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# *Questers of the Middle Realms*



A fantasy roleplaying game of vaults and vermin



# Questers of the Middle Realms

*A fantasy role-playing game of vaults and vermin*

*by*

*Silver Branch Games*

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Written and designed by Tim Gray.

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

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# *Questers of the Middle Realms*

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# Introduction

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

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

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

## What is a roleplaying game?

A role-playing game (RPG) is basically a fun way for a group of people to sit round a table and play “let’s pretend” using a particular set of rules and background/setting/game world.

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

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



## Making it your own

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

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

Similarly, there are many organisations out there but you will decide which are important in your game. There are some examples later to get you started.

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

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

## Ways to play

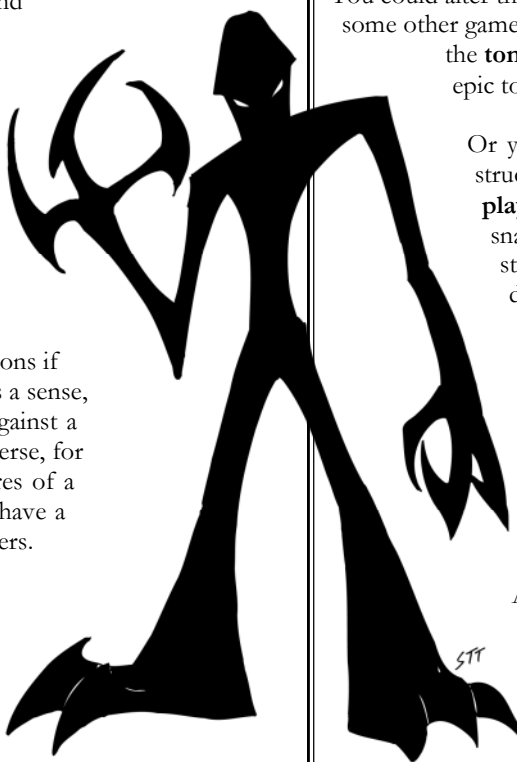
You don’t have to play in the “default” style: apply what’s here in the way that suits your group best. You could run a straight-laced traditional fantasy game, or epic swords and sorcery, or tweak it to suit new gamers or youngsters. QMR is adaptable: it reflects back the flavour and detail you decide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

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

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

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

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



## *So it's like this...*

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

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

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

### **Build-it-yourself approach**

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

There are vast ranks of **gods**, powerful and capricious entities with their own spheres of influence and complicated relationships within the cosmic hierarchy. Fortunately we take the approach of only detailing the ones you want to focus on in your game, invented by the players or GM. Lesser beings earn **Favour** for pleasing a god (or lose it for angering one), and anyone can draw on this for little bits of divine aid. Trained priests can do more impressive miracles.

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

### **Places**

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

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

**Dwarfholds** - dwarf cities burrowed into mountains.

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

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

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

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

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

**Murklemere** - biggest lake, with distinctive wildlife.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Races**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Questers**

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

*Questers  
of the Middle Realms*

# Rules

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

The core element of PDQ is the concept of a prose, descriptive, do-it-yourself, wide-ranging **Quality** standing in as attribute, advantage, merit, flaw, skill, or incapability.

The version of PDQ found in QMR has been adapted for a play experience reminiscent of Certain Well-known Fantasy Games, while keeping the simplicity and flexibility PDQ provides. One of the common ideas in fantasy gaming is that characters start off as insignificant pond scum with low abilities and limited wealth and equipment, and develop over time to big fish with fearsome competence, extraordinary wealth and, strangely, lives no less beset by trouble and uncertainty. Characters are in kit form: players create them a little at a time, aiming for an effective “build”, and each increment of character power is an exciting point in the game. Characters also build up a collection of loot – gold, gems, enchanted backscratchers, Wands of Ineffable Doom, grateful princesses and so on.

## Qualities

Qualities describe your character’s particular talents, skills, and flaws. They also provide game mechanics for how those abilities or disabilities work in play (see below, *Task Resolution Basics*). Qualities should grow out of the character concept and game setting (for instance, as this is a fantasy setting you couldn’t have anything depending on modern technology).

Qualities are often drawn from five general areas:

- ✦ **Physical.** Having to do with the body, athleticism, or natural talents;
- ✦ **Mental.** Areas of study, intellectual acuity, education;
- ✦ **Social.** Groups the character is a member of or associates with, skills in dealing with people;
- ✦ **Professional.** Knowledge and skills picked up on the job;
- ✦ **Other.** Esoteric skills, magical powers or physical resources.

## PDQ Master Chart

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



## Penumbra

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

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

For example, consider a character in a modern setting who has the Quality of “Teacher.” For some *PDQ* games, that will be perfectly fine; for others, too broad. The GM might ask the player to refine the Quality, to give a better idea of the sorts of things that will fall under the Teacher Quality’s penumbra. So: “Teacher” could become “University History Prof,” “Secondary School Chemistry Teacher,” or “Primary School Teacher.” While all would cover the basic concept of education, each individual choice will bring different skills under the Quality penumbra – not just their fields of interest, but also supplementary knowledge: the University History Prof would have more experience with (academic) politics, the Secondary School Chemistry Teacher would know more about adolescent fads, and the Primary School Teacher would be better at dealing with kids on a sugar high.

Take another example more suited to the world of *Questers*: “Swordsmanship”. This Quality would be useful not just in hacking away at things, but also in cleaning and maintaining swords, discovering the location of nearby swordsmiths and fencing trainers, and so forth. If the player had instead selected a Quality of “Rapier,” the Quality would only be useful in fighting with that kind of sword, and involve knowledge surrounding rapiers exclusively.

**Overlapping Qualities** - if a situation falls under the penumbra of more than one of your Qualities, all of them can help to accomplish the task.

Qualities for **gear** and **Arcane powers** - equipment and magic - are important in QMR and get their own sections shortly.

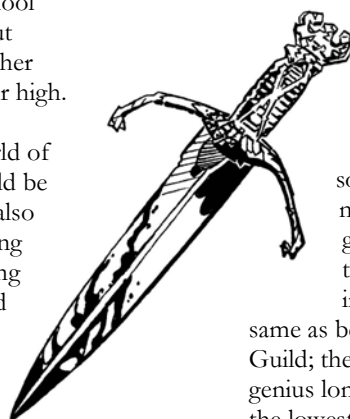
**Professional** Qualities give a general cluster of the central abilities for a profession. They never give supernatural powers, even for ones like Mystic or

## Quality Examples

- † **Physical:** Strong, Agile, Hardy, Climbing, Knife-fighting, Roguishly Handsome, Ballroom Dance, Perseverance
- † **Mental:** Quick-witted, Strong-willed, Observation, Knowledge of the Supernatural, Medicine, Craft Metal, Philosophy, Fine Food and Drink, Strategy & Tactics
- † **Social:** Persuasion, Trickery, Intimidation, Alluring, Taxidermists’ Guild, Conversationalist, Charming Effusive
- † **Professional:** Warrior, Thief, Magus, Street Urchin, Spy, Scholar, Bounty Hunter, Mad Inventor.

Priest, though they certainly give knowledge of how such things work and probably the ability to detect them. Powers must be bought separately.

**Personality.** Remember that Qualities can also cover your demeanour, drives and relationships with people and organisations – for instance Joker, Taciturn, Virtuous, Loves Sister, Protector of Tribe, Be the Greatest Swordsman. With the right motivation even modest skills can win the day!



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

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

## Ranks

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

- ✦ **Poor** [-2]
- ✦ **Average** [0]
- ✦ **Good** [+2]
- ✦ **Expert** [+4]
- ✦ **Master** [+6]

The numbers in square brackets following the Rank of the Quality show the Rank's **Modifier** – how much is added to or subtracted from a 2d6 dice roll (see *Task Resolution*). Characters have some things going for them (Strengths), and at least one thing working against them (Weakness). At everything else, characters are neither noteworthy nor inept – that is, they're Average [0].

## Strengths and Weaknesses

A **Strength** is an inherent positive aspect (benefit, skill, talent, attribute, or power) of a character. Come up with a word or a pithy phrase to sum up the Strength. Examples include Fighting, Willpower, Fly Like A Bird, Find Bargains, and Run Away!

A **Weakness** is an inherent negative aspect of the character, stemming from ignorance, flawed understanding, physical or mental incapability, or some other vulnerability. A word of advice: pick something that will be fun or entertaining (for you the player, not necessarily you the character) to flub at! Come up with a word or a pithy phrase to sum up the Weakness. Examples here include Glass Jaw, Weak-willed, Slow As Molasses, and Wallflower. Weaknesses are always Poor [-2] Rank.

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

## Notes on choosing Qualities

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

**Overlapping Qualities** fill a similar role to "feats", "edges" or whatever in other RPGs: they let you boost your effectiveness at specific types of task by picking Qualities that work in tandem, at the expense of broader expertise and flexibility as you use up precious Quality slots. For example you could take both Knight and Swordsmanship to combine when fighting with a blade, but with all that training you probably didn't get out much.

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

## Gear

Objects can have Qualities attached, making them important to the story. The simplest is just the general quality (small Q) of the thing, reflecting materials, workmanship, role in the grand tapestry of fate and the like – e.g. Good (+2) Sword. This comes into play when the item performs its key function(s). But other Qualities can be attached too, including Arcane ones at the GM's discretion, in which case you might be as well to record the item like a mini-character.

There are three sorts of gear.

- ✦ **Shadow items.** We assume that ordinary items necessary for practising a character's Qualities come along with those Qualities, like a lockpick with *Pick Locks*. Characters also have the bare essentials for travelling around and getting by day to day. They're part of the scenery; we just assume their use and don't remark upon it. These are rated Average as they're not otherwise defined. They can also be broken, stolen or otherwise taken away by cruel fate (i.e. the GM).
- ✦ **Character items.** These are objects that have been bought using the character's Quality ranks. They are effectively part of the character. If a player invests Quality ranks in an item they should

not be permanently deprived of it, though they might lose the use of it temporarily if it's lost, stolen or in need of repair. At start of play character item Qualities can't go above Good (or Average if they have Arcane Powers). Raising them in play might be more a matter of learning how to use the item's full potential than actually bolting new bits on. Stuff that's unusual, rare or expensive like Plate Armour needs to be taken as a Quality. In fact, any item that you want to give you a bonus for rolls needs to be specified.

- 7 **Props.** These are objects that are not part of the character, but are available for character use for a while. You don't start with any: they're gained and lost in play. Examples might be a Heaping Helping of Gold, Wand of Precipitate Micturation or Semi-loyal Retainer. This is covered in *Loot* below.

**Weapons.** Note that different types don't, in themselves, make any difference to the damage you do in combat. Having a bog standard Honkin' Sword of Hurtin' just allows you to use your *Honkin' Sword of Hurtin' Fightin'* Quality. The system defaults to focusing on the characters, not the equipment list, but you can bring a lot of gear in if you want.

**Living beings as gear.** This is certainly possible: you can have an Expert (+4) Warhorse or a Good (+2) Squire as character Qualities, for instance, and maybe even as Props. There's a bit more on this under *Task Notes and Options* below.

**Exotic gear.** Some funky and/or rare equipment cannot be used with ordinary combat skill-type Qualities, but only with ones specific to it. For instance a Dwarven Experimental Flame Carbine is beyond an ordinary crossbowman, and most fencers do not know how to use a Triple Sword of Lalthnari. Innate traits like Hawkeye or Agility would still apply, of course.

## Arcane Qualities

These are supernatural and magical things beyond what ordinary people can do. Those trained in magic have them, and so do some beasts. They can also be attached to objects. The GM may choose to allow starting characters not connected to an Arcane organisation to have one relatively low-key Arcane Quality from an accident of birth, inheriting a magical sword or some such thing.

*Examples:* Breathe Fire\*, Move Objects\*, Summon Insect Swarm\*, Astonishing Leap\*, Create Undead\*, Holy Smiting\*, Discerning Glance\*.

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

**Powers.** When you put the first Rank into an active Arcane Quality that lets you do something special like hurling lightning or turning into a coypu you get it at Average [0], not Good [+2]: the benefit is gaining the ability to do it at all. (This also means characters specialising in Arcane powers are less able to soak up damage. You could see this as them being scrawny scholar types, or as the trade-off for being able to do fancy stuff in the story.) There's a whole section on using *Magic* later on.

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



# Task Resolution Basics

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

## Simple Situations

In *simple situations*, the task is clear-cut, there are no outstanding issues interfering with the attempted action, or randomness would bog down the game. In a simple situation, the GM looks at the *PDQ Master Chart* and determines the Difficulty Rank of the task. Then, the GM compares that Difficulty Rank to the character's most appropriate Quality Rank. The higher Rank of the two "wins". If the Difficulty Rank of the task is equal to or higher than the character's relevant Quality Rank, the task becomes a *complicated situation*.

Examples: Jefferson wants to climb a wall using his Good [+2] Outdoorsman Quality (he successfully convinces the GM that climbing a cliff face is similar enough to climbing a wall for it to count). He'll automatically succeed in scaling Poor [5] and Average [7] Difficulty walls.

If another character, Kristov, wanted to climb a wall, he has no applicable Quality, and so would have the default Quality Rank of Average [0]. This means he can only automatically succeed in climbing Poor [5] Difficulty walls.

For Jefferson, Good [9] or higher Difficulty Rank walls are complicated; for Kristov, Average [7] or higher Difficulty Rank walls are complicated.

## Complicated Situations

Dice rolls are made in *complicated situations*: where comparisons of Rank are inconclusive, or when randomness is desired. Complicated situations are when Quality and Difficulty Ranks are tied, or when Quality Rank is lower than Difficulty Rank. To attempt a complicated situation, the PC rolls two regular six-sided dice (2d6), adds the two results together and adds on the Modifier for their Quality Rank. To succeed, the PC must match or roll higher than the Target Number of the task's Difficulty Rank.

Examples: Jefferson the Barbarian is trying to climb a Good [9] Difficulty wall using his Good [+2] Outdoorsman Quality. The Target Number of Good [9] Difficulty – as noted in the brackets – is 9. Jefferson must roll 2d6 and add his Modifier of +2, trying to match or beat a 9. He rolls a 3 and a 5, giving him  $3+5+2 = 10$ ! He succeeds in climbing the wall.

Kristov wants to follow Jefferson up that Good [9] Difficulty wall: again, he has no applicable Quality, and so must use the default Quality Rank of Average [0]. He must match or beat a 9 when rolling 2d6. He rolls exactly the same thing that Jefferson did: a 3 and a 5, and since Average Rank Qualities have no Modifier, that's a total of 8. This is below the Target Number of the wall, so Kristov fails.

When a character's Qualities are set against the Qualities of other characters this isn't just complicated, it's a *conflict situation* (see below).

## Conflict Situations

*Conflict situations* involve active resistance by another to a character's attempts to perform a task: trying to punch a guy in the face, out-thinking a chess player, running a race, or convincing a guard that you weren't really breaking in. Conflict situations include more than just the immediate success or failure of an attempted action; here, conflict includes the back and forth of an active contest, out-maneuvring the competition and wearing down an opponent's resistance. Examples of conflict situations include combat, seduction, haggling, debating, and so forth - the same rules apply in each case. (Note that some groups won't necessarily want to use the conflict situation mechanics to resolve social interactions, and will want to rely on pure roleplaying instead. This is fine – the rules structure is there if a group wishes to use it.)

In conflict situations, the characters involved compare the results of 2d6 plus Modifier rolls; the highest successful result wins and does "damage" to the loser. (PDQ uses an abstract form of damage, reducing characters' Qualities, rather than simulating bruises, stinging retorts, etc.) The conflict goes back and forth in exchanges, with opponents wearing each other down until one of them is out of the contest. Conflict situations have a set of specific rules, presented later.

# Upshifts and Downshifts

## Upshifts (Being Badass)

This is how PCs get more bang for their buck. If players describe their characters' attempts to perform an action in a graphic, flavourful and entertaining way, the GM can give them an *Upshift*: for that particular action, the PC rolls as if their Quality were one level higher (essentially giving an additional +2 to their roll). So, rather than "I hit the sailor" (or "I haggle"), the player says something like "I grab the sailor's shirt with one hand and pull him closer to punch him in the face with my other fist – arr, matey!" (or says, in character, "May the fleas from a thousand camels infest the beds of your children if you try to rob me in this way!"). If the PC had a Good [+2] Pirate (or Bargaining) Quality, this would change his roll in attempting to hit the sailor (or haggle with the merchant) from 2d6+2 to 2d6+4, as if he were Expert [+4] Rank.

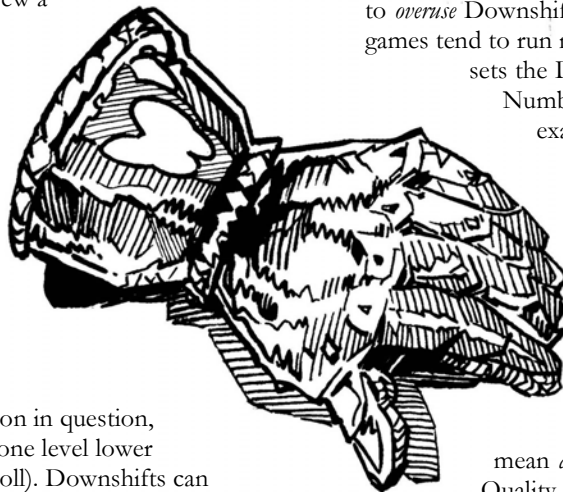
**Upshifts above Master Rank** add an *extra die* to the character's roll (i.e. instead of rolling 2d6+6+2, the character rolls 3d6+6).

## Downshifts

While *functionally* the same thing (a -2 to a 2d6 plus Modifiers roll), the reasons behind having a Weakness or incurring Downshifts are different.

For example, Jefferson has a *Weakness* of Poor [-2] Reader. If he needs to brew a really complicated and unusual herbal salve, requiring reading an apothecary's manual, this Weakness will affect his overall competence (Good [+2] Herbalist). Instead of rolling 2d6+2, Jefferson will be rolling 2d6+0. That's just par for the course, an effect of his Strength and Weakness interacting in that particular situation.

A *Downshift* means that for the action in question, the PC rolls as if his Quality were one level lower (essentially giving him a -2 to the roll). Downshifts can come from a number of sources: for instance if a combatant decides to Play It Caggy (see below, *Conflict Strategies*), or the effects of Failure or Damage Ranks (see below, *Damage*).



## Being Lame-ass

*Being Lame-ass* is – in some ways – the opposite of Being Badass. Boring, uncharacteristic, or disruptive roleplaying can ruin everybody else's fun, and after all, the point of roleplaying is to have a good time. If a player is reading, refusing to pay attention, watching TV, pedantically rules-lawyering, utterly ignoring the characterisation of their PC, being pointlessly abusive or distracting to other players, or – saints preserve us! – *sleeping* at the gaming table, they are working against the overall good time. In these cases, the GM *could* give the offending PC a Downshift based on the player's behaviour... but what's the point? If the player's not interested enough in the game to even pay attention, penalising his character will probably have little effect on his behaviour.

Try to discover the cause of the player's Being Lame-ass. Maybe it's something about the focus or subject matter of the campaign, a difference of roleplaying style, or even an unrelated personal issue that's bugging the player. The answer to Being Lame-ass is to discuss the situation outside of the game – either by taking a break or talking between sessions – and try to work through it like grown-ups. A little bit of open communication can do wonders for these sorts of issues.

While judicious use of Downshifts to reflect a sudden or unexpected change in the complexity of a situation can work very well, GMs should resist the temptation to *overuse* Downshifts as situational modifiers. *PDQ* games tend to run more smoothly if the GM simply sets the Difficulty Rank (and thus, Target Number) of a task appropriately. For example, if the PCs are attempting to climb a Average [7] Difficulty wall and it begins to rain, a Downshift to each of their relevant Qualities makes sense. However, if it's already raining when they begin their attempt, simply make the wall Good [9] difficulty from the start.

**Downshifts below Poor Rank** mean *automatic failure* in the use of that Quality.

# Character Creation

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

A **character sheet** to record your characters' abilities and development appears at the end of the book (with a Roll of the Heavens sheet to go on the back for recording the gods your group invents, explained further in the *Setting* section). You can print or copy these as needed.

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

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

**Level** is just for tracking character improvement, and starts at 1.

**Personality hooks.** Every character has a Virtue and a Vice – defining features of their personality. **Virtues** are features usually considered positive, like Brave, Daring, Generous, Honest, Just and Kind. **Vices** are things generally considered negative, like Cowardly, Miserly, Stubborn, Cynical and Lazy. These serve two purposes: they act as hooks to help you play the character, and they help you to gain Fortune Points (see below). They aren't Qualities, but you might want to take a corresponding Quality to make you more effective at those sorts of actions as well.

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

**Homeland.** You have Good (+2) in Homeland (specify – see setting info): everyone is from somewhere. It reflects basic general knowledge of an area's people, places, wildlife and so on. It might sometimes be useful for actions or personality traits

common to those who live there, at the GM's discretion, but this should be quite rare. Homeland often stays at Good throughout a character's career.

**Organisation.** You have Organisation (specify) at Good: everyone has done their initial training with someone. Invent an organisation (or use an existing one, like the examples later on) that the character is a member of or has been associated with in the past. At least some of your other Qualities should reflect this. That organisation then exists for the purpose of the game: characters can and should refer to it (as opposed to all the others we don't know about) and it should be the source of occasional story elements (like a rival, or agents trying to bring a PC back), especially if more than one player picks the same one. (If it's a temple you can invent a patron deity at start of play, or use an existing one – see *The Roll of the Heavens* later on for more about this.)

**Basic Qualities.** Allocate 5 ranks of Qualities as you wish - but see the *Limits* box below.

Buying a Quality at Good takes one rank, buying one at Expert takes two and a Master rank takes three. (But for Arcane Powers Average costs one and so on.)

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

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



## Limits

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

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

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

## Sample character: Jefferson the Barbarian

Jefferson (a name of great honour in his tribe!) appears in some of the examples in the rules sections. Let's work him up in detail as a starting character.

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

He's Human, so from *Races* (see below) that gives one Good personality-type Quality. Let's go for Superstitious.

We also need the personality hooks. I go for a traditional barbarian Vice of Hot-tempered. But he's a simple man and doesn't hold a grudge. Virtue might be Honest, but we'll go for True Friend.

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

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

For Weakness we'll have Poor (-2) Reader - his people aren't big on the written word.

We know that he'll be Level 1 and have 1 Fortune Point to start. That's everything we need!

### Jefferson the Barbarian

Race: Human

Level: 1

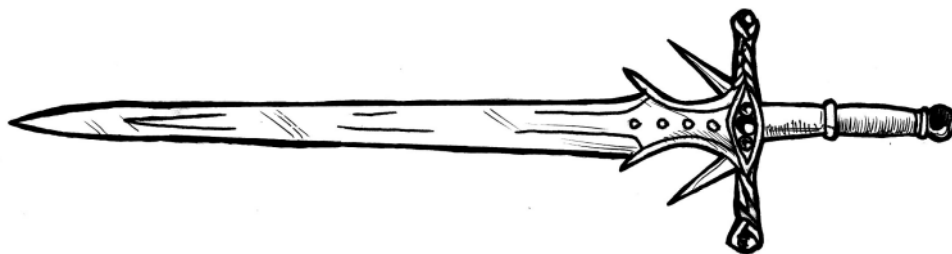
Virtue: True Friend

Vice: Hot-tempered

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

Weakness: Poor (-2) Reader

Fortune: 1



# Races

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

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

**Rank.** A starting character's Racial Strength is always Good. It can, however, be increased through levelling up in the normal way. Old or powerful members of a non-human race often have higher ranks in the Racial Quality. This is not essential though: if being an inventor is a more important part of the character than being a dwarf, those are the Qualities that'll get developed.

The race abilities work in one of these ways.

† **MOD abilities.** The Racial Quality works a bit like a cluster of normal Qualities, adding its current MOD into the mix whenever the situation is appropriate. The GM should have a bit of flexibility to interpret this: usually it's limited to what's listed, but occasionally other applications will seem suitable.

† **Downshift abilities.** You can do something special, but you have to take a temporary Downshift on your Racial Quality to do it. It can't go below Average. The Downshifts last till the start of the next scene. Basically what this does is regulate how big a role a non-human character's specialness plays in the story: for instance if they use up their funky elf powers doing something impressive those elf powers will be less prominent in the rest of the scene, leaving more room for others to show what they can do.

† **Innate abilities.** These are just on or off - they're not even Qualities, just things you can do that most people can't (or vice versa). They remain the same regardless of the Racial Quality's current Rank.

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

## Humans

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

† Humans do not have a Racial Quality. Instead, they get one extra Good [+2] personality-type Quality (Brave, Duplicitous, Hates Pixies, etc), with no corresponding Weakness.

## Elves

They look like tall, slim, well-proportioned, attractive humans with slightly pointed ears and a superior attitude. Elves were the first intelligent species created by the gods, and they are immortal. This turned out to be a very bad idea. The elves are not completely adapted to their immortality, so as the years drag on they become desperate for any diversion to chase away the tedium. Most engage in debaucheries of all kinds, and they have a reputation for it.

Elves are also known for their knowledge and skills, which they generally keep from the "lesser" races to maintain superiority.

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





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

## Strengths

### MOD:

- ✦ **Flawless.** Maintaining your appearance and composure (e.g. resisting dirt or taunting).

### Downshift:

- ✦ **Immortality.** Elves return from death, knitting back together again, unless the body is destroyed sufficiently to make this impossible (minced, burned, dissolved, etc.). You recover any damage needed to get all your Qualities up to Average (Failure Ranks first - see *Conflict*), then continue recovering in the normal way. This process usually happens within an hour, but sometimes takes longer if you have to wait to get some *Elf* Ranks back first.
- ✦ **Superior** – You can pull off occasional truly impressive feats due to your great age and experience, superhuman reflexes or maybe the aerodynamics of your pointy ears. Burn a rank to use another Quality's Target Number instead of its MOD for one specified task. It can't be a feat of physical strength or endurance and you can only do it if you have an audience, preferably of the lesser races.

### Innate:

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

## Weaknesses

### MOD:

- ✦ **Jaded** - resisting an opportunity to do something that'll provide interesting sensations.
- ✦ **Reputation** – in social situations where morals or integrity are involved, e.g. getting someone to trust you. (Even other elves. They know what you're like.)

### Innate:

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

## Dwarves

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



Dwarves are sexless creatures, lacking the relevant biological equipment and psychological drives. This gives them a lot of clear thinking time compared to most other species. They do have the impulse to create, and most of them are pretty good at working with stone, metal and jewels. As their minor works seem to be popular with other races they have built trade links. They also like games of strategy and logic, crossrune puzzles and suchlike. Their society is practical and egalitarian, with an atmosphere somewhat like a gentlemen's club. Reports of hard drinking and rough fighting are based on misunderstanding: a fine dwarven liquor using select fungi and mountain spring water for a delicate flavour and pleasant buzz will blow the ears off many other species, and enthusiastic demonstration of competitive martial arts can break less rugged folk.

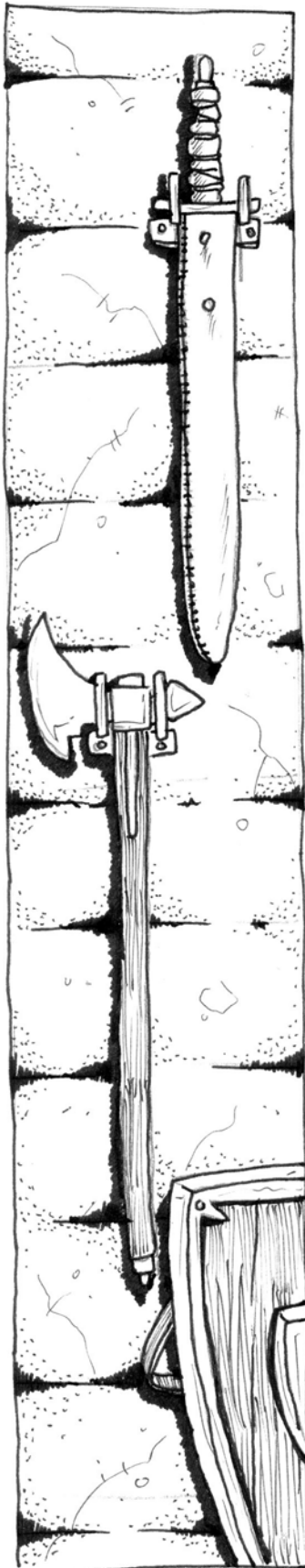
## Strengths

### MOD:

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

### Downshift:

- ✦ **Endurance** - dwarves are tough and stubborn, and can burn off their Racial Quality to shrug off most harmful effects as described in *Conflict Rules*.



#### Innate:

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

#### Weaknesses

##### MOD:

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

#### Innate:

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

## Orcs

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

The Great Blood is long over and the gods are not concerned about elf numbers any more, so the orcs are largely forgotten. Their society is changing. Some stick to the “old ways” of nomadic elf-hunting in small bands with evocative names. Others are trying to build their own civilisation, merging bands together into “parties” with ever-longer composite names and

settling permanently in a territory. Some are even able to cooperate with elves for short periods. A party often adapts one or more elements that it perceives as being part of civilised culture, like all wearing hats and carrying umbrellas. Sadly, these never suit them at all.

## Strengths

### MOD:

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

## Weaknesses

### MOD:

- ✦ **Ignorant** – orcs are ill-equipped for cerebral tasks like solving puzzles or remembering abstract lore.
- ✦ **Uncouth** – orc manners and appearance mean attempts to fit into civilised society rarely pay off, e.g. making an impression, observing etiquette.
- ✦ **Vulnerable Senses** – orcs are easily affected by sensory overload like dazzling light or foul odours, and prefer not to operate under full sun.

## Hobblings

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

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

## Strengths

### MOD:

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

### Downshift:

- ✦ **Lucky** – you can burn a rank to use the equivalent of a free Fortune point to make a re-roll or dictate a coincidence.

## Weaknesses

### MOD:

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

### Innate:

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

## Halfbreeds

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



## Conflict rules

### Initiative

First, figure out who goes first – that is, who has *Initiative*. Most of the time, the flow of the situation will indicate who acts first, but in some cases, this order may need to be determined. Here's how to do it:

- ✦ If a character attacks without warning – taking the victim by surprise – the attacker automatically goes first. (If the target is caught totally unawares defence can only include passive Qualities, e.g. Tough as Nails but not Fancy Footwork.)
- ✦ The character with the highest Rank in a “speed” or “reaction time” Quality relevant to the situation (Fastest Sword in the East, Jumpy, Quick Wits) goes first, followed in order by those with relevant Qualities of lower Ranks.
- ✦ The character with the highest Rank in a Quality not relevant to the situation goes next, followed by those of lower Ranks.

Ties can be broken by either:

- ✦ Stating that tied characters resolve their actions simultaneously; or

✦ Rolling a die, with the highest number winning Initiative.

Once Initiative is determined, conflict resolution can proceed. Characters with a higher Initiative may “hold their actions” for as long as they want, but after the last character has done something they need to take that held action or lose it. After everyone involved in the conflict situation has taken an action (or chosen not to), the characters can start a new Turn, acting in the same order. This continues till the conflict is resolved.

Example: In a yard near the docks Jimbo and Salty Dave are sparring. Jimbo is using his Expert [+4] Brawling Quality here, while Salty Dave is using his Good [+2] Cutlass Quality. Jimbo's Rank is higher, so he goes first.

Elsewhere in town there's a heated discussion between Zandra, using her Expert [+4] Merchant Quality (she's used to talking people into things), and Jefferson, using his Expert [+4] Barbarian Quality (he's used to intimidating people into doing what he wants). Zandra and Jefferson are both at Expert rank, and thus tied. The GM decides that Initiative between them will be determined with a die roll. Zandra rolls a 3 and Jefferson rolls a 4. Jefferson has Initiative.

## Moment of Truth

The character whose turn it is will be called the *attacker*; the character who is the target of the attacker's action is called the *defender*. The attacker explains what his attempted action is, and the defender explains how he'd try to counter that action. Then the attacker rolls 2d6 and adds the appropriate Modifier for Quality Rank. The defender does the same. The character with the higher total wins.

If the attacker is successful, *damage* is applied to the defender; if the attacker fails, no damage is done. A tie is just that – nobody wins, nobody loses... but they both muss each other up a little.

Example: As the Turn starts, Jimbo is the attacker and Salty Dave is the defender. Jimbo is going to grapple the Pirate using his Expert [+4] Brawling, and Salty Dave decides to try and hold him off using his Good [+2] Cutlass Quality. Jimbo rolls 2d6+4 for a result of 10, Salty Dave rolls 2d6+2 for a result of 8. Thus, Jimbo does damage to Salty Dave this turn – see below – and has grabbed the scurvy dog. (If Salty Dave had been a better Pirate, this would give a different result: if he had Good [+2] Pirate, the characters would have tied and done each other damage; if he were an Expert [+4] Pirate, Jimbo's attack would fail and he'd take no damage.)

On his action, Salty Dave wants to escape from Jimbo's bear-hug. He gets a result of 11, while Jimbo gets a result of 6. Salty Dave does a *lot* of damage to Jimbo in getting free.

## Damage

Damage (be it physical, mental, emotional, or social) is the loss of capability. As a character takes damage, he is less likely to be able to perform at peak efficiency. This is shown by a temporary Downshift applied to the character's listed abilities called either a **Failure Rank** or a **Damage Rank**, depending upon the nature of the conflict. A character can suffer both Damage Ranks and Failure Ranks in the course of a conflict situation. They are functionally the same thing during a conflict, but Failure is recovered quickly and Damage can trouble the character for longer. If damage wipes out all of a character's Quality ranks they "**zero out**" and lose the conflict, with whatever consequences might follow.

## Time in Conflict

The terms used in *QMR* for identifying the passage of time:

*Scenes* are the entire conflict; starting with determining Initiative and ending with someone winning, losing, surrendering, or leaving the situation.

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

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

## Range in Conflict

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

## Movement in Conflict

While *QMR* tends to leave movement rates for characters abstract and up to the discretion of the GM (like by requiring a character to make a roll using a speed or movement Quality vs. a reasonable Difficulty Rank), some folks like a concrete movement rate. So here it is: characters have a movement rate equal to 4 yards plus the sum of all involved Quality Modifiers per turn. Half of this is taken on their action, and the other half is taken during their reactions. This means that a Good [+2] Knight with Qualities of Expert [+4] Horse and Good [+2] Riding would have a movement rate of 12 yards per Turn (base 4, +2+4+2); they can move up to 6 yards on their action and 6 yards on their reactions.

## Failure and Damage ranks

In mental, social, and some physical conflicts, loss of capability is usually temporary, and is represented by **Failure Ranks**. Examples include a chess match, witty repartee, or running a race. Failure Ranks are almost always completely recovered at the end of a Scene. (Unarmed strikes do Failure Ranks unless the attacker has some specific martial arts Quality. Attacks with improvised blunt objects may do so at the GM's discretion.)

In many physical conflicts loss of capability is more enduring and is represented by **Damage Ranks**. Examples here include not just combat, but also *environmental damage* taken by running through fire, falling off a roof, or starting to drown. (Non-physical conflicts might sometimes produce Damage Ranks for persistent effects, e.g. a serious social setback.) Some or all Damage Ranks are recovered at the end of a Scene.

## Applying damage

In a successful attack, the difference between the attacking and defending rolls determines how many Failure or Damage Ranks are done to the defender.

If the roll results are tied, *both* characters take a single Failure rank.

Example: Following the *Moment of Truth* example, on Jimbo's action the difference between his roll and Salty Dave's was 2, so he does 2 Damage Ranks to the Pirate. On Salty Dave's action, he did a whopping 5 Damage Ranks to Jimbo.

Each point of damage reduces one Quality by one rank: it will function at that lower rank until the character recovers from the damage. The player selects which of his Qualities takes the damage (see the box, *The Key to Understanding Conflict Abstraction*), and can spread the damage out across several abilities at once. It may only be applied to those abilities listed on the character's sheet (that is, not any one of the character's infinite number of "default" Average Qualities).

Whichever Quality the player decides takes the first hit of damage in a conflict generates a **Story Hook**, a complication for the character's life (see box).

Example: Jefferson hits Mikos for 3 Damage Ranks. Mikos takes one of the Ranks on his Streetwise Quality, temporarily dropping it from Good [+2] to Average [0]. This generates a Story Hook for the GM (see below). There are still 2 Damage Ranks to account for. Mikos drops Guardsman from Good [+2] to Average [0].

## Story Hooks

Several elements of PDQ help the players and GM come up with these exciting or interesting subplots, complications, and events for their characters. They might manifest straight away, but the GM will usually store them up for after the current scene. (See also *GM's Notes* section.)

In conflict situations, whichever ability the player selects to take the first hit of damage generates a Story Hook. Some GMs might also wish to use the ability that the PC chooses when zeroing out of a conflict (that is, when any one of the character's Qualities drops below Poor [-2] Rank) as a source of these sorts of Story Hooks. For example, if you take the hit to your Homeland Quality maybe someone from your past will come looking for you to ask for something, get revenge, or whatever.

Additionally, a character's Weakness, background, Virtue and Vice can spark Story Hooks.

OPTIONAL RULE - If there are only one or two players when a Story Hook pops up, the group can Scheherazade the situation. To Scheherazade, the Story Hook is roleplayed out immediately as a flashback, flashforward, or "cut-scene" with the GM and players temporarily taking over any involved NPCs. These characters interact until they hit a point of crisis, then the action returns to the original conflict.

One Rank of damage to go, and Mikos is in a situation. He cannot drop his Poor [-2] Singing a Rank because this would mean he "zeroed out" (see below) and lost the overall conflict. He must drop either Guardsman or Streetwise from Average [0] to Poor [-2]; he chooses Streetwise.

## Zeroing out

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

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

**Examples:** Let's say that Jefferson hits Mikos again for 2 more Damage Ranks. Mikos takes one of the Ranks on his Guardsman Quality, temporarily dropping it from Average [0] to Poor [-2]. All of his Qualities are now at Poor [-2], and he still has to take another Rank of Damage somewhere. He takes it on Guardsman, which generates another Story Hook for the GM (see box), and is out of the conflict.

**Death.** Just because a character zeroes out doesn't mean they die. For physical conflicts, the default assumption in *QMR* is that characters can only be killed once they are unconscious or otherwise helpless - in

### The Key to Understanding Conflict Abstraction

Basically, in any conflict, some of a character's Qualities can be thought of as useful for either "attack", "defence" or "absorption."

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

This abstraction of how Failure or Damage Ranks are applied isn't meant to be a direct simulation of reality ("Hey, why does getting punched in the face lower my Florist Quality?"), but a measure of the character's rising and falling power to affect the story. Amusing justifications can be made up anyway if you so wish ("Well, your black eye makes it hard to arrange peonies...").

### Recording damage in Questers

The Questers character sheet in the back of this book provides a **damage track** next to the spaces for recording a Quality's name and permanent Rank. When you take some damage you write a letter in a box: F for a Failure Rank, D for a Damage Rank or S for a voluntary downshift.

Mark the current Rank, so you'll always be able to see what that Quality is at right now. For instance if your permanent Rank is Expert and you take 1 Failure Rank, mark an F in the Good box. (Damage track boxes equal to or higher than your permanent Rank won't get used - ignore them.)

It's important to distinguish between damage types because they come back in different ways. Downshifts can't be recovered within a scene; the others can. Damage Ranks can linger over multiple scenes; the others can't. So sometimes you'll have to shuffle the letters around a bit, for instance if you recover a Failure Rank in the middle of the damage track. Write lightly in pencil, leave room for changes, and make it clear so you don't get confused.

other words, zeroed out. This requires no roll, check, or action, simply a statement on the attacker's next turn that he wishes to kill the victim. (GMs should feel free to change this rule if they desire. Perhaps characters pick whether they are doing "bruising" damage or "killing" damage at the beginning of a conflict situation.) Sometimes zeroing out is just the prelude to a character being shoved into a villain's deathtrap!

### Environmental damage

This comes from stuff like falling, jumping through a fire, drowning, or other complicated situations. It works by comparing the Target Number of the task against the total of the character's failed roll. The difference between roll and Target Number is the Damage Ranks taken.

**Example:** Say that in the example above from *Complicated Situations*, where Kristov wants to follow Jefferson up a Good [9] Difficulty wall, he is instead trying to follow the barbarian *down* the wall. As he has no applicable Quality, he must use the default Rank of Average [0], and match or beat a 9 when rolling 2d6. He rolls a 3 and a 5, for a total of 8. This is 1 below the Target Number of the wall, so Kristov fails, falls, and takes 1 Damage Rank from the sudden stop.

## Weaknesses in conflict

If the character has a Weakness related to the type of conflict (for example, Glass Jaw in a hand-to-hand combat, Poor Reader for research in a library, or Can't Say No to a Pretty Face in a seduction attempt), he will have to take two extra Damage Ranks the first time – and only the first time – he gets tagged in the relevant situation. Any Story Hook generated from the influence of a Weakness should be more intense than a typical Story Hook.

NOTE - Qualities reduced to Poor [-2] Rank during a conflict situation by Failure or Damage Ranks are not Weaknesses; Weaknesses are character flaws decided upon at character generation. There's a difference between a Weakness of Poor [-2] Unathletic (the character's never been that into sports) versus someone in a race who is normally a Good [+2] Athlete but has been temporarily reduced to Poor [-2] Rank by accumulating Failure Ranks (he's out of breath and feeling the burn).

## Shrugging off an attack

If – in the GM's opinion – a character has a *relevant* Quality of Good [+2] Rank or better that could feasibly allow him to ignore or resist damage in the situation (like Armour, Iron Will, True Love, or Impeccable Pedigree), the character can not only add it to his reaction rolls (to dodge, parry, block, evade, etc.), but he can choose to *sacrifice* a Rank of this protection in order to shrug off damage.

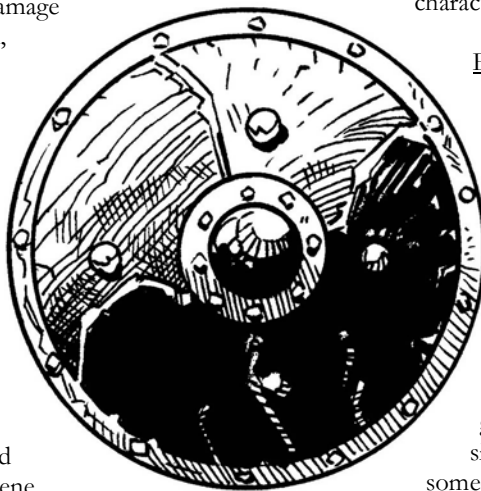
The player chooses to take a temporary Downshift on the Quality (usually after seeing a roll result they don't like the look of). This allows the character to ignore *all* Failure or Damage Ranks from one action. Such Downshifts last till the end of the scene; by the start of the next scene they are "recovered". All subsequent uses of the Quality in the scene are at the Downshifted rank.

So if somebody is trying to pry a donation out of a PC who has Expert [+4] Rank Iron Will, the PC can in theory ignore 2 turns of Failure Ranks over the course of the conflict by reducing his Iron Will once for each attack against him that is successful. However, once a Quality reaches Average [0] Rank (through Downshifting to ignore or resist, or from taking Failure or Damage Ranks), it can no longer be used in this fashion.

## Recovering from damage

Once a Scene ends, the injured character will begin to recover lost Ranks. How many he gets back depends upon whether he was in *momentary danger* or is still in *continuing danger*.

- † **Momentary Danger.** If nothing else is going on, and the character is otherwise safe, relaxed, and lacking any time constraints. In other words, the scene was pretty much self-contained as a part of the story. Examples of momentary danger include playing cards with a six year old, a chase on horseback (though some Environmental Damage could happen...), or a seduction attempt. At the end of the Scene all Failure or Damage Ranks are removed, restoring Qualities to their appropriate levels.
- † **Continuing Danger.** The overarching situation that the conflict happened in is risky, stressful, or under deadline (a race to get an injured person to a doctor, chasing down a monster, assaulting a villain's secret headquarters). At the end of the conflict scene characters recover all lost Failure Ranks, but only 1d6 lost Damage Ranks of abilities. The player selects which ability Ranks are restored. The character will not recover any more Ranks until the next scene ends, the GM tells them to roll again, a Quality comes into play, or the character spends Fortune Points to heal.



**Example:** Jefferson's been beaten up by a shambling undead monstrosity. At the end of the conflict, all of his Qualities were Downshifted to Poor, except for Barbarian, which he had zeroed. Since this happened in The Old Graveyard We Don't Use No More he's still in continuing danger. He rolls for damage recovery and gets a 3. He puts 1 Rank into bringing Barbarian to Poor [-2] (now he's conscious), and uses the remaining 2 to get Toughness back to Good [+2], since he figures it'll be the most useful if someone else jumps him.

## Special damage recovery

**Intrinsic Qualities.** A Strength like Quick Healer should allow the character to gain back the standard 1d6 roll, plus their Modifier. A Weakness like Slow Healer would mean that the character rolls 1d6-2 (the Modifier for Poor), with a minimum of zero Ranks regained.



**Mundane aid.** Another character can use appropriate Qualities to help. Because the system is so flexible the GM can allow anything that sounds right for the situation, like Healer to address wounds or disease, or Oratory to restore flagging spirits, or an item like a Good (+2) Herbal Salve. So these come into play at different times: if the situation is a tense negotiation with no physical injuries Healer wouldn't be any good, for instance. The limitation is that it takes time (and perhaps equipment and facilities) - several minutes at least. It adds its MOD (or perhaps gives an Upshift if it's a Slow Burn Prop) to the number of Damage Ranks the helped character recovers between scenes.

**Magical aid.** Spells, miracles, items and so on with suitable powers work the same as mundane aid, with the benefit that they take effect instantly (so potentially within a scene as well as at its end). Of course they have a cost in energy or Favour, or a limit on how often they can be used.

## Conflict Strategies

There are two additional strategies that a character can use in conflicts, depending upon whether they want to concentrate on attack or defence. One can only be used by an attacker and the other only by a defender. If a PC wishes to utilise either of these strategies, they must announce it at the beginning of their turn. They cannot be used on the same turn.

✦ **Flip Out.** The attacker makes strong attacks (physical, mental, or social) without much heed to defence. A Flip-Out grants an Upshift for the attack, and a Downshift on all defensive reactions and other non-conflict-related actions until your next turn.

✦ **Play It Cagey.** The defender opts for safety by not taking any chances, holding back in the conflict. Playing It Cagey grants an Upshift for all defensive reactions and a Downshift on all the character's non-conflict-related actions until their next turn; unfortunately, it means that the character's *next* attack action will suffer from this Downshift.

## Task Notes and Options

### Shift accumulation

All Upshifts, Downshifts, and bonus dice are cumulative. So if a character is Being Badass and Flipping Out simultaneously, he would have 2 Upshifts (or a Modifier of +4) on the attack and damage. This means if the starting Quality was of Average [0] Rank (2d6), it would temporarily become Expert Rank (2d6+4); if the Quality was Good [+2], the roll would be 2d6+6, and if the Quality was Expert [+4], the roll would be 3d6+6, because one of the Upshifts would take the Rank above Master and translate into an extra die to roll.

For **Modifier** accumulation, however, it's less fiddly to just add all the MODs together rather than working out how many extra dice to use. Shifts are added on top of that, so you could end up with rolls like 3d6+10.

### Using multiple Qualities together

If the GM agrees that more than one Quality can be brought to bear on a task, simply combine the Modifiers for the relevant Qualities. (If a character spent one of their choices in character generation on buying something under their penumbra as a separate Quality, this is where they reap the benefit.)

Furthermore, this case includes not just the Qualities of a single character, but also if **multiple characters** team up to perform a task. If multiple characters are joining forces only one of them needs to roll, and that's the character with the higher Initiative.

Example 1: Standing on the second floor of the temple, Salty Dave sees some assassins attacking his buddy Jimbo on the ground floor. He decides to join the fray, and grabs a decorative garland to swing down while slicing with his cutlass. Salty Dave can combine his Good [+2] Cutlass and Good [+2] Swinging Qualities in his attack on one of the assassins. He'll be rolling 2d6+2+2, or 2d6+4, for this swashbuckling manoeuvre.

Example 2: Zandra (Expert [+4] Merchant) and Kristov (Good [+2] Minstrel) decide to work together to try to convince an Expert [+4] Theatre Owner that Kristov is worth signing up as part of the entertainment. Zandra will make the roll of 2d6+4+2; she gets a 4 and a 6, for a total of 16. The GM rolls for the Manager: a 4 and a 6 for a total of 14. Zandra and Kristov successfully convince the NPC that Kristov is a potential star!

## Multiple targets

If it's necessary for a character to take on multiple targets simultaneously in a single action, he can split his attentions (and relevant Quality Ranks) between them. Of course, this leads to a commensurate decrease in effective skill. For each additional target selected, apply a Downshift to the Quality Rank.

You never need to split your defence this way: you get the full thing each time you're attacked.

Example: Say that Jimbo (Expert [+4] Brawling) is fighting two of the eerily grinning Night Riders. If he tries to take them both on he'll only be at an effective Rank of Good [+2] for his attacks on each. If there were 3 Night Riders, he'd have an effective Rank of Average [0]; if 4, Poor [-2]. If there were 5 Night Riders he'd automatically fail all five attacks, since his split Rank would bottom out with another Downshift. Better to take them on one or two at a time.

But wait! Jimbo has Ship's Cook at Good [+2] Rank. Perhaps if the melee took place in an inn kitchen, the GM might agree that Jimbo could add in his culinary know-how (grabbing cleavers, throwing pots and pans, and so on). This circumstance would allow Jimbo to take on 2 Riders at Expert [+4], 3 Riders at Good [+2], 4 Riders at Average [0], 5 Riders at Poor [-2], and auto-fail only when facing 6 Riders in the kitchen at once.

## Streamlined conflict

You can simplify something that might normally be a conflict situation by treating it as a complicated situation. That is, instead of having characters roll using their Qualities against each other to determine success, simply treat their Quality Rank as a Difficulty Rank. Then, the attacker uses the Target Number of that Difficulty Rank to roll against for success; as with Environmental Damage, the difference between roll result and Target Number gives the damage Ranks.

**Minions.** This is particularly useful if the player characters encounter nameless henchmen who are only there to serve as obstacles. If a PC can overcome such a minion's defensive TN, it's beaten - no calculation of damage Ranks necessary. The minion's attacks damage the PC in the normal way.

Example: Salty Dave has reached the treasure chamber of the Assassins' Guild. His path is blocked by a Henchman Assassin (Average [0] Henchman). Salty Dave rolls his Good [+2] Cutlass Quality against the henchman's Target Number of 7. He rolls a 3 and a 6, plus 2 from Good [+2] Cutlass, giving him a total of 11. Eleven easily beats 7, so Salty Dave slices the henchman from stem to stern in one blow and continues toward his prize.

## Gear creatures in conflicts

If you have a piece of "equipment" that's actually a living creature there are a few things to note.

- ✦ When they act, they use any Qualities defined for them to fulfill their main functions, like an occupation. A Good (+2) Warhorse could be Good for running fast and kicking people.
- ✦ However, they have a bit more autonomy than an inanimate item. In-game they decide their own actions, though still controlled by the player. That means they're not necessarily limited by the main character's number of actions. You can handle it two ways: the henchthing adds on to the character's abilities for an action, which could include allowing you to split an attack between more opponents, or it takes separate action on its own.
- ✦ Opponents can, however, direct attacks at it specifically - e.g. goblin #3 hacks at the warhorse. Such attacks can only be opposed by Qualities the henchthing can muster itself, and any resulting damage can only be taken to the henchthing's Qualities. It can zero out independently of the main character, meaning that it can take no further actions in the current conflict but its owner might be able to keep going if other Qualities remain.

## Ridiculous difficulties

GMs have the option, to be exercised very rarely, of using Difficulty Ranks of Improbable [19] and Impossible [25] for really challenging tasks where only the super-gifted have a chance of succeeding.

## Fumbles

This is an optional rule, if you want to increase the slapstick quotient. If the dice come up double 1s and you would have failed, it's actually a fumble: something actively bad happens, like throwing your sword over your shoulder or setting fire to your auntie.

## Conflict Example

Let's say that Kristov (Good [+2] Dirty Fighter) and Jefferson (Expert [+4] Barbarian) get into a fight. Jefferson's going to go first, since his fighting-relevant Quality Rank is higher than Kristov's.

JEFFERSON: "I punch at the little twerp."

KRISTOV: "I'll try to duck under the big moose's punch."

JEFFERSON (rolls 2d6+4; he rolls a 3 and a 1 for a total of 8): "Eight!"

KRISTOV (rolls 2d6+2; he rolls a 4 and a 5 for a total of 11): "Eleven! Ha!"

GM: "Kristov bends down, and Jefferson's punch misses the mark. Kristov's turn."

KRISTOV: "I come up and try to sock him one in the nuts!"

JEFFERSON: "Ooooh, not cool, dude. Why do you always go for the low blow?"

KRISTOV: "My Quality is Dirty Fighter, sport."

JEFFERSON: "Well, I'll try to parry his punch away from my groin."

KRISTOV (rolls 2d6+2, he rolls a 4 and a 5 for a total of 11): "This one goes to *eleven!* Heh heh heh!"

JEFFERSON (rolls 2d6+4; he rolls a 6 and a 3 for a total of 13): "Thirteen. Guess it's not your lucky day!"

GM: "Jefferson knocks Kristov's low blow aside, easily."

KRISTOV: "Gulp."

JEFFERSON (miming cracking his knuckles): "This is gonna hurt you a lot more than it hurts me, buddy." (to GM) "I'm gonna grab his shirt, throw him into the wall, and wind up my haymaker. When he bounces back, I'll connect. Hard."

KRISTOV: "Hey, that's more than one action!" (looks at GM)

JEFFERSON: "Nope, it's Being Badass." (looks at GM)

GM (ponders): "Yeah, that's pretty badass. Jefferson gets an Upshift on the attack."

KRISTOV (buries his head in his hands): "This is gonna hurt."

GM: "What's your reaction to the attempt going to be?"

KRISTOV (has a bright idea): "I'm gonna Play It Cagey."

GM: "You know that'll screw up your next attack."



KRISTOV (ponders): "Nah, it's not worth it. I need to tag this guy a couple of times, and I'll need all the bonuses I can get. I won't Play It Cagey."

GM: "Alright, Jefferson's rolling against an effective Master [+6] Barbarian for this attack, or 2d6+6. Go for it."

JEFFERSON (rolls 2d6+6; he rolls two 5s for a total of 16): "Sweet sixteen, baby!"

KRISTOV (rolls 2d6+2; he rolls a 1 and a 3 for a total of 6): "Dammit. No go."

GM (calculating, 16 minus 6 is a total of 10): "Jefferson throws Kristov against the wall and clocks him on the return for 10 Damage Ranks."

JEFFERSON: "Take that, little buddy. Should've Played It Cagey."

KRISTOV (glumly looking at his character sheet): "Well, I could drop all my Goods to Averages, that's 4 Damage Ranks. Drop them all to Poors, that's another 4. Two more... okay, I drop my Minstrel from Average to Poor. That leaves one Damage Rank, and everything I got is at Poor now. Crap. I'll take it on Dirty Fighter and bottom out. I'm unconscious."

GM (to Jefferson): "Now what do you do?"

JEFFERSON: "I have a beer and wait for him to wake up, so he can take back what he said about my mum. Or else."

GM (to Kristov): "After a couple minutes, you come around. You're still in continuing danger because Jefferson could stomp your ass again. Roll 1d6 for Damage Recovery."

KRISTOV (he rolls a 4): "Four Ranks back... Hmm, I'll put Dirty Fighter back to Good, that's 1 to hit Poor and 2 more to get to Good, total of 3. Minstrel back to Average, that's 1. There, that should do it."

JEFFERSON (to Kristov): "Apologise for what you said about my ma!"

KRISTOV: "Sorry! Don't hit me again, okay?"

## Improving Qualities

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

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

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

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

**Judging organisation choice.** Remember that they do have entrance requirements, looking at skills, personality traits like loyalty, and existing affiliations. Most organisations are happy to take on qualified trainees in good standing, but if it’s a bit dubious persuasion might be needed. The GM should certainly take a few minutes to play through this, including social

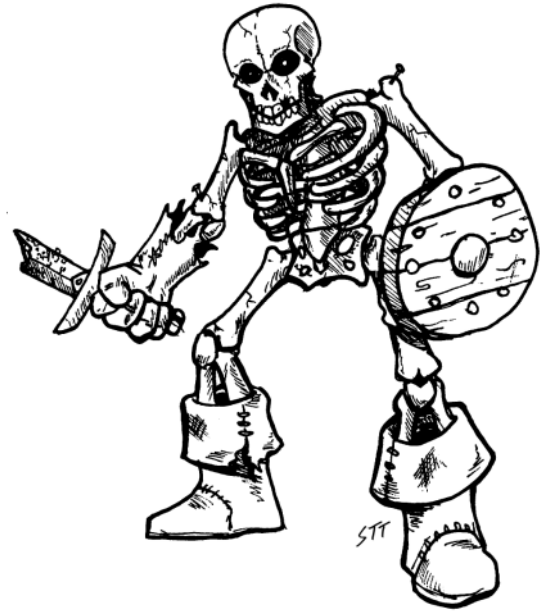
rolls and such if necessary. (“Cannibal Necromancers of Glorm? Er, never heard of them. This is just an odd-shaped birthmark.”) Then the character must spend a bit of time studying, typically a couple of weeks (which is unrealistic but keeps things moving along – maybe there’s magic involved!). For a bit of optional entertainment you could have a standard test adopted by most organisations: to defeat a member of the new level (i.e. one above yours) in some appropriate contest (could be a fight, riddle game, debate...) before your new status is confirmed.



# Fortune Points

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

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



## Spending Fortune

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

- ✦ **Fate Smiles** – make a dice roll again, rolling 1d6+6 and keeping the better of the two roll results.
- ✦ **Extra Effort** – an Upshift on a roll you're about to make (could turn a situation simple).
- ✦ **Pull Yourself Together** – take an action or reaction to recover 1d6 Failure ranks or 1 Damage.
- ✦ **That's Odd** – dictate a plausible coincidence that happens or a minor fact about the current situation (not including facts one would expect to be true anyway, e.g. no points are needed to find a hammer at a carpenter's workshop).

## Gaining Fortune

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

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

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

# Loot

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

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

## Props

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

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

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

In fact, in most cases the acquisition of a Prop should be a signal to the GM to come up with story developments that will take it away or use it up, generating new exploits for the characters in the process. Players can, if they wish, **invest** in a Prop when they level up, using character Ranks to buy its abilities. The item then becomes part of their character, but now only the Qualities and Ranks that have been bought are available for use – any others are simply not appearing in the story for a while, until the player buys them back up again (if ever).

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

- † **Bonus** – the item has one or more Quality ranks that are there all the time. These generally aren't Arcane: more useful than flashy, like a

Weatherproof [+4] Cloak or a Fast [+2] Horse. But it's possible to have items with Arcane bonuses to key functions.

- † **One-shot** – you can use it once and that's it. That's certainly true of a Healing Potion that gets drunk or a Shiny Crown that gets spent in trade – these use their MOD as a bonus, once.
- † **Plot Point** – the item can be used once per session (to distinguish it from character items that can be used once a scene) on an ongoing basis. Maybe it could "really" be used more often, but it's a Prop so in story terms it only gets brought in when dramatically appropriate. This one's particularly used for items with active Arcane powers, like a Wand of Ass Frying.
- † **Slow Burn** – the item gets depleted gradually, burning off one Rank at a time to give an upshift on an appropriate roll. When it zeroes out (you use the Poor rank) it becomes useless or unimportant. For example a Big Heap of Jewels, which you can spend a little at a time in trade. (A Shiny Crown couldn't be used this way because it's a single item.)



**Dramatic Exit.** There is one way a Prop can help you avoid damage. Subject to a sensible narration of how it happens, you can use the Prop's Target Number to add to a defence in return for the Prop getting destroyed or lost to the character permanently. (This will often negate an attack entirely.) You can add this on to a roll you've just made and don't fancy much. For instance, it looks like a magus' fireball is going to cook your goose, but your flailing Wand of Lucrative Authorship intercepts it and is reduced to ash, phoenix feather and all. Or you manage to bribe or distract an opponent by forfeiting your Bag of Gold Coins.

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

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

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

## Wealth Scale

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

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

## Buying and selling

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

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

Assigning **item value** works like this.

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

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

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



# Magic

This section covers the various means by which characters can manifest powers and other funky stuff. It falls into three camps: **miracles**, which draw down the power of the gods; **thaumaturgy**, which uses learned ways to manipulate universal forces; and **mysticism**, which draws on the internal powers of mind and body. (These aren't always mutually exclusive - a temple to a particular god, for instance, might have an associated order of mystics or even thaumaturgists - but they would use different Qualities.)

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

**Penumbra.** Spells should be neither too broad nor too narrow, giving more than one possible application but limited to particular kinds of effect so that casters have to build up their arsenal gradually. For instance Fold Clean Hobbling Laundry\* has no application in an adventure story, but Rutkin's Invisible Domestic\* performing all kinds of household tasks could have uses from endearing yourself to hosts to sweeping away signs of misdeeds in a hurry. A spell that only does one thing is alright if that thing is going to be really useful - Smite Monster\*, perhaps. A spell that does several really useful things is probably overpowered - like Control All The Elements\*. A small number of fairly useful things is the ideal.

**Fatigue:** after you cast a spell, you must make a separate fatigue check roll - if you fail you take a Failure Rank. This limits the number of spells a

## Magic Effects Table

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

This table is expanded from the basic concepts on Time, Range, and Movement in the Basic PDQ rules (and based on the Powers table found in Atomic Sock Monkey Press' *Truth & Justice*). The GM must decide which quantities are important to a particular effect (usually a couple of them) and ignore the rest. You can, of course, use other quantities as well - for instance the scales for Wealth and Size that appear elsewhere.

\* **Time** has two scales: one using the (re)action/Turn/Scene structure, and one for longer measures. Making an effect permanent (petrification, disintegrations, etc.) is up to the GM's veto; it will often require a Fortune Point.



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

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

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

**A tactical note.** Contests in PDQ come down, substantially, to matching attack and defence: you want to have abilities that can be put into play to defend against your opponent, and abilities against which your opponent cannot defend. One big advantage of Arcane powers is that it's much less likely that an opponent will have Qualities that can defend. If you wallop someone with the Invisible Telekinetic Fist of Doom their Agility and Lightning Reactions are no use because they can't see it coming. So that's why magic is dangerous (and gives the GM plenty of adjudication to do).

## Divine Aid

### Favour

Most priests in the setting devote some effort to keeping track of how much they've pleased and offended different deities. Coupled with the maze of political and personal relationships between the deities and their followers, this can get very complicated. In the game we measure Favour as numerical pools of points for the known, named gods that the group has decided will feature in its stories (see *Roll of the Heavens* later on). Building up this "credit" allows you to call on the god for aid in future. Favour can range from -10 to +10; most people have 0 with most deities.

**Gaining Favour.** Characters who do notable things that please a god build up a pool of Favour points linked to that deity. You can raise Favour to 1 by a fairly minor act related to the god's area of interest;

### Casting options

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

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

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

## Ordination\* (specify)

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

further points require more significant actions. Socially, you need to be a professional priest to be accepted as doing some god-related things - like holding a service.

**Losing Favour.** You can also lose Favour points by doing significant things to displease a god. Favour can go negative this way. Pleasing one god might automatically displease others opposed to it. The GM should decide how fickle and labyrinthine the inter-relationships between gods are – it might be crucial for a priest to keep up to date with who they're allied with this week.

**Penance and Retribution.** A character with negative Favour is cut off from divine aid. They may build their Favour back up again in the normal way by doing things that please the deity. This is wise, because a large negative Favour is a dangerous thing to carry around. If the character catches the god's attention they will be the subject of a detrimental miracle (a magical power bringing direct harm, social embarrassment, obstacles to current goals, etc.). The GM can trigger this up to once per scene if the character has -2 Favour or worse and enters one of the god's temples, is in proximity to one of its priests, or enters a location keyed to its area of interest (e.g. the frog god tends to keep an eye on swamps). Use current negative Favour as if it were a MOD to determine the rank and therefore the extent and intensity on the powers table. For example, if you have -4 Favour the miracle is Expert rank and the GM looks at that row on the table for its possible effects. A serious offender can bring down wrath on those around them. The good news is that each such miracle defuses one point of negative Favour.

**Favour Fallout.** If you have +10 Favour and gain some more you can't hold on to it, but there are a couple of other possibilities. You might gain a **Mark**, a noticeable side-effect of being touched by the deity's power. For instance a priest of Slobop the Frog God might develop webbed fingers and toes. These give a balanced pair of Good and Poor Qualities – they might help with certain tasks (webbed digits would be useful



for swimming), but in other situations they are inconvenient, and they can certainly be spotted by people you meet and used to make guesses about your affiliation. You only get one Mark per deity. Once you get a Mark it stays, but may alter cosmetically according to your current state of Favour. The other possibility is **recognition**: your Favour with another deity friendly to your own is raised from 0 to 1. (By the way, if you get to -10 Favour you're going to be the target of constant miracles and followers with pointy things. Your main option is to put your affairs in order rapidly.)

## Calling on the Gods

Anyone with positive Favour can call for minor aid related to the god's area of influence, such as bits of good luck or minor healing aid. Trained priests, however, are much better at it (see *Ordination* in box). It works with social-type Qualities (e.g. Expert [+4] Wheedling) for both casting and fatigue, as you're trying to persuade the deity and its assistants to provide what you want.

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

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

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



**Blessings** are small instances of divine aid, and anyone with Favour can attempt to call for them. Basically you gain a Fortune Point that must be used straight away or lost. It can do any of the things Fortune normally can, chosen by the caller and used personally or bestowed on another individual nearby. However, its application must be appropriate to the deity that grants it. The god

of trade and wealth isn't big on healing, but might grant recovery for a merchant or a caravan guard. Blessings are treated as Average power use for fatigue checks.

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

## Thaumaturgic Science

Long ago, people sought a way to use magic without relying on the favour of the gods. They found they could do so by manipulating the components of the world around them in certain ways. Each magical technique and effect is a hard-won secret, and many different "orders" (called all sorts of things, actually, but this is what we'll use) have grown up, each possessing knowledge of a small group of related magics or maybe only a single one. Members of an order also develop appropriate non-Arcane Qualities. Some orders have good relationships with each other; others are deadly enemies; all guard their knowledge zealously. A practitioner of thaumaturgy is called a magus, plural magi. It works with Qualities to do with intellect for casting and endurance for fatigue.

Thaumaturgy has a few additions to the standard rules for using Arcane powers.

**Correspondence.** To make thaumaturgy work you have to manipulate the relationship between at least two objects with some connection to the spell, while incanting the words of power. For instance, for Shape Light you might use a lit candle and a preserved eyeball you carry for the purpose. Sometimes arranging the proper correspondence takes a bit of extra time. This manipulation is always something that could be observed by someone in position to do so. The GM must decide whether what the player describes is a proper correspondence (and can give an upshift or

downshift if it's particularly good or poor). Different orders favour different tools for this: naturalistic ones will use animal bits and herbs, while more academic ones might use ceremonial wands and alchemical powders. In a pinch you can always improvise with what's at hand.

**Wild magic.** Thaumaturgic power is less reliable than divine power – it can escape from the caster's control and take effect in a way other than they intended. On the casting roll, if the dice come up as double 1's the magic goes awry – perhaps it strikes a friend rather than an enemy, or reduces something it should have increased. If the dice come up as double 6's the magic surges: the GM chooses one appropriate property on the table to take effect at 2 ranks higher than the caster intended, e.g. trying to light a candle sets an entire room on fire. Narrate the consequences of wild magic as you see fit – they should produce some mixture of dismay and amusement around the gaming table.

NOTE: If you're rolling more than two dice Wild Magic is only triggered if the dice show all 1's or all 6's.

### Familiar\*

This Quality is found often among members of certain Arcane orders - usually thaumaturges, and especially the Chartered Magi of Logrin. (There are also non-magi who have links with animals working in a broadly similar way, magical or otherwise, like the Weasel Riders of Helongor.)

You are magically linked to an ordinary but obedient, smart and durable animal. The familiar can always find you, given time. The Quality's rank measures the strength of the bond and the potency of the creature.

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

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



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

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

## Mysticism

Some orders concentrate on developing the inner powers of the mind and body. These work just as in the standard rules. However, they only teach appropriate powers – for instance mind reading, telekinesis, controlling one's own body to reduce pain or go into a trance, seeing events far off. They are aided by Qualities to do with inner strength, calm and willpower.

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

## Arcane items

One specific Arcane power is *Enchant Object\**. Priests and magi can have it; mystics rarely do. It lets you embed another Quality into an item in several different ways. Such items can either be Props or character possessions. (Arcane properties can only be added to character possessions if paid for by character points; enchantment cannot give you new ranks in character Qualities otherwise.) Enchantment always takes an extended ritual, is always fatiguing and, for non-divine versions, the fatigue causes Damage rather than Failure. To use it make the casting roll at the indicated difficulty level. If it succeeds the embedded power is at the lower of your *Enchant Object\** rank and (if applicable) your rank in the embedded power. This Quality will be found in NPCs more often than PCs.

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

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

**Plot Point items (Expert).** The embedded spell can be triggered repeatedly, but no more than once per scene. This would cover your Flaming Swords and Wands of Transvestism. (Character items can be used once per scene; Props, which should of course be less significant, once per session.) Learning to use one involves a Good [9] process of mystical attunement, plus you must satisfy any conditions set when the item was created (e.g. "Can only be used by a red-headed Valharian at night.")

## Items of Power

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

**Relics** are objects with a permanent charge of one specific god's power. Relics are usually very obvious to a god's followers. They consider them sacred objects that should only be possessed by members of their faith who follow its model of proper behaviour.

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

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

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

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



# Setting

## *The Roll of the Heavens*

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

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

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

## The Greater Gods

These are the most widely worshipped and powerful gods. But there's also a certain remoteness about them: because they're such a part of the background to life, and with quite general rather than specific domains, folk don't always get excited about them and often prefer to appeal to a more specifically relevant lesser god. (*Author's note for the eagle-eyed: these are based on Mesopotamian mythology, for kicks.*)

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

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

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

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

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

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



## The Lesser Gods

There are uncouthed legions of lesser gods covering plague, lust, trade, animals, plants, and so on from the very general to the very specific. The more specific they are the less general power they have, with fewer worshippers advancing their cause and fewer gods seeking alliances - the horned god of animals is widely sought, but the shadowy goddess of thievery is left to make her own way until someone needs something specific. Some gods are thoroughly nasty, but thoughtfully provide their servants as smiting fodder.

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

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

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

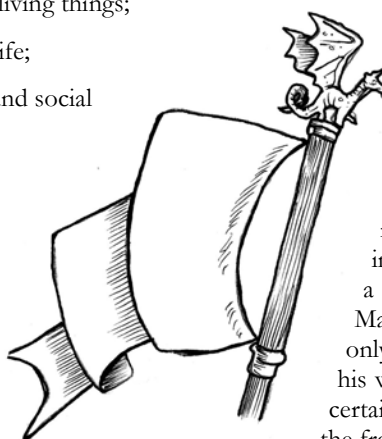
The relationship between any given pair of deities usually falls into one of these categories: fundamentally allied, temporarily allied, apathetic/neutral, temporarily hostile, fundamentally hostile. You can qualify them further – for instance, a pair of gods might supposedly be allies but their relationship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

## Creating Gods

Each player can “create” a named god related to a particular event their character is involved in once per session, and receives a Fortune Point for adding something to the story. Everyone then records the new deity on their Roll of the Heavens, and those involved in the event record the appropriate positive or negative Favour.

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

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



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

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

You shouldn't go mad doing this, otherwise you'll have more gods than your puny brains can handle within three sessions and stunt the potential for future development. We're assuming that everyone will use this power sensibly rather than filling up the Roll of the Heavens for the sake of it. Everyone round the table is at liberty to try to talk a player out of it. What should happen is that you gradually build up a network of deities and start to see possible relationships between them and, in particular, occasions where gaining Favour with one would lose it with another. Characters start to become trapped by the conflicting desires of the gods. Bwahaha etc.

# Organisations

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

Most organisations fall into one of the following camps.

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

Each organisation provides its members with a **token** that proves their affiliation and level. They are useful for getting you into certain places, and sometimes there’s a general requirement to show good standing with a reputable organisation, for instance at the door of a high society ball or official reception. Forging these is possible, but it’s a serious offence and you’ll be pursued by civil authorities and (vigorously) by the organisation in question. They say someone forged the Assassins’ Guild token, once...

Some **sample organisations** follow, and most of the nations listed in the Places section also have a notable

example organisation. These should get you going with ideas of your own.

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

## Sample organisations

### The Tinkers’ Guild

Members of the Bards’ Guild spend most of their time on melancholy songs and poems about men/women/dwarves, often beautiful, noble, wealthy or otherwise a cushy number, who have kicked them out. They’re of only minor use in spreading news of what’s going on around the lands. The Tinkers’ Guild has grown into this role. Originally they were just humble travelling menders of pans and knives, but today they think of themselves as “independent traders”. They travel from town to town with mules or carts full of stuff they picked up cheap back along the road. They’re usually very willing to share information they’ve gathered in return for food, drink or lodgings. In a day or two they move on, leaving people with their purchases. The Guild proclaims its “strict requirements” for the veracity of news and the quality of merchandise. It also has good lawyers.

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

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





## Draymar's Dregs

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

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

## The Houses of Finance

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

priests and clerks, led by a senior priest titled "Gnomon" as they show the way to prosperity like the pointer on a sundial.

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

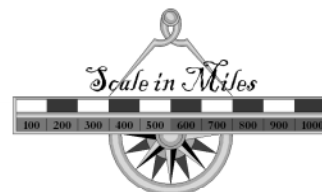
## The Phlogistonic Symposium

This thaumaturgic college is located on Ablarang, a small volcanic island in the group called The Swarm. It wasn't always volcanic, of course; just as the Symposium wasn't always here. But these magi specialise in fire magic, and the good citizens of their previous home gave them a generous grant to move somewhere with pleasant surroundings free of distraction from their scholarly pursuits. The Symposium seeks to understand the fundamental energy of the universe, which it believes drives all physical processes. Harnessing this energy could have all sorts of exciting applications, say the magi, and tapping into it could connect with the whole universe.

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



# Ludor



Ko-Sha Cartographers' Guild. Value of miles may go down as well as up.  
Have you thought about one of our extended guarantees?

## Places

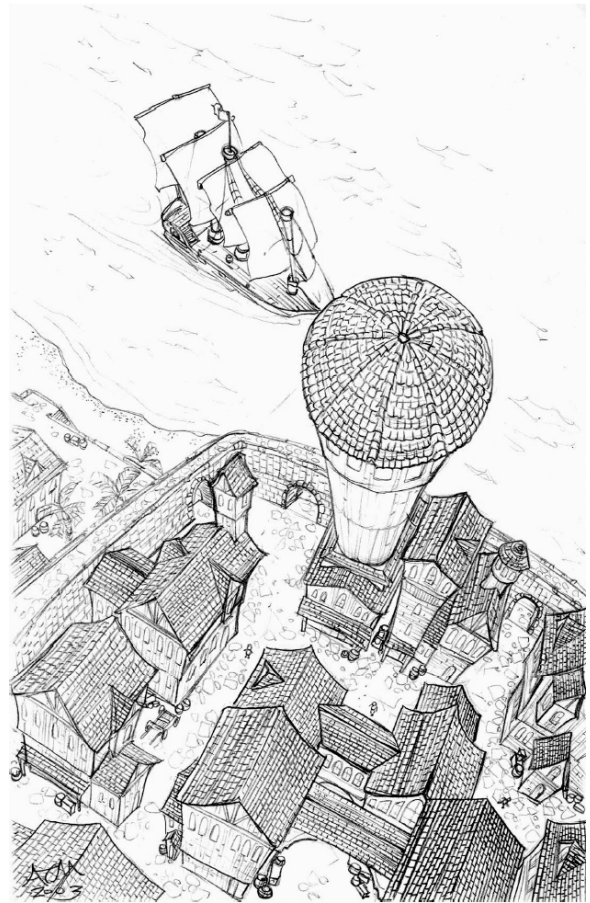
Here are some of the major areas. Some example local organisations are given as inspiration for making characters, but these are just one possibility within an area. (A larger colour version of the map opposite is available at [www.silverbranch.co.uk](http://www.silverbranch.co.uk).)

### Ar-Karap

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

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

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



### Arrganarr

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

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

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

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

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

## Dwarfholds

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

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

## The League of Groth

This small nation lies near Kadink and Orthedia, at the north of the Plains of Plap. It's made up of a number of cities, each ruled by a Prince (who can, in fact, be female). The people are creatures of morbid fashion, wearing black almost exclusively and cultivating an air of artistic suffering. With outsiders they aim for aloof superiority. Days usually start with lunch and end with supper as they prefer the night-time, and this helps to develop nice pale skin. The noble and wealthy spend much time at decadent parties where they show off their expensive new outfits and artworks and stare moodily into the distance. Some of them can afford

isolated estates out on the moors. Folk also like the theatre, and a séance makes a good night in. Supernatural creatures are tolerated in the cities, and even sought out, as long as they fit in. Groth is known for the excellence of its artists and clothiers, but not everyone favours the styles. It has occasionally gone to war with its neighbours, usually because of some leader with a strong sense of tragic destiny.

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

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

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

## Helongor

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

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

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

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

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

## Kadink

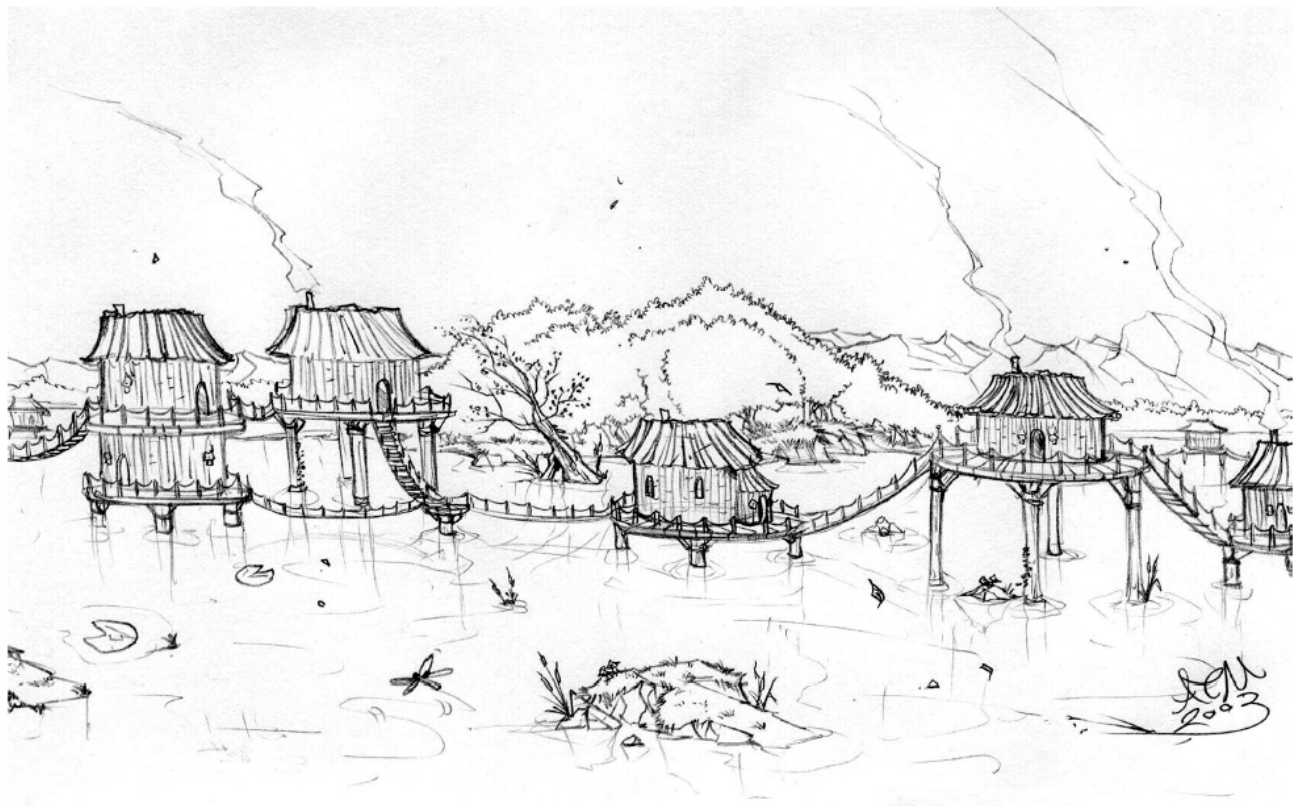
This swampy realm lies (and, occasionally, cheats) south of Orthedia at the confluence of rivers. The people are suspicious – of the weather, their surroundings and each other, all of which are justified. Any tussock can conceal something venomous, toothy or bad-tempered. Villagers do, however, wrest survival from the marshes, going out on punts or stilts to collect animals, plants or fungi – some for food, others for

extraction of interesting substances for export. Kadinkians are also known as canny traders and spies. The towns, built on the few dry parts of the country, have a brisk blend of business, intrigue and one-upmanship.

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

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

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



## Ko-Sha

On the western coast lies the great Bay of Wush, notable for the orange-garbed members of the Beachcombers' Guild who are often seen running across the sand to escape some mutant beast or cosh stubborn shipwreck survivors. The traveller following his nose will soon discover the city of Ko-Sha, the largest in the world (or so it says, and would it lie to you?). Pretty much anything you'd want in a city can be found here for a price, though it might have had several previous owners. Things you don't want might find you as well.

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

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

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



## Logrin

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

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

**The Logrin Navy** is the most powerful in the Western Sea. Their forests give good timber, their shipwrights know their craft, and a surprising number of the upper-class officers are capable commanders. Sailors do all manner of tasks from swabbing the decks to manning the ballistas. The

Navy's main task is defending shipping routes, but some vessels go exploring.

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

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

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

## Orthedia

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

For the most part the ordinary people just get on with their lives, little affected by changes in "ownership" of their villages and towns. A good lord may gain their respect; a bad one has some sort of accident sooner or later, possibly witnessed by several dozen locals who

happened to have errands in the castle or mansion at the time. The king in Caer Paladion is unconcerned as long as these things happen without too much fuss and the taxes keep flowing.

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



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

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

## Plunder Port

Off the southwestern coast lies a group of many small islands known as The Swarm. The largest of these holds the only settlement of any size: the small city of **Plunder Port**. It was founded by pirates long ago, and their descendants are known for their flamboyant dress, bravado and odd style of speech. It's a well-ordered place with good housing, medical facilities (prostheses a speciality) and civic infrastructure. The place is run by an elected Governor. It sticks to its free trade roots: any goods can be traded as long as they don't cause direct harm to the population (selling grog to under-12s is an offence, for instance) and all the appropriate records are kept in order. Some of the people crew the municipal ships that go out under the skull flag to collect taxes from vessels passing through their waters.

Captains taking the detour to avoid paying risk other perils on the big ocean.

*"Yo-bo, darling! How was the office?"*

*"Yo-bo! Cut-throat Bob from Accounting wanted to slash our budget but I soon keelhaunched him."*

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

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

In the surrounding waters the most persistent danger is the **Jelly Corsairs**. A few individuals of strong will and larcenous intent have somehow been able to merge with the wagon-sized jellyfish native to the area, turning them into personal seacraft with good speed and manoeuvrability; long, strong tentacles with a deadly sting; and the capacity to carry a small boarding party on their backs. It's said that their founder and leader, Captain Balboa, now exists as a frock-coated skeleton within a jelly of immense size.

## Scata

The north-east is occupied by this wide and gloomy realm of thick, dark forests, winding rivers, marshes, moors and looming hills, with long, hard winters. It's an agricultural land: most inhabitants live in farmsteads with their extended families, periodically making the trip to one of the few towns by cart or boat to sell their produce. They're a dour, stubborn, superstitious lot. Well, perhaps not technically superstitious because Scata demonstrably is rife with all kinds of spirits and strange creatures, from benevolent to mischievous to hungry for souls and bones. The trick is to attract good spirits to look after the house, possessions, crops and livestock, while warding off harmful ones. The routine of what to put where – saucer of milk on the hearth, horse-shoe over the door, mousetrap on the seventh stair, beartrap in the turnip patch – can be quite complicated, and baffling to outsiders. (A guest going to the outhouse in the middle of the night had better have their wits about them.)

The lowlanders clear forest to plant crops and have most of the towns, including the walled capital city of Dun Corv whence the Zar-Riy rules. The highlanders on the moors and mountain foothills spend more time

on herding livestock. They're an independent lot, considering the lowlanders soft and often airing resentment of their rule round the fire at night. The men have skirt-like garments called *kirita* and large weapons.

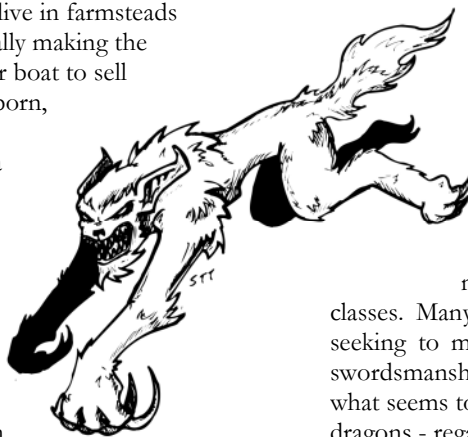
**The Zar-Riy's Bogateers** are an elite group of agents traveling the countryside to destroy harmful supernaturals (from *boganoi*, a general term for hostile spirits). Most are rugged, pragmatic types, equipped and aided by the temples of the capital. They don't have flashy heraldry, and their code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

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

## Tek Wei

This land in the far south-east consists of a chunk of mainland and a number of offshore islands, with many impressive connecting bridges. The people are addicts of intricacy. They are the human masters of alchemy and clever mechanical devices; advanced contraptions from here gradually find their way to the rest of the world, but are usually discarded as no-one can understand how to work them. The Tek Wei social system involves complex layers of status and manners, particularly among the noble classes. Many people obsess over a specific skill, seeking to master its every tiniest facet – from swordsmanship to preparation of noodles. They have what seems to outsiders an inexplicable soft spot for dragons – regarding them as wise and benevolent beasts when everybody knows they'd have your leg for elevenses as soon as look at you – and dragon motifs appear often.

The Amber Empire is ruled from the great mainland city of **Yong Ting** by an Emperor, who is accorded the status of a demigod and lives in great luxury but is of little relevance in the movements of politics. That is conducted by ministers and high-ranking courtiers playing deadly games of etiquette. It's a court city: most





of what happens there is about supporting the clockwork of government, which according to tradition (as preserved by court officials) must be done in fine clothes and beautiful buildings over excellent food with a suitably visible entourage. Lacking in these respects would bring a dangerous loss of status, jeopardising the entire socio-political system (they say).

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

Gods are worshipped in Tek Wei as elsewhere, but less... enthusiastically: most see them as present and important but remote, populating a celestial bureaucracy that's usually too busy reorganising its filing system to handle direct operation of the physical world. Much of that is handled by contractors – minor spirit entities working under the auspices of the various gods. Occasionally problems are caused by interfering mortals who lack an understanding of the fine points of labour relations. A high proportion of magicians here are mystics. Arcane items are used often, sometimes in the form of one-shot invocations to spirits written on paper, prepared in a ritual that uses Favour to imbue a power.

**The Hidden Hand** is an organisation of masters of stealth and arms. Its existence is well known, but its members operate in extreme secrecy. They are for hire by anybody to undertake missions, usually of assassination or infiltration, and pride themselves on completing any task they take on. Conversations with agents are mercifully rare, as they have a paranoid aversion to admitting or confirming anything – it's often impossible to know whether you've actually hired them until your enemy is disposed of.

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

## Valharia

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

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

**Valhar Rangers** – the men are good at energetic skirmish fighting, but not that great for actually defending borders, policing the wilds or keeping order in town. Therefore, from time to time the gods single out a young woman with a fighting spirit and the embers of common sense and send a large, impressive animal of some sort to be her companion and stoke that common sense. (It has to be large and impressive to give unruly Valhar pause. A cat or eagle large enough to carry a person would be about right.) The two spend a lot of time together in the wilds, dramatically scanning the distance for trouble from high vantage points and such. The Rangers recognise each other as a sisterhood of mutual respect, but don't often gather together as they might get in each others' light.

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

## Wochilat

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

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

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

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

## Yrisiriel Forest

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

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

projects, from current to long-forgotten. Those that are sealed should probably be left that way – it's amazing how flesh-eating centipedes can multiply in a decade. Some of these "projects"

roam the rest of the wood: wolves with second heads grafted on, bears with magic blasting gems in their eye sockets, hopping brambles, aphid golems, all sorts of strange nastiness. Not all the surprises here are living things: some are enchanted or crafted objects or even places, like the Cell of Critical Laughter, pesticidal ornithopters or lounge furniture upholstered in several different *unusual* leathers.

And, to be fair, not everything is nasty. It's just that those are the things the PCs will tend to find.

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



## Other places

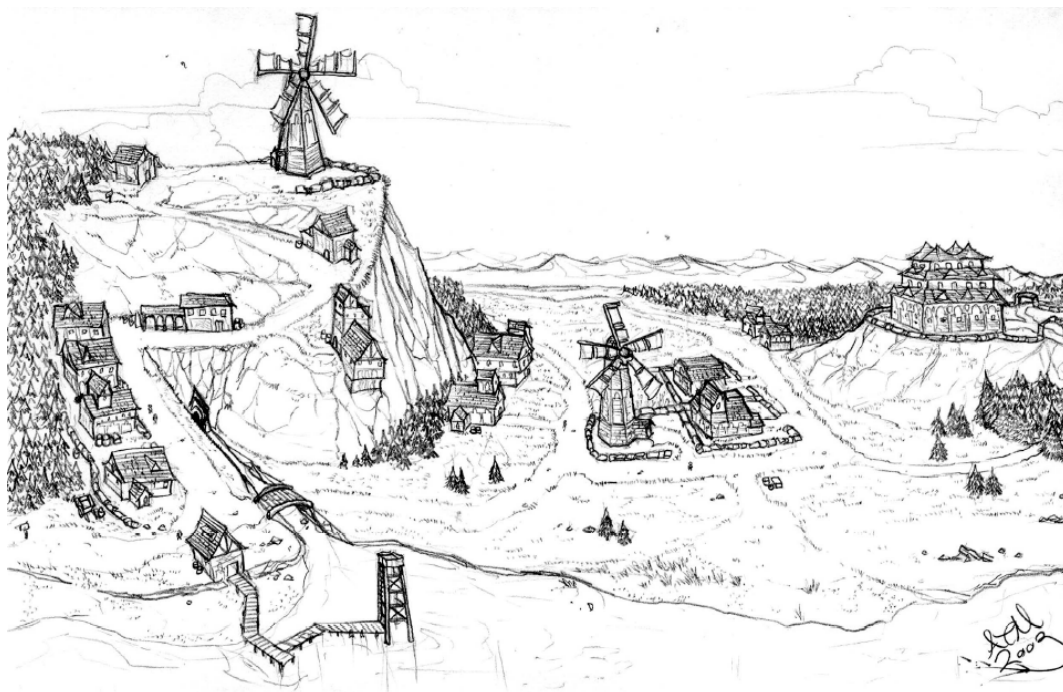
Here are a few more interesting areas.

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

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

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

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



## Sample characters

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

You could use them as starting player characters, and their stats are given accordingly. Alternatively you could use them as NPCs for the players to encounter as patrons, allies or even opponents. In that case you might want to level them up a few times.

### Tibbir, Priest of Slobop

*By Chad Underkoffler*

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

**RACE:** Human

**LEVEL:** 1

**VIRTUE:** Unprejudiced

**VICE:** Likes His Drink

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

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

**FORTUNE:** 1

**NOTES:**

† **Channel the Divine Frog Nature\*** is a miracle granted by Slobop that allows Tibbir to take on the abilities of his froggy brethren. This highly flexible miracle can cover anything from permitting miraculous jumps, extensible sticky tongue, water breathing, amphibian communication, underwater sight, exude poison through skin, etc. - so long as Tibbir himself is the conduit for the power.

† **Healing Slime of Slobop\*** is a miracle causing the user to exude a healing glop from their hands and feet. It can treat many ailments, injuries, and diseases. It's gooey and sticky and a bit stinky,

though (a downshift for many social interactions for at least a scene).

† **Not a Spy, Dammit!** means that Tibbir suffers unjustly by many people assuming that his affability is a subtle facade over the cold, paranoid mien of a Kadinkian Intelligence Service agent... which he emphatically is not.

### Enos Tik, Darque Duellist

*By Chad Underkoffler*

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

**RACE:** Elf

**LEVEL:** 1

**VIRTUE:** Daring

**VICE:** Cynical

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

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

**FORTUNE:** 1 (max 5)

### Ronkar the Red - Wizard of the Prismatic Order

*By Tim Gray*

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

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



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

RACE: Human (as far as anyone can tell)

LEVEL: 1

VIRTUE: Supportive

VICE: Meddling

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

WEAKNESSES: Poor [-2] Irritable.

FORTUNE: 1

NOTES:

✦ **Pyrotechnics\*** - magic for creating and controlling small quantities of flame. This can be used to provide illumination like a torch, light flammable materials, create pretty displays in different colours, and so on. It can't be used to create raging infernos, imprisoning circles and the like.

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

## Shard, Hobling Mystic

*By Chad Underkoffler*

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

RACE: Hobling

LEVEL: 1

VIRTUE: Honest

VICE: Proud

QUALITIES: Good [+2] Homeland: Murklemere (esp. North Shore/Orthedia), Good [+2] Organisation: The Mystic Monks of Murklemere, Good [+2] Hobling

(MOD: Small, Animal Instincts, Resilient Constitution; DS: Lucky), Good [+2] Fishing, Good [+2] Mystic Monk, Average [0] Iron Fist\*, Average [0] Cloud Step\*, Average [0] Cobra Fingers\*.

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

FORTUNE: 1

NOTES:

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

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

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

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

## Karabus Kraal, Action Librarian

*By Chad Underkoffler*

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

RACE: Human

LEVEL: 1

VIRTUE: Just

VICE: Stubborn

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

WEAKNESS: Poor [-2] Hopeless Urbanite.

FORTUNE: 1

NOTES:

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

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

# Creatures

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

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

## Size

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

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

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

Here are some of the main applications.

- † **Large size is good for:** making powerful close combat attacks; resisting damage from close combat attacks; feats of strength; some tasks requiring reach.
- † **Large size is bad for:** avoiding ranged attacks from smaller opponents; sneaking around; crossing fragile surfaces.
- † **Small size is good for:** not getting hit by ranged attacks; sneaking around and staying unnoticed; getting into small spaces.

- † **Small size is bad for:** resisting close combat damage from larger opponents; feats of strength; resisting forces (like being blown about by the wind); tasks requiring reach.

## Notes on size

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

- † In hand-to-hand combat power is more important.
- † In ranged combat accuracy is more important.
- † Optional rule - an attacker more than one size level smaller than the defender does Failure Ranks, not Damage Ranks. A human might get peppered with pixie arrows, but they won't do any lasting harm. (Unless they're poisoned, of course...)

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

## Type

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

- † **Grazer** – uses include running, hiding and dodging.
- † **Scavenger** – uses include foraging, resisting harm and adaptability.
- † **Predator** – uses include attacking, chasing and ferocity.

## Other common Qualities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Incorporeal\*** – lacking physical substance, like ghosts. It acts as Arcane Resistance against all ordinary physical attacks. It doesn’t work against direct effects of magic (as opposed to physical effects produced by it). Against physical attacks carrying a magical charge (enchanted swords etc.) it just uses MOD. Incorporeal creatures can’t make ordinary physical attacks, but often have some Arcane ability like Chilling Touch that does damage on an apparent physical attack. They can pass through solid objects, are untroubled by gravity and don’t need to breathe. The MOD can be added to tasks like stealth.



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

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

- † Damage poisons - just does another lot of straightforward damage, opposed by toughness.
- † Faculty poisons - target a particular Quality theme. These are phrased generally and damage is applied to whatever the victim has that seems appropriate. A “strength” one might do all its damage to Strength, Built Like a Brick Outhouse and such, while a “perception” one could damage Acute Hearing or Night Vision. Abilities won’t drop below Poor this way. If the victim has no applicable Quality they gain a new one at Poor, which disappears again when they recover.
- † Condition poisons - resist the poison’s TN or suffer some condition, e.g. paralysis or blindness.

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

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

## Sample creatures

### Amphisbaena

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Bear

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

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

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Large

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

### Bugra

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

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

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

### Demon

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



Demons are natives of the Nether Realms, a parallel dimension with lots of darkness and fire and stuff and, as it turns out, rather well-organised public services.

Sometimes they are summoned to the Middle Realms through magic, usually with the intent of compelling them to perform some service before returning to their home. More powerful ones may be able to open a gateway themselves, usually to send henchthings through.

For the rank and file you can think of them like football supporters. They are followers of Evil, taking



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

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

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

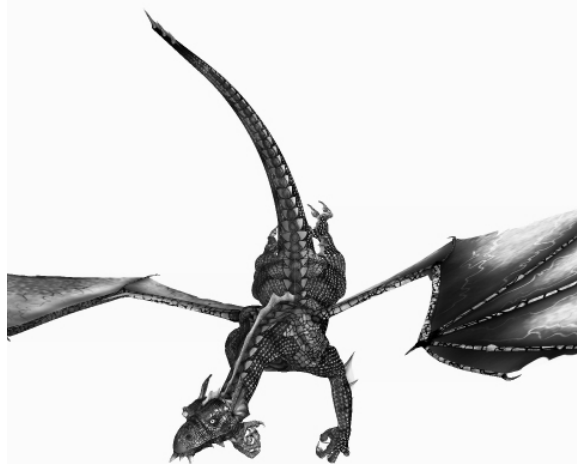
**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Evil (makes them vulnerable to some tactics, e.g. appropriate persuasion or magic)

## Dragon

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

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

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



noxious gas; the white, frost-breathing dragons of northern Valharia; and the red, fire-breathing dragons frequenting the slumbering volcanoes of the Musty Mountains. But then there are anomalies like the Auld Plaid Worm of Scata, thought to be unique, whose breath when sorely provoked is said to be the sound of a hundred drunken bagpipers.

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

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

These stats are for a fairly formidable specimen:

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

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

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

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

## Faery

These magical creatures, about 1ft tall, live under the hills of Logrin (see *Places*) and enjoy playing tricks on mortals. Although they have no taste for war, some of them have handy spears, bows or slings. Their dwellings under the hills are possibly in pocket dimensions that open into Logrin, which may connect to form “Faeryland”. Sometimes groups come out to dance or dump garbage.

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

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

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

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Small, Poor [-2] Repelled by Pure Iron

## Gnome

These little humanoids live in colonies in the Godsmile foothills and certain other locations. They’re about 2ft tall with brownish skin and pale hair, usually wearing a rough smock. They build earthen mounds with rakish chimneys and extensive tunnel systems. They are, in

general, busy constructors, making ramshackle structures out of natural and found materials. There is a saying: “If you want it built fast, get gnomes. If you want it to stay up, get dwarves.” In reality, though, most civilised people prefer gnomes to be elsewhere.

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

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

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

## Goblin

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



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

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

## Gryphon

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

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

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Large

## Jelly Corsairs

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

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

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

† *Aquatic:* used for speed, manoeuvrability and survival.

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

## Jeopard

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

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

**Weaknesses:** none

## Rat

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

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

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Small

## Squrtle

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

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

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Large

## Swamp Shambler

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



A shambler at rest looks like an ordinary pile of vegetation, made up of rotting leaves, moss, twining

roots and such. They are patient hunters, sitting under a tree or half-submerged in a bog until a victim arrives to ambush. The “arms” are actually clusters of tendrils with a reach of 10 feet or more that immobilise and constrict. It’s rumoured that much larger specimens can be found deep in the swamps.

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

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

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

† *Grasping Appendages*: once an attack hits successfully the victim is immobilised - they can’t move around, and even small actions like getting a dagger out must beat this Quality’s TN. It also limits the creature’s movement somewhat as it must stay in reach of the victim, and each “arm” can only entangle one victim at once.

† *Ambush*: adds to the first attack in a situation where the creature surprises its victim.

## Tundra Cats

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

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

**Strengths:** Good [+2] Large, Master [+6] Predator, Expert [+4] Athletic, Good [+2] Cunning, Expert [+4] Keen Senses, Good [+2] Night Vision, Expert [+4] Survival, Expert [+4] Resist Cold, Good [+2] See Things Far Off\*

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

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

## Weasel, Giant

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

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

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

## Weremantis

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

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

**Weaknesses:** none

## Wereplatypus

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

The transformation brings body hair, growth of the snout, webbed digits and a broad tail. They have venomous spurs on their ankles and wrists, used in

## Werecreatures

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

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

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

fighting over territory and mates (though as numbers are low meetings with other wereplatypuses are rare) – in humans this poison causes excruciating pain and swelling, lasting days or even weeks, and is the vector for the lycanthropy. Their gait on land is a little awkward, but in the water they are swift and graceful, catching small creatures for food. They seem to be able to locate living things even in pitch darkness.

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

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

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

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

## Wizen

These creatures live in the icy Norwast. Or rather they don't, as they are walking corpses. Unlike most such things they have retained some intellect and will, and followed rumours and legends to a place where they can be free from discrimination and pitchforks. Most humanoids can't survive here, but the Wizen aren't particularly bothered by the cold. Sometimes ice crystals freeze up their joints, but they just lie down and rest until they thaw, however many weeks it takes.

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

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

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

## Zombie

These are the inferior model of walking dead, sad and repulsive creatures animated by magic.

They are strong and hard to hurt, but have only enough mind to follow the commands of a master or perhaps vague instincts from their living days (like going home or getting revenge). They're basically cannon fodder.

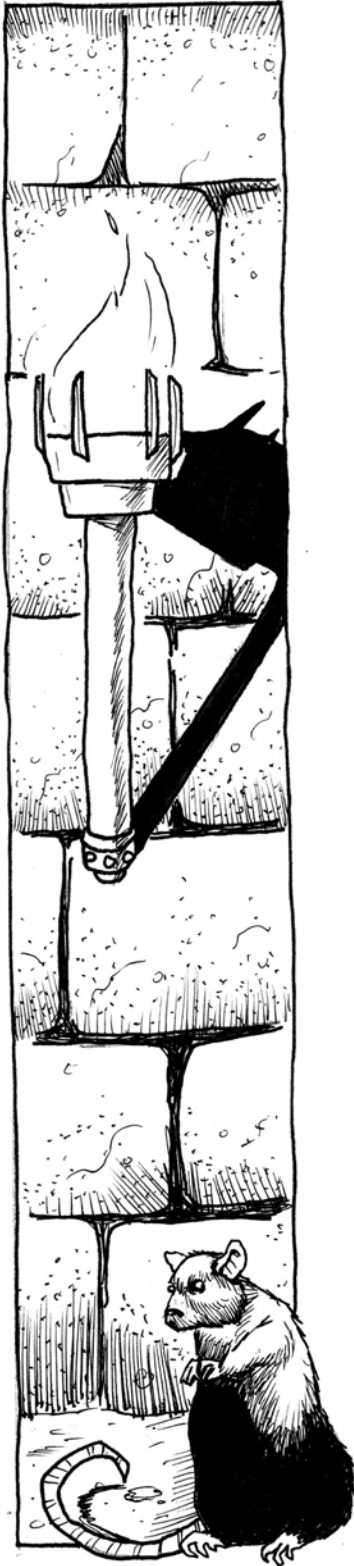


**Strengths:** Good [+2] Dead\* , Good [+2] Strong, Good [+2] State of Decay, Good [+2] Night Vision

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

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

# Game Master's Notes



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

## Trust

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

## Tone

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

## Setting Up Adventures

### Goals

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

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

However, remember one thing: a goal will only work if the players care about it. That means there must be a plausible reason why the characters would take it on board, and it must sound like a fun thing to do. If the whole forward motion of your game depends on a hook that nobody's interested in or willing to follow up you'll be sitting there doing a goldfish impression.

## Matching challenges

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

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

## Hazards

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

Example. Jefferson the Barbarian is exploring a ruined temple and fails to notice an Expert (+4) Pit Trap in time. He convinces the GM that his Good (+2) Outdoorsman applies because the situation is similar to losing your footing on a mountain scramble (another GM might not have agreed), and Good (+2) Toughness will clearly help to resist damage from the fall. So Jefferson's rolling +4 against the Expert Target Number, 11. He rolls 2 and 3, for a total of 9. He takes 2 Damage Ranks and now has to think of a way to get out.

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

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

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

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

In some cases you might want a bit more detail. Then you can treat the hazard just as if it were a character, giving it a few appropriate Qualities (in the same way as special items). For example you might have Pit Trap: Good (+2) Deep, Good (+2) Big Pointy Spikes. What this does is add the potential for more sophisticated interactions. Some things the characters do will only involve one of the hazard's Qualities (climbing out only uses Deep) but others might have the Qualities ganging up (falling in would use both Deep and Spikes).

## Rewards

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

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

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

## In Play

### Spotlight

Possibly the most important thing to remember when running a game is that all the players are there to have fun through their character, and that means showing off: from time to time that character must do something really impressive or otherwise entertaining. That means your story has to give opportunities to do this. If you have a group composed entirely of brawny barbarians don't give them an adventure revolving around solving clever clues. Clearly the players are all in it for the fighting, so have one or two clues, play up the barbarians' puzzlement and eventual lucky success, then get on to the lamentation of the enemies. You could turn the same example round for a group of weaselly wizards.

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

### Complexity

Some people get off on having lots of detail and working out how to balance the different elements; others prefer a very minimalist approach to give them a clearer view of the story. So you can define lots of stuff, or very little. Bear in mind, though, that things should feel as if they're on the edge of chaos at least some of the time, for instance as you find yourselves trapped between the conflicting desires of the deities. Everyone should have enough to keep track of to give a feeling of struggle in the face of a fickle and uncaring universe that keeps sending the bailiffs round, but not so much that it gets in the way of enjoying the game. As GM you should be aware of this and give advice to help the group to fine-tune to suit its comfort level.

## Scenery and description

This is another area where different gaming groups have different preferences. In general you want locations and scenery to have enough of an interesting presence to remind everyone that they're in a fantasy setting without the description getting in the way of the focus on the characters' actions.

So, come up with some interesting locations for the characters to visit. That could mean impressive ("The ancient statues guarding the pass tower hundreds of feet above you"); or unusual; or just the kind of place your players wouldn't normally go ("You descend into the sewers below the city"); or the sort of place they would go, but presented in a way distinctive to the game setting (a bar crowded with fantasy characters).

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

- † What impressions would they get first? If you open a door into a room containing two dozen walking skeletons with glowing red eyes, your initial impression is not going to focus on the style of the decorative plasterwork. You can compress these extra details, e.g. "It's an ornate room - full of skeletons!", or just omit them until the initial impressions are dealt with.
- † Use all the senses. Humans are strongly oriented toward sight, and take in most detail that way, but other senses often affect us more powerfully - describing an unusual sound or smell can be a good way to increase atmosphere.

## Story Hooks

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

What it does for you is to enable those sorts of side tangents that make straightforward quest-type stories more interesting, without requiring preparation work (though it might be worth scribbling down some possible riffs on the PCs' Qualities as a resource, to avoid being stumped when they come up). Because the players have identified their own Qualities and chosen





## Sample Story Hooks

Here are some possibilities and Qualities that could generate them.

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

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

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

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

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

which ones take hits to generate Hooks, these episodes should be pretty good at highlighting aspects of the character they want to play.

One reason why it's a good thing to make everyone have Homeland and Organisation membership Qualities is that players will be very tempted to take damage to those early on in a conflict, as they're not often terribly useful, and that gives you a nice Hook to bring their background back to haunt them.

## Abstract wealth

Some people might have difficulties with the way QMR handles wealth, gear and treasure, especially if they're used to other games that track precise numbers of silver, gold and uranium pieces. You'll need to find a level of description that makes it work for your group; invent currencies and numbers.



(For instance you could map the Ranks to: small units; big units; big units x10; big units x100; big units x1000.)

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

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

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

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

## Lame-ass redux

Don't forget what we said in the *Being Lame-ass* box earlier on. Sometimes players disrupt the game or suck the energy out of it by their behaviour. If friendly hints don't work, the best option is to have a private word with them to find out what's going on.

As GM your job is to try to make sure everyone round the table is having fun. If that person isn't, you'll want to see whether you can make some changes to help them enjoy it. Or maybe they're just having a bad day - we all do - and need a bit of understanding from the group this session. Maybe they didn't even realise that they were creating a problem, and will fix it once it's explained to them. Any number of things might be going on.

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

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

# Adventure:

## *The Little Shrine of Doom*

This is a simple adventure outline to help you get started in QMR. It's a mini-dungeon: there aren't many rooms and progress through it will be pretty linear, but as it's short hopefully that won't chafe too much.

### *The way to the shrine*

#### Beginning

The characters are in Polliver, a small village beside a swamp. The most obvious location for this is in Kadink, but you can put it pretty much anywhere that'll accommodate swamps (change the village name if you like). What the characters are doing there is largely up to the players. Inform them that they have met up and work out some sketchy justification as a group, or run through some introduction in the inn or general store if you prefer.

They will realise that the locals are regarding them suspiciously - if it's Kadink, even more suspiciously than normal! You might have them check to realise this as a Good task if they have suitable perceptive abilities, but it's pretty important that they get it so if there's any doubt just tell them. (If they don't take this bait, find a reason for the locals to approach them - e.g. a PC is from an organisation known to right wrongs.)

Turns out that earlier that day a bunch of armed men in black turned up looking for a swamp guide and took one of the villagers, Erlik Vandacott, by force, disappearing into the swamp. The villagers would like their fellow back ("He owes me money!"). If pressed they'll identify a young fellow named Beebo as the person currently around who's best suited to guide the party. (He's here because he's too lazy and cowardly to go out and do honest work, but will help the characters if paid.)

**Villagers.** If you need Qualities, e.g. there's a fight for some reason, most just have Good [+2] Homeland: Kadink (or wherever); some also have Good in a profession. Beebo has Good [+2] Swamp Knowledge.

#### What's going on?

(Don't tell the players this bit.) The kidnappers are Killian Blackstar, a young Priest of Azanüt seeking to build his fortune, and his henchmen. Killian has learned of an ancient shrine to his god located in this swamp, and seeks objects of power that may still be within. He knows how to get past the shrine's defences, but he doesn't know how to get through the swamp safely - hence the kidnap.

#### Through the swamp

Tracking the kidnappers shouldn't be hard, because if the characters can't do it there's no adventure! You might ask for a check with suitable Qualities, or describe it in such a way as to make it plausible without. If the group has Beebo he'll take care of that for them - make a couple of mentions of him finding signs to follow.

On the way the group will encounter scratchy plants, stinky rotting vegetation, treacherous mud, biting insects and the like. Treat the whole swamp as an Average [7] hazard, wearing the characters down with Failure ranks if they fail to resist it. If they have Beebo they get an upshift.

That matters because along the way they'll encounter a **swamp shambler** - stats in the Creatures section. It's camouflaged as plant stuff - see whether they notice it or it gets surprise when it attacks. When it's defeated anyone poking around in its remains or the place it was sitting will find Average [0] Petty Valuables, a Slow Burn Prop consisting of odd coins and jewellery from its previous prey.

#### The shrine... of evil!

Eventually the party reaches its destination: a low stone building in the shape of a pyramid with the top cut off, partly covered in vegetation. It's obviously quite old, and looks deserted. An empty doorway leads inside.

Sensitive characters might detect a faint residue of evil from the building. Knowledgeable ones might be able to interpret the carvings round the door as connected with the cult of Azanüt. There's enough mud and stuff round the entrance that it's very obvious a group of people have gone in recently.

## Level 1

A corridor leads in 10 feet to a square stone chamber about 25 feet across. It's dark inside, so the party will need some sort of light source - only a faint light comes through the entranceway. This is obviously a small temple - there are statues, a stone altar, braziers etc. It's an Average task to identify Azanüt on a good look at the fittings. However, before they can spend time on that they'll meet the residents.

**Bloodbats.** These creatures resemble large mutant bats, about 1ft long in the body. The most notable differences are a long, dagger-like proboscis that they stick into animals to feed on blood, and a set of six somewhat insect-like legs for grabbing on to victims. These ones live in the old shrine and fly out to hunt. They don't have any loot. When the kidnappers came through they killed a couple (taking the bodies) and drove the rest off - finding signs of the fight is an Expert task. There are about 1½ times as many as you have PCs, but treat them as minions so taking one out is just complicated.

Good [+2] Small, Good [+2] Predator, Good [+2] Flight, Good [+2] Sharp Proboscis (used for puncturing and for draining blood once attached), Good [+2] Grasping Legs (resist being detached); Poor [-2] Small.

**The doors.** On the same wall as the entry are two wooden doors, one either side. They're locked but somewhat decayed - only Average to pick the lock or force them open. They're both small store-rooms, a walk-in cupboard with shelves.

- ✦ In the first one opened is a small collection of goblets, candlesticks, etc. - Good [+2] Evil Silverware, a One-Shot Prop that'll need unloading in the right place because of its markings.
- ✦ The second room appears to be empty, but an Average search reveals a small glass vial in a back corner. It contains thick green liquid, and anyone able to read the scratched ink runes can make out "demon" and "protection". It's a Good [+2] Potion of Demon Armour\*, a One-Shot Prop causing the drinker to develop tough scaly skin.

This gives MOD protection against physical injury for a scene, and also Poor [-2] Demonic Appearance.

**The altar.** A Good [9] search of the room, aided by faint muddy footprints, reveals that if you rotate a demon face on the altar a flagstone behind it slowly folds down to show a steep, narrow staircase going down to Level 2.

## Level 2

The staircase ends in a stone corridor with damp dripping from the walls. About 30 feet ahead a doorway is visible with a faint light beyond.

Reaching the doorway is complicated by a **Good [+2] Pit Trap**. A section of floor swings away if anyone stands on it, dropping them down a hole. Good is the TN to spot it if anyone is specifically looking for traps; to avoid taking damage if triggered; and to climb out if anyone falls in. If you know where it is you can avoid it by edging past along the side walls as an Average task.

## The library

The corridor opens into a hexagonal room about 30 feet across, lit by a single torch. The walls hold shelves of books and papers, and on the far side there's a desk. In the middle of the room stands a figure, perhaps mistaken for a statue till it moves, shedding dust: a gaunt, sunken-faced warrior in old bronze armour. When the PCs enter he raises his sword and, as they cannot give the proper passwords, attacks.

**Undead guardian.** Same stats as a Wizen: Expert [+4] Dead, Good [+2] Strong, Good [+2] Occupation - Warrior, Good [+2] Stubborn, Good [+2] Night Vision; Poor [-2] Dead. He also has a Good [+2] Ancient Bronze Sword\*, an enchanted Bonus Prop.

Many of the books, papers, etc round the walls have been attacked by various exotic moulds. (In fact, an enterprising character with specialised knowledge might realise that samples could form a Good [+2] Exotic Mould Collection for sale to a scholar of unusual plants and fungi. Finding one is non-trivial, and who knows what strange projects they might have?) Of what's intact, much bears foreboding symbols of evil that will deter right-thinking folk.

## Killian Blackstar, Priest of Azanüt

**DESCRIPTION:** Good-looking young man with pale skin, flowing black hair and an arrogant, superior expression. Wears fine black robes. (He could make a good recurring villain if he survives.)

**RACE:** Human

**LEVEL:** 2

**VIRTUE:** Ambitious

**VICE:** Arrogant

**QUALITIES:** Good [+2] Homeland: League of Groth, Good [+2] Organisation: Cult of Azanüt, Good [+2] Flair for the Dramatic (free for human), Good [+2] Ordination - Azanüt\*, Good [+2] Lashing Tentacles of Night\*, Average [0] Create Undead\*, Good [+2] Quick Thinking, Good [+2] Willpower, Good [+2] Social Intrigue.

**WEAKNESSES:** Poor [-2] Vain.

**FORTUNE:** 3

**PROPS:** Average [0] Pouch of Coins (Slow Burn), Good [+2] Fine Robes (One Shot), Good [+2] Dagger (Bonus; will be used to fight).

✦ **Lashing Tentacles of Night\*** - a pool of darkness around the caster's feet extrudes tentacles of shadow that attack nearby opponents. Attacks are at the spell's Rank, split as far as Poor for multiple opponents. It lasts for the duration of a conflict.

✦ **Create Undead\*** - turns a corpse into an undead creature that will follow your commands. Rank limits the number of creatures you may control at any time, and also how Large they may be. The new creature has its old Qualities plus Good [+2] Dead, a Rank of Strong, and Poor in Slow and Stupid.

**Henchmen.** These are just Good [+2] Thugs, dressed in black, armed with swords and obedient to Killian. Treat them as minions. There are about a dozen, but fine-tune to suit the party. All told they have Average [0] Pocket Change.

**Deadbats.** Killian brought back two Bloodbats the group killed as undead "pets". They look normal unless you spot the sword wounds, and they still seek blood. Run these as full creatures, not minions - they'll be fairly tough.

Good [+2] Small, Good [+2] Predator, Good [+2] Flight, Good [+2] Sharp Proboscis, Good [+2] Grasping Legs, Good [+2] Dead\*, Good [+2] Strong; Poor [-2] Small, Poor [-2] Slow, Poor [-2] Stupid.

**What's really here?** Basically it's an opportunity for the GM to plant stuff. There could be clues leading on to a future adventure - maybe a reference to another site set up by the cult or long-standing infiltration in a surprising place. You could go into the history of the shrine. If the characters need it, give them a magic item or two, for instance:

✦ **Expert [+4] Scroll of Healing** - restores MOD Ranks of damage (Average counts as 1).

✦ **Expert [+4] Ring of Spider Summoning** - this is in the desk drawer. It's silver, with a silver webbing filigree over a black stone. It's a Plot Point Prop, containing the Spider Summoning spell which causes a dog-sized spider to appear for a scene and follow the caster's simple commands. It has the Quality "Spider" at the spell's Rank (uses include attacking prey, climbing walls, spinning webs and so on). It's always the same one, no matter how mangled it gets each time, and remembers the way the characters treat it. (For a darker atmosphere you could have a spell to summon a swarm of ordinary spiders instead, but it could be fun to get the characters attached to Googly Goo here.)

## The hidden passage

The shelves on the right-hand wall of the library are actually a secret door, opening inwards to reveal a corridor beyond. It's an Expert [11] task to find and open this. (As there's no sign of the people they're following the players should have a pretty good idea that there's further to go, and make an effort to find a way through.)

The passage is about 30 feet long, ending in a sturdy-looking metal-bound door. There seems to be some sort of alcove in the wall at the end. It's an Expert task to detect a faint smell of decaying vegetation or notice small holes in the walls half-way along.

**Fire chicane** - the corridor is trapped, triggered by floor pressure anywhere in the middle half. It taps into swamp gas to project flames across the space. There's about a foot of safety at floor and ceiling, and a foot's clearance from the opposite wall, though the jets come from alternate walls. For a straightforward attempt to cross you need to resist an Expert hazard, probably with toughness or flexibility. The good news is that the alcove contains a seat where an acolyte would deactivate the trap with a lever to allow approved persons to pass, so only one person needs to get through.

## The final chamber

The door is neither locked nor trapped. It opens into a colonnaded room 30ft wide and 50ft long, the inner sanctum of the cult. Inside are Killian Blackstar and his entourage - see box - as well as Erlik cowering in a corner. The bad guys are probably surprised to see the PCs, unless they made a lot of noise in the corridor. In any case, they attempt to destroy these interlopers. (It's probably worth sketching on a sheet of paper to represent the room so the PCs can dodge round the pillars and such.)

At the far end of the room is another statue of Azanüt, flanked by braziers which burn with a sickly green hue. Around the place are many stands, cases and caskets, most of them empty. It was the cult's storehouse for its artifacts, though most of the good stuff is gone now. When the PCs enter Blackstar is standing before a statue of a demonic figure in some smooth black stone, chanting in some guttural language. He pauses just long enough to instruct his minions to "Kill them!", then continues. With another two full turns he will succeed in releasing this demon from its imprisonment, gaining a useful servant (with the sample stats given in *Creatures*). Any substantial distraction will stop him (e.g. inflicting some damage), and he'll also stop if his minions are losing badly and need assistance. Give him some dialogue about how the stuff in here will make him powerful.

The bad guys have clearly got partway through searching the room. They have gathered:

- ✦ Expert [+4] Jewelled Chalice (mercifully free of cult markings) - One-Shot Prop;

- ✦ Good [+2] Scroll of Rat Form - One-Shot Prop; thaumaturgic magic turning one person into a rat, lasts a scene unless caster cancels it sooner, resisted with physical and/or mental toughness if unwilling.

If the PCs finish the search they can also find:

- ✦ Good [+2] Visibility Potion - the drinker becomes supernaturally obvious for a scene - anyone nearby must resist or watch them to the exclusion of all else.
- ✦ Rubbery Rod - crafted in some natural rubber from the jungles of Wochilat, it's a sort of sceptre in the shape of a green tentacle, a Plot Point Prop holding the miracle Good [+2] Deranging Delineation of Klu\* - causes an image of the bulbous, tentacled head of Azanüt's lieutenant Klu to overlay the caster's own head. All who get a decent look at this squormugamous apparition's face must resist the spell's Rank or go insane - believing they're a chicken, screaming about clowns, attempting to fly, or otherwise becoming thoroughly useless (and even hazardous) for a duration based on Rank. Servants of Azanüt can use their Ordination\* Rank to resist.

## Finishing off

Assuming the PCs are victorious and there are no complicating factors, you can fast-forward to them returning the grateful Erlik to the village. Find out what they've done with Killian and his followers - will they return in future? Now you just have to give the characters some opportunities to get into trouble with their new loot.



# GM Cheat Sheet

## PDQ Master Chart

| LEVEL          | AS QUALITY RANK  | MODIFIER TO 2D6 ROLL | AS DIFFICULTY RANK  | TARGET NUMBER |
|----------------|--|----------------------|---|---------------|
| <b>Poor</b>    | Notably inept.   | -2                   | A trivial task.   | 5             |
| <b>Average</b> | Typical human capability.                                  | 0                    | Straightforward task.   | 7             |
| <b>Good</b>    | Most professionals or talented newcomers.                  | +2                   | Complex task, requiring attention to detail.                        | 9             |
| <b>Expert</b>  | Noted professional; talent with skill to back it up.       | +4                   | Intricate task requiring sharp concentration, hard for a novice.    | 11            |
| <b>Master</b>  | Acclaimed genius: talent with substantial skill behind it. | +6                   | Extremely difficult task, hard for most professionals in the field. | 13            |

## Magic Effects Table

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

### Spending Fortune

- ✦ **Fate Smiles** – make a dice roll again, rolling 1d6+6 and keeping the better of the two results.
- ✦ **Extra Effort** – an Upshift on a roll you're about to make (could turn a situation simple).
- ✦ **Pull Yourself Together** – take an action or reaction to recover 1d6 Failure ranks or 1 Damage.
- ✦ **That's Odd** – dictate a plausible coincidence or minor fact.

### Gaining Fortune

- ✦ **Did It My Way** – doing significant stuff to follow your Virtue or Vice.
- ✦ **Flawless Victory** – succeeding in some notable challenge.
- ✦ **Fickle Finger of Fate** – the GM does something bad to your character to progress the story.
- ✦ **GM Discretion** – miscellaneous impressedness with a player.

*Questers  
of the Middle Realms*

*These being the worldly particulars of:*

## First impressions

Race:

*Level:*

*Virtue:*

*Vice:*

Player name

## Fortune Points

[illegible]

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

Deity

Favour

Deity

Favour

## **The Greater Gods**

Elal – sky, strength, rulership

Eaki – water, knowledge, craft

Ashtir – love, war

Shamutu – sun, day, judgment, time

Nansin – moon, night, judgment, time

Ninmuza – agriculture, cycles of nature

Azanüt – twisting, demons

## **The College**

## **The Wild**

## **The Sanctum**

## **The Hearth**

| <i>Prep</i> | <i>Rank</i> |
|-------------|-------------|
|             |             |
|             |             |
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