

The World of the Hyperborean Mice

The world of **Hyperborean Mice** is a realm of gritty swords & sorcery adventure cast in miniature. Rather than humans and elves, the characters are small mice and rats who live in a great field not far from an ancient, rotting farmhouse of human design. Magic is in their very blood; it enables them to speak, think, walk upright and, in those individuals with the knack, to cast spells.

There are many kingdoms in the rocky plain known as the Fallows, but the most ancient and most powerful is the great Empire of Muscala. The Empire is ruled by a decadent aristocracy of heavily inbred but magically potent albino mice known as the White Lords. They are said to be descended from the First Ones, a group of white mice with incredible magical powers who settled in the Fallows long ago, fleeing from the tyranny of mysterious giants known as Titans. The First Ones interbred with the common mice of the field, producing generations of mixed-blood offspring with great intelligence but weaker magical powers. Later, they used their magic to grant intelligence to other rodent species as well, so that they could act as foot-soldiers during the great war against the Ka'ats. After that legendary conflict, they passed into mythology and are believed to have ascended to godhood. The First Ones are believed to watch over the Fallows from the heavens and are still worshipped today.

Over the generations that came thereafter, however, the magic of the White Lords has worn thin and the magical powers of modern mice are thought to be waning compared to their ancestors. The inbreeding common amongst the upper classes has slowed the process, but not stopped it. Each year, more mice and rats are born *Forsaken*, meaning that they have weak intellects, no magical powers and often violent tempers. Sometimes their children are completely feral, being purely ordinary mice bereft of magic.

Emperor Luciel XXIV, the current ruler of Muscala, is a dissipated and decadent noble-mouse who rarely leaves the Imperial Palace, trusting the administration of the empire to his subordinates. Lesser rulers pay tribute to the Empire to keep the Imperial Army at bay. There are many small kingdoms here, ranging from the impoverished farmlands of Duvain's Weal to the wealthy port cities of Lakeshore. Their rulers engage in their own petty squabbles and border conflicts, but so long as the flow of grain to Muscala is not interrupted, the Empire considers these to be purely internal matters.

Adventurous mice often seek out the great capitol city of the Empire, the mousy metropolis of Haven. Haven is a dangerous, crime-ridden den of iniquity, but it is also a city of opportunity. A great portion of Muscala's wealth moves through Haven and there are many chances for a cunning mouse or rat to advance themselves.

Some other notable locations are:

- The Alabaster Temple: home of the Pontifex and where most priests are trained.
- Fashor: a desert kingdom of Arabic appearance located on the far side of Greatwater.
- The Wildlands: a lawless region beyond the edge of civilization. Ruled by barbarian clans of rats and mice (many of whom are forsaken) and more than a few bands of vile, cannibalistic shrews.
- The Tzarchul Ruins: ancient sunken ruins from a long-lost civilization that predated the arrival of the First Ones. Ancient carvings in these ruins depict the Tzarchul as something like fat, tailless rats. Exactly what destroyed their civilization is unknown.
- The Forbidden Lands: an area sealed off by order of the First Ones in ancient times. A partially collapsed wooden building of ludicrous size is visible there and is referred to by some as the Citadel of the Titans. Entry into this area is punishable by death.

Wizardry is well known and respected in the Fallows, but Sorcery (which deals with spirits, demons and dark gods) is forbidden in many areas and its practice punishable by death. Many monsters, such as the voracious Ghuls (vile, undead shrews) are thought to be creations of Sorcery.

The most potent enemies of the mice are the monsters... predators who, by dint of eating talking mice, have acquired some portion of their magic themselves. These creatures range from slightly-more-intelligent animals to beasts that can speak, think and sometimes even work magic themselves. Most dreaded of these is Hoorooru the Silent Death, a great horned owl now worshipped as a god by some mice. Banned from entering the Empire itself by ancient magics, he and those depraved rodents who worship him still plot to overthrow the Emperor and establish Hoorooru as the absolute ruler of the Fallows.

Hyperborean Mice Quickstart Rules

Character Creation

1. Allocate 5 points between your stats:
 - **Agility:** speed, balance and dexterity
 - **Brawn:** strength and toughness
 - **Cleverness:** intelligence, wit and charm
 - **Drive:** willpower and force of personality
 - **Perception:** your aim and awareness of your surroundings
 - **Magic:** your personal magical potential

The "average" stat is zero. No stat can go above +3 at this point. You can get up to 2 additional points by subtracting points from stats you don't mind going negative in. [Optional rule: your GM may allow you to change your Status to +1 for a cost of one stat point or reduce it to -1 in order to get an extra stat point.]

2. Pick a race. This will adjust your attributes and possibly Status and Size (which also default to zero).
3. Your GM will tell you how many Hero Points your characters receive. It's usually 3. When spent, they come back at the rate of 1 per restful night's sleep in play and 2 more at the end of each session. NPCs may have any where from 0 to 5 Hero Points themselves, but most NPCs should have 0 or 1.
4. Spend 75 XP on skills and Extras (binary traits like Feats/Gifts/Advantages/etc.). See the cost chart. Note that you get 3 Extras for free; taking any more will cost you additional points. Unspent points are just unspent XP. Spell-casting skills will only be available if you take an Extra which allows access to them.
5. Calculate your secondary attributes. Movement rate is Agility+5, Hit Points are equal to 10+Brawn+Endurance Skill+Size. Innate armor is equal to Size.
6. Describe up to 3 Emotional Ties to NPCs or organizations in the setting. This can be things like "Hates King Ferrik", "Adores children" or "Loyal to the Empire". You can take some later if you don't take 3 now.
7. Select name, gender, equipment (your Status determines what you can get), background information, et cetera. Basically just fill in all of the details.

Character Races

- Royal Mouse (highly inbred albino aristocrats): Agility -1, Brawn -2, Cleverness +1, Perception -1, Magic +2, Status +2. Vulnerable to sunlight; suffer a -1 penalty to most physical tasks in bright light.
- White Mouse (middle class): Brawn -1, Cleverness +1, Perception -1, Magic +1, Status +1.
- Common Mouse (lower class, the most common race): +1 to Agility or Perception (your choice).
- Jumping Mouse (different species): Agility +1, Magic -1. +10 to Athletics rolls involving jumping.
- White Rat (traditional servants of the aristocracy): Agility -1, Brawn +1, Magic -1, Status +1, Size 1.
- Common Rat (lower class menial workers): Brawn +2, Perception +1, Magic -2, Status -1, Size 1.
- Wild Rat (untrustworthy barbarians): Brawn +3, Drive +1, Perception +1, Magic -3, Status -2, Size 1.

Cost Chart (these are total costs for that level, so going from +3 to +4 would cost 4 extra XP)

Buying Skills (extra specialties cost 5 XP each): Buying Extras:

- | | |
|-------------|-------------------|
| ● +0: free | ● 3 Extras: free |
| ● +1: 1 XP | ● 4 Extras: 8 XP |
| ● +2: 3 XP | ● 5 Extras: 18 XP |
| ● +3: 6 XP | |
| ● +4: 10 XP | |
| ● +5: 15 XP | |

Ratings past the end of the charts are not available at character creation.

This is a very basic system, really... the cost to increase a skill to the next level is always equal to the rating of that next level, so going from +7 to +8 costs 8 XP. Extras are treated like a special double-cost skill that starts at +3. This means that it's always possible to purchase additional Extras, but the cost gradually becomes prohibitive.

In general, a Skill Rating of +5 should be thought off as that of a Journeyman, +10 as that of a Master, and +15 as a Grandmaster. When you increase a skill to +10 (and again at +15), you actually get to increase the stat that the skill is based on by +1 (if it depends on a choice of two stats, pick one).

Example Skills

Each skill depends on one or more stats. Your stat bonus for that skill is your rating in the appropriate stat. If the skill depends on two stats, use the higher rating to determine your bonus.

Skills with an asterisk (*) are *specialized*. You must choose a specialty when taking them. They apply at full value to tasks covered by your specialties and ½ normal value (round down) when your specialties do not apply. Extra specialties can be added for a flat 5 XP each.

Acrobatics (Agility): skill at maintaining your balance, taking falls gracefully and performing acrobatics.

Acting (Cleverness): skill at imitating someone else's mannerisms believably. Can be used as a performance art.

Athletics (Agility/Brawn): skill at running, swimming, jumping and climbing.

Awareness (Perception): your ability to notice subtle details in your vicinity.

Boating (Agility): skill at handling boats, skiffs and rafts, particularly in bad weather.

Charm (Cleverness): skill at flattery, seduction, general gossip and making friends.

Craft* (Cleverness): making and repairing things. Example specialties: weapons, carpentry, pottery, weaving.

Digging (Brawn): skill at digging stable burrows (and other things) rapidly. A neglected skill in most big cities.

Endurance (Brawn): ability to resist fatigue. *Also helps determine your Hit Points.*

Etiquette (Cleverness): skill at following the intricate rules of etiquette favored by the upper classes.

Evasion (Agility): skill at evading blows by getting out of their way.

Finance (Cleverness): skill at running a household or business, handling money and appraising goods.

Gambling (Cleverness): skill at maximizing your winnings in games of chance. Use *Thievery* to cheat.

Intimidation (Drive): ability to frighten others with glares and outright threats.

Intuition (Magic): ability to sense the presence of strong danger, active spells or subtle mystical influences.

Leadership (Drive): ability to inspire and command others.

Lore* (Cleverness): general education and detailed academic knowledge. Example specialties: animals, herbs, magic, religion, history, politics. Lore is often rolled at ½ value to interpret writings in foreign languages.

Medicine (Cleverness): skill at treating wounds, poisons and diseases.

Melee Weapons* (Agility/Brawn): fighting with hand-held weapons. Example specialties: swords, axes, spears.

Missile Weapons* (Perception): skill at hitting targets with missile weapons. Example specialties: bows, crossbows, slings. Note that bows and slings (but not crossbows) suffer a Penalty Die for unskilled use.

Performance* (Agility/Cleverness): entertaining others. Example specialties: dancing, music, story-telling.

Persuasion (Cleverness): skill at speaking persuasively, even when lying.

Psychology (Perception): insight into the hidden motivations of others. Used to detect lies and to taunt foes.

Reaction (Agility/Perception): ability to react quickly to sudden events. *Also helps determine your Initiative.*

Resist Magic (Drive/Magic): ability to resist overt magical effects. Intuition resists subtle ones.

Resolve (Drive): resistance to pain and suffering. *Also helps determine your Stun Threshold.*

Riding (Agility): skill at staying on a mount.

[Spell] (Magic): each spell is a separate skill. Spells can only be purchased if you possess certain Extras.

Stealth (Agility): skill at moving silently and keeping to shadows to avoid being seen or heard.

Tactics (Cleverness): skill at military tactics, including planning for major battles and setting up ambushes.

Thievery (Agility/Perception): skill at picking pockets, sleight of hand and opening locks.

Thrown Weapons* (Agility/Perception): throwing weapons effectively. Example specialties: thrown axes, spears, knives. Throwing objects for purposes other than attacking someone uses this skill at full value.

Tracking (Perception): skill at following trails by scent and small signs of a creature's passage.

Traps (Cleverness/Perception): skill at spotting, setting and disarming traps and snares.

Traveller's Lore* (Cleverness): knowledge of the language, culture, customs, laws, secrets, etc. of particular areas. Example specialties: Haven, the Imperial Palace, Rookwood. Rolled at ½ value to understand foreign tongues.

Unarmed Combat (Brawn): skill at wrestling, brawling and other forms of close combat.

Wilderness (Cleverness/Perception): surviving in the wilderness, knowledge of animal habits and the weather.

Other (Varies): if there is no skill that matches what you're looking for, get your GM to create a new one.

Example Extras

Many Extras are said to *Enhance* specific skills. This means that when you spend a Hero Point to add Bonus Dice to that skill, you receive 2 extra Bonus Dice if you spend it before rolling and 1 extra Bonus Die if you spend it *after* rolling. This is not a cumulative effect, so if you have two Extras which both enhance a given task, you still will only receive 1 or 2 extra Bonus Dice.

Blind-Fighting (requires Awareness 5+): your penalties for fighting in the dark are only -1 for melee and -2 for ranged instead of -5 and -10. Enhances the Awareness skill for any checks that don't involve sight.

Born Gambler (requires Gambling 5+): you pick up games of chance so quickly that you are no longer penalized for playing a game you are not familiar with. Enhances the Gambling skill.

Born Leader (requires Leadership 5+): you can spend a Hero Point to add Bonus Dice to any action being performed by someone under your leadership. You can also spend a Hero Point to give every person under your command one Bonus Die that they can add before rolling to one action during the current scene. Enhances the Leadership skill.

Burrower (requires Digging 5+): you can carve out a burrow with amazing speed. By spending a Hero Point, you can dig a burrow large enough for you to fit in as a single Focused action. Enhances the Digging skill.

Danger Sense (requires Intuition 5+): your sensitivity to danger is so great that the GM should roll it for you secretly when something threatens you that you are unaware of. Enhances the Intuition skill.

Doctor (requires Medicine 5+): when you roll Medicine to tend an injured person, the normal effect is to heal them 2 extra points per day instead of 1. Enhances the Medicine skill.

Heroic: you have one more Hero Point. This Extra can be taken multiple times.

Indefatigable: when you suffer Fatigue, reduce the number of Fatigue points you have by one for purposes of determining fatigue penalties.

Indomitable (requires Resolve 5+): you automatically succeed at any attempt to resist talking under torture. Enhances the Resolve skill.

Kenshar Practitioner: you can purchase the three Kenshar spell skills. This meditative art is rare outside of Fashor.

Lightning Reflexes (requires Reaction 5+): you are never penalized due to surprise. Enhances the Reaction skill.

Long-Range Magic: your spell-casting penalties due to range are ½ normal. Your maximum range is doubled.

Mana Burst: twice per day you can cast a Concentrated spell without taking extra time or an extra Fatigue.

Marksman (requires Ranged Weapons 5+): your penalties due to range are reduced to -3 for melee, 0 for close, -3 for medium and -7 for long range. Enhances the Ranged Weapons skill.

Master Craftsman (requires Craft 5+): you can appraise items in your Craft specialties with a glance. Enhances the Craft skill.

Master Locksmith (requires Thievery 5+): your penalty for trying to pick a lock with inferior tools is -1 and with

no tools is -2 instead of -5 and -10. Enhances the Thievery skill for tasks involving locks.

Master Pickpocket (requires Thievery 5+): the penalty for trying to pickpocket someone who is paying attention to you drops from -5 to -1 and the penalty for trying to pickpocket someone who is actively watching for it drops from -10 to -2. Enhances the Thievery skill for pickpocketing attempts.

Mouse of Many Tails (requires Acting 5+): the penalty for attempting to imitate a specific person is reduced to -1 or -2 if you have only a vague description, instead of the normal -5 and -10. Enhances the Acting skill.

Natural Charm (requires Charm 5+): your character is so dashing that they can use Charm without penalties even in totally inappropriate situations such as in the middle of a fight. Enhances the Charm skill.

Reflexive Catch (requires Thrown Weapons 5+): when someone throws a weapon at you that you could reasonably catch, you can use your Thrown Weapons skill as a defense. If you tie their roll or better, you catch the weapon yourself. You can attempt this against missile weapons (such as arrows and crossbow bolts) but you must Focus on doing so.

Scholarly (requires Lore 5+): you are never penalized on Lore rolls due to distractions. Enhances the Lore skill.

Sorcery: you can take the six Sorcery spell skills. Sorcery involves spirits and demons and is illegal in many areas.

Spell Mastery (requires the appropriate [Spell] skill at 5+): you can use the advanced effects of your chosen spell. Enhances that spell skill. This Extra can be taken multiple times, each time applying to a different spell.

Spinning Strike (requires Melee Weapons 5+): as a Focused action, you can apply a single melee attack to all foes within range. This effect only works with a weapon that you are specialized in.

Untouchable (requires Evasion 5+): you are so skilled at avoiding blows that you no longer need to give ground when you roll a Partial Success on an Evasion roll. Enhances the Evasion skill.

Weapon Mastery (requires Melee Weapons 5+, specialized in chosen weapon): you are so skilled with a particular type of weapon that when you apply an Extra Damage crit to a hit with that weapon, you get to increase the size of the added die by 1 step (from a d6 to d8, for example). Enhances the Melee Weapons skill when fighting with that weapon.

Well-Travelled (requires Traveller's Lore 5+): you can speak foreign tongues that are covered by your specialties as though you were a native. Enhances the Traveller's Lore skill.

Wild-born (requires Wilderness 5+): you are so at home in the wild that you can travel at full speed through rough terrain and even hazardous terrain only slows you down to ½ speed. Enhances the Wilderness skill.

Wizardry: you can purchase the six Wizardry spell skills. Wizardry is the most common form of magic.

This is only a sampling of the full list of Extras that I intend to include with the game. All of them follow the same general outline. If the Extra requires a specific skill, it will require that skill at a rating of 5+ (the highest rating that a starting character can begin with). An Extra which needs a bit of extra potency will generally enhance the skill that it depends on.

Status Level Summary



A character's *Status* is an abstract representation of how high their position in the Fallows is. The starting rating of a character is mostly determined by what race you choose to play, but you can win or lose Status in play as a result of your adventures.

In many social situations, your Status will be applied as a modifier to your rolls... in extremely status-conscious formal situations (such as trials), this modifier may be doubled.

Naturally, there are situations where a high status may penalize you and a low status help you (for example, if you were captured by a barbarian clan that hated the Empire), but the descriptions below should convey what a given Status rating normally implies.



- -5: a monster to be attacked or fled from.
- -4: an escaped slave or anyone else that it isn't illegal to harm, but might be illegal to help.
- -3: homeless and penniless. No items that can't be found loose on the ground; anything more expensive and people will assume you stole it.
- -2: crushing poverty. A leaky shack to live in and perhaps some crude tools that could double as weapons. You never get enough to eat. If you are a household slave, you might live a better life but nothing you use will be yours.
- -1: poverty. A shack to live in and some tools that could double as weapons. There's always at least a couple of days a week where you don't get enough to eat.
- +0: commoner. A small, plain house and the right to carry a knife or other small metal weapon for personal protection. You may not get enough to eat during winter, but the rest of the year usually isn't too bad. Any animals you own will be the kind that work or are raised for food.
- +1: middle class. A nice house and the ability to afford and carry a decent-sized metal weapon. You rarely have to skip a meal. You might own a low-quality riding beetle and one pet (an animal that doesn't work).
- +2: upper class. A big house with at least one household servant. You can get metal weapons and armor. Your food is probably cooked for you. You probably own a good-quality riding beetle and may have multiple pets.
- +3 to +4: upper-upper class. A big house with a family of servants. You may not have to dress yourself. You probably have a choice of steeds and a carriage for rainy days. The highest position that anyone other than a white or royal mouse could reasonably aspire to.
- +5 to +7: wealthy aristocrat. A landowner with a small mansion and multiple families of servants. You probably have at least one bodyguard and your word is law amongst the commoners who live on your land. The highest position that any white mouse can reasonably aspire to; only royal mice can achieve higher rank. You might be able to get an audience at the Imperial Court.
- +8 to +9: Baron, Duke or minor King. A keep of your own and a personal militia to protect it. A large section of the countryside pays you fealty. Your word is law amongst lesser nobles in your domain. If a Baron or Duke, you will be expected to attend Court at least once per year. If the Emperor dies, you could conceivably end up as the new Emperor.
- +10: Emperor. Absolute ruler of all you survey with control over an entire army of soldiers. Your word is law even amongst the aristocracy, although offending your immediate inferiors is still a risky endeavor since they do have armies of their own.

Basic Task Resolution

The basic system is to roll Stat + Skill + 2d10 and compare to the difficulty (which may be a flat value or the result of someone else's roll). Stat checks use Stat (x2 if Stat > 0) + 2d10 instead.

- Fail by 8+: Critical Failure (regular failure plus a Mishap occurs automatically)
- Fail by 1+: Failure
- Beat difficulty by 0-3: Partial Success (½ normal effect or normal effect -1, whichever is less)
- Beat difficulty by 4+: Success (normal effect)
- Beat difficulty by 8+: Critical Success (normal effect plus a crit)
- Beat difficulty by 12+: Critical x 2 (normal effect plus 2 crits)
- Add another crit for every additional 4 points you beat the difficulty by

Crits

Crits (short for Critical Successes) represent the benefits of especially successful actions. Each crit improves on your normal result in some fashion. Players will normally be able to choose what sort of effect a crit has (more damage, more impressive, more subtle, etc.) or make suggestions for a possible effect.

Bonus and Penalty Dice

If you get Bonus Dice, you'll get to roll some additional d10s and take the best two as your roll. If you get Bonus Dice *after* rolling, just add them to the pool of dice you already rolled and take the two best as per normal.

If you get Penalty Dice, you add that many d10s but you have to take the two *lowest* instead of the two highest. Naturally, Bonus and Penalty Dice cancel each other out, one-for-one. If you try to roll a skill that you don't actually have any points in, the GM may inflict a Penalty Die on you to represent your lack of training.

Perfect Rolls and Mishaps

When you roll at least two 10s on a test (the highest possible roll), treat it as rolling a 24 instead of a 20.

When your highest die is less than or equal to the *Risk* of an action (usually 1), a *Mishap* (a bad side effect of your action) occurs even if the final result of the action was successful.

Aiding Other Rolls

Sometimes you'll use one skill to try and aid another roll. Roll the first skill to determine how much aid it can provide for the second roll. This is often an opposed roll, with your opponent setting the difficulty.

On a *Partial Success*, add one Bonus Die to the follow-up roll. On a regular *Success*, add two Bonus Dice. For each crit scored, add an additional +2 bonus. On a failure no benefit is received and a Mishap will incur a Penalty Die on the follow-up roll.

Bonus Dice and Probability:

Note that Bonus Dice make good rolls more likely, but never certain and they do not increase the maximum result that you can roll. Actual Bonuses (which modify your rolls by a flat amount like +2) don't change the likelihood of a good or bad roll, but do increase the maximum possible result.

The rules for aiding a task only give actual bonuses if you score crits; granting Bonus Dice is much less unbalancing.

For example, you might spend a round maneuvering for a better combat position. This would be an opposed Tactics roll vs your target. If you rolled a Double Crit on that roll, your next attack would receive 2 Bonus Dice *and* a total bonus of +4 to your roll.

The benefit from aiding a roll is normally applied to your next roll but you can hold off briefly if the GM agrees that it would be appropriate. Aid from multiple sources can be combined in a single roll, but only if the sources are notably different. For example, you could apply aid to an attack from both an Acting roll that tricked your opponent into lowering his guard and from a clever feint, but you could not roll Acting twice or feint twice and apply the benefit to the same roll. When in doubt, just apply the better of the two aid attempts.

These rules can also be used to aid others. For example, you could attempt to raise someone's confidence with Leadership or coach them on sword-fighting with your Melee Weapons (Swords) skill. In general, if there isn't an opponent to roll against, roll against a flat difficulty of 10.

Hindering Other Rolls

Occasionally, you'll want to try and *hinder* someone else's roll. This generally involves using a social interaction skill such as Intimidation or Psychology to distract someone from something that they're doing.

If they're making an opposed check, just treat your attempt as aiding their opponent. But if they're rolling against a set difficulty, you can use the results below instead. Note that this is basically the exact reverse of the benefits you normally receive from an aid roll.

- Partial Success: they suffer a Penalty Die
- Success: they suffer 2 Penalty Dice
- Each crit adds a -2 Penalty as well

Opposed Rolls

In general, an opposed roll (where both sides roll and then compare their results) is handled by treating whichever character rolled lower as the defender. So if you roll Evasion and beat someone's attack roll by 4 points, that's a Success on your Evasion roll. Ties are normally won by the aggressor.

Using Hero Points in Play

Hero Points represent bursts of will and sheer determination that can make the difference between success and failure. There are several different things that they can be spent on:

- **Adding Bonus Dice to a roll:** if you spend the Hero Point *before* rolling, you get 2 Bonus Dice. If you spend it *after* you've already rolled your dice, you only get 1 Bonus Die.

If you have an Extra or Emotional Tie that *Enhances* a task that you're spending a Hero Point on for Bonus Dice, you'll receive additional Bonus Dice as though you were spending another Hero Point. If you have *both* an Emotional Tie and an Extra that apply, the effect is cumulative, but having multiple Ties or multiple Extras that apply doesn't increase the number of Bonus Dice received.

So if you were rolling the Medicine skill to aid someone that you had a positive Emotional Tie to (which enhances attempts to help them) *and* you possessed the *Doctor* Extra, which enhances Medicine rolls, you'd get a total of 6d10 Bonus Dice (an extra 4d10) if you spent it before rolling and 3d10 (an extra 2d10) if you spent it afterwards. If you had two Emotional Ties to the person, you would only receive 4d10/2d10 Bonus Dice instead.

- **Activating a special power:** some abilities require such exertion that it costs a Hero Point to use them. If an action requires you to be Focused to do it, you can spend a Hero Point to be able to perform it as a normal action instead.
- **Shrugging off fatigue:** spend a Hero Point and spend a turn resting to negate one level of Fatigue immediately. If you spend the Hero Point immediately when the Fatigue is acquired, it doesn't take an action.
- **Recover your balance:** spend a Hero Point to instantly recover from being *Off-Balance* without spending an action to do it.
- **Roll with a blow:** you can spend a Hero Point to halve the amount of damage you just took from any single physical attack (or other source that your GM allows). Afterwards, you are left prone and Off-Balance.

Hero Points are normally recovered at the rate of 1 per good night's sleep and an extra 2 at the end of each game session.

Using Emotional Ties in Play

When your character is attempting an action that matches up with one of his Ties, the Tie *enhances* it, which will give you extra Bonus Dice if you spend a Hero Point on it. When you are attempting an action that *conflicts* with one of your Ties, you cannot spend Hero Points on it at all. If an action matches up with one Tie but conflicts with another, you can spend Hero Points but receive the normal number of Bonus Dice. Note that overlapping Ties that happen to both apply to the current action are not cumulative.

If you are completely out of Hero Points *and* one of your Ties applies to the current action, you can choose to spend one of the two Hero Points that you'll receive at the end of the session *now* (and yes, the fact that your Tie applies still increases the number of Bonus Dice received). Naturally, you can only do this at most twice per session; after that, you won't receive any Hero Points back at the end of the session.

The Fourth Tie: every character is assumed to have a *fourth* Tie automatically: their will to live. This means that any roll where failure can mean death will automatically be enhanced. That normally only applies to Survival Checks, but could apply to other skills such as outrunning a terrible predator or making a jump over a pit of lava. You can choose to replace this Tie with another of your choice, but doing so means that your character lacks the self-preservation instinct of normal people. Such people generally find the death that they're looking for quickly.

Adding, Dropping and Replacing Ties: Emotional Ties represent strong personal investments in certain ideas, goals or people. If something happens during a session that you think would change your character's priorities permanently, you can ask the GM to let you add a new Tie (assuming you haven't taken all 3 yet) or replace an existing Tie with a new one. In general, you should only take a new Tie that represents feelings that you've been demonstrating in play for several sessions already. For example, if your family were threatened by an enemy, you could legitimately drop your "Loyal to Prince Yulen" and replace it with "Protective of Family" or even "Hates [Enemy]"... provided that you had been demonstrating loyalty and affection towards your family.

In general, you shouldn't change Emotional Ties more often than every few sessions. Normally such changes should occur between sessions. Only important, potentially life-changing events should cause a Tie to be replaced in the *middle* of a session.

Simplified Combat

The basic combat system is fairly abstract. Each combat round, the characters all perform a set series of actions.

1. Roll Initiative. This is just a Reaction skill roll. Characters normally act in order from highest roll to lowest, but characters can choose to hold their action and perform it whenever they wish, with the caveat that when one character wants to act before or after another, the one that rolled best gets to decide the order in which their actions occur.

For groups of NPCs, it's recommended that you assume that the NPCs automatically roll a 10 on their 2d10.

For situations where both sides are already ready and focused on each other (such as formal duels), it's common to use an opposed Tactics check instead.

2. When a character gets to act, they can perform any reasonable actions, bearing in mind the following:

- If you throw your full effort into an action it is considered *Focused*. You get a benefit (if nothing else is specified by the rules, you get a Bonus Die) for that action, but at the cost of suffering a Penalty Die to all other actions that round. In particular, this means that if you focus on an attack, you'll be more vulnerable to being attacked. If you focus on defense, you get a Bonus Die to all defense rolls that round, but a Penalty Die for anything else.

You have to declare Focus *before* making any rolls that would have been penalized by it, so if you have already rolled a defense roll at full value, you can't Focus on an attack that round. Note that if a task says that you *have* to Focus to perform it, you don't get a bonus die; your benefit is getting to perform that action at all.

- You can only perform one Parry and one Evasion roll per round at full value. Any rolls after that suffer a Penalty Die. Shields and certain weapons will give you extra Parries, which do not count towards this limit and will not be penalized.

On a Partial Success on an Evasion roll, you must give ground or be hit (if you retreat onto rocky ground or into another obstacle, the GM may ask for an Acrobatics roll to avoid falling down).

On a Partial Success on a Parry roll, if your opponent's weapon is decidedly superior to yours (a combination of size and materials) your weapon may be damaged or knocked out of your hand. See the Weapon Bashing rules.

- Missile weapons require you to spend one turn reloading them before they can be used. If you *Focus* on reloading a bow or sling, you can reload and fire during the same turn, but you'll suffer a Penalty Die to defense rolls. Crossbows are particularly slow and awkward and require you to *Focus* on reloading in order to reload them at all.
- Ranged attacks cannot be Parried except with shields.
- The minimum target number for any attack is 5. No matter how low your opponent rolls, if they roll less than a 5 their total is assumed to be 5. Foes who are unprepared for any kind of attack automatically defend with a 5.
- Other modifiers (such as range penalties for ranged attacks, darkness, or cover) may modify your rolls.
- You can often spend a turn performing an action designed to aid an attack or other action the following round. Some examples are:
 1. Maneuvering for a better position: roll Tactics vs Tactics.
 2. Taunting a foe into making a mistake (requires some knowledge of what would enrage them): roll Psychology vs Resolve.
 3. Making a feint: roll Melee Weapon vs Melee Weapon.
 4. Pretending to be badly wounded or that you wish to surrender: roll Acting vs Psychology.
 5. Intimidate a foe by *almost* delivering a deadly blow, but stopping it: roll Melee Weapon vs their defense.

6. Any other skill that the GM thinks appropriate to the situation.

- As an action, you can declare a Fend vs a foe who has a shorter weapon than you and is currently out of melee range. Once declared, you can automatically attack before them (regardless of initiative) if they try to close into melee range. Once they *do* get into melee range, this effect goes away.
- You can generally take a few steps while performing other actions, but your GM may penalize you if you're trying to do something complicated (like aim and fire a bow) while moving. If you go to an all-out run or scamper, you'll move much faster but will be considered to be Focused on moving.
- If you are thrown *Off-Balance*, you will suffer a Penalty Die to all actions until you spend an entire round to recover from it (recovering is considered a normal action, not a Focused one).

Attacking

1. Your attack will be an opposed roll (or, occasionally, a flat value). If you roll a Partial Success or better, you hit and can roll damage. Subtract the target's armor from the damage done. Crits will generally add some sort of additional benefit, such as inflicting extra damage.

Note: to speed up large combats, try assuming that NPCs always roll a 10 on their 2d10 for defense rolls.

2. Stun damage is temporary damage and goes away at the rate of 1 point per 10 minutes of rest.
3. If the damage from a single hit (whether real injury, stun damage or a combination) equals or exceeds your Stun Threshold rating, you are thrown *Off-Balance*.
4. If the total damage suffered equals or exceeds your Hit Points, you fall down and pass out. If this blow did not equal or exceed your Stun Threshold, you can finish any remaining actions during the round, but will collapse afterwards.

If your real Hit Points have been reduced to a negative number (stun damage does not count towards this), you may die. After a reasonable pause (generally after the fight is over or during a lengthy pause), the GM should call for a Survival Check. This is a Drive test (Drive+2d10; remember to double your Drive rating if it's greater than zero) vs a difficulty equal to 10+Negative HP. So if you are reduced to -3 HP, your Survival Check will be vs difficulty 13. The results determine whether or not your character will revive on their own. Do not include stun damage with this check; only real injury counts.

If someone rolls Medicine vs the same difficulty within a reasonable time frame, they can *aid* your next Survival Check.

- Critical Failure: the character dies shortly thereafter. They may regain consciousness briefly, but won't be able to do more than whisper and move feebly.
 - Failure: the character is incapacitated. Without medical care, they will die within the hour. Even with medical care, they continue to take 1 point of damage per day and must roll another Survival Check each time until they either roll a better result or die.
 - Partial Success: the character regains consciousness, but is severely hurt and will suffer 2 Penalty Dice to all actions until they heal back up to positive HP. They are limited to stumbling about and will generally need someone to lean on to travel.
 - Success: the character is hurt but can cope. They suffer a Penalty Die to all actions until they heal back up to positive HP.
 - Critical Success or better: the character can operate normally despite their injuries, as long as they don't get hurt again. They suffer no direct penalties but are still in enormous pain.
5. Wounded characters heal at the rate of 1 point per night's rest (no rest, no healing). Spending the entire day resting heals another point. Proper medical treatment (roll Medicine vs difficulty 10) heals 1 extra point plus an additional point per Crit (note that a Partial Success will normally heal nothing because $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1 gets rounded down to zero). Wizardry and Sorcery can both heal more, but may not be available. Really poor conditions (e.g.- having to travel all night without rest) may actually cause wounded people

to *suffer* another point of damage per night.

6. The penalties for ranged attacks are generally -5 if in melee, +0 if at close range, -5 if at medium range and -10 at long range. Light cover generally grants a +1 or +2 bonus to defense rolls against ranged attacks, heavy cover a +5 and complete cover adds +10 or makes the attack completely impossible.

Common Combat Crits

When you score a critical success or better on an attack, you'll receive one or more crits to apply to your attack. Some common combat crits are listed below, although you can always suggest a different effect. You can even select the same critical effect multiple times for a single blow.

- **Extra Damage:** your hit inflicts an extra +1d6 damage.
- **Bypass Armor:** your attack bypasses armor worn by the target (as opposed to innate armor) by striking the target in an unarmored location. Armor that covers the target thoroughly will only be reduced to ½ value by the first Bypass Armor crit but can be completely bypassed with a second one.
- **Weaken Foe:** your attack delivers an injury which will hamper your foe until the wound can be tended. So long as your blow does at least 1 point of damage, the target will be at -1 to appropriate rolls for the rest of the fight. For example, you could say that you struck a warrior's wrist to weaken his sword-fighting skills, his foot to hamper his movement, his head to weaken his perception or rattle his brains (reducing Cleverness), et cetera. You can also choose to inflict a -2 penalty instead, but the effect then lasts only for the rest of this combat round and the entire next one.
- **Painful Blow:** add +10 to your rolled damage but this extra damage does not do injury; it is only used to determine whether or not the damage reached your target's Stun Threshold. This can enable you to throw even a heavily armored foe Off-Balance. Even if they still aren't stunned (or even injured), a blow like this always stings more than normal and will certainly get their attention.
- **Strike Specific Location:** your attack hits a very specific spot on the target. Under normal circumstances this has no special effect, but it can be useful for things like cutting the cord on someone's medallion or striking a monster in its only vulnerable spot.
- **Precise Blow:** your attack inflicts an extra 1d4 damage, but you can choose to reduce the final damage done by as much or as little as you like. This is useful for defeating foes without killing them.
- **Stunning Blow:** your attack inflicts an extra 1d4 stun damage. If this attack was already at least ½ stun, you get to add an extra 1d6 stun instead.
- **Strike Weapon:** you can change your attack to a Weapon Bashing attempt and still increase your weapon's Force Rating by +2.

Naturally, your GM is the final arbiter of whether or not a given crit is acceptable in a given situation. For example, you can't say that you strike your foe in the foot to slow him down if he's a giant snake.

Weapon Bashing

The Weapon Bashing rules add a bit of realism to the weapon system. When you hit someone's weapon with a superior one, you might knock theirs out of their hand or even shatter it outright.

This should be checked for under 2 general circumstances:

- [Optional] Someone rolls a Partial Success on a Parry. Apply only ½ (round down) of the attacker's Force Rating.
- Someone chooses to deliberately attack an opponent's weapon and rolls a Partial Success or better (crits add +2 to your weapon's Force Rating).

A weapon's Force Rating is a rough measure of how much power and impact it delivers.

- Light weapons: Force 0
- Medium weapons: Force 1
- Heavy weapons: Force 2

- Metal weapons: Force +1

If you are using a weapon that you have insufficient Brawn to wield properly, its Force Rating should be reduced by 1 or 2 points. Really huge weapons (often wielded by giant monsters) may have really high Force Ratings.

The "normal effect" of your action is to apply the Force Rating of your weapon to theirs. On a Partial Success, you only apply ½ of your weapon's normal Force Rating, so you are unlikely to affect them unless their weapon is decidedly inferior.

Your effective Force Rating minus theirs:

- 0 or less: no effect
- +1: their weapon is knocked askew, inflicting a -2 penalty to rolls using it until they spend an action to shift their grip.
- +2: their weapon is knocked out of their hands but lands next to them.
- +3: their weapon is sent flying.
- +4 or better: their weapon is shattered.

Handling Formal Duels

When duels are fought, it's normally done in a clear area with a pair of identical weapons. Rather than using the normal initiative system, since both foes are already ready and focused upon each other, they instead make an opposed Tactics check to see who seizes the initiative. Whoever rolls better gets to apply their Tactics check as an aid to their first attack. On a tie, roll initiative normally.

A death-duel normally continues until one foe cannot continue and the victor may finish off a defeated foe if desired, although doing so is considered crass and ungentlemanly. Ordinary duels are won by whoever draws first blood, but in the hands of a good swordsman that first blow can be deadly. A foe can also choose to surrender, although depending on the circumstances their surrender may not be accepted.

Example: Roko (melee skill total of +8) is facing off against a novice swordsman (skill total +2) in a formal duel. During the opening feints and parries, Roko rolls his Tactics (+5) vs his foe's (+1) and gets a 21 vs their 13, a critical success. This gives him two Bonus Dice and a +2 Bonus on his attack, giving him a final 26 vs their 16, another critical success. Rather than hurt the kid, Roko chooses Strike Weapon as his crit.

Their weapons are both medium swords (Force 2) but Roko's crit gives him a +2 bonus. The kid's sword is knocked out of his grip and falls to the ground with a clatter. Having been deftly disarmed with a single stroke, the brash young noble-mouse quickly decides that an apology is in order.

Example 2: Pretending to be an overconfident novice, Castilla the swordswoman has tricked a foolish swordsman into accepting her challenge of a duel. Her foe would have been much more reluctant had he realized that Castilla was actually a member of the Black Paw hired to assassinate him.

The GM awards her 2 Bonus Dice and a +2 Bonus for rolling a crit on the Acting roll that fooled the nobleman. She also wins the Tactics contest and receives another 2 Bonus Dice and another +2 Bonus. She applies both to her first real attack, rolling a 31 vs his 15. This gives her a devastating triple-crit, which she applies to damage. Since she has the Sword Mastery Extra, this gives her an extra 3d8 damage, giving her a final total of 21 points. Since her foe only had 16 Hit Points, this leaves him at -5. He rolls a Survival Check (using his Drive of +2) vs a difficulty of 15. Unfortunately, he only rolls a 10 and is left incapacitated. Since this was not a death-duel, he may still live if his family can get good medical care for him... in which case Castilla will have to try again.

Weapons and Armor

Weapon Sizes

Weapons come in 3 general size categories, based on the way that they are used.

- Light weapons: used lightly in one hand, they typically inflict 1d6+Brawn/2 damage and grant two "free" parries per turn.
- Medium weapons: often used in a hand-and-a-half style where the warrior switches back and forth from fighting one-handed or two-handed as the situation calls for it. They typically inflict 1d8+Brawn damage, grant one "free" parry per turn, and add an additional +1 damage when used two-handed.
- Heavy weapons: massive, heavy weapons that are normally used two-handed. They typically inflict 1d10+Brawn x 1.5 damage and grant an additional +2 damage when used two-handed.

Weapons are typically intended for a particular range of Brawn ratings, but this can generally be glossed over in play. Particularly large weapons may go beyond the "heavy" category. A one-handed weapon for a *Titan* (the common term for a human being in the Fallows) would be an enormous, building-destroying engine of destruction that would take multiple rats just to drag around.

Weapon Types

To differentiate different types of weapons without adding too much complexity, each style of weapon has at least one special benefit that the wielder can use. Not all weapons are available in all sizes.

- Sword (light, medium or heavy): if you score a crit on a parry check, you receive a Bonus Die that you can apply to your next attack, provided that it's against that foe.
- Mace/Club (medium or heavy): you can choose to turn $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ of your damage into stun without otherwise penalizing your attack. A club is just a mace made of inferior materials. Spiked maces are generally treated like axes instead.
- Axe (medium or heavy): when you make a focused attack with an axe, you inflict +2 base damage and an extra +2 per crit.
- Staff (medium or heavy): inflicts damage as though it were a size smaller, but grants an extra "free" parry per turn. You can choose to turn $\frac{1}{2}$ of your damage into stun without otherwise penalizing your attack.
- Knife (light): can be used in close combat (that is, in very tight quarters or when grappling) without penalty (the normal penalty is -2 for a light weapon, -4 for a medium one and -8 for a heavy one).
- Spear (medium): if you are trying to fend off a foe, you receive a Bonus Die to attack and defend against them.
- Flail (medium or heavy): opponents suffer a Penalty Die when trying to parry this weapon, but you suffer a Penalty Die whenever trying to parry *with* it. There is no effect on foes who dodge it. The *Risk* of using a flail in combat is 2 instead of the usual 1.

Armor

Armor isn't always worth the hassle. It will encumber your character, making certain tasks harder, but still... the added protection from damage may save your life.

As a general rule, the penalties due to armor will be roughly equivalent to the protection value. Encumbrance penalizes tasks that require free movement such as Athletics, Acrobatics and Evasion, but not regular combat skills. Wearing *any* armor will prevent the character from scampering (running on all fours, a very fast but disgracefully undignified mode of travel) until it is removed.

Note that Evasion is one of the skills penalized by wearing armor. This is important, because mice will sometimes find themselves facing huge predators that even metal plating can't protect them from; you may not want heavy armor if you're going to face a huge foe.

- Heavy Leather Tunic: tough treated animal hide (often lizard or turtle) that covers the back and front but often has gaps on the sides to allow easier movement. Stops 2 points of damage, but applies a -1

encumbrance penalty. Requires Status +0 or better to purchase.

- Reinforced Leather: leather with lots of metal reinforcement. Stops 4 points of damage but applies a -3 encumbrance penalty. Requires Status +1 or better to purchase.
- Chain-mail Coat: made of metal links with leather or padded cloth beneath it, this heavier and more expensive armor stops 6 points of damage but applies a -4 encumbrance penalty. Requires Status +2 or better to purchase.
- Breastplate: heavy metal plates strapped to the warrior's front and back. This expensive armor stops 8 points of damage but applies a -5 encumbrance penalty. Requires Status +3 or better to purchase.

Full-body suits of armor (which cover the warrior almost completely) *double* the encumbrance penalty, but each *Bypass Armor* crit now only bypasses $\frac{1}{2}$ of the armor's protection rating instead of the full amount. They also have to be personally fitted to you and add +3 to the Status level required to purchase it.

Shields

Shields are similar to both weapons and armor. All shields grant one extra "free" parry per turn. Shields can be attacked just like attacking a foe's weapon, but they receive a +1 bonus to their Force Rating for defense and a -1 penalty to it if you try to bash someone else's weapon or shield with your own.

- Light: a light shield incurs a -1 encumbrance penalty.
- Medium: a medium shield incurs a -2 encumbrance penalty but also grants a +1 to defense rolls.
- Heavy: a heavy shield incurs a -3 encumbrance penalty but also grants a +2 to defense rolls.



Fatigue

The game uses a simple system for measuring Fatigue. Each point of Fatigue after the first incurs a -1 penalty to most actions. They go away at the rate of 1 point per hour of rest.

A character with 5 levels of Fatigue (a -4 penalty to their actions) is *exhausted* and can no longer run and will be obviously unsteady on their feet. Any character who manages to make it to 7 levels of Fatigue (a -6 penalty) will pass out.

As a general rule, a character will suffer one level of Fatigue for every hour of serious work. Truly exhausting work (or special efforts such as casting a concentrated spell) can accumulate Fatigue much more quickly. Light efforts generally take 2-4 hours to accumulate a point of Fatigue.

Magic

A mage casts spells by extending a tendril of their own, innate magic and rededicating its energies to a new purpose. As soon as the mage stops concentrating, the tendril will snap back and be reabsorbed by their own magical aura. Such tendrils are invisible and can only be detected by magic, although the Intuition skill can tell you when one is touching your own aura.

In order to cast spells, you have to take an Extra which gives you access to spell-casting skills. The most common one is Wizardry, which lets you purchase 6 different wizardry-based spell-casting skills. There is also the *Spell Mastery* Extra, which lets you produce more advanced effects with a specific spell. *Spell Mastery* can be taken once per spell-casting skill.

Basic Procedure: casting a spell uses basically the same procedure as a skill check. The caster rolls Magic + Spell Skill + 2d10 vs the target number. As long as you tie or beat the difficulty (usually 10, but some effects are more difficult), the spell goes off. If the spell is a hostile action, the target may get a chance to roll a skill of their own to resist; if they roll better than the basic difficulty, compare your spell-casting check to their roll, instead. If you beat the basic difficulty but are successfully resisted, then the spell was cast but the target managed to avoid or resist it.

If a Mishap occurs on a failed spell, the caster takes an additional level of Fatigue. On a successful spell, a Mishap generally means that the wrong effect was applied or the wrong target affected.

Certain spells are *Fatiguing* and always incur an additional level of Fatigue when attempted, even if the spell fails to be cast at all!

Spell Power: the power of a spell is normally determined by the caster's Magic rating. If no other effect is specified for a crit, each one adds a +2 to the caster's effective Magic rating. Normal spells last as long as the mage continues to concentrate on maintaining them, but reduce the caster's effective Magic rating by 1 per spell being maintained (which will both reduce the effectiveness of and penalize all Magic-based skills).

Concentrated Spells: *Concentrated* effects deliver all of the spell's energy in a moment; such spells are more powerful, but the mage loses all fine control and always incurs an additional level of Fatigue. Unless otherwise specified, maintaining a Concentrated spell costs the caster an additional Fatigue *per round*.

Severed Spells: *Severed* spells are permanent (the tendril is permanently severed from the mage's own magical aura, thus the name) and each one cast requires the expenditure of a Hero Point and a Focused action. The mage also incurs an extra level of Fatigue and at least one *Severance Point*. When the number of Severance Points accumulated exceeds the mage's Magic rating + 2 (minimum 1), the mage loses 1 point of Magic *permanently* and their Severance Point total is reset. As a result, no mage severs spells lightly.

Spell Ranges: the basic range for a spell (unless otherwise stated) is 5 paces. For every full 5 paces between you and the target, add +2 to the difficulty. You can double the basic range by Focusing on your spell and spending at least one extra round casting it. If you are maintaining a spell whose target is getting further away, apply the range penalties retroactively (causing it to get weaker and weaker) until the spell finally fails.

If you cast a regular 5-pace range spell by touching the target directly, you receive a +2 bonus to your roll.

Counter-spells: the basic way to oppose another spell is to cast one that does the exact opposite. Thus, a mage who wishes to prevent or undo an Influence spell could spend an action to cast their own Influence spell to negate the first one. The counter-spell must roll as high or higher than the spell being blocked and must be of the exact same type. Thus, spells that require *Spell Mastery* to cast can only be counter-spelled by someone else who possesses the same *Spell-Mastery*.

The original spell is blocked as long as the counter-spell is maintained; if the mage casting the counter-spell drops their spell before the caster of the original spell ends theirs, the original spell will take effect again. Thus, severed spells can be counter-spelled as per normal, but unless the new spell is also severed, the severed spell will come back into effect as soon as it the counter-spell ends.

The Six Arts of Wizardry

The six spell-casting skills of Wizardry are listed below, along with some example effects. The type of effect will be listed in parenthesis, along with the typical difficulty (most are always 10). Advanced spells are in italics; these are only available to mages who have taken the *Spell Mastery* Extra for that spell.

Delve (fatiguing): study an object's inner structure at close range, usually by touch. The advanced form allows the mage to actually alter the object's structure, reshaping it permanently. The harder the substance, the more difficult it is to reshape and the longer it takes. Using Delve always incurs an extra point of Fatigue.

Delve is a very close-range spell (the mage projects thousands of tiny magical tendrils into the subject) and normally requires the caster to touch the target directly. If you extend the range by Focusing on it, the basic range is extended to 1 pace.

- Study (10): examine an object's basic physical structure magically. This can be used to find hidden compartments or structural weaknesses. If the object is enchanted, it can reveal what sort of spell is on it. If used on a living being, this spell can be used to aid any Medicine rolls performed on them.

This can also be used to try and determine if someone is lying to you by monitoring their bodily processes and looking for signs of nervousness. The target gets to resist with their Resist Magic skill. Apply your result as an aid to any Psychology rolls.

- Stun (Concentrated, 10): attempt to stun a creature by tugging on its physical structure from within. This bypasses all worn armor and inflicts 2d6+(Magic x2) stun damage, with crits adding +1d6 stun each. It is resisted by the Resist Magic skill. This spell cannot be maintained.
- Magical Conduit (Severed, 10): by lacing an object with magical tendrils and leaving them there, the object becomes a conduit for the mage's spells. If the caster touches the object, they are also effectively touching anything else that is touching it. This is most commonly used to create a magical staff which can be used to deliver touch-range spells without actually touching the target directly.
- *Shape (Varies)*: the mage physically reshapes an object into a more pleasing form, molding it from within. The harder the substance, the more difficult this is and the longer it takes to make changes. The difficulty can be reduced by 5 (to a minimum of 10) if the caster puts their full concentration into the spell and spends at least one additional round casting it.

- Water: difficulty 10, time required is 1 round per change.

Water will only hold a form as long as the mage maintains this spell; after that, it collapses again.

- Mud/soft earth: difficulty 15, time required is 1 minute per change.

Again, anything sculpted out of mud will slowly lose its form after the spell ends.

- Flesh/wood: difficulty 20, time required is 10 minutes per change.

If used on a living target, they can also attempt to resist with their Resist Magic skill.

- Soft Metal: difficulty 25, time required is 1 hour per change.

- Hard Metal: difficulty 30, time required is 6 hours per change.

The better that the caster overcomes the difficulty, the more precisely they can control the object's new shape. On a Partial Success, only crude changes can be made.

- Partial Success: only crude changes can be made.

- Success: detailed changes can be made.

- Each crit can reduce the amount of time required by one step or allow for more precise and detailed changes (apply a +2 bonus per crit to any other skills being rolled).

If the caster wishes to reshape an object in a particularly specific manner, they may need to roll a secondary skill. For example, being able to reshape an object with your mind will not enable you to create a great work of art unless you also have the Craft skill. The exact results depend on what the caster is doing.

- Shaping an object into a tool or piece of art: roll Craft to determine how well-made the final shape is. Remember that on a Partial Success on the Shaping check, only crude forms can be created, so normally a full Success or better is required to create actual art.

- Water-dancing: the art of making water or other substances dance and assume amusing shapes is

referred to as water-dancing. It's popular among some members of the very rich. The caster *must* reduce the shaping time to 1 round per change to succeed. Roll Perform (water-dancing) to see how entertaining the final result is.

- **Healing wounds:** physical wounds can be closed up by reshaping the victim's flesh and getting at least a full Success (a Partial Success is liable to do more harm than good). Roll your Medicine skill vs the same difficulty. The normal effect is to turn 1d4+Magic points of damage into stun. Each crit turns another 1d4 points of damage into stun. Unlike most shaping, this is especially strenuous; each "change" after the first incurs another level of Fatigue. It isn't comfortable for the patient, either, who isn't considered to be resting during the process.

Example: Cassandra is attempting to heal Roko. He has taken 15 points of physical damage. Since she is willing to devote her full attention to the spell, she rolls against difficulty 15 and gets a Full Success. This allows her to roll her Medicine skill vs the same difficulty and she gets another full Success. It will take her 15 minutes to heal 1d4+3 points of Roko's damage. She continues to treat him for another 30 minutes, converting all of his damage into stun and suffering a total of 3 Fatigue herself. Roko now has 15 points of stun damage; it will take him about two-and-a-half hours of rest to recover completely.

Damage due to sources other than physical injury may not be treatable. For damage due to poisons and illnesses, often only ½ or none of the damage can be cured with this spell.

- **Shatter (Concentrated, 10):** like the Stun effect, but the mage attempts to physically tear the target asunder from within. This process is one step faster than normal shaping. The spell inflicts 2d6+(Magic x2) damage and each crit adds +1d6 damage. It is resisted with the Resist Magic skill. This spell cannot be maintained.
- **Reinforce (Severed, 10):** a web of mystical tendrils are laced through an object to better hold it in its current shape. The material affected adds the caster's Magic rating in additional innate armor. This spell cannot armor living creatures as hardening their flesh will instead inflict damage on them as though they were targetted with the Shatter effect.
- **Clay (Severed, 10):** a shaping spell is laced through an object and then left there. Any future attempts to reshape the object *by the same caster* do not incur the 1 Fatigue for using Delve. Other casters must subtract twice the original caster's Magic rating (minimum 1) as a penalty from all attempts to Shape the object.

Illusion: sending mental impressions of simple noises and momentary images to another's mind. Resisted by the Intuition skill to distinguish truth from illusion. The advanced form allows for the projection of complicated messages and complete illusions. Note that illusions are really hallucinations; they have no actual physical reality, but exist solely in the target's mind. Even if a target thinks that they've been blinded by an illusion of darkness, they really can still see, it's just that their brain thinks that the darkness is real and the evidence of their eyes fake.

- **Distraction (10):** cause the target to see distant movement, feel a soft touch, or hear a faint, indistinct sound that appears to be coming from the direction you desire. If they are actively attempting to discern if there is magic at work, they can roll Intuition vs the caster's roll, otherwise their resistance roll is assumed to be their Intuition total +5. Successful resistance means that they can tell that the distraction isn't real.
- **Momentary Illusion (Concentrated, 10):** project a poorly defined but strong illusion into the target's mind. The effect lasts for at most your Magic rating in rounds (minimum 1). Unlike a Distraction, however, the projected illusion can be overwhelming... a huge creature rushing towards them and blocking their view, a stunningly loud noise screaming in their ears, or even being engulfed in flames. Apply the caster's roll vs their Intuition as an attempt to hinder any of their actions; the penalty lasts until the illusion fades. Successful resistance lets them separate the fake images in their head from what they're really seeing around them and operate without penalty.
- **Permanent Distraction (Severed, 10):** as per the Distraction spell, but the spell is bound into an object and is experienced by anyone who touches the object.
- **True Illusion (10):** as per a Distraction, but the illusion can be detailed and realistic. For example, the

caster can make an image of himself walk up and engage someone in conversation or just have his words go straight into their ears. As usual, they can roll Intuition to distinguish illusion from reality, but usually with a +5 bonus (the less detail, the harder it is to be sure that it's an illusion; additional bonuses can be granted if the caster has the illusion do something obviously unreal).

- *Mind-Speech (Concentrated, 10)*: this effect opens a *two-way* auditory illusion of sorts, where the target and the caster can think words back and forth and hear each other's responses. This communication is easy to recognize as magical (the target gets a +10 bonus to recognize this, if it matters) but that doesn't generally matter as Mind-Speech is normally only used to deliver urgent messages.
 - **Partial Success**: the spell requires the mage's full concentration and costs 1 Fatigue per round to maintain.
 - **Success**: the mage can merely Focus on the spell, but it still costs 1 Fatigue per round.
 - **Critical Success**: the caster can ignore either the Focus requirement or the additional Fatigue cost.
 - **Double Critical**: the spell can be maintained indefinitely without being distracted or exhausted.
- *Programmed Illusion (Severed, 10)*: as per a Permanent Distraction, but the spell plays back a "programmed" True Illusion instead. As before, only the person touching the enchanted object will see the illusion. The spell can be set to dissipate after the first time it is triggered, if desired.

Influence: manipulating a person's emotional state with magic. This is a very subtle process, and the target may not even become aware of it. The advanced form allows for overt commands to be given that can restrict or compel specific actions.

- *Instill Emotions (10)*: cause a target to feel a specific emotion of your choice. The effects are subtle and may not be recognized as a magical effect. While it influences the target's mood, it can also act as an aid or hindrance to many other tasks (for instance, negotiating with someone is much easier when you can make them feel more generous) and the effect lasts as long as the mage maintains it. The effect is resisted with Intuition; since the emotions are instilled externally, someone who realizes that they are magical in nature can easily ignore them. A person who is wary of magical effects receives a +5 bonus to their resistance roll and someone who knows to expect it receives a +10.

The most potent use of this effect is probably not as an aid or hindrance, but as a way to manipulate the actions of others. If someone is already leaning towards a particular action, this spell is a good way to nudge them the rest of the way. For example, a yawning guard might be made to doze off or an angry nobleman pushed into actually starting a fight.

- *Emotional Attack (Concentrated, 10)*: blast a target with an overwhelming rush of emotion. This is very overtly magical and is resisted with the Resist Magic skill. On a Partial Success, the target suffers a Penalty Die to all actions for the duration of the spell (normally only a single round, although it can be maintained at a cost of 1 Fatigue per round). On a full Success, they are also left Off-Balance when the spell ends. Each crit causes the target to act in accordance with the chosen emotion for one round.
- *Emotional Enchantment (Severed, 10)*: an Instill Emotions spell can be bound into an object so that it affects whoever touches it for as long as they do so. Charms which make the wearer feel more sleepy are sometimes used by wealthy families to quiet particularly noisy infants, but the practice is not particularly healthy for them in the long run.
- *Permanent Emotion (Severed, 10)*: basically just an Instill Emotions spell that lasts indefinitely, permanently coloring the target's personality in some fashion. After a day the target will no longer suffer die modifiers from the effect (as they learn to cope with it) but they will still always tend towards the mood that was laid upon them by this spell.
- *Suggestion (10)*: a mental suggestion is implanted in the target's mind and resisted with the Intuition skill. The more reasonable the suggestion, the more likely they are to think that it's their own idea and act upon it. Ideas that are obviously alien to them will never be followed. The target receives a +5 bonus to resist if they are wary of magical influences and a +10 bonus if they know to expect one.
 - **Partial Success**: the target will obey if they are already inclined towards the suggestion.

Example: making a guard go investigate a strange noise.

- Success: the target will obey a suggestion that they are neutral towards.

Example: making a patrolling guard take one route instead of another.

- Critical Success: the target will obey a suggestion that they are opposed to.

Example: making a guard stand aside while you pass.

- Double Critical: the target will obey a suggestion that they are strongly opposed to.

Example: making a guard give you his weapon instead of arresting you.

A suggestion that the target is fanatically opposed to (e.g.- kill themselves, kill a loved one, sit still and let someone hit them, betray a sacred trust) will never be obeyed.

- **Command (Concentrated, 10):** a powerful mental command is forced into the target's mind and resisted with the Resist Magic skill. This extremely overt effect drives the command into their brain and tries to force them to comply. The more strongly opposed the target would be to the command, the harder it is to make them obey it.
 - Partial Success: the caster must put their full concentration into maintaining the spell and it costs them 1 Fatigue per round maintained.
 - Success: the caster can maintain the spell by merely Focusing on it but it still costs 1 Fatigue every few rounds (assume 3 rounds, if it matters).
 - Critical Success: the caster can drop either the Focus requirement or the Fatigue cost.
 - Double Critical or better: the caster can maintain the command without having to Focus or take Fatigue.

The resistance roll is modified by how strongly the target is opposed to obeying the command. *Stopping* someone from taking an action is always easier than forcing them to actually do something specific. A target who is forced to perform an action can spend a Hero Point to delay doing it for a round.

- This gives the target an excuse to do what they really wanted to anyway: -5
- The target will only be inconvenienced if they obey: +0
- The target will be harmed if forced to obey: +5
- The target will be very seriously upset or seriously harmed if forced to obey: +10
- The target will be heartbroken (or possibly dead) if forced to obey: +20
- The caster is forcing them to *perform* a particular action instead of just prohibiting one: add another +5

So, forcing a target to kill themselves or a loved one would grant them a +25 to resist, while forcing them to merely stand still while someone else does the deed would only grant a +20. A common use of this spell is to force an attacker to stand aside and let you go... as long as you don't try to attack them, they normally receive a +0 to their roll.

- **Geas (Severed, 10):** as per the Command spell, but the compulsion laid upon them is semi-permanent. Only prohibitions really work indefinitely. The target can be forced to perform an action, but if it takes longer than the caster's Magic rating minus theirs in days, they will be able to break free. If the target's Magic rating is equal to or larger than the caster's, an active compulsion will only last a few hours.

A Geas can combine both active orders and prohibitions... for example, the ancients were fond of using the Geas "leave the Fallows and never return" upon monsters too powerful to attack directly. It's believed that Hoorooru himself is under such a Geas, laid upon him by one of the First Ones.

Manipulate: telekinetically manipulating objects as though you were tugging on them with an invisible hook. The advanced form allows for fine manipulation and actual levitation.

- Basic TK (10): move an object around slowly with your mind (your effective Brawn rating is equal to your Magic rating minus 5).
- TK shove (Concentrated, 10): shove or pull a target with a Brawn rating equal to your Magic rating.
- Skyhook (Severed, 10): make an object that you could lift with Basic TK simply float in place indefinitely.
- *Fine TK (10)*: as for Basic TK, but the object can be manipulated as though you were touching it with your hands. This can be used to choke a foe, but your effective Brawn rating is still equal to your Magic rating minus 5.
- *Levitation (10)*: by pushing against nearby objects with telekinetic force, the mage can float through the air. You can move Magic – Size paces per round, but this requires you to Focus on maintaining this spell. The range penalty is determined by your distance to a surface that can take your weight.
- *Flight (Concentrated, 10)*: as per levitation, but you hurtle through the air at 10x the normal rate.
- *Self-powered (Severed, 10)*: enchant an object so that it will repeat a simple series of motions whenever touched by a Scry spell. The motion programmed cannot last longer than your Magic rating in rounds.

Scry: magically search an area for objects, creatures or magical effects. The advanced form allows the mage to locate distant characters or areas that they are very familiar with, regardless of distance. The spell sends out a web of thin tendrils of magic that react when they brush up against anything.

The Scry spell can be used to find creatures or objects fitting a simple set of criteria. For example, a mage could search for water, any living creatures, any magical creatures or just every nearby physical object. Ongoing magical spells are particularly easy to detect and will generally be noticed even if the mage wasn't looking for them.

As a general rule, the better the mage rolls, the more information they can get:

- Partial Success: detect the location of magical creatures (including all intelligent animals) and ongoing spells as well as large and solid inanimate objects. Good enough to let you get a general map of the landscape, but not good enough to sense small details. If you try to navigate by it (if there is no light, perhaps), you'll have to move very slowly and carefully.
- Success: you can tell vague details like what *sort* of magical creature or the presence of less solid objects like water or leaves. You can tell what spell you're sensing (another Scrying spell, a Spark spell, etc.) if you detect one, provided that you're familiar with that sort of magic. You can navigate by Focusing on the spell.
- Critical Success: you can sense things well enough to recognize individual faces and to tell exactly what a spell does, provided that you're familiar with that sort of magic. Even with unfamiliar magic, you'll generally get a clue as to what it does. You can navigate with it without penalties.
- Each additional crit adds more and finer detail.

Trying to scry *through* solid objects is very difficult. Scrying through a barrier of wood or earth applies a -5 penalty... scrying through stone applies a -10 and scrying through metal applies a -15! Of course, if there is a decent-sized gap in the barrier you can extend your tendrils through that and bypass part or all of the penalty. The typical effects of the Scry spell are listed below.

- Search (10): search an area magically. The normal form allows the mage to search a 60° arc that extends as far out as the chosen range of the spell. By Focusing on the spell, they can expand that to a 360° range. This area of awareness moves with the mage and can be maintained as long as they choose.
- Far-search (Concentrated, 10): perform a Search spell that extends 10x as far in a 60° arc or twice as far in all directions. This is good for finding something specific, but since it costs another Fatigue for every round that you maintain it, it's not good for navigating through an area without sight.
- Ward (Severed, 10): enchant an object with a tendril that reacts whenever it is touched by something matching certain criteria (a living creature, a magical creature, a spell, etc.). The ward still has a tenuous connection to the caster and they will sense when it goes off. The better the spell is cast, the more specific the ward's criteria can be, as per the normal Scrying rules (for example, detecting when a *specific* person touches something would require a Critical Success).

- *Locate (10)*: try to find the current direction and distance to a specific creature or object, *regardless of distance*. The more familiar you are with the target, the easier this spell is. A close companion or object that you've handled and used for years applies no penalty. If you've only seen the target before a few times before, you suffer a -5 penalty. If you're only operating on a description, you suffer a -10 for a very detailed description and a -20 for a vague one. An *inaccurate* description makes this sort of scrying impossible.

A Partial Success gives you a general direction. A full Success gives you a general distance as well. Critical Successes add more and more information.

- *Scry (Concentrated, 10)*: as per the Locate spell, but treat it as also performing a Search spell on the target's location remotely as well, letting you see what's going on there.
- *Permanent Link (Severed, 10)*: attach a tendril to an object or even a person so that they are always considered to be "very familiar" for scrying purposes, no matter how familiar with them you actually are. A Permanent Link that you've created can also be detected and identified with only a Partial Success on a regular Search effect.

Spark: produce heat and flame magically. Often used to light a mage's way. The concentrated form can throw an explosive fireball. The advanced form can produce lightning and wizard-light (a shimmering light source that produces no smoke or heat).



- *Create Flame (10)*: conjure a small ball of flame (about the size of a candle flame) that you can move about with your mind. If held against an unmoving object for several rounds, it inflicts Magic points of fire damage and may set it alight. This can also be used as a light source, with the brightness being determined by your Magic rating (as a general rule, a rating of +1 is a candle flame, a rating of +5 is a torch and a rating of +10 is daylight).
- *Fireball (Concentrated, 10)*: produce a flash of fire that travels along a mystic tendril and explodes when it hits the end of it. Treat as an attack (resisted only by Evasion) that inflicts 2d6 + Base Magic damage to everyone within a 2-pace area. Each crit adds +1d6 damage and causes targets with fur to catch fire, taking another point of damage per round until they manage to put out the fire (taking 2 full turns at a minimum).
- *Everflame (Severed, 10)*: conjure a small ball of flame (as per Create Flame) that burns until forcibly extinguished. This can float in midair or be attached to an object.
- *Create Spark (10)*: as per the Create Flame spell, but the spell conjures an ongoing electrical discharge that sparks prettily. Anyone touching it gets a mild electric shock and must roll Resolve vs the caster's Magic rating (x2 if positive) + 10 or be thrown Off-Balance.
- *Lightning Bolt (Concentrated, 10)*: a massive electrical arc travels down the length of a mystic tendril and discharges into whatever it is touching. Treat as an attack that inflicts 2d6+(Base Magic x 2) damage to the target (each crit adds +1d6 damage), but ½ of the damage is stun. If the target is thrown Off-Balance by this attack, they are also sent sprawling in a seizure which lasts Total Damage / Stun Threshold rounds.
- *Ongoing Spark (Severed, 10)*: conjures an ongoing electrical discharge (as per Create Spark) that continues indefinitely until grounded for several rounds (generally by dipping it in water or pressing it against a large metal object and leaving it there).
- *Wizard-light (10)*: conjure a ball of shimmering light which acts like a Create Spark spell but produces no heat and adds +2 to your effective Magic rating for determining its brightness. The light does not burn, but can still be physically snuffed out.
- *Flash of Light (Concentrated, 10)*: produce a brilliant flash of light from the tip of your spell-tendril. Roll your effective Magic rating (doubled if positive) vs everyone looking in that direction's Reaction skill, as

though you were rolling to *hinder* their actions. The penalties incurred affect every task that involves sight and are reduced by one level at the end of every round (not counting the one where this spell was cast) until their vision is back to normal.

- *Wizard-lamp (Severed, 10)*: like the Everflame spell, but producing a ball of wizard-light instead. To protect the spell from being disrupted, Wizard-lamps are commonly created inside of glass objects. In the homes of the very rich, such lights will also have a Skyhook enchantment so that they float in midair.

Remember, the advanced forms (in italics) are only available to mages who have purchased the *Spell Mastery Extra* for that spell. A wizards can use all of the basic effects, but the advanced ones are only available after diligent study and practice.

Example Character: Lobowitz the Liar

Lobowitz is a notorious con artist residing in Haven. He is known for his clever disguises and has a knack for liberating valuables from gullible mice with his words alone.

Race: White Mouse

Attributes:

| | | |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Agility +0 | Cleverness +4 | Perception +0 |
| Brawn -1 | Drive +1 | Magic +1 |
| Status +1 (middle class) | Size +0 | |

| | | |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Hero Points: 3 | Movement Rate: 5 | Innate Armor: 0 |
| Hit Points: 9 | Stun Threshold: 6 | |

Emotional Ties: hates clergy, distrusts all royals, lothario

Extras:

Natural Charm (use Charm without penalties, Enhances the Charm skill)

Master Craftsman (can appraise with a glance, Enhances the Craft skill)

Mouse of a Thousand Tails (reduced penalties for impersonating others, Enhances the Acting skill)

| <u>Skills</u> | <u>Skill Total</u> |
|--|--------------------|
| Acting (Cleverness): +5 (15 xp) | +9 |
| Charm (Cleverness): +5 (15 xp) | +9 |
| Craft [Disguise] (Cleverness): +5 (15 xp) | +9 |
| Etiquette (Cleverness): +4 (10 xp) | +8 |
| Finance (Cleverness): +1 (1 xp) | +5 |
| Gambling (Cleverness): +2 (3 xp) | +6 |
| Melee Weapons [Swords] (Agility): +4 (10 xp) | +4 |
| Persuasion (Cleverness): +3 (6 xp) | +7 |

Equipment & Property:

Rapier (sewing needle) A light sword. Rolling crits on a Parry will grant Bonus Dice to your next attack.

Used Riding Beetle

Holds a room over the "Golden Grub Inn" in Haven

(Many thanks to Riotopsys of RPG.net for contributing this sample character.)