows you to call on the god for aid in future. Favour can range from -10 to +10; most people have 0 with most deities.

Gaining Favour

Characters who do notable things that please a god build up a pool of Favour points linked to that deity. You can raise Favour to 1 by a fairly minor act related to the god's area of interest. Further points require more significant actions. Socially, you need to be a professional priest to be accepted as doing some god-related things – like holding a service.

Losing Favour

You can also *lose* Favour points by doing significant things to *displease* a god. Favour can go negative this way. Pleasing one god might automatically displease others opposed to it. The GM should decide how

fickle and labyrinthine the interrelationships between gods are. It might be crucial for a priest to keep up to date with who they're allied with this week.

Calling on the Gods

Anyone with positive Favour can call for minor aid related to the god's area of influence, such as bits of good luck or minor healing aid. Trained priests, however, are much better at it (see *Ordination* in box).

Casting works with social-type Qualities (e.g. Expert [+4] Wheedling) for both casting and fatigue, as you're trying to persuade the deity and its assistants to provide what you want.

Blessings are small instances of divine aid, and anyone with Favour can attempt to call for them. Basically you gain a Fortune Point that must be used straight away or lost. It can do any of the things Fortune normally can, chosen by the caller and used personally or bestowed on another individual nearby. However, its application must be appropriate to the deity that grants it. The god of trade and wealth isn't big on healing, but might grant recovery for a merchant or a caravan guard. Blessings are treated as Average power use for fatigue checks.

Ordination* (specify)

This is required for any professional priest, and enables you to call Blessings and Miracles with reasonable frequency. You gain supernatural recognition as a servant of a specific god, starting at Good (like an Arcane Enhancement). You get a one-off Favour boost of 2 points (your MOD) added on to any you already have (usually zero). You know rites that will draw one Favour from the god per day, to a maximum level of your MOD. (If you currently have more than that it's good form to do the rites anyway.)

Miracles are like other active Arcane powers, reflecting special knowledge of incantation and ritual to unlock these greater aspects of the god's influence. (Note that each power learned is specific to one god and can only be used with its Favour. If you become a priest of another god with overlapping interests the only way to use that pool of Favour is to learn a second version of the power.)

Fatigue. The big difference is that instead of fatiguing your character Qualities, divine magic fatigues your Favour with the deity in question. Make the fatigue check using your current Favour like a Quality MOD, with the TN from the rank of power you used as normal. If it fails your Favour is reduced by one. Eventually your patron will get fed up of you and put on the celestial answerphone message. Then you'll need to do stuff to get back in their good books. This is much slower to recover than the Fatigue for standard power use, but it doesn't penalise you (except by eating away at your ability to call on your god).

Example. Fourpetal is a priestess of Ninmuzi. She has Expert [+4] Ordination (Ninmuzi)* and Good [+2] Power Over Plants*. She starts the day in her deity's good books with 4 Favour. After using a miracle to conceal the group's wagon beneath vines and creepers she has to make a fatigue check. For her this means adding current Favour (4) to the result of 2d6. She only rolls 2 and 2, for a total of 8, but the Target Number for using Good rank magic is 9, so she fails and her Favour goes down to 3.

From a character point of view you call on the god by simple exclamation or prescribed rote, sending your will to the heavens, and if your plea catches the deity's attention greater or lesser aid will be forthcoming. This will always involve doing something obvious to bystanders, like shouting "In the name of Slobop!" or grasping your frog-shaped pendant or reciting arcane formulae.

Penance and retribution

A character with negative Favour is cut off from divine aid. They may build their Favour back up again in the normal way by doing things that please the deity. This is wise, because a large negative Favour is a dangerous thing to carry around.

If the character catches the god's attention they will be the subject of a detrimental miracle (a magical power bringing direct harm, social embarrassment, obstacles to current goals, etc). The GM can trigger this up to once per scene if the character has -2 Favour or worse and enters one of the god's temples, is in proximity to one of its priests, or enters a location keyed to its area of interest (e.g. the frog god tends to keep an eye on swamps). If you get to -10 Favour you're going to be the target of constant miracles and followers with pointy things. Your main option is to put your affairs in order rapidly.

Use current negative Favour as if it were a MOD to determine the rank and therefore the extent and intensity on the magic effects table. For example, if you have -4 Favour the miracle is Expert rank and the GM looks at that row on the table for its possible effects. A serious offender can bring down wrath on those around them.

The good news is that each such miracle defuses one point of negative Favour.

Dubious blessings

If you have +10 Favour and gain some more you can't hold on to it, but there are a couple of other possibilities.

You might gain a **Mark**, a noticeable side-effect of being touched by the deity's power. For instance a priest of Slobop the Frog God might develop webbed fingers and toes. These give a balanced pair of Good and Poor Qualities – they might help with certain tasks (webbed digits would be useful for swimming), but in other situations they are inconvenient, and they can certainly be spotted by people you meet and

used to make guesses about your affiliation. You only get one Mark per deity. Once you get a Mark it stays, but may alter cosmetically according to your current state of Favour.

The other possibility is **recognition**: your Favour with another deity friendly to your own is raised from 0 to 1.

Thaumaturgic Science

Long ago, people sought a way to use magic without relying on the favour of the gods. They found they could do so by manipulating the components of the world around them in certain ways.

Each magical technique and effect is a hard-won secret, and many different ‘orders’ (called all sorts of things, actually, but this is what we’ll use) have grown up, each possessing knowledge of a small group of related magics or maybe only a single one. Members of an order also develop appropriate non-Arcane Qualities. Some orders have good relationships with each other; others are deadly enemies; all guard their knowledge zealously. A practitioner of thaumaturgy is called a magus, plural magi.



Thaumaturgy works with Qualities to do with intellect for casting and endurance for fatigue.

There are a few additions to the standard rules for using Arcane powers.

Correspondence. To make thaumaturgy work you have to manipulate the relationship between at least two objects with some connection to the spell, while incanting the words of power. For instance, for Shape Light* you might use a lit candle and a preserved eyeball you carry for the purpose. Sometimes arranging the proper correspondence takes a bit of extra time. This manipulation is always something that could be observed by someone in position to do so. The GM must decide whether what the player describes is a proper correspondence (and can give an Upshift or Downshift if it's particularly good or poor). Different orders favour different tools for this. Naturalistic ones will use animal bits and herbs, while more academic ones might use ceremonial wands and alchemical powders. In a pinch you can always improvise with what's at hand.

Wild magic. Thaumaturgic power is less reliable than divine power – it can escape from the caster's control and take effect in a way other than they intended. On the casting roll, if the dice come up as double 1s the magic *goes awry*. Perhaps it strikes a friend rather than an enemy, or reduces something it should have increased. If the dice come up as



double 6s the magic *surges*: the GM chooses one appropriate property on the table to take effect at 2 ranks higher than the caster intended, for instance trying to light a candle sets an entire room on fire. Narrate the consequences of wild magic as you see fit. They should produce some mixture of dismay and amusement around the gaming table.

Notes. You can use Fortune for a reroll to try to avoid the wild magic. If you're rolling more than two dice Wild Magic is only triggered if the dice show *all* 1's or all 6's.

Example. Back to Thanazimo in the alley. The rogue hasn't taken the hint, so the magus lets loose another ball of flame. Sadly his casting roll comes up with double 1s: he loses control of the magic and his robes burst into flame. Maybe the smoke will bring help.

Setting. In some locations the ambient energy has a particularly strong flavour due to local influences – for instance a graveyard would have strong death energy. This can give a casting Upshift or Downshift (without affecting limits or fatigue) to magic if that background energy would clearly and strongly help or oppose it. Fire magic can be harder on a ship at sea, but would be easier on the rim of an active volcano. Such ambient energy also influences the effects of wild magic, skewing the actual result or the special effects.

Mysticism

Some orders concentrate on developing the inner powers of the mind and body. These work just as in the standard rules. However, they only teach appropriate powers, like mind reading, telekinesis, controlling one's own body to reduce pain or go into a trance, or seeing events far off.

Mysticism sticks closest of the three to the standard rules. Casting is aided by Qualities to do with inner strength, calm and willpower.

Example. Caffeinous is a member of the Brotherhood of Cyan, who believe the world is but a dream and can be influenced by mental discipline and sharp dressing. He uses Good [+2] Astonishing Leap* to reach an archer on a rooftop across the street. The GM agrees that his Rank is sufficient for the distance without a casting roll; there's no active resistance or chance of wild magic. He just needs to make a fatigue roll to see whether he takes a Failure Rank, and uses his Good [+2] Willpower to help with this.

Familiar*

You are magically linked to an ordinary but obedient, smart and durable animal.

This Quality is found often among members of certain Arcane orders – usually thaumaturges, especially the Chartered Magi of Logrin. (There are also non-magi who have links with animals working in a similar way, magical or not, like the Weasel Riders of Helongor.)

The Quality's Rank measures the strength of the bond and the potency of the creature. The familiar can always find you, given time.

At Average it has the appropriate Size – usually Good (+2) Small; a basic creature type of Grazer, Scavenger or Predator at Good (see *Creatures* section); and one other Good ability reflecting the particular species (like Gnawing for a rat or Night Vision for an owl). Each further rank of Familiar* gives the creature another Quality Rank.

Because Familiar* is a character Quality the creature cannot be taken away permanently (unless the GM wants to arrange it as an important story element). However, damage to this Quality can get it trapped somewhere, make it lose patience with you, or other temporary problem.

Casting options

Undercasting. You can choose to use a spell at less than its full Quality Rank. This is handy if the effect you're after is a minor one, as it makes it less tiring – accomplished casters use this often. The lower Rank you choose sets the effect limits, casting roll MOD and TN for the fatigue check (using your full Rank for the roll).

Overcasting. It is possible to exceed the normal limits of your ability, though this is usually a desperate move. (Arcane organisations strongly discourage students from doing it because of the potential fallout.) You can Upshift your Quality by *one Rank only* for purposes of the effect limit or a casting roll to determine intensity of result. There are two downsides.

‡ You *automatically* take fatigue if the spell succeeds.

‡ For any of the three forms of magic there's a strong risk of the spell going awry (as thaumaturgy always can), giving an unhelpful or even dangerous effect instead of the one you wanted (and still causing fatigue). This happens if *any* double comes up on the dice – two 2s, two 4s, etc. That's normally a 1 in 6 chance, and becomes hellishly volatile if you push yourself to 3+ dice. (The GM *might* allow a Fortune Point to override it. Bribe them.) The player and GM should cooperate to describe these incidents in an entertaining way.

Arcane items

One specific Arcane power is Enchant Object*. Priests and magi can have it; mystics rarely do. It lets you embed another Quality into an item in several different ways.

Such items can either be Props or character possessions. (Arcane properties can only be added to character possessions if paid for by

character points; enchantment cannot give you new Ranks in character Qualities otherwise.)

Enchantment always takes an extended ritual, is always fatiguing and, for non-divine versions, the fatigue causes Damage rather than Failure. To use it make the casting roll at the indicated difficulty level. If it succeeds the embedded power is at the lower of your Enchant Object* Rank and (if applicable)

your Rank in the embedded power. This Quality will be found in NPCs more often than PCs.



One Shot items (Average). Embed a spell you know; after use the enchantment is gone. (Obviously this is usually a Prop.) Examples include potions, scrolls and magic twigs or feathers. Some mundane action is set as the trigger for the magic, often involving destroying the object: drinking the potion, reading the scroll, snapping the twig, burning the feather.

Bonus items (Good). One Rank of a (non-power) Quality is bestowed on the object and exists permanently thereafter. This gives the equivalent of your +1 swords and lockpicks, for instance turning an unremarkable item into a Good [+2] Towel or a Good [+2] Impressively Sumptuous Outfit into an Expert [+4] one. A Quality can only ever be raised once by Enchantment, so you'll have to mark them with an asterisk to avoid repeats. That's also useful because some monsters are only vulnerable to enchanted items.

Plot Point items (Expert). The embedded spell can be triggered repeatedly, but no more than once per scene. This would cover your Flaming Swords and Wands of Transvestism. (Character items can be used once per scene; Props, which should of course be less significant, once per session.) Learning to use one involves a Good [9] process of

mystical attunement, plus you must satisfy any conditions set when the item was created (e.g. ‘Can only be used by a red-headed Valharian at night.’)

Stems of Power

These are rare and sought-after objects that have absorbed particular types of magical energy into their very substance. If you have one you can use it once per scene (brandishing it or otherwise involving it in the casting process) to give an Upshift for casting appropriate magic without affecting the difficulty of the accompanying fatigue check. These items only gain their power from long exposure to the forces they embody, so they have to be found, not created in play.

Relics are objects with a permanent charge of one specific god’s power. They are usually very obvious to a god’s followers – who consider them sacred objects that should only be possessed by upstanding members of their faith.

Talismans are objects that embody a particular flavour of thaumaturgic energy (similar to the *Setting* paragraph above). Talismans always have very obvious signs of their alignment, because that’s what enables them to work. A sea-energy talisman might be a rod covered in shells and barnacles; a death-energy one might be an axe with indelible bloodstains and a dark ‘feel’. Powerful magi are keen to collect talismans – so if you get one, expect occasional visitors.

Mystics do not have anything similar. They must rely on their own resources.

Anyone can sense the presence of power in an object as a Good task, but will have to deduce its nature. Perception and intuition Qualities might help, and Arcane training certainly will. A trained person managing it as an Expert task will know whether it’s a relic or a talisman; if they’re a priest and it’s a relic of one of their gods they’ll know that too.

Those well-versed in magic are expected to go around festooned with all sorts of weird paraphernalia. In the past pre-emptive attacks against such persons led to the Tinkers' Guild adopting its distinctive badge and white headscarf or neckerchief.

Divisions of Magic – optional aid

When faced with the possibility of inventing almost any Arcane power, it might be helpful to have some sort of structure to suggest ideas. This section originally appeared in the *Character Assistant* mini-supplement, and is somewhere between a player aid and a bit of setting fun.

Categorising magic, of course, is an endeavour fraught with difficulties. There are a multitude of competing schemes fiercely championed by groups of scholars, at one time leading to the Mage Wars and eventually to most countries making it a matter of law that magic cannot be definitively and comprehensively defined.

However, one of the more popular schemas is that created by Krikamet of Kangura, presented here. (Of course priests are less happy with attempts to fit their powers into this scheme, but it works reasonably well.) The scheme consists of six main 'divisions' of magic. They're listed here with some of the most important constituent disciplines.

1. Artifice – the study of the mechanics of magic itself, and its use relating to crafted objects. Specialists converse in complicated theories and spend a lot of time in laboratories.

† *Dweomancy*. Detecting and analysing magical fields.

† *Dweomurgy*. Manipulating magical fields, including creating, disrupting and concealing them.

† *Enchantment*. Creating magical objects.

2. **Cosmurgy** – the study of the invisible forces of the universe, like time and chance, and of other dimensions. Specialists tend to be spaced out even by magi standards.

† *Summoning* creatures from other planes.

† *Teleurgy* is the study of overcoming the barrier of distance for communication or instant travel. Some of it is rather experimental, and there have been cases of embarrassing fusions with insects.

† *Transmortalism* is the polite term for the study of overcoming death, such as calling up spirits and reanimating dead bodies. Most localities allow its practice only under a strict licence.

† *Warding* creates invisible barriers to block particular kinds of creature or harm.


3. **Domination** – controlling the thoughts and behaviour of living beings. Specialists often take on a rather casual view of the rights of others.


† *Deception* is the specialised study of deceiving the senses and mind, notably through illusions. There is sneaky overlap with Elementalism for producing real phenomena.

† *Internal Alchemy* is the art of controlling one's *own* mind, and through it the body. (Mysticism is big on this, though most mystics object to the category.)

4. **Elementalism** – manipulating the inanimate forces and substances of the ordinary physical world to call them up, change them or put them down. Examples include fire, water, wind,







earth, light, darkness, cold, sound and motion. Specialists have a tendency toward power trips.

5. Inquisition – gaining information, like learning secrets, finding hidden things, sensing things far off and predicting the future. Specialists suffer from the burden of too much knowledge, and the lure of just a little more...

6. Mutation – altering the shape, substance or properties of something. It's one of the most popular divisions, and specialists tend to be relatively normal apart from a tendency to fiddle with things.

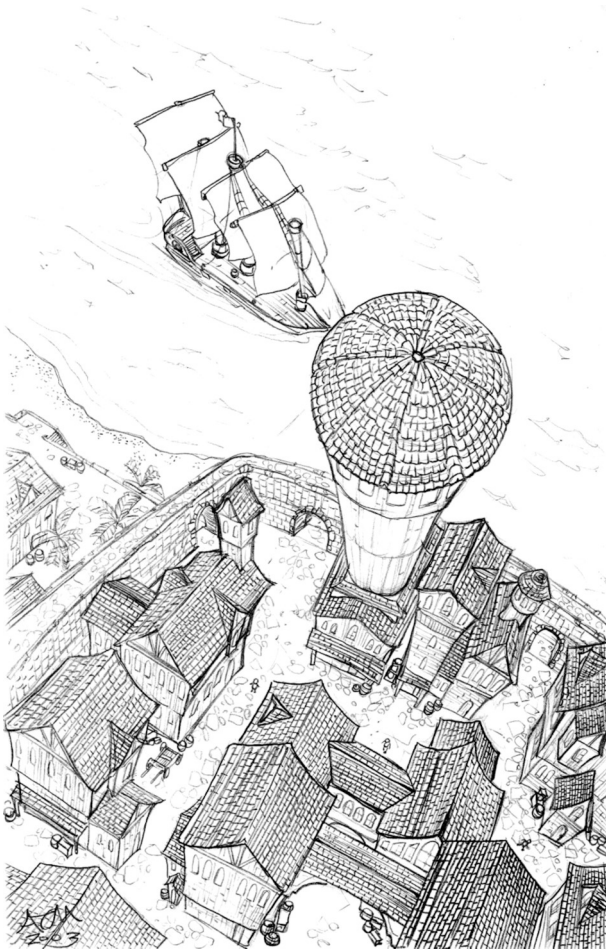
† Augmenting a living creature's faculties.

† Healing living creatures.

† Shape-changing – altering size, form or appearance.

† Craft-magic – a body of very practical spells working with objects for everyday domestic uses, e.g. mending, sharpening, cleaning.

The Middle Realms



The Roll of the Heavens

Most fantasy settings have lots of gods with different areas of responsibility, and this one is no exception. They are beings of huge power, but not aloof and infallible – they have emotions and conflicts like those of mortals and make mistakes (though it’s rash to point this out). The lesser races attempt to curry their favour and can call on this ‘credit’ for aid.

There’s a small number of greater gods, known everywhere, and an uncountable number of lesser ones covering fairly specific areas of influence, with all sorts of politics between them. The existence of many gods with different agendas accounts for the peculiar variety of species in a fantasy world. (There are not gods specifically ‘of’ races: intelligent species are created by one or more Gods of Something and then adopt them as their patrons. Or shun them out of spite.)

Attempting to catalogue their ranks or keep track of Favour with the whole lot is out of the question. The approach is this: all of them are out there, but only some are important in your story so those are the only ones to worry about. They include the greater gods and whichever lesser gods *your group makes up*. For keeping track of this we use **The Roll of the Heavens**. There is an actual Roll of the Heavens, a divine self-updating scroll recording all the Realms’ deities, simultaneously present in the vaults of several important temples. For game use, though, it’s a sheet of paper recording the deities in your campaign and your Favour with each of them.

The Greater Gods

These are the most widely worshipped and powerful gods. But there’s also a certain remoteness about them: because they’re such a part of the background to life, and with quite general rather than specific domains, folk don’t always get excited about them and often prefer to appeal to a

more specifically relevant lesser god.
(Author's note for the eagle-eyed: these are based on Mesopotamian mythology, for kicks.)

𐎗 **Elal** – god of sky, weather, strength and rulership; chief of the gods.

𐎗 **Eaki** – god of water, knowledge and craft; the wise counsellor and cunning planner.

𐎗 **Ashtir** – goddess of love and war; self-centred and often disruptive, but essential to the order of things.

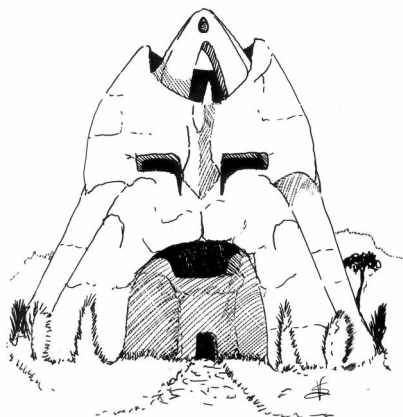
𐎗 **Shamutu** the sun god and **Nansin** the moon goddess represent the day and night, mark the passage of time and serve as divine judges, watching all that happens below. Shamutu has encompassing vision, seeing things that are far off; Nansin sees things that are hidden.

𐎗 **Ninmu**zi, Who Dies and Returns, represents agriculture, the power of the land to sustain life and the cycles of nature, and appears in both male and female forms.

It's also worth mentioning **Azanüt** here, as he has widespread recognition although not officially counted with the six greater gods. Usually referred to as 'The Demon Lord Azanüt', he is actually the god of perversion: twisting things out of the natural and proper way. He is served by many entities that have been so altered, including his lieutenants Klu and Yofofof.

The Lesser Gods

There are uncounted legions of lesser gods covering plague, lust, trade, animals, plants, and so on from the very general to the very specific. The more specific they are the less general power they have, with fewer



worshippers advancing their cause and fewer gods seeking alliances. The horned god of animals is widely sought, but the shadowy goddess of thievery is left to make her own way until someone needs something specific. Some gods are thoroughly nasty, but thoughtfully provide their servants as smiting fodder.

To organise The Roll of the Heavens, Eaki has decreed that each lesser deity should be affiliated to one of the following Celestial Estates:

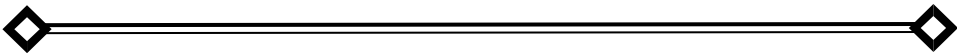
- ƒ The Wild – natural phenomena and living things
- ƒ The Hearth – activities of everyday life
- ƒ The College – specific occupations and social roles
- ƒ The Sanctum – feelings and abstract stuff.

The gods tend to have one of two attitudes to this. Some think it foolish or irksome, but find it wise to humour Eaki in public. Those who buy into it often treat it like a school house system, and can get quite competitive. Sometimes affiliations are obvious; sometimes it's a tough judgment call, and might even suggest story elements. Some deities move between Estates over time – and sometimes Estates want to get rid of them!

The relationship between any given pair of deities usually falls into one of these categories: fundamentally allied, temporarily allied, apathetic/neutral, temporarily hostile, fundamentally hostile. You can qualify them further. For instance, a pair of gods might supposedly be allies but their relationship is dominated by fierce competitiveness. You can add detail to the gods' personalities and relationships over time if it interests you.

Creating Gods

Each player can 'create' a named god related to a particular event their character is involved in once per session, and receives a Fortune Point for adding something to the story. Everyone then records the new deity



on their Roll of the Heavens, and those involved in the event record the appropriate positive or negative Favour.

(Character creation is a special case: anyone making a priest character can create their patron deity and add it to the Roll with no Fortune or Favour consequences.)

For instance, the party has just defeated a voracious giant frog. Bill declares, “I bet we’re in trouble with Slobop the Frog God now!” Everyone adds “Slobop – Frogs” to the Roll (under The Wild); Bill gets a Fortune Point; and all the PCs record -1 Favour.

The creating player should also come up with a sentence or two about Slobop to give the Frog God’s approach to his remit. (Remit, remit.) It’s a general idea of personality and interests that the Narrator should note down as a guide for future appearances in the story. Maybe Slobop is just peaceful and damp, caring only for his charges, or maybe he seeks to expand his worship among humans (and put an end to certain culinary practices), or maybe he’s supporting the frog-people in an anti-mammal crusade.

Once deities are brought to front of stage like this, the GM should absolutely use them to generate complications for the characters. If the GM wants to introduce a new god, by the way, they can – but every player gets a Fortune Point the first time it appears.

You shouldn’t go mad doing this, otherwise you’ll have more gods than your puny brains can handle within three sessions and stunt the potential for future development. We’re assuming that everyone will use this power sensibly rather than filling up the Roll of the Heavens for the sake of it. Everyone round the table is at liberty to try to talk a player out of it.

What should happen is that you gradually build up a network of deities and start to see possible relationships between them and, in particular, occasions where gaining Favour with one would lose it with another. Characters start to become trapped by the conflicting desires of the gods. Bwahaha etc.

Organisations

Characters start their career as a member of some organisation and may join others as they progress. Organisations are important parts of society, and there are a multitude of them in the setting.

As with gods, we do not try to list them all. Organisations can be made up by players, thereby becoming notable parts of the story. Someone may decide that their character has trained with the Purple Wizards of Hoom – we'd never heard of them before and now we want the player to tell us something about them. Abilities gained from training will reflect the organisation. Many characters will stay with the same organisation throughout their careers and rise in its ranks. Others will flit around between different groups. This can be useful, but the politics can get a bit sticky. (Sometimes even red and sticky.)

Most organisations fall into one of the following camps.

- ‡ **Arcane organisations** deal with the various mystic arts. They might be a religious order (from a ragged band of nomadic fanatics to custodians of a big marble temple), making the character a trained priest; or a thaumaturgical order, making the character a trained magus; or a mystic order, making the character a trained, er, mystic.
- ‡ **Guild-type organisations** are formed around a particular profession, from smiths and weavers to scribes and apothecaries, for mutual aid and to police the use and teaching of skills. Some professions are common everywhere, but you usually find that each settlement has different prominent ones. However, they could be state organisations like the Kadinkian Intelligence Service, or others like the mercantile empire of House Grab't.
- ‡ **Martial organisations** are usually a 'company' – a division of a nation's armed forces or a mercenary group.

Each organisation provides its members with a **token** that proves their affiliation and level. They are useful for getting you into certain places,

and sometimes there's a general requirement to show good standing with a reputable organisation, for instance at the door of a high society ball or official reception. Forging these is possible, but it's a serious offence and you'll be pursued by civil authorities and (vigorously) by the organisation in question. They say someone forged the Assassins' Guild token, once...

Some **sample organisations** follow, and most of the nations listed in the Places section also have a notable example organisation. These should get you going with ideas of your own.

Remember that organisations have **minimum requirements**. Joining one has to make sense, which translates to believable aptitudes and skills (don't apply to a scholarly order if you have Poor Reason). Organisation entries usually suggest Qualities or Quality types that you must either have when you begin your training with the organisation or learn as part of that training so that you have them when you leave. There might also be suggestions for other abilities likely to be gained by members. Organisations you make up yourself should follow a similar approach.

Sample organisations

The Tinkers' Guild

Members of the Bards' Guild spend most of their time on melancholy songs and poems about men/women/dwarves, often beautiful, noble, wealthy or otherwise a cushy number, who have kicked them out. They're of only minor use in spreading news of what's going on around the lands. The Tinkers' Guild has grown into this role.

Originally they were just humble travelling menders of pans and knives, but today they think of themselves as 'independent traders'. They travel from town to town with mules or carts full of stuff they picked up cheap back along the road. They're usually very willing to share information they've gathered in return for food, drink or lodgings. In a day or two they move on, leaving people with their purchases. The Guild proclaims

its ‘strict requirements’ for the veracity of news and the quality of merchandise. It also has good lawyers.

Most guild centres are small camps that move around somewhat unpredictably within a general area. The central guildhouse in Ko-Sha, though, is a permanent building. Sort of. Generally referred to as ‘The Grand Shack’, it appears to have been built with a wide range of materials and styles tacked on over a long period of time – which, of course, it has. Although bits occasionally fall off, the whole proves to be surprisingly sturdy in adversity. Because they tend to travel with various objects hung about their persons, the Tinkers mark their guild affiliation with a white headscarf or neckerchief to avoid being mistaken for mages festooned with objects of power.

If you don’t have a suitable Craft skill you must take one; most Tinkers accumulate a few. They often have abilities to do with gathering information and fast talking, and getting away from trouble.

Draymar’s Dregs

This mercenary company has a good reputation for getting the job done, even if most people don’t want to be seen associating with it. Orc founder Draymar has a simple policy of bringing in outcasts who no one else wants to work with, as long as they are good at what they do. There’s a high proportion of non-humans: orcs, hobblings, even a couple of dwarves and elves. As well as getting their hands dirty they have to be willing to get along with each other, so it’s not for everyone. They work for whoever will pay – defence, demolition, raiding – but draw the line at harming innocent minorities, as that’s where many have come from.

Members tend to be gritty survivor types. You should end up with at least basic combat ability, and intimidation or stealth skills. Most members have another couple of physical-type skills like climbing, riding or survival. Specialisms like working with traps and other devices are welcome.

The Houses of Finance

The Houses of Finance exist in all major cities. They are run by followers of Zurik, god of wealth and trade, and the temple is usually part of the same building or complex. Their motto is: “The gold must flow.” They mint coins, make loans, and preserve local markets from the effects of dumping large caches of ancient gold by moving resources between settlements. (Attempting to dispose of amounts above a certain limit without going through the Houses is an offence, often punished by guard duty on resource-transfer caravans in dangerous areas.) Each House has a staff of priests and clerks, led by a senior priest titled ‘Gnomon’ as they show the way to prosperity like the pointer on a sundial.

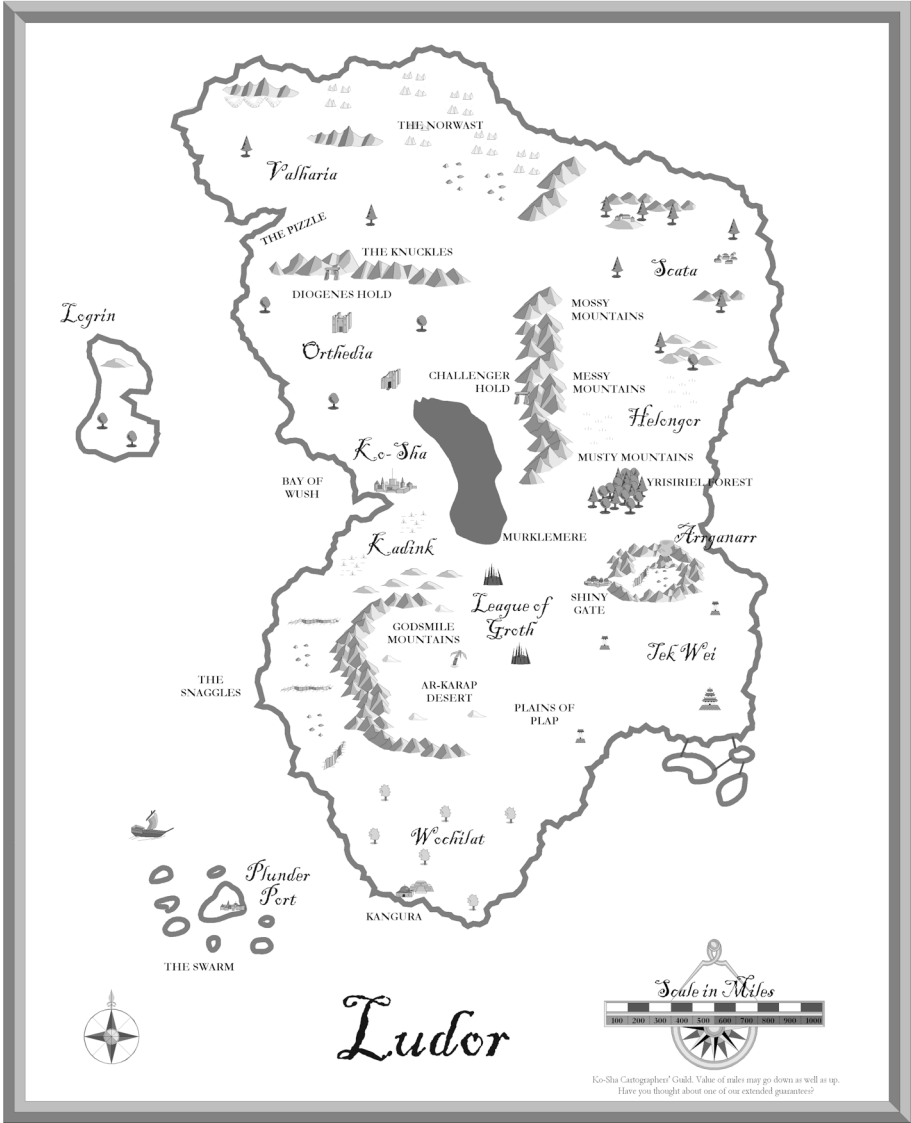
Priest of Zurik is an Arcane role, though temple clerks are more guild types. They are good at dealing diplomatically with a wide range of people as well as scholarly calculation and record-keeping; they’ll often have a good grasp of current events, especially in higher circles of society. Followers of Zurik tend to rely more on minor Blessings than flashy Miracles.

The Phlogistic Symposium

This thaumaturgic college is located on Ablarang, a small volcanic island in the group called The Swarm. It wasn’t always volcanic, of course; just as the Symposium wasn’t always here. But these magi specialise in fire magic, and the good citizens of their previous home gave them a generous grant to move somewhere with pleasant surroundings free of distraction from their scholarly pursuits.

The Symposium seeks to understand the fundamental energy of the universe, which it believes drives all physical processes. Harnessing this energy could have all sorts of exciting applications, say the magi, and tapping into it could connect with the whole universe.

This is, of course, an Arcane occupation. You must end up with at least one fire-related power. It would be good form to hold back on Qualities that might make it seem like you actually know what you're doing. Most members are kindly but absent-minded, with a knack for surviving the carnage they cause.



Places

Here are some of the major areas. Some example local organisations are given as inspiration for making characters, but these are just one possibility within an area. (A larger colour version of the map opposite is available at silverbranch.co.uk.)

Ar-Karap

Travellers in the southern interior eventually encounter the baking, sandy expanse of the Ar-Karap Desert. Not much lives here, and the unprepared traveller will certainly join that category, though certain rodents, reptiles and insects survive by burrowing beneath the sand and preying on each other. There are a few oases where water from underground springs collects and plants can grow – they are important waypoints for trade routes across the desert and trading posts have grown up there. The sands also hold monuments and relics of ancient times, some occupied. There are two main groups of people in Ar-Karap: the city folk of Veribah and the Dandwarin nomads.

The **Dandwarin** live in small clan groups, moving their camps from place to place and meeting at oases for trade. Larger gatherings occur on certain festival dates for religious and social purposes like inter-clan marriages. They rarely go into Veribah, regarding the people as soft and caged. The nomads rely on the beasts called Bugra, lizards the size of a large horse with long thin legs to hold them away from the hot sand and ridged hides that collect dew in the cold nights. They're not especially fast, but they are strong. Sometimes feuds erupt between clan groups – these are usually continued for a certain time as a matter of principle, with much insulting and occasional fighting, and then cease abruptly for reasons unclear to outsiders. Dandwarin are known as canny traders, and are also keen on certain games of strategy.

At the largest oasis is the city-state of **Veribah**, known for its domes and minarets and its bustling and noisy bazaar. The city is ruled by former vizier Sultan Jafar Doom, known to have training as a thaumaturgist and possibly as a mystic. Life is safe and prosperous for citizens as long as they follow his laws and show the proper respect, but infractions are dealt with swiftly and mercilessly. His personal guard consists of the animated skeletons of young men who attempted to keep him from his rightful position. The manufacture of Djinn Repellent is one of his most closely guarded secrets.

Arrganarr

Near the centre of the continent is a landscape of volcanoes and sharp, bleak rock. Most folk shun it: evil creatures lair there in crevices and warrens, the strong subjugating the weak.

However, this being the Middle Realms the inhabitants and the outside world have realised the benefits of trade in minerals, foodstuffs and the niceties of life (it's hard rendering decent soap from the fat of your underlings), so the small town of **Shiny Gate** has grown up on the border. It's a place where monsters are people too, and you never know what you'll be rubbing shoulders with. Evenings in Moss-eyes' Tavern when the band gets going are quite an experience. Non-violence is strictly enforced by a Watch with strong representation from the, er, ethnic communities. For those irreconcilable differences there are designated areas for formal duelling if both parties agree. In fact the denizens of Arrganarr go to great lengths to make the place appealing to other species – as they understand them. Some find the pastel shades and cheerful greetings a little wearing after a while and yearn for the gutters of Ko-Sha.

If you pass through into Arrganarr itself you're fair game for any marauding creature that might fancy nibbling your gizzard or reckon it's the rightful owner of your jewellery. Those who can hold their own against the various minions sometimes get drawn into squabbles between rival evil overlords. It's probably as well to avoid the McGibbet's fast

food carts at well-travelled waypoints, though the locals do praise the hob dogs.

The **Shiny Gate Watch** is an interesting posting: instead of slaying monsters you're trying to stop them from being hurt and, indeed, probably working alongside them. Officers learn how to defuse situations quickly and effectively.

You should have some combat ability, perhaps with an emphasis on subduing opponents without harming them. More importantly, you'll be able to prevent conflict by diplomacy and/or intimidation. You'll probably have one or two basic detective skills, like noticing, searching or getting information out of people.

Dwarfholds

Diogenes Hold is one of the larger ones, located in the Knuckle Mountains in the north. It's the epitome of standard dwarf life, with well-equipped workshops and comfortable lounges where dwarves discuss their latest engineering and exploration projects over fine drink and cigars.



Challenger Hold lies eastward in the Messy Mountains, the giant-haunted region between the vaporous dozing volcanoes of the Musty Mountains and the dismal pools of the Mossy Mountains. Sadly the dwarves have abandoned it now. They delved too deep and opened realms that should not have been disturbed. Now the halls are home to giant carnivorous reptiles, prolific fungi with soporific spores and hairy spear-wielding humanoids.

The League of Groth

This small nation lies near Kadink and Orthedia, at the north of the Plains of Plap. It's made up of a number of cities, each ruled by a Prince (who can, in fact, be female). The people are creatures of morbid fashion, wearing black almost exclusively and cultivating an air of artistic suffering. With outsiders they aim for aloof superiority. Days usually start with lunch and end with supper as they prefer the night-time, and this helps to develop nice pale skin. The noble and wealthy spend much time at decadent parties where they show off their expensive new outfits and artworks and stare moodily into the distance. Some of them can afford isolated estates out on the moors. Folk also like the theatre, and a séance makes a good night in. Supernatural creatures are tolerated in the cities, and even sought out, as long as they fit in. Groth is known for the excellence of its artists and clothiers, but not everyone favours the styles. It has occasionally gone to war with its neighbours, usually because of some leader with a strong sense of tragic destiny.

The largest and most powerful of the cities is Bynight in the south, built on the walls of a crater caused by some immense long-ago projectile from Plap. The streets follow circles and go down in levels, with the higher status folk living near the bottom beside Ebonmoon Lake.

The Dark Candle Guild is an order of mediums and seers, much in demand for facilitating recreational spiritualism and as advisors, and generally regarded as trend-setters.

This is an Arcane group with a mystic bent. Members usually have good social skills and a bit of performance ability. Knowledge of the supernatural is pretty much essential. Qualities for resisting happiness and preserving one's appearance might be fun. Arcane powers usually have a flavour of darkness or death, or are traditional psychic abilities like object reading or divination.

Helongor

This land of rolling plains and low hills, sometimes known as the Grass Sea, lies east of the Messy Mountains. The Helongorim are proud, independent farmers and herders with a warrior heritage. They are rugged and straightforward, enjoying drink, song and physical contests. Insults to their prowess or honour are quickly answered. They have little truck with magic.

The Weasel Riders of Helongor are the warrior elite and the Helongorim most likely to be encountered by outsiders. The giant weasels native to the area are tamed or raised to form close bonds with their masters. The long-bodied creatures are fierce, quick, agile and cunning, capable of great speed over short distances. The Riders wear chain mail and a metal helmet possibly bearing the teeth of a favoured weasel of the past, and are armed with spears and swords. They patrol their territories and are suspicious of strangers; they are particularly unfriendly to orcs. The weasel is almost a sacred animal to the Helongorim; those not selected to ride help with stabling and grooming, and bear the scars proudly. Harming a weasel is a good way to earn their enmity; being compared to one in some way is high praise.

The people live in scattered villages and a couple of modest towns, mostly wood-built with ornate carving on the important buildings. It takes a lot to bring them together in common cause. In fact, rulers usually find it's better to *stop* them coming together in quantity because of the brawling that results.

Those who bring trouble to this land learn to fear the **Weasel Riders**.

You must be able to ride and fight; fancy stuff is likely to be connected with these. You might have inherited high quality gear. You'll also need Weasel Companion, which affects the abilities of your mount and your relationship with it – see the *Familiar** box in the Magic section for guidelines, though this is not an Arcane Quality.

Kadink

This swampy realm lies (and, occasionally, cheats) south of Orthedia at the confluence of rivers. The people are suspicious – of the weather, their surroundings and each other, all of which are justified. Any tussock can conceal something venomous, toothy or bad-tempered. Villagers do, however, wrest survival from the marshes, going out on punts or stilts to collect animals, plants or fungi – some for food, others for extraction of interesting substances for export. Kadinkians are also known as canny traders and spies. The towns, built on the few dry parts of the country, have a brisk blend of business, intrigue and one-upmanship.

Elsewhere within the swamps live groups of **lizardfolk**. In contrast with the Kadinkians, who maintain their settlements against nature by sheer force of resentment, the lizardfolk feel they live in an earthly paradise and give thanks every day for their good fortune. They're happy to share their bounty with visitors, and beatifically forgive the unenlightened their failings and bad habits. The truly persistent in offending against their laws or religious sensibilities may be assisted to regain oneness with the great cycle of existence by feeding the mangrove trees (named for their slow-moving but persistent carnivorous roots).

The Kadinkian Intelligence Service is known to be one of the best (they would say *the* best) in the Realms. Its operatives can lurk, skulk, forge, eavesdrop and scheme like few others.

Members develop skills in stealth, intrusion, observation and deceit. You must end up with at least a bit of Stealth, or something very similar.

Ko-Sha

On the western coast lies the great Bay of Wash, notable for the orange-garbed members of the **Beachcombers' Guild** who are often seen

running across the sand to escape some mutant beast or to cosh stubborn shipwreck survivors.

The traveller following their nose will soon discover the city of Ko-Sha, the largest in the world (or so it says, and would it lie to you?). Pretty much anything you'd want in a city can be found here for a price, though it might have had several previous owners. Things you don't want might find you as well.

Ko-Sha is a city-state in its own right. In times gone by it was a feudal kingdom, but it has moved toward a somewhat more metropolitan and democratic model, adapting its old institutions along the way. Today it is led by a Steward, Humphrey Abelard, theoretically responsible to the Council of Bastards (the result of long-ago inheritance negotiations) but usually able to tie them up in internal wrangling to get what he wants.

The city is mostly made up of tightly packed streets in neighbourhoods with quaint and alarming names, from the busy craft workshops of The Hive to the petty crime of Fiddler Street to the greater temples round the paved square colloquially known as Godsyard. Inhabitants develop urban survival instincts that enable them to get on with their lives and skirt possible sources of trouble, like not going to certain places at certain times and knowing who to be polite to.

The Classic Inn is known as a place where adventurers meet others of their ilk and find assignments to undertake. It's more roomy than one would guess from the outside, with plenty of discreet booths. Several of the stout wooden ceiling supports are used as noticeboards, with various advertisements pinned up with knives, tent pegs, candle wax and orc spit. Free beer and chair legs are provided during Angry Hour from 9 till 10. The Inn is owned by Dun Mastrin, a very short fellow with balding white hair and piercing blue eyes, usually dressed in red. He might almost be a gnome, but thankfully seems to be of some other species. Mastrin is often seen lounging around smoking a pipe and observing events. He has great magical powers (of uncertain type) and sometimes uses them to protect himself, the Inn and his staff, but he enjoys watching patrons struggle along for themselves.

Logrin

This small nation is an island in the Western Sea. The people, polite and reserved (when sober at least), are divided into an upper class with a hierarchy of noble titles who drink wine and plan Expeditions; a middle class who drink tea and handle bureaucracy; and a working class who drink beer and keep the country running. They are good at many crafts, but excel in few. They have an extensive network of trade routes, protected by a strong navy.

The island is also home to **faeries**, little magical creatures that are occasionally glimpsed, especially in rural areas. Most are about a foot tall, preferring green clothing. They live in communities under hills. Mortals encountering them had best be wary, as they're not particularly keen on being observed, but if good manners are used it's said one might even benefit from the experience. Faeries have many magical powers, particularly of illusion. They enjoy using these to play tricks on mortals.

The Logrin Navy is the most powerful in the Western Sea. Their forests give good timber, their shipwrights know their craft, and a surprising number of the upper-class officers are capable commanders. Sailors do all manner of tasks from swabbing the decks to manning the ballistas. The Navy's main task is defending shipping routes, but some vessels go exploring.

Sailor is a skill-based occupation involving handling a ship, climbing and swimming. Officers also know how to handle a ship, and have leadership skills – as most are upper class, weapon training



and Wealth would fit for social background.

The **Chartered Magi of Logrin** are unusual in being a thaumaturgic order sponsored and regulated by the state. Youngsters with intelligence and magical potential are sent to board at Beestewilde School of Thaumaturgy, where they receive a good general education, get into exciting scrapes, deal with friction between the social classes and pick up a little bit of magic. On graduating they gain a licence to practice. (Some join the Navy in the valued position of Ship's Magus, where their thoughtful approach and arcane knowledge makes them a useful foil for daring but illogical captains.) Only native Logrians who have been through the School can be Chartered, but others who render great service to the order or the realm may be granted Associate status, which can be helpful in Logrin society.

Graduates of the School should have a couple of knowledge-type skills and at least one personal Quality like Brave, Hard-working, Good-hearted or Self-serving. It's common to take *Familiar** (see box in *Magic* rules section). The order teaches a wide variety of thaumaturgic powers, mostly to do with manipulating the natural elements.

Orthedia

Extending north and east of Ko-Sha lies a temperate realm of hills and forests, reaching up to the cool foothills of the Knuckle Mountains in the north. It's a feudal land, with local lords (and occasionally ladies) laying claim to as much land as they can hold and occasionally fighting over territory. Over time the changing fortunes and eccentric tastes of noble families have generated a significant number of lonely mansions, ruined castles and interesting crypts and catacombs. In fact one mercantile family has a nice sideline running tours for adventurer types.

For the most part the ordinary people just get on with their lives, little affected by changes in ‘ownership’ of their villages and towns. A good lord may gain their respect; a bad one has some sort of accident sooner or later, possibly witnessed by several dozen locals who happened to have errands in the castle or mansion at the time. The king in Caer Paladion is unconcerned as long as these things happen without too much fuss and the taxes keep flowing.

It’s a fertile land, but that cuts both ways as there’s plenty of hungry wildlife. Sometimes the nobles take a break from their jousting, archery, sewing and feasting to hunt it; sometimes, when it doesn’t look like so much fun, they call in professional exterminators. “I like a clean forest, what?” Heraldic beasts are particularly common, and this can sometimes be an annoyance; the gleaming towers of Caer Paladion are kept that way by athletic servants cleaning off the gryphon poo.

The Knights of the Argent Cube are an elite national military unit drawn from the upper class, trained to fight on horseback and on the ground, and about the only people in the Realms known for gadding about encased in full plate armour. They’re also noted for single-mindedness in choosing equipment for maximum power in combat. Most favour a two-handed weapon (usually greatsword) and also carry one or two one-handed weapons and a shield. They’re generally regarded as not over-bright, and mercenaries sometimes call them ‘tin turtles’ for their lack of speed and manoeuvrability, but everyone knows that when a group is bearing down on you it’s time to be elsewhere.

This is a martial role with an emphasis on powerful attacks and mounted combat, so you’ll need some fighting and riding. As a noble you’re likely to have Wealth. You’ll need to take your armour as a Quality for it to affect rolls, and you might want a weapon too.

Plunder Port

Off the southwestern coast lies a group of many small islands known as The Swarm. The largest of these holds the only settlement of any size: the small city of **Plunder Port**. It was founded by pirates long ago, and their descendants are known for their flamboyant dress, bravado and odd style of speech.

It's a well-ordered place with good housing, medical facilities (prostheses a speciality) and civic infrastructure. The town is run by an elected Governor. It sticks to its free trade roots: any goods can be traded as long as they don't cause direct harm to the population (selling grog to under-12s is an offence, for instance) and all the appropriate records are kept in order. Some of the people crew the municipal ships that go out under the skull flag to collect taxes from vessels passing through their waters. Captains who take the detour to avoid paying risk other perils on the big ocean.

"Yo-ho, darling! How was the office?"

"Yo-ho! Cut-throat Bob from Accounting wanted to slash our budget but I soon keelhauled him."

"Yar! Here's your rum and slippers."

The other islands of **The Swarm** are theoretically under Plunder Port's jurisdiction. The larger islands have sandy coasts and forested interiors, inhabited by a variety of strange plants and animals and occasional colonies of intelligent species. The smallest islands are little more than rocky atolls. Within the group are at least a couple of isolated monasteries and thaumaturgic colleges.

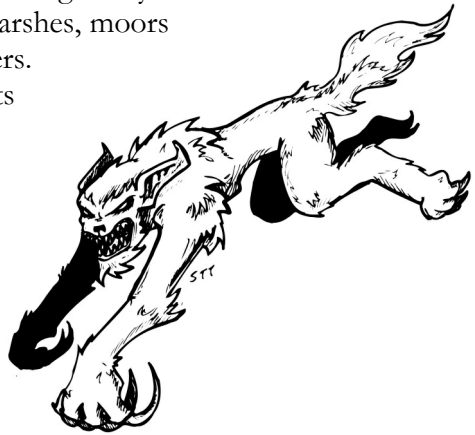
In the surrounding waters the most persistent danger is the **Jelly Corsairs**. A few individuals of strong will and larcenous intent have somehow been able to merge with the wagon-sized jellyfish native to the area, turning them into personal seacraft with good speed and manoeuvrability; long, strong tentacles with a deadly sting; and the

capacity to carry a small boarding party on their backs. It's said that their founder and leader, Captain Balboa, now exists as a frock-coated skeleton within a jelly of immense size.

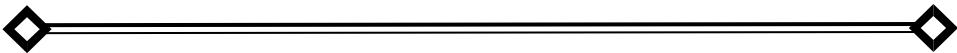
Scata

The north-east is occupied by this wide and gloomy realm of thick, dark forests, winding rivers, marshes, moors and looming hills, with long, hard winters. It's an agricultural land: most inhabitants live in farmsteads with their extended families, periodically making the trip to one of the few towns by cart or boat to sell their produce.

They're a dour, stubborn, superstitious lot. Well, perhaps not technically superstitious because Scata demonstrably *is* rife with all kinds of spirits and strange creatures, from benevolent to mischievous to hungry for souls and bones. The trick is to attract good spirits to look after the house, possessions, crops and livestock, while warding off harmful ones. The routine of what to put where – saucer of milk on the hearth, horse-shoe over the door, mousetrap on the seventh stair, beartrap in the turnip patch – can be quite complicated, and baffling to outsiders. (A guest going to the outhouse in the middle of the night had better have their wits about them.)



The lowlanders clear forest to plant crops and have most of the towns, including the walled capital city of Dun Corv. From here the Zar-Riy and his court rule the realm. The highlanders on the moors and mountain foothills spend more time on herding livestock. They're an independent lot, considering the lowlanders soft and often airing resentment of their rule round the fire at night. The men have skirt-like garments called *kirta* and large weapons.



The Zar-Riy's Bogateers are an elite group of agents traveling the countryside to destroy harmful supernaturals (from *boganoi*, a general term for hostile spirits). Most are rugged, pragmatic types, equipped and aided by the temples of the capital. They don't have flashy heraldry, and their code is simply to protect the people and live to fight another day. However, there is some competitive spirit and when they meet up they trade tall monster stories, duel with silver knuckleblades and get in trouble with the City Guard.

You need some knowledge of the supernatural. Members usually gain physical skills like climbing and jumping, some ability in fighting and avoiding harm, and investigative skills for finding clues and uncovering people's secrets. A number of them have an innate Arcane ability due to an unusual background, which can be useful but makes them closer to what they fight.

Tek Wei

This land in the far south-east consists of a chunk of mainland and a number of offshore islands, with many impressive connecting bridges. The people are addicts of intricacy. They are the human masters of alchemy and clever mechanical devices. Advanced contraptions from here gradually find their way to the rest of the world, but are usually discarded as no-one can understand how to work them.

The Tek Wei social system involves complex layers of status and manners, particularly among the noble classes. Many people obsess over a specific skill, seeking to master its every tiniest facet, from swordsmanship to preparation of noodles. They have what seems to outsiders an inexplicable soft spot for dragons – regarding them as wise and benevolent beasts when everybody knows they'd have your leg for elevelenses as soon as look at you – and dragon motifs appear often.

The Amber Empire is ruled from the great mainland city of **Yong Ting** by an Emperor, who is accorded the status of a demigod and lives in great luxury but is of little relevance in the movements of politics. That is conducted by ministers and high-ranking courtiers playing deadly games of etiquette. It's a court city: most of what happens there is about supporting the clockwork of government, which according to tradition (as preserved by court officials) must be done in fine clothes and beautiful buildings over excellent food with a suitably visible entourage. Lacking in these respects would bring a dangerous loss of status, jeopardising the entire socio-political system (they say).

Much of the rest of the mainland is simple, poor and rural, inhabited by peasants working on agricultural tasks. Heroic figures tend to be unwelcome, as long experience tells the peasants who comes off worst when the supernatural ass-kicking starts. The islands have more individual characters. For example, the island of **Ong** is now mostly covered by the city of **Ong**, renowned throughout the world for its prolific output of crafted items from workshops crammed into every street.

Gods are worshipped in Tek Wei as elsewhere, but less... enthusiastically. Most see them as present and important but remote, populating a celestial bureaucracy that's usually too busy reorganising its filing system to handle direct operation of the physical world. Much of that is handled by contractors – minor spirit entities working under the auspices of the various gods. Occasionally problems are caused by interfering mortals who lack an understanding of the fine points of labour relations.

A high proportion of magicians here are mystics. Arcane items are used often, sometimes in the form of one-shot invocations to spirits written on paper, prepared in a ritual that uses Favour to imbue a power.

The Hidden Hand is an organisation of masters of stealth and arms. Its existence is well known, but its members operate in extreme secrecy. They are for hire by anybody to undertake missions, usually of assassination or infiltration, and pride themselves on completing any task they take on. Conversations with agents are mercifully rare, as they have a paranoid aversion

to admitting or confirming anything – it’s often impossible to know whether you’ve actually hired them until your enemy is disposed of.

If you don’t already have Stealth or a close equivalent you must take it. Other physical, subterfuge and intrusion skills like weapon training, dodging, acrobatics, climbing and disguise are also common.

Valsharia

This icy, mountainous land lies in the far north-west, above the Knuckle Mountains. The people are physically strong and tough, so much so that they think nothing of wandering around in the snow in fur or metal beachwear. Valharian babies don’t get slapped when they’re born; they deck the midwife. Men gain status from muscular torsos, and spend time at bodybuilding exercises. Many villages keep a trained wrestling bear for practice – these usually become quite friendly with the people and enjoy their buckets of ale. Women learn draping, posing and how to intimidate a roomful of soft southern men. More than one fur trapper has returned home singing soprano.

The Valhar are primarily hunters, living in tribal villages that variously trade with or raid their neighbours. The tribes around Pizzle Bay have become reasonable boatbuilders and take to the coast of the Western Sea for raiding other settlements and hunting whales and other large creatures. Important positions in the tribe are the Chief, who embodies the ‘face’ of the community and makes sure no one brings disgrace, and the Wise Woman, who learns healing and other knowledge from her predecessor, dispenses sensible advice and generally has a thankless job that ages her prematurely.

Valhar Rangers – the men are good at energetic skirmish fighting, but not that great for actually defending borders, policing the wilds or keeping order in town. Therefore, from time to time the gods single out a young woman with a fighting

spirit and the embers of common sense and send a large, impressive animal of some sort to be her companion and stoke that common sense. (It has to be large and impressive to give unruly Valhar pause. A cat or eagle large enough to carry a person would be about right.) The two spend a lot of time together in the wilds, dramatically scanning the distance for trouble from high vantage points and such. The Rangers recognise each other as a sisterhood of mutual respect, but don't often gather together as they might get in each others' light.

You need to start play in this, really – it would be extraordinary for a non-Valhar to pick it up while wandering through. Fighting and survival skills are strongly recommended. You must take the *Familiar** Quality – see box in the *Magic* rules – which gives you an unusual creature as a loyal but not necessarily subservient companion. Unlike the default, your companion's size is Average or Good [+2] Large.

Wochilat

At the southern tip of the continent is this land of jungle and plain. The people are dark-skinned, usually dressed in brightly woven robes. The land is so abundant that subsistence is no struggle and they're a cultured and easy-going lot, often found sitting outside the eating houses or on the temple steps, discussing philosophy or the issues of the day over pipes of jungle leaves. There are still some jungle tribes who preserve their traditions of cannibalism, but it's strictly regulated these days.

The city of **Kangura**, with its block houses and step pyramid institutions in white and gold stone, is probably the oldest in the Realms and a centre of learning. The **Catacombs**, remains of older versions of the city, lie below the streets and is said that there are openings from here into still older and darker pathways.

The Ancient and Dedicated Order of Custodians – the Great Library of Kangura extends throughout a large building and the vaults beneath, and contains writings in a wide variety of forms, from paper books to clay tablets, as well as all sorts of intriguing objects. Those who serve must understand interpretation and cataloguing, be able to navigate the maze of passages and chambers, and occasionally deal with Things from both within and without the vaults. One danger is that potent items can infect the space around them with the qualities they embody. An ancient book of natural history, for instance, sometimes generates animal noises and might even cause physical animals to stalk the stacks. The effects are more pronounced for older items, items of similar provenance kept too close together, items containing magic knowledge, or if magic is used nearby (the items feed on the energy released).

You should certainly look at skills of knowledge, being well-read, finding things and concentration. Librarians usually have Good [+2] Custodial Lenses*, enchanted spectacles that improve visual senses permanently whilst worn and can illuminate an arc out to 20 feet ahead of the user for up to 4 hours a day. (They're primarily an Enhancement, so Good is the first Rank.)

Yrisiriel Forest

This ancient and beautiful woodland has survived all the agriculture and industry of the outside world because it is the great refuge of the elves and no one wants to go there. People respect their ancient ways, like torture and experimentation.

In the deep glades the elves make their homes within living trees. Over centuries these Treehalls have been sculpted, twisted and enlarged by pruning, potions and magic until they form palaces of unnaturally convoluted form, unsettling for non-elves to navigate. Their chambers house the owner's various interests and projects, from current to long-



forgotten. Those that are sealed should probably be left that way – it’s amazing how flesh-eating centipedes can multiply in a decade. Some of these ‘projects’ roam the rest of the wood: wolves with second heads grafted on, bears with magic blasting gems in their eye sockets, hopping brambles, aphid golems, all sorts of strange nastiness.

Not all the surprises here are living things: some are enchanted or crafted objects or even places, like the Cell of Critical Laughter, pesticidal ornithopters or lounge furniture upholstered in several different *unusual* leathers. And, to be fair, not everything is nasty. It’s just that those are the things the PCs will tend to find.

The Treehalls are mostly arranged in a sort of city, but well spaced out from each other to avoid the neighbours – you can usually see a few others from each. Some, however, are off in the woods on their own or in small groups. Some are occupied; in many cases the owner hasn’t been back for a long time, but is still considered to be in residence; and in some cases they’ve just forgotten about their former homes.

Other places

The Norwast is a land of ice and snow too harsh for humans, between Valharia and Scata. Some creatures manage to survive here. The most notable are the great Tundra Cats and occasional wandering Wizen, undead things with some vestiges of independent thought. There seems to be animosity between the two. The Tundra Cats come in different colourations similar to feline species elsewhere, but all are larger, hardier and smarter. They seem to have a supernatural ability to glimpse things far off. The Wizen occasionally wander into Valhar territory singly or in small groups, and are dispatched. It’s rumoured there’s a fortress of the

things somewhere in the Norwest, and some wonder whether one day they'll descend in force.

Murklemere is the largest lake in Ludor; in practical terms an inland sea. Some parts are thought to be extremely deep. Its shores adjoin Orthedia, Kadink and Groth. Each nation has a few fishing villages there, referring to each others' territories as North Shore, West Shore and East Shore. They put on a show of disliking each other for outsiders. As well as the distinctive wildlife (like the squurtle with its grasping tentacles and hard, streamlined shell), the lake's notable for a group of aquatic dwarves. They roam the depths in a great metal vessel, the *Questor*. There are rumours of ancient structures and strange phenomena down there.

The **Godsmile Mountains** form a vertical arc in the south-west. On the inside lies the Ar-Karap Desert, shadowed from rain by the peaks. The outside of the arc frames Wochilat and Kadink at its ends. In the middle the mountains slope down westwards to the area known as **The Snaggles**, a landscape of rock, sand, poor soil and scrubby vegetation broken by labyrinthine winding gullies and chasms. Many hostile creatures lair here. A few settlers from different lands have set up homesteads for a new and independent life, and some come prospecting for the minerals that can be found in the canyon walls by hardy climbers. In the middle lies the only settlement, **Stone City**, which is actually a small town with buildings made of wood. It has the feel of a frontier trading post that struggles to maintain law and order.

Between Ar-Karap, Tek Wei, Wochilat and Groth lie the **Plains of Plap**, an area of flat grassland inhabited by grazing animals and things that eat them. Few people live here: there are a couple of indigenous tribes and some small scavenger camps of hardy and desperate folk from other lands. The most notable feature of the plains is that things fall from the sky at random intervals and locations. Mostly these are ordinary objects, but sometimes they're large or unusual and occasionally there's even a living creature that survives its landing. The scavengers gather them up to sell, but of course every so often they get hit. The phenomenon is reckoned to be god-related, but no one knows the reason or whether the items are newly created or taken from elsewhere.

Sample characters

Here are some personages, august and otherwise, who one might find when travelling about the Realms. They arose during the playtest and review phase of game development, and it seemed like a fun idea to put them in the book. They show how players can bend the rules and setting to fit their ideas.

You could use them as starting player characters, and their stats are given accordingly. Alternatively you could use them as NPCs for the players to encounter as patrons, allies or even opponents. In that case you might want to level them up a few times. They may also give you ideas for how you'd come up with something similar done in a way that you prefer: the flexibility of PDQ at work!

Tibbir, Priest of Slobop

By Chad Underkoffler

DESCRIPTION: A short, squat man with a shaved head, protuberant eyes, a pug nose and a grin. He carries a quarterstaff and wears a jacket of mottled green leather (crafted to look like leopard frog skin). Slobop, of course, is the god of Frogs, Swamps, and Flying Insect Pest Control.

RACE: Human

LEVEL: 1

QUALITIES: Good [+2] Homeland: Kadink, Good [+2] Organisation: the Temple of Slobop, Good [+2] Jolly (free for human), Good [+2] Ordination* (Slobop), Good [+2] Lizardfolk-Friend, Good [+2] Staff Fightin', Average [0] Channel the Divine Frog Nature*, Average [0] Healing Slime of Slobop*.

WEAKNESS: Poor [-2] Not a Spy, Dammit!

FORTUNE: 1

NOTES:

- ‡ **Channel the Divine Frog Nature*** is a miracle granted by Slobop that allows Tibbir to take on the abilities of his froggy brethren. This highly flexible miracle can cover anything from permitting miraculous jumps, extensible sticky tongue, water breathing, amphibian communication, underwater sight, exude poison through skin, etc – so long as Tibbir himself is the conduit for the power.
- ‡ **Healing Slime of Slobop*** is a miracle causing the user to exude a healing glop from their hands and feet. It can treat many ailments, injuries, and diseases. It's gooey and sticky and a bit stinky, though (a downshift for many social interactions for at least a scene).
- ‡ **Not a Spy, Dammit!** means that Tibbir suffers unjustly by many people assuming that his affability is a subtle facade over the cold, paranoid mien of a Kadinkian Intelligence Service agent... which he emphatically is not.

Enos Tik, Darque Duellist

By Chad Underkoffler

DESCRIPTION: Tall, slim, handsome elf with raven-black hair, amber eyes, and a sneer. Favours well-cut black outfits, spilling with lacy ruffles. He is a member of The Salle of Darque Heroes, a duelling society that is popular in the League of Groth; there are clubhouses in every major city of the League, as well as some in foreign climes.

RACE: Elf

LEVEL: 1

QUALITIES: Good [+2] Homeland: League of Groth, Good [+2] Organisation: The Salle of Darque Heroes, Good [+2] Elf (MOD: Flawless; DS: Immortality, Superior; Innate: Night Vision), Expert [+4] Charming, Good [+2] Acrobatics, Good [+2] Fencing, and Good [+2] Rapier Wit.

WEAKNESSES: Poor [-2] Elf (MOD: Jaded, Reputation; Innate: Luckless) and Poor [-2] Extravagant.

FORTUNE: 1 (max 5)

Ronkar the Red – Wizard of the Prismatic Order

By Tim Gray

DESCRIPTION: He is a magus, one of an order whose members each style themselves after a particular colour. The Prismatic Order has access to a wide range of general magics, but they each tend to use ones in keeping with their colour theme. The leader of the Order is the venerable Coronel the White.

Ronkar appears as a human in late middle age with a bristling ginger beard and fierce eyebrows, with battered russet and crimson travelling clothes, a pointed hat and a wooden staff. His manner may be abrasive and impatient, but deep down he is a good and kindly soul. As long as you don't piss him off.

The Wizards are engaged in a long-running conflict with a cabal of wicked elves. At one point these foes attempted to magically convert Ronkar into an agent, but something strange occurred in the process and he ended up with elven regeneration ability instead. They crush him, they drown him, but he keeps coming back.

RACE: Human (as far as anyone can tell)

LEVEL: 1

QUALITIES: Good [+2] Homeland: Logrin, Good [+2] Organisation: The Prismatic Order, Good [+2] Authoritative (free for human), Average [0] Pyrotechnics*, Average [0] Prismatic Words of Power*, Expert [+4] Knowledgeable, Good [+2] Elven Regeneration* (as race description).

WEAKNESSES: Poor [-2] Irritable.

FORTUNE: 1

NOTES:

† **Pyrotechnics*** – magic for creating and controlling small quantities of flame. This can be used to provide illumination like a torch, light

flammable materials, create pretty displays in different colours, and so on. It can't be used to create raging infernos, imprisoning circles and the like.

‡ **Prismatic Words of Power*** – the Order knows a number of these extremely powerful magics. As a Quality it allows you to do almost anything involving the physical world, subject to effect limits as usual, but is *immensely* tiring. Instead of the normal fatigue check, you automatically take 1 Damage Rank and *all* your remaining Qualities fill up with Failure ranks to take them to Poor. In other words, you can do one impressive thing but then you're rubbish for the rest of the scene. It also screams like a siren to any beings in the vicinity who are sensitive to magic.

Shard, Hobling Mystic

By Chad Underkoffler

DESCRIPTION: She's a short, fuzzy humanoid wearing a leather vest and breeches.

RACE: Hobling

LEVEL: 1

QUALITIES: Good [+2] Homeland: Murklemere (esp. North Shore/Orthedia), Good [+2] Organisation: The Mystic Monks of Murklemere, Good [+2] Hobling (MOD: Small, Animal Instincts, Resilient Constitution; DS: Lucky), Good [+2] Fishing, Good [+2] Mystic Monk, Average [0] Iron Fist*, Average [0] Cloud Step*, Average [0] Cobra Fingers*.

WEAKNESS: Poor [-2] Hobling (MOD: Small, Appetite, Naive; Innate: Tastes Like Chicken), Poor [-2] Can't Say No to a Handsome Face.

FORTUNE: 1

NOTES:

‡ **Mystic Monk** covers meditation, praying, philosophy, sweeping, cooking, doing laundry, and unarmed combat.

‡ **Iron Fist*** puts mystical might behind Shard's punches; when used, her fists count as magical weapons for the duration of a conflict and do Damage Ranks rather than the normal Failure Ranks for unarmed strikes.

‡ **Cloud Step*** – a perfect balance of 'key' that permits mystically extended jumping distance and hang time, as well as lightly stepping on falling leaves, drifting smoke, or still water.

‡ **Cobra Fingers*** – disrupts an opponent's 'key' on a successful unarmed strike – if the victim can't resist this Quality they are paralysed.

Karabus Kraal, Action Librarian

By Chad Underkoffler

DESCRIPTION: Tall, well-built black man with closely shorn black hair and brown eyes. Wears spectacles and robes of bright blue.

RACE: Human

LEVEL: 1

QUALITIES: Good [+2] Homeland: Wochilat, Good [+2] Organisation: The Ancient and Dedicated Order of Custodians, Good (+2) Hard-boiled (from human), Expert [+4] Well-Read, Good [+2] Custodial Lenses*, Good [+2] Brawling, and Good [+2] Detective.

WEAKNESS: Poor [-2] Hopeless Urbanite.

FORTUNE: 1

NOTES:

‡ **Hard-boiled** – he's seen and done a lot of things, and little fazes him any more.

‡ **Hopeless Urbanite** means Karabus is a city-dweller through and through. He has problems operating in rural or wilderness contexts, and knowledge is severely limited – just what he's read.

Game Master's Section



Running the game

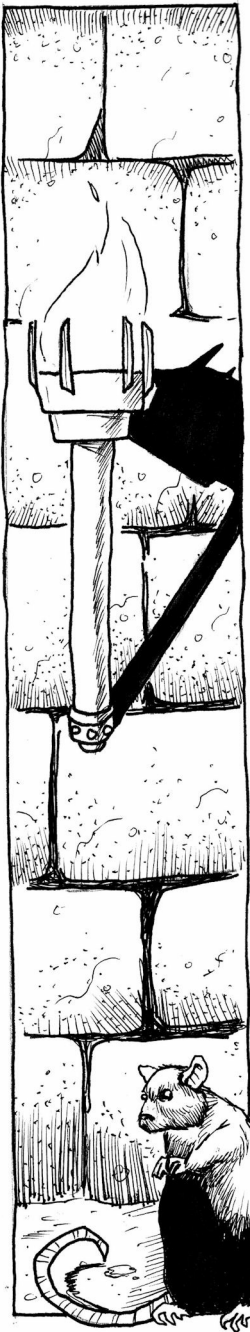
So, you've stepped forward (or been pushed!) to be the Game Master running *Questers* for your group. The GM has more work to do than the other players, and more responsibility. It's your role to facilitate the enjoyment of the group, to prepare adventures for the characters to run through, and to adjudicate decisions in play. When it works, it's a good feeling. When it doesn't it's like the proverbial herding cats – very frustrating. This section gives you a few tips for achieving the former.

Trust

With any RPG the most important factor in having a good game is having a good group: people who can get along together, communicate as reasonable human beings, and form a consensus about what sort of game they'll enjoy. This is especially important with the PDQ system, which makes for 'high trust' games. You don't have vast swathes of rules to cover every eventuality, which places the burden of smooth running more on the players' ability to work together for shared fun within the bounds of the setting. It's a good idea to make sure everyone's happy working this way before you start.

Tone

Another thing to make sure you all agree on is the tone of the game. The default for *Questers* is light-hearted but not slapstick: the characters have exciting action scenes and scheme to get ahead, while the players see the funny side of fantasy roleplaying. You could go for something different – for instance using these rules with another published setting or one you've made up that's more serious, even dark. If everyone has a clear picture of what you're going for they can choose Qualities appropriately rather than picking stuff that breaks the mood.



Setting up adventures

Goals

The most basic underpinning of an adventure is a goal: what are the characters supposed to be doing? These are often very simple, like ‘Guard the caravan till it gets to Ko-Sha’ or ‘Retrieve the Amulet of Ambiguous Puissance from the Crypt of Misleading Normality’. The adventure itself consists of the stuff that happens in the process of achieving the goal. (It might include a change of goal too – maybe part-way through they find things are not as they thought, like the nice old lady who hired you is actually the Wicked Witch of the South-South-East and it turns into a quest to put an end to her evil ways.)

If you adopt the quest-type model common in fantasy gaming and fiction it really is this simple. The bits that make the story interesting are provided by the characters’ actions and interactions along the way, and PDQ is particularly handy for enabling that (especially through Story Hooks).

However, remember one thing: a goal will only work if the players care about it. That means there must be a plausible reason why the characters would take it on board, and it must sound like a fun thing to do, or like something that’ll take them a step in the direction they want to go.

If the whole forward motion of your game depends on a hook that nobody’s interested in

or willing to follow up you'll be sitting there doing a goldfish impression. (Players generally want to make the game happen. You just need to give them enough to work with.)

Matching challenges

The general toughness of an opponent is based around the sheer number of Quality Ranks it has. What those Qualities are, compared to those of the player characters, makes a difference (maybe a big one) but the most basic measure is the amount of damage needed to take it down. You can try to match this to the player characters, but their numbers of 'hit points' will vary according to development choices. For instance, taking a large number of Qualities at low level makes you slightly tougher than concentrating your Ranks in a smaller number of abilities, because of the Average and Poor levels you get automatically when you take a Quality. A 1st level (starting) character will have 11-16 'hit points', with each level thereafter giving an extra 2-4.

You can make an opponent a bit tougher by giving it a Prop or two. However, you then have to be prepared for the player characters to get hold of those Props if they defeat it. Don't put anything in there that'll unbalance your game or short-circuit the plot.

Hazards

Traps, nasty environments, falls, burns, are all in the category of inanimate stuff that's bad for the characters. In most cases you can just treat it as environmental damage with a Target Number that must be opposed by any relevant abilities the characters possess, so it's just the usual question of picking a Rank to reflect its degree of nastiness. The Magic Effects Table might give some assistance in fixing a Rank.

Example. Jefferson the Barbarian is exploring a ruined temple and fails to notice an Expert [+4] Pit Trap in time. He convinces the GM that his Good [+2] Outdoorsman applies because the situation is similar to losing your footing on a

mountain scramble (another GM might not have agreed), and Good [+2] Toughness will clearly help to resist damage from the fall. So Jefferson's rolling +4 against the Expert Target Number, 11. He rolls 2 and 3, for a total of 9. He takes 2 Damage Ranks and now has to think of a way to get out.

Hazards can have different **consequences**. In the example above, the victim got hurt *and* ended up in a difficult situation. Consequences usually involve:

- ≠ **damage** – which can mean all sorts of things in PDQ, measured in Damage and Failure Ranks, wearing the character down
- ≠ a **condition** – like being unable to move or see, perhaps imposing a Target Number (maybe Jefferson has a TN 11 climbing task ahead of him) on further activity or blocking the character from some types of action for a while (like succumbing to sleeping gas)
- ≠ or both!

Decide what these will be when you design a hazard, but be fair. You're not trying to beat the characters or players, but to put them on that rollercoaster of peril-escape-peril-escape.

Note: hazards can be a good opportunity to use the Fortune Points option *Fickle Finger of Fate*, for instance if you want everyone to be affected by the sleeping gas with no chance to resist, in order to move to a scene in a villain's lair. This is definitely high trust stuff: the players have to know that you're not trying to beat them but to build a more enjoyable story.

In some cases you might want a more detailed hazard. Then you can treat it as if it were a character, giving it a few appropriate Qualities (in the same way as special items). For example you might have Pit Trap: Good [+2] Deep, Good [+2] Big Pointy Spikes. What this does is add the potential for more sophisticated interactions. Some things the characters do will only involve one of the hazard's Qualities (climbing

out only uses Deep) but others might have the Qualities ganging up (falling in would use both Deep and Spikes).

Rewards

Players like to get short-term goodies. Those with experience of other fantasy games, in particular, are likely to have been trained to go searching for loot the moment an opponent is defeated, snuffling around the body and its residence like starving ferrets.

You should probably let them find something at least half the time, even if it's very minor. It's understood, for instance, that most predatory monsters accumulate the pocket change of their victims, so a searcher might end up with a Poor or Average Pile of Small Change as a Slow Burn Prop. Occasionally they'll find something more impressive, from a Good (improved quality/function) item to Props with Arcane Qualities. In general a more powerful opponent is expected to have better loot, reflecting the effort needed to defeat it.


The way wealth works in *Questers* makes it easy to come up with this sort of thing on the fly, but it's a good idea to plan the items available through major encounters. In some cases you might require a searching test to see whether the character finds the goodies.


In play

Spotlight

Possibly the most important thing to remember when running a game is that all the players are there to have fun through their character, and that means showing off: from time to time that character must do something really impressive or otherwise entertaining.







That means your story has to give opportunities to do this. If you have a group composed entirely of brawny barbarians, don't give them an adventure revolving around solving clever clues. Clearly the players are all in it for the fighting, so have one or two clues, play up the barbarians' puzzlement and eventual lucky success, then get on to the lamentation of the enemies. You could turn the same example round for a group of weaselly wizards.

You also need to keep players' spotlight time roughly equal. If the action focuses on one character for a while, try to find things to keep the other players interested (like amusing or exciting developments, or even giving them a non-player character to run) and give their characters plenty to do soon afterwards.

Complexity

Some people get a buzz from having lots of detail and working out how to balance the different elements; others prefer a very minimalist approach to give them a clearer view of the story. That could be in character abilities and backgrounds, setting detail or plot threads. You can define lots of stuff, or very little.

Bear in mind, though, that things should feel as if they're on the edge of chaos at least some of the time, for instance as the characters find themselves trapped between the conflicting desires of the deities. Everyone should have enough to keep track of to give a feeling of struggle in the face of a fickle and uncaring universe that keeps sending the bailiffs round, but not so much that it gets in the way of enjoying the game. It's escapism, after all. As GM you should be aware of this and give advice to help the group fine-tune to suit its comfort level.

Scenery and description

This is another area where different gaming groups have different preferences. In general you want locations and scenery to have enough of an interesting presence to remind everyone that they're in a fantasy



setting, without the description getting in the way of focus on the characters' actions.

So, come up with some interesting locations for the characters to visit. That could mean impressive ("The ancient statues guarding the pass tower hundreds of feet above you"); or unusual; or just the kind of place your players wouldn't normally

go ("You descend into the sewers below the city"); or the sort of place they *would* go, but presented in a way distinctive to the game setting (a bar crowded with fantasy characters).

Then, describe the location in a way that's evocative but, most of all, concise. Pick a few key features that'll sum up the location (or creature or whatever). The players will tell you if they want more by asking questions. To start with think of two things.

∕ What impressions would they get first? If you open a door into a room containing two dozen walking skeletons with glowing red eyes, your initial impression is not going to focus on the style of the decorative plasterwork. You can compress these extra details, e.g. 'It's an ornate room – full of skeletons!', or just omit them until the initial impressions are dealt with.

∕ Use all the senses. Humans are strongly oriented toward sight, and take in most detail that way, but other senses often affect us more powerfully – describing an unusual sound or smell can be a good way to increase atmosphere.

Story Hooks

It's probably a good idea to talk to your players about this before starting, just to make sure everyone's on the same page about it. Some people will prefer to focus on the mission at hand, while others will be happier to wander off exploring bits of their character's life outside the dungeon.

What it does for you is to enable those sorts of side tangents that make straightforward quest-type stories more interesting, without *requiring* preparation work. (It might be worth scribbling down some possible riffs on the PCs' Qualities as a resource, to avoid being stumped when they come up.) Because the players have identified their own Qualities *and* chosen which ones take hits to generate Hooks, these episodes should be pretty good at highlighting aspects of the character they want to play.

One reason why it's a good thing to make everyone have Homeland and Organisation membership Qualities is that players will be very tempted

Sample Story Hooks

Here are some possibilities and Qualities that could generate them.

"A message arrives from your old teacher – he needs your help urgently!" (Organisation, Relationship with Teacher)

"Your vengeful half-brother steps out of the shadows with a loaded crossbow!" (Homeland, Nemesis – Half-brother, Archery)

"One of the creatures is carrying a betrothal necklace from your distant tribe!" (Homeland, Relationship with Tribe, Lost Love)

"The Snitchfinder General of your Order accuses you of revealing magical secrets to outsiders!" (Organisation)

"A young swashbuckler challenges you to a duel!" (Swordplay, Famous)

to take damage to those early on in a conflict, as they're not often terribly useful, and that gives you a nice Hook to bring their background back to haunt them.

Abstract wealth

Some people might have difficulties with the way QMR handles wealth, gear and treasure, especially if they're used to other games that track precise numbers of silver, gold and uranium pieces. You'll need to find a level of description that makes it work for your group; invent currencies and numbers. (For instance you could map the Ranks to: small units; big units; big units x10; big units x100; big units x1000.)

PC: "How much for these vials of Holy Water?"

GM: "Two dozen grothgroats, 5 sinshillings." (Aside, "That's a Good [9] price".)

PC: "Will you take 3 silver weasels and a bent copper?" (Aside, "I'm trying to haggle him down to Average [7].")

GM: "No, but I could take twenty bronzed hobbling toes." (aside, "He's sticking to Good [9].")

Disruptive players

Sometimes a player's behaviour can break the flow of the game, suck the energy out of it, or make other people uncomfortable. People are people, with all their foibles and variations. Examples include reading, refusing to pay attention, watching TV, playing games on a phone or tablet, pedantically rules-lawyering, utterly ignoring the characterisation of their PC, insisting on playing their PC's story rather than working with the group's agenda, or even being abusive or harassing to other players.

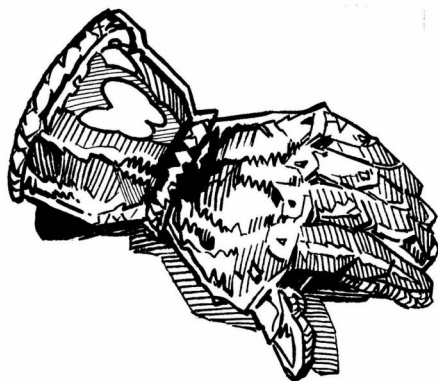
If friendly hints don't work, the best option is to have a private word with the disruptive player to find out what's going on. Take a break, or talk between sessions, and see if you can work through it like grown-ups.

As GM your job is to try to make sure everyone round the table is having fun. If that person isn't, you'll want to see whether you can make some changes to help them enjoy it. Maybe it's something about the focus or subject matter of the campaign, or a difference of roleplaying style.

Or maybe they're just having a bad day or personal issue – we all do – and need a bit of understanding from the group this session. Maybe they didn't even realise that they were creating a problem, and will fix it once it's explained to them. (Most people don't want to cause problems. They may be very thankful for feedback if you do it sensitively.)

On the other hand, as GM you're responsible to the group as a whole, and you'll need to set some limits beyond which you won't tolerate one person's behaviour spoiling things for others. If the worst comes to the worst and someone repeatedly fails to mend their ways after an honest but tactful chat, you might have to ask them to leave the group.

Hopefully it won't happen to you. But remember, one of the people who's supposed to be having fun is *you*. Taking on the GMing job means you should try to be considerate and flexible, but you don't have to be a doormat.



Creatures

Monsters are one of the fundamental elements of fantasy games. This section talks about how to use Qualities to model the range of weird critters the characters will come across, and gives a selection of ready-made beasts from the familiar to the peculiar.

Conversion from other systems. The approach is simply to look at what's significant in the other game's description and give appropriate Qualities, discarding any little fiddly bits.

Customising creatures. Individuals can differ from the standard stats listed here. For instance goblins have Cowardly as a Weakness, but the leader of a band might well be tougher and fiercer, dropping that Weakness and gaining Good [+2] Strong.

Size

This is possibly the most significant creature feature, defined by the Qualities **Large** and **Small**. (If neither is specified, of course, size is Average - that is, roughly the same as a human.) Their levels are like this, extending away from human size in both directions:

- † Master Small – humanoid up to an inch tall, insect
- † Expert Small – humanoid a few inches tall, mouse, sparrow
- † Good Small – humanoid 2-3ft tall, dog, cat
- † Average – human-sized
- † Good Large – humanoid around 10ft tall, horse, bear
- † Expert Large – humanoid around 30ft tall, rhino, elephant
- † Master Large – humanoid around 100ft tall, whale

These are brackets; use the closest level. They are **paired** Qualities: each comes with an associated Weakness, for instance Expert [+4] Large, Poor [-2] Large. The Weakness activates in different circumstances from the Strength. In some cases this depends on the size level of an opponent.

Here are some of the main applications.

- ‡ **Large size is good for:** making powerful close combat attacks; resisting damage from close combat attacks; feats of strength; some tasks requiring reach.
- ‡ **Large size is bad for:** avoiding ranged attacks from smaller opponents; sneaking around; crossing fragile surfaces.
- ‡ **Small size is good for:** not getting hit by ranged attacks; sneaking around and staying unnoticed; getting into small spaces.
- ‡ **Small size is bad for:** resisting close combat damage from larger opponents; feats of strength; resisting forces (like being blown about by the wind); tasks requiring reach.

Notes on size

Size in combat. In QMR, unlike many other RPGs, an attack includes both the accuracy of a strike and its damaging power, and a defence includes both the ability to not get hit and the fortitude to soak up damage. However, conventional wisdom says that a large creature is easier to hit but harder to hurt, while a smaller creature is harder to hit but more fragile. So to make size play an interesting part in physical combat we have to come up with some guidelines, and these are reflected in the previous paragraphs about what Small and Large are good for.

- ‡ In hand-to-hand combat power is more important.
- ‡ In ranged combat accuracy is more important.
- ‡ Optional rule - an attacker more than one size level smaller than the defender does Failure Ranks, not Damage Ranks. A human might get

peppered with pixie arrows, but they won't do any lasting harm.
(Unless they're poisoned, of course...)

Size “reduction”. In conflicts the effective rank of a creature's size may change due to damage or downshifting. Of course the creature doesn't actually change size: it's more a case of its size becoming a less important feature of the story. When comparing two creatures' sizes (for instance to see whether a Weakness kicks in) always look at the permanent Ranks.

Type

Natural animals and some supernatural monsters fit into a certain ecological role. The following can be used as a variant on professional Qualities. Using this and size together gives a basic creature definition to fine-tune with special abilities. (Try to fit a beast into a single category if you can, but if necessary you could give it two, probably at lower levels, or invent a slightly different Quality that fits better.)

† **Grazer** – uses include running, hiding and dodging.

† **Scavenger** – uses include foraging, resisting harm and adaptability.

† **Predator** – uses include attacking, chasing and ferocity.

Other common Qualities

(This creature Quality list is expanded from first edition. It originally appeared in the supplement *Bewildering Beasts*.)

Arcane Resistance (specify) – near-immunity to one particular type of harm, like heat, cold, poison or strong cheeses. Ordinary ‘background’ occurrences of the harm won't bother the creature at all. Against those produced by key characters it adds its Target Number to resistance rather than its MOD, and if any damage is taken it's as Failure Ranks.

Aversion (specify)* – with this Weakness something (e.g. fire, iron, garlic) is inimical to the creature. It can repulse, penalising the creature with the Poor [-2] MOD in active attempts to drive it back. In attacks it causes damage, bypassing Arcane defences and applying MOD to resistance. Deliberately touching an aversion object gives 1 Damage Rank.

Blood Hunger – with this Weakness a creature with *Energy Drain** that has no points in its energy pool is beset by hunger, becoming obsessed by the blood in those around it and suffering the [-2] if it needs to resist feeding. That Energy pool reduces by 1 point per scene, or thereabouts; they can't go more than a day or two without a snackette. Whether they want to depends on the individual; many enjoy hunting whenever they can.

Claws, Teeth, Stinger, etc – some nasty sharp or pointy appendage(s) that can be used to attack; Rank reflects degree of nastiness.

Darksense – the ability to get around without any light at all. The assumption is that it gives something kind of like a visual image, even if it works by ultrasound or heat detection or just plain magic, though this is probably less detailed than ordinary sight.

Damage Resistance* – increased resilience against all types of mundane physical harm, adding its MOD to a wide spectrum of rolls. It is bypassed by direct magical effects, which includes enchanted objects but not physical phenomena conjured by magic. There are often other specific substances or influences that can bypass it.

Dead* – found in creatures like zombies and vampires, acts as Arcane Resistance (adds TN, not MOD) against various kinds of effect that really only work on living subjects, including: death magic, life drain, most poisons and diseases, sleep and pain. The MOD can be used to oppose straightforward physical trauma. (It does quite a lot for one ability, but you do have to form close personal relationships with worms.)

(Terrain) Dweller – many creatures are particularly adapted to their environment and skilled in surviving there. This Quality is specified

especially when that habitat has difficult conditions. Possible versions include Desert Dweller, Jungle Dweller, Ice Dweller, Ocean Dweller. It covers both the skills to find food, shelter, etc. and resistance to environmental hazards like the heat of the desert. It's most commonly used for natural animals, as an aid to quick-and-dirty descriptions (size, type, habitat), often at Good Rank; less commonly for supernatural monsters (but you could use it for any character, with variants like City Dweller). Of course you can choose to specify separate Qualities instead (or as well if it's particularly good at one aspect).

Energy Drain* – this can take various forms, like a chilling touch or blood drain. The victim takes damage in the usual way, and the user recovers that same number of Ranks of damage. If the user hasn't lost that many Ranks, the surplus goes into a pool of up to 10 points that can be spent rather like Fortune to give Upshifts (one per action).

Enhanced Sense (specify) – gives an unusual sense (see Darksense above), or one that covers an unusual range (hearing ultrasonics), or one that's unusually sensitive (tracking by scent). Give it a name to reflect what it does. This works like any other Quality, but the more Arcane versions might allow rolls that can't normally be attempted. Sometimes sense Qualities stack up, like Keen Senses, Good Eyesight and Distance Vision.

Evil – a paired Strength and Weakness. Makes the creature more effective at things that demonstrate its nastiness, hooks it in to the evil social structure, and makes it susceptible to some metaphysical stuff.

Flight – the ability to move through the air, with or without wings. Rank gives speed and manoeuvrability.

Incorporeal* – lacking physical substance, like ghosts. It acts as Arcane Resistance against all ordinary physical attacks. It doesn't work against direct effects of magic (as opposed to physical effects produced by it). Against physical attacks carrying a magical charge (enchanted swords etc.) it just uses MOD. Incorporeal creatures can't make ordinary physical attacks, but often have some Arcane ability like Chilling Touch that does damage on an apparent physical attack. They can pass through

solid objects, are untroubled by gravity and don't need to breathe. The MOD can be added to tasks like stealth.

Magic Resistance* – adds MOD to resist the effects of any magic cast directly on the creature. It doesn't work against indirect effects, e.g. physical phenomena created by magic, like fireballs and mutant chimpanzees.

Night Vision – the ability to see normally in low light conditions, though not total darkness.

Pack Hunter – adds on to aggression, courage, initiative and tactics when the creature attacks in a group of at least three.

Plant – pain and trauma don't affect it as they would an animal. MOD resists physical blows, but not heat or cold. Resists effects designed specifically for animal life with its TN – like poison, sleep, mind control, magic affecting the body.

Poison – there are many types. In most cases poison effects can only be healed within the scene by an agency targeted specifically at poisons, like a Cure Poison spell or potion. The effect of a poison lasts 'a while', which will often count as continuing danger for healing purposes for the next scene or two. The onset period of fantasy poisons is usually 'turn' (after everyone's acted) or 'scene' (end of this or early in next).

‡ Damage poisons – just does another lot of straightforward damage, opposed by toughness.

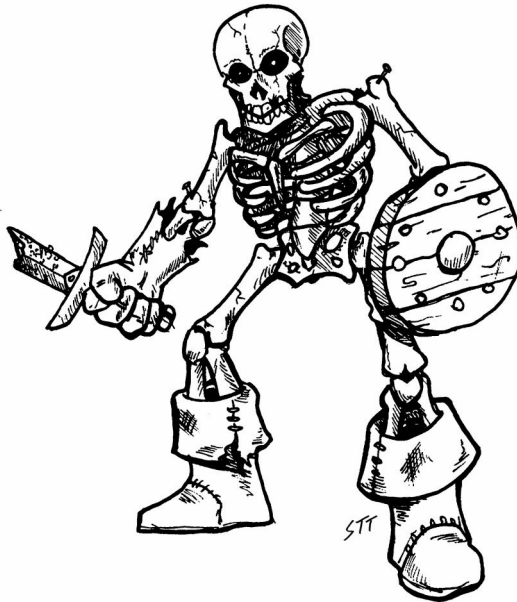
‡ Faculty poisons – target a particular Quality theme. These are phrased generally and damage is applied to whatever the victim has that seems appropriate. A 'strength' one might do all its damage to Strength, Built Like a Brick Outhouse and such, while a 'perception' one could damage Acute Hearing or Night Vision. Abilities won't drop below Poor this way. If the victim has no applicable Quality they gain a new one at Poor, which disappears again when they recover.

† Condition poisons – resist the poison’s TN or suffer some condition, e.g. paralysis or blindness.

Regeneration – the creature heals very rapidly, regaining MOD damage ranks at the end of each round (Average counts as 1). There are often certain types of harm the regeneration can’t heal, for instance fire.

Shocking Appearance – when the creature is first encountered this Rank must be resisted by mental fortitude Qualities like Willpower and Bravery, taking the difference as Failure Ranks (like environmental damage).

Swarm – when a large group of small creatures acts as a single unit it becomes a greater threat. Qualities are those of the individual, but Swarm replaces size (it can be Average). It’s based on weight of numbers, good for resisting all physical attacks and splitting attacks.



Sample creatures

Amphisbaena

This odd reptilian beast about the size of a calf is mostly found in Orthedia. It has two heads, one at each end of its sinuous lizard body, each capable of independent thought. It is intelligent and has the power of speech. The heads usually have personalities that are just slightly different – they might banter but rarely have serious disagreements, and seem to have an instinctive connection regarding control of the body. Its main food is ants, so it doesn't prey on people but is quite capable of defending itself if necessary.

There are four legs with odd chicken-like feet on which it can run at great speed in either direction. The eyes appear to glow in low light. Males have upward-curving horns on their heads. The fangs are venomous. It has powerful regenerative abilities, though stories that if cut in half the pieces will rejoin are exaggerated. It is immune to cold, and in folklore its skin confers protection from cold and ailments caused by it like colds, chills and arthritis (it would certainly act as a cold-retardant material).

Strengths: Expert [+4] Two-headed, Good [+2] Agility, Good [+2] Survival, Expert [+4] Fast Runner, Expert [+4] Arcane Resistance (cold)*, Good [+2] Regeneration, Good [+2] Poisonous Bite, Good [+2] Night Vision

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Split Personality (for making difficult decisions)

† Two-headed: it's effectively two separate beings with a shared set of physical resources and low-level telepathy about using them. This Quality can boost bites against a single target or multiple targets, help to avoid surprise, etc.

† Poisonous Bite: extra attack vs toughness Qualities after a successful bite attack, doing straightforward damage.

Bear

This is the brown bear, found high up in the food chain in hills and forests in most parts of the Realms. (The small yellow Honey Bears of eastern Orthedia are completely different.) General advice is to stay away. “Do not meddle in the affairs of bears”, they say, “for they are big buggers and quick to anger.”

Strengths: Good [+2] Large, Good [+2] Scavenger, Good [+2] Predator, Expert [+4] Strong, Good [+2] Dangerous When Roused

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Large

† Dangerous When Roused: bears really just want to get on and do their thing, but are terrifying defenders when faced with an apparent threat like being attacked or someone getting too close to their cubs. In such a situation this adds on to attacks.

Bugra

These great lizards are native to the desert lands of Ar-Karap. They are domesticated (in a loose sense) by the Dandwarin nomads to serve as beasts of burden. A Bugra is the size of a large horse with long thin legs to hold it away from the hot sand and a ridged hide that collects dew in the cold nights. They're not especially fast, but they are strong. In disposition they're like a camel crossed with a large boulder.

Strengths: Good [+2] Large, Good [+2] Scavenger, Expert [+4] Strong, Good [+2] Tough Hide, Good [+2] Stubborn, Good [+2] Desert Survival

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Large, Poor [-2] Vulnerable to Cold

Demon

These beings come in all sorts of shapes, sizes and power levels. Most are basically humanoid with additional features like horns, bat-wings, tails, pointy teeth, claws, spikes, scales and so on. They can be as small as a cat or as tall as a house, but most are in the human size range.

Demons are natives of the Nether Realms, a parallel dimension with lots of darkness and fire and stuff and, as it turns out, rather well-organised public services. Sometimes they are summoned to the Middle Realms through magic, usually with the intent of compelling them to perform some service before returning to their home. More powerful ones may be able to open a gateway themselves, usually to send henchthings through.



For the rank and file you can think of them like football supporters. They are followers of Evil, taking every opportunity to talk it up and do down supporters of the other side (from virtuous kings to buxom white witches). They sneer, snarl and rant, and adapt their bodies for a nastier look. They gather evil artifacts for their collections and seek out the company of well-known players. They don't have any highly developed metaphysics: they just like the sense of belonging and purpose. Higher-ups like the demon princes sometimes have a more free-thinking view, which usually involves manipulating others to increase their personal power.

Qualities vary quite a lot, but here's a bog standard one.

Strengths: Good [+4] Evil, Good [+2] Scary Appearance, Good [+2] Strong, Good [+2] Darksense, Good [+2] Bat Wings, Good [+2] Arcane Resistance – Fire

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Evil (makes them vulnerable to some tactics, e.g. appropriate persuasion or magic)

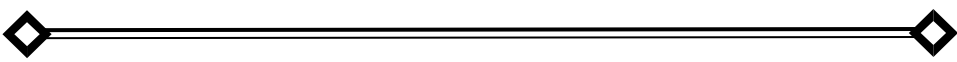
Dragon

People talk a lot of nonsense about dragons. Some say they're the eldest of all inhabitants of Median; some say they're gods in human form; some say they're the descendants of giant reptiles that once dominated the world. All you really need to know is that they're colossal lizards with attitude issues and superpowers.

Having said that, there are good reasons for their mystique. They can certainly live over 1000 years, barring mishaps, and grow steadily as they age, from the size of a pony to over 100 feet long. Many are highly intelligent and know many secrets. They have their own kind of magic, which seems to be like mysticism (not relying on external power or foci) but with a greater range of possible effects, though individuals vary a lot in the amount they know. Some are vicious predators; others enjoy a scholarly debate (though dessert is always a possibility). And although we class them as reptiles one can see features of many animal types; and, indeed, of elemental beings of a whole other order.



Most exasperating of all is the variation. Why are there so many different types of dragon, with different colourations and decorative features like crests and horns? One theory popular among scholars is that this is an adaptation: there's only really one species of dragon, but they gradually alter to fit the terrain where they spend their time. They all have the ability to breathe out some form of elemental energy or substance as an attack and/or defence, and this too alters with type. However, scholars trying to work out a reliable scheme for this suffer terribly.



Certainly, it is easy to account for the green dragons occasionally found in the swamps of Kadink, with their breath of noxious gas; the white, frost-breathing dragons of northern Valharia; and the red, fire-breathing dragons frequenting the slumbering volcanoes of the Musty Mountains. But then there are anomalies like the Auld Plaid Worm of Scata, thought to be unique, whose breath when sorely provoked is said to be the sound of a hundred drunken bagpipers.

The differences are further accentuated by their use of treasure. Dragons like to accumulate all sorts of shiny metals and precious stones. They gain these as booty from their meals, or as gifts from those who want to make sure they don't become meals. They use it to dress up. A dragon is always seeking to enhance its appearance by hanging things here, embedding them between scales there, or layering precious materials on top – the different elemental natures seem to have their own ways of fixing things on. When dragons meet they compare their looks; it's a combination of bonding and competition for status. A dragon suffering a serious insult or letdown about its appearance is liable to become upset, causing it to cry elemental tears, storm off or annihilate groups of small bipeds. Older dragons become at least a little more subtle in decoration and balanced in attitude.

There is a degree of mutual respect (though not necessarily liking) between dragons and elves, as the two exist on similar timescales. Dragons and dwarves either cooperate or compete for caves and treasure.

These stats are for a fairly formidable specimen.

Strengths: Master [+6] Large, Expert [+4] Predator, Expert [+2] Intelligent, Expert [+2] Willpower, Good [+2] personality trait (pick one), Expert [+4] Keen Senses, Expert [+4] Breath Weapon*, Expert [+4] Flight, Expert [+4] Long-lived, Good [+2] Tough Hide, plus a couple of dragon magic Qualities

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Large, Poor [-2] Vanity

† *Breath Weapon*: this lets the dragon project whatever its specific breath type is, usually as a straightforward damaging attack as if it were a spell – using the magic effects table for limits of range, area, etc and checking for fatigue (they can only do it so often in a short period). It also gives them Arcane Resistance* to that type of damage: fire, cold, poison, and so on.

† *Long-lived*: the Quality of having been around a while. It helps with certain attempts to remember information or withstand dismaying things.

Faery

These magical creatures, about 1ft tall, live under the hills of Logrin (see *Places*) and enjoy playing tricks on mortals. Although they have no taste for war, some of them have handy spears, bows or slings.

Their dwellings under the hills are possibly in pocket dimensions that open into Logrin, which may connect to form ‘Faeryland’. Sometimes groups come out to dance or dump garbage.

They regard mortals as clumsy, dim and, let’s face it, hairy and smelly, and enjoy playing tricks on them. (Elves they fear and avoid where possible.) They have a type of scrying crystal that records a scene before it and replays it as a sort of miniature illusion later. Faeries like to get together with their friends and watch the most amusing and embarrassing scenes from their collections, and it’s rumoured that there are annual competitions.

Faery magic seems to work like mysticism in that it needs no external power or props, but has a wider range of effects. Forms of illusion or ‘glamour’ are the most common; it also covers dealing with the natural world and generally messing with mortals.

Strengths: Expert [+4] Small, Good [+2] Agility, Expert [+4] Trickery, Good [+2] Music, Good [+2] Dance, Good [+2] Stealth, Expert [+4] Night Vision, plus a couple of faery magic Qualities

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Small, Poor [-2] Aversion to Pure Iron

Gnome

These little humanoids live in colonies in the Godsmile foothills and certain other locations. They're about 2ft tall with brownish skin and pale hair, usually wearing a rough smock. They build earthen mounds with rakish chimneys and extensive tunnel systems. They are, in general, busy constructors, making ramshackle structures out of natural and found materials. There is a saying: "If you want it built fast, get gnomes. If you want it to stay up, get dwarves." In reality, though, most civilised people prefer gnomes to be elsewhere.

Most gnomes are workers, with limited intellects capable of holding only one key directive at once. They tend to repeat this while they perform it: "Dig dig dig dig...", "Build build build build...", "Fight fight fight!" and so on. In spite of this they have a great natural ingenuity, being quick to find useful things and work with them, and are able to carry out limited signed negotiation with each other and other creatures they encounter. (In fact they dislike seeing stuff lying around unused, and at least one town has employed a gnome that's got separated from his group to clear up litter on the common.) Some are overseers, possessing a greater capacity for free thinking: they are able to assess a situation, decide on a directive and issue it to workers. Each colony is run by a queen, who has true intelligence of the sort enjoyed by other creatures. She issues commands and produces eggs.

Strengths: Good [+2] Small, Good [+2] Quick, Good [+2] Scavenging, Good [+2] Climbing, Expert [+4] Ramshackle Construction, Good [+2] Darksense*

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Small, Poor [-2] Limited Intellect, Poor [-2] Obedient

Goblin

These are small, ugly, vicious humanoids with greenish skin. They are basically primitive hunters, but prefer to exist by taking from others. Goblins are usually armed with crude clubs or spears. They're not especially brave or strong-willed and are often found serving (at least nominally) some more powerful evil being. They can be found in quantity more or less anywhere, filling their divinely ordained role as cannon fodder.



Strengths: Good [+2] Small, Good [+2] Vicious (used for fighting), Good [+2] Survival, Good [+2] Sneak, Good [+2] Theft

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Small, Poor [-2] Ugly, Poor [-2] Cowardly

Gryphon

These Orthedian creatures blend the body of a lion with the head and wings of an eagle. Embodying two such kingly beasts makes them very popular with the heraldic crowd, but to the farmers they're basically a machine for converting your livestock into poop on your roof. Gryphons have animal-level intelligence and a fiery nature. They do, however, seem to be able to recognise a common cause (like a forest fire or infestation of undead) and cooperate with other species for short periods. They nest on mountains and inaccessible hillsides, and are particularly fond of horsemeat. A few people have trained them from youngsters to use as mounts or sentinels, but they're not really safe with strangers.

Strengths: Good [+2] Large, Expert [+4] Predator, Expert [+4] Flight, Good [+2] Athletic, Good [+2] Fierce, Expert [+4] Keen Eyesight

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Large

Jelly Corsairs

These unusual pirates haunt the waters round the southwestern islands called The Swarm. The area is home to jellyfish the size of wagons, not normally interested in humans but dangerous if encountered by accident. The Corsairs have worked out that the jellies are colony creatures and found some way, presumably with magical aid, to insert themselves and take over control of the colony. Once joined they usually don't come out again, and in fact most of the Corsairs remain free, using the jellies as boarding craft (one needs a certain mindset to be bonded successfully anyway).

Strengths: Expert [+4] Large, Good [+2] Pirate, Good [+2] Willpower, Expert [+4] Jelly Body, Good [+2] Aquatic, Expert [+4] Stinging Tentacles (straightforward damage)

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Large, Poor [-2] Resist Wind

† Aquatic: used for speed, manoeuvrability and survival.

† Jelly Body: most of the bulk of the fusion is jellyfish, and that doesn't respond to damage in the same way as a human body. This Quality defends against impact and weapons, but not against energy.

Jeopard

A large cat that hangs around in hazardous locations in Wochilat and Tek Wei. It's a superb ambush predator.

Strengths: Expert [+4] Predator, Expert [+4] Athletic, Expert [+4] Stealthy, Good [+2] Ambush Attack, Expert [+4] Keen Senses, Good [+2] Night Vision

Weaknesses: none

Rat

These rodents can be found almost everywhere. They might not be big or strong, but they're smart, adaptable and resilient.

Strengths: Expert [+4] Small, Expert [+4] Scavenger, Good [+2] Gnawing, Good [+2] Sensitive Smell

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Small

Squrtle

These dangerous beasts, inhabiting the great lake of Murklemere, are named for mixing features of both squid and turtle. They have a hard shell, streamlined for rapid travel through the water, powerful clawed flippers, and a head with bulging eyes and long, strong tentacles with which they grasp prey. They sometimes attempt to extract the meaty goodness from passing ships, and experienced sailors carry clubs or knives to discourage the groping tentacles.

Strengths: Expert [+4] Large, Good [+2] Predator, Good [+2] Grasping Tentacles, Expert [+4] Armoured Shell, Expert [+4] Swimming

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Large

Swamp Shambler

These brutish creatures are found in Kadink and other temperate to warm locales, mostly in swamps but also in other damp areas. They often have the rough outline of a large human, but are actually carnivorous plants that kill prey and then gradually break down its flesh for nutrients.



A shambler at rest looks like an ordinary pile of vegetation, made up of rotting leaves, moss, twining roots and such. They are patient hunters, sitting under a tree or half-submerged in a bog until a victim arrives and the shambler can make a surprise attack. Its 'arms' are actually clusters of tendrils with a reach of 10 feet or more that immobilise and constrict. It's rumoured that much larger specimens can be found deep in the swamps.

Strengths: Expert [+4] Plant, Good [+2] Strong, Expert [+4] Grasping Appendages, Expert [+4] Plant Camouflage

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Intellect, Poor [-2] Slow-moving

† Grasping Appendages: once an attack hits successfully, the victim is immobilised. They can't move around, and even small actions like getting a dagger out must beat this Quality's TN. It also limits the creature's movement somewhat as it must stay in reach of the victim, and each 'arm' can only entangle one victim at once. (If both arms are full the creature will retreat if it can, or bludgeon other combatants with their friends.)

Tundra Cats

These are predators of the Norwast, the icy land in the far north between Valharia and Scata. They are great cats in a variety of colourations reminiscent of species elsewhere. They are big, tough and smart, and some claim they have a supernatural ability to glimpse things far off.

They dislike the undead Wizen and sometimes go out of their way to destroy them. Other humanoids are usually safe as long as they behave sensibly, as the cats don't think they're worth the risk to take. (Hobblings should not go out in the snow alone though.) There are hunters' tales of places sacred to the cats, like burial grounds or natural rock fortresses, though no direct witnesses have ever returned.

Strengths: Good [+2] Large, Master [+6] Predator, Expert [+4] Athletic, Good [+2] Cunning, Expert [+4] Keen Senses, Good [+2] Night Vision,

Expert [+4] Survival, Expert [+4] Resist Cold, Good [+2] See Things Far Off*

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Large, Poor [-2] Heat Intolerant

*† See Things Far Off** lets the cat view a place or being it knows as if it were there, though the vision is usually brief and fragmentary.

Weasel, Giant

These are the beasts ridden by the warriors of Helongor. The weasels are lithe and quick, bounding through the grass, with long bodies brown above and white below (moulting to all white in more northerly parts in winter). Left to their own devices they're deadly predators, pouncing from ambush. They're hard to control for anyone not used to them, mixing mischief and viciousness. The downside of using them is that they cannot keep up a fast pace for as long as a horse.

Strengths: Good [+2] Large, Good [+2] Predator, Good [+2] Agile, Expert [+4] Quick Reactions, Good [+2] Keen Senses, Good [+2] Stealth, Good [+2] Night Vision

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Large, Poor [-2] Wilful (hard to control), Poor [-2] Sustained Effort

Weremantis

Some types of lycanthrope are just strange, but some are extremely dangerous. One of the latter is the weremantis, a merciless hunter with lightning reflexes and a tough carapace. Its reverse-jointed arms have serrated edges to slash and trap prey, and its compound eyes give it heightened sensitivity to movement. Intimate relationships with a female in either form are short-lived, as instinct drives them to eat their mate. Weremantis are commonest in Tek Wei and Wochilat.

Werecreatures

The creatures known as lycanthropes are thought to be the result of ancient sorcerous experiments to harness animal vitality to make good soldiers and workers, which instead produced powerful predators capable of hiding in human form.

Survivors of attacks occasionally find that their wounds are magically infected and they turn into lycanthropes themselves. (At the end of each scene where a character has been exposed, *before* damage is recovered, the GM makes a secret roll for the character using Qualities that oppose physical infection and magical transformation, difficulty Average. If it fails the GM can narrate the gradual transformation – presumably the PCs will seek some sort of magical cure.)

There are several known types of lycanthrope, mercifully few in numbers. Nansin, the stern judge of the moon, abhors these perversions of nature: under her full light they are forced to reveal their true form, and she empowers her metal silver to destroy them.

Strengths: Expert [+4] Predator, Expert [+4] Lightning Reflexes, Good [+2] Strength, Good [+2] Agility, Good [+2] Stealth, Good [+2] Serrated Forearms, Good [+2] Tough Carapace, Expert [+4] Damage Resistance* (not vs silver)

Weaknesses: none

Wereplatypus

Another type of werecreature is the Duck-Billed Egg-Laying Mammal That Walks Like a Man. Those it infects are doomed to a life of confusion and ridicule. They are found near lakes and rivers, hunting in the water at night and making large burrows in banks.

The transformation brings body hair, growth of the snout, webbed digits and a broad tail. They have venomous spurs on their ankles and wrists, used in fights over territory and mates (though as numbers are low meetings with other wereplatypuses are rare). In humans this poison causes excruciating pain and swelling, lasting days or even weeks, and is the vector for the lycanthropy. Their gait on land is a little awkward, but in the water they are swift and graceful, catching small creatures for food. They seem to be able to locate living things even in pitch darkness.

They're not especially aggressive – one *might* take a child alone in the water, but in general they avoid people, so most communities just let them get on with it. Sometimes there's some friction over them depleting fish stocks, and of course family members find a loved one's aquatic excursions troubling and might seek help to investigate or bring them back. The creatures do defend themselves if attacked and unable to escape.

Strengths: Good [+2] Scavenger, Good [+2] Strong, Good [+2] Endurance, Expert [+4] Swimming, Good [+2] Blindsight, Expert [+4] Damage Resistance* (not vs silver), Good [+2] Poisoned Spur (straightforward damage)

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Confusion (easily swayed about its position in the scheme of things), Poor [-2] Slow On Land

† Blindsight: a combination of bio-electricity and movement sensed through the bill, allows detection of living things within about 20 feet.

Wizen

These creatures live in the icy Norwast. Or rather they don't, as they are walking corpses. Unlike most such things they have retained some intellect and will, and followed rumours and legends to a place where they can be free from discrimination and pitchforks. Most humanoids can't survive here, but the Wizen aren't particularly bothered by the cold.

Sometimes ice crystals freeze up their joints, but they just lie down and rest until they thaw, however many weeks it takes.

Their secret is a fortress out in the wastes, built of rock and ice by unnaturally strong hands and home to a community of the dead. They do not willingly reveal its location – even here they have their enemies, like the marauding Tundra Cats and parties of Valhar warriors out to make their names.

Strengths: Expert [+4] Dead*, Good [+2] Strong, Good [+2] occupation (specify one, dimly retained from when alive), Good [+2] personality trait (ditto), Good [+2] Night Vision

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Dead (tends to colour social interactions)

Zombie

These are the inferior model of walking dead, sad and repulsive creatures animated by magic. They are strong and hard to hurt, but have only enough mind to follow the commands of a master or perhaps vague instincts from their living days (like going home or getting revenge). They're basically cannon fodder.

Strengths: Good [+2] Dead* , Good [+2] Strong, Good [+2] State of Decay, Good [+2] Night Vision

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Dead (tends to colour social interactions), Poor [-2] Stupid, Poor [-2] Slow

† *State of Decay:* zombies are often imperfectly preserved, leading to various bits rotting and eventually falling off. This is shocking to see and, let's face it, to smell. At the beginning of each close encounter with one or more zombies (but only once per scene) apply it as a hazard opposed by Qualities of will and constitution. (The GM could play around with different ranks of decay – meeting yuckier zombies in the same scene would probably require another contest.)

Ten Magical Thingies

Introduction

This section originally appeared as a small PDF supplement of the same name, and has been folded into the revised edition. It's aimed at giving the GM some amusing and interesting items to place in the players' path.

Some of these are spells embedded in items, and those Qualities are explained as bullets in the entries. (They could, of course, be found as spells separate from the item.)

Some items could exist as different versions at varying levels of potency, so they're described as "Quality [Rank]" for you to customise.

Acknowledgements

The Sixpence People owe a nod to my favourite critters from Adamant Entertainment's *Underworld* game of modern subterranean fantasy. The Peril Protection Pendant owes a nod to Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*.

Corset of Defence

This item was invented at the behest of court ladies, both the day crowd and the evening shift workers, to aid them in escaping drunken and frisky nobles. It has found favour in other milieus too.

Basically it has a Quality of *Defence** [Rank], giving the wearer its MOD benefit to dodge out of the way of blows, grapples and such. In most

cases it is also a [Rank] *Corset* – that is, its materials and workmanship keep pace with its magical properties.

Delmolio's Patent Cure-all

The Delmolio's brand is known throughout most of the civilised Realms, due mainly to energetic and persistent marketing. He's a quack and a charlatan, but his products are just useful enough to keep him from being shut down, and keenly priced too. (Of course you get what you pay for, which in this case includes occasional irritating side-effects.)

The 'Patent Cure-all' is perhaps the most famous of all, to the extent that someone might say, "But then I drank a Delmolio's." It bills itself as, "The sovereign remedy to all ills and mender of all hurts!" In reality it makes you feel a bit better and recover a bit quicker.

Effects. In game terms it's usually ranked Good, though there is an Extra Strength version that's Expert.

- ‡ On drinking it, MOD Damage Ranks are not eliminated but converted to Failure Ranks, making them quicker to get rid of through natural healing or Fortune Points. (An Average version – maybe past its sell-by date – would be counted as MOD 1 as usual.)
- ‡ You can add the MOD for resisting diseases and poisons for the next hour or two.

Side-effects. "Our secret recipe includes many potent herbs and enchantments." Well, it certainly tastes pretty foul, with a strange tingling sensation going down and a tendency to see rainbow auras around things for an hour or so. Sometimes, in addition to the benefits, a minor magical mishap occurs. Roll 2d6: on double 1s the drinker is afflicted by some magical alteration like donkey's ears or purple skin. This is generally cosmetic with a bit of nuisance value and perhaps a Downshift in some situations (especially social). It wears off after a couple of hours. The Extra Strength Cure-all version is the same, but with the side-effect on *any* double – the main reason why it's not found very often.

Disposable Armour

The ABRA Co. (Ko-Sha, Ong Ong) is an alliance of magi and artisans producing “labour-saving devices for the discerning adventurer”. In practical terms, they specialise in selling you things to fill needs you didn’t know you had.

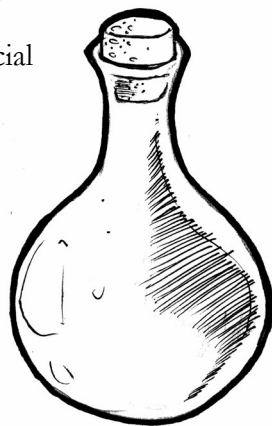
The Disposable Armour is a sort of thin cloth overall, greyish with a pattern vaguely resembling chainmail, easily carried in a corner of a pack. You pull it on over normal clothing – it’d go over a leather jerkin, but not bulky mail or plate – and activate the enchantment. It then gives *Good [+2] Armour** for a scene, after which the magic is exhausted and you simply throw it away. You can, if you wish, take a Downshift to shrug off a single attack altogether – the attacker lands a lucky blow and burns out the enchantment prematurely.

Divisibility Potion

Drinking this potion splits you into a dozen small replicas of yourself for a scene – useful for sneaking around or swarming enemies.

The replicas can only communicate with each other by normal speech – often loud argument, in fact. Assign them numbers for keeping track. Number 1 has a special status as the ‘keystone’: they’ll be the one the others recombine into when the spell ends, flashing back as magical energy blobs from wherever they are. The duplicates recognise this and might give No. 1 some grudging deference as the leader.

Each individual has your original Qualities. Their size is one level smaller, and this is used if you send an individual off, for instance to scout somewhere. They can also act as a unit, with the



Swarm Quality at one level higher than your original size (minimum Average).

Items are a bit tricky. Each replica has the Shadow items necessary for practising skills, but character items and Props remain with Number 1 unless passed across (and will return magically when they recombine).

Track damage for any duplicate that acts on its own *and* for the Swarm as a whole. For every 5 Failure or Damage Ranks taken by an individual the whole takes 1, and if an individual zeroes out the whole takes a Damage Rank. The Swarm as a whole inherits any damage you had when you split, and each replica inherits a fifth of that; when you recombine you keep the Swarm's damage levels.

Glamour Crystal

These items appear as semi-precious stones, and might have material worth based on that alone. But in fact they are storage devices, holding an illusionary scene with a full complement of senses. When the trigger conditions are met the scene springs forth, overlaying the nearby area in the minds of those within it. They can wander through and observe its elements. The scene can even be a moving, changing tableau, allowing animated elements or a recording of a brief set of events. (You could even use it as a message, but these crystals aren't trivial to create.) The illusion may be set to remain in existence as a static scene, terminate at the end of a cycle or keep repeating itself.

The elements of the illusion don't have real substance: they ripple like water if touched, and have the feel of water too. That's not to say they're totally harmless though. The glamour could contain **hazards**, like an attacking knight or a wall of fire. These can be given whatever Qualities the GM thinks fit and attack a character (and be resisted) in the normal way – but if they succeed they inflict just 1 Failure Rank of shock regardless of the actual result. A victim who knows for sure that it's only an illusion gets an Upshift to resist.

If the crystal is **destroyed** it releases all its stored sense impressions in one go, giving everyone nearby a Failure Rank of “Whoa!” (and a confusing mass of data – roll to pick out useful bits).

There is a greater peril associated with the stones, though: sometimes they have **parasites**. There is a type of being labelled ‘ethereal interlopers’ by scholars, who are pretty sure they originate on a different plane of existence. Interlopers are not matter as we understand it, and somehow are able to slip *inside the illusion*, even while it’s stored in the crystal. There they lie dormant and wait till the glamour is triggered by potential prey. They feed on the negative emotions of living beings, and can alter their appearance to look like an element of the glamour, changing the experience of those within it to generate the feelings they crave. They don’t react to contact like the rest of the illusion, allowing solids to pass through seamlessly and giving a cold, tingly feeling. As a hazard, though, they work the same way as the rest of the glamour.

Ethereal Interloper

Strengths: Expert [+4] Incorporeal*, Expert [+4] Emotion Feed*, Good [+2] Intelligent, Good [+2] Cruel, Expert [+4] Alter Appearance

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Withstand Positive Emotions

† *Emotion Feed**: this is kind of a variant of the creature ability *Energy Drain**. If anyone nearby definitely feels an emotion (in this case negative ones, especially fear) – taking cues from the reactions of the players, or from explicit influences like horrible creatures or spells – the creature can feed on it. Roll this Quality against a TN from any Qualities the target might have that would help them resist the negative emotion: Strong Will, Courage, Unfazeable, etc. If the creature wins it gets just 1 point of energy regardless of the result, or 2 points if the victim took any damage Ranks, balancing the fact that it doesn’t have to touch the victim but can draw from anyone nearby. If the emotional influence actually causes a victim to zero out the creature automatically gets 2 points. It may be wise for the GM to

note characters' relevant Qualities ahead of time and make the rolls without explaining them.

‡ *Alter Appearance*: the creature's natural form is a shifting silvery energy field, somewhat two-dimensional, but it can manifest whatever appearance and sound it likes in our reality with a bit of concentration.

‡ *Withstand Positive Emotions*: if nearby beings genuinely feel happiness etc the GM must assign that a Rank for intensity, which then becomes a hazard the creature must resist or take Failure Ranks. Zeroing out means it departs to its own plane.

Ninmuzi's Guardian

If there's one thing the god/goddess Ninmuzi hates it's stealing life energy. These amulets, made of fine woods carved with Ninmuzi's symbols, are usually owned by the higher ranking of her/his faithful. They have two properties: a permanent protection against such theft, and a retaliatory attack against anyone who tries it.

‡ *Protection Against Energy Drain** [Rank]: Energy Drain* is listed as a creature ability, but there are certainly spells working the same way. This Quality simply adds its MOD to resist the drain, and is permanently on.

‡ *Life-force Retaliation* [Rank]: this is an active Arcane power, triggered by an Energy Drain* attempt on the wearer. A tendril of green energy attacks the drainer, doing straightforward damage. It bypasses *Dead** and *Incorporeal**. If the drainer has a pool of points of stolen energy, this effect's damage is split as equally as possible between punishing them (always the first point) and liberating that energy. Retaliation takes a while to recharge, so it only triggers once per scene.

Peril Protection Pendant

This is another item from the ABRA catalogue. It has a permanent effect of hooking into the wearer's senses and preventing them from seeing anything that might alarm them. It does this by overlaying the relevant impressions with something the wearer will find safe and comforting instead – often something from childhood experience or stories. For example, a troll might appear as a 9-foot bipedal bunny, and an approaching zombie might look like your grandma and smell of fresh bread. It doesn't alter things they might be carrying – so your grandma might have a meat cleaver. Inanimate hazards are similarly altered but not hidden: a swinging bludgeon trap might look like a pillow on a pendulum, and a precipice might appear to have lots of cushions at the bottom. There's a certain knack to adapting to the magic's logic, and not everybody can manage it (which can get you into trouble).

The reason it's worth a try is that the Pendant opposes actively horrifying influences. It can block an influence of lower Rank as a simple contest, but equal or higher Ranks call for a resistance roll helped by the Pendant's MOD. If the nastiness leaks through it manifests as changes in the Pendant's illusion – maybe the big bunny has big pointy teeth.

Portable Steed

This is a sort of wallet that can be carried around in a pocket and, when needed, opened up to magically produce a riding animal. It's a Plot Point item. You could give it a Rank and use that to determine how long the steed is maintained – when the time expires it kind of folds up back into the wallet. You can also put it away deliberately before the time's up.

Unfortunately there's a certain amount of variability in what the magic gives you. It's always a suitable thing to carry the user at a reasonable pace for a reasonable duration. The GM can make stuff up, or use the following chart with a 2d6 roll. The player can, if they wish, spend a

Fortune Point to bypass fickle fate and get something appropriate to their current situation.

- 2 Bicycle
- 3 Group of goblins carrying chair
- 4 Weasel (giant)
- 5 Cat (giant)
- 6 Dog (giant)
- 7 Horse or Pony
- 8 Ox
- 9 Bugra
- 10 Elephant
- 11 Giant
- 12 Dragon

The creature is defined very simply. It has a pair of Qualities for size at [Rank, usually one level higher than that of the item's user but possibly different or even Swarm instead of size] and Poor. It also has a pair for its type at Good and Poor, so that positive and negative aspects of each will come into play in different circumstances. For example, a human could use it and get one of the Giant Weasels of Helongor. Then the steed would be Good [+2] Large, Poor [-2] Large, Good [+2] Weasel, Poor [-2] Weasel. The steed serves well, though it might make a fuss or otherwise act according to its nature.

Sixpence People

It's not clear where these came from. Perhaps they were created by someone who loved money, or as a warning to someone who did, or by a conman or thief, or someone who wanted to punish one. Anyway, they are little homunculi that appear as ordinary coins when dormant, but sprout arms and legs and will perform tasks for their owner. ('Owner' seems to be a vague term, but based around having them



for a while and treating them well.) They communicate using expressive gestures.

The name comes from early sightings, but in fact they've been observed in the form of various different currencies. Those early reports had them as rather basic creatures, emerging from dormancy to follow simple commands and then subsiding again. But as time goes on they seem to be staying active more of the time and exhibiting more independent behaviour, including social interactions and even building things. One reliable source has seen a pair of them accompanied by a couple of pennies running around – leading to the strange and somewhat unnerving conclusion that they're minting.

Sixpence Person

Strengths: Master [+6] Small, Expert [+4] Coin, Good [+2] Metal Body, Average [0] Darksense

Weaknesses: Poor [-2] Small

† *Coin*: this is mainly for looking like a coin to avoid detection, but could conceivably be used for other coin-like things like rolling around. It's not used for physical resilience: that's what *Metal Body* is for.

Stormblade

These are the hand-and-a-half, or 'bastard', swords given to the Paladins of Elal. These mighty and righteous servants of the ruling god advance the cause of order and authority. Joining their ranks involves many tests of prowess and character.

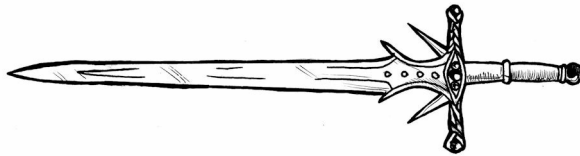
A Stormblade has an air daemon, a servitor of Elal, bound into it by divine magic. The wielder cannot communicate with this entity, but can

call upon certain powers. In game terms, the weapon has the following Qualities.

† At least *Good* [+2] *Bastard Sword* to reflect the materials, workmanship and size. Higher ranking folks can have better ones.

† *Air Daemon** [varies]: the common version has this at *Good*, but again it can go up (often, but not always, in step with the quality). There are two uses. It can **absorb elemental air energy** from attacks against the wielder, notably wind and lightning, adding its MOD to defence as a permanent effect. As an active power it can **sheathe the blade in lightning**, adding MOD damage to attacks and giving an Upshift for social impressiveness. Note that the daemon has a veto on the use of its powers and will not grant them to a wielder who's in poor standing with Elal.

† *Poor* [-2] *Air Daemon*: carrying all that divinely bestowed air-power around has its downside: air-related things love it. Birds want to come and sit near it or on it, which can be a problem if you're trying to escape notice. Winds ruffle your hair when they don't bother anyone else. In a thunderstorm, lightning tries to arrive close to its brother.



The Sarger game

As characters have adventures and develop, the players might want to increase their standing in society and reflect that in Qualities. Here are some you can use.

Players might buy them as experience, or gain them as rewards for significant achievements. You can take each one more than once, reflecting specific things or persons. They usually start small (Average) and build up, though it's possible to jump right in at a higher Rank if they receive a great gift.

This could help you to run adventures partially at the domain level rather than the adventuring level, covering matters like politics, trade, war and espionage. If you want to do a lot of that, you might want to add more detailed Qualities to places and people.

Optional: for each Rank a Domain or Retainer has above Good in its central Quality, give it an additional Quality at Good to flesh out its capabilities, personality or ambience.

Title* – a form of official recognition bestowed by an authority within a group, like a ruler, high priest or head of a community. Claiming your title boldly may help social interactions with relevant groups. (For instance Prince of Thieves won't help you in courtly diplomacy, but will in the dodgy part of town.)

Domain* – a location you own that affords a level of safety and resources. The Rank indicates the size and opulence from Average [0] Cottage to Master [+6] Palace or Castle. The MOD helps with damage recovery while there. It also avoids accommodation costs! A domain can generate wealth, as long as someone is managing it – often that requires a Retainer. Of course it can be a rich source of story hooks – ‘You get a message that there's been a fire at your manor house in Orthedia.’

Retainer – you have a loyal follower who performs certain functions for you. They have one of the following roles (or another you think of), acting as a Quality at [Rank] - and obviously they can just do things for you without any rolling. These differ from hirelings (Prop people) in being more durable (get injured and temporarily taken out) and more loyal. You should probably name them.

‡ Guard – will protect your person, or a location.

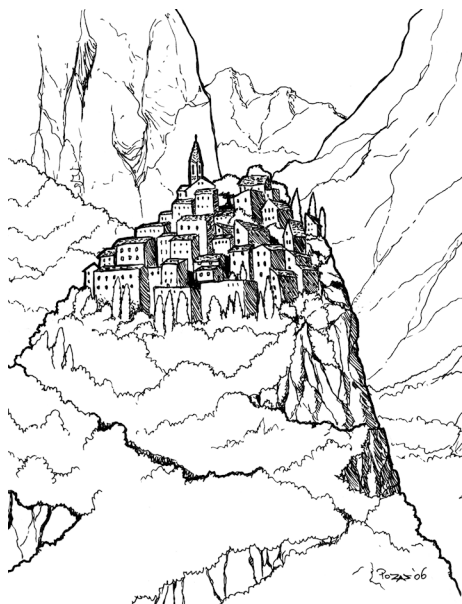
‡ Servant – carries your stuff, cleans your clothes, looks after the horses, etc. Can add to your appearance, making an impression on guests.

‡ Captain – looks after the military affairs of a domain.

‡ Steward – looks after the administrative affairs of a domain. Helps with generating wealth and looking after visitors.

‡ Spymaster – helps with uncovering secret information about local goings-on and other domains. If you want that sort of thing.

‡ Adviser – knows about a specific subject area and can provide guidance or practical help.



Adventure: The Little Shrine of Doom

This is a simple adventure outline to help you get started in QMR. It's a mini-dungeon: there aren't many rooms and progress through it will be pretty linear, but as it's short hopefully that won't chafe too much.

The way to the shrine

Beginning

The characters are in Polliver, a small village beside a swamp. The most obvious location for this is in Kadink, but you can put it pretty much anywhere that'll accommodate swamps (change the village name if you like). What the characters are doing there is largely up to the players. Inform them that they have met up and work out some sketchy justification as a group, or run through some introduction in the inn or general store if you prefer.

They will realise that the locals are regarding them suspiciously – if it's Kadink, even more suspiciously than normal! You might have them check to realise this as a Good task if they have suitable perceptive abilities, but it's pretty important that they get it so if there's any doubt just tell them. (If they don't take this bait, find a reason for the locals to approach them – e.g. a PC is from an organisation known to right wrongs.)

Turns out that earlier that day a bunch of armed men in black turned up looking for a swamp guide and took one of the villagers, Erlik Vandacott, by force, disappearing into the swamp. The villagers would

like their fellow back (“He owes me money!”). If pressed they’ll identify a young fellow named Beebo as the person currently around who’s best suited to guide the party. (He’s here because he’s too lazy and cowardly to go out and do honest work, but will help the characters if paid.)

Villagers. If you need Qualities, for instance if there’s a fight for some reason, most just have Good [+2] Homeland: Kadink (or wherever); some also have Good in a profession. Beebo has Good [+2] Swamp Knowledge.

What’s going on?

(Don’t tell the players this bit.) The kidnappers are Killian Blackstar, a young Priest of Azanüt seeking to build his fortune, and his henchmen. Killian has learned of an ancient shrine to his god located in this swamp, and seeks objects of power that may still be within. He knows how to get past the shrine’s defences, but he doesn’t know how to get through the swamp safely – hence the kidnap.

Through the swamp

Tracking the kidnappers shouldn’t be hard, because if the characters can’t do it there’s no adventure! You might ask for a check with suitable Qualities, or describe it in such a way as to make it plausible without. If the group has Beebo he’ll take care of that for them – make a couple of mentions of him finding signs to follow.

On the way the group will encounter scratchy plants, stinky rotting vegetation, treacherous mud, biting insects and the like. Treat the whole swamp as an Average [7] hazard, wearing the characters down with Failure ranks if they fail to resist it. If they have Beebo they get an Upshift.

That matters because along the way they’ll encounter a **swamp shambler** (stats in the Creatures section). It’s camouflaged as

plant stuff – see whether they notice it or it gets surprise when it attacks. When it's defeated anyone poking around in its remains or the place it was sitting will find Average [0] Petty Valuables, a Slow Burn Prop consisting of odd coins and jewellery from its previous prey.

The shrine... of evil!

Eventually the party reaches its destination: a low stone building in the shape of a pyramid with the top cut off, partly covered in vegetation. It's obviously quite old, and looks deserted. An empty doorway leads inside. Sensitive characters might detect a faint residue of evil from the building. Knowledgeable ones might be able to interpret the carvings round the door as connected with the cult of Azanüt. There's enough mud and debris round the entrance that it's very obvious a group of people have gone in recently.

Level 1

A corridor leads in 10 feet to a square stone chamber about 25 feet across. It's dark inside, so the party will need some sort of light source – only a faint light comes through the entranceway. This is obviously a small temple, with statues, a stone altar and braziers. It's an Average task to identify Azanüt on a good look at the fittings. However, before they can spend time on that they'll meet the residents.

Bloodbats. These creatures resemble large mutant bats, about 1ft long in the body. The most notable differences are a long, dagger-like proboscis that they stick into animals to feed on blood, and a set of six somewhat insect-like legs for grabbing on to victims. These ones live in the old shrine and fly out to hunt. They don't have any loot. When the kidnapers came through they killed a couple (taking the bodies) and drove the rest off – finding signs of the fight is an Expert task. There are

about 1½ times as many bloodbats as you have PCs, but treat them as minions so taking one out is just complicated.

Good [+2] Small, Good [+2] Predator, Good [+2] Flight, Good [+2] Sharp Proboscis (used for puncturing and for draining blood once attached), Good [+2] Grasping Legs (resist being detached); Poor [-2] Small.



The doors. On the same wall as the entry are two wooden doors, one either side. They're locked but somewhat decayed – only Average to pick the lock or force them open. They're both small store-rooms, a walk-in cupboard with shelves.

- ≠ In the first one opened is a small collection of goblets, candlesticks and the like. It's Good [+2] Evil Silverware, a One-Shot Prop that'll need unloading in the right place because of its markings.
- ≠ The second room appears to be empty, but an Average search reveals a small glass vial in a back corner. It contains thick green liquid, and anyone able to read the scratched ink runes (a scholarly task) can make out 'demon' and 'protection'. It's a Good [+2] Potion of Demon Armour*, a One-Shot Prop causing the drinker to develop tough scaly skin. This gives MOD protection against physical injury for a scene, and also Poor [-2] Demonic Appearance.

The altar. A Good [9] search of the room, aided by faint muddy footprints, reveals that if you rotate a demon face on the altar a flagstone behind it slowly folds down to show a steep, narrow staircase going down to Level 2.

Level 2

The staircase ends in a stone corridor with damp dripping from the walls. About 30 feet ahead a doorway is visible with a faint light beyond.

Reaching the doorway is complicated by a **Good [+2] Pit Trap**. A section of floor swings away if anyone stands on it, dropping them down a hole. Good is the TN to spot it if anyone is specifically looking for traps; to avoid taking damage if triggered; and to climb out if anyone falls in. If you know where it is you can avoid it by edging past along the side walls as an Average task.

The library

The corridor opens into a hexagonal room about 30 feet across, lit by a single torch. The walls hold shelves of books and papers, and on the far side there's a desk. In the middle of the room stands a figure, perhaps mistaken for a statue till it moves, shedding dust: a gaunt, sunken-faced warrior in old bronze armour. When the PCs enter he raises his sword and, as they cannot give the proper passwords, attacks.

Undead guardian. Same stats as a Wizen: Expert [+4] Dead, Good [+2] Strong, Good [+2] Occupation – Warrior, Good [+2] Stubborn, Good [+2] Night Vision; Poor [-2] Dead. He also has a Good [+2] Ancient Bronze Sword*, an enchanted Bonus Prop.

Many of the books and papers round the walls have been attacked by various exotic moulds. (In fact, an enterprising character with specialised knowledge might realise that samples could form a Good [+2] Exotic Mould Collection for sale to a scholar of unusual plants and fungi. Finding one is non-trivial, and who knows what strange projects they might have?) Of what's intact, much bears foreboding symbols of evil that will deter right-thinking folk.

What's really here? Basically it's an opportunity for the GM to plant stuff. There could be clues leading on to a future adventure – maybe a reference to another site set up by the cult or long-standing infiltration in a surprising place. You could go into the history of the shrine. If the characters need it, give them a magic item or two, for instance:

‡ **Expert [+4] Scroll of Healing** – restores MOD Ranks of damage (Average counts as 1).

‡ **Expert [+4] Ring of Spider Summoning** – this is in the desk drawer. It's silver, with a silver webbing filigree over a black stone. It's a Plot Point Prop, containing the Spider Summoning spell which causes a dog-sized spider to appear for a scene and follow the caster's simple commands. It has the Quality *Spider* at the spell's Rank (uses include attacking prey, climbing walls, spinning webs and so on). It's always the same one, no matter how mangled it gets each time, and remembers the way the characters treat it. (For a darker atmosphere you could have a spell to summon a swarm of ordinary spiders instead, but it could be fun to get the characters attached to Googly Goo here.)

The hidden passage

The shelves on the right-hand wall of the library are actually a secret door, opening inwards to reveal a corridor beyond. It's an Expert [11] task to find and open this. (As there's no sign of the people they're following the players should have a pretty good idea that there's further to go, and make an effort to find a way through.)

The passage is about 30 feet long, ending in a sturdy-looking metal-bound door. There seems to be some sort of alcove in the wall at the end. It's an Expert perception task to detect a faint smell of decaying vegetation or notice small holes in the walls half-way along.

Fire chicane – the corridor is trapped, triggered by floor pressure anywhere in the middle half. It taps into swamp gas to project flames across the space. There's about a foot of safety

at floor and ceiling, and a foot's clearance from the opposite wall, though the jets come from alternate walls. For a straightforward attempt to cross you need to resist an Expert hazard, probably with toughness or flexibility. The good news is that the alcove contains a seat where an acolyte would deactivate the trap with a lever to allow approved persons to pass, so only one person needs to get through.

The final chamber

The door is neither locked nor trapped. It opens into a colonnaded room 30ft wide and 50ft long, the inner sanctum of the cult. Inside are Killian Blackstar and his entourage – see box – as well as Erlik cowering in a corner. The bad guys are probably surprised to see the PCs, unless they made a lot of noise in the corridor. In any case, they attempt to destroy these interlopers. (It's probably worth sketching on a sheet of paper to represent the room so the PCs can dodge round the pillars and such.)

At the far end of the room is another statue of Azanüt, flanked by braziers that burn with a sickly green hue. Around the place are many stands, cases and caskets, most of them empty. It was the cult's storehouse for its artifacts, though most of the good stuff is gone now. When the PCs enter Blackstar is standing before a statue of a demonic figure in some smooth black stone, chanting in some guttural language. He pauses just long enough to instruct his minions to "Kill them!", then continues. With another two full turns he will succeed in releasing this demon from its imprisonment, gaining a useful servant (with the sample stats given in *Creatures*). Any substantial distraction will stop him (like inflicting some damage), and he'll also stop if his minions are losing badly and need assistance. Give him some dialogue about how the stuff in here will make him powerful.

The bad guys have clearly got partway through searching the room. They have gathered:

♣ Expert [+4] Jewelled Chalice (mercifully free of cult markings) – One-Shot Prop;

♣ Good [+2] Scroll of Rat Form – One-Shot Prop; thaumaturgic magic turning one person into a rat, lasts a scene unless caster cancels it sooner, resisted with physical and/or mental toughness if unwilling.

If the PCs finish the search they can also find:

♣ Good [+2] Visibility Potion – the drinker becomes supernaturally obvious for a scene – anyone nearby must resist or watch them to the exclusion of all else.

♣ Rubbery Rod – crafted in some natural rubber from the jungles of Wochilat, it's a sort of sceptre in the shape of a green tentacle, a Plot Point Prop holding the miracle Good [+2] Deranging Delineation of Klu*. This causes an image of the bulbous, tentacled head of Azanüt's lieutenant Klu to overlay the caster's own head. All who get a decent look at this squormugamous apparition's face must resist the spell's Rank or go insane – believing they're a chicken, screaming about clowns, attempting to fly, or otherwise becoming thoroughly useless (and even hazardous) for a duration based on Rank. Servants of Azanüt can use their Ordination* Rank to resist.

Finishing off

Assuming the PCs are victorious and there are no complicating factors, you can fast-forward to them returning the grateful Erlik to the village. Find out what they've done with Killian and his followers – will they return in future? Now you just have to give the characters some opportunities to get into trouble with their new loot.

Characters

Killian Blackstar, Priest of Azanüt

DESCRIPTION: Good-looking young man with pale skin, flowing black hair and an arrogant, superior expression. Wears fine black robes. (He could make a good recurring villain if he survives.)

RACE: Human

LEVEL: 2

QUALITIES: Good [+2] Homeland: League of Groth, Good [+2] Organisation: Cult of Azanüt, Good [+2] Flair for the Dramatic (free for human), Good [+2] Ordination – Azanüt*, Good [+2] Lashing Tentacles of Night*, Average [0] Create Undead*, Good [+2] Quick Thinking, Good [+2] Willpower, Good [+2] Social Intrigue.

WEAKNESSES: Poor [-2] Vain.

FORTUNE: 3

PROPS: Average [0] Pouch of Coins (Slow Burn), Good [+2] Fine Robes (One Shot), Good [+2] Dagger (Bonus; will be used to fight).

‡ **Lashing Tentacles of Night*** – a pool of darkness around the caster's feet extrudes tentacles of shadow that attack nearby opponents. Attacks are at the spell's Rank, split as far as Poor for multiple opponents. It lasts for the duration of a conflict.

‡ **Create Undead*** – turns a corpse into an undead creature that will follow your commands. Rank limits the number of creatures you may control at any time, and also how Large they may be. The new creature has its old Qualities plus Good [+2] Dead, an extra Rank of Strong, and Poor in Slow and Stupid.

Henchmen

These are just Good [+2] Thugs, dressed in black, armed with swords and obedient to Killian. Treat them as minions. There are about a dozen, but fine-tune to suit the party. All told they have Average [0] Pocket Change.

Deadbats

Killian brought back two Bloodbats the group killed as undead 'pets'. They look normal unless you spot the sword wounds, and they still seek blood. Run these as full creatures, not minions – they'll be fairly tough.

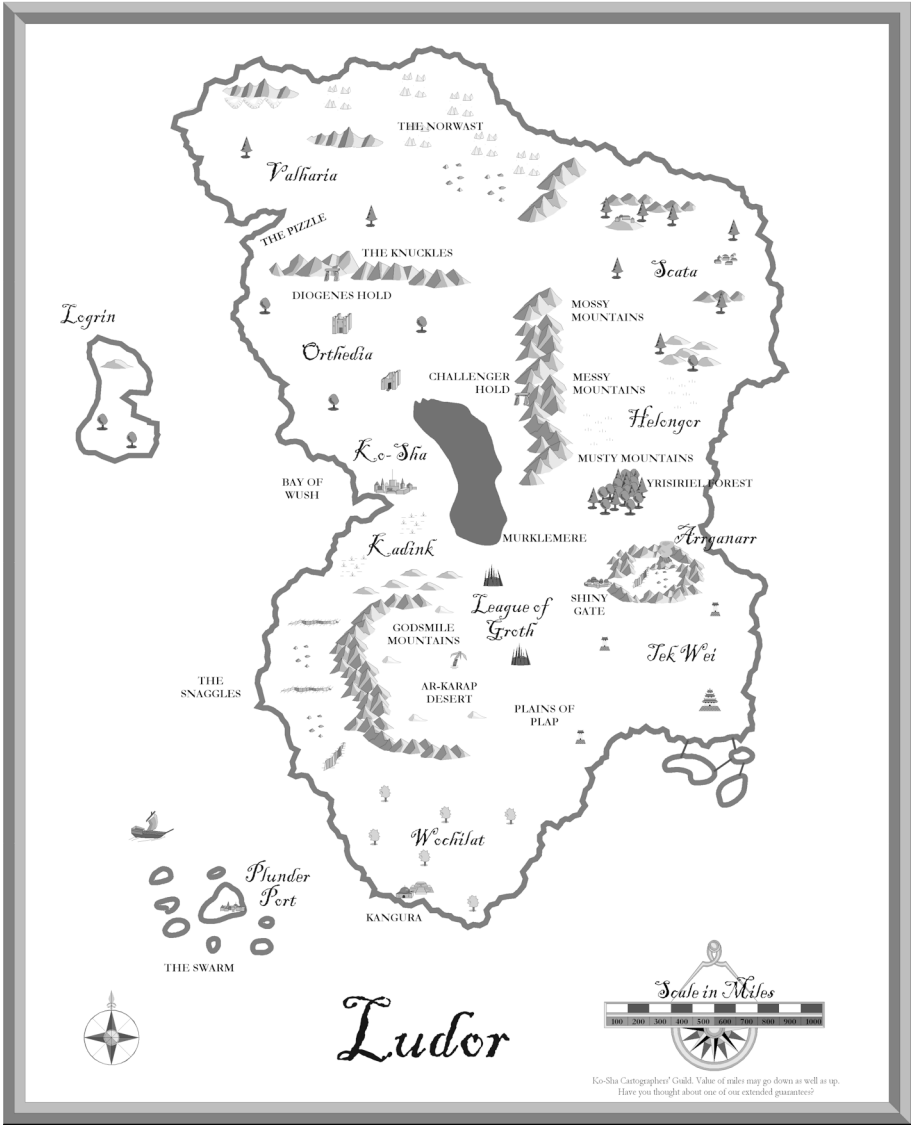
Good [+2] Small, Good [+2] Predator, Good [+2] Flight, Good [+2] Sharp Proboscis, Good [+2] Grasping Legs, Good [+2] Dead*, Good [+2] Strong; Poor [-2] Small, Poor [-2] Slow, Poor [-2] Stupid.

PDQ Master Chart

RANK	AS QUALITY RANK	MODIFIER TO 2D6 ROLL	AS DIFFICULTY RANK	TARGET NUMBER
Poor	Notably inept.	-2	A trivial task.	5
Average	Typical human capability.	0	Straightforward task.	7
Good	Better than usual; most professionals or talented newcomers.	+2	Complex task, requiring attention to detail.	9
Expert	Noted/famed professional; talent with skill to back it up.	+4	Intricate task, difficult and requiring sharp concentration, hard for an average person.	11
Master	Acclaimed genius: talent with substantial skill behind it.	+6	Extremely difficult task, hard for most professionals.	13

Magic Effects Table

RANK, MODIFIER, TARGET NUMBER	TIME/DURATION	RANGE	AREA	NUMBER OF SUBJECTS	WEIGHT	FORCE	ENERGY
Poor [-2] [5]	1 action/ reaction (5 minutes)	Touch. (12 in.)	Closet (1sq yard)	1	Objects up to 1-hand weapon	Punch	Candle
Average [0] [7]	1 Turn (30 minutes)	Near (10 yards)	Room (25 sq yards)	10	Heavy person (250 lbs.)	Full tilt body check	Campfire
Good [+2] [9]	1 Scene (1 hour)	Unaided sight	Field	100	Bear, horse, small rowing boat	Sturdy club	Bonfire
Expert [+4] [11]	2 Scenes (6 hours)	A few miles	Square mile	1000	Laden wagon	Runaway wagon	Forest fire
Master [+6] [13]	4 Scenes (24 hours)	A few hundred miles	City and immediate environs	Entire city/country	Ship	Cannonball	Volcano



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