

# HEROQUEST



Moon  
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Publications

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# HEROQUEST



## Core Rules



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# INTRODUCTION

*HeroQuest* is a roleplaying rules engine suitable for play in any genre. (In the unlikely event that you've picked up this book without knowing what a roleplaying game is, go immediately to "Roleplaying In a Nutshell", below, and then return to this section.)

The game presents a simple and flexible system that allows Game Masters (hereafter called "Narrators") to make decisions the way authors and screenwriters do when creating novels, TV episodes and movies. *HeroQuest* encourages creative input from your players, resulting in an exciting, unpredictable narrative created through group collaboration. Its abstract resolution methods and scalable character levels make it equally suitable to any genre, from epic fantasy to satirical soap opera. Whether your next game idea draws on the tropes of horror, war, westerns, martial arts, pulps, cyberpunk, cliff-hangers, giant robots, super-powered heroes, space opera, cop action, corporate intrigue, furry animals, swashbuckling adventure, Greek tragedy or drawing room comedy, *HeroQuest* can resolve its scenes of conflict, both big and small. You could even use *HeroQuest* to emulate a musical—although it won't do any of the singing or dancing for you.

## Tools, Not Rules

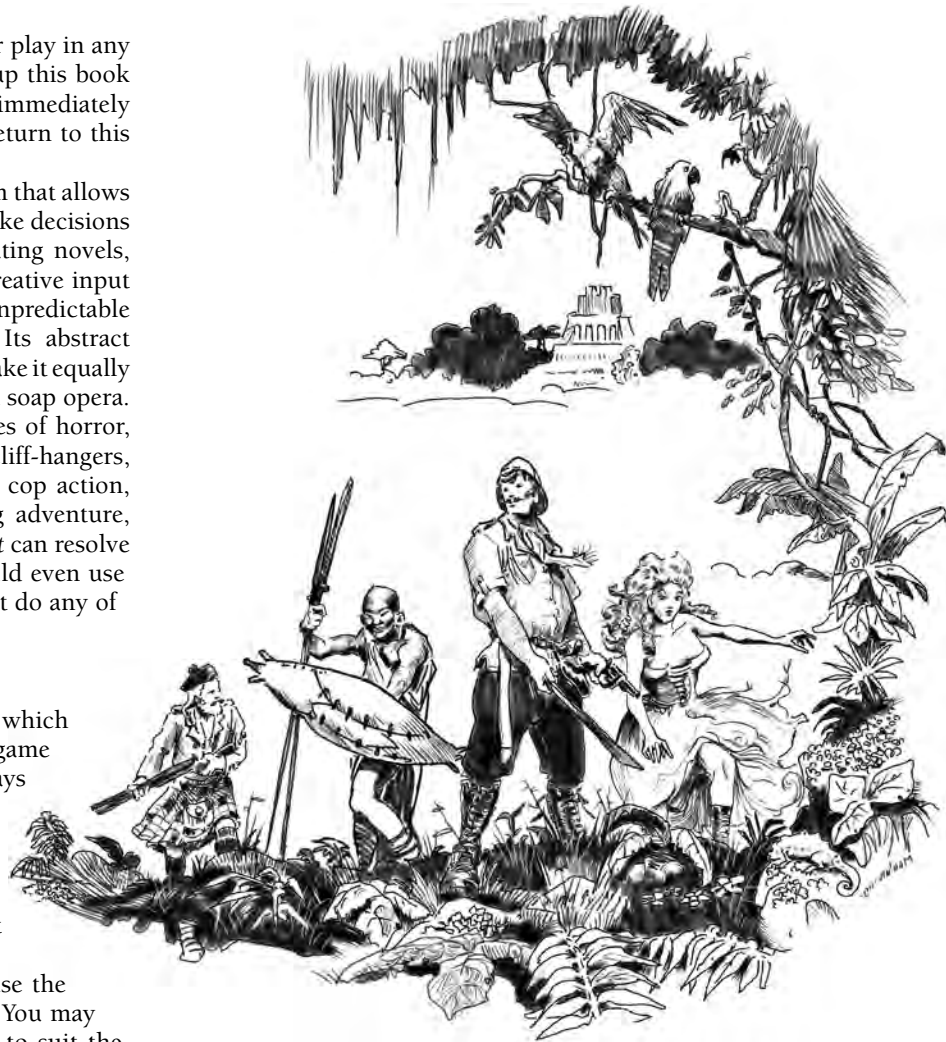
Think of *HeroQuest* not as a set of inviolable rules which you must adhere to in order to be running the game properly, but as a toolkit containing a variety of ways of resolving dramatic situations as they arise in play. It is meant to facilitate your creativity—and then to get out of your way, and that of your players. It offers multiple ways of resolving conflicts, and relies on you to choose the best one for the current moment, based on your storytelling instincts.

Every *HeroQuest* Narrator can, and should, use the toolkit the game provides to run in her own way. You may run it differently from one genre to the next, or to suit the changing input of an evolving group of players.

*HeroQuest* does not make specific decisions for you, but instead helps to shape and guide your own decision-making process. It is well suited to a collaborative, friendly group with a high degree of trust in each other's creativity.

## Who Prospers?

It is an unavoidable fact that all roleplaying games favor certain player skill sets. Where some games reward memorization, an instinct for math, and the willingness to comb through multiple rulebooks for the most useful super powers, *HeroQuest* tips the scales for creative improvisation, verbal acuity, and a familiarity with the techniques and stereotypes of popular fiction.



If the members of your group are often at odds and rely on their chosen rules kit as an arbiter between competing visions of how the game ought to develop, *HeroQuest* is not the rules set you need. Stick with your more structured system of choice.

*HeroQuest* becomes your game as soon as you start to use it. In *HeroQuest* mailing lists and discussion forums, this principle is known as YGWV: Your Game Will Vary.

## Roleplaying in a Nutshell

Experienced roleplayers have read versions of this section many times before. Move along; there's nothing new to see here. As for Neophytes, keep reading.

Roleplaying is a hybrid experience, combining elements of game play and collective storytelling. A group gathers together to talk its way through a spontaneously created story. All but one of the participants, called players, creates a fictional character (called a PC, for player character) defined by various

## What You Need

To play *HeroQuest*, you need paper, pencils, and one twenty-sided die for each participant.

A set of poker chips, preferably including green and red chips, is a handy optional item to have on hand. You might also want to use miniature figures, handouts, or maps. With the wider use of electronic gaming publications and a wealth of historical information only a Wi-Fi connection away, many Narrators find a laptop an increasingly indispensable resource at the gaming table.

abilities listed on a record called a character sheet. Using these abilities, the PCs pursue various goals in an imaginary world portrayed by a participant called the Narrator. The Narrator controls various other people and creatures in this fictional environment. The players describe how their PCs pursue their goals; the Narrator challenges them by putting obstacles in their path. Sometimes these barriers to success come in the form of supporting characters who oppose them; at other times, they're impersonal physical or mental challenges, like a lock that must be picked or a cliff the characters have to climb. Whenever the characters try to overcome a difficult obstacle, the Narrator decides how difficult it will be. Using numbers attached to their abilities, the players roll dice to see if they prevail. The Narrator rolls dice to represent the resistance posed by whatever challenge they face. Their success or failure, as determined by the die rolls, changes the direction of the story, in either a big or small way.

Although some games last for only an evening, it is typical for one group to play a series of stories involving the same characters and setting over a period of time. We refer to them collectively as a series, or sometimes a campaign. (The latter term derives from the origins of the roleplaying form in historical war games.)

A transcript from a portion of a *HeroQuest* session might go as follows. (Don't expect to understand the game rules the players refer to; we'll explain them later.)

*Lynne, the Narrator, is running a game she calls TWisTSHoCK, in which the characters play a disparate band of people in a dystopian near future united by their shared history as victims of mysterious implantation surgeries. Each has a weird power granted them by these bio-implants. They've been trying to find out who placed these devices inside them, and for what reason, while at the same time evading capture by the secret police. The players and their characters are:*

*Rich, who plays Mike McNally, an alcoholic former insurance salesman who can breathe underwater. Yumei plays Lila Frost, a music producer possessing an empathic relationship with electronic devices. Sara plays Anna Najari, a homemaker who can see images from peoples' thoughts. Ashley plays Bruce Cortland, an antiques dealer who can cause small quantities of solid matter to transmute into gas.*

*The session is already in progress. In the story, it's the middle of the night. The group has broken into the offices of a corporation they believe to be connected to their implantations. They've subdued a security guard, gagging him and trapping him in a chair*

*with duct tape. As a supporting character, the part of the guard is taken by portrayed by Lynne.*

*Rich: I look around the office. What do I see?*

*Lynne: It's a richly appointed office with heavy mahogany desk. Identical leather books, for decorative purposes only, line the oak shelves. There's a water feature recessed into the marble flooring—a real pond stocked with holographic koi, who swim to the surface and react curiously to your presence.*

*Yumei: Is there a painting on the wall behind the desk?*

*Lynne: Yes, as a matter of fact. An abstract painted in Jackson Pollock's famous drip style.*

*Ashley: Bruce uses his Appraisal ability to see if it's an authentic Pollock, or otherwise valuable.*

*Lynne: Okay, roll the die.*

*[Lynne has decided that the painting is an interesting detail that is tangential to the storyline. As such, its only purpose in the narrative is to give Bruce a chance to shine and demonstrate his competence. Accordingly, Lynne decides that his attempt will, barring an obviously horrible die roll on his part, automatically succeed. To preserve the players' sense of uncertainty, she rolls her own die, but does not bother to check the result.]*

*Ashley: Success, with a 14.*

*Lynne: You identify it as the work of a Pollock imitator named Hayden Trainor. At auction it would probably fetch between ten and twenty thousand dollars.*

*Rich: I take it down from the wall.*

*Sara: What are you doing?*

*Yumei: Don't touch anything!*

*Rich: We can sell it and buy guns!*

*Sara: Guns? I keep telling you guns will just get us in more trouble!*

*Ashley: Besides, do you know how hard it is to sell a stolen painting?*

*Rich: Well, in that case, I take it down and rip a hole in it. These scumbags are gonna pay for messing with me.*

*Ashley: I try to get it out of his hands—safely—before he vandalizes a work of art.*

*Lynne: Mike, do you let him?*

*Rich: No, I want to wreck it.*

*Lynne: Okay, what abilities are you using?*

*Rich: I have Everything I Touch Turns To Crap at 13.*

## Version History

*HeroQuest* began its life in 2000 under a slightly different title, *Hero Wars*. The game was first issued, in a revised edition, under its current name, in 2003. The book you hold in your hands is the game's first appearance as a core rules set intended for use in any genre. Previous editions were set in Greg Stafford's classic fantasy world of Glorantha. Moon Design offers a line of *HeroQuest* products set in Glorantha, which remain compatible with this generic version of the rules. A new Glorantha-based genre book, as well as sourcebooks to supplement play in a variety of other settings and genres, will follow this one. You don't need to know anything about Glorantha to understand this book or play *HeroQuest* games.





*Ashley: I have Stop Stupid People From Doing Stupid Things at 17.*

*Lynne: Roll the dice.*

*Ashley: Success, with a 7.*

*Rich: [pumping his fist in the air] Whoo! I got a 1—a critical success!*

*Lynne: That's a minor victory for Mike. He manages to keep it away from Bruce, and then sticks it down on the desk, impaling it on an expensive pen holder.*

*Having removed the painting from the wall, you see that there's a safe behind it.*

*Yumei: I don't suppose it's open, or the combination is listed on a handy sticky note nearby?*

*Lynne: Afraid not.*

*Sara: [Putting her finger in front of her lips.] I non-threateningly approach the guard and remove the duct tape from his lips. "I don't suppose you know the combination, do you?"*

*Lynne: [in character, as the guard] "You think they trust me with something like that? I'm just a lowly wage slave, with a wife and a family. Six kids, I got. Please don't hurt me, please don't—"*

*Sara: I gently put the gag back on him.*

*Yumei: The safe isn't electronic, by any chance?*

*Lynne: [Who hadn't thought it would be, but realizes where Yumei is going with this and sees a good way to move the story forward.] Why, yes, as a matter of fact.*

*Yumei: Okay, I lean in and whisper softly, using my electronic empathy to coax it open...*

*Lynne calls for Yumei to roll her Electronic Empathy ability, and the story continues from there...*

## Thinking in Story Terms

Although there's no right or wrong way to play the game, a certain story-based logic does underlie the entire system. Where traditional roleplaying games simulate an imaginary reality, *HeroQuest* emulates the techniques of fictional storytelling.

Understanding this distinction will help you run the game in a natural, seamless manner. Although the game can be run in a more simulative style, you'll find that it fights you a bit when certain edge cases crop up. One of this book's objectives is to get under the hood of narrative technique and show you how it works. This will either help you run the game in its emulative style, or, if you prefer a simulative approach, to understand how you'll need to modify it to suit your preferences. For example, let's say that you're running a game inspired by fast-paced, non-fantastic, martial arts movies in a contemporary setting. A PC is running along a bridge, pacing a hovercraft, piloted by the main bad guy. The player wants his character, Joey Chun, to jump onto the hovercraft and punch the villain's lights out. You must decide how hard it is for him to do this.

In a traditional, simulative game, you'd determine how hard this is based on the physical constraints you've described. In doing so, you come up with numbers and measurements. You'd work out the distance between bridge and hovercraft. Depending on the rules set, you might take into account the relative speeds of the hero and the vehicle. You determine the difficulty of the attempt based on these factors, and then use whatever resolution mechanic the rules provide you with to see if Joey succeeds or fails. If he blows it, you'll probably consult the falling rules to see how badly he injures himself (if he lands poorly), or the drowning rules, if he ends up in the river.



In *HeroQuest*, you start not with the physical details, but with the proposed action's position in the storyline. You consider a range of narrative factors, from how entertaining it would be for him to succeed, how much failure would slow the pacing of the current sequence, and how long it has been since Joey last scored a thrilling victory. If, after this, you need further reference points, you draw inspiration more from martial arts movies than the physics of real-life jumps from bridges onto moving hovercrafts. Having decided how difficult the task ought to be dramatically, you then supply the physical details as color, to justify your choice and lend it verisimilitude—the illusion of authenticity that makes us accept fictional incidents as credible on their own terms. If you want Joey to have a high chance of success, you describe the distance between bridge and vehicle as impressive (so it feels exciting if he makes it) but not insurmountable (so it seems believable if he makes it.)

In other words, *HeroQuest* starts with story considerations, deciding the difficulty and then working backward to describe physical details in accordance with them. This is the way that authors and screenwriters make decisions. If this were a movie, the writers and director would first of all decide whether the Joey succeeds or fails. This is a structural decision; it determines if the scene continues with a thrilling shipboard combat, or concludes with a frustrated hero sputtering in the polluted waters of the Hudson River. After making this choice, they then construct the sequence to be suitably sensational, however it comes out.

Just as fundamental differences separate literature and film, roleplaying is its own narrative form with its own distinct dynamics. *HeroQuest* emulates the decision-making of older narrative forms but adapts it to the requirements of roleplaying. Chief among these is the need for uncertainty to surround all noteworthy conflicts.

Authors and screenwriters create for an audience. In roleplaying, the Narrator and players are their own audience. They must be as surprised by the outcome of events in a story as we are when we read a book or watch a movie. When Joey jumps off the bridge in a game session, everybody should be

collectively holding their breath, anxious to see if he gets to duke it out with the bad guy. The result must not be predictable. So instead of deciding if he succeeds or fails, you decide roughly how likely it is that he'll succeed, and let the die rolls make the final determination.

As Narrator, you then describe either result so that it seems compelling. Then you and the players, through the characters you control, continue to move the story forward until the next point of conflict. The contrasts between the way obstacles are created and described in fictional storytelling, *HeroQuest* Narrating, and traditional roleplaying games, are shown in the *Logic of Story* diagram below.

**To sum up: Pick the resistance, then justify it.**

*HeroQuest's* basis in fictional storytelling should not be construed as criticism of the traditional mode. The author continues to design and play in both styles, each of which has its own long list of distinct merits.

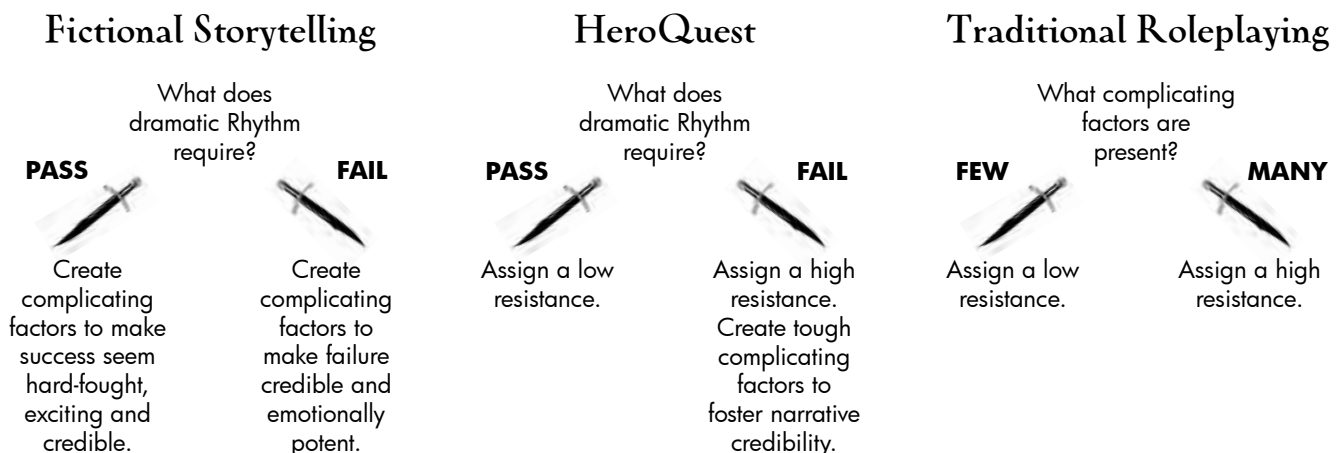
If you're trying to get *HeroQuest* to work in a more simulationist manner, you are not "playing wrong." Be prepared, though, to face a frustration or two along the way, as you bend the game in a way it may not be able to fully support.

## First, Second and Third Person

Most of this book is for Narrators. However, in certain instances, particularly in sections explaining what characters can do, its use of the second person shifts to address players. We adopt this convention in the interests of minimal syntactical torture and trust that you'll be able to work it out from context.

We want both women and men to enjoy playing our game. Pronouns present an odd challenge in roleplaying game writing, because one often has to refer to a hypothetical single person doing something in the future. To clarify sentences, we will generally refer to our hypothetical Narrator as "she" and the equally hypothetical player as "he." This should not be taken as an implicit statement that only women can run games, and only men can be players.

## The Logic of Story Obstacles





# Keywords

In certain genres, especially where the Narrator is able to draw on published HeroQuest setting material, you may build your character around one or more keywords. A keyword gives you a package deal: you get a number of abilities by selecting a pre-existing character concept, which you then modify. Although you never have to incorporate a keyword into your character, doing so helps you integrate your character with the setting and themes of a series. In the case of unfamiliar or original settings, a well-written keyword comes with a description telling you everything you need to know about the world in order to start playing a character of that type.

Keywords are best suited for use as the character's core area of expertise. *Creating a character for a Glorantha-based game, you settle on the Humakti weaponthane keyword. You decide that your PC, Harmarth, will be a wily Humakti weaponthane.*

In certain genres, characters may require multiple keywords: for example, one for area of expertise, another for species or culture, and perhaps a third for religious affiliation. *Otholiel has the keywords Thelemic Effectuator (his area of expertise), Quandari (his race) and Hondaraki (his religious faith.)*

Here are three ways to handle keywords. In choosing your approach, balance your personal conception of your series with the needs of your players. Some may find their creativity sparked by a longer list of abilities to riff off of, while others can improvise from a smaller set, or become indecisive when faced with too many opportunities.

**Keyword-Free:** In a modern era game, Tax Attorney is easily understood, and there's no need to ever detail the specific abilities that any tax attorney could bring to bear on game challenges. This approach saves the effort of coming up with detailed lists, and also allows players to come up

with their own concepts (perhaps Attack Lawyer) while not inadvertently restricting them to using the listed abilities. It's also appropriate for a shorter series, when character improvement isn't as important. Characters can still supplement the broad ability with related but more specific ones, such as Play To Jury.

**Keywords as Packages:** At the other extreme, the Narrator of an Age of Sail game might want to treat keywords simply as shorthand for a package of abilities. These might be boosted together during character creation, but she deems the Sailor keyword's Climb Rigging, Cutlass Fighting, and Swear A Blue Streak too unrelated to increase together during a game. Players are still free to use the keyword as an ability, and in fact may prefer to write only the specific abilities they've improved on their character sheet.

**Keywords as an Umbrella:** A middle ground is to treat keywords both as raisable abilities and as a collection of more specific abilities. This approach keeps the character sheet from getting too cluttered (there's probably no point in every character listing Know London in a Jack the Ripper game) but encourages specialization. Players write specialized abilities under the keyword, along with how much they've improved them:

*Londoner 15*  
*Know Local Accents +1*  
*Stiff Upper Lip +2*

In some settings, an ability may be listed in more than one of a character's keywords. Choose only one to detail it under. It may prove fruitful to mix keyword approaches. In a Glorantha game, some Narrators might treat the magic keyword as an umbrella (as per the Appendix) and cultural keywords as packages.

**Procedural:** as part of their job, highly competent professionals solve a succession of problems, perhaps interspersed with ongoing stories of their personal lives.

**Picaresque:** likeable rogues experience a series of colorful small-scale incidents over the course of their meandering journeys.

**Chronicle:** the lead characters manage the economic and political affairs of a community (or other unit, such as a corporation), often over a large span of time. Players may play multiple characters, perhaps over several generations.

**Gritty:** amoral characters struggle to survive in a cruel and selfish world.

**Parody:** goofy characters enjoy comic invulnerability to permanent consequences in an affectionate, silly spoof of a usually serious genre.

**Satire:** a darkly comic setting infused with biting social commentary.

character abilities. If they work well, original settings make up in novelty what they lose in familiarity. They also give you, the player, more license to build elements into your Narrator's creation. A collaborative Narrator might let you flesh out your character's tribe, nation, religion, or culture.

The setting will suggest the sorts of characters you can play, which may be narrowed further by the series premise.

## Mode

The Narrator should also indicate narrative mode of the upcoming series, so you can create a character that suits it. Your comic relief character won't suit a grimly realistic portrayal of life on the streets; nor will an amoral mercenary fit in a world of nostalgic cliffhanger thrills. The mode is a narrative pattern from which the game draws its assumptions. Common examples of narrative modes include:

**Epic:** a sweeping tale of heroism, against a backdrop of great historical events.







The mode suggests elements to build into your character. A procedural demands professional competence. A parodic series encourages a series of absurdly named abilities.

Mode also suggests behavioral norms for the characters. Picaresque characters are supposed to be clever and waggish, and remain sympathetic even when they engage in a little larceny. Epic characters, by contrast, should be heightened in both their positive qualities and their tragic flaws.

Ambitious Narrators may blend modes, or switch from one to the other over the course of a long series. The picaresque adventures of a spoiled young prince and his retinue of ne'er-do-wells could slowly transform itself into a more serious historical epic when he ascends the throne and takes his nation to war.

Narrators seeking input from their players may ask them to get together and request a mode. Or they may have you create characters without reference points, and then find the narrative mode that best brings out their potential.

Existing settings often imply a tone and narrative mode. If using such settings in a traditional way, Narrators won't need to specify either. If tone or mode depart from the standard assumptions, they'll let you know.

### Premise

The premise tells you what the PCs have in common, and either explains or implies a collective goal. It can be summed up in a formulaic sentence: The characters are X who do Y:

- The characters are members of a touring rock band continually drawn into supernatural mysteries.
- The characters are interstellar revenue officers assigned to patrol a lawless quadrant.
- The characters are either psychic warriors protecting mankind from extra-dimensional invasion, or hallucinating drug addicts in a deteriorating bungalow in Santa Ana, California; they're never sure which is actually true.

Because the premise impinges the most on the characters' identities and objectives, Narrators should be highly ready to modify it in response to player input. The Narrator may suggest a setting and then ask the group to collaboratively create the premise themselves. Or she might allow you to create a disparate team of PCs, place you in an environment, and let you create your own agenda in the course of the story.

Many existing settings imply a premise. Expect to be informed in advance if your Narrator intends to depart from the setting's default premise.

### Concept

Now that you know enough about your Narrator's series to create a character to fit into it, it's time to create a strong central concept for your PC. Your concept is a brief phrase, often just a



couple of words, that tells the Narrator and other players what your PC does and how he or she acts.

When in doubt, start with a noun or phrase indicating the PC's profession or area of expertise, and modify it with an adjective suggesting a dominant personality trait:

- brutish escape artist
- forgetful professor
- generous gunfighter
- haughty priestess
- hotshot lawyer
- naïve warrior
- noble samurai
- randy mecha pilot
- remorseful assassin
- sardonic ex-mercenary
- slothful vampire

You'll note that some of the above examples play on common stereotypes, and others present unexpected juxtapositions. Whether you prefer to rely on time-tested archetypes or to defy expectations is a matter of taste.

## Name

Now provide your character with a name. This is easy when game takes place in a setting where people use familiar names. Historical settings may require some research on your part; lists of names from many cultures and periods can be found with a quick Internet search. If your character belongs to an imaginary culture that is supposed to appear as if it has a coherent, made-up language, your Narrator may provide you with a list of sample names.

Names should fit not just the setting and your character conception but the narrative mode. A silly-sounding name, even if drawn from real life, is inappropriate to a gritty series, for example.

## Appearance

Visualize your character, and jot down a quick description to repeat to the rest of the group. Listeners will tune out after a few details, so keep the list short and hit the high points first.

Use short cuts to convey visual information. You might want to cast your character as a well-known actor: “She looks like Nicole Kidman with a Bettie Page haircut and a jewelled eye patch.”

Alternately you can borrow images from classic paintings or photographs, bringing copies in to show the group. Or draw an image yourself, if your talents lie in that direction.

## Narrative Hooks

Left to their own devices, many roleplayers tend to play their characters in a cautious, risk-averse fashion. Often this happens because they’re identifying strongly with their characters and want to keep them out of trouble. Heroes of stories, on the other hand, are always strongly motivated to get into interesting trouble. They’re people with strong desires who take decisive, risky action to get what they need or want.

One of your main tasks when first conceiving a *HeroQuest* character is to put him or her under the sort of pressure that will motivate him to get out and do things, even when the consequences of failure are dire. The idea that keeps your character active in the story is called a **narrative hook**.

Your Narrator will tell you what sort of narrative hook her series requires. Often this varies according to its mode.

In an epic, for example, you might be asked to supply the character’s driving ambition, which will propel him into the swirl of historical events driving the story to come:

- Jim Twiller hates Neo-Communism, and will do anything to bring it down.
- Brother Bodo wishes to spread the doctrine of St. Ranfel across the Nine Islands.
- Zenkichi has always loved the Willow Princess from afar, and will sacrifice all to protect her from her enemies.

In a procedural, the character’s motivation is a collective one, inherent to the series premise; they’re professionals doing their jobs. They wait for problems to come to them, and then solve them.

Picaresque characters may be required to supply the impulse that gets them into amusing scrapes:

- Flavio can never resist an opportunity to make himself look cleverer than his fellow man.
- Cornucant can’t stop himself from propositioning foxy aliens.
- If there’s something in a tomb you’re not supposed to touch, you can be sure that Miles is going to touch it.

In a chronicle, you may be asked to supply the contribution you make to the community. (Your motivation is implicit; you have to manage this resource, increasing its productivity and protecting it from outside threats.):

- Barntarling plows the fields and brings in the crops.
- Mahmoud manages the corporation’s relations with its dealerships nationwide.
- Paulie “the Clam” Montecchio runs the numbers racket and the labor unions down at the docks.

Gritty characters may be asked to suggest the situation that will invariably rouse them out of defensive, survivalist mode:

- Korak X2 is obsessively curious about computer parts from before the collapse.
- The ronin Minekawa is a sucker for children in distress.
- Alakoring will always risk his own hide to protect a fellow Orlanthe.

Parodies and satires are often, respectively, spoofy or acerbic versions of other modes. You may be asked to take a serious narrative hook from the appropriate mode and put an absurd or biting spin on it.

Your Narrator will collaborate with you to modify your hook if it doesn’t fit the spirit of the series or details of the setting, or if it doesn’t seem like it will provide sufficient motivation to seek out risky situations.

Characters can evolve in the course of play, modifying their narrative hooks in response to events as they unfold. Expect your Narrator to work with you if you are slow to adopt a new and obvious hook when an old one falls by the wayside.

*In a tear-jerking climactic sequence achieved after many weeks of play, Zenkichi fails to protect his beloved Willow Princess from the bakemono ninja. Now that she lies dead in his arms, what is his motivation to continue?*

*Vengeance, you decide. Zenkichi will risk all to slay the seven grotesque leaders of the bakemono clan. If the series continues after he succeeds at that dread task, he’ll need yet another narrative hook. But that’s a problem for many months from now...*

In fiction, major characters are often torn between contradictory impulses. Tony Soprano juggles his desire to be a good family man against the pursuit of his rapacious appetites, and the need to manage his criminal empire. Hamlet is caught between his desire for certainty and his obligation to avenge his father. Building inner tension into your own characters may achieve powerful results—provided that the warring impulses motivate the PC to go out and do contradictory things, like Tony Soprano, rather than mirroring him in indecision, like Hamlet.



## Choosing Abilities

Now that you know who your character is, what he does, and why, it's time to better define exactly how he does things, by picking his abilities.

Anything that your character can use to solve problems or overcome obstacles in a story can be an ability. You decide how to describe your abilities. Some abilities, such as your central area of expertise, can be very broad, entailing a wide variety of related capabilities. Others might be very colorful and specific, granting you advantages when you enter into a conflict with an opponent using a less directly applicable ability. The more creative your description of these oddball abilities, the more likely it is that you'll be able to take advantage of this dynamic. Abilities often include a mix of the following elements:

- **Physical traits:** strength, endurance, or keen eyesight.
- **Mental talents:** like quick-wittedness, strong memory, mathematical aptitude.
- **Personality:** like humor, vengefulness, or determination.
- **Physical Training:** like rock climbing, football, or karate.
- **Fields of knowledge:** like astronomy, theology, or photography.
- **Occupations:** like martial arts instructor, archaeologist, starship pilot.
- **Possessions:** magic sword, giant robot, bullet-proof vest.
- **Broader resources:** trust fund, ranch, holding company.
- **Cultural background:** Inuit, Brazilian, Martian, Formless One From the Outer Depths, Lunar Hoplite. Available choices vary by series.

- **Fantastic powers:** magic, science fiction gear, mutant gifts. Consult your Narrator for the particular fantastic abilities, if any, available in the series for which you're building your character.
- **Inhuman anatomy:** In some series, you may be playing a nonhuman, with its own set of inherent abilities: a robot, an alien, or an elf or troll. These are typically summed up in a keyword. Most series restrict the use of nonhuman characters to a list provided by the Narrator, or don't allow them at all.
- **Biographical facts:** like born in zero-gravity, Ivy League pedigree, or familiarity with shantytown customs.
- **Relationships:** other people you can call on to help you solve your problems. These are categorized, depending on their degree of commitment to you, as retainers, sidekicks, allies, contacts, and patrons. Your Narrator can help you categorize them, based on your verbal description, or you can consult p. 60 for more detail. Certain series will disallow particular sorts of contacts; your Narrator will tell you ahead of time when this is the case.

**To repeat: if you can solve a problem with it, it's an ability.**

Because you can make up your own abilities, we don't try to group them into strict categories. For example, a skilled photographer requires knowledge and manual dexterity. Does that make it a field of knowledge or a physical pursuit? Well, who cares? That question suits a desire for strict categorization that has little bearing on the ways authors tell stories. The best abilities overlap multiple categories. In play, *HeroQuest*



## Your Character Sheet

A character sheet is a piece of paper listing crucial information about your character. To emphasize HeroQuest's simplicity and customizability, we encourage you to design your own character sheet, laying it out in a way you find intuitive. It may be a sheet of battered blank paper covered with chicken scratches indecipherable to everyone but yourself, or a work of art in its own right. Every character sheet contains the PC's name, abilities and their ratings. Your Narrator may ask you to include other information unique to her series, from your narrative hook to a family crest.

encourages you to find novel ways to use your abilities to solve problems.

Instead we encourage you to personalize your character sheet to group your abilities in a way that fits your sense of logic, or evokes something about the PC's history and personality.

Describe each ability however you want. Some sound better as nouns, other as adjectives. A colorful phrase is often more fun than a single word.

When choosing abilities, don't bother to specify how good you are at them. That will be determined later, when you assign numerical ratings to each ability. When you pick names that suggest how good you are, these are not taken literally, but instead reflect a subjective, and possibly incorrect, perception of your capabilities. You can't make your character better than others by taking an ability like Best Gunfighter In the West, Never Loses At Chess, or Indestructible. You will lose gunfights, chess matches, and be proven only to some extent indestructible, when you suffer defeats in contests of those abilities. Better to just take the abilities Gunfight, Chess, and Hard to Hurt, and not suffer the embarrassment when your actual capabilities fail to live up to the hype.

## Flaws

Many great fictional characters are defined as much by their humanizing flaws as by their positive qualities. You may assign up to three flaws to your character. Common flaws include:

- Personality traits: surly, petty, compulsive.
- Physical challenges: blindness, lameness, diabetes.
- Social hurdles: outcast, ill-mannered, hated by United supporters.

Flaws are assigned a rating equivalent to your abilities. Your first flaw is rated at your highest ability, your second shares the same rating as your second-highest ability, and your third equals your lowest ability.

Certain keywords include flaws. Flaws gained through keywords do not count against your limit of three chosen flaws. All flaws after the third are given the same rating as your third ability. You may designate flaws from keywords as your first or second-ranked flaw. When flaws manifest during play, the Narrator places you in a contest against them, rolls their associated ability ratings as Resistances to your efforts. This method applies to flaws that primarily present the character with additional obstacles to overcome.

Narrators may decide during play that certain flaws are better expressed as penalties to your attempts to overcome other resistances. Divide the value by 5 and round (a flaw of 19 imposes a -4 penalty). This is appropriate where you specify that your ability to solve problems drops under certain specific conditions. Examples might include:

- Tongue-tied in large gatherings.
- Lousy with a stick shift.
- Can't stand snakes.

*Vittorio the nervous mafia mobster has the flaws Anxiety Attacks, Distracted By Beauty, and Rant-Prone. The Narrator decides that the first and last of these tend to present obstacles of their own, while the second will most likely hamper Vittorio while he tries to achieve other obstacles. Anxiety Attacks gets a rating of 7, which is the same as Vittorio's top ability. His second flaw, Distracted By Beauty, has a rating of 20 (his second ability) but usually incurs a penalty of -4. His third, Rant-Prone, gains a rating of 13, which is equal to his lowest ability rating.*

Some groups find flaws enormously useful in humanizing their characters. Another school of thought considers them unnecessary at best, and more often actively troublesome. Often, PCs' dominant flaws do not appear on their character sheets; they arise more or less unconsciously from the player's style, in the course of the story. The PC may be played as, to name a few common examples, cowardly, dominating, or reflexively dishonest. Characters with both imposed and spontaneously-occurring flaws are generally too unlikable to support the dramatic weight of an ongoing story.

A worse problem with flaws occurs when a spotlight-hogging player uses them to exert control over the rest of the group. Many so-called flaws are in fact fun to play, in a very selfish sense. They exert more of a disadvantage on the other players, who have to work around them to get to their goals, than on the character they're supposed to harm. Players who use flaws to stop the story and focus attention on themselves shouldn't find active encouragement for their disruptions in the game rules.

Many so-called flaws are in fact abilities in disguise, and should be treated as such. If being, say, vengeful or an outcast can ever work to your advantage in a conflict, it's not a flaw, and can't be had for free.

However, you might not realize that a flaw can be useful. If during play what seemed only detrimental could be of use, with Narrator approval you can spend a hero point (see p. 57) and convert it to a regular ability.

*Brenna is Disrespectful of Authority. She is constantly in trouble, and winds up thrown out of Harvard. But when a man in a dark suit shows up late at night and flashes a Homeland Security ID, she decides to stand up to him. Her most appropriate ability is Disrespectful of Authority. Although it was considered a flaw, the Narrator agrees this is an amusing twist, and allows it to be converted into an ability. Brenna wins the contest, and the mysterious suit backs down from her courageous refusal to submit passively. She might still get into trouble with the powers that be a lot of the time, but she's now also free to use the ability to her advantage.*



# CHARACTER CREATION METHODS

*HeroQuest* offers three methods of character creation: **prose**, **list**, and **as-you-go**. Innovative Narrators may introduce other methods, like having the players answer a questionnaire, and deriving abilities from their answers.

you to rewrite the sentence. Note, however, that you cannot specify more than one sidekick in your prose description. You may face other restrictions depending on the series the Narrator is running; be sure to learn about these before starting.

## The Prose Method

Write a paragraph of text like you'd see in a story outline, describing the most essential elements of your character. Include keywords, personality traits, important possessions, relationships, and anything else that suggests what he can do and why. The paragraph should be about 100 words long. If you enjoy a challenge, or have a stickler Narrator, it must be exactly that long.

Compose your description in complete, grammatical sentences. No lists of abilities; no sentence fragments. Your Narrator may choose to allow sentences like the previous one for emphasis or rhythmic effect, but not simply to squeeze in more cool things your PC can do.

Bill writes the following prose description:

*Charming bounty hunter Dwayne-O Walken is known to millions of television viewers from a reality program following his world-spanning adventures. Dwayne-O's gleaming shotgun Phyllis (part of an endorsement deal) and his catch-phrase, "Ka-Chunk, punk!" strike panic into miscreants everywhere. When not building his enormous muscles or engaging in endurance training, he enjoys a glamorous tabloid lifestyle. Through his website, Dwayne-O cultivates contacts with far-flung fans from all walks of life. A dedicated gadget-lover, he panics whenever separated from his high-end cell phone and its wireless net connection. His schedule-conscious sister Darla makes his travel arrangements and fends off legions of female admirers.*

Once your narrative is finished, convert the description into a set of abilities. Mark any keywords with double underlines. Mark any other word or phrase that could be an ability with a single underline. Then write these keywords and abilities on your character sheet.

There is no limit to the number of abilities you can gain from a single sentence, as long as the sentence is not just a list of abilities. If your Narrator decides a sentence is just a list, she may allow you the first two abilities, or she may tell



## Dwayne-O's Abilities, Synopsised

Bill groups his abilities into rough categories, for ease of reference. Categories have no impact on the game system, so list yours in an order that makes sense to you.

Just because you group an ability in one category doesn't mean that you can't use it for other purposes. Enormous muscles might give Dwayne-O an edge in certain social situations, for example.

The categories you pick can further convey the flavor of your character. Bill has created the categories in Dwayne-O's parlance, hence the references to Doing Stuff and Knowing Stuff. For a character in an ancient historical setting, you might use lofty, fake-archaic terms for your categories. A science fiction game might require technical terms, and so on.

**The Job:** Bounty hunter

**Doing Stuff:** enormous muscles, endurance

**Social:** Charming, catch-phrase: "Ka-Chunk, punk!", known to millions of television viewers, legions of swooning admirers, strike panic into miscreants everywhere,

**Knowing Stuff:** dedicated gadget-lover, reality program, wireless net connection, world-spanning adventures,

**Taking Care of Business:** endorsement deal, glamorous tabloid lifestyle,

**Stuff I Own:** gleaming shotgun Phyllis, cell phone, website,

**People:** contacts with far-flung fans from all walks of life, sidekick: sister Darla (schedule-conscious, makes travel arrangements),

**Flaw:** panics whenever separated from his cell phone

After combing through your description, take all of the underlined phrases and convert them to list form. Your Narrator then reviews it, looking for potentially useful abilities you may have missed.

Bill checks his prose description. He's playing in a modern day series where the Narrator has decided keywords are unnecessary, so he'll be giving all abilities single underlines only:

Charming bounty hunter Dwayne-O Walken is known to millions of television viewers from a reality program following his world-spanning adventures. Dwayne-O's gleaming shotgun Phyllis (part of an endorsement deal) and his catch-phrase, "Ka-Chunk, punk!" strike panic into miscreants everywhere. When not building his enormous muscles or engaging in endurance training, he enjoys a glamorous tabloid lifestyle. Through his website, Dwayne-O cultivates contacts with far-flung fans from all walks of life. A dedicated gadget-lover, he panics whenever separated from his high-end cell phone and its wireless net connection. His schedule-conscious sister Darla makes his travel arrangements and fends off legions of swooning admirers.

Bill has double-underlined the phrase "high-end cell phone" to indicate that it is part of two abilities: the flaw Panics Whenever Separated From His High-End Cell phone, and the object itself, High-End Phone.

It took Bill's Narrator to see that Reality Program might be an ability unto itself; Dwayne-O might use it when he needs to figure out something related to television production, for example.

**Advantages of the Prose Method:** The prose method encourages you to think about your character in words instead of numbers. A skillful player can wring more abilities out of this method than the others; as such, it is meant to appeal to so-called power gamers. These players, who like to bend the rules to their maximum advantage, tend to be number crunchers. This method trains them to be word crunchers instead, helping them to make the leap to the HeroQuest ethos from traditional roleplaying games.

One strong idea is more powerful than a dozen unconnected ones; the 100-word limit encourages you to keep your character simple. The prose method tends to create the most vivid and offbeat abilities and ability descriptions.

**Disadvantages of the Prose Method:** This technique seems to reward the clever, which egalitarian-minded players may find troubling. (Actually, it's debatable whether it's better to have many abilities or just to concentrate on a few, but in questions of gaming preference, perceptions matter.) The prose method takes more preparation time, both for the players and for the Narrator, than list and as-you-go methods.

### The List Method

What the list method lacks in flavor, it gains in speed and ease of use. Having chosen a character concept and name (and any other elements required by the Narrator, such as a narrative hook) complete the following steps:

1. Note your main area of expertise, which, depending on the series, may be a keyword. You probably already picked this when you came up with your character concept.
2. If your series uses other keywords, such as those for culture or religion, you may have them for free.
3. Pick 10 additional abilities, describing them however you want. (Essentially you're skipping the writing step from the prose method and going straight to a list. However, you most likely wind up with fewer abilities than the prose version.) Only one of these abilities may be a Sidekick—assuming your series allows them in the first place.
4. If you want, describe up to 3 flaws.

Steve creates a character for the same globetrotting action series in which Bill's character, Dwayne-O, appears.

His core concept is of a remorseful former counter-insurgent. Steve decides to make him a former member of the Russian military, haunted by atrocities he took part in during the Chechen conflict. After some quick research into Russian names, he calls his PC Nikolai Levshin. His narrative hook is that, if he gets wind of a chance at redemption, he'll sacrifice anything to get it.

Implicit in the concept are the two abilities **Counter-insurgency** and **Remorseful**. That leaves Steve with nine more abilities to pick. He imagines that Nikolai has been living in



# Creating Entertaining and Effective Characters

## Sympathy

Heroes of adventure fiction have one thing in common: even if they are deeply flawed, their creators make sure that the audience remains sympathetic to them. In a roleplaying game, your audience is your Narrator and your fellow players. If your character is likeable or admirable in some way, you will find that he lives longer. No PC in HeroQuest can expect to live forever, but if everyone likes your protagonist and enjoys having him in the game the Narrator will be more likely to act in his favor to keep him around when the chips are down. Other players will be more inclined to risk their characters to rescue yours when he runs into trouble. If your character has no redeeming characteristics, they will wave him goodbye.

## Indispensability

If you create a unique protagonist, your Narrator and fellow players will probably help to keep him alive. Maybe he has some ability or status that makes him important to the campaign. Maybe he is just plain entertaining. Either way you have made him indispensable, which is a useful technique in roleplaying games.

On the other hand, if your hero is uninspired and run-of-the-mill, or if you tend to play the same hero every time, regardless of his abilities or hero description, neither Narrator nor players will care much when he bites the dust. They will expect you to create another one just like him anyway.

## Ambiguous References

Sometimes an ambiguous but poetic phrase can get you more than a precise one. This is particularly true of fantastic or imaginary abilities, which are wide open to interpretation. You might have only a vague idea of what a phrase means when the game starts, waiting for an appropriate moment while playing to propose an exact meaning for the intriguing reference. Ambiguous details can be used for anything: a purpose, magical treasure, relationship, or magical ability.

## Backstory

Character description is not a biography. Some players like to write much more than 100 words about their PCs. Such an extended background is called a backstory. The 100-word narrative gives the current condition of the character; the backstory explains how he got that way. For example, you can use it to explain where the character got certain abilities. At the end of each play session, check to see how much of your material has actually been heard by the other players. Choose one aspect to focus on before each session and try to work it into the present story, the one everyone is telling.

Narrators can use part of a backstory to set up an adventure. Common elements in character backgrounds can tie the group closer together. Thus, if they all hate the same clan, or served together in the same unit in the army, the Narrator may bring in characters from their past, even if they are not in the Relationships section of your character sheet.

*New York City, making a living as a cab driver: NYC Cabbie. He chooses some additional abilities to tie into his core concept of a mentally scarred tough guy: Dead-eyed stare, Intimidating, High Pain Threshold, and Psychological Resistance.*

*Steve's Narrator is not using cultural keywords, but elements of Nikolai's backstory imply some language and cultural knowledge. So he chooses the following abilities: Born and raised in Russia and Infiltrated Chechen rebels. For his last two abilities, he selects contacts appropriate to his background: Russian intelligence and Russian mafia. Then he adds a Flaw: Painkiller addiction.*

*Steven concludes by transferring his rough notes to a character sheet, grouping the abilities into categories evocative of his character:*

### Nikolai Levshin

**Hook:** Seeks redemption

**Past:** Counter-insurgency, Intimidating, High Pain Threshold, Psychological Resistance, Born and raised in Russia, Infiltrated Chechen rebels, Contacts: Russian intelligence

**Present:** NYC Cabbie, Contacts: Russian mafia, Remorseful, Dead-eyed stare

**Flaw:** Painkiller addiction

**Advantages of List Method:** Many players find the list method faster and less creatively taxing than the prose method. Everyone gets the same number of abilities, no matter how clever they are. Players used to other games will find it the most familiar and comforting of the character creation methods.

**Disadvantages of the List Method:** The list method often leads to a series of abilities that are not only drier than you get from the prose or as-you-go methods, but more closely related to one another. It does less than either of the other character creation methods to introduce players to the HeroQuest way of thinking about story and character.

## The As-You-Go Method

In the As-You-Go method, you improvise most of the characters' abilities during play.

Start play with only your basic concept (an area of expertise, which may be a keyword, modified by an adjective), a description of the character and, if required, a narrative hook.

When events in the story put you in a situation where you want to do something, you make up an applicable ability on the spot. The first time you use an ability (including the two you start play with), assign an ability rating to it. (The process of assigning ratings is explained soon, on p. 19.)

## Cultural and Language Abilities

By default, all PCs are assumed to be reasonably fluent in the base language spoken in the series, and acceptably familiar with the main culture in which it is set. In settings involving unfamiliar cultures, you may have access to a cultural keyword, sometimes called a homeland keyword, which you get for free. Cultural keywords may simply indicate a basic familiarity with a society's customs and language, or may include a number of abilities everyone raised there knows. For example, if you have the keyword Inuit you not only speak the language but may (depending on the period) have abilities like Hunting, Cold Weather Survival, and Snowmobiling.

To speak additional languages or exhibit basic familiarity with cultures other than your own (and/or the locale of the series), you must choose them as abilities. In keeping with *HeroQuest's* use of broad-based abilities, you may find you can squeeze more uses out of an ability by phrasing it in biographical terms. For example, Steve gives his character the ability *Infiltrated Chechen Rebels*. This fact shows that he speaks Chechen well enough to pass as a native, and knows enough details about life in Chechnya to not only survive but prosper there.

Because the series is set in an English-speaking milieu, Steve does not have to expend one of his ability slots on awareness of the language, or of the American scene. However, if he wanted to pass as someone born and raised in the US, his Narrator might require him to take an additional ability to reflect that.

If you want your character to be unable to communicate effectively in the series' default language, or exhibit little familiarity with local customs, take a flaw like Obvious Foreigner, New Immigrant, or Speaks [Language] Poorly.

Once you've given yourself 11 abilities (including the two you started with), you're done creating your character. After that, you gain additional new abilities the same way everyone else does—see *Improving Your Character*, p. 57.

As per the other methods, you are (in series that allow followers at all) restricted to only one Sidekick.

Christine is new to roleplaying. Her Narrator, Kathy, takes her through the As-You-Go character creation method.

**Kathy:** *This story is set in the modern day and takes its inspiration from action movies. You can't have magic or science fiction powers, but you can perform crazy stunts like you'd see in a Bond or Die Hard flick.*

**Christine:** *Hmm. Okay, where do I start?*

**Kathy:** *For your first character, let's base it on a character you like, then change it enough so it feels original. What's your favorite action movie character?*

**Christine:** *Most of those characters are male. I think I'd sooner play a woman. How about Ripley from Alien?*

**Kathy:** *That's sort of a futuristic character. She's an ordinary person who turns out to be bad-ass under pressure. And she works on a freighter. I guess the modern equivalent of that would be a trucker. Do you want to play a tough-as-nails lady trucker, maybe?*

**Christine:** *Sure. Why not? Let's call her Rachel Fisher.*

**Kathy:** *Okay, that starts you out with two abilities: Tough-As-Nails and Trucker.*

**Christine:** *And I'd better be good with a shotgun.*

**Kathy:** *That makes a third ability—Shotgun. Write them down. You have eight abilities to go.*

The Narrator gets the story rolling, introducing the various PCs and getting them into entertaining trouble. Before she knows it, the rollicking action movie pacing has Rachel as a fish out of water, standing on a cliff in the Peruvian mountains as guerrillas boil out of the jungle toward her.

**Christine:** *I turn and brandish my shotgun at them!*

**Kathy:** *There are about eight of them, and they have assault rifles. Your brandishing doesn't slow them down.*

**Christine:** *Then I guess I better talk to them.*

**Kathy:** *How do you talk to them?*

**Christine:** *Obviously Rachel grew up in a border state and speaks Spanish.*

**Kathy:** *Okay, that's a new ability—Spanish. Write that down on your character sheet. You can communicate with them, but how do you persuade them?*

**Christine:** *Uh, well, when I was in college, before I got restless and quit, I got good grades in my humanities class because I was able to easily assume any point of view and argue from it. So these guys are Shining Path guerrillas, right? I talk to them in their own ideological terms, and assure them that I'm down with their crazy revolution.*

**Kathy:** *So the ability is Assume Any Point of View?*

**Christine:** *Sounds good.*

**Kathy:** *And since you're about to use it on their commandante, you'll have to assign a value to it. You haven't done that yet, so you can start it at 13 or 17, and then increase it by up to another 10 points. (This is explained on p. 19.)*

**Christine:** *I think this will be a very useful ability, and besides, I don't want to be shot or forced off the cliff, so I'll go for the max.*

**Kathy:** *Then write down Assume Any Point Of View 7, with a square W after it, to symbolize a mastery. And now roll to see if you succeed in convincing him that you're a Sendero Luminoso sympathizer.*

This process continues until eventually Christine ends up with the following abilities:

**Occupation:** Trucker

**Traits:** tough-as-nails, never gives up

**Knacks:** assume any point of view, avoid romantic entanglements, sense of direction

**Items:** shotgun, GPS tracker

**Background:** speaks Spanish, Gymnastics training, make tasty food out of anything

**Advantages of the As-You-Go Method:**

This approach allows you the highest degree of collaboration with your Narrator. It's faster than any other, letting you get started immediately, without any prep work. Because you get to create abilities in response to situations that come up in play, you rarely wind up with items on your character sheet that never get used. This method embodies the "show, don't tell" rule of fiction: like a character in a story, all of your abilities are introduced through action. As-You-Go is the best way to introduce players who are completely unfamiliar with roleplaying to the form.

**Disadvantages:** Some players find that the initial fungibility of the As-You-Go character disrupts their ability to immerse themselves in their characters. Others feel that they'd rather have their characters shape the storyline than allow the storyline to shape their characters.

**Assigning Ability Ratings**

Through one of the character creation methods, you've now defined your abilities. These tell you what you can do. Now you assign numbers to each ability, called **ratings**, which determine how well they do these things.

Assign a starting rating of 17 to the ability you find most important or defining. Although most players consider it wisest to assign this rating to their area of expertise, which is also often a keyword, you don't have to do this. All of your other abilities start at a rating of 13.

Now you may spend up to 20 points to boost any of your various ability ratings. Each point spent increases a rating by 1 point. You can't spend more than 10 points on any one ability.

Depending on your series, you may be able to raise all of the abilities from a single keyword by spending 1 point, or may have to buy them up one ability at a time. See "Keywords" on page 10.

**Masteries**

*HeroQuest* abilities are scored on a range of 1–20, but are scalable. When you raise a rating of 20 by one point, it increases not to 21, but to 1W. The W signifies a game abstraction called a mastery. You have now reached a new order of excellence in that ability.

If you're engaged in a contest against an opponent, and you have an ability of 10W versus his opposing ability of 10, you enjoy an enormous advantage over him, and can expect to win most of the time. As you progress, you may gain multiple masteries. Multiple mastery is marked with a number to the right of the W symbol. If you have 10W2, you have two masteries. 10W3 means that you have three masteries, and so on. Opposed masteries cancel out, each contestant reducing



their rating by the same number of masteries until only one or neither of them has masteries. A character with two masteries enjoys the same great advantage over one with a single mastery as a character with one mastery has over an opponent with no masteries. If you have an advantage of two or more masteries over an opponent, you can pretty much count on pounding him into the dust.

**How Good are Masteries?**

- A character with the same ability rating as an opponent will win about half the contests they engage in.
- One mastery will beat anyone who is a full mastery lower about 75% of the time.
- If the character is two full masteries higher, the chance of victory is about 95%.
- At three levels, he is all but certain to win.
- At four, he will always be victorious, although opponents might survive to tell the tale...



## Boosting Keywords

Keywords include entire packages of abilities associated with a given occupation, archetype, or source of fantastic powers, whether that be alien anatomy, cybernetic implants, schools of magic, or types of futuristic gear.

In some series, each of these abilities is treated as separate for purposes of character improvement, both during the ability boosts in character generation, and during later character improvement as a result of play (see p. 57). In others, they're treated as a package during improvement, and all abilities increase with a single expenditure.

The more permissive choice results in characters who are broadly capable within their defining areas of expertise, much like iconic heroes in fictional source material.

The restrictive choice is more in keeping with a traditional sense of balance between PCs in a roleplaying group. Some keywords come with more abilities than others; allowing them to advance all at once compounds the apparent disparity between players with ability-rich keywords and those using more modest ones.

In practice, most *HeroQuest* PCs, no matter how many abilities they possess, have multiple ways of solving most common problems, and the choice between them is largely a matter of flavor. Some players find it easier to describe interesting actions from a wide palette of abilities; others do better with a few simple ways of doing things.

We recommend using the restrictive ruling only if this becomes a serious bone of contention in your group.

With the umbrella approach to keywords (p. 10) it costs 1 hero point to raise a single ability under the umbrella, or 2 points to raise the entire keyword.

The **W** symbol is a Mastery Rune, which has significance in the world of Glorantha (see p. 119). For other series, you may choose to substitute another thematically appropriate symbol: perhaps stars for a space opera game, or throwing stars for a martial arts extravaganza.

## Character Creation Recap

1. Learn your parameters (setting, genre, mode, premise)
2. Conceptualize your character
3. Name your character
4. Describe appearance
5. Add narrative hooks
6. Choose abilities (prose, list, or as-you-go); include keywords if available
7. Assign ability ratings

## Bill Assigns His Abilities

Bill starts by assigning the 17 point starting value to his area of expertise, Bounty Hunter. Everything else starts with a 13. He then raises Bounty Hunter by the maximum 10 points, from 17 to 7**W**. That leaves him with 10 points to distribute between his seventeen other abilities. He devotes 2 points apiece to charming, gleaming shotgun Phyllis, and his relationship with his sister Darla. All of these are now rated at 15. That leaves 1 point each to boost enormous muscles, endurance, catch-phrase, and dedicated gadget lover, raising each of these abilities to 14. His final character sheet looks like this:

### Dwayne-O Walken

**The Job:** Bounty hunter 7**W**

**Doing Stuff:** enormous muscles 14, endurance 14

**Social:** Charming 15, catch-phrase: "Ka-Chunk, punk!" 14, known to millions of television viewers 13, legions of swooning admirers 13, strike panic into miscreants everywhere 13

**Knowing Stuff:** dedicated gadget-lover 14, reality program 13, wireless net connection 13, world-spanning adventures 13,

**Taking Care of Business:** endorsement deal 13, glamorous tabloid lifestyle 13

**Stuff I Own:** gleaming shotgun Phyllis 15, Cell Phone 13, website 13

**People:** contacts with far-flung fans from all walks of life 13, sidekick: sister Darla 15

See how the ratings put the ability descriptions in perspective. Dwayne-O might indeed be known to millions of television viewers, but his ability to leverage this when solving problems is actually fairly modest.

## High Level Campaigns

*HeroQuest* can easily handle a campaign where the PCs are movers and shakers of their community, caped superheroes, or Roman soldiers mustered out in Britain after 20 years of service, without needing elevated difficulty ratings. Since the campaign is about such characters, and the things they'd be expected to do, the usual ability ratings work just fine. A superhero doesn't need to roll a contest of strength against an ordinary person—he simply succeeds. Instead, drama comes from him trying to stop a speeding locomotive, and it's simpler to keep this a contest of (say) 17 vs. 14 than 17**W** vs. 14**W**. The latter may seem more impressive, but the masteries cancel out.



# OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

## How to Begin

Adventure stories consist of a series of obstacles, which the heroes must overcome in order to reach their final goal.

A player's encounter with a plot obstacle presents a conflict which must be resolved, either as a success or a failure. The *HeroQuest* rules present a number of different ways of resolving conflicts, which the Narrator chooses based on the conflict's relative importance to the story (see below).

In all cases, the player chooses an ability relevant to the conflict at hand, describes exactly what his character is trying to accomplish, and how. The Narrator may modify these suggested actions to better fit the fictional circumstances, and may describe the actions of the characters or forces on the other side of the conflict. The player rolls a 20-sided die; the Narrator does the same. The Narrator compares the two results, arriving at a degree of success or failure. Armed with this knowledge, she describes the outcome of the conflict, and any lingering consequences to either participant. (When players enter into conflict with one another, each rolls dice, and the Narrator interprets the results, as usual.)

The available resolution methods are as follows:

**Automatic Success:** The PC simply succeeds. Depending on the desired emotional effect, the Narrator may not require a die roll, or may pretend to engage in a simple contest (below), fudging the result to grant a win to the PC.

**Simple Contest:** The PC and Narrator (or PC and another PC) each roll a single die, for an immediate result.

**Extended Contest:** A sequence of die rolls, between one or more PCs and one or more supporting characters, breaks the conflict resolution into a series of actions. What this method loses in brevity of result, it gains in suspense and detail.

Simple and extended contests can resolve the actions of multiple characters acting at once, on either side of the conflict.

## Contests

Although the various contest types differ in complexity and detail, they are united by the following common features:

- Narrators and players start every contest by framing it.
- Abilities may be boosted or penalized by modifiers.
- Results are determined by comparing the PC's die roll to that of an opponent, or an abstract resistance.
- A character's result can be increased by bumps. You get a bump if you enjoy a level of mastery over your opponent, or if you spend a hero point.
- Degrees of success provide the magnitude of victory—or defeat.

## Framing the Contest

Contests in *HeroQuest* are more abstract than resolution methods in most other roleplaying games. They don't simply tell you how well you succeeded at a particular task: they tell you whether or not you achieved your entire goal.

The player(s) taking part in the contest and the Narrator start by clearly agreeing on 1) what prize is up for grabs and 2) what tactics they're using to try to get it. The Narrator then secretly makes the same determination for supporting character opposition, if any. This process is called framing the contest.

**Naming the prize:** Narrators start framing the contest by asking the involved player(s) what prize they're trying to win, or what goal they're hoping to achieve.

- This may be a literal prize, like a gold cup, a gun, or a briefcase full of money.
- More often the prize is a metaphorical one, like access to a location—a treasure vault or the database servers containing the secret plans.
- In a struggle for resources, the winner gets control of something: a seat in government, a supply of goods, the assistance of an ally.
- In a fight, the prize may be the opponents themselves, who the PCs are fighting to capture or kill. (Just as often they'll be seeking another goal and must incapacitate enemy combatants to get it. In this case, beating the enemy is the tactic, not the prize.)
- The stakes may be defensive in nature, as when the PCs try to stop supporting characters from doing something harmful, like dropping a bomb on a city, or assassinating the king.

Sometimes, especially as they get used to the system, the players' answers will be unclear, or will skip to how they're seeking the prize without first specifying what it is. When this happens, ask the question in concrete terms: "What are you hoping to get out of this?"

If you're having trouble figuring out what is being fought over, it may be a sign that the stakes are too low to justify an extended contest. Instead a simple contest, or group simple contest, is called for. (The types of contests are described shortly, see p. 26.) Conversely, your players may be all fired up over a situation you planned to resolve more simply. This is a sign that you should invest more focus and suspense into it by using a group extended contest. Never deny the players the chance to feel passionate about events in your game!

**Tactics:** Here the player(s) describe how they're trying to get the goal. They name the abilities they intend to use, and describe how they mean to use them. If their suggestions seem unlikely based on the situation, the Narrator describes the circumstances more clearly or explains why

the suggested course of action won't work in the game world. When a suitable tactic and governing ability is chosen, the contest has been framed.

**Opposition/Resistance:** After the contest is framed from the players' point of view, the Narrator decides what the antagonist's goal is (if the PCs are opposed by characters or creatures), or what the opposite outcome will be (if the PCs are resisted by an abstract or impersonal force.) In the former case, the PCs will be resisted by an ability; the Narrator decides what this will be, and prepares to describe it in action.

*Rick is running a gladiator-inspired game featuring a squad of elite Roman soldiers who have been betrayed, and now find themselves as gladiators in the Circus Maximus, fighting for their lives. Jeff plays Fumio, leader of the group. Neil plays his trusted lieutenant, the rakish Cassius, who specializes in fighting with a net and javelin. As this is a fantasy-tinged campaign, Cassius's javelin has been enchanted with magic by none other than Jupiter himself; it always returns to Cassius's hand whenever it is flung.*

*In a gladiatorial contest against fierce Nubian charioteers, Fumio is wounded with an arrow in his shoulder, and Cassius has been fighting hand-to-hand with a Nubian warrior separated from his chariot. The two Roman heroes are backed against the walls of the arena with the crowd braying for blood—anyone's—behind them. Both men are exhausted and outnumbered; the noise of the crows has reached a feverish pitch. The Nubians, sensing victory, have the Romans surrounded and close their chariots into a semi-circle, hemming the heroes in.*

Rick frames the contest. "So," he asks Jeff and Neil, "what's your goal?"

"We have to break that wall of chariots!" Jeff cries.

"They have all the advantages," Rick says. "Do you want to try to fight your way through, despite the odds?" It's not his place to impose an answer on the players, but his tone suggests that the question warrants a bit more thought.

"Wait," says Neil. "If we try to break through them head-on, we'll be slaughtered. What we need is one of these chariots. Then we can take the fight back to the Nubians. We know they're not as good as us hand to hand, but we can still drive a chariot. Get one of those and we can consider ourselves even."

"Good point," agrees Jeff. "Yes, that's the goal: secure one of those chariots."

Now that the prize is agreed upon, Rick will know how to interpret the results if they win their contest against the Nubians—their chariot wall will be broken and the crowd, excited at the prospect of a thrilling chariot battle between both sides, will throw their support behind Fumio and Cassius.

"Okay, and how are you going to accomplish this?"

"It's time I called upon Jupiter's gift," Neil says. "I'll hurl my javelin at the driver of the chariot on the edge of the wall nearest Fumio and, when it returns to my hand, hurl it again at the archer. The javelin always returns at speed, right?"

"Right," says Rick. "Jeff, what does Fumio do?"

"Fumio runs at the chariot Cassius is handling with his javelin and leaps over the side to grab the reins."

## Default Ratings

If you enter a contest for which you have no relevant ability whatsoever, your base target number is a 6. Like ability ratings, it may be subject to modifiers.

## Altering Probabilities

Groups wanting higher abilities to win out slightly more often can invert the results when both contestants get the same result, so that the high roller, not the low roller, wins the marginal victory.

## Hero Points

Each character starts the game with a pool of 3 hero points, and gains more of them at the end of every session. These are a precious resource, as they are used both to boost characters' contest results, and to improve abilities over the long term. For more on how hero points are awarded, and how they can be used to improve your character, see p. 57.

"Risky," says Neil. "What happens if we fail? We're dead men..."

"I have Leap Obstacles at 6**W**," Jeff points out. "And your Fight With Javelin is 9**W**. We have a good chance. What is there to lose? Do nothing, and we go down. We've fought too long and too hard to give Emperor Commodus the satisfaction of seeing us die like this. And I want my revenge!"

"Works for me," says Neil.

As it does for Rick: he now knows the prize of the contest, and the abilities being used to wage it. He decides that the Nubian Chariot Driver will resist the javelin attack with his Tough Warrior ability. If he wins the contest, he'll be able to defend against Fumio's attempt to leap over the chariot's side with the same ability. When Cassius hurls his javelin at the second Nubian, it will be at a similar resistance (because all the Nubians have similar abilities, for ease of bookkeeping).

It's time for the contest to begin. "So," says Rick, "ready to take some risks? The whole crowd of 20,000 is waiting..."

## Modifiers

Where an ability rating represents a general ability to succeed in the narrative, modifiers reflect specific conditions that may make it easier or harder to overcome particular obstacles. They are applied to your ability to get a final target number.

Young Crittenden's greatest goal is to steal a kiss from Sofia, the fetching foreign exchange student he's been dreaming about all semester. His Sweet Talk ability is 3**W**. However, because Beasley and Taunton filled his sneakers with herring, his current odor is less than conducive to romance. This imposes a 6-point penalty on his attempt to romance Sofia, taking his target number down to 17.

If the tactic you have chosen for the contest seems either especially easy or difficult, or the governing ability only partially suited to it, the Narrator will assign appropriate modifiers. For more on modifiers, see p. 51.

## Resistance

Most dramatic obstacles come in the form of supporting characters opposed to your goals. When you face impersonal or abstract forces, the Narrator chooses a Resistance to represent the difficulty of the obstacle. Guidance for Narrators on assigning Resistances appears on p. 71.

*Rebuffed by Sofia, Crittenden heads for his private place of meditation—his favorite tree, where he will sulk and plot dark vengeance against the hated Beasley and Taunton. Wintry showers pelt down on him, coating the tree with a slick layer of ice. Under normal conditions, Crittenden could not fail his climb, but now he must enter a contest to succeed. The Narrator assigns a Resistance of 14, representing the new difficulty of getting up the tree.*

## Die Rolls

To determine how well your character uses an ability, roll a 20-sided die (d20). Compare the rolled number with the target number (ignoring masteries for now); low rolls are better than high. At the same time, the Narrator rolls for the resistance:

**Critical:** If the die roll is 1 (even when the target number is 1), you succeed so brilliantly that the Narrator may reward your character with an extra, unexpected effect.

**Success:** If the die roll is greater than 1 and less than or equal to the target number, you succeed, but there is nothing remarkable about the success.

**Failure:** If the die roll is greater than the target number but not 20, you fail. Things do not happen as hoped.

**Fumble:** If the die roll is 20, you fumble (even when the target number is 20). This is the worst result possible, and you will suffer a disturbing or entertaining catastrophe. The degree of success or failure of the PC and Narrator's rolls are compared in either a simple or an extended contest.

## Bumps

A bump affects the degree of success or failure of the die roll. A bump up improves the result by one step, changing a fumble to a failure, a failure to a success, or a success to a critical. Bump ups come from two sources: masteries and hero points (applied in that order). A bump down reduces the degree of success of your opponent. Bump downs come from one source: **masteries**.

## Bump Up with Mastery

You get one bump up for each level of mastery your PC has greater than your opponent's. Opposed masteries cancel out (based on target numbers, not beginning ability ratings), so if your opponent has as many or more masteries as you do you will not get a bump up.

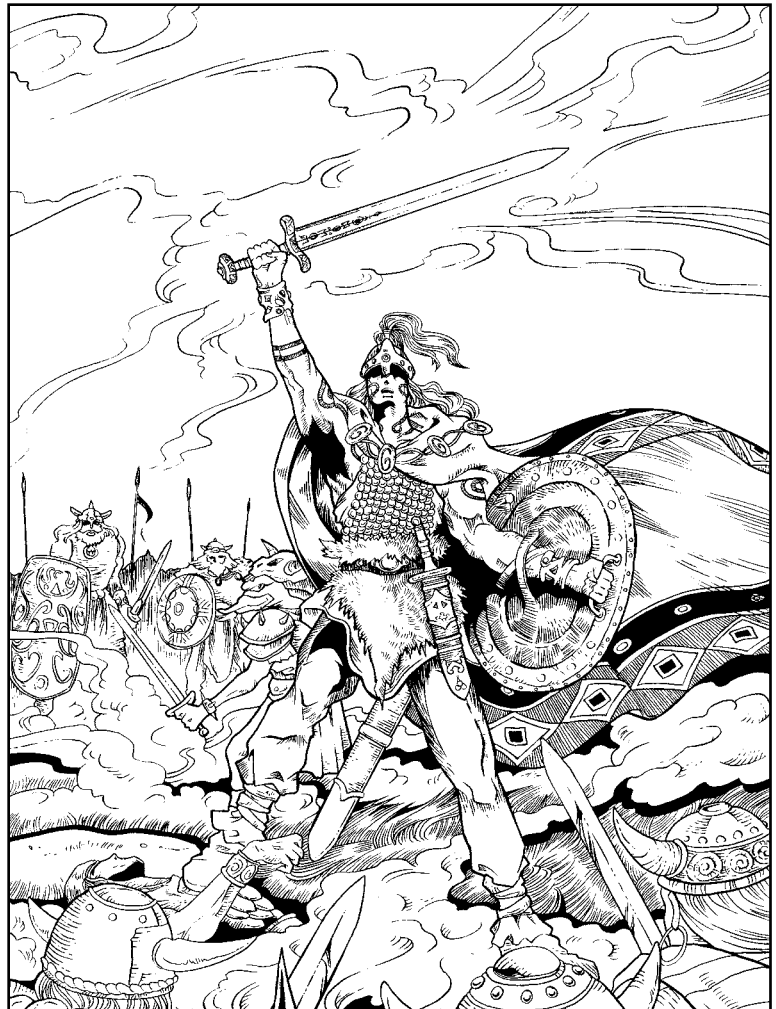
*Crittenden's faculty advisor, the hapless Mr. Jenkins, comes to talk him down from the tree. Jenkins opposes his Gentle Persuasion ability of 13 against Crittenden's Specious Logic ability of 6 $\mathbb{L}$ . Crittenden's player, Colin, rolls a 5—a success. The Narrator rolls a success for Jenkins—a 12. Because Crittenden has a mastery over Jenkins, he bumps up his result by one step, from success to critical.*

## Bump Up with Hero Points

You can spend a hero point to bump up any result by one step. You may only bump your own rolls, not those of PCs or supporting characters—with the exception of sidekicks and retainers, which, as extensions of your characters, you may spend hero points on. You can decide to use a hero point for a bump after the die roll results are calculated (including any bump ups resulting from masteries).

*Crittenden remains in the tree even as the weather grows more turbulent, and a rare wintry thunderstorm lashes the school grounds. A bolt of lightning strikes the tree. The Narrator requires a simple contest for Crittenden to remain safely in its branches. Colin rolls his admittedly lacking Athletics ability of 13, against the lightning bolt's rating of 10 $\mathbb{L}$ . Colin gets a 6; the Narrator, a 7. The Lightning bolt bumps up from a success to a critical. To succeed, Colin must spend Crittenden's last hero point. That bumps him up to a critical result, too. Since his roll is lower than the Narrator's (see simple contest table, p. 28), he earns a minor victory. He remains in the tree—barely—dangling by a sturdy branch.*

During extended contests, you may spend only one hero point per exchange. You may spend any number of hero points on a simple contest.





The expenditure of a hero point represents that moment in a story where the protagonist pushes himself to the limit, marshals previously untapped reserves, or pulls a rabbit out of his hat. Strive to make this as exciting a moment in your game as it would be in the equivalent fiction. Describe exactly what extraordinary thing you're doing to bolster your use of the ability at hand. One useful approach is to look at your character sheet for other abilities you might be using to bolster this one, as if you were performing an augment (p. 53). When stuck for a solution, feel empowered to describe outside forces acting on your character, making him the beneficiary of good fortune or convenient coincidence. Wherever you reach for inspiration, be creative and play up your big moment.

*Colin, spending Crittenden's hero point, leaps up to exclaim excitedly, miming the action of his character frantically scrambling to remain in the scorched, smoking, lightning-damaged tree.*

## Bump Down with Mastery

A bump down works like a bump up, but in reverse. It decreases the result by one step: a critical to a success, a success to a failure, or a failure to a fumble. If you have a critical and still have one or more "unused masteries," you can use them to bump down an opponent, since you cannot get a result better than a critical for yourself. The opponent receives one bump down for each level of mastery remaining. Bump downs come from masteries, never hero points.

*Crittenden's near-fall inspires him to come down from the tree to get back at Taunton. He wants Taunton to think that he's got valuable contraband hidden up in a hole in the tree. When Taunton climbs it, he'll sit on the branch, which Crittenden has sawed halfway through. Crittenden uses his Elaborate Deception ability of 14 to spread rumors through the school. Taunton resists with his Untrusting ability of 17. Both roll successes. Crittenden's first mastery bumps his result to a critical, which is as high as it can go. So his second bumps Taunton's result down one step, to a failure.*

## Degrees of Success

Sometimes all you need to know to interpret the results of a resolution is whether the character succeeded or failed. In other instances, you'll want to know how well a protagonist succeeded, or how badly he failed.

All of the resolution methods yield degrees of success for the victor. The possible degrees of success, from least to greatest, are: marginal, minor, major, complete. Ties are also possible. A success for one contestant means a corresponding failure for the loser.

**Tie:** Tie means no result. Effort was expended, but the net result is that nothing consequential occurs, or else both sides lose or gain equally.

**Marginal:** A nominal victory or defeat, with little gain or loss. The victor gains only the immediate benefits of winning. The loser suffers no lasting effects of his defeat beyond the end of the contest.

**Minor:** A clear victory or defeat, with a significant but limited effect. The victor gains the immediate advantage of his victory, plus the defeat has some lasting effects, although they are typically annoyances. The loser suffers penalties that last for at least a day, possibly longer.

## No Repeat Attempts

A contest represents all of your attempts to overcome an obstacle. If you are defeated it means that no matter how many times you tried to solve the problem with your ability, you finally had to give up. You can try again only if you apply a new ability to the task or your Narrator agrees that special circumstances exist.

## Confusing Ties

Narrators will find most tied results easy to describe—as inconclusive standoffs, in which neither participant gets what he wanted.

*Petrov and Bulgakov struggle for the Luger. It falls from both of their grips, down into the storm drain, where neither of them can get it.*

However, in some situations, ties become difficult to visualize. Chief among these are contests with binary outcomes, where only two possible results are conceivable.

*To go back to the example of Crittenden trying to stay in the tree as it gets struck by lightning, what happens if Crittenden and the storm tie? He's either in the tree, or out of it; he can't be both.*

Narrators resolve confusing ties in favor of the PC, awarding him a marginal victory. Contests between PCs tend not to be binary; in the rare cases where they are, award the minor victory to the PC with the highest number of unspent hero points. (This adjudication does not require the winner to spend any of those points.)

**Major:** A resounding victory or defeat, with serious consequences for all participants. The victor may gain fame or glory. The loser is prevented from pursuing his plans until he somehow counters the results, and he will likely suffer lasting penalties. For both, the effects are long-term, lasting weeks or even months.

**Complete:** A total victory or defeat, with momentous consequences for all involved. These repercussions are often permanent or irreversible; the Narrator might make their removal the goal of an entire adventure or campaign. The victor will be famous (at least for a while). The loser suffers a severe penalty.

Use the degree of success to determine any side effects (p. 27) or lingering consequences (p. 31), but be sure to describe the success in narrative terms. The chart below offers some suggestions.

## Automatic Success

In an automatic success, the Narrator decides that the character will succeed, and he does. The process breaks down as follows:

- The player describes what his character is trying to do, and with what ability.

- The Narrator decides that the character will succeed. If degree of success matters, the PC scores a minor victory.
- The Narrator describes what happens.

Automatic successes are appropriate when failure would seem peculiar or out of character, and in cases where the Narrator can't envision an interesting or entertaining plot branch arising from failure.

In some cases, especially the latter, Narrators may want to preserve suspense by calling for a die roll anyway, and engaging in a **mock contest**—see p. 27.

Automatic successes without the need of a die roll create a sense of power and accomplishment for players. These may be appropriate for conflicts early in a story or session, which establish the protagonists' high level of competence in the face of minor opposition.

In instances where the player wants more than a minor victory, he can gain a complete victory by spending 1 hero point. (This desire indicates that the player has a stronger stake in the outcome than anticipated, and you probably should have at least run a simple contest. Oh well; you can't spot 'em all.) PCs can never gain automatic successes against other PCs.

## Sample Contest Consequences

### Climbing

- Complete Victory:** You reach the top in record time, possibly helping your companions along the way.
- Major Victory:** You climb quickly and competently to the top.
- Minor Victory:** You make slow but steady progress to the top, albeit without flair.
- Marginal Victory:** You took a long time and had some problems, but you reached the top.
- Marginal Defeat:** You got nowhere, and may be hurt.
- Minor Defeat:** You made no progress, and are tired, sore, and perhaps impaired.
- Major Defeat:** You fall while climbing, and are injured.
- Complete Defeat:** You fall from a great height, and are badly wounded, perhaps even dying.

### Combat

- Complete Victory:** Your opponent is down, probably dying; or he surrenders.
- Major Victory:** Your foe is badly injured and stops fighting.
- Minor Victory:** Your foe takes a significant wound.
- Marginal Victory:** Your opponent is slightly wounded, but otherwise intact.
- Marginal Defeat:** You are hurt enough to affect your ability and want to get out of the fight.
- Minor Defeat:** You are wounded enough to significantly affect your abilities.
- Major Defeat:** You are injured badly enough that your ability to escape is compromised.
- Complete Defeat:** You are dying.

### Finding Your Way

- Complete Victory:** You got there the best and easiest way.
- Major Victory:** You are very sure of your way, and get there quickly and without problems.
- Minor Victory:** You know where you are going, and get there easily.

- Marginal Victory:** You get there, but it takes awhile.
- Marginal Defeat:** You thought you knew where you were going, but take a wrong turn.
- Minor Defeat:** You went off track somehow.
- Major Defeat:** You are utterly lost.
- Complete Defeat:** You are lost, and in a dangerous place.

### Romance

- Complete Victory:** She is like putty in your hand, besotted by your presence and eager to do whatever you want.
- Major Victory:** She smiles and stares into your eyes, rapt in your presence and eager to please you.
- Minor Victory:** She smiles and stares into your eyes.
- Marginal Victory:** She smiles at you.
- Marginal Defeat:** She turns away.
- Minor Defeat:** She frowns.
- Major Defeat:** She gives you a very cold look and makes an accusation of impropriety and insult.
- Complete Defeat:** She makes a detailed accusation of lewdness in front of a crowd, and wants you run out of town.

### Social Conflict

- Complete Victory:** You have driven your opponent from the company in disgrace.
- Major Victory:** You have acutely embarrassed your opponent in front of his peers.
- Minor Victory:** You made your opponent look foolish.
- Marginal Victory:** You seem to be right, but it is debatable.
- Marginal Defeat:** You are uncertain of your behavior.
- Minor Defeat:** You embarrass yourself.
- Major Defeat:** You are abashed and cannot look people in the eye. Your social standing is affected.
- Complete Defeat:** You are mortified to the point of having to leave or do something drastic. Your social standing is affected permanently, and you may face exile, demotion, or punishment of some kind.



## Simple Contests

A simple contest unfolds as follows:

1. **Frame the contest.**
2. **Figure your target number using the ability rating and any modifiers.** Your **target number** is the rating of your ability, plus or minus **modifiers** the Narrator may give you—especially if the ability is not well suited to the task. The higher the number (and the more masteries), the more capable your character is.
3. **The Narrator selects the resistance.** The Narrator opposes your hero with a **resistance**—the harder the task or tougher the opponent, the higher the resistance.
4. **Roll a d20 to determine your degree of success or failure, then apply any bumps.** The Narrator does the same for the resistance. Compare your rolled number with your target number to see how well you succeeded or failed with your ability, as described in “Die Rolls” on p. 23. Remember to apply any bumps from masteries or hero points, as described previously.
5. **Determine level of victory or defeat.** Compare your success or failure with the Narrator’s on the Simple Contest Results table to find your level of victory. It is possible for a character to succeed at his die roll but still be defeated.

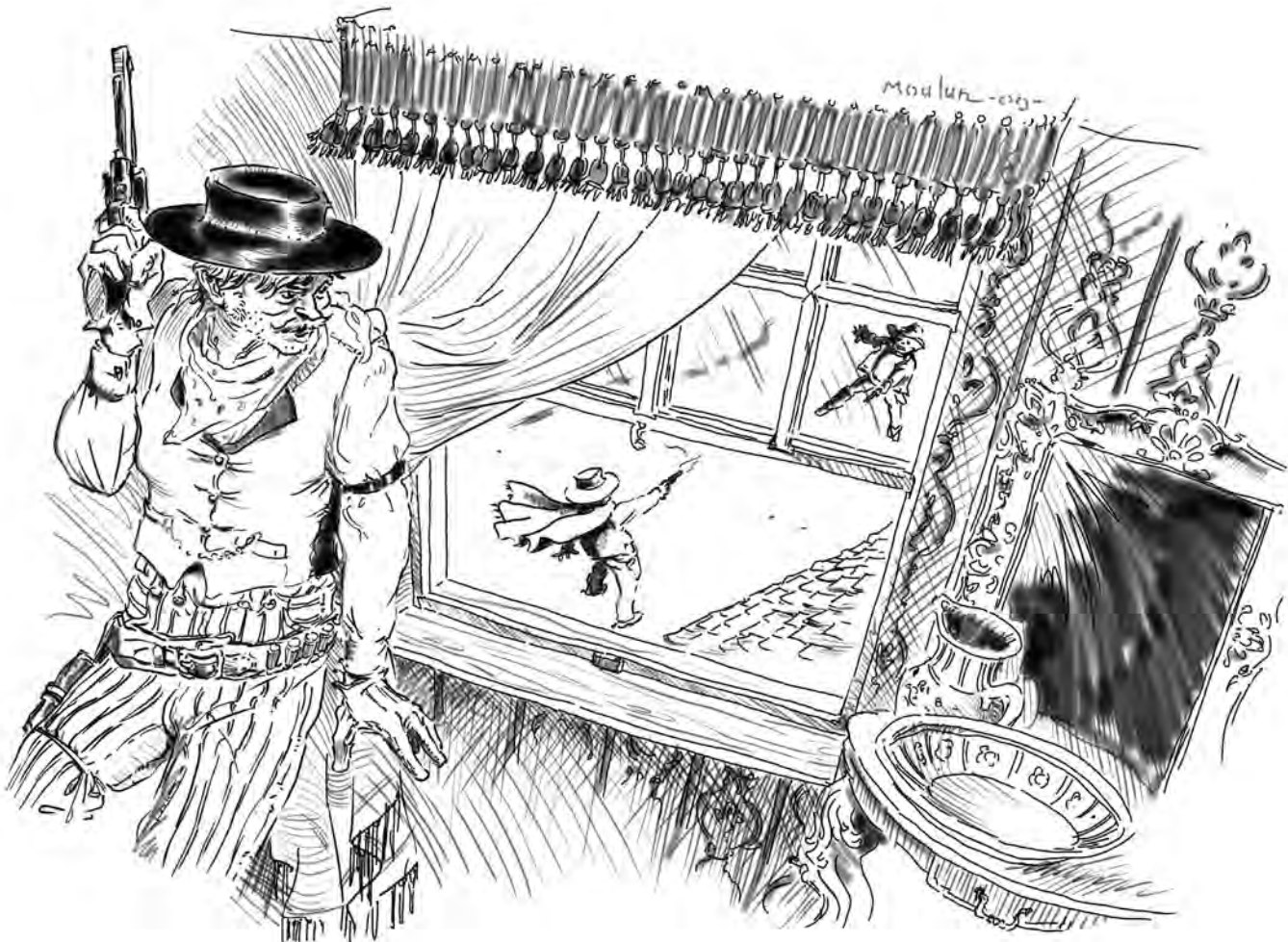
6. **Determine effects of hero point expenditures, if any.** In a simple contest, characters may spend any number of hero points to bump up their results. If they do so, their final levels of victory or defeat are modified accordingly.
7. **Determine contest consequences.** Describe the result based on “Degrees of Success” on p. 24. If necessary, compare the level of victory or defeat with the Contest Consequences table on p. 30.

### Simple Contest Example

Sheriff Cooper (played by Dan) is the lawman of a typical western town. The bank robbers he put away five years ago have busted out of jail and are heading back to town to take their revenge. The train arrives in the station at noon, and, out of cowardice, the townsfolk have left Cooper to fend for himself. Cooper knows that he can’t defeat all six outlaws single-handedly and he needs help. He decides to go to the saloon, half an hour before the train arrives, to see if he can get some help from the sullen, cowardly, townsfolk. His best hope is to get schoolmaster Ned Bates onto his side; if Ned shows some backbone, then maybe others will have a change of heart.

**Step 1: Dan and Jenny (the Narrator, who’ll be playing Ned) frame the contest.**

“What prize are you going for?” Jenny asks.





“I want Ned Bates to change his mind and help me sway the townsfolk. I don’t want him to necessarily do anything heroic—just give me some moral support.”

“That’s great. Very clear goal. Now what tactic are you using to get it?”

“I’m going to use my **Contact: Ned Bates ability**, arguing that when he needed help to fix the schoolhouse roof, it was me that helped him nail on the new shingles. When his wife was struck with the fever, it was my wife who sat by her bedside with her and brought her through it.”

Although neither of these happened in any of the previous Western games she’s run for Dan, Jenny likes the reasons Dan’s come-up with. They perfectly fit with Sheriff Cooper’s quiet, helpful, community-minded lawman character.

**Step 2: Figure target numbers.**

“You got it, Dan. What’s your **Contact: Ned Bates ability** rated at?” asks Jenny.

“13. But I reckon that the help my wife gave to his counts for a lot of emotional capital, so I figure I can apply the +3 bonus I got to my reputation as my consequence of victory to this.”

“Sure,” says Jenny. “Increase your target number to 16.”

**Step 3: The Narrator determines resistance.** Jenny who has had no need to create game statistics for Bates until now, decides that he has a Cautious ability, rated at 13.

**Step 4: Roll the dice.** Dan rolls an 11; Jenny a 17. That’s a success for Cooper (below his target number of 16) but a failure for schoolmaster Bates (above his target number of 13.)

**Step 5: Determine success level:** Consulting the Simple Contest table for success vs. failure, Jenny sees that Cooper has scored a minor victory. She checks the write-up for minor victories, seeing that it yields a significant victory with temporary effect.

**Step 6: Determine results of hero point expenditures, if any.** Jenny has not given Bates, a minor supporting character, any hero points. Nor is he sufficiently passionate about this issue that he’d spend them if he had them. Dan doesn’t need to spend his hero points—he’s already come out on top.

**Step 7: Narrator describes consequences:** “Bates listens to what you have to say. He can’t meet your gaze—none of the townsfolk in the saloon can—but when you talk of how you and your wife helped him and his wife in their hour of need, you can see him close his eyes and fight back tears. Finally he looks up, looks around the saloon, and pulls himself straight. He holds out his hand and you shake firmly. Ned Bates nods. ‘There’s times when a man needs all the help he can get, Sheriff Cooper. Don’t make no difference what odds he faces; no man wants to stand alone.’”

As Cooper has now swung Ned Bates over to his side, Jenny decides that Dan will gain bonuses to any further contests he stages in order to win over more of the townsfolk. “Cooper thanks Ned with a smile and happens to glance at the clock on the wall behind Ned. The train carrying the Bowman Gang arrives in eight minutes...”

## Consequences

Contests, in addition to deciding whether the character gets the prize he was after, carry additional side effects, or consequences. These are negative if the character loses, and positive if he wins.

## Mock Contests

In a mock contest, the Narrator calls for a simple contest but alters the die roll for the opposition, creating what is in effect a secret automatic success.

The Narrator goes through the usual process for a simple contest. If the PC scores a victory without intervention, that result stands. If the opposition would otherwise win the simple contest, the Narrator describes a marginal victory for the PC.

Mock contests contain a small element of risk: when characters fumble, they are treated as ordinary simple contests, which the PC will either lose, or must spend one or more hero points to bump their way out of. (This rule is necessary to prevent players from knowing that you were planning on fudging the roll on their behalf.)

In a game set in the mythical world of Glorantha, Verenkorth the Vengeful, a Sartarite guide of Pavis (played by Brian) finds a magical source of transportation as the furious undead of the Big Rubble blindly rage on the slope of the hill above, intent on killing Verenkorth and regaining the secret map he’s just stolen. Verenkorth has spotted one of the fabled Golden Punts (a river boat used on the Zola Fel river) hidden in the reeds at the water’s edge.

The Narrator, Alison, planned the Golden Punt as an emergency exit strategy for the PCs, should they need it. And they do—as the result of earlier obstacle resolutions, boats they used to sail downriver have been lost to marauding trolls and the treacherous Zola Fel currents. Not wanting to tip her hand, Alison wants it to seem as if acquisition of the Golden Punt is less than a sure thing. So she decides to make it a mock contest.

Verenkorth runs to pull the punt from the reeds. “Have I any idea what this boat is? What shape is it in?” Brian asks Alison.

“You can tell it’s old, and it glimmers with some form of magic, but you haven’t any idea what that magic is. Its hull is wooden but covered with tattered gold leaf and algae coats the base of it. It’s taken on some water, but looks sturdy enough.”

“Okay, but if it’s magical, I want to see if I can see what sort. I’m going to use my **Understand Secrets ability**.”

Alison thinks that’s a reasonable ability, but defining precisely what the magic is will be beyond pretty tricky. “It’s a simple contest. Roll away.”

Alison rolls, though she doesn’t bother to set a resistance, since she’s going to let Brian win anyhow. If he gets a 1 on his roll, then she may reveal something of the magical nature of the punt (it can sail itself). Brian gets a 14; her roll is a 7. If this were a real contest, he’d lose. But it isn’t, so he succeeds.

“With slavering zombies plodding your way, you wrack your brains searching for any stories about golden boats on the Zola Fel. You think you’ve heard rumors that Golden Punts are unsinkable and that they’re stable in any waters—remember you have to get back up river against the currents that sank your last boat!”

Accordingly, Narrators should never use mock contests for situations where it would seem jarring or out of character for the PC to fail—only for those in which, for dramatic reasons, victory should be (almost) guaranteed. Mock contests are impossible between player characters.



SIMPLE CONTEST RESULTS TABLE				
Contestant A	Contestant B			
	Critical	Success	Failure	Fumble
Critical	Low roll has marginal victory, else tie	Contestant A has minor victory	Contestant A has major victory	Contestant A has complete victory
Success	Contestant B has minor victory	Low roll has marginal victory, else tie	Contestant A has minor victory	Contestant A has major victory
Failure	Contestant B has major victory	Contestant B has minor victory	Low roll has marginal victory, else tie	Contestant A has minor victory
Fumble	Contestant B has complete victory	Contestant B has major victory	Contestant B has minor victory	Tie*

\* In a group simple contest (see p. 32), the Narrator may declare that both contestants suffer a marginal defeat to indicate that, although their results cancel out with respect to each other, their situation worsens compared to other contestants.

### States of Adversity

When characters lose contests, they may suffer **states of adversity**: literal or metaphorical injuries which make it harder for the characters to use related abilities.

- In a fight or test of physical mettle, characters wind up literally wounded.
- In a social contest, they may suffer damage to their reputations.
- If commanding a war, they lose battalions, equipment, or territories.
- In an economic struggle, they lose money, other resources, or opportunities.
- After losing artistic contests, they may suffer bouts of crippling self-doubt, preventing them from doing good work. (In fact, morale crises are a useful catch-all consequence for any number of contests in which lingering ill effects are otherwise difficult to think of.)

From the least to the most punishing, the five states of adversity are: Hurt, Impaired, Injured, Dying, and Dead. The first four are possible results of any contest. Dying characters become dead, unless they receive intervention of some sort. In extreme cases, characters may die immediately as a consequence of an extended contest—see p. 37.

### Healthy

Characters who aren't in a state of adversity at all are considered healthy.

It is possible to seem banged up without suffering any measurable penalties. If you get into an extended contest during which you were at a disadvantage for a long time and finally came from behind for the win, you may seem bruised, winded, anxious, or otherwise the worse for wear. Although this apparent harm may yield you useful sympathy, it doesn't actually slow you down at all.

### Hurt

A hurt character shows signs of adversity and finds it slightly harder to do things related to his defeat. Either his flesh or pride may be bruised. If he's halfway sensible, he'll enter similar situations with some reluctance—at least until he recovers. Until he does, he suffers a  $-3$  penalty to all related abilities.

*While showing off his skills with a massive broadsword to impress the locals of a backwater village he's about to defend, Gundar the ageing Barbarian suffers a marginal defeat. The Narrator describes this as muscle strain, and rules that he suffers a  $-3$  penalty on all physical activities.*

Characters may suffer multiple hurts to the same ability. These are cumulative until recovery occurs.

*That night, Gundar suffers another marginal defeat while defending himself from a drunken patron who's tired of the barbarian's constant boasting, and throws a nifty punch. Gundar is now bruised and battered, and the hapless, big-mouthed barbarian suffers a  $-6$  penalty to all related actions.*

Unless the Narrator has a compelling dramatic reason to decide otherwise, hurts vanish at the end of a session, after one day of rest per accumulated hurt, or when in-game events justify their removal.

### Impaired

An Impaired character has taken a jarring blow, physically, socially, or emotionally, and is much likelier to fail when attempting similar actions in the future. He suffers a  $-6$  penalty to all related abilities. Impairments combine with hurts and with other impairments.

As bad as the character's condition may be, there's nothing wrong with him that some prolonged inactivity won't fix. A single impairment goes away after one week of rest, or when an in-game event (like miraculous or extraordinary treatment) occurs to make their removal seem believable.



## Dazed

In some situations, the Narrator may rule that a character is dazed. They are conscious but unable to initiate actions of their own. If another character engages them in a contest, they can snap out of it and defend themselves.

## Unconscious

Characters can be rendered unconscious by contests where achieving this state is the contest's stated goal. Unconsciousness can, depending on genre, result from chokeholds, inhalation of sleeping gas, sleep spells, rayguns set to stun, or the simple failure to remain awake while fatigued. In most adventure genres, unlike real life, it is fairly easy to knock people out without doing them permanent damage. This convention allows the heroes to remove opponents as obstacles without permanently harming them. In series employing this conceit, you can knock opponents out on a minor victory or better. On a marginal victory, they become dazed instead.

In settings where player characters routinely kill helpless opponents, Narrators should ensure that it is never easier to knock enemies out than to kill them. For more on this problem, see p. 85.

## Injured

An injured character has suffered a debilitating shock to the system, one which renders him all but helpless.

To even participate in a contest, he must succeed at a prior **contest of wherewithal** to rouse himself to action. Appropriate abilities for contests of wherewithal might include:

- *Physical action*: Endurance, High Pain Threshold, Grim Determination, etc.
- *Intellectual activity*: Concentration, Iron Will, Love Of Country (if action to be attempted is patriotic), etc.
- *Social humiliation*: Savoir Faire, Unflappable, Stoic Dignity

A contest of wherewithal faces a Moderate resistance (see p. 72). Even if the injured character succeeds at the contest of wherewithal, he takes an automatic bump down whenever he uses any related ability in a contest. (The bump down does not apply to the contest of wherewithal itself.) Where it seems apt, the Narrator may choose to ignore the bump down if the character scores a major or complete victory on the contest of wherewithal.

Any active hurts or impairments continue to be counted against him as well.

In a post-apocalyptic game, Bruno the Hook (Mikko) has been injured by radiation poisoning. The Narrator, Susan, describes this as a physical injury that also impairs mental functioning. Prior to his radiation burn, Bruno suffered a Hurt in a scuffle with plaguemen. He suffers the Injured penalty and the previous -3 Hurt penalty.

The rest of Bruno's scrounger band goes off in pursuit of some gasoline canisters they see up on a ridge, leaving him to suffer on a pallet in a cave. After they're gone, a hungry mutant coyote snuffles its way into the cave mouth. Bruno wants to scare it off, using his Hurl Object ability to toss a rock at it.

First, he must succeed at a contest of wherewithal. "I use my Adrenaline Rush ability to momentarily ignore the pain and clear my mind," says Mikko. This ability is rated at 16 and reduced by the -3 penalty to 13; he rolls a 6. Using the Resistance Class table (p. 72), Susan sees that a Moderate resistance is 19. She rolls a 16. This is a success vs. success in Bruno's favor, a marginal victory. It allows Bruno to attempt to throw the stone at the coyote.

(If he had failed, he might grope for the stone, only to have it fall out of his debilitated grasp.)

Bruno has Hurl Object at 14; his -3 Hurt penalty reduces the target number to 18. The coyote has Dodge at 18. Mikko rolls a 19; Susan gets a 20. Bruno takes a bump down from his Injury, for a fumble vs. fumble—a tie. In this context, Susan rules that the rock misses the coyote, and that he and Bruno snarl ineffectually at one another until it finally gets bored and slinks off.

Physical traumas will impose these penalties on nearly all actions; severe pain makes it hard to concentrate on mental and social activities, too. Some mental injuries will likewise make it difficult to perform physically.

Certain other injuries are compartmentalized in effect: a particular subset of abilities is penalized, but others work as normal. Social injuries are a prime example: you may be unable to present your face in polite society, but that won't stop you from solving equations, firing a pistol, or painting a portrait.



In realistic settings, physical injuries take many months to recover from, even with quality medical treatment. Without treatment, they may become permanent, or even send the character on a deteriorating spiral into eventual death.

Most games inspired by serial fiction will treat injury in a more forgiving way, allowing the character to return to full health after spending an undefined amount of time between sessions undergoing hospital treatment.

If magical or advanced healing is a part of your setting, you may be able to recover immediately from injuries, given the proper treatment.

The time it takes to recover from injuries to one's morale, social standing, and so on should be roughly equivalent to physical injuries. (An argument might be made that in very realistic genres, psychological traumas should last even longer than physical ones, perhaps even becoming permanent. Use this reasoning with caution; players will probably find it unduly punishing. In fiction, emotional damage is healed only through cathartic events, in which the character completes his so-called "story arc" and undergoes a redemptive transformation.)

### Dying

A dying character will, without rapid and appropriate intervention, soon expire. To save him, the PCs must typically overcome a story obstacle and/or succeed at a difficult contest. According to the conventions of dramatic storytelling, the character typically has just enough time left for the other characters to make this one attempt.

*Example One:* the charismatic pirate, Captain Crane, falls from a yard-arm trying to secure a loose sail while his ship battles its way through a ferocious storm battering the Spanish Main. The fall is a bad one and Crane breaks his back: he is dying.

To save him, the Narrator explains that the other pirates must get him back to Port Dagger, where he can receive treatment and his condition can be stabilized. It will take them eight hours to turn the ship around and sail back. A fellow privateer with First Aid rolls to see how long Crane has left. He succeeds; the Narrator tells him that Crane has maybe eight hours, give or take.

The Narrator decides that the suspense in the scenes about Crane's rescue revolves around the effort to get him to Port Dagger. If the PCs get him there, he survives—no roll by the medic supporting character will be required. Instead, an extended contest of the team's sailing abilities determines whether they get him back in time. If they do, he lives.

## Secret Contests

In a few situations, being asked to undertake a contest spoils the suspense or reveals a secret. The classic example of this is a contest to see if a character perceives something hidden and dangerous. You can play this as an ordinary contest; doing so creates a sense of unease, as a failed player wonders what would have happened if he had succeeded.

In a particularly grim or deterministic series, you may instead prefer to blindside the players by using secret contests. To stage a secret contest, check the character's sheet for the most relevant ability, and roll for both the character and the resistance. Reveal the results only on success.

*Egyptian priest Horemheb (Jim) enters his bedchamber, unaware that an asp has been hidden in a hollowed compartment in his headrest. The Narrator, Alice, is more interested in surprise than suspense and opts for a secret contest. Looking at her copy of Jim's character sheet, she sees that Horemheb's most appropriate ability is Wary, rated at 17. Keeping track of which die is which, she rolls that ability against a resistance of 14. She scores a 10 for Horemheb, versus an 8 for the resistance. Horemheb fails.*

*Unaware of the threat, Horemheb proceeds into the room. When Jim says that his character goes to sleep, Alice narrates the snake attack. If Horemheb had seen it, he could have avoided the attack entirely, for example by tossing a blanket onto the headrest and tossing it out the window.*

Secret contests are always simple. When necessary, they may be group simple contests against a single resistance (p. 32).

*Example Two:* Explorer Jean-Pierre Duvivier suffers a complete defeat while trying to avoid the bite of the deadly Burmese krait. The anti-venom is back at camp, which is fifteen minutes away. Coincidentally enough, he has about that much time before the toxin's effect on his body becomes irreversibly lethal.

The Narrator decides that in this instance the suspense surrounding Jean-Pierre's survival revolves around the administration of the anti-venom. Jean-Pierre's character will get to camp in time, at which time the player must roll his Hardy Constitution ability against the krait's Venom. A victory means survival; defeat means death.

When it seems unbelievable for the time between dying and death to coincide with the time it takes for intervention to occur, Narrators should choose a longer interval between dying and death. Contrive toward character survival, except when players obviously prefer dramatic deaths over last minute revivals.

Minor supporting characters no one cares about saving typically die after a few perfunctory gasps, as will characters who have no chance of being saved.

CONSEQUENCES OF DEFEAT TABLE

Defeat Level	State of Adversity	Penalty
Marginal	Hurt	-3 penalty to appropriate abilities
Minor	Impaired	-6 penalty to appropriate abilities
Major	Injured	Automatic bump down on uses of appropriate ability
Complete	Dying	No actions allowed





Successful intervention usually leaves the character injured. Depending on the narrative circumstances, a complete victory on the intervention attempt may leave him merely impaired.

If intervention fails, the character will die, but not necessarily immediately. Although irrevocably doomed, he may survive long enough to deliver a poignant final speech... or linger in his deathbed for agonizing months. He will be lucid enough to deliver dialogue but, unless the Narrator deems it dramatically appropriate, unable to perform any task complicated enough to require a contest.

Like other states of adversity, dying may be literal or metaphorical. Your standing in society, business or politics may be on the brink of permanent extinction. You may be facing mental death—a permanent lapse into madness or senility. For more on metaphorical death, see below.

Dying adversaries may, if rescued by their allies, be taken off for appropriate intervention, surviving to vex the protagonists another day.

### Dead

A character who dies as a result of physical injuries is gone from the game, period. Your fellow PCs will perhaps hold a funeral as the player creates a new character from scratch, and works out with the Narrator a way to integrate him into the ongoing series.

Death from a non-physical contest will likely be metaphorical. (Unless you're playing a game based on 19<sup>th</sup> century novelists like Thomas Hardy, in which case it is entirely in genre to literally die of embarrassment or heartbreak.) If you die in an economic, social, spiritual, or artistic contest, you permanently lose entire suites of abilities.

*Charismatic bounty hunter Dwayne-O Walken (p. 15) has suffered a scandal so shocking that even a tabloid figure can't come back from it. The Narrator rules that he's effectively dead as a celebrity and social figure. She takes his character sheet and crosses off the following abilities: Charming, catch-phrase, known to millions of television viewers, legions of swooning admirers, strike panic into miscreants everywhere, reality program, endorsement deal, glamorous tabloid lifestyle, world-spanning adventures, website, contacts with far-flung fans from all walks of life. She even rules that his faithful sister/sidekick Darla deserts him.*

*Harsh? You bet. That's death for you.*

*With so many of his most enjoyable abilities stripped from him, Bill decides that Dwayne-O isn't really Dwayne-O anymore, and decides to send him into ignominious retirement, so he can create a new character unencumbered by metaphorical death.*

Even if you're only metaphorically dead, the Narrator is within her rights to declare that your character has undergone changes so dire as to make him unplayable. He may be incurably insane, or so socially shamed that he retires to a life of obscurity or religious meditation. He may be shunned by all around him, sent into permanent exile, or sentenced to long-term imprisonment with no hope of escape.

### Lingering Benefits

Just as characters who suffer defeat can suffer ongoing ill effects in addition to the loss of the prize at hand, characters who win can gain lingering extra benefits.

Feel free to assist the Narrator by suggesting possible benefits, recognizing that she retains final say.

#### Examples:

- Lieutenant Xornox climbs a high cliff. He can apply what he learned to future uses of his Climb skill.
- Gundar the Barbarian wins a fight against a wizard. His player argues that he should get a bonus the next time he fights a wizard, because he no longer thinks they're so tough.
- Robbie Segretti hacks into the database of Black Hook LLC. This will give him serious cred in the hacker community, which he can apply to his Score Info From Fellow Hackers ability.
- Pierre Alexandre successfully defends his honor in a duel against the Comte de Tourvel. Given the importance of dueling at court, his player argues that the ensuing bonus should apply to any social ability.

If the Narrator accepts your case, you get a bonus on the selected abilities, or in the specified situation, as determined by your victory level.

CONSEQUENCES OF VICTORY TABLE	
Victory Level	Bonus
Marginal	+0
Minor	+3
Major	+6
Complete	+9

The bonus lingers until you suffer a defeat on a contest where you use either the bonus or the ability with which you won the original contest.

*"Howlin'" Horace McLaglen is a member of a quasi-criminal private firefighting gang in 1850s New York City. He gains a +6 bonus after heroically preventing a potentially devastating fire, and applies it to all contests he undertakes relating to his run for a position at city hall. He used his Firefighting ability to gain the bonus, and uses it again to combat a new fire in Chinatown. He's knocked out of that contest. His failure eclipses memories of his previous triumph. He loses his +6 bonus on all political activities.*

You can't decline the bonus when you think you might lose it; you must always use it in any contest in which (in the Narrator's judgment) it ought to apply.

Narrators should keep a record of all active lingering benefits, to alert themselves to situations where they might be lost.

When you lose lingering benefits, your Narrator may use them as inspiration for states of adversity.

*McLaglen is physically Impaired at the end of the Chinatown firefight. The Narrator describes him as suffering from smoke inhalation. But since he built so much of his political campaign on his prior firefighting success, she also rules that he suffers the standard Impairment penalty to all political activity. He will have to not only do something to recuperate physically, but politically as well.*



At the end of a storyline, especially when a significant period of game-world time passes between the conclusion of one episode and the beginning of the next, the Narrator may declare that all lingering benefits have expired.

You may apply bonuses from multiple lingering benefits to a single contest.

*Professor Hexagon battles the Green Menace on the wing of a gyrocopter. He applies two lingering benefits to his ability to arrive at his target number.*

*The first is a +3 bonus from a minor victory in which he rescued a group of orphans forced into slave labor by the Green Menace. After this contest, Hexagon's player, Aidan, suggested that the bonus represented his increased determination to bring the loathsome villain to justice—and should be applied to all contests toward that aim.*

*The second lingering bonus comes from his recent defeat of the Green Menace's chief henchman, Morgo, who turned out to be a machine-man, just like his master. Aidan asked that this bonus, a +6 (from a major victory) be applied to any future fights against machine-men.*

*Hexagon fights using his Super-Serum Enhanced Physique ability of 7 $\blacksquare$ . The total bonus from both lingering benefits is +9, taking him to a target number of 16 $\blacksquare$ .*

Narrators should be alert to circumstances in which the lingering benefit applies, even though the player doesn't know about it, or has forgotten to ask.

*Even if Hexagon didn't already know that the Green Menace was a machine-man, he should still be eligible for the +6 bonus.*

The Narrator is always free to assign lingering benefits to supporting characters, including antagonists.

## Group Simple Contests

In the following contest type, multiple participants take part in a contest, each of them rolling once. Use it when more than one character takes part in a conflict that does not warrant the resolution time of an extended contest.

A group simple contest can pit all of the participating characters against a single resistance, representing one obstacle.

In a contest against resistance, each player rolls a single time; the Narrator rolls the same resistance value once per player. The two results are compared on the Resolution Point Table (p. 37), to get a numerical value which the winner then adds to his side's total. The side with the highest total scores a victory, the degree of which is determined by the difference between results, as seen on the Group Simple Contest Result Table. If the results are tied, the outcome is inconclusive or mutually unsatisfactory.

Unlike an extended contest, the Narrator has everyone roll simultaneously, and holds off on describing the action until all of the results are tabulated and combined. The relative contributions of the participants toward the victory are indicated by the number of resolution points they contributed to their team's final tally. You'll often find it easiest if you wait to describe the top scoring player or players' actions last.

Characters are considered to act more or less simultaneously. (Where the participants would logically take turns acting, instead employ a series of simple contests, with order of action decided by the players, or by other factors arising from the

logic of the fictional situation. That way the players can stop as soon as they succeed, which is not possible in a group simple contest.)

GROUP SIMPLE CONTEST RESULTS TABLE		
Difference between Results	Winning Group's Victory Level	Winner Negative Consequences
0	No winner; result tied or inconclusive	
1	Marginal	Hurt
2	Minor	Unharmed
3-4	Major	Unharmed
5+	Complete	Unharmed

*In a series inspired by Chinese fairy tales, four hungry travelers are trying to catch a fish in a river. It is a magical fish; if they can catch it, they can harvest enough flesh from it to feed a hungry village, then release it to swim away without harm. However, the fish only rewards those skillful enough to catch him with their bare hands. The four PCs, Tripitaka (Jamie), Monkey (Graham), Pigsy (Scott) and Sandy (Ken) all wade into the river, to catch it.*

*The Narrator, Vivian, thinks this will be a fun scene, but doesn't want to extend it to epic length, so she decides on a simple contest. In keeping with the lighthearted slapstick style of the series, all of the PCs want to try at once, so she elects to employ a group simple contest. She decides to represent the difficulty of catching the magic fish with a single Resistance value, of 16.*

*Each player rolls a die; the Narrator rolls 4 dice, keeping track of which matches each player.*

*Jamie, using Tripitaka's Serene Good Fortune of 18, scores a 14 against Vivian's 13. That's a success vs. success in Vivian's favor—a marginal victory for the resistance, which gives it 1 resolution point. The score is now 0–1.*

*Graham, using Monkey's Deft Capering of 8 $\blacksquare$ , rolls a 12 against Vivian's 17. That's a success vs. failure in Monkey's favor, winning his side 2 resolution points, taking the total to 2–1.*

*Pigsy uses his Forage For Food 3 $\blacksquare$ ; Scott rolls an 11 against the Narrator's 15. That's a success vs. success in his favor, garnering him a single resolution point. The total is now 3–1.*

*Sandy uses his Scary Countenance of 8 $\blacksquare$  to frighten the fish into submission. (In a more serious game, the Narrator might consider this a Stretch (see p. 52), but it fits the spirit of this series just fine.) He rolls a 15; so does Vivian. This tied success vs. success result adds nothing to the final total.*

*That total, at 3–1 in favor of the PCs, means that they've caught the fish. Consulting the group simple contest result table, Vivian sees that it is a minor victory.*

*Now that the results are in, it's time for Vivian to narrate: "You leap heedlessly into the water, splashing after the fish. Sandy splutters down into the water to scare the fish with his frightening visage, but forgets to breathe and winds up coughing and spluttering. The terrified fish leaps into Pigsy, who stuns it slightly, before it bounces off of him and into a startled Tripitaka, who falls back into the water. Monkey leaps in, deftly snatching it out of the air. The four of you wind up on the bank, wet, spluttering, and exhausted—but with a slippery fish to take to the village, inside a clay pot full of river water."*



Alternatively, a group simple contest can take place as a series of paired match-ups between two groups of contestants. Characters forced to participate in more than one contest face the standard multiple opponent penalties (see p. 43).

Lindsay runs a game of post-apocalyptic survivalism. The PCs are the battle leaders for the feral suburban community of Millwood Acres, which is at war with the neighboring gated community of Riverglen Homes. Fearing an alliance between Riverglen and the gothsquads of the nearby amusement park, they decide to launch a series of punitive raids against their enemies. They frame the contest so that, if they succeed, the Riverglenners appear weak and unsuitable for alliance in the eyes of the gothsquadders.

The four PCs are Joella (played by Nina), Steve (Magnus), Stu (Brendan) and Starkweather (Wulf.) They're going to split up and hit four Riverglen defense points all at once. Each will lead a small squad of warriors on motorbikes and scooters. They choose the defense points according to the presence of their various hated rivals. All players roll at once; Lindsay rolls once each for the four antagonist characters.

Nina rolls Joella's Skirmisher rating of 18 against her rival, Irene Caddis, who defends with her Fight From Fortification rating of 16. She rolls a 1, versus the Narrator's 9. That's a critical vs. success, which scores 2 resolution points for her side.

Using Steve's Motorized Assault rating of 8 $\blacksquare$ , Magnus contends against the Vigilant Defender 5 $\blacksquare$  ability of his personal enemy, Ratter Glynn. He rolls a 6 versus Lindsay's 2—a success vs. success in Ratter's favor. That scores 1 resolution point for Riverglen Homes.

Brendan rolls Stu's Find Defensive Flaws ability of 3 $\blacksquare$  against Forsythia's Instill Berserk Fury of 17. He gets a 9, versus Lindsay's 2. That's another success vs. success for Riverglen homes, taking the score to 2-2.

What he hasn't counted on is the return to Riverglen of their old war leader, Salton, who they thought banished to the city lands. Salton pits his Rescuing Cavalry ability of 10 $\blacksquare$  against Stu, who responds with his Adjust To Circumstances ability, which after the -3 multiple opponent penalty, has an effective rating of 2 $\blacksquare$ . He rolls a 13 versus Lindsay's 10. That's a success vs. failure for Salton, earning 2 resolution points for Riverglen. The score is now 2-4.

It's up to Starkweather to even the odds. He pits his Pinpoint Maneuvers ability of 8 $\blacksquare$  against the Architect's Booby Trap ability of 16. He scores a 13, against Lindsay's 14, but decides to spend a hero point to turn that result from success vs. success into critical versus success. That takes the score to 4-4. A tie is disappointing, but better than an unequivocal loss.

With the results now determined, Lindsay can now narrate the results: "Your skirmishes, as skirmishes tend to be, proved less than decisive. Joella led her squad to shoot up Irene's fortifications at Riverglen's west gate, leaving impressive damage. Unfortunately,



Ratter saw Steve's motorized assault coming, and repelled it by ordering his men to lay down a persuasive line of covering fire. Forsythia likewise whipped her fighters into a fury, pushing Steve back before he could find a chink in her fortifications. Then Salton suddenly reappeared, roaring in with his men from the rear to humiliatingly rout Steve's forces. At the same time, Starkweather was blowing like a banshee through The Architect's carefully laid minefield. An impressive showing, but overall, only enough to turn the evening's festivities into an explosive draw. The next day, your contact inside the amusement park crew tells you that the skirmishes won't impact their decision regarding a Riverglen alliance, one way or the other.

### Boosting Results

Because they average together the results of multiple participants, group simple contests tend to flatten outcomes, making victories more likely to be marginal or minor than major or complete. In many cases this is dramatically appropriate; if the contest were really pivotal to the drama, you'd be running an extended contest instead. On the other hand, the system throws up more than its share of inconclusive outcomes, which runs contrary to strong drama.

To overcome this flattening effect, players are permitted, at the beginning of a group simple contest, to spend one or more hero points to purchase a boost. A boost assures a clearer victory, should they prevail. The cost of this varies by the number of PCs participating: 1 hero point for 1-3 PCs; 2 hero points for 4-6 PCs, or 3 hero points for 7-9 PCs. (Costs extrapolate from there for rare groups with more than nine PCs.) Groups may spend twice as many hero points as required to gain a double boost. The points may be spent by any combination of players. They remain spent no matter how the contest resolves.

On a tie or a PC victory, a boost increases the collective victory level by one step: from tie to marginal victory, from marginal to minor victory, from minor to major victory, or from major to complete victory. A double boost increases it by two steps: from tie to minor, from marginal to major, from minor or major to complete.

*If the group in the Riverglen example above had purchased a boost before commencing the contest, it would have cost them 2 hero points, and would have upped their final result from a tie to a marginal victory. A double boost would have cost them 4 hero points, and earned them a minor victory.*

### Consequences and Benefits

Assign bonuses for lingering benefits according to the group's victory level, as per the Lingering Benefits table, p. 31. Assign penalties for negative consequences according to the resisting force's victory level, as per the States of Adversity table, p. 30. (Both tables also appear in the quick reference section of this book.)

Depending on which approach seems to grow organically from the story, ongoing repercussions from group simple contests may be assigned to the entire group, or to individual members who performed either especially well, or especially poorly. Default to rewarding everyone. Resort to individualized repercussions only when a group reward defies dramatic credibility, or when competition within the group is a pivotal dramatic issue.

In a social contest, all members of a winning group gain ongoing bonuses in upcoming interpersonal interactions. All members of a losing group suffer penalties.

In an intellectual contest, everyone on the winning side learns from the experience and gains a bonus, or becomes demoralized and suffers future penalties.

In a physical contest where the PCs win, lingering benefits tend to be social or material, allowing everyone to benefit. If they were raiding for cows, everyone gets a share of the wealth or social bonus they were all fighting for. Or the group might gain a fearful reputation, applying a demoralization penalty to their next group of opponents. A mountaineering crew gets to share in the fame of a spectacular climb, even if some of the group members contributed more to the success than others.

Physical contests in which the heroes lose tend, on the other hand, to break the mold. It's hard to justify why a competitor who overcame his resistance would be hurt as badly as one who got his head handed to him. Here story logic will almost always require you to single out individual team members to bear the brunt of physical injury.

Separated results could also apply in cases where team members are working toward the same goal independently. They might always be appropriate in certain specialized series, where a grim sense of alienation or isolation overwhelms any sense of team effort. Examples of these might include Le Carré-style espionage or Machiavellian court intrigue.

When singling out participants in a winning contest, characters who posted positive resolution points to their side's result get the benefit corresponding to their level of victory, as seen on the Simple Contest Results Table (p. 28 or Quick Reference Appendix) and compared to the Lingering Benefits Table (p. 31 or Quick Reference Appendix.)

In a losing contest, the characters whose opponents won victories against them suffer penalties as per their defeat levels, also as per the Simple Contest Results table, as compared to the Consequences of Defeat table (p. 30 or Quick Reference Appendix.)





**Separated Benefits Example:** Elena runs a fantasy series set in the Gloranthan city of Pavis, which is currently under occupation by the hated Lunar Empire. The heroes (Harmath, Svetz, Varond, and Sabyne) are working to bring down the Lunar regime, but are scattered around Pavis and unable to easily meet up. At the moment they are looking to make contact with the Free Pavisites and their leader, Brygga Scissortongue—a tough task because the Lunars have many spies and much magic employed in the hope of trapping Brygga and any who oppose the Lunar forces. Whichever character manages to make contact with Brygga will gain kudos amongst their respective local street gangs. The PCs all contest against a resistance representing Brygga's elusive and suspicious nature, and the various Lunar spies who are out to catch anyone conspiring to subvert the Lunar regime.

Harmath scores a success vs. success, adding 1 point to the group total. Svetz loses a success vs. success, subtracting 1 point. Varond gets a critical vs. success, posting 2 points for the team. Sabyne, with a success vs. a fumble, adds 3 points to the group total. The team wins the group simple contest, with an impressive 5-point difference separating them from the resistance. That's a complete success: Elena finishes her narration of their various attempts to contact Brygga by cutting to the infamous tavern, Gimpy's, where the PCs meet, face to face, with the elusive Brygga, travelling incognito and with a substantial, if well-disguised, bodyguard.

Although the group met its objective, some members contributed more than others, and will advance in Pavic politics, while others get nothing. Consulting the Simple Contest results table, Sabyne's success vs. fumble result is a major victory, and Harmath's success vs. success is a marginal victory. The Lingerin Benefits table shows that the major victory is worth a +6 bonus, while the marginal victory gets nothing. Until circumstances within the rebellion against the Lunars change again, Sabyne applies her +6 bonus to all tests to rise within the Free Pavisite organization.

**Separated Adversity Example:** Roman legionaries Maximus, Quintus, Albus, and the witch-woman Éibfine lick their wounds after losing what should have been an easy skirmish with a gang of Picts. The group suffered a minor defeat, with Maximus winning a success vs. success (marginal victory), Quintus losing a failure vs. success (minor defeat), Albus going down on a failure vs. critical (major defeat) and Éibfine scoring a success vs. failure (minor victory.) Maximus and Éibfine, the characters scoring victories within the broader defeat suffer no adversity, though of course they fail in their ultimate objective of increasing Pictish fear of Romans. Checking the Consequences Of Defeat table, Quintus' minor defeat means that he is Impaired, with a -6 penalty to appropriate abilities. Albus' major defeat means that he is Injured, suffering an automatic bump down on most abilities until he recuperates. If it matters, the Narrator can also determine that Maximus' opponent is hurt (-3 penalty) and that Éibfine's enemy is Impaired (-6 penalty).

## Extended Contests

Most conflicts should be resolved simply and quickly, using the simple contest rules. However, every so often, you'll want to stretch out a resolution, breaking it down into a series of smaller actions, increasing the suspense the players feel as they wait to see if they succeed or fail.

Think of the different ways a film director can choose to portray a given moment, depending on how important it is to the story, and how invested he wants us to feel in its outcome.

For example, there are two ways to shoot a scene in which a thief cracks a safe. The action can be portrayed quickly, perhaps with a moment where the actor catches his breath to see if the tumblers fall into place, and a brief swell of music on the soundtrack. Then he sighs with relief, opens the safe, and gets whatever is inside. Directors choose to dispense with such actions relatively quickly when they're tangential to the main point of the story. In this instance, the story is about what happens after the thief gets what's in the safe, not about what might happen to him if he fails.

Another film might instead choose to make the opening of the safe provide either a pivotal turning point in the story, if not its climactic moment. It would spend many scenes building up to the safe-cracking sequence: introducing the team of thieves, underlining the difficulty of the attempt, and making us care what happens if the safe isn't opened. Unlike the above example, this is a movie about a bunch of guys who set out to crack a safe. Naturally, then, it would be a huge disappointment to the audience, after all of that build-up, if the director quickly and anticlimactically allowed the lead character to succeed or fail in a few short moments. Instead he breaks the attempt into a series of obstacles. There is an ebb and flow to the action, as film techniques manipulate our sense of tension. The pace of editing often increases. The pulse of the music tightens its subliminal grip on us. First the hero seems to be succeeding, then failing, then succeeding, and then failing again... until the moment when final triumph is won—or disaster ensues.

Even a movie driven by action and suspense will typically include only a handful of these set-piece sequences. They need the rest of their running times to build up to their big moments, to make us care about the characters, and to give us quiet moments to contrast with the white-knuckle parts.

Set piece moments of action, suspense or heightened drama, are resolved with extended contests. This contest type allows you to focus on important sequences, drawing them the suspense surrounding their outcomes. They can be exciting when employed sparingly, but lose their luster when overused. Most groups will find that the typical four-hour session should contain at most one or two group extended contests. Don't throw them in gratuitously, even if it means that entire sessions go by without any extended contests.

There is no action that is always by definition important. You may be tempted, for example, to adjudicate every fight with an extended contest, because fights seem like they should take a while and focus the players' attention. Doing this will dilute the impact of all of your fight scenes.

Think of your favorite action movie. Fights with main villains and their featured sidekicks are fully dramatized, with an ebb and flow of suspense as the relative advantage flows back and forth between the two sides. But anonymous guards and bad guys are dispensed with in seconds, because conflict with them is not what the scene is about.

Always know why you're using one of the pivotal scene contest methods. If you can't articulate to yourself why this is a pivotal scene in the current session, use simple contests instead.



If the stakes don't matter much, use simple contests instead. If the players aren't emotionally invested in a situation, think about using a simple contest. Maybe you didn't lay enough groundwork, and need to go back and insert story development scenes in which they come to understand why this matters. Then come back to it and run it as an extended contest. Possibly the players have a different idea of what the story is about than you do, and you need to follow their lead. Find out what they care about, make the stakes of the drama revolve around that, and use one of the two extended contest mechanics to drive *that* sequence instead.

## Extended Contest Sequence

### 1. Frame the contest.

### 2. Carry out one or more rounds, repeating as necessary.

An extended contest unfolds as a series of simple contests. At the end of each simple contest, the winning character (or resistance) scores a number of **resolution points** (RPs) to his tally, which varies between 1 and 5, depending on the result. Tied results leave the score unchanged.

The first of the contesting characters to accumulate a total of 5 points wins; his opponent is knocked out of the contest and loses whatever is at stake in the storyline.

The number of resolution points the winner garners at the end of each exchange depends on the degree of victory he scored. He gets 1 point for a marginal victory, 2 for a minor victory, 3 for a major victory, and 5 for a complete victory. After using the following table for your first few extended contests, you'll quickly memorize these scores.

### 3. Determine Contest Consequences.

If you lose an extended contest, you probably suffer lasting consequences, depending on the number of resolution points your opponent (or, sometimes opponents) scored against you.

Where it is appropriate for the loser(s) of an extended contest to suffer lasting consequences, they are determined in one of two ways, according to the contest's position in the overall narrative. The final scene typically has more serious consequences than those that lead up to it—it needs to resolve a story line, satisfyingly if not permanently.

## Determining Consequences During the Rising Action

The term **rising action** refers to all of the many plot events and complications that occur between the beginning and the climax of a story. During this phase of your story, use the Rising Action method to assess consequences.

Find the difference between the winner and loser's resolution point scores as of the contest's conclusion, and cross-reference with the following table to find the severity of lasting consequences suffered by the loser. (As you'll see, in the case of a close-fought contest, it is possible for the winner to be Hurt, too.)

The Rising Action method may slightly scuff up the contest winners, but nonetheless allows them to move quickly onto the next scene of the story without having to take significant time off for physical, emotional, spiritual or political recuperation. Losers, naturally, will emerge considerably worse for wear.

## What Scores Represent

Your resolution point score tells you how well you're doing, relative to your opponent, in the ebb and flow of a fluid, suspenseful conflict. If you're leading your opponent by 0–4, you're giving him a thorough pasting. If you're behind 4–0, you're on your last legs, while your opponent has had an easy time of it. If you're tied, you've each been getting in some good licks.

In a fight, scoring 1 point might mean that you hit your opponent with a grazing blow, or knocked him into an awkward position.

Scoring 2 points might mean a palpable hit, most likely with bone-crunching sound effects.

A 3-point hit sends him reeling, and, depending on the realism level of the genre, may be accompanied by a spray of blood.

However, the exact physical harm you've dished out to him remains unclear until the contest's end. When that happens, the real effects of your various victories become suddenly apparent. Perhaps he staggers, merely dazed, up against a wall. Maybe he falls over dead.

In a debate, a 1-point success might occasion mild head nodding from spectators, or a frown on your opponent's face.

A 2-point result would occasion mild applause from onlookers, or send a flush to your opponent's face.

On a 3-point result, your opponent might be thrown completely off-track, as audience members wince at the force of your devastating verbal jab.

In interpreting the results of individual simple contests within an extended contest, Narrators are guided by two principles:

1. No consequence is certain until the entire extended contest is over.
2. When a character scores points, it can reflect any positive change in fortunes, not just the most obvious one.

(If you want the PCs to suffer zero risk of lengthy recuperation, even if they lose, be sure to frame the contest so that it lacks lasting consequences.)

*Othello beats Hamlet in a rising action contest. Hamlet had 3 points against him, to Othello's 2 points, when Othello scored a critical vs. failure against him, ending the contest with a final result of 6 to 2. The difference between results is 4 points. Checking the Rising Action Consequence table, we see that Hamlet winds up Impaired, and Othello is Unharmd. Othello's victory level is Minor—as is Hamlet's defeat level.*

Feel free to treat a PC's Dead results as Dying, if this better suits your story (and is acceptable to the player, who may feel a glorious death is entirely appropriate for his character).



RESOLUTION POINT TABLE				
	Level of Success			
Level of Success	Critical	Success	Failure	Fumble
Critical	1	2	3	5
Success	2	1	2	3
Failure	3	2	1	2
Fumble	5	3	2	N/A

### Determining Consequences During The Climax

For the final, climactic confrontation that wraps up your story, use the following, more punishing method of doling out consequences. As is appropriate to a climactic confrontation, victories in this system skew toward greater decisiveness: the winner never scores less than a minor victory.

Take into account all resolution points scored against all participants. Winners and losers alike add up all resolution points scored against them by any opponent. Then the losers add 1 to their totals. The result is then cross-referenced against the Climactic Scene Consequence table.

In this determination method, even the winners may pay a horrible price for their heroism. If used for climactic battles, this method can result in a scene resembling the conclusion of *Hamlet* or a Hong Kong heroic bloodshed movie. It is possible for a hero to win a series of fights, and then, just as he realizes his ultimate triumph, to slump to the ground, dead. Under this determination method, it is sometimes safer to be quickly knocked out of a fight with mere Impairment or Injury, than to get repeatedly hit during a series of triumphant but punishing skirmishes with various opponents.

To determine the winning side's victory level for a climactic scene, cross-reference with the second-worst state of adversity among the defeated opponents. If there is only one opponent, use his state of adversity.

CLIMACTIC SCENE VICTORY LEVEL TABLE	
State of Adversity	Victory Level
Hurt	Marginal
Impaired	Minor
Injured	Major
Dead or Dying	Complete

## Backwards Compatibility

The extended contest system seen here is new to this edition of the *HeroQuest* rules. Devotees of the previous bidding system can still use the rest of this rulebook with their preferred approach.

CLIMACTIC SCENE CONSEQUENCE TABLE	
Total RPs Scored against Character	State of Adversity
0	Unharmed
1	Dazed
2	Hurt
3	Hurt
4	Impaired
5	Impaired
6	Injured
7	Injured
8	Dying
9+	Dead

RISING ACTION CONSEQUENCE TABLE			
Difference between Results	Loser Negative Consequences	Winner Negative Consequences	Winner's Victory Level / Loser's Defeat Level
1	Hurt	Hurt	Marginal
2	Hurt	Unharmed	
3	Impaired	Unharmed	Minor
4	Impaired	Unharmed	
5	Injured	Unharmed	Major
6	Injured	Unharmed	
7	Dying	Unharmed	Complete
8	Dead	Unharmed	
9	Dead	Unharmed	

## Parting Shot

In the round immediately after you take an opponent out of the contest, you may attempt to increase the severity of the consequences they suffer by engaging in a parting shot. This is an attempt (metaphoric or otherwise) to kick your opponent while he's down:

- Striking an incapacitated enemy
- Attacking a retreating army
- Attaching one more punitive rider to a legal settlement
- Demanding additional money from a business partner
- Delivering one last humiliating insult

At the battle of Thermopylae, the Spartan army has just defeated King Xerxes's elite Persian infantry, inflicting massive defeat. Xerxes, enraged, comes down to confront a defiant Leonidas. Intent on showing Xerxes that Sparta will never surrender, no matter what the odds, Leonidas pits his Charismatic Leadership 19 against Xerxes's Arrogance of 18. The men spar verbally for several rounds, treated as an extended contest, and Leonidas emerges triumphant with a score of 5-1. Xerxes, before his lieutenants, adjutants, concubines and sullen Persian warriors, has been humiliated by Leonidas's verbal dexterity.

But this is not enough for the Spartan: he wants to ensure that Xerxes's supposed divinity is thoroughly questioned by those who fawn to him. He wants everyone to know that the Persians are led by a man—not a god. Leonidas decides to go for a final action. "As Xerxes glowers at me," Leonidas's player, Andy, says, "I hurl my spear at this so-called god to prove that, like his pathetic Persian warriors, he bleeds."

The ability you use must relate to the consequences the character will suffer, but needn't be the same one you used to win the contest. If the loser is still in a position to use an ability, he does so; otherwise the Narrator rolls a suitable resistance value.

The Narrator decides that Leonidas's Spear Combat of 10 is the best ability for this situation, even though it is about humiliation rather than necessarily killing. The goal for the contest is to belittle Xerxes—not to kill him. The Narrator decides on a resistance of 17—reflecting Xerxes physical presence but also the fact that he has turned his back scornfully. If Leonidas scores a Critical and the Narrator gets a Failure, then score for the contest goes to 8-1 in Leonidas's favor. Xerxes's confidence after his verbal battering with Leonidas, the Narrator rules, is Dying. Unless someone intervenes to boost his ego, Xerxes's leadership of the Persian forces will be seriously undermined to point of rebellion.

If you succeed in your parting shot roll, you add the result from your roll to the final number of RPs scored against the opponent in the exchange that removed him from the contest.

However, if the opponent succeeds, he takes the number of RPs he would, in a standard exchange, score against you, and instead *subtracts* them from the number of RPs scored against him in the exchange that removed him from the contest. If the revised total is now less than 5, he returns to the contest, and may re-engage you. The Narrator describes this as a dramatic turnaround, in which the victim's overreaching foe has somehow granted him an advantage allowing him to recover from his previous misfortune. The provisional consequences suffered now go away, and are treated as a momentary disadvantage.

If Leonidas scores a Failure and Xerxes a Critical, the 3 resolution points that would, in a normal contest, apply to Leonidas are instead subtracted from the total lodged against Xerxes. The score goes from 5-1 against Xerxes to 2-1.



The Narrator describes the outcome: “Xerxes is so enraged by the spear which has just struck one of his most precious concubines that he yanks the spear from the woman’s body, whirls, and throws it into the Spartan ranks. It strikes Menelaus, a young warrior Leonidas had considered a potential captain. The Persian ranks roar with laughter and approval; the Spartans are, for now, on the receiving end of some humiliation.” And, on a score of 2-1, Xerxes’s reputation and standing has been somewhat restored.

Where it makes sense in the narrative, unengaged characters may attempt parting shots against opponents taken out of the contest by third parties. Defenders who are enabled to return to the group contest may rejoin the contest they previously lost, or start a new exchange, most likely against the over-reaching enemy who tried to harm them when they were down.

Characters may not revive their teammates by using their lamest abilities to make parting shots on them; this, by definition, does not pass a credibility test (p. 74).

### Notation

Extended contests are easy to keep track of. For each contest, draw a rectangular box. Write the initials of the PC in the upper left hand corner, along with their current rating in the ability that character is using. In the upper right hand corner, jot down the initials and relevant rating of the PC’s opponent. (If two PCs are engaged in a contest, choose the order arbitrarily; it doesn’t really matter.)

### Asymmetrical Exchanges

You may choose to briefly suspend your attempt to best your opponent in an extended contest, in order to do something else. An instance where one contestant is trying to win the contest and another is trying to do something else is called an **asymmetrical exchange**. In an asymmetrical exchange, a character pursuing an objective other than victory does not score points against the other if he wins the exchange. Instead, he gains some other advantage. He still loses points if he fails. Often he will be using an ability other than the one he’s been waging the contest with, one better suited to the task at hand. This becomes additionally dangerous when the rating associated with the substitute ability is significantly lower than the one used for the rest of the contest.

Notorious buccaneer “Tawny Port” Jackman is engaged in a cutlass duel on his ship, the Red Opal, against the dreaded Portuguese Bill. Tawny Port notices that a trail of gunpowder on the deck has ignited. Unless the path of the flame is interrupted, it will reach the cargo hold where the ammunition is stored, and blow the entire ship sky-high. You’d think that his opponent would also want to postpone the fight to aid with the firefighting effort, but Bill has always valued vengeance over self-preservation.

The score in their extended contest stands at 3–3. Tawny Port has been fighting with his Swashbuckling ability of 19; Portuguese Bill with his Iron Sword Arm ability of 2 $\mathbf{1}$ .

Tawny Port’s player, Mike, quizzes the Narrator: “If I execute a flashy acrobatic maneuver while trying to snuff out the flame, that still counts as a use of my Swashbuckling ability, right?”

“Sure!” says the Narrator. “It’s textbook swashbuckling!”

“Okay. Being in the middle of a furious boarding action and all, there’s got to be a bit of loose rigging flying by, right?”

“Absolutely!”

## Poker Chips

An alternate, more visual method of notation involves the use of poker chips. When one or more resolution points are scored against you, add the requisite number of red poker chips to a pile. Your pile of chips provides an immediate visual cue to all concerned, marking your current status. If an assist reduces your resolution points, remove that number of chips from your stack.

You can also track your opponent’s status with a similar stack of green poker chips. Where group contests pit unequal numbers against one another, you may want to keep a stock of miniature figures (or other identifying tokens) on hand to identify which green stack belongs to which opponent.

If you do use poker chips, they also provide an excellent way to keep track of your hero points. Maintain a white stack of chips representing your current point total, turning them into the Narrator when you spend them.

Although it’s more an entertaining flourish than an event that requires careful tracking, the Narrator might also plop down a blue poker chip to signal the expenditure of a supporting character’s hero point.

The red and green chips are also useful in visually tracking Group Simple Contests (p. 32).

*“Then I grab it as it goes by, fly up into the air, and whoosh like a pendulum over to the line of gunpowder, dispersing it with my boots before the flame reaches it. And, oh yeah, I may be spending a hero point on this...”*

Mike rolls a 3. The Narrator, rolling for Portuguese Bill, gets a 20—a fumble, which his  $\mathbf{1}$  allows him to bump up to a failure. Still, it looks like Mike won’t be spending that hero point after all.

Success vs. failure yields a minor victory. The Narrator decides that this means that Tawny Port has snuffed out the line of gunpowder, but does so somewhat gracelessly, yelling in panic as the rope swings him across the deck. “A stray bit of shot pierces your hat on the way back,” the Narrator adds.

Tawny Port does not get the 2 points he would normally apply to his score against Portuguese Bill. This is too bad, because he would otherwise have been able to knock his hated enemy out of the fight. Nonetheless, that’s better than having his ship blown up, with him on it.

In addition to secondary objectives, as in the above example, characters may engage in asymmetrical exchanges to grant augments (p. 53) to themselves or others. Disengaging requires success at an asymmetrical exchange.

### Disengaging

You can always abandon a contest, but, in addition to losing the prize under contention, you may also suffer negative consequences. Many contests will have no stakes other than the mutual intent to harm one another—each contestant is trying to attach negative consequences to the other. In such instances, you will always suffer negative consequences if you simply withdraw—unless you successfully **disengage**.



To disengage, make an asymmetrical exchange, usually using the ability relevant to the contest you're trying to wriggle out of. If you fail, your effort is wasted, and the score against you increases, as it would have during a normal exchange. If you succeed, you escape the clutches, literal or metaphorical, of your opponent, without further harm.

Jenny Morrison (played by Adrienne) a libidinous teenager at summer camp, is being attacked in a boathouse by a knife-wielding slasher. She's been defending herself with a trash can lid but the slasher has already lodged a score of 3-0 against her. The slasher has been attacking with Homicidal Maniac 5W, with Jenny defending with a Tenacious When Cornered ability of 17. Adrienne decides it's time to disengage. "I throw the trash can lid at his head, then try to leap through the boathouse window into the lake."

The Narrator rolls a 20 for the slasher. Adrienne rolls an 18, a failure. The slasher's mastery advantage bumps his fumble to a failure. Adrienne spends a hero point to bump the failure to a success. This leaves the final result as a success vs. failure: a minor victory for Jenny. "You fling the lid at him," narrates the Narrator, "momentarily stunning him. You take advantage of the pause in his rampage to climb out the boathouse's tiny window and dive into the lake's dark and freezing waters."

You must describe your actions in a way that makes your enemy's inability to inflict further harm on you seem credible. In the case of a fight where opponents mean to hurt or kill you, you must definitively leave the scene of the battle. Less visceral conflicts may allow for a complete surrender without having to physically depart.

Suave super-spy Corin North is engaged in a high stakes baccarat game with the master criminal Le Pompeux, and is losing badly, with a score of 4-1 against him. He hoped to shame Le Pompeux in front of a potential contact, but now recognizes he's lost that battle. Now he wants to quit the game without suffering lasting damage to his reputation as an unflappable gambler. In this instance, successfully disengaging doesn't require him to leave the casino. In fact, that would be a sign of weakness.

"There's a gorgeous woman watching the game, I imagine," ventures Corin's player, Eric.

"There are many gorgeous women watching the game," the Narrator replies.

"I want to make it seem as if I have grown bored with it, and am instead interested in seducing the most receptive-seeming of the stunning onlookers."

Eric and the Narrator resolve Corin's disengagement, using his Suave ability, which is more highly rated than his Gambling. Corin prevails. All onlookers believe that Corin has withdrawn from the game not because he's losing, but because he has found a more diverting use of his time. He remains in the scene to chat up his new date for the evening.

Your opponents may pursue you if you disengage, but will have to succeed in chasing you down, or otherwise forcing you back into the suspended conflict, before starting a new contest with you. Pursuits in this context should be resolved with simple contests. If your opponents are able to catch up with you and re-engage you immediately, with no intervening events to change the balance of power between you, the previous suspended contest resumes, with its original score intact.

## Example Reversed: Jenny Fails To Escape

Let's take a look at the example of Jenny and the slasher with the opposite outcome:

If the rolls had been reversed, with Adrienne getting a 20 and the Narrator an 18, this is what would have happened: Even with a hero point spent by Adrienne, the exchange resolves as a success vs. failure in the slasher's favor. Jenny not only fails to escape, but has another 2 resolution points scored against her. With the total against her at 5, she is defeated by the slasher, and rendered helpless. Even under rising action resolution, the difference of 5 points means she is injured. As homicidal maniacs aren't known for their mercy, and there's no one around to rescue Jenny, she becomes another unfortunate addition to his kill list for the night.)

Le Pompeux may believe that Corin has abandoned the baccarat table for purely carnal reasons, but that doesn't quench his desire to humiliate the world-famous secret agent. He taunts North. A simple contest ensues, pitting the agent's Suave ability against Le Pompeux's Get Under Your Skin. If Le Pompeux wins, he lures Corin back to the table, resuming the contest with its original score of 4-1.

If you disengage using the rising action method of consequence determination, you suffer no consequences.

In a climactic scene, however, resolution points scored during contests you disengaged from are still taken into account when determining consequences. In the case of a group contest, consequences against you are determined as soon as you disengage.

Cunning space renegade Malk Reynard has been battling the sinister Agents of the Authority in a bid to get his beloved spaceship released from a port lockdown. Malk has fought his way through the various levels of the Authority facility and finally reached the control room. This is the climactic sequence of the evening with each hero in Malk's party having engaged in a contest against the powers the Agents of the Authority can level. After several exchanges Malk faces a score of 3-0 against him: he is engaged in a fist-fight with Agent Gray, an old adversary who employs his martial arts knowledge against Malk's more simplistic Street Fightin'. Bloodied and cowed, Malk's player, David, knows that Malk has little chance of defeating Agent Gray so he decides to make good his losses, return to his ship, The Dragonfly, and formulate a new plan.

The Narrator calls for a disengagement roll to see if Agent Gray manages to capture Malk, as has been his intent. Luckily, Malk succeeds (burning a hero point in the process), and he manages to leap onto a nearby cargo conveyer heading towards where The Dragonfly is berthed. Malk still has 3 resolution points lodged against him and is therefore Impaired—a consequence the Narrator interprets as the result of all the bruises, contusions and cuts Malk has suffered at the hands of the masterful Agent Gray...

### Group Extended Contests

Group extended contests proceed as a series of extended contests between pairs of characters, interwoven so that they happen nearly simultaneously. As in an extended contest between two characters, only one exchange per pair of adversaries occurs each round. Usually the PCs make up one team, and their supporting character antagonists the other.

The classic example of a group extended contest is a big hand-to-hand fight. Other climactic situations that could be resolved with a group extended contest include:

- an election campaign
- a lobbying effort
- a large-scale military engagement
- a face-off between superhero teams and their super villain enemies
- an entire war
- an attempt to corner the silver market

As with any contest, the Narrator and players begin by framing the contest and choosing relevant abilities.

At the outset of the first round, the Narrator determines the initial pairings between PCs and their opponents. All else being equal, players generally have more fun when they can choose their own opponents. If you choose to do this, allow the players to act in the order of their ratings in the abilities they'll be using in the contest, from highest to lowest.

It is possible for one character to wind up facing more than one opponent. In this case, he is considered to be part of two (or more) pairings.

*Hauled before the Lunar Tribunal of Pavis, the adventuress Griselda is forced to account for her actions (or 'crimes' as the Tribunal frames it) in the Big Rubble. If she loses, she faces a hefty punishment from the Lunar authorities plus the loss of her standing in the criminal underworld of New Pavis. This verbal conflict is played out as a series of three pairings, each of them involving Griselda:*

- Griselda versus Jorjar the Quick, Constable of Pavis
- Griselda versus Tala Errio, priestess of the Red Moon
- Griselda versus Gimjim the Grim, Head of Pavis Intelligence

Order of action doesn't matter much in a group extended contest. Unlike many roleplaying combat systems, where the chance to take the other guy out before he can hit you provides a big benefit, here there is no great advantage to acting first. Accordingly, Narrators can resolve the various sub-contests that make up a group extended contest in the order they find most intuitive. Usually you'll find it most convenient simply to use player's seating order to determine the sequence in which the initial exchanges of a contest occur. Exchanges are always resolved in the same order from round to round.

*In round one, Jorjar contests Griselda, followed by Tala Errio and then Gimjim. The order of action in round two is the same: Jorjar, then Tala, then Gimjim.*

Having determined the order in which the various pairings will be resolved, it's time to start the first round. Start with the first exchange in the order, then go onto the second, and so on, until all pairings have resolved a single exchange. Once this happens, the round concludes, and a new one begins, starting over with the first exchange.

As in a single extended contest, each member of a pairing is trying to be the first the score 5 points against another. When a character has 5 points scored against him *by a single opponent*, he is eliminated from the contest.

If defending against multiple opponents, it is possible to have more than 5 points scored against you in total, but remain in the contest. (Points scored against you by opponents who fail to eliminate you can come back to haunt you in resolutions using the Climactic Consequences Table.)

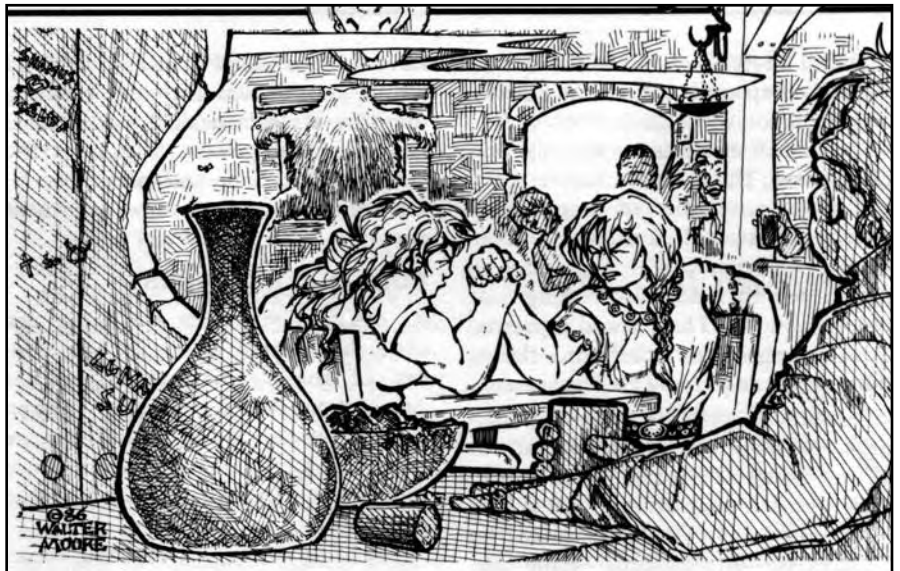
*By the second round of their conflict, Jorjar has scored 3 points against Griselda, and Tala Errio has scored 2. Although the total of these two scores is 5 Griselda is not out of the contest—and will not be, until one of them scores a total of 5 points against her.*

As characters are eliminated from the group contest, their victorious opponents may then move on to engage new targets, starting new contests, which are then added to the end of the existing sequence.

The group extended contest ends as soon as there are no active characters on one side of the conflict. The side with one or more characters left standing wins. Consequences to all participants are then determined.

If using the Rising Action Consequence Table, only the difference between scores in the exchange that felled the affected character is taken into account.

*Gimjim scores another 3 points against Griselda, knocking her out of the contest with a final score of 5–2. The damage to Griselda's social reputation is commensurate with a difference of 3; all abilities relating to it are therefore Impaired. This is a minor*



victory for Gimgim and a minor defeat for Griselda. Because their exchanges did not fully conclude, neither Jorjar nor Tala score victories or suffer defeats.

Although Griselda's reputation is tarnished (-6 penalty in relevant contests), the story continues, and she can try to work her way out of this humiliation before it reaches its climax.

When using the Climactic Scene Consequences Table, characters total up all of the points scored against them by all characters, including those from individual contests they won, and contests left incomplete at the time of their elimination from the group extended contest.

At contest's end, the scores of the three exchanges are as follows:

Griselda versus Jorjar: 3-3  
 Griselda versus Tala Errio: 0-4  
 Griselda versus Gimgim: 5-2.

In this climactic version of the scene, the social harm is more serious, and suffered by all involved. Gimgim has 2 points scored against him; his reputation as the Invisible Enforcer is Hurt. Jorjar has 3 points against him; his reputation as the stalwart Constable of Pavis is Impaired. Poor anxious Tala Errio has 4 points against her; her reputation as the prospective bride of the city god Pavis is Injured.

Griselda totals the points scored against her for all three exchanges, for a total of 8. Accounting for the extra point she suffers for having lost, her reputation is Dead. She cannot show her face in Pavic society again, and knows it. Shortly thereafter, she disappears into the Big Rubble along with her accomplices, and is never seen again.

With the Consequences determined, the winners are now free to claim their prize. In a contest to resolve the climax of the story, the claiming of the prize concludes it. Otherwise, the story develops further, taking into account the results of the winners' victory.

### Unrelated Actions

Characters not currently enmeshed in an exchange—either after a successful disengagement, or after winning an exchange—may take actions within the scene that do not directly contribute to the defeat of the other side. These unrelated actions may grant an augment to themselves or to a teammate. They may achieve a secondary story objective (see p. 53).

They resemble asymmetrical exchanges, except that, as they are performed by characters who are not targeted by any opponents, impose no additional risk.

### Assists

A character may take an unrelated action to grant an assist to a teammate enmeshed in an exchange. (An assist is an attempt to reduce a comrade's resolution points. Characters can't make an assist on themselves.)

To make an assist, a character engages in a simple contest, either against a suitable resistance, or an applicable ability of an affected opponent. Assists are subject to the same restrictions as augments (p. 53): they must be both credible and interesting.

## Disengagement in Group Extended Contests

Original scores remain intact if you re-enter a group extended contest after having disengaged from it, assuming that your previous combatant(s) are now in a position to re-engage you. An engagement with fresh opponents is treated as any other new contest. If an opponent attempts to disengage from you while you are also engaged by at least one other contestant, you suffer a penalty of -5 when you roll to counter to his disengagement.

By default, characters making assists face Moderate Resistance (as per the Resistance Class Table, p. 72). Each subsequent assist attempt to the same beneficiary, steps up by one factor on the table: High, then Very High, then Nearly Impossible. The difficulty escalation occurs even when a new character steps in to make a subsequent assist. In rules terms, this escalation allows the occasional dramatic rescue but makes it difficult for the players to prolong losing battles to excruciating length. Dramatically, it emulates the constant raising of the stakes inherent in a suspenseful scene. Like other *HeroQuest* rules structures, the limitation mirrors a literary conceit, not a literal reality. The Narrator makes it seem credible by justifying the increasing difficulties with descriptions of ever-escalating countermeasures on the part of the opposition.

Narrators should feel free to adjust the starting resistance up or down by one step to account for genre credibility or other dramatic factors. If an assist as proposed seems too improbable or insufficiently useful, Narrators should collaborate with players to propose alternate suggestions that would face Moderate Resistance.

The assist alters the score against your teammate according to the result of a simple contest:

ASSIST RESULTS TABLE	
Contest Outcome	Change to Score against Recipient
Complete Victory	-4
Major Victory	-3
Minor Victory	-2
Marginal Victory	-1
Marginal Defeat	0
Minor Defeat	+1
Major Defeat	+2
Complete Defeat	+3

As the table reveals, assists are risky: if they fail, they can add to the score against the recipient, possibly even eliminating him from the contest.



Points from an assist can be applied to a single exchange only. Scores in exchanges can never be reduced below 0.

*The good guys are trying to pilot their starfighters through the asteroid field to blow up the AQ'ak satellite before it activates and fills the Guidon Sector with tri-polarizing radiation. Hotshot pilot Harsteni Valk has just sent the AQ'ak Screamer on her tail spinning into the void. Now she sees that her comrade, Dirk Fles, is in trouble, with a laser burn eating its way through his aft engine. (In rules terms, the score in Dirk's current exchange is 4-2 against him.) Rather than engage the Screamer directly, Harsteni decides to execute a spiral pass maneuver and get close enough to Dirk's ship to spray it with retardant, putting out the fire. Having already established the asteroid field as a challenge to navigate through, the Narrator assigns a Very High resistance, which Harsteni nonetheless beats, scoring a marginal victory. The score in Dirk's exchange changes from 4-2 against him, to 3-2.*

Remember that even in a fight, the relative scores of opponents in an exchange reflect only the relative strength of their positions. They may or may not track to physical damage, the real extent of which is determined at the end of the fight. (See p. 37.) Players lending assists needn't describe them as actions that heal or help their comrades; they can also describe aggressive maneuvers against their friends' opponents.

*In the above example, Harsteni's player could just as well have described her actions as a volley of distracting fire against the AQ'ak Screamer.*

In most roleplaying games, the smart thing to do when you finish off an opponent and want to help a comrade who's getting pummeled is to join the fight and start reducing that opponent's hit points. In *HeroQuest*, this may or may not be the tactically sound move, as you simply start a fresh exchange with the opponent. Depending on the situation, you may want to do this (perhaps allowing your ally to disengage), or give your ally an assist.

### Engaging Multiple Opponents

If you are engaged by more than one opponent, you take part in a number of contests equal to the number of opponents. For each extra contest you are forced to participate in during a given round, you suffer a cumulative -3 penalty.

*Bare-knuckled archaeologist Harvard Payne is charging through the rain forest with a golden idol under his arm, using his Dodge ability of 6W to avoid being tackled by three members of a rival team: Heinrich, Fritz, and Joachim. Each of them is trying to bring him down using their Tackle abilities. Harvard will face one of them at his full 6W, another at 3W and the last at 20.*

Narrators should resolve all engagements against a single PC at once, adjusting the order of action as necessary. The player can choose the order in which he engages his respective opponents. It's usually smartest to engage them in order of relative toughness, from highest to lowest rating.

*Harvard knows that Heinrich is the toughest of the lot, so he chooses to confront him first. Fritz insulted him back in the cantina, so he takes the -3 penalty in his exchange with him. This leaves Joachim, against which he takes the -6 penalty.*

Occasionally a new contestant may engage a character later in the round (for example when that contestant's intended target is knocked out of the contest before he gets a chance to act.) If the engaged character has already been engaged, his penalty reflects the number of opponents he's already engaged this round.

*Several rounds have passed, during which Fritz has been eliminated from the contest. The Narrator has a surprise in store for Harvard: another member of the rival team, Wolfgang, is lying in wait for him, having captured his pilot. The Narrator resolves Harvard's contests with Heinrich (no penalty) and Joachim (now at -3), and then starts the new exchange against Wolfgang, who leaps out from behind a gigantic fallen log to attempt a flying leap into Harvard. This third exchange puts Harvard at a -6 penalty.*

If the Narrator's description of the contest places more than one opponent within striking range (literal or metaphorical) you may choose to engage multiple opponents, opening up exchanges against each. You suffer multiple opponent penalties of -3 per exchange, for each opponent after the first.

### Followers

Players may choose to have their followers (p. 60) take part in group extended contests in one of three ways: as full contestants, as secondary contestants, or as supporters.

**Contestant:** The follower takes part in the contest as any other character would. Players roll for their followers as they would their main characters. However, followers are removed from the contest whenever 3 resolution points are scored against them in a given exchange. In a gritty genre where sidekicks routinely expire in the protagonists' arms, an additional 2 resolution points are then scored against them, increasing the severity of any consequences they suffer.

*Simon's superhero character Nightbringer (Control Shadows 7W) is aided by his beautiful sidekick The Allure (Persuasion 17). In the final confrontation with Doctor Oblivion, Nightbringer faces off against the evil Doctor while The Allure tackles the Doctor's alien henchman, Rubicon. If Nightbringer and The Allure prevail, Doctor Oblivion will be prevented from activating the Apocalypse Configuration and Millennium City will be saved from destruction. If they fail, it's curtains for Millennium City.*

*If The Allure acts as a contestant, Simon rolls for both Nightbringer and The Allure who enter separate exchanges. Nightbringer does well in his confrontation with Doctor Oblivion but The Allure, her charms useless against the alien Rubicon, suffers a defeat of a failure versus the Rubicon's critical. With a score of 3-0 against her, The Allure is out of the contest.*

In genres that allow but de-emphasize followers, Narrators may rule that they may never act as full contestants. Narrators may also disallow this, on a case-by-case basis, simply to keep large group contests manageable.

**Secondary contestant:** To act as a secondary contestant, the follower must have an ability relevant to the contest. The follower sticks by the character's side, contributing directly to the effort: fighting in a battle, tossing in arguments in a lobbying effort, acting as co-pilot in an aerial race, or whatever. Although the player and Narrator describe this, the player does



not roll for the follower. Instead, these efforts benefit the main character in two ways:

1. When confronted by multiple opponents, the main character may ignore the multiple opponent penalty for one foe for each follower acting as a secondary contestant.

*Having saved Millennium City, Nightbringer and The Allure are attacked by Doctor Oblivion's half-alien associates from Dimension 9, the Infinity Accord. Two Infinity Accord Shocktroopers materialize in Nightbringer's base, armed with neural glaives designed to destroy Nightbringer once and for all.*

*This time The Allure acts as a secondary contestant. Simon and the Narrator describe her as staying by Nightbringer's side as he takes on both of the Infinity Accord Shocktroopers, unleashing his considerable powers over darkness to repel their neural glaive attacks. Although forced to take part in two exchanges per round, Nightbringer suffers no multiple opponent penalty thanks to The Allure's loyal presence.*

2. The main character may, at any point, shift any number of RPs to a follower. Followers with 3 or more points lodged against them are removed from the scene. When a follower is removed, an additional 2 RPs are lodged against them, increasing the severity of consequences they suffer. The main character loses the protection against multiple opponents afforded by the follower.

*Nightbringer is already down 3-2 against the leader of the Infinity Accord's Shocktroopers when the Shocktrooper gets lucky and nails Nightbringer with a Critical vs. Fumble result. Maybe Nightbringer shouldn't have spent all of his hero points during the battle with Doctor Oblivion! Normally Nightbringer would go down with a final score of 8-2. Instead, he shifts 4 of those points to The Allure and she is removed from the scene instead. The Narrator adds another 2 points to that, so that The Allure will turn out to be Injured (physically this time) when consequences are determined—a good dramatic result that the Narrator knows will spur Nightbringer to seek revenge against the invaders from Dimension 9.*

**Supporter:** The follower is present in the scene, but does not directly engage the main character's opponents. Instead he may perform assists and other unrelated actions.

*Darran's hero, Fireblade, has a sidekick of his own: the android Mentat-4. Mentat-4 doesn't fight, but when Fireblade is on the ropes against the Infinity Accord Shocktroopers, Mentat-4 grants his beloved companion an assist (see p. 42), by using his holoprojector eyes to dazzle the neural glaive-wielding Shocktrooper about to sap Fireblade's internal electrical field.*

Followers acting in any of these three capacities may be removed from the contest by otherwise unengaged opponents. To remove a follower from a scene, a character engages him in a simple contest of relevant abilities. On any failure, the follower is taken out of the contest. For consequence determination purposes, the follower has X+2 RPs lodged against him, where X is the usual number levied by the Resolution Point Table.

## Consequences and Group Extended contests

In a Rising Action contest, if you win more than one exchange, you can theoretically be hurt multiple times—once for each contest you win with a difference between results of 1.

If you win more than one exchange in either Rising Action or Climactic contests, and then need to determine a final level of victory (to determine, for example, lingering benefits from the contest), use the victory level you attained against the character who contested against you with the highest target number.

*Political pundit Theo Arlino holds his own in a televised debate against two more famous talking heads. He scores a minor victory against Florence Rutka and a major one against Hyman Durrell. Florence contested Theo with Ad Hominem Attacks 4u; Hyman resorted alternately to Heated Rhetoric 18, Circular Logic 17, and Damned Lies and Statistics 3u. The highest of those ratings is Florence's 4u, so Theo's victory level for the entire group contest is minor.*

*An Infinity Accord Shocktrooper is left unengaged after knocking a third hero out of the battle in Nightbringer's base. Deciding that Mentat-4 has been too effective in helping Fireblade, he lays into the android with Stun Stick 15. Darran rolls Mentat-4's Backpedal Out Of Danger 13 to counter. The Narrator rolls a 2 to Darran's 11, scoring a Minor Victory for the Shocktrooper. That's enough to take Mentat-4 out of the contest. He suffers the 1 resolution point a character would usually take from the losing end of a success vs. success result, plus an additional 2, for a total of 3. When Consequences are racked up, he'll prove to be Impaired—might that have consequences for the android's Loyalty Chip?*

### Group Extended Contest Example

The PCs are the Burgundy Killzones, a gang of nanotech-enhanced gladiators, taking on their hated rivals, the Emerald Death Rats, in a televised battle royale. The Narrator, Irene, has been building anticipation to this fight for a couple of sessions, so its use of the Climactic Scene Consequence Table is entirely apt. The Burgundy Killzones are:

- The bloodthirsty (and ironically named) Big Ripper, with a 19 in Small But Deadly. Played by Gilberto, who has 3 hero points.
- The bombastic Bonespike H-Bomb, with a rating of 3u in Bludgeoning Brawler. Played by Michelle; 2 hero points.
- The apelike Zen master Red Shaman fights with his Unarmed Combat rating of 17. Played by Sam, 1 hero point.
- And finally, the Heavy Rapper, who stomps into the arena with a rating of 9u in Big and Bad. Played by Jukka, with no hero points left.

HEROQUEST CORE RULES

## Tonight's opponents are:

- *Thundering Skullhead*, who boasts a rating of 9 in *Electro-Trident*. No hero points.
- *Treacherous Clara*, with a rating of 17 in *Lamprey-Mouthed Tentacles*. 1 hero point.
- *Horrible Pete*, with *Lithe and Ropy* 17. 3 hero points.
- And last but not least, *Zombie Elvis*, with a rating of 3 in *It Takes More Than An Axe In My Head To Slow Me Down*. No hero points.

The arena sends the combatants out in random chutes, so you never know who's going to face who in the first exchanges of the melee. (The Narrator has prepared the players for the fact that they don't get to pick their engagements, so that they accept it as a detail of the setting, rather than resenting the loss of choice.)

Irene uses miniature figures to replicate the effect of the chutes. She mixes up the miniatures representing the combatants, determining the initial pairings:

- *Big Ripper* vs. *Treacherous Clara*.
- *Bonespike H-Bomb* vs. *Horrible Pete*.
- *Red Shaman* vs. *Thundering Skullhead*.
- *Heavy Rapper* vs. *Zombie Elvis*.

Round One: The first exchange is between *Big Ripper* and *Treacherous Clara*. "I dart between her legs and mangle her with my power-saw!" Gilberto cries. He rolls a 4; so does the Narrator. This tied result leaves them at 0-0 for the first round.



## The Implied “I Try To”

When narrating their characters' actions, players will often describe them in a way that suggests the outcome. For example: “I intimidate the horned wolf so he won't howl or try to bite me!”

Of course, the outcome is decided not by what the players say, but by the resolution system. However, Narrators should beware the temptation to act as phraseology cops, slapping down the players whenever their descriptions seem to cross the line between attempt and result. It's sometimes hard to come up with colorful descriptions, and it's part of your job to enable the creativity of the players. Rather than correct them, read all such declarations as if they begin with the implied phrase “I try to...”

As in: “I try to intimidate the horned wolf so he won't howl or try to bite me!”

This point applies to all contest forms.

Irene narrates the ensuing standoff: “Clara anticipates your standard move and blocks you. The two of you circle each other warily, as the crowd screams for blood.”

Now comes the exchange between Bonespike H-Bomb and Horrible Pete. “I leap up, muay thai style, and try to nail him on the back of the head with my elbow spikes,” says Michelle. Irene rolls an 11 to Michelle's 2. Bonespike's **W** bumps this success vs. success to a critical vs. success, in his favor. Horrible Pete is outmatched but rich in hero points, so Irene spends one on his behalf, ending in a critical vs. critical. With the lower roll, Horrible Pete ekes out a marginal victory. The score is now 1-0.

Irene narrates: “Pete lithely ducks beneath your hammer blow and delivers a glancing blow to your abdomen with his ropy fingers.”

Next up: Red Shaman takes on Thundering Skullhead. “I try to grab his electro-trident and use its leverage to flip him over.” Irene rolls a 6 to Sam's 13, which, with Skullhead's bump, results in a critical vs. success result in his favor. The score is 2-0.

“He takes advantage of your attempt to grab the electro-trident, and gives you a solid jolt from it. You think you can smell your teeth burning.”

Finally for this round, it's Heavy Rapper versus Zombie Elvis. “Duh...” says Jukka, “I try to club his head off with my baseball bat.” Jukka rolls a 2; Irene, a 4.

This success vs. success result goes to Heavy Rapper, who lodges a resolution point against Zombie Elvis, for a score of 0-1.

“You club him good,” says Irene, “and there's a big dent in the side of his cranium. He grins as if barely fazed.”

Everyone has now participated in an exchange, so that's the end of round one.

**Round Two:** “I slash off Treacherous Clara's right kneecap!” cries Gilberto (Big Ripper.) He rolls a 14; Irene, a 6. That's a success vs. success in Clara's favor.

“She takes advantage of your telegraphed swing to rake your face with her lamprey-tentacles!”

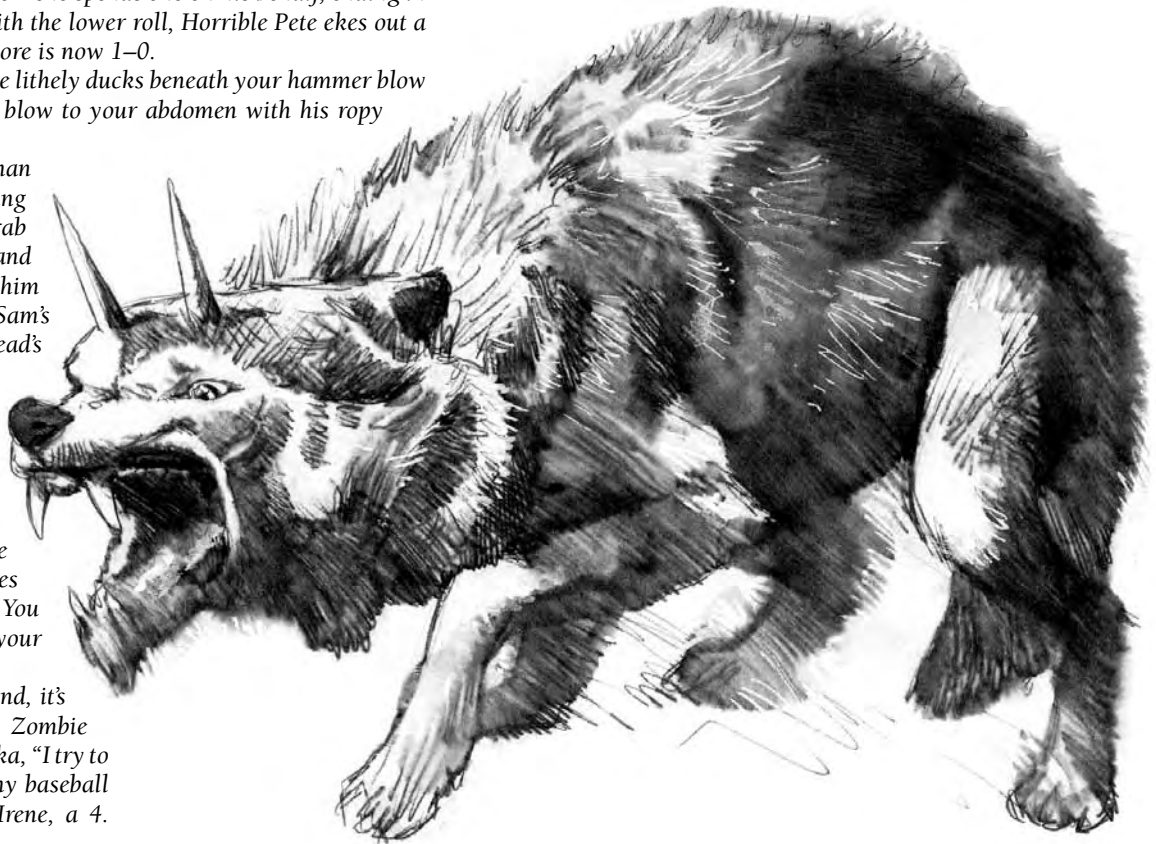
“Yowch!” cries Gilberto.

The score is now 1-0 against Gilberto.

Bonespike H-Bomb versus Horrible Pete: “I bonespike him with an elbow to the throat,” Michelle follows up her bombast with a roll of 1. The Narrator rolls a 15. Bonespike's mastery bumps Pete's success down to a failure, for a provisional result of critical vs. failure. Irene then spends one of Pete's hero points, narrating the final result: “You jam him right in the trachea, but miraculously, Pete dis-impales himself. His ropy flesh heals up around the exposed wound.”

That's a critical vs. success, which lodges 2 resolution points against Pete, for a new score of 1-2.

Red Shaman vs. Thundering Skullhead: “Learning my lesson about the electro-trident, I try to get behind him and deliver a roundhouse kick,” says Sam. He rolls a 4, to the Narrator's 12. Skullhead's mastery bumps his failure into a success, but that still leaves Red Shaman with the low success, for a success vs. success result in his favor. “The kick hits home!” Irene narrates.





## Keeping Score

To maintain the sense of back-and-forth of a suspenseful scene, make sure you keep your players aware at all times of where they stand by reminding them of the scores after each exchange. You may even find it useful to mark the running scores on a whiteboard or (for the technically well-equipped) projected computer image.

Preserve consistency by always marking scores with the PC first and the supporting character second. When players contest against one another, list the scores according to seating arrangement, with the player to your left first.

*“Thundering Skullhead reels back, apparently stunned.” The score is now 2–1.*

*“Zombie Elvis may be in his Vegas period,” says Jukka, “but his girth is no match for Heavy Rapper! I try to belly-flop onto him, crushing him beneath my enormous weight!”*

*Jukka rolls a 5; the Narrator, a 15. That’s a success vs. failure, scoring Heavy Rapper 2 more resolution points against Zombie Elvis, for a total score of 0–3. If Zombie Elvis doesn’t turn it around soon, he’s headed straight for undead Graceland.*

**Round Three:** *“I kick my power-saw into turbo mode and fling it at Clara’s face!” howls Gilberto. He rolls a 6 for Big Ripper; Irene rolls a 17 for Treacherous Clara. That’s a marginal victory (success vs. success) in Gilberto’s favor. Irene narrates: “Clara ducks, but the edge of the saw still shaves a notch out of her ear.” Big Ripper lodges a resolution point against Clara, bringing the score to 1–1.*

*“Bonespike fakes out Horrible Pete with a feinted elbow-slam, then nails him with a hit from his knee-spike instead,” says Michelle—then rolls a 20. Fortunately, her **W** over Pete bumps that up to a mere failure. Irene rolls a 9 for Pete, a success. Success vs. failure lodges another 2 points against Bonespike, for a new score of 3–2. “Horrible Pete takes advantage of the feint, waiting until you’re off balance to kick your legs out from under you,” Irene narrates.*

*“The Red Shaman leaps up into the air to kick Skullhead in his bone-masked face,” declares Sam. He rolls an 11 to the Narrator’s 9. Skullhead’s **W** bumps his success into a critical, scoring 2 more resolution points against the Red Shaman, for a score of 4–1. Irene winces in appalled sympathy at what is about to happen. “Skullhead hits you as you leap, delivering a shuddering blow to the groin with the back end of his electro-trident. You go down—hard!”*

*Heavy Rapper has no time to pity his teammate; he has the Zombie Elvis pinned and vulnerable. “I grab him by his lifeless pompadour and smash his skull into the floor!” Jukka exults. He rolls a 5, to the Narrator’s 18. Success vs. failure scores 2 resolution points against Zombie Elvis, for a final score of nil–5. “You pound him till his corpse-like body stops shuddering. He’s out of the fight,” Irene says. Jukka stands and bellows out a victory roar.*

**Round Four:** *“I pull a couple of force shurikens from my belt and fire them in a wide angle at Treacherous Clara,” says Gilberto. “And it’s time to even the score, so this time I’m spending a hero*

*point.” Maybe he should have waited for his result: he rolls a 1, while the Narrator rolls a 9. As Gilberto already has a critical, his hero point bumps Clara down one result level, to a failure. That would nearly put Clara out of the fight, so the Narrator decides to spend her sole hero point to keep her in. That brings her back to a critical vs. success, and lodges another 2 resolution points against her. “She ducks and weaves,” Irene narrates, “the shurikens home in on her; she dodges them—but they come around again to slash her hip and shoulder blades.” The score is now 1–3 against her.*

*“Bonespike goes for a double-handed flying hammerblow,” says Michelle. She rolls a 12 to the Narrator’s 7. As the result would be a success vs. success in her opponent’s favor, putting her on the brink of defeat, Michelle elects to spend a hero point. As that would put Horrible Pete on the brink of defeat, the Narrator decides to spend his last hero point, returning the result to success vs. success, in Pete’s favor. “Pete ducks out of the way, leaving you to slam into a pillar.” The score is now 4–2.*

*The Red Shaman is up next and, at 4–1, is already on the brink of defeat. In a street fight, he would try to disengage, but if he does it during a championship gladiatorial match, he knows he’ll destroy his career and lose all of his endorsement contracts—a fate worse than defeat. “I let Skullhead come at me, and try to use his momentum against him, with a sharp jab to the solar plexus.” Sam rolls a 16 to the Narrator’s 9. That’s a success vs. success in Skullhead’s favor, bringing the score to 5–1. “He comes at you, but is too deft to let you past his defenses. Your blow fails, and he smacks you between the eyes with the butt of his electro-trident. You convulse like a fish on a hook and slide to the flooring in a heap.” The Red Shaman is out of the fight.*

*Heavy Rapper finished off his own foe last round, so he’s primed to take a little blubbery vengeance on behalf of his downed comrade. “While Skullhead’s still prancing in victory, I come up from behind and slam into him like four hundred pounds of pile driver!” Jukka declares. (He’s taking a minor liberty by describing Skullhead’s reaction, but it’s entertaining and in character, so the Narrator embraces his description.)*

*Although this will be Skullhead’s second exchange in a single round, it is not occurring while his first opponent is still engaging him. Therefore he faces no multiple opponent penalty, as he would have done if Red Shaman were still active in the fight.*

*Irene draws up a fresh exchange box to keep track of the new score. Now Skullhead is picking on someone his own size; both combatants have scores of 9**W**.*

*Jukka rolls a 3 to the Narrator’s 7. That’s a success vs. success, in his favor—a resolution point scored against Skullhead. “He sees you coming, soon enough to avoid being caught completely flatfooted, but you still tag him with a palpable body-check.” The score is 0–1.*

**Round Five:** *“I rush headlong at Clara and sink my toxic teeth into her inviting leg,” says Gilberto. (For flavor’s sake, he’s switched to another combat ability, Poisonous Incisors, which happens to have the same rating as his Small But Deadly ability.) Uh-oh: he rolls a 20, to Irene’s 4! Gilberto spends a hero point, but even then the result is success vs. failure, in Clara’s favor. “As you open your mouth to take a chomp on her, she sinks her lamprey tentacles into your own cheek! Your red blood engorges her ravening appendage.” She scores 2 points against him, for a new total of 3–3.*



Bonespike H-Bomb is on the wrong end of a 4–2 score in his exchange with Horrible Pete. “I bounce off the pillar and dive at him, elbow ready to jab a spike right into his jugular vein!” Michelle rolls, planning on spending a hero point, and gets a 16, against the Narrator’s 20. Her **W** over Pete bumps her failure up to a success. Her hero point bumps her result one notch further, to a critical. Pete has no hero points left to spend, so the final match-up is a critical vs. fumble—5 points for Bonespike. “You jab your bony thorn right into his throat. Pete goes from pale to paler, and collapses, gurgling and clutching his punctured Adam’s apple.” Bonespike comes from behind for a final total of 4–7.

With Red Shaman and Zombie Elvis down, that leaves one exchange left to resolve this round: the relatively fresh showdown between Heavy Rapper and Thundering Skullhead. “Now that he’s off-balance,” says Jukka, “I plow him with a plain and simple pile driver to the face.” He rolls a 12; Irene, an 11. This failure vs. failure result resolves in Skullhead’s favor, tying the score at 1–1. “Not so fast,” grins Skullhead, as he probes your blubber with a tentative but potent electro-trident jab.”

**Round Six:** “I draw a serrated blade from my boot, and slice through the boot to slit her Achilles’ tendon,” says Gilberto, clearly switching back to Big Ripper’s slightly luckier Small But Deadly ability. He rolls a 15 to Irene’s 2, but spends his last hero point to bump it up. Treacherous Clara has none left to spend, so the result stands at critical vs. success: 2 resolution points lodged against her. That takes her total to 5, putting her out of the contest. “Blood gushes out of her slashed boot. Clara weaves, then slumps to the arena floor.”

It’s Bonespike’s turn to act, but he wants to see if Heavy Rapper can finish off Thundering Skullhead on his own. So he holds off, reserving the right to act later.

He gleefully circles the Heavy Rapper/Thundering Skullhead match-up. “I try to hip check him into a wall, then pin him there,” Jukka says. He rolls an 11 to the Narrator’s 20. Failure vs. fumble yields 2 points for Heavy Rapper, taking the score to 1–3. “You’ve got him pinned, all right,” Irene narrates. “Pinned and struggling to free himself.”

Bonespike can’t resist a scrap. “I run in from the side and jab him!” Michelle exults. She rolls a 19 versus the Narrator’s 1. Even with Skullhead’s -3 multiple opponent penalty taken into account, that’s still a Critical vs. Failure in Skullhead’s favor, lodging 3 points against Bonespike, for an opening score of 3–0. Irene narrates the result. “Your lunge gave him the chance to reposition himself, free himself from the pin he was in, and zap you with the Electro-Trident!”

**Round Seven:** Big Ripper could join the fray, opening up a third exchange against Thundering Skullhead, but, as the first combatant this round, wouldn’t get the benefit of a multiple opponent penalty. “I hold off and reserve the right to jump in later,” Gilberto says.

“With Skullhead focused on Bonespike, I slam his head against the wall,” exclaims Jukka. He rolls a 4 to the Narrator’s 8. Success vs. success gives him 1 point, bringing the score to 1–4 in his favor. “He’s dazed, with a trickle of blood running from the mouth of his skull mask.”

“Is Skullhead still going after me?” Michelle asks.

“He appears uncertain. Three on one are not good odds.”

Tactically, it makes sense for Bonespike to withdraw from the contest if he’s not being pressed on it. But Michelle decides that

such good sense would be out of character for her PC. “What the heck! He wades right in with a furious windmilling strike!” She rolls a 4 to Thundering Skullhead’s 14—a failure vs. failure in Bonespike’s favor, for a marginal victory. “You slide awkwardly into him; he falls humiliatingly back, seeming to have twisted his ankle,” Irene narrates. The Bonespike vs. Skullhead match-up is now 3–1 for Skullhead.

With the crowd roaring for blood, and Skullhead now facing a -6 multiple opponent penalty, Big Ripper can’t resist plunging in, too. “I slither in from below and try to jab him in the thigh,” Gilberto says. He rolls a 16 vs. Irene’s 12. Now at 3**W**, the 12 is a failure for Skullhead which is then bumped up to a success. That results in a success vs. success in his favor, for a score of 1–0. “He rears back, leering, and stomps his hobnail boots into your tiny face,” Irene describes. “The crowd loves his crazy bravery, holding his own against three foes!”

**Round Eight:** There are now three active exchanges, all involving Skullhead.

First, Heavy Rapper. “Neither mercy nor creativity are in my nature,” Jukka declares. “I just keep freaking pummeling!” He rolls an 8 to the Narrator’s 9. That one point difference is enough to give the Rapper a success vs. success victory, and the final point he needs to take out Skullhead, with a final result of 1–5. “You break his mask into a dozen pieces. He falls against you, dazed and unable to continue.”

“Finally!” Gilberto pants.

**Aftermath:** The crowd goes wild as the medics hit the floor. Now’s the time to see how badly everyone’s injured.

Zombie Elvis fell after a single exchange, with the standard 5 points against him, plus the loser’s penalty of 1, for a total of 6. He’s Injured.

Horrible Pete went down after a single exchange, with an unusually high 7 points against him. The loser’s penalty takes that to 8, so he’s Dying.

With 5 points lodged against her, plus 1 for losing, Treacherous Clara is Injured.

Thundering Skullhead had 1 resolution point against him in his victorious mano-a-mano with the Red Shaman, and then fell against Heavy Rapper with 5 points, taking another 1 resolution point from his unfinished match with Bonespike along the way, and then the loser’s penalty, for a total of 8. He, too, is Dying.

What of our victorious heroes?

Big Ripper disengaged after being docked for 4 resolution points. He’s Impaired.

Red Shaman went down with 5. He’s Impaired, too.

Bonespike H-Bomb got hit for 4 resolution points from Horrible Pete, then another 3 from Thundering Skullhead. That makes 7 points, so he’s Injured.

Heavy Rapper had only 1 point lodged against him in any of the three exchanges he took part in. He’s merely Dazed, and able to complete an added victory lap as the bloodthirsty crowd showers him with flowers, recreational pharmaceuticals, and cash cards.

The other survivors, losers and victors alike, are rushed off, groaning, on stretchers, bound for top-notch medical treatment befitting the top stars of the American Gladiatorial League.

It has been a glorious day in the arena.

# Contest Options

Players who want more tactical choices can use these optional rules.

## Risky Gambits

During an extended contest, a character can attempt to force a conflict to an early resolution by making a **risky gambit**. If the character trying a risky gambit is lucky enough to win the exchange, he lodges an additional 1 resolution point against his opponent. However, if the character trying the risky gambit loses the exchange, his opponent lodges an additional 2 resolution points against him.

If both contestants engage in a risky gambit, the winner lodges 2 more resolution points than usual against the loser.

Opting for a risky gambit should never be a purely mechanical request. Specify what you're doing that's so risky, and what bad consequences are likely to result if your gambit fails. If your proposed negative repercussions seem weak, your Narrator will worsen them when narrating consequences to match the actual outcome.

*In a Samurai court intrigue game, the beautiful Lady Eiko is trying to convince her cruel husband, Lord Washizu, to spare her brother, Kichijiro. The resolution point score is 4 to 3 in Lord Washizu's favor. Her player, Sarah, says she's desperate enough to resort to her ultimate threat—that if her husband unjustly allows her brother to be executed, she'll never warm Washizu's bedchamber again. With the risky gambit invoked, she contests her Courtly Wiles 18 against Washizu's Pig-Headedness 17.*

*Example of success: Sarah rolls a 4 against the Narrator's 15. This outcome is a success vs. success in her favor, which would normally score 1 resolution point against Washizu. Instead she lodges a total of 2 points against him, taking him to 5 points, and concluding the contest in her favor.*

*Speaking in character as Washizu, the Narrator reddens, blusters, demands to know how Eiko could possibly make such a threat—and relents, mumbling that Kichijiro will be merely banished to Okinawa.*

*Example of failure: Sarah rolls a 15 against the Narrator's 4. This is a success vs. success in Washizu's favor. It scores the usual 1 resolution point against Eiko, plus an additional 2 as the cost of her reckless gambit, for a total of 3. This takes her to 7 resolution points, resolving the contest in Washizu's favor.*

*Not only does Washizu refuse her and send Kichijiro to his doom. The Narrator, checking the Climactic Resolution Table, sees that her relationship with Washizu is dying. She can't take any actions leveraging her status as his wife for the moment. Unless she takes immediate measure to correct the damage to her noble marriage, she'll never be able to do it again.*

*The Narrator describes Washizu turning white with anger and storming out of his audience chamber without a word, ordering his men to immediately commence the execution. Eiko cries out to him, but he pretends not to hear her sobs.*



Supporting characters should use risky gambits sparingly, either as a response to a PC risky gambit, or when the Narrator feels that an extended contest has begun to drag.

## Defensive Responses

In an extended contest, a character can make a **defensive response**, which lowers the number of resolution points lodged against the losing party to an exchange. If the character wins the exchange, he lodges 2 fewer resolution points against his opponent. If the character loses the exchange, the number of resolution points lodged against him decreases by 1. The total number of resolution points assigned by an exchange is never less than 0; there is no such thing as a negative resolution point.

Weird edge cases aside, defensive responses are useful only in group extended contests, when you find yourself waiting for rescue as you struggle to hold your own against a stronger opponent.

Although it's always best to vividly narrate your actions, defensive responses can be hard to describe. Try to picture what's going on and paint a verbal picture. Are you hunkering down? Running away? Hiding behind your shields? In an argument, you might be clouding or changing the subject.

The PCs are sea captains under the command of the Vandal king, Geiseric, staging a raid on Palermo. You're engaged in a group extended contest resolving your attempt to sack the city. Unfortunately, your character, Munderic, happens to have landed at the point of stoutest resistance. Your men, represented by your Ravaging Raider 15 ability, are outmatched by the defenders' City Protector 7W. You need to hold on until another PC, Sigesar, with his Destroy Defenders 14W, can finish his engagement and come to

your aid. Munderic already has 3 resolution points lodged against him, and only 1 against the Palermans.

Invoking a defensive response, you order your men to fall back and regroup. You roll a 2 to the defenders' 5. Their mastery bumps up a success vs. success in their favor to a critical vs. success. This would normally lodge 2 resolution points against you, but instead is reduced to 1 point. That takes you to 4 resolution points instead of knocking you out of the contest.

Because they allow inferior opponents to prolong extended contests, use defensive responses for supporting characters only when it makes a situation more exciting—which is to say, almost never.

## Notation

Extended contests are easy to keep track of. For each contest, draw a rectangular box. Write the initials of the PC in the upper left hand corner, along with their current rating in the ability that character is using. In the upper right hand corner, jot down the initials and relevant rating of the PC's opponent. (If two PCs are engaged in a contest, choose the order arbitrarily; it doesn't really matter.)

RS17 vs. TS10W
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For a rising action contest, add a smaller box to the right of the first:

RS17 vs. TS10W	
----------------	--

At the end of each exchange, mark the score *against* each character with a tally beneath their initials.

RS17 vs. TS10W	
//	

When either tally hits 5, the crossbar clearly shows you that the contest has ended.

RS17 vs. TS10W	
//	###

For a rising action contest, you can then mark the difference in the right-hand box:

RS17 vs. TS10W	
//	###
	3

During a group extended contest (see below), having a group of these boxes on the page allows you to quickly and easily perform the bookkeeping for a complicated sequence involving many characters. As characters are eliminated from and the victors go on to start new contests, you can draw in new boxes on the fly.

If a character's rating is altered in mid-contest, either by modifiers, or because the character has switched to another relevant ability, you can alter the rating in your notation box. (Practically speaking, you'll only have to do this for supporting characters. Players will keep track of their own ratings.)

RS19 vs. TS10W	
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# MODIFIERS

This section contains additional information on modifiers. As you'll recall, modifiers are added to or subtracted from a character's ability to arrive at his final target number. Positive modifiers are called bonuses; negative modifiers are called penalties.

Positive modifiers, or bonuses, may raise an ability high enough to gain a mastery, in which case the character gets the bumps up or down that a mastery would normally supply.

Negative modifiers, or penalties, may lower an ability to the point where it loses one or more masteries. In this case, the character loses the bumps up or down he would normally get.

Modifiers should only be used to alter a character's target number to reflect unusual circumstances he helped to create, or has some control over. Unusual circumstances primarily affecting opponents result in modifiers to their abilities. If an unusual situation applies to a resistance, change the resistance number. (As you'll see in the section on resistances on p. 71, best practice is to decide how difficult a task ought to be dramatically, choose a resistance, and then, if necessary, invent modifying circumstances to account for any unusual or changed degree of difficulty.) Because modifiers complicate bookkeeping, it's always preferable to fold them into a resistance whenever you can.

## Specific Ability Bonuses

Because players get to name their own abilities, a tension exists between the vivid, specific ability descriptions that make for fun and memorable characters, and the dully non-specific ability names that increase the number of actions they can logically attempt. The system rewards creative and specific ability choices over all-encompassing abilities by awarding Specific Ability Bonuses.

When you contest an opponent whose ability is less specific to the situation at hand than your own, you gain either a +3 or +6 modifier, with the higher modifier reflecting a larger gap between the specificity of the two abilities.

*Johnny and Jimmy enter into an arm-wrestling match. Johnny's most relevant ability is Strong. Jimmy's most relevant ability is Arm-Wrestling. Johnny's ability is about the broadest that could possibly be used for this contest, while Jimmy's is specifically targeted to it. Jimmy gets a +6 bonus.*

*After making short work of Johnny, Jimmy calls for another opponent. Joey steps up. His ability is Barroom Athletics. This is also highly specific, but still broader than Johnny's ability. Jimmy only gets a +3 bonus against Joey.*

Broader abilities are penalized not to maintain a balance against the Narrator's world, but within the group, so that colorful choices are rewarded. Accordingly, when PCs contest against abstract forces, the Narrator uses the abilities of the

other PCs as a benchmark of specificity. If another member of the group has a more applicable ability than the one you're using, you take a -3 penalty to your attempt. If the ability is vastly more applicable, you take a -6 penalty to your attempt.

This rule applies whether or not that character is also using the same ability in a parallel contest. The PC being used as a benchmark needn't even be present during the current scene.

*In a science fiction game, set in a prison complex on an alien planet, Bruce (played by Chris) wants to move a huge boulder away from the mouth of a cave. His best ability is Strong. The Narrator, Nicole, checks her copies of the other characters' sheets, and find that Fred (played by Hal) has Sentenced To Five Years Hard Labor as one of his abilities. It has already been established in the story that Fred's hard labor involved the toting of rocks back and forth. Nicole decides that this is a somewhat more applicable ability, as rock toting still just one thing that Fred's ability can do. (If it were Toted Rocks In a Prison Yard, it would be a vastly more applicable ability.)*

*Fred isn't present. He's on the other side of the island, looking for the lost astrolabe—but that doesn't matter, because this rule exists to reward players with entertaining ability descriptions, not to simulate anything happening in the world. Chris' character should not be able to outshine Hal's at rock toting. Bruce faces a -3 penalty on his attempt.*

The ability to which yours is compared must share a common origin or general theme with it.

*Xervox (played by Steve) has an ability called Disintegrator Ray. It could conceivably used to achieve Bruce's ultimate purpose—to get the rock out of the cave mouth. However, because it's thematically quite different, Chris isn't stealing Steve's thunder when he uses his strength to move the rock. Nicole doesn't consider this ability when assigning broad ability penalties.*

This rule is meant to apply only to obvious cases. Because they rest on language interpretation rather than math, they come down to gut instinct. If you can't decide between a modifier of 3 and a modifier of 6, default to the 3. If you can't make an easy snap judgment, the modifier is 0.

## Target Numbers of Zero or Less

If penalties reduce a target number to 0 or less, any attempt to use it automatically results in a complete defeat. The character must find another way to achieve his aim.



## Stretches

When you propose an action using an ability that seems completely inappropriate, the Narrator rules it impossible. If you went ahead and tried it anyway, you'd get a Complete Failure—but you won't, because that would be silly.

In some cases, though, your proposed match-up of action and ability is only somewhat implausible. A successful attempt with it wouldn't completely break the illusion of fictional reality—just stretch it a bit. If you saw the same scene in a book or movie, you might smile a little at the convenience of it all, but still remain engaged with the story.

Using a somewhat implausible ability is known as a **stretch**. If your Narrator deems an attempt to be a stretch, you suffer a -6 penalty to your target number. Further, any major or complete victories you might score are instead treated as minor victories.

A strong explanation can turn an implausible action into a mere stretch.

*Professor Hartman has the ability Egyptian Hieroglyphics 16. Exploring a tomb deep beneath the streets of Baghdad, he encounters a tablet bearing an inscription in Sumerian cuneiform. "Hmm," says his player, Aidan, "can I say that, back at the British*

*Museum, I spent enough time around colleagues in the Sumerian department to puzzle through a translation attempt?"*

*The Narrator, Maggie, takes a moment to think about this. If this was a TV show, and Hartman justified his knowledge with a similar line of dialogue, she'd spot it as a screenwriter's contrivance, but still accept it. "It's a stretch, but I'll allow it."*

The definition of stretch is elastic, depending on genre. All sorts of crazy stunts ought to be possible in a high-flying martial arts game. Conversely, even common cinematic conceits ought to be impossible in a realistic espionage game inspired by John Le Carré novels.

Narrators may allow stretches for the same reason authors and directors do: to keep the story moving. If they disallow an action as implausible during one session, they can still reserve the right to rule it a stretch later on—provided they do some fancy justifying to explain the apparent internal contradiction.

Narrators should not impose stretch penalties on action descriptions that add flavor and variety to a scene, but do not fundamentally change what the character can do with his ability. These make the scene more fun but don't really gain any advantage, much less an unfair one, for the player.



Rebecca is running a fight sequence in a fantasy series, using the extended contest rules. Martin, playing Caladro the Swordsman, fights with his Flashing Cutlass ability. Thanks to a series of atrocious rolls, he's missed a bunch of times against what should be an inferior opponent. "To heck with the sword!" Martin cries. "I'm going to kick him into the wine barrel!"

A Narrator accustomed to saying "no" to her players might consider this a stretch, given that his described action involves neither flashing nor a cutlass. But if successful, it accomplishes the same end as an action using the sword—lodging resolution points against an opponent in an ongoing fight. The Narrator allows it to pass without comment.

Narrators running series in those rare genres that enforce very strict realism should, rather than impose a penalty, instead propose a more suitable action description.

Likewise, if you, in any setting, get creative with an action description in a way that impinges on another player's signature gimmick, the Narrator should ask that you amend your description to keep the PCs distinct.

Later on during the same fight, Dennis, who has the combat ability Heavily Armored Knight augmented to 18W, says, "I pick up Marta's bladed shield and go to town on the goblins with it, sawing and slashing at them!" He's referring to the distinctive weapon carried by another PC, Marta. Marta's player, Sonia, has even drawn an elaborate sketch of the shield. During the last round, Marta suffered a minor defeat, prompting Rebecca to describe her as having dropped her weapon. Various penalties have reduced her target number to 2W, so Dennis's character, Sir Percheron, will easily outclass her in the use of her own defining gimmick. What's worse, Dennis and Sonia have been mildly sniping at one another all evening. Whether or not Dennis is knowingly trying to annoy her, this is a clear instance where direct Narrator intervention is called for. As always, strong collaboration involves suggesting a cool alternative, instead of simply saying no:

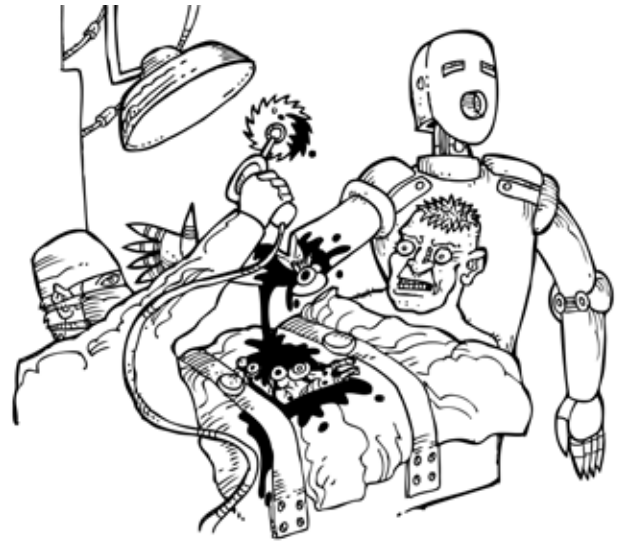
"That steals Marta's thunder a bit, don't you think? How about you wade in with your two-handed sword, kicking the shield back to her on your way to engage the goblins?"

Protecting PC uniqueness sometimes requires delicate judgments. Some players care deeply about having their gimmicks eclipsed, while others make that a low priority compared to group creativity or achievement of in-story goals. Don't bother enforcing it if no one in your group gives a hoot. Even within a single group, some instances of schtick-stealing might seem egregious, and others actively fun.

Let's say that the above incident unfolded differently. Sonia and Dennis are getting along fine, and Marta has just been knocked out of the contest with a sneaky blow from behind. She's got enough resolution points lodged against her that she'll be badly Injured when consequence time rolls around.

"Screaming for vengeance in Marta's name," Dennis says, stirringly, "I hoist her shield high and drive it deep into the treacherous varlet's flesh!"

Sonia is pumping her fist in excitement, so it's clear that she won't consider this an act of scene-stealing. The Narrator allows it as is.



## Situational Modifiers

Narrators may also impose modifiers when, given the description of the current situation, believability demands that a character should face a notable advantage or disadvantage. During an extended contest, they should typically last for a single exchange, and reflect clever or foolish choices by the character. Assess modifiers of +6, +3, -3, or -6. Modifiers of less than 3 don't exert enough statistical effect to be worth the bother. Those higher than 6 give the situational modifier a disproportionate role in determining results.

## Augments

An augment is a bonus that a character gets to his target number as a result of a prior contest. This can be either a contest he took part in, or one performed by someone else, most likely a PC. Unlike the case of a lingering benefit, which is a side effect of a contest conducted for another reason, an augment contest is conducted for the sole purpose of gaining this bonus.

To grant a bonus to a character in an upcoming contest, you engage in a simple contest against an appropriate resistance chosen by the Narrator. The default resistance for an augment is Moderate; see the Resistance Class Table, on p. 72. Together with the Narrator, you frame the contest, making it clear how your action will assist the recipient (who might be you, or another character).

In order to work, an augment attempt must be entertaining and memorable. The Narrator decides whether your description is entertaining, using the following criteria:

**Is it fresh?** If the Narrator finds something new, original, or unexpected (but fitting) about your description, she'll consider it entertaining. Conversely, if you've recently (either in this session or previous ones) used the same ability to achieve the same end, the attempt is probably repetitive, and therefore not entertaining.

Dr. Abel (Sam) is about to perform surgery on Linus (Lawrence) to remove the alien parasite from his spinal column. Nils, playing the company android, Xera, proposes to augment Dr. Abel's attempt. "My hydraulic fluid contains an anti-bacterial agent to prevent infectious agents dangerous to humans from

lodging in my internal systems. It's harmless to humans, but we saw the mother creature shrink back from me when I was leaking fluid. If you inject a small quantity of it into Linus, it may stun the bioform, causing it to loosen its hold on his nerve fibers."

This is the first time Nils has suggested using his Android Anatomy ability as to augment a medical procedure, and his explanation is both vivid and novel. Norah, the Narrator, gives him the go-ahead to attempt the augment.

The next time he tries it, it won't be fresh any more. Nils will have to wait for a session or two, or find an additional twist on it, to wring an augment out of the concept.

Specific ability modifiers apply to augment attempts, but don't pass the freshness test if you over-rely on particular abilities.

**Does it illuminate character?** Does your action reveal or confirm something about your character, or your relations with the augment's intended recipient? If it does, without being repetitive, your augment works.

Stan and Adrian play a father and son team of gladiators, Brunius and Marcellus. Marcellus, who rashly spoke out against the Emperor, is about to go into the arena to face nearly certain death at the hands of three opponents. "I use my Love For My Son ability as I deliver a final inspirational speech to Marcellus," says Stan. "What matters is not whether he survives, but how he brings glory to the house. Of course, secretly I'm hoping that the fearlessness I aim to instill grants him the necessary savagery to survive."

**Does it create suspense?** If your augment attempt puts you at genuine risk—physical or otherwise—it will invest the group more heavily in your success, and thus deserves a chance to work.

In a WWII game, set around the D-Day landings, Bravo Team is pinned down in an alleyway by sniper fire coming from the bell tower of a derelict church. Rolland (played by Doyle) is going to expose himself to fire long enough to fire his missile launcher at the tower. "I'm going to create a diversion," suggests Rex, who plays Bagger. "I'll make a run for it to the next alleyway, drawing his fire, using my Duck and Weave ability. That should give Rolland a bonus on his attempt to hit the tower without getting shot in turn." Because Rex is risking injury to his character, his augment attempt generates additional suspense—and warrants approval by the Narrator.

**Does it elicit an excited or emotional response?** If the rest of the group reacts to your description with obvious enjoyment—laughing, sincerely applauding, sitting forward in their seats, riffing on what you've just suggested, you have objectively proven it entertaining. This criterion trumps all others.

Burly super-powered hero Stonehenge has a catch phrase he utters every time he enters a truly important combat: "What time is it? It's Punch You O'clock!" By all rights, Stonehenge's player, Andrew, ought to have exhausted all augment possibilities from this battle cry months ago. Yet, whenever he bellows it out, he does so with such relish and enthusiasm that the group can't help smiling and laughing. Before his character wades into a rooftop donnybrook to take on the sinister Cubeface, Andrew delivers the line yet again—and once more scores an augment to his own Big Punching Guy ability.

At first glance, it may seem that this rule puts the Narrator in the uncomfortable position of critiquing player performance. In practice, players can be counted on to step up to the creative challenge, and will, after a few tries, learn to propose entertaining augments.

Further, Narrators should work collaboratively with players, using the "yes, but" principle (p. 77) to suggest ways that might make a mundane or repetitive suggestion into an entertaining action.

If the Narrator accepts the augment, you engage in a simple contest to see if it works. The magnitude of the bonus granted depends on the victory level. Any augment roll has a small chance that you'll hamper the recipient, levying a penalty against him.

AUGMENT RESULTS TABLE	
Success Level	Bonus
Complete Victory	+1d
Major Victory	+9
Minor Victory	+6
Marginal Victory	+3
Marginal Defeat	0
Minor Defeat	0
Major Defeat	0
Complete Defeat	-3

Nils rolls to see if Xera's attempt to augment Dr. Abel's surgery attempt works. Xera's Android Anatomy ability is 18. Norah sets the resistance at 14. Nils rolls a 1 to her 3. Critical vs. success results in a minor victory. Xera's infusion of android serum does indeed send the parasite into a quiescent state, granting a +6 bonus to Dr. Abel's Surgery roll.

You get one chance to receive an augment on any given contest. If the augmenting character succeeds, you get that augment bonus, and no other. If he fails, you gain no bonus, or even a penalty—and can gain no other bonus from any other augment for the contest in question. (This does not include proposed augments which the Narrator considers insufficiently entertaining to have an effect.)

Augments can, however, combine with other bonuses, including those from lingering benefits.

Although some groups will find endless chains of contests exciting, the vast majority of Narrators will want to rule that it is impossible to augment an augment roll.

Augments last for the duration of a single contest, whether simple or long. The story's internal logic will dictate whether a given augment has to be used right away (and is useless if the recipient is somehow delayed or interrupted), or whether the recipient can deploy it at will.

In the Bravo Team example, above, Rolland must take split-second advantage of the diversion Bagger creates for him. If something delays his shot, the moment will have passed, and he won't get the augment.



## Quick Augments

Although some players like the uncertainty of rolling for augments, these rolls don't advance the story, and can slow down the game a bit. Narrators may choose to run their game with calculated augments: divide the augmenting ability by 5 and round.

*Xera's Android Anatomy ability is 18. It provides a +4 augment to Dr. Abel's Surgery roll. The augment would be the same even if Xera's ability were 20.*

All the other rules of augments apply. Obviously the mathematical result isn't the same as for rolled augments. This isn't a problem—the difference is small, and you can take it into account when determining resistance. (In fact, you could have your players divide by 10 if it's faster for them.) But don't mix calculated and rolled augments in the same game.

*In the Marcellus and Brunius example, Marcellus can probably save the augment and use it against his dangerous foes, even if he first has to face an incompetent opponent the arena masters have thrown up against him to add a little extra blood to the proceedings.*

In some cases, Narrators may rule that an augment intended for one situation can be used for another.

*After Stonehenge makes his battle cry, a new opponent suddenly appears in the fight—Nebulon, a villain the big guy loathes at least as much as he does Cubeface. The Narrator rules that his catch phrase augment is just as applicable to one marquee baddie as another.*

### Plot Augments

A plot augment is earned by overcoming a particular plot obstacle created by the Narrator. The magnitude of the plot augment is +3, +6, +9, or +10. The more challenging the plot obstacle, the higher the augment.

Unlike standard augments, plot augments probably require the PCs to succeed at a number of simple contests. They may fail a few, but still triumph in the end to overcome the obstacle. Some plot augments might be available simply through clever and interesting roleplaying, without a die roll in sight.

Narrators introduce plot augments so it is obvious that overcoming one obstacle will grant an advantage later.

*The entire group in a game based around the Siege of Troy is soundly and humiliatingly defeated by the wrathful warrior Achilles. Then they hear that the oracle Dodona knows his secret weakness. To learn the secret, they must journey through the treacherous Serpent Vale, and then pass a series of tests to prove their fealty to the earth goddess.*

*The PCs spend an entire session overcoming the obstacles involved in both the journey and the tests of Dodona. They suffer setbacks along the way. They ultimately succeed, and learn that Achilles can be defeated by stabbing his heel. This knowledge gives all combatants against him a +10 bonus to their fighting abilities.*

Player prompting may also suggest possible plot augment scenes to the Narrator.

*The group plans for the presentation before the Galactic Parliament. They know that their patron's rival, Orgoj Orgosian, will try to line up allies against them. "He's got to have a secret in his past," says one of the players, "that we can use to tarnish his reputation, and give us an advantage when we try to sway the Senators back to our cause."*

*The Narrator hadn't considered this until now, but it sounds like an idea ripe with entertaining possibilities. They go off digging into Orgosian's background, and she decides to give them a chance to get a file on him, which will give them a +6 bonus in negotiations where the Senator's reputation is a relevant factor. Naturally, to get the document, they'll have to overcome suitably interesting and challenging obstacles.*

Depending on the story, a plot augment can modify the abilities of several characters. They typically apply only to a single situation, going away when that situation is resolved.

*The first time the PCs fight Achilles, they get the modifier that comes with knowing his weak spot. After that, he figures out what they're up to, learns about his vulnerability, and makes sure the back of his foot is carefully armored from that moment on. If the PCs still want to take him out, they'll have to find some new advantage over him.*

Plot augments combine with other modifiers, including other augments. Multiple plot augments can be applied to a single contest.

## Armor and Weapons

*HeroQuest* models arms and armor like it does everything else: any piece of gear, if sufficiently important to even mention, is treated as an ability you use to solve problems. The degree to which you can overcome an obstacle with your quilted leather armor or your glaive-guisarme depends not on any qualities inherent to the objects themselves, but to the points you've allocated to the ability.

Thus, a Heavily Armored Knight ability of 18 makes a character as effective at combat as would Acrobat Swashbuckler at the same rating. This corresponds to the way action scenes are depicted in the movies. Every effective combatant has a defining gimmick, which may or may not be connected to their gear. Characters are assumed to be equipped with the best weapons and armor for their combat style, as part of their ability.

## In a Nutshell: Augments

An action that qualifies as an augment is:

- fresh
- illustrates character
- creates suspense
- elicits an emotional response

Roll a simple contest, usually against Moderate Resistance or calculate a Quick Augment (Narrator's preference).



The difference between them lies in the types of actions you can describe, and what you can accomplish in unrelated actions and unusual contests. If you get caught in a crushing trap, you could contest with your Heavily Armored Knight ability to avoid harm, where the Acrobatic Swashbuckler, once in the trap, will have to rely on some other, possibly lower-rated, ability to get out of trouble. Conversely, Acrobatic Swashbuckler could help the second character swing on a chandelier, a task to which Heavily Armored Knight is (pardon the pun) unsuited.

You can also create separate abilities around your gear: you could have a Knightly Combat ability of 18, and a Gleaming Armor of 16. You could then use Gleaming Armor to try to augment Knightly Combat before wading into battle.

Although the effects of weapons and armor generally cancel each other out, you can use modifiers of 3 or 6 to take rare special cases into account or evoke setting-specific flavor:

- Arthurian knight fighting without armor has a -6 penalty.
- The iron-using Sea People gain a +3 against the bronze-using Hittites.
- Xorian frequency jamming decreases the responsiveness of the colonist's EFA suits, levying a -3 penalty.

## Possessions and Equipment

*HeroQuest* treats your possessions and equipment like it does everything else: as abilities you can use to solve problems, or to augment other abilities, which you then use to solve problems.

By listing a piece of equipment as integral to your character, you imply that you know how to use it. It's never necessary to split the item and the ability to use it into two separate abilities.

*If you take the ability Flashy Sports Car, you don't also have to give yourself a Drive ability in order to operate it. However, if you do take a separate ability, like Race Car Driver, you can use that to augment Flashy Sports Car, or vice versa.*

Some items of gear are just objects. Others may carry social associations rendering them useful in solving other problems.

*Flashy Sports Car not only gets you places, but can be used to impress a certain subset of people. It may also imply a range of contacts, like fellow car enthusiasts.*

Choose possessions not only for their utility, but to illuminate your character's personality.

*There are many different types of flashy sports car. Is your character best defined by cherry-red Ferrari fresh off the lot, a restored 1961 Aston Martin, or a classic 70s muscle car?*

Narrators may need to describe, verbally or in writing, pieces of equipment that are common in the setting but unfamiliar in our modern world, to give you an indication of what they can do. This is especially necessary for fantastic or imaginary gear; see p. 99.

## Wealth

In most settings, wealth is treated as just another ability you use to overcome obstacles. Your ability is not an objective measure of the size of your fortune, but instead indicates how well you solve problems with money and resources. As always, you are encouraged to select a more specific and colorful name for your ability than the generic term wealth, like Millionaire Philanthropist, Oil Tycoon, Herds Of Cattle, Trust Fund, or Treasure Vault.

This is in keeping with fictional sources, which never bother to provide a detailed accounting of a character's financial affairs. Even in works where the acquisition of wealth is a focus, from the business-based soap opera to the adventures of freebooting barbarians, the exact state of the protagonist's exchequer is handled as an abstraction. We know that the hero is either prospering, or in a state of financial crisis requiring him to actively overcome story obstacles.

For a more detailed tracking of economic factors, use the community support rules, giving a Wealth resource to a settlement, corporation, or other relevant entity.

Where a character gains wealth as a result of a particular story, the Narrator should decide how much any wealth-reflecting abilities increase, and whether or not the increase benefits an individual or the entire group. The increase also needs to be reckoned in relation to existing wealth-related abilities.

*A character with the Private Treasure Vault ability at 5W is unlikely to notice the swelling of his coffers if the party suddenly comes upon a modest treasure horde: however the lowly thief, who has no real wealth ability, will find his pockets bulging. In this instance the Narrator decides to allocate the thief the Reasonable Gold Stash at 13, but decides not to increase the other character's Treasure Vault ability any further. "For you," she says, "it's just more cash that you don't know what to do with."*

Use the same guidelines when deciding if a player can increase wealth with a hero point between adventures.

But remember: Wealth in *HeroQuest* is primarily about how well you use your resources to solve problems; it is not about bean-counting or noting every gold piece, doubloon, dollar, cent or Euro on your character sheet.





# HERO POINTS

Hero points are a resource that players must carefully allocate. They allow you to heighten your victories and dull your defeats. They are the price you pay to improve your abilities over time. They are also used in a few unusual adjudications—resolving tied results between PCs, for example (see p. 24).

## Gaining Hero Points

You get 3 hero points when you create your character.

At the end of every session, you get another 3 hero points. (Narrators may prefer to award a range of 2-4 depending on the length or intensity of the session—the number of hero points expended is a good indication of intensity.) Optionally, at the end of the session, the Narrator polls the players to suggest which of them delivered the most entertaining play. If a clear winner emerges by quick consensus, this player gets an additional hero point.

At the climactic conclusion of a multi-session story arc, the Narrator awards an additional 3 hero points per player, and may also poll the players to select an MVP for the entire storyline.

Some Narrators choose to award directed improvements (below) to all players at the end of each session based on their most interesting or amusing actions.

## Improving Your Character

You may improve any ability by 1 point per session, at a cost of 1 hero point.

To raise an ability by 2 points at once costs 3 times the cost of raising it by 1 point. 3 points at once costs 6 times as much. To raise it by 4 points at once, which is the maximum per-session increase, costs 10 times what it would to raise it by 1.

You can add a new ability by spending 1 point; it begins with a rating of 13. If the ability seems out of character for your PC, your Narrator will probably require you to come up with a believable explanation before approving it. The easiest way to get an apparently out-of-character new ability approved is to do something in the game to justify it.

*You get a little tired of playing the big dumb guy and decide to give him a surprising familiarity with existential philosophy. Knowing that your Narrator will probably question this choice, you decide to set this up in play. When the group searches a professor's apartment, you describe yourself as irresistibly drawn to a copy of Being and Nothingness on his bedstead, pocketing it to read on the way to the next obstacle. When you then try to buy a new Existentialism ability, you've already established this in-character, and your Narrator is in no position to object.*

Conversely, events that occur in play often serve as inspiration for organic-seeming new abilities. If you befriend an interesting supporting character, you can acquire a Contact or Patron ability that ensures an ongoing relationship with him. (In some instances, your Narrator may ask that you not

establish relationships with supporting characters she has other plans for.) Likewise, you can make sure that you can permanently hold onto a new piece of equipment by buying it as a new ability. This process is called **cementing an experience**.

*You play Carter Flanison, planetary explorer. As you tread the soupy surface of Epsilon-9, the Narrator describes a fuzzy hopping insect creature following you like a lonely house pet. As far as she's concerned, this is a throwaway image meant to add a little flavor to the scene. You're tickled by the idea, though, and describe yourself as picking one up and taking it back to your access pod. At the end of the session you buy the ability Pet: Hopper 13. What problems the furry little guy will help you solve remain to be seen, but you're sure you'll think of something.*

If your setting includes extraordinary abilities not found in the real world, these may be, in keeping with the fictional reality of the world background, restricted in either availability or rate of improvement.

*In Joanne's futuristic world of DNA manipulation and mutant powers, players may choose up to three specific extraordinary abilities from a list she supplies. Because these abilities are installed in the womb, players can't add them during play—what they start out with is what they get. Joanne also specifies that these cost 3 hero points to raise 1 ability point.*

## Catch-Ups

Players have a strong incentive to increase their biggest and most useful ability at the end of every session. Over time, this tends to leave their more colorful, but less versatile, abilities in the dust, languishing on the character sheet with their mournful starting values. This tendency reinforces itself; as the gap between highest and lowest abilities increases, they're even less likely to be used.

A package deal, called a **catch-up**, softens this tendency. Whenever you acquire a new mastery, up to five abilities of your choice also increase by 3 points apiece. Only abilities with values 5 or more points behind your newly adjusted rating in the raised ability qualify for a catch-up.

## Improving Keywords

Some games allow you to raise keywords as if they're regular abilities. In a game using the umbrella approach to keywords (p. 10) it costs 1 hero point to raise a single ability under the umbrella, or 2 points to raise the entire keyword by a point (multiply the costs of raising abilities by 2 if you want to raise a keyword more than one point at a time). Package keywords can't be raised after character creation.

Your character in a mythic Russia game, *Iron-Hearted Vladimir*, is a Muscovite wheeler-dealer on the make. He has a rating of 20 in *Manipulate Superior* and you spend 1 hero point to increase it to 14. This allows you a catch-up, increasing five of his low-rated abilities by 3 points apiece. His lowest ratings are: *Mongol Customs* 13, *Drink Vodka Moodily* 13, *Sentimental* 13, *Mythology of St Alexander Nevsky* 14, *Look Pious* 14, *Russian Customs* 15 and *Cunning Tactics* 15.

Your current aim is to win the favor of the notoriously bibulous abbot of the local monastery, so you choose to improve *Drink Vodka Moodily*, *Mythology of St Alexander Nevsky*, *Look Pious*, *Russian Customs* and *Cunning Tactics*. *Drink Vodka Moodily* goes from 13 to 16, *Mythology of St Alexander Nevsky* and *Look Pious* to 17, *Russian Customs* and *Cunning Tactics* to 18. This leaves *Sentimental* still at 13, but there's no room for that if Vladimir is going to rise in the Muscovite court!

In a game with umbrella keywords you may only raise three abilities (because there tend to be fewer abilities on your character sheet), or one keyword and one ability. You can't raise abilities under a keyword, nor gain a catch-up when the effective value of a sub-ability reaches a mastery (because it's the keyword, not the abilities under it, that has a rating).

### Directed Improvements

On occasion a Narrator may increase one of your abilities, by 1 to 3 points, or give you a new ability, usually rated at 13. These are called **directed improvements**.

Ability increases are usually rewards for overcoming particularly important or dramatic obstacles. They happen immediately, rather than at session's end. Directed increases are not counted against you when determining the cost of an ability increase for that session.

*Bodo*, a humble rat-catcher in the Gloranthan city of Pavis, uses his low-rated *Eloquence* ability to sway the cruel *Gimgim the Grim* from executing his friends. His player, *Tadaaki*, roleplays the scene splendidly, and tops it off by rolling a critical against the Narrator's failure. The Narrator, *Mika*, describes the normally sinister and stoic *Gimgim* as moved to tears. The moment is so memorable that she immediately increases *Bodo's Eloquence* by 3 points, from 13 to 16.

At the end of the session, *Tadaaki* wants to raise *Eloquence* by another point. The directed improvement is ignored when determining the cost of the improvement, so it takes only 1 hero point to take the ability from 16 to 17.

Narrators can use in-session improvements to encourage roleplaying from players who don't usually get into it—it can be a very concrete form of praise. Post-session rewards often boost colorful secondary abilities.

New abilities are provided as logical outgrowths of the plot, and need not reflect success at a particular contest.

*Cybersoldier Jonathan "Psycho" Vallone* inhales a dose of an alien drug and goes on a hallucinatory trip that grants him a sudden understanding of an arcane local philosophy, *Rhomboidalism*. To allow him to draw on this new insight, the Narrator gives him the ability *Rhomboidalism* 13.

In a game with umbrella keywords or keywords as packages, directed improvements should be to individual abilities—again the idea is to encourage colorful abilities that players might not otherwise improve or add.

## Why Advance Characters At All?

Few of the adventure genres we draw inspiration from actually feature significant character improvement through the course of a series. Mysteries, pulps, military adventures, westerns, and space operas tend to feature characters who are highly competent from the outset. Occasionally a secondary character, most often a male ingénue, starts out as a greenhorn and proves himself in the course of the story. (Just as often, a once-competent secondary character redeems himself and returns to his legendary past level of competence.) Other, grimmer genres, like horror, satirical SF, and arguably post-apocalyptic survivalism, keep their protagonists relatively weak throughout.

Fantasy is a prominent exception: it is not uncommon to follow a character from humble beginnings to epic achievement.

Rate of improvement is basically, then, a genre element. Narrators who want a rapid growth curve should decrease the costs of ability improvement. Those who want slower growth should increase them.

That said, roleplayers really enjoy increasing their PC's abilities on a regular basis. Regular ability boosts helps to keep them invested in their characters, and thinking of their futures. This is one area where *HeroQuest* bows more to the demands of the roleplaying form than to precedents set by the source material.

In series fiction, relationships are another common exception; highly competent heroes often make friends or contacts they meet again in a sequel. Narrators can encourage this with directed improvements.

## Extended Contests and Healing Resistances

Narrators anxious to recognize the fine gradations of extended contest results can use the following rules. In an extended contest (rising action), the resistance is 14, or four times the difference between results, whichever is greater. In an extended contest (climactic scene), the resistance is 14, or four times the total resolution points scored against the character, whichever is greater.

The mercenary *Ingrid Umlaut* was debilitated on the *Transix Orbital Platform* when the *Big Garçon* hacked into her zero gravity martial arts nanoware implants, reprogramming them into an expert system specializing in Byzantine hagiography. She lost a climactic contest with a 7-4 score. A street doctor will face a resistance of 84 to restore her implants to their proper function.



# RECOVERY AND HEALING

States of adversity of Injured or less lapse on their own with the passage of time. However, you'll often want to remove them ahead of schedule, with the use of abilities.

## Healing Abilities

The ability used to bring about recovery from a state of adversity must relate to the type of harm sustained by the victim.

Physical injuries can be healed by medical abilities. These include the ordinary healing practices available to the culture in question, and may include extraordinary healing appropriate to the setting: magic in a fantasy world, nanotech in a science fiction series, mutant powers in a world of caped crusaders, and so on. In many settings, mundane healing can at best remove a single level of adversity, whereas extraordinary powers can return a dying patient to full health in the wink of an eye.

Mental traumas, including those of confidence and morale, may be removed with mundane psychology or through extraordinary abilities. They might also be removed through a dramatic confrontation between the victim and the source of the psychic injury.

Social injuries must be healed through social abilities. They probably require public expiation of some sort, often including a negotiation with the offended parties and the payment of reparations, either tangible or symbolic.

Damage to items and equipment requires some sort of repair ability. Extraordinary items may require genre-specific expertise: a broken magic ring may require a ritual to reforge.

Healing attempts will almost always unfold as simple contests. An exception might be a medical drama, in which surgeries would comprise the suspenseful set-piece sequences of the game.

## Resistances

Default resistances to remove states of adversity are as follows:

HEALING RESISTANCES TABLE	
State of Adversity	Resistance
Hurt	Low
Impaired	Moderate
Injured	High
Dying	Very High

Healing attempts, especially of dying characters, provide splendid opportunities for plot augments (p. 55).

*Wu Long was poisoned by the dreaded Black Darts, and is dying. Chan Dun knows his attempt to harmonize Wu Long's chi flow is likely to fail—unless the Giang Hu warriors can reach the floating pavilion on the Lake of Ghosts, and retrieve a vial of Red Powder from the shadow monks there.*

## Consequences of Healing

A successful healing attempt removes one level of adversity for each level of victory. A major defeat increases the subject's level of adversity by 1; a complete defeat adds an additional 2 levels of adversity.

## Example of Healing: The Spear Wound

*After a pitched battle with the Picts, General Romanus lies on his deathbed, having been impaled by a spear. His officers admit into his presence a wild woman of the woods, Ioetis, who proposes to heal him with her ritual magic.*

*Ioetis receives a blessing from the legion's priest in the name of the gods of Rome, adding 6 to her magical healing ability of 8W, for a final target number of 14W.*

*Romanus is dying, so the resistance is 20W. Richard (Ioetis's player) rolls a 13; the Narrator, Cathy, rolls a 19. This is a success vs. success result, with Richard the low roller. He scores a marginal victory.*

*His one level of success reduces Romanus's state of adversity by one step, from Dying to Injured.*

## Example of Healing: The Apology Tour

*Teenage singing sensation Deirdre Jump flips out during a late nightclub appearance, screaming epithets at her audience. After camera-phone footage winds up all over the Internet, public relations wiz Carmen Hemphill (played by Fiona) is called in to repair the damage. She coaches Deirdre on the right things to say and sends her on an apology tour to various media outlets. Although it's Deirdre doing the talking, she's a supporting character, so the player will make the roll using her character's abilities.*

*Carmen's Public Relations ability is 8W. Deirdre's career is Injured, so the resistance is 5W. Fiona rolls a 1; the Narrator, an 11. With masteries canceling out, this is a critical vs. failure result. A major victory is three levels of success, so Deirdre loses all three of the levels of adversity she's currently faced with.*

*Thanks to Carmen, her sincere contrition—and admission that she's checked into rehab—has completely erased all damage to her career from the deplorable incident.*

## Healing During an Extended Contest

Characters with healing abilities may use them during extended contests. They are not reducing states of adversity but are rendering other assistance. Represent this with an assist (p. 42).





# RELATIONSHIPS

*HeroQuest* allows you to play out social conflicts with as much suspense and drama as other games devote to fighting. Your success in a typical *HeroQuest* game will depend as much, if not more, on your social abilities as on your sword arm or trusty laser weapon.

Social abilities can be inherent to your character, like Charming, Intimidating, or Famous. Just as effective are your relationships—connections to supporting characters, who you can draw on to overcome plot obstacles.

## Relationships with Supporting Characters

Many relationships connect you to supporting characters controlled by the Narrator.

When you try to use one of these relationships to solve a problem, you contest with your relationship ability. You can't simply go to the supporting character you have a relationship with, stick them with the problem, and expect to see it solved.

If you succeed, the supporting character helps you solve the problem. If you fail, they don't. As with any ability, you must still specify how the contact goes about overcoming the obstacle. Calls on relationships are almost always simple contests.

*In Cold War Berlin, MI-6 operative Alec Gwynne (played by Jeff) wants to engineer the recall of French military attaché Henri Jouvét, who is probably a double agent. Gwynne has the ability Contact: Reporter Desmond Audley 17. "I tell Desmond about the Granholm incident," says Jeff, "and suggest that he talk to Jouvét's superior at the embassy about it. That ought to get him yanked back to Paris, tout de suite." The Narrator, Ellen, sets an overall Resistance of 18, which represents the sum total of a number of factors, from Audley's possible disinterest in the case to the French embassy's commitment to Jouvét. Ellen calls for a simple contest.*

*Jeff rolls a 6 vs. Ellen's 17. Audley goes off to research his story. Soon Gwynne hears that Jouvét has been recalled to France.*

In especially crucial situations, it may seem dramatically inappropriate for a PC to solve a problem indirectly, by working through others. Player characters should be the driving force in any narrative. They should have to expose themselves to risk to overcome pivotal obstacles. Where characters seem to be taking the easy way out, Narrators can simply provide plot justification for a very high resistance.

*Later, Gwynne wants Audley to sneak into a hotel to get a document for him. This is a big risk he should be taking himself, so Ellen imposes a Resistance of 18<sup>W</sup>2. When Alec fails, she explains via dialogue, in Audley's voice: "Are you daft, man? I'm an ink-stained wretch, not a spook!"*

Alternately, the Narrator can expose the supporting character to serious risk. If the character dies or suffers a change of status that renders him useless to the PC, the player permanently loses the relationship ability. Permanent loss of

an ability is a steep price to pay. It can also occasion scenes of dramatic angst, in which PCs are confronted with the terrible consequences of risking others' lives to achieve their ends.

Before putting relationship characters at serious risk, Narrators should make sure the players understand the magnitude of the possible consequences. Players have a right to be annoyed if they think they're dispatching a PC on a minor errand, when in fact he's being sent into a meat grinder.

When relationship characters undertake significant risk, they may suffer states of adversity commensurate with the level of the character's defeat in the contest of the relationship ability. Or it may simply be the PC's relationship with them that is damaged or destroyed.

*Gwynne calls on Audley to deliver an envelope to an East Berlin dead drop, even though he knows it's under surveillance by the KGB. He is well aware of the danger, but has no other way of informing a deep cover agent that his identity has been blown. Gwynne rolls his Contact: Desmond Audley ability against a high resistance, and suffers a major defeat. The Narrator interprets this to mean that Audley is captured by the KGB. She can either decide that Audley has been literally Injured, or that his willingness to ever again do favors for Gwynne is metaphorically Injured.*

Supporting characters have their own agendas within the game world and mostly act independently of your PC. When they do so, the Narrator rolls on their behalf, using abilities she has assigned to them.

*Even though Audley is on friendly terms with Gwynne, he's also working on a story that may expose MI6 assets in East Germany. Gwynne may well wind up contesting against him, treating him as a minor antagonist, in an upcoming session.*

Like any ability, the sorts of problems a relationship can solve for you depend on how you describe it—in this case, how you describe the supporting character. (The chance of success is, as always, determined by the rating.) As a form of shorthand, useful relationships with supporting characters fall into three categories: allies, patrons, and contacts.

In order to make use of a relationship, you must be in a position to communicate with the supporting character. No amount of pull will help you when you can't get hold of your friends in high places.

## Allies

An **ally** is a character of roughly the same level of accomplishment as you, often in the same or a similar line of work. You share a commitment to a broader goal. The ally likes or admires you but expects the relationship to function as a two-way street. For every favor you ask of him, he'll ask one of you. These reciprocal favors will be roughly equivalent in terms of risk, time commitment, difficulty, and inconvenience. An ally's ability ratings are about as high as yours.

You're playing an entrepreneurial star pilot interested in making an honest buck with your ship. A suitable ally might be another pilot, or a mechanic, navigator, or weapons officer. The ally shares your basic goals, and so is a fellow self-employed adventurer. Sometimes you'll help each other out; sometimes you'll be friendly competitors.

You're a spear-wielding warrior fighting to defend your community of bronze-age cattle herders. A suitable ally might be another stout-armed warrior of your own community, or an opposite number from a friendly neighboring clan. You could also pick another sort of effective defender from either community, like a wizard, healer, or explorer.

The PCs belong to a cell of revolutionaries plotting the overthrow of the android government. Your ally is probably a member of a parallel cell.

If you think of your PC as a comic book character, an ally is a character who also has his own comic book, and is making a guest appearance in yours.



## Patrons

A **patron** is an employer, mentor, commander or other person of senior rank. Patrons enjoy greater access to resources than you do, either through personal ownership (as in the millionaire benefactor) or authority (the general of an army.)

## Changing Ability Ratings over Time

Supporting characters with whom you have relationships improve over time. Values for their ratings are comparative to yours. As you improve, so will they. Narrators needn't track the improvement over time, but simply update their ratings whenever they reappear in the storyline.

*When Audley first appears, his rating in his main ability, Reporter, is set to be the same as Gwynne's top ability, MI6 Agent, at 5u. Several sessions go by before Gwynne again feels the need to call on him. By this time, his MI6 Agent ability has increased to 8u. Audley's Reporter ability has done the same.*

Narrators may, for plot purposes, decide that supporting characters suffer states of adversity unrelated to the PCs' actions—provided the PCs can, by overcoming obstacles, reverse them. Perhaps a story revolves around a patron's fall from grace, and the group's efforts to restore him to his previous (and useful) place of high status.

They may lend you advice or provide you with resources but are too busy and important to personally perform tasks for you. They may hire you to do jobs, or issue orders within a command structure to which you both belong. A patron may feel considerable affection toward you, or perceive you merely as a useful underling. Even if he sees you as a surrogate child (or an actual one, for that matter) and possible successor, he is likelier to help you after you've completed an assignment for him than if you've been shirking your obligations. In other words, when you roll your Patron relationship, the Narrator adjusts the resistance depending on what you've done for him lately.

A patron will have ability ratings two or more masteries higher than yours in political, social, and resource-related abilities. You probably outshine him in other areas, although he may once have been far better than you are now at piloting a ship, swinging a sword, or infiltrating a complex.

- The patron of an independent star pilot would probably be a regular client.
- The clan warrior's patron is a clan elder, like the chief.
- The revolutionary's patron is the charismatic leader of the entire movement, or perhaps a higher-ranking rebel who recruited him into the struggle.
- The police commissioner may be a caped crusader's patron.

## Contacts

A **contact** is a specialist in a profession, hobby, or area of expertise. Although you must be able, if prompted, to explain how you cultivated these contacts, they needn't necessarily relate to your keyword or other defining abilities. Contacts provide information and perform minor favors, but will expect

information or small favors from you in return. They may share your goals but are more likely to view them neutrally. The commitment a contact feels toward you is at best that of a friendly acquaintance. Perhaps he regards you as a valued customer or fellow enthusiast. Without powerful incentives, contacts won't stick their necks out for you.

A contact's ratings in his main areas of expertise are on a par with your best rating.

You can describe a contact as being a particular individual, or as a group of similar individuals. If you draw on a group, you can expect to conduct normal business with them but not to get them to go the extra mile for you. Group contacts are most useful to get you in touch with classes of people who are otherwise difficult to contact. Depending on the setting, examples might include criminals, revolutionaries, demonic entities, wandering shamans, or sentient robots.

- A starship pilot's contacts might include various clients or vendors, but could just as easily include artists, scientists, cantina scum, and assorted professionals.
- A clan warrior's contacts might include farmers, hermits, wandering traders, itinerant holy men, and benevolent mythological creatures of the surrounding wilderness.
- The revolutionary might know smugglers, gunrunners, and hackers. From his daily life, he could know anyone from homemakers to movie stars.

## Relationships as Flaws

Certain relationships with supporting characters act as flaws. They impose obligations on you, prompting the Narrator to present you with obstacles you have no choice but to overcome.

### Dependents

A **dependent** is a person, usually a family member or loved one, who requires your aid and protection. Your Narrator will periodically create storylines in which the dependent is endangered. In action-oriented genres, the danger will be literal: your dependent may be kidnapped or menaced on a semi-regular basis. In more cerebral settings, the danger may be financial or moral.

## Professional Contacts

Any professional ability can be treated as a source of contacts. If you're a lawyer, it stands to reason that you know many other lawyers, and probably politicians, members of public interest groups, and businessmen associated with your legal specialty. Mercenaries know other mercenaries, along with an array of arms dealers, brokers, and international shady characters. A priest knows fellow ecclesiasts, various parishioners, and maybe a theologian or two.

However, a profession used as a source of contacts will always be considered a Stretch (p. 52). To more reliably draw on particular contacts associated with your profession, take an explicit ability too.

Adult dependents may have abilities rated as highly as yours, but none of them are particularly useful in dangerous situations.

Child dependents have only a handful of abilities, rated at a maximum of 8 to 12, depending on the age.

Rather than taking a dependent as a flaw, you may find it more fruitful to specify the nature of your relationship as an ability, such as Love For Wife or Love For Son. That way, you still guide the Narrator to include the rescue of your loved one as a story motif, while also getting an ability you can use as an augment in appropriate situations.

### Adversaries

An **adversary** is a rival, enemy or other individual who can be relied upon to periodically disrupt your plans. Your adversary's goals are probably the opposite of yours, although he could be a bitter rival within the same community, organization, or movement. His antipathy for you is definitely personal, perhaps rooted in some past clash or slight.

Adversaries needn't be passively waiting for you to do things so they can obstruct you. Narrators will give them plans and schemes that you will discover and attempt to disrupt.

By default, your adversary has as many abilities and rating points as you do. Players who like to be hard pressed may request adversaries who outclass them by at least one mastery in their top two to three abilities.

Because you have defined yourself in part by your relationship to your adversary, expect your Narrator to contrive to keep your adversary alive and kicking, even in circumstances when you could permanently dispose of similar opponents.

When one member of a group chooses an adversary, the other PCs usually wind up dealing with him, too. As such, you should consult with your fellow players before writing him into your series. The group may want to specify a single adversary for the entire party, or group their disparate adversaries together in the service of a single organization or cause.

To treat an adversary as an ability, rather than a flaw, describe your emotional response to him. Examples: Hates Leonard Crisp, Fears the Electronaut, Sworn Vengeance Against Heimdall. That way, you still inspire the Narrator to add the plot elements you desire, but can use your antipathy toward the enemy to augment your target numbers against him.

### Followers

A **follower** is a secondary character who travels with you and contributes on regular basis to your success. There are two types of followers: retainers and sidekicks.

Followers need not be people, or even sentient beings: you can write up a spirit guardian, trusty robot, or companion animal as a follower.

### Retainers

A **retainer** is a more or less anonymous servant or helper. You may specify a single retainer or an entire staff of them, as appropriate to your character concept.

Like other abilities, a retainer ability lets you overcome relevant obstacles by engaging in a contest.

*Cigar-chomping newspaper tycoon Wilford Conrad (played by Rory) seeks vengeance against a business rival. "I use my*



*Retainers: Paparazzi ability to stake out the club his wild quasi-celebrity daughter frequents, and get scandalous shots of her.* The Narrator, Eva, specifies a simple contest, chooses a Resistance of 10 (the daughter is notorious for this sort of thing), and Rory rolls his ability of 18 against it. He gets a 1 against her 12: a critical vs. failure, or major victory.

“Your paparazzo minions do you proud,” says Eva. “You have your choice of severe inebriation pictures, or ones showing her in a state of accidental undress.”

Retainers generally regard you with all the affection and loyalty due to an employer or master. If you treat them more poorly than is expected for your culture, the Narrator will increase the resistance of attempts to make use of their talents.

To model the contribution of combat-oriented retainers (such as bodyguards and spear carriers) to a fight, use them as an augment to your ability. Where appropriate, you and the Narrator describe the effect their presence has in the ongoing fight.

*Charismatic privateer Finian O'Connor (played by Walter) has the ability Retainers: Complement of Motley Rogues 18. He gets into a bar brawl in Port-au-Prince, and augments his Swashbuckling Action 5* with his retainers. *Walter scores a +9*

*bonus with an augment, by enthusiastically describing the shock and horror with which his rogues react to the insults lavished on him by the bar's inhabitants. Finian enters the extended contest with a target number of 14* with a target number of 5.

Finian's first roll is a failure, which the Narrator describes as follows: “The men of the Stinking Unicorn barrel into your rogues, bearing down on them with broken chair legs. One muscle-bound bloke delivers a thundering blow to the back of your head.”

Later, when Finian scores resolution points against the bar brawlers, the Narrator also includes his retainers in the description: “With a well-placed groin kick, you send your muscular enemy sinking to his knees. Meanwhile, your men rally as one, forcing their opponents up and over the bar.”

Other sorts of servants can likewise contribute to non-violent conflicts.

During a conflict in which you use retainers in a fight, the Narrator can rule that states of adversity apply to them. Retainers who are routinely Impaired in battle, or Injured even once, are apt to leave your service, even when well treated.

Retainers suffering non-violent states of adversity are less likely to depart, though it is still possible.





## Availability of Followers

Sidekicks are inappropriate for many genres, and may be disallowed by your Narrator. Check to see if they are permitted before building them into your character. By introducing a clever concept and agreeing to certain parameters, you may be able to get a follower approved for a setting that does not usually allow them.

Sidekicks are usually suited to fantasy, pulp adventure, and the super-powered hero genre.

They are not generally suited for games in which the protagonists belong to command structures, like police procedurals, or military games. If you are among the officers of a starship, the PCs probably comprise the top of the command chain (or an elite unit farther down the organizational table) and treat the rest of the crew as either retainers, or a community.

Although it is standard in adventure genres for the antagonists to command squads of faceless henchmen, it is extremely unusual for the good guys to have retainers. This may be appropriate in certain fantasy or historical settings—Glorantha, for one. In these unusual cases, the Narrator may allow retainers who confer the same benefits in extended contest as sidekicks do. For this purpose, each retainer gets a single ability rated at 17, which can't be improved. You may still improve your retainer rating, which determines your chances of solving problems with your retainer in other circumstances.

*A major defeat in the paparazzo example, above, might have meant that Conrad's photographers were, thanks to clandestine maneuvering by his rival, hired away by a rival agency, who then destroyed their negatives.*

If you lose retainers for any reason, you can replace them simply by providing a convincing explanation of how you go about it. PCs who are notoriously hard on their retainers may have to overcome challenging plot obstacles to find another band of willing servitors.

### Sidekicks

A **sidekick** is a secondary character under your control. Most of the time he stays at your side to render assistance, but he can also go off and perform errands or missions on his own.

Give your sidekick a name. Be prepared, when asked, to explain how the sidekick came to be your follower, and why he continues in that role.

Sidekicks start with three abilities, one rated at 17 and the others at 13. Any of these abilities may be a keyword. At least one of them should indicate a personality trait. (A sidekick is often a less experienced version of yourself, with the same main abilities as your PC.)

If the sidekick is nonhuman or a member of an unusual culture, one of its three starting abilities must be its species or culture keyword.

In games where creatures are given fixed game statistics (see p. 103), your Narrator may allow you to start the game with the being's base values. Creatures who start with abilities significantly greater than your own may not be available as sidekicks.

Once you've determined the sidekick's base abilities, divide 15 additional points between three of them, spending no more than 10 on any one ability.

These abilities, like your main character's, can be improved through the expenditure of hero points. (As usual, it costs 2 points to raise an umbrella keyword.)

You may use any of your sidekick's abilities as you would your own. Your sidekick can go off and do things without your character.

Sidekicks confer various benefits during extended contests, described on p. 43.

*Randy creates a sidekick for his character, Lance Arrakian, a PC in a futuristic series. Deciding on a creature instead of a human character, he opts to create a holographic artificial intelligence called a secondary. Looking through the Narrator's list of game statistics for secondaries, he settles on the model called a psychopomp. Its base abilities are:*

*Psychological Counseling 13, Soothing Countenance 13, Historical Knowledge 13, Harakisian Theology 18, Holographic Entity 13.*

*Randy can now add 15 points to up to 3 of these abilities. He adds 7 to Harakisian Theology, bringing it up to 5 $\mathbf{W}$ . He adds 8 to Soothing Countenance, increasing it to 1 $\mathbf{W}$ .*

*He names the secondary Father Jenkins. As a nonhuman, Jenkins lacks personality; Soothing Countenance is as close as it gets.*

### Replacing Lost Sidekicks

As a consequence of defeats in which they participated, sidekicks can be killed or leave your service permanently. (Sidekicks suffer worse states of adversity than your main character; see p. 28).

Defeat in physical contests can lead to literal death. Metaphorical deaths from non-violent contests indicate a break with the main PC. The sidekick may angrily withdraw from service, but is more likely to sorrowfully retire. You might bring a sidekick back from metaphorical death by overcoming story obstacles. These obstacles should be difficult, most likely taking the main focus of an entire storyline within the series.

If you lose a sidekick, you may create a new one with as many abilities as the lost supporter. Subtract 3 rating points apiece from the sidekick's top three abilities. Then distribute the modified ratings among the new sidekick's abilities.

*Ace dirigible pilot Smoky McCoy (played by Herve) loses his sidekick, Ralphie Jones. At the time of his unfortunate plunge into the Swiss Alps, Ralphie's abilities and ratings were as follows:*

*Lucky 7 $\mathbf{W}$ , Scrappy Brawler 2 $\mathbf{W}$ , Mechanic 13, Mysterious Amulet 14.*

*When the top 3 abilities are reduced by 3 apiece, these ratings become:*

*Lucky 4 $\mathbf{W}$ , Scrappy Brawler 19, Mechanic 13, Mysterious Amulet 11.*

*Herve can now create a new sidekick with four abilities, rated at 4 $\mathbf{W}$ , 19, 13, and 11.*

If your old sidekick was a creature and your new one is a standard character, the new character gets only a number of starting abilities equal to 3, plus the number of new abilities you added to the creature sidekick during play.

If your new sidekick is a creature, it has its base abilities, plus an additional one for each new ability you added to your previous sidekick during play. If the new sidekick has more abilities than the old, any abilities left over after you've allocated the modified ability ratings are rated at 13.

PCs with retainers may find it convenient to promote them to sidekick status, giving them names and personalities, with a sudden boost in abilities and ratings to match.

## Communities

Heroes in many adventure genres are rootless wanderers whose competence in the violent arts keeps them at a remove from the ordinary people they fight to protect.

Your character, however, may be part of one or more communities—large groups of people to whom you owe an obligation of protection, formal or otherwise, and in return receive moral and material support.

Possible communities include: your family, your government, companies or corporations, the place where you live, social movements, professional associations, guilds or unions, religious sects, hobbyist groups, and organizations devoted to common philosophies or ideologies.

Your Narrator will often supply you with one or more communities as part of the premise of her series. In this case, your relationship to that community is something you receive for free, as an additional ability.

*Machiko creates a series in which the PCs are colonists on an isolated planet, who all live in New Paradise, a hardscrabble settlement of about 500 people. All characters get the ability Community: New Paradise for free.*

Whether or not community ties are integral to a series, you can also connect yourself to additional communities. If the setting of the series is unfamiliar to you, collaborate with your Narrator to find one that fits your concept.

*Hayato, a player in Machiko's game, wants his PC to have ties to a second community. Machiko suggests making*

*him a member of New Paradise's tightly knit community of Hasidic Jews. Hayato finds this an intriguing concept, which inspires him to completely change his character's name and backstory.*

Where otherwise unclear, mark a community ability as such by preceding it with the parenthesized word (Community): for example, (Community) Veteran's Hospital.

Like any ability, you use a community relationship to overcome plot obstacles. Communities are useful abilities because of the broad range of assistance they can grant you, either through contests or augments. They can provide you with goods, information, advice, and contacts. Communities can boost your morale, offer healing, and provide safe haven while you recuperate. Your ability reflects not the size, power, or influence of your community, but the degree to which you can leverage it to solve problems. Thus it is possible to have a very high rating that measures your relationship to a small community, or a beginning-level rating in your relationship to a large and mighty one.

*Hayato's character, Menachem Hager, has the abilities Community: New Paradise at 17, and Hasidic Community at 20. Although the second group is only a sub-sector of the settlement's overall population, Menachem's connections to it are stronger, and he can rely on them for greater support than he can the town as a whole.*

As with professional contacts, you might argue that connection to a community is implicit in another ability.



If you have the ability *Cop*, you undoubtedly enjoy the community support of your fellow local police officers. However, drawing on this may be considered a stretch, whereas if you also take *Thin Blue Line* as its own ability, you know you'll be able to use it without penalties.

Also like any other ability, you can draw on a community ability to augment another ability.

*Menachem takes part in a boxing match against a champion put up by the local firefighters. He draws on his Cop community to cheer for him when he hits the ring, gaining an augment to his morale which he applies to his Elusive Scrapper ability, the primary ability he's using to win the boxing match.*

Like relationships to individuals, your bond to a community is a two-way obligation. You must aid its people and further its aims. Communities with strict hierarchies expect you to obey their recognized leaders. Even informal groups usually have de facto authorities, whom you flout at your peril. Communities tolerate various levels of hypocrisy; you may be expected to live strictly by their ideals, or only pay lip service to them. Depending on the economic customs in your setting, you may have to pay a portion of your earnings to your community. Communal societies with no notion of personal property may add all of your earnings into the group kitty. Other communities, like corporations and bureaucracies, may pay you to belong to them. If you refuse to render aid when needed, break with community traditions, or otherwise set yourself apart from your people, you suffer a state of adversity in regard to it. This can happen not only as a consequence of defeat, but through roleplaying choices alone.

*One of Menachem's fellow police officers is suspected in the beating death of a young Hasidic man. His religious community approaches him to demand that he call for the police officer's arrest. Menachem demurs; he doesn't want any community, even his own, to dictate who gets charged with a crime in New Paradise. The Narrator rules that his Hasidic Community ability is Impaired for the duration of the crisis.*

As the above example attests, many dramatic stories can arise from a conflict between competing community obligations.

## Community Centered Series

Series in which community plays a central role call for more involved rules. These appear in their own chapter, starting on p. 87.





# PLAYING STORIES

Adventure stories consist of a series of obstacles, which the heroes must overcome in order to reach their final goal. This chapter shows Narrators how to think of stories as a chain of obstacles, then demonstrates how to use the game's various resolution systems to move the characters through the story from one obstacle to the next.

## The Pass/Fail Cycle

In literary jargon, the structure that arises from a chain of obstacles is sometimes referred to as the pass/fail structure. At each obstacle, the protagonists either succeed, which grants them an advantage that eventually leads to a new obstacle, or fail, which puts them at a disadvantage and sends them up against another obstacle. When they fail, it is often due to an external reason, not because they are weak, mistaken, or incompetent.

For example, let's break down the classic story of Beowulf into a series of obstacles. (We trust that all of you scholars of Old English poetry will forgive the adaptations we've made to the story for the sake of example.)

First, we have the goal. The monster Grendel invades the clan hall of the Danish king, Hrothgar, killing many of his men. Beowulf, a hero of Sweden, learns of this and travels to the king's hall, intent on proving himself by slaying the monster.

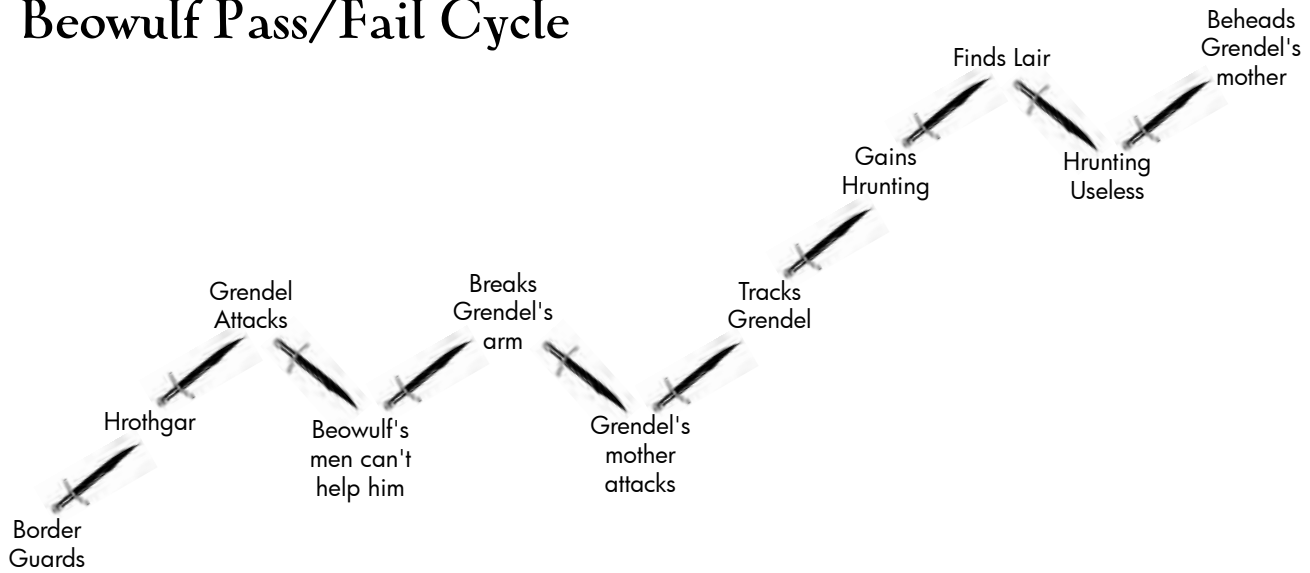
Beowulf is challenged by Danish border guards. He *passes* this obstacle by impressing them, gaining an audience with Hrothgar. Beowulf meets Hrothgar, seeking a place in his hall. He *passes* this obstacle; Hrothgar retains a favorable impression of him from a previous encounter.

Now staying in Hrothgar's royal hall, Beowulf and his men are present when Grendel attacks. Beowulf's men *fail* against the monster, who kills one of them.





# Beowulf Pass/Fail Cycle



Beowulf turns the tide against Grendel, ripping off his arm. He *succeeds*. Grendel staggers off into the night, mortally wounded. Celebrations prove short-lived when Grendel's even more monstrous mother shows up at Hrothgar's hall, seeking vengeance. Beowulf and company *fail*; she kills his loyal retainer, Aeschere.

Beowulf tracks Grendel's mother; he *succeeds* in following her to the shore of an icy lake.

Moved by Beowulf's skill and bravery, the Danish warrior Unferð, previously his rival, gifts him with the sword Hrunting. Beowulf *succeeds* in gaining an apparent advantage.

Beowulf dives into a lake and finds Grendel's underground lair. He *succeeds*. Beowulf initially *fails* to defeat Grendel's mother. Hrunting is useless against her, so Beowulf discards it in favor of an even more fabulous sword found among the creature's treasure hoard. He *succeeds* in decapitating her.

This pattern of successes and failures maps out as follows, with successes represented by upward arrows and failures by downward arrows:

Although often compared to a roller coaster, the **pass/fail** cycle, when mapped out, shows a gradual upward motion, with periodic swings downward.

In fiction, the author creates excitement by manipulating the rhythm of successes and failures. If the hero succeeds all the time, we, the audience, stop worrying about him, and disengage from the story. If he fails all the time, our desire for vicarious wish fulfillment is thwarted, and we turn against the narrative, feeling anything from annoyance to anxiety.

In *Beowulf*, we see this principle in action. The pass-fail pattern goes like this: pass, pass, fail, pass, fail, pass, pass, pass, fail, pass, pass. Note that successes outnumber failures by nearly three to one, and that the failures are evenly distributed through the storyline. This means that successes cluster together, but failures do not.

The pass/fail cycle serves its purpose by allowing the author to orchestrate a pattern of tension and release. She creates tension by having the hero fail, or making it seem as if he will fail. Having built up tension and frustration, she releases it by allowing the hero to succeed. We, identifying with the hero, feel the adrenaline rush of excitement that comes with real-world success.

## Fiction is Linear but Roleplaying Branches

If we could just exactly replicate the pass/fail cycle of Beowulf's unknown author every time, our work here would be done. It's not that simple, though. Audiences need an unpredictable pattern of success and failure, and roleplayers want to see their own decisions driving the direction of the storyline.

The author of fiction enjoys an advantage over a *HeroQuest* Narrator: she has to take into account only one possible outcome from any obstacle. She decides if the hero succeeds or fails, and then continues to plot the story in a linear fashion.

Narrators, rather than creating a single plot line for the hero to move through, must anticipate that the heroes will either succeed or fail when confronted by any noteworthy obstacle. Either by preparing in advance or through improvisation, they must be ready for the story to branch into many possible stories. The decisions of the players, in tandem with the game's resolution system, determine which story actually takes place. The result is also a linear story, but the process must be at all times open-ended, so that the players have determining influence over the outcome of the story. They must not only be granted considerable power to drive the story, they must *feel* that they have it. Oddly enough, it is often easier to accomplish the former than the latter.

In a *HeroQuest* version of the Beowulf story, the Narrator would require the player to use a suitable ability to impress the Danish border guard. She'd have to react with an interesting story choice if he failed his roll, leaving the border guard unimpressed with him. Beowulf's player might decide to approach the king's

hall without permission. This would in turn change the nature of the scene in which they seek Hrothgar's permission to billet there, making it harder, or requiring an ability other than Past Great Deeds. Perhaps Beowulf and his entourage decide to stake out the hall from a distance, intercepting Grendel before he arrives...

Although the branched story probably winds up revolving around successive confrontations with Grendel and his mother, as per the original, the series of obstacles, as well as the pattern of passes and failures, no doubt diverges substantially from the original plan. This is how it ought to be, especially when the divergences result from player choices.

## Resolution Methods

### Conflict Pacing in Fictional Sources

When an author or director depicts a conflict, she decides how much attention to pay to it. Conflicts of minor importance to the storyline are dispensed with quickly, in a line or two:

*The doorman at the Black Finn didn't want to let me in at first. Money changed hands, and I swept into the bar, unimpeded.*

More important conflicts are described in greater detail. Within each conflict the pass/fail cycle plays out in microcosm. One participant may seem to be on top at first, then lose ground, then recover, only to face another setback, before ultimately prevailing. By presenting the scene in this way, the author invests the audience in it.

*The loss of my last sawbuck stung, but I wasn't here to waltz with the help. I was looking for the proprietor. Little Louie was standing behind the bar, all three hundred pounds of him. His eyes were drilling down a waitress' cleavage while he ragged her out for some petty indiscretion. It was nice of the big ape to remind me how much I disliked him. That gave me the anger I needed to do what came next.*

*I leapt the counter and pistol-whipped him from behind. This had gone too far to let elementary fairness stand in the way. The butt of my .38 scraped a red dent in the thick fold of flesh at the bottom of his skull. He wove on his feet. I thought it was over.*

*Lou turned and swung. I flew backwards into the bar. Bottles and glasses rained down onto me. My gun went flying. Lou's boys came my way. The big man waved them off.*

*He fainted me out, then tried to land a sucker punch in my right kidney. I anticipated him, grabbing a highball glass and flinging it in his bony kisser. It shattered satisfyingly. Blood from a lacerated forehead poured into his eyes, blinding him—as he wrapped iron fingers around my trachea.*

*The Black Finn swirled and swam as my oxygen supply dwindled. My hand drifted across a long, hard object on resting on pegs beneath the bar. The barman's shotgun. I didn't have the distance to fire it, but I could sure use it as a club. I swung it ineffectually, but he drew back instinctively from the firepower.*

*I jammed it under his throat. His bully boys backed off.*

*"Remember a poor little waif name of Lili Watson?" I asked.*

*He grunted in the vague affirmative.*

*"Well, you murdering piece of chute trash, we have an appointment—at her unmarked grave."*

*HeroQuest* allows you to make the same sorts of decisions, choosing the amount of time and attention you spend on an obstacle, depending on its importance to the story.

## Choosing the Right Resolution Method

In an improvised story created in collaboration with your players, it's not always easy to know how much weight to grant to a conflict resolution. Ideally, neither you nor the players know exactly where the story is headed. Sometimes you'll know instinctively which method to use.

When in doubt, the following rule is your first resort:

**The degree of emotional investment the players have in a conflict determines the complexity of the resolution method used to resolve it.**

If you remind yourself of this and you're still stumped, break it down further with the following questions:

1. *Do the players show little emotional investment in the outcome of the conflict?* If so, consider a simple contest, or even an automatic success. If you expected this to be an important obstacle, but the players are lukewarm to it, you probably haven't established its stakes as sufficiently vital to them. You may want to improvise your way out of the current scene, allow them to find out why it should matter to them, and then return to your planned larger conflict later. Even better, figure out what the players really want to pursue instead of your planned conflict, and build a set of suitably entertaining obstacles to take them to that goal.
2. *If the character fails, can you think of no interesting resulting obstacle to branch toward?* Use an automatic success, possibly disguising it as a simple contest. (See p. 24 and 27.) Failed results are interesting when they build tension, which is then released when the characters achieve a success on the pass/fail cycle. A failed result

## Other Story Types

Our assumption throughout *HeroQuest* is that you're using it to run games set in one of the many adventure genres: fantasy, space opera, horror, western, martial arts, and so on.

Although we don't spend much time addressing it, the system can be used for virtually any narrative form.

Comedy, like adventure, consists of a series of obstacles that the hero must overcome on the way to his goal. The structure remains the same, but the scenes are played for laughs, and the worst consequence the hero typically faces is some variety of escalating humiliation. Comedies can range in realism from outright lunacy to the finely-drawn social observation of a Jane Austen novel.

Drama pits the main characters against one another; their obstacles are personal or internal, rather than the external hurdles adventure characters face. They tend to face one developing, multi-faceted crisis and either undergo a personal transformation, achieving redemption, or resist it, and are destroyed.

As we assume that few groups are looking to run series based on *Long Day's Journey Into Night* or 80's teen sex comedies, adapting the advice given here from adventure to other story types is left as an exercise for the aesthetically daring reader.

which results in a boring or annoying consequence *deflates* tension. Avoid staging conflicts that lead to tension-killing failures.

3. *Would it seem peculiar for the character to fail?* If so, use an automatic success. Failure can seem peculiar when its results would be comic in what is meant to be a serious scene or when no equivalent character in fiction would ever fail to overcome so petty an obstacle. Failure at minor tasks, especially those directly related to a PC's defining ability, may seem out of character, and thus peculiar.
4. *Is only the player directly involved emotionally invested in the outcome?* Use a simple contest.
5. *Are the stakes high for everyone?* Use an extended contest.
6. *Are the stakes low?* Use a simple contest, if not an automatic success.
7. *Will the outcome change the PCs' circumstances, or long-established facts of the world, forever?* Use an extended contest.
8. *Have you already used a couple of longer contests during the current session?* Use a simple contest. If this seems unthinkable, due to the great stakes involved, consider adjusting your pacing so that the extended contest occurs at the top of the next session. On the other hand, if you have the time and everyone seems excited to go, use the extended contest.

All of these questions can be rephrased as **Can I get away with doing it more simply?** If you can, do it.

### Examples

Julie is running a hardboiled detective game for a solo player, Ronnie. Ronnie plays sardonic private detective Mack McNair. The evening is drawing to a close; Ronnie has learned that Lili Watson, the runaway he's been hired to find, has been murdered. He's also identified the killer—Little Louie Clark, brutish proprietor of a bar called the Black Finn. Now all he has to do is bring him to justice. Ronnie decides that Mack will head to the Black Finn to find Little Louie.

This is a return visit to the bar. Julie has already established that there's always a watchful doorman at the door. Internal consistency demands that there be one present now. Logically, getting past the bouncer presents an obstacle for Mack to overcome.

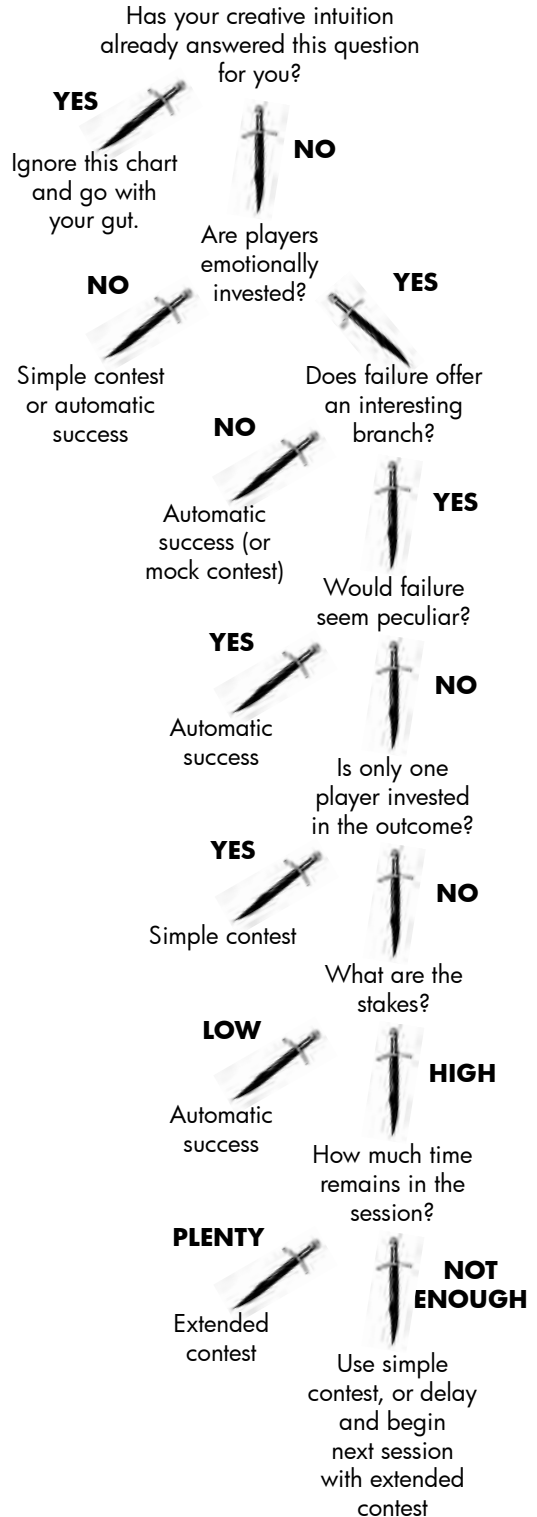
"I pull out a sawbuck," says Ronnie, "and bribe my way past him."

However, the momentum of the story demands that Mack meet up with Little Louie as quickly as possible. A long scene of negotiation with a nameless doorman will merely draw attention to what should be a minor interaction. It should either be a simple contest or an automatic success.

Julie asks herself how the story might branch if Mack fails. Is there an interesting possible result that won't take the story on an annoying tangent? Yes—if Mack fails, the bouncer calls for Little Louie, who comes out onto the street to meet him. This will still allow the confrontation to occur, but with Mack at a disadvantage, because Louie will be prepared for him. (The extent of the advantage would depend on the degree of Mack's failure; see plot augments, p. 55.)

Julie and Ronnie resolve the bribery attempt; Mack prevails and is allowed into the club without further incident.

## Decision Tree: Choosing Your Contest Type



He looks around for Little Louie. Reflecting the ease of his entry into the Black Finn, Julie describes him as looking in the other direction, polishing a glass behind the bar.

Mack could talk him into custody, using his “It’s All Over, Pal” ability. But over the course of his investigation, he’s come to feel for Lili Watson, a poor kid who never caught a break. “I leap the counter and whale on him,” Ronnie decides.

Julie must now decide how to resolve this fight. This is the big confrontation at the end of the story. Ronnie is emotionally invested in it. The stakes are high; Louie’s fate, and Mack’s sense of justice, hang in the balance. The answer is obvious—this must be an extended contest.

## Assigning Resistances

To choose a resistance, start by deciding whether you want the odds to lean toward failure or success, and to what extent. Some Narrators arrive at resistances based purely on their own creative instincts, without reference to any of these rules. That’s not just acceptable, but commendable. Your own experience as a Narrator should be granted greater weight than the following set of guidelines. Resistances fall into the following six classes, from most to least daunting: Nearly Impossible, Very High, High, Moderate, Low and Very Low. (To translate a resistance class into a final number, see the next section.)

If the scene is a climactic one you’ve been building toward for the bulk of the session or series, assign High or Very High Resistances. If the action the character proposes seems so unlikely as to strain credibility, but not quite enough for it to completely fail a credibility test (p. 74), assign a Nearly Impossible Resistance.

If the action attempts to leapfrog a series of interesting obstacles to solve the main problem of the story in a disappointingly abrupt fashion, assign a Very High Resistance. (If they succeed, you must then find a new main problem arising from their solution of the one you were prepared for.)

If you can’t envision an interesting story branch from failure, make success automatic. Do not require a contest at all. If you

can envision story branches from failure, but they seem less entertaining than from success, assign a Very Low Resistance.

If you can envision equally entertaining story branches from either result, look to the PCs’ current position on the pass/fail cycle. You can do this instinctively or mechanically. To measure instinctively, read the players’ collective mood. Do they think they’re doing well, and starting to get cocky? If so, hit them with a High Resistance. Do they perceive that they’re faring poorly, and growing disheartened? Give them a Low Resistance. Does their mood seem neutral? If so, use a Moderate Resistance. (Note that you, knowing what’s going on in the world, may think that the players are doing better than they are. Make resistance determinations based on their perceptions, no matter how misguided they might seem to you. Think of the players as the audience in a movie; if they’re feeling pressured and depressed in what is meant to be an escapist adventure, it’s time to lighten the mood. If they no longer feel a sense of urgency or jeopardy, tighten the screws.)

To track the pass/fail cycle mechanically, make a chart of the story as it progresses, measuring the result of each major obstacle. The table consists of two elements: point-form descriptions of each obstacle as it is resolved, and connective arrows. If the PCs succeed, place an upwards-pointing arrow after the obstacle notation. If they fail, mark it with a down arrow. For an inconclusive result, use a level arrow. Mark major victories and defeats with double arrows.

When a group of PCs acts separately but simultaneously to overcome the same obstacle (as when scaling a cliff, bluffing their way through security, or moving silently through a secured area), note the worst outcome on your diagram.

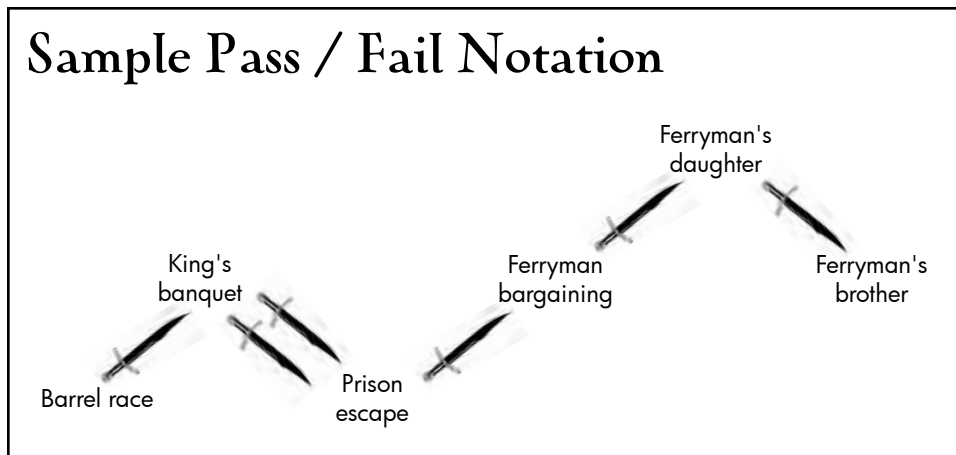
Include on your diagram only the resolutions of major obstacles. Don’t treat arguments or other contests that set the stage for another resolution as separate contests. Also disregard obstacles tangential to the storyline, or of interest to only a single PC. A success gained by one PC on a matter of little importance to the others shouldn’t increase the resistance for a pivotal contest all of them are invested in.





Extremely punctilious Narrators may wish to keep separate pass/fail charts for each PC, or mark each character's results with different colored pens. They can then use these to keep track of subplots or to spot when an individual player has gone for a depressingly long time without a win, even when the rest of the group has been performing superbly.

Here is a sample pass/fail notation:



As you can see, the PCs in this game have had a victory, a complete defeat, two more victories, and then a defeat.

To use your pass/fail tracking chart in assigning resistances, check the most recent pair of arrows against the Pass/Fail Resistance Assignment Table, below. Treat each major defeat as two defeats, and each major victory as two victories.

PASS/FAIL RESISTANCE ASSIGNMENT TABLE	
Previous Two Results	Resistance for Present Contest
3-4 Defeats	Very Low
2 Defeats	Low
2 Ties	Low
1 Defeat + 1 Victory or Tie	Moderate
2 Victories, 0 Defeats	High
3-4 Victories, 0 Defeats	Very High

In the example diagram, the two most recent results are a victory and a defeat. This means that the next resistance, barring other factors, ought to be Moderate.

You may find the maintenance of a pass/fail tracking diagram a useful exercise even if you continue to rely on story instinct rather than slavishly resorting to the table.

Are any of the players breaking the fictional illusion by openly speculating on what the resistance of the current obstacle will be, based on the dramatic considerations we're describing here? Surprise them by setting a resistance contrary to expectation, and by presenting them with a shocking (and probably undesirable) plot twist arising from the contest's

outcome. If they're expecting a tough obstacle, use a Very Low Resistance. If they're expecting an easy time of it, impose a Very High Resistance.

Always remember that the pass/fail method of resistance assignment is a fallback measure. Use it when you have no strong answers to the questions listed above. Don't let it rigidly override your dramatic instincts, or sacrifice the broader credibility of the narrative to the pacing needs of the moment.

For example, it might be a signature detail of your world that dragons are always extremely tough opponents. If the PCs confront a dragon, don't chuck your continuity out the window to make it suddenly an easy kill. Keep its resistance values high. Instead, find some other way to give the party a much-needed win. Maybe they can frame the contest so the dragon has to rely on a weak ability. Perhaps the scene turns on a contest with some other character or impersonal force, to which you can assign the low resistance called for by pass/fail tracking.

Likewise, some tasks should become easier over time, because it

improves pacing and preserves the players' sense of growing mastery over their environment. The tribal chieftain who seemed like an impossibly imposing threat when they were first starting out can be defeated through an automatic action now that they're back from the wars with several masteries under their belts. (On the other hand, it might be equally entertaining to have an important early antagonist go through a parallel rise in fortunes, so that he remains a viable villain throughout your series.)

### Calculating Resistances

Resistances are determined relative to the PCs' collective ability ratings, taking into account the general sort of contest they're about to enter.

### Choosing Resistance Numbers

Resistance numbers are derived from a base number, which is modified according to the resistance class, as per the following table:

RESISTANCE CLASS TABLE	
Class	Value
Nearly Impossible	Base +12
Very High	Base +9
High	Base +6
Moderate	Base
Low	Base -6
Very Low	Base -12 or 6, whichever is lower

The base starts at 14. After two sessions of play, it increases by 1. After every subsequent two-session interval, it increases by another point.

All contests use the base number, except for contests to determine augments. Resistance to augments increases at a slower rate (because characters often augment with secondary abilities they don't increase as fast); it increases so augments don't become more influential as PCs improve.

BASE VALUES TABLE		
Sessions to Date	Base Value	Augment Value
1-2	14	14
3-4	15	14
5-6	16	15
7-8	17	15
9-10	18	16
11-12	19	16
13-14	20	17
15-16	21	17
17-18	22	18
and so on...		

The “Sessions to Date” entries in the above chart include the current session. It's easier to keep track of your base values (changing them every two or four sessions) than to keep track of the current session number and refer to the chart every time you want to calculate a resistance.

Inca nobles Manco (played by Adam), Poma-Capi (Malik) and Chalcuchima (Emmanuel) have ventured into the jungle in pursuit of the legendary feathered jaguar. The Narrator, Louise, decides that the next obstacle on their quest should be a physical one. She decides to have them encounter a pool of hidden quicksand. Having no predetermined dramatic reason to make the quicksand either difficult or easy, Louise checks her pass/fail chart, and sees that the group has been victorious over its last two obstacles. According to the Pass/Fail Resistance Assignment Table, this calls for a High resistance.

This is the sixth episode of the Inca series, so the base value is 16. A High resistance is base + 6.  $16 + 6 = 22$ . Louise sets the resistance for spotting the quicksand at this number. Louise wants this moment to generate suspense in case of failure, and elects not to treat this perception test as a secret contest (p. 30). Instead, she has Adam, whose character has been previously described as scouting ahead for trouble, roll Manco's Jungle Scout  $4$  against the  $22$  resistance. The result is a failure vs. failure in favor of the resistance. Manco, though advancing carefully, steps onto seemingly solid ground, only to fall through a hard crust into enveloping quicksand.

Louise determines the difficulty of getting Manco out of the quicksand. Sticking with the Pass/Fail Resistance Table, she sees that the group's last two results were a victory and a defeat, calling for a Moderate resistance. This equals the base, 16.

Poma-Capi attempts to pull Manco out by tossing him a rope, using his Wiry Physique ability of  $5$ . Chalcuchima augments him with his Appease Earth Spirits of  $8$ ; this should

induce the quicksand to cooperate in Poma-Capi's efforts to remove Manco from its grip.

Augmenting always faces a Moderate resistance—this is always the unmodified base value, which here is 15. Emmanuel rolls a 2 against Louise's 15, for a minor victory (critical vs. success). According to the Augment Results Table, Poma-Capi gets a +6 bonus from Chalcuchima's invocation, bringing his effective rating to  $11$ . Contesting against the Moderate resistance of 16, Malik rolls a 19 against Louise's 18. His mastery bumps up his result from failure vs. failure to success vs. failure, for a minor victory. Poma-Capi hauls Manco out of the quicksand.

Unable to think of an application for the +3 bonus arising as a consequence of victory, Louise brings Malik into the process, asking for a suggestion. Malik says that it should reflect his character's increasing confidence against the physical perils of the jungle. Louise agrees and will apply it, until another result changes his fortunes, to future contests fitting that description.

If your series grants non-standard starting values to PC ability ratings, adjust the base value to fit. Generally speaking, the base should be 13 points lower than the highest possible ability rating at start of play. This guideline may not hold for unconventional means of ability rating distribution, especially those that result in a particularly large spread between best and worst abilities.



Depending on how frequently augments are used in your game, you may need to increase the base value slightly.

If you find that PCs in your series either succeed or fail with frustrating regularity, adjust the base value upwards or downwards until, through experimentation, you arrive at a number suiting your group's distribution of ability ratings. Remember, the table is just a guideline, and the context of your story will always trump it.

### New Conditions, New Resistance

Resistances are usually assumed to have all complicating or mitigating factors built into them, and under most circumstances require no modifiers. Even when the PCs re-encounter a previous obstacle, you can change the resistance directly if the pass/fail cycle or other dramatic or pacing reasons indicate that this is the most entertaining choice.

Make sure that you describe changing conditions so that the change in difficulty appears believable:

- "It's very windy today, so your shot will be even trickier this time."
- "The market is on the rise today, so it's easier to get a return on your investments."
- "Those ghosts you stirred up have shown up to howl, ruining your concentration."
- "Joaquin's car is running faster today—must be that new ace mechanic he hired from Ecuador."

If you want a rematch contest against characters or creatures to have a markedly different chance of success, create conditions that mitigate for or against the opposition, altering their target numbers. Wherever possible, express these as modifiers to the PC's abilities, rather than the opposition's. Of course, it's even better if the players actively seek ways to alter the odds in their own favor, with plot and ability augments. That way, they'll have earned their triumphs, rather than merely becoming the beneficiaries of good fortune.

*During the journey to the guru's subterranean lair, it made dramatic sense for the animated statues around his temple to pose a significant threat. On their way back, it would seem repetitive and annoying to give them the same attention in the narrative—but at the same time a disappointing cop-out to ignore them altogether. You therefore rule that the chakra powder given to them by the head monk disturbs their mystic senses, granting the characters +9 bonuses to their contests to evade the statues and creep away into the jungle undetected. Thus you preserve the internal reality of the setting while maintaining control of your pacing.*

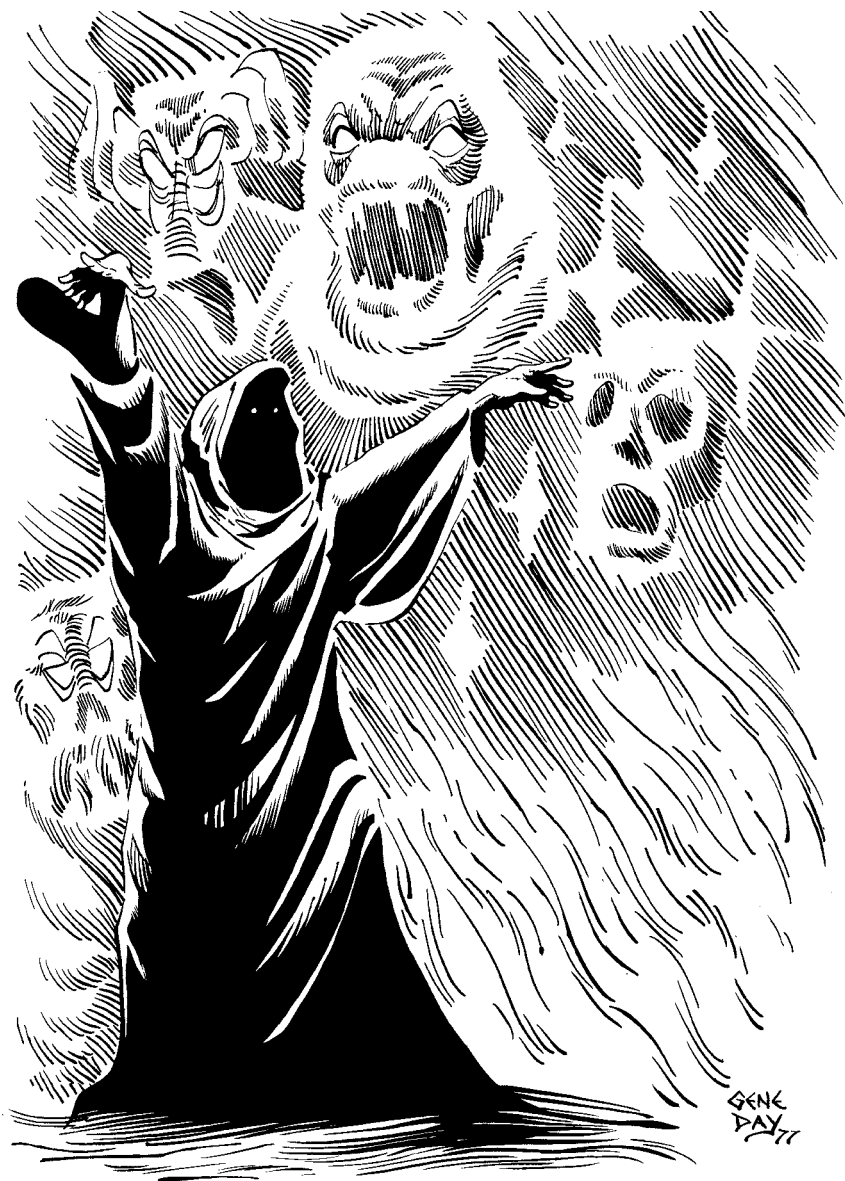
### Credibility Tests

The process of deciding whether a proposed outcome is possible is called a **credibility test**.

In works of fiction, it is the author's job to maintain the illusion of fictional reality by presenting the reader only with events that seem credible within the rules of reality they've established for their world. Often this is an exercise in maintaining the line between the excitingly unlikely and the absurdly impossible.

If you're watching a western and the hero leaps from the top of a bluff onto the back of his speeding horse, you probably buy this as a possible action in the heightened world of the movies. If, however, you saw a movie where the hero is standing on the plain a half a mile behind his speeding horse, and then runs to catch up with it and mount it, you'd find this laughable breach of reality so great as to take you out of the movie.

As Narrator, you are never obligated to allow a contest just because two characters have abilities that can be brought into conflict. If the character's proposed result would seem absurd, you disallow the contest, period. If it seems





possible but very difficult, assign an extremely high resistance. Don't make the mistake of assigning a high resistance to avoid an impossible outcome—lucky rolls and hero points can make your world seem suddenly ridiculous.

Michelle is running a western game. The Minnesota Kid (played by Alex) stands on a salt flat, half a mile away from his horse, Platinum. A posse is on the horizon, and intends to take Minnesota back to town for a necktie party. Minnesota has a Run Fast ability of 18. Platinum's Run Fast ability is rated at 8.

"Hey," says Alex, "I run faster than my horse. Can I sprint half a mile to catch up with him?"

Michelle doesn't have to think about this; common sense tells her that the outcome would be inappropriately laughable. "Nope, that would be absurd. You may be better at using your Run Fast to solve problems than Platinum is, but you aren't objectively faster than a horse. And if you were, you could just outrun the posse. Which would also be absurd. Time to think of a more credible solution."

"Okay," says Alex, "can I call Platinum back to me, with my Piercing Whistle ability?"

Michelle can imagine this happening in a western movie of roughly the same tone as her series, though it should be difficult. She allows the contest, with a suitably high resistance.

Players are typically as attuned to common sense narrative reality as you are, and will not routinely propose patently absurd actions. You'll find that they do almost all of your credibility testing for you. If anything, you'll face the opposite problem, where the players act with undue caution even though their characters exist in a relatively forgiving high-adventure setting.

What constitutes a credible action may vary from one setting to the next. In film, directors typically establish early on just what degree of realism we should expect for the duration of the movie. An over-the-top action sequence situates us in a pliable world operating under video game physics. A nasty close-up brawl puts us in the real world, where any blow hurts. If Stephen Chow one day makes a western, he might well establish it as taking place in a cartoonish world where cowboys can outrun their horses.

HeroQuest allows you to adjust the reality level you use for each setting. In a realistic world, interpret results with a gritty adherence to physics. In an over-the-top game, describe the same outcomes as expressions of gravity-defying stunt work.

**Example One:** Adriana is running a realistic espionage game in the style of a John Le Carré novel. A car bears down on protagonist Hamish Carter on the streets of Beirut, intent on pinning him against a wall.

Hamish's player, Gianfranco, says, "I use my Dodge ability to get out of the way."

"It's a simple contest," says Adriana. "What do you want, if you succeed?"

"I want it to hit something, removing the car as a weapon. I position myself so that it crashes the corner of the alleyway if it misses me."

Gianfranco rolls Hamish's Dodge of 18 against the bad guys' Drive ability of 14. He gets a 1; Adriana, a 13. As it stands, this is a minor victory. Gianfranco spends a hero point to bump his result up, converting it into a major victory.

"The car crumples against the wall, its engine clearly destroyed," Michelle narrates.

**Example Two:** Fiona is running a spy game in over-the-top movie mode. On the French Riviera, a car bears down on protagonist Dirk Steed.

Dirk's player, Wesley, says, "I use my Death-Defying Leap ability to not only avoid impact, but land on the hood of their car."

Fiona runs a simple contest, pitting Dirk's Death-Defying Leap of 18 against the bad guys' Vehicular Homicide of 14. As in the above example, the player gets a 1 and the Narrator a 13. Wesley spends a hero point to turn the result into a major victory.

"As they barrel toward you," Fiona narrates, "you leap up onto the hood. It's careening along the St. Tropez Boulevard, with you clinging onto it. Now what do you do?"

## Contest Options

Narrators may modify the basic HeroQuest chassis by incorporating the following optional rules.

### Upping the Stakes

Some players want a system where exchanges in extended contests impose immediate penalties on their losers. At first glance, this would seem to mimic the source material, in which heroes become increasingly pressed, scuffed up, and exhausted as an action tale barrels toward its pulse-pounding conclusion.

However, if you peel back the outer layers to look at the pass/fail structure underneath, you'll see that adventure protagonists do not fail more the further he gets into a story. The opposite tends to be true: failures tend to cluster around what in a film would be the break between first and second acts. The hero then spends the rest of the story accruing the successes he needs to overcome his primary obstacle. His face may be swollen, his arm bandaged, his vision blurry, but he's racking up successes as the narrative accelerates. These outward signs of injury are cosmetic, meant to increase our sense of suspense as we hope for his success. They increase impact during the back-and-forth of a suspenseful sequence but do not increase his overall chance of failure.

What does tend to ramp up as a story progresses are the stakes for failure. To emulate this, track an additional number for extended contest participants: their **stake points**. In an extended contest, any character suffering a minor defeat gains 1 stake point. Characters suffering major defeats gain 3 stake points. (If you're using poker chips to track character status, indicate these with an odd color chip or other token.)

## In a Nutshell: Resistances

Use your judgment first.

Choose resistance class (according to story needs, or with pass/fail table): Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, Very High, or Nearly Impossible.

Determine Base Resistance using the Base Value Table. Use the Resistance Class Table to modify the Base and derive a final Resistance.



When a character with stake points loses an extended contest, his number of stake points are added to the resolution points scored against him when consulting either the Rising Action or Climactic Scene Consequence Tables.

This injects added suspense to the ongoing proceedings, making the group more afraid for their characters, because the results will be worse if they lose. It does so without upending the pass/fail structure by making them more likely to lose as the story progresses.

### Death Spiral

A very few fictional models depict contests as harsh, attritional affairs where the first hit is almost always determinative. To make extended contests grim, brutish and short, immediately assess penalties to losers of exchanges according to the Consequences Of Defeat table. As the death spiral rule reduces the chances of reversals and makes outcomes more predictable, you may prefer to skip a step and simply resolve every conflict, no matter how momentous, with simple contests.



HEROQUEST CORE RULES



# NARRATING

No matter what rules set you use, running an entertaining roleplaying game remains a fun and rewarding challenge. This chapter presents advice specific to the *HeroQuest* system, as opposed to more general advice applicable to all games. Beginning Narrators who need help on the fundamentals can look to a number of high quality standalone products that provide general game mastering advice.

## Collaboration Versus Authorship

A narrative-based roleplaying game like *HeroQuest* takes interpretive power away from rulebooks (with their specific descriptions of various powers and abilities), and gives it to the Narrator. In doing so, it also takes a sense of control from the players, who select these powers and use them to influence the game world. For this reason, you must give them that power back—and more—in the form of creative input. It's easy to improvise with *HeroQuest*. To create a new supporting character or obstacle, simply jot down a few words and numbers on a piece of scrap paper. This makes it a simple matter to switch gears on a dime, and to follow the story leads that your players lay down for you.

The narrative style gets a bad rap among some players, who assume that it means an overbearing Narrator will impose on them a pre-determined story, the outcome of which their characters are powerless to alter. These assumptions usually spring from their past bad experiences with uncollaborative Narrators. Address these expectations by allowing the player's choices to lead your narrative. You might start the game with at least one possible interesting storyline in mind, but should always be willing to abandon it if the players seize the reins and take it in an unexpected direction. Your goal is to move the story toward *any* thrilling outcome, not a particular endpoint you've already envisioned.

It does no good to treat your players as creative collaborators if they can't detect their own influence on the storyline. Look for opportunities to solicit their input. Leave gaps in the storyline that allow the PCs to pursue their own agendas.

Create scenes with built-in opportunities for players to detail portions of your world.

*Joanne runs a game that weaves together covert supernatural elements with the conventions of 19<sup>th</sup> century grand opera. Violetta (played by Kim) and her sometimes-lover Ricardo (Raul) attend a ball, where they meet the mysterious Count Larchmont.*

*"Violetta," says Joanne, "you gasp when you see him, because you once knew him, under a different name. I'm going to come back to you in a moment and ask who he seemed to be at the time, and what your relationship with him was. Ricardo, you too blanch at the sight of him. You know him as a practitioner of a certain type of magic. Think about what type of magic, and how you came to know this."*

*After some thought, Kim says, "He was an admirer, of course!" (Violetta's master ability is Legion of Admirers.) "He went under the name of Alfredo Valmont, and traveled in revolutionary circles. His French accent was good, but never fooled me."*

*Raul supplies his answer to Joanne's question: "Larchmont is widely known as a Mesmerist. I saw him perform acts of hypnotism at a certain, shall we say, gathering of rakes and libertines. In Paris, last year."*

When a player scores an impressive success and you aren't sure what he'd consider an ideal result, ask for suggestions.

*After most of the guests have gone home, Violetta tempts Larchmont into demonstrating his mesmeric powers on her. She scores a major victory in her attempt to resist him. Because Violetta's action is defensive in nature, Joanne is hard-pressed to think of an interesting result. So she asks Violetta's player what she'd like to see happen.*

*"Maybe his power feeds back, and gives me the opportunity to influence him."*

*"Yes," says Joanne, "but it will have to be subtle."*

*"I plant in him the suggestion that he accidentally leave his engagement book behind when he leaves."*

When players seem unhappy with a result, find out how it failed to live up to their expectations. If you realize that you've made a huge error of outcome interpretation, don't be afraid to hit the rewind button. It's better to nullify an event that causes players to become seriously dissatisfied with your game than to compensate for it or work around it. Don't worry about breaking the illusion of reality by taking back a conflict interpretation: it has already been broken, by the expectations disconnect between you and your players.

Sometimes you'll encounter a dominating player who tries to take advantage of your willingness to rewind by appealing a number of your interpretive calls, in which case you'll have to push back. However, it's much more common—and damaging—for players to suffer in silence. Some players are going to dislike the narrative style no matter what you do. Among them are tactically minded players, who enjoy maximizing control while minimizing risk. Because they actively seek out controlled results, they may have trouble enjoying a game where difficulties arise from the pass/fail cycle, which is designed to keep the protagonists in interesting trouble at all times.

## Saying Yes

Many of us have unconsciously trained ourselves to reflexively say no to the players. If they ask if there's a wrench under the console, and we haven't planned for there to be a wrench under the console—or a high priest in the temple, or a hungry look on that lion's face—we say no.

That said, most situations can be enlivened, and made more collaborative, when you say yes to the players. Where the question is of no great consequence, a simple yes will suffice. When saying yes would confer an unearned advantage, make the players work for it by adding a twist or complication. Say yes, *but...* This grants the player's wish, but requires him to overcome a newly introduced plot obstacle to get it:

- “Yes, there’s a wrench under the console, but its jammed under one corner, as if being used as a shim. You’ll have to lift it somehow to get at it.”
- “Yes, according to the attendant, there is a high priest at the temple—but he’s reclusive, and suspicious of wanderers and ragamuffins, such as yourselves.”
- “Yes, one of the lions looks particularly hungry. What did you have in mind?”

Players who become familiar with this technique can use it to seamlessly point you toward desired story developments, making your game more collaborative.

If players are unfamiliar with the world, a collaborative Narrator can treat the setting details as provisional, if she has not yet introduced them to the players. She can alter them if necessary, in order to say yes to the players.

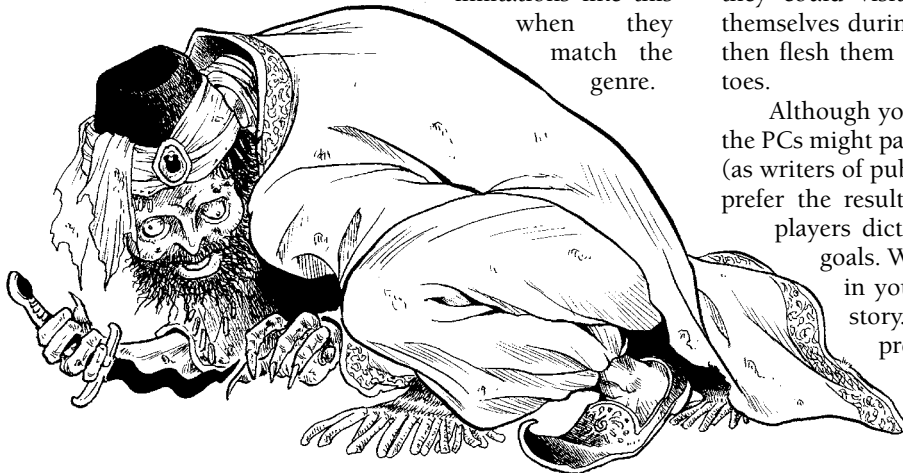
*Your notes tell you that Arahaka Station is a run-down orbiter used primarily to advance the empire’s territorial claims. One of your players, putting together a cunning plan, asks, “I don’t suppose, since this is near the spatial anomaly, there are long-range telescopes on board?” To enable the player to advance his storyline, you revise your notes, and instead specify that Arahaka is indeed an observatory.*

## Saying No

Although it’s best to say yes whenever possible, there are a couple of instances where the answer to player queries about a situation should be a flat refusal.

**Preserving a story premise:** A particular dramatic situation may exist only under certain conditions. If the troopers must remain out of radio contact so that they have to deal with a crisis themselves, then the communications array remains dead until the situation has otherwise resolved itself—no matter how hard they try. (Players are more likely to accept situational

limitations like this when they match the genre.



They expect the phone to go dead when they’re recreating a slasher movie. Unless you foreshadow it adequately, managing their expectations in advance, they’ll get justifiably frustrated if their magic stops working at the climax of an epic fantasy series.)

**Preserving narrative consistency:** If you’ve already established that a fact or situation pertains in your world, it’s more important to maintain believability by sticking to your continuity. (Look for ways to have your cake and eat it too, by thinking of a ways to adhere to continuity *and* give the player what he wants.)

## Player Responsibility

Collaboration is a two-way street. Although it’s traditionally the Narrator’s job to oversee pacing and narrative flow, encourage your players to be proactive, to find interesting objectives for their characters to follow, and find ways to break through when they get stuck.

Do this by posing suggestions in the form of a question. If they’re deadlocked over some decision, the query, “So what’s the best way to resolve this dispute?” may spur players to move through the problem in their own way.

## Set Pieces

One way to build a memorable scenario is around one or more set pieces, vivid scenes of exploration, wonder, and action. Start by creating a description of a fantastic place or jaw-dropping event:

- the undersea lair of an arch-villain, dripping with baroque touches
- a magical plateau where trolls skate to and fro on a vast field of black glass
- seen out the starship window, a battle to the death between space squids and a living asteroid

Now comes the important part—to find a way for your players to interact with your set-piece scene. They might change its course, use information gained from it in a later sequence, or navigate its dangers to achieve an objective of their own.

Some groups might enjoy the sense of collaboration that results when you ask players them to suggest wondrous places they could visit or thrilling incidents they might involve themselves during upcoming adventures. Ask for loose ideas, then flesh them out with a few twists to keep them on their toes.

Although you can map out a particular series of obstacles the PCs might pass or fail on their way to the set piece moment (as writers of published adventures are forced to do), you may prefer the results of a more open-ended approach. Let the players dictate narrative direction as their pursue their goals. When they reach a point that allows you to slip in your prepared set piece, fit it into the evolving story. In this way you strike a balance between preparation and spontaneity.

Another way to think of this is to ask yourself what the PCs want, then find a way to work your set piece into the answer to that question.





# RUNNING CONTESTS

The secret of becoming an entertaining *HeroQuest* Narrator is to learn to bend the contest system to fit your style. This section contains further notes and options for running contests.

## Combined Abilities

On certain occasions you may rule that a character can only hope to achieve his goal by using two disparate abilities. When this occurs, average the two ability ratings, then apply any modifiers, to arrive at the target number.

*The classic example of this situation is the character who's trying to talk his way out of a beating his opponent is already attempting to administer. Seamus, using his Silver-Tongued 6*  *ability, is trying to convince Tor Hammerlund that it would be brutish to stomp him for the mere transgression of flirting with his wife. Tor is trying to use his Stomp ability of 18 to hurt Seamus. Because Tor is already tearing the bar apart trying to get his hands on Seamus, the Narrator rules that Seamus can't just stand there talking while he waits for his arguments to sink in. He has to make at least some effort to avoid Tor's blows. Seamus' player, Kevin, proposes using his Duck Blows ability of 18. The average of Seamus' Silver-Tongued and Duck Blows abilities is 2*  *.*

Combining abilities, rather than using the best one and augmenting it with other, is always a disadvantage to the character. Only require combined ability use when story logic absolutely demands that the character face a lower chance of success, because he has to do two things at once.

## Mobs, Gangs, and Hordes

Sometimes the PCs will face large numbers of individually inconsequential opponents. You can roll for each of them separately, taking note of the multiple opponent penalties they incur against their enemies.

More simply, you can treat many as one. Divide the number of minor opponents by the number of contesting PCs. Treat each of these sections of the crowd as a single character with one ability rating. They don't impose a multiple opponent penalty; instead, their numbers are factored into the ability rating you assign to them. When the mob loses an exchange, describe individuals within it as being hurt or falling away. When it wins, describe them overwhelming the PC, or swelling in numbers.

*Former mercenaries Brother Anthony, Brother Bede and Brother Boniface defend their monastery against a Viking horde. The Narrator, Tessa, abstracts the invading Vikings as two groups of six raiders apiece, giving each a Viking Horde rating of 18, and a single Viking leader, Odd Bloodhand, as a single opponent with a Fiercely Swinging Ax ability of 19. Horde #1 engages Anthony; Horde #2 takes on Bede, while Boniface confronts Bloodhand. Neither Anthony nor Bede face multiple opponent penalties; except for the details of description, each group is a single opponent.*

*In the first round of her extended contest, Anthony and Boniface both score marginal victories against their opponents, while Bede suffers a marginal defeat. Tessa narrates as follows:*

*(Anthony vs. Horde #1) "Your quarterstaff pushes the Viking warriors back. They trip over each other in the growing morass of mud outside the monastery gate. One yowls in pain and limps away, his ankle twisted."*

*(Bede vs. Horde #2) "The Vikings press you back against the monastery wall. Blows rain down on you from all sides. None of them hit hard, but there are so many of them."*

*(Boniface vs. Odd) "You exchange a series of inconclusive blows with the wild-eyed Viking chieftain, until an ill-timed ax swing gives you the chance to clip him in the throat with the end of your staff."*

## Mass Effort

Clashes of massive forces resolve like any other contest, simple or extended, solo or group. These include:

- Military engagements
- Corporate struggles for market share
- Building competitions
- Efforts to spread a faith or ideology
- Dance competitions

If the PCs are not participating in the contest and have no stake in its outcome, don't bother to run a contest. Just choose an outcome for dramatic purposes.

Otherwise, start by determining the PC or PCs' degree of influence over the outcome. They are either:

**Determining factors:** The success of the effort depends mostly on their choices and successes. For example, they might be military leaders facing a force of roughly equal potency. As all else is equal, the better general will win the day. In this instance, the PC or PCs contest a relevant leadership ability against those of opposing leaders.

## Force vs. Words

Persuasive characters will often try to talk their way out of fights. Depending on the situation, you may require the talker to defend with a combined ability (see "Combined Abilities"), or stage a simple persuasion contest before the fight breaks out. In the latter case, the would-be combatant uses an appropriate ability to resist the persuasion. If successful, he can go on to a new contest to resolve the combat. If a fight breaks out, the would-be persuader must now defend with an appropriate physical ability.



The Lost Arrow clan conducts a cattle raid against their neighbors, the uHeren. The Narrator decides that the attackers and defenders are about evenly matched, so the contest pits the leadership abilities of the two war party captains, Lankoring Swordbeard (a PC) and Varl Varlsson (a supporting character) against one another.

**Contributors:** One of the forces enjoys a clear advantage over the others, but the PC's efforts may tip the balance in favor of a chosen side. A player or players contest with a rating representing the strength of the force, but can augment its rating with a PC ability.

As *Data War III* enters its final throes, the Zerocheck and S-Sharp corporate teams race to build an ultimate weapon called the packet bomb. The poorly equipped but plucky S-Sharpers face a disadvantage in their respective Programming abilities, which will be used to resolve the contest. However, PC Abdullah Hamdun will augment that ability with his Lateral Thinking rating of 18.

**Acted Upon:** The PCs have little influence over the outcome, but are stuck in the middle of the conflict and must struggle to prosper within it. The Narrator predetermines the outcome of the overall competition on dramatic grounds. (Narrators wanting to surprise themselves with the outcome can secretly roll a simple contest between appropriate ratings.) Each player contests against a rating determined by the Narrator, using the Pass/Fail Resistance Assignment Table if needed. Contest winners gain lingering benefits, while losers suffer states of adversity.

Sarge, Mikulski, Bonarro, and Flats are mere dog soldiers of Bravo Company in the D-Day invasion. Everybody knows who wins this one—the question is whether the PCs survive. They each contest their various infantry abilities, none of which are rated above 18, against an impersonal Normandy: Beach Of Death ability

rated at 10<sup>W</sup>2. The contest uses the Climactic Scene Consequence table. Sarge winds up hurt; Mikulski is dead, Flats is injured and Bonarro scores a minor victory, earning himself a medal and a +3 bonus worth of bragging rights to applicable social situations.

## Extremely Extended Contests

There's no particular time scale associated with contests. Both simple and extended contests can resolve events that take seconds or seasons. Time is compressed into a simple (or extended) moment of drama. But some contests may by their very nature be a drama that can't be resolved at one point in the narrative. Examples include political campaigns, construction projects, or seductions. These can be resolved by extended contests where each round is conducted at an appropriate moment in your game, rather than sequentially. You'll need to keep track of the resolution points and the resistance, though this might change as the context changes (a civil war started by the players could impede their castle-building plans). The challenges of each round will vary, and the player will use a different ability or augment the next time.

Ask yourself if dragging out the resolution increases the tension, or if the moment will be lost. Also be sure you can describe the results of each round without certain consequences. If in doubt, use a shorter contest, perhaps treating it as a series of flashbacks.

Killer Korol (played by Chris), a noted warrior, lover, and poet of the Varmandi clan, learns of a nymph who lives in a pool off of the Swan Creek. After several trips to scout her out, he finally gets a glance of this unearthly beauty. He is enamored, and declares he must have her. The Narrator, Dana, figures seducing the elusive nymph could take weeks. Because the other players have made plans for a trip to Wintertop, she decides to run an extended contest over several sessions.



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For the first round, Korol spreads flower petals over the waters of the pool and offers the nymph a fine silver necklace. From poolside he recites poetry extolling her great beauty and his love for her. He can see her watching from below. Chris uses Korol's Seduce Women With Poetry augmented by Know Gifts Women Want. His adjusted skill is 5W. But nymphs will not accept just any man. The nymph resists with her Resist Mortal Suitor, rated at 11W because it is a hard contest. Dana rules that nymphs aren't women, and assesses an additional -3 penalty to Korol. Chris feels this is a defining moment for Korol, and pre-spends a hero point to help improve his chances. Dana reminds him to describe the hero point use, so Chris says, "I draw on my experiences patrolling the local area to compare her pool favorably to all bodies of water within a day's ride." He rolls a 7 and Dana rolls a 10 for the nymph. The hero point bump raises Korol's failure to a success and he gains a resolution point from the marginal victory. The nymph rises up out of the pool, gives Korol a kiss full on the lips, and dives back in. Korol leaves the Swan Creek more determined than ever; he has a new goal. On the trip back to his stead, Korol begins composing an elaborate poem he can use next time, still savoring the nymph's sweet taste on his lips.

## Difficulty Without Failure

Sometimes the PCs will encounter a challenge where the requirements of story logic and story pacing seem to be at complete odds with one another. Failure offers no interesting plot branches, or would prolong the story's pacing right when you need to cut to the chase and wrap things up for the session. At the same time, to maintain credibility or continuity with previously established story elements, you need to make the obstacle feel difficult.

Two distinct methods allow you to create a sense of difficulty without allowing for the prospect of failure: the arduous automatic success, and the costly success.

### Arduous Auto-Success

Use an arduous automatic success when your primary concern is pacing. Simply allow the characters to succeed without a contest, and then describe in sweat-inducing detail their hard-won victory. Unlike the standard automatic success, the objective here is not to make the group feel powerful and competent (though it may do that as well) but to emphasize the rigors of their grueling task, preserving suspension of disbelief.

*At the conclusion of their rousing adventure in the Dark Continent, Sir Quentin Haggard and his company of doughty explorers have restored Princess Ch!au to her rightful throne, slain the carnivorous god of the Bat People, and mapped the temple of Golden Bones (before it fell into the Chasm of Dread). Their trip through trackles jungles to the Chasm of Dread took an entire game session. No self-respecting boy's own novel would add the equivalent of five chapters worth of travelogue after its big finish, so the Narrator, Anu, won't do it either. Instead, she narrates thusly:*

*"Waking up from the sixth and final day of the princess's victory party, Haggard and company begin their toilsome journey back through the Diogo Ravine, across the vine-covered bottomlands, through the rainforests, and up the Gabão coast.*

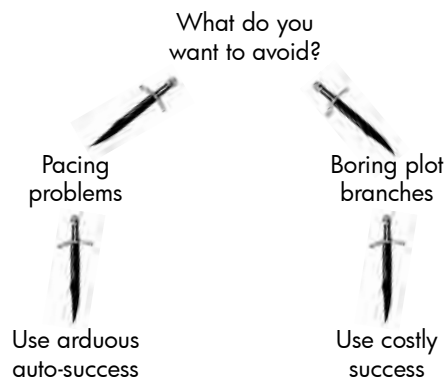
*Along the way, they skirmish again with the Pirongo tribe, flee from elephants, and shoot a rare striped jungle lion. It's touch-and-go when Jenkins comes down with a parasitic fever, but by the time you clamber aboard the steamer back to England the rash has all but disappeared."*

This paragraph of fast-paced exposition ends the story at the right place without making it unrealistically seem as if the trip was death-defying on the way to the chasm, and a cakewalk on the way back.

### Costly Successes

Use a costly success where failure offers no entertaining plot branches, but when you still want the group to work for victory, and to feel a sense of suspense over the outcome. In a costly success, the PCs succeed—but at a price.

### Decision Tree: Difficulty without Failure



Brenda runs a Glorantha series, a setting where trips to the magical realm known as the Other Side are always portrayed as difficult, no matter how heroic the characters. She has prepared a scenario where pivotal developments occur while the PCs are on the Other Side. If the PCs don't get there, they miss the whole story. However, she doesn't want to devalue the challenges of Other Side travel, which are a central fact of the setting. She decides that any defeat will instead become a costly success.

Whether you tell your players in advance that they're entering a contest that may result in costly success is a matter of taste. Some groups will prefer to know, so they can adjust the resources they draw on. Others will find this an unwanted challenge to their suspension of disbelief, and would rather be surprised to discover the contest's true stakes.

Even if the players suffer a defeat, they still achieve the prize around which the contest is framed. They also, however, suffer a state of adversity to one or more abilities, in keeping with the defeat level, as per the Consequences of Defeat Table.

The state of adversity might apply, as in an ordinary contest, to the abilities used in that contest. Usually, though, they apply to some other resource-related ability, which may come to haunt the group later on. When in doubt, ask yourself if the penalty will cripple the group in dealing with contests

arising from the costly success. If so, you haven't solved your uninteresting failure problem, merely kicked it down the road to stop your plot a few scenes later on. In this case, apply it to a resource or tangentially related ability instead. Ideally, target the ability the group used to augment their attempt—assuming that a penalty to it won't stop the story dead a few scenes later.

- If they suffer a costly success on their way to the Other Side, the characters in Brenda's Glorantha series see their clan's magical strength reduced.
- Due to cost overruns, the construction of the Mars rocket threatens to bankrupt Tom Nova's company. Having suffered a major defeat, he suffers an automatic bump down on uses of his Junior Industrialist ability.
- The group convinces the lords of the realm to make Prince Aroin regent until the king's return, but in the process have strained their relations with their allies in the church. Having suffered a minor defeat, Aroin takes a -6 to his Friend of the Church ability.

Often you'll want to save the ill effects of the costly success until a later session. Fallout from past costly successes makes a fine springboard for new stories.

Costly successes should almost always be simple contests; anything important enough to be played as an extended contest should lead to meaningful plot branches from both success and failure. (Or to put it the opposite way, if it doesn't branch in two directions, it's not pivotal enough to be an extended contest.)

The use of costly successes, like most Narrator choices in *HeroQuest*, is a matter of context. Just because an Other Side journey was played as a costly success last session doesn't mean you can't use a standard contest this time out, when failure isn't a story-stopper.

### Pyrrhic Victories

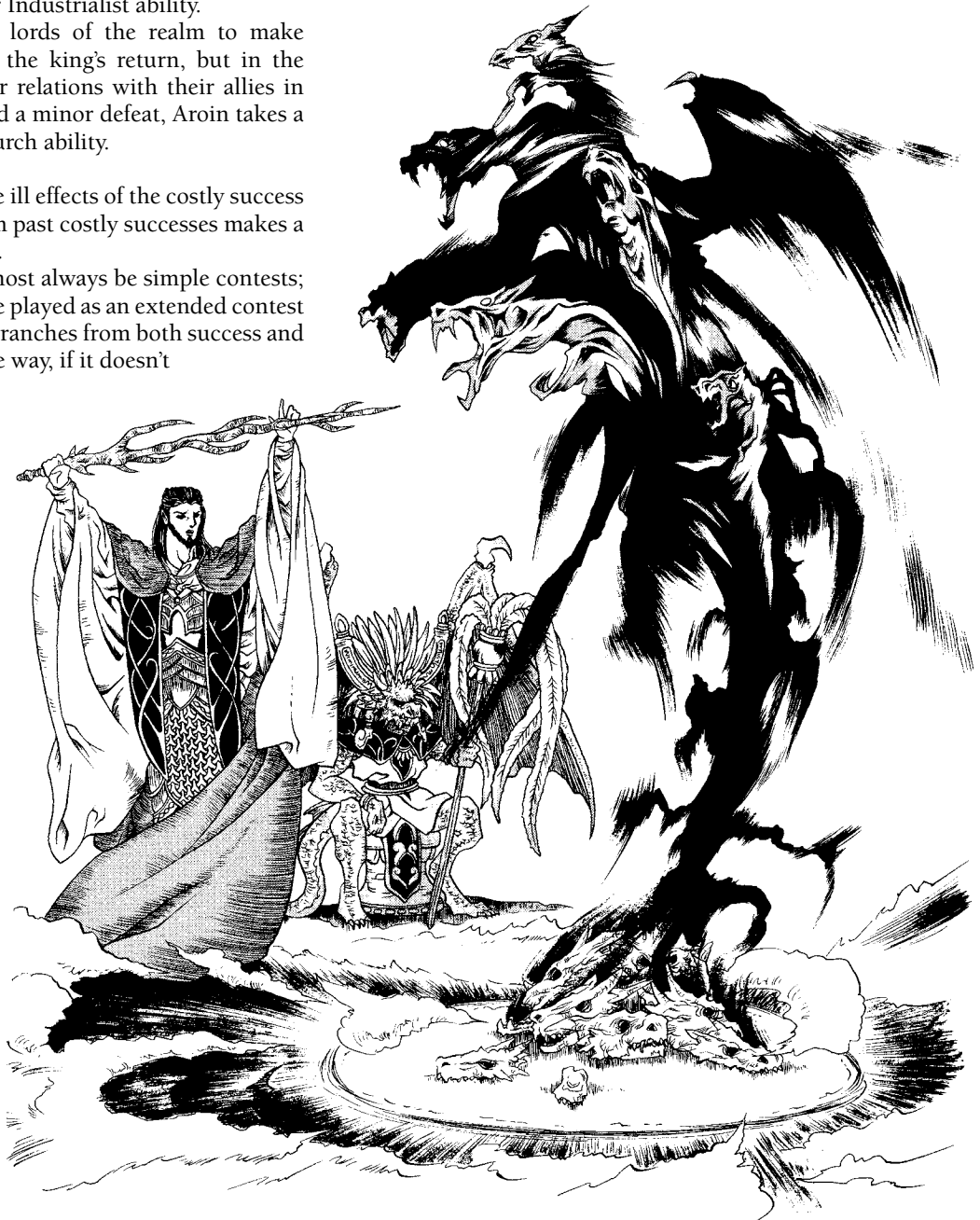
In a Pyrrhic victory, players boost their chances of success in a contest by accepting negative consequences at its end, even if they win the prize around which it is framed. The PCs each gain a mastery in the abilities they're using to prosecute the contest. At the contest's end, they suffer the following states of adversity, as per the Pyrrhic Victory Table.

As with any proposed action, the players must convincingly describe the potentially suicidal risks

they're taking to achieve their objective. They must also show how these risks can bring them the awful victory they seek.

*Leonidas and his Spartan captains prepare their phalanx to withstand the Persian charge at Thermopylae. The contest is framed so that they succeed in turning back the Persians if they succeed, and are overrun if they fail. The PCs engage in a group simple contest; the results of which will apply to all of them. Leonidas boosts his Spartan warrior from 18 to 18L. Cylon increases his Phalanx Fighter from 14 to 14L. Demeos boosts Fearless Fighter from 1L to 1L2. This evens their chances against their opponent's Terrifying Army 8L2 ability.*

At the end of an extended contest (in which the Narrator treats the Terrifying Army as a horde, with one unit against each PC), the Spartans knock out the three horde units and



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win. The Persians are driven back, losing the battle. Cylon is out, too, however, suffering a Marginal Defeat. He's dead. Leonidas wins with a marginal victory. He's dead. Demeos ends on a major victory. He's merely injured.

PYRRHIC VICTORY CONSEQUENCES TABLE	
Outcome	State of Adversity
Any Defeat	Dead
Marginal Victory	Dead
Minor Victory	Dying
Major Victory	Injured
Complete Victory	Impaired

### Tricky Cases

Beginning *HeroQuest* Narrators are sometimes flummoxed by certain situations that at first glance seem difficult to adjudicate using the contest rules. Thinking through these problems is generally a matter of taking a step back and focusing less on the scene's specific details and more on its overall dramatic purpose.

When in doubt, ask yourself, "How does this happen in books or movies?" Focusing on how like things work in reality often sidetracks you by inspiring you to organize your thinking from the details up, rather than from the narrative structure on down.

### Impersonal Foes

Running contests between players and an abstract or impersonal force such as a mountain, market conditions, or their own personality flaws may seem strange at first. Remember that you are not personifying this force, or granting it intentionality. The mountain is not thinking or acting. You are not playing the mountain as a character. You are simply describing a series of setbacks that the character faces in his effort to get up the mountain.

If you think a contest with an impersonal force is likely and you know you have problems thinking up possible setbacks on the fly, jot down a list beforehand:

- **Mountain:** icy patch, especially steep bit, crevasse, high winds, altitude sickness, aggressive mountain goats, demoralizing frozen corpse
- **Market conditions:** investor panic, cable news hype, supply chain disruptions, worker unrest, currency fluctuations
- **Hamlet's indecision:** doubts reality of ghost, loves his mother, won't kill a praying man, thinks too much, feigned madness becomes real

### Missile Combat

Fights conducted from a distance may be more difficult to envision and describe than hand-to-hand combat, where each exchange can be described as an attempt to land a single blow. (It needn't be this way—even in a close-up fight, multiple actions can be subsumed under a single exchange.) In part the disconnect comes from the difference between real and dramatic

missile fights. In reality, missile combat is a game of caution; fighters run for cover when they're fired on, then hunker down and plink at each other. Dramatic missile combats come in two varieties: the duel, and the fast-moving action sequence.

The iconic type of duel is the western-style shootout. Combatants stand out in the open, blasting away at each other until one of them falls. This fight can easily be described on a shot-for-shot basis, although it is often over so quickly that a simple contest is probably more appropriate.

In action movie gun battles, characters run around, continually exposing themselves to fire, which conveniently (for the heroes, anyway) tends to land just at their feet as they scoot for the next bit of cover. These are best described as battles for superior position. When characters lose exchanges of insufficient magnitude to remove them from the contest, they are best described as having lost position. They've been driven back or forced to retreat to cover. They may be forced to reload (which in action films is a rhythmic choice unrelated to the magazine capacity of any weapon) or presented with some other distracting obstacle, like a baby carriage bouncing down the steps into the middle of a gun battle.

### One-Sided Missile Combat

Fights in which one side is armed with missile weapons and the other is not seems at first glance to pose a conceptual challenge: what happens if an unarmed party wins an exchange?

The answer, as always, is to refer back to the framing of the contest. What is the winning party hoping to achieve? If he's

## Non-Lethal Combat

In almost every genre, experienced combatants should have the option to restrict the harm they inflict on their opponents. To do this, players specify that their characters are fighting to disable, not kill, before they land any blows.

If, at the end of any fight, an opponent is assessed as being Dying or Injured, and the character who knocked him out of the fight was fighting to disable, the result is reduced by one consequence level: from Dying to Injured, or from Injured to Impaired.

The conditions of a fight may decrease consequence results, or prevent lingering harm outright. A fight with padded weapons will have a winner and loser, but will result in serious harm only if something goes horribly awry—perhaps as the result of a fumble.

In some genres—particularly those evoking the upbeat, kid-friendly, whiz-bang adventure of yore, non-lethal fighting should be the default. Players are assumed to be fighting to disable except where they specify otherwise. All results of Injured or worse are reduced to merely Impaired.

In extremely gritty settings, Narrators may assess a penalty to the combat rating of a character intent on fighting non-lethally. In more heroic games, the ability to fight mercifully is considered to be built into the characters' combat ratings.





A character without missile weapons may simply be trying to escape harm. If so, a victorious exchange represents progress toward this goal: he gets further away from them.

Characters may be pursuing other goals while enemies with missiles try to harm them: they might be trying to retrieve an object, get to a position, or rescue a person. When they win exchanges, they get incrementally closer to achieving the specified goal, to an extent proportionate to the size of their victory. When they lose, they're driven back or find the goalposts otherwise moved against them.

If your one-sided missile situation threatens to yield impossible results, you're dealing not with a challenge of description, but a credibility issue. (See p. 74 for more on credibility.) For example, your pre-gunpowder setting may follow historical precedent by establishing that foot soldiers without missile weapons have essentially no chance of winning against mounted archers. If so, frame contests to avoid an improbable result—make them about the infantry's attempt to escape, versus the cavalry's effort to mow them down.

### Mismatched and Graduated Goals

Most contests will be framed so that one of two possibilities pertains:

- Character A is trying to do something; character B is trying to stop him.
- Character A is trying to do something bad to character B; character B is trying to do the same to character A.

In either case, the results of the contest are fairly easy to determine. In the first instance, character A either succeeds, or doesn't, and negative consequences strike the loser. In the second, one side wins, the other loses.

Sometimes, though, the two sides in a contest may have goals that do not directly contract one another.

*A huntsman pursues a nurse, who is trying to escape through the forest with two small children. The huntsman wants to kill the nurse. The nurse wants to save the children.*

trying to defeat the opposition in combat, he achieves some kind of progress toward that goal. The most obvious advantage is that he's able to close the distance between himself and his opponent, and is thereafter able to engage him in close combat. On a big enough victory, he may not only close the distance, but then engage and strike his opponent. Forget the conventions of other roleplaying games: in *HeroQuest*, a single result can be described as an entire series of actions toward the same end result.

The types of abilities used in such a fight will vary depending on your results interpretation. A character may use Duck and Weave to run through a hail of missile fire, then Fisticuffs to trounce his opponent, who in turn might start with Archery and be forced to switch to Knife Fighter when the distance is closed.

When encountering **mismatched** goals, your first job is to determine whether the mismatch is complete, or partial.

In a complete mismatch, neither side is at all interested in preventing the other's goal. A complete mismatch does not result in a contest; the Narrator asks what the PCs are doing, and then describes each participant succeeding at their goals.

*The Narrator, Gwen, talks to the two players, Freya (the nurse) and James (the huntsman) to see how mismatched their goals really are.*

"Freya," she asks, "you don't care at all if your character survives?"

"As long as I can get the children out of the queen's forest and into safe hands, my life means nothing."

"And James, you really aren't interested in capturing the kids?"

"The queen said kill the nurse. I know she sort of implied that I should capture the kids, but she didn't say it, so I'm going to take refuge in literal-mindedness and only do exactly what she told me to."

"Wow," says Gwen. "Well, then, there's no contest then. The nurse will die, and the children will get free. Freya, why don't you set the scene as you encounter the woodsman?"

*With Gwen prompting as needed, Freya and James go on to describe the nurse's murder, and the children's escape to safety. As James and Gwen play out his report to the queen, Freya gets started creating a new character.*

In most instances, the contest goals are not actually mismatched, but **graduated**. One or more participants has both a primary and a secondary goal. In this case, the Narrator frames the contest, identifying which goal is which. To achieve both, the winner must score a major or complete victory. On a minor or marginal victory, he achieves only the primary goal.

*Few roleplayers would be as careless of their character's survival as Freya, in the above example. The situation would more likely play out like so:*

"Freya," the Narrator asks, "you don't care at all if your character survives?"

"Well, of course I do, but if I have to choose between my own life and that of the kids, I'm picking them."

"In other words, you primarily want the kids to get away, but if you can save yourself, too, you'll do that."

"Right."

"That makes it a graduated goal. On a major or better victory, you live and the kids get away. On a minor or worse victory, the kids get away, but you die."

"James, are you really uninterested in capturing the kids?"

"Mostly I want to kill the nurse. If I can, I'll grab up the kids afterwards."

"Then that's a graduated goal, too. On a major or better victory, you get the kids, too. On a minor or worse, you overcome her in combat—"

"And then I kill her."

*A simple contest ensues. Freya pits the nurse's Inconspicuous Departure ability of 18 against the huntsman's Huntsman ability of 6W. She rolls a 1, against James' 16—a critical vs. success in her favor, or minor victory. She gets the kids to safety, but is felled by the huntsman's axe.*

### Joining Extended Contests In Progress

When a PC wishes to join an extended contest in progress, the Narrator determines whether the player accepts the current framing. If so, he can participate. In an extended contest, he simply selects an opponent and enters into a new exchange. A new contestant who wants to achieve something other than the goal established during framing may instead perform unrelated actions, including assists and augments.

### Free For Alls

In a few situations, such as demolition derbies or attempts to grab a coveted item, group contests will not take place between two sides, but will be free for alls, where all participants hammer away at each other until only one is left standing. These play out as normal, with each character initially choosing one or more opponents to enter into exchanges with, and seeking out new exchanges after knocking rivals out of the contest. Instead of ceasing when everyone on one side is out, they end when all but one contestant are down.

### Accepting Persuasion

When it comes to persuasion, mundane or extraordinary, players exhibit a distinct double standard. They hate to lose autonomy over their own characters, but are only too happy to take it away from others. Expect unhappiness when supporting characters do unto them as they hope to do unto others.

Although extraordinary powers may be defined differently, ordinary persuasion has its limits. In general, you can persuade someone to do something only by convincing him that it serves his own agenda. Unless he has a flaw that suggests he is susceptible to sudden conversion, you can't change his faith, ideology, or other deeply held beliefs with mere argument, rational or otherwise. Attempts to persuade people to behave in a manner that is completely out of character fail a credibility test. In order to proceed with a contest, the prospective persuader must alter his desired goals and talking points, so that both remain credible.

### Helpless Foes

*HeroQuest* combats, in keeping with most adventure fiction, tend to leave the losers incapacitated but not dead. Sympathetic protagonists do not go on to cold-bloodedly slaughter helpless opponents. They imprison them, turn them over to official justice, or (if they are unimportant to the plot) leave them groaning on the floor and move on.

Roleplayers tend to exhibit a disregard for the lives of their fictional enemies. You can either embrace this as endemic to the form, or present players with reasons to act as sympathetically as their fictional counterparts.

To prevent them from jarringly engaging in callous murder, see to it that your settings contain the normal constraints that prevent such killings. If the PCs act like psychopaths, they'll be treated as such. In modern or highly urbanized settings, authorities will seek out and punish murderers. Ancient and feudal cultures may impose other penalties, such as the payment of wergild, for wrongful killing. Killers may face religious or social sanction; in magical settings, the wrath of the gods may have measurable effects. Certain cultures may

provide incentives for keeping one's vanquished enemies alive, from ransoms to prisoner exchanges.

The reluctance of fictional characters to kill mirrors reality. Well-balanced people, especially those who consider themselves basically decent and good, feel an instinctive aversion to murder. Model this by requiring would-be cold-blooded killers to roll an appropriate personality trait, like Sociopath, Vengeful, or Hates the River Folk, against a resistance of 14 to 14<sup>W</sup> or more, depending on the victim and overall emotional circumstances. Killing a hardened foreign soldier who slew a relative is easier than slitting the throat of a poor conscripted farmer who grew up in the next village. If would-be killers lose the contest, they are overwhelmed by instinctive reluctance and cannot proceed—just as when they lose in a contest against a personality flaw.

Sometimes players want to kill defeated foes because they're afraid they'll come back later, or alert their allies. To help preserve PC sympathy, craft situations to give them a better alternative than murder. Give them the ability to reliably imprison their foes for the duration of the current situation. If mercy is consistently penalized, you can expect your protagonists to abandon it.

In general, people will treat downed opponents the way they'd anticipate being treated if their situations were reversed (if not a little better). Make sure the players know when they're entering into fights where they can expect to be treated mercifully after defeat, or when neither side expects quarter from the other.

In certain settings, like military adventure, the killing of helpless foes may be in-genre and should not be penalized in this way. Even then, it is appropriate to depict it as distasteful, and to make the players feel that they're engaged in a dirty, if possibly necessary, task.

Often what players really want is the chance to rightfully kill a bunch of bad guys in righteous combat. Satisfy this need by pumping up the results when they overcome anonymous or essentially interchangeable minor foes. Treat complete, major or even minor victories as viscerally satisfying instant kills.

Likewise, marginal or even minor victories may mean not that enemies are incapacitated, but that they flee the field of battle, removing themselves as threats. (Don't do this in cases where the PCs want to capture their enemies for ransom or interrogation.)







A unique and oddball setting might start with a list of strange resources, extrapolating its world from the assumptions needed to make these features important.

Although you can probably imagine some intriguing exceptions, in general all communities in a single setting possess the same resource sets. By default you track only the resources of your focus community. In a series heavily dominated by economic and political conflict, you might enjoy tracking the relative resources not only of the PC community but also of its rivals.

Having chosen the resources you're going to measure, you can either design the community yourself, or let your players do so by committee, aided by a questionnaire you create.



## Sample Questionnaire Questions

**When the bomb hit, your ancestors:**

- Embraced the radiation (+1 to Psionics)
- Fled for the shelters (+1 to Installation)
- Grabbed canned food (+1 to Wealth)
- Made alliances (+1 to Diplomacy)
- Scrambled for weapons (+1 to Warfare)

**They came out of the shelters:**

- sooner than anyone (+1 to Psionics, Warfare)
- as soon as they heard footsteps above (+1 to Diplomacy, Wealth)
- when everyone else did
- when they were good and ready (+1 to Installation)

**When the ape people appeared, your ancestors:**

- battened down the hatches (+1 to Installation)
- fought them tooth and nail (+1 to Warfare)
- ignored them and kept on scavenging (+1 to Wealth)
- turned them against their enemies (+1 to Diplomacy)
- felt their futures as a new color in the world (+1 to Psionics)



## Assigning Ability Ratings

If you're assigning community ratings at the beginning of a series, you'll be distributing the following ratings between the five abilities: 12W, 9I, 18, 18, and 12. Note that the size of the group doesn't affect the ratings—a giant software company has greater resources than a plucky startup, but it's more difficult to bring those resources to bear on a dramatic problem. But there are times when groups are more effective than individuals.

To add community resource tracking to a series already in progress, add 1 rating point to each of the above numbers for every three sessions you've already run. Adjust this as you would for calculating base resistance values (p. 73). Distribute the ratings between the five abilities either by assigning them yourself, based on your conception of the community and its role in the upcoming storyline, or by questionnaire.

## The Questionnaire Method

Create a questionnaire that asks the players to make choices about the history of their community. They can choose their multiple-choice answers by consensus, majority vote, or take turns. Each question secretly assigns a score to one or more resource types. When you're done, rank the resources in the order of the scores, assigning the high ratings to the highest questionnaire results and the lowest to the low.

The questionnaire introduces your setting in a punchy, interactive format, and tailors the community to your players' desires, increasing their investment in it.

## Drawing on Resources

PCs can use resources as their own after convincing their people to let them expend precious assets. This requires a preliminary contest using a social ability, most likely the character's community relationship. Use a Moderate resistance as your baseline, with higher resistances when the PC's proposals seem selfish or likely to fail, and lower ones when everyone but the dullest dolt would readily see their collective benefits. Increase resistances if the group draws constantly on community resources without replenishing them.

The lobbying effort and the actual resource use require framing, a clear description of what the characters are doing, and other details to bring them to fictional life. PCs can use resources directly, or to augment their own abilities.

Unlike character abilities, each use of community resources temporarily depletes it. On a victory, the characters win the prize specified by contest framing, and a penalty is applied to subsequent uses of the resource. On a defeat, the characters lose the prize and an even more severe penalty is applied to subsequent resource uses. If the PCs fail to secure the prize they were seeking, the depletion penalty is also applied to the PCs' social and community abilities when interacting with members of their community. This reflects community displeasure at their fruitless expenditure. Penalties from the Resource Depletion Table replace standard penalties for defeat, not add to them.

Like other modifiers to resources, depletion penalties end at the end of the current interval. These include depletion penalties applied to character abilities. However, a depletion penalty left unattended at the end of the interval can result in a permanent drop in the relevant resource.

Narrators who want resource depletion to lead to longer-lasting social penalties can, at the cost of some extra bookkeeping, have the characters shed a 3-point penalty at the end of each interval.

RESOURCE DEPLETION TABLE	
Contest Outcome	Depletion Penalty
Complete Victory	0
Major Victory	-3
Minor Victory	-3
Marginal Victory	-3
Marginal Defeat	-6
Minor Defeat	-6
Major Defeat	-6
Complete Defeat	-9

*Gest Oddleifson calls on his community to assemble a raiding expedition to the island of the Angles. He uses Silvertongued Leader 19 in his attempt to gain the approval of his fellow chieftains. The Narrator chooses a Moderate resistance for the attempt, which happens to be 16. Gest prevails on a success vs. success result, for a marginal victory. After much grunting and frowning of brows, the chieftains reluctantly agree to send men and arms with him to Angle-Land.*

*Gest has now gained access to the community's Warfare resource. It is rated at 6LW, while his own Pitiless Raider ability is rated at only 19. He decides to use the Warfare resource directly, and to augment it with Pitiless Raider. If his own rating were higher than the resource, he'd do it the other way around. Gest scores a minor victory on his Pitiless Raider augment, gaining a +6 bonus to the Warfare resource. It is now effectively a 12LW.*

*Gest now runs the contest for the raid itself, pitting Warfare 12LW against a resistance of 5LW, representing the Angle-Land defenses. The Angles eke out a minor victory. Gest fails to get the loot he promised, and has degraded the community's ability to conduct further raids. As per the Resource Depletion table, its Warfare resource suffers a -6 penalty.*

*Because he expended their resources without achieving his aim, the -6 penalty is also applied to all of Gest's relations with his community, including his Silver-tongued Leader ability. These will last until the end of the current interval.*

## In a Nutshell: Community Design

1. Choose the scale of community you want to model.
2. Describe your community.
3. Specify an interval.
4. Define approximately five community resources.
5. Assign resource ratings to fit your concept, or use a player questionnaire

## Nested Communities

PCs may have relationships at multiple levels. Aldus, a Medieval Venetian character, could have a relationship to his family, his city, and even the Lombard League (as well as the Church).

Aldus can use any of these relationships in social situations or to augment. But since the Narrator has chosen to track the resources of the city, the other communities remain abstract. Aldus can mobilize the gondolas of his uncles to chase a Greek spy through the city's canals (using Relationship: Polo Family to augment his Relentless Pursuit ability). When the spy escapes to Athens, Aldus rolls his Relationship: Venice to see if he can use the city's formidable Navy rating for a campaign against the Greeks.

Although communities nest, resources don't. The Polo family has many boats of their own, but no Navy rating.

## Required Resource Use

As part of your setting design, you may specify that certain actions in a setting always require the use of a community resource. For example, in Glorantha, a ritual that propels heroes to the magical realm known as the Other Side must always include an expenditure of community Magic resources.

Actions requiring resource expenditure are exempt from several of the general rules covering augments. Because the resource use is obligatory, it need not meet the usual criteria for entertainment value. Also, when the resource is used as an augment, the PCs can also add a second augment from some other ability, adjudicated according to the standard rules, including entertainment value criteria. (This way, the required resource use doesn't penalize you by forcing you to augment with a low-rated resource when you could otherwise use a higher-rated ability.)

## Preserving Resources

Threats to community resources act as a spur to PC action. The Narrator may rule that the penalty from any contest outcome may be applied to a resource. (It might at the same time be applied to one or more PC abilities.)

When choosing a penalty arising from a player defeat in a simple contest, use the Consequences Of Defeat table (p. 30). For an extended contest, the penalty corresponds to the second worst state of adversity suffered by a defeated group member.

*The contest allows the Emperor's men to overrun the village of Qilan, torching its houses and looting its rice stores, if they win a battle against the PCs. This they do, besting Li Kang (minor defeat), Chun Kan (major defeat), Lo Cao (minor defeat) and Noodle Po (complete defeat.) The second worst result among them is a major defeat, so Qilan's Wealth rating suffers a bump down.*

If groups voluntarily concede a contest by withdrawing, their communities suffer a Major Defeat.

## Bolstering Resources

PCs can add bonuses to community resources by seeking out and overcoming relevant obstacles, specifying in the contest framing that the proceeds of victory go the community. If they succeed, bonuses from the Consequences Of Victory table are applied to a resource instead of one or more character abilities. (The Narrator may rule that the bonus also applies to PCs in social situations that involve community members, reflecting gratitude for their efforts on behalf of the community.)

*Gest Oddleifson, chastened by the failure of his raid, seeks to restore the community's lost military capacity. He travels to the Spike of Gloom to find the blind giant who dwells there and challenge him to a riddling contest. If he wins, the giant will have to make a new longship for Gest's community. Gest scores a minor victory against the giant, gaining a +3 bonus as a consequence of victory. He applies this to the community's Warfare resource. That cancels out part of the penalty applied to it in the ill-fated Angle-Land raid, taking it from -6 to -3.*

## Background Events

Changes to resources brought about by PCs take center stage in a series, but in the background all sorts of other events periodically alter the community's prosperity. These include the actions of other community members, who are depleting and replenishing resources all the time, as well as the unexpected intrusion of outside forces.

At the beginning of each interval, perform a simple contest of each resource against a resistance equal to the average value of all resources. These contests simulate events outside of the PCs' control or influence; they can't be augmented or bumped up with hero points. The result of the contest may apply a modifier to a resource, as per the following table:

RESOURCE FLUCTUATION TABLE	
Contest Outcome	Depletion Penalty
Complete Victory	+9
Major Victory	+6
Minor Victory	+3
Marginal Victory	0
Marginal Defeat	0
Minor Defeat	-3
Major Defeat	-6
Complete Defeat	-9

Invent specific reasons for each fluctuation and narrate them to the players.

*David checks the War, Peace, Wealth, Morale and Magic ratings of his Grey Dog clan. War takes a -6; Peace gets a +3, and Morale a -3, while the other ratings are unaltered. At the top of the session, he narrates the results: "A raid against the haughty Vingalans has left half of your strongest warriors recuperating from their wounds, and left a good suit of chainmail on enemy lands. The Hiord took pity on your misfortunes and have offered an alliance against the despised Vingalans. Even so, the discontent among the weaponthanes has spread to the farmers."*

Except where the group is exceptionally keen on tracking resources, skip the background events process when the PCs are long absent from home. Feel free to rejigger them to serve your plot purposes when they return. You may also want to shuffle this process offstage when the PCs are occupied by epic events. This prevents them from having to flee from a climactic plot development to go home and tend to the beet crop.

## Crisis Tests

When resources endure penalties, the Narrator conducts a **crisis test** at the beginning of each game session to see if trouble strikes the community. A high but penalized rating can still lead to crisis, because people have adjusted to the equilibrium it offers and feel squeezed when it shifts on them.

A crisis test is a simple contest (one for each penalized ability) of the Resource rating against a resistance equal to the average of all resource ratings. Like background event checks, these can't be augmented or bumped up by player action. On any defeat, the community starts to visibly suffer.









### Counting Cows

Groups who wish to quantify community resources even further can tie their more concrete resource abilities to particular numbers per rating point. You might decide that each point of Wealth rating indicates a million dollars, twenty-five cows, or a chest of gold. Each point of Warfare might indicate a specific number of fully equipped soldiers and one piece of field artillery.

Having made permanent changes to the community's resource ratings, you then restart the cycle by again testing for a new set of background events.

You may wish to perform the necessary figuring during a break, between sessions, or when inter-party interactions occupy the group's attention. It may also depend on how much the players feel community resources add to their game sessions.

### Changes from Plot Events

You may decide that certain remarkable triumphs or horrifying catastrophes may directly alter a resource rating, independent of the seasonal resource tracking system given here. For example, if, at the end of a major plot-line, the trolls have overrun the group's clan lands, razing all of the buildings and hauling off half the population to toil as slaves, they've clearly lost much more than the maximum 2 points per season. The possibility of a dramatic swing in community fortunes should be made clear by the Narrator during contest framing, so that the players know the stakes and can pull out all the stops to secure victory or stave off defeat.

### Changing Scale

Narrators can inject a jolt into their long-running series by switching the scale of the communities they track. A game based on clans can evolve into a game of tribes when the clans begin to confederate (surely with PC help). At this point you can assign new values to each tribe. If the tribes later join into nations, you can adjust the level of the series again—provided that the PCs are now gaining benefits directly from their relationship to the bigger entity, rather than the small part of it they started out with.



# CREATING GENRE PACKS

This chapter shows Narrators how to adapt the game to various genres and settings.

A **genre pack** is an information kit for your players, telling them what sort of world they'll be operating in, what they can expect to be doing in it, and what extraordinary abilities (if any) they can use to accomplish these aims.

In many instances, you won't need a genre pack at all. The more familiar a genre or setting, the more you can rely on a common shorthand understanding of the world. If everybody is already big fan of fantasy author X, you can probably run a game set in his world without any preparatory work at all.

*HeroQuest's* descriptive approach to game mechanics means that you can easily use any reference materials designed for existing settings. All you have to do is concentrate on the words and ignore the numbers. You can use existing lines of game supplements from other companies, or non-gaming setting bibles produced for many well-known books, television shows, and movies. Mine relevant text passages for ability names, just as you would the 100-word description from a character created using the prose method.

Moon Design Publications will also produce setting packs for various popular genres, and continue its series of *HeroQuest* supplements set in the world of Glorantha.

A number of the suggestions below apply to multiple genres, but we've put them into a single category for convenience.

## Keywords

Almost every genre presents a series of recurring character types. The western gives us, among others, the flinty-eyed gunfighter, the comically grizzled sidekick, the earnest schoolmarm, the feather-bedecked saloon gal, the greedy cattle rancher, the hard working homesteader and, depending on when it was written, the savage or noble Indian. Hardboiled mysteries have smart-mouthed private dicks, femme fatales, thick-skulled cops, slick mobsters, dodgy club owners, and so on.

Either through their literary resonance or mere repetition, these have become the archetypal characters of their genres.

Keywords are a tool Narrators use to encourage players to adopt the signature character types of their settings. They consist of a list of abilities standard to that type, along

with explanatory text laying out the character's activities, appearance, outlook, and goals.

For existing genres, the process of creating keywords consists of looking at the source material, identifying the types, describing them, and listing the abilities necessary to do what characters of that type do.

However, with these very familiar genres, you can often get away with not writing up keywords at all. Everybody who's seen a fair number of westerns knows the sorts of things a grizzled sidekick can do. Just give the character the ability Grizzled Sidekick and interpret it generously in play.

It's in unfamiliar worlds that keywords become absolutely necessary. Keywords were first created to present the world of Glorantha, which has its own unique set of archetypes: Humakti Weaponthane, Dragonewt Scout, Seven Mothers Missionary, and many others. Players who don't know Glorantha can't draw on a common understanding of these types to infer what they can do in play. They need textual description to orient them, and a list of abilities to suggest what actions characters of their chosen type can take.

A well-written keyword tells the player everything he needs to know to get started playing in an unfamiliar world, through the point of view of his character. You may wish to drive home this point by writing the explanatory material in the second person.

## Choosing Keyword Abilities

There is no set number of abilities that ought to go into each keyword. However, you should try to keep the numbers of abilities granted by each type of keyword roughly on a par



with one another. Occupational keywords probably grant more abilities than cultural keywords.

Absolute balance between keywords is neither necessary nor probably achievable. Players with many abilities will gain only a marginal advantage in play. The range of tasks they can attempt is somewhat greater. They are also less likely to face stretch penalties. More abilities may make it easier to avoid repetitive augment attempts. On the other hand, players with fewer abilities can advance them faster. Having fewer abilities to keep track of allows many players to react more quickly. Ultimately, the core idea of the system, that every ability is mechanically identical to every other, automatically takes care of most game balance issues for you. That said, keywords with comparatively few abilities will seem less attractive to players than fully loaded ones.

Use this dynamic to ensure that the mix of characters in your group reflects the most common archetypes. If you're running a cyberpunk game, for example, you want a hacker, a mercenary with an implant, and maybe an information broker. If nobody picks any of these types, the game won't really feel like cyberpunk. It is perfectly acceptable to reward players for making in-genre choices by giving these core types longer and cooler ability lists.

Players look to keyword ability lists for inspiration when inventing their own abilities. Provide a good example by



## Sample Occupational Keyword

This keyword is from a science fiction campaign set in the towering, labyrinthine city of Loom Respite. In this setting, people mutate to fit their occupations, so this keyword includes physical as well as learned abilities.

### Pulper

Reviled and feared by the dwellers of the upper reaches, you are a pulper, a worker in the waste vats. Born and raised in the fetid, lightless trash chambers of the city, you have gained an aspect others find fearsome. Your dark, outsized eyes are highly adapted to low-light conditions. Your skin is pallid, your muscular frame hunched and twisted. Generations of natural selection have rendered you immune to most toxins and pollutants. Accustomed to backbreaking manual labor, you exhibit fearsome upper-body strength. The presence of hungry blood eels beneath the fetid liquid waste has taught you to quickly scuttle out of danger. Forbidden to own firearms, you've learned the martial art of klastan, which uses a trash waste shovel as its prime weapon. Though you speak Loom Respite's commlingua with a crude and halting accent, you converse fluently in chathar, the vulgar tongue of laborers and outcasts. Every Urday you take part in the mass percussive rites of your workclan, affirming your solidarity with the beleaguered toilers of the lower reaches.

**Abilities:** Waste Vat Worker, Reviled and Feared, Low-Light Vision, Grotesque Aspect, Muscular Frame, Upper Body Strength, Immune To Toxins, Quick Scuttling, Klastan (shovel-based martial art), Speaks Chathar, Percussionist

**Flaws:** Light Sensitivity, Speaks Commilingua With Crude Accent

making the ability names evocative and particular. Berserk Spearman is better than Warrior.

### Cultural Keywords

Abilities for cultural keywords reflect the background knowledge the character gains simply by growing up in the culture in question. They usually include:

- a language (if their native language is not the lingua franca of the series that characters are assumed to be speaking in)
- knowledge of an area, which may range from a neighborhood to an entire region, depending on the distance people travel in that culture in the course of their ordinary lives
- (in pre-industrial societies) one or more subsistence skills, such as farming, hunting, foraging, and various crafts
- (in modern societies) basic education in reading, math, and so on. These abilities can usually be left implicit and needn't be spelled out.





## Sample Cultural Keyword

This keyword is from a fantasy campaign.

### Ak-Thul

You are of the Ak-Thul, the people of the white wastes. From birth, you were carried on your mother's back in a fur-lined papoose. When you first walked, you walked on snow. Soon you learned to wander for miles at a time without tiring. When you could pick up a spear, you learned to hunt. The animals you hunt are sacred to you; from their bodies you make everything you need, from the hides you wear to the bone spears you use to hunt them. At night, your people gather in their snow huts and tell the tales of the maker

gods, Big Snow and Cold Water. To build your strength, you wrestle. Your language is called Tj-thul; outsiders cannot speak it, because it hurts their tongues. Since the people from the south came, bringing with them their strange huts made from giant dead plants, you have learned to speak their tongue as well. They are nowhere as good as the Ak-Thul at smiling, riddling, or stone carving.

*Abilities:* Arctic Survival, Hunting, Spear, Distance Walking, Wrestling, Smiling, Riddling, Reverence For Animals, Craft Hide Clothing, Craft Bone Tools, Stone Carving, *Mythology:* Big Snow and Cold Water, *Languages:* Tj-Thul, Umerian.

Many culture keywords will also include a working knowledge of a religious faith or ideology. Pantheistic cultures may allow you to take a general keyword for the core mythology and then take one or more religious keywords to specialize in the rites and myths of particular gods of their pantheons.

In some settings characters might belong to two cultures: a base culture and a sub-culture.

### Religious Keywords

Religious organizations may provide tutelage in the rites and myths of a particular god, and also serve as mutual aid societies that teach occupational and other abilities.

In most settings, religion won't play a sufficiently central role to require religious keywords.

For series set in imagined worlds, you may still want to list the faiths available to the characters, with descriptive text.

### Extraordinary Powers

It's easy to apply common sense to situations when characters use abilities that exist in our real world. You know that a man can't run as fast as a horse, bend a crowbar over his knee, or access a credit card database with his mind.

In the various fantastic and futuristic genres, characters may be able to do some or all of those things. Any ability that is impossible in the real world but possible in a genre setting is called an **extraordinary power**. Most genres offer only a single means of acquiring extraordinary powers: through magic, physical mutation, the use of technology, or whatever. A few may allow multiple sources of extraordinary powers: examples include comic book heroes and genre mash-ups, like fantasy/cyberpunk.

Extraordinary powers are limited by two factors. One, like any ordinary ability, is the rating. That tells you how well the character can



use the ability to solve problems. The second limitation lies in your textual description of the extraordinary power. This specifies what the power can do, and (if you choose to do so) lays down the upper limits of its effectiveness.

Textual descriptions can be as loose or tight as you wish.

For a very loose, improvisational series, in which the ground rules for extraordinary powers are determined as you go, use only the ability titles. Under this approach, there is no hard-and-fast limit to extraordinary powers. The players can attempt to do anything that seems like it might happen in a story of this type, bounded by credibility tests (p. 74). Establish resistances based on the narrative requirements of the pass/fail cycle, and then describe the magnitude of the result based on success levels. You may wish to supply the players with a complete list of ability names available in your setting, provide a few examples and allow them to invent like abilities, or permit them to invent any abilities they want, without prior input from you.

To inject a sense of nitty-gritty reality into your fantastic world, write detailed descriptions of what each extraordinary power can do. If prep time is at a premium, supply only lists of available abilities before character creation. Wait until you see which ones the players choose, then write up descriptions for them before the first session of actual game play.

The less tightly you define your series' extraordinary powers, the more its tone will resemble a wild and crazy movie

blockbuster or a four-color comic book. Greater definition reduces the potential for over-the-top action, and tends to resemble the action in a novel or a more down-to-earth TV series.

Fidelity to source material provides another reason to tightly define extraordinary powers. If you're trying to reproduce a particular property, you want its force sabers or rings of ancient evil to work the way they do in the original material.

The way you write ability descriptions conveys (in addition to specific information about your series) a sense of tone. In a militaristic or futuristic series, you may want to precisely lay down statistics for weapons, vehicles, and other items of technology—even though you will then probably avoid clear numerical references during adjudication. You want to convey the *feeling* of a nuts-and-bolts setting, even if the rules don't make any great use of these numbers thereafter.

Conversely, for a fantastic or ancient setting, you'll want to define abilities in terms that evoke the way characters see that world. You could measure everything in cubits or imaginary units of measure. More appropriately, use relative comparisons. Instead of telling the players that they can lift so many hundred pounds for x number of seconds, tell them that they can briefly lift a small pony into the air.

## Frameworks

Most series, even those without extraordinary power descriptions, benefit from an overall **framework** that explains the origin of extraordinary powers and the general limitations under which they operate. Frameworks allow you to apply a few overall rules of the setting to all uses of the power, creating a sense of consistent internal logic, and making it easier for you to figure out what makes common sense in a world of imaginary abilities. The framework consists of the following elements:

- The **origin** tells you where the extraordinary abilities come from. This gives you something to fall back on when you try to figure out if an unusual use of an ability lies within the realm of possibility. The origin story may be well known, or kept as a secret from your players.
- **Overall limitations** indicate what powers of this sort can never do.
- **Overall requirements** tell you what a character must do to access these powers. These include elements that must be present in a character's backstory to allow him to use the powers in the first place.

Depending on the sort of extraordinary ability you are describing, you may need to add other categories of information for needed clarity.

Complicated conceptions of imaginary powers may require sub-frameworks. For example, there might be many schools of magic that all have a single origin and limitations, but different requirements.

Alternately, a single setting may include several types of extraordinary powers with completely different origins. These may seem superficially similar (like variant forms of magic) or obviously unrelated (technology and mutant powers.)

## Sample Religious Keyword

This keyword is from the Ak-Thul fantasy campaign, and details one of its specialty religions.

### Bitter Wind Shaman

Big Snow and Cold Water made the world by mating, and in so doing had many offspring. The middle brother was Bitter Wind, who keeps the world in its proper round shape by continually running around it, pounding it with his feet. Without him, the land would flatten and break apart, like sea ice in the melting season. Yet his gift is a harsh one; if you get too close to him, he burns your skin or fills the air with suffocating snow.

From birth, people could see your affinity for Bitter Wind, in the fast-moving shapes your breath made when it left your mouth. When you came of age, you were exposed to the elements. Bitter Wind blessed you, not only suffering you to live, but granting you his magic. Now you may summon his winds when needed, and calm them when they grow too violent.

Like any shaman, you dispense advice to the people. You embody the great spirit who grants you power by sharing his moods: you swing unpredictably from good humor and protectiveness to raging fury.

*Abilities:* Give Advice, Predict Weather, Mythology: Bitter Wind, Good Humor, Protectiveness, Raging Fury, Shaman

*Magical Abilities:* Summon Winds, Dismiss Winds, Whip Up Snow, Resist Cold

## Magic

To build magic into your setting, first create a framework. If there are multiple origins for magic, create a framework for each. The framework can be a few paragraphs long or run for thousands of words, depending on how tightly you wish to define your world. Some players love detail; others will skim any documents you send them and rely on you to explain as you go.

In specifying what magicians can actually do in your world, you can then choose between two levels of detail:

**Ability names only:** Use only your framework and the names of abilities to define what the characters can do. When players try to use the ability in play, you decide what they can and can't attempt, based on what seems credible and fun. This approach gives the greatest room for improvisation, but may strike some as too loose to provide a sense of reality.

*Aimee chooses to define magic with only a brief framework and ability names. She doesn't have much prep time and prefers to allow her creative players to collaborate in defining her world.*

*One of her players, Bob, decides to play Ikthut, an Ak-Thul Bitter Wind Shaman (p. 96). He writes down the magical abilities from the keyword, and play begins. Soon Ikthut encounters a hunting party of invaders from the south, and looks at his sheet to see what magic he can employ to deter them from locating his community.*

*"I use Whip Up Snow to create an enormous, blinding cloud that will send them back to where they came from," Bob says.*

*Aimee nods; that sounds like a reasonable description to her. The leader of the southern hunting party, a supporting character called Coarse Treader, has magic of his own: a shard of spirit bone granting him the ability Find the Trail. Aimee calls for a simple contest, pitting Ikthut's Whip Up Snow 18 against Coarse Treader's Find the Trail 3d4. She rolls a 14, to Bob's 16: a marginal success for Coarse Treader.*

*Aimee narrates the result: "Winds of your patron spirit appear from every direction, stirring up a blinding cloud of whiteness. The southerners disappear into the growing plume. But finally one of them emerges, holding a shard of bone before him, as if it guides his way. He's covered in ice crystals, but stands before you, and sees your people's snow huts in the distance. This day, his magic has proven stronger than yours."*

**Describe specific effects:** For each ability, write a paragraph explaining how it works. Specify either its breadth or its limitations, plus any interesting side notes that might have an impact on the story. When players try to use the ability in play, you collaboratively consult the description to decide if the proposed action falls within its parameters of what is and isn't possible. This approach strikes a balance between improvisation and structure, but requires significant preparation time.

*Leslie likes to write up details of her world, and finds that her players prefer some guidance where their imaginary powers are concerned. She writes a description of the Whip Up Snow magic provided by the Bitter Wind:*

**Whip Up Snow:** causes high winds to swirl in from all directions, picking up loose snow, hurling into the air, and keeping it there. Only works if loose snow is present, and only outside. Lasts until shaman wills it to cease, or until he performs

some other action. Presence of the great Bitter Wind spirit is detectable by anyone who can see into the spirit world.

*Lesley runs the same situation as above for her player, Martin. He starts by reading his sphere of influence description. "It says here I can whip up a cloud of loose snow. Can I use that to obscure their vision, and keep them from spotting my people?"*

*Lesley agrees. She then consults her sphere of influence description for Coarse Treader's Find the Trail magic:*

**Find the Trail:** Contained in a bone shard, this magic causes the object's pointed end to always point to the user's desired destination. The user must enter into a semi-trance state, concentrating on where he wants to go. He may frame

## Example Framework

This is a framework for a pulp-inspired series, Eerie Wonder Tales. The Narrator writes this for her own reference; a redacted version is given to the players.

**Origin:** No one today, aside from a few insightful madmen, knows that the gods of mythology were real, and once walked the earth alongside mortal men. They retreated to their immortal realms when monotheism swept the western world, paying only occasional visits since then. They vanished for good after the Enlightenment, but left traces of themselves behind. As the myths tell us, the gods were fecund and lustful, and mated with many of the world's greatest beauties. Now, when individuals bearing DNA traces of two or more gods undergo a traumatic event, their innate divine power awakens, granting them great physical prowess or covert magical abilities.

**Overall limitations:** All-American good guys can't use any effect that looks outwardly magical. They can seem extraordinarily lucky, or perform unlikely feats of physical prowess, but nothing that obviously appears to defy the laws of physics. They can build and use wondrous items, so long as they can be explained with a veneer of pseudoscientific babble.

Player characters must be exotically foreign to access obviously magical effects. (Evil supporting characters of any background may use them.) They appear to get these by performing rituals and incantations they find in ancient tomes, or which are handed down by oral tradition within evil sects. Workers of magic believe themselves to be drawing power directly from demonic entities, but like everyone else in the world, are really activating their innate divine energies.

Overtly magical effects can only occur in mysterious or isolated places, under cover of darkness, or where people are predisposed to believe in supernatural phenomena.

**Overall requirements:** About one in ten thousand people have enough divine DNA to wield latent extraordinary powers. All PCs are assumed to fall into this category, even though neither they (nor their players) know this as the campaign begins. Instead, each player must provide an origin story explaining how they first discovered their heroic potential.



this in concrete terms (“I wish to find the stream where we killed the deer”) or abstract ones (“I wish to find the man with the red hat.”)

Again, it seems appropriate that *Coarse Treader* can think, “I wish to find the nearest community” and use the bone to point him through the snow.

If you want to tie yourself down even further—perhaps because it gives your players a greater sense of control over contest outcomes—you could go so far as to describe specific results from various victory levels for each magical ability.

### Magical Equipment

Many settings allow only specialized practitioners with long training or innate talents to directly evoke magical effects, but allow anybody to make use of magical objects. Common magical objects include weapons, armor pieces, rings, wands, gems, medicine bags, and potions.

Pieces of magical equipment are abilities. Characters can have such abilities as Protective Ring, Orc-Slashing Sword, or Salve Of Invisibility. They can even invent vague but evocative items, like the Orb Of La-Koth, and, with your collaboration, work out in play what they can do with them. If you write detailed descriptions for the magical powers in your game, you should do it for items as well.

Characters draw on magical equipment like they would any other ability. They use the description to see if it applies to their goal, describe what they’re doing, and roll the ability corresponding to the item.

You may permit characters to find magical items during play. Until they buy an ability allowing them to use the items, they wield them with a default ability of 6.

When a player buys a found item as an ability, it becomes as much a part of his PC as any item he described during character creation. Until then, you can have the item stolen or destroyed without qualm. Also like any ability, items can suffer states of adversity, reducing the character’s ability to use it, or, in the event of death, destroying the item entirely.

### Making Items

Here are some sample guidelines on magical items suitable for a generic fantasy series. Discard them as necessary to create your own unique take on magic items in your world, or to emulate an existing setting.

When creating your framework, decide how common magical items are and how hard they are to make. They may be produced on a regular basis by alchemists and magically capable artisans. Or they might be extremely rare, created only by, say, reclusive dwarves living in distant mountains, or the gods in their various heavens. Perhaps there haven’t been any magical items made for eons.

If items are rare, you’ll either want to severely restrict the number of item abilities the players can build into their characters, or explain as part of your series premise why the group owns so many of these incredibly scarce relics.

In settings where item creation is common, PCs and supporting characters should be able to make them. Here are rules for item creation in a conventional pseudo-Tolkien meets quasi-Howard fantasy series:



Each type of item requires its own separate crafting ability: Create Magic Weapon, Create Magic Armor, Brew Potion, Write Magic Scroll, Craft Magic Ring, and so on. Exotic item types require their own abilities, like Make Crystal Ball or Grow Homunculus, which explains why they’re rare and exotic in the first place. Characters must also take the mundane equivalent of the craft in question: Blacksmithing, Chemistry, Calligraphy, Silversmithing, and the like.

Certain cultures or schools of magic may specialize in particular items. Nomadic shamans may make items from animal products. Artfully crafted glass and metals are made only in large settlements capable of sustaining populations of artisans.

Depending on the rules of magic in your world, you may want to require that makers of these items can themselves work the type of magic they’re instilling in their items: if you want

to create a Fire-Breathing Sword, you need the magical ability Fire-Breathing.

It is not unreasonable to rule that characters must get a complete victory to craft a fully functioning item. Lesser results may get you items that work only briefly (perhaps only once in the case of a marginal victory), or deliver only partial results. A less-than-perfect Fire-Breathing Sword may throw off a burning aura that is somewhat useful as a light source, but does nothing to burn your enemies in battle. Although unpredictably wonky results are more fun, here are default ranges for imperfect magical items, for moments when inspiration fails you:

- *Major victory*: Item works for a month.
- *Minor victory*: Item works for a week.
- *Marginal victory*: Item works once.
- *Complete defeat*: Item appears to be perfectly functional, but backfires disastrously on its wielder when first used.
- *Any other defeat*: Item doesn't work.

Not all items need be created in the same way: shamanic items might have spirits bound into them, and work only when the entities are appeased. Mystical items might require a state of enlightenment in the user.

### Exhaustible Items

Items that are consumed during use, like potions, are a fantasy staple. To model them in *HeroQuest*, focus on the maker, not the user. The magical craftsman creates the item with an appropriate ability, like Brew Potion or Write Magical Scroll. The Narrator makes note of the rating used to make the item. When it is used, the user rolls, using the item creator's rating, not his own, as the basis for the target number.

*Madison Furnish (played by Don) purchases a potion of sorcerous vision disguised as an aspirin tablet. He ingests it before meeting his target, famous record producer Stan Geist. The tablet was manufactured by an occulto-pharmacologist with a Second Sight rating of 18W. Stan is an alien demon with a Resist Detection ability of 15. Don rolls for the potion; the Narrator, Fiona, rolls for Stan. Don gets a 1 to her 12. His extra mastery bumps Stan down to a failure, for a Critical vs. Failure result: a major victory.*

*"You see him as he really is," Fiona says, "a pulsing jellyfish-like creature with a thousand blinking eyes."*

Because these items can give players access to ratings far above their own, Narrators should ensure that they overcome significant obstacles to acquire items by highly-rated makers.

Although your framework may establish different ground rules for magic, it stands to reason that temporary items are easier to make than permanent ones. Victory levels might determine the number of doses of potion you make, or the number of times you can use a magic scroll before its calligraphy fades from view.

### Super Powers

The super powers wielded by costumed heroes are only slightly less elastic, in terms of the wide range of problems they can solve, than broadly-defined magical abilities. After creating your framework, you can either create a master list of abilities or leave ability names up to your players. If you do create a list,

you can leave it at ability names or define them more tightly, as with magical abilities.

If the players are all passably acquainted with the genre, you can use a short hand by defining particularly tricky powers by comparison to well-known characters from your favorite comics.

Comic book fans recognize various power levels within a superhero universe. On one end of the spectrum, you see the street-level heroes who depend mostly on athletics and gadgets to fight crime. On the other, you get cosmic heroes who meet god-like beings and battle over the fate of worlds. *HeroQuest's* scaling allows heroes of both sorts to interact. A street-level hero will even be able to overcome his cosmic counterpart with sufficiently high ratings in his comparatively mundane abilities.

*Street-level vigilante Agent Orange tries to keep an informant quiet as cosmic-grade hero Nebula attempts to read his mind. Agent Orange pits his mundane Intimidation ability of 12W against Nebula's extraordinary ability Mindmeld, rated at 6W. Barring some lucky rolls or a hero point expenditure on Nebula's part, Agent Orange is likely to scare the informant so badly that his thoughts become unreadable.*

## Ordinary vs. Extraordinary

In many settings, abilities may be available in either mundane or extraordinary form. It is crucial to distinguish between them.

When framing contests, Narrators must determine what is credible within the reality of their worlds, and rule out contests where the desired outcome is impossible (see p. 74).

A character might have Strength as either an extraordinary or an ordinary ability. One with ordinary strength must conform to believable human limits. Another PC with extraordinary Strength faces either no limit, or a higher-than-normal limit set by the Narrator in her framework or power description.

Ability ratings do not represent an absolute scale, but the character's chance of solving problems with that ability. It is therefore possible to have, in the same group, a character with an ordinary Strength of 18W and one with extraordinary Strength at the same rating. The difference between them is that the extraordinary character can frame contests without regard to ordinary human limits, where the ordinary one is constrained by the limits of narrative credibility. The ordinary guy might be able to beat the extraordinary at arm wrestling, because he's better leveraging his mundane strength. However, unlike his extraordinary counterpart, he can't ever lift a car over his head.

To prevent the ordinarily strong guy from beating the extraordinarily strong one at arm wrestling, put a cap on ordinary abilities. If Mr. Ordinary tops out at 18W but Ms. Extraordinary can keep improving without limit, she'll eventually leave him in the dust.



However, if you want to enforce one style over the other, do so by restricting the sorts of super powers available to the characters. For a street-level series, you might limit powers to those that extend normal human abilities. When creating a cosmic series, you might insist that all of the characters be able to survive in, and travel through, the vacuum of space.

### Thematic Unity

Each costumed hero's powers tend to revolve around a unified theme. The guy who breathes underwater also commands the denizens of the sea. The gal with the carapace and proportional strength of a scorpion also produces a stunning venom to inject into her prey. To maintain this conceit, require your players to justify the thematic unity of the various powers they propose to take.

Power groupings should also follow a narrative unity. All of the character's super powers ought to arise from a single origin. If a player proposes a character who has mutant healing powers, then got bitten by a radioactive animal, and later acquired cyborg limbs, collaborate with him to find a more coherent way to group together the various powers he seeks. Be prepared to bend this rule in the face of a particularly compelling origin story. Some famous comics characters, like that regenerating guy with the claws, attribute their powers to disparate sources.

(Multiple power origins may be especially appropriate in a post-modern supers game that seeks to emulate the sometimes absurdly convoluted continuity of contemporary comics. Perhaps the hero acquired a theme-breaking second set of powers when a new creative team took over his comic book and radically revised his original concept.)

### Power-Specific Limitations

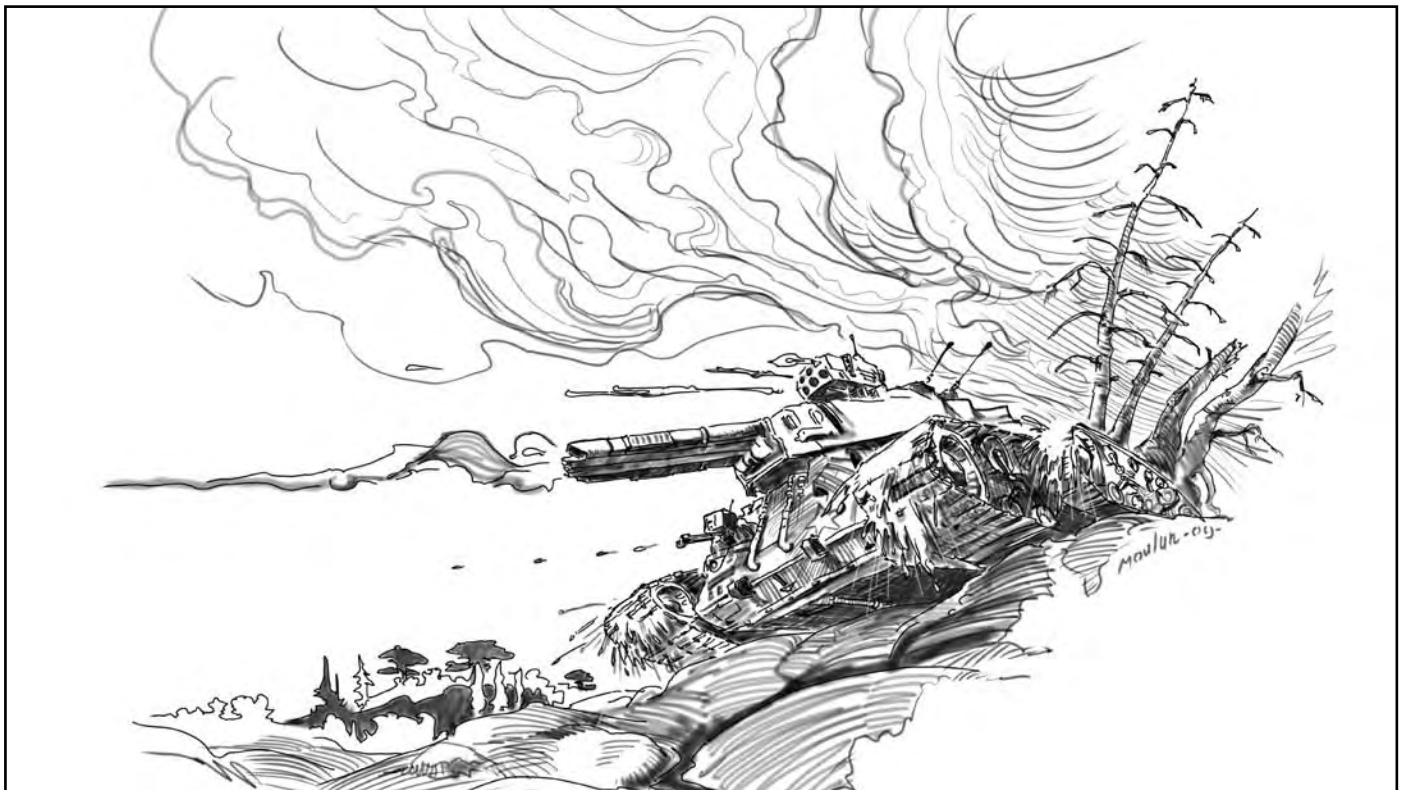
Limitations on super powers are a standard genre device, granting each hero a useful Achilles heel to keep him suitably vulnerable. There's the guy with the heart condition, the hero who crumples in the presence of certain green rocks, and that other guy who can't handle anything yellow.

You may require players to create limitations on their powers, or, if your players exhibit an especially laid-back approach to issues of character control, surprise them by imposing limitations during play.

Player-created limitations should be at least as credible as the examples from the source material. Often they tie into the hero's origin story. Check proposed limitations to see that they neither dominate play by cropping up all the time (such as a vulnerability to electronic devices) nor are so rare that they never come up at all.

These limitations function as a type of flaw. As with any flaw, make sure that the brunt of the disadvantage falls on the player and his character, not on the group as a whole. Enforce this even when the player can point to multiple examples in the source material. The classic instance of this would be the power that malfunctions and turns the hero into a berserk killing machine who attacks his friends.

It is not uncommon for players to happily build limitations into their super-characters, but to rebel when you do what a comic book writer would do, and insert them into the story to prevent the character from doing something obvious to bring the story to a premature conclusion. Junk limitations entirely if you think some of your players will object to their use. Comic book heroes tend to have absolute powers, which work all the time unless blocked by a limitation. *HeroQuest* characters are



always limited by their ratings, so all you need to do to protect a plot situation requiring a high likelihood of failure is to assign it a high resistance.

*AC Comics' marquee character, Uberhuman, only fails while using his X-ray vision power when the thing he's trying to perceive is shielded by lead. HeroQuest character Ultraperson fails whenever his player rolls poorly in comparison to the Resistance.*

To keep limitations more in tune with the source material, treat them as absolutes. Instead of assigning a rating to the flaw and rolling it as a resistance, the Narrator simply rules that the character cannot succeed in situations where the resistance comes into play. If the PC realizes ahead of time that the limitation is in play, the character won't bother trying, and will thus avoid a humiliating defeat.

*Ultraperson wants to peer inside a vault but already knows that it's lead-lined. There's no point trying, so he calls on a gadget-wielding ally to whip up an impromptu ultrasound device to do the job instead.*

## High Tech

Unlike magical spheres of influence or super powers, the capabilities of an item of futuristic technology are not necessarily explicable from a mere descriptive phrase.

Items that are simply souped-up versions of contemporary technological items may be summed up with a cool-sounding make and model, followed by (in parenthesis) a generic descriptive phrase, as in:

- Hellharrier M-20 (tank)
- NeuroStopper (taser)
- Heckler-Wesson Bugdropper Max (grenade launcher)

When allowing players to devise their own tech under the narrative character creation method, do not count the entertaining brand names of devices against the 100-word total, unless they are in and of themselves descriptive of the item's capabilities. Otherwise, you're penalizing players for adding fun flavor to your game.

Wholly imaginary pieces of gear will require item descriptions.

If you're open to allowing the players to contribute background material to your setting, allow them to submit item names and descriptions during character creation or improvement. As with any player-Narrator collaboration, you may find yourself tweaking the details to conform to your setting framework, while still accommodating the kernel of the idea the player found appealing in the first place.

You may, however, prefer to give your players a fully realized world, presenting them with an imaginary catalogue of technology and item descriptions, and allowing them to pick only from the list you supply. Some players find it easier to get into the hard-edged gear-head mindset by flipping through a list of tantalizingly shiny items than by being asked to make up their own.

Item descriptions can be brief and general, or longer and highly specific. The degree of detail you lavish on them depends on the style of science fiction setting you want to evoke. Space opera adventure is best supported by broad, loophole-filled



## Sample Tech Descriptions

Here are two takes on the same item: one a brief description suitable for a broadly interpretive space opera game; the other, a nuts-and-bolts description suitable for a harder style of SF:

**Blink gun:** Emits a teleportation ray that can instantly relocate a single target to any position within 50 m.

**Blink gun:** Emits a narrowly focused energy beam that breaks a single target down on the molecular level and reassembles it at any position within 50 m. The target must be discontinuous with other objects, which prevents teleportation of a building column or the wheels of a moving vehicle. It is not possible to teleport only a portion of an opponent. Targets may not exceed a surface area of 3m<sup>2</sup> or mass of 175 kg. The beam is nearly invisible, appearing as a rippling distortion in space. It emits only trace quantities of heat energy.

In factory condition it can move targets only to unoccupied space, ensuring safe rematerialization. An experienced customizer can hack the firmware to remove this limitation, turning the blink gun into a lethal weapon that materializes victims inside other objects or beings.

Even portable teleport technology takes enormous computing power. A state of the art blink gun's onboard processor clocks in at 14k quadrohertz. Energy requirements are high; the gun's barrel-mounted battery weighs 6kg and gives out after 6 shots. Batteries reach a surface temperature of 80°C after use and must be removed with insulated gloves to avoid flesh burns.

Blink guns can be disrupted by high-frequency radio waves. Anti-BG emitters are available in large, stationary industrial models, which jam blink beams very effectively, or as portable body armor attachments, which are notoriously unreliable.

Developed for use in prison riots, the non-lethal blink gun was repurposed in devious ways during the Cluster War. Ownership of a blink gun suggests a background in law enforcement, insurgency, counter-insurgency, or mercenary work. It has become increasingly fashionable among the so-called Robin Hood gangs, who use it to non-lethally neutralize guards from the banks they're robbing.

Brand names include: Heckler-Wesson ReCager, Pommworks Spatial Twister, and NuKrupp BG-122.

item descriptions, which allow the characters to improvise wild applications of their technology under pressure, with the aid of gum and paper clips. If you're emulating hard SF, with its loving descriptions of imaginary works of engineering, you want the tech to feel real, right down to the nuts and bolts—with accordingly constrained ability descriptions. In keeping with the slide-rule ethos of the sub-genre, these can be full of numbers and math, real or imaginary. These may set limits for credibility tests (p. 74) but are otherwise to be treated as merely descriptive, not simulative. They're there to evoke a mood, not as a basis for narrative reasoning that replaces the pass/fail cycle.

To integrate your imaginary items of technology more fully with your setting, develop social associations for them. Just as the ownership of a particular type of sports car tells you about the person who owns it, other characters should be able to make assumptions about you (accurately or otherwise) based on your choice of vacuum rifle, photon grenade, or cyber-implant.

In realistic settings, items of cutting-edge technology can be expected to exhibit design defects, or experience failure under certain conditions. Narrators can package these flaws into their tech descriptions.

### Vehicles as Characters

In settings showcasing vehicle action, from starship combat to giant robot slugfests, vehicles may be defined like characters, with multiple abilities of their own. Like other complicated pieces of equipment, vehicles may possess flaws.

In a world where vehicles come off the rack, and iterations of any given model possess essentially identical capabilities, the Narrator should provide a list of vehicles with pre-determined abilities and ratings. The following example suits a WWI flying ace game:

#### *Sopwith Camel*

*This single-seat fighter plane earns its nickname from the hump-like configuration of its gun installation.*

*Maneuverability 6W, .303 Vickers machine guns 6W*

*Flaws: Chokes On Takeoff 18, Hard To Handle -6*

In fanciful settings where each PC operates in his own distinctive vehicle, Narrators may require players to invent them from scratch, just as they do their characters. This example is from a giant robot series, inspired by the wackier, kid-friendly side of the genre:

#### *Kaleidotron*

*This carnival-themed mecha can disguise itself as a rollercoaster.*

*Rainbow light rays 7W, Armor (trestle-like projections) 3W, Rolling punch 20, Skate on car-like feet 18*

Both of these vehicle examples skimp on the details. For a series that revels in technical details, buff them up with extensive passages of statistics and engineering lore. In the case of real vehicles, these are available in profusion in the Internet. For futuristic settings, make up your own additional details, as in the fleshed-out example for the blink gun above.

As a rule, vehicles should not be subject to character improvement. Characters can increase their Piloting or Driving ratings, but the vehicles themselves don't grow more effective over time. An exception pertains when the vehicles are sentient or possessed of artificial intelligence, and therefore capable of learning and adjusting to their environments. In certain settings you may allow characters with engineering abilities to increase various vehicle ratings or decrease flaws by a point or two, reflecting their tinkering and customizing abilities. In general, however, vehicles designed for high performance are considered to be at the top of their capabilities when they debut in the narrative. Narrators can frame contests involving character-like vehicles in one of two ways:

- The character uses an ability related to handling the vehicle (such as Flying Ace or Mecha Pilot), taking a relevant augment from one of the vehicle's abilities.
- The character enters a contest using one or more of the vehicle's abilities as he would his own, perhaps using his driving or piloting ability to augment, perhaps using another of the vehicle's abilities.

### Psychic Talents

Psychic abilities appear in the superhero genre, as one of many sources of super powers. They also show up in some SF, and in tales of the fantastic and supernatural. In over-the-top genres you may want to treat them as open-ended super abilities. In most cases, though, emulating the source material requires a tight cap on the ability of psionic powers to solve problems.

Because they short-circuit many standard plot devices, mental abilities are generally problematic in roleplaying games. PCs who reliably read minds can overcome any deception by supporting characters. Clear premonitions theoretically allow the PC to sit at home and wait for the vision in which the mystery is suddenly solved, without risk or effort. Overcoming a villain by controlling his mind is usually anti-climactic.

Mind control exposes another gap between genre material and roleplaying practice: the danger that players will lose control over their characters. Many players get very upset when this happens, and would rather see their characters killed than lose their volition, even briefly. This becomes especially fraught when it's one player taking control of another's PC. (For more on this general issue, see "Accepting Persuasion," p. 85).

If you look to the source material, you'll see that psychic powers are kept generally unreliable. Characters can't choose when they activate, or achieve more than partial successes with them. Underline this as you write ability descriptions for the various psi talents you want to include in your series. Emphasize the fuzziness of their results: a mind reader might be able to detect only moods, or know when a character is lying, but not what he is lying about.

You may wish to impose limits on ability ratings. Another way to handle this is to cap degree of success for mental powers. Perhaps all major and complete successes are treated as minor. Or you can impose a more difficult resistance to plot-harmful abilities.

Outside of science fiction, stories in which multiple protagonists exhibit mental powers are rare. Your standard horror/mystery allows for one psychic among a team of

otherwise normal investigators. You may wish to permit only one player—perhaps the one with the best attendance record—to give his PC psychic powers. This single psychic should be restricted to one to three extraordinary abilities. To save time creating write-ups, you might ask the player to, drawing on genre material for inspiration, propose the types of abilities he wants to have. Then you can write up detailed descriptions for only these powers. This is less work for you, but risks disappointing a player who envisioned the ability with different limitations.

### Species Traits

Many settings let players portray nonhuman characters, from the elves and dwarves of epic fantasy to the aliens of space opera. Although some alien races might be humans with superficial cosmetic differences, it's standard for such races to exhibit fun biological quirks that can be treated as extraordinary abilities.

- Elves in your setting might boast great longevity (and thus a wealth of knowledge from centuries of life experience) or be plant people who partake of a universal mystical consciousness.
- Your version of dwarves will probably have high strength and endurance, along with a range of sensory abilities related to their subterranean lifestyle.
- Your aliens might include pointy-eared logicians with limited psychic powers, or bony-headed warriors boasting multiply redundant internal organs.

To express these conventions in *HeroQuest* terms, create a species keyword with both second-person description and a list of abilities, with extraordinary ability descriptions as necessary.

Where an ability might be either ordinary or extraordinary, be sure to specify which of the two possibilities pertains. You might place an upper limit on a species' extraordinary version of an ordinary ability. Do so by adding, in parenthesis, a brief quantitative descriptor after the ability name. This defines the maximum result for this species at this extraordinary ability, after which attempts fail the credibility test (p. 74) and cannot be attempted. Examples might include:

- Dwarven strength (lift a horse; kick in a steel-reinforced wooden door)
- Gnoll damage resistance (shrug off arrow hits)
- Grok'nar running speed (outrun a horse over sprint distances)

You may be tempted to give a species an extraordinary version of an ordinary ability because you want to show that the species is better than the average human in a particular area. This is not necessary: you're already making all characters of this type better than average simply by giving them the ability in the first place. (Remember, average is a rating of 6!) Whether the player of this species keeps this ability higher than that of the other PCs is up to him, and depends on how he allocates his build points during character creation. Keep in mind that the other PCs are also above average in any area they choose to highlight by choosing an ability.

Most species keywords include a range of ordinary abilities as well. These are typically social, informational and sometimes occupational abilities arising from their cultures.

Species keywords may also include cultural, social, or physical flaws. Rate the most serious of these at 17, and the others at 13. These reflect the ratings endured by starting player characters. Other supporting characters of the same species may have them at even higher ratings.

Players may not choose other abilities directly contradictory to their species flaws. This does not stop them from selecting abilities that might on occasion be used to counter them.

*If a species has the flaw Low Pain Threshold, you can't cancel it by taking the ability High Pain Threshold.*

*Grim Determination, which could be used to counter Low Pain Threshold (among many other resistances in a variety of other situations), remains perfectly acceptable.*

### Creatures

Narrators can create entire menageries of fantastic animals and monsters before embarking on their series, or can make them up as they go along. In settings where PCs can take creatures as followers or companions, they'll expect to know which beasts fit the bill, and what their abilities and ratings are. Create a dozen or so prime candidates in advance, or provide a longer list of brief descriptions to the players and then flesh out the ones they find interesting.

Give creatures as many abilities as you think they need. Before assigning ratings to the abilities, decide how tough you want them to be in relation to heroic player characters. If they should easily overwhelm the average PC, give them multiple masteries in their most important abilities. If they're a match for the average PC, give them a rating of 7 in their top ability. Moderately challenging creatures should top out at 16.

If a creature serves only as an adversary, you won't need specific ratings. The creature poses a trial to be overcome. In

## Example Psychic Talent

### EVP Reader

The character is adept in the manifestation and interpretation of Electronic Voice Phenomena, or EVP. These are mysterious voices recorded on tape by presumably psychic means. The psychic makes a recording of either open air in an empty room, a radio tuned between stations, or another source of electronic white noise. When played back, the user may locate short bursts of nearly incomprehensible verbiage. It may sound like an inhuman whisper, or several voices murmuring at once, sometimes in multiple languages. On a successful use of the ability, the voices reveal information of relevance to the psychic's situation. It has yet to be conclusively determined whether the voices are produced by entities from beyond our reality, or imprinted on the tape by the psychic himself. The phenomena are also sometimes called Raudive voices, after the parapsychologist who extensively documented them.



fiction, sneaking past the guard dog doesn't depend on the dog's Watchfulness rating. Instead, the degree of challenge depends on the needs of the narrative. If you want to give the PCs a Low resistance, describe the dog as elderly or sleeping off a big meal. If your story needs a High resistance, mention a pack of dogs, or a West Highland White sleeping with one eye open.

It's easy to describe what happens with the guard dog because everyone is familiar with dogs. To help narrate the results of a contest involving imaginary creatures, come up with typical abilities and categorize them as Significant or Exceptional. You might describe the use of Exceptional abilities if the resistance is High or Very High. A few animals (perhaps giants or dragons in a fantasy setting) will have Legendary abilities, which are always challenging and may be at +**W** or even Nearly Impossible (+**W**2) resistance.

Some beasts will have Weaknesses. If the PCs can arrange the contest so it's against a notably poor ability, the resistance is logically less. As always, it's up to you to set the overall resistance—the PCs might try to take advantage of a rhinoceros's poor eyesight, but end up facing its much keener sense of smell.

If the resistance suggested by the pass fail/cycle seems way off from what you'd expect from a creature, maintain narrative



## Sample Species Keyword

### High Elves of Ammelon

You are of the fair people, the willowy immortals who act as guardians of the forests and repositories of ancient wisdom. You grew up in an isolated community, away from humans, encountering them only during your adulthood—that is, after you were a hundred or more years old. Unless slain by violence or misadventure, you will never die. If you are like most of your kind, you cautiously cleave to your immortality, avoiding needless risk.

Physically, you are taller and thinner than the average human. Your hair is a silvery blond color; your skin, pale and slightly florid. Elven eyes may be cerulean blue or forest green, but are uniformly clear and penetrating. Your slightly pointed jaw holds forty-four small teeth of such perfection that the goblins of the Murklands traffic in them, valuing them as semi-precious stones.

When the angelic creator beings known as the Sirhal departed from the world, they made you guardians of the earth. As such, you feel an instinctive harmony with nature, one reflected in various innate sensory abilities.

*Abilities:* Archery, Beautiful, Imperious, Singing, Woodland Survival, Woodland Warfare, Nature Knowledge, Elven History, Language: Ammelon, Lore of the Sirhal, Goblin-Fighting Lore.

*Plus any one of the following abilities:* Wood Carving, Leather Working, Craft Bow & Arrow.

*Extraordinary Abilities:* Longevity, See In Darkness (outdoors)

*Flaws:* Teeth Traded As Commodities, Despised by Goblins, Low Pain Threshold.

**Elven Longevity:** The High Elves of Ammelon are effectively immortal. Though susceptible to pathogens, the character is immune to congenital or degenerative disease. This ability is used in contests where the character's long life experience comes into play, ranging from knowledge of history to tests of emotional maturity and detachment.

consistency by describing the situation to account for the variance. The troll is fighting in bright sunlight. The blood ape is superbly camouflaged by the leaves of the rocanthus tree, etc.

Animals that never pose a challenge to people in any way don't warrant ability ratings. Treat them as a part of the scenery. A swarm of ants might have a Resistance to an exterminator, but don't usually need game statistics.

#### Consciousness

In fantastic settings, it's not always clear whether a creature is just an animal, or an intelligent being in its own right. Where necessary, distinguish between the two by noting the creature's Consciousness.



Most settings require three states of Consciousness:

**Sapient:** The creature is intelligent, has a personality, and can make conscious choices. It can therefore be affected by standard social abilities, including personality traits. (This assumes that the characters attempting to do so are able to meaningfully communicate with them.) In a fantasy setting, sapient creatures might include dragons, sphinxes, and tree-men.

**Animal:** The creature lacks self-awareness and the ability to make conscious choices, instead operating on instinct and perhaps a handful of trained responses. It cannot be communicated with and is not subject to persuasion, social pressure, or the influence of personality.

Certain magical abilities may allow the user to harness these instincts, commanding the creature as if fully trained, or to awaken a sense of sapience, either permanently or temporarily.

(In some fantasy worlds, all common animals are actually latently sapient, and can respond intelligently to magical communication.)

**Sub-Animal:** The creature is at least somewhat mobile and responds to environmental stimuli, but otherwise lacks even

the autonomy that instinct grants to animals. It cannot be trained, commanded, or communicated with. Examples might include carnivorous plants, spatial anomalies, and other oddities.

In some fantasy worlds, plants may possess latent animal consciousness, or even sapience.

Consciousness is a descriptive trait, not an ability. It establishes what sorts of interactions characters can conduct with the creature without violating credibility.

#### Abilities vs. Absolute Values

Creature ability ratings, like those of any other character, are expressed in abstract, relative terms, not as a concrete scale providing a hard-and-fast numerical comparison between creature types. Always keep in mind that ratings measure a being's *ability to solve problems* with the quality in question, not its absolute parameters.

Imagine two crocodiles, each 15 feet long and weighing 1800 pounds. The one on the left—let's call him Scar—is an

## Sample Creature

### Griffin

Griffins are ferocious flying carnivores with the bodies of oversized lions and the heads, wings, and forelegs of eagles. They live in great communal nests of up to a dozen individuals, often located in caves or other natural shelter. They particularly prize horse meat, and may attempt to grab a fresh supply from mounted humans. Although they give birth to live young like mammals the females do not lactate, and instead feed their young with meat, just as eagles do. Griffins cannot be tamed, and any attempt to do so will meet with a violent response from the animal.

Griffins prefer hunting in plains or grasslands, often traveling in packs of two to five adults. They generally attack from above using their Aerobatics and Grab Victim abilities, often hoisting a victim aloft with their foreclaws and then raking and tearing at them with their hind legs and sharp beak. If a victim resists in the air, the griffin will drop it. Once the prey is dead, the griffin will carry it back to its aerie.

When fighting smaller opponents, griffins use the same technique, and may drop victims from great heights. If a creature is too heavy or bulky to lift, griffin will attack with its beak and foreclaws, from above if possible. Several griffins may mob a single attacker. Against aerial opponents, the griffin makes repeated runs past the target, and attacks with its beak and foreclaws.

**Significant Abilities:** Thick Skin and Feathers, Cunning, Fly Fast, Tough.

**Exceptional Abilities:** Bite and Claw Attack, Aerobatics, Grab Victim, Large, Spot Prey, Strong.

**Consciousness:** Animal

**Relevant Statistics:** males 400-600 lb, 8-9 feet long; females 325-400 lb, 7-8 feet long; flying speed 80 mph (short distances only), wingspan 12-14 ft.

older specimen, while the one on the right—Blackie—remains young and vital. Each is the same size, but Blackie is better able to leverage his size against its prey when it attacks. Even though they are identical in mass and length, Blackie can have a Size ability rated at 18L2, while Scar has only Size 18L.

Likewise, a rat might have a Fast rating of 8L, indicating his ability to get out of trouble by scurrying away. A horse might have a Fast rating of 8L, indicating its ability to move quickly from one place to another. This does not mean that the rat can outrun a horse on a race course—or that a horse can slip through a predator's clutches by zipping into the underbrush. During contest framing, the Narrator employs a credibility test, using common sense to separate out the problems a fast rat

can believably overcome, versus those obstacles suited for a fast horse.

In most cases, common sense alone can help you determine which contests to allow, and which to reject because they seem patently absurd. However, especially where imaginary animals are concerned, you may want to include some quantitative numbers in your creature descriptions, under the heading **Relevant Statistics**. Don't knock yourself out listing figures for qualities that will never figure in a contest. It makes sense to reference the top speed of a cheetah, but not of a tree sloth. If, like most Narrators, you can wing it without them, by all means do so. You can always make up absolute values for your imaginary creatures as the need arises.





# GAMING IN GLORANTHA

Many established players will want to know how to adapt this edition of *HeroQuest* to games set in its original setting of Glorantha. This chapter scratches the surface, providing a very basic starting point toward that goal. It will be expanded in upcoming Glorantha-centric supplements from Moon Design.

Given its space constraints, this chapter cannot serve as a new reader's introduction to this rich and detailed world. To learn about Glorantha, start with the official [www.glorantha.com](http://www.glorantha.com) website, *Glorantha: Introduction to the Hero Wars* (from Moon Design) or *Glorantha: The Second Age* (from Mongoose Publishing, available in print and PDF).

## What is Magic in Glorantha?

Runes power Gloranthan magic. Different magical systems interact with the runes in different ways. Worshipers of gods

develop an affinity with certain runes, and for actions within that rune's sphere of influence; many theists mark themselves with magical tattoos to show their runic affinities. Spirit magicians work with spirits which possess the power of particular runes and own charms that hold these spirits, gained by those spirits' friendship. Wizards manipulate runes into spells powered by energy drawn from nodes in the Essence Plane.

Magical abilities allow you to overcome tests when describing actions. Different levels of magical understanding allow you to stretch credibility in increasing ways.

At low levels of understanding (common magic for theists, charms for spirit magicians, or blessings for wizards), you are only able to become exceptionally powerful at normal activities. Magic does not allow someone to do something they could not normally achieve, just do it better. If you focus on





the Movement rune, you might be able to fill your lungs with Orlanth's breath and run faster than a professional athlete. Or if you focus on the Fertility rune, you might be able to sing a song that speeds normal healing, or set bone so that it heals as good as new.

With guidance (as an initiate for theists, a practitioner among animists, or adept for wizardry) you can use the runes to achieve supernatural effects that would defy a normal credibility test. An Orlanth initiate who uses his Movement rune might run up a wall, fly, or teleport; a Chalana Arroy healer can use the Fertility rune to regrow a limb or help the lame to walk again.

## Framework:

### Three Forms of Magic

**Origin:** Glorantha is a magical world ruled not by physics and natural law, but by the mythic interaction of supernatural forces. Myth defines culture, and also palpably shapes reality. The type of magic people wield is determined by culture and religion. Glorantha's many religions interact with the Other Side. Travelers to this unearthly realm can interact with gods, saints and spirits, taking personal journeys into eternal myths. Three distinct systems give magic to mortal beings: Divine Magic, Spirit Magic, and Wizardry:

- Divine Magic users emulate divine entities to draw on the magic of the God World. *An affinity is something you are.* Having a particular type of magic affects your behavior.
- Spirit Magic users strike deals with spirits—entities resident in animals, plants, simple objects, and features of the natural world. *A spirit is something you have.* You need to satisfy your spirits in order for them to work for you.
- Wizards cast highly specific spells learned from the esoteric study of magical texts, manipulating abstract magical forces. *A spell is something you know.* The limits of your knowledge are sharply circumscribed.

## Other Magic

Many Gloranthans have magic abilities that don't fall into one of the three religious approaches. You might have an unusual talent due to supernatural ancestry, or have gained it on a heroquest.

## HeroQuests

Each religious approach has special rituals that allow worshippers to cross over to the Other Side and reenact a myth. This practice is called heroquesting, and it can result in gaining an unusual magic ability, or a blessing for an entire community. The details are outside the scope of this appendix, but heroquest magic doesn't need to follow the standard rules described here.

**Overall Limitations:** Gloranthans stick to the magics granted them by their cultural backgrounds, and so use whatever magic is locally available. Historically, attempts to distill or purify ancestral traditions of magic have always led to epic disaster. Just ask the God Learners.

**Overall Requirements:** Almost everyone practices magic of some kind. Ordinary people use everyday magics in pursuit of the economic activities that provide them the necessities of life. Heroes wield powers of legendary magnitude. Whether you are a humble peasant or a mighty adventurer, the cultural element of your magic binds you to a community. The community might be as large as a nation or as small as a band of piratical heroes. It lends you strength, and you fight to protect it.

**All kinds of magic are equivalent:** Despite the different magic types, in rules terms all kinds of magic are alike: each is an ability, so the Flying feat, Eagle Flight spirit, and Fly spell are equivalent. And whether an ability is broad or narrow, ability names suffice—you don't need to detail specific effects.

**Keywords represent magic:** All the magic systems make use of umbrella keywords (see p. 10). You don't need to write down every specific ability.

## A World of Exceptions

The world of Glorantha is vast and complex. For every generally true statement about its cultures and magical practices, there is some group somewhere to serve as an exception that tests the rule. Rather than fill this chapter with prose-killing qualifiers, we instead make broad statements that are almost always true—except for the inevitable exceptions hiding somewhere in the corners of the world. There's always someone somewhere who does it differently.

## Runes

Runes are symbols that have power inherent in them. They're the magical building blocks of Glorantha. They are symbols, archetypes, embodiments, and actual matter or energy of the mundane world.

Runes are more than just written symbology. When a rune is written or inscribed, the real power of the magical image is present within it. Repetition of a rune does not weaken it, but strengthens its presence and firm reality in creation.

## Myths

From a young age, you learned the myths of your culture—the often thrilling, sometimes puzzling stories recounting the exploits of the gods. These are set in the God Time, a prehistoric era before the boundaries between Mortal World and Other Side were as fixed as they are now, when gods had free reign to do new things, and to change and grow. Sixteen hundred years ago, the God Time ended, and the actions of the gods were constrained by an event called the Great Compromise. Now it is mortal men and women who change the world, using sparks



of god identity within their bodies to draw divine power from the Other Side. Myths are the road maps to magical power. If your god did it, maybe you can do it, too, no matter how impossible it seems.

It is difficult for mortals to comprehend the true nature of the Other Side. The laws that permeate the mortal world do not apply, and there is no concept of linear time. Things can, and do, happen out of sequence and sometimes simultaneously. As the place where myths are born or created, the Other Side is malleable to those who have the right powers and connections to mold it. This is principally the power of the gods, but certain mortals, blessed by their deity, may gain such powers and contribute to, or forge their own, myths.

## Divine Magic

*An affinity is something you are.*

People using divine magic—theists—have a personal connection to one or more divine beings. They often worship pantheons of interrelated gods. Theists do not disbelieve in the reality of rival cultures' gods. It is not uncommon for the

gods of one region to appear as antagonist figures in the myths of its neighbors. For example, Lunar worshippers identify Orlanth as one of the Rebel Gods who tried to destroy the world. It is also often the case that certain gods of one's own pantheon will be regarded as harmful or dangerous figures, whose magic is drawn upon only by outlaws and troublemakers.

## Pantheon Worship

Adulthood rites let you take part in a community ritual that brings you into contact with the Other Side. There you establish a connection to the gods and goddesses of your people. The despised God Learners called such pantheon worshippers “lay members.” In many cultures, you are chosen and marked out by a deity of your pantheon. For most men, this is the father god of the pantheon; for most women, the great mother. These central mythic figures are sometimes divided into multiple aspects, allowing you to bond with the face of your god most relevant to your life. A plowman might encounter the great god Orlanth in his aspect as Barntar the good farmer, while a warrior finds himself chasing the glorious shadow that is Destor. Some people are drawn to specialized gods, like healers or firelords. Heroes are worshipped too. They were mortals who pursued their destinies and divine connections so fervently that they passed into legend, earning a special place in the God World. You too can become a worshipped, immortal hero.

Your connection to the God World now established, you learn more and more. Elders, mentors and experienced family members teach you how to nurture and draw upon it. This process takes several years. As the god is now part of you, your connection is intimate and personal. With time and dedication you start to channel certain aspects of your god's personality and character; as devotion grows, so your god grows stronger within you and the closer your relationship with the god becomes. Eventually you can become a dedicated **initiate** to that god, creating an intimate and powerful relationship between you and your god.

## Ten Thousand Gods?

Three picks from 22 Core Runes produce over ten thousand combinations. There aren't that many distinct gods, however. As long as you're not looking for an exact match, this isn't a problem. You might be an Ernalda worshipper but also an entertainer, and so take Illusion instead of Fertility. Or add the Stasis rune to Yelmalio's two, to help building fortifications. Expect to justify unusual combinations to your Narrator, especially if you've picked runes described as incompatible. This is rare in Glorantha, and usually results in terrible internal conflict.

## Rune Affinities

Each divine being is associated with a small number of **rune affinities** (usually shortened to “affinity”). These are a collection of the natural forces, economic activities, personality traits and other qualities most central to its mythic identity. Great gods have many affinities, but are approached through their aspects. Every affinity is associated with a Gloranthan rune.

- Ernalda’s affinities are Earth (□), Fertility (X), and Harmony (III).
- Yelmadio’s affinities are Sky (☉) and Truth (Y).
- Kastok, the cavalry god of the Dara Happan people, provides the affinities of Mastery (L) and Fire (☉).

Each of your rune affinities is a separate ability with its own rating. Choose up to three affinities as part of character creation. Pick one to start at 17; the others start at 13. Write the affinity names and runes on your character sheet. An affinity is a magical keyword, and costs two hero points to raise.

Many cultures are associated with a specific rune and typically have that rune as one of their three starting affinities. For example, most Orlanthe men have the Air (G) rune and most Orlanthe women have the Earth (□) rune. Most Dara Happan nobles have the Fire (☉) rune and most Dara Happan peasants (of either gender) have the Earth (□) rune.

## Common Magic

As you first learn to draw on your rune affinity, you start by using it as an augment to ordinary tasks, and can’t use it directly as an ability. At this point it does not behave like an extraordinary power. You can’t do anything overtly supernatural with it; you simply get magically better at doing ordinary things. This is known as **common magic** and has its equivalent in the other two traditions.

*Marius Domesun, a lay member of the Yelmadio religion, has the affinities of Sky 13 and Truth 17. He can use either of these affinities to augment his other abilities, such as Spear and Shield Combat (by calling upon his Truth affinity to help every blow strike true, just as Yelmadio’s own spear always struck true), but he can’t use the Truth affinity as a direct ability to, say, learn the true nature of a particular secret or an enemy’s weakness.*

You may possess common magic affinities associated with more than one deity. The deities may even seem opposed or incompatible, so long as they come from the same pantheon. Unusual characters may worship gods from multiple pantheons. In this case, you must be able to explain your character to the Narrator so that his past history, and acceptance by other members of the community, both pass a credibility test.

## Paths to a Divine Connection

If you share at least one affinity with a god, you may be able to develop a divine connection with that deity, assuming you meet the prerequisites for that god. You begin to emulate that god and perform in its myths and rituals. Eventually, you may seek to dedicate yourself to that god. This is called **initiation**.

Many gods can be approached from more than one rune. For example, Orlanthe can be approached from the G, R and

L runes. Someone who approaches Orlanthe from the R rune specializes in the Movement aspect of Orlanthe, commonly called Orlanthe Adventurous. However, he can still call upon Orlanthe’s G and L powers (assuming he has those runes), just at the (presumably lower) ratings of those runes. Virtues, flaws, and cult special abilities may vary from aspect to aspect.

Several cults have prerequisite rune requirements. For example, in order to initiate to any aspect of Orlanthe, you must have at least the G rune whether you approach from the G, the R or the L rune (and in some cases, even other runes). Usually you’ll use whichever of those runes are higher. Some gods have more than one rune prerequisite, but can only be approached from one rune.

## Initiation

If you have a rating of at least 1L in an affinity when you begin the game, you may decide that your character is an **initiate** of a deity who possesses that rune affinity. You join a sub-community comprised of worshipers of the same god, known as a **cult**. Write on your character sheet Initiate of (Deity) along with the rune affinity you are using as your divine connection to the god, e.g. Initiate of Orlanthe (R). This is called your **divine rune affinity**. You may be an initiate of multiple deities, but only within the same pantheon, and only if their virtues (see below) are compatible. As an initiate, your divine rune affinity rating may also be used:

- as a personality trait, to reflect your ability to emulate your god, as indicated by the virtues listed in the cult description.
- as a social ability, to reflect your relationship with your temple, shrine, or other group of fellow cultists.
- as a knowledge ability, to recount knowledge of the myths, rituals, and other lore of the deity.
- as a flaw, used by the Narrator to hinder you when you attempt to act in a manner contrary to the ethos of your god. The flaw may also be used when you want to undertake actions that conflict with the time obligations cult membership imposes on you. Narrators relying on this device should take care to make it dramatically interesting. Simply negating a plot line is boring. Instead, this flaw should be used to make the character overcome an additional obstacle, or to direct him to another equally compelling plot branch where his adventures further the cult’s objectives.

*Marius Domesun’s Truth affinity has developed to 3L and he has initiated to Yelmadio, with the Y rune as his divine rune affinity. Instead of it being merely a magical augmentation to mundane abilities, Marius can use Truth directly as an ability to, for instance, relate the myths of Yelmadio’s victories accurately, and thus inspire his fellow Sun Dome Templars. Moreover, any attempt he makes to lie will be opposed by his Truth rating.*

Initiation increases your magical effectiveness. You may now use your affinities associated with your god directly, as you would any other ability. Further, you may describe actions and contest results as overtly supernatural. Use the affinity

name as you would any other ability, except that credibility tests need no longer apply to them. However, the affinity is a keyword describing a wide range of magic, so it's treated as a broad ability (see p. 51).

*Marius could also use his Sky affinity (which has now risen to 19) as a direct ability—perhaps to call forth a bright light to drive off trollkin. However, a value trollkin's Not Afraid of the Sun ability gets a +6 bonus against the broad ability.*

You may become an initiate during play. In addition to the mastery requirement, the Narrator may require you to overcome a plot obstacle to achieve acceptance by your cult. Cults typically teach their members certain abilities, as well as expecting them to behave in certain ways. When you gain 1W in an affinity, you may add these abilities with the catch-up (see p. 57).

*Sora Goodseller's Communication (H) affinity has reached 1W, and she decides to initiate to Issaries. She takes advantage of the opportunity to learn Tradetalk (starting the ability at 15), and also adds the virtue Fair Dealer. And she changes the old affinity to Initiate of Issaries (H).*

If you begin play as an initiate but don't have common abilities associated with worshippers of your god (e.g., sword fighting for Initiates of Orlanth Adventurous, pike and shield combat for Initiates of Yelmalio, or horse riding for initiates of Elmal), your Narrator may allow you to add them at 13, or deem you a precocious initiate who still needs to learn them.

## Devotion

If you are an initiate with a rating of 1W or more in a divine affinity, you may attempt to become a **devotee** of the corresponding deity. You must overcome one or more plot obstacles to achieve this status, often including an Other Side journey where you present yourself before your deity for approval as one of his or her servants. Narrators should take care to either resolve this quickly, or give the other PCs a rooting interest in, and opportunities to contribute to, your success.

You renounce your initiate status to any other deities. You may still perform common magic associated with their affinities, but can no longer use them directly. You must also permanently lose the ratings and abilities of any spirit magic or wizardry you may have had. You can only devote to one cult.

Your time commitment to the cult becomes all-consuming. Everything you do must either emulate your god, or aid your cult organization. When your affinity is used as a flaw as per the initiate description, you always face it with at least a -6 penalty. Where time commitments are concerned, your Narrator will work to make them part

of the character's reality while ensuring that you always have something interesting to do in the story.

*Wilms Deadeye has Devotee of Humakt (†) at 11W and Loyal to Davarandar (his lord) at 5W. Davarandar tells Wilms to lie about an incident, which pits his loyalty to Davarandar against his Devotee of Humakt rating. Since he's a devotee, he rolls with a -6 penalty. Despite this, loyalty wins out, and his Humakt rating takes a lingering penalty.*

Because of the time obligations and the personality pressures of the affinities, devotee status is uncommon among divine worshippers.

## Feats

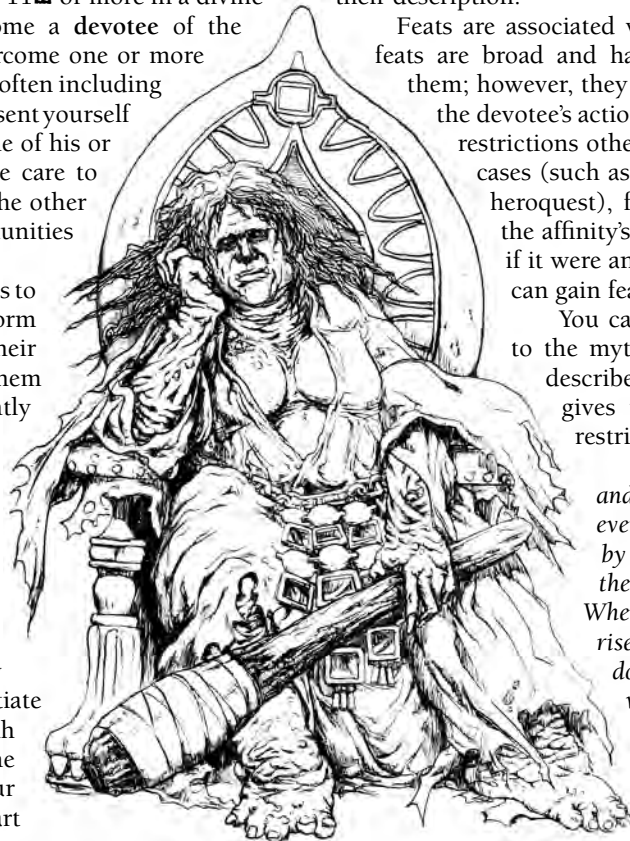
As a devotee, you may perform magical **feats**. When you become a devotee you learn one feat, and can learn additional feats by overcoming a small plot obstacle and spending a Hero Point. A feat is a repetition of one your god's mythic deeds. With a feat, you can fully identify yourself with your god and perform his magic as though you were the god. When you use a feat to accomplish a goal, you use the rune affinity rating, and may use it directly.

Using a feat allows you to channel the full power of your god or the myths associated with him. Using a feat is not an invisible act: the devotee always exhibits some form of manifestation of the powers at his disposal. He might appear to grow larger, burn with an inner glow, crackle lightning from his fingertips, or even start to physically resemble the commonly understood images of his god. When using feats, players should have some idea of how this power manifests and weave it into their description.

Feats are associated with a specific rune affinity. Some feats are broad and have many powers associated with them; however, they also place the most restrictions on the devotee's actions. Others are narrow and have few restrictions other than emulating the god. In some cases (such as due to a directed improvement or heroquest), feats are given a rating other than the affinity's. Write this as "+2" or whatever, as if it were an ability within a keyword. Initiates can gain feats in this fashion.

You can create **feats** that are appropriate to the myths of your cult. A feat should be described in about 50 to 100 words that gives the scope of its powers and any restrictions on its use.

*Darvargast is a devotee of Helamakt and knows the Sivin Feat. This is the event where Helamakt defeated the elves by blinding them and then burning down their forests with lightning and winds. When Darvargast invokes this feat, he rises into the air, can blind elves, hurl down mighty lightning bolts against their woods, and fan fires with his winds. Everything he does as Helamakt is a very specific ability, which makes it extremely difficult for the elves to defend against him.*





## Ritual Magic

Your people sacrifice to the gods for their blessings all the time: for good hunting, to ensure a safe journey, before a meal, and so on. Although critical in daily life, this is so routine that there's no bonus in game terms. You can, however, make significant sacrifices. These involve a moderately lengthy ritual, and more substantial gifts or service to the gods (usually resulting in a -3 lingering consequence to Wealth or a similar ability). Or your Narrator may allow you to swear an oath to your god—write this down. These unusual practices give a lingering benefit if you win a contest against Moderate difficulty. Use your best affinity, augmenting with Wealth or another appropriate ability.

*Marius Domesun lost everything to troll bandits, so he can't afford to make generous sacrifices to Yelmalio. Instead, he offers to stand watch at the Sun Dome temple for a week in exchange for Yelmalio's aid tracking down the trolls. He augments his best affinity (Truth 3W) with his Stay Awake ability. He gains a minor victory, conveying a +3 lingering benefit to his Tracking.*

You can get even more help from the gods with the aid of a temple. Generally this involves persuading the priestly hierarchy to officiate at a day-long ceremony performed on the sacred grounds. Success grants you (and your companions) the ability to use one of the god's feats in a single contest, using your best divine affinity. Persuasion involves your best affinity (as social relationship); you can usually augment with a religious virtue or community relationship.

*Marius tracked the trolls to their lair in the Big Rubble, but prudently returned to his temple for help confronting them. He convinces the Sun Dome priests to lend him some of their magical support (using his Truth affinity augmented by Hate Trolls). During the next Fireday ceremony, the priests weave Marius into the rituals, and he is granted one use of the Shield of Brilliance feat. The ability rating is his Truth affinity (even though this feat is normally associated with the Sky affinity).*

Or you can ask your community to grant use of their magic rating (see p. 87).



## Rituals and Other Systems

Although their worship doesn't involve sacrifice, spirit magicians and users of wizardry can similarly enhance their magic or call on their religious community.

## Spirit Magic

*A spirit is something you have.*

To spirit magicians—sometimes called animists—the world is alive and full of spirits—conscious entities who embody the objects, plants and creatures they dwell within. The spirits speak to them. They learn to communicate back, often by singing a simple song, such as:

*Tell me your name, what do you do?  
What do you want me to do for you?*

Whatever the exact words, the exchange revolves around a sense of mutual help and reciprocity. The spirit grants aid to the animist in exchange for a favor of like magnitude. Spirits grant power according to their natures. A rope spirit might help you bind things together. A frog spirit could help you jump, or render you fertile, or let you spend a long time in the water. The spirit of a willow grove might lend you shelter, warning you when enemies approach. An animist's relationship to his spirit friends is personal, and not to be lightly revealed to others. Animists participate in community rituals led by their shamans, granting worship energy and receiving communal benefits in return.

Your method of accessing spirit powers is culturally determined. Your community follows a broad tradition of worship, which includes several **spirit societies**. These are defined by the great spirits you revere, and the lesser spirits your community is experienced in dealing with.

If you come from an animist culture, you gain a Tradition keyword (starting at 17) that includes the Spirit Sense ability. This allows you to hear, see, and communicate with spirits, though it in and of itself grants you no special persuasive powers in dealing with them. Spirit Sense simply allows you to interact with the spirits of objects, plants and animals as you would with any other supporting character.

## Spirit Worshipers

A basic animist is a spirit worshipper. With Spirit Sense, you see perhaps one or two spirits reveal themselves to you per day. As a general rule you can't initiate these contacts.

At this level you possess a number of **charms**, fashioned for you by more potent and experienced spirit magicians. These are ritually fashioned objects containing spirits associated with your tradition. Give yourself up to five charm abilities as part of the Tradition keyword. Define each of these by describing the type of magic it contains. Effects evoke the natural world or very simple technologies. Each spirit is associated with a rune, which is the source of the spirit's magic.

*Endon Grinner is a young man of the Bison tribe and is not a member of any spirit society. He knows a handful of charms he got from local societies and the tribal shaman, and can use each at his Praxian Tradition keyword rating of 17:*

- Charm: Antler Fighting ▽
- Charm: Stay Underwater ~
- Charm: Hard As a Rock ◡
- Charm: Piercing Arrowhead ⊙
- Charm: Meadow Of Gold ◻

The descriptions of these abilities will change over time.

When calling on the magic of a charm, you must be able to touch it with your bare skin, and must call or sing the name of your spirit out loud. You may use charms only to augment; they do not produce overtly extraordinary effects. To use a charm, you must convincingly explain to the Narrator why a spirit of the sort you possess could aid you with the task you're performing. You know not to press a spirit into a task for which it is clearly unsuited, as this would release it from the charm, rendering it useless. The spirit is also released from its charm when you suffer a complete defeat on its ability use; on a major defeat, it may go to sleep for a time.

A charm's innate power is based on your tradition keyword although you can spend a hero point to improve a charm ability above your tradition keyword. Write this as "+1" or whatever, like any ability within a keyword. When you raise your tradition keyword or a charm ability, you may swap an old charm for a new one during a suitable break in the action. (Narrators may make this difficult for you if it's dramatically interesting, or allow the swap to happen between scenes to keep the main story moving.) You may keep the same type of charm, or specify that you've traded for a completely different sort of spirit. Once you hit a rating of 19<sup>W</sup> your tradition keyword or in any charm, you've maxed out, and must become a member of a spirit society (see below) to advance further.

You are expected to participate in the community's rituals and contribute to its survival. If you fail to help, the Narrator applies plot penalties to your charm abilities.

If you want to become a shaman eventually, give yourself a Patron relationship to a current shaman. This choice indicates that you have been training under him for a period of years. Not everyone has such a relationship, so it does not fall under the tradition keyword.

## Spirit Societies

If you have a mastery in a spirit magic tradition, you may specify that you belong to a spirit society (assuming you meet any other prerequisites). Spirit societies are animist cults with special relationships to spirits granting powers above the norm for your culture. You may select one or more spirit societies of your culture's tradition, forming a bond to spirits who deliver magic of a particular type. In so doing, you also join a sub-community, consisting of the local followers of your spirit society. Write your spirit society in parentheses next to your tradition, e.g. Praxian Tradition (Waha spirit society).

As a member of a spirit society, you gain the following benefits which add to or supersede those of a tradition:

- Your Spirit Sense ability grants you the power to open a window into to the spirit world, allowing you to lead community rituals and communicate with the powerful spirits that reside there.
- You may use the spirits in your charms as stretch abilities rather than merely augmenting. You may also describe extraordinary effects. However, such direct uses are treated as stretches. These effects correspond to the spirit types permitted by your spirit society. You may increase your ability in a charm or the spirit society keyword without limit. You can swap the spirits in your own charms. Depending on story pacing, the Narrator may require you to play out the acquisition of a new spirit, perhaps overcoming one or more story obstacles. Once per session per charm, you may specify that you are releasing the spirit from its containing object as you draw on its power. This use of the charm is not treated as a stretch. However you can't draw on the spirit again until the next session, as it must undertake a



time-consuming journey back to the charm through its original home in the Spirit World.

- You may take one or more free-roaming spirit helpers as allies (see p. 60). Work out with the Narrator the simple requirements such helpers might impose (such as a visit to a hilltop once a season).
- With Spirit Sense, you may make charms for others. Once per session, conduct a simple contest of Spirit Sense against a Moderate resistance. On a success, you fashion a common magic charm usable by any character. If you give it to a player character, the PC must buy a new ability, at the usual beginning rating, to make use of it. If you give it to a supporting character (not including followers) you gain a social, economic or other benefit commensurate with your success level.

You are expected to devote time to support both your community, and to the sub-group of fellow members of each spirit society. The Narrator may now treat your highest-rated animist ability as a flaw. Any attempt to shirk your duties to



community or practice, or to behave contrary to the virtues listed in the keyword for your practice, results in a contest in which you must overcome this flaw to succeed. Even when you do succeed, you will probably face social pressures and other additional ongoing plot obstacles.

As a member of a spirit society, you may use abilities or keywords granting you magic from theist or sorcerous keywords, or to animist magic of other pantheons, but will face the disapproval of your community if you wield them openly.

You may become a member of a spirit society during play. In addition to the mastery requirement, the Narrator may require you to overcome a plot obstacle to achieve acceptance by local adherents of your spirit society.

*Endon Grinner fought and killed a Sable warrior and took his scalp as proof of the deed, and was welcomed into the tribal Waha spirit society. His Praxian Tradition ability becomes his Waha Spirit Society ability. This is an opportunity to choose new spirits for his charms. They can now perform extraordinary effects for him, so he goes into a little more detail. He takes Broo-Killer (an anti-Chaos spirit), Killer-of-Evil (an anti-outlander spirit), Great Charger (a bison movement spirit), Strong Arm (a spirit of great combat prowess) and Peaceful Killer (a spirit who can protect him against enemy spirits).*

### Shamans

A shaman is a powerful spirit magician capable of traveling into the Spirit World. To become a shaman, you must:

- Have a tradition at 11<sup>W</sup> or greater, and have a Patron relationship to a shaman equal or greater than your highest-rated animist ability.
- Overcome a major plot obstacle during an ordeal culminating with your first solo journey to the Spirit World.
- (If you acquired the Patron relationship during play) Overcome a major plot obstacle accounting for your ability to compress several years of training into a short period.

Shamans are effectively members of a spirit society. In addition to the benefits of spirit society membership, you can draw on charm without treating their abilities as stretches. When you release a spirit from its charm, you gain a +9 bonus on the associated ability use.

You can call on the spirits within charms soundlessly, just by thinking.

You gain a *fetch*, an incorporeal second self which enables you to enter the Spirit World. It remains in the natural world when you are in the spirit world and vice versa. It renders you immune to multiple opponent penalties from spirits and other bodiless entities. It stays behind to stand guard over your physical body when you leave it to journey in the Spirit World. With its aid, you can immediately escape from the Spirit World with a simple contest success against a resistance no greater than Moderate. (Normal departure is always time-consuming and fraught with obstacles.) The Spirit Sense ability is used to resolve all fetch powers. If your fetch is somehow destroyed, you die, too.

As a shaman, you do not need to renounce magic from theist or sorcerous sources, or from other traditions, but you can't make use of them while you remain a shaman.

Your duties to community and practice increase along with your power; when contesting against your Spirit Sense/highest rated animist power as a flaw, you will always have a penalty of at least -6. Where time commitments are concerned, your Narrator will work to make them part of the character's reality while ensuring that you always have something interesting to do in the story.

## Wizardry

*A spell is something you know.*

Wizardry is the direct manipulation of the runes of Glorantha. It is possible to learn and recite a formula that will always produce a known effect. Wizardry is both rational and logical. Only the most advanced users of wizardry claim to understand the underpinnings of this complicated mechanism, and even then, like the God Learners, their mistakes make things go horribly wrong.

In the lands of the west, people belong to churches and learn to venerate the sacred text of Malkion, the Supreme Being, the Invisible God. Church leaders called liturgists bless the flock and curse its enemies, providing the hierarchical Western version of common magic.

Most Western magic is practiced in this church setting, but there are those who make a more exciting and adventurous application of its principles: the wizards. Wizards take a rationalistic approach to magical evocation and form many independent schools of magic. Most believe in Malkion but pursue his gift of essence magic outside a church hierarchy. There are also the followers of saintly orders, who cast spells in emulation of the revered paragons of the faith.

The Essence Planes, dimensions of thoughts and connections, are the source of wizardry. Wizardry schools know the world and its laws and use a time-tested, logical worldview to manipulate magical energy.

## Spells

Spells are common to every culture in Glorantha. They are taught by word of mouth, and passed down from generation to generation. It may be as simple as a spell to summon light, or as complicated as one that banishes demons to back to Hell. Anyone can learn and use a spell. You don't need to be able to read, just memorize a series of words, gestures, and potentially other ritual actions.

*Vonnenerious knows the spell "Excoriate the Insect Pestilence" at 13. He can use it directly to eradicate any insect, but it is useless against other types of creatures.*

Spells perform one function very effectively. The Narrator enforces this by taking an unusually severe and literal-minded approach when evaluating your attempt descriptions. If the result you're attempting with a spell seems like a stretch, it isn't possible at all. However, unlike other forms of magic, spells can always be used directly. Spells are learned and improved like another other skill.

Hedge Wizards found in western villages are the most common example of someone who just focuses on learning spells. They have learned a number of useful spells, but are not able to read grimoires.

## Grimoires

Grimoires are sacred texts or magical books that explain, describe or otherwise analyze Gloranthan metaphysics. Most of the holy texts of Western churches are grimoires, but there are many other kinds. Most grimoires are tied to a single rune. The most famous, *The Abiding Book*, is tied to the Law rune (Δ) and describes the Laws of Creation. As a user of wizardry, you were taught to understand their esoteric truths as formulae for spells manipulating the forces of the Essence Plane.

As magical keywords, it costs two hero points to gain or increase a grimoire. Your relationship to the grimoire shows that you are able to read it, but initially your understanding will be very limited. Spell effects are listed in the entries for each grimoire. When you acquire a grimoire, choose four of these as the spells you have already learned. You may perform your spells directly, using your rating in the grimoire, and describe them as having obviously extraordinary effects. Unlike theist and spirit effects, however, spells are very specific and limited.

*Vonnenerious, as a member of the secret School of the Unified Man, has a rating of 17 with the grimoire Master of the Faceless King that contain spells related to the Stasis rune (Δ). He chooses the following spells that he can cast with the rating of 17:*

- *Command Jolanti*
- *Mold Rock*
- *Stabilize Masonry*
- *Split Rock*





Since his school is supposed to be secret, Vonnanerious also studies *The Abiding Book*. Focusing on its description of the laws of demonology, he chooses the following spells that he can cast with a rating of 13:

- Identify Demon's Names
- Know Demon Weakness
- Be Invisible to Demon
- Resist Demon

You can't attempt to gain new spells within a grimoire until you have at least a 1W rating. You may have the rote formulae for a spell already in your book, but until you travel to the Essence Plane to interact directly with the forces you're harnessing, you lack the understanding to use them. You may acquire a maximum of one additional spell per session. This requires you to travel to the Other Side, and, as pacing warrants, to overcome one or more significant plot obstacles. Your rating in any grimoire allows you to create a portal to the Other Side. You may attempt to cross over once per session; these are always simple contests. If you fail to cross over, or to overcome an obstacle, you lose your chance to gain any new spell during the current session. Gaining spells in this fashion does not cost a hero point.

### Apprentices

Wizards of independent schools begin their careers as apprentices. Like students of any institution of higher learning, they spend most of their time attending lectures, taking notes, and poring through texts. Although a series in which everyone is an apprentice wizard could be a lot of fun, an apprentice, yoked to his studies, won't mesh well with a band of freer, footloose heroes. Having noted their existence, we'll move on to more immediately playable character types.

### Adepts

Your character may begin play as an adept, a recent graduate of a wizardly school. Having completed a lengthy education, he may be somewhat older than other beginning adventurers.

Adepts begin play knowing a single grimoire at 17 that is the core text of the magical school or saintly order they belong to. This book is your holy scripture. When you start play, choose four spells appropriate to your grimoire as the spells you have already learned.

You can add additional grimoires during character creation, but they must relate to your school or order.

Graduation is just the beginning of your obligation to your school. You are expected to make new scholarly discoveries on its behalf, sharing them with the faculty. When members are attacked or challenged, you must take up your grimoires to defend them. Expect also to be saddled with various mundane duties and fundraising requirements. Schools also expect certain standards of behavior, although this is a social requirement—unlike theism, your magic is entirely logical, and does not depend on your actions.

It goes without saying that as a devout Malkioni you may under no circumstances possess any magical abilities from the wretched theists or animists.

It is only possible to attain adept status during play if your Narrator places a multi-year gap in her narrative, during which you can undergo the prerequisite months of tedious apprenticeship that precede it.

**Liturgists** (who lead church worship) and members of saintly orders are considered as adepts for rules purposes, though their roles in society are quite different.

### Mage

Once you've reached 11W in any grimoire, you may be considered for **mage** status. You must overcome at least one significant plot obstacle to win this rank from your senior colleagues. The privileges and drawbacks of adept status continue.

At this level, you may gain, as new abilities, grimoires from any other wizardly organization. You never fail in your attempt to travel to the Other Side; at most, these attempts are treated as Costly Successes. You may discover new spell effects within existing grimoires. Begin by suggesting a thematically appropriate effect, justifying it in terms of your school's favored Malkioni theology. Make an Essence Plane journey, overcoming at least one dangerous obstacle. Then test your rating in the scripture against a Very High resistance. If successful, you rediscover a forgotten religious truth. This epiphany allows you to complete the magical formula. You may now practice this spell, and teach it to others. Most schools insist that you teach new spells to their full members, and keep them secret from outsiders. If you fail to create your rediscovered spell, you cannot gain any other additional spell during the current session.

As a mage, your administrative and fundraising duties increase. Even the most free-ranging scholar is saddled with occasional teaching duties. Your obligation to serve as a model

## The Abiding Book ▲

### The One True Book

*The Abiding Book* is the prime scripture for both established and marginal churches in the West. God wrote it a thousand years ago while witnesses watched. It is a sacred history whose magic has been proven. It tells how Creator became (or made) the Law, the Prophet, the Founder, and at last the Person who was martyred.

Sections of *The Abiding Book* are instructions on how to cast a blessing or curse. Many of these are encoded: "He used the mercury finger of his left hand on that curse." Liturgists and others that know the spiritual teachings understand what this means. Sometimes people coax other magic from *The Abiding Book*, so that each church has a special blessing, known only to them, that they have extracted from its deeper meanings.

All schools generally know *The Abiding Book's* spells, even though they have often been revised and rewritten without reference to that work. Many adepts learn only a few of these spells independently, preferring to concentrate on their school's special spells.

to apprentices and adepts redoubles. When treating your scriptural achievement as a flaw, you always face at least a -6 penalty.

However, you also gain considerable prestige within the organization, and can use your grimoire rating as an augment to social interactions when intimidating adepts and browbeating students.

## The Runes and the Gods of Glorantha

Runes originated with the very creation of Glorantha. Their precise origin is unknown, and believers in particular runes always insist that theirs was first-made. Tales link the gods of the Celestial Court with the runes, each god embodying a rune. Their interactions led to the births of the Young Gods; these newer deities are often associated with one or more parental runes as a result.

Each rune has myths associated with it. Some have elaborate cycles woven around their stories. All begin with a member of the Celestial Court who owned the rune, and end with the current Greater God who owns it. In these stories the runes are sometimes treated as things, or beings, or abstract powers, or even all three.

The powers of the Core Runes are universally acknowledged. The deities who command those runes are the Greater Gods. Those deities cannot be changed without altering the very fabric of the universe. Such alteration is against the Cosmic Compromise which begat Time, and cannot occur.

There are lesser runes, not shown here, and many signs and symbols as well.

### Rune Classifications

Minaryth Purple, the great Jonstown Librarian, stated that there were four types of runes: Elements, Powers, Forms, and Conditions. Each god has one or more specialties within the forces described by the runes. These are the areas in which the particular god, and therefore his or her priests, are most effective and versatile. To say that a god is a Fire rune god, an Illusion god, or whatever, is to say that priests of that god will specialize in that area.

## Element Runes

The Elements are what Glorantha is made of, the raw and lifeless essence, unintelligent and inert except for their primal urges. They are what form the ground you walk on, the air you breathe, and the warmth that you feel. During the Hero Wars period, five elements were recognized.

### ● Darkness

*Meaning: Darkness, cold, underworld*

The most ancient rune, the First Born, the Waker from the Void, from whom all other Elements were born or descended. Darkness was the first Element to arise out of the primal chaos. Darkness is traditionally most potent against Chaos. The mace and the rock are the weapons of Darkness and lead is its metal. The Darkness rune is manifested as Subere.

**Personality Traits:** *Cruel, cold, secretive*

**Incompatible with:** *Other Elements*

### ~ Water

*Meaning: Water, fluidity, seas, rivers*

Water was born of Darkness, set to floating over the sprawling sea like a pool surrounded by darkness. As an Element, it is called Son of Darkness, Pathway to the Underworld, and Supporter of the Earth. The whip, the flail, the net and the trident are the weapons of Water and quicksilver is its metal. The Water rune is manifested as Magasta, King of the Waters.

**Personality Traits:** *Mercurial*

**Incompatible with:** *Other Elements*

### □ Earth

*Meaning: Earth, physical things, agriculture, solidity*

Earth is the third Element, Queen of Life, Mother of Many, Supporter of All. She fills the central portion of the world, both physically and spiritually, and because of this, her surface is the primary manifestation of the physical plane. The axe is the weapon of the Earth rune and copper is its metal. The Earth rune is manifested as Ernalda, Queen of the World.

**Personality Traits:** *Pragmatic, prudent, worldly*

**Incompatible with:** *Other Elements*

### ⊙ Air

*Meaning: Air, breath, violence, weather, storm, wind, Middle Air*

Air is next, though actually Fifth Born, Umath the Son of Earth and Sky, whom he tore apart to make room for himself in the world. He is the Breaker of Laws, Destroyer of Heaven, Father of Fury, Fighter Against Darkness, and Lightbringer. The sword and the bow are the weapons of Air and silver is its metal. The Air rune is manifested as Orlanth King of the Storms.

**Personality Traits:** *Passionate, proud, unpredictable, violent*

**Incompatible with:** *Other Elements, Moon, Chaos*

### ⊙ Fire

*Meaning: Fire, sky, purity, light, stars, the Sky Dome*

Fire (or Sky) is the fifth Element, and usually the last one accepted in the common world. He is the Crown of the World, the Purity of Station, the Distant One, and the Emperor of the Sky Dome. The Sky is different from Air, for Air separates Earth and Sky. After his defeat by his son, the Sky has been aloof from mankind, although his children remain close. The spear is the weapon of Fire and gold is its metal. The Fire rune is manifested as Yelm.

**Personality Traits:** *Loyal, honest, purity*

**Incompatible with:** *Other Elements*

## Power Runes

Said to symbolize the members of the Celestial Court, the Power runes are unique in that they are formed in mutually antagonistic pairs. Opposing deities often have opposing Power runes as part of their identities. A hero of great power may be able to worship gods of two non-paired Powers, but will very rarely have more. Deities rarely if ever have access to two paired Powers.

There are several theories about the Power runes besides this dualistic one, but we know that this theory was popular during the Hero Wars period. Some said that all of the "positive"

attributes came first, while the later “negatives” were generated quickly during the War of the Gods. Other philosophers claimed that there was a gradual step-building pattern among the deities, which follows the established Creative Devolution theories. Regardless of the truth, it is important to remember that most people, including the magicians of the time, knew very little about these Powers except the rudest beginnings of their spiritual potential. Expressions and Experiences dealing with their inner natures are tasks for the greater deities, and not the races of men. Still, no one would deny that every person knows something of each of these Powers, and may tap them in varying degrees.

### III Harmony

*Meaning: Unity, cooperation, healing*

This rune is said to represent the Divine Harp with which Order was separated from Chaos. It is quite ancient and revered throughout the world. She is the power of Healing and Community.

**Personality Traits:** *Forgiving, merciful, peaceful*  
**Incompatible with:** *Disorder*

### IX Disorder

*Meaning: Disorder, trickery, trouble*

Some say that Disorder is the First Born of the Powers, and so is the foundation of the universe. The symbol itself is of unknown origin.

**Personality Traits:** *Destructive, reckless, selfish*  
**Incompatible with:** *Harmony*

### X Fertility

*Meaning: Plenty, Giving, Love, Sex*

This rune symbolizes the Ancient Cup from which the whole world was poured at the dawn of creation. It is the symbol of growth and life.

**Personality Traits:** *Generous, lustful*  
**Incompatible with:** *Death*

### † Death

*Meaning: Death, separation, conflict, endings*

Known to be the First Sword, the immortal and cursed weapon which Humakt used to bring death to the world. He is the unyielding fate of all living creatures, both mortal and divine. Death is a frightening but necessary agent of eternal change who can be used in a courageous and noble way to preserve the world.

**Personality Traits:** *Relentless, ruthless, unemotional*  
**Incompatible with:** *Fertility*

### ∞ Stasis

*Meaning: Immobility, Stability, Unchanging*

The various names for this rune illustrate the ideas behind it. It is clearly connected with the art of alchemy and the dwarfs. They claim that this is the First Rune, for it provided the foundation from which everything else was created, or else provided the foundation of hard laws which were used to overcome the forces of Chaos.

**Personality Traits:** *Stubborn, inflexible, exacting*  
**Incompatible with:** *Movement*

### ∞ Movement

*Meaning: Mobility, Change, Conflict*

This rune denotes the ancient wheel of Larnste the Mover and is often called the Larnste rune. There are claims for it to be the First Rune, for without it there would have been no growth from Chaos. Change introduced Conflict and Violence into the world, and is considered to be the sire of Air.

**Personality Traits:** *adventurous, dynamic, impulsive, reckless*  
**Incompatible with:** *Stasis*

### Y Truth

*Meaning: Truth, knowledge, writing*

This is a rune of the ancient, all-seeing sky gods, and is said to represent the torch which the Grey Ones used to escape from Chaos. Thus, its constancy and order set creation



apart from random, unsettled Chaos, and so it is yet another candidate for the First Rune.

**Personality Traits:** *Truthful, observant*

**Incompatible with:** *Illusion*

### ♁ Illusion

**Meaning:** *Falsehood, concealment, tricks*

Eurmal, the Father of Lies, always claimed that this was the First Rune, for without it there would be none of us to think we ever were. He refused to explain further.

**Personality Traits:** *Deceitful, cowardly*

**Incompatible with:** *Truth*

## Form Runes

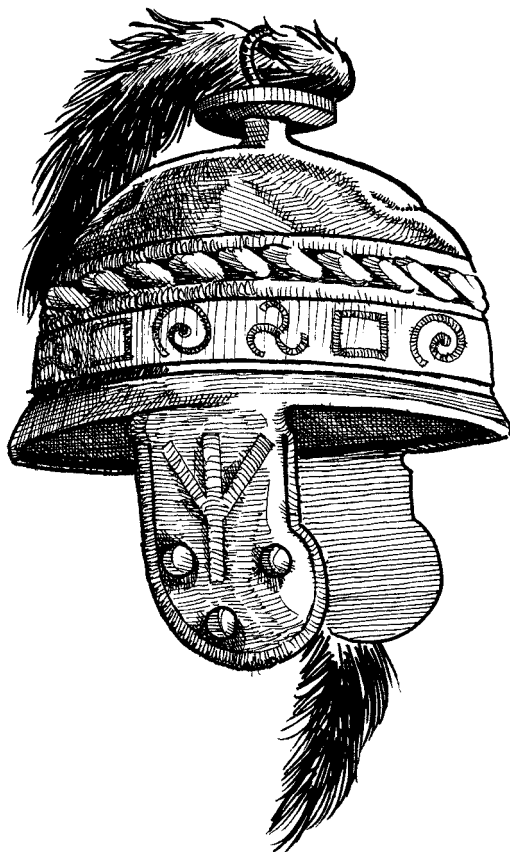
The Form runes can be understood as the basic molds that the greatest gods used to populate the many niches of the physical plane. A god is often described as being of a particular Power or Element, and the Form determines how this force is expressed. Everything has a Form rune but they are rarely a source of magic powers other than the form itself. For example, all men have the Man rune (♁) but it simply means that they are men (and not gods, discorporate beings, animals, or plants).

The following runes depict the most basic of their forms.

### ♁ Plant

**Meaning:** *Plant Life*

This rune is often named Flamal, who is known as the father of vegetation. During his lifetime, there was an intense period of vegetable growth and dominance upon the Surface World, called the Green Age. Thus, this rune is the symbol of the first life upon Glorantha. Many deities have a connection with the Plant rune, one being Aldrya, whose religion is a combination of Earth, Plant, and Fertility.



### ♁ Beast

**Meaning:** *Animal Life*

This rune is also called the Dragon's Eye, and is supposed to represent the armor plate over a dragon's eye. Dragons are thought to be the progenitors of all beasts (at least those with four or more legs), though no one has had the nerve to ask a dragon about it. It is thought to have originally been a dragonewt rune, and its complexity supports this belief, as does the fact that it is known almost nowhere else in the world except the Hykimi regions at the edge of the world.

Many animals have their own rune and are also associated with other runes. For example alynxes, sheep and bulls are all associated with the Air rune, cows, geese, pigs and snakes are associated with the Earth rune, horses and most birds are associated with the Fire rune, and so on.

If you take this rune as an affinity, write down a specific animal it relates to, such as Bear (♁).

### ♁ Man

**Meaning:** *Human Life*

This rune represents the humanoid shape, and is common among all intelligent humanoid races. Some other races interpret it as "slave" or "food." It is said to represent Grandfather Mortal, about whom numerous folktales are told; he is also sometimes called simply the Old Man, Progenitor of Races. He fathered many races, built some more, and provided the form for others which were created during the Gods Age.

### ♁ Spirit

**Meaning:** *Discorporate beings*

This rune describes the spirit aspect of the universe. Shamans are always tied to the Spirit rune, since they gain their power by dealing with the entities of this Form.

### ♁ Chaos

**Meaning:** *Entropy, evil, corruption*

This rune is descriptive of those who are descended from the forces of entropy. Such creatures are usually bound to some Form, since even Chaos must obey the Laws of Time, but it might be combined with any other rune, even opposed Powers. Nothing is totally safe from the taint of Chaos.

## Condition Runes

There are three main Condition runes and many minor ones. They often modify by showing which aspect of an Element, Power, or Form is served by a deity. The use of such Condition runes usually masks the true identifying runes of the deity or individual described, although it may also signify the independence of a hero or magician from religious ties.

### ♁ Mastery

**Meaning:** *Leadership, authority, sovereignty*

The all-purpose rune, Mastery can be used as a symbol of Mastery of Men, Magic, or the Elements. As Master of Men, it describes a hero. As Master of Magic, it symbolizes any deity of cult of reasonable power. As Master of the Elements it denotes a sort of innate intelligence among the physical stuff of the world, or what we commonly know as the Elemental Demons.





The exact origins of the rune are lost, but it's connected with the Dead Gods whose gigantic crowns are still sometimes found among the abandoned peaks of the world. This rune is manifested as Arachne Solara.

### ⚔ Magic

*Meaning: Communication between worlds*

This rune indicates a connection between men and gods. Almost redundant in this magic-rich world, this rune describes how a deity or individual deals with the power of another rune. Since it is impossible to deal with the runes without magic, it means much. The symbol also has a much deeper meaning, denoting an individual's "personal power."

### ⚡ Communication

*Meaning: Communication, trade, exchange*

The Communication rune, also called the Issaries rune, is a unique composite of the Movement and Harmony runes. It symbolizes language and speech, passage and transit, travel, trade and roads. The God Learners widely popularized this rune as the symbol of trade, but it is more than just that.

**Personality Traits:** Fair dealing, open minded

### ☾ Moon

*Meaning: Illusion, cycles, balance*

The Lunars claim that the Moon is the sixth Element, but this is rarely accepted outside the Lunar Empire. This rune reappeared in the Third Age; its obvious presence and the power of the rune in its locale prove its importance. The Moon rune embraces and includes Chaos and wages a brutal war with Orlanth over control of the Middle Air.

### Other Runes

More runes are known throughout Glorantha. These include specializations of the Element runes, sometimes called sub-elements, such as Cold (❄), Heat (☀), and Light (☾). Some runes are linked to specific creatures, races, cultures, or lands, such as the runes associated with Shargash (♁) and Yinkin (♂). Others are similar to the Condition runes, and may simply represent less universal concepts or symbols. This category includes such runes as Hell (♁), Luck (♁), Fate (♁), Law (♁), and the Eternal Battle (♁).

Finally, entirely different runic systems are known, such as the Celestial symbols used in Dara Happa or the ideograms that spell out the names of the deities of Pelanda.

## Pantheons and Runes

Strong deities lead others less powerful than themselves; such a group is called a pantheon. The three pantheons given here list only a few of their better-known members and actually include many more gods and goddesses. These pantheons include entities that provide divine magic, spirit magic and even wizardry.

### The Lunar Pantheon ☾

The traditional religion in Dara Happa is the Solar pantheon headed by Yelm. In the Golden Age, Yelm ruled the universe with benevolence and perfection. This time of order and happiness continued for a hundred thousand years until the time of the Rebel Gods who murdered the Emperor, destroyed his harmonious realm, and fell to squabbling with each other over the shards of the world. But Yelm's purity and virtue brought the Rebel Gods to him, repentant. Yelm returned to the world, though now he must spend half of his time in the underworld.

In the Third Age, the Seven Mothers brought back Sedenya, the Moon Goddess, and initiated a new religion in Peloria. The

reborn Moon taught some of her followers the way to become immortal. Her pantheon is composed of mortals who have so succeeded. The Lunar pantheon is worshipped within the Lunar Empire, which covers Peloria and now stretches into Dragon Pass and Prax.

Yelm (☉☰☰)  
Lodril (☐☒☒)  
Shargash (☉☉)

sun god and emperor  
earth father and lord of matter  
the destroyer, underworld god, and war god

Buserian (Y☉)

the recorder and sky watcher  
(approached from the Y rune)

Erissa (☒☒☒)  
Sedenya (☒☉☑)

healer (approached from the ☒☒☒ rune)  
the Red Goddess, the reincarnating Moon

Seven Mothers (☒☉☑)  
Etyries (☉☑)  
Yanafal Tarnils (☉☑)  
Cerise Church (☉☒)

recreators of the Red Goddess  
messenger of the Red Goddess  
the Lunar war god  
Lunar wizardry, grimoires include  
Twelve Hundred Names of Rufelza,  
The Cerise Book, and Seven Steps of  
Life and Birth



## The Praxian Tradition ☩

Prax was once rich and green, until Chaos slew the great spirit Genert and his Garden became the desolate Wastes. The Praxian Tradition is dominated by the needs of survival and follows the ways set down by its founder, Waha. Waha made the Survival Covenant, dividing the tribe between those who would eat and those who would be eaten, between people and animals. As Prax is a land full of dead and Sundered spirits, there are many local practices and independent spirits that can be contacted to save a clan from hunger or lead a raid to victory. The spirit societies of the Praxian Tradition provide mainly spirits, and not runic affinities.

Waha (†𐌺)	khan of khans
Storm Bull (𐌲𐌹)	berserker, Chaos-killer
Eiritha (𐌵𐌰)	Mother of Herds
Daka Fal (𐌺𐌺)	judge of the dead
Horned Man (𐌶𐌹)	the great shaman

## The Storm Pantheon ☩

The Storm Tribe headed by Orlanth and Ernalda is the dominant religion of Dragon Pass. Its deities range in demeanor from the civilized Issaries to the brutal Urox. Orlanthi mythology is full of personal combat and heroism, reckless deeds and

honorable responses to impossible situations. The storm gods overthrew the oppressive and evil Emperor and liberated the world. When too many people complained of hunger and fear, Orlanth accepted his responsibility and led the Lightbringers into Hell to restore the world.

Orlanth (𐌲𐌲𐌺)	storm god, king and warrior
Ernalda (𐌵𐌰𐌺)	earth goddess, queen and source of life
Chalana Arroy (𐌵𐌺𐌺)	healer (approached from the 𐌺𐌺 rune)
Issaries (𐌺)	god of speech, trade and travel
Lhankor Mhy (𐌶𐌺)	god of knowledge (approached from the 𐌶 rune)
Humakt (†𐌶)	god of death and war (approached from the † rune)
Elmal (𐌰𐌶)	the sun god (approached from the 𐌰 rune)
Urox (𐌲𐌹)	the storm bull, berserker god, Chaos-killer
Yinkin (𐌶)	god of alynxes, hunting and sensuality
Kolat (𐌶𐌲)	great spirit of the winds (approached from the 𐌶 rune and providing spirits instead of runic affinities)









RESOLUTION POINT TABLE				
	Level of Success			
Level of Success	Critical	Success	Failure	Fumble
Critical	1	2	3	5
Success	2	1	2	3
Failure	3	2	1	2
Fumble	5	3	2	N/A

RISING ACTION CONSEQUENCE TABLE			
Difference between Results	Loser Negative Consequences	Winner Negative Consequences	Winner's Victory Level / Loser's Defeat Level
1	Hurt	Hurt	Marginal
2	Hurt	Unharmed	
3	Impaired	Unharmed	Minor
4	Impaired	Unharmed	
5	Injured	Unharmed	Major
6	Injured	Unharmed	
7	Dying	Unharmed	Complete
8	Dead	Unharmed	
9	Dead	Unharmed	

CLIMACTIC SCENE CONSEQUENCE TABLE	
Total RPs Scored against Character	State of Adversity
0	Unharmed
1	Dazed
2	Hurt
3	Hurt
4	Impaired
5	Impaired
6	Injured
7	Injured
8	Dying
9+	Dead

CLIMACTIC SCENE VICTORY LEVEL TABLE	
State of Adversity	Victory Level
Hurt	Marginal
Impaired	Minor
Injured	Major
Dead or Dying	Complete

ASSIST RESULTS TABLE	
Contest Outcome	Change to Score against Recipient
Complete Victory	-4
Major Victory	-3
Minor Victory	-2
Marginal Victory	-1
Marginal Defeat	0
Minor Defeat	+1
Major Defeat	+2
Complete Defeat	+3

AUGMENT RESULTS TABLE	
Success Level	Bonus
Complete Victory	+12
Major Victory	+9
Minor Victory	+6
Marginal Victory	+3
Marginal Defeat	0
Minor Defeat	0
Major Defeat	0
Complete Defeat	-3

HEALING RESISTANCES TABLE	
State of Adversity	Resistance
Hurt	Low
Impaired	Moderate
Injured	High
Dying	Very High

PASS/FAIL RESISTANCE ASSIGNMENT TABLE	
Previous Two Results	Resistance for Present Contest
3-4 Defeats	Very Low
2 Defeats	Low
2 Ties	Low
1 Defeat + 1 Victory or Tie	Moderate
2 Victories, 0 Defeats	High
3-4 Victories, 0 Defeats	Very High

RESISTANCE CLASS TABLE	
Class	Value
Nearly Impossible	Base +12
Very High	Base +9
High	Base +6
Moderate	Base
Low	Base -6
Very Low	Base -12 or 6, whichever is lower

BASE VALUES TABLE		
Sessions to Date	Base Value	Augment Value
1-2	14	14
3-4	15	14
5-6	16	15
7-8	17	15
9-10	18	16
11-12	19	16
13-14	20	17
15-16	21	17
17-18	22	18
and so on...		

PYRRHIC VICTORY CONSEQUENCES TABLE	
Outcome	State of Adversity
Any Defeat	Dead
Marginal Victory	Dead
Minor Victory	Dying
Major Victory	Injured
Complete Victory	Impaired

RESOURCE DEPLETION TABLE	
Contest Outcome	Depletion Penalty
Complete Victory	0
Major Victory	-3
Minor Victory	-3
Marginal Victory	-3
Marginal Defeat	-6
Minor Defeat	-6
Major Defeat	-6
Complete Defeat	-9

RESOURCE FLUCTUATION TABLE	
Contest Outcome	Depletion Penalty
Complete Victory	+9
Major Victory	+6
Minor Victory	+3
Marginal Victory	0
Marginal Defeat	0
Minor Defeat	-3
Major Defeat	-6
Complete Defeat	-9









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# HEROQUEST

## Core Rules

*Anything you can imagine, you can play...*

HeroQuest is the innovative, dynamic, and flexible rules engine by Robin Laws, suitable for play in any genre or setting. It presents a simple and flexible system that allows Game Masters to make decisions the way authors and screenwriters do when creating novels, TV episodes and movies. HeroQuest encourages creative input from your players, resulting in an exciting, unpredictable narrative created through group collaboration. Its resolution methods and scalable character levels make it equally suited for any genre, from epic fantasy to satirical soap opera. Whether your next game idea draws on horror, war, westerns, martial arts, pulps, cyberpunk, cliff-hangers, giant robots, super-powered heroes, space opera, cop action, corporate intrigue, furry animals, swashbuckling adventure, Greek tragedy or even drawing room comedy, HeroQuest can handle it! You can even use HeroQuest to emulate a musical - although it won't do the singing or dancing for you.

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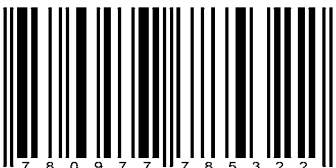
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This book contains everything needed for play:

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- Narrating** - the secrets for balancing the give and take between narrators and players.
- Followers and Support** - how your sidekick, followers, horde, army or community help.
- Creating Genres** - details for creating and detailing your own game world.
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