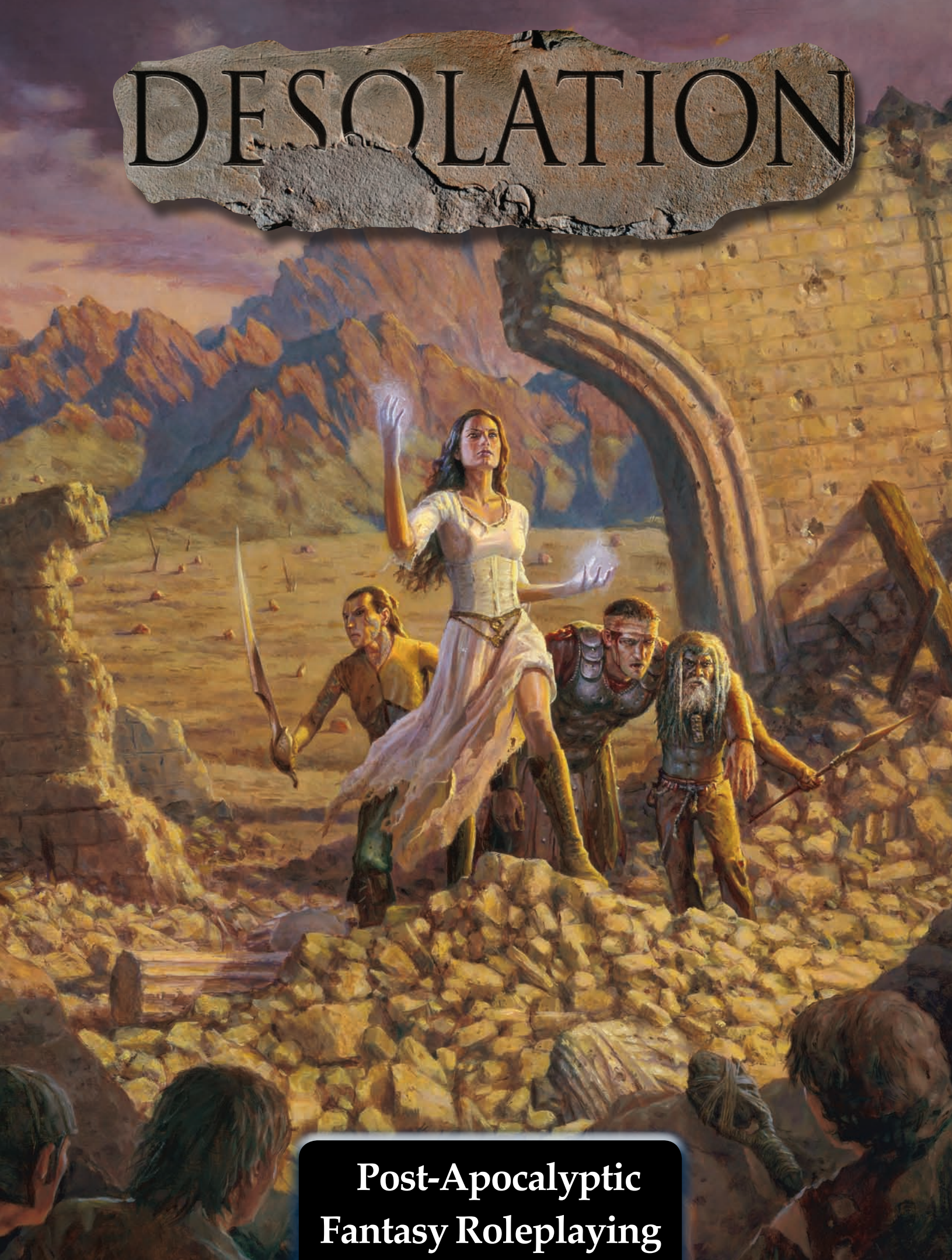
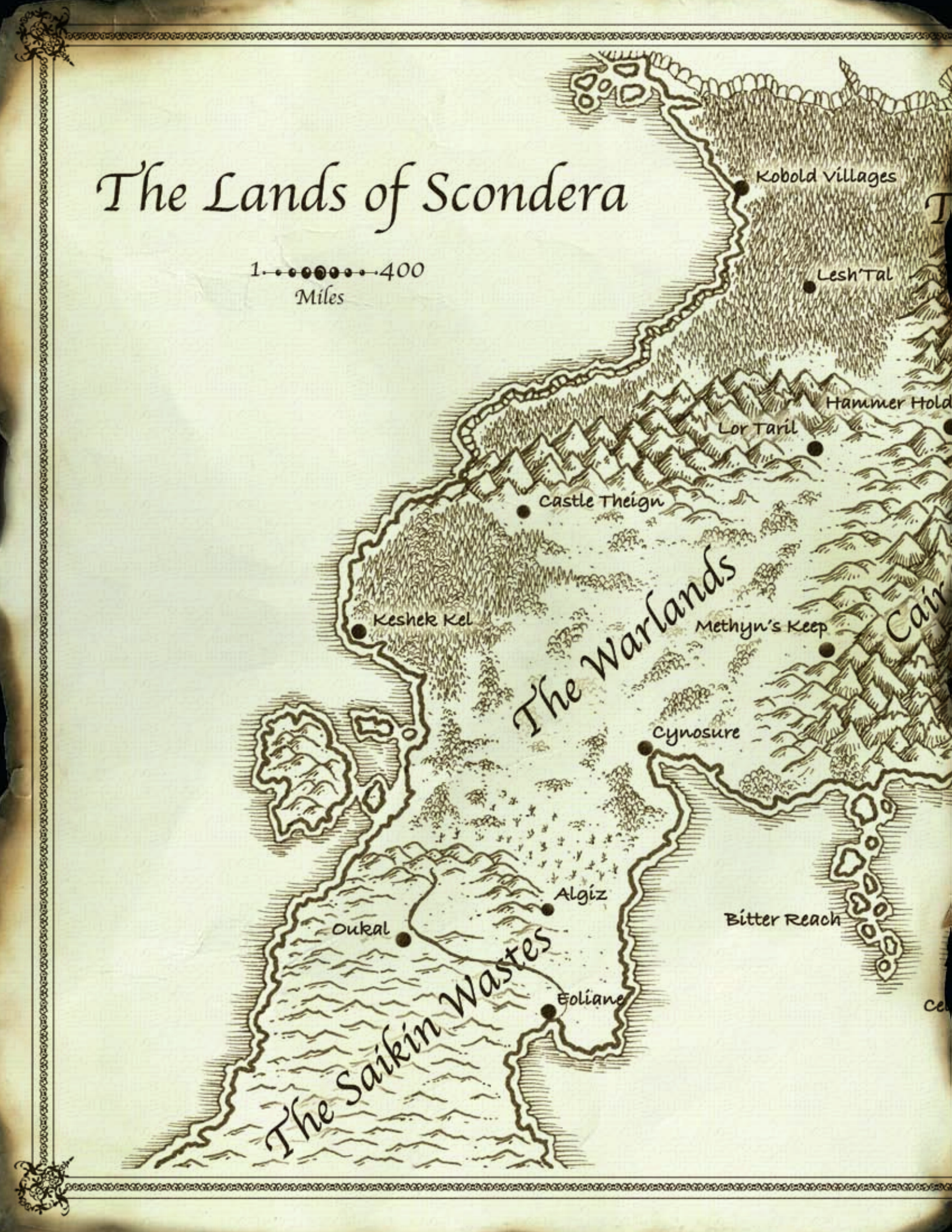
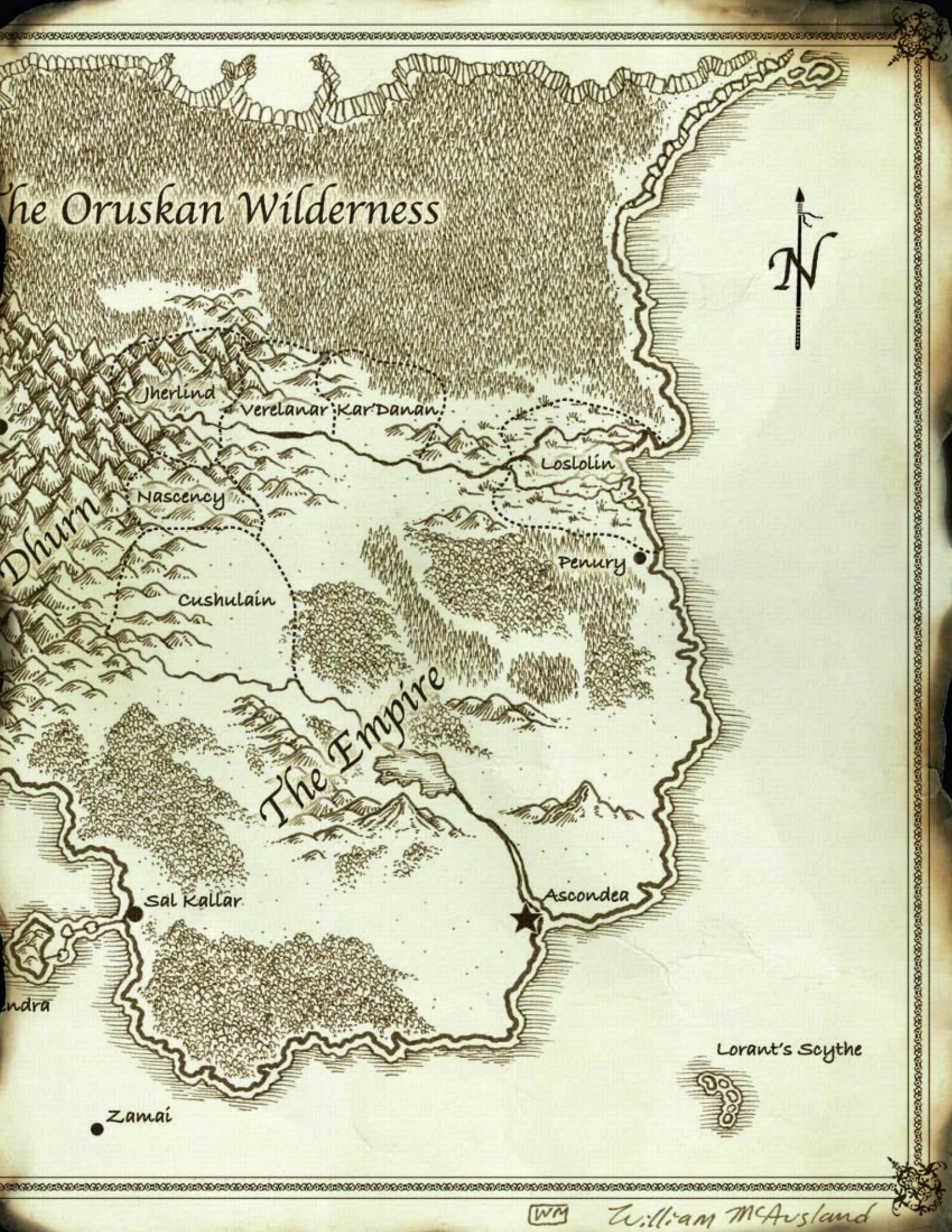
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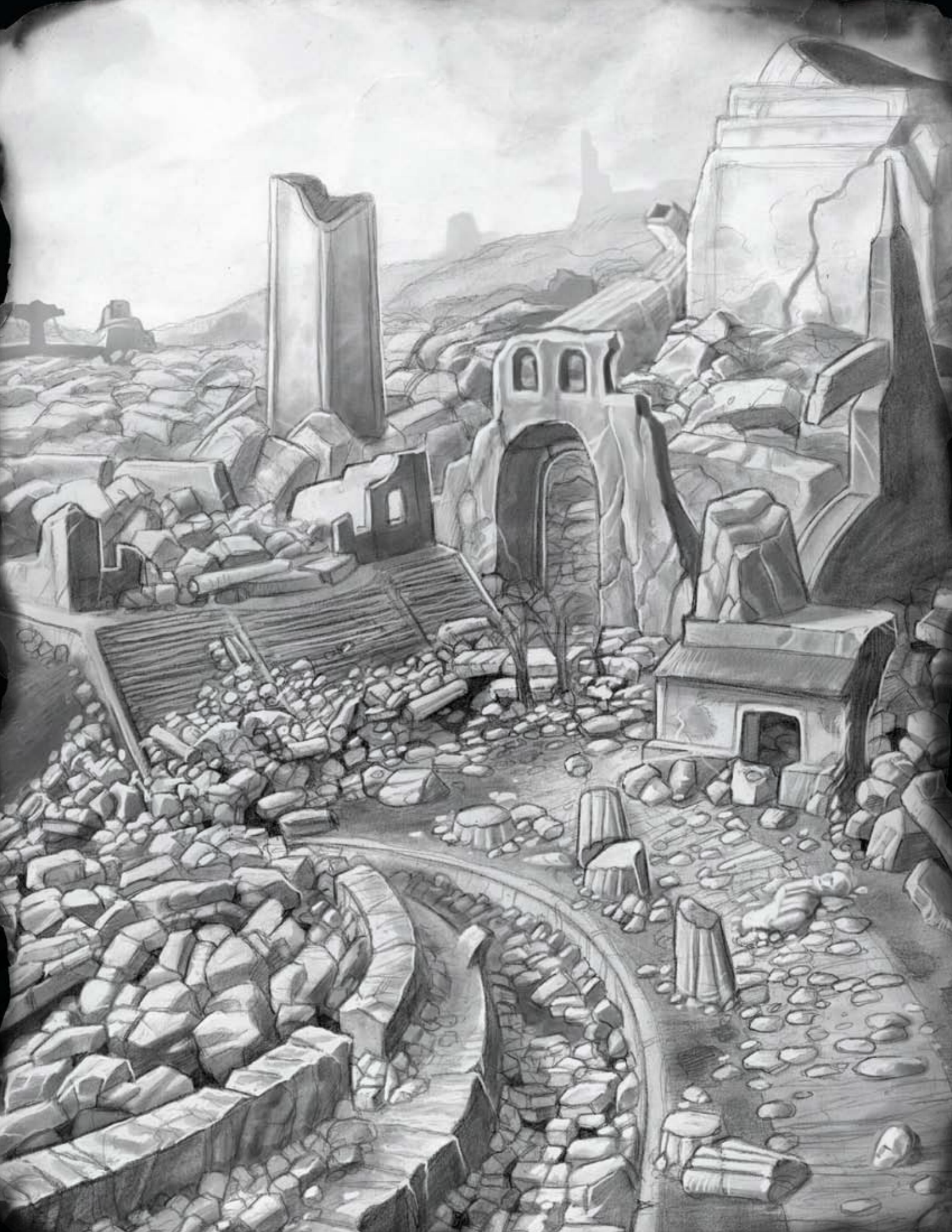
Post-Apocalyptic Fantasy Roleplaying


The Lands of Scondera
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Miles
Kobold Villages
Lesh'Tal
Hammer Hold
Lor Taril
Castle Theign
The Warlands
Keshek Kel
Methyn's Keep
Cynosure
Algiz
Oukal
Bitter Reach
Eoliane
The Saikin Wastes



WM William McAusland





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Dedications

Jamie: For Heather, whose faith in me drives me to be worthy of it. For Hannah and Jenna, who inspire me every day with their imagination and curiosity. I hope you never lose either. And for my family and friends, whose guidance and advice have always been appreciated — even when not followed.

Stephen: For Sara, who has patiently put up with all my nonsense. Also, for my family and friends, on both sides of the Atlantic; I'm fortunate to have two continents' worth of both. Finally, this is my latest attempt to give something back to a hobby that's made me very happy over the last 25+ years. I hope you like it.

Matt: For my wife, Tessy. She has been supportive and understanding every step of the way, enduring many lonely nights and weekends while *Desolation* was being born. This is also for Elizabeth and Alice, who have been patient while Dad was off in his own world. And of course, thank you to all my other family and friends, who have given me nothing but encouragement.



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INTRODUCTION

Willim of Fertile Fields rose from the straw pile on the dirt floor of his sod home. He still wasn't used to waking up alone. **Maree hadn't made it through the Long Winter.** Now it was just him and his son, Aldrew. The boy had survived six years. Willim had hoped for more offspring to help him in the fields, but that was Before. He nudged the sleeping child with his foot.

"Let's go," he said. "The sun's almost up."

Reluctantly, the child rolled out of bed. The two split a meager amount of rabbit jerky in the dark. Willim didn't like to waste wood or pitch. They washed the dried hare down with some rain water and headed for the fields.

Fertile Fields' name might seem misleading to any visitors, not that there were many. The town, consisting of 40 sod homes and a newly constructed log common house at its heart, was indeed in a field — a vast plain, actually, that stretched for miles. But **the dry, brown plains looked far from fertile**.

Willim looked at the just-completed common house with a mixture of pride and anger. It had taken many months to harvest the scarce wood and construct the building. Now the townsfolk had some measure of protection from marauding beasts and the cold winter, should it return. If they would have had it sooner, Maree may have survived.

Around the common house were the livestock pens, and around them circled the fields. The sod homes lined the perimeter of Fertile Fields: the first defense from anything that threatened the crops or animals.

He and Aldrew made their way to the patch of earth they had turned last week. It was ready for seeding, but Willim had no seeds. He had helped build the common house, though, and so was entitled to one bag of seed collected from his neighbors' surplus. He stopped by the common house and collected the small bag.

He was embarrassed by his need to rely on his neighbors, though in truth the only reason any of them survived was because *they could rely on one another*. It was a good place to live, Willim thought. Everyone worked hard. There was precious little time for anything else. Those who didn't contribute were ostracized, which usually equated to a death sentence.

Willim used his index finger to make holes in the soil, into which he placed a single seed in each. Aldrew followed behind him, gently covering the seed with soil and then sprinkling it with a few drops of water from a pig's bladder.

The two worked this way for hours until the sun was high in the sky. They spoke very little. There would be time for that at midday break.

Willim's back hurt from stooping all morning, and the last of the seed had been planted.

"All right," he said, slowly straightening. "That's enough for now."

It fact, **it was not enough**. If the crop grew well, it might be enough to sustain him and Aldrew. But if anything went wrong — too little rain, too much rain, insects, disease, hail, anything — there would not be enough. And ***these days something always went wrong***. They needed more seed.

"Can I go see if Sandro's ready for break?" Aldrew asked.

"After we pray," said Willim. He hadn't been much of a believer in the Divine Mother, though Maree was. After she passed, it made him feel better to think she was in a better place.

"Mother," he began the prayer Maree had taught him, "please nurture this crop. May it grow toward the light and be protected by your embrace. *Blessed are your children.*"

"Blessed are your children," Aldrew said dutifully before running toward a neighboring field.

"Mind the rows," Willim yelled after him.

Midday break was the bright spot in the day. Many of Fertile Fields's farmers congregated in and around the common house to talk and eat. The topics were always the same: the weather, the crops and the livestock. Willim stopped home first to get some bread, an onion and more rabbit jerky for lunch before making his way to the common house.

He was halfway there when he heard the beating drum. **A stranger was approaching Fertile Fields.** Willim ran back to the house, grabbed a pitchfork, and hurried to the gathering crowd of men on the outskirts of town. The women and children ran to the common house. Aldrew knew to take shelter in the house, so Willim didn't try to find him.

All the men of Fertile Fields — scythes, pitchforks and shovels in hand — stood in a line in front of two strangers.

"State your business," said Tobias in his booming voice.

"We come in peace," said one of them. The bedraggled elf wore hardened leather strips and had a sword of bone tied at his side. "We have goods to trade for food, if you've any to spare."

There was a murmur from the farmers as they discussed the many ways they disliked and distrusted strangers, especially the cursed elves. It seemed all a game to Willim. One of the strangers was almost always allowed to enter. **The curiosity of the outside world was just too great.**

"Will you leave your weapons here in our care?" Tobias finally asked.

Now it was the strangers' turn to murmur between themselves.

"Barcus will stay with them," the elf said as he untied his rope belt and handed his sword to his companion.

"Very well," said Tobias. "You are in Fertile Fields. I am Tobias."

"Fertile Fields?" asked the man as he looked around. He shrugged. "I am Korlian, this is Barcus. We come from New Beda."

Barcus also dismounted and disarmed. Korlian followed Tobias and a good number of the other men into the village. Many of Fertile Fields' citizens stood guard over Barcus. Though the two strangers had horses and weapons, **the farmers had superior numbers**. It would be foolish for the strangers to try anything. Of course, it was foolish to travel in such a small party.

Willim followed Tobias and the stranger to the common house. By the time he arrived, some of the strangers' treasures were already laid out on the floor. Willim saw a few wooden handles that could be used for tools, *a large bag of seeds*, some pelts, a pair of leather boots, three bronze arrowheads and a long length of rope. His eyes were on the seeds, though he knew that he had nothing to trade for them, when a collective gasp from the townspeople caught his attention.

Korlian held **a steel plowshare** in his hands, holding it up high over his head for everyone to see. It had dwarven runes carved along its edge. Many of the townsfolk remembered all too well the days Before, when magically sharpened and reinforced plows cut effortlessly through the most hardpan soils.

The townsfolk were of one mind: The plowshare and seeds might allow the village to survive.

Tobias was already haggling, though halfheartedly so. The town did not have enough resources to trade for the plowshare. Tobias was stalling, Willim realized, and **tightened his grip on his pitchfork.**

A few moments later, Big Burle entered the common house. The man was the tallest in the town, and skilled at hunting and tracking. He spent most of his days walking the perimeter of Fertile Fields, hunting game and watching for dangers. Burle caught Tobias' eye and gave a quick nod.

Willim was a bit surprised. These two looked like experienced travelers. He had assumed they were too smart to travel as just a pair — to enter a town with no backup. Maybe they had friends beyond Burle's hunting grounds.

It was a risk Tobias seemed willing to take.

"No, no," the stranger was done haggling, nervously realizing he would not get a decent trade here. "I'm afraid I cannot let it go for less …"

"We thank you for your contribution to Fertile Fields," Tobias interrupted him.

The elf drew a rusted dagger from beneath his leathers. It was too late.

The men, women and children of Fertile Fields fell in upon Korlian. They **stabbed at him again and again** with their sharpened wooden tools and pummeled him with clenched fists until the elf was dead.

Big Burle made a strange bird call outside the door. In a moment, Barcus would meet the same fate as his companion.

They buried the strangers in a field that had not yet been planted. And they offered thanks to the Divine Mother.

"Mother," Tobias said over the graves, "**Thank you for these gifts.** May their bodies feed our fields and their supplies protect our town. May it grow toward the light and be protected in your embrace. Blessed are your children."

"*Blessed are your children,*" echoed the townsfolk.

Introduction

Welcome to the world of *Desolation*, a post-apocalyptic fantasy roleplaying game that allows players to explore the traditional sword and sorcery setting in a new way. The high fantasy world has been shattered and reshaped. Civilization has been lost. Mankind has nearly been destroyed. Even the laws of magic have been broken.

You will be playing the survivors of this apocalypse, one of the few who have managed to make it though the devastating Night of Fire and endure the bleak Long Winter. The world as you knew it is gone, replaced by one that is harsh and unpredictable. It's filled with unfamiliar landscapes, terrible beasts, power-hungry warlords and desperate survivors. Lawlessness, cruelty and danger are now more common than order, compassion and safety.

But there is more to do than just survive. The world is a blank slate. The future now belongs to you and the few others who remain. The opportunities are limitless. Will you explore the new world or stay in one place, trying to protect what little you have? Will you save the arts and relics of the past, or focus on the here and now? Will you rebuild the previous governments or form your own? Will you protect the innocents or dominate them? Is there a better day on the horizon, or has all hope been lost?

All these are questions you will answer while playing *Desolation*. The direction this new world will take is up to you.

The Post-Apocalyptic Genre

The word "apocalypse" conjures a biblical end-of-the-world image: fire, brimstone, judgment day and more. For some, this marks the end of everything bad and the start of everything good. For most, it's just the end of everything.

The post-apocalyptic genre deals with the survivors of world-ending events, and what they must do to survive. Those who remain have lost everything they once had, both in terms of societal structure and actual physical items. For many survivors, this new reality is a chance to be reborn into something better than they were before. For others, the post-apocalyptic destruction is a chance to seize power and dominate others.

The genre is often used as a vehicle to lay bare the core of society and examine its values, views and motivations. By stripping away the threat of law and punishment, post-apocalyptic settings allow characters to pursue what they truly desire. It can reveal the true nature of a character and the world in which he once lived.

What is Desolation?

Many people have played in a game or read a novel where characters wander through the ruins of some long-forgotten civilization or search for a mysterious relic crafted by a lost race. Typically, these ancient peoples are gone because of a vast cataclysm they brought upon themselves.

Desolation embraces this common fantasy convention and reaches back in time to where it all went wrong. Instead of yet another fantasy world set thousands of years after such an event, characters are thrown back to the apocalypse itself.

Desolation allows characters to experience these apocalyptic events and the ruined new world rising from the ashes of the old. It's a world where dangers and opportunities are plentiful; a world where chaos and survival constantly clash with law and compassion; a world free of the typical fantasy assumptions. It is a setting with many shades of grey and moral uncertainties.

Perhaps nothing is more uncertain than magic. It has shifted from being commonplace and respected to being feared and fractured. It is now difficult to control and learn. Those who don't use it properly can be harmed or even destroyed by it.

The slate has been wiped clean. The survivors are in a battle not only against the hostile environment, but one another. Artifacts from Before, both magical and mundane, are highly prized. Players and their characters learn early on how limited resources are. The only thing rarer than a well-crafted weapon is a blacksmith to repair it.

Desolation is targeted toward players who enjoy a character-driven, intense roleplaying experience. It's a game for players who want to build the story of their characters, not power levels. In a world without law, individuals determine their own path. They could be driv-

en to find lost loved ones, build new communities, raise armies, explore the broken lands or discover lost power — all in an attempt to stop the chaos, or take advantage of it. Their actions will determine whether they become heroes or villains.

What is Roleplaying?

In essence, roleplaying is interactive storytelling. It's an opportunity to gather with friends — both old and new — to tap into your creativity, spin a yarn, and make it come to life. *Desolation* is a roleplaying game that will provide you with countless hours of imaginative entertainment.

The history books will tell you that roleplaying first came about in the 1970s, when people started playing fantasy wargames with miniature figurines, and when the very first roleplaying game (RPG) was published. But roleplaying has been around for much longer than that. After all, what child hasn't played some form of house, or cops and robbers? Those games are much less sophisticated than those we engage in as adults, but it goes to show that the fundamentals of roleplaying games, if not the mechanics, have been with us for a long time.

As we've grown up, so has the hobby of roleplaying. Much has changed since that first book was published. There are a myriad of genres available to explore: fantasy, superheroes, science fiction, horror and pulp, to name just a few. Just as exciting, we have a variety of gaming methods to consider: ranging from intensive storytelling with broad rules, to hack-and-slash combat with detailed rules, and everything in between.

Desolation is a post-apocalyptic fantasy roleplaying game with gritty survivors, desperate and power-hungry villains, hostile environments and hopeful heroes. It is powered by the Ubiquity roleplaying system, an innovative game system that emphasizes storytelling and cinematic action. It provides you with the tools and flexibility to play the kind of game you want to play.

What You Need to Play

A group needs the following to play:

■ A copy of the *Desolation* rules and setting manual. All players may want to have their own copy.

■ A gamemaster (GM) to create adventures, play non-player characters (NPCs), adjudicate rules and keep the story moving.

■ Two or more players to run characters who are part of the story. Players need a sense of imagination and willingness to explore the *Desolation* setting.

■ A character sheet to hold all the important information about the characters. You'll find a character sheet in the back of this book.

■ Pencil and paper to take notes and track changes on the character sheet.

■ Dice to roll to determine how well characters do during the game.

How to Use this Book

Desolation is divided into chapters that allow readers to reference specific parts of the game. Rules and system information are separated from setting and background.

Chapter 1: Before describes the world of *Desolation* prior to the Apocalypse. It contains information on races, geography and history.

Chapter 2: The Apocalypse recounts the destruction of the world, detailing the Night of Fire and Long Winter.

Chapter 3: After outlines the world as it today, explaining how races, cultures and landscapes have changed.

Chapter 4: Character Creation gives step-by-step instructions on how to make an interesting character.

Characters includes 12 ready-made characters that can be used as examples of how to create a character, or as your group's characters if you want to start playing right away.

Chapter 5: Magic describes the unique magic system of *Desolation*. It includes rules, traditions and spell examples.

Chapter 6: Religion summarizes the major faiths found in *Desolation*.

Chapter 7: Rules explains how to resolve actions and challenges.

Chapter 8: Combat provides all the tools needed to endure and fight in the world of *Desolation*.

Example of play gives you a roll-by-roll account of a sample encounter.

Chapter 9: Equipment describes the weapons and armor that can still be found in the After.

Chapter 10: Storytelling includes tips on how to use the unique elements of *Desolation* to create a great story.

A Few Good Men is a sample scenario that can be run as a standalone adventure or integrated into a longer campaign.

Chapter 11: Bestiary describes numerous beasts, monsters, animals and races that can be used to challenge players.

Index references the page numbers of important rules and terms used in *Desolation*.

BEFORE

Wooden stools sat atop the ale-stained tables of the Hungry Chir tavern, their legs in the air **like so many bugs** on their backs as Morte flung new sawdust over any fresh vomit on the floor. Only the table where four of the Silent Council sat showed any sign of life in the inn. During business hours, the Hungry Chir looked like most other inns in Cynosure. No one suspected *it was owned and operated by representatives of what some called the Empire's fourth council*.

"Kees, what is Reld doing with Keshek Kel?" asked Commander Thales. "Last time we met, you thought he might use it to form an alliance with Wesk's forces."

"That fell through," replied Kees, after taking a sip of ale. "I made sure of that. Wesk will likely take it from him before month's end. The real question is, why can't we get some decent **dwarven ale** in this place?"

Thales ignored the question. He didn't like being stationed in Cynosure any more than his men liked infiltrating the warbands, but they'd be going back to the Empire soon enough.

"You should've drawn my duty," said Yves. "Warlord Braehl wastes half his time raiding caravans from Cair Dhurn. He doesn't even use scouts to make sure the caravans have weapons. Most of the time they're full of kegs and his men spend the next week in a drunken stupor. I mean, really, I don't see why we don't *bring the legion over and mop up* — expand the Empire from sea to sea."

"If the Council of Swords had its way, I'm sure we would," Thales said. "But the other councils have grown **complacent with the peace we provide**. They're happy to let the warlords fight among themselves as long as they stay west of the Primeas. But it sounds like Braehl has no intentions of crossing the mountains, then?"

"No," said Yves. "He'll be lucky to keep his command. I think his second is looking to make a move."

"Do you require anything to make that happen?" asked Thales.

"No sir. I've started a few rumors that Braehl is about to recruit a new lieutenant. It won't take long till that gets back to Jarel. I expect Braehl will get a knife in the back."

"Well, if Jarel doesn't do it, you may have to," Thales said. "Make it look like Jarel is responsible, of course. The Councils are **getting nervous** about the growth of Braehl's army, especially with them being so close to the mountains."

"Understood," said Yves. "It'll be done before our next meeting, one way or the other."

"And after that, it's back to the Empire," said Nigel. "I can hardly wait. After eight months of living like a savage, civilization seems like a distant memory."

"It'll come back to you after a few glasses of wine at the Calladium," said Kees. "Marble floors instead of sawdust, plush chairs instead of barstools ..."

"True. I can't believe this," Nigel said, gesturing around the Hungry Chir, "is the high life. But after ***a month of raiding*** and eating jerky around a campfire even this seems pretty good."

"A month of raiding?" asked Thales. "I thought Koruk was regrouping."

"He was, until Sarik slit his throat," said Nigel. "Poor bastard. I mean, it's not like he knew Sarik's mother was in that village we attacked. I did, of course, but I neglected to mention it *until the last tent was burned*."

"Well done," Thales said. "If Koruk and Sarik had united their tribes, they might have swallowed up a number of the smaller warbands. **They could've become a problem.** Legionnaire Gaits gave you information on Sarik's mother, I take it."

"Yes. We met discreetly," said Nigel. "No one from Koruk's or Sarik's camps missed us."

"Good," said Thales. "Don't get sloppy during the last month of your tours. If even one warlord suspected **the Empire was controlling the chaos** ... well, the Warlands would turn into Verelanar, only 100 times larger. I don't need to remind you *what a united Warlands would mean to the Empire*."

"No sir," chimed all three agents.

"We'll do whatever it takes to protect the Empire," said Kees. "After all, if they're not citizens of the Empire ..."

"They're not really people," said Yves, finishing the phrase that was popular within the Silent Council.

"Eat up, gentlemen," said Thales. "It'll be the last decent meal you get for awhile."

Chapter 1: Before

"We will bring light to the darkness of the world."

The continent of Scondera was once a thriving and wondrous place. Several nations called it home, from the noble Ascodean Empire to the violent Warlands. The Primea Mountains lay between the two, separating them in many ways. To the north lay the Oruskan Wilderness, home to the savage folk, and to the south lay the desolate Saikin Wastes. Tucked around the Empire were the Marches, a half dozen independent countries, each with its own culture. Millions of souls made their home in Scondera, until the Night of Fire changed the world forever. To know what was lost, one must understand what came Before.

The Ascondean Empire

Long before the Empire, other cultures existed — and sometimes thrived — in pockets of civilization throughout the world. Most were scattered human kingdoms, the majority of which were long gone before the Night of Fire. Some of these distant, forgotten cultures sent out expeditions, and the most progressive armed their explorers with curiosity rather than bloodlust. So it was with the far-flung seed that became the Empire.

Humble Beginnings

The Empire began as the tiny village of Ascondea near the delta of the Rappian River. Its founders had much to be thankful for, even in those first days. The fertile deposits of the delta made farming easy, and the channels that led to the ocean gave the villagers sheltered access to the Green Sea and the eastern coastline of the continent. With full stomachs and a thirst for knowledge, the first Ascondeans set out to explore the world.

The first king of Ascondea was called Teneas. Of all the families in that first village, his was the largest and held the most land, so it was a simple decision to elect him leader. When he took the title of king, it was in imitation of the larger nations around Ascondea, and everyone thought it right and proper that the Ascondeans make an effort to look their best.

Inspired by what they saw in their dealings with other races, the Ascondeans decided there was much they could learn — and much they could give. Teneas and the other early leaders placed as much importance on art, education and magic as other civilizations placed on army-building and conquest. That's not to say Ascondea shunned war … not at first. Indeed, as its reputation as a wealthy society became well-known, it rigorously defended itself with magic and advanced military tactics.

Nearby towns and communities came to the Ascondeans and asked to join them, often for protection or trade benefits. The Ascondeans turned no one away, as long as those who came would agree to provide military and economic resources for the greater good. Eventually, an elected council grew up around the once-small village.

The council was initially made up of the leaders of the multitude of towns and cities that comprised the new nation, and these people were typically wealthy and powerful. This conglomerate of villages, towns and nations was known as the First Alliance.

As the Alliance grew, internal strife became its greatest danger, and a civil war between those who wove magic and those who did not seemed inevitable. The soldiers of the legions grew jealous of the rich mages, while the commoners felt ignored and unappreciated. The discord grew stronger.

Invasion of the Black Wing

With the Alliance under rising pressure from within, a great army poured in from the Northlands. In a feat of organization previously unthinkable, the tribes of the northern wilderness were united under a single clan called the Black Wing.

Led by Khran'doral, a mongrel of singular strength and intelligence, the clan of Oruskans had spent an entire generation preparing for this invasion. Khran'doral had taken only the toughest and most cunning orc and goblin warriors. He had trained them for a full decade, teaching them the tactics of the legions, the history of the Ascondeans and the weaknesses in their Alliance. He also brought together powerful Shamans to prepare magical defenses against the Sorcery they would face.

The Black Wing army poured into Ascondea, not stopping to burn and pillage as they would have before, but always mov-

ing and resupplying as they pushed deeper into the human lands. This unexpected tactic made it difficult for the Ascondean legions to regroup, and before they knew it, the Black Wing fell upon the capital city.

The mage's guild did its best, but was pulled apart by the bestial forces of the orc Shamans. A few dozen apprentices, along with some legionnaire recruits and some civilian support staff, managed to retreat into the central tower of the Mage's Academy, protecting a handful of leaders who remained.

For a day and a night, the Black Wing tore the Shining City apart, killing thousands of people and celebrating an unthinkable victory against the crown jewel of human civilization. A few survivors kept vigil inside the well-protected Great Hall of the Academy, waiting for the Shamans of the Black Wing to finally force their way in.

Among the few nobles to survive was Lentine Corvalas, a forward-thinking but relatively unknown noble from an outlying province. His theories describing a fairer society where the people had better representation in government were considered progressive by the masses. Before the attack, Corvalas had been considered something of an eccentric by most of his peers. In the end, he owed his life to this eccentricity: When the attack came, he had been in the kitchens of the Great Hall of the Academy, sneaking ale and food with some guards and servants he had befriended.

Escape from the Shining City

In the Great Hall, a handful of lesser-injured commoners, soldiers-in-training and apprentice sorcerers, led by a young centurion named Halivar Graith, hatched a plan to sneak the few surviving leaders of Ascondea to safety. The mages cloaked the group with magic, and the young legionnaires used steel when magic wasn't enough. Graith himself stood between an orc's attack and Corvalas, taking a wound to his arm while protecting the noble.

Even the trusted old butler of the academy's headmaster played his part by leading the entire group of survivors through ancient service tunnels that wove through the basements of the University Quarter and out into the Rappian River itself. The group sneaked onboard a scow and, against all odds, got out of the city and delivered the leaders to safety.

Corvalas made sure the commoners, apprentice mages and soldiers who had been involved were rewarded for their heroism with more than just silver, but with stories and positions of public glory — something for people to get behind. Centurion Graith was promoted to captain, and was given his own command that helped to retake the capital.

The idea of the Alliance took on more significance than simply disparate regions working together. It was reborn as a concept of the classes of people inside the country working together to drive the Black Wings back into the Northlands.

In the midst of war, a new treaty was established among the nations of the Alliance. It created a ruling council, made up of representatives, or Speakers, from all regions inside this new nation. Each Speaker represented the working classes, the academics and mages, or the military. Over these was the Prime Speaker, who would officiate and be, for all intents and purposes, the elected leader of the fledgling state. This treaty was known as the Concord of Ascondea. The Alliance became the Concordea and soon succeeded in completely driving out the Black Wing.

The Councils

The elected governmental bodies — the Council of Servians, the Council of Swords and the Council of Magores — worked together to eradicate hunger, drought, disease, crime and toil from the lands of the Concordea. The Magores' heightened magic allowed the Servians to harvest more crops and craft better goods. The Swords maintained the peace and protected Servian and Magore alike. General Graith was elected Speaker for the Council of Swords, after leading the Ascondean Legions to victory over the Black Wings in the north.

Corvalas, for his wisdom in creating the Councils, was



elected Prime Speaker. Until his death 10 years later, he prepared the way for what would later become the greatest nation that the world had ever seen.

The Enlightenment

Much of the decade Corvalas acted as Prime Speaker for the Concordea was a period of rebuilding, and acclimating the nation to the Councils and the new government. Most people were very much in favor of the system, though for a while it seemed as though nothing had changed.

The nobles felt disenfranchised at first. The power given to the legions had kept the nobles in check. Graith spent most of his time away from Ascondea, mopping up the last pockets of resistance from Black Wing survivors. Corvalas knew this could be a problem. Despite the new system of democratic representation, the Concordea could not thrive with vultures without and resentful nobles within. In order for the Councils to work, it would have to be led by a firm hand. The only way democracy could grow would be through a dictatorship.

Graith was an intelligent man. He and Corvalas had long spoken of what needed to happen to save the ideals of the Ascondean Alliance. The outside threat of the Black Wing had been an effective way to unify the nation, but it had been destructive. What they needed was a similar unifying objective — one that was constructive and positive, and would take care of internal and external threats at the same time.

It was Corvalas who introduced the concept of bringing Enlightenment to the rest of the Eastern Kingdoms. Graith seconded his motion, and the rest was lost in cheers and cries of exultation.

For those nobles who had lost some power after the creation of the Councils, the Enlightenment brought them positions of importance. They would be the diplomats and teachers, leading groups of soldiers and engineers out into the broken wilderness that surrounded the lands of the Concordea, building schools and bridges, bringing trade and roads to the nations that had been hungrily watching for signs of weakness. They would bring a taste of the Ascondean culture that these nations so craved.

Some regions were pleased to see the Concordea representatives visit, and greeted them with open arms. Others were angry and resented what they saw as incursions onto their sovereign soil. A few resisted, turning out small, yet valiant armies to stop the invaders. They were crushed immediately. The power of the legions was overwhelming: Outside governments were "strongly advised" to join with the Concordea.

There were several small wars in the first years of the Enlightenment. The Concordea was seen as a bully, a swaggering nation ruled by a despot — or worse, as a mad old man wielding a military dictator's sword. This attitude did not go unnoticed by Corvalas or Graith, yet they moved ever forward, genuinely regretful their work was at times underappreciated.

Within the first decade of the Enlightenment, the Concordea's borders grew, adding more than a dozen nations or city states. The Concordea stretched from the Primea Mountains to the eastern Green Sea. As Corvalas lay on his deathbed, he proclaimed that Graith should be named his successor, and moreover, should forever be the Prime Speaker of the great Ascondean Concordea.

An Empire is Born

As an act of great reverence for the first Prime Speaker of the Concordea, the Councils did elect Graith. In a sorrowful, long-planned speech in front of the Councils, Graith declared that with Corvalas gone, the dream of the Enlightenment and the Concordea had died with him. Unless, Graith swiftly added, he were given the time and the power to make Ascondea something truly great.

He asked for the support of the legions, and the Council of Swords raised their voices in a great cheer. Then he asked for the support of the mages, and the Council of Magores created great arcs of blue and green light that lit the entire city, and he knew he had their support also. Finally, Graith asked humbly for the support of the common men and women of Ascondea, and the roar that lifted from the streets of the city left no doubt in anyone's mind that he had what he needed: the permission to create an empire. Thus, Emperor Graith I came to power, and the Ascondean Empire was born.

The emperor's first act was to rebuild the lands acquired during the Enlightenment, thereby gaining the conquered peoples' complete devotion. His actions during times of war and peace served as an example for emperors to come. His philosophy was based on the belief that the Empire was destined to be a utopian society.

The Enlightenment would last for 20 more years, and after the violence-tinged years of the first decade, the latter years were more peaceful. The Enlightenment became what could be called a genuine search for knowledge and light.

By the end of the 30-year period of Enlightenment, the Empire had nearly doubled in size. More than this, it consolidated its rule over the lands already gained. With the improvement in roads and trade infrastructure, real peace was now possible.

When Emperor Graith I died, 48 years after the founding of the Empire, he was more beloved than anyone could have predicted, even in the first days of that new nation.

Subsequent rulers followed in his footsteps, with an occasional stumble along the way. The Empire continued to grow, though more slowly. Some kingdoms joined it willingly, drawn

by its advanced culture. Others joined reluctantly, goaded by the Grand Army's enchanted swords. Still others joined for the protection the Empire could provide. It brought high culture to all the kingdoms it engulfed, and allowed them representation in government. Its schools of magic attracted the most skilled students from all levels of society, who in turn graduated and added their knowledge to the Empire's success. The Empire became a well-oiled machine, fueled by magic and greased by a common vision.

That vision was one of perfection. Every member of the Grand Army of the Empire went to battle with enchanted arms and armor. Farmers tilled their fields with magically sharpened plow shares, many behind enchanted beasts. Architects and engineers used magic to build great public works that defied physics. Artists of the Empire created ensorcelled masterpieces of unmatched beauty. Magic flowed like music through the Empire.

Soon, not only did the Empire stretch from the islands of the Green Sea west to the Primea Mountains, but nearly an equal distance north and south. Magical portals and an amazing system of roadways allowed its leaders to effectively govern the expanse. Communication and travel among the provinces was fast and efficient.

The Golden Utopia

Just before the Night of Fire, the nations of the East had settled down into a stable political structure. Cushulain seemed destined to join the Empire within a few years, or a decade at most, while some of the nations of the Marches, such as Kar'Danan, Loslolin and Verelanar, would never consider the Empire a friend or ally — but they posed no threat. The Oruskans were held safely at bay by the power of the legion.

At its peak, the citizens of the Empire voted to outlaw war so that they could know true peace. Intellect was prized above all else, save creative indulgences. It was as close to utopia as a society could be.

Provinces of the Empire

Ascondea Central

This province was the oldest part of the Empire. Although it was once the entire nation, it became known as the lands surrounding the Imperial Capital. It stretched approximately 150 miles inland, and about half that distance north and south along the coastline. The oldest families in the Empire lived here, and had for thousands of years. If there were "true Ascondeans" as



compared to other citizens of the Empire, they would have been born here. Such true-born tended to have a superior attitude toward the "outer" provinces and those they call "visitors" to the Capital.

Gerinty

This rugged province on the southwestern border of the Empire was nearly deforested two centuries ago, thanks to the Ascondean Legions and their shipbuilding. It was slowly recovering with the help of some friendly mongrel Shamans. Along the way, it turned into a kind of "reserve" for itinerant mongrels. In general, mongrels who were passing through Ascondea — especially if they looked like they were seriously considering settling down in more "civilized" areas — were gently, but firmly, encouraged to relocate to Gerinty. Most didn't complain, and many found the region to be to their liking.

Kala

Along with the larger religions, many smaller cults called Kala their home. Most of them were given some degree of credibility by having a temple here. The Church of the Divine Mother had a huge temple complex here, and trained many of its Sacred Sons and Daughters in Kala.

Merene

Merene was an isolated coastal region about 300 miles south of Ascondea, along a 50-mile stretch of shoreline that could only easily be reached by sea — and then only if you knew the waters well. The isolation was almost accidental, caused by rough tides and currents, along with a hilly, barren terrain inland. The location resulted in a network of villages almost totally dependent upon fishing and the ships they built out of the small amount of wood to which they had access. Merene ships were triumphs of simplicity and effectiveness, perfect for exploration. The fledgling Ascondean Empire quickly recognized the value that the region could offer. Merene shipbuilders were responsible for creating the fast ships of the Ascondean Navy, helping them gain mastery of the Green Sea and the oceans around the continent. Their only rivals in this field were the Celendrites.

Palantra

This region joined the Empire 34 years ago. It was the most recent addition to Ascondea. Palantra was a small province south of Cushulain. It owed much to forestry, mining and farming. Of little strategic interest, Palantra had been petitioning the Empire for membership for many years before the Councils agreed to add it. Of note were the large number of ruins along the north-south road leading from Jherlind through Cushulain and into Palantra. Ascondean archeologists were starting to travel to Palantra to investigate further.

The Celendran Chain and the Bitter Reach

The islands of the Green Sea to the southwest of the Empire included the Celendran Chain and the Bitter Reach. The Celendran Chain was a small chain to the east, connected by the Golden Span, while the Bitter Reach was a longer chain coming south from the Primea Mountains.

Rumored to be descended from a race of pirates — some more descended from others — the island province has a rich history. The large city on the island, Celendra'nar, was the home of the area's culture. The region was absorbed into the Empire about 300 years ago, as was its people's shipbuilding skills. A large number of Celendrites rebelled against joining the Empire and became a pirate culture, fighting the Empire or joining with factions in the Warlands.

Most of the Celendrite pirates lived in the Bitter Reach, which blocked the way between the Empire's oceans and the Warlands, which made it fairly dangerous to travel directly along the coastline. The less-dangerous sea journey was via Celendra'nar out into the ocean and around the end of the Bitter Reach, but that required a good captain and a better vessel, and several additional days of travel.

Two hundred years ago, the Empire built a vast bridge across the small chain of islands to Celendra, not just as a gesture of goodwill, but to prove that their power over magic, architecture, and the ocean itself was greater than that of the Celendrites. Once completed, no ship was needed to travel between Ascondea and Celendra'nar, just a wagon. The journey across the Golden Span took more than a week, with stays in inns on the various islands along the way. The secondary benefit to the Golden Span was to allow for better control of the seas beneath it, and to cut down on pirate attacks on the trading vessels that had been plying their way between the island chain and the mainland.

Sal Kallar

What had originally been a minor port on the mainland opposite the chain, and previously overwhelmed by Celendra's wealth and status, found itself as the landward anchor for the Golden Span. Sal Kallar grew rapidly into a bustling city, almost the twin of Celendra'nar, though lacking the shipbuilding skills and history of that more exotic location. The tolls were so high to travel upon the bridge that Sal Kallar became the vacation destination for less wealthy Ascondean families, though all who traveled to their expensive homes along the Celendran Chain passed through Sal Kallar.

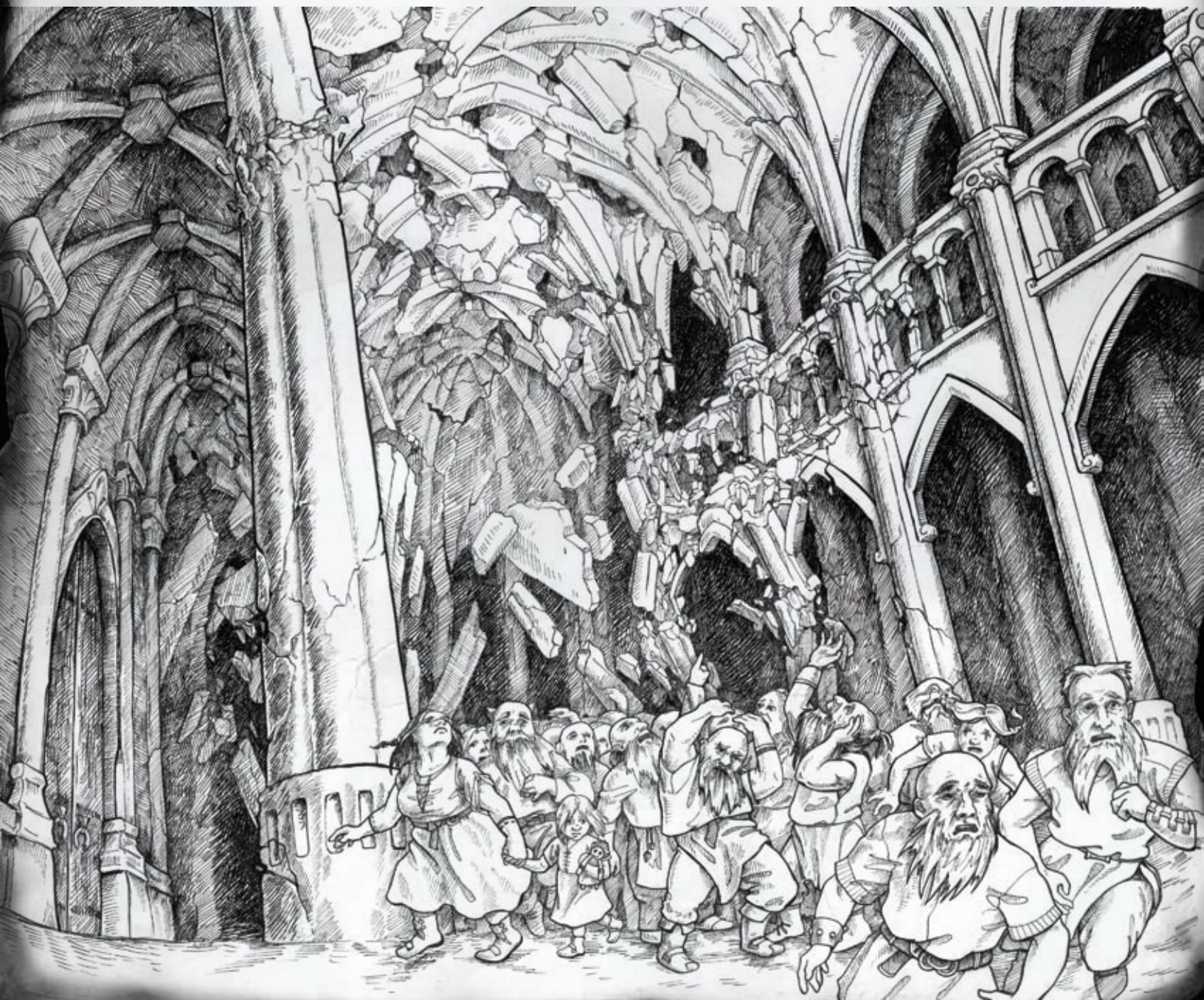
Playing an Ascondean

The Empire was a tapestry of more than two dozen regions and provinces, ranging in size from Ascondea Central to areas such as Lovain, an expanse of forest 300 miles wide. Though the areas closest to Ascondea Central were part of the original Alliance, most of the provinces were ancient kingdoms and city-states absorbed during the Enlightenment.

All of these regions retain aspects of their heritage and cultural traditions. Emperor Graith I considered it of utmost importance that each region of the Empire maintain its culture. He encouraged provinces to keep their accents and dialects as much as possible. Subsequent emperors followed his lead, though it was still Ascondean that would be taught in schools as the primary language of the Empire.

Religion was practiced freely, and architecture and clothing varied widely. Fashion being what it was, fads spread quickly out from the capital each year, and were widely adopted in outlying regions. Each emperor respected his predecessor, but tried to build upon what had gone before. Architectural styles would slowly develop, subtly changing in interesting and creative ways, using magic and engineering to develop ever greater feats and legendary buildings that would ensure each leader's cultural immortality.

For the average citizen far from the capital, life scarcely changed year after year. There was little interference from the Empire, except for occasional taxation for a project in a distant province, which would garner little more than a heavy sigh. Most were quite proud to be part of the Empire.



Cair Dhurn

High Deep, The Sacred Vaults, The Deep Reach

Rising more than 25,000 ft. from sea level, the Primea Mountain Range extended from the ocean into the Oruskan Wilderness like a massive wall between the Empire and the Warlands. But the wall was not solid. The mountains were crisscrossed with tunnels from thousands of years of mining by the dwarves of Cair Dhurn. Their mountain home was more than just mining tunnels, however. It contained great halls and temples with walls of gold and silver, and ceilings of precious gems.

For ages, the dwarves of Cair Dhurn ruled the Primea Mountain range. The dwarves believe they were the first race created by Uyln, the Forger. As such, they believe they are destined for greatness. They say they were placed in the Primea Mountains to protect the world from the Deep Horrors that lie beneath it — and to maintain balance between the quickly multiplying humans on either side of their mountains.

Throughout their history, the mountain dwarves worked to be worthy of their chosen status by using the gifts the Father and Mother gave them. Stories of their grand halls and cathedrals beneath the mountains were legendary. The quality of their steel weapons, armor and tools were unsurpassed.

Only one entrance to the mountain kingdom was well known. The ornate metal gates spanned a high mountain pass that curved its way from the foothills on the eastern side of the Primeas. The gates were closed only in times of war so as not to hamper the flow of finely crafted metalwork streaming from Cair Dhurn, nor the payments and goods coming in from the Empire and the Marches. There were many other entrances to High Deep, as non-dwarves called the country, but they were well hidden. One, in particular, allowed the dwarves to profit from the Warlands' constant need for arms and armor.

The dwarves' metalwork was unmatched, but not just because of their expertise at separating the finest ore from stone, or their legendary craftsmanship. Both were enhanced by the dwarves' ancient rune magic, which made their forge fires hotter and their pick axes harder.

Metal works weren't all that the dwarves peddled. Hundreds of dwarven missionaries traveled the known — and some say, the unknown — lands to bring religious enlightenment to the surface dwellers. Many civilizations' fables attribute the gift of forge fire to dwarven missionaries. The missionaries were celebrated as heroes in the theocracy of Cair Dhurn, the way great warriors were exalted in the Warlands or gifted diplomats were idolized in the Empire. The five missions focused on different aspects of society, according to which dwarven god they served: the Father, the Mother, the Forger, the Blooded or the Hidden. The leaders of each of the missions always pledged loyalty to the High Theocrat, who was said to be chosen from the missionaries by the pantheon of gods themselves.

Greed was not frowned upon by the dwarven pantheon. As dwarves followed rich veins of iron, gold and silver deep into the mountains, however, they uncovered something they did not expect. Whether the evil beasts they encountered were simply heretofore unknown creatures of the deep, demons from the abyss, or Oruskan deities, no one knows. The dwarves called them Deep Horrors, and constantly guarded the deep mines so that the evil didn't escape into the upper reaches of Cair Dhurn and out onto the surface.

With the enemies from below at bay and no enemies from above, Cair Dhurn had nothing to fear except enemies from within. For the High Theocrat, that enemy was Valin Stoneson. A generation before the Fall of the Mountain, Stoneson committed the ultimate crime in Cair Dhurn: He claimed to be a prophet. Worse, he preached about the destruction of Cair Dhurn.

The dwarves waged the most civil civil war in history, choosing to simply ignore Stoneson and his followers until they went away. Stoneson's followers called the five-year-long civil war "The Ignorance." When, 70 years later, Stoneson's doomsday prophecies came true, the dwarves of High Deep were completely surprised.

Playing a Mountain Dwarf

You are one of the last of your kind. The mountain dwarves suffered more than most when the Night of Fire caused the magically supported tunnels of Cair Dhurn to fall and the peaks of the mountains to explode. Your homeland is gone. One of the fuels of your society — gold — is now meaningless. At least you still have the Five Pillars, unless the Night of Fire caused you to forsake the dwarven gods.

You may be intent on finding survivors beneath the rubble, or just assume that no one could have survived. You know that if, somehow, the Deep Horrors survived, the surface dwellers are doomed. With few Deep Horror hunters left to keep them at bay, and the other races' lack of resistance to the beasts' poisons, there would be nothing to stop them.

You likely have more immediate concerns, however. Dwarves are known as talented craftsmen, and blacksmiths are in high demand in the After. Though you may never have worked a forge, surface dwellers may assume you're feigning ignorance because you don't want to help them rebuild. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background gets you or your party members into trouble.

Common Archetypes: Missionary, Deep Horror Hunter, Miner, Blacksmith

Please see the dwarves' racial traits in the Character Creation chapter on page 62.

Lorant's Scythe

The Thousand Faces; The Cursed Isles

The Empire had its utopian society, and the diminutive island folk had theirs. The crescent-shaped chain of islands that Hale Lorant first "discovered" more than 150 years before the Apocalypse had ancient roots. Island folk stories handed down by elders for many generations spoke of the island as a mother and protector. The island folk believe they were part of the islands and the islands were part of them. Everything was connected. It is a belief system that had served the islanders well for countless centuries.

The symbols of their beliefs — carved totems with many faces — were the first sign of culture that Lorant and his crew found standing tall along the islands' shores like watchmen. Unlike these looming gods, the people of the islands were not tall in any way. They stood barely 4 ft. in height, reminding the explorers of children, though that innocent misconception did not last long. The island folk were clearly a separate race, with their own culture and traditions and, as became obvious, their own forms of magic.

The half-sized islanders welcomed Lorant as a friend, as they welcomed most visitors. He made a good impression by being polite and respectful of their ways, and by asking permission to collect some of the islands' exotic flora and fauna before taking it back to the Empire.

Island folk governed themselves based on mutual respect. Crimes against one another were mitigated by a meeting of other islanders who decided what retribution would be required for the accused to pay to the victim, or the victim's family, to make things right. They extended the same respect to visitors.

The animals on the island, for the most part, were on the meek and mild side. The plants, however, were a biological treasure trove that were in high demand by the apothecaries of the Empire. Many of the ships that came after the islands' herbs, flowers, roots and spices were not as respectful as Lorant had been years before, and each one paid a price. Ship captains who stole from, harmed or offended the island folk simply didn't last long. They soon died — taken by sudden storms, freak accidents, wasting diseases or worse. Word quickly spread among the western lands that the island folk had powerful curses. Indeed, it became common in the Empire to explain any unusual death on a curse from a "Splint," the mainlanders' derogatory name for the little island folk.

Still, the lure of easy money drew heartless men. Fifty years before the Apocalypse, a rogue band of rovers invaded. They killed, raped and looted. The islanders' slings, darts and blowguns were made for downing birds, not men. The island folk who could escape did, paddling to the mainland in outrigger canoes. The island folk thrived on the mainland by living off the scraps of the Empire's excess. Their Listeners plotted revenge.

Before long, however, the Empire wanted to be rid of its unwanted guests. The islanders' culture didn't mesh well with the prosperity-driven Empire. The navy set sail for Lorant's Scythe, prepared to drive the invaders away and help the island folk repopulate their homes. They found only decomposing bodies of the rovers — the Listeners' pleas had done their work for them.

While not all the island folk returned home, many gratefully did, and were happy to trade with those from the Empire. Soon the mainlanders' stone buildings on Lorant's Scythe grew into port cities where once there had only been thatch huts.

In return for the right to harvest the islands' bounty, the Loranthians received the protection of the Empire and western goods they prized: colorful materials, tobacco, western musical instruments and mead. The Empire and Lorant's Scythe built a healthy trade relationship, even when they agreed to disagree.

Then the Great Wave came, and the islands returned to the sea. The surviving island folk were left homeless. Many washed ashore, becoming refugees once again. They gathered what they needed to survive from garbage heaps instead of beautiful island forests. That's not to say the loss of their homeland didn't affect them deeply, it's just that they accepted the loss.



Most island folk don't understand the mainland survivors' need to constantly rebuild and gather power. After all, a tree's spirit is still a tree, even if it's turned into a house or an arrow.

Other races look down upon the Loranthians, many of whom appear to be nothing more than vagrants and gutter-snipes. The old rumors of the island folk curses are remembered, though, so most are wise enough to leave them be.

Playing a Loranthian

Adaptation is second nature to an islander. Island folk are known for their easygoing nature. You have an easier time coping with life after the Great Wave than some other cultures. You grow where you're planted.

Your peoples' reputation for curse magic may help or hinder you in the After, where magic is often feared and practitioners are often hated. Mainlanders may not know how to differentiate a Listener from other islanders. The mainlanders have many strange ideas about Loranthian culture. It is up to you whether to adopt their ways or work to keep the island folk's culture and practices alive. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party.

Common Archetypes: Listener, Fisherman, Rogue

Please see the Loranthians' racial traits in the Character Creation chapter on page 62.

The Marches

The Freelands, The Borderlands

The Empire was bordered by seven free lands that had avoided becoming part of it for various reasons. Some, like Cushulain, seemed destined to eventually join the Empire peacefully, while others, such as Verelanar and Loslolin, resented or rejected the Empire outright.

Cushulain

The Emerald Reaches; Grand Farm of the Empire

After many centuries of friendly relations with the Empire, the fertile lands of Cushulain had become an autonomous territory of Ascondea. Indeed, the Council of Servians, the Council of Swords and the Council of Magores each had a representative from Cushulain. They could not vote in the affairs of the Empire, but they had some small voice. Likewise, the Ascondean Ambassador to Cushulain was more than just a representative of a neighboring country — he had a seat on the Cushulain Circle, and the considerations of the Empire were taken most seriously.

Trade between the two lands was mutually beneficial. Cushulain's vast rolling hills produced a great deal of food, much more than they needed for themselves. Even without magical intervention, Cushulain had long been considered the "Grand Farm of the Empire," a title that few considered insulting.

The importance of Cushulain to the Empire had given it protected status for nearly 100 years. It was the first of the areas to be cleared of the Black Wing after the Great Invasion. The Fourteenth Legion was almost entirely deployed along the western border, an easy position that saw little conflict. Cushulain volunteers to the Imperial Legions were welcomed, and were usually deployed to the northern borders.

Just before the Apocalypse, two political movements had gained momentum. The first was led by Ashtel Mantery, a well-known and popular merchant and businessman who supported true unification with the Empire. His argument, a persuasive one, was that the various trade tariffs in place didn't really need to be there, and joining the Empire would enrich everyone involved. Like most people, he suggested that Cushulain was already part of the Empire, and a signature on a piece of parchment would just remove some ridiculous laws that were costing farmers and traders a copper on each gold crown in taxes.

The other movement was smaller, but vocally opposed to unification. Led by Petrick Faar, an ex-legionnaire, the Independence movement was not anti-Empire. Indeed, as a successful and well-decorated soldier for the Empire, Faar expressed great admiration and love for Ascondean culture, but believed that both the Empire and Cushulain would suffer if they unified. He described at length the benefits for both countries having their own identity, and pointed out that the taxes and trade tariffs were important because they partially paid for the upkeep of the excellent imperial highways and the Fourteenth Legion.

For the most part, the people of Cushulain were happy to listen to all well-reasoned arguments. Most believed that becoming part of the Empire wouldn't actually make any difference to their daily lives, and was probably only really of concern to the politicians and civil servants. Debate on the question of whether Cushulain should officially join the Empire was a favorite pastime of its citizens before the Apocalypse laid waste to the region. These debates, though often passionate, rarely resulted in any trouble. Cushulain was a peaceful place right until the end.

The eastern borderlands of Cushulain, however, did see some small conflicts — mostly between the legion and raiding parties of mongrels and western tribes that would occasionally wander down from the Primea Mountains, especially in the late fall and early winter. The farmers and frontier folk of Cushulain who made their homes along the borders were capable of defending themselves from most incursions, and the Fourteenth Legion found themselves mostly policing the forested foothills.



Playing a Cushulainer

Whether you yearned for adventure and left your homeland as soon as you could, or you never even considered leaving as an option, Cushulain is in your blood. Your home lives in your dreams. Her quiet green farmland and her mantle of pine forest haunts you sometimes, but she's always there, in the back of your mind, giving you hope for the future in your darkest moments. Cushulainers are known for their practicality and optimism — to the point of annoying those around them. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party.

Common Archetypes: Farmer, Shepherd, Laborer

Jherlind

The Fall Lands, The Goat Lovers

Jherlind was a rugged but beautiful nation set in the northern reaches of civilized lands, bordering the Primea Mountains and the Oruskan wilderness. Primarily known for its awe-inspiring waterfalls and tall crags that led into the inhospitable uplands, Jherlind also boasted several remote fertile valleys and hidden lakes that allowed its people to survive in the otherwise unforgiving landscape. It was a hard land that bred hard people.

Although Jherlind was small in size, its people possessed an independent spirit and a deep sense of national pride. The nation had no real centralized government or recognized borders. It was a collection of villages and households that happened to share a common geography, language and purpose. The allegiance of a Jherlinder was to his household and family first, his village second and his country third.

The members of most villages belonged to the same household, a group of families who could trace their lineage back to a common ancestor. There were many households found within Jherlind, but there were only four great households — those who claimed to descend from heroes of old. The family surnames of the great households contained one of the following: Peaks, Falls, Vales or Cliffs. Members of these great households had no special rights or privileges, but were larger than other households and took great pride in their ancestry. Family names were derived from household names. Some examples are the Eastpeaks, Blackpeaks, Wintervales, Northlakes and Tornwinds.

Jherlind rebuked offers to join the Empire on several occasions, preferring to exist as it had for the last several hundred years. The last time the Empire attempted diplomacy, a decade ago, it ignited a feud between two of the Great Households that existed until (and possibly after) the Night of Fire.

The greatest of Jherlind's warriors had forsaken their households and dedicated themselves to the mountains and their weapons. Commonly called the Unshattered, these men suffered through rigorous training and initiation rituals that culminated with a dive off the waterfall called Mehra's Tears, which left one in three dead and broken at her base.

They brandish a special set of paired cudgels, called Kherahs, which are made from the heavy curved horns of indigenous rams. This, combined with the warriors' surefootedness, led to them being called the Goats of Jherlind. Originally meant to be a term of derision, it was adopted by the Unshattered. Some went so far as to replace their original household name with "Goat."

The people of Jherlind possessed a disdain for all things magical. They always found spell casting to be an unnatural tool of the weak. In addition to their self-reliance, their hatred of magic stemmed from an ancient holy text. It explained the mountains' tears flow because she has seen what magic will bring.

This, sadly, came to pass two generations ago when the Empire tried to bring Jherlind into its fold. The households tolerated the Empire's magic-using diplomats, fearing Ascondea's wrath. Soon after, a plague spread across the land, disfiguring and blinding many. This came to be known as the Blight of Re-

minding. Since then, the Jherlinders were relentless in heeding the ancient warnings against magic. They forbade the use of any magic within their lands.

Nestled among the crags and cliffs of Jherlind were the Pools of Nhirain, a small collection of hot water springs. Found within a deep cave, the exact location of the springs was kept from outsiders because they were believed to possess curative powers. The springs were said to slow aging, restore sight, heal wounds, cure illnesses and even bring back the dead. In addition to these powers, the pools were thought to provide the drinker with increased strength and endurance, and most importantly, resistance to magic. Legends even tell of ancient swords quenched within the Pools of Nhirain after being forged, which allowed them to slice through spells as well as flesh.

These springs were watched over by the Barren, women who took no husband or were unable to have children. Most women did not choose this life for themselves, but were forced into it by their husbands or households. They were the caretakers of a small settlement near the pools and were responsible for tending to those in need of the pool's healing powers. They were considered members of all households once they donned the brown veil of the Barren, and were protected and revered by all. To harm one of the Barren was to forfeit your life. The Unshattered were frequent visitors to the Pools of Nhirain, and guarded both it and its caretakers with fervor.

Playing a Jherlinder

As a Jherlinder, you are known for your loyalty to your household. It is common for Jherlinders to commit selfless acts to help a member of their household. You may transfer that loyalty to your adventuring comrades. However, the Night of Fire likely only reinforced your fear and hatred for all things magical. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party.

Common Archetypes: Unshattered Warrior, Liberated Barren Woman, Household Elder, Mage Hunter

Kar'Danan

The Kingdom of Dust; The Circus of Bone

For more than 1,000 years, the Kingdom of Kar'Danan was thought of as a cesspool of Necromantic studies. The long line of kings and queens who ruled Kar'Danan owed their own fealty to the Circle of Dust, the Necromantic power behind the throne.

One king, 700 years ago, attempted to defy the Circle — initially refusing their advice, then ignoring their demands. Finally, this king turned against the Circle, raising an army and attacking its stronghold, the Burning Palace, deep in the Telsgard Forest. This king, his name lost to history, spent the subsequent 28 generations screaming in pain, impaled upon spikes above the gate as an example to anyone who would dare to take on the Circle.

Dozens of baronies made up Kar'Danan, each baron responsible to the king, who played them off one another in an endless political game. Though the title of baron was usually passed down to the oldest son of the last holder, the king overruled many such successions with poisoned words and blades, as well as with small armies.

The most recent ruler of Kar'Danan was King Oliver Ashland, whose family had been in power for more than 150 years — a long time in this kingdom. His closest supporters were a small group of baronies who called themselves the King's Sword, though it was rumored that this sword may have been aimed at Ashland's own heart.

Relations with neighboring lands were always tense. The Circle of Dust did not tolerate diplomacy at the best of times, and when they met with the king, it was usually to demand more resources for their never-ending research. Many wars were merely "recruiting drives" for the Circle's own army of undead.

The Circle had learned it was best to keep out of war with the Empire, however. The last incursion across the southern border resulted in a significant defeat for the kingdom, and the Circle lost three of its nine ancient practitioners. That was 50 years before the Apocalypse, but resentment toward the Empire had not waned. Instead of testing the Empire again, the kingdom periodically sent expeditions into the northern wilderness to pillage and raid the mongrel villages that sought shelter near the Kar'Danan border — which was still safer than the monster-ridden forests further north.

The Circle advised the king only rarely. Their appearance in Court was cause for much fear and speculation. They did not appear to interfere with the secular politics of the kingdom, though it is assumed they operated behind the scenes. Their power was last seen openly 10 years before the Apocalypse, when King Oliver's father, Pask Ashland, appealed to the Circle for assistance in putting down a band of outlaws operating freely in one of his distant baronies. The Circle agreed, and King Pask entered that barony with an army of skeletal warriors, each clad in armor seemingly forged from darkness itself.

The outlaws were defeated and the villages that had supported them were razed. The baron was handed over to the Circle — the only price they demanded for their help — though the bodies of the outlaws and the hundreds of villagers were never found, and never buried.

Kar'Danan had several natural resources of interest to the Empire and neighboring nations. There was a rich vein of iron running through the Carrick Hills, a long ridge that lay alongside the Geltin River. This 10-mile chain of hills was riddled with mines, and was a source of much of the iron used in the north. Kar'Danan traded with nearly every nation of the East and West, including the Warlands. Only the Empire and the dwarves refused to trade with Kar'Danan for their iron; the Empire for political reasons, and the dwarves out of a deep superstition against Necromancy.

Carrick Hill iron was of very high quality, and was sought after in the Warlands for sword making. The trade caravans that plied far to the north to get the iron to their buyers faced a long, dangerous journey, but the profits justified the dozens of deaths faced by each caravan. Many of the kingdom's young nobles considered the iron caravans to be a rite of passage, and were often found traveling incognito as guards or merchants.

Playing a Kar'Daner

For the most part, your life Before was lived in fear of the Circle of Dust — either of the political games played in their name, or of becoming an undead minion in some vast skeletal horde. After the Night of Fire, you may have found freedom from the Necromancers, but at what price? Your life has gone from bad to worse — but at least you are alive. Unlike other survivors, you may be secretly grateful for the Night of Fire. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party.

Common Archetypes: Necromancer, Noble, Laborer

Loslolin

The Exiles; The Swamp Kingdom

The people of Loslolin never liked outsiders. Perhaps an army ransacked them in ancient times or a foreigner brought disease. For as long as anyone can remember, the Loslonites have wanted to be left alone. Most were happy to grant them their wish.

The land in Loslolin that wasn't swamp was either marsh or bog. Outsiders disparagingly referred to the region as the Swamp Kingdom. Huge reptilian beasts patrolled the waters; blood-sucking bats flitted through the night sky; snakes were hidden in branches; even the mud could be deadly. Every man, woman and child of Loslolin had learned to thrive in the hostile environment, but outsiders rarely lasted through a night.

When the Empire began expanding, the Loslolin family clans banded together to dig a deep canal through the muck. It encircled all of Loslolin. Hideous creatures swam just below the canal's surface, and thousands of biting insects harassed anyone close enough to smell the swamp's stench. Though it was no true deterrent to the Grand Army, the moat got its message across. The Empire had no need for the area, and decided to let it be. After all, it acted as a small buffer from northern invasion. Even the Oruskans would think twice before attempting an invasion through the muck.

Family was everything in Loslolin. The eldest family member called the shots for an entire clan of extended relatives, which could number in the hundreds. Bloodlines were often contested, with cousins and in-laws switching sides based on the political climate. Sons and daughters were frequently married off to other clans to strengthen alliances. The elders, in their wisdom, solved most clan disputes among one another. Problems that couldn't be solved were often "swallowed up" by the swamp.

Each family's second-eldest, known as the Tyee, was responsible for solving any problems the elders could not. The assassinations were difficult to prove. Someone went out in the swamp to hunt or fish or forage, and they simply did not return. Bodies were rarely found. If murder was somehow proven, the guilty Tyee and his or her elder were forever exiled from Loslolin. For this reason, the third-eldest of each family was sometimes locked away or kept under guard to ensure he or she made no political moves to quickly become the eldest.

Like other dangers in the swamps, clan feuds were always a threat — and usually hidden. But word of the Loslonites' assassination skills reached the outside world. The most infamous assassin in the Empire's history was from Loslolin. If nothing else, exiles from the Swamp Kingdom knew they could find dishonest work as hired killers.

The clans existed on separate islands of dry land in the vast swamps, so contact and communication were minimized. Travel was via reed rafts of varying sizes, sometimes large enough to carry small herds of marsh cows. The families traded within and among themselves, when needed. But so independent were the Loslonites that it was an embarrassment for one family to ask another to trade. The swamps could be harsh, but they also provided everything the Loslonites needed, from food to shelter.

Roots, rare flowers and herbs that grew only in the swamps were used in family remedies that had been handed down over dozens of generations. These cure-alls were said to make right any affliction, from rabies to mental illness. Some protected against mosquitoes, others against lycanthropy. The region's many poisonous snakes and lizards were also used for less-beneficial elixirs.

Potion makers known as brew witches held a special place in Loslolin society. They understood how to combine the swamp's many unusual plants into powerful potions. Their skills made medicines more potent and poisons undetectable. Their concoctions were much in demand by the outside world.

They were the only reason foreigners ever visited Loslolin. Desperate people who braved the swamps in the hope of trading for a potion that would cure a loved one's affliction were rarely sent away empty-handed.

The witches respected those who would dare enter the swamps in the hopes of helping a family member. Those who came for poisons or merchants who wished to sell the potions to others were usually turned away with nothing, but not always. It was up to each brew witch to decide which visitors would receive potions — not even the elders could intervene.

Playing a Loslonite

Everyone from Loslolin is an exile after the Night of Fire. The swamp's life, which supported the dozens of villages in the Before, was nearly destroyed by the Night of Fire. It can no longer sustain you. You must venture out into the world you were taught to hate since birth.

What's worse, you'll probably have to rely on others to survive. Your independent nature and distrust of anyone outside of Loslolin could be a blessing or a curse in the After. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party.

Common Archetypes: Brew Witch, Assassin, Exile

Nascency

Silver Steppes, The Beginning

Nascency was the religious center of the Argent Path. It was located between Cushulain and Jherlind, east of the northern Primea Mountain range. Its nickname, "Silver Steppes," does not refer to the geography of the land, but rather to the only entrance into its walled capital, Sanctahl. A road paved with silver, a tribute to the Argent Path's deity, Sansehl, led through a gate to a towering church in the center of the city.

From that church, the Walker governed both the Silver Steppes and the affairs of the church according to the teachings of the Argent Path. It was a crushing responsibility, filled with many temptations that could lead him off the Path. To help him, four Guides debated and voted on each political decision. The Walker broke any tie votes. Nascency had been peacefully governed the same way for centuries, ever since it broke free from the Concordea during the Enlightenment.

During that time of conflict, the Walker and Guides called the faithful to Nascency and officially declared itself an independent state. The Concordea had lost its way, the Walker surmised, and the Guides agreed. The Concordea's leadership wisely chose not to use force against the holy men.

It was during the first weeks of secession that construction began on the wall. It was built over many generations, first of earth, then of wood and finally of stone. It became a massive barrier protecting Nascency from the outside world, including the Empire. At its peak, the Empire could have easily broken through the wall with magic and war machines, but more than a physical barrier kept Nascency from being annexed. A long line of emperors all understood the influence of the Argent Path. It had many followers in Ascondea and across the Marches. Many more who did not follow the Path respected its principles. It would have been political suicide to invade Nascency.

And so the land under Sanctahl's influence grew until it reached the mountains to the west, the border with Jherlind to the north, and Cushulain to the south. But borders could not hold back the missionaries of the Argent Path, who walked purposefully down the silver road to bring their unwavering beliefs to the furthest corners of the land. They built great cathedrals where they went, to draw the ignorant to the righteousness of the Path.

Nascency produced more than missionaries, of course. It was famous for its sweet tobacco, its nimble horses and its premium wool. It imported large quantities of parchment and silver, and produced enough food to support its population.

The people of Nascency were not required to follow the Argent Path, but the vast majority of them did.

Poverty was low because the church cared for those in need by teaching them useful skills or helping them to become missionaries. However, the crime rate was high. The goddess Llevalak tempted many away from the Path. Only years of forced solitude spent in personal introspection could lead the lost back to the Path, so Nascency's jails were packed.

Playing a Nascentite

There are many ways to lead people to the Argent Path. Most lead by example, living a life serving others and following the teachings of Sansehl. Others saw the Night of Fire as a wake-up call. The cathedrals, charity and preaching of Before were obviously not enough. The most extreme of these followers think society should be cleansed of those following Llevalak — by whatever means possible. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party.

Common Archetypes: Missionary, Engineer, Farmer, Rebuilder

Penury

The Banished Province, The Witherlands

Penury was not a region of the Marches, per se, but neither was it under the control of the Empire. It was a 10-square-mile piece of brush-covered land south of Loslolin that was inhabited

entirely by the cursed elves who were not welcome anywhere else. Penury was the one place in the world where they gathered in large numbers.

Emperor after emperor failed to address the refugee elves, who had become squatters on what was technically the Empire's land. Pity and the desire to keep their curse contained to a small area held equal weight in the Empire's decision to ignore Penury.

The dead fields of Penury were a far cry from the elves' ancestral homes in the forests. For 10,000 years, the elven races had lived in harmony with nature. Balance was maintained, never taking more than Nature could give, and tending to Her needs with magic and love. The lesser races were of little consequence. In truth, the elves were pompous and arrogant.

Then, suddenly, 600 years before the Apocalypse, the forests turned against the elves, and rejected them — physically, spiritually, violently. It began when the druids started going insane. They were the spiritual backbone of elven society, and when they began instructing the people to sacrifice more time and magic to Nature, it was the first sign.

The druids demanded more and more. The people grew worried. Harvests got poorer, and the land itself seemed to be withdrawing from the elves. When the druids began sacrificing children to the forest, that was the final insult.



The elven people rose up against the druids, who, in turn, used their magic and connection to Nature to strike back against the unbelievers. Nature herself could not stomach the defilement, and she struck down the entire elven race.

First, the druids were torn apart by the Nature magic they were misusing. Next, the elven people who had allowed the druids to go too far were thrown out of their paradise. They were killed by the thousands. Their majestic, forest-top cities were splintered and shattered by branches and vines.

The sight of hundreds of druids, hung by vines, creaking back and forth high above the ground, would be the last sight for many elves as they fled their homelands.

From that day on, Nature was no longer friend to the elf.

In the 600 years since the last elven city was destroyed, the elves have wandered as refugees, expelled from the forests not by people, but by the land itself. They became a vagabond race for the most part. Most don't stay in one place for long because Nature continues to reject them. Crops fail, winters worsen, summers intensify, and the land forces them to leave. Many consider elves to be cursed, and do not suffer their presence for more than a few weeks at a time. Penury was their only permanent refuge away from the scorn of other races. It was a depressing place, filled with hopeless elves, many of whom spent money they had begged and stolen on alcohol and narcotic plants.

Small elven communities existed in larger cities, where Nature's curse affected their everyday lives less. The elven quarter of Ascondea, for example, contained hundreds of elves. Their graffiti covered the city walls with scenes of beautiful woodlands. Small clans of elves also existed outside of city walls, in places not fit to farm. Many of these, unable to sustain themselves from the land, became artist communities where elven craftsmen and artisans would create beautifully melancholy works of art. Such beauty from such a pitiful race was highly prized by wealthy city dwellers.

Playing an Elf

Even after the Banishment, you still revere Nature. Elves mark the first days of spring as a holiday, though instead of a celebration it has become a commemoration — more akin to showing their respect for a long-lost relative than rejoicing in a rebirth. Your people surround themselves with crafts made to look like natural objects, such as trees, woodland animals and flowers. Elves often embroider their clothes with stitched representations of leaves, vines, nuts, berries and animals. You may constantly battle depression or retain hope that Nature will accept you again. Unlike many other survivors, you are



accustomed to begging to survive. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party.

Common Archetypes: Artist, Rogue, Performer, Craftsman

Please see the Elves' racial traits in the Character Creation chapter on page 62.

Verelanar

The Grand Mistake; Punishment Detail

Until the Apocalypse, the recent history of the Empire had been bright, filled with successes and victories. However, a few exceptions stand out.

Verelanar was one of its greatest failures.

Twenty years before the Apocalypse, the United Kingdoms of Lanar underwent a period of political upheaval as corrupt kings were overthrown by an extensive and well-organized rebellion. The people took control and unified the lands under the banner of Verelanar, or "the True Lanar." This was no single man or woman, but an ideal, a position that was immediately granted to the most popular member of the rebellion, Gravisk Carr.

Carr quickly consolidated power, and for a few years, Verelanar was almost a paradise. It didn't seem strange that he immediately opened negotiations with the Ascondean Empire, who graciously offered to send in legionnaires to help rebuild the newly unified nation. Some whispered of the threat of Enlightenment, but Carr assured everyone that once the small garrison from the Tenth Legion had finished rebuilding, they would leave. The long decades of crippling slavery and poverty that the people had experienced under the evil kings were swept away, and their future looked bright. The Ascondean Empire continued to rebuild, and no one seemed to notice that the Tenth Legion was in no hurry to leave.

It all ended when it became known that the Empire had instigated the glorious rebellion, and Carr had been — and still was — on the Ascondean payroll.

The people were furious. The grand revolution, their proud act of self-determination, had been nothing of the sort. As riots and fighting broke out in the streets of Carr City, Carr tried to explain what had happened. He spoke passionately about how the Empire had only wanted to help. He talked at length about how they had been deeply moved by the plight of the Lanarian people under the heel of cruel kings, and how they had just wanted to bring democracy and freedom to the region. They had trained the rebels and provided weapons and armor. Wasn't the freedom that they now enjoyed worth it? The Empire, he pleaded, just wanted to be friends to the people of Verelanar.

The people would have none of it. Empowered by the very freedoms that the Empire had sponsored, they rose up once more and murdered Carr, then turned on their liberators.

Because such an act had previously been unthinkable, the Empire's borders were barely protected. The Tenth Legion had been watching apprehensively as the rioting broke out, reluctant to interfere without clear orders from Ascondea. The people's army of Verelanar pierced several leagues into the Empire before they were crushed by the legions. Though the "Ten-Hour Invasion" had given them a bit of a scare, more serious was the bright anger and shining hatred they had created in this once-grateful land.

The Empire first militarized the borders of Verelanar, put up walls and gates, and then sent in more legionnaires to try to protect the non-armed populace of the shattered country. The Peacekeeper Legion (the Tenth Legion's ironic nickname) reconciled its position, fortified and got ready for a longer stay than its soldiers could have imagined.

For nearly a decade, the Peacekeeper Legion attempted to control Verelanar with a gentle touch, though the number of injuries and deaths on both sides was enormous. Supporting the ruling council of Verelanar, the Tenth Legion didn't even wear the uniform of the Empire, preferring a more neutral garb.

Violence was common, with rioting and attacks against the Tenth Legion a daily reality. Most of the violence was in an attempt to force the legion to leave, or at least to make sure that there were no illusions about how unwelcome their presence was. Some of the violence was simple frustration, but for the legionnaires, and their civilian support staff who had to endure it, the difference was lost on them.

In the years leading up to the Apocalypse, service in the Tenth Legion was considered punishment detail. The Peacekeepers were comprised of the dregs of the legions. Diplomats, merchants and nobles who had earned the ill favor of the Councils were assigned to Verelanar until they had learned their lesson.

The last year before the Apocalypse finally saw the beginnings of an uneasy peace, with outbreaks of violence becoming less common. The population appeared to finally be settling down and coming to terms with the concept of ruling themselves without Ascondean influence. Some spoke of the Legion starting to send soldiers home before the end of the year. This would have been welcomed. The Tenth Legion had grown weary of years of protecting people who hated them. The Empire regretted interfering in the affairs of a country that it felt it saved, and was bitter that its efforts were not appreciated.

Playing a Lanarian

You are fiercely independent, bitter and angry — just as you

were in the Before. The Night of Fire has done nothing to improve your humor, and you're certain the Empire was behind it. You'll be damned if you'll let the end of the world stop you from getting what you want. You're sure the Empire caused the Apocalypse, and you take every opportunity to humiliate an Ascodean. You're a survivor, you always have been, and while you're alive, the spirit of True Lanar will never be crushed. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party.

Common Archetypes: Guerilla Fighter, Black Market Merchant, Slaver

Gearhaven

The Forgotten Nation

In truth, no one is entirely certain whether the gnomes ever had an entire land to themselves. Archeological evidence gathered by eminent scholars throughout the Empire and the Marches seemed to support the idea that gnomish lands once ran in a strip from the southern extent of the Primea Range to the Green Sea, an area roughly a quarter of the size of the Ascondean Empire at its height. Remains of highways and some settlements indicate that the gnomes simply abandoned their lands hundreds of years before the Empire was formed, and scattered themselves across the continent.

These scattered gnome villages were very hard to find; no one had been able to properly map all of their locations. They were very far apart, and no one really seemed to be interested in locating all of them. The quirky decision of the gnomish people to "give up" their nation was of passing interest to the civilized peoples of the world, nothing more. The gnomes had nothing anyone wanted, and the feeling was apparently mutual.

Some strange puzzles remained, however. Near some of the larger ancient gnomish ruins stood great mounds, hinting that treasures might be buried beneath them. Some researchers found what appeared to be elaborate burial tombs, with impossible-to-open doors (and impossible-to-squeeze-through openings) that seem to contain … nothing. Some metallic objects of no apparent purpose were recovered, gigantic cogs and spokes that would suggest massive machinery. Yet no such devices remained even nearly intact, and no gnome could speak of their purpose — that knowledge appears to have been lost to the gnomes as well.

It was no accident that ancient gnomish history had been lost to modern society. Thousands of years before the Night of Fire, gnomish civilization was at its height. Technology and magic went hand-in-hand. The gnomes soared the skies in gliders powered by technology and arcane spells, striding the land in homes that moved under their own steam.

Three major cultural groups existed. Engineers built graceful bridges and giant towers, some of which stand to this day. Weavers spun magic into the structures. Mystics looked beyond mere magic and mundane metal into the unknown in an attempt to solve the mysteries of life. Mystics also had the power to tap into the Ancestral Stream, a flowing river of consciousness that includes the thoughts and experiences of all gnomes — past, present and future.

For a long time, the gnomes thought their magic and technology balanced each other out. They realized they were wrong when gnomish Mystics detected huge shifts in the magical energies of reality. They knew it would spiral out of control if they continued to rely on them so heavily. They went to their leaders and instructed them that the only way to avoid catastrophe was to stop building — to take what they had learned and hide



it. The magic and mechanical genius of the gnomes had to be sacrificed. They wistfully said goodbye to technology, broke it down and hid it from themselves and everyone else.

Using the Ancestral Stream, the Mystics predicted the safest places to live in case of cataclysm and split their race up across the lands to settle those areas. Their ancestral home, the original Gearhaven, was left to be swallowed by the Empire. One last magical spell was woven throughout their race, and they Forgot. The spell even filtered out high technology and magical knowledge from the Ancestral Stream.

Modern gnomes lived mundane lives in small settlements that are all named Gearhaven. No settlement had more than 250 gnomes in it. All of the structures in all of the Gearhavens were built for the small gnomes, which made it impractical for most others to visit. Gnomes traveled to other races' settlements to trade.

Four main branches of gnomish culture formed after the Forgetting. Most gnomes were uninvolved in the Mystics' grand plans. They are called Sleepers by their more adventurous kin. They spent most of their days farming, crafting or trading, but one day each week they spent in worship and dutifully provided a tithe to the Mystics. The Mystics led gnome society since the Forgetting. They used the tithes to purchase supplies that the keepers hid in secret caches. Keepers are gnomes who believe that the caches of supplies and the ancient technologies and magicks should remain hidden. Finders, on the other hand, are the gnomes who traveled the lands looking for areas that would be safe from the Night of Fire. They get visions and dreams from the Ancestral Stream when they find safe havens, then inform the Mystics of their finds. Finders believe the ancient hidden treasures should be discovered. They traveled the lands in the Before, searching for the lost treasures and trying to warn other races about the impending doom. Just like the elves before the Banishment, no one wanted to listen.

Playing a Gnome

Gnomes are efficient and practical. They have a reverence for flowing water, especially rivers. The Ancestral Stream is the center of gnomish culture. It is their religion and their afterlife. It is every gnomes' goal to accumulate knowledge that they can contribute to the Ancestral Stream when they die. This can cause gnomes to focus on learning every last detail of even the most mundane, everyday tasks. Unfortunately, the Forgetting is still in effect, causing you to talk in circles about magic, science, technology and gnomish history. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party.

Common Archetypes: Finder, Keeper, Mystic, Sleeper

Please see the Gnomes' racial traits in the Character Creation chapter on page 62.

The Oruskan Wilderness

The Northlands

The expansive lands far north of the Empire weren't all permafrost and glacial ice, as many believed. There were dense, coniferous forests below the tree line of the Gelid Mountains where the ice pack partially melted in the short summer, giving way to streams that turned the southern reaches green with flora for a few months each year. But the harsh winters were what defined the Northlands.

For half of the year, snow was heaped upon the wilderness and blown into great drifts as tall as the loftiest spires of the Empire. The winter wind was so biting, it was said it could gnaw flesh from bone. The plains of the tundra were wiped clean by it. Even the trees of the southern forests stood like one-armed soldiers, their branches nearly stripped of needles on the windward side.

Only the strongest survived in such an environment. Most of the inhabitants were the so-called "beast men" races, also known as the Oruskans: kobolds, goblins, orcs and trolls. The terrible winters both battered and protected them for ages. Autumnal raiding parties into the civilized lands knew they only need to flee into the frigid arms of the extreme north to escape even the most dogged pursuit. Most people from the more civilized lands wanted little to do with the hostile landscape, but some discovered its value.

Hunters and trappers willing to brave the cold, the Oruskans and the dangerous animals, collected thick pelts from the region's abundant game. But the warlords of the west foraged the area for a different resource. They realized long ago that the Oruskans were fierce warriors. Their lieutenants visited whenever major offenses were being planned, attempting to lure young warriors and Shamans into their armies with promises of glory and gold.

Beyond the trappers, recruiters and a few military outposts, the Oruskans ruled the Northlands. Tribes of orcs and goblins fought among themselves and one another for control of the sheltering southern forests, while the thick-skinned trolls ruled the Gelid range of mountains to the far north. The kobold tribes existed independently along the western coast or much further north — using their sheer numbers and wits to compensate for their lack of physical strength, or simply by living in areas too cold for anyone else to settle.

The Oruskan races survived as hunters and gatherers, though often that "gathering" came in the form of raids. The civilized races' caravans, villages and small towns were all fair game, as were the settlements of other Oruskans. When direct attacks didn't work, the Oruskans resorted to sneak attacks and lightning strikes. Only an all-out attack from the civilized

lands could stop the raiding parties completely, and the Northlands' harsh weather prohibited the long campaign that would require. So the monstrous races continued to raid while the civilized lands continued to defend — such was the way it had always been, and most expected it was the way it always would be. But then the Night of Fire changed everything.

Playing a Northlander

Humans and mongrels are the most common non-Oruskan races inhabiting the Northlands. Both do so at their own peril, and have learned to be vigilant to survive in the wilderness. You have to be hardy — and a little foolish — to live or work in an area thick with orcs, goblins, kobolds and trolls.

You are a natural survivalist, but are unaccustomed to any type of social graces. You can't understand some survivors' interest in rebuilding a civil society. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party. Details on the Oruskan races can be found in the Bestiary on page 224.

Common Archetypes: Outdoorsman, Recruiter, Primalist, Barbarian

Lesh'Tal

Barely a city at all, Lesh'Tal is still remarkable simply because it was one of the largest Oruskan settlements since the time of Khran'doral and the Black Wing. Located far to the northwest, and beyond the reach of the legions, Lesh'Tal grew up around a trading post run by two goblin tribes: the Lesh Kekal, and the Tal Kekal. The sheer distance from the Empire helped, as did the post's location near the Western Ocean. It was free and unsullied by any single nation's navy, and too far north to be of interest to the Warlands.

Even the solitary kobolds traded here, bringing furs down the coast from the frozen north, and trading for wood and steel. The expert tanners and leather workers found that they had a captive market of Oruskans who were willing to trade in a safe and undisturbed place.

Eventually, the orcs moved in and took over. No one was surprised by that, but what was unusual was that the orcs left the goblins in charge of the markets, and merely demanded a tithe of the profits in return for their presence and the protection they offered.

The smarter-than-usual orc responsible for this foresight was called Muzgi. He was not a chieftain, but led a willing group of clever, hand-picked orc warriors who were able to control their tempers. Muzgi's forces were invaluable as bodyguards and security, and soon Lesh'Tal was booming. Other orc tribes attempted to come in and take over, but Muzgi and his elite orc guard repelled each attack easily — usually with the help of visiting goblin and kobold traders.

With more than 12,000 permanent residents, and perhaps another 10,000 traders a month passing through the town during the summer, Lesh'Tal was a bustling port of intrigue and trade.

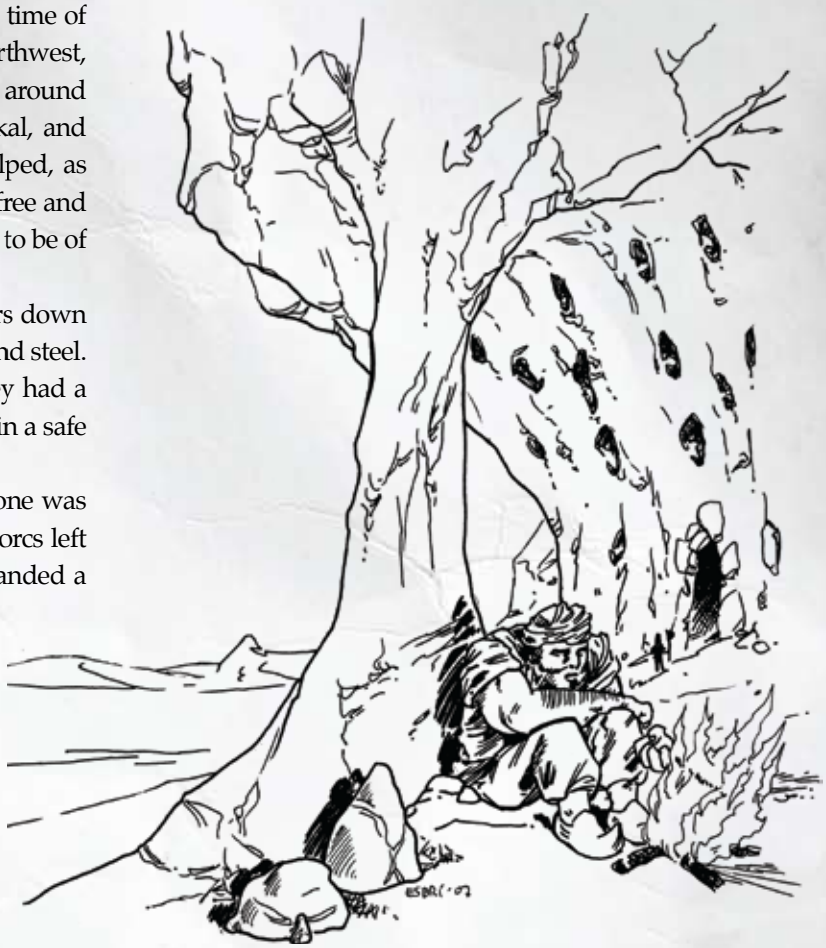
The Saikin Wastes

The Great Desert; The End of the Road, The Vastlands

South of The Warlands was an area not even the warlords fought over. Traveling south from the city of Cynosure, the scrubgrass gave way to rockier ground called the Plain of Pebbles.

Further south, the rocks got larger — until it seemed as if the stone bones of the world were jutting up through the surface, the flesh rubbed raw by the near constant, wind-blown grit. Hundreds of miles of this skeletal landscape finally yielded to undulating waves of yellow sand to the far south.

Blistering daytime heat quickly turned to deathly cold nights. Water holes were few and far between. One river, the Heoliate, was known to make its way from the western mountains, across the southern desert and into the sea. There may well have been others, but accurate maps of the Wastes didn't exist.



BEFORE

Before the dwarves came, few lived in the Vastlands by choice. Its inhabitants were recluses and bandits, lost souls and luckless men — people discarded by society. The desert dwellers learned to survive in the harsh landscape. It was rumored they ate cacti needles and drank vulture blood. Whatever the case, life was not stifled in the Vastlands. For those who knew where to look, the Great Desert was alive with useful plants and animals.

Algiz

For thousands of years, the Oruskans had fought one another and the more civilized races. Plunder and territory were not the only results of their raping and pillaging, however. Half-breeds were born to the victors' captives and the vanquished survivors. Most were killed because of their tainted blood, but some were simply ostracized. Eventually, surviving outcasts joined together, forming their own small tribes. They became adept at surviving, running and hiding.

As time passed, the half-breeds' blood mixed with that of their motley brethren again and again over generations. Their numbers grew as they actively sought others like themselves, until their heritage became nearly unrecognizable. They have become something different than the sum of their ancestors. They have become mongrels.

Neither accepted nor completely rejected by the monstrous or civilized races, most mongrels built a niche for themselves as go-betweens. They've acted as traders, using their wilderness skills to shuffle goods between "savage" and "civilized" societies. Some mongrel tribes, tiring of life on the edge of society, joined together and made the journey south to the Vastlands, where land was there for the taking — if you could survive.

They tried to build a small outpost among the wind-sculpted bedrock outcroppings south of the Plain of Pebbles. A few hundred mongrels made the journey to set down roots in Algiz by carving out caves in the soft sandstone. Old desert folk just shook their heads at the attempt. The desert, they said, does not reward permanence. A camel with a tent strapped to its back was the way to survive in the Saikin Wastes.

Still, the mongrels were a tough lot, and seemed to be making a go of it before the Night of Fire. They had established a tribal form of government in which Shamans were responsible for using their Primal Magic to attract game for mongrel hunters. The game was then used to feed the entire outpost. The mongrels proved to be quite resourceful, using almost every part of the animals the hunters killed to make weapons, blankets and other household items they traded with Cynosure, Oukal and Eoliane.

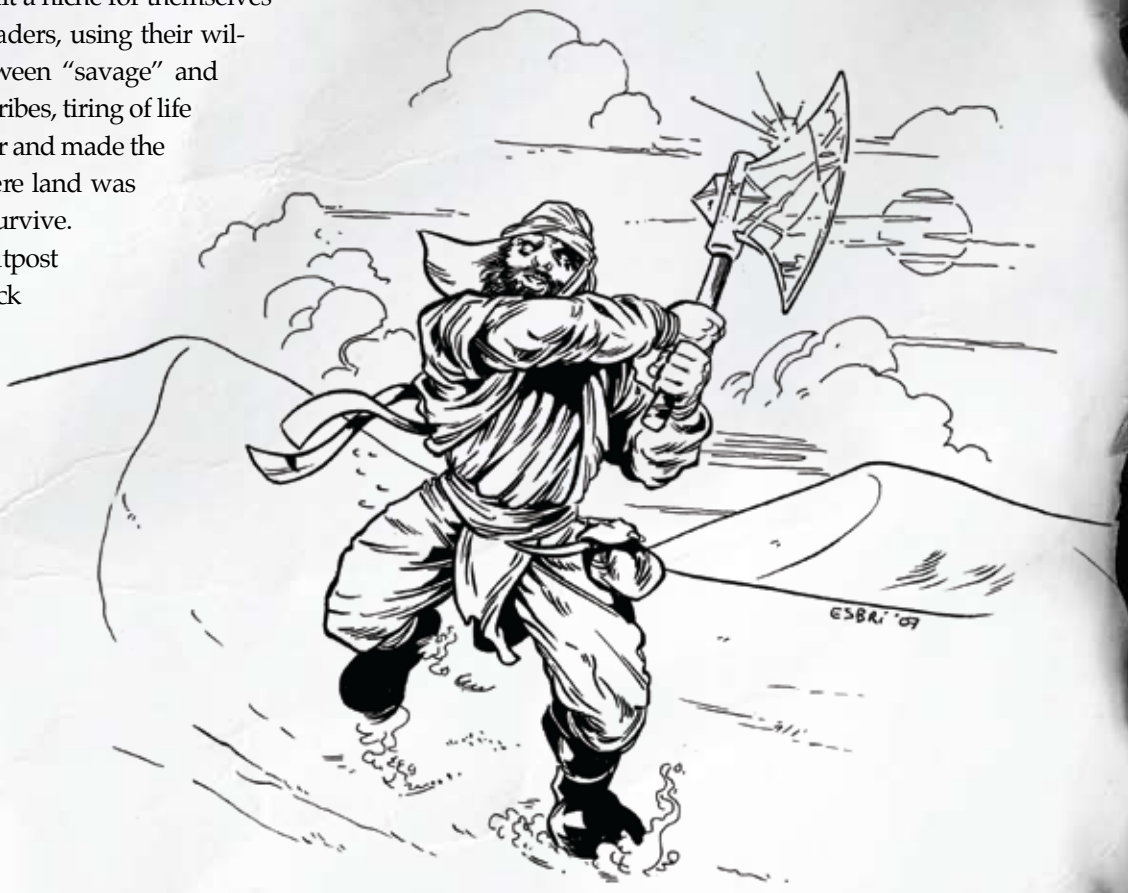
Common Archetypes: Hunter, Primalist, Caravan Guard, Trader

Eoliane

One town, Eoliane, survived the ages in the Great Desert. Others had sprung up and then been abandoned or swallowed by shifting sands. Some trick of the winds whipping around the surrounding plateaus always seemed to blow the worst of the sands away from Eoliane.

In the spring months, when the Heoliate River was at its fullest, Eoliane bustled with activity as dwarves from Oukal, mongrels from Algiz and traders from the Empire and Warlands gathered to do business. The Desert Meet, as it was known, was one of the few times Eoliane resembled a normal community. There was no rule of law, of course, so the traders brought their own men for protection.

It was not a trip for the meek. Bandits along the trade routes stepped up their activities before and after the Meet, attempting



to loot a rich caravan. Even during the event, the traders' hired help — unaccustomed to the potency of the region's fermented goat milk — would get into drunken brawls that spilled out into the streets day and night.

It wasn't all business for the merchants, either. In addition to selling their wares, traders would often place bets on whose guards would best the other's in pit fights, or who could get the highest price for an identical item, or how many mongrels it would take to lift a boulder. Betting quickly became a tradition at the Desert Meet, with the stakes growing more outrageous with each passing year.

But for the rest of the year, "town" was too generous a word for Eoliane. It was a rest stop along the seashore at the delta of the near-dry Heoliate River. It was a rough, nearly lawless place that was a known haven for pirates and bandits of all sorts. Whenever the Empire's forces neared, Eoliane was quickly surrendered — only to be reinhabited soon after the legion tired of the heat, cold and desolation of Eoliane. It wasn't worth defending.

Common Archetypes: Swashbuckler, Bandit, Merchant, Exile

Oukal

After five years of "The Ignorance," as Valin Stoneson's people called it, the prophet left Cair Dhurn — and a third of the mountain kingdom's citizens followed him. He led them to the desert, along the banks of the Heoliate, where he said the gods commanded they live, and then he died. They dubbed their village Oukal, the dwarven word for "Outcast." That was two generations before the Night of Fire. Since then, Oukal has been led by Stoneson's son and grandson. While some lost faith and went in search of their own fortunes, most devoted themselves to the survival of the village.

It didn't take long for the desert dwarves to use their fire-rune powered forges to melt the minerals they discovered into glass. As they worked with this new material over generations, they discovered how to make it more durable. Before long, glass was used in place of the steel to which they once had access. Glass hammers and maces made formidable bludgeoning weapons, and glass blades were sharper than steel, though more fragile. They also created different forms of armor using the material. Tumbled bits of glass were sewn into padded armor. Leather armor was studded with dozens of glass beads that could deflect most blows.

Oukal was a marvel of dwarven engineering. Its brilliantly placed glass walls subtly redirected the constantly blowing sands that had buried other outposts in the Great Desert. Most dwarves spent the heat of the day below the surface in salt mines that they had dug. Still, life was not easy. Glass could protect them, but it could not feed them. Fish from the nearby Heoliate river and a desert breed of goat called a vleet provided what they needed to survive, from food to clothing.

Like their mountain cousins, desert dwarves became known for their craftsmanship. Their household glassworks were highly prized in the Empire. Though steel weapons were cheaper and more plentiful, glass weapons made their way across the lands. It was considered stylish by certain nobles to carry a glass sword, and some of the finer Ascondean inns had glass weapons from Oukal hanging in their taverns as conversation pieces.

Common Archetypes: Rune Caster, Glass Smith, Miner, Shepherd

Playing a Desert Dweller

The Saïkin Wastes were the most inhospitable region of the world in the Before. Chances are, you were only there because you weren't welcomed in the more civilized lands. After the Night of Fire, those social barriers are gone. Many desert dwellers will travel north to start their lives anew or try to rebuild.

You have the stubbornness that allowed you to survive in such a harsh environment. You never listened to what others said could not be done, and you see no need to start now. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party.

Please see the dwarves' and mongrels' racial traits in the Character Creation chapter on page 62.

The Warlands

The War-Torn West, The Bloody Battlefields, The Thousand Nations

No one is quite sure who first called this chaotic, ever-shifting political landscape the Warlands, but the name stuck, and for the last millennia — perhaps longer — it has been this way.

While the eastern half of the continent was slowly building, the Warlands seem to have always been in conflict. Desperate for resources, the Warlands originated as an area of many nomadic tribes, similar to the current situation in the far north. The tribes followed the seasonal resources, clashing when herds of deer or cattle crossed significant geographical bottlenecks such as fords or passes through the many hills.

These battles would become almost predictable, as the spring and fall brought the tribes against one another again and again in the same places each time. The only thing that changed were the tribes themselves, as harsh weather to the north and south would drive other groups into the lands west of the Primea Mountains, and so more groups found themselves thrown into the mix.

Eventually, some tribes found a balance between chasing down their food and capturing it from passing nomads. However, few of these settlements lasted, as word of a village would draw raiding parties.

This endless cycle of violence did see rare breaks when long, mild summers gave way to gentle winters, and the movement of tribes slowed for years at a time. In the middle of these quiet periods, the first citadels were started. Built over decades by one conquering clan after another, the fortresses became sprawling behemoths. The citadels were much sought after as strategic prizes by warlords and became some of the few locations in the Warlands that existed long enough for cartographers to include on their maps.

The first great citadel was Keshek Kel, built on top of a volcanic plug near the western coast. It stood high above the surrounding hills and plains. The mount was 300 ft. high, and the keep atop was solidly built. Getting to the top was difficult, and many tribes broke apart upon its walls.

First built by two orc-led tribes who had united to combine their slave labor, Keshek Kel could have been held almost indefinitely against outsiders. However, the tribes squabbled and rowed, eventually destroying one another from within. The citadel was empty for just days before a human tribe moved in and held the keep for more than 10 years.

Keshek Kel may have been the first great citadel, but in the century since its building, there have been several more. A half dozen survived until the Night of Fire: Keshek Kel, Methyn's Keep, Lor Taril, Hammer Hold, Last Bastion and Castle Theign. They acted as the central points of what passed as civilization in this bitter land.

Other than the great citadels, there were no real political borders in the Warlands. The vast expanse of land between the citadels, which ranged from plains to great forest, from steppes to swamps, was a bad place to be. It was generally a devastated landscape alive with battles or dying with their aftermath. Villages were routinely raised and razed. Nomads still traveled it in the Before, following game and rival clans as they had for centuries.

But the citadels were not immune to the Warlands' turmoil. Quite often, a sudden coup or sneak attack from a rising warlord could change leaders and topple the city-states overnight. Like vultures, waves of tribes flew into the power vacuum, snapping and grabbing for territory and resources.

The West was in constant flux. It was just as common to see an orc Shaman and a human mercenary fighting side-by-side as it was to see them fighting against each other. It was said that there are no civilians in the Warlands, only warriors and people who haven't started fighting yet.

Cynosure

Relatively untouched and almost serene in comparison to the bloody chaos of the Warlands was Cynosure, a port city that fed the war-torn West with new blood and foreign goods. While the worst of the violence of the Warlands was kept at bay by Cynosure's city walls, this neutrality was hard-earned and regularly defended — with treachery and intrigue commonplace. Still, Cynosure belonged to no one but itself, and anything was available for the right price. Many said that only the firm hand of Cynosure's master kept its streets from drowning in blood.

The city was ruled by Camson Hurle, a former mercenary general whose company was hired by the previous ruler to help protect the city. One night, Hurle's great axe cut his former employer in twain, and he has ruled ever since. Hurle has a reputation as a fierce warrior and shrewd strategist — both in physical and political battles. During his tenure, he deftly defended Cynosure against attacks by other warlords, political pressures exerted by the Empire and internal coup attempts. Still, he was seen as soft by other warlords, who view the battlefield of politics as an old man's game. He proved them wrong by repeatedly thwarting their raids of the city. Truth be told, Cynosure's wealth came at a high price to Hurle. He was saddled with a myriad of political complications that most warlords prefer to avoid.

A thriving economy in the Warlands was no small feat. Trading caravans traveling among Cynosure, the citadels and the Vastlands were dangerous undertakings. Still, many merchants risked it all to avoid the high tariffs of the Empire or to trade in the Warlands' plentiful goods, which fetch high prices in more civilized lands. And of course, others found it the perfect place to trade in goods that the Empire labeled as illegal.

The Empire was blamed for a great many things in the Warlands — from backing wars to maintain the chaos in the Warlands and therefore the peace in the Empire, to the high price of steel. There was no love lost between the two entities.

Playing a Warlander

You've had to fight to survive in the Warlands, even if you don't call yourself a warrior. Laws are few and far between, and only the strong or cunning survived in the West. There's always a need for another sword arm. Now that the Apocalypse has wiped out the barriers to the east, you may find yourself in a raiding party headed that way — whether you like it or not.

The Warlands also churned out some of the most skilled horsemen in Scondera, who struck fast and escaped faster. Nomadic tribes of mongrels were also common in the forests and plains of the West. You are accustomed to capitalizing on every opportunity that comes your way, making the most of the always-shifting political winds. The GM may reward you with a

Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party.

Common Archetypes: Primalist, Sorcerer, Criminal, Merchant, Warrior, Blacksmith, Scoundrel

Zamai

The Floating City

The rovers came from across the sea, where they once lived in seaside cities. The tattooed sailors arrived on the shores of the Empire about 60 years before the Apocalypse, in three waves. It is rumored that they fled their homeland. Though most won't discuss it, this is true. A plague had decimated their homeland's population. It was followed by three tsunamis, which destroyed their coastal cities. Some rovers, still trusting in the sea, set out to find a new home.

They found it in the clear, calm waters of the Green Sea. A collection of the rovers' village ships — large vessels that contained just about everything the rovers needed — was always anchored a league off the southeastern coast of the Empire. The number of brightly painted ships lashed together was in constant flux as rover captains came and went. Some days there might be two or three, while on another there might be more than 100 ships bobbing on the waves.



Zamai served as a home base for village ships as they stopped in ports to trade, share news and entertain the locals with acts of fortune telling — but those were just acts, not their true magic. The rovers used their actual magical tradition, Beguiling, to quickly learn the locals' language by reading their minds — which also made it easier for their "fortune tellers" to part the fools from their silver. Some people tried in vain to distinguish the specific tattoo rovers used to mark Beguilers.

The village ships often sailed in groups and formed small communities. Rover society was led by the captains of their ships. Each captain was responsible for his or her ship, and everyone on it. Becoming a ship's captain was the height of rover society, second only to staying a rover captain for any length of time. Captains had to be constantly vigilant about other rovers trying to replace them through political maneuvers.

When larger issues needed to be resolved, a Council of Captains was convened in Zamai. The council was presided over by the most experienced captain in attendance. It handed down punishments that included marking the guilty with tattoos, which broadcast their crimes as a warning to other rovers. Some crimes were so serious that the marked criminals would be exiled from rover society, doomed to walk on land like a dog.

Of course, most locals couldn't recognize all of the rovers' tattooed sigils of warning. Rovers who were branded as murderers and rapists had little trouble finding acceptance on the mainland — as much acceptance as any other rover. Mainlanders viewed the seafarers with suspicion, since they had a reputation for being mind readers and con artists.

Playing a Rover

Rovers don't like to stay in one place for too long, and they pride themselves on being clever. Outwitting someone — what other races might call "swindling" — is looked upon favorably. Using violence to get what you want, however, is seen as dishonorable by rovers.

That's not to say that rovers are all pacifists. Exiles are freed from the rules of rover society, and after the Night of Fire there aren't nearly as many social stigmas. The GM may reward you with a Style point whenever your cultural background causes trouble for you or your party.

Common Archetypes: Sailor, Swashbuckler, Rogue, Grifter, Performer

Please see the rovers' racial traits in the Character Creation chapter on page 62.

His feet hurt. Blisters upon blisters. The tattered remains of his legionnaire's boots offered almost no protection against the broken dusty ground.

Weeks of walking, trying to keep under cover during the blasting sunlit days and trying not to freeze when the strange new stars stared down uncaring from the night sky, had taken their toll upon everything he owned.

There had been other travelers with him, but *they had given up* over the last few days. The temptation of a rover village-boat had been too much, and the last of his rag-tag group had chosen the relative sanity of the grounded river vessel over the uncertainty of looking for a place that, in all likelihood, had been destroyed nearly two years ago during the Night of Fire.

Braylim couldn't give up. He'd lost everything except the hope that his home might still be out there. Even if it was just a scorched mark on the ground, that would at least be *closure*. He wondered, briefly, what he'd do if he found nothing left. **Would he just end his life**, throw it away like he'd seen dozens of others do when despair had finally won?

With all the death and destruction, for a person to choose death was *an insult to those who had died.* Braylim knew that he had to survive.

Just then two men stepped out from behind a shattered heap of rocks just ahead. Each had a splintered wooden club with rusty iron nails beaten and folded around the end in a halo of pain. Their eyes were **mad and desperate,** their skin lacerated with **disease and starvation**.

Drawing his legionnaire's sword with a sigh, Braylim realized that two more **precious lives** were about to be ended when so few remained.

His memories of the Night of Fire still haunted his thoughts. A soft rain had been falling upon the camp, on the edges of the town of Helane, a quiet Cushulain settlement in the heartland. Helane had been the home of a young woman named Sonda, and on that evening, she'd been visiting with him. The sun had set, with *an unusual yet beautiful red glow* on the eastern horizon. His rover friend had been mesmerized by the strange sight, but Sonda's urgent kisses had driven Braylim to gently pull her into his tent. Before they could make love, the world had ended.

A blasting hot wind roared across the farmland and plains, and the camp was whipped into chaos. The patrol's sergeant incanted a spell to protect the soldiers, but *something went wrong.* He began to howl in agony and **his skin seemed to fracture** as bright white light erupted from inside his very body. In moments, he was a pillar of ashes, blown into nothingness by the furnace-hot winds.

Braylim grabbed Sonda's hand and pulled her into cover behind some larger rocks. **The ground shuddered** and began to fracture around them. Two soldiers fell into a huge crack, *their cries lost in the screams of the air and the earth.* A great gout of flame belched forth from that wound, and **the stench of burning flesh** pervaded the air.

Sonda's grip upon his hand tightened, and then her hand was gone. Something unseen had ripped her away from him. He shielded his eyes, calling her name and trying to see where she'd gone. All he could make out was a pillar of rock where there had once been nothing, leaping high into the night. Atop the crooked spire of stone, **a figure had been impaled.**

Braylim reached out and grabbed the spire. His hands came away wet with Sonda's blood ...

He looked at his **blood-covered hands,** mesmerized by the glistening dark liquid, before shaking his mind free of memories.

The sunlight was bright and hard. **The two bodies of the broken-minded bandits lay before him.** They had fallen to his practiced blade work in moments. The only emotion Braylim had felt had been *pity*.

As always, his next thought was of what he could take from the bodies. He picked them clean of the items he had use for — leather belts, metal fastenings and the nails on their clubs. He checked their boots next, but neither pair would fit him. Still, they might be tradeable. He found two hide bags hidden nearby, with a wineskin half-full of stinking water and some pathetic trinkets.

Braylim went back to the bodies, and quickly examined them. He was relieved to see that whatever diseases they had were probably a result of malnutrition. He was probably still well. Lucky, perhaps. **Luck had seen him through** this far.

He moved back a few hundred feet into shade and sat down, sipping slowly at the foul water so as not to vomit. All he had to do now was wait for some animals to come along ***to scavenge on the corpses***. Perhaps he'd eat well this day.

Chapter 2: The Apocalypse

"Mama, look at all the shooting stars."

At the center of the *Desolation* roleplaying game is the end of a high fantasy world. The Night of Fire changes the near-utopian perfection of Before into a harsh struggle for survival in the After. It turns the idyllic lives of the average Ascondean citizen into a dramatic day-to-day adventure with the potential for great and terrible destinies. Other cultures, such as the outcast elves, pious dwarves and carefree island folk, had their worlds recast. The Night of Fire is the one thing everyone has in common, though most will have experienced the Apocalypse in different ways. Here's what happened.

Unheeded Warnings

Only the gnomes had a hint of what was coming. Their mystic connection to the universe gave them a vision of a future that was very dark indeed. Long ago, they avoided their own destruction by realizing their melding of magic and technology would cause a great shift in the Balance. They buried their creations and wove a spell of Forgetting over themselves, so that they might forever avoid causing the end of all things. Centuries later, the gnomish mystics felt the warning signs rise again.

Smaller trembles had been detected before. Other civilizations, such as the elves, had suffered social and magical disasters that had been contained. The disasters suffered more recently by the rovers added weight to the gnomish theory of the coming doom. Something had to be done.

The gnomes reasoned that, because they had been willing to give up their own power and glory for the sake of the world, others would do so as well. They decided to warn all the Lands of Scondera. In the last days before the Night of Fire, strange signs and omens were everywhere; not the least of which was the appearance of gnomish envoys. They visited the capitals of each region and requested audiences with leaders from government, religions and academia. The envoys delivered a vague, yet urgent warning of looming disaster, and urged the leaders to prepare for the end.

These small harbingers were mostly ignored, however, and often ridiculed. Several were imprisoned, though they would invariably vanish from their cells.

A few people did listen to the gnomes, and tried to prepare. Some would survive what happened next.

People on the edge of civilization noticed an increase in animal attacks and odd weather patterns. Other signs included unusual magical side effects. The Weave itself was changing, becoming taut and straining.

A few weeks before the end, the Empire's College of Astronomy noted that the stars seemed to be moving strangely. Many were missing from the sky.

As the days progressed, more oddities were witnessed by more people. Again, many could be seen in the sky, as green boiling stars flared up from nowhere and vanished, though there were other signs and portents. Most thought of these as curiosities, nothing more. Even if there was a disaster looming, magic could stop anything. There was nothing to fear.

The Night of Fire

Although the Apocalypse is called the Night of Fire by many survivors, the destruction was not limited to heat and flame. Death wore many faces that night. Crushing walls of water drowned untold numbers, while sudden blizzards sealed the frozen fate of many more. There were countless deaths from far more unusual circumstances and unimaginable scenarios. Everyone remembers the night differently, but the one memory that remains is the constant rain of fire.

It began peacefully enough. A quiet Sconderan mid-summer day was coming to an end. Fog hugged the northeastern coastline; a soft rain fell upon the uplands and the mountains.

As scholars and learned folk know, the world is a sphere, and the sun sets first on the most eastern islands of Lorant's Scythe before sweeping westward, wrapping the Empire and the Marches in night before crossing the vast Primea Mountains and drawing dusk over the Warlands.

The tribes of island folk watched the sun set in the west, and settled in for an evening of ancient songs, stories and smoking. As the bright red glow of the sun faded, an eerie orange glare began on the eastern horizon where the night should have been. The waters of the vast Eastern Ocean heaved suddenly,

washing over the islands. Thousands drowned in a few short minutes. Those who survived the deluge would not live for long, as the sky itself seemed to catch fire, blazing with intense heat and brightness. Soon most of the islands would be melting and hissing against the foaming sea. Some simply vanished.

The wave of destruction followed the sunset westward, sweeping sailors and fishermen with it.

As night fell, the incomprehensibly massive wave of water and fire slammed into the coast of the Empire and the surrounding lands. The water surged up valleys and hammered against cliffs and beaches. In some places, the ground itself erupted and boiled with lava. The earth heaved and shook, as if in throes of pain. Fierce winds of fire and ice tore through towns and villages. People emerged from homes and inns, confused and panicked. Some simply ignited into flame, others froze to death where they stood.

As the waves of heat and freezing air blew past, the rain of fire began and did not stop until shortly before sunrise.

Quiet fields were shattered as massive shards of stone punched through the ground, like fractured bones through skin. The ground shuddered and opened canyon maws that swallowed entire towns. Thousands of acres simply turned to liquid, and rivers turned to blood.

As the wave of destruction whipped across the world, some noticed a few bright stars, still visible through the fiery sky. They pulsed and flashed into even greater brightness, puncturing the churning atmosphere with burning lances of light, too painful to look at directly. Many went blind before they died.

By the time the destruction reached the Imperial Capital, the archmagi were aware of the impending doom. They tried to use their most powerful magicks to protect the city, but died as the shattered Weave burned them from the inside out. The night would see the deaths of nearly all the most powerful mages in the world, all victims of their own power.

The high spires and towers melted and fell, and the endless avenues of marble and gold shattered and burned like everything else as the capital was reduced to rubble.

In the west, great blazing trails of fire were seen in the skies, as meteorites blazed through the atmosphere and clipped the highest peaks of the Primea Mountains, sending debris down into the foothills. The meteorites slammed into Ascondea, creating a ragged line of craters, and sending out devastating shockwaves that destroyed homes up to 100 miles from the point of impact. But this was nothing compared to what was coming.

The great forests of the north suffered a variety of fates. Much of it burned, and some of it just withered and died in moments. A vast expanse turned instantly to stone, petrified forever as a memorial. In the center of the forest, the earth was torn apart with a grinding roar, forming a vast canyon that stretched for tens of miles. Clans and tribes were scattered. Most of the Northlands' few permanent settlements were lost, while their Shamans were consumed by their own magic. Years of progress and civilization were washed away in a single night, throwing the monstrous races back toward their savage roots.

Rivers succumbed to the invasion of the ocean, with massive swells of water pushing far inland. Lakes formed where there once was desert, while lush grasslands burned and cracked with the heat, reduced to badlands in a matter of hours.

Along parts of the southern coast, the sea pulled back and back, creating endless miles of drying and parched mud flats, with crags and deadly sandy valleys of their own.

By the time sunset fell upon the Primea Mountains, half the continent was devastated — on fire, frozen, flooded or shattered by huge geological changes. Then the Primea Mountains fell. The vast, ancient mountain chain collapsed in upon itself. Some peaks fell more than two miles to flatten the dwarven cities of Cair Dhurn. Huge chasms and cracks that opened beneath the roots of the mountains caused most of the range to nearly vanish, with clouds of dust and rock that spread out faster than a griffin could fly.

To the east, the stunned and broken populace was hit hard by this wall of stone and rock, and many more died, buried beneath the shattered bones of the world. To this day, there are thousands of square miles of rubble caused by the implosion of the Primea Mountains.

The shockwave of rock and dust also pushed west. While the mountains had absorbed the brunt of the wave of fire and ice, many regions of the Warlands still suffered terribly. The Apocalypse fell upon them next, followed by the stony death emanating from the destruction of the mountains. Earthquakes rocked the Warlands and the rest of Scondera during the night and for days and weeks afterward, weakening the skin of the world. Molten rock burst through as fledgling volcanoes further endangered those desperately trying to survive.

With the fall of the mountain range, rivers sprang up in new directions, flooding many areas and drowning much of the dwarven civilization wherever their halls and tunnels had survived the breaking of the mountains.

Throughout all of this, the inhabitants of Scondera sought safety. Race, religion and nationality meant nothing — the Night of Fire took lives without concern for petty mortal affairs. Places that seemed safe became death traps. Churches, apparently well-constructed havens, often depended upon Rune Magic for their structural support. Many of the faithful met their gods that night, crushed beneath the stones of their holy places.

Others cowered in their fragile homes, and were spared the worst when their light wooden roofs either blew away or collapsed in, causing little or no harm. However, the fires that engulfed entire towns and cities killed thousands.

Some folk went underground into ancient temples or ruins, and many actually survived the Night of Fire only to find their bolt-hole entrances blocked by yards of rubble. Some of these survivors were never seen again.

For most, the Night of Fire meant running, hiding, screaming and crying. Many lost their loved ones, seeing them die right before their eyes. In some cases, this was a literal loss, with the missing person's fate still a mystery months later.

Fortunately, many survivors remember little about the Night of Fire. Their memories are a patchwork of barely related incidents. It's not unusual for a survivor to wake up screaming months later, as a new memory bubbles up during a nightmare, like a dead fish in a pond.

The Broken Weave

The tearing and breaking of the fabric of magic wrecked havoc in the physical world as well as the unseen world of magical forces. And indeed, for one night, this world of energy became visible in terrible ways.

As the Night of Fire continued, the Weave itself seemed to strain and finally break. Great jagged arcs of magical energy lashed from nowhere, destroying or twisting anything it touched. Ordinary people and magi alike witnessed this interaction between the Weave and reality. Most spell casters were grounding points in the Weave storm and were ripped apart into dust and smoke before the eyes of the astonished and terrified. People saw magical energy kill their loved ones or maim them with even the lightest touch. Buildings were destroyed in bright blue flashes, while wild animals and livestock were mutated into slavering beasts that rampaged through the burning towns.

Magical belongings, both trusted and taken for granted, discharged their power into the great arcs of magic, adding to the chaos. Some just exploded, killing their owners, or turned against them in other ways. Enchanted bracelets and necklaces shrank in size, severing arms, hands and heads, while some armor crushed and killed its wearers. All the while, ordinary people watched as magic turned against them. As they stared up at the writhing snake-like ribbons of hateful energy, with the Night of Fire burning around them, many made a connection in their minds: One must have caused the other. Magic was no longer something to love. It was something that must be feared and stopped, lest anything like this ever happen again.

The damage to the Weave caused other effects. Some,



such as the instant petrification of isolated forests, were not apparent for months afterward. Others happened right before people's eyes.

Ordinary animals, already fearful and panicked by the events unfolding around them, found themselves broken and twisted as the Weave lashed out at random. Some creatures became powerful and more dangerous, driven insane by the magical energies. Others died painfully, unable to cope with the changes. People, too, were Weave-Touched and Broken. Some didn't survive the transformation.

The writhing and damaged Weave also seemed to open doors to the past. Ancient legendary creatures, such as dragons, wyverns and massive brotula, emerged and unleashed another kind of havoc upon a world that was already breaking apart.

While many events were cataclysmic, some were mostly harmless, even wondrous — or would have been had the circumstances not been so terrible. A full accounting of all the unusual events of the Night of Fire would be impossible, but the following were reported:

- A man turned to glass as he ran, only to fall and shatter.
- A woman, known to be dead several years, was alive again.
- Several statues changing poses during the Night of Fire.
- An entire town being swallowed by an impossibly large core delver.
- Individuals, buildings, villages and even islands were deposited hundreds of miles from their original location.
- Women giving childbirth at the time suffered no pain or complications.

Perhaps most unnerving of all, some small areas were left completely untouched by the destruction. They stood as mocking reminders of what had been lost.

Daybreak

Eventually, the night ended, though for many it would be days or weeks before the air cleared enough to see the sky. The sun shone down upon a changed world. Nine-tenths of the population was dead, and every map that had ever existed was now wrong.

Aftershocks

The days and weeks following the Night of Fire were full of chaos, sorrow and further death. The land was shattered — truly unfamiliar and alien, with mountains and hills twisted and, in many cases, just gone. As the skies cleared, the stars themselves looked unfamiliar. Several bright red and orange stars that had not been there before burned down upon the living and dead.

The first few days consisted of searching for food and water. Once found, precious supplies had to be protected. In almost all areas, even in those that had once considered themselves the height of civilization, barbarism ruled. In many places, familiar landmarks were gone or altered beyond recognition. Survivors weren't willing to set out on long journeys. Some did because they were desperate to find help or lost loved ones. Most travelers were never seen again; a few gave up early on and sought shelter at the first willing settlement they came across.

For regions closer to where the Primea Mountains once stood, earthquakes and aftershocks were common parts of daily life, further interfering with survivors' attempts to find some kind of footing. As the weeks turned to months, strangers banded together for protection, but were just as likely to be betrayed by those they reached out to. Still reeling from their losses, most survivors were waiting for help from whatever government to which they gave fealty. As time went on, and it became clear that help was not coming, people took matters of law and justice into their own hands. Small communities sprang up around remaining towns and villages or viable resources, and some small skirmishes occurred as pecking orders were established. For the most part, these were fast, dirty fights.

This period, first of dazed questioning followed by frantic consolidation of what could be grabbed before winter came, gave no real advantage to anyone. The general consensus was that when the legions came (or whichever governmental force had ruled over the area arrived), certain people would pay for their crimes, while others would get the justice they had sought. For now, survival was the most important priority.

The few settlements that managed to gather enough supplies and people who could work together in a constructive way — either peacefully or at the end of a lash — seemed to have the best chances for survival. They repaired buildings, armed themselves with whatever they could find and made preparations as best they could.

The Long Winter

Summer ended in weeks and autumn was over a few weeks after that, crushed under a winter that seemed like it would never end. It got cold and stayed cold, as harsh blizzards roared in from the north, burying the lands as far south as the old southern coast in feet of snow each time. It never quite thawed completely for the next year, and people feared that the whole world would become a frozen nightmare — like the far north used to be. The coldness even reached across the Warlands and Saikin Wastes. Snow touched ground that had not seen it for centuries, and although not as frigid or hard hit as other regions, these lands were unaccustomed and unprepared for such temperatures.

The sheer ferocity of the winter took everyone by surprise.

Settlements soon enacted rationing and harsh laws to maintain whatever supplies they had. The last travelers who felt they could brave the vanishing roads reported that the snow was everywhere, and soon even those meager attempts at communications shut down.

Most people quickly began to miss the safe, reliable magic they once depended upon. Some risked fire runes for heat and warmth, and were either killed or exiled from their village for their insanity. In the rare places where magic was tolerated, it was slightly more comfortable, but it was far from the lifestyle enjoyed by the majority of folk Before.

As the Long Winter progressed, days became progressively shorter — this was expected, but when the hours of dark began to last 18, then 20 hours, people were filled with fear and bewilderment. Eventually, about nine months after the Night of Fire, the sun sank below the horizon and did not rise the next morning. There was an entire week of near dark, with only a twilight glow on the horizon, and the survivors were certain that this was truly the end of all things.

This "Long Night" did eventually end, and when the sun finally rose over the horizon once more, it was a significant moment for many survivors. For those who believed in Balance, the endless darkness represented the furthest swing away from light and all things good. Now, as day and night returned to a normal pattern, they believed the worst was over and they could truly hope for better things. Still, no one would ever take the sun coming up each day for granted ever again.

Beasts that had previously only been the stuff of myth became confirmed realities as they emerged in search of food and violence. The deep cold brought Oruskans out in search of supplies. The struggle for meager resources continued until blood was being spilled over mouthfuls of food and the smallest fragments of firewood. Many died from hunger, violence or despair during the Long Winter. It was made more tragic by the presence of magic in some of these settlements that could have saved them, though its use was still risky. No one could know that the Weave had calmed down somewhat since the Night of Fire, but no one wanted to risk an earthquake or boiling storm of fire.

Settlements made up of erstwhile farmers, laborers and other common folk found themselves hunting great beasts across frozen landscapes, fighting off kobold scavengers who would steal their kills, and wearing warm, comfortable clothing made from the skins of polar bears and giant Weave-Touched woolly schlekks. Those survivors who learned to adapt, who could hang onto hope and endure through despair, found themselves watching in wonder as the ice began to melt, and the snow started to recede.

After a year, the Long Winter was finally over.

The Thaw and After

It took three months for the ground to finally soften, and for most of the snow and ice to disappear. The vast glaciers remain, and may for decades as they slowly melt. The world still shakes from time to time during the Thaw, and no one fully trusts that the seasons will ever return to normal. There are many questions that need answered. The world has changed forever. It may be years, or longer, before anyone fully comprehends the extent of what's happened. Everyone wonders why it happened, and that may never be answered.

Some don't want those questions answered. They survived, and that's enough. They want to rebuild their homes and their lives, plant some crops and get on with things. That's always how it's been, but now there may be extra steel in the attitudes of these uncommon commoners.

For now, the roads seem to have cleared, and for those with the need to travel and see what has become of the world, the time has come. Of course, the same is also true for those who wish to build the new empires of the world, or to take by force what they always wanted Before.



AFTER

No one had really thought about how **Broken Bend** had got its name. After all, it was fairly obvious.

Once a wide bend in a deep, slow-moving river that had made its way from the Primea Mountains to the Green Sea, all that remained after the Night of Fire was the **long, lazy, dry curve** that now acted as a moat of sorts, surrounding three sides of the village.

The fourth side of the village had a tidy palisade of tall, thick tree trunks, some of which were carved into *deadly spikes*. During the day, half a dozen villagers each took an hour to stand guard. At night, for now, that number doubled.

The entrance to Broken Bend was a solid stone bridge that had once spanned the entire river, but now came to an end about halfway across. A happy accident, the rest of the bridge now made up a protective wall on either side of the town's entrance, which was a well-made, yet easily movable wooden platform that reached over to the remaining side of the bridge. When necessary, the platform could be pulled back across inside the village.

All in all, it was ***a superior setup***, one that its creator was proud of.

Gensh Pallipoon was a tiny figure in the village — literally. The gnome was little more than 4 ft. tall, shorter than a dwarf, and just a little taller than a Splint, though not by much. Broken Bend owed more than just its clever defenses to Pallipoon's expertise. When he arrived here, it had been little more than a camp, filled with a handful of **desperate survivors** with no idea how to survive the onset of what would become known as the Long Winter.

Pallipoon had brought with him two important things. First, *he'd long known that this spot would be a great place* for a village. He had drawn up plans for the palisade and the bridge years ago. Second, **he had a map**. Although he carried a scrap of goatskin with complicated marks and notations, it was just for show. The real map existed only in his mind, in a network of memories that weren't all his.

For example, just before the snow started, he'd taken a group of villagers out into the shattered wilderness, and had brought back a supply of nuts, flour and preserved food that he'd *"found"* on his travels earlier.

No one questioned where Pallipoon had found these things. No one really cared, because ultimately, everyone benefited. When the village decided to elect a mayor, deep in the heart of the Long Winter, everyone had asked Pallipoon to lead them. He refused, gently, insisting that he was merely a *"purveyor of usefulness."* Instead, he suggested that they elect Janal Kresk, an attractive middle-aged woman who had lost her children during the Night of Fire. Everyone agreed, and Kresk had been a good leader so far. She would often seek out Pallipoon for advice, and he was willing to give it.

Once, three **weary and wounded** travelers arrived in the depths of the Long Winter. Everyone **gave up a meal** to feed them. As their strength returned, the newcomers decided that Broken Bend needed new leadership. When the largest among them ***held a knife to Kresk's throat*** one evening, telling her that she could either give up her position or die, a decision was made.

Using herbs that Pallipoon had "found" some months previously (and had kept for such an occasion), the newcomers were *drugged as they ate*. They found themselves *in the snow and ice* the following morning, on the far side of the broken stone bridge.

They **yelled, threatened, and finally begged** Broken Bend to let them back in, penitent and regretful for their actions. *The shouts died first. The three died soon after.* Their bodies remained by the bridge as a warning to those who would abuse the kindness of strangers.

Months later, when the Long Winter ended, Pallipoon took a couple of volunteers out and **recovered the frozen corpses**. The remains were taken far from the village to a spot that *Pallipoon had marked with stones before the Night of Fire.* Three graves. Three bodies.

The volunteers said nothing, and Pallipoon offered no explanation. The corpses were buried in their pre-determined spots. After prayers to the Divine Mother were offered, the group returned to Broken Bend in time for dinner.

Chapter 3: After

"Everything is gone. Why am I still here?"

Eighteen months have passed since the Night of Fire. The continent of Scondera has been broken in every conceivable way, and it's likely that the whole world has suffered similar changes. The geography, economies, governments, cultures and the Weave are all fundamentally different than Before. What follow are some recommended guidelines on the effects of those changes. Players and gamemasters are encouraged to make use of these effects in their campaigns via plot hooks, character arcs and motivations built around what the Apocalypse left of the world. But these are only recommendations. *Desolation* is meant to provide a basis for GMs and players to create their own versions of the world. For player and GM tips, please see the Storytelling chapter on page 203.



A World Broken and Remade

There is no complete map to show how the Lands changed during the Apocalypse. Any surviving cartographers have had more important things to worry about, like food and shelter. Most people don't realize the full extent of the changes caused by the Night of Fire. At first, most would have guessed their particular region was hardest hit. Eventually, though, refugees and the rare traveler brought word of the vast destruction. Secondhand information and rumors shape most people's views of the world After.

Some things appear to be certain: The Primea Mountains have been shattered and, for the most part, are now a broken chain of much smaller mountains separated by ragged passes and barren valleys. Instead of a 2,000-mile detour to get around the range, it is now possible (though dangerous and still difficult) to travel through the center of the continent. This is a convenience that is being used by various surviving factions of the Warlands.

Many rivers are missing, having left only a dry, twisting bed behind. Some have been redirected, flowing in a completely different direction, or forming lakes and small seas where there were once plains or basins. Likewise, several lakes drained into the shattered ground, and perhaps new rivers flow deep beneath the surface.

In some areas to the north, it looks like vast glaciers have swept through — creating 10,000 years of damage in a 12-month span. As the Long Winter ended, they melted away, leaving alluvial plains and moraines to mark the end of scraped and eroded valleys.

Some beaches have been turned to glass, and in many cases, no longer have an ocean beside them. Some rolling hills are now scattered islands along new coastlines.

Indeed, there seems to be no limit to the destruction and oddities caused by the Night of Fire — from ships on mountainsides, where neither sea nor mountain existed Before, to dead forests, to villages being transported thousands of miles, nearly unscathed. It's almost impossible for survivors to separate fact from fiction without seeing it for themselves.

Some decide to venture forth, in the hope of finding a land and society not ravaged by the Apocalypse. Most prefer to huddle together, looking for strength and safety in numbers. These people form the first communities — small groups of people who often band together in what's left of a city or town. They decide which refugees and travelers to admit, often based on what value that person would bring to the community. There are many who are deemed useless and shunned, and of course there are those who find it easier to survive by preying on others.

The roads, or what's left of them, are indeed a dangerous place to be. Desperate men, women and never-before-seen beasts stalk the roads like predators watch watering holes. Monstrous Oruskans, driven from the Northlands by the destruction, have come south looking for food. But neither man nor beast is the most dangerous element of travel, if the rumors are true.

Aftershocks and severe weather are common. The earth can suddenly open to swallow travelers whole. Freak lightning storms drop fatal bolts like rain. Tornadoes and floods often carry people and communities away. The world was severely traumatized by the Apocalypse. It will be some time before it fully recovers, if it ever does. Aftershocks are something every survivor must deal with as they come to the realization that Nature, not mankind, is the most powerful force in the world now.

Barter and Bread

Long-range communication and trade have broken down, along with the Empire's system of magical portals and roads. Trade caravans once traveled among all the lands, stopping even at small villages. Every level of society had access to exotic goods. Now few traders are willing to risk their lives, or any meager goods they may have amassed. Those who do are heavily guarded.

Most sellers no longer accept gold and silver coins, which were once used to buy goods and services across Scondera. However, there are still those who covet gold and precious metals, dreaming of a time, years hence, when their treasures will suddenly recover their value from Before. They are considered fools by most.

Scavenging and bartering have replaced shopping and purchasing. Well-made weapons and tools from Before are highly valued, as are the locations of the ruins where they can be found. Village leaders often hold, and protect, such secrets.

Economies based on trade were not the only ones crippled. Agrarian economies were destroyed by the Long Winter. Food is scarce, thanks to the unpredictable weather and the destruction caused by the Apocalypse. In many communities, seeds function as a sort of currency. Droughts, floods and famines are still common events, making farming a constant gamble.

Why There is No Map of the After

A gamemaster's map of post-apocalyptic Scondera would stifle creativity. There are limitless possibilities presented by the destruction of a high-fantasy world. The ideas and imaginations of everyone who plays *Desolation* will take stories and games in directions never conceived.

Although there are descriptions of the aftermath of the Night of Fire, the details have been purposefully left vague. There are numerous communities and guidelines provided to spark creativity, but the world is intended to be a blank palette for the GM to tell his story. Experienced GMs will use this freedom to create a unique world and a vivid gaming experience.

Even hunters and gatherers find there is less to harvest from the wilds. Those animals they do find are sometimes unpredictable, and much more dangerous than they once were. Some of Nature's most timid creatures have become wicked, innately magical beasts.

You're on Your Own

The government and military have been shattered worse than the landscape. Those who waited for the Empire to step in and fix things for them have been badly disappointed. Only the small, simple governments have managed to reorganize. But even they are powerless to truly affect the lives of their people, unable to provide the protection, order or resources that are so desperately needed. Their guidance and unifying vision can be a powerful source of hope, however, and that is more than most have. Many settlements have sent scouts to discover the fate of their nation; few have returned with good news — when they've returned at all.

With no government, much of the military is without guidance. Most military personnel were on duty when the Night of Fire occurred and have no family other than their brothers and sisters in arms. More than a few of these units have decided they are best suited to rule, and have become despots and warlords in their own right. Generals and captains are proclaiming themselves barons, or even kings. Still others remain true to their former nations and try to uphold the old laws and protect their citizens. The vast majority simply want to survive, return home or find a new place to settle and a new cause worth fighting for.

Self-reliance is no longer just a matter of pride. It's a way of life. No one else is going to help build the wall around the town, make sure the village across the ridge doesn't steal crops or help defend against marauding warbands. Hard work, wits

and good luck will be needed to live in this new world. Everyone is on their own, and everyone is equally desperate to survive. With no government or military to watch over them, people must learn to look out for themselves.

Might Makes Right

Borders have been erased, even some of the natural ones. Most governments have been toppled. A few leaders have managed to hold onto a modicum of power, but they no longer lead what would have been defined as a government Before. A government has the authority and power to make and enforce laws. Leaders in the After often have the power to enforce their authority, but few have the power to enforce laws.

The Apocalypse has left a vacuum that many survivors are interested in filling. The greedy, earnest, faithful, corrupt and courageous all have their reasons for filling the void. The results are varied: press gangs gather any who are able to fight, elections are held, taxes — just and unjust — are levied, communities are conquered. Tyrants and great leaders alike are rising from the destruction of the Apocalypse.

Lawlessness reigns in most areas. Travelers and villagers are responsible for their own safety. The lack of security creates a culture of paranoia, superstition and fear of outsiders. It can turn law-abiding citizens into bloodthirsty mobs.

The Fall of High Culture

High culture has been abandoned. The Apocalypse caused survivors to revert to satisfying their base needs of food and shelter. Two years after the Night of Fire, there is music and art, but it is no longer viewed with the importance — even reverence — it once was. What music there is has a melancholy, dark feeling, and while some people try to recapture what was lost with their primitive creations, there simply isn't the time. Moreover, most people's hearts aren't in it. The craftsmen in the After don't have the impetus to create works of art, and there are very few left who have the skill.

Most of the beautiful works of art from Before that combined magic and craftsmanship were lost to the Night of Fire. Much of what survived was converted into something more practical. Weapons, armor, clothing … all are now made to be functional, not beautiful. The surviving music and art from Before serves as a painful reminder of what has been lost, and for that reason alone, many people shun such things.

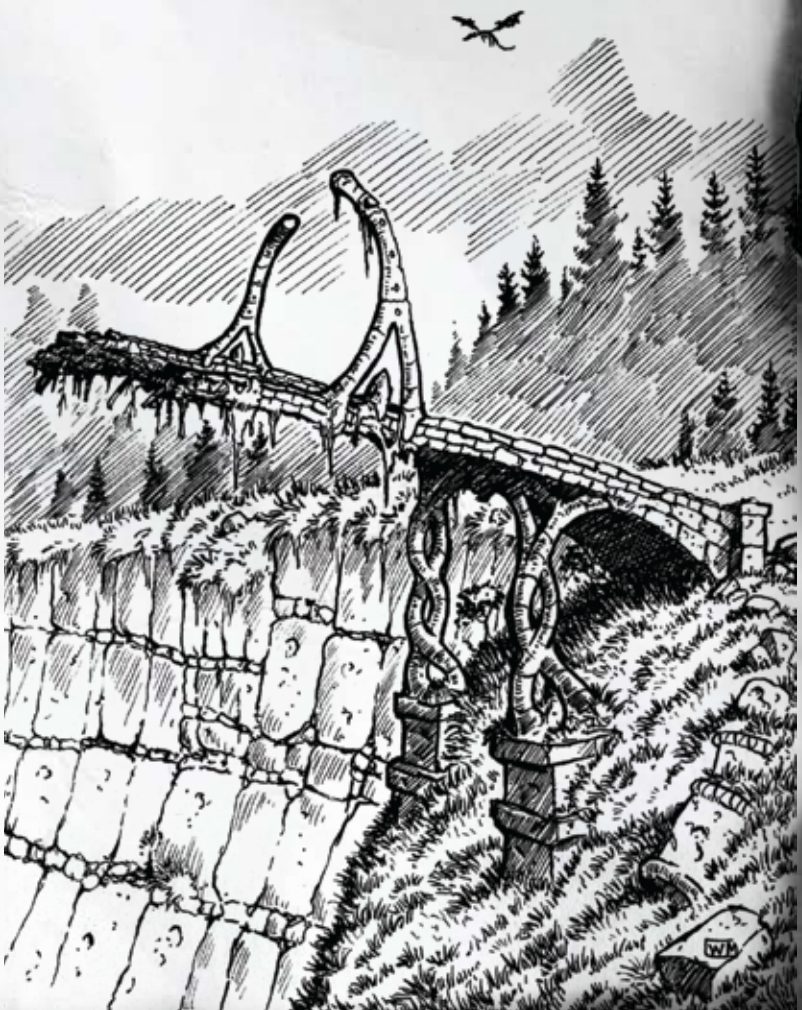
The Fear of Magic

Those in the former Empire, who relied on magic to do everyday chores, have to learn how to live in a world with very little magic. Those in the Saikin Wastes, Warlands and Oruskan Wilderness, who led lives of hardship Before, find the post-apocalyptic adjustment to be less extreme. Most people fall somewhere in between, but nearly all people once relied on magic in their day-to-day lives to some extent. The destruction of the magical infrastructure touched nearly every person after the Apocalypse, directly or indirectly.

None were as affected as practitioners of magic, of course. Most of them were destroyed when they tried to use their magic to protect themselves during the Night of Fire. Those few who survived have learned to use their magic carefully, both to avoid the ill effects of Burn and to avoid being harassed — even killed — by those who blame magic for the Apocalypse. Anyone who witnessed the wild unleashing of the Weave during the Night of Fire firsthand is very aware of the danger posed by magic, and will act accordingly if faced with a practitioner of the art. For more information on how magic has changed, see page 129.

Encounters in the After

A variety of interesting locations or environmental effects can be encountered almost anywhere in the After. What follow are some examples of what survivors can expect to find when they come across such locales.



Aged Community

Many settlements survived the Night of Fire, only to lose most of their population during the Long Winter. Others experienced inexplicable side effects from the breaking of the Weave that posed other threats to their survival. Rumors tell of a village where the entire population aged by 50 years. The middle-aged and seniors died immediately from old age. Only the young survived. Their bodies aged by half a century, but their minds are still those of toddlers and teenagers.

Ash Dunes

An enormous amount of rock, dust and ash was thrown into the sky during the Night of Fire from the destruction of the Primea Mountains and more. The fallen ash has been swept into dunes or hills, much like sand or snow. However, an unexpected foray onto an ash dune may result in a slow, painful death. Dry, unpacked ashes cannot hold a person's weight. People may fall into the mass of burnt stone, wood, and bodies as they slowly choke to death.

Bone Forest

The disturbing sight of a bone forest can be one of several different phenomena. Sometimes, they are comprised of the skeletons of large creatures apparently long dead. The bones look like bare white trees from a distance, but the truth is clear as one approaches. In rarer cases, they may appear to be a petrified forest, but the trees are truly made of bone, as if bone was swapped out for wood.



Chasms/Pits

Whether caused by enormous earthquakes, or the impact of the meteorites that shook Scondera, cracks and holes have opened in the ground. Sometimes existing chasms have expanded, becoming much wider, with existing bridges no longer connecting both sides. Most of the new chasms have either water or ragged rocks at the bottom. It can be hard to know what's down there, so an unexpected fall into one can be either inconvenient or deadly.

Craters

Craters can be almost any size, from 20-ft. holes created by impacts from large chunks of rubble, to gaping scars miles across left by meteorites.

In areas of average or higher rainfall, craters are often filled with water, which can be much warmer than expected. Survivors expect to find little in the way of useful remains of civilization in a crater, but as natural watering holes they offer good hunting as local wildlife gather to drink.

Ever-burning Forests

When the Night of Fire rained burning liquid flame down upon Scondera, many things ignited and burned for a long time. Even though ice and cold was as much part of the events of that terrible night, some things didn't stop burning, ever. There are entire forests still burning, with black bellowing smoke visible leagues away. The tremendous heat given off by such a blaze makes it nearly impossible to approach, and thus no one is sure if the trees are regenerating unnaturally quickly and giving fuel to the fire, or if some enormous rogue Elemental is sitting at the center of such a conflagration.

Ever-fruiting Forests

At first glance, a forest full of trees that constantly bear fruit, even replenishing a day or so after being harvested, sounds like a dream come true. Such places do exist, sometimes as large expanses or small copses of a few dozen trees. The fruit may not always be tasty, but a regular source of food is a rare thing in the days and months after the Night of Fire. Of course, once word gets out, the forest will need to be defended. Many will want to own or control such a location, and would kill just to find it.

Glaciers

As the Long Winter took hold, glaciers — wide rivers of ice dozens of miles long — moved in from the remains of the

Primea Mountains and the Oruskan Wilderness. Usually moving inches a day, the glaciers appeared from nowhere, and have stayed for months after the Thaw as they slowly melt. Although a welcome source of fresh water for many, glaciers bring their own dangers. In some cases, entire tribes of kobolds or other Oruskans call them home. Other creatures also inhabit the many caves of glaciers: bears, wolves and worse. Exploring a glacier can be dangerous. They are often covered in crevasses and pits, and a fall can be fatal — even if the natives don't get you.

Glass Plains

The Night of Fire was well named. The blistering temperatures caused by the burning rain, and the blasting waves of heat and fire created by sudden volcanoes and violent explosions, were hot enough to fuse sand into glass. Whole beaches and stretches of desert became glimmering expanses of obsidian or gray glass, glinting in the sunlight. Shards of this glass are particularly sharp, and can be used as makeshift weapons or tools, though they shatter easily. These plains can often be difficult to navigate: Footing is difficult to find, and the jagged nature of the glass creates great risk to clumsy travelers.

Hot Springs/Poisonous Geysers

As something of a mixed blessing, hot springs can provide both fresh water and heat for a community. The water can be sulfurous and foul, but ultimately safe to drink, while the warmth can sustain an entire village through the Long Winter. However, these springs can also unexpectedly explode, emitting poisonous gas and spraying blistering hot water over a wide area. Many believe the benefits outweigh the risks, and it's not uncommon to see groups of people nursing burns and scars. They're simply making the best of what they have near such places.

Lava Lakes

Sometimes the surface of Scondera has been sheered open, like a lesion or large open wound, and the liquid blood of the earth bubbles up and fills the hole like water. These bubbling, boiling masses of lava give off tremendous heat. The steam and gas can be seen rising from several miles away. During the Long Winter, some settlements may have grown up around such places because the life-sustaining heat is too important to ignore. The dangers of living near such a location, though, are many. Earth tremors or sudden periods of activity can throw masses of lava up over the edges of the lake, causing tremendous damage — and instant death to unprotected life nearby.

Villages of Undead

While more likely to be found in regions in and around Kar'Danan, the strange sight of a settlement full of silent, standing corpses or skeletons can be discovered almost anywhere in Scondera. With the Weave damaged, wild unexpected instances of Necromantic magic can cause entire deceased populations to come back to a kind of animated half-life. Sometimes instead of simply standing motionless, the undead continue to carry out the last activities they were engaged in before they died, going about a kind of unlife. Others are violent and will attack any living creature that comes into view, hungrily tearing at flesh. There's nothing good about finding such a place — though with time and effort, such a settlement could be reclaimed for the living.

Volcanoes

Even in the Before, volcanoes were dangerous and could explode without warning. However, the Night of Fire resulted in hundreds of volcanic eruptions as the skin of the world became brittle, and the molten rock that lies beneath everything sprung up here and there. Thankfully, most immediately became either dormant or extinct, though many still spew out fire, ash and gas on a regular basis. These still-active volcanoes can grow quite large — indeed, several are already hundreds of feet high. The others, the ones that flared out immediately, are no larger than small hillocks, but have the potential for explosive, unexpected re-ignition.

The New World

The suggested fates of each of the lands presented below are entirely optional. GMs and players are encouraged to explore their own take on Scondera after the Night of Fire.

Use the suggestions in the overviews above, and the more specific examples below, to spark new ideas. Perhaps one of the Marches suffered much less than described here, setting them up to be a leading light in the years after the Long Winter. Perhaps they suffered much more.

The Ascondean Empire

The Apocalypse damaged the Empire more completely than any other society. Some even say the Empire somehow caused the Apocalypse. If it did, it paid the ultimate price.

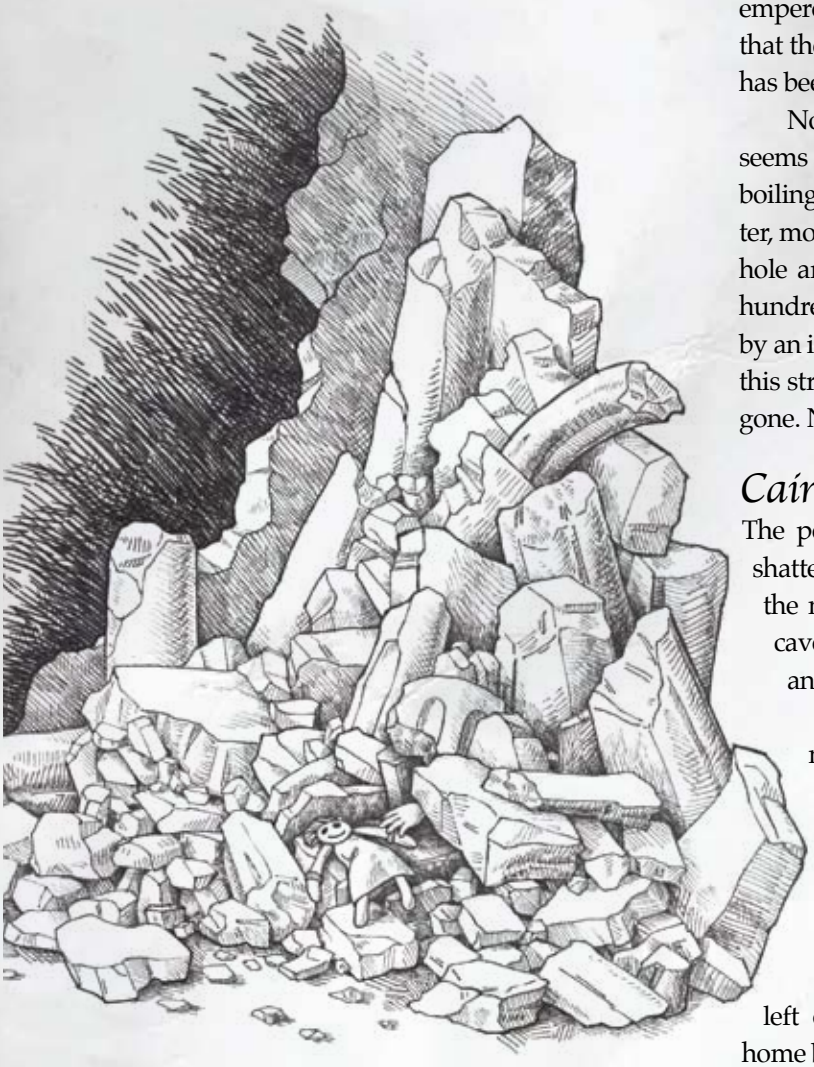
Everything that the Empire had fought so hard to create was gone in a single night. All of the lives that had been lost, all of the sacrifice and hard work, was ultimately for naught. Every structure, social, political and physical, was thrown to the ground or smashed into nothing.

The coastline of the Ascondea Empire has been forever al-

tered by the Night of Fire. From the first gigantic waves that crashed ashore, to the extended flooding from rivers overwhelmed by shockwaves from earthquakes, meteorite strikes and stranger, darker events, the Empire's very shape has changed. It's likely that vast tracts of lowlands and floodplains have been turned into lakes or new inlets from the ocean. Massive geological shifts have raised other parts of the coastline, creating brand-new land, or drained the ocean away, leaving endless tracts of fetid mud plains.

With the fall of the Primea Mountains, a vast shockwave blasted its way east and west. The eastern wave front tore down endless miles of forests and scattered rubble hundreds of miles from the mountains themselves. Several meteorites impacted in roughly a north-east to south-west line, apparently having clipped the highest peaks of the Primeas. This scattered chain of craters are something close to a navigation point for those who realize what has happened, but little else is familiar.

As elsewhere, strange environmental effects have occurred. For the most part, this includes a large number of glaciers that have pushed their way into the northern and western frontiers of what used to be Ascondea. But stranger things have also occurred. Travelers have reported patches of blistering hot desert where there should only be grassland or forest; glassy plains of obsidian rock with no apparent explanation; and new hills and mountains, ragged and freshly hewn from the bones of Scondera. All of these things have happened, and are only a few examples of the oddness visited upon Ascondea by the Night of Fire.



The majority of survivors from the Empire were in smaller communities, far from the capital. Cities and larger towns fared especially badly during the Night of Fire.

Ascondean survivors, at least initially, tended to think of themselves as still being part of the Empire. Most believe the legions will restore order, and that the Councils survive in some form or another. This hope is tenacious, and lasts through the Long Winter before beginning to fail. The majority of Ascondeans are starting to believe that they are just survivors; that the name and the concept of "Ascondea" is something that belongs to the past, not the future. Still, rumors persist throughout the continent of the Empire's return — whispers that the emperor is still alive or that the Councils have reconvened or that the legions are marching westward. So far, however, there has been no indication of any of those rumors being true.

No one has been able to find the capital of the Empire. It seems to be missing. Far to the east, where the sometimes still-boiling ocean meets the twisted, broken land, there is a vast crater, more than 3 miles across. Scattered around the edges of this hole are ruined buildings, looking as if they were destroyed hundreds of years ago. This crater was obviously not created by an impact from above. Mages report that the Weave around this strange wound in Scondera itself is not just damaged, but gone. No magic is possible here at all.

Cair Dhurn

The peaks of the Primea Mountains and Cair Dhurn were shattered and broken by the Apocalypse, killing most of the mountain dwarves and trapping others in the deepest caverns. No one knows how many mountain dwarves, if any, still eke out a living trapped in a prison of stone.

Other mountain dwarves, mostly missionaries and merchants, were traveling on the surface when the Night of Fire occurred. They and their surviving desert dwarf cousins know what else lies beneath the rubble. Some pray their buried kin will find passages to the surface, while others fear the Deep Horrors so much they secretly hope that no escape exists.

Small communities of dwarves grew atop what was left of the mountains. Many traveling dwarves returned home before the Long Winter, hoping to find their clansmen or

dig out survivors. Their hopes were dashed when they saw the extent of the damage, but they had nowhere else to go.

The Primea Mountains fell prey to a number of effects. First, several large meteors clipped the highest peaks of the range on a west-to-east path into the heart of Ascondea itself. This damage was then compounded by a deep series of earthquakes that combined with the failure of the rune-supported caverns to cause much of the mountain range to collapse into itself. In some areas, the mountains fell into deep chasms that had existed in the Before, but had been made wider and less stable by the Night of Fire. Where the mountains once acted as an impenetrable barrier, some sections collapsed to the point of creating navigable passes between the lands previously known as the Warlands and the Ascondean Empire. The range is now mostly a scattering of several smaller, lower mountain chains, with raw shattered granite marking the cracked and broken remains of the once-majestic range.

The damage goes deeper and further than the visible effects on the mountains. Most of Cair Dhurn has been buried, save for small outposts and a few chambers that did not rely on magic for structural integrity. However, the chasms and pits leading to the abyss that the Deep Horrors call home have widened. Fortunately for the surface world, most of the pathways out have been buried, but surely some still remain.

Lorant's Scythe

When the Apocalypse occurred, the island folk were washed away from their islands like ants in a deluge. Many washed ashore on the mainland. Their island home was destroyed, but their easygoing nature remained intact. They took the path of least resistance, scrounging on other people's scraps to survive. To the island folk, a hunk of moldy cheese from the garbage was not so different from everything else. Its spirit was still connected. A meal of rat meat and rainwater was about the same as a meal of venison and wine.

No one understood why the island folk seemed to be happy as guttersnipes. But they learned to respect the beggars and more. Soon after the Apocalypse, it became a popular superstition that ignoring a begging island folk was a sure way to anger the fates. If they had asked an islander, he might have explained that curses come with a terrible price to pay and were not taken lightly, but no one wanted to speak to the filthy little grubbers.

Rumors persist of entire Loranthian islands being found, more-or-less intact, hundreds of miles inland. Such geographical oddness is not uncommon after the Night of Fire, but islanders surviving this relocation seems unlikely.

Still, Loranthians turn up from time to time in the most unusual places, sometimes "washed ashore" several hundred



miles inland with only the memory of water to explain their translocation. Listeners suspect the spirits were involved in saving Loranthians from the worst excesses of the Night of Fire. No one knows if the Scythe is still there, but given the scale of the destruction seen elsewhere, it seems unlikely. Plus, no one aside from the Loranthians really cares.

Cushulain

Spared the worst of the other geological effects of the Night of Fire, thanks to its landlocked status and relatively unspoiled landscape, Cushulain's proximity to the Primea Range did not serve it well. The collapse of the mountains sent huge boulders and chunks of rubble tumbling down the foothills and through the forested uplands, leaving devastation in their wake. The gently rolling farmlands of this nation are lost under many feet of sharp scree, or scoured to bare rock beneath the swift glaciers that swept in from some of the remaining high mountain valleys during the Long Winter. It's unlikely that much remains of Cushulain, other than what lives on in the memories of its survivors. These folk hold their memories very close to their hearts, but Cushulain is gone, a ruin of ash and dust, with possibly worse to come.

Cushulain has inherited a new burden: The largest navigable pass through the broken remains of the Primea Mountains emerges into the remains of the country, and so this once-idyllic land may become the newest addition to the Warlands.

Jherlind

Although they were spared the same kind of destruction visited upon much of the Primea Mountains, the Night of Fire did not ignore the people of Jherlind. The cliffs and crags that had once been their protectors had turned against them, crashing together or tumbling down. Most valleys and villages are now lost within seas of broken stone. The earthquakes created new chasms and mountains, rerouted rivers and drained ancient lakes. Many waterfalls dried up, while others rose to greater heights and size, flooding the land beneath them. Jherlind was reformed, but its essence remained unchanged. Unflinching and rugged before, it continues to test those who live there.

The Pools of Nhirain have been lost in the new landscape. Some fear they have vanished forever, but most believe that as long as the people of Jherlind survive, so will the springs. At least one member of the Barren was known to have survived and, strangely, was heavy with child.

Mehra's Tears, once the largest waterfall in the nation, has grown since the Night of Fire. Many consider this appropriate because she must be weeping for all who have died.

A great meeting of all the surviving households' leaders was held just before the Long Winter. It was declared that all feuds must end and that the survival of Jherlind was paramount. The nation must be rebuilt, and the redefined land must be protected. They decreed that all men who trespass the Fall Lands will be killed, and all women will be used to replenish the households.

Select Jherlinders — some of whom were enraged by the Night of Fire — were charged with exploring the outside world where they would stamp out any remaining magic, bring back women and look for land to invade. The Night of Fire proved to Jherlinders that magic should not exist. Now that the mages have been weakened, it is Jherlind's time to thrive.

Kar'Danan

Since the Night of Fire, few have made the journey to investigate Kar'Danan, though the thought of iron ore will drive some people there sooner or later. Whether those mines are intact, or what has become of the ore itself, is unknown. The large forests of Kar'Danan are rumored to be occupied by the undead legions of the Circle of Dust.

Kar'Danan's main problems came with the rushing flood waters of the Geltin River, which first came upstream as the powerful tsunami that struck the eastern seaboard pushed hard and fast up through the landscape. Then, as those waters ebbed, more pushed down from the mountains, as shuddering earthquakes and tremors forced another devastating wall of water through the already flooded capital city of Karak Dar. It was as if some occult hand had decided to wipe the world clean of the ancient home of Necromancy, and no one who remained after the first flood survived the second. Few have braved these ruins since the Thaw. The countless undead that inhabit the sodden capital are enough deterrent to keep most thieves and scavengers out.

The Circle of Dust, of course, is a constant unseen presence in the thoughts of the survivors here. No one is quite sure what became of the Nine, but they may have perished along with other mages as the Weave unraveled. This is the fervent hope of those Kar'Daners who made it through the Long Winter. Many wonder if some of the thin, quiet folk with whom they spent the year of icy cold are, in fact, Necromancers. Perhaps they are just silently waiting to see who lives and who dies before acting. Even if the Circle of Dust has been broken, their legacy of fear and paranoia lives on.

Though fear of magic is more or less universal now, the average Kar'Daner especially reviles the Necromantic heritage of their people. Although they still fear magic, and especially Necromancy, the survivors are not the passive folk they once were. The odds are now against the lesser mages of the Circle — or so it seems. Whereas before, even a minor Necromancer could expect to be shown a fearful respect, these days they are more likely to be lynched by a terrified, but empowered group of peasants.

Loslolin

An unpleasant land before the Night of Fire, Loslolin has not been improved by the end of the world. The same surging wave of water that did so much damage elsewhere, swept over the low swamplands of Loslolin as it pushed inland, and killed countless Loslonites in its wake. When the water fell back, the swamp had tripled in size, with some of it becoming an inland lake. Parts of the swamp boiled during the Night of Fire, killing much of the wildlife and creating a stinking mass of rotting, partially cooked meat that has been mostly been picked clean by scavengers. Acres of gleaming white bone still glisten just below the surface of the dank water. Twisted, Broken and Weave-touched versions of the swamps' original animal inhabitants skulk and hunt among the fetid islands.

One side effect of the boiling swamp has been the almost ceramic-like domes of baked mud that push through here and there. These make for excellent building materials, through they are difficult to carve out. Almost all of the Loslolin villages lie beneath the muck now. Survivors have built their new settlements over the old.

The many strange herbs and plants used in potion-making have also changed. Some have vanished, possibly forever, while new, strange varieties have sprung up since

the Thaw. Any surviving botanists or apothecaries may find that Nature has provided them with new ways to ease people's suffering, in the form of plants that can be used for healing balms or painless poisons.

Nascency

Nestled in against the Primea Mountains, the Night of Fire showed no mercy to the citizens of the Silver Steppes. However, it did leave Sanctahl's great church tower and walls intact. The Walker and the Guides live there still. They spent the Long Winter debating the cause of the Night of Fire, finally deciding they had not been rigorous enough in leading people down the Path. The ignorant must walk the Path if the world is to be rebuilt. Many faithful returned to Sanctahl after the Night of Fire to seek guidance. Sanctahl is much smaller in the After, but its people are more devoted than ever to showing any survivors how to walk the Path.

The people of Nascency suffered much during the Night of Fire, but found strength in their faith during the Long Winter. A group of about 150 surviving dwarves emerged from previously unknown tunnels just before the Winter set in, and found themselves almost prisoners among the people of the Path.

Penury

The destruction suffered by Penury was of an ironic kind. The cracked, dead earth of this outcast refuge was replaced by an old-growth forest that sprang up from nowhere during the Night of Fire. Many of Penury's inhabitants who weren't killed outright by the Night of Fire were killed like their ancestors were during the Banishment: The trees, undergrowth and forest animals turned on them.

However a few elves, who could be considered the most penitent of their race, have discovered they can once again enter forests. This is a breath of hope for them — but they know they must truly be deserving of this gift. For some, that means helping those around them, now that they have fallen, too. For others, it means teaching the lesser races a lesson in humility. These Penitents, as they have begun to call themselves, helped the surviving elves of Penury during the Long Winter by providing food and dead wood for building materials and fires. The forest was there to nurture and save the elves. Other races were turned away, at first with just harsh and bitter words. But as desperation took hold, the Penitents found themselves using their fledgling new magic to repel and kill those who would take what was not theirs.

Verelanar

Some places suffered more than others during the Night of Fire, and some places found themselves better suited to cope with the aftermath. Though Verelanar also found itself dealing with the Geltin River's flooding, and the raining storm of rubble from the Primea Mountains, it was a place that had less far to fall. With more in common with the Warlands than the Empire, Verelanar was a place of conflict and anger in the Before. People learned to be ready for food shortages and the need to be evacuated to safer areas at any moment. Those who survived the Night of Fire are slightly better prepared than their Ascondean neighbors, though the lack of general resources would cause problems during the Long Winter. The presence of the Tenth Legion was both helpful and detrimental to Lanarian survivors — while some legionnaires offered protection and assistance, many still held great resentment toward natives. This caused them to act less than honorably toward the survivors.

Their actions did not go unnoticed or unpunished in Beda, the renamed capital city of Verelanar. Their cruelty helped an even more cruel king rise to the throne in New Beda (see page 55).

The Long Winter was tough on the survivors of Verelanar. Like Kar'Danan, they had to suffer raids from the Oruskan Wilderness to the north, and the sudden ice-age conditions as impossible glaciers pushed deep into the remains of the landscape. They were more united, however, not having had the centuries of warring baronies splitting their nation apart. New Beda quickly rose to become a power in the region, something that neighboring regions lacked.

Gearhaven

Centuries of meticulous preparation paid off for the gnomes of Gearhaven. Safe and sound in carefully selected locations, these towns still felt the shudders of the world changing beneath them, and their people watched sadly as the sky ignited above them. The fire fell upon them, but their buildings were well constructed and designed to withstand the Apocalypse. The rivers that diverted made no difference to the deep wells of Gearhaven, and when the Long Winter fell upon Scondera, the gnomes were ready for that, too.

Now the Sleepers will patiently wait the hundreds of years it may take for life to return to normal after the Night of Fire.

Keepers will search for ancient gnomish high technologies that the Night of Fire may have unearthed, so they can be hidden again. They must also search the new and foreign landscape for their caches of supplies in order to guard them from scavengers. Keepers will not give up supplies unless their cache will help rebuild the world. Supplies won't be given up for a settlement that's just going to die anyway.

Finders also continue to travel the land, searching for the caches of technology and magic that can only be accessed through gnome-sized tunnels, and are surrounded by ancient



magical traps and mechanical defenses. They hope to share the supplies with those in need.

Mystics continue to listen to the many voices babbling in the Ancestral Stream, looking for guidance. Is this the Apocalypse their kind have been preparing for all these centuries? It very much seems like it, and they dread to think that the worst has yet to come. Some think that the Night of Fire was merely the beginning — the physical change — and that a dark season of warfare and violence is coming.

The Oruskan Wilderness

Though the Apocalypse changed everything for everyone, sometimes the changes were not for the worse. True, the Oruskan Wilderness was a hellish place for a while. First, its vast forests burned, then it froze as hurricane-force winds from the distant north blew the fires out and froze the burned trees solid. The Long Winter was even worse in the north. Yet the Oruskans do not speak of "the end of the world." The "civilized" lands are no longer civilized. Although the farms and villages the Oruskan tribes used to raid are gone or not worth raiding, and rich caravans no longer travel the ruined roads, this was not all bad. The powerful armies of the Empire were gone, and there was no one left to protect the pickings to the south. Despite the truth that the Oruskans had also been diminished by the destruction of the Apocalypse, many believe that this is their time now.

Lesh'Tal

Lesh'Tal was badly disrupted by the Night of Fire. An entire tribe of kobolds rushed into the area and took over. Once the Thaw came, however, Muzgi returned with another force of orcs — more determined than ever to make Lesh'Tal a center of trade in the new world. They pushed out the kobolds and set their captives to work rebuilding.

Now that the great eastern cities of the Empire were in shambles, the west — and specifically, Lesh'Tal — could thrive under Muzgi's leadership. He would accept all comers and offer them the protection and stability only strength of arms could provide in the After. In return, they would work to make the city great.

The time for councils and equality had ended. Now it was a time for a decisive show of strength.

The Saikin Wastes

This vast expanse of dust, rock and sand was inhospitable before the Apocalypse. When the Night of Fire twisted the world, the Saikin Wastes are larger than before and contain new mountains and hills where there was once flat plains of bare stone. Green swaths of forest sprung up, only to die without water or good soil. Rivers burst from the ground, only

to dry up when their source failed. These changes, however, were minor and localized. The Wastes were spared the kind of devastation experienced almost everywhere else.

Valin Stoneson's predictions finally came true. The outcast dwarves did not suffer as many deaths as their mountain kin. Knowing what evils crept beneath Cair Dhurn, and fearing that the Deep Horrors of the abyss were now unguarded, many of the desert dwarves are journeying back to their ancestors' homes. Somehow they know the way, despite the passage of time and the ravages of the Apocalypse.

The Warlands

Of all the lands, the Warlands were least affected by the Apocalypse. The Night of Fire only reduced its population by half. The regions closest to the Primea Mountains were the worst affected, as countless tons of rock and rubble buried towns and villages. Further west, the damage was much less, or at least, less noticeable. For most, the Night of Fire was just another terrible attack upon their warband.

The Long Winter was another matter. For a long while, the endless warfare paused, allowing warbands and communities to regroup during the winter. Small skirmishes still occurred as resources were taken over and over again in a desperate struggle to survive the cold.

When the Thaw came, the frustrated ambitions of the Warlands boiled out along with their soldiers into the new world. Many citadels still exist and Cynosure, with a population of 15,000, is the largest city in the After. Many warlords have turned their eyes eastward, now that the Primea Mountains are no longer a wall closing them in. The new passes and gaps in the shattered mountain range promise to make life more complicated for those in the east, and give hope for a rich future in the Warlands.

Zamai

The rovers worship the horizon and the tides. When the Apocalypse hit, which rovers call the Great Wave, the horizon was lost to ash and smoke for weeks. The rovers believed their gods had forsaken them again. The Great Wave sank most of their ships and sent others far into the mainland to crash upon mountains, sand dunes and plains.

The Apocalypse caused some rovers to turn their backs on the sea, while others can't wait to show the tides they are worthy of sailing to the horizon. Some see it as a sign that rovers shouldn't stay near land too long. They think their gods are punishing them for relying on the land and not the sea.

For others, the loss of Zamai is a deep reminder of another loss, long ago, and many mourn for the ongoing bad luck of their race, seemingly cursed to forever wander.

Communities in the After

The following community examples are just that: examples of the kind of places where characters could have either have spent the Long Winter, or locations just over the next hill as they explore the shattered remains of Scondera.

Bogdon's Raiders

- **Population:** 250 (110 humans, 60 mongrels, 50 orcs, 30 goblins)
- **Survival:** Pillaging
- **Motivation:** Conquest
- **Personality:** Intimidating
- **History:** A bloodthirsty tribe cuts a deal with a far-sighted orc entrepreneur, and finds it's in a position of real power in the After.
- **Attitude toward magic:** Indifferent
- **Government:** Puppet warlord

Background

Kalba Bogdon might have been just another short-lived human chieftain in the Warlands, had he not struck a deal with Muzgi of Lesh'Tal to provide the Oruskan city with a clear road into the Warlands. Bogdon's tribe had been fortunate enough to come along Lor Taril, the citadel that guarded the northwestern border — such as it was — between the Warlands and the Oruskan Wilderness, just after a long siege. Both sides in the siege were starving and had suffered terrible losses battling each other. They were just weak enough for Bogdon's tribe to defeat them. The tribe was still looting the place when the Night of Fire occurred. The citadel protected Bogdon's people somewhat, and they stayed there until the Thaw.

Bogdon was just smart enough to know that the Lor Taril citadel would be a target for warbands greater than his after the weather broke. He was prepared to take his chances on the plains when a force of orcs rode up and requested parlay — an odd thing for a small army of orcs to do. But Bogdon had lived this long by luck, not by wits, and he accepted their parlay.

It was the best decision he had ever made. The orcs were led by a strange one of their kind called Muzgi, who said he was from Lesh'Tal, an Oruskan city far to the north. He was interested in keeping the border between the Warlands and the Northlands open, and he wanted Bogdon to do it.

Muzgi offered to supply Lor Taril, and he was prepared to give Bogdon a gift of 50 well-trained, axe-wielding orcs. The orc axe wielders would make sure Bogdon lived up to his end of the bargain, but otherwise do his bidding.

And so it was that Bogdon became a warlord, and his bloodthirsty tribe became known as Bogdon's Raiders.

Traders and merchants are few and far between immediately after the Thaw, so Bogdon's Raiders busy themselves by attacking anyone they suspect of banditry, or those settlements they determine are harboring bandits. Ostensibly a protective force, it is widely known that Bogdon's Raiders are no better than the bandits they supposedly guard the roads against.

Kalba Bogdon himself is a toad of a man with slightly bulging eyes, quivering jowls and a balding head. The similarity is heightened by Bogdon's habit of "croaking" when deep in thought. He is not a quick thinker, and as he mulls over decisions, he "uhs" and "ums" incessantly. Before he became Warlord Bogdon, it was whispered that he had mongrel blood, but now no one dares.

Bogdon doesn't realize his tribe survives on the whim of Muzgi and his force of orcs. The axe-wielding orc warriors pay lip service to Bogdon, but are ultimately loyal to Muzgi. Unbeknownst to Bogdon and his followers, one of the orcs is actually a Shaman who uses his magicks to keep Muzgi apprised of the situation in the Warlands. Muzgi genuinely wants to make Lesh'Tal a great center of trade in the After, and Bogdon is just one tool he uses to achieve his goals.

Traditions

Muzgi's elite axe men are treated with reverence by the other members of the warband. They get first choice of any loot and always eat first.

To maintain its reputation as the After's most feared warband, Bogdon's Raiders kill every bandit they come across — except one person. This one person, chosen by Bogdon, is forced to watch the slaughter and then released to tell the tale.

Not content to decapitate their foes and place their heads on pikes like other warbands, Bogdon's Raiders take the time to pike the entire bodies of those they slaughter. They leave bandit camps surrounded by these ghastly silhouettes, which look like a macabre puppeteer has tired of his playthings.

Geography

Never wandering too far from the north-south wagon trails that still connect the Warlands with the Oruskan Wilderness, Bogdon's Raiders have learned every hill, tree and dry river bed where bandits might hide. They maintain the Lor Taril citadel as a base, but always have a force patrolling the roads to keep them clear for trade between Lesh'Tal and the lands to the south.

A week's ride to the east of Lor Taril are the ruins of the Primea Mountains. Three days to the south is a lake of lava that has not cooled since it boiled to the surface during the Night of Fire. Another warband has staked its claim near the lake. Bogdon's Raiders steer clear of them, as long as they don't try to waylay traders.

Resources and Needs

The Raiders have extensive experience in combat skills and talents, as one might imagine. They are also extremely talented riders and scavengers in the wilderness, capable of surviving in the wild for weeks at a time. However, they lack some subtly, and are always on the look-out for blacksmiths and other craftsmen, as well as healers and anyone with "second story" skills. They don't mind taking what they need without asking, and slaves are as good as any other kind of help.

Cult of Kull

- **Population:** 200 (160 humans, 40 mongrels)
- **Survival:** Hunter/gatherers
- **Motivation:** Enlightenment
- **Personality:** Fanatical
- **History:** A warland cult dedicated to a charismatic primalist and his fungi totem.
- **Attitude toward magic:** Hatred of all magic other than that of Charek Kull's, which is thought to be a divine gift.
- **Government:** Theocratic dictatorship

Background

Founded less than a decade ago by a young primalist named Charek Kull, the Cult of Kull is a Warland tribe fanatically devoted to him and his fungi totem. Kull became the tribe's Shaman when the former chieftain was killed by corpse fungi. Kull used his magic to turn the corpse fungi away from the tribe's settlement. Since then, he has kept his people on the move. Widely seen as a group of drug-addicted goat herders, the cult has become a real danger to wandering travelers and members of small communities whom they attempt to abduct and initiate into the cult or sacrifice.

The Cult's leader, Charek Kull, is a primalist who claims to be able to speak with corpse fungi. He makes all laws based on his (or the fungi's) whim. To outsiders, he would appear to be a raving madman much of the time, but to his followers, he is the chosen one who will lead them to enlightenment. They protect him at the expense of their own lives.

The Cult of Kull makes mushrooms, molds and yeasts the center of their culture. What seems strange to outsiders makes perfect sense to Kull's followers. Fungi decompose Nature's dead, feed off living organisms, reproduce en masse and can be used for food or poison. This idea of fungi as the ultimate survivor and provider forms the cult's religion. But the penultimate expressions of their beliefs are the corpse fungi — unique organisms that actually animate the corpses as they feed off them. The cult fears and worships the corpse fungi.

Kull spends much of his time "communing" with the

corpse fungi via hallucinogenic mushroom-induced journeys to their reality. He often emerges from these ceremonies demanding the sacrifice of non-believers to the corpse fungi. His people then fan out from wherever the nomadic tribe is in the Warlands, looking for suitable sacrifices. They abduct outsiders — usually women or children, but they will take anyone they are capable of — and bring them to Kull. Kull then uses his magic to call forth corpse fungi, who claim their bound "offerings" by pummeling them into unconsciousness or to death, and then infecting them with spores — all to the rhythmic chanting of the Cult of Kull.

While the ceremonies of sacrifice are what the cult is known for by outsiders, the cult also pays homage to fungi in other ways. Mushrooms are considered to be food of the gods, and are eaten on special occasions. The tribe subsists mainly by herding goats, using yeasts to create yogurt, kefir (an alcoholic drink of fermented goat's milk) and curd cheeses from goat's milk. They are also skilled at creating potent poisons by mixing certain noxious mushroom varieties.

The cult is careful not to attack any tribes it is not absolutely sure it can defeat. It has been known to secretly poison larger tribes' food supplies to weaken them for takeover. It has also set great fires upwind of tribes and burned certain types of hallucinogenic fungi in them in an attempt to bewilder their opponents. It is even rumored that Kull commanded a force of corpse fungi to attack a particularly strong enemy. Tribes that are defeated can choose to swear loyalty to Kull or be sacrificed to the corpse fungi. Those who choose to live are drugged — sometimes for months — until Kull is satisfied that they are true followers.

The Night of Fire only strengthened the beliefs of the cult. With so much death and destruction, all types of fungi are spreading at incredible rates. Entire forests were laid low, and are now the kingdom of fungi. With the terrible loss of life, there are more corpse fungi walking the lands than ever before. The Cult of Kull is on the rise, and actively seeking recruits.

Traditions

Sacrificial ceremonies are held in which non-believers are offered to corpse fungi amid tribal chanting and dancing. The sacrifices are followed by a feast of galisse, a yogurt dish topped with truffles and curds.

Vision visits are caused by consuming different hallucinogenic mushrooms that are used by tribe members to get answers to life's questions and relax. They are performed by Charek Kull to determine the fate of the tribe.

The Word: Rousing speeches given by Charek Kull after emerging from his vision visits with the corpse fungi.

Geography

Although they were wandering nomads who mostly ranged in the eastern Warlands Before, they now have new areas to roam in the After.

Resources and Needs

Like most wandering nomadic tribes, the Cult has everything it needs when it comes to skills in riding, understanding the wilderness, and being able to survive it. They are also charismatic and talented in Primal Magic. In addition, they have livestock — and plenty of faith and fervor. What they need is more sacrifices, and the combat expertise to take what they need to survive, be it food, more livestock, or people for their fungi gods.

Fertile Fields

- **Population:** 93 humans
- **Survival:** Farmers, hunters
- **Motivation:** Protect their own, maintain their community
- **Personality:** Stoic, faithful, fearful, wary, practical, intolerant
- **History:** An isolated farming community that has found solace in an ancient religion, and a pragmatic attitude that endangers all visitors.
- **Attitude toward magic:** Magic is just another tool to use, like a hammer or shovel.
- **Government:** Theocracy devoted to the Divine Mother, led by one person who best embodies her principles. That person is currently Tobias Aldhelm.

Background

An isolated farming community on the northern border of Kar'Danan, Fertile Fields was a tough place to live before the Night of Fire. Being near the Oruskan Wilderness made its farmers battle-hardened. Their fighting spirit and strong faith in the Divine Mother allowed them to tame a small patch of the wilderness. Their Baron, Waylan Schrous, could spare few of his men for their protection, so they relied on a handful of his foresters and their own pitchforks. Unfortunately, that wasn't enough. Goblins raided the settlement days before the Night of Fire, slaughtering everyone and burning Fertile Fields' homes and barns.

The people of Fertile Fields awoke the day after the Night of Fire, not knowing it had occurred. They remembered the goblin invasion. They remembered the hundreds of spears and arrow tips ripping through them. They remembered dying. They naturally assumed they were in the Beyond. They looked at the ash-darkened sky and the bleakness all around them, and thought they were being punished.

But they felt alive. They got hungry and thirsty. They grew tired digging through the ash and into the hard soil to find the potatoes they had planted when they were alive. They slept and were amazed to wake again to the same desolate landscape. They waited for something to happen, but nothing did.

Their practicality got the best of them and they started building with the only material readily available: sod. The earthen homes weren't much, but they were glad to have them when the air turned cold and the snows came. The resurrected people quickly learned that people who died during the Long Winter didn't come back — at least not to the settlement. Visitors came, but at first the people of Fertile Fields did not trust them or believe their stories of the world's end. They cast out the interlopers and considered them tests of their faith.

Tobias Aldhelm was unofficially elected as leader of the settlement when he explained their predicament to everyone's satisfaction. He said the Mother had been at work when the goblins attacked. The townfolks' deaths had protected them from the horrors of the Night of Fire that visitors had told them about. The people of Fertile Fields had been killed before the Night so that the Mother could give them new life in the After. She worked to bring them food and livestock through the Long Winter. She brings them fresh water via a mountain stream now that the snows are melting, and more travelers bearing gifts of trade.

The people of Fertile Fields outwardly accept Tobias' explanation. But privately, many of them still believe they are dead and are in an afterlife. They feel they are being punished by the Divine Mother, not blessed. However, just like those who believe they are blessed, those who think they are damned are more devout than ever. The blessed praise the Mother for their gifts. The damned pray to her for forgiveness.

Traditions

A church service in praise of the Divine Mother is held each evening at dusk. Visitors who accept her are allowed to stay in Fertile Fields. Others are cast out or killed if they have items that would greatly benefit the settlement and refuse to leave them.

Geography

Fertile Fields was carved from forested land and worked into lush farmland where villagers grew wheat, vegetables and hops. It was the northernmost village in Schrous' barony, in the Kingdom of Dust. Though isolated and far from the Burning Palace, they knew the power of the Necromancers. Though it's never spoken — and even thoughts of it are quickly brushed away — some fear the Divine Mother had nothing to do with their resurrection. After the Night of Fire, the people of Fertile Fields were no longer surrounded by woodlands and rich soils. Its fields were dead and lifeless, as if the soil had been sterilized. They found a small stand of timber four days' journey to the Northeast, across a chasm. Five days to the south is what appears to be a new mountain range thrusting up from the prairie. The melting snow has created a swift stream to the east of the settlement.

Resources and Needs

The people of Fertile Fields would be a dream come true for much of the rest of Scondera. They have been given a second chance. They know about farming and woodworking. But they are desperate for raw materials, dangerously so. They also need someone to enrich their minds as well as their soil, and they might literally kill for metal or seed.

Hillsborough East and West

- **Population:** 300 (200 humans, 70 mongrels, 15 rovers, 10 island folk, 4 elves, 1 gnome)
- **Survival:** Hunter-gatherers
- **Motivation:** Survival, unification
- **Personality:** Serious, wary, open
- **History:** A town divided by fear of magic, but still united in gratitude to the mongrel tribe that helped the myriad races survive the Long Winter.
- **Attitude toward magic:** Divided between acceptance and fear
- **Government:** Shaman chieftain

Background

Hillsborough is really two settlements, one on each side of a valley. Until quite recently, it was one. The communities are separated by Ice Lake, which was created by melting snows. Perhaps someday it will contain fish, brought in as eggs hitchhiking on waterfowl. For now, it is a physical barrier between the two rival communities and the source of their water.

The divide between them runs deeper than the lake, however. After the Night of Fire, a mongrel tribe found itself far from its home in the Northlands. It was as if their entire camp had been swept thousands of miles to the southeast. Just before the Long Winter, the mongrel chieftain, Charl, sent his warriors out on raids to loot what was left of the nearby settlements. As a Shaman, he could sense the coming cold. Time and again the warriors found little more than homeless westerners who were ill-prepared for the coming winter. The raids became rescue missions, and Hillsborough was born.

During the Long Winter, the refugees brought into the tribe were supported by the mongrels. The mongrels shared food

from their hunts, showed them how to survive the cold and live off the scarred land. In return, the grateful refugees shared their trades and promised to farm the land when the winter ended.

That was before the kobolds attacked a month ago. They sniffed around Hillsborough for days, using the obscuring snowfall to skulk about. Once they had found the weaknesses in the village's defenses, they attacked. A few advance scouts busied the sentries while the rest of the kobold pack overran the crude walls the villagers had managed to erect. There were hundreds of them inside the village within minutes. Charl had no choice but to use his magic.

With curses shouted at Nature in a guttural growl, Charl took on the characteristics of his totem, a great white bear. His black hair turned white, his arm muscles grew twice their size, and claws and fangs replaced nails and teeth. He led his warriors to victory over the kobolds, who fled in the face of organized opposition. Half of Hillsborough fled as well, across the valley.

Some of them refused to return, so great was their fear of magic. Charl would like to get them to come back because he fears for their safety and survival. He's at a loss about how to do that, other than raiding their camp and forcing them back. Charl has challenged any of them to a fighting match, with the winner taking control of the tribe. He has had no takers.

Traditions

Once a year in the spring, Charl's entire tribe goes on a hunt and kills any and all game (except for bear) as a symbolic gesture to show Nature they are in control. A feast, known as the Fearsome Feast, is prepared using the spoils of the hunt.

Children are expected to spend a week in the wilderness just before they turn 10.

The aged are revered for their wisdom.

Bears are honored as great survivors and kings of the forest. The penalty for harming a bear is death.

Geography:

Hillsborough is located on the former plains of Cushulain, close to the eastern border of what was once the Empire. The flat land took on a different shape during the Night of Fire. Some say the earth itself rippled when Ascondea was destroyed. The city's destruction was like a pebble thrown into a pond. Shockwaves rolled out from the former capital city, and were frozen in time by the Long Winter — or so the story goes.

Whatever the cause, the land now resembles a crumpled blanket. Halfway up each side of one of the "folds" is the divided community of Hillsborough.

A month's journey to the east, where the gold-tipped spires of Ascondea once competed with the sun, is a magnificent crater, partially filled with sea water. Five days to the south is a huge slab of granite that forms a plateau several miles wide and thousands of feet high. A few dozen moraines to the west is a conifer forest, though the people of Hillsborough have had a tough time bringing any significant amount of lumber back over the undulated terrain. To the north, a two-week's march away, is a huge glacier that appeared after the Night of Fire. A kobold settlement is in, on or around the glacier.

Resources and Needs

Among the wood, metal, seed and general farming and other advice that the divided people of Hillsborough need, their leader needs additional suggestions. Charl is saddened that he has frightened some of his people with his magic, and he would show great gratitude to someone who could help him with this problem. The village also needs help shoring up its defenses against further kobold attacks.

Keshek Kel

- **Population:** 446 (175 humans, 80 dwarves, 60 orcs, 50 mongrels, 45 goblins, 20 rovers, 12 elves, 3 Loranthians, 1 gnome)
- **Survival:** Growth
- **Motivation:** Power
- **Personality:** Cunning, devoted
- **History:** One of the most ancient great citadels remains a center of power in the After, as Warlord Reld gathers a new nation around himself.
- **Attitude toward magic:** A useful tool and weapon, as long as it's under Keshek Kel's control
- **Government:** Military dictatorship

Description

As the oldest of the great citadels, Keshek Kel has an ancient history that repeats itself in a series of battles, sieges, daring raids and ruthless warlords. The fortress has been partially destroyed and rebuilt by different cultures so many times that it looks like it was designed by a madman.

Just before the Night of Fire, a familiar scene was playing out at Keshek Kel. Warlord Oken Reld and his diminished force of less than 100 men were besieged by an army that outnumbered them four to one. Though the fortress' defenses were so daunting that the opposing army could not overrun them, Reld knew they would soon be starved out of the prize that was Keshek Kel. Reld had come to power through strategy and cunning, rather than brute force. He was wracking his brain for a way out of his predicament when the answer fell from the skies.

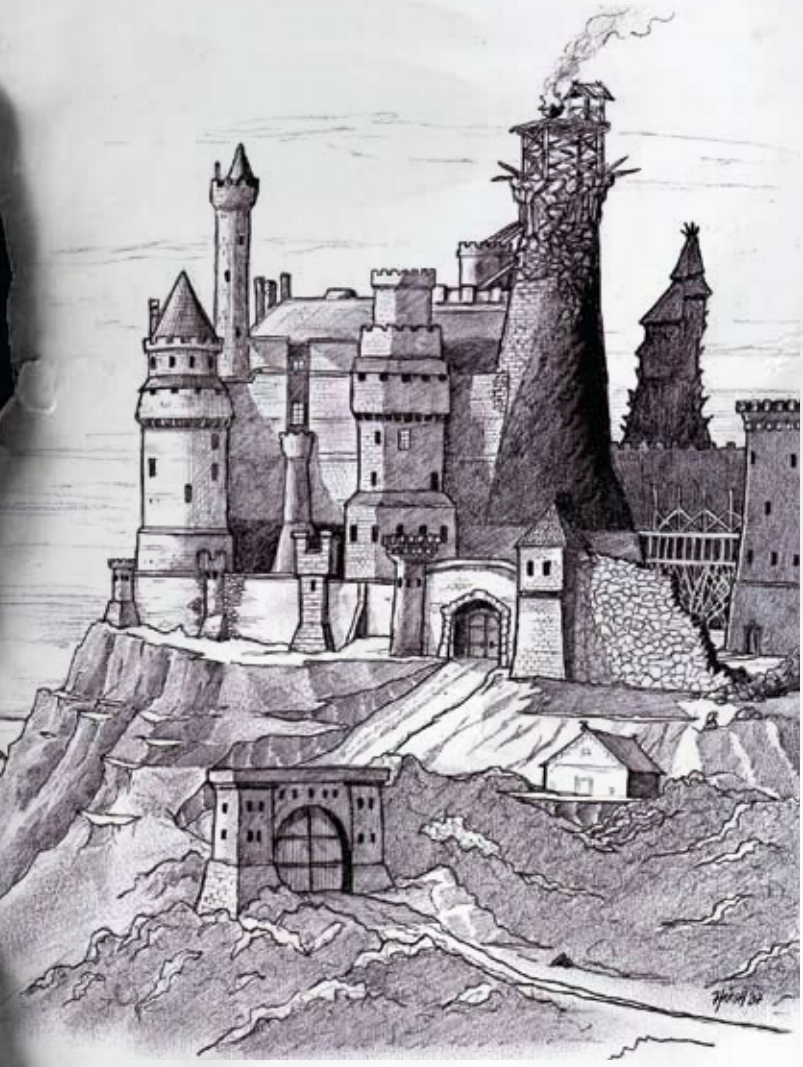
The hundreds of yards of cleared battlefields surrounding the fortress were cleared of the besieging army as the Night of

Fire fell. The citadel was partially ruined by the quaking earth — but even in the Before it was never whole.

As a pillar of strength and stability in the chaos of the Warlands, Keshek Kel's role in the After is a new one in its history: the center of a village. Assuming the Night of Fire had been some sort of attack, Warlord Oken Reld sent scouts to investigate. Instead of a hidden force of warriors and powerful mages, the scouts found nothing … nothing but a few desperate survivors begging for shelter.

Warlord Reld did not know what caused the Apocalypse or how widespread it was, but he did understand desperation and how to use it. He allowed the survivors to pitch tents in the shadow of Keshek's towers. More and more came as the snow began to fall. Reld's soldiers became providers. They collected firewood; they hunted game; they built shelters. Most importantly, they showed loyalty to Reld.

By the end of the Long Winter, Oken Reld was the ruler of a completely loyal army of 450 men, women and children. He was fanatically popular among his people. Loyalty was a rare thing in the Warlands, and Reld devised a way to make the most of the opportunity. Instead of charging forth to conquer neighboring tribes, as was the way of the Warlands, Reld decided to make his would-be enemies come to him.



Keshek Kel was the perfect bait. He would let those it attracted be crushed against the fortifications of the citadel if he must, but he'd much rather Keshek Kel absorb them. He would rebuild the citadel's defenses, stockpile food and water, and continue to instill a great sense of loyalty and gratitude among the citizens of Keshek Kel.

Warlord Reld fully expected to soon command a city of thousands, all fiercely loyal to him. If all went according to Reld's plans, his power would gradually grow until Keshek Kel was the capital city of a great and lasting country — the likes of which the chaotic Warlands had never seen.

Traditions

Keshek Kel has formal rites of citizenship that resemble a religious ceremony. The would-be citizen pledges life and loyalty to the glory of Keshek Kel and Warlord Reld.

Every boy or girl old enough to hold a dagger is mentored by one of Warlord Reld's warriors. The mentor not only teaches them to fight, he or she becomes a surrogate parent who helps solidify the younger generation's loyalty to Keshek Kel.

Disputes are settled by public fighting matches. The old and sick may choose champions. Killing a fellow citizen of Keshek Kel in such a match is punishable by death.

Anyone who wants to be a citizen of Keshek Kel must swear fealty to Warlord Reld. Disloyalty to Keshek Kel or Warlord Reld is punishable by death.

Every citizen of Keshek Kel is a member of its army, is given a home and must donate a tenth of their food supplies to Keshek Kel's stockpiles.

Non-citizens must be fed, but may only stay in Keshek Kel for two days.

Geography

Sitting atop a high peak on the cliffs of the western coast of the Warlands, Keshek Kel was surrounded by desolation long before the Night of Fire lit the skies. It was used as a military outpost even before Ascondea was founded because of its location. From its perch atop Mount Dun, Keshek Kel's rulers have had a 360-degree view of the surrounding hills, plains and sea.

After the Night of Fire, the view was even clearer. Fires cleared the brush from the hills and turned the pine forests into little more than used matchsticks. A river, once hundreds of miles to the north, had somehow been rerouted during the Night of Fire. It now flowed less than a mile to the north of Keshek Kel, emptying over the cliffs in a great waterfall that poured into the sea to the west.

Resources and Needs

The citadel is a center of power. The arts of war are known here, but to conquer the world, an army needs more. It needs more people; it needs food, craftsmen and healers. It needs lawmakers and farmers. It needs everything that a nation needs, in fact, and if Reld cannot convince those who possess such skills to stay, they will stand aside or be swept away.

New Beda

- **Population:** 500 (321 humans, 75 elves, 50 mongrels, 30 rovers, 10 mountain dwarves, 10 Loranthians, 2 desert dwarves, 2 gnomes)
- **Survival:** Hunter-gatherers, scavengers, farming, slave trade
- **Motivation:** Survival, past glory, revenge
- **Personality:** Outwardly friendly, secretly prejudiced against outsiders, hate Ascondeans
- **History:** Beda, the former capital of Verelanar, was already in ruins before the Apocalypse. After the Night of Fire, the son of Gravisk Carr — Anlaf — captured the peoples' hearts and minds with a plan to regain Verelanar's former glory, without the Empire.
- **Attitude toward magic:** The people of New Beda are conflicted over magic use. They both fear and crave the power of magic. Magic users are as likely to be hanged as to be made high-ranking officials, depending on how they are perceived and what they have to offer the town.
- **Government:** Dictatorship. There is a nightly curfew in place in New Beda. Food is rationed. It is treason to say anything negative about Anlaf Carr.

Background

The people of Verelanar, which had been occupied by the Empire for more than a decade before the Apocalypse, know better than most how to survive in a ruined world. Their country had been in shambles for years, thanks to an Ascondea-supported puppet government led by Gravisk Carr, which was overthrown.

Gravisk's son, Anlaf, who had been in prison until the Night of Fire partially destroyed it, had thought long and hard about how to get his revenge on the Empire. He had come to the conclusion that it was the Empire that had set his father up to fail, and that they made Gravisk their scapegoat. There had been no puppet government, at least not until after his father had been slain and the Empire had stepped in. Before this treachery, the kingdoms of Verelanar were united, and the people had known their place. They served their king.

What Verelanar needed again, Anlaf reasoned, was a new king. Now that he had been freed, he set his plan into motion.

Anlaf used his considerable charisma and vision to organize small gangs that began capturing any non-natives they came across in the city's ruined buildings. He used slavery, which his father's Ascondea-backed government had abolished, to show the people of New Beda that he was not like his father. Every surviving soldier from the Empire's Tenth Legion, which occupied Verelanar Before, was enslaved before the Thaw. Outsiders who wandered into the city during the Long Winter were also enslaved. Anlaf's gangs have become his own personal police force. Now that the Thaw has arrived, Anlaf sends his men out on horseback each day, looking for more slaves.

Of the 500 people living in and around New Beda, half are slaves. For the most part, the citizens of Verelanar support Anlaf's plan because they hate the Empire and are happy to have slaves doing the heavy work involved in rebuilding. They believe in Anlaf's vision of a rebuilt Verelanar. As they see defensive walls and buildings rising from the ashes of Beda, his power grows. Many have been given plots of land near the city to farm. They have accepted Anlaf Carr as their ruler.

Outsiders are greeted as friends by the people of New Beda. The roped and chained slaves working throughout the town are described as lawbreakers working off their sentences. The locals try to put visitors at ease until Anlaf's gangs can investigate them. Those who show no desirable skills are captured as slaves. Those with skills in demand by New Beda are asked to trade those skills. Refusing the offer can lead to the guests being pressed into indentured servitude.

A few free citizens of New Beda are truly sympathetic to visitors and may try to discreetly warn them to get out of town quickly. These people would be considered traitors by Anlaf, and the punishment for treason is death.

Traditions

The anniversary of the Night of Fire has been decreed a national holiday, since it helped Verelanar defeat its imperial occupiers.

Geography

New Beda is built among the ruins of Beda, the former capital city of the Freeland of Verelanar. Its inhabitants use the partial shells of the buildings from Before as a basis for their shelters, which are constructed of animal hides, stones and wood debris. A day's march to the east of the city is a large, kidney-shaped lake that was not there before the Night of Fire. Two days' march north of the city is a downed forest, as if a powerful wind had simply laid hundreds of acres of trees on their sides.

Resources and Needs

Anlaf needs a keep. He'll need slaves to build it, and craftsmen and weapons, and healers … these all come first. After that

comes everything else, and Anlaf will just take that, too. He'll kill whoever refuses. New Beda already has much of what it needs, and Anlaf doesn't consider it too hard to get what's lacking. It's just a matter of time and waiting for the right people to get close enough to grab.

Onyx Falls

■ **Population:** 200 (100 mongrels, 50 goblins, 30 humans, 20 elves)
■ **Survival:** Hunting/gathering, stockpiles, limited trading
■ **Motivation:** Build a safe, permanent settlement.
■ **Personality:** Selective, paranoid and territorial.
■ **History:** Empty monastery claimed by goblins. Gave refuge to very few during the Long Winter; only to those who could contribute in the long term.
■ **Attitude toward magic:** Spell casters will be turned away, if not killed outright. The changes to the nearby river and waterfall have been blamed on magic (as has the entire Apocalypse).
■ **Government:** Autocracy. A goblin named Vrewl is the self-proclaimed governor of Onyx Falls. His authority is not currently being challenged because of the prosperity of the community. However, should the need arise, all the goblins and two-thirds of the mongrels are completely loyal to him.

Background

The Brotherhood of Silent Voices established the monastery nearly four generations ago, choosing the valley for both its remote location and beauty. The simple cloister was dedicated to the art of wine making and was well known for its sweet-flavored vintages. The Night of Fire left all but one monk dead, but he quickly left in search of other survivors after burying his brothers.

The monastery stayed empty only a short while before being discovered by a goblin merchant named Vrewl. His tribe had also suffered great losses and was desperate for a sanctuary from the harsh winter. With their chieftain and Shaman dead, Vrewl became their new leader and quickly brought them within the walls of the monastery. As time passed and the winter grew harsher, others stumbled across their settlement. However, with the limited resources, Vrewl was forced to make hard decisions — and he found himself more than capable of making them. He quickly found support from those who did not want bear the burden of these decisions, but enjoyed their fruits. His most ardent supporters are the goblins and mongrels who enjoy a slightly elevated social status, but all who are allowed to stay have a life that is protected and at times even comfortable.

The settlement is mostly filled with warriors who are familiar with the surrounding area. They spend a great deal of time patrolling for strangers, intercepting them before the location of Onyx Falls can be discovered and identifying potential trading partners. At least one such partner has been identified and is providing scavenged metal in exchange for furs and hides.

Currently, Onyx Falls has managed to remain hidden and reasonably prosperous. However, recent encroachments from the northwest by orcish raiding parties have threatened their security. The only other outside threat they may be facing is coming from below, as strange noises have been heard in some of the collapsed tunnels below the monastery. Internally, there is rising anger at the decision not to eat or use anything from the blackened water, an early law established by Vrewl. Some have begun secretly eating fish caught from the river. No ill effects have been suffered so far.

Traditions

None are allowed to join the community unless they possess a skill of value. Vrewl makes this determination personally. Skilled craftsmen and warriors are allowed to bring along an unskilled spouse or child. Every year, there is a cleansing — members who are not pulling their weight are cast out.

Geography

The monastery and surrounding buildings are situated on top of a large, yet low plateau located within a secluded valley. Damaged during the Night of Fire, the plateau now suffers a slight tilt and numerous cracks — although the overall integrity still seems strong. Built within the plateau and winding deep within the earth are a series of catacombs and warrens, used to store the wine created by the monks who once lived there. Perhaps a half-mile to the west of the monastery is one of the sheer valley walls that now stands 100 ft. taller than Before. Spilling from it is the waterfall that gives this settlement its name. Nearly 200 ft. wide, the Onyx Falls fills the valley with the constant sound of crashing water. For some reason, the water turns an inky black as it falls, keeping this color for nearly a mile before returning to normal.

To the north, the valley stretches out normally for nearly 10 miles before abruptly ending at a plain of black volcanic glass. On the lip of the eastern valley way is a enormous boulder hanging over the edge that seems to defy gravity and has become the focus of a cult made up of Loranthians, who have decorated it with hundreds of drawing of faces. To the south lies a fertile vineyard that refuses to grow anything but grapes.

Resources and Needs

Vrewl is tough but usually fair. He takes his responsibilities to the community of Onyx Falls seriously, and will do just about

anything to ensure it survives. That might mean making offers to people with experience in farming, smithing and combat that they can't refuse.

Ridge River

■ **Population:** 143 (135 humans, 5 dwarves, 2 rovers, 1 gnome)
■ **Survival:** Farming, logging and carpentry
■ **Motivation:** Rebuild, maintain civil order, protect outlying houses and farms. Keep local wizard at bay.
■ **Personality:** Stern, judgmental, militant, superstitious and intolerant. Afraid of the nearby wizard. Subtly racist.
■ **History:** A settlement in the middle of nowhere Before finds itself on a tempestuous new border, and struggles to protect the halo of farmsteads that depend upon it.
■ **Attitude toward magic:** Very distrustful, even to the point of not trusting skills or talents they do not clearly understand as not being magical.
■ **Government:** Barely democratic, with Mayor Kenly Grent leading a small group of town elders. Distrustful of non-humans.

Background

Once an average village in the middle of nowhere, Ridge River was nothing special. It was a human settlement with little contact with the outside world, specializing in preparing lumber gathered from the surrounding hills for transport deeper into the Empire. However, after the Night of Fire, Ridge River found itself more-or-less intact in the middle of the chaos.

The families in the farms and homesteads surrounding the village came to Ridge River looking for safety, and Kenly Grent, once little more than a foreman in this logging town, found himself having to be more than that. Given his leadership experience, he was voted mayor, and he quickly realized he had to be tough in order to keep everyone alive. During the Long Winter, his efficient nature kept most of the survivors alive, and when the Thaw came, many of the families were able to return to what was left of their homes and farmsteads. Even though less than a quarter remained usable, there is enough farmland to support Ridge River, and there will probably be enough left over for trading at harvest.

Grent believes that his no-nonsense attitude has kept everyone alive, and his practice of forming a full-time militia has protected them from the increasing number of incursions from the west. He feels that something bad is coming from the ruins of the mountains, and he wants to be ready.

Grent's more immediate fear is the strange new tower that has somehow appeared to the north (along with the other changes in geography), and the fact that there is a Necromancer or mage inside it who has sent messages and demands to farmers living nearby. Grent is superstitious, and fears magic. The people of Ridge River have punished visitors whom they believed were practicing magic. The mage is a bigger problem that needs to be dealt with as soon as possible, but he can't spare his own men to do it.

Traditions

Every man, woman and child who can carry a weapon must spend 12 hours a week on guard duty or patrol.

Geography

Ridge River sits at the end of a long ridge of hills that existed Before, and lies on the curving, fast Ridge River. The ridge used to be grassy and rolling, but now has sprouted what appears to be an ancient pine forest that stretches for about 50 miles north along the ridge. About a half-day north along the ridge is a strange tower that wasn't there Before. About a day's walk south and east are badlands, and to the west, the rugged shattered remains of the Primea Mountains can be seen, about a week away across a broken plain.

Resources and Needs

With all that lumber lying around, Ridge River is never without a few fires burning, and no one goes cold. There are plenty of arrows, bows and anything that can be made of wood. Metal is a big problem, and until the forge gets repaired, will remain so. Food and water are plentiful, so they have much to trade. What they need are good archers to train their militia, a blacksmith, and some women who are willing to stay and help repopulate.

Shipwreck

■ **Population:** 65 and growing (41 humans, 10 mongrels, 8 rovers, 4 Loranthians, 2 desert dwarves)
■ **Survival:** Hunter-gatherers, hoping to become agrarian. Willing to trade.
■ **Motivation:** Long-term sustainability through growth
■ **Personality:** Skeptical, judgmental, fair
■ **History:** A makeshift shelter that became a commune, on its way toward becoming a major town.
■ **Attitude toward magic:** Cautious, but pragmatic.
■ **Government:** Whan Cho settles disputes and guides the commune's efforts. He is an intelligent man who governs by wit, not brawn.

Background

A rover village ship that once traded between Cushulain and Ascondea along the Rappian River is at the center of Shipwreck. Its brightly painted masts jut up conspicuously

from the hull at odd angles in a stark juxtaposition to the dead fields surrounding the ship. Whatever brought the ship out into the plains that now surround it did not do so gently. The ship's hull, garishly painted with multi-colored, whirling designs similar to the tattoos worn by many rovers, is split in two from starboard to larboard. The head of the ship lies on its starboard side, while the stern came to rest on its larboard side. The red-painted foremast protrudes from the lolling bow and points due east, while the yellow mizzenmast points to the west. The main mast is being used as the center beam of a common house being constructed by the villagers.

After the Night of Fire, the masts were like beacons to those scanning the near featureless horizon for shelter from the cold. The first to find it was a rover named Whan Cho. After being ostracized from his village ship by his girlfriend's overprotective father who was the ship's captain, he had become a common laborer. He had been harvesting in the fields of Cushulain when the world nearly ended. He stumbled upon the ship through the ash, hoping to find other survivors — maybe even someone he knew. But the broken ship contained only dead rovers, strangers all.

In the following weeks, others came, mostly humans. Their natural wariness of rovers was overcome by sheer exhaustion. Seeing a rover in a rover ship, they assumed it was his and were grateful for the shelter it provided. Cho saw no need to correct their mistake and graciously accepted all comers.

The Night of Fire directed Cho down a path he could not have predicted. Once happy to work during the day, drink through his pay and start again — he now had a greater goal. He found he was adept at settling disputes among the survivors during the Long Winter. He created a fair plan to dole out the ship's goods, and the people followed it. In a way, he had risen to the pinnacle of rover society: He was a ship's captain, and he was good at it.

Cho never gave up hope that the Thaw would come. When it did, the people of the ship — his people — asked him what they should do. Cho told them to build.

They first dug a moat in a wide circle around the ship. They used some shovels crafted from oars and barrel staves to dig into the muddy ground. Cho directed them to toss the dirt onto the inner bank to create a low earthen wall, which they topped with whatever flotsam from the ship was not useful for anything else. Cho told them the wall and moat would help them defend themselves. From what, they did not know.

The survivors fell back upon the type of society that had gotten them through the Long Winter. Each person's talents were identified. The best hunters were given the metal-tipped spears made by the best craftsmen in the little group. The best cooks prepared the game for everyone to eat. Those with farming experience planted what few seeds the survivors had and traveled with the hunters to harvest more from any plants that, protected beneath the earth as seeds, emerged into the light as the snow melted away.



Everyone in Shipwreck had a place in the small society. The sense of purpose helped keep the despair away. They had come to rely on each other, which helped shape them into a solid community.

The warming weather brought other travelers now and then. They were greeted with distrust at first, but allowed to trade and given shelter if they posed no threat. Cho spoke with each one personally and weeded out those with no useful skills whom he thought might threaten his authority. The others he encouraged to stay, especially the strong but unambitious.

The people of Shipwreck have expanded outside the shelter of the broken ship hulls. Tents and crude sod structures surround the ship. The frame of a long common house is being built, and will be covered with hides to provide shelter for all should the winter come again.

Cho does not trust any users of magic. His rover upbringing taught him to be cautious and guarded around Beguilers, and he makes no attempt to quell rumors among the people of Shipwreck that only magic could have caused or prevented the Night of Fire. However, he is intelligent enough to make use of resources, both magical and mundane, should the situation present itself.

Cho might work with magic users who could benefit him or Shipwreck, but he would do so secretly. If his people accuse a visitor of using magic, he would not publicly attempt to intervene on the visitor's behalf.

Healers are a different story. Cho makes sure his people understand that healing skills and magic are distinct, because he would love to have a healer living in Shipwreck.

Traditions

Believing the east- and west-pointing masts of the ship in the center of their community have special meaning (and no doubt influenced by Cho's rover traditions), it is customary for the people of Shipwreck to thank the sun each day by bowing to it at sunrise and sunset.

The enfeebled, lame or sick who are not expected to recover — and therefore cannot contribute to the community — are expected to leave Shipwreck. Infants, if born healthy, are given every opportunity to grow into strong adults. Infants who are born with birth defects or are sick are often killed by their parents.

Polygamy is encouraged in order to expand the population of Shipwreck (and attract strong men to stay in the commune). Men must marry at least two women, and must provide for their wives and children.

The people of Shipwreck must use their talents to better the community as a whole.

Geography

Though he's not sure, Cho has told his people they are in the Freeland formerly known as Cushulain. It's his best guess given that's where he was when the Night of Fire struck, and many of his people are also from Cushulain. There are some burned forests nearby, but they aren't a good source of wood for the settlement, which is giving Cho serious headaches. They need to burn something at night, and he doesn't want to keep burning parts of the ship.

Resources and Needs

Shipwreck is a good spot to rest for the night — the residents have done a good job creating a defendable location, and work well together. Anyone with any degree of useful talent (especially healers) will be asked to stay after a few key people speak with them to see whether they'd be a good fit. What's really needed in Shipwreck is some wood and lumber that isn't part of the ship. Cho also wants some farmers to settle here, along with some seed and livestock. He misses having some culture around, too, but realizes it may be some time before that luxury is available. In the meantime, any performers or entertainers who stop by will be treated as favored guests.

Smoke Rise

- **Population:** 160 (65 island folk, 80 humans, 15 rovers)
- **Survival:** Fishing, foraging
- **Motivation:** Spiritual growth
- **Personality:** Accepting, purposeful
- **History:** Founded a few days after the Night of Fire as a means to cremate bodies.
- **Attitude toward magic:** The island folk of Smoke Rise are as accepting of magic as they were Before. Others are fearful, but respectful of it.
- **Government:** The people of Smoke Rise do their best not to anger The Many Who Is One. They follow the island folk tradition of giving thanks for the smallest gifts. They respect the rights of all things and all people who respect them, but are justified in any punishment they dole out to anyone or anything that does not treat them likewise.

Background

Brem Pakite knew he would live. When the Great Wave swept away his home, Gahr Dahl gave him a gift. It was his island's largest totem pole. Pakite saw the 20-ft.-long tree trunk carved with the many faces of the island folks' god while he was still under water. It rushed up to him in the swirling chaos and he held on tight as it floated to the surface. He used his first breaths to give thanks and didn't

let go as the currents carried him many miles toward the mainland.

Most of his people hadn't been so lucky. Of the thousands of bodies washed up on the rocky shore, most were island folk. Pakite was nearly overcome with sorrow as he made his way along the beach. So many souls were trapped here. He found a few people still living, and used what little magic he could to coax them back to consciousness, but almost fainted away himself. He prayed he'd find his father, one of his island's most powerful Listeners, among the living. He'd know what to do. But that was not part of Gahr Dahl's plan.

The body of his father was the first one Pakite burned, as he was taught, in order to send the man's soul safely to the Spirit World. He carried it up on the bluff, placed it carefully atop some flotsam that was plentiful along the coast, and lit it. But it was just one of thousands who needed help on their journey. For months, he and other survivors carried the dead from the shores to the pyre on the bluff. They erected the totem of Gahr Dahl near the fire and built shacks from driftwood around it as the weather grew colder. Each week, even in the coldest depths of the Long Winter, they collected ashes from the fire and released them to the wind. The huge pyre kept them warm, and their task gave them a reason to carry on.

The endless rising smoke drew other survivors, mostly humans from the Empire's cities who were not good anglers without their magical gear. The Loranthians were happy to feed them with the surplus of fish they caught, so long as the humans helped burn the bodies. The island folk had woven wide fish nets from reeds that grew near the water. They anchored them in the dirt in quiet bays at low tide, creating a corral that they closed off at high tide. When the ocean retreated again, the largest fish and crabs were left in the nets.

Before the end of the Long Winter, the non-islanders outnumbered the island folk, and a vote was taken whether to continue the difficult — and increasingly horrible — work of collecting the decaying corpses and body parts to burn them. Pakite spoke passionately of the need to maintain their traditions and the horrors of becoming a Lost Soul. He threatened to stop sharing the day's catch with the non-islanders, but they had learned the Loranthians' techniques and could fend for themselves. He could not sway the vote. He ordered them to leave the community, but they voted to stay. Pakite was not accustomed to majority rulings. He was the Shaman now.

In a last-ditch effort, he threatened to curse the hands of those who refused to feed bodies to the pyre. He hoped his peoples' reputation among the mainlanders would allow him to bluff his way through, because he knew his magic was not strong. His threat was met with nervous snorts of derision, but no one backed down.

With little choice, Pakite held his hands over the fire as he asked the spirits to burn those who would doom the trapped souls. He fully expected to pass out from the effort and fall into the fire, but the spirits granted his request. Four of the men began screaming in agony and dropped to the ground. They rolled about as they begged for help putting out the flames they felt consuming them, but there were no flames. Two threw themselves off the bluff into the shallow waters far below in a crazed attempt to stop the burning sensation. The others writhed on the ground for long minutes, unable to be consoled, until they finally stopped moving.

Half of the humans left and did not return. The other half began collecting bodies for the fire, beginning with the four people their Shaman had just killed.

Traditions

Each week, all the people of Smoke Rise take the carefully collected ashes of the bodies they have burned and ceremoniously scatter them on the wind. The ceremony, which is accompanied by chants in the island folks' language, is followed by prayer, song and dancing.

The people of Smoke Rise give thanks for every favor bestowed upon them by their god, Gahr Dahl: a sunny day, a rainy day, a good catch, a meal, a restful sleep, a vivid dream, a second chance … There is much to be thankful for in the After.

Geography

Smoke Rise sits atop a windswept bluff beside the ocean. To the north and south are rocky beaches. To the east is the sea. A barren plain lies to the west, dotted with the ruins of half a dozen towns and villages.

Resources and Needs

Smoke Rise has all the fish its inhabitants can eat, which is fairly valuable when most of the world is starving and desperate for food. Magical and mundane healing can also be found here. Boats, net making, weaving and other fishing-related crafts are common. Animists are able to practice their magic openly in Smoke Rise. The settlement needs more than just fish to eat, though. Agricultural resources are sorely needed, along with folk to defend the community and craftsmen with skills in building and smithing. The island folk also miss many of their native herbs.

His name hadn't always been Leeson. He'd chosen that name in the days after the Night of Fire. **It had been one more thing he'd stolen**, one more thing that hadn't been his.

He'd been a prisoner of the Empire, caught red-handed with a bag of diamonds and gold crowns, and the finest lock-picks stolen money could buy. He had been a second-story man, ***in and out of more noblewomens' bedrooms than an amorous Beguiler,*** when he had finally been tracked down by a bounty hunter.

Leeson had just began his second year of incarceration when **the world came to an end**.

The walls of the prison had fallen, and guards and inmates alike had fled in the face of the fire and ice and stars falling from the sky. **Leeson had needed to kill someone,** a convicted murderer who had tried to take his bag of quickly gathered supplies. It had been the first time he had ever killed anyone. He still felt bad about it sometimes.

Eventually, he found himself in the village of Kendarrow, a small community that was filled with just women and children. They told him how *all the men over 14 had caught fire*, just like that, burning to death in seconds. He was asked to stay. He saw no reason to refuse. There was food, water and shelter, and he hadn't been with a woman in some time. Now here were dozens, all needing help.

"What's your name?" asked one woman, a mother of two young boys. Her eyes were desperate, pleading. *She'd watched her husband burn* days before.

"Leeson," he said, taking the name of the first person he'd ever stolen from. The woman had hugged him in gratitude.

He realized that **he could leave his old name behind**. Perhaps he could leave behind all that went with it, too.

In time, others came to the village. Leeson was asked to make decisions about who would stay and who would go. Sometimes the decisions were difficult — turning sick people away because they could spread disease to the rest of the survivors, for instance. But people were glad that he was strong enough to make the decisions.

When they started calling him Mayor Leeson, he realized that his life had changed in ways he couldn't have imagined before the Night of Fire.

The Long Winter was difficult. Leeson lost the woman who had first asked his name, then had become his wife. He comforted her children as her body was burned on a pyre outside the walls of the settlement. Her passing was like an ache that never went away.

By the time the Thaw came, ***Leeson had become a strong and confident leader.*** He was quiet and careful, and still feared that someone would find out who he had been Before.

One day, a man came to Kendarrow. Leeson recognized him. The man traded some arrows for a few hours in the make-shift inn and some time with a willing woman. The visitor heard much about the Long Winter. About how the town had survived thanks to the strong leadership of Mayor Leeson.

Leeson waited until the visitor was about to leave before talking with him.

"I recognized you when you entered the village," Leeson told the bounty hunter, who was finishing his meal at the inn. "It's been a while."

"Leeson, eh? That's not the name I remember. **Didn't you get five years?"**

"Yes, I did. I … got out early. Are you going to tell anyone?"

The bounty hunter said nothing for a moment. He drank some more before speaking.

"Some men would've taken advantage of a situation like this," he said. "A smart man would."

He looked at Leeson, evaluating him. Then he stood, and Leeson stood too, taking a few paces back. People looked around, sensing the tension. They looked afraid, but it was clear that **they would step up and fight for their mayor, die for him**. Both Leeson and the bounty hunter saw it. In that moment, they exchanged a look that spoke of second chances, deserved and taken.

The bounty hunter nodded slowly to Leeson, then smiled. He picked up his backpack.

"Mayor Leeson. **You're a smart man.** Good for you." he said.

He walked out of the inn, *taking Leeson's past and his secret with him.*

Chapter 4: Character Creation

"Who are you and why shouldn't I kill you?"

Characters are the center of the story in *Desolation*. Their motivations, personalities and histories form the backbone of the game. Your character should be fun to roleplay and add to other players' enjoyment of the game.

Characters should be created during the first session. By sitting down together with the gamemaster and other players, everyone can discuss which concepts, motivations, personalities, skills and talents will work best together. The GM is responsible for ensuring all concepts will have a place in the campaign.

The character creation steps below build upon one another, like layers of bricks in a wall. Following each step in order will make it easy to generate a character you'll look forward to playing — and one that adds to the story in a positive way.

Character Creation Steps

Step 1: *Decide on a archetype (page 63).*

An archetype represents your character's role and is used as a guide for character creation. Use the archetype examples provided, or make up one of your own.

Step 2: *Select your character's race (page 65).*

Dwarves, elves, gnomes, Loranthians, mongrels and rovers all have different physiological traits, as compared to a human baseline. They also speak different languages. All characters begin with two languages. See the Linguistics Skill on page 80 for more information.

Step 3: *Outline your motivation, personality and history (page 70).*

What did your character do in the Before? What's he or she like now? What drives him or her? Your character's motivation, personality and history (MPH) sum up your character.

Step 4: *Choose Primary Attributes (page 71).*

Purchase Primary Attributes using your character's MPH as a guide. You have 15 Attribute points with which to buy Primary Attributes ratings, which are purchased on a one-for-one basis. You must put at least one point, but no more than five points, in each of the six Attributes.

Primary Attribute Rating	Description
0	Abysmal
1	Poor
2	Average
3	Good
4	Great
5	Excellent
6+	Amazing

Step 5: *Calculate Secondary Attributes (page 74)*

- **Size** = 0 (humans, elves, dwarves, rovers and some mongrels)
- **Size** = -1 (Loranthians, gnomes and some mongrels)
- **Size** = +1 (some mongrels)
- **Move** = Strength + Dexterity
- **Perception** = Intelligence + Willpower
- **Initiative** = Dexterity + Intelligence
- **Defense** = Body + Dexterity – Size
- **Stun** = Body
- **Health** = Body + Willpower + Size

Step 6: *Choose Skills (page 76).*

You have 15 points with which to purchase Skill Levels on a one-to-one basis. You may purchase up to five levels in any one Skill at character creation. Some Skills may be specialized in, while others are so broad that a discipline within them must be focused on.

Skill Rating	Description
0-1	Abysmal
2-3	Poor
4-5	Average
6-7	Good
8-9	Great
10-11	Excellent
12+	Amazing

Step 7: *Choose a Talent and Flaws (page 83 and 98).*
Talents represent your character's special abilities, and Flaws represent your character's physical, mental or social shortcomings. You may choose one Talent at character creation and multiple Flaws.

Step 8: *Spend experience points (page 103).*
Your character starts play with a certain amount of life experience. You have 15 experience points to spend on Primary Attributes, Skill Levels, Skill Specializations or additional Talents. Unspent experience points may be carried into play.

Trait	Experience Point Cost
Primary Attribute	Each new Skill Level x 5 points
Skill	Each new Skill Level x 3 points
Skill Specialization	3 points
Talent	15 points

Step 9: *Fill in the details.*
Now that you have determined your character's skills and abilities, it's time to fill in the rest of the details. Name your character and write a physical description. Firm up a character background and pick out his gear.

Step 10: *Calculate starting Style points (page 103).*
If you took a Flaw during character creation, you start play with one Style point. The GM may award additional Style points for writing a character background, creating props, writing a detailed character background, or other activities

Archetypes

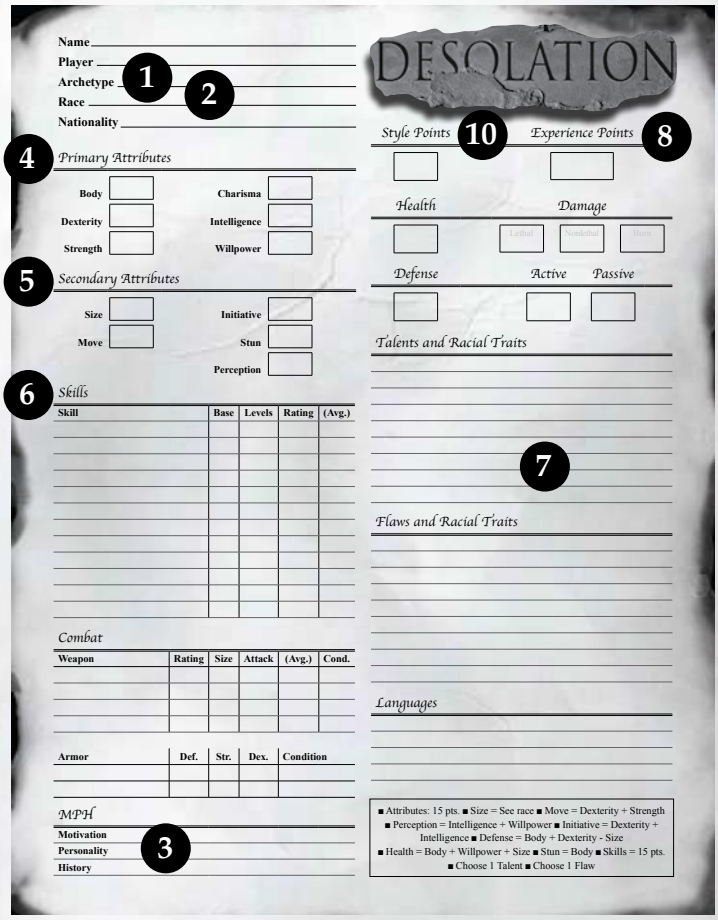
Desolation's survivors have many different skills and backgrounds from before the Apocalypse. Some may be ill-equipped to live in the After. Others may have skills that are quite useful in the post-apocalyptic world. A character concept describes this in broad strokes. It should let someone know in a few words who your character is and was. It can include things like race, profession, personality traits, philosophy or heritage.

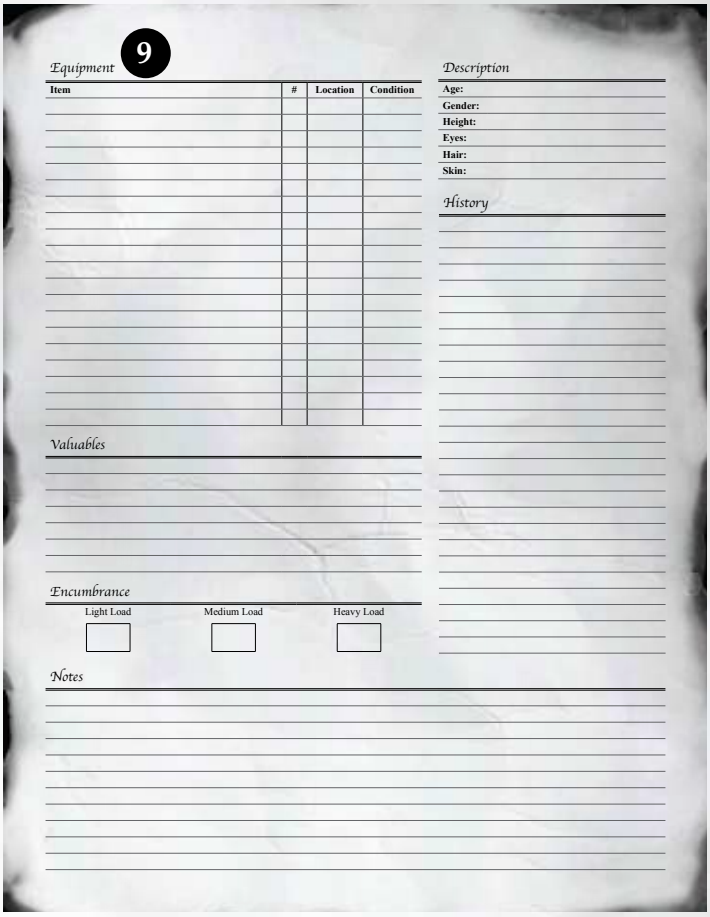
Below are some archetype examples that can be used or modified for use in *Desolation*. This is by no means an exhaustive list. Feel free to create and play your own archetypes.

Academic

The search for knowledge drives the academic. They hunger for answers and thirst for truth, seeking it out wherever it may be found. It is up to the academic to see to the needs of future generations and continue their pursuit of knowledge.

Examples: Historian, Alchemist, Philosopher, Astronomer





Craftsman

Taken for granted in the Before, craftsmen are the skilled men and women who possess the power to build and create. In the After, their services are desperately needed.

Examples: Smith, Carpenter, Wainwright, Mason

Criminal

Some men and women who will do whatever it takes to reach their goals, even if it means breaking the law. These people can range from the poor man who steals to feed his family, to the sociopath who kills for sport. In the After, there often is no law, which begs the question of whether they're still criminals …

Examples: Bandit, Guild Thief, Murderer, Prostitute

Everyman

Not everyone is born to wealth or achieves greatness. In fact, most are simple people who just go about their lives — unremarkable to the world at large and forgotten by history and poets. These are the men and women who do all the unseen and unappreciated tasks that are vital to society. Accustomed to rolling up their sleeves and doing an honest day's work, the everyman will be more prepared than others for the arduous life that lies ahead.

Examples: Farmhand, Herder, Laborer, Servant



Healer

In every civilization there are those who tend wounds and sickness, no matter how primitive or cultured they may be. In the After, the healer will find many patients, but the healing arts seem like magic to many. More than a few healers have lost their lives trying to save others.

Examples: Herbalist, Chirgeon, Medicine Man, Apothecary

High Born

Born to power (and often wealth), these men and women led lives filled with privilege and opportunity. Many think it was an easy life, but more often than not, it was a life of duty and high expectations. In the After, status and breeding mean less than surviving until the next harvest. But this distinction may help them to shape and lead the world.

Examples: Noble, Chieftain, Aristocrat, Diplomat

Holy Person

In the After, not only have most churches and temples been destroyed, but so have many people's convictions. On the other hand, many now turn to religion to explain what has happened. The holy person must be able to inspire the hopeless and give answers to those who have lost their faith. It is an arduous task, but perhaps the most important one in the After.

Examples: Priest, Shaman, Listener, Faithful Farmer

Merchant

Although they come in many shapes and sizes, from the world traveler who deals in exotic merchandise to the street vendor who hawks his simple wares, merchants are the same at heart: They sell things. In the After, supplies are low and demand is high — though money isn't worth what it once was. Still, there are excellent trades to be made by those who are willing to take the risk.

Examples: Trader, Spice Merchant, Street Vendor, Shop Keep

Outdoorsman

The comforts of the city may appeal to some, but the outdoorsman is more comfortable beneath the stars than a roof. These men and women thrive in nature, making a life in an untamed land where few could survive. In the After, the outdoorsman may find the world will be more to their liking. Their skills and knowledge will prove invaluable in the times ahead.

Examples: Forester, Woodcutter, Ranger, Scout

Performer

Many things can fuel a performer. Perhaps it is the desire for fame and fortune, or maybe they practice one of the arts for art's sake. In the dark times that follow the Night of Fire, some think

there's no need for pretty paintings or songs, but performers know better. They believe their art will help sustain the world and enable the survivors to endure at least another day.

Examples: Traveling Bard, Sculptor, Storyteller, Painter

Scoundrel

There are those who break the law, and then there are those who merely bend it. These are the gamblers who will take your money, the temptresses who will break your heart and the grifters who will do both. The scoundrel may find life in the After filled with less opportunity than Before. However, their guile and talents will be useful tools.

Examples: Fortune Teller, Gambler, Pawn Broker, Seductress

Spell Caster

The glory days of magic have ended. Those who wish to continue down the path of magic must be ready to endure many obstacles. Not only has the world changed, but so has the very nature of magic. Spell casters are few and far between, but they are still a powerful force if they are willing to accept the risks from Burn and those who blame them for the Night of Fire.

Examples: Sorcerer, Necromancer, Listener, Primalist

Traveler

Some people always want to see what lies beyond the next hill or curve in the road. Filled with wanderlust, the traveler is a person who has nowhere to call home except for the saddle. Their sense of wonder and eagerness to explore will serve them well in the After, where everything has changed.

Examples: Explorer, Pioneer, Sailor, Rover

Warrior

Warriors exist both to protect and to conquer, sometimes for profit or even sport. Some are noble and principled, while others are unscrupulous and immoral. Those who know how to handle themselves in a fight will find themselves at an advantage in a world where might often makes right.

Examples: Legionnaire, Mercenary, Gladiator, Soldier, Brawler

Races

Now that you know what kind of character you want to play, it is time to build him or her. The first step in this process is choosing your character's race and noting racial physiological traits, which will affect Primary and Secondary Attributes. A synopsis of each race is listed below. For more information on the history and homelands unique to each race, see the Before chapter.

Race	Physiological Traits
Desert Dwarf	Darkvision, Hardy, Resistance, Dense, Sensitive eyes, Slow
Mountain Dwarf	Darkvision, Hardy, Resistance, Broken compass, Dense, Slow
Elf	Indefatigable, Keen hearing, Musical, Unnatural
Gnome	Mental acuity, Gnomish subconscious, Heaven sense, Reject magic, Slow, Small
Human	None
Island Folk	Disease Resistance, Limber, Nimble, Slow, Small, Voracious
Mongrel	Variable, see page 69
Rover	Exotic, Farsight, Waterborne, Susceptible, Slight

Dwarves

Though of the same race, mountain and desert dwarves are culturally distinct. Both have an average life span of 110 years. Descriptions of each are listed below.

Desert Dwarves

Desert dwarves are squat and stand about 4½ ft. tall. They keep their beards cropped shorter than mountain dwarves and have swarthier skin. Desert dwarves wear light-colored clothing in multiple layers, often covering their heads with it against the heat of the day and to help shade their eyes.

First impressions: A combination of their clothing, tanned skin and glass weapons gives desert dwarves an alien aura, especially to those familiar with mountain dwarves.

Common names: Dwarven common names consist of a first name, followed by a clan name. Examples of first names

Building a Party

Talk to the other players about the character concepts each of you will be playing. Everyone should know what role his or her character fills in the party. In addition, make sure to define each character's area of expertise.

By the same token, it's a good idea to talk about character motivations with the other players. You don't have to be explicit about your character's motivation if you don't want to, but it helps to know which ones are incompatible with the rest of the party. Even if everyone knows his or her character's role, the game could dissolve into in-fighting if characters have conflicting goals. Discussing motivations ahead of time lets the group set the level of interpersonal conflict desired for the game.

include Kardar, Lugdun, Dooghan, Marghan and Hengen. Examples of clan names include Kedaghin, Guhncleve and Barshuun.

In brief: After following their prophet away from their mountain home, the desert dwarves formed the community of Oukal in the Saikin Wastes. They survive the desert heat by dwelling in salt mines during the day. For more information, see the Before chapter.

Desert dwarf physiological traits:

- Darkvision: Ignore any Perception penalties from darkness.
- Hardy: One extra die whenever you spend Style points on Body-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.
- Resistance: +2 to any check to resist poison. You are immune to the poison of the Deep Horrors and the fungi they carry.
- Day blindness: -1 to Perception rolls in bright light.
- Dense: -4 to all swim attempts.
- Slow: Movement rate is reduced by 1.

Mountain Dwarves

Mountain dwarves look similar to their desert cousins. They are the same height, averaging 4½ ft. tall. Their long beards, pale complexion and clothing set them apart, however. Mountain dwarves who are not political officials of the church often wear drab, comfortable clothing. Church officials wear gray robes adorned with five jewels that represent the Five Pillars.

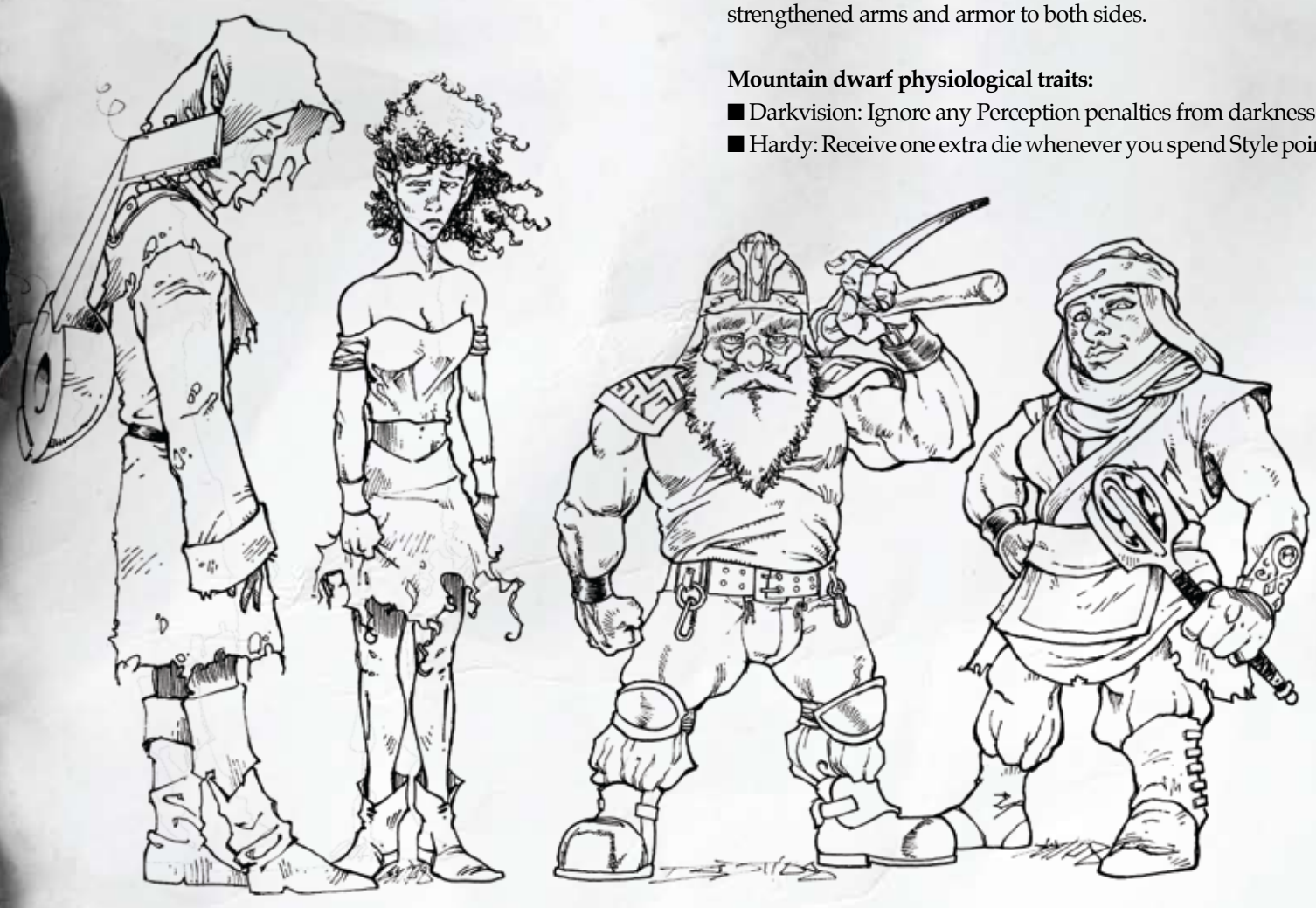
First impressions: Mountain dwarves are shrewd business people and devout believers. They have a reputation for enjoying their drinks, thanks to their tolerance to alcohol and inclination to loosen up when leaving the confines of the mountains.

Common names: Mountain dwarves' first names are similar to the desert cousins; however, their clan names are often "Ascondeanized" into names such as Stonebreaker, Darkdelver, Blackspan, Greenstone and Coalheart.

In brief: The dwarves of Cair Dhurn were part of a theocracy devoted to the Five Pillars. Every facet of their lives revolved around the Five Pillars, from politics to mining and forging to fighting the Deep Horrors. Their location between the civilizations of the east and west served them well when selling rune-strengthened arms and armor to both sides.

Mountain dwarf physiological traits:

- Darkvision: Ignore any Perception penalties from darkness.
- Hardy: Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points



Elves *Dwarves*

on Body-based rolls above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

■ Resistance: +2 to any check to resist poison. You are immune to the poison of the Deep Horrors and the fungi they carry.

■ Broken compass: -2 to all navigation rolls because your natural connection with the world has been broken.

■ Dense: -4 to all swim attempts.

■ Slow: Movement rate is reduced by 1.

Elves

On average, elves are taller than humans, but slighter and more graceful. Their hair colors run the gamut from blond to black. Their almond-shaped eyes, too, have a range of shades that include blues, browns, greens and grays. Elves tend to be fair-skinned. They have pointed ears and long fingers. Elves used to be a long-lived race, but now live about 90 years.

First impressions: Many elves wander the lands like beaten dogs waiting for the next kick to the ribs. Others have the regal look of fallen kings and queens. A great sense of shame hangs over them.

Common names: Elven names tend to reflect the Song that made up their lives for so much of their existence. Since the Song was lost, all that remains is this tiny reminder in the sound of their names. Examples include Annalaris Loranthalrone, Ten'tara Marestel, Vel'maral Annatha and Lor'nara Solnuran.

In brief: The vagabond race of elves has not fared well since being banished from Nature 600 years ago. They cling to the lowest rung of society by slender fingers. Still, they revere Nature.

Elven physiology traits:

■ Indefatigable: Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points on Willpower-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

■ Keen hearing: +2 bonus to hearing Perception rolls.

■ Musical: +2 bonus to musical Perform rolls.

■ Unnatural: Animals and plants receive a +1 dice on attack rolls against elves. Elves receive -2 to all Skill rolls in woodlands. If elves stay in any place too long, crops fail and animals get sick.

Gnomes

Gnomes stand about 3 ½ ft. tall, but are well-proportioned apart from their large heads. A Gearhaven gnome dresses in practical clothing. Finders and Keepers also dress practically, which means they have many pockets in their traveling garb that are filled with every item they might need. Mystics are so tied to the Ancestral Stream that they wear flowing robes and have a flowing speech pattern. Gnomes live about 200 years.



Mongrels



Gnomes

First impressions: Other races don't take gnomes seriously. Their size and long-term views make them easy to dismiss.

Common names: Gnomes have two names, followed by a title, and tend to use all three when dealing with each other. They don't like the human habit of using only one name, and would prefer to be referred to by at least two of their names at all times. Examples include: Teltar Gensh, Keeper; Rellin Pulveen, Farmer; Venteen Orien, Watcher of Sheep; Gregor Kent, Cook.

In brief: Having avoided creating an Apocalypse centuries ago, the gnomes were the only race who predicted the Night of Fire. They prepared and tried to warn others, but no one would listen. Gnomes commemorate the Forgetting — an ancient spell they cast to erase their knowledge of magic and technology — annually by remembering what is important today in their own lives. Celebrations include reading long lists, and making resolutions and toasts.

Gnomish physiology traits:

■ Gnomish subconscious: Ignore the -2 penalty for using Academic and Linguistic Skills untrained.

■ Heaven sense: Gnomes always know the time of day and the season and can visualize the heavens with remarkable accuracy.

■ Mental acuity: Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points on Intelligence-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

■ Reject magic: The Forgetting forces gnomes to resist even beneficial magic. Spells to heal or enhance must be resisted.

■ Small: -1 Size.

■ Slow: Movement rate is reduced by 2.

Humans

Humans come in many shapes, sizes and skin tones. They average 5 ft. 10 inches in height. Their hair can be black, brown, blond, red or gray. Their eye colors range from blue to green and brown to black. In the eastern lands, skin tones vary from a pale white to a rich tan. In the western lands, skin tones tend to be a ruddier color. Within the fashion-focused Empire, there were slight regional differences in clothing styles, enough to distinguish someone's origin by how they dressed. Outside of the Empire, clothing was usually dictated by necessity.

In brief: The history of the human race is long and varies by nationality. It shares a common thread of expansion through



Rovers ***Humans*** ***Loranthians***

conquest of their surroundings and neighbors. As some built the Empire, others tamed the western wilderness, pushed back the monstrous races to the north or fought to carve out civilization in the Saikin Wastes. They were shaped by their surroundings. Humans from the Warlands learned being nomadic was the best way to survive, while those in and around the Empire learned to rely on the fertile land and sea. Their population grew rapidly, and soon they outnumbered all other races.

Because humans are the most populous and widely dispersed race, they are the baseline of racial traits. They have no special physiological qualities attributed to race.

Island Folk, aka Loranthians

Island folk stand about 4 ft. tall on average and have skin tones ranging from a deep olive to a rich brown. They have black hair and brown or black eyes. They often wear colorful clothing and traditional island accoutrements, such as bracelets or necklaces made of seashells, nuts, animal bones or woven reeds. They seem to physically age quickly, becoming gray, wrinkled and stooped by age 40. However, their average lifespan is 80 years.

First impressions: Though outwardly friendly, the Loranthians' beliefs do not place any importance on personal hygiene.

Common names: Often unpronounceable by the visiting Ascondean explorers, Loranthian names were Ascondeanized into more speakable forms. These have survived to the present day. Also, "Hey, Splint!" was the generic catch-all name yelled at most island folk by humans. Their true names are rarely shared with strangers, thanks to their superstitious beliefs regarding names and power. Examples of the nicknames they share with others include Jaz, Pallo, Neek, Quetta, Yenal and Verollo

In brief: Though slight of build, the islanders' reputation for curse magic garners them much respect. Very little about the outward appearance of island folk would indicate they are deserving of such respect. Their laid-back attitude about everything — from what they eat to what they look like — stems from their belief that everything is connected, therefore the difference between clean and dirty, for instance, are inconsequential.

Island folk physiology traits:

■ Disease resistance: +2 on rolls to resist disease.

■ Limber: +2 to climbing or to fit into or through a small space.

■ Nimble: Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points on Dexterity-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive. It does not affect Secondary Attributes such as Defense and Initiative.

■ Slow: Movement rate is reduced by 2.

■ Small: -1 Size.

■ Voracious: Must consume twice the amount of food as an average human.

Mongrels

Mongrels' mixed heritage churns out some surprising physical characteristics. Though always humanoid, some blur the boundaries between man and beast. They may be born with vestigial limbs, partially covered with fur or scales, have oversized incisors or even tusks and claws. Some have thick, leathery skin, while others have green- or gray-tinged skin. Some have large, pointy ears while others appear to have no ears at all. All sorts of maladies and birth defects are common in the mongrel bloodline. Though rare, some mongrels look very much like humans. Others could easily pass for Oruskans.

First impressions: Most races view mongrels with a certain amount of disgust, fear or pity. Their heritage evokes distrust and uncertainty.

Common names: Mongrels' first names usually follow the pattern of the dominant culture of the area, human or otherwise. Last names usually denote the mongrels' homeland, when they have one. Family names are uncommon. Examples include Krek of Kharhut, Guk of Ridge River and Ruul of Seaside.

In brief: Mongrels often band together in tribes led by a chieftain. The chieftain is often a Shaman, or is supported by a Shaman because of the reverence and fear most mongrels have for magic. Tribes are more likely to be nomadic hunter/gatherers than agrarian. Mongrels often revere their elderly out of respect for their ability to survive for so long. Mongrels often blame Nature for their disfigurements and for the Night of Fire. Mongrels count surviving another day as a small victory against Nature.

Mongrel physiology traits:

Pick two:

■ Brute: Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points on Strength-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

■ Darkvision: Ignore any Perception penalties from darkness.

■ Enhanced sense: +2 to Perception rolls involving one sense selected at the time of character creation.

■ Giant: +1 Size (Cannot be taken with the Small trait).

■ Natural weapon: +1 point of lethal damage when using the Brawl skill because of claws, fangs or another natural weapon.

■ Thick hide: +1 to Defense.

Pick two:

■ Disfigured: -2 to any rolls when appearance is a factor.

■ Fragile: -1 to Stun.

■ Gnarled hands: -2 to rolls requiring fine manipulation.

■ Malformed: -2 to any Athletics or Acrobatics skill rolls.

■ Slow: Movement rate is reduced by 2.

■ Small: -1 Size. (Cannot be taken with the Giant trait.)

Rovers

Rovers are slender in frame and, on average, a bit shorter than humans. Their olive skin is often decorated with swirling tattoos. Rovers have dark hair and almond-shaped eyes. Some rovers have webbed hands and feet, and others are rumored to have gills. They wear light, colorful layers of clothing that repel water. Their clothing is made of Rover Silk, a material they brought from their homeland. It is prized for its light weight and water resistance. It is also common for rovers to wear reed cloaks.

First impressions: With their tattoos and brightly colored clothes, rovers stand out from the crowd. Some people are fascinated with their exotic heritage, but this is tempered by the rovers' reputation as grifters and scoundrels.

Common names: Rovers living among humans sometimes adopt human names. Examples of names in their native tongue include Cha Ci-nen, Tsai Luag, Han Veng, and Pau Hoim.

In brief: Rovers are most comfortable at sea. Almost all rovers revere the horizon — especially during sunrise and sunset. Their only significant holiday, Landfall, occurs every few years when the "Sun" constellation is due in the West. During this holiday, rovers make landfall and spend weeks celebrating. Because space is at a premium aboard their ships, tattoos are traditionally given as gifts. They are often received on birthdays, landfalls, marriages, and on other important events. Rovers enjoy playing mind games with each other and other races. They respect cleverness like orcs respect strength.

Rover physiology traits:

■ Exotic: Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points on Charisma-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

■ Farsight: Ignore moderate (-2) Perception roll penalties for distance.

■ Waterborne: +4 to Swim rolls and the length of time you can hold your breath.

■ Susceptible: -2 to resist disease.

■ Slight: -2 to feats of strength, such as heavy lifting, pushing or breaking items. This does not affect Melee or Brawl rolls.

Motivation, Personality and History

Your character's motivation, personality and history (MPH), allow you to understand how they react to certain situations and why they react that way. Roleplaying your character according to his or her MPH gives you more opportunities to earn Style points.

Motivation

Motivation explains why your character does what he does. What drives him to put his life on the line or hunker down? Answering these questions will help define your character's motivation:

■ What were the character's goals, ambitions and dreams before the Night of Fire?

■ Who and what did your character lose during the Night of Fire and Long Winter?

■ How did the Apocalypse change your character's motivation?

■ What drives your character in the After?

■ How do his goals in the After relate to those set in the Before?

Motivations will vary according to a character's personality and history. The table below lists just a few common examples, but is not meant to be comprehensive.

Motivation	Description
Rebuild	You seek to restore the world to what it once was, or what you think it should have been.
Duty	You continue to follow a code or organization from Before.
Faith	Your belief in a higher power guides your actions.
Greed	You want to accumulate as much wealth as possible.
Discovery	You want to understand how the world has changed.
Love	Your strong feelings for someone, someplace or something drives you.
Power	You take advantage of the opportunity to fill the leadership void left by the Night of Fire.
Protect	Your actions are dictated by the need to protect those weaker than you.
Honor	You live your life by a strict code that guides your actions.
Knowledge	You are driven to understand the world and the events around you.
Fame	You desperately want to make a name for yourself.
Redemption	You try to redeem yourself for a past act.
Revenge	Your thirst for vengeance dictates your actions.

Personality

Personality tells you how your character views the world and reacts to it. It gives insight in how she will try to accomplish her goals and deal with adversity.

■ What was your character's outlook on life Before the Apocalypse? How has it changed?

■ Does your character's race, religion and/or country of origin affect her outlook?

■ How does she view the events of the Night of Fire? Is she angered, saddened, remorseful, stoic, accepting, happy, crazed?

■ What in your character's personality gives her hope?

■ Does your character think anything good has come from the Apocalypse?
■ What opportunities does your character see in the post-Apocalyptic world?
■ What does she miss most from Before, and why?

History

History tells you where your character came from and what you endured. It is particularly important in the world After because your character will have had a life Before and survived many hardships during the Night of Fire and Long Winter. Answering these questions will help mold your character's history:

■ Where is your character from?
■ How did your character make a living in the Before?
■ Who were his family, friends, co-workers and enemies? Does he know whether any survived?
■ What hobbies did your character have in the Before?
■ Did anything traumatic happen to him in his life Before?
■ Where was he and what was he doing during the Apocalypse?
■ How did he survive the Night of Fire?
■ Where did he spend the Long Winter?
■ How did he survive the Long Winter, and where?
■ Has he met the other characters in the party? If so, how? What does he think of them?
■ Was he wounded, scarred or disabled during the Apocalypse?

The events of the Night of Fire are an excellent opportunity for characters to take a variety of Flaws that reflect the degree to which they were affected by the Night. Perhaps they lost an eye or a limb, or have been left disfigured by burns and scars. Even if he or she came through the night physically intact, there are mental flaws that may have been suffered.

During the character creation process, it is not necessary to write an entire book (or even an entire paragraph) about your character's MPH. Both motivation and personality can often be summed up in a sentence each — maybe even in a single word. Of course, as history creates motivations formed by personality, you may be surprised by how complete an MPH your character has at the end of the character creation process.

Primary Attributes

Once you have selected your character's race, you must determine six Primary Attributes. These represent the character's inherent physical, mental and social prowess. In game terms, Attributes are the basis for all of your character's Skills and special abilities. Virtually every die roll that you make in the game will involve one of your character's Attributes.

Attribute	Represents
Body	Constitution and toughness
Dexterity	Speed, coordination and agility
Strength	Vigor and muscle power
Charisma	Confidence and personality
Intelligence	Reason and intellect
Willpower	Courage and resolve

You have 15 points to spend on the six Primary Attributes, which are purchased on a one-for-one basis. Each Attribute can be no greater than 5 or less than 1.

Body

Body represents your character's constitution and toughness. It determines how much damage your character can take, how resistant he is to injury and how long he can go without food and water. Characters with high Body ratings are rugged and tough, while characters with low Body ratings are frail and sickly.

Note: *Island folk, gnomes and some mongrels are a Size -1, which means they have a maximum Body of 4. Some mongrels are a Size +1, which means they have a maximum Body of 6.*

Body Rolls

Body is rolled when your character attempts to fight off disease, resist the effects of a drug, potion or poison. It is also used to determine how long your character can hold his or her breath.

Resistance

Dice Pool: Body rating x 2; type: Reflexive Action

Make a Body roll when your character is poisoned or exposed to a contagious disease. The Difficulty of the roll depends on the potency of the toxin or disease. Failing the roll means that your character is poisoned, or has contracted the illness and will suffer its effects (see page 190).

Disease/Toxin	Difficulty
Mild food poisoning	1
Common cold	2
Malaria	3
Snake venom	4
Deep Horror venom	5

Dexterity

Dexterity represents your character's speed, coordination and agility. It determines your character's ability to avoid damage, and how quickly he or she reacts to danger. It is also the base for ranged combat, stealth and riding skills. Characters with high Dexterity ratings are quick and graceful, while characters with low Dexterity ratings are slow and clumsy.

Dexterity Rolls

Dexterity is rolled when your character tries to catch something before it falls or snatch something before someone else does. It also determines how well your character keeps his or her balance under hazardous conditions.

Balance

Dice Pool: Dexterity x 2*; type: Reflexive Action

Make a Dexterity roll when your character is in danger of losing his or her balance. The number of successes you roll must equal or exceed the Difficulty of the task being attempted in order for your character to keep his or her footing. Failing to roll enough successes means that your character loses his or her balance and falls (see page 189).

Balance	Difficulty
Walking on uneven ground	1
Walking across a log	2
Hopping from stone to stone	3
Walking along a narrow ledge	4
Walking a tightrope	5

** Characters with the Athletics or Acrobatics Skill may substitute either Skill rating for this roll.*

Strength

Strength represents your character's vigor and muscle power. It determines how much damage your character does in close combat, and how much weight he or she can carry. It is the base for close combat and athletic skills. Characters with high Strength ratings are strong and powerful, while characters with low Strength ratings are weak and lethargic.

Note: Island folk, gnomes and some mongrels are a Size -1, which means they have a maximum Strength of 4. Some mongrels are a size +1, which means they have a maximum Strength of 6.

Strength Rolls

Strength is rolled any time your character tries to lift or break an object through brute force. It also includes shoving another character, or taking an item away from someone.

Feats of Strength

Dice Pool: Strength x 2*; type: Standard Action

Make a Strength roll when your character attempts to pick up an item. The Difficulty of the task depends upon the weight of the object. Failing to roll enough successes means that your character did not pick up the item, or only partially lifted it.

Weight	Difficulty
50 lbs.	1
100 lbs.	2
250 lbs.	3
500 lbs.	4
750 lbs.	5

** Characters with the Athletics Skill may substitute that Skill rating for this roll.*

Charisma

Charisma represents your character's confidence and personality. It determines how persuasive and attractive your character is, and is the base for interpersonal and performance skills. Animism, Beguiling and Elemental magical traditions rely on Charisma. Characters with high Charisma are charming and magnetic, while characters with low Charisma are rude and unattractive.

Charisma Rolls

Charisma is rolled whenever your character tries to charm or ingratiate himself to someone else. It also represents your character's ability to befriend animals.

Influence

Dice Pool: Charisma x 2*; type: Standard Action

Make a Charisma roll whenever your character tries to influence a non-player character (NPC). The Difficulty of the task is equal to the NPC's Willpower rating. Allies loyal to you are easier to sway, so you receive a +2 bonus to your Charisma roll. Conversely, sworn enemies are harder to influence, so you suffer a –2 penalty to your Charisma roll.

The GM determines the NPC's initial attitude toward your character and each success rolled in excess of their Willpower rating improves their attitude by one step. Failing to roll enough successes degrades the NPC's opinion of your character by one step for each success fewer than the required number.

Attitude
Loyal (+2 bonus)
Helpful
Friendly
Neutral
Unfriendly
Hostile
Enemy (-2 penalty)

** Characters with the Diplomacy Skill may substitute that Skill rating for this roll.*

Intelligence

Intelligence represents your character's reason and intellect. It determines how well your character senses the world and how quickly he or she reacts. It is the base for all knowledge and craft skills. Necromancy, Primal, Rune and Sorcery magical traditions also rely on Intelligence. Characters with high Intelligence ratings are clever and observant, while characters with low Intelligence ratings are dim-witted and inattentive.

Intelligence Rolls

Intelligence is rolled whenever your character tries to recall a piece of information or commit something to memory. It also determines how proficient your character is at recognizing patterns and putting information together.

Reason

Dice Pool: Intelligence x 2*; type: Reflexive Action

Make an Intelligence roll when your character tries to make sense of a piece of information or understand the reasons behind a series of events. The Difficulty of the roll depends on the complexity of the information or situation. Failing this roll means that your character is unable to figure it out, or only figures out part of what is going on.

Reason	Difficulty
Clear directions	1
Complex instructions	2
Bizarre situations	3
Esoteric information	4
Arcane mysteries	5

** Characters with the Investigation Skill may substitute that Skill rating for this roll.*

Willpower

Willpower represents your character's courage and resolve. It determines how hard it is for others to manipulate your character. It also represents your character's will to live, and determines how much damage he can take in combat. Mysticism and faith-based talents also rely on Willpower. Characters with high Willpower ratings are courageous and determined, while characters with low Willpower ratings are craven and gullible.

Willpower Rolls

Willpower is rolled when someone tries to manipulate your character's thoughts, via magic or otherwise, or when his life is in danger. It also represents resistance to pain and torture.

Courage

Dice Pool: Willpower x 2; type**:** Reflexive Action

Make a Willpower roll whenever your character is in a life-threatening situation. The Difficulty of the roll depends on how threatening the situation is. Failing this roll means that your character is shaken and will try to get away from the situation as soon as possible.

Courage	Difficulty
Facing danger	1
Being hurt or wounded	2
Being maimed or disfigured	3
Facing certain death	4
Facing a slow and agonizing death	5

Starting Off Stronger

Some GMs may want the characters in their campaigns to begin play slightly more powerful than the standard *Desolation* character. This is not uncommon, especially considering how harsh and unforgiving the setting can be. Below are several options that can help players create more dynamic characters who will have a greater chance of surviving. If you choose to start off stronger, select only one of the following options.

- Give characters an extra Attribute point (or two) to spend. This will lead to stronger characters all around because all Skills are based on Attributes.
- Give characters two starting Talents instead of one. This will lead to more diverse and interesting characters, and helps to distinguish similar archetypes from one another.
- Give characters an extra 15 starting Skill points. This will create more capable characters who will have greater breadth and depth in their chosen Skills.

Extra Talents or Skill points can add extra layers to a character's history, especially if they are tied into the time after the Night of Fire. The Long Winter is an excellent opportunity for characters to gain new knowledge and abilities that they may not have had in the Before.

Secondary Attributes

Your secondary attributes are calculated based on your Primary Attributes and your race's Size.

Attribute	How Calculated
Size	0 (humans, elves, dwarves, rovers and some mongrels), -1 (Loranthians, gnomes and some mongrels), +1 (some mongrels)
Move	Strength + Dexterity
Perception	Intelligence + Willpower
Initiative	Dexterity + Intelligence
Defense	Body + Dexterity – Size
Stun	Body
Health	Body + Willpower + Size

Size

Size represents your character's height, weight and bulk. It is set at zero and is modified only by racial traits, Talents or Flaws.

Your character's size modifies her Defense, Health and maximum Body and Strength rating. It is also subtracted from Stealth and attack rolls. Larger characters are easier to hit, but they're stronger and take more damage to kill. Conversely, smaller characters are harder to hit, but take less damage to kill.

For example, a Size 1 character may have maximum Body and Strength ratings of 6. He also receives a +1 bonus to his Health rating. Unfortunately, his size makes him a larger target and makes it more difficult for him to hit smaller creatures. Therefore, he suffers a –1 penalty to his attack and Defense rolls. See page 180 for more information on how Size affects combat.

Move

Move represents how fast your character moves during combat and while walking or running.

Your character's Move rating is calculated as follows:

Move* = Strength + Dexterity

Characters with high Move ratings are strong and fast, while characters with low Move ratings are slow and easily tired. See the chart below to convert Move ratings to distance.

A character's Move rating is also used to calculate how fast he can swim, how high he can climb, and how far he can jump.

** Characters with the Athletics Skill may substitute that Skill rating for their Move rating.*

Size	Attack/Defense	Health	Max. Body/Strength	Height/Length	Weight	Example
8	–8	+8	14	50–100 ft.	50–100 tons	Whale
4	–4	+4	10	25–50 ft.	10–50 tons	Lesser Brotula
2	–2	+2	8	15–25 ft.	1–10 tons	Regnant
1	–1	+1	6	7–15 ft.	500 lbs.–1 ton	Core Delver
0	0	0	5	5–7 ft.	100–500 lbs.	Human
–1	+1	–1	4	2–5 ft.	10–100 lbs.	Carrion Reaper
–2	+2	–2	3	1–2 ft.	1–10 lbs.	Giant Insect
–4	+4	–4	1	6 in.–1 ft.	½–1 lb.	Bat
–8	+8	–8	0	6 in. or less	½ lb. or less	Spider

Move	Combat (turn)	Swimming (turn)	Climbing (turn)	Horizontal Jump†	Vertical Jump†	Walk (hour)	Run (hour)
1	5 ft.	2.5 ft.	2.5 ft.	2.5 ft.	1 ft.	½ mile	1 mile
2	10 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft.	2 ft.	1 mile	2 miles
3	15 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft.	3 ft.	1.5 miles	3 miles
4	20 ft.	10 ft.	10 ft.	10 ft.	4 ft.	2 miles	4 miles
5	25 ft.	10 ft.	10 ft.	10 ft.	5 ft.	2.5 miles	5 miles
6	30 ft.	15 ft.	15 ft.	15 ft.	6 ft.	3 miles	6 miles
7	35 ft.	15 ft.	15 ft.	15 ft.	7 ft.	3.5 miles	7 miles
8	40 ft.	20 ft.	20 ft.	20 ft.	8 ft.	4 miles	8 miles
9	45 ft.	20 ft.	20 ft.	20 ft.	9 ft.	4.5 miles	9 miles
10	50 ft.	25 ft.	25 ft.	25 ft.	10 ft.	5 miles	10 miles

† If your character does not have a running start, his jumping distance is halved.

Perception

Perception represents your character's ability to notice and interpret his or her surroundings. It also represents her ability to focus her attention and remain vigilant over long periods of time. The more successes you roll, the more observant your character will be. In some cases, your roll will be opposed by another character's Stealth roll. Failing to roll enough successes means that your character misses or overlooks something.

Perception = Intelligence + Willpower

Characters with high Perception ratings are insightful and observant, while characters with low Perception ratings are oblivious and unaware.

Initiative

Initiative represents how quickly your character reacts to danger. It also determines when he acts during a combat round. The more successes you roll for Initiative, the earlier your character acts during combat.

Your character's Initiative rating is calculated as follows:

Initiative = Dexterity + Intelligence

Characters with high Initiative ratings are quick and vigilant; characters with low Initiative ratings are slow and often surprised.

Defense

Defense represents your character's toughness and ability to evade attacks. This includes avoiding an attack and protecting vulnerable areas. An attacker must roll more successes than your character's Defense rating to hurt her. If they roll fewer successes, the attack misses. If the attacker rolls more successes than your Defense rating, your character takes that much damage. See page 180 for more detail on Defense and damage.

Your character's Defense ratings are calculated as follows:

Defense = Passive Defense + Active Defense – Size

Passive Defense = Body + Armor

Active Defense = Dexterity

Characters with a high Defense rating are tough and hard to wound, while characters with a low Defense rating are weak and easily hurt.

Sometimes your character will only get to use an Active or Passive Defense rating. This normally occurs when your character is unable to evade an attack or when the attacker is only trying to touch your character. Some bonuses and penalties will only apply to your Active or Passive Defense ratings. In certain cases, your character may lose the Active Defense rating completely, leaving only her Passive Defense rating.

Stun

Stun represents your character's ability to shrug off damage and keep fighting. If your character takes more damage than his Stun rating in a single blow, he or she loses the next action. If your character takes more damage than twice his Stun rating in a single blow, he is knocked out for a number of minutes equal to the amount of excess damage taken.

Your character's Stun rating is calculated as follows:

Stun = Body

Characters with high Stun ratings are resilient and determined fighters, while characters with low Stun ratings are weak and easily dispatched.

Health

Health represents your character's vitality and capacity to take damage. This includes Burn, lethal and nonlethal damage. Your character can take up to her Health rating in damage without suffering any ill effects. When your character's current Health rating drops below zero, she falls unconscious. When she reaches -5 Health, she dies. See page 186 for more information about healing and damage.

Your character's Health rating is calculated as follows:

Health = Body + Willpower + Size

Note: Island folk, gnomes and some mongrels are a Size -1, which means they have a maximum starting Health of 4. Some mongrels are a Size +1, which means they have a maximum starting Health of 6.

Characters with high Health ratings are robust, while characters with low Health ratings are weak and fragile.

Negative Health

Small characters tend to be weak and fragile creatures. As such, they receive a penalty to their Health and maximum Body ratings. This may result in a small character starting with a negative Health rating, which will be considered zero at the start of play. When the character takes his or her first wound, the new Health rating takes effect. This usually results in the character falling unconscious; however, a character with a starting Health of -4 or lower will die from the first wound.

Choosing Skills

Skills represent the training, education and experience a character has acquired. You have 15 Skill points with which to purchase Skill Levels. Skill Levels are purchased on a one-for-one basis. No Skill Levels may be purchased higher than 5 at character creation. Use your character's MPH as a guide to choosing Skills.

There are no restrictions on the Skills one may purchase. For example, a spell caster can learn how to use a sword and a mercenary can be stealthy. However, it is vital that all Skills purchased make sense for the character concept according to the MPH.

Broad Skills and Disciplines

Some Skills are so broad and complex that you are required to focus on a single discipline. Each discipline is treated as a separate Skill and must be purchased individually.

Specializations

A character may decide to specialize in a particular aspect of a Skill in which he has acquired Rankings. This costs half a Skill point and gives a character a +1 bonus to the Skill roll when the Specialization applies. A Skill cannot be specialized in more than once during character creation. For example, a character with the Survival Skill could Specialize in tracking to receive a bonus when using the Tracking Specialization. Any other use of Survival, such as foraging, would use the Skill's normal rating.

Characters may even Specialize in a discipline they have chosen within a Broad Skill. For example, a character with a History Discipline within the Academics Skill can have a Specialization of Ancient Ascondean History.

Magic Skills

Skills in magic are difficult to attain. Before acquiring Levels in Magic Skills, an associated Talent or Skill is required. See the Magic chapter on page 129 for more information.

Base Attributes

Every skill has a base attribute that represents natural ability with that skill. Even if a character has no training, he may still have some proficiency. To be a real expert, however, he needs to invest time and energy into mastering a Skill.

Skill Levels

Skill Levels represent the effort your character has put into learning a Skill, either through formal education or experience.

You may not purchase more than five Skill Levels in any one Skill during character creation, but additional Skill Levels may be purchased with experience points gained during play.

Skill Rating

Skill Ratings represent your character's overall ability with the skill. It is equal to the Skill Level plus the base attribute. Certain talents can also increase the Skill Rating.

Skill Rating	Description
0 – 1	Abysmal
2 – 3	Poor
4 – 5	Average
6 – 7	Good
8 – 9	Great
10 – 11	Excellent
12 or more	Amazing

Untrained Skill Rolls

You may normally make a Skill roll even if your character has no Skill Levels in a particular Skill. Your character's untrained Skill Rating is equal to the associated Base Attribute with a –2 penalty, plus or minus any conditional modifiers. If this lowers your dice pool to zero or less, you'll fail unless you get some help, take more time or spend Style points. Though most Skills can be rolled untrained, a Broad Skill cannot be rolled without at least one Skill Level in that Skill.

Synergy and Teamwork

Whenever your character has more than one Skill (with a rating of 4 or higher) that is applicable, he receives a +2 bonus per Skill. This bonus is added to the Skill with the highest rating.

When working as a team, characters with the same Skill can help one another. For every extra person helping with a task (with a Skill Rating of 4 or higher), a +2 bonus is given (up to a maximum of +10). The character with the highest Skill Rating receives the bonus and makes the roll.

Skill Descriptions

Academics

Broad Skill

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Academics represents general knowledge of the Humanities, Liberal Arts and Sciences, acquired through formal education or intensive self-study. Your character has spent time studying a particular subject (such as history, philosophy or religion) and can discuss this topic at length. Your character must focus on a specific discipline, such as:

- History: The study of the history of the Scondera
- Law: The study of law and legal practices
- Literature: The study of literature, writers and their works

Skill	Attribute	Examples of Specializations and Disciplines
Academics*	Intelligence	History, Law, Literature, Philosophy, Religion
Acrobatics	Dexterity	Balance, Breakfall, Contortion, Juggling, Tumbling
Animal Handling	Charisma	Birds, Dogs, Farm Animals, Horses
Archery	Dexterity	Blowguns, Bows, Crossbows, Nets, Slings
Art*	Intelligence	Music, Painting, Sculpture, Writing
Athletics	Strength	Climbing, Jumping, Running, Swimming, Throwing
Brawl	Strength	Dirty Tricks, Grappling, Kicking, Punching, Throws
Brew Magic Potion**	Intelligence	—
Con	Charisma	Bluff, Fast Talk, Lying, Tricks, Seduction
Craft*	Intelligence	Apothecary, Bowyer/Fletching, Carpentry, Smithing
Create Magic Item**	Intelligence	—
Diplomacy	Charisma	Etiquette, Leadership, Negotiation, Persuasion, Politics, Trading
Empathy	Intelligence	Body Language, Emotions, Intuition, Lies, Motives
Gambling	Intelligence	Cards, Cheating, Dice
Intimidation	Charisma	Interrogation, Orders, Staredown, Threats, Torture
Investigation	Intelligence	Crimes, Enigmas, Interview, Research, Search
Larceny	Dexterity	Lockpicking, Pickpocketing, Security, Sleight of Hand
Linguistics	Intelligence	Codes, Deciphering, Gestures, Lip Reading, Translation
Magic**	Variable	Animism, Beguiling, Elemental, Necromancy, Primal Magic, Rune Magic, Sorcery
Medicine	Intelligence	Chirgery, Diagnosis, First Aid, Herbalist, Veterinary
Melee	Strength	Axes, Clubs, Knives, Spears, Swords
Performance*	Charisma	Acting, Dancing, Musical Instrument, Oratory, Singing
Ride	Dexterity	Bulls, Camels, Elephants, Flying Mounts, Horses
Sailing	Dexterity	Boats, Canoes and Rafts, Large Ships, Small Ships
Scavenge	Intelligence	Battlefields, Businesses, Institutions, Rural Areas, Urban Areas
Stealth	Dexterity	Camouflage, Disguise, Hiding, Shadowing, Sneaking
Survival	Intelligence	Foraging, Hunting, Navigation, Shelter, Tracking
Warfare	Intelligence	Logistics, Organization, Strategy, Tactics, Terrain

** Broad Skill, ** Magic Skill*

- Philosophy: The study of logic and the meaning of life
- Religion: The study of theology and religious beliefs

Acrobatics

Base Attribute: Dexterity

Acrobatics represents experience and training in performing highly demanding physical feats such as contortion, juggling and tumbling. This skill is often performed before an audience, but has more practical uses as well — such as balancing or breaking a fall. Characters with this skill may substitute their Acrobatics rating for Dexterity rolls.

Examples of specializations:

- Balance: The ability to keep balance in dangerous situations
- Breakfall: The ability to break a fall and take less damage
- Contortion: Your character's ability to twist her body into unusual shapes
- Juggling: The ability to juggle multiple objects
- Tumbling: The ability to roll, flip and jump with grace

Animal Handling

Base Attribute: Charisma

Animal Handling represents the ability to train and care for animals. This covers befriending or domesticating an animal, working with it, and teaching it basic commands. Not all animals are capable of learning tricks, and wild animals are unlikely to obey commands until your character has earned their trust. Examples of specializations:

- Birds: The ability to work with falcons and other birds
- Dogs: The ability to work with dogs, wolves and other canines
- Farm Animals: The ability to work with domesticated animals and drive carts and wagons
- Horses: The ability to work with horses, mules and donkeys

Archery

Base Attribute: Dexterity

Archery represents proficiency with ranged weapons, including bows, crossbows and slings. It also covers the use of

more exotic weapons, such as blowguns, nets and bolas. Archery also allows characters to more accurately aim ranged magical effects from wands, staffs and other magic items. Examples of specializations:

- Blowguns: Your proficiency with blowguns and other breath-powered weapons
- Bows: Your proficiency with short bows, longbows and various arrows types
- Crossbows: Your proficiency with different crossbows and bolt types
- Magic Items: Your proficiency with wands, staffs and other ranged magical items
- Nets: Your proficiency with nets and other ranged entanglement weapons
- Slings: Your proficiency with slings and other projectile types

Art

Broad Skill

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Art represents experience and training in a specific art form. It covers a range of artistic disciplines. Characters with this skill are able to create, design or critique art within their chosen field. Examples of specializations:

- Music: The ability to compose songs and musical scores
- Painting: The ability to draw, illustrate and paint images
- Sculpture: The ability to carve and sculpt
- Writing: The ability to write poetry, novels and short stories

Athletics

Base Attribute: Strength

Athletics represents a talent for performing common physical activities such as running, jumping and swimming. It also covers climbing and throwing — including throwing weapons in combat. Characters with this skill may substitute their Athletics rating for both their Move rating and Strength rolls. Examples of specializations:

- Climbing: The ability to scale trees, walls and other obstacles
- Jumping: The ability to leap horizontally or vertically
- Running: The ability to run over short and long distances
- Swimming: The ability to swim across rivers, lakes and other bodies of water
- Throwing: The ability to throw objects accurately and over a great distance

Brawl

Base Attribute: Strength

Brawl represents your character's ability to fight with his bare hands. It covers everything from skilled unarmed combat to clawing and biting. Characters with this Skill are not only adept at hand-to-hand combat, they are able to easily knock down, incapacitate or throw opponents. Examples of specializations:

- Dirty Tricks: The ability to do what it takes to hurt an opponent
- Grappling: The ability to grapple and immobilize an opponent
- Kicking: The ability to use knees and feet to hurt an opponent
- Punching: The ability to use hands and elbows to hurt an opponent
- Throws: The ability to flip an opponent or knock him to the ground

Brew Magic Potion

Magic Skill

Prerequisites: Craft/Apothecary 4

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Your character knows how to combine the trace amounts of magic that exist in all flora and fauna to create magic potions that mimic the effects of various magic traditions. Characters without the Magical Aptitude Talent can brew potions that mimic Easy or Average difficulty spells from any tradition except Rune Magic. Characters with a Magical Aptitude Talent can brew potions up to a Very Hard difficulty in their particular tradition.

To create a potion, the player must state its intended effect and then roll the assigned difficulty or better using the character's Brew Magic Potion Skill. Like magical spells, poorly made potions can backfire or have unintended effects that won't be known until the potion is used. Creators of potions take Burn, just as spell casters do, and can elect not to roll all the dice in their Brew Magic Potion Skill. Unlike magic, extra successes cannot be used to expand a potion's effects or make it more potent. Potions must be imbibed to work. Their effects can be resisted. The number of magical potions that a character can have in existence at one time is equal to his or her Brew Magic Potion Skill Rating. See the Magic chapter on page 129 for more information.

Note: *Rune Magic cannot be used to create potions. Players cannot Take the Average on Brew Magic Potion Skill rolls. Style points cannot be used to increase Brew Magic Potion rolls.*

Con

Base Attribute: Charisma

Con represents a talent for lies and deception. It covers bluffing, fast-talking, seduction and tricking others. Characters with this skill may get what they want, but they are mistrusted and may have to quickly move on before their marks realize they've been duped. Examples of specializations:

- Bluff: The ability to appear stronger or weaker than you are
- Fast Talk: The ability to get what you want by fast-talking

- Lying: The ability to lie convincingly and with sincerity
- Tricks: The ability to trick someone into doing something
- Seduction: The ability to seduce someone with charm and wit

Craft

Broad Skill

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Craft represents experience and training in a specific profession or trade. It covers a wide range of technical and craftsman skills, such as carpentry, fletching and blacksmithing. Characters with this Skill are able to build, repair or modify items in their chosen craft. Your character must focus on a specific discipline, such as:

- Apothecary: The ability to prepare and create various non-magical tonics and medicines
- Bowyer/Fletching: The ability to build and repair bows and arrows
- Carpentry: The ability to build and repair wooden structures and furniture
- Smithing: The ability to forge metals into armor, weapons and useful items

Create Magic Item

Magic Skill

Prerequisites: Magic Affinity Talent, appropriate Craft Skill discipline

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Your character has enough knowledge of craftsmanship and a magical tradition to combine them into a magic item.

Creating a magic item is a two-step process. A player must first craft a masterpiece-quality item (Difficulty 7). The character can then immediately attempt to temporarily imbue the item with a magical effect. To do so, the player states the desired magical effect, the GM sets a Final Difficulty and the player rolls his or her Create Magic Item Skill to attempt to imbue the item. Compare the result to the table below. If the attempt fails, that item cannot be imbued with magic.

If the item was successfully imbued, additional spells may immediately be imbued into it by making separate Create Magic Item rolls. The difficulty for each of these rolls is increased by 1 for every additional spell. Multiple casters may attempt to imbue magical effects upon the same item by rolling their Create Magic Item Skill. They still receive the penalty for imbuing multiple spell effects. A failed imbue attempt ends the possibility of further imbuing the item.

If a character wants the magic item's effects to be permanent, a Rune Caster must draw a rune of permanence on it. It takes at least one full day to create a magic item. Only a Rune Caster can make a magic item without the Create Magic Item Skill.

Extra successes can be used to increase the potency or charges of the magic item. The number of magical items that a character can have in existence at one time is limited by his or her Create Magic Item Skill Rating. Creators of magic items take Burn, just as spell casters do. See the Magic chapter on page 129 for more information.

Note: *Players cannot Take the Average when using the Create Magic Item Skill. Style points cannot be used to increase imbue magic item rolls.*

Final Spell Difficulty	Imbue Roll
1	3
2	4
3	5
4	6
5	7

The table above assumes the item will be used once per day or has five charges. Add 1 point of final spell difficulty for items that can be used an extra time per day or for an additional five charges. No magic item created in the After can be used more than three times per day or have more than 15 charges.

Diplomacy

Base Attribute: Charisma

Diplomacy represents experience and training in handling various social situations. This covers leadership, etiquette and politics. It also covers negotiation and swaying others to a particular point of view. Your character is inspiring and has the ability to motivate others. Characters with this Skill may substitute their Diplomacy rating for Charisma rolls. Examples of specializations:

- Etiquette: The ability to act appropriately in various situations
- Leadership: The ability to motivate and inspire others
- Negotiation: The ability to bargain and make a deal
- Persuasion: The ability to sway others to a point of view
- Politics: The ability to obtain and maintain political power
- Trading: The ability to buy, sell or barter

Empathy

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Empathy represents the ability to read people and understand their feelings and motivations. This includes interpreting body language and detecting lies, as well as intuition and gut feelings about a situation. Characters with this Skill have very good instincts and are hard to fool. Examples of specializations:

- Body Language: The ability to read another's body language
- Emotions: The ability to identify someone's emotional state
- Intuition: The ability to get the feel of an ambiguous situation

- Lies: The ability to detect when someone is lying
- Motives: The ability to figure out someone's true motivation

Gambling

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Gambling represents expertise at games of Skill and chance. Characters with this skill have better-than-average luck when betting or playing games. Examples of specializations:

- Cheating: The ability to cheat at a variety of games of chance
- Dice: Skill at games using dice, and knowledge of their rules
- Cards: Skill at playing cards, and knowledge of various games

Intimidation

Base Attribute: Charisma

Intimidation represents the ability to browbeat and frighten people. It includes making threats, barking orders, interrogation and even torture. Characters with this Skill are imposing, and generally given a wide berth. Examples of specializations:

- Interrogation: The ability to verbally get information from someone
- Orders: The ability to get someone to obey direct orders
- Staredown: The ability to get someone to back down by staring at them
- Threats: The ability to scare someone to get what you want
- Torture: The ability to physically or psychologically torture someone to get information

Investigation

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Investigation represents the ability to search for clues, uncover evidence and discover the hidden. It includes researching information and piecing together what your character discovers. Your character is able to talk to someone to get questions answered. Characters with this Skill may substitute their Investigation rating for Intelligence rolls. Examples of specializations:

- Crimes: The ability to investigate crimes and look for clues
- Enigmas: The ability to unravel mysteries and solve riddles
- Interview: The ability to ask the right questions
- Research: The ability to do legwork to find answers
- Search: The ability to search for clues and hiding places

Larceny

Base Attribute: Dexterity

Larceny represents an aptitude for stealing and robbing. It covers everything from petty theft such as picking someone's pocket, to bypassing magical alarms. Characters with this Skill are able to steal anything that catches their eye, no matter how tricky the security. Examples of specializations:

- Lockpicking: The ability to pick a lock using available tools
- Pickpocketing: The ability to pick someone's pocket without anyone noticing
- Security: The ability to bypass guards and magical alarms
- Sleight of Hand: The ability to palm small items and perform sleight-of-hand tricks

Linguistics

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Linguistics represents knowledge and understanding of language structure. Your character's Linguistics Level equals the number of languages your character speaks in addition to Ascondean and his native tongue. Your character's Linguistics Rating is used to determine his or her proficiency in encrypting written messages, translating spoken languages, reading lips and understanding gestures. Examples of specializations:

- Codes: The ability to encrypt languages and break codes
- Deciphering: The ability to decipher texts
- Gestures: The ability to communicate via pantomime
- Lip Reading: The ability to understand someone by reading their lips
- Translation: The ability to translate spoken words

Language	Description
Ascondean (common)	Language of the Empire; very widespread
Cushu	Slow, purposeful language of Cushulain
Dwarvish	Gutteral, basic language spoken by dwarves
Elvish	Lyrical, flowing language spoken by elves
Gnomish	Slow, complicated language of the gnomes
High Acondean	Formal Ascondean, spoken by nobility
Jherlindish	Brash, forceful language spoken in Jherlind
Kar'Danish	Harsh, spartan language of Kar'Danan
Lanarian	Quick, hard language of Verelanar
Loranthian	Choppy, chirping language of the island folk
Loslolin	Variant of Ascondean, spoken in the swamps
Oruskan	Brusque, brutish language of the Northlands
Rover	Exotic, musical language of the rovers
Saikin	Rapid, rhythmic language of the Wastes
Warland Pidgin	Simplified Oruskan mixed with Ascondean, spoken in the Warlands and by mongrels

Magic

Magic Skill

Prerequisite: Magical Aptitude Talent

Base Attribute: Intelligence or Charisma based on tradition

Magic represents your character's knowledge of a particular arcane art. It is acquired through cultural or formal education. Characters with this Skill are able to cast spells. You have a general understanding of how magic works.

Your character must focus on a specific tradition:

- Animism: The ability to barter with the spirit world. Based on Charisma. Requires Magical Aptitude: Animism Talent.
- Beguiling: The ability to read and affect others' minds. Based on Charisma. Requires Magical Aptitude: Beguiling Talent.
- Elemental Magic: The ability to tap into elemental powers. Based on Charisma. Requires Magical Aptitude: Elemental Talent.
- Necromancy: The ability to speak to, raise and command the dead and siphon others' life force. Based on Intelligence. Requires Magical Aptitude: Necromancy Talent.
- Primal Magic: The ability to channel primal powers via totems. Based on Intelligence. Requires Magical Aptitude: Primal Magic Talent.
- Rune Magic: The ability to create and use runes of magical power. Based on Intelligence. Requires Magical Aptitude: Rune Magic Talent.
- Sorcery: The ability to tap into the magical power lines of the world. Based on Intelligence. Requires Magical Aptitude: Sorcery Talent.

Medicine

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Medicine represents medical training and experience. It covers the diagnosis and treatment of diseases for humans and animals. It also includes bandaging wounds and performing chirgury. Characters with this Skill are able to treat illnesses, tend to wounds and save people's lives. Examples of specializations:

- Chirgury: The ability to operate to correct a medical condition
- Diagnosis: The ability to diagnose an illness
- First Aid: The ability to bandage wounds, stop bleeding and revive a patient
- Herbalist: The ability to use herbs and poultices to treat many illnesses
- Veterinary: The ability to examine and treat animals

Melee

Base Attribute: Strength

Melee represents proficiency with a variety of handheld weapons, such as clubs, knives, axes, swords and spears. Characters with this Skill are deadly with virtually any handheld weapon. Examples of specializations:

- Axes: Proficiency with axes, polearms and other chopping weapons
- Clubs: Proficiency with maces, clubs and other blunt weapons
- Knives: Proficiency with knives, daggers and other small-bladed weapons
- Spears: Proficiency with spears, lances and other extended weapons
- Swords: Proficiency with swords, rapiers and other bladed weapons

Performance

Broad Skill

Base Attribute: Charisma

Performance represents the knack for entertaining people through performance arts such as acting, dancing or singing. It also covers playing musical instruments and delivering a rousing speech. Characters with this Skill are fun and interesting, entertaining, and can often move their audience to laughter or tears. Examples of disciplines:

- Acting: The ability to play the part of a character or impersonate a specific person
- Dancing: The ability to move with style and grace
- Musical Instrument: The ability to play a musical instrument with precision and flair
- Oratory: The ability to deliver a persuasive and motivational speech
- Singing: The ability to sing with power and subtlety

Ride

Base Attribute: Dexterity

Riding represents your character's aptitude for riding all different kinds of mounts, including horses, mules, camels and more exotic animals. Characters with this Skill are able to ride expertly and control their mounts in combat. Examples of specializations:

- Bulls: The ability to mount and ride oxen and bulls
- Camels: The ability to mount and ride a camel
- Elephants: The ability to mount and ride an elephant
- Flying Mounts: The ability to mount and ride a griffon or other flying mount
- Horses: The ability to mount and ride a horse

Sailing

Base Attribute: Dexterity

Sailing represents your character's ability to command and control boats and ships. Characters with this Skill are able to steer canoes, sail ships, assess their quality and perform basic maintenance. Examples of specializations:

- Boats: The ability to operate boats without sails
- Canoes and Rafts: The ability to operate small watercraft
- Large Ships: The ability to operate ships with more than one sail
- Small Ships: The ability to operate ships with a single sail

Scavenge

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Scavenge represents your character's ability to search through ruins and find items that could be useful later. It takes experience and skill to know where to look and recognize items others may miss. This Skill can only be used in previously inhabited areas. Examples of specializations:

- Battlefields: The ability to search the remains of battlefields and military encampments
- Businesses: The ability to search the remains of businesses (shops, taverns, inns, etc.)
- Institutions: The ability to search the remains of large buildings (temples, libraries, etc.)
- Rural Areas: The ability to search the remains of small villages and farms
- Urban Areas: The ability to search the remains of large, once crowded cities



Stealth

Base Attribute: Dexterity

Stealth represents the ability to avoid detection in a variety of circumstances. It covers shadowing someone, hiding and sneaking about. It also includes your character's affinity for disguises. Characters with this Skill leave no trace of where they have been and are hard to detect. Examples of specializations:

- Camouflage: The ability to hide objects or people by blending them into the surroundings
- Disguise: Your character's ability to disguise himself or herself as someone else
- Hiding: The ability to blend into the surroundings
- Shadowing: The ability to follow someone unnoticed
- Sneaking: The ability to move without being seen or heard

Note: *Your character's Size rating modifies your Stealth rolls. It is harder for larger characters to go unnoticed, while smaller characters are more difficult to spot.*

Survival

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Survival represents your character's ability to find food and shelter in the wild. It also covers navigation, and hunting and tracking game. Characters with this Skill are at home in the wilderness and can take care of themselves and guide others. Examples of specializations:

- Foraging: The ability to gather edible plants and find fresh water
- Hunting: The ability to find, trap and kill animals for food or clothing
- Navigation: The ability to determine your general location and direction of travel
- Shelter: The ability to build or locate suitable shelter from the elements
- Tracking: The ability track people and animals

Warfare

Base Attribute: Intelligence

Warfare represents knowledge and skill in the art of war, whether acquired through formal training or firsthand experience. It covers everything from large-scale campaign strategy and logistics to small-unit tactics and organization. Characters with this Skill are able to outwit, outmaneuver and outlast their enemies on the battlefield. Examples of specializations:

- Logistics: The ability to move and maintain a military force
- Organization: Knowledge of military organization and chain of command
- Strategy: The ability to plan an overall military campaign
- Tactics: The ability to employ military units in combat
- Terrain: Select arctic, desert, mountain, naval or woodland

Talents

Talents reflect your character's aptitudes and special abilities. One may be taken at character creation. They cover a wide range of activities and give your character a new ability or improve one he or she already has. Talents also let you "break the rules" by ignoring certain penalties, or by doing something normally not allowed.

Advanced Talents

Standard Talents may be purchased more than once — representing an even greater expertise or ability — to provide your character with an increased benefit. Advanced Talents may be purchased a specified number of times, limiting their maximum benefit. See the individual talent descriptions for more information.

Unique Talents

Unique Talents can only be taken once, while standard Talents may be taken multiple times. A Talent is available to any character who meets the prerequisites (if any). While most Talents can be purchased any time, some are only available during character creation.

Talent Descriptions

Accuracy

Prerequisite: None

Your character can attack with pinpoint accuracy, picking a target out of a crowd, hitting him or her behind cover, and aiming for any vulnerable spots.

Benefit: Your character makes called shots at a reduced penalty. You may ignore up to a -2 penalty for targeting a specific location — such as when an opponent is wearing armor, or hiding behind cover. This Talent also reduces penalties for attacking opponents that are smaller than your character.

Normal: When making a called shot to hit a specific target, your character suffers a penalty between -1 and -8 depending on the size of the target area, how much armor an opponent is wearing, or the amount of cover he or she has.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to four times. Your character may ignore an additional -2 called shot penalty per level. For example, the first purchase allows him or her to ignore up to a -2 penalty, the second allows up to a -4, and so on.

Agile

Unique; only available during character creation

Prerequisite: None

Your character is exceptionally graceful, limber and coordinated. His speed and agility are far above average.

Benefit: Your character gains +1 Dexterity rating. This bonus affects Dexterity rolls and all Dexterity-based Skills. It also factors into Secondary Attributes and raises his maximum Dexterity rating by 1 point.

Normal: Your character's Dexterity rating is unmodified.

Alertness

Prerequisite: None

Your character is remarkably attentive to the surroundings. She is vigilant and rarely lets her guard down.

Benefit: Your character gains a +2 Perception rating.

Normal: Your character's Perception rating is unmodified.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent twice, gaining your character an additional +2 Perception rating.

Ancestral Stream

Unique

Prerequisite: Gnome

Your character can tap into the Ancestral Stream in an attempt to gain information on a particular person, place or thing in the immediate area that may be noteworthy or historically relevant. This information will not reveal secrets or details that could not be known by the gnomish people.

You activate this ability by spending a Style point. This Talent cannot be used in stressful situations, such as combat, because it requires deep meditation.

Benefit: You make an Intelligence plus Willpower roll to determine how successfully your character has opened his mind to the Ancestral Stream. You (but not others) may spend Style points to roll additional dice. The GM will determine the difficulty of finding information on a certain topic. If a botch is rolled, the information received might be false or misleading.

Note: *The GM may predetermine that no information can be gleaned on a topic for plot purposes. If this is the case, any Style points spent on the Talent should be returned to the player.*

Difficulty	Topic
Easy (1)	Commonly known
Average (2)	Widely known
Tough (3)	Uncommon – known by the minority
Hard (4)	Obscure – known only by the learned
Very Hard (5)	Little known – known only by a select few
Nigh Impossible (6+)	Very obscure – known only by those immediately involved

Normal Talents	Prerequisite	Benefit
Accuracy	—	Reduced called shot penalties
*Agile**	—	+1 Dexterity rating
Alertness	—	+2 Perception rating
*Aquatic**	Rover	Breathe underwater
Attractive	—	+1 Charisma with people
Blind Fight	—	Reduce poor visibility penalty
Block	Brawl 4	+2 Defense vs. unarmed attacks
Blunt Strike	Melee 4	Do nonlethal damage with lethal weapons
Bold Attack	Charisma 3	Use Charisma with a combat Skill
Bold Defense	Charisma 3	Use Charisma for Defense
Calculated Attack	Intelligence 3	Use Intelligence with a combat Skill
Calculated Defense	Intelligence 3	Use Intelligence for Defense
Captivate	Performance 4	Temporarily entrance targets
*Charismatic**	—	+1 Charisma rating
Combat Aptitude	Intelligence 3	Exchange attack and Defense dice
Combat Skill	Skill 4	+2 Defense with a non-combat Skill
Danger Sense	—	Reduced surprise penalty
Diehard	—	Improved death threshold
Direction Sense	—	Improved sense of direction
Dual Wield	Dexterity 3	Reduce two-weapon attack penalty
Evade	Dexterity 3	+2 Defense vs. ranged attacks
Fearsome	Intimidate 4	Frighten opponents
Final Stand	—	Make free attack before falling
Finesse Attack	Dexterity 3	Use Dexterity with a specific combat Skill
Flurry	Dexterity 3	Reduce multiple strike penalty
Focused Attack	Willpower 3	Use Willpower with a specific combat Skill
Focused Defense	Willpower 3	Use Willpower for Defense
*Giant**	—	+1 Size rating
Guardian	Intelligence 3	Defense bonus to allies
Headstrong	Willpower 3	Use Willpower for Stun rating
High Pain Tolerance	—	Reduce wound penalty
Inspire	Diplomacy 4	Provide Skill bonus to allies
Instant Reload	—	Reload weapon as free action
*Intelligent**	—	+1 Intelligence rating
Iron Jaw	—	+1 Stun rating
*Iron Will**	—	+1 Willpower rating
Keen Sense*	—	+4 Perception rating with a specific sense
Knockout Blow	Brawl 4	Improved knockout ability
Know-It-All	Intelligence 4	Ignore or reduce untrained skill penalty
Lethal Blow	Brawl 4	Do lethal damage with Brawl
Lifesaver	Medicine 4	Improved healing ability
Long Shot	—	Double weapon ranges
Lucky	—	+2 dice to one roll per session
Mobile Attack	Dexterity 3	Move and attack at same time
Mounted Combat	Ride 3	Attack from a mount without penalty
Parry	Melee 4	+2 Defense vs. armed attacks
Provoke	Con 4	Provoke opponents
Quick Draw	—	Draw weapon as free action
*Quick Healer**	Body 3	Double the normal healing rate
Quick Reflexes	—	+2 Initiative rating
Rapid Shot	Dexterity 3	Reduce multiple shot penalty
Robust	—	+2 Health rating
Run	—	Improved running speed
Skill Aptitude	—	+2 Skill rating to one Skill
Skill Mastery	Intelligence 3	Expertise with one Broad Skill
Spring Up	—	Stand up as free action
Staggering Blow	Brawl 4	Improved knockback ability
Stalwart	—	+2 Body to resist disease, poison and hold breath
*Strong**	—	+1 Strength rating
Strong Defense	Strength 3	Use Strength for Defense
Style Study	Intelligence 3	Take advantage of opponent's weaknesses
Subsist		Survive without food and water longer
Subtle Strike	Stealth 4	Make sneak attacks
Swift	—	+2 Move rating
Time Sense	—	Always know time
Tinker	Craft 4	Ignore improvised penalty
Total Defense	Dexterity 3	Improved Total Attack ability
*Total Recall**	—	Never forget anything
*Tough**	—	+1 Body rating
Tough Attack	Body 3	Use Body with a combat Skill
Vigorous Defense	Dexterity 3	Reduce multi-attacker penalty
Weave Warped	—	Cause casters more Burn
Faith Talents	**Prerequisite**	**Benefit**
Blessing	True Faith	Bless others with Style points
Divine Intervention	True Faith	Style points after a roll give others automatic successes
Higher Faith	True Faith	+2 Willpower in religious situations
Prayer Circle	True Faith	Lead others in prayer
True Faith	—	Style point after a roll to gain an automatic success
Magic Talents	**Prerequisite**	**Benefit**
Battle Mage	Magical Aptitude	+1 Spell Damage to do harm
Burn Conversion	Magic 8	Take 2 Burn for 1 success
Burn Diversion	Magic 6	Tap Strength to fuel spells
Burn Reduction	Magic 6	Ignore 1 point of Burn
Burn Transfer	Magic 8	Share Burn with willing people
Enhance Potency	Magical Aptitude	Increase Potency of spells
Inconspicuous Casting	Magical Aptitude, Dexterity 3	Accept 1 Burn to not be noticed when casting
Magical Adept	Magical Aptitude	Style points before casting to gain automatic successes
Magical Aptitude*	—	Cast spells from one tradition
Mystic Talents	**Prerequisite**	**Benefit**
Ancestral Stream	Gnome	Tap into the Ancestral Stream
Borrow Skill	Gnome, Ancestral Stream	Learn or improve a skill from the Ancestral Stream
Borrow Talent	Gnome, Ancestral Stream	Learn or improve a talent from the Ancestral Stream
Conversation	Gnome, Ancestral Stream	Speak with members of the Ancestral Stream
Improved Connection	Gnome, Ancestral Stream	Tap into the Ancestral Stream with greater ease

** This Talent is only available during character creation*
Unique Talents are listed in italics
Skill prerequisites refer to Skill Ratings, not Skill Levels

Normal: You cannot gain information from the Ancestral Stream.

Aquatic

Unique; only available during character creation

Prerequisite: Rover

Your character is special among the rovers and was blessed at birth with a set of small, but functional, gills located under the jaw line.

Benefit: Your character can breathe underwater and cannot drown. The gills are unobtrusive, but can be noticed with an Average Perception check. An aquatic character still has lungs; he can breathe normally on land and is subject to suffocation.

Normal: Your character cannot breathe underwater.

Attractive

Prerequisite: None

Your character is sexier and more attractive than the average person. People tend to like him, and are more easily influenced when he is around.

Benefit: Your character gains a +1 Charisma rating when dealing with people. This bonus affects his Charisma rolls and all Charisma-based Skills.

Normal: Your character's Charisma rating is unmodified when dealing with people.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent up to three times, gaining an additional +1 Charisma rating per level.

Battle Mage

Prerequisite: Magical Aptitude

You have focused your magic on causing damage.

Benefit: You automatically receive a +1 bonus to your Spell Damage when using magic to harm someone or something.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent up to three times, gaining an additional +1 bonus to Spell Damage rating per level.

Normal: Your character's Spell Damage is unmodified.

Blessing

Unique

Prerequisite: True Faith

Your character's faith can inspire or bless others.

Benefit: Your character can make a Willpower roll by praying. A Willpower roll is twice a character's Willpower Attribute. The number of successes rolled equals a pool of extra temporary Style points that can be used by those inspired/blessed during that scene. Your character dictates who gets Style points from the pool and how many they get. At the end of the scene, the Style point pool disappears.

Normal: Your character does not receive additional Style points for prayer.

Blind Fight

Prerequisite: None

Your character can target opponents without having to see them. She might hear them breathing, catch their scent or feel



their presence — always seeming to know where they are.

Benefit: Your character makes blind attacks at a reduced penalty. She may ignore up to a -2 penalty because of poor visibility (such as fighting in partial darkness or with blurred vision).

Normal: You suffer a -4 penalty when your character makes a blind attack against an opponent, if she knows her general location. Making a blind attack against an opponent whose location is unknown results in a -8 penalty.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to four times. Your character may ignore an additional -2 visibility penalty per level.

Block

Prerequisite: Brawl 4

Your character is adept at defense in hand-to-hand combat. He instinctively blocks blows and deflects strikes without having to go on the defensive.

Benefit: Your character gains a +2 Defense bonus against unarmed attacks. This bonus also stacks with the dodge bonus. If your character loses Active Defense, the Block bonus is lost.

Normal: Your character's Defense rating is unmodified.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent twice, gaining an additional +2 Defense bonus against unarmed attacks.

Blunt Strike

Prerequisite: Melee 4

Your character knows how to use weapons to incapacitate opponents without killing them, pummeling them into submission with the flat of a blade or the haft of an axe.

Benefit: Your character may do nonlethal damage with lethal weapons at no penalty. If wielding a nonlethal weapon, such as a club or staff, your character gains a +2 Melee bonus to his or her attack.

Normal: You suffer a –2 penalty to your attack roll whenever your character tries to do nonlethal (instead of lethal) damage with a melee weapon.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent twice, gaining your character an additional +2 Melee bonus.

Bold Attack

Prerequisite: Charisma 3

Your character is daring and courageous, and knows how to use that as a weapon. He or she unnerves opponents with unshakable confidence.

Benefit: Your character uses his or her Charisma rating as the Base Attribute for a specific combat Skill, such as Archery, Athletics, Brawl or Melee (designate when Talent taken).

Normal: Your character uses the standard Base Attributes for combat Skills.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent multiple times, but the benefit is applied to a different Skill each time.

Bold Defense

Unique

Prerequisite: Charisma 3

Your character is fearless and confident, using the strength of his or her presence as a defense. He scares opponents into making feeble attacks.

Benefit: Your character uses Charisma instead of Dexterity when calculating his Active Defense and Defense ratings.

Normal: Your character uses Dexterity when calculating Defense ratings.

Special: You may not buy this Talent if your character already has the Calculated Defense Talent.

Borrow Skill

Unique

Prerequisite: Gnome, Ancestral Stream

Through focus and meditation, your character is able to tap into the Ancestral Stream and temporarily improve her Skill set. She can learn a new Skill or enhance an existing Skill. This skill can be mental, social or physical (including combat Skills). Even a Skill Discipline within a Broad Skill group can be learned.

You activate this Talent by spending a Style point and choosing the Skill needed. This Skill set lasts for a scene, but an additional Style point can be spent to increase its duration by multiple scenes. Borrow Skill cannot be activated in stressful situations, such as combat, because it requires deep meditation.

Benefit: You make an Intelligence plus Willpower roll to determine how well your character traversed the Ancestral Stream and absorbed the information about the desired Skill set. You (but not others) may spend Style points to roll additional dice.

If a new Skill is being borrowed, your character gains the level equal to the number of successes rolled. If an existing Skill is being improved, your character gains a Skill increase equal to the number of successes rolled minus 1. This is because the fine details of a Skill are harder to learn than the initial concepts.

If a botch is rolled, your character learns an unexpected Skill instead of the desired Skill. The GM selects this Skill.

Normal: Your character cannot improve or gain skills from the Ancestral Stream.

Borrow Talent

Unique

Prerequisite: Gnome, Ancestral Stream

Through focus and meditation, your character is able to tap into the Ancestral Stream and temporarily gain a new Talent or advance an existing Talent. This cannot be used to gain Magic-

based Talents, Mystic Talents, Faith Talents or Talents available only at character creation. Normal prerequisite rules apply.

You activate this Talent by spending 1 Style point and choosing a talent for your character to learn. This new Talent lasts for a scene, but one additional Style point can be spent to increase its duration. Borrow Talent cannot be activated in stressful situations, such as combat, because it requires deep meditation.

Benefit: You make an Intelligence plus Willpower roll to determine how well your character traversed the Ancestral Stream and absorbed the necessary insight for the desired Talent. You (but not others) may spend Style points to roll additional dice. Borrowing or improving a talent has a difficulty of 3.

If a botch is rolled, the character learns an unexpected Talent instead of the desired Talent. The GM selects this Talent.

Normal: Your character cannot improve or gain skills from the Ancestral Stream.

Burn Conversion

Prerequisites: Magical Aptitude, Magic 8

You have learned to manipulate magical failures.

Benefit: After determining the number of successes from a Magic Skill roll, the caster may add one additional success by suffering two additional points of Burn damage. This damage cannot be mitigated by the Burn Reduction Talent or with Style points. This Skill cannot be used on botched Magic rolls.

Normal: Extra successes cannot be gained by taking additional Burn damage.

Advanced: You make take this talent a second time to gain two successes by suffering four additional points of Burn.

Burn Diversion

Prerequisites: Magical Aptitude, Magic 6

You can fuel your spells by tapping into your Strength.

Benefit: For any Burn damage that would reduce your Health to 0 or below, you can instead reduce your Strength to pay for each point of Burn damage. You will incur all negative effects of the lowered Strength. The lost Strength points return to normal as Lethal Wound points would, but they do not return until all Lethal and Nonlethal wounds have healed. Strength cannot be reduced below 1 via Burn Diversion.

Normal: Damage inflicted by Burn that reduces your Health to 0 would cause you to become exhausted. Damage inflicted by Burn that reduces your Health below 0 would cause unconsciousness. Damage inflicted by Burn that reduces your Health beyond -5 begins converting to lethal damage.

Advanced: You make take this Talent twice, but the benefit the second time must be applied to your Dexterity or Intelligence.

Burn Reduction

Prerequisites: Magical Aptitude, Magic 6

Your can use magic without paying as high as a price as other casters.

Benefit: You ignore one point of Burn each time you use magic.

Normal: Every magic use failure inflicts one point of Burn.

Advanced: This Talent can be taken three times, allowing one more point of Burn to be ignored each time.

Burn Transfer

Prerequisite: Magical Aptitude, Magic 8

You can mitigate Burn by transferring it to someone else.

Benefit: You can mark willing people to share Burn with them. One point of Burn can be transferred for each mark made. A magic user can only apply one of her marks to any one person. Marks persist until used or the magic user dies. The marked person must be alive for the Burn to transfer. A magic user's Magic Skill Rating equals the number of marks she can maintain at once. A magic user cannot choose the order in which the Burn is transferred among her marks. Marked people can sense which direction the magic user is and vice versa.

Normal: Burn only affects the magic user casting the spell.

Advanced: You may take this Talent a second time to gain its benefit against unwilling people and double the number of marks your character can maintain.

Calculated Attack

Prerequisite: Intelligence 3

Your character is wily and clever, able to use his intellect as a weapon. He knows how to take advantage of an opponent's mistakes and exploit weaknesses in defenses.

Benefit: Your character uses his or her Intelligence rating as the Base Attribute for a specific combat Skill, such as Archery, Athletics, Brawl or Melee (designate when Talent taken).

Normal: Your character uses the standard Base Attributes for his combat Skills.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent multiple times, but the benefit is applied to a different Skill each time.

Calculated Defense

Unique

Prerequisite: Intelligence 3

Your character is shrewd and smart, anticipating her opponent's attacks and expertly defending against them.

Benefit: Your character uses her Intelligence instead of Dexterity when calculating her Active Defense and Defense ratings.

Normal: Your character uses her Dexterity when calculating his or her Defense ratings.

Special: You may not buy this Talent if your character already has the Bold Defense Talent.

Captivate

Prerequisite: Performance 4

Your character is a magnetic and attractive performer. She is able to capture attention with her performance abilities and sheer force of personality.

Benefit: As a Standard Action, your character can attempt to entrance her opponents during combat. Make a Performance roll against all opponents within 10 ft. of your character. If you roll more successes than an opponent's Willpower rating, she is entranced and unable to attack for a number of turns equal to the number of extra successes you rolled. An entranced opponent may defend herself normally, but the spell is broken if she is attacked during this time. If you roll more than twice an opponent's Willpower rating, she is completely enthralled and loses her Active Defense rating for a number of turns equal to the total number of extra successes you rolled.

Normal: Your character may only attempt to entrance an audience outside of combat. They automatically lose interest in the performance if the situation turns violent.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to three times, gaining your character a +2 Performance bonus for each additional level purchased.

Charismatic

Unique; only available during character creation

Prerequisite: None

Your character is exceptionally charming and persuasive. Her ability to influence people far exceeds that of the average person.

Benefit: Your character gains a +1 Charisma rating. This bonus affects her Charisma rolls and all Charisma-based Skills. It also factors into her Secondary Attributes and raises her maximum Charisma rating by one point.

Normal: Your character's Charisma rating is unmodified.

Combat Aptitude

Unique

Prerequisite: Intelligence 3

Your character has a gift for combat; she knows how to use her expertise for both offense and defense.

Benefit: As a Free Action on your character's turn, you may take up to a -4 penalty on her Defense rating to add an equal amount of bonus dice to her attack rating, or vice versa. You may not reduce either rating to zero in this manner. These modifiers remain in effect until your character's next action, when you may reallocate dice once again.

Normal: You suffer a -4 penalty to your attack roll and gain a +2 bonus to your Defense when your character fights defensively.

Combat Skill

Prerequisite: Non-combat Skill 4

Your character is adept at keeping himself out of harm's way when using a non-combat Skill (such as Medicine, Investigation or Diplomacy) during combat.

Benefit: Your character gains a +2 Defense bonus whenever he uses a specific non-combat Skill in combat (designate one when you take this Talent).

Normal: Your Defense rating is unmodified when using non-combat Skills in combat.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent multiple times, but the benefit is applied to a different Skill each time.

Conversation

Unique

Prerequisites: Gnome, Ancestral Stream

Your character can do more than just wade through the Ancestral Stream. Through focus and meditation, she can actually speak with a member of the Stream.

You activate this Talent by spending two Style points and focusing on the person (or type of person) with whom you would like to speak. Conversation cannot be activated in stressful situations, such as combat, as it requires deep meditation.

Benefit: You make an Intelligence plus Willpower roll to determine whether you can find and isolate the voice of the gnome your character is seeking. You (but not others) may spend Style points to roll additional dice.

Your character does not need to know the specific person with whom she wishes to speak, but she must be able to describe something that would distinguish him from the rest of the Stream, such as an occupation, hometown, etc.

Finding a specific person has a difficulty of 4, assuming your character knows the gnome's name. The more you know about the gnome, the easier it is to find and speak with him. Additional detailed knowledge about the gnome can give bonus dice to the roll (at the GM's discretion).

When looking for a gnome (or type of gnome) in the Stream whose name your character does not know, the base difficulty is 3. This is modified based on how many members of the Stream could possibly meet your requirements. The table below outlines these modifiers.

Once your character is able to locate the gnome she is looking for, the actual conversation is very brief (about 30 seconds). You can extend this by spending additional Style points (30 seconds per Style point).

If a botch is rolled, your character meets a random ancestor and is stuck in a conversation that is tedious and unhelpful.

Difficulty	Description
-2	Looking for someone who was part of a large group. Example: A person who is a blacksmith.
0	Looking for someone who is part of a moderate-sized group. Example: A person who once lived in an area.
+2	Looking for someone who is part of a small or select group. Example: A person who once lived in this house.
+4	Looking for a specific person. Example: The person who drew this map.

Normal: You cannot communicate directly with a member of the Ancestral Stream.

Danger Sense

Unique

Prerequisite: None

Your character can sense unseen threats, such as sneak attacks and ambushes. Because he is constantly alert to danger, your character is never caught with his guard down.

Benefit: Your character retains his full Defense rating when surprised or ambushed. This includes attacks he cannot see coming, such as backstabbing. Sometimes the GM will make an Empathy roll on your behalf to see whether your character gets an unbidden premonition or a bad feeling about a situation.

Normal: Your character loses his Active Defense rating when surprised or ambushed.

Diehard

Prerequisite: None

Your character is hard to kill. She can continue fighting even after taking enough damage to kill an ordinary person.

Benefit: Your character does not fall unconscious, and automatically stabilizes, when reduced to negative Health. She may continue to act, but will suffer wound penalties on all actions equal to her current Health. In addition, her death threshold is increased to -7 Health.

Normal: Your character is unconscious when reduced to negative Health and will continue to lose Health unless she stabilizes.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent up to three times. Each additional level increases your character's death threshold by two points (up to –11 Health).

Direction Sense

Unique

Prerequisite: None

Your character does not need a compass. He has an innate sense of direction and rarely gets lost. Your character knows which way is north even when he can't see the sun.

Benefit: Even in adverse conditions, your character automatically knows which direction he is heading without having to make a roll. This Talent also gives you a +2 bonus to all navigation rolls.

Normal: You must make a navigation roll (Difficulty 2) for your character to determine his direction of travel.

Special: Cannot be taken by mountain dwarves.

Divine Intervention

Unique

Prerequisite: True Faith

Your character believes that he can call upon a higher power to change fate.

Benefit: You can spend your character's Style points to give anyone automatic successes after a Skill roll has been made. For every two Style points given, an automatic successes received. Style points cannot be donated to the character using Divine Intervention. This Talent cannot be used to help with spell casting.

Normal: You can only spend Style points on behalf of another character before a Skill roll has been made.

Dual Wield

Prerequisite: Dexterity 3

Your character can wield a weapon in each hand, doubling the amount of damage she can inflict on her enemies.

Benefit: Your character may attack without penalty when using a weapon in her off-hand. Alternately, she may attack two times (using one weapon in each hand) by making a Total Attack with a -4 penalty on each attack roll. These attacks may be made at different targets.

Normal: Attacking with a weapon in your character's off-hand results in a -2 penalty. Alternately, your character may attack twice by making a Total Attack with a -4 penalty to her primary attack and a -6 penalty to her off-hand attack.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to three times. Each additional level reduces the Total Attack penalty by 2.

Enhanced Potency

Prerequisite: Magical Aptitude

Your character has focused his magic on increasing Spell Potency.

Benefit: Your character automatically receives a +1 bonus to the Potency of his spells when trying to affect someone. Note that this does not affect the Spell Damage rating.

Normal: Your character's Spell Potency is not enhanced.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to three times, gaining a +1 Potency bonus per level.

Evade

Prerequisite: Dexterity 3

Your character has a knack for avoiding ranged combat attacks. She ducks and weaves, making it harder to hit her.

Benefit: Your character gains a +2 Defense bonus against ranged attacks. This bonus also stacks with the dodge bonus. Anything that causes your character to lose Active Defense also causes her to lose her Evade bonus.

Normal: Your character's Defense rating is unmodified.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent twice, gaining an additional +2 Defense bonus against ranged attacks.

Fearsome

Prerequisite: Intimidate 4

Your character knows how to use fear and intimidation as a weapon. He can unnerve enemies and even cause them to turn tail and run.

Benefit: As a Standard Action, your character may attempt to scare his opponents. Make an Intimidation roll against all opponents within 10 ft. If you roll more successes than an opponent's Willpower ratings, she suffers a –2 penalty to her attack and Skill rolls for a number of turns equal to the number of extra successes you rolled. If you roll more successes than twice your opponent's Willpower, she flees in terror for a number of turns equal to the total number of extra successes you rolled.

Normal: You may make an Intimidation roll against a single opponent in an attempt to scare him.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to three times, gaining your character a +2 Intimidation bonus per level.

Final Stand

Unique

Prerequisite: None

You can summon the strength from within to make one last attack before being knocked unconscious, or begin dying or die.

Benefit: If your character is lethally wounded to the point of reducing his Health to 0 or less, he may make a free attack before he falls at a +2 Skill rating.

Normal: Your character falls unconscious when lethal damage reduces your Health reaches 0, begins dying when his Health is reduced below zero, and is dead when his Health reaches -5.

Finesse Attack

Prerequisite: Dexterity 3

Your character is quick and agile and knows how to use speed as a weapon, slipping her attacks past an opponent's defenses.

Benefit: Your character uses her Dexterity rating as the Base Attribute for a specific combat Skill, such as Athletics, Brawl or Melee (designate one when you take this Talent).

Normal: Your character uses the standard Base Attributes for her combat Skills.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent multiple times, but the benefit is applied to a different Skill each time.

Flurry

Prerequisite: Dexterity 3

Your character can attack twice in quick succession, doubling the amount of damage he inflicts on enemies in close combat.

Benefit: Your character may attack twice by making a Total Attack with a -2 penalty on each. Both attacks must be made with the same weapon, or with a weapon and an unarmed attack.

Normal: You may attack twice by making a Total Attack with a -4 penalty on each attack roll.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent two times, allowing your character to attack twice without penalty.

Focused Attack

Prerequisite: Willpower 3

Your character is dogged and relentless, able to use his discipline as a weapon. He focuses attacks to wear down an opponent's defenses.

Benefit: Your character uses his Willpower rating as the Base Attribute for a specific combat Skill, such as Archery, Athletics, Brawl or Melee (designate one when you take this Talent).

Normal: Your character uses the standard Base Attributes for his combat Skills.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent multiple times, but the benefit is applied to a different Skill each time.

Focused Defense

Unique

Prerequisite: Willpower 3

Your character is stubborn and unyielding. She focuses her will to defend herself, shrugging off blows and never letting her guard down.

Benefit: Your character uses Willpower instead of Body when calculating her Passive Defense and Defense ratings.

Normal: Your character uses Body when calculating Defense ratings.

Special: You may not buy this Talent if your character already has the Strong Defense Talent.

Giant

Unique; only available during character creation

Prerequisite: None

Your character is more than 7 ft. tall and weighs more than

300 pounds. He towers over normal people and is bigger, stronger and tougher than they are.

Benefit: Your character receives a +1 Size bonus.

Normal: Your character is Size 0.

Special: This bonus affects Health and maximum Body and Strength ratings. Your character's increased Size will also penalize attack and Defense ratings.

Guardian

Prerequisite: Intelligence 3

Your character is gifted at looking out for others and protecting them from injury. She shouts warnings, deflects blows and pulls people out of harm's way.

Benefit: As a Standard Action, your character may grant a +2 Defense bonus to all allies within 10 ft. of her. She must be able to see and speak to allies in order to grant this bonus.

Normal: Your character cannot grant Defense bonuses to allies.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent twice, allowing your character to provide an additional +2 Defense bonus to her allies.

Headstrong

Unique

Prerequisite: Willpower 3

Your character is steadfast and unshakable, and uses his indomitable will to shake off even the most powerful blows. Your character can literally will himself to keep fighting, even when his body aches to collapse.

Benefit: Your character uses his Willpower instead of his Body when calculating his Stun rating.

Normal: Your character uses his Body when calculating his Stun rating.

High Pain Tolerance

Prerequisite: None

Your character can ignore grievous, nasty wounds. She still feels pain, but it doesn't slow her down.

Benefit: Your character isn't automatically unconscious when reduced to negative Health. (You still have to make a stabilization roll, or your character will continue to lose Health each turn.) She remains conscious and ignores wound penalties until reaching -3 Health, at which point she falls unconscious as normal.

Normal: Your character automatically falls unconscious when reduced to negative Health, and must make a stabilization roll or continue to lose Health each turn.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent twice, allowing your character to remain conscious and ignore wound penalties until she reaches -5 Health (at which point your character falls over dead). If your character also has the Diehard Talent, you may take the High Pain Tolerance Talent one additional time for each level of Diehard that she possesses. Each level increase allows your character to ignore two additional wound penalties.

Higher Faith

Unique

Prerequisite: True Faith

Your religious faith is strong.

Benefit: Your character gains a +2 Willpower Rating when determining the results of a Blessing Talent, and for rolls when his religious convictions would strengthen his resolve.

Normal: Your Willpower is unmodified.

Improved Connection

Unique

Prerequisites: Gnome, Ancestral Stream

Your character has a deeper understanding of the Ancestral Stream than other gnomes. She is better able to access and navigate the Stream, increasing her other Mystic Talents.

Benefit: Your character rolls two additional dice any time she uses a Mystic Talent. In addition to this, the duration of these talents are automatically extended — as if an additional Style point was spent.

Normal: Your character's Mystic Talents are unmodified.

Inconspicuous Casting

Prerequisites: Magical Aptitude, Dexterity 3

Your character knows how to cast without being noticed.

Benefit: When casting a spell, your character may take one point of Burn to not be noticed by anyone with a Perception of 5 or less.

Normal: Casting cannot be done without being noticed.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent twice. The second level increases the Perception limit to 8.

Inspire

Prerequisite: Diplomacy 4

Your character is skilled at motivating others. He can infect people with confidence and enthusiasm, and drive them to perform better than they thought possible.

Benefit: As a Standard Action, your character may grant a +2 Skill bonus to all allies within 10 ft. of him. He must be able to see and speak to his allies in order to grant this bonus.

Normal: Your character does not grant any Skill bonuses to his or her allies.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent twice, allowing your character to provide an additional +2 Skill bonus to allies.

Instant Reload

Unique

Prerequisite: None

Your character can reload weapons with amazing speed.

Benefit: Your character may reload a weapon as a Reflexive Action, allowing her to reload and fire in the same turn. Weapons that normally take longer than a combat turn to reload will only take your character a Standard Action to reload.

Normal: Reloading a weapon takes a Standard Action, but some weapons take longer to reload. Your character must wait until his or her next turn to fire a weapon after reloading it.

Intelligent

Unique; only available during character creation

Prerequisite: None

Your character is exceptionally bright and clever. His or her intellect far exceeds that of the average person.

Benefit: Your character gains a +1 Intelligence rating. This bonus affects his Intelligence rolls and all Intelligence-based Skills. It also factors into his Secondary Attributes and raises his maximum Intelligence rating by one point.

Normal: Your character's Intelligence rating is unmodified.

Iron Jaw

Prerequisite: None

Your character is exceptionally sturdy and solid. She is extremely hard to daze and can take quite a beating before losing consciousness.

Benefit: Your character gains a +1 Stun rating.

Normal: Your character's Stun rating is unmodified.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent up to four times. Each additional level grants your character an extra +1 Stun rating.

Iron Will

Unique; only available during character creation

Prerequisite: None

Your character is exceptionally courageous and driven. His resolve and determination far exceed the average.

Benefit: Your character gains a +1 Willpower rating. This bonus affects his Willpower rolls and any Willpower-based Skills. It also factors into his Secondary Attributes and raises his maximum Willpower rating by one point.

Normal: Your character's Willpower rating is unmodified.

Keen Sense

Only available during character creation

Prerequisite: None

Your character has a particularly acute sense, such as vision, hearing, or smell. She has amazing sensitivity and rarely misses anything.

Benefit: Your character gains a +4 Perception bonus when using a particular sense, such as vision, hearing, touch, taste or smell (designate one when you take this Talent).

Normal: Your character's Perception rating is unmodified.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent multiple times, but the benefit will be applied to a different sense each time.

Knockout Blow

Prerequisite: Brawl 4

Your character is a master of nonlethal combat. She knows exactly where to hit an opponent to daze him without hurting him very much.

Benefit: Your character gains a +1 damage bonus to stun her opponent. No additional damage is done, but this damage bonus makes it possible for your character to stun or knock out an opponent without doing much damage to him.

Normal: Your character's unmodified damage is compared to your opponent's Stun rating. If she inflicts more damage than her target's Stun rating, her opponent will be stunned for one turn per additional success. If she inflicts more damage than twice her opponent's Stun rating, her opponent will be knocked out for one minute per additional success.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to four times. Each level grants your character an additional +1 damage bonus to stun her opponent.

Know-It-All

Prerequisite: Intelligence 4

Your character has broad familiarity with a variety of different tasks. He may be a handyman, drifter, or jack of all trades, but he can perform tasks without any formal training.

Benefit: Your character may ignore the untrained Skill penalty when using any general Skill. In addition, he may make an untrained Broad Skill roll at a –2 penalty.

Normal: Your character makes untrained Skill rolls with a –2 penalty and may not make untrained Specialized Skill rolls.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to three times. Your character gains a +1 Skill bonus to untrained Skill rolls at second level and a +2 bonus at third level.

Lethal Blow

Prerequisite: Brawl 4

Your character's hands are deadly weapons. He knows exactly how and where to hit an opponent to do the most damage. Your character is not trying to incapacitate his opponent — he is going for the kill.

Benefit: Your character's Brawl attacks do lethal damage.

Every two points of nonlethal damage inflicted does one point of lethal damage instead. Leftover points do nonlethal damage, as normal.

Normal: Brawl attacks do nonlethal damage.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to three times. Each level grants your character an additional +2 Brawl bonus when making a lethal attack.

Lifesaver

Unique

Prerequisite: Medicine 4

Your character is a gifted healer. Her touch is soothing and she has an amazing ability to treat wounds. People under her care heal much more quickly and cleanly than normal.

Benefit: Your character heals one lethal or two nonlethal wounds per one success rolled on your Medicine rolls.

Normal: Your character heals one lethal or two nonlethal wounds per two successes rolled on your Medicine rolls.

Long Shot

Unique

Prerequisite: None

Your character is skilled at attacking distant targets. He intuitively adjusts for range, and can hit targets accurately over very long distances.

Benefit: Your character's weapon ranges are doubled, allowing him to shoot or throw at targets with a reduced penalty.

Normal: Your character's weapon ranges are unmodified.

Lucky

Prerequisite: None

Your character is lucky and somehow manages to get out of dangerous situations and pull off tricky maneuvers.

Benefit: Once per game session, your character receives a +2 luck bonus to any dice roll.

Normal: Your character's dice rolls are unmodified.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent up to five times. Each additional level grants your character an extra +2 luck bonus per game session. These bonuses may either be used separately or added to the same roll.

Magical Adept

Prerequisite: Magical Aptitude

You have an innate talent for magic.

Benefit: You can spend two Style points before your character casts a spell to get one automatic success.

Advanced: This Talent can be taken up to three times in order to spend more than two Style points to receive more than one automatic success. Each time it is taken, it allows you to spend two additional Style points before casting a spell in order to receive additional automatic successes.

Normal: Your character's spell casting roll is not modified.

Magical Aptitude

Only available during character creation

Prerequisite: See table below.

Your character has a magical aptitude for a particular magical tradition.

Benefit: Your character can learn to cast spells from that one tradition.

Tradition	Prerequisite
Animism	Loranthian race
Beguiling	Rover race
Elemental	Elven race
Necromancy	Human race
Primal Magic	Human, Oruskan or mongrel race
Rune Magic	Dwarven race
Sorcery	Human race

Normal: Your character cannot perform magic without an aptitude for that type of magic.



Mobile Attack

Prerequisite: Dexterity 3

Your character excels at fancy footwork, and can make accurate and powerful attacks even while moving.

Benefit: Your character may attack without stopping his movement (up to his total Move rating).

Normal: Your character may move and attack, or attack and then move, but he may not attack while moving.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent twice, granting your character the ability to simultaneously run and attack.

Mounted Combat

Unique

Prerequisite: Ride 3

Your character is adept at attacking from a mount and hitting a target with melee or range weapons.

Benefit: Your character attacks from a moving mount without penalty.

Normal: Your character suffers a -2 attack penalty when attacking from a moving mount.

Parry

Prerequisite: Melee 4

Your character is adept at parrying armed combat attacks. She automatically deflects cuts and thrusts without having to go on the defensive.

Benefit: Your character gains a +2 Defense bonus against melee attacks. She must be holding a weapon or item capable of parrying to get this bonus. This bonus also stacks with shield and dodge bonuses. If your character loses Active Defense, she will lose the Parry bonus as well.

Normal: Your character's Defense rating is unmodified.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent twice, gaining your character an extra +2 Defense bonus against melee attacks.

Prayer Circle

Prerequisite: True Faith

You can lead others in a prayer circle, sharing faith and devotions that can later buoy their spirits.

Benefit: Once per session, your character can lead others in prayer, asking his god or gods to favor all within the circle in a particular endeavor. Later during the same session, you can spend a Style point to give each member of the prayer circle a Style point of their own. At the end of the scene, these Style points disappear. The prayer circle is limited to people who share your faith. The maximum number of participants is equal to twice your Willpower. A character can only be part of one prayer circle at any given time.

Normal: Your character cannot give Style points to others.

Advanced: You may take this Talent a second time, allowing you to spend two Style points to give each member of the prayer circle two Style points.

Provoke

Prerequisite: Con 4

Your character is gifted at taunts and insults. He can draw attention to himself, and away from his friends and allies.

Benefit: As a Standard Action, your character may attempt to provoke opponents into attacking him. Make a Con roll against all opponents within 10 ft. of your character. If you roll more successes than an opponent's Willpower rating, she will attempt to attack your character for a number of turns equal to the number of excess successes rolled, or until she is attacked by someone else. If you roll more successes than twice an opponent's Willpower, she will continue to attack your character even if someone else attacks her.

Normal: You may make a Con roll to taunt one enemy into attacking you.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to three times, gaining your character an additional +2 Con bonus per level.

Quick Draw

Unique

Prerequisite: None

Your character is able to draw weapons with amazing speed. She is so fast that her weapons seem to just suddenly appear in her hands.

Benefit: Your character draws weapons as a Free Action, allowing her to ready a weapon and attack in the same turn. Weapons that normally take longer than a turn to ready only take a Standard action to draw.

Normal: Drawing a weapon takes a Standard Action, but some weapons take longer to ready depending on how it is carried. Your character must wait until her next turn to fire a weapon after drawing it.

Quick Healer

Unique; only available during character creation

Prerequisite: Body 3

Your character heals at a remarkable rate. Even life-threatening wounds don't keep her down for long.

Benefit: Your character heals at twice the normal rate. She heals two nonlethal wounds per day, or one lethal wound per three days of rest. Exertion during this time makes her heal twice as slowly.

Normal: Your character heals one nonlethal wound per day, or one lethal wound per seven days of rest. Exertion during this time makes her heal twice as slowly.

Special: The Quick Healer talent does not increase the healing rate of Burn damage.

Quick Reflexes

Prerequisite: None

Your character reacts to danger much faster than the average person, allowing him or her to take action well before they do.

Benefit: Your character gains a +2 Initiative rating.

Normal: Your character's Initiative rating is unmodified.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent twice, gaining your character an additional +2 Initiative rating per level.

Rapid Shot

Prerequisite: Dexterity 3

Your character can attack two times in quick succession, doubling the amount of damage she inflicts on enemies in ranged combat.

Benefit: Your character may attack the same opponent twice by making a Total Attack with a –2 penalty on each attack roll. Both attacks must be made with the same weapon, which must be capable of attacking twice in the same turn.

Normal: You may attack the same opponent twice by making a Total Attack with a –4 penalty on each attack roll.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent twice, allowing your character to attack the same opponent twice without penalty.

Robust

Prerequisite: None

Your character is exceptionally hale and hearty. His physical fitness is far superior to the average person. As a result, he is able to soak up a lot more damage before losing consciousness.

Benefit: Your character gains a +2 Health rating.

Normal: Your character's Health rating is unmodified.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent twice, gaining your character an additional +2 Health rating per level.

Run

Unique

Prerequisite: None

Your character is swift and fleet of foot. She runs much faster than the average person and can even keep up her amazing speed over long distances.

Benefit: Your character's running speed is doubled.

Normal: Your character runs at normal speed.

Skill Aptitude

Prerequisite: None

Your character has a natural affinity for a particular activity or subject, and is considered a prodigy or expert in his field.

Benefit: Your character gains a +2 Skill rating to a specific Skill (designate one when you take this Talent). This is a general bonus and does not give your character any free Skill Levels.

Normal: Your Skill ratings are unmodified.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent multiple times, but the benefit is applied to a different Skill each time.

Skill Mastery

Prerequisite: Intelligence 3

Your character is a genius in a particular field with expertise in all its various disciplines. She may be a master craftsman or amazing artisan, for example.

Benefit: Your character may take one Broad Skill — Academics, Art or Craft (designate one when you take this Talent) — as a general Skill, granting him or her general expertise in all its disciplines.

Normal: Each discipline under a Broad Skill must be taken as a separate Skill.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent multiple times, but the benefit is applied to a different Skill each time.

Spring Up

Unique

Prerequisite: None

Your character can get back on his feet with amazing



speed and grace. When knocked to the ground, he immediately bounces up again.

Benefit: Your character stands up as a Free Action, allowing him to get up and attack in the same turn.

Normal: Standing up takes a Standard Action.

Staggering Blow

Prerequisite: Brawl 4

Your character's unarmed blows are extremely powerful. He can stagger an opponent or even knock her off her feet.

Benefit: Your character gains a +1 damage bonus to knock back his opponent. No additional damage is done, but the bonus makes it possible to stagger or knock down the opponent.

Normal: Your character's unmodified damage is compared to his opponent's Strength rating. If he inflicts more damage than his target's Strength rating, the opponent is knocked back 5 ft. per additional success. If he inflicts more damage than twice his opponent's Strength rating, the opponent is knocked clean off her feet.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to four times. Each level grants your character an additional +1 damage bonus to knock back your opponent.



Stalwart

Unique

Prerequisite: None

Your character is less susceptible to poison and disease. She can also hold her breath longer than others.

Benefit: Your character gains a +2 to Body rolls to resist disease, the effects of a drug or poison and the amount of time she can hold her breath.

Normal: You make a Body roll. The difficulty depends on the potency of the disease or toxin. Your character can hold her breath for one minute per point of Body rating.

Strong

Unique; only available during character creation

Prerequisite: None

Your character is exceptionally muscular and well built. His might and vigor far exceed that of the average person.

Benefit: Your character gains +1 Strength rating. This bonus affects his Strength rolls and all Strength-based Skills. It also factors into his Secondary Attributes and raises his maximum Strength rating by one point.

Normal: Your character's Strength rating is unmodified.

Strong Defense

Unique

Prerequisite: Strength 3

Your character is stalwart and vigorous. She uses her powerful build for defense and to resist damage.

Benefit: Your character uses her Strength rating instead of Body when calculating her Passive Defense and Defense ratings.

Normal: Your character uses her Body rating when calculating her Defense ratings.

Special: You may not buy this Talent if your character already has the Focused Defense Talent.

Style Study

Unique

Prerequisites: Melee 5, Intelligence 3

Your character knows how to take advantage of opponents' weaknesses.

Benefit: For each turn your character spends studying an opponent in battle, he gains a +3 to his Total Attack Roll, up to a +6 maximum bonus.

Normal: A Total Attack allows you to gain a +2 bonus to your Attack roll.

Special: Studying an opponent takes most of your character's attention. Your character cannot actively defend himself, block, parry or attack while doing it. He can move and take

damage without losing concentration. Style Study bonuses do not stack with Aiming bonuses.

Subsist

Unique

Prerequisite: None

Your character can subsist on little or no food and water longer than most.

Benefit: Damage from going without food and water is halved.

Normal: Your character suffers a lethal wound each day he goes without water, and a lethal wound each day he goes without food.

Subtle Strike

Prerequisite: Stealth 4

Your character is a master assassin, capable of sneaking up on prey and striking with lethal accuracy.

Benefit: Your character may use her Stealth rating when making an unarmed or melee attack against an opponent who is unaware of her presence. Make a Stealth roll (including weapon modifiers) against your opponent's Passive Defense (plus armor modifiers). If you roll more successes than your opponent, your character inflicts one point of damage per extra success. If you roll fewer successes than your opponent, your attack has failed. Once your character attacks her target, she automatically loses the element of surprise and cannot use this Talent again on the same opponent (unless she gets away and finds a way to surprise him again).

Normal: Your character may not use her stealth offensively.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to three times. Your character gains a +2 attack bonus at second level and a +4 bonus at third level.

Swift

Prerequisite: None

Your character is exceptionally fast. His speed far exceeds that of the average person.

Benefit: Your character gains a +2 Move rating.

Normal: Your character's Move rating is unmodified.

Advanced: You may purchase this Talent twice, gaining your character an additional +2 Move rating per level.

Time Sense

Unique

Prerequisite: None

Your character has a highly accurate internal clock and always knows what time it is or how much time has passed.

Benefit: Your character knows what time it is without having to make a roll. She can even tell how much time has passed while sleeping, and wake up at a predetermined time.

Normal: You must make an Intelligence or Survival roll (Difficulty 2) to determine the approximate time of day.

Tinker

Prerequisite: Craft (Any) 4

Your character can improvise almost anything he needs using everyday items around him.

Benefit: Your character may ignore the penalty for using improvised tools and materials.

Normal: Your character suffers a -2 penalty for using improvised tools and materials.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to three times. Your character gains a +2 tool bonus at second level and a +4 bonus at third level.

Total Defense

Unique

Prerequisite: Dexterity 3

Your character is adept at making concentrated attacks without letting down her guard. She can defend herself even while making an aggressive, reckless assault.

Benefit: Your character retains her full Defense rating when making a Total Attack.

Normal: Your character loses her Active Defense rating when performing a Total Attack.

Total Recall

Unique; only available during character creation

Prerequisite: None

Your character never forgets anything. He has a perfect memory and remembers each detail of everything he has ever seen, heard or read.

Benefit: Your character always remembers details without having to make an Intelligence roll. (Taking notes during play is a good aid for roleplaying this ability.)

Normal: You must make a successful Intelligence roll (with a Difficulty determined by the GM) to recall a particular piece of information.

Tough

Unique; only available during character creation

Prerequisite: None

Your character is exceptionally hardy and robust. Her stamina and endurance far exceed that of the average person.

Benefit: Your character gains a +1 Body rating. This bonus affects Body rolls and any Body-based Skills. It also factors into her Secondary Attributes and raises her maximum

Body rating by one point.

Normal: Your character's Body rating is unmodified.

Tough Attack

Prerequisite: Body 3

Your character is tough and resilient, and can use his fortitude as a weapon, shrugging off lesser blows and plowing through opponents' defenses.

Benefit: Your character uses his Body rating as the Base Attribute for a specific combat Skill, such as Archery, Athletics, Brawl or Melee (designate one when you take this Talent).

Normal: Your character uses the standard Base Attributes for his combat Skills.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent multiple times, but the benefit is applied to a different Skill each time.

True Faith

Unique

Prerequisite: None

Your character actively believes in a higher power. She does not need to be a holy person to have the True Faith talent. Anyone can have True Faith.

Benefit: Your character may spend a single Style point after a roll to either gain an auto success or achieve a minor miraculous result. A minor miraculous result is something above and beyond what is normally achievable with a Skill. Your character can affect her Skill attempts and others' Skill attempts, as long as they are not opposed to her religion or goals. Style points cannot be donated to your character to activate the True Faith talent.

Vigorous Defense

Prerequisite: Dexterity 3

Your character keeps up an active defense — always moving and turning to keep his opponents at bay. Even multiple opponents have difficulty wearing him down.

Benefit: Your character may be attacked twice in the same combat turn without penalty. Additional attacks penalize his Defense rating as normal.

Normal: If your character is attacked more than once during the same combat turn, he suffers a -2 penalty to his Defense rating for each additional attack.

Advanced: You may buy this Talent up to four times. Your character can defend against an extra attack per combat turn without penalty for each additional level (i.e., the initial purchase lets your character defend against one additional attack without penalty, the second allows two additional attacks, and so on).

Weave Warped

Unique

Prerequisite: None

After the Night of Fire, something about your character naturally disrupts spell casting, forcing magic users to concentrate harder to affect him.

Benefit: Each time anyone uses magic against your character, directly or indirectly, the caster suffers an additional point of Burn, above and beyond what he would normally suffer as a result of the magic use.

Normal: A magic user's opponent doesn't affect the amount of Burn he takes.

Flaws

Flaws represent your character's physical, mental or behavioral shortcomings. Whenever your character is hurt or hindered by a Flaw during play, you earn Style points that may be spent for bonus dice when you need them. Therefore, the more you roleplay your character's Flaw, the stronger and more versatile your character will be. Don't constantly roleplay your Flaw, however, as it will lose potency if overused. For this reason, GMs may limit the number of Style points earned through Flaws to one per game session.

You get one Style point when you take a Flaw during character creation. Characters must start play with one Flaw in addition to any inherent to their race. The GM's permission is required for additional flaws. Following are descriptions of some common Flaws. Feel free to create your own with GM approval.

Flaw Descriptions

Addiction

Your character is physically or mentally addicted to a specific substance or activity, and will do anything to satisfy her need. If she overindulges or goes too long without getting a fix, you suffer a -2 penalty on all rolls until she sobers up or overcomes her addiction. You earn a Style point whenever your character's addiction hurts her or someone she cares about.

Amnesia

Your character has suffered some sort of trauma that caused him to lose his memory. He may recover part of his memory over time, but it is exceptionally disorienting when it happens, so you suffer a -2 penalty on all rolls until the

episode is over. You earn a Style point when your character suffers a traumatic flashback, or when something from his past comes back to haunt him.

Blind

Your character cannot see and is forced to rely upon her other senses to get around. She may have suffered an accident or been born that way, but she is completely blind. You automatically fail any roll that requires your character to see. You earn a Style point whenever a severe blunder or misunderstanding occurs because of your character's blindness.

Braggart

Your character inflates his abilities to epic proportions, but is unable to live up to the hype or carry out his threats. Your character may promise to perform nearly impossible tasks that he cannot do. You earn a Style point when your character's bragging about his abilities gets him, or the people who believe him, into serious trouble.

Callous

Your character is selfish, uncaring and insensitive to the suffering of others. She is hardhearted and will not go out of her way to help anyone. Pleas for mercy fall on deaf ears. You earn a Style point when your character does something particularly selfish or refuses to help someone in dire need.

Clumsy

Your character is awkward and uncoordinated. He frequently drops things, bumps into walls and tables, and knocks things over. Your character suffers a -2 penalty to any roll where grace and coordination are a factor. You earn a Style point when your character suffers harm or causes unintended damage because of his clumsiness.

Condescending

Your character thinks she is better than everyone else. It doesn't matter whether she is actually superior. Anyone who disagrees with her is clearly mistaken, and must be put in his place. You earn a Style point whenever your character proves someone else wrong or establishes her own superiority.

Coward

Your character is afraid of conflict and won't stand up for himself. He will run from a fight, or surrender if unable to flee. You suffer a -2 penalty on all rolls when he is threatened with physical violence. You earn a Style point if your character gives up without a fight or abandons his friends to save his own skin.

Flaws	Description
Physical Flaws	
Blind	Cannot see, and automatically fails sight rolls
Clumsy	Poor coordination
Day Blindness	Eyes are extremely sensitive to light
Deaf	Cannot hear, automatically fails hearing rolls
Despised	Conjures bad feelings from others
Disfigured	Ugly, unattractive and repulsive to others
Dying	Has an incurable disease and may soon die
Hard of Hearing	Poor hearing and may misunderstand speech
Mute	Cannot speak and must write or gesture instead
One Arm	Missing an arm and has trouble doing work
One Eye	Missing an eye and has poor depth perception
Poor Vision	Bad eyesight and has trouble identifying things
Sickly	Prone to sickness and fatigue
Slow	Reduce movement
Small	Not as big or strong as others
Speech Impediment	Trouble speaking and may be misunderstood
Mental Flaws	
Addiction	Hooked on a specific substance or activity
Amnesia	Lost his memory and may have flashbacks
Curious	Fascinated by the unknown
Delusional	Suffers from hallucinations or delusions
Depressed	Sad and pessimistic
Height Complex	Unreasonably angry if anyone comments on your lack of height
Impulsive	Impatient and reckless and often gets in trouble
Mentally Unstable	Mental illness causes him to act unpredictably
Obsession	Compulsion to perform a particular activity
Overconfident	Foolhardy and sometimes gets in over his head
Paranoia	Anxious and distrusts everyone around her
Perfectionist	Overly demanding of himself and of others
Phobia	Scared of a particular thing and will avoid it
Behavioral Flaws	
Braggart	Inflates abilities to epic proportions
Callous	Selfish, uncaring and insensitive of others
Condescending	Thinks he is better than everyone else
Coward	Afraid of conflict and may run from a fight
Criminal	Believed to have committed a serious crime
Denial	Believes life will return to normal any day now
Gullible	Will believe almost anything
Guttersnipe	Prefers to be dirty and smelly
Honest	Never lies
Intolerant	Biased against a certain thing
Merciful	Compassionate and forgiving
Shy	Dislikes social situations and tries to avoid them
Superstitious	Goes out of his way to follow unusual beliefs
Vengeful	Bent on revenge
Vow	Sworn to an action or organization
Zealot	Dedicated to spreading his religion, to a fault
Miscellaneous Flaws	
Hunted	Pursued by an individual or organization
Secret	Has an embarrassing or shameful secret
Unlucky	Cursed, jinxed or otherwise unlucky

Criminal
Your character is believed to have committed a serious crime, regardless of whether she actually did it. She may be a fugitive on the run or may have done time for her misdeeds. Regardless, people distrust your character and may turn her over to authorities — or extract their own justice — if given the chance. You earn a Style point whenever your character is hurt by her negative reputation.

Curious
Your character is insatiably curious. The unknown fascinates him. Your character will leave no stone unturned in search for answers. He cannot leave well enough alone and often ends up in trouble. You earn a Style point whenever your character's curiosity causes trouble.

Day Blindness
Living and working in the dark have made your character's eyes extremely sensitive to light. Bright light, such as a sunny day, dazzles him — and he has to squint in it to even make out hazy, washed-out images. You receive a -1 penalty to sight Perception rolls in bright light. You earn a Style point whenever a severe blunder or misunderstanding occurs because of your character's day blindness.

Deaf
Your character cannot hear and may have to learn to read lips to communicate. She may have suffered an accident or been born that way, but is completely deaf. You automatically fail any roll that requires your character to hear. You earn a Style point whenever a severe problem or misunderstanding occurs because of your character's deafness.

Delusional
Your character has a deeply held belief that is completely false. She may see or hear things that aren't there, or believe that she is at the heart of a conspiracy. No amount of evidence will convince her otherwise. You earn a Style point whenever your character's delusion causes trouble.

Denial
While your character acknowledges the Night of Fire occurred, he underestimates its impact. Your character believes former governments will impose the rule of law soon. He is sure everything will quickly return to normal, and lives life as if the Apocalypse never happened. You earn a Style point whenever your character is taken advantage of because he continues to follow laws and cultural norms from Before.

Depressed
Your character is perpetually sad and gloomy. He is pessimistic and believes the worst of himself. No matter what happens, he expects circumstances to conspire against him. You earn a Style point whenever your character's dire predictions come true or something happens to crush his spirits.

Despised
Most people don't like your character, which affects his ability to interact with them. You earn a Style point whenever a misunderstanding occurs because your character is despised.

Disfigured
Your character has a nasty scar, birthmark or deformity that repulses other people. As a result, he is considered ugly and unattractive. You suffer a -2 penalty on all rolls where your character's appearance is a factor. You earn a Style point whenever your character is rejected because of her appearance.

Dying
Your character is ill and will die soon. She may have an incurable disease, but hasn't given up on finding a cure. You suffer a –2 penalty to all rolls whenever your character's disease acts up. You earn a Style point if your character is incapacitated by sickness or forced to confront her mortality.

Gullible
Your character is naive and easily cheated. He takes people at their word, even if they have lied to your character in the past. Your character suffers a -2 penalty on rolls to resist deception. You earn a Style point whenever your character is taken advantage of because of his trusting nature.

Guttersnipe
Your character is dirty and stinks, and she likes it that way. Other people avoid your character because of her garbage-loving ways. She has no intention of changing, however, and avoids baths and even cleansing rain showers at all costs. You earn a Style point whenever your character is rejected because of her appearance or aroma.

Hard of Hearing
Your character has poor hearing. He may be deaf in one ear or just have trouble hearing normally. Either way, you suffer a -2 penalty on any roll when hearing is a factor. You earn a Style point whenever your character's poor hearing gets him into trouble or causes a critical misunderstanding.

Height Complex

Your character hates being called short and will instantly anger upon hearing a short joke or anything she perceives to be a crack about her height. Physical challenges made more difficult by your character's lack of height will quickly frustrate her, and cause her to act irrationally. You earn a Style point if your character's height complex causes trouble for her or her companions.

Honest

Your character is sincere and straightforward. He always tells the truth and plays by the rules, even when his opponents do not. Your character suffers a -2 penalty on social rolls whenever he tries to lie or cheat. You earn a Style point whenever your character's honesty causes trouble.

Hunted

Your character is being actively pursued by a highly motivated individual or group. She may have something they want or be someone they hate. You earn a Style point whenever your character is in danger of being caught.

Impulsive

Your character is impatient and reckless. He detests waiting around and will take action without taking time to plan. As a result, he is often unprepared for trouble and forced to improvise. Your character will jump into dangerous situations without thinking twice. You earn a Style point whenever your character's impulsiveness gets him or his companions into serious trouble.



Intolerant

Your character is prejudiced against certain situations, behaviors or types of people (such as a particular race, culture, sex or religious group). She may react with disgust or even hostility when confronted with the object of her dislike. You earn a Style point when your character's intolerance causes trouble, or when she convinces someone else to detest the same thing.

Mentally Unstable

Your character has a mental illness that may cause him to act in abnormal ways at inappropriate times. He may hear voices, do irrational things or have emotional outbursts. You earn a Style point whenever your character's unstable nature gets him or his companions into serious trouble.

Merciful

Your character is kind-hearted and sympathetic. She believes that violence is wrong and prefers to live and let live. She will do everything possible to ease the suffering of others. You earn a Style point whenever your character shows compassion to an enemy or refuses to retaliate when wronged.

Mute

Your character cannot speak and is only able to communicate through hand gestures or writing. He may have a problem with his vocal chords, or had his tongue cut out, but it makes speaking nearly impossible. You automatically fail any roll that requires your character to speak. You earn a Style point whenever a severe problem or misunderstanding occurs because of your character's inability to speak.

Obsession

Your character is fixated on a particular activity, such as keeping herself clean, organizing her possessions, or wooing the person of her dreams. If your character cannot indulge the obsession regularly, you suffer a -2 penalty on all rolls until she is able to satisfy her compulsion. You earn a Style point when your character's obsession causes her to do something dangerous or endanger someone else's life.

One Arm

Your character is missing an arm. He cannot wield two-handed weapons and his lifting capacity is halved. If your character attempts to perform an action that normally requires two hands, you suffer a -2 penalty on the roll. You earn a Style point when your character drops something or

makes a critical blunder because of his missing arm. *Special: You cannot take the Dual Wield Talent if you have this Flaw.*

One Eye

Your character is missing an eye, but may have a fake eye or wear an eye patch to cover it. As a result, your character has poor depth perception and you suffer a -2 penalty on any ranged attack rolls. You earn a Style point if your character critically misjudges distance or is blindsided by someone.

Overconfident

Your character has high self-esteem — perhaps too high. He believes there is nothing he can't do better than anyone else. This foolhardy attitude can get him into trouble from time to time. You earn a Style point when your character is forced to ask for help or when his bravado gets him in over his head.

Paranoia

Your character is excessively concerned with his well-being. He is wary and distrustful of everyone, including close family and friends. He may even have a persecution complex and believe there is a vast conspiracy against him. You earn a Style point whenever your character pushes a friend away or actually catches someone working against him.

Perfectionist

Nothing your character does, or anyone else does, is ever good enough. She can't stand lackadaisical attitudes. Quickly laid plans make her nervous. If left to her own devices, she would mull over a problem for days. You earn a Style point whenever your character pushes a friend away or creates a problem because of her perfectionism.

Phobia

Your character is scared of a particular situation, object or type of person. He will actively avoid the object of his phobia, and flee if confronted with it. If he cannot escape, you suffer a -2 penalty on all rolls until your character is able to get away. You earn a Style point whenever your character's fear gets the better of him. Below are just a few examples:

- **Agateophobia:** Your character, like most people in the After, survived a horrific experience during the Night of Fire. However, your character's experience was so disturbing that he fears it will drive him insane.
- **Agoraphobia:** Your character has an irrational fear of wide open spaces. An open plain, the open sea, the desert — anywhere there is no chance of finding cover makes him lose his nerve.
- **Apocaphobia:** Every thunderclap or darkening sky has your character running for cover. He's afraid the Apocalypse isn't over yet, and that the worst is yet to come.
- **Futuraphobia:** Your character is afraid that his worst nightmares and most horrible thoughts are actually visions that are going to come true.
- **Hylophobia:** Trees, with their gnarly roots, waving branches and dead bark covering living innards are just not right. Your character can handle being near one or two, but a forest full of them are just too much to bear.
- **Thalassophobia:** Your character is afraid of large bodies of water. He will not willingly get on a ship or even wade into an ocean. He'd rather walk thousands of miles around a large body of water than cross it. Even lakes and rivers are suspect.

Poor Vision

Your character has bad eyesight. She may be nearsighted, farsighted or just have dim vision. You suffer a -2 penalty on any roll when sight is a factor. You earn a Style point when your character's poor vision gets her into trouble or causes her to make a critical mistake.

Secret

Your character has some sort of shameful secret that would be extremely embarrassing if it came to light. As a result, he will do everything possible to keep his secret hidden. You earn a Style point if your character is confronted with the truth or goes out of the way to protect his secret.

Shy

Your character is uncomfortable in social situations and tries to avoid them as much as possible. She dislikes being the center of attention and prefers to let others take center stage. You earn a Style point if your character misses out on getting recognition or a reward for her actions because she won't assert himself.

Sickly

Your character may be weak, prone to sickness, plagued by allergies, constantly fatigued or all of the above. You receive a -2 penalty to Body rolls that would be affected by his sickness. You earn a Style point when your character's sickliness gets him into trouble or causes him to make a critical mistake.

Slow

Your character has short legs, a bad leg or foot or some other physical limitation that slows him down. Dwarves suffer a -1 penalty to Move ratings, while other short-legged races suffer -2 to their Move ratings. Characters with physical disfigurements that slow them down suffer a -2 to their

move ratings. You earn a Style point when your character's reduced movement gets him into serious trouble.

Small

Your character is Size -1, causing her both physical and social problems. Because of he height she is often not taken seriously. You earn a Style Point when your character's size causes her severe difficulty or when she is rejected because of it. *Special: You cannot take this Flaw if you have the Giant Talent.*

Speech Impediment

Your character has trouble speaking clearly. He may have a stutter, lisp or some sort of disfigurement that makes understanding him difficult. This may cause important information to be misunderstood or delivered too slowly. You earn a Style point whenever a severe problem or misunderstanding occurs because of your character's speech impediment.

Superstitious

Your character is extremely superstitious and will go out of his way to follow his unusual beliefs. Your character will avoid performing any activity that is considered "bad luck," and will never miss an opportunity to do something that will give him good fortune. You earn a Style point when your character's eccentricities cause trouble, or if one of his beliefs turns out to be true.

Unlucky

Your character is cursed, jinxed or just has chronic bad luck. Whenever anything is left to chance, circumstances will almost always conspire against her. Once per game session, you suffer a -2 penalty on any one dice roll. You earn a Style point if this causes your character's action to fail, or if you roll a botch.

Vengeful

Your character can't let something go. She can't turn the other cheek. If she is slighted or wronged — or even perceives being wronged — she must get vengeance. You earn a Style point when your character's thirst for vengeance cause her to get into serious trouble.

Vow

Your character has made a solemn oath that he takes very seriously. It might be a vow involving protection, faith, sacrifice or any other promise your character is bound to keep. You earn a Style point whenever upholding your vow requires your character to make an important sacrifice.

Zealot

Your character is so dedicated to spreading the word about her religious beliefs that she often insults other religions and turns conversation into theology lectures. She turns more people away from her beliefs than she converts. You earn a Style point when your character's zealousness causes her trouble, or if one of her beliefs converts someone.

Starting Experience Points

Each character starts with 15 experience points, representing all of the experience and training he has accumulated prior to the start of the game, including over the Long Winter. The GM may vary the amount of starting experience points depending on the power level of the game he is running. If a player is creating a new character who is joining an existing party, he may be given additional starting experience points.

Starting experience points may be spent in the following manner:

Trait	Experience Point Cost
Primary Attribute	New Skill Level x 5 points
Skill	New Skill Level x 3 points
Skill Specialization	3 points
Talent	15 points

Unspent points may be carried into play, subject to GM approval.

Starting Style Points

Style points can be used in the game to give your character a bit of luck when his back is against the wall. They can be spent on bonus dice to boost a single roll, to boost a Talent for an entire scene or combat or to reduce damage.

You may start play with up to five Style points. However, you have to do some extra work to earn them. Starting Style points may be earned in a variety of ways, always at the discretion of your GM.

- Creating a detailed or interesting MPH: 1 to 3 points
- Taking an additional flaw at character creation: 1 point
- Creating a plot hook (e.g., a rival or dependent) for your character: 1 point each
- Using props or costumes for your character: 1 point
- Miscellaneous (e.g., hosting the game): 1 point

Of course, Style points can also be earned during the game. For more information on earning and spending Style points, see page 170.

THE FORMER LEGIONNAIRE

"The Empire lives in me."



Lem Ollender

Race: Human
Archetype: Warrior
Style: 3
Motivation: Duty
Health: 5

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Dexterity: 2*
Strength: 4
Charisma: 1
Intelligence: 2
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Move: 7
Perception: 4
Initiative: 4
Defense: 8
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	4	3	7	(3+)
Archery	2	1	3	(1+)
Brawling	4	2	6	(3)
Intimidation	1	3	4	(2)
Melee	4	5	9	(4+)
Survival	2	1	3	(1+)

Talents

Flurry: Can attack twice in quick succession
Lucky: +2 dice to one roll per session

Flaws

Vow, uphold the laws of the Empire: Receive a Style point whenever it gets him or his companions into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.
Spear	3L	0	12L	(6) L	Good
Fist	0N	0	6N	(3) N	
Bow	2L	0	5L	(2+) L	Worn

Armor	Def.	Str.	Dex.	Cond.
* Breastplate	+3	0	-1	Good

Languages

Ascondean, Lanarian

My Story

Before the Night of Fire, my life belonged to the Empire. Like my father before me, I was a legionnaire. Unlike my father, who was a general, I commanded a mere half-hundred men and women, and I probably only received that honor because of him. I never resented it. I loved the respect it brought me. Being in service of the Empire was a privilege.

Then came the day when my commander gave me an order I could not carry out. Goblin or not, I would not kill a helpless prisoner. My refusal resulted in a transfer to the Tenth Legion in Verelanar. I quickly discovered why they called it "Punishment Detail."

It was terrible. The people hated us, and we hated them. They poisoned our water, spat in our faces and threw rocks at us as we patrolled their streets. My father disowned me, ashamed of my dishonor and my assignment to Verelanar. I was ashamed too. Not of myself but because my beloved legion's ideals weren't quite as pure and as noble as I'd once thought. I knew I had been right not to murder that prisoner, though I watched as my commander cut his throat anyway.

I decided to try to prove to the people of Verelanar that not all Ascondeans were to be hated. I did my best to act with honor and integrity during my time there. It was difficult at times, and I had to stay my hand on a number of occasions. These people were not helpless prisoners, but they were still under our care and protection. No matter how much they despised us.

The Night of Fire fell upon that blighted country like a cleansing fire. While many legionnaires took the chance to flee or take revenge upon the people of Verelanar, I tried to save as many as I could. I wasn't thanked for my help, even though I saved dozens of lives. If I hadn't escaped the country a few days later, I think I would have had my own throat cut.

I wore the uniform of my old legion as I traveled. I tried to find out what had happened. The only news I was able to find was bad. It looked like the Empire was in ruins. The only other legionnaires I met were either running for their lives or abusing their rank and position for their own gain. I gave the first group of legionnaires I met a chance to join with me; the second I gave a chance to surrender before I officially removed their rank and position. At that point they were traitors, and could be dealt with accordingly. I had to execute many traitors.

I spent the Long Winter in a small village in the company of elderly goblins and mongrel-folk who seemed grateful to have a warrior among them. I often felt I was paying the balance of a debt during that Winter, protecting those harmless Oruskans where I had not stood up for that goblin prisoner.

The villagers had not been part of the Empire Before, but they respected me and the laws I brought with me, where the people of Verelanar had not. It made me realize that the Empire might stand in ruins, but only physically. It could be rebuilt in the hearts of anyone willing to believe. Perhaps I can help rebuild the Empire and the legion into what I had always hoped it would be.

Roleplaying

You can earn Style points by making sure everyone knows you're the one in charge. Don't let anyone push citizens of the Empire around. You are one of the last surviving symbols of the Ascondean Empire — a legionnaire — and you will get the respect you deserve. You have definite ideas on what is right and what is wrong. You'll always give those on the wrong side of the law one chance to do the right thing, but just one.

"We haven't lost our humanity."



Esther LaVore

Race: Human
Archetype: High Born
Motivation: Rebuild
Style: 3
Health: 4

Primary Attributes

Body: 2
Charisma: 3
Dexterity: 3
Intelligence: 4
Strength: 1
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 7
Move: 4
Defense: 5
Perception: 6
Stun: 2

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Academics/History	4	2	6	(3)
Archery	3	1	4	(2)
Bows			5	(2+)
Diplomacy	3	2	5	(2+)
Nobility			6	(3)
Linguistics	4	1	5	(2+)
Magic/Sorcery	4	5	9	--
Medicine	4	2	6	(3)
Melee	1	1	2	(1)

Talents

Magical Aptitude: Sorcery
Burn Reduction: -1 Burn per spell

Flaws

Obsession, Civility: Receive a Style point whenever it gets her or her companions into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.
Bow	2L	0	7L	(3+) L	Good
Quarterstaff	2N	0	4N	(2) N	Good

Languages

Ascondean, High Ascondean, Dwarven

My Story



I've lost everything. Everyone has, of course. The difference is that everyone else simply had much less to lose. Before I was everything that a person could aspire to be in the Empire. I had beauty, wealth, power and more importantly, I had magic. I was a baroness, a wife, a mother and a member of the Council of Magores. I had the respect of my peers, the adulation of my subjects and the fear of my enemies. I say this not to brag, only to help you understand how far some of us have fallen.

When the Night of Fire took everything from us, I was working in the service of the Empire. One of my honored duties was interviewing and evaluating children who showed magical potential. I would test their emerging talent and prepare the child and their family for enrollment in the Academy. I missed my family, but I knew my work was important.

On my last assignment, I believed I had discovered two particularly talented and powerful children — twins who could someday be archmagi. As the fire rained down, I saw the twins burst into flames, torn apart by their own magical potential. Driven mad with grief, the children's parents threw me out into the burning night. I barely survived. My own magic left me wounded and near death when I tried to use it to protect myself. Only luck and the blessings of the Divine Mother kept me safe. I quickly learned to keep my sorcery to myself over the next few months. The Long Winter was difficult, though my noble standing and skills with bandages and salves were enough to garner respect and a place in a settlement. I used my magic sparingly. I had no choice but to keep it secret.

My husband and children were at home in the capital city during the Night of Fire. Rumors say that there is nothing left of it but a smoking crater. I pray that I will be rejoined with them someday. In my heart, I know I will not see them again in this life.

By all accounts, the Empire is no more. The world has sunk into depravity and despair. I weep at night for all who have been lost. Not only for my family and subjects, but also for the children of today and tomorrow that must endure these horrors without the Empire to guide and protect them.

Although I still possess my skills with magic, I am loath to use them. The world has changed in so many ways. People blame magic for what has happened and now treat magic and its users with fear and distrust. If that were not enough, the Weave itself seems broken; even the simplest of spell is painful to attempt. What was once my greatest gift has turned into a curse. Though I remember what happened to the twins that night, I refuse to believe that magic is itself cursed. It is not to blame for the Night of Fire, and neither are my kind.

In the end, some things are more powerful than magic. The Empire was built with more than Sorcery. The ties that bound the Empire together were those of civility and trust, politeness and an agreement to work together to forge something greater than the sum of its individual parts. That must endure, now more than ever.

I am nothing now. But in time, that will change. I will make it change.

Roleplaying

One way to earn Style points is to maintain your poise and dignity, no matter what the situation. It may seem like a waste of time and effort to most, but you know better. You refuse to act like an animal. You will set an example for others to follow. How else will the traditions and customs of the Empire survive? What's the point of survival if you are going to live in a world of brutality and disorder? Rebuilding the civilization you once knew isn't going to happen any time soon, but people can start by simply being civil to one another.

THE SCAVENGING DWARF

Denner Khent

Race: Mountain Dwarf
Archetype: Criminal
Motivation: Wealth
Style: 3
Health: 4

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 2
Dexterity: 4
Intelligence: 3
Strength: 2
Willpower: 1

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 7
Move: 5*
Defense: 8
Perception: 4
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Con	2	2	4	(2)
Craft/Blacksmith	3	2	5	(2+)
Larceny	4	3	7	(3+)
Melee	4**	2	6	(3)
Scavenge	3	3	6	(3)
Stealth	4	3	7	(3+)

Talents

Darkvision: Ignore Perception penalties caused by darkness
Hardy: 1 extra die when spending Style points on Body-based rolls
Resistance: +2 to resist poison, immune to Deep Horror poison and disease
** **Finesse Attack:** Base melee on Dexterity, not Strength
Subtle Strike: Use Stealth for attack vs. Passive Defense

Flaws

Broken Compass: -2 to Navigation rolls
Dense: -4 to Swim rolls
* **Slow**: -1 to Move
Apocaphobia: Receive a Style point whenever fear of apocalypse gets him or his companions into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.
Hammer	2L	0	8L	(4) L	Good
Dagger	1L	0	7L	(3+) L	Worn

Armor	Def.	Str.	Dex	Cond.
Leather	+1	1	--	Worn

Languages

Ascondean, Dwarven

"Did you feel that? Did the ground just shake?"



My Story

It ain't over, I tell ya. People are crawling out from their hidey holes and saying everything's gonna be all right. Fools! It's not ever gonna be right again. The sky could open up and pour down fire again any second. I'm always ready for it, but what's it matter? If part of a mountain falls from the sky, it won't do much good to see it coming.

The only thing that matters to me is making it through another day so maybe I can find a safe place. The Pillars know I can't go home, even if Cair Dhurn did still stand. I didn't leave on the best of terms.

Instead of spreading the word like my father wanted, I threw in with the legion. They needed horseshoes and nails, and those were about all I was good at making. Wages weren't much, but I was able to "supplement" that by finding items off the battlefields to mend and sell. The dead didn't need 'em. If there weren't any battles, I had to look elsewhere ... like in the packs of people who didn't take care of their belongings. I made a pretty good living selling my fixed-up finds in the towns we stopped at along the way. I coulda sold shine to the sun … then the sun disappeared.

It still gives me the shakes just thinking about it. People were dying all around me. The legionnaires whirled around looking for someone to fight. But you can't fight the gods. I think the mages tried. They got all pumped up like they were gonna cast a big 'ole spell and then — boom, bang — they started exploding like corn cobs in a campfire. They didn't all explode. I was standing right beside Merril when he just turned to dust and blew away. Most of the legionnaires got smashed by fiery rocks falling from the sky or burned to a crisp by the lighting bolts that fell thicker than rain drops.

I'm not sure how I survived and I don't care why. I know I ran as fast these stumpy legs could carry me. I know I did some things I'm not proud of — like knocking that cook into a pit that opened up in the ground. I was outta my mind with fear and she was in my way. I didn't even know what I was doing.

Just before the Long Winter, I crawled up on a town they called Hope Hollow. I made the mistake of saying I was a smithy. I thought maybe I could trade some repairs for food. Gods I was hungry. They threw shackles on me faster than ugly on a mongrel and forced the labor outta me. I spent almost a year there, chained up and hammering nails, shovels and swords outta any scrap they could find. Nice place. Hope it burns when the fire comes again.

When the Thaw came, so did some visitors. An ex-legionnaire wanted his sword fixed and had the food to pay for it. They musta thought better of trying to take food from a trained soldier, so they let him talk to me. I used every fast talking trick I knew to get him on my side. He wasn't too bright, but he got me outta that town.

We parted ways not long after. He and I didn't see eye to eye on some things — like me thinking he was an idiot for wanting to save every lost soul we ran across. He didn't like me taking things neither. I didn't take it personally, but I did take his dagger.

Roleplaying

You can earn Style points by playing up your irrational fear of the returning Night of Fire. Loud noises or even storm clouds can set you off. You're also afraid of being imprisoned again, so you tend to gloss over the fact that you're a smithy and are cautious about when and where you use your larceny skills. You're a bit rough around the edges, having spent most of your life around soldiers. People see you as angry or surly, but you really just call things the way you see them. You're not heartless, just realistic.

"You're hardly worth burning."

Menelaris Covanalar

Race: Elf

Archetype: Spell Caster

Motivation: Reclaim Power

Style: 3

Health: 6

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 3
Dexterity: 2
Intelligence: 2
Strength: 2
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 4
Move: 4
Defense: 5
Perception: 7*
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	2	2	4	(2)
Larceny	2	2	4	(2)
Magic/Elemental	3	4	7	--
Melee	2	3	5	(2+)
Stealth	2	2	4	(2)
Survival	2	2	4	(2)

Talents

Indefatigable: 1 extra die when spending Style points on Willpower-based rolls
Keen Hearing: +2 to hearing-related Perception rolls
Musical: +2 music-related Performance rolls
***Alertness:** +2 to Perception
Magical Aptitude: Elemental

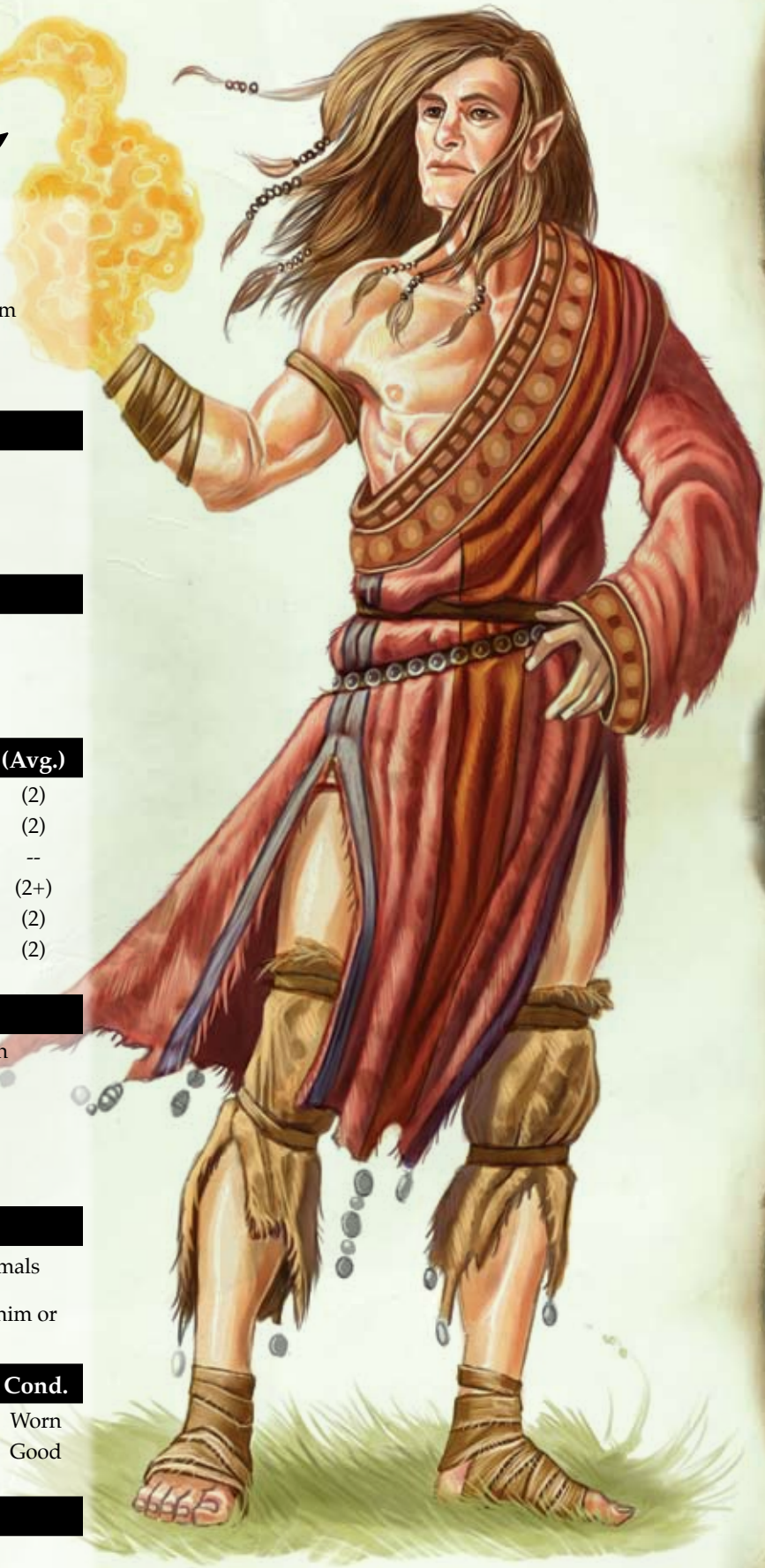
Flaws

Unnatural: -2 to Skill rolls in woodlands, plants and animals receive +1 to attack elves
Condescending: Receive a Style point whenever it gets him or his companions into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.
Axe, Hand	2L	0	7L	(3+) L	Worn
Dagger	1L	0	6L	(3) L	Good

Languages

Ascondean, Elven



My Story

I've been spit on, many times — by men, women, and even children — just because of my race. Just because I'm an "accursed" elf. That was Before, when shame burned through me like hot lead. They weren't worth my hate, so I kept it all inside.

Not long before the Apocalypse, the fire came out. A farmer in Cushulain — dreadful place, full of corn-fed bumpkins interspersed with the occasional hayseed ... though far fewer of them now, I'd wager. Where was I? Oh yes, one of Cushulain's finest caught me sleeping in his barn one morning. He started yelling about me cursing his harvest and decided to kick me out, literally. The oaf's manure-soaked boot caught me in the nose. Blood pounded in my ears. It sounded like a stampede, only louder. The pain was excruciating. I cried out in anger and somehow the sound surrounded me in flames. It scared the farmer off. It also burned down his barn. I suppose that made us even.

With trial and error, I eventually learned to summon the flames and the air that feeds them. Before long I had enough control that I could melt a lock without charring the door. The magic let me get what I needed to survive. We elves were scrounging for centuries before the Night of Fire brought the rest of you to our level. Still, I never took more than I needed.

I believe the stories my grandfather used to tell us about the Banishment. I believe Nature took our magic because we didn't maintain the Balance. After all this time, the elves have been granted the Song again. It is a precious gift, given only to those elves, like myself, who are worthy. I have no intention of losing it.

But one day I did. It was gone. I looked up and was almost relieved to see the ominous red sky. Whatever was going on, it wasn't just me — though now I truly wish it would have been. The ground began to shake. Winds I could not control threatened to carry me away. Then fire fell from the sky. I found a farmhouse with a deep, well-stocked cellar and waited to die. I didn't. My magic came back, but it was much harder to coax out. Now it's physically draining each time I cast a spell.

A few months ago I decided to set out. Maybe I had been given the gift for a reason, I thought. Perhaps I was intended to use my magic to help others, though no one had ever helped me. Regardless, I decided to assist the first group of survivors I saw. They were digging out from the deep snows that had buried whatever was left of Scondera.

I called upon the Song and melted the ice and snow away. Flames shot from my hands, melting feet of snow in seconds. The men's eyes got big as they saw me do what would have taken them hours. I started to say "You're welcome," but then darkness closed in on me and I passed out.

I woke up in time to see a shovel hit me in the head. If a couple of the village's less savage inhabitants hadn't secreted me away ... well, let's just say I won't be helping anymore non-gifted ones unless they prove their worth.

Roleplaying

You are special, and you know it. You are one of the few elves who once again have the Song.

After a lifetime of being put down and seen as lower-class, it's nearly impossible for you not to flaunt your magical power and gloat about the beleaguered state in which most survivors find themselves. It's as if the entire world has been brought as low as the Banishment brought the elves. It's as glorious as it is terrible.

It is difficult for you to help people. You know most of these same people would not have lifted a finger to help an elf in the Before. Still, even your jaded conscience can sometimes be moved by the pitiful plight of survivors. But when you do help, you make sure they know they owe their survival to an elf.

You can earn Style points when your true, condescending, feelings come to the surface.

"War is coming."

Osim Kerhab

Race: Human
Archetype: Warrior
Style: 3
Motivation: Redemption
Health: 6

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Dexterity: 2
Strength: 3
Charisma: 2
Intelligence: 2
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Move: 5
Perception: 5
Initiative: 4
Defense: 6
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	3	2	5	(2+)
Archery	2	3	5	(2+)
Linguistics	2	2	4	(2)
Melee	3	4	7	(3+)
Saber			8	(4)
Ride	2	2	4	(2)
Survival	2	1	3	(1+)
Navigation			4	(2)

Talents

Danger Sense: Reduced surprise penalty
Quick Draw: Draw weapon as a reflexive action

Flaws

Intolerant, Oruskans: Receive a Style point whenever it gets him or his companions into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.
Bow	2L	0	7L	(3+) L	Worn
Saber	3L	0	11L	(5+) L	Good

Armor	Def.	Str.	Dex.	Cond.
Leather	+1	1	--	Worn

Languages

Ascondean, Warland Pidgin, Oruskan, Saiken

My Story

All I have ever known is conflict and pain. One of my earliest memories is the death of my parents, executed by the Warlords of Nor Norak. Our village was destroyed long before the Night of Fire. Why my mother and father had to be killed as an example to the rest of us seems pointless. I was raised by the few humans within the Nor Norak.

Most the warband was Oruskan, and they treated us badly. I was beaten many times as a child, almost to death. I only survived because I was healed, slowly and with unnecessary pain, by the cruel Necromancer that was the only human with any rank or respect in the warband. They feared him, of course, even the Primalist who was second in command. Those two dueled many times in the decade they served together. The leader of the warband, a scarred and vicious orc named Norak, never let one gain advantage over the other, realizing he needed both to maintain power and control over his people.

As I grew older, I found solace and comfort in the company of the horses. The humans in the warband were considered too weak for combat. We looked after the food and supplies, including the animals. The orcs didn't believe in using horses in combat, usually preferring them for their meat. When horses were taken from their enemies, they ended up in stew. That seemed like a waste to me, but so much of what the foolish Oruskans did was wasteful. I learned to ride the horses and used them to carry food and water between outlying camps. The camp masters were upset at first — "What a waste of food," they said, but eventually even they saw the sense. I was a good rider. I began taking orders between camps, sensitive commands that Norak would not entrust to magic. I was ordered to scout for the warband, so I did.

I spent less and less time in the camps, and more time in the wilderness, finding sources of food and water, and making reports on the activity of rival warbands. One day, like many others, I was asked to find new recruits for our forces. I spent a week locating and reporting on likely villages in the area. I came across one small settlement that seemed strangely familiar. As I rode around it, my painted face-mask causing panic and fear in its cowering people, I realized that it was just like the village from which I had been plucked as a child. The terrified faces of the children and their parents broke a heart I did not know I still had. I turned and rode off into the wilderness, leaving behind my cruel taskmasters and the cruel man I had become.

When the Night of Fire came weeks later, I thought it was punishment. Now I realize it was a second chance. I intend to take it. I will protect others from the lashes of tyrants and the cruelty of oppression. And I will take revenge upon the Oruskan monsters that treat humans as if we are less than they are. We are not. They must not be allowed to inherit this broken world.

Roleplaying

After years of servitude in the Warlands, you are now free. It remains to be seen what you will do with this freedom. Much time has been wasted already. The threat of the Warlands and their encroachment to the east worries you deeply. While you feel no real sense of belonging anywhere, you are happy to fight against the cruelty that once held you in its grasp. You may take prisoners or show mercy on occasion, but only if it's not an Oruskan-led warband. Then all bets are off, and you will not stop until they are all dead. You can earn Style points by taking actions to redeem your past mistakes.

Keke Lekili

Race: Loranthian
Archetype: Holy Person
Motivation: Redemption
Style: 3
Health: 3

"The spirits made me to do it."

Primary Attributes

Body: 2
Charisma: 4
Dexterity: 3
Intelligence: 2
Strength: 2
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: -1
Initiative: 5
Move: 3*
Defense: 7
Perception: 4
Stun: 2

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	2	2	4	(2)
Throwing			5	(2+)
Diplomacy	4	2	6	(3)
Swaying others			7	(3+)
Intimidation	4	1	5	(2+)
Magic/Animism	4	5	9	--
Medicine	2	1	3	(1+)
Melee	2	1	3	(1+)
Survival	2	2	4	(2)

Talents

Disease Resistance: +2 to resist disease
Limber: +2 to climb or to squeeze into small spaces
Nimble: 1 extra die when spending a Style point on Dexterity-based rolls
Burn Transfer: Share Burn with the willing
Magical Aptitude: Animism

Flaws

* **Slow**: -2 to move
Small: -1 size
Voracious: Consume twice as much as average human
Zealous: Receive a Style point whenever religious beliefs get her or her companions into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.
Spear, short	2L	+1	6L	(3) L	Good
Darts (2)	1L	+1	7L	(3+) L	Worn
Club	2N	+1	6N	(3) N	Good

Armor	Def.	Str.	Dex.	Cond.
Leather	+1	1	--	Good

Languages

Ascondean, Loranthian



My Story

The mainlanders feared me, I think. I used to think they were funny. I used to enjoy asking the spirits to make the mean ones mess their britches. Sometimes I'd ask the Spirits to poison one's blood with alcohol first thing in the morning so everyone would think he was Sal Kallar's town drunk.

But it's not funny now. Now it makes me angry. For all their big buildings and fancy talk, the mainlanders were little more than apes in clothes. They knew nothing of The Many Who Is One. They never thanked the spirits for their good fortune — for all they had. I should have known the spirits would not let the mainlanders' insults go unpunished.

I lived on the mainland, among the non-believers of Sal Kallar. There was so much of everything, all around us, yet they constantly worried about keeping it all and getting more. I used to get in trouble for "stealing," which is what they called it when I was hungry and ate some fruit from a merchant's cart.

They locked me in a small room in a big building as a form of punishment. They didn't seem to understand that a room with a lock on it was the same as a wide open field to me. They brought me food and water. I was content. Then the spirits sent one of the human leaders to me. He had a dying young one and I asked the spirits to make her well. They did, and the leader was grateful. He took me out of the room and told me I was free. That made me laugh. He was stupid, but kind. He made the other people in Sal Kallar share with me.

It was almost like being home. I stayed in the man's house with his family. Sick people would come and sometimes, if I liked them, I would ask the spirits to make them better. Sometimes the spirits would. They would give me gifts that I would give to the spirits. I told them to thank the spirits too — but it wasn't enough.

They would go back out into the city and collect their shiny coins and eat their fresh foods and put on their pretty clothes and never thank the spirits for any of it. I knew their spirits were doomed, but what could I do? I didn't know the spirits would punish them all at once.

Gahr Dahl sent the Great Wave, not just because the mainlanders never appeased the spirits, but because we island folk never taught them to. We should have made the mainlanders honor our ways instead of just feeling sorry for them. But there were so many of them. Of course, now there are fewer … much fewer. The spirits have made it easier for us to carry out their will by killing so many of the non-believers. The ignorant must be taught to respect the Thousand Faces, and I was spared so that I could teach them. It may be a hard lesson.

Roleplaying

You think those who do not know of Gahr Dahl are children who must be taught a lesson. Sometimes they can be led to Gahr Dahl through kindness, such as healing them and then showing them how to properly thank the spirits. Sometimes, however, you must ask the spirits to be strict with them. Some children are too spoiled to risk sparing the rod. You save your most painful curses for those who blatantly insult the spirits, but you rarely miss an opportunity to teach. You'll earn Style points when you spread the word of Gahr Dahl.

You know you share the blame for the coming of the Apocalypse. You think the increased risk of painful Burn is a reminder of your duty to show the mainlanders the many faces of Gahr Dahl. You aren't shy about using your magic. You are ready to accept any Burn your spells may bring.

You don't bother trying to learn and follow the mainlanders' rules and laws. They're as important to you as the rules of children's games.

"The pursuit of knowledge is its own reward."

Desmun of Westharbor

Race: Human
Archetype: Academic
Motivation: Knowledge
Style: 3
Health: 6

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 2
Dexterity: 2
Intelligence: 3
Strength: 2
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 5
Move: 4
Defense: 5
Perception: 6
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Academics/ Astronomy	3	3	6	(3)
Academics/ Cartography	3	2	5	(2+)
Craft/All*	3	3	6	(3)
Book Binding			7	(3+)
Diplomacy	2	2	4	(2)
Investigation	3	3	6	(3)
Melee	2	1	3	(1+)
Rapier			4	(2)

Talents

Inspire: +2 skill bonus to other players
* **Skill Mastery, Craft:** Use disciplines of Craft with no penalty

Flaws

Curious: Receive a Style point whenever it gets him or his companions into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.
Rapier	2L	0	6L	(3) L	Good

Languages

Ascondean, High Ascondean



My Story

Since I was a child, I've loved the stars. Each night, for as long as my parents would let me stay up, I would look out the window and watch the sky wheel high above. I learned the constellations: the Great Dragon, the Divine Mother and the End-Father, the Magister's Hat ... They were all friends to me. I could tell what time of year it was just by looking at the stars. Drawing maps of the stars was just the start of it for me. Eventually I was drawing maps of the town where I grew up and the area around it.

When my parents sent me to the capital for my advanced education, I wondered if I would be trained as a mage. Instead, I was sent to the Imperial Department of Research as an apprentice to the great cartographers who had mapped out so much of the Empire and the lands beyond it. I was delighted. For the next 10 years I worked hard as an assistant across many areas, learning how to create atlases and guides for the military and the councils.

One thing I missed was doing my own map work. I eventually had dozens of people on my staff, doing field work for me, but I did try to put in time on the ground myself. It was good to be seen getting your hands dirty, of course, but I also loved it. I mean, it was why I got into the work in the first place. I like to work near the mountains especially, updating older maps. It gave me a chance to spend time looking at the night sky in clear air, and a chance to relax far from the city.

One summer evening I gathered up my telescope, surveying equipment, pens, paper and ink, and set off down the road toward Merene. I updated the local maps as I went. The area was peaceful and attractive, and the existing maps were in need of considerable work.

One night, as I sat sipping wine outside the comfortable inn I'd been calling home for the last month or so, I saw a great green flash in the sky. I looked up to see a boiling star flare into existence, and then fade. I had not seen it before. It had no name in my memory, but I knew what I had seen. It was the death of a star, a rare and terrible thing, and my heart was filled with dread. I knew it was a bad omen. I immediately began to compose a letter to my superiors back in the capital city. I tried to use my box of sending, but the letter remained in the transmission slot. The magic failing each time.

I began to consider returning myself. The next evening, as I sat unsettled outside, watching the sky, I saw another star die. Though I'd intended to leave within the next couple of days, I did not have a chance. The Night of Fire fell upon us all, and the world changed forever.

Of course, now all the old maps are useless. That nearly broke my heart until I realized that someone has to make all the new ones. Maybe that's why I survived. I need to teach my skills to others. I need to make sure that others know how important they are. Everyone else is just struggling to survive, but what they don't understand is that survival is useless if we become little more than uneducated savages in the process. I fear that it's already begun.

Roleplaying

You have what it takes to remap the world, but you can't do alone. It's dangerous out there. You'll need help and protection. There is also a good chance that you can save and preserve some of the knowledge that survived, compiling it into books to keep it alive forever. You can earn Style points for collecting and preserving knowledge. If civilization is going to survive, it will need to know how to farm, how to heal, how to build and how to forge. All of that information will need to be preserved, and you can do that. In a real way, you are drawing a map to the future.

THE ROVER PERFORMER

"Don't you just love me?"



Sasha Veng

Race: Rover
Archetype: Performer
Motivation: Fame
Style: 3
Health: 4

Primary Attributes

Body: 2
Charisma: 4
Dexterity: 3
Intelligence: 2
Strength: 2
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 5
Move: 6
Defense: 5
Perception: 4
Stun: 2

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Acrobatics	3	3	6	(3)
Athletics	2	4	6	(3)
Throwing			7	(3+)
Linguistics	2	2	4	(2)
Performance / All*	4	5	9	(4+)
Singing			10	(5)

Talents

Exotic: 1 extra die when spending Style points on Charisma-based rolls
Farsight: Ignore moderate sight Perception penalty (-2) to see things at a distance
Waterborne: +4 to swim and holding breath
Captivate: Can entrance as a Combat Action
* **Skill Mastery, Performance:** Use Disciplines of Performance with no penalty

Flaws

Susceptible: -2 to resist disease
Slight: -2 to perform feats of strength (does not affect attacks)
Obsession, Attention: +1 Style point when your need for attention gets you or your companions into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.
Dagger (thrown)	1L	0	8L	(4) L	Good
Rock (thrown)	0N	0	7N	(3+) N	

Languages

Ascondean, Rover, Dwarf, Elf

My Story

You've heard of me, I'm sure. No, no don't bow. A round of applause will be fine. I'm teasing, of course …

I hate to say it, but at least the Apocalypse made people realize the importance of the arts. Sure, we once put on huge productions in every port city to standing ovations, but now … it's different. The audiences are smaller, yes, and less refined. But now I can tell they really need me. They need my songs to lift their spirits. They watch me dance and it reminds them that beauty still exists. I can see it in their eyes. I do more than entertain audiences now. I give people hope. Not everyone can say that.

Before, every sweet young thing with a pretty face thought she was an entertainer. No so. I was the real deal. I had the experience, the contacts — and most of all, I had the talent. Some of these pretenders may have turned some heads back then, but not anymore. It takes a special type of person to get up on stage after all this death and destruction. Not many can do it. But I can. I have to. My audience needs me — and I'll admit it — I need them.

My manager, Yoki, and I wound up in the middle of nowhere during the Night of Fire. One second I was on stage, smiling at hundreds of people. Then bam. The next minute it was just Yoki and me in the middle of a forest. The village we spent the Long Winter in didn't like magic users and word got out that Yoki was a Beguiler. I don't know if they chased him off or killed him, but I suspect the latter. He wouldn't have left me willingly, that's for sure.

It's not been easy without him. He had his uses, and not just as a manager. He was fairly handy with a blade and knew how to handle some of the more rambunctious customers. I've had to run out of some places myself. Some people mistake my social nature for something else, or believe that just because I like dancing in a provocative way means I want to be pawed over or ... well, other things. Of course, they discover that not all of my skills are just for show. And sometimes, while they are watching me smile, they fail to notice the dagger in my hand.

I spent the Long Winter in a village where they really didn't like my singing. That was tough, let me tell you. I got up every night and told some stories, did some dancing, and sang some songs. While they tolerated that, they were more interested in having me carry stones and blocks of wood around, or defend the smelly place from kobolds or bears. It's very difficult to distract a kobold with even my good lucks, but I tried my best. And when the villagers were close to losing their patience with me, I was always able to give them a winning smile, or in the worst cases, a fake tear or two. Either way, I didn't starve. Though I ached for a decent appreciative audience. I couldn't wait to get back on the road when the winter was over. I mean, I know there was an apocalypse, but it's not like the world ended! Cheer up, people!

Now I'm back traveling, it's better. The people want to be entertained, and that's what I do best. The people remember me. They appreciate me. And I like to be appreciated

Roleplaying

You are the consummate performer. Before the Night of Fire, your star was sinking, but now you shine brightly through the darkness. You can gain Style points by acting the diva at inappropriate times. Performing is all you know, but luckily your career began as a circus act and you haven't forgotten your useful acrobatic and throwing skills.

"Let the Pillars guide your purpose as they guide mine."

Hengen Barshuun

Race: Desert Dwarf
Archetype: Spell Caster
Motivation: Duty
Style: 3
Health: 5

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 2
Dexterity: 2
Intelligence: 4
Strength: 2
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 6
Move: 3*
Defense: 5
Perception: 6
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Academics/Religion	4	2	6	(3)
Athletics	2	2	4	(2)
Craft:/Glasswork	4	2	6	(3)
Empathy	4	2	6	(3)
Magic/Rune Magic	4	4	8	--
Melee	2	3	5	(2+)

Talents

Darkvision: Ignore Perception penalties caused by darkness
Hardy: 1 extra die when spending Style points on Body-based rolls
Resistance: +2 to resist poison, immune to Deep Horror poison and disease
Magical Adept: Can spend 2 Style points to gain an automatic success to Magic roll
Magical Aptitude: Rune Magic

Flaws

Dense: -4 to Swim rolls
Sensitive Eyes: -1 to sight Perception in bright conditions
* **Slow:** -1 to Move
Overconfident: You gain a Style point whenever your overconfidence gets you or your companions into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.
Glass mace	2L	0	7L	(3+) L	Good

Languages

Ascondean, Dwarvish



My Story

I was blessed from birth. My father was a Rune Caster and my mother was a respected priestess of the Five Pillars. From an early age I knew I was different from my peers in Oukal. I was reading when they were starting to speak, drawing when they were learning to hold a brush, heard truths while they were listening to bedtime stories, and saw my purpose while they played at make believe. I was destined for greatness, of that there was no question. I was sure I was going to be a prophet.

My rune casting abilities were also evident at an early age. I was apprenticed to one of the most prestigious members of our community — Sandir Ruung, great nephew of the Prophet and one of the few within the community who were gifted both with faith and magic. I spent the next 15 years of my life at his side, learning the truths of the Pillars and the intricacies of the runes.

I found the runes spoke to me louder than the gods. I could feel the power that coursed through the glowing sigils I etched. Although I felt the presence of Uyln within the furnaces, his voice never reached my ears. I could sense Aldwair's presence just beyond my vision, but he never showed himself. For the first time in my life, I knew failure.

Wracked with despair, I sought to strengthen my relationship with the Pillars. I went into seclusion and searched for the connection I thought was missing. I meditated. I pored over ancient writings. I even tried to express my faith through art, creating images with glass and infusing them with magic. I waited for the gods to speak with me, sure that I was special enough to warrant their attention, but they remained silent. It was a difficult time for me and my pride.

Eventually I saw that I had presumed an honor greater than was deserved. My role was not to speak with the gods and interpret their will as a prophet. I was an instrument of the Pillars and would serve them faithfully.

I was traveling the edges of the Primea Mountains, spreading the true word of the Pillars and trying to encourage my distant kinsmen to come to Oukal, when the Night of Fire came. It was not my first foray into the mountains for such a purpose, so I was accustomed to the derision and hostility that greeted me. But I was not prepared for the world to break.

I sought shelter in a nearby cavern with a half-dozen dwarves. I led us in prayer as we huddled together beneath the earth, trusting in the gods to keep us safe. That we survived is proof of their existence. I can still recall the exact moment the mountains fell and I heard Aldwair's voice for the first time. It was a cry of rage and agony.

When morning came, we found ourselves sealed within the cavern. I used my magic for the first time since the world broke, trying to lighten the boulders that blocked our exit. I had suffered Burn before, but never had I suffered such agony and fatigue. My once-pristine runes were jagged and ugly, mimicking the pain I felt as I wrote them. I passed out from the effort. Fortunately, the rubble was shallow. When I awoke a path had been cleared to the surface. We were truly blessed.

We immediately set forth for Oukal, arriving shortly after the snow began to fall. The tragedy and horror seen during our journey was beyond comprehension. It showed me my destiny. I had survived for a reason. I would spread the word of the Pillars and use their gifts to help the world to pick itself up from ruin.

Roleplaying

You have been given a great gift by the gods and are determined to use it for the good of the church and mankind. This gift was not randomly bestowed. You are favored by the Five Pillars. They have set you on a path to fulfill your destiny. As long as you remain faithful, there is nothing you cannot accomplish. Fulfilling this destiny will earn you Style points.

Although spell casting is more painful than before, it is still potent and divinely inspired. The gods have not retreated, nor have they forsaken you. You have heard that many other spell casters dying during the breaking of the world, and have come to the conclusion that those who remain are worthy to continue to wield the power. It is a terrible burden, but one your bear proudly.

THE GNOME FINDER

"I told you this would happen."

Jarinar Pendilton

Race: Gnome
Archetype: Traveler
Motivation: Discovery
Style: 3
Health: 4

Primary Attributes

Body: 2
Charisma: 2
Dexterity: 3
Intelligence: 3
Strength: 2
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: -1
Initiative: 6
Move: 3*
Defense: 7
Perception: 6
Stun: 2

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Academics/Geography	3	2	5	(2+)
Diplomacy	2	2	4	(2)
Larceny	3	2	5	(2+)
Medicine	3	1	4	(2)
Melee	2	1	3	(1+)
Scavenge	3	3	6	(3)
Survival	3	4	7	(3+)

Talents

Gnomish Subconscious: Ignore untrained penalties to Academics and Linguistics rolls
Heaven Sense: Know time and day
Mental Acuity: +1 extra die when spending Style points on Intelligence-based rolls
Ancestral Stream: Can attempt to gain knowledge via gnomish ancestors
Guardian: Can provide a Defense bonus to allies

Flaws

* **Slow**: -2 to Move
Small: -1 to Size
Braggart: Receive a Style point whenever bragging gets him or his companions into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.
Walking Stick	1N	+1	5N	(2+) N	Good

Armor	Def.	Str.	Dex	Cond.
Leather	+1	1	--	Good

Languages

Ascondean, Gnomish



My Story

No one ever listens to me. They didn't listen to me before the Night of Fire, and they don't listen to me now. That's fine, that's fine. I'm just a gnome, after all, and no one ever takes us seriously.

Maybe they should have. Maybe if they had, we could have avoided all of this — the Night of Fire, the Long Winter and whatever nightmare this once beautiful world has become.

I'm a Finder, a noble and important tradition within my culture. But would anyone actually listen to me — even when I was trying to warn them about the end of the world? I'd been sent from Gearhaven, you see, with important news about an upcoming disaster. I didn't have all the details, mind you. The Mystics just knew it was bad. They had long been listening to the Ancestral Stream — the very essence of the gnomish race — and they had a sense of what was to come. Not only was I told to go warn those who would listen, but I was to try to find some safe places, too. They gave me small fortune in gold crowns to buy equipment and told me to bury it in the safe places I found. It would be needed later.

Hey. Hey! See? You're not even listening to me now. That's exactly what I've been putting up with all this time. Don't make me smack you with my walking stick.

Where was I? Oh, yes. I walked and walked, all over the Empire and the Marches, and not even minor officials would take me seriously. It wasn't all bad. Along the way I had dreams, sent by the Ancestral Stream. I started making a very important map, marking down safe places and the locations of equipment caches that I set up along the way. I often wondered if the Stream would send other gnomes to guard them — Keepers. I hoped I'd never have to find out.

But hope never really amounts to much, does it? Eventually, my dreams led me to a town that I knew was particularly safe and important, and I knew that I'd not be leaving it for a while. I spent a couple of months stockpiling useful supplies, and then the Night of Fire finally came.

It was awful. Worse than I could have imagined, and so many people died. But the town itself was left more or less intact, as I knew it would be. The people were so grateful for the supplies I'd prepared, I thought they would make me mayor. But I just kept my head down and waited for the Long Winter to be over so I could get back on the road and start finding those caches on my very important map.

There were a lot of other people who needed those supplies I hid. I wasn't prepared for the very geography of the world to be different! Now my map is next to useless. How am I meant to save the world with something that's probably better as fire tender?

Still, there's no time to worry about that. Maybe I'll find some landmarks that I recognize. Perhaps the Ancestral Stream will guide me in the right direction. There's always a chance I'll meet some other gnomes that know what's going on, or have a better map. And perhaps I'll find someone worth helping.

I suppose anything could happen. I might even find someone who'll listen to me.

Roleplaying

You are looking for a reason to save the world. You're ready to be proved wrong — to find out people are worth saving. So far, you've seen little to change your mind. Violence is everywhere and civilization seems to be vanishing. No one heeded your warnings Before — why should they heed them now? You're almost sick of trying. Almost. But in the center of your heart is a warm ember of hope that nothing can really dampen. You can earn Style points for only helping those worthy of your services.

"There's no use crying about it."

Krek of Kharhut

Race: Mongrel
Archetype: Outdoorsman
Style: 3
Motivation: Protect
Health: 8*

Primary Attributes

Body: 4
Dexterity: 3
Strength: 3
Charisma: 1
Intelligence: 2
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Move: 4**
Perception: 4
Initiative: 5
Defense: 8
Stun: 4

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	3	1	4	(2)
Archery	3	4	7	(3+)
Craft/Fletching	2	1	3	(1+)
Melee	3	3	6	(3)
Stealth	3	2	5	(2+)
Survival	2	4	6	(3)

Talents

Brute: +1 extra die when spending Style points on Strength-based rolls
Enhanced Sense: +2 sight-related Perception
Accuracy: Reduced called shot penalty
* **Robust:** +2 Health rating

Flaws

Disfigured: -2 to any Charisma-based rolls involving face-to-face contact
** **Slow**: -2 to Move
Pyrophobia: Receive a Style point whenever your character's fear of fire gets him or his companions into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.
Bow	2L	0	9L	(4+) L	Good
Short Sword	2L	0	8L	(4) L	Worn
Dagger	1L	0	7L	(3+) L	Good

Armor	Def.	Str.	Dex	Cond.
Hides	+1	1	--	Good

Languages

Ascondean, Oruskan



My Story

I miss them — my wife, and my two children. We had an understanding with the village of Kharhut. It was near the northern border of the wilderness. We kept it safe from wild animals and intruders, and they left us alone. They even let us into the village sometimes to trade. I had to cover up my face, or let my wife do the trading. She was actually quite pretty, I think. All that short, soft fur made her look like an otter, and not so much a monster — not like me. Our children had her looks and my strength ...

But they're gone. My wife, our children the village. Why I was spared, I do not know. One moment they were there, then I was alone. The Night of Fire, the humans call it. I remember the fire. It fills my nightmares. Our small cottage was engulfed in a wall of heat and it was ablaze seconds later. I have flashes of my wife screeching in agony, even as we tried to throw water over ourselves and the children. I, too, was burning, but somehow I survived. I awoke hours later, lying in a river.

I have no memories of what happened, but my greatest fear is that I ran, abandoning my family as some kind of primal instinct drove me to flee at the cost of those I loved. Maybe it's true what others say about mongrels — that we're just animals that can talk. I don't know. When I returned home, my family was dead. Their bodies were still smoking in the ruins of our cottage. I must live with that. Perhaps my fear of fire is my punishment. I cannot stand to be close to even a campfire for too long. The thought of a large blaze is enough to fill my mind with memories of the night my wife and children burned.

I did not think I would have to live with my guilt for this long. When the Long Winter came, I was sure I'd be seeing my family again in the spirit world. Surely it would have been a blessing. Instead, I found a small settlement where the people took me in and gave me broth and a place in their camp. I was happy to do the dirty jobs no one else wanted to do, and they were happy to let me. They seemed to sense my loss. I knew they had lost much too. We had much in common. They did not judge me for surviving. I was so grateful for that. I still am, months later.

The settlement is gone now. It was destroyed by a group of humans from the Warlands shortly after the Thaw. Again I survived when so many others died. I killed many of those murderers before I was forced to flee. I'm glad to say that I was able to save many of my friends, though I don't know what happened to them since. We were separated in the confusion.

If only the Night of Fire wouldn't have happened. From what I've seen, it must have been caused by humans. Nothing I did caused it. My family was innocent. Maybe the humans deserved it, but my people didn't. Still, it's done and it's over. I suppose we have to make the best of what's left.

I travel now to see what's left of the world, and to see if I can find another place like the one where I spent the Long Winter. Somewhere with people who don't care what I look like and who will give me a chance to contribute. That's all I ask. I had so much Before and didn't fully appreciate it. But all I want now is to be accepted.

Roleplaying

You miss your family, but you're practical. Everyone has lost something or someone. You've lost more than some and less than others, though you feel your loss more because of a guilt that may or may not be real. Even so, you ache to be accepted. It's a need that runs deeper even than your sense of guilt and loss. Eventually, you hope to find a place to settle down and perhaps even start a new family. For now, perhaps you can find that sense of belonging among a group of like-minded travelers. There's much to be done, and you have skills that will be needed in the After. You will earn Style points by using your skills to protect the helpless in the After.

THE FARMER WITH FAITH

"We all deserve a second chance."



Tarl Ishrak

Race: Human
Archetype: Holy Person
Motivation: Faith
Style: 3
Health: 6

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 2
Dexterity: 2
Intelligence: 2
Strength: 3
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 4
Move: 5
Defense: 5
Perception: 5
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Academics/Religion	2	2	4	(2)
Two Above			5	(2+)
Craft/Farming	2	2	4	(2)
Empathy	2	3	5	(2+)
Emotions			6	(3)
Melee	3	3	6	(3)
Scavenge	2	2	4	(2)
Survival	2	2	4	(2)

Talents

Blessing: Bless others with Style points
True Faith: Can spend a Style point after a roll to gain an automatic success

Flaws

Honest: Receive a Style point whenever honesty gets him or his companions into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.
Club	2N	0	8N	(4) N	Good
Dagger	1L	0	7L	(3+) L	Good

Languages

Ascondean, Cushu

My Story

I thought I knew what loneliness was, but I was wrong. It ain't like waiting for my Cacia to come back from visiting her sister or heading out on my own during spring plantin'. It's knowing that everyone you ever spoke to in your whole life is dead, and not having anyone to help you bury them.

I never took the good things for granted. My wife Cacia was so pretty, she had the bluest eyes. It was like looking into a summer sky when she smiled at me. My boy, Lor, he was a blacksmith's apprentice and was good at it too. We had another child on the way. Lor said he'd help out around the farm when the baby was born at the end of the summer. He was a good boy.

When the sky lit up and started to burn, I thought that the world was dying. My crops caught fire, my land cracked open and the farm animals had been driven wild and mad by flashes of lightning and magic. Lor ran outside to try and calm them down. He was kicked in the head by his horse, which had grown about twice as big as it was before. He just dropped like a stone, and I knew he was dead. I went out to pick him up. I carried him inside, my skin burning as the rain fell upon me. I didn't know what else to do. I just crawled into a corner and gathered Cacia into my arms. I put my hand on her belly, hoping that she and my unborn baby wouldn't suffer none.

All of a sudden, there was a bright slow glow of light that seemed to start up from inside Cacia's belly. For a second, I thought I could see the outline of the small body inside hers before the light spread out to fill her completely. I was told later that it might have been that my unborn child had magic in his soul, and that when the Weave broke, it took them both away. I hope it didn't hurt. When I could see again, there was nothing left of them, save ashes on the floor.

Eventually, the Night of Fire ended, and I was alive. I buried what was left of my family under an apple tree on a hill that overlooked the farm — Cacia and my boy would have liked that. I sat under that tree and waited for the world to take me too. I think I could have stayed there forever.

But after a few nights I heard it — a voice in the distance. For some reason I up and followed it. I stopped in what was left of the church. I don't remember walking all those miles. All I know is that I looked up and saw the Divine Mother looking down at me. I wasn't alone no more.

I reckon I had a greater calling than sitting under a tree, so I dug around in the rubble of the church and found one of the priest's robes. For the first time in my life, the teachings weren't just a bunch of words I said on the holy days. I felt them and I understood them. I couldn't save my family, but I could maybe save other folks, if I listened to the Divine Mother.

So I went back up to the farm and said my good byes. I think Cacia would have understood. The world was broken and lots of people need a voice to call out to them — to let them know they aren't alone. So, I'm still a farmer. But now the only crop I'm raisin' is hope.

Roleplaying

One way to earn Style points is to help others cope with the devastation and loss inflicted by the Night of Fire. You should be a beacon of hope and a pillar of strength to those who need it. You like to help people however you can, whether it be by sharing your skills as a farmer, fighting off bandits or simply providing a shoulder for someone to cry on.

Although you are easygoing and do not push your faith on others, you do not tolerate fools. You have seen too much suffering to sit idly by while it is visited upon others. You're not afraid to get your hands dirty, and sometimes bloody. That's just one of the things that sets you apart from "real" priests.

Jirgan sat in the dark cellar. His hands were tied behind his back. A rag that smelled of **sweat and vomit** — neither of them his — was crammed in his mouth and held tight with rope. He could hear them coming.

He had somehow escaped the Circle of Dust during the Night of Fire. Even more amazing, Lor'anne had survived as well. He had used his magic to find her. They were finally going to be together, or so he thought. They found a group of survivors who let them into their makeshift village. They were able to keep his talents a secret all through the Long Winter. Then that kid — **that damned kid** — decided to play on a ruined wall and fell. Her skull was cracked open. She was dying.

Jirgan would have let her die. He had certainly done worse while working for the Nine. But the thought didn't cross Lor'anne's mind. He knew she would never look at him the same way if he didn't heal the girl. He hoped the people he had been living with for more than a year would accept his help.

He placed one hand on the girl's head and another over his heart as he chanted the words that would transfer part of his life force to her. Black flames crackled along his arm in waves, closing the girl's wounds as it healed her and injured him. It hurt more than he expected. **The magic was out of his control.** He heard Lor'anne scream. Everything went black.

He had been bound, gagged and imprisoned by the villagers ever since. They told him Lor'anne was safe, and would stay safe if he cooperated. The village's self-appointed mayor, Hurek, and a few of his men would come to get Jirgan. It was always at night. He assumed they didn't want anyone to know they were using his "dark magic" for their own purposes. Once he was told to heal a dying woman. Once he had to help clear a field of tangle vines by draining the life from the thorny plants.

But it wasn't the mayor who opened the door this time. It was Evelyn, a the mother of the girl he had saved.

"We haven't got much time," she said in a whisper as she began cutting the straps tied around his wrists.

Jirgan pulled the gag out of his mouth as soon as his hands were free. "Where's Lor'anne?"

Tears streamed down Evelyn's face. "She's dead," she sobbed. "**They killed her.** She was trying to get you out and they killed her. They're coming. You need to go."

Evelyn rushed toward the door, but Jirgan grabbed her arm and spun her back around. "Did they burn her?"

"No," the woman said, a confused look on her face. "They buried her, in the graveyard with the others. We have to go."

"When?" he called after her, but the frightened woman was already out of sight.

Jirgan did not follow her. He loosely tied the gag around his head, put his hands behind his back and waited.

Hurek and two of his men opened the door. They peeked in, as they always did, then opened the door fully.

Jirgan spit the gag out, lifted his arms and chanted the words that would steal their life. He had never attempted to drain three people. **Black flames crackled around the three men** and leapt back to him. The men dropped to the ground, out cold. Jirgan dropped to his knees, fighting unconsciousness. The pain of Burn subsided, but the pain of loss remained.

He used Hurek's dagger and slit the man's throat. He bound and gagged the others, then went in search of a shovel.

The fresh dirt gave Jirgan hope as he dug. The longer she was dead, the more difficult the spell. If it went awry ...

He pulled Lor'anne's corpse from the hole. He brushed dirt off her face and knocked beetles and worms from her body. At least they had closed her eyes.

No one had raised an alarm. Jirgan cradled the body of his beloved in his arms as he carried her back to the cellar.

The men had regained consciousness. Jirgand could see the fear in their eyes.

"It's exactly what you think," he said.

The men began to scream into their gags.

Jirgan gently placed Lor'anne's body on the floor, grabbed the two men by their necks and began to chant. **They struggled at first, and then were still.** Weakened by the effort, Jirgan continued the spell. He held Lor'anne by the hands and began to transfer the men's life into her. But it was a tap that he couldn't shut off. It burned, and then the world went black.

He woke, moments later, lying face to face with Lor'anne. Her eyes were open. "Lor'anne?" he whispered.

She stared at him, dead inside, a mindless darkness in the wells of her eyes. She reached for him.

Jirgan began to weep and drew his dagger with a trembling hand.

Chapter 5: Magic

"Killing a mage is doing the world a favor."

Magic exists in nearly all fantasy worlds. It is magic that helps set the fantastic apart from the mundane. In some worlds, magic is pervasive and embedded into everyday life. In others, it is a strange and mysterious force that can only be tapped into by a select few. In the world of *Desolation*, magic falls somewhere in between, taking many different forms and being viewed in many different ways.

The Empire took special care to find and train those with great magical potential. They sought talented people from all walks of life. They believed in the power and potential for magic to make life better for all, making it one of the foundations of their society. To the Empire, magic was both an art and a science — but more than anything else it was a tool.

Outside the Empire, people looked at magic with wonder, reverence and fear. Many tied it into their religion and faith. They believed that such power could only come from the gods, so those who could use it must be holy men. Others saw it as a dark art that was not to be tampered with.

Origins of Magic

Asking where magic came from is like asking where the mountains came from or why there is air. Magic is simply part of the world, but it can only be accessed by tapping into an invisible energy field. Sorcerers have described this as a "curtain draped across the world, woven of magical energy." Hence, the common nickname — the Weave. Each magical tradition has its own belief on the nature of magic and the Weave, but all draw their spell casting abilities from it — whether they realize it or not.

Burn

Regardless of the tradition and their beliefs, all magic works in essentially the same way. It allowed the user to gather power from the Weave and process it through his or her body and mind to create a magical effect. Different traditions allowed the caster to create specific effects by drawing power from the Weave in different ways. There was one constant: Burn.

Burn is known by different names — the price, drain, the weaver's fee, bleed, and more. It is the cost every user must pay when casting a spell. It is a painful process that occurs when the power from the Weave is filtered through the caster to create a spell. The more powerful the spell, the more energy needed, and the more extensive the Burn.

No one is immune to Burn, but it can be mitigated. Experience is a caster's greatest ally against Burn. Constant training, preparation and knowledge can help improve the casting process by increasing efficiency and refining technique, or even raising a caster's tolerance to Burn. Before the Apocalypse, there were items a caster could use to help deal with Burn. They are now rare and highly coveted.

Magic in the After

Something happened to the Weave during the Night of Fire. When the world was reshaped, the Weave was changed as well. One of the few remaining scholars has compared the Weave to a briar patch that surrounds a small pool of water. When someone casts a spell, they must reach through the briars and pull out some of the water. Before the Apocalypse, the thorns were small. But now, the briar patch is thicker, the thorns are bigger and sharper — and the water is boiling.

When the Apocalypse occurred, magic users were especially unprepared for the sudden and extreme change in Burn. It is estimated that more than half of the Empire's Council of Magores fell in a single minute during the Night of Fire, consumed by the power of their own magic. Before dawn, nearly all spell casters were either dead or unconscious — and in the coming days, unconsciousness equaled death.

Life for magic users is difficult after the Night of Fire. Their skill was now a double-edged sword they were afraid to wield. What once set them apart from everyone else was now something they feared. It was like telling a blacksmith that every time he swung a hammer it might explode.

On top of this, the respect and awe magic users once received turned into distrust and anger. Nearly everyone blamed the Apocalypse on magic. Different people blamed different tra-

ditions, but at the end of the day it didn't matter who was casting the spell. Magic and those who used it were turned into pariahs. People needed someone to blame, and casters and holy people were the easiest targets.

Holy people suffered somewhat at the hands of the masses, but in addition to the need for blame, people also needed hope and guidance. The holy people provided this, and the spell casters did not. Magic users, no matter how well intentioned, learned magic was not welcome in the world after the Apocalypse.

A terrible number of people were stoned, burned and hanged as spell casters — regardless of whether they deserved it. Most of these people were incapable of casting a spell, but possessed skills and knowledge above the norm, such as midwives, healers, herbalists, engineers and other learned people. In their efforts to protect themselves, the masses destroyed those they would need the most.

And now magic, like most other professions that require great skill and training, is dying a slow death. All the great teachers are dead. All the great libraries are lost. All those with potential are untapped. Without great effort, the art will be lost in a generation or two.

The Magic Skill

The Magic Skill requires the character to focus on a specific tradition. However, unlike other Skills, the Magic Skill has a Talent prerequisite. The Talent purchased determines which magical tradition a character can focus on. It is possible for a human to possess more than one Magic Talent and therefore purchase multiple Magic Skills, each devoted exclusively to a specific tradition. This, however, is very rare and requires the permission of the gamemaster.

The Magic Skill is used to cast a spell, just as the Athletics Skill is used to throw a knife or the Melee Skill is used to swing a sword. Casting a spell is a standard action and follows the same basic structure, although there are several important differences. The most important of these is the range of results that can occur and the need for a Base Difficulty and Final Difficulty.

Unlike other skills, where the player typically either succeeds or fails, the Magic Skill always produces an effect. Although the exact goals of the caster may not be met, the caster is rewarded with something — even when only one success is rolled. Conversely, when extra successes are rolled, additional effects can occur. These beneficial effects are often controlled by the player, but can be dictated by the GM for storytelling purposes.

Playing a spell caster can be more challenging than other characters, but can also be more rewarding.

Magic Overview

Step 1: Describe the Spell

Tell the GM what your spell will look like, what it is doing, and what you hope to accomplish. Be descriptive.

China is playing Sillette, a dwarven Rune Writer, who has been tossed into a cave by her captors. The way out is blocked by an 8-ft.-diameter boulder. She considers her options and decides to try to use her magic to escape. She describes the spell to her GM, "I want to etch a rune of shrinking into the boulder. I only want it small enough for me to escape, so it only needs to shrink down to 6 ft." Explaining what she is trying to accomplish makes it easier for the GM to assign a difficulty.

Step 2: Determine Difficulty

The GM determines the Base Difficulty and Final Difficulty rating for the spell effect your character is trying to achieve. The Base Difficulty is used to calculate the Spell Damage or Potency. The Final Difficulty is equal to the Base Difficulty, plus or minus any modifiers.



The GM decides that changing the physical size of something is a Base Difficulty of 3 (Tough) since she is affecting the boulder in a "strong, but uncomplicated way." He also decides to add an extra level of difficulty because she is trying to affect such a large object. The Final Difficulty of the spell is 4 (Hard).

Step 3: Calculate Dice Pool

Like other skills, your magic dice pool is equal to your Magic Skill rating. Unlike other Skills, you do not have to roll every die in your dice pool. Burn damage is taken for every failure rolled when using magic, so it may not be in your best interest to roll the full dice pool. If necessary, you can spend your own Style points to increase your character's dice pool, but you may not accept Style points donated by other players.

China doesn't want to take too much Burn in case there are guards outside the cave. Although Sillette has a Magic Skill Rating of 10, she decides to only roll eight dice and hope for the best.

Step 4: Roll the Dice

Once the dice pool is finalized, the player must roll the dice and count the number of successes and failures rolled. Unlike other Skills, a player casting a spell cannot Take the Average. The chaotic nature of magic after the Night of Fire makes it impossible to determine an average result.

China rolls eight dice and gets the 4 successes she needs! This also means she gets 4 failures, which could all turn into Burn.

Step 5: Calculate Burn

Regardless of the success of the spell, the caster suffers Burn damage equal to the number of failures rolled. Various Talents, magic items or Style points can reduce or eliminate Burn on a one-to-one basis. Burn-reducing Style points can only be spent by the player whose character is casting the spell.

Sillette has the Burn Reduction talent, so the Burn is reduced from 4 to 3. She also decides to spend a Style point to eliminate a point of Burn. She ends up taking 2 points of Burn damage.

Step 6: Resolve the Spell Effect

There are four possible outcomes when casting a spell.

- **Botch** — No successes. The spell fails and something bad happens.
- **Failure** — Not enough successes. The spell fails, but may have limited effects.
- **Success** — Just enough successes. The spell is cast as intended.
- **Extra Successes** — More successes than needed. The spell is cast and extra successes can be spent to either reduce your Burn or enhance the spell.

With four successes, Sillette etches an intricate rune into the stone and the spell goes off as planned. Magic flows through her into the rune, causing it to crackle with energy and shrink the boulder. She is ready to make her escape!

Step 7: Target Defends or Resists

If the spell is cast at an unwilling or unsuspecting target, he can defend against it.

Spells that attempt to physically harm a target have a Spell Damage value that the target defends against. Any success rolled by the defender reduces the amount of damage taken.

Spell Damage = Base Difficulty + Primary Attribute + Extra Successes

Spells that don't cause damage but still target an opponent may be resisted. Such spells have a Spell Potency value that the target resists. If not fully resisted, these spells successfully accomplish the caster's goal described in Step 1.

Spell Potency = (Base Difficulty + Primary Attribute) / 2 + Extra Successes

Since the stone was not magical or being held be someone, there is no opposed roll to be made.

Describe the Spell

Magic is free form. It is up to players to determine what they'd like to accomplish with their character's magic. As long as the spell effect is within the realm of the caster's magical tradition, he can attempt it. Each tradition has a specific set of capabilities and limitations that must be followed when casting a spell. See Magic Traditions below for more information.

Creativity and resourcefulness are the most powerful traits a player can possess while playing a spell caster. Each tradition has its limitations, but most obstacles have more than one solution. The entertaining and clever use of magic is a great way to earn Style points that are sure to come in handy for a spell caster.

Players should explain not only what their characters are trying to do, but why they want to do it. What do they hope the outcome will be? It is well and good for a player to say he wants to cause the ground to become muddy, but is the intent to make the ground slippery, or to make a thick layer of mud that holds opponents in place?

Determine Difficulty

The free-form nature of magic can present challenges for GMs because it's important to consistently assign Base Difficulties and Final Difficulties for every spell players throw during a story. A Base Difficulty is used to determine a Spell's Potency or Damage rating. The Final Difficulty represents the number of successes a player must roll in order to cast a spell as intended.

Remember there are some things certain traditions cannot do, no matter how many successes are rolled. See Magical Traditions below for more information.

Spell Categories

The first step toward consistent spell difficulty judgments is to categorize the many spell effects. All spell effects fit into one of nine categories:

■ **Alter/Enchant Characters** — Affecting the mind, body or spirit of a character or creature.

■ **Alter/Enchant Objects** — Reshaping, imbuing with magic or even turning objects into something else entirely.

■ **Create/Conjure** — Summoning creatures or creating objects out of thin air.

■ **Damage** — Attempting to reduce the Health of a target, or targets.

■ **Disrupt Spells** — Breaking enchantments and interrupting spells.

■ **Healing** — Increasing the Health Attribute, repairing defects, damages, illnesses and other conditions a person or creature may suffer from (Necromancers and Animists only).

■ **Increase/Decrease Attribute** — Raising or lowering Primary or Secondary Attributes. This category does not include Health and Stun Attributes, which are addressed in the Healing and Damage categories.

■ **Increase/Decrease Skill** — Raising or lowering a character's or creature's Skill rating, or a tool, such as a weapon, used to perform the Skill.

■ **Perform Tasks** — Replicating the end results of physical labor.

As a general rule of thumb, a spell that replicates a Talent will have a Base Difficulty of three (Tough). The spell effects listed below can be used to help assign a Base Difficulty to the new spells players are sure to invent.

Alter/Enchant Characters

Some traditions allow their casters to modify the mind, body and spirit of themselves, other characters and creatures. Physical transformation, mental manipulation and magical alteration are all within the realm of possibility. The more radical, complicated or powerful the modification, the higher the Base Difficulty. Often these spell effects have an end result of affecting Skills or Attributes, which can be a good guide to determining difficulty.

Attempts to harm or manipulate another person can be resisted. When attempting to cast a spell against an opponent, the target may resist the Spell Potency of the attack using the appropriate attribute. See Defending or Resisting on page 135.

Difficulty	Character Alteration/Enhancement
1: Easy	Can affect self in a minor way. This can include expanding senses or modifying appearance, but does not affect Attributes or Skills. Others can be affected only in superficial or limited ways. This cannot cause damage or impact any rolls.
2: Average	Can affect self and others in a simple but straightforward way. Spells can cause limited physical transformation, basic mental manipulation and simple magical effects.
3: Tough	Can affect self and others in a strong, but uncomplicated way. Spells can cause simple physical transformations, uncomplicated mental manipulations and moderate magical effects.
4: Hard	Can affect self and others in a significant way. Spells can cause moderate physical transformations, invasive mental manipulations and potent magical effects.
5: Very Hard	Can affect self and others in a powerful and complicated way. Spells can cause unnatural physical transformations, invasive mental manipulation and advanced magical effects.
6+: Nigh Impossible	Can affect self and others in an incredibly potent and sophisticated ways. Spells can cause total physical transformations, violent mental manipulation and tremendous magical effects.

Alter/Enchant Objects

Casters can modify the items around them in many ways; reshaping their form, altering their appearance, giving them magical properties, changing their attributes or even transmuting them into a different object altogether. The more radical, complicated or powerful the modification, the higher the Base Difficulty of the spell.

Base Difficulty	Object Alteration or Enchantment
1: Easy	Can only affect an item in a superficial or limited way. Spells cannot change the nature of the object or affect its properties or usefulness in any meaningful way.
2: Average	Can affect an item in a simple and straightforward way. Spells cannot change the nature of an item, but can accentuate its normal properties and usefulness.
3: Tough	Can affect an item in a strong, but uncomplicated way. Spells can slightly change the nature of an item and greatly enhance its existing properties and usefulness.
4: Hard	Can affect an item in a significant way. Spells can change the nature of an item in uncomplicated ways, allowing simple transmutations. The properties and usefulness of an item can be drastically increased or altered.
5: Very Hard	Can affect an item in a powerful and complicated way. Spells can alter and control the nature of an item, allowing the caster to animate objects. Multiple properties can be modified or enhanced.
6+: Nigh Impossible	Can affect an item in an incredibly sophisticated way. Spells can fundamentally alter the very nature of an item. Properties and usefulness can be vastly changed or enhanced — even made permanent. New life can be created.

Create/Conjure

Some traditions allow casters to conjure items, summon creatures or create objects out of thin air. The more complicated, powerful, intelligent or large the item or creature is, the higher the Base Difficulty. Summoned creatures are friendly to the caster and will follow reasonable orders. Constructing items out of raw materials is easier than creating them from magic. Items made of magic last for a single combat or scene, while physical objects last until destroyed.

Base Difficulty	Ability to Conjure or Summon
1: Easy	Create only the simplest and rawest of items in small amounts.
2: Average	Summon a totem animal. Create a small, simple object.
3: Tough	Summon a mindless servant. Create an empowered weapon or tool.
4: Hard	Summon creature to attack enemy. Create a more complex or larger object.
5: Very Hard	Summon intelligent creature to attack enemy. Create an enchanted, or enhanced, large or complex object.
6+: Nigh Impossible	Summon destructive forces of nature. Create a very large or complex object.

Damage

Using magic to simply cause damage has a Base Difficulty of two. Damage is calculated by adding the Base Difficulty of two plus the caster's Primary Attribute, plus any extra successes the caster rolls. Targets may defend against damaging magical attacks, much like they would mundane attacks.

Disrupt Spells

Spell casters from every tradition have the ability to break enchantments and interrupt spells within their own traditions. Due to their understanding of the Weave, Sorcerers can disrupt spells from any tradition. The player casts a spell of disruption against the spell or enchantment he or she is trying to disrupt. The GM rolls a number of dice equal to the Final Difficulty of the opposed spell or enchantment. The disruption succeeds if the player rolls more successes than the GM.

Healing

This is a rare ability, but an important one. Not only does it include the ability to increase the Health attribute, but it also includes the ability to repair defects, damages, illnesses and other conditions a person may be suffering. The damage healed can be lethal or non-lethal.

Note: Only Necromancy and Animism can heal, and not all of the examples in the table below are applicable for both traditions.

Base Difficulty	Healing Example
1: Easy	Increase Health by 1
2: Average	Increase/restore Health by 2; double healing rate overnight; unstun target; remove/cure weak toxin; remove/cure weak illness (common cold, allergies)
3: Tough	Increase/restore Health by 3; triple healing rate overnight; restore cosmetic imperfection, broken bones; remove/cure strong toxin; remove/cure moderate illness (flu, scab rot)
4: Hard	Increase/restore Health by 4; double healing rate for a week; restore potency or infertility; remove/cure dangerous toxin; remove/cure serious illness (pneumonia, measles)
5: Very Hard	Increase/restore Health by 5; triple healing rate for a week; restore sight, speech or hearing; remove/cure deadly toxin; remove/cure deadly illness (pox, black lung)
6+: Nigh Impossible	Increase/restore Health by 6; heal twisted limbs, deformities; raise dead; remove/cure very deadly toxin; remove/cure very deadly illness

Increase/Decrease Attribute

Both the Primary and Secondary Attributes of a character or creature can be increased or decreased, although Health and Stun are handled differently than other Secondary Attributes and do not use the table below. If the Primary Attribute is altered, all dependent Skills and Secondary Attributes are also affected. The default duration of the spell is an entire combat (if cast in combat) or an entire scene (if cast out of combat).

A negative attribute modification can be resisted using the target's Willpower vs. the Spell Potency.

Base Difficulty	Skill Roll Change	Attribute Roll Change
1: Easy	NA	NA
2: Average	+/- 1 die	+/- 1 die from a Secondary Attribute roll
3: Tough	+/- 2 dice	+/- 2 dice from a Secondary Attribute roll +/- 1 die from a Primary Attribute roll
4: Hard	+/- 3 dice	+/- 3 dice from a Secondary Attribute roll +/- 2 dice from a Primary Attribute roll
5: Very Hard	+ /- 4 dice	+/- 4 dice from a Secondary Attribute roll +/- 3 dice from a Primary Attribute roll
6+: Nigh Impossible	+/- 5 dice	+/- 5 dice from a Secondary Attribute roll +/- 4 dice from a Primary Attribute roll

Increase/Decrease Skill

Skill roll dice pools can be increased or decreased by magically affecting the character or creature performing the Skill or enchanting the tool (such as a weapon) being used to perform

that Skill. The default duration of the spell is an entire combat (if cast in combat) or an entire scene (if cast out of combat).

A negative Skill modification can be resisted using the target's Willpower vs. the Spell's Potency. If cast on a held or worn item, the spell can be resisted by the wielder or wearer.

Perform Tasks

The end results of pure physical labor can be replicated by a caster, especially if the proper tools are present. The more skill, time or effort required to perform a task, the higher the Base Difficulty. Extra successes can be used to reduce the amount of time taken for the task or to improve the quality of the end results.

This spell category represents physical activities such as setting up a tent, digging ditches, moving soil, felling trees, cleaning rooms, mending clothes or even cutting stone — all things that one person could do by himself given time, but that magic makes easier and faster. For example, it's easy to dig a hole, but it can take a while. With magic, that work can be completed in moments, or a vast moat can be completed by a single mage in a few hours or a day.

Crafting items, such as swords, armor or even chairs, range from Tough to Nigh Impossible (depending upon the quality of the finished product) and requires the mage to have some Craft Skill related to the effort.

Modifiers

In addition to the spell effect, a GM must consider duration, range, area of affect, line of sight and other circumstances to assign a Final Difficulty. These modifications, over and above the Base Difficulty, are not included in Spell Damage or Potency. They are simply used to determine how many successes will be needed to cast the spell as intended.

Duration

There are no precise guidelines for exactly how long a spell will last in terms of minutes, hours or days. Instead, spell duration is measured in game terms — a combat turn, next action, scene or game session.

The default duration of a spell cast under less-than-perfect conditions, such as during combat, is the remainder of that encounter or that immediate situation. In normal situations, a spell caster can better control the energy pulled from the Weave. As a result, a spell will last longer. This is the only benefit gained from casting spells calmly.

Spells that fix, repair or restore things to their normal state are instantaneous and permanent.

The duration of a spell can be increased by adding to its Final Difficulty or applying extra successes from the roll.

Note: Modifying the duration of the spell does not increase or decrease the Base Difficulty, which is used to calculate Spell Damage and Potency.

The following table can used to determine how duration may be increased after calculating the Base Difficulty. Note that the spell difficulty can never be less than 1.

Difficulty	Combat Duration	Out of Combat Duration
-1 Difficulty	Single Round	Next Action
Default	Entire Combat	Entire Scene
+1 Difficulty	Entire Scene	Multiple Scenes
+2 Difficulty	Multiple Scenes	Entire Session
+3 Difficulty	Entire Session	GM's Discretion

Range, Area of Effect, Line of Sight

By default, a spell can be cast upon a single person, object or area that is within 25 ft. of the caster and in his or her line of sight.

If a caster wishes to affect something farther away, multiple targets or something unseen, he or she can either increase the Final Difficulty of the spell or hope to roll extra successes and apply those.

Difficulty	Range	Area of Effect	Line of Sight
Default	Touch to 25 ft.	Single target or 3-ft. radius	Unobstructed
+1 Difficulty for each benefit	25 to 50 ft.	2 targets or 10-ft. radius	Can bend around obstacles or penetrate thin barriers. Caster must know where the target is.
+2 Difficulty for each benefit	50 to 150 ft.	4 targets or 30-ft. radius	Can turn corners or bend around multiple obstacles. Can penetrate a wall or door. Caster must know where the target is.
+3 Difficulty for each benefit	150 to 500 ft.	8 targets or 60-ft. radius	Can penetrate multiple barriers or a very thick barriers. Caster does not need to know the location of the target.
+4 Difficulty for each benefit	500 to 1,500 ft.	12 targets or 120-ft. radius	Can target a spell regardless of barriers or line of sight. Caster does not need to know the location of the target.

Each additional level of difficulty accomplishes only one benefit; however, they are cumulative. For example, to hit two targets 30 ft. away would add 2 to the Base Difficulty (+1 for to affect two targets and +1 for extended range).

Note: Increasing the Final Difficulty of a spell does not increase the Base Difficulty, which is used to calculate Spell Damage and Potency.

GMs may or may not give targets cover bonuses to their Defense, depending on the type of spell being cast and its effects.

Dice Pool

Unlike other Skills, where it is always in the best interest of the player to roll as many dice as possible, the Magic Skill must be used judiciously because failures equate to Burn damage.

Casters may decide to spend Style points for additional dice to roll. These additional dice will also cause Burn damage if a failure is rolled on them. A player may always elect to use Talents that might alter how many successes are needed or how Burn is generated and applied.

A player cannot accept Style points from other players to increase his character's magic dice pool.

Roll the Dice

To cast a spell, dice must be rolled. A player cannot Take the Average when casting because of the instability of the Weave. Count the number of successes and the number of failures.

Calculate Burn

Burn is the painful and damaging side effect of channeling magical energy. When casting a spell, it is possible (and likely) for the caster to receive Burn.

Burn is a special kind of damage that is inflicted regardless of whether the spell succeeds. Burn damage is both mentally and physically draining, causing discomfort and fatigue to the caster. Burn damage is a type of non-lethal damage deducted from the caster's Health. A single point of Burn damage is recovered with every 30 minutes of rest.

Burn is equal to the number of failures a player rolls on his Magic Skill when attempting to cast a spell. It can be mitigated a number of ways:

- Using Style points to reduce Burn on a one-to-one basis.
- Using extra successes to reduce Burn on a one-to-one basis.
- Using Talents that allow the caster to ignore or redistribute Burn.
- Using rare artifacts or relics.

Resolve the Spell Effect

A spell's outcome depends on the number of successes achieved vs. the Final Difficulty of the spell. If no successes were rolled, the spell fails and no effects are achieved. If the caster suffers enough Burn damage to be knocked unconscious (see Damage, Page 184), the spell he or she was casting still takes effect.

By this step, the GM knows how many successes are needed to achieve the desired effect, so the number of extra successes can be determined. Extra successes can be used to reduce Burn or enhance the spell.

Defending or Resisting

Defending Against Spells

Most damage is defended against by rolling Defense and comparing the number of successes to the spell Damage. Any points of spell Damage not defended against are subtracted from the target's Health. However, in some cases it may be appropriate to defend against a spell using an Attribute, such as Willpower for mental attacks or Health against unavoidable attacks. The GM will determine if armor or cover bonuses apply.

Spell Damage = Base Difficulty + Primary Attribute + Extra Successes

Resisting Spell Effects

Other types of spells do not attempt to harm an opponent directly, but do attempt to affect him in some way. These types of spells may be resisted by targets. For example, attempting to turn an opponent into a mouse or decreasing an opponent's Skills or Attributes entitles the target to a resistance roll.

Spells may be resisted by making an appropriate Attribute roll against the caster's Spell Potency. In most cases, the Spell Potency must be *fully* defended against for the target to ignore it. However, the GM may take the number of successes into account for storytelling purposes when determining the duration or other details.

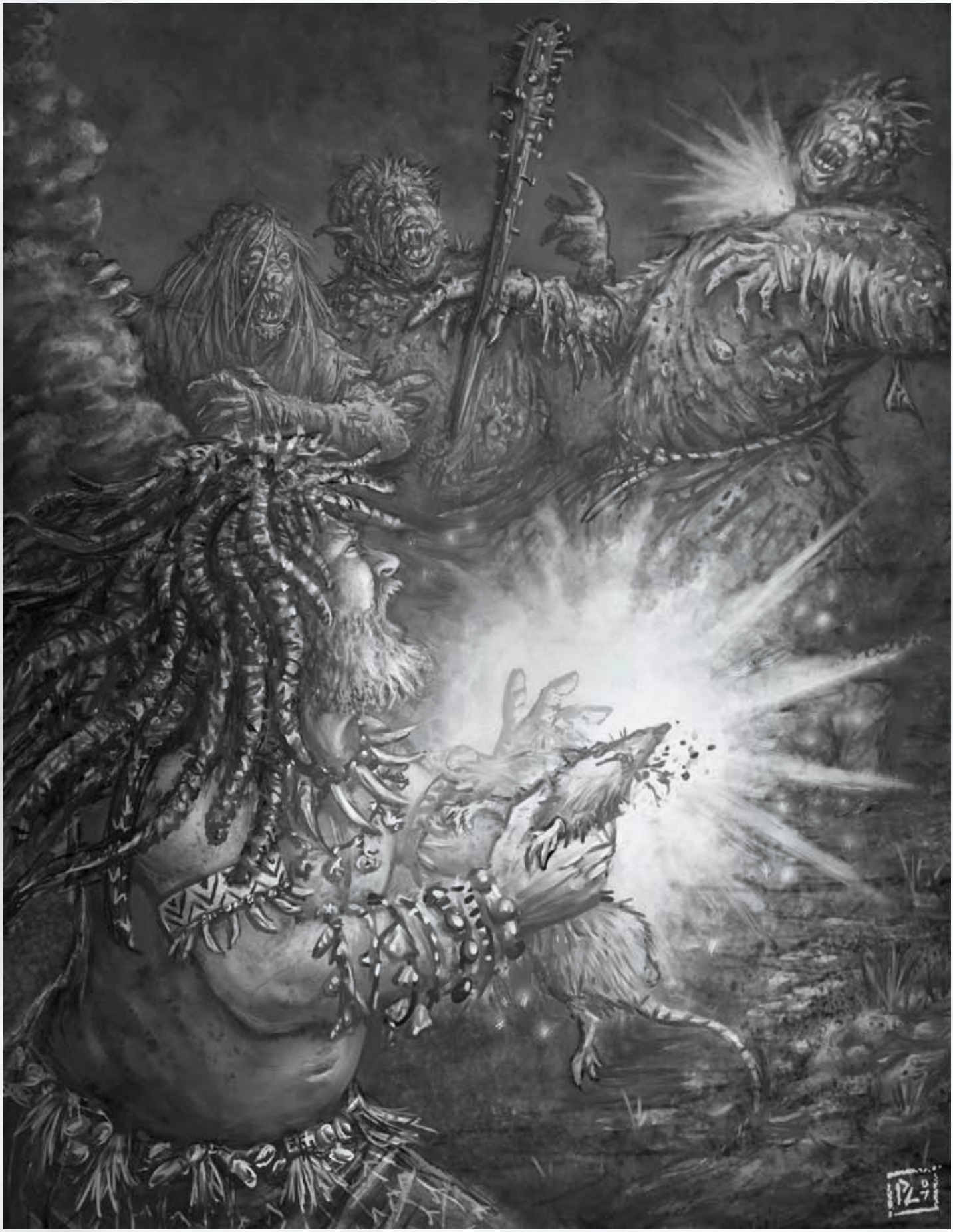
Potency is determined by taking the average of a spell's Base Difficulty plus Primary Attribute (casters can roll this instead of taking the average, if they desire). Any extra successes are then added to the Spell Potency.

Spell Potency = (Base Difficulty + Primary Attribute) /2 + Extra Successes

Spell Potency is also used if the caster is trying to stun an opponent. The target may resist the Potency of the spell using Body or Willpower. The target is stunned one round for every Potency success that is not defended against.

Magical Traditions

Every culture has its own magical traditions handed down through generations. All casters access the same Weave, but in different ways. Some casters don't even believe their magic stems from the Weave. Primalists attribute it to totem animals, for example, while Animists believe their magic



is granted by the spirit world. It is up to the player to use her character's magical abilities in imaginative ways while staying within the scope of her character's tradition.

The magical traditions have distinct roleplaying aspects as well as different spell effects. Casters must adhere to the beliefs, methods and restrictions placed upon them by their tradition if they wish to use magic. This not only adds flavor to the game, but provides extra challenges and opportunities for characters.

Magical Tradition	Capabilities
Animism	Affects fate, fortune and health
Beguiling	Affects memory, emotion and perceptions
Elemental	Manipulates and takes properties of bonded elemental
Necromancy	Affects life, death and the undead
Primal Magic	Affects Nature through a totem animal spirit
Rune Magic	Manipulates the properties of objects via runes
Sorcery	Affects and uses the energy of the Weave

Animism

Tradition: Island Folk
Primary Ability: Charisma

The island folk's magical tradition stems from their belief that everything — tool, plant, animal, person and natural phenomenon — has a soul. The many souls are worshipped as one deity with different faces, for the soul of a plant deserves to be honored as much as the soul of a man. In fact, the Loranthians believe the plant's soul may once have belonged to a man.

Some island folk have been blessed with the ability to communicate with the spirit world, and can ask that the souls of the living and the dead grant them favors. This is how the island folk's Listeners perform their magic. By listening to the spirits and learning their secrets, a Listener's soul can visit the spirit world to request favors.

There are many paths to the spirit world — invisible trails that connect the souls of the living to that perfect place. They intersect each other in what most would call a tangle of knots. Listeners are taught to see how these paths are woven, not knotted, together. They learn to project their souls along the many paths to the spirit world. This brief journey is not without its dangers, however.

Animism and Burn

Sometimes a lost soul can waylay the Listener's soul on its trip. Lost souls are angry because they have been trapped in the mortal world. When someone dies, the island folk believe his body must be ritualistically burned and the ashes spread on the wind. The wind carries the person's soul along the right paths to the spirit world. If this is not done properly, souls become lost on their way to the spirit world, and are doomed to wander.

Sometimes a Listener can visit the spirit world, request a favor and slip back unnoticed by the lost souls. This was common Before. However, the massive numbers of deaths caused by the Apocalypse means many souls were not sent on their journey, so there are more lost souls roaming the mortal world. It has become much more difficult for Listeners' souls to travel the paths unnoticed. The more powerful the spell, the longer the journey to the spirit world, and the more likely it is that the Listener's soul will be attacked. These scuffles hurt the caster, causing what western spell casters call Burn. It's more common now for many lost souls to attack the Listener's soul, causing Burn.

Sorcerers from the Imperial Academies tried in vain to explain how the Weave actually worked to Listeners, but they refused to give up their quaint beliefs in Lost Souls.

Animism Spell Examples

Easy (1 success required)

Read Spirit – You can gather general info about a person (race, age, etc.)
Headache – You can cause an opponent to suffer an irritating headache.
Fortune's Smile – You can add dice to someone's next Skill roll.

Average (2 successes required)

Heal Injury – You can restore lost Health to someone who is wounded.
Simple Curse – You can cause the target to suffer a penalty to his or her next action.
Refreshing Slumber – Double natural healing overnight.

Tough (3 successes required)

Good Fortune – You can cause automatic successes on a Skill roll.
Diagnose – You can find out what ails someone by looking at his or her spirit.
Paralyze – You can cause your opponent to become paralyzed from the neck down for a short time.

Hard (4 successes required)

Curse – You can create a curse that lasts for days.
Speed Healing – You can double someone's rate of healing for a week.
Blind – You can cause someone to temporarily lose his sight.

Very Hard (5 successes required)

Detoxify – You can permanently remove any poison and its effects from the target.
Cure Sickness – You can remove a disease or other ailment.
Serendipity – You always win games of chance. Any minor random event favors you for a scene.

Nigh Impossible (6+ successes required)

Make Whole – You can remove a deformity or other crippling affliction.
Lingering Curse – You can turn someone's spirit against him, creating lasting bad luck.
Spirit's Kiss – You can give someone lasting good luck.

Roleplaying Tips

The souls of the spirit world are fickle. They must be asked nicely to affect fate, fortune and health, and they must be repaid for their services. Common ways to pay off such a debt is for the Listener to spend time in prayer, thanking the spirits and offering a sacrifice that balances out what the spirit world has provided to the Listener. Thus, a Listener who asks the spirit world to cause someone to be diseased would likely repay them with something pure, such as fresh water, clean snow or, for extremely powerful favors, even a young soul. Listeners who do not pay proper respect to the spirit world will soon find that it has become closed to them.

Listeners must identify their targets to the spirits in some way if they are to affect him. Something from the intended victim is very helpful when making a request. A name, a secret, a personal possession, a drop of blood — even a lock of hair will help. Some Listeners also use physical representations of their targets, such as a doll or drawing, or other sympathetic items to guide the spirits in fulfilling their requests.

What Listeners Can Do

Animism can affect fate, fortune and health through curses and boons. The target of a Listener's anger could be afflicted with disease, struck blind, fall lame, have a fatal accident or simply lose a bet. Friends of Listeners may benefit from faster healing, lucky shots or be able to find that much-needed weapon while scavenging ruins. Causing or healing physical ailments and changing luck are all within the power of the spirits.

Animism is a subtle magic. Listeners cannot shoot fire from their hands, summon beasts to their aid or read minds. They cannot tell the future, but they can determine their target's fate to some extent.

Animism Example (Tough)

Brem pulled a dead, well-used rat from his haversack. Its eyes had been poked out, its gut ripped open and crudely stitched back together, and its tail was charred and blackened. As the mongrels advanced, spiked clubs raised for the killing blow, Brem broke the rat's neck and spoke the ancient words that asked the spirits to transfer the break to a mongrel. He felt the ecstasy as the power of magic filled him, but the spell took more than he had expected as it left him. He was weakened, and worse, he didn't hear a satisfying snap of his target's neck. Still, the mongrel did drop his weapon and grab his neck in pain. But now the other mongrels turned their attention toward the Splint who used magic.

Beguiling

Tradition: Rovers

Primary Ability: Charisma

For centuries, the rovers have woven their magic around the power of the mind. They believe that to know oneself is to know everyone else, and that the mind is the center of the soul. If one can perceive something, then it is real enough, regardless of any physical aspect to its existence. The perception of a place, a person or an event is all that really matters.

In the tradition of Beguiling, the Weave is comprised of thoughts, intentions and memories that are constantly being created by every living, thinking being. These stretch backward and forward through reality, connecting every mind that has lived and ever will live.

Beguiling is the art of manipulating the Weave to cloud or alter a person's mental perceptions, emotions and memories. A stranger can seem like an old friend, and tattered rags can ap-

Beguiling Spell Examples

Easy (1 success required)

Sense Emotion – You can discern the true emotion of a target.
Nudge Mood – You can slightly alter the mood of a target.
Distract – You can cause the target to perceive a small noise that doesn't really exist.

Average (2 successes required)

Mental Attack – You can inflict mental pain, causing non-lethal damage.
Simple Illusion – You can create a simple illusion that only the target sees.
Terrorize – You can fill an opponent with terror.

Tough (3 successes required)

Detect Lies – You can tell whenever the target is hiding the truth.
Endear – You can cause the target to treat you as a trusted friend.
Mind Probe – You can pull a specific piece of information from the target's mind.

Hard (4 successes required)

Twist Emotion – You can shift the target's mood significantly.
Edit Memory – You can temporarily edit the target's memory in a minor way.
Control Action – You can cause the target to take a specific action.

Very Hard (5 successes required)

Large Illusion – You can create a completely realistic illusion in multiple targets' minds.
Illusionary Trap – You can trap the subject in an illusion that encompasses all of his or her senses.
Peruse Memories – You can read the memories of the subject like an open book.

Nigh Impossible (6+ successes required)

Erase Memory – You can permanently remove a memory.
Long Distance Telepathy – You can communicate with a familiar mind over long distances.
Puppet – You can completely control the actions of another for a short time.

pear as the richest royal garb — if you're a Beguiler with the talent and gall to pull it off.

In rover society, those with the talent to Beguile are discovered early in life. Once their skills are discovered, the Beguiler is given a series of tattoos. These tattoos are not noticeably different from the other, more mundane, markings worn by most rovers. But among their own people, the marks stand out clearly. This is not just a matter of pride and status, the tattoos allow other rovers to know with whom they are dealing.

After the Night of Fire, surviving Beguilers find themselves still mostly accepted by their own people. It's well known by rovers that Beguiling is a mental power, and couldn't possibly have been responsible for what happened. However, among other people, Beguilers are hated even more than Before. Magic is magic, after all.

Beguiling and Burn

The mind is not as wide open as others may think. Somewhere between the Beguiler's mind and the mind of the subject is a barrier, like the ice on a frozen river. Beguilers call this Tenh. There is often a price to be paid for reaching through: Burn.

A skilled practitioner can find cracks and gaps in the barrier. Before the Apocalypse, the Tenh was like a ripple, a feeling of cold and strangeness, when it was felt at all. After the Apocalypse, the Weave shifted and the Tenh became thick and tough. It shatters when broached, leaving jagged edges that threaten to lacerate the mind of the Beguiler.

Roleplaying Tips

Even among their own people, Beguilers are viewed with suspicion. As part of a survival instinct, Beguilers tend to avoid using magic on other rovers, though sometimes it can be used to enhance the taste of food or drink, or make music sound better. As such, they are accustomed to using their abilities to make their own people happier.

Most Beguilers feel defensive about their talent — after all, they weren't given much choice about having it. Many leave their own people so they can use their magic to gain an advantage in the outside world. Few ever push their limits — even in the Before, Beguilers could get into a lot of trouble if they were found out.

Affecting another's mind requires focus and concentration. When casting a spell, Beguilers often stare intensely at their target, seeking to make eye contact. If possible, physically touching their victim is preferred. The shorter the distance between the Beguiler and his target, the better.

What Beguilers Can Do

Beguiling affects the mind. All spell effects are caused by this influence upon the mind. The senses can be blocked or altered. Emotions can be enhanced or changed. Illusions can be created on an individual basis, though such an illusion will look different to each person (the illusion of a chair, for instance, will look different for each person, but it will appear to be a chair to all affected). Memories can be read and altered temporarily. A subject's mind can also be overwhelmed by sensation, stunning or injuring them.

Nothing physical can be created or altered by Beguilers. No visible illusions are ever seen by unaffected onlookers, only the reactions of a beguiled subject. No physical harm can be done to a subject, nor can a subject be made to harm themselves directly, though they may end up being harmed indirectly as a result of their actions while beguiled.

Beguiling Example (Hard)

Ki'ure regretted ever leaving the sea. There were no goblins on the sea. Two of the beastmen blocked the road ahead of her and a third had an arrow trained on her back. She had only one chance to leave these woods with her possessions — and perhaps her life. She dropped her weapon as a sign of surrender and trained her mind on the goblin who had been giving the orders. She traced the tattoos on her temples and spoke the words her great-grandmother had taught her.

"Kill ..." the goblin commander began, pointing at Ki'ure. But then the rover gained control of his mind and he pointed at the goblin beside him. "Kill him!" he ordered.

An arrow sailed past Ki'ure and into the shoulder of the goblin, who drew a sword and attacked the one who had ordered his death. Ki'ure dropped to her knees, weakened from the spell. She grabbed her dagger and scrambled into the woods as the goblins fought one another.

Elemental Magic

Tradition: Elves
Primary Ability: Charisma

The elves have always perceived magic as a kind of music or song, made up of the pulse of life and the relationship between all things.

Over countless millennia, the elves developed a deep understanding of these rhythms of the natural world. This understanding involved the complex relationship between the "true nature" of all things — a balance of elements pulled into the Weave of life and environment. The druid-priests shared the Song with their race, living a tranquil, idyllic life.

For centuries, this has been the case. Just before the Apocalypse a few particularly penitent elves began to feel something deep inside, an echo of the Song. There was still silence, but Nature no longer completely abhorred the elf. A strange détente had begun, almost as if Nature had big-

ger problems, and the elves were no longer at the center of her distaste. They were still shunned, but not completely reviled.

With the Night of Fire came the shattering of the Weave. To a small number of elves, it came as a sudden blast of sound, cacophonous and disharmonious.

Magic had returned to the elves. But it was not as it had been. Now it was simple, single notes of the Song — basic sounds that could be manipulated. It was such a relief after the endless years of silence, but it was a far cry from the magnificent delicacies of Song of which their legends spoke.

The basis of the Song had always been the elements, in varying levels of complexity. Now only Fire, Air, Water and Earth could be manipulated by elven mages. It is like learning to talk again after years of silence. Perhaps the elves would learn to sing again, in time.

Elemental Magic and Burn

For an Elementalist, the Weave is like trying to listen for a perfect note in a storm of static and white noise. It is very hard for elves to open themselves up to this deafening noise. It can quickly overwhelm them, to the point of actually causing resonating frequencies that damage their minds and bodies. An elf experiencing Burn is feeling his entire body and soul being

Air/Fire Elementalist Spell Examples

Easy (1 success required)

Summon Flame – You can create a small flame, enough to light a candle or some kindling.
Light Breeze – You can summon and funnel wind into a brief cooling breeze.
Air Tap – You can command a small amount of air, enough to tap someone within 10 feet.
Warmth – You can warm your body enough to chase away a chill.

Average (2 successes required)

Hurl Fire – You can shoot flames at a single opponent who rolls his normal Defense against this attack.
Wall – You can create a wall of fire or air big enough to cover one of your flanks, adding a bonus to your Defense.
Muffle Sound – You can slow the air moving around a sound enough to muffle it, thereby squelching a scream or shout.
Levitate – You can lift yourself on a platform of air.

Tough (3 successes required)

Flight – You can surround yourself with wind and ride it through the air at great speeds.
Invisible Grasp – You can control air well enough to pick up a heavy object within 10 ft. and move or throw it.
Elemental Weapon – You can create and wield a 4L melee weapon of air or fire for the length of a combat encounter.
Servant – You can create a servant out of air or fire that will follow simple commands and perform simple actions.

Hard (4 successes required)

Summon Elemental – You can summon a creature of fire or air and command it for one turn.
Sonic Boom – You can force the air around you out so quickly that it creates a nearly deafening boom and possibly stun those nearby.
Protective Bubble – You can surround yourself and others in an air or fire shield that will offer some protection from harm.
Delayed Ignition – You can cause a burning object to erupt in flames up to 10 minutes after you walk away.

Very Hard (5 successes required)

Steal Air – You can attempt to suffocate one target by stealing the air from his lungs.
Solid Wall – You can create a large, nearly impenetrable wall from fire.
Paralyzing Wind – You can wrap a small group of people in air, blowing so hard at them from all directions that they cannot move.

Nigh Impossible (6+ successes required)

Create Storms – You can force masses of hot and cold air together to create thunderstorms.
Become Elemental – You can turn into air or fire for a short time.
Song of the Sun – You can create a fire hot enough to melt stone.

Earth/Water Elementalist Spell Examples

Easy (1 success required)

Chill – You can cool a small amount of liquids, such as a pitcher of ale or pot of water.
Dowse – You can detect unseen sources of water.
Clean – You can cause all dirt to fall off an object.
Brick – You can mold a pile of dirt into a sturdy brick.

Average (2 successes required)

Purify – You can cleanse a small amount of liquid of impurities (but not poison).
Waterproof – You can create a protective bubble, keeping small objects dry (even if submerged).
Rock Pelt – You can fling a barrage of small rocks, dealing non-lethal damage to a target.
Shape Stone – You can mold a block of stone into a simple object.

Tough (3 successes required)

Breathe Underwater – You can breathe underwater as you normally would breathe air.
Flash Freeze – You can instantly freeze a moderate amount of liquid, such as a barrel of wine of part of a stream.
Dig – You can quickly move a large amount of dirt.
Grasping Ground – You can cause the earth to reach up and hold a target fast.

Hard (4 successes required)

Summon Elemental – You can summon a creature of water or earth and command it for one turn.
Walk on Water – You can walk or run across the surface of a liquid as if it were dry land for an entire scene.
Spikes – You can cause stone or earth surfaces to sprout with sword-sized spikes, causing lethal damage to anyone impaled.
Stone Wall – You can create a thick wall of stone.

Very Hard (5 successes required)

Alchemy – You can change one liquid into another.
Transmute – You can change the state of earth, turning it to mud or vice versa.
Rolling Path – You can cause the ground to move beneath you, allowing you to travel long distances without exertion.

Nigh Impossible (6+ successes required)

Flood – You can cause a body of water to dramatically increase in volume, causing it to flood.
Become Elemental – You can turn into earth or water for a short time.
Open/Shut Cave – You can cause the mouth of a cave to open or close like the maw of a giant animal.

torn apart. With skill and practice, elves can learn to exclude the unnecessary noise when listening for the Song, bringing the music they hear out of the Weave and into the world.

Roleplaying Tips

Elves have not had access to magic for centuries. They have been bereft of hope and dignity, living with the consequences of their arrogance for many long years. None are alive today who experienced the terror of Nature's backlash firsthand. Still, in their culture there is a strong fear and respect for the forests — and for magic, too.

For those who can hear the Song again, albeit a noisy and broken version of it, there is a real sense of astonishment and hope. Many elves fear the Elementalists, worried they might lose control of their magic again. But the reappearance of magic after the Apocalypse, and Nature's rescinded harshness, are signs for most that their fortunes are on the rise.

Elementalists have an affinity for their chosen elements and prefer to be near it as much as possible. They often feel empty when unable see or touch their elements and some have taken to carrying them in small amounts. When casting a spell, Elementalists typically incorporate the element into the casting process somehow. Singing or humming is also an important part of the spell casting process, especially when their elements are not at hand.

What Elementalists Can Do

An Elementalist can command Fire, Air, Earth or Water to do his or her bidding. Some form of the element must be present in the environment in order for the magic to work, though some magic users carry a pocketful of soil or a waterskin to help in those situations.

Elementalists must choose one element as their Prime. This is the element to which they most closely relate. They also gain access to another element, the one in harmony with their Prime Element according to the circle of elements: Earth>Water>Air>Fire>Earth. For example, a Water Elementalist also has access to Air, as it is harmonious with Water, and a Fire Elementalist can also access Earth as an element in their magic.

Elementalists can do amazing things, such as produce walls of stone or ice to block a path, or hurl handfuls of fire at opponents. They can even surround themselves with protective barriers of elements. Some can imbue themselves with the "idea" of an element, giving them greater speed, stronger skin or the ability to breathe underwater. After all, many songs can be written with just a few basic notes.

An Elementalist can cause harm or influence the environment only via the interaction of an elemental force. They cannot alter or control the elements within creatures. For example, they cannot freeze a man's blood inside his veins. However, this would not stop them from stealing the air from the man's mouth, making it hard for him to breathe, or blasting him with freezing winds until he gets frostbite.

Elementalists cannot directly affect the mind or soul of anyone, though they can imbue themselves with the elements. They can also imbue others temporarily.

Elementalist Example (Average)

Ulrice walked along the overgrown flagstone road. She hated playing the bait, but it had always worked in the past so her companions had again demanded it. As expected, a man emerged from the brush along the right side of the road. An arrow whizzed by Ulrice's head. It had come from the trees along the right side of the road.

"The next one will pierce your pointy ears," said the man. "Into one and out the other, as it were. Now do as I say and we might forget it's good luck to kill an elf."

Ulrice dropped to her knees and rubbed her hands on the dirt-covered stones. She sang the words of command and her skin became the color of the old Empire cobblestones.

"Mage!" the man yelled, but four arrows were already on their way toward the elf. Three of them bounced harmlessly off her stone-hardened skin. The fourth, surprisingly, found its mark. But



Ulrice's bounty hunter companions on the left side of the road had their targets, and their arrows took out the bandit archers who had revealed themselves.

Ulrice, drained by the magic and wounded, passed out before he knew whether the bandit leader had been captured.

Necromancy

Tradition: Humans
Primary Ability: Intelligence

Necromancy is also known as death magic, an ancient misnomer that has stuck. A more technically correct name might be "life magic," because Necromancers actually draw their power from the force coursing between and around all living things — the Weave.

It is widely assumed that Necromancers make some sort of pact with the mystical powers of death, but that is not the case. Because they can twist and use the force of life for their own purposes, Necromancers are looked upon as practitioners of the dark arts. Despite the Circle of Dust (see page 19) and what most people think, Necromancy is not inherently evil. The end results, however, are all almost universally feared and reviled — especially the creation of undead.



Necromancy and Burn

In the Before, the life force of the world was strong. It was easy to access the power Necromancers needed to work their magic. After the Night of Fire, life was drastically reduced — and so was the power available to Necromancers. It was harder to come by and more dangerous to use. It was as if death, now strengthened after the Apocalypse, fought against the Necromancers when they tried to tap into the Weave of life. Others have argued that what little life force remains actively fights against the necromantic magicks.

Roleplaying Tips

Necromancers were always on the fringes of society. They were not officially accepted in Ascondea's great schools for the arcane arts, and indeed the practice of Necromancy was illegal in the Empire, though at times it had its uses. Some Necromancers became recluses because of the ostracism, while others learned to hide their powers. Some, like those in the Circle of Dust, used the fear and mystery associated with necromancy to their benefit.

A Necromancer may feel misunderstood, entitled, embarrassed or proud because of her magical tradition. The tradition's history has always been one of mystery, treachery and evil. Those who practice death magic must be prepared for the assumptions others will make about them and their abilities. The positive uses for Necromancy have long been ignored by the Empire and overshadowed by its more obvious uses. Those who try to change the reputation of Necromancy face a difficult road. The Apocalypse served as a sort of equalizer for Necromancers. Before, other magicks were regarded as doing works good for mankind, while Necromancy was reviled. In the After, all traditions of magic are generally despised.

Necromantic spells are painful for the recipient (even if meant to be beneficial) and have a dark quality about them. The caster's eyes often turn black, inky motes of energy are released and ebony rays of energy are not uncommon. The worst of all, however, occurs during restoration and other life restoring processes. Necromancy requires Balance. When life is restored, is must be taken from somewhere — surrounding plants, creatures and people are all valid sources.

What Necromancers Can Do

Necromancers can take the life force from any living thing and use it to replenish, lengthen or restore the life force of another living (or formerly living) thing. Necromancers are known for siphoning life, animating corpses, transferring pain and commanding the undead.

Less well known is the Necromancer's ability to heal and rejuvenate the body, which is considered by many as little more than a vessel for life energy. They have the abil-

ity to repair physical damage to this vessel, healing wounds and reversing aging, but cannot affect diseases, poison or other more subtle ailments.

Necromancers cannot create life from nothing. They simply transfer and manipulate the energy of living things. Necromancers cannot control or manipulate minds. They cannot affect the physics of the world.

Necromancy Example (Hard)

Gravis couldn't believe his good luck. The Apocalypse had left him with his pick of dead to animate. Sure, it was more difficult to do, but he had time. His soon-to-be army of undead was lying all about him. He chose a former soldier and began to recite the words that would replace the corpse's life with magic. It took more effort than Gravis expected, and he fell unconscious. When he awoke, the soldier stood over him awaiting orders. One down, many more to go …

Necromancy Spell Examples

Easy (1 success required)

Scan Life – You can scan the life forces in the vicinity to get a general overview of the population.
Sense Undead – You can determine if there are undead creatures near you.
Minor Restoration – You can restore 1 point of Health to someone who is wounded.

Average (2 successes required)

Disruption – You can splinter part of someone's life force, causing damage.
Repel Undead – You can create an area that undead creatures cannot enter.
Necromantic Aura – Undead creatures are unable to perceive you.

Tough (3 successes required)

Restoration – You can repair someone's life force, healing his or her body.
Animate Corpse – You can temporarily animate a corpse to create a zombie or skeleton.
Fatigue – You can drain someone of energy and resolve, causing him to suffer from exhaustion.

Hard (4 successes required)

Wither – You can cause your target to age instantly.
Siphon Life – You can drain life from a target and give it to yourself in a single action.
Seize Undead – You can take control of an undead creature you did not create.

Very Hard (5 successes required)

Reverse Aging – You can remove some of the ravages of time.
Birth Unliving – You can create a zombie or skeleton that will exist until destroyed.
Seance – You can infuse just enough life back into the recently dead for them to answer some questions.

Nigh Impossible (6+ successes required)

Death Storm – You remove one point of life from everything within 100 ft.
Resurrect – You can bring the recently dead back to life.
Extinguish Life –You can remove all of your target's life force, killing him or her instantly.

Primal Magic

Tradition: Humans, Mongrels, Oruskans
Primary Ability: Intelligence

Practitioners of Primal Magic see all of Nature's plants and creatures as one living thing. Magic flows through Her like blood through veins. Outsiders may think mongrel and beastmen Shamans are granted magic via a kinship with Nature. Such is not the case. They command individual plants and animals by directing Her blood flow where they need it. It's not a gentle pull of threads in the Weave. It's not harmonious. It's not pleasant. It's forcing Nature to do something against Her will.

This is not to say that every Primal practitioner is a sadistic brute. Some mongrel Shamans see the means of their magic as necessary toward a positive end. But the Primal Magic tradition was born in the Northlands, where Nature is cruel and unforgiving. Nature and her magic are to be respected. Only the strongest can take it and use it. No matter how it's presented, Primal Magic retains its barbaric heritage.

One such barbaric act involves choosing a totem animal. Blood must be shared between the Shaman and his chosen totem in an ancient ritual. From that point on, all animals of that species are indentured to the Shaman and he can summon their traits to use as his own.

Primal Magic and Burn

Primal Shamans are taught to find Nature's weak spots and exploit them. Sometimes they find those weaknesses and suffer no ill effects from casting. Sometimes they're wrong and Nature strikes back. After the Apocalypse, the surviving Shamans have found out the hard way that Nature has changed.

Nature became more cruel and powerful in the After. Her wrath does not stop at storms and earthquakes. It now extends into Her heart, where Primal practitioners draw their magic. In the After, Nature's weaknesses are all but gone and She fights against all who try to manipulate her.

Roleplaying Tips

Shamans are attuned to Nature because they are always on the lookout for weaknesses in what they see as the physical embodiment of Nature. They don't do this out of hatred. They battle Nature knowing She is a more-than-worthy adversary, and give Her all due respect. It is a matter of survival of the fittest. Hunt or be hunted. Only the strong survive in the wild, and that's exactly where Shamans live — whether they're in the forests or a civilized town.

Shamans are often seen as barbaric by those not familiar with their customs. They take on the traits and behaviors of their

totem and may often seem to have more in common with their totem animal than their humanoid companions. Their magic often manifests itself in harsh ways, which can scare off would-be companions.

Shamans who are in an environment that is not the favored habitat of their totem animal may find spell casting to be more difficult. The Shaman's totem is like a younger sibling to the caster. He or she will protect it. This can prove to be a weakness, so some Primal practitioners try to keep their totem a secret. Others flaunt their connection with the wilds by dressing to resemble their totem.

In order to speed game play, anyone playing a Primalist should calculate the effects of transforming into his or her totem, and using its various aspects, in advance.

What Primal Shamans Can Do

Primal Magic can be used to command and interact with living plants and animals. A Primal practitioner can also take on the characteristics of his totem animal, such as leaping like a deer, moving silently like a mouse or even growing great shark teeth to maul an opponent. A Primal caster can also influence the weather and plant life.

Primal Magic cannot command things outside of Nature, nor does it have specific control over weather or the elements of Nature. For example, it can cause clouds to drop rain over a general area, but could not concentrate the rainfall on one person or structure. It cannot affect the minds of people. It cannot reach beyond the grave. A Primalist is bound to a totem for life.



Primal Magic Example (Tough)

Sikyatavo was on the run again. The mongrel maid had crept into the village easily enough, but getting out with her haul was another story. A dozen villagers were hot on her heels. She rounded a corner and flattened herself against a wall , hiding like her totem, the rabbit, would. Most of the villagers ran past, but one spotted her and yelled for the others.

Sikyatavo considered commanding the grass to trip them, but there were too many. Instead she summoned her totem spirit to grant her its speed. Nature answered her call and she was off, easily outdistancing her pursuers as she bounded through the forest.

Primal Spell Examples

Easy (1 success required)

Heightened Sense – You can increase one of your senses.
Skin of the Beast – You can grow fur, scales or feathers to help protect you from the elements.
Sense Weather – You can tell what the weather will be like in the near future.

Average (2 successes required)

Grow Natural Weapon – You can grow claws, talons, teeth, pincers or other natural weapons.
Stealth – You can mimic your totem's silence, gaining a bonus to Stealth rolls.
Speak with Totem – You can communicate with your totem animal.

Tough (3 successes required)

Command Totem – You can force your totem animal to do your bidding.
Animate Plants – You can cause vines/weeds to move and entangle things.
Gills – You can grow gills to mimic your totem's ability to breathe underwater.

Hard (4 successes required)

Vicarious Perception – You can perceive the world through the senses of a totem animal.
Summon Rain – You can call rain to fall within the next 24 hours.
Flight – You can mimic your totem's ability to fly (but without wings).

Very Hard (5 successes required)

Green Speak – You can communicate with plant life.
Summon Prey – You can compel the natural prey of your totem animal to come you.
Transform – You can turn into your totem animal.

Nigh Impossible (6+ successes required)

Storm – You can cause a terrible storm to appear within hours.
Totem Avatar – You take on all the most desirable aspects of your totem and temporarily meld them with your human form.
Cast Thoughts – You can mentally send a message to all totem animals in the vicinity and receive responses.

Rune Magic

Tradition: Dwarves
Primary Ability: Intelligence

Long ago, dwarves alone deciphered the written language of the Weave. While it is said their ancient brethren had a much larger magical vocabulary, only the most useful runic knowledge survived the centuries.

The dwarves' best smiths, jewelers, architects and engineers were all Rune Writers who used magic to improve their already impressive creations. Runes supported the mineshafts that allowed dwarves with rune-hardened picks to extract the precious ore and stones. Magical explosions cleared the hardest areas. The raw materials were used to create rune-enhanced arms, armor and jewelry in forges made impossibly hot with rune magic.

But magic alone is not enough to create great works of art or construct great feats of engineering. Rune magic can only enhance what is already there. Artistry and raw materials are still required, but they are supported and extended by runes. As dwarven casters create, they etch the strange sigils and speak ancient words that bring deep powers to the surface.

Rune Magic and Burn

During the Night of Fire the language of magic changed briefly. It caused every rune the dwarves had ever made to lose their magic for the night.

The language returned, but it's not exactly the same. The runes are slightly different now and harder to form. The words that are spoken require odd inflections. Making a small mistake when writing a rune in the Before was not uncommon, especially by younger Writers still learning the correct combination of runes and words. Now those mistakes are made all too frequently by all Rune Writers. The penalty for mistakes is much harsher now, burning painfully through the dwarves' minds.

Runes used to accept the magic poured into them by the casters and were beautiful to behold. Filled with soft glowing energy that pulsed and hummed, the symbols were an art form unto themselves. In the After, magic resists the runes and enters only by the force of the caster's will. The energy crackles and thrashes within the sigils, looking like something ugly and caged.

Roleplaying Tips

The dwarves of Cair Dhurn were hit especially hard by the Night of Fire. Their mountain home collapsed upon itself as the shifting Weave broke the runes supporting the mineshafts. Because of this, Rune Writers from Cair Dhurn may have strong feelings of survival guilt. Rune Writers from Oukal may feel guilty as well, thinking they should have kept trying to convince their brothers and sisters to leave the mountains.

As members of a theocracy, mountain dwarves will often rely on their faith to see them through. Desert dwarves, having been led to safety by a prophet, maintained their strong religious beliefs. Because all surviving dwarves know about the Deep Horrors, they may feel responsible for warning others or hunting down any horrors that escaped the fall of Cair Dhurn.

Rune Writers must actually draw or etch runes as part of their spell casting. This can be as primitive as using a stick to scratch the symbols in dirt or painting symbols with nothing but his own blood. Or it can be an elaborate and painstaking process, such as etching the runes into precious metals with fine tools. Regardless, the symbols must be accompanied by the ancient language.

What Rune Writers Can Do

Rune Writers can etch complex sigils into objects and speak strange words to enhance, modify, transform, repair or otherwise affect an object. These runes can affect items in many ways; changing the size, shape, color, density and even the composition. Magical properties can also be bestowed (or removed). Objects can become animated with limited sentience. Wards can be crafted to protect portals and containers. Weapons



and armor can be enchanted. The options are really only limited by imagination.

Rune magic alone cannot create anything. For example, it can make a sword sharper, or a forge hotter, but it cannot create a sword or summon fire. However, expert craftsmen who create masterpieces can use Rune Magic to infuse them with magic. Rune Writers are the only spell casters who can make magical effects permanent. The runes fade away after the power is brought to the surface unless the Writer etches a permanence rune as well, which is very difficult to create.

People and animals cannot have runes inscribed upon them.

Rune Magic Example (Average)

Olmace hid behind a tree, cowering from the slavering bear that was tracking him. The dwarf could hear its plodding footsteps coming his way. He fumbled for his dagger and quickly scratched two runes on the tree as he spoke the ancient words. The Burn coursed through his body, weakening him. The tree exploded in a shower of splinters that pierced the bear with dagger-sized splinters. But it wasn't enough to kill it. Olmace's only hope was that the creaking tree would fall on the angry bear before its claws ripped him apart.

Rune Magic Spell Examples

Easy (1 success required)

Polish/Mend – You can clean and repair superficial damage to an item.
Mark – You can inscribe an object with a rune invisible to the untrained eye.
Sharpen – You can cause an edged weapon to be sharper for a short time.

Average (2 successes required)

Strengthen – You can cause an item to be stronger and more durable than normal.
Explode – You can cause an item to burst and cause damage to a target.
Lighten – You can reduce the weight of an object.

Tough (3 successes required)

Fix – You can repair worn items or fix simple broken items.
Enlarge – You can make an item larger than normal.
Open – You can make a door or portal open (even if locked).

Hard (4 successes required)

Hide – You can mark an item so that it escapes most people's notice.
Preserve – You can cause a perishable item to remain fresh.
Simple Transmute – You can turn a material into a similar material, such as changing one type of wood to another.

Very Hard (5 successes required)

Animate Object – You can bring a statue or item temporarily to "life."
Ward – You can create a series of runes that will protect a space or item.
Reassemble – You can fully restore a non-magical item that has been broken.

Nigh Impossible (6+ successes required)

Disintegrate – You can cause an item to crumble into dust.
Transmute – You can change one item into another.
Permanency – You can cause a rune's effect to be permanent.

Sorcery

Tradition: Humans
Primary Ability: Intelligence

All magic users access invisible lines of power to draw magical energy from Nature, the spirit world, the elements or the mind. Sorcerers are unique because the grid of magical power lines is actually the source of their magic, not the pathway to it. Sorcery siphons magical energy directly from the Weave.

Before the Night of Fire, Sorcery was often used in conjunction with other magical traditions to make more difficult spells easier to accomplish by enhancing their connection with the Weave. This was especially true with Rune Magic and permanency runes.

After the Night of fire, such things were no longer possible for Sorcerers.

Sorcery and Burn

The Weave became too unstable to support permanent connections after the Night of Fire. Even the basic art of tapping into the Weave has become difficult, even dangerous. The Weave, once thought of by Sorcerers as a solid infrastructure, is now more like a living thing. The lines of power writhe and buck in the After, making it more common for Sorcerers to be harmed by the energy they're attempting to extract as they cast spells.

Roleplaying Tips

Sorcerers were once nearly universally admired for their magic. In civilized lands, they were likely to be artists, engineers, architects, astronomers and city planners. The synergy of Sorcery and other magic was a powerful boon to society.

In less-civilized places, Sorcerers were also prized. In the Warlands, for instance, one experienced Sorcerer was worth 50 good archers.

Even without any other magic to enhance, Sorcerers could wield the raw energy of the Weave as a weapon. After, their choices are more limited. Some have become hired guns, while others hide any hint of their power. All magic is suspect in the After, but none more so than Sorcery, which once was the linchpin holding the Empire together.

What Sorcerers Can Do

Sorcerers can tap into the Weave and use its magical energy in many different ways. They can channel the magic into weapons, such as grasping energy tentacles or destructive rays, explosions

and missiles. They can create constructs out of solid Weave energy, ranging from simple walls and tools to semi-sentient servants and beasts to protective shields and cages. The magic can also be used to pick things up and move them — giving Sorcerers limited flight and telekinesis.

Because they are so attuned with the Weave, Sorcerers can affect and perceive how others use it. They can discern the properties of magic items, sense enchantments and detect others who can cast spells. They can influence how energy is drawn from the Weave, hampering or helping other spell casters. Sorcerers can also break enchantments and disrupt spells from any tradition.



Sorcery Example (Hard)

Leona stood before the crowd of angry peasants who blocked the road before her. She and her retinue had no way of breaking through, as the outraged and bitter serfs shook their fists and shouted abuse at the noblewoman. Something about not having enough food for the winter — Leona wasn't sure, but then she was too concerned with getting as far south as she could before the snows started falling.

Her patience at an end, she stood upon the top of her carriage and raised her hands to the sky. She closed her eyes and began to pull energy from the Weave and unleash its raw power upon the rabble. Soon there would be the stench of burned flesh, but she would be long gone before most of the survivors woke up.

Sorcery Spell Examples

Easy (1 success required)

Sense Magic – You can sense the presence and strength of magic in a person or object.
Light – You can summon small amounts of energy from the Weave and hold it in your hand or attach it to an object.
Move Object – You can surround a small item in energy from the Weave and control its movement with your mind.

Average (2 successes required)

Energy Bolt – You can shoot a bolt of magical energy at a single opponent.
Shield – You can create a protective nimbus around yourself, adding a bonus to your Defense.
Energy Snare – You can create a web of solid energy to entangle an opponent.

Tough (3 successes required)

Discern Properties – You can examine a magical item and identify what magical properties it possesses.
Levitate – You can surround yourself with magical energy and lift or lower yourself to the ground.
Simple Object – You can create a simple tool or item out of solid energy.

Hard (4 successes required)

Energy Explosion – You can create a large explosion that harms everyone caught with its radius.
Flight – You can surround yourself with energy and fly through the air at great speeds.
Servant – You can create an indistinct energy entity that will follow simple commands and perform simple actions.

Very Hard (5 successes required)

Energy Beast – You can create an animal out of magical energy that will attack a designated opponent.
Advanced Object – You can create a larger or more complicated construct out of solid energy.
Tangle Weave – You can modify the connection between a caster and the Weave, causing additional Burn when they cast spells.

Nigh Impossible (6+ successes required)

Renew Magic – You can restore and/or recharge a magical item back into functional condition.
Travel – You can turn yourself into energy and travel across the Weave to another destination.
Block Weave – You can block the connection between a caster and the Weave, making it impossible to cast spells.

Magic Items

In the Before, magic items were common. Household trinkets, such as runestones that would cause fires to flare hotter or torn material to mend itself, were in nearly every upper middleclass home in the Empire. Dwarven runes ensorcelled with permanence made weapons, armor and tools stronger, sharper and lighter. Healers combined science and animist potions to cure the sick.

Slightly rarer were items based on the Primalist tradition that allowed shepherds to command their flocks, soldiers to disrupt enemy cavalries or hunters to attract prey. More powerful magic items, such as Sorcerers' staffs and wands, and Rune Writers' masterpieces, were out of reach for all but the most wealthy. Items based on Beguiling and Necromancy were illegal in most civilized lands, but many still existed. Because Elemental magic was just returning to the elves when the Night of Fire struck, no magic items using the Elemental tradition existed in the Before.

The reason magic items were so common in the Before was because of how compatible Sorcery and Rune magic were. Alone, Rune Writers found it nearly impossible to imbue items with a permanent connection to the Weave, and so the magic would always eventually fade. Sorcerers knew the Weave better than any other tradition, and were able to tap into it with great ease. Yet the ability to permanently capture it was also incredibly difficult for Sorcerers, who would have to recharge their magical items on a daily or weekly basis.

Together, the two traditions found a common ground that made miracles possible. Sorcerers could enable the Rune Writers to more easily etch Runes of Permanence on top of an already written Rune, or indeed, any other magical effect from another tradition placed within or on an item.

Of course, the Night of Fire broke almost all of those connections, destroying most Rune-Sorcery pairings. Buildings and bridges fell apart into rubble, magic items exploded and vaporized, and suits of armor melted around their wearers.

The Night of Fire destroyed the most powerful magic items, just as it destroyed their powerful creators. Magic items in the After are very hard to come by.

Artifacts

Not all magic items have been destroyed. Those that survived the Night of Fire are commonly called artifacts. Below are some examples of artifacts that survived. Still, powerful magic items are exceedingly rare in the After. It would be nearly impossible for a person to possess one, let alone more than one of the artifacts below in his lifetime. Some have Burn backlash limitations that stem from the damaged Weave.

Armor

Beguiler's Bane

This heavy iron helm, crudely forged by blacksmiths in Verelanar, helps prevent Beguiling magic from penetrating the wearer's mind by providing a +4 bonus to resist mental magical attacks.

Bracers of Flight

These bracers provide a +1 Defense bonus and allow the wearer to fly continuously for one hour each day at a running pace.

Pall Bearer

For many years, this steel tower shield was used to carry the bodies of the legion's generals from their funerals to their final resting places. It can levitate upon command, up to three times each day, carrying up to 300 pounds for up to one hour.

Parry shield

When parrying, this longsword acts as a shield that provides +2 Defense bonus. It will activate up to three times per day.

Thrak's Skin

This hide armor, rumored to be fashioned from the last of the Great Trolls and magically preserved, provides +3 Defense. There are no Dexterity penalties, and it weighs only 10 pounds so it can be worn by characters with a Strength of 1 or above. It magically alters itself to fit its wearer.

Burn backlash: If a single strike does more than 10 points of damage, the armor is rendered useless.

Miscellaneous

Amulet of the Archmagi

This unique golden amulet, worn by the Archmage of the Council of Magores, protects its wearer from Burn damage. The caster wearing the amulet will only take three points of Burn damage, no matter how many failures are rolled.

Cap of Animal Command

This fur cap, once owned by Cushulain's most respected shepherd, allows its wearer to command up to six animals from any species for one hour each day.

Circlet of Lie Detection

This colorful silk bandanna changes color when the wearer hears a falsehood. It was used by rover captains when presiding over trials involving high crimes. The target of inquisition must make a Willpower roll vs. a difficulty of 4 to hide their lies.

Burn Backlash: Each time the bandanna is used, the wearer must make a Willpower roll vs. a difficulty of 2. A failure causes him or her to be unable to tell a lie for a full day.

Divining Rod
Piercing the soil with this 6-inch glass rod causes a small fountain of water to erupt from the ground. The pure water from the fountain will flow for one hour.

Gloves of Deafening
Clapping these leather gloves together creates a deafening sonic boom that robs everyone and everything within 25 ft. of their hearing. The deafness lasts for one day.
Resist: Body 3

Goggles of Predator's Sense
The lenses of these leather goggles are made of thick rose quartz that would appear to detract from, rather than add to, the wearer's vision. However, when worn, the goggles add +2 to sight Perception rolls.

Key of Deeger-Oon
This tarnished silver key is rumored to have traveled across the sea with the rovers. With its ornate etchings and curved teeth, the key is said to be capable of locking any man's heart, rendering him incapable of love or affection. Rumors spoke of a sister key made of polished silver than can reverse the effects.
Resist: Willpower 4.

Lorant's Skull
This human skull is rumored to be the skull of Hale Lorant, the explorer who discovered Lorant's Scythe. Kissing it removes diseases, poisons and afflictions. It can be used once per day.
Burn backlash: Each time the skull is kissed, someone who knows the person kissing it is afflicted with the removed ailment.

Lens of Cravuhr
This circular piece of blue glass has been highly sought after by spell casters for generations. The caster is able to use the lens to focus the Burn he or she receives outward as a bolt of destructive energy. Any Burn suffered is redirected as lethal damage. The caster may target anyone within line of sight.
Resist: The target may only resist using armor and active defense.

Life Finder
This compass, encased in bone, always points toward the nearest concentration of living people or animals within 1 mile.

Lightning Rod
This staff is inlaid with silver lightning bolts. It is capable of simultaneously hitting three targets with magical energy for 4L damage each. It has 20 charges.

Mantle of Invisibility
This torn and ragged cloak allows the wearer to fool the minds of three people each day into believing he is not there.
Resist: Willpower 4.

Moccasins of the Fox
These crudely stitched leather moccasins add a +2 bonus to Stealth rolls.
Burn backlash: If the wearer's total Stealth Skill roll is lower than 4, the moccasins bleed, leaving a trail of blood.

Ring of Burn Reduction
This brass ring appears ordinary upon first glance, but most spell casters will recognize its value. When worn by a spell caster, the ring glows each time a spell is cast, absorbing one point of Burn damage.
Burn backlash: If the wearer botches his magic roll, Burn taken is lethal.

Ring Snare
When this gold ring is tossed to the ground and the proper command word is spoken, it transforms into a ring of magical energy that duplicates itself dozens of times, creating a net of interlocking rings of energy. Anyone nearby during the near-instantaneous expansion, or anyone who steps into the 6-sq.-ft. net, will be held fast for up to one hour.
Resist: Dexterity 4 or Acrobatics 4 to avoid.

Runestones
Unlike other magic, dwarven runes are etched into materials and can be triggered at any time. Any magical effect capable with Rune magic is likely to exist as a runestone. Common effects such as warmth, polishing and sharpening are more likely to be found than runes of transmutation or reassembly.

Soul Catcher
This black leather bag allows a Necromancer to store the life force she drains. The life can be used at a later time to heal the owner or others. The bag will hold up to 10 points of life force.

Splint Rot
When opened, this vial releases a nauseating gas that incapacitates everyone within 15 ft. for up to one hour.
Resist: Willpower 4.

Totem of Good Fortune
Thought lost when the islands of Lorant's Scythe returned to the sea, this wooden totem is crudely carved to resemble a smiling face that dangles from a woven-reed necklace. It allows its wearer

to re-roll one roll per day.
Burn backlash: If a character tries to use the totem more than once per day, the totem's smile changes to a scowl and causes the wearer to suffer -1 to all Skill checks.

Wands
A number of these previously common wands survived the Apocalypse. Created by magic users from different traditions, they allow the wielder to hurl fire, energy or frost up to 25 ft., doing lethal or non-lethal damage. This damage can range between 3 and 6. Most can be used three times per day. It is possible that some multi-funtional wands capable of hurling more than one type of magical attack may still exist in the After.

Whistle of Nharg
This bone whistle was created by a powerful Primalist to combat the human expansion into the Oruskan wilderness. When blown, it summons torrential rain and thunderstorms. In addition to the flooding and other natural hardships caused by such rainfall, Primalists found the lightning within the storm easier to summon and turn on their opponents. It reduces the Primalist user's spell difficulty by 1 when summoning lightning, and allows the caster to target where it strikes.

Weapons
Air Blast
Once per day, swinging this staff in the air causes a wave of air to blow up to 6 ft. out from the wielder that is powerful enough to knock down an opponent.
Resist: Strength 3

Dagger of Ghin
This long bone dagger was stolen from the Circle of Dust hundreds of years ago. In addition to granting the wielder increased speed and accuracy, the weapon grants unique benefits when it deals a killing blow. The dying's lifeforce is transferred into the wielder, restoring wounds and providing increased vigor. The dagger provides +2 to Melee, +2 to Initiative and restores Health when a killing blow is delivered.
Burn backlash: If the dagger does not deliver a killing blow every day, it goes inactive until "awakened" by making another killing blow.

Death by Fire
When activated, this flame-covered blade causes an extra point of damage to successful attacks and can hurl a ball of fire up to 25 ft. for 3L damage. It can be used three times per day.
Burn backlash: Botched attacks made with this sword causes 1L damage to the wielder.

Frost Touched
When activated, this ice-covered blade causes an extra point of damage to successful attacks and can hurl a ball of frost up to 25 ft. for 3L damage. It can be used three times per day.
Burn backlash: Botched attacks made with this sword causes 1L damage to the wielder.

Rock Splitter
Twice per day, pounding the ground with this all-steel pickaxe causes a 6-ft.-long chasm to spread forth in a pie shape from the wielder. The chasm is 10 ft. deep and 6 ft. wide at its end point.
Resist: Dexterity 3 to avoid falling.

Silent Whip
While the wielder swings this whip overhead, she is surrounded in silence that muffles any sound she makes. It causes anyone who might hear her to suffer a -4 Perception penalty to hearing.

Sword of Feor
Forged by the desert dwarves, this steel-hard porcelain blade has been in the possession of an Imperial general since it was forged. Thought to be unbreakable and a source of inspiration to many legionnaires, blood and dirt will not cling to its alabaster surface. It provides +3 to Melee attacks and provides its wielder with the Flurry Talent with no penalty for multiple attacks.

Unfortunate strike:
Successfully hitting an opponent with this club causes him to bumble his next action. It has 10 charges.

Potions
Potions are more common magical items than artifacts because they can be created more easily than permanent magic items. Below are examples of potions that mimic Easy or Average difficulty spells.

- Healing Potion: This grey liquid will double the imbiber's natural healing rate overnight.
- Love Potion: This red liquid, created by a Beguiler, can temporarily cause the imbiber to fall in love with the first person he or she sees.
- Levitation: This clear liquid allows anyone who drinks it to levitate for a short time.
- Restoration Potion: This black concoction, created by a Necromancer, fully repairs the imbiber's life force.
- Bottled Weave: This blue, glowing liquid gives the imbiber two extra dice on their next magic roll. The spell must be cast immediately after drinking the potion or the Weave burns out of their system, causing 2N damage.

Tong Sha was hungry. In fact, he was starving. Although he was reluctant to try to entertain himself into a meal and a place to stay, especially in this fetid backwater town, the rover spoke with the innkeeper briefly. The dwarf seemed intrigued by the prospect of some entertainment.

"So, do you sing? Dance? By Hirnir's teat, **you're not going to do any magic are you?"** he asked. Tong shook his head.

"No. I do comedy."

"Oh good. Well, **if you don't die out there**, I'll feed you and put you up for the night. Fair enough?"

Tong nodded, impressed the dwarf had used the correct term for a bad performance. He wasn't worried.

The rover jumped up on a table, calling for attention.

"Good evening, my friends! My name is Tong, and I have some jokes for your entertainment! If you like them, throw me a penny and I'll keep telling them. If you don't like them, throw me a silver, and I'll stop!"

Silence. That wasn't good. Tong stared out at the occupants of the inn. There were some elves, a couple of Loranthians and a dozen or so humans, including four at one table at the back wrapped in cloaks and barely visible.

"I've always found religion to be a funny thing," started Tong, pacing around the large table, attempting to sound conversational.

"For instance, I hear if you want to get close to the Divine Mother, you have to spend 13 years being Embraced. I don't know about you, but after seeing some of those statues, I wouldn't mind spending 13 years pressed up against **those**!"

He waited for some laughter, but instead was greeted by stony stares from some of the humans.

"That's nothing, of course. What about those elves and their religion? It's all about music, right? Have you ever heard any elven songs? How many times can you hear a song about getting beaten up by trees? Aren't they all bark and no bite?"

The group of elves gasped, and one started to weep openly. The rest glared at him, and Tong looked around at the rest of the room, desperately trying to see if anyone had even smiled yet.

"Uh, well, I heard that the island folk have an interesting religion too. Indeed, our own innkeeper told me earlier that Gahr Dahl Himself came in here once and asked for a drink. The innkeeper told him **'I'm sorry, but we don't serve spirits.'**"

The island folk in the audience were muttering to each other, and one had pulled out a battered dead rat, and was stroking it suspiciously.

"We don't serve spirits? No?"

A couple of people booed, and someone shouted a vague threat involving a pitchfork and Tong's throat. He was worried that he was losing them here, but he had a great joke that would always pull them back.

"The innkeeper here is a pious dwarf, I have a lot of respect for that. But I told him that maybe if his religion had been the Church of the Six Pillars, instead of Five, the mountains wouldn't have fallen down!"

There was silence. **The dwarf had turned a deep red color, and there was foam on his lips.** Tong wasn't sure what that was about, so he turned his attention back to the room. Time for his show stopper.

"Well, everyone loves an Argent Path joke, right? Do you know they recruit heavily from the pirates of the Bitter Reach?"

Tong put one hand up and covered his left eye.

"Arrrr, gents!"

At that point, the group of cloaked humans at the back of the room had clearly had enough. They stood, and their cloaks fell back revealing the ragged but intact insignia of the Wayfarers, those followers of the Argent Path who are dedicated to protecting travelers from harm. **Swords sang as they were pulled from scabbards,** but the ring of steel was quickly lost as the cheer went up from the angry audience.

"I guess this means no dinner for Tong tonight," joked Tong, jumping down from the table. He edged back into a far corner of the room and ***waited for the punch line***.

Chapter 6: Religion

"What have the gods wrought? Why did they do this?"

Many strive to find their place in the universe and to understand the mysteries of existence. They look to higher powers to give them comfort, protection and purpose. Religion helps guide the faithful through their lives and provides answers to the otherwise unanswerable questions.

In the world of *Desolation*, there is no single religion that is truer than another. There is no celestial battle between good and evil for the destiny of mankind. No gods walk among the people, or ever did, though that does not stop people from believing in them.

All of the religions believe in some kind of higher authority, be it from a single god to a sprawling pantheon. In fact, each of the faiths has gotten it wrong. The closest things to deities in the *Desolation* setting are the Two Above, more akin to cosmic forces than gods. They exist solely to keep the universe in balance, one representing the forces of creation and the other the forces of destruction. Not all religions include the Two Above, but many do in some form.

The Two Above have no personality or agenda, they simply are. Their presence is in almost all things, existing together, opposing one another, or one following the other in an unending cycle. It is a delicate and constant balance that exists everywhere, often unseen. The greatest example of this is Nature itself.

Divine power is invisible in the world of *Desolation*. There is no proof that any of the various religions and beliefs are correct. There are no clerics calling down holy fire or invoking their god's name to perform great miracles for the masses. People have faith for one reason: Their religion answers life's difficult questions for them.

A balanced religion incorporates both aspects of the Two Above. It need not include them in name, but it must include the concepts in equal measure. Examples of this would be a single god with dual natures, a pantheon of opposing gods, or simply the worship of the Two Above.

Regardless of the religion, believers are the same in many respects. They get their core beliefs about morality and the afterlife from their faith. It helps define who they are and why they do what they do.

Monotheistic Religions

Faiths with a single all-powerful deity are not uncommon among the people of Scondera. Typically such a deity possesses both aspects of the Two Above and serves as a balance unto itself. In some cases, the deity has multiple aspects that are in balance. Sometimes the deity may be very tempestuous, or may simply be the embodiment of all things.

Not all monotheistic faiths contain both sides of the Two Above. Some believe their deity to contain only one of the aspects, and in some cases, neither.

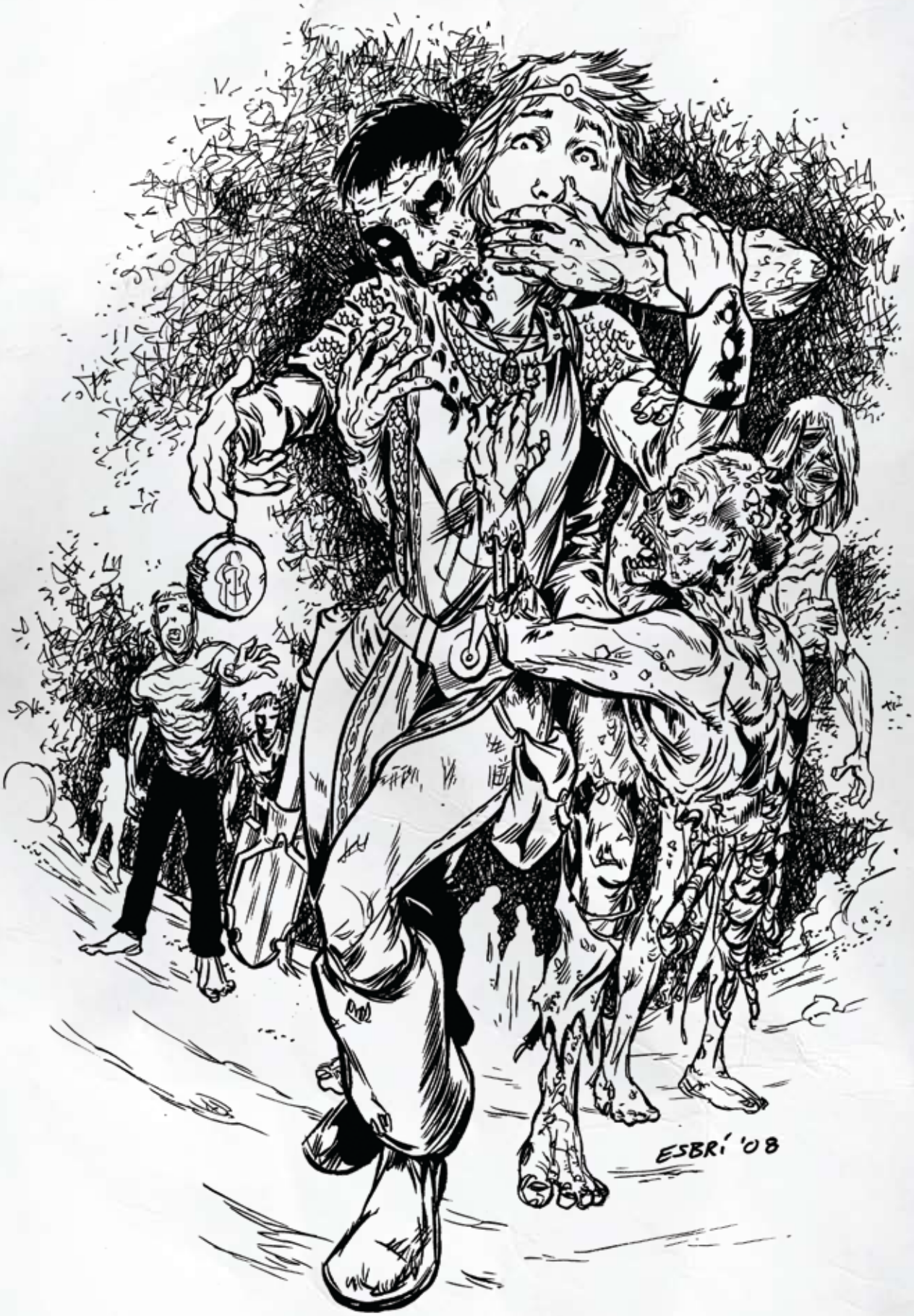
Dualistic Religions

There are several prominent religions spread across the lands that have incorporated the Two Above into their faiths as opposing entities. In these faiths, one aspect embodies creation and order, while the other embodies destruction and chaos.

Although both sides of the Two Above exist in dualistic religions, they are not always considered equals. Most faiths favor one aspect over the other, or believe that one is destined to overcome the other — leading to some kind of promised utopia or new world made in their deity's image. Less common, however, is the belief that the two aspects will never cease their struggle against the other and that when their conflict ends, so does the world.

Polytheistic Religions

Several faiths contain a multitude of deities that are all worshipped by its followers. In some religions, each deity possesses both aspects of the Two Above. In others, the pantheon is balanced with some representing the creation aspect and some representing the destruction aspect. These pantheons can range from an incestuous family to a collection of intelligent animals.


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Two Above, Many Below

What follows is a tour of the major faiths of Scondera. These represent the beliefs held by the majority of races, but there are many other minor religions and cults not included here.

Religion	Primary Worshippers
Empyrean Faiths	Humans (Ascondea, the Marches, Warlands)
Argent Path	Humans (Nascency and beyond)
Mohzaik Pantheon	Humans (Warlands, Saikin Wastes), Oruskans
Cult of Baranthum	Oruskans
The Five Pillars	Dwarves (Cair Dhurn, Oukal)
Tsai'zhil, The Horizon's Call	Rovers
The Chorus	Elves
Ancestral Stream	Gnomes
Primalism	Oruskans, Humans (northern Ascondea, Jherlind, Loslolin, Verelanar)
The All Within	Loranthians

The Empyrean Demesne of Antithetical Efficacy

The most widely spread religion is almost never called its full name. Instead, it is more commonly known as just the Empyrean faith. This dualistic religion has many different sects with wildly varying goals and beliefs, but at its core are the Two Above. A powerful and nurturing maternal figure represents creation and order. This Divine Mother is balanced by a ravenous force of chaos and destruction known to take many forms. The two wage a constant struggle against one another, and are considered the embodiments of good and evil.

The Divine Mother is seen not only as caretaker and nurturer, but also as protector and defender. Like any mother, she cares for all her children and wants them to prosper and grow into the best they can be. She espouses a message of peace and goodness, encouraging her followers to help one another and work against the forces of entropy and evil.

Working to bring the world into chaos and darkness is the shape-shifting entity known by many names — but none is more common than the shadowy, faceless End Father, who seeks to tear down civilization and consume all that mankind has built. Many followers believe a new world will begin after the current one is destroyed and that the faithful will rule over it.

Below are the most common sects and variations of the Empyrean faith.

Church of the Divine Mother

Motivation: The Church exists as source of good, worshipping the Divine Mother. It acts as a guiding light and source of hope to the common man. By spreading this good will, it hopes to counteract the forces of the End Father and repair the broken spirits he has touched.

The faithful believe that it is more difficult to build and be caring than it is to tear down and act selfishly. It isn't that the Divine Mother is less powerful, merely that her teachings require more effort and vigilance. In the end, however, they are more rewarding. Evil is unrelenting, but in time the Church hopes that it can be conquered and the world can become a utopia for all. At times it seems an impossible task, but letting the End Father destroy the world cannot be allowed.

Personality: Inspiring, helpful and caring. The Church is patient and understanding with those who try to embrace the Mother. Against those who try to harm her followers, the church can be an unrelenting and fierce protector.

Worship takes place in churches that are well appointed and of higher quality and décor than its surroundings. The Church should be a place of beauty and distinction to inspire its followers. The High Church is one of the largest and most stunning buildings constructed by man. Even the lowliest of churches can boast of something special, such as stained glass, ornate carpentry or exquisite stonework.

The clergy is comprised of both men and women who take the mantle of either Son or Daughter. They are assigned to a church, leading worship services and other activities to help improve the community. They are required to live from the generosity of those they tend to and are forbidden to accumulate personal wealth beyond the poorest member of their congregation.

History: The original sect of the Empryean faith, the Church of the Divine Mother is older than the Empire. Although never made the official Imperial religion, it is by far the most popular and accepted faith of its people. The Church's ideological belief in building a better world coincides nicely with the Empire's political ideals. It is not surprising that the High Church and seat of the faith's power is located in the Ascondean capital. Nearly every village, town, and city within the Empire has a church in it.

As the Empire has expanded, so too has the Church. However, beyond the borders of Ascondea the Church is much less influential. It has been aggressive in its missionary work and has tried to spread its word to anyone who is willing to listen. Because of its peaceful nature and unwillingness to force itself upon others, the Church has had less success in the Warlands and Oruskan wilderness than other "civilized" lands.

Afterlife: Those who follow the tenets of the Church will be Embraced. This means that their spirit will spend 13 blissful years in the Divine Mother's radiance. During this time the spirit is purified and strengthened, leading to a richer and fuller life when it is reborn into the living world.

Eventually, after enough purifications, a person will be born that can truly make a difference in the world. Embodying and espousing the faith, this person is Embraced as a Favored Child upon death. When a person is afforded this honor, their spirit ascends and is able to be with the Divine Mother forever. These Favored Children are revered and set forth as examples to the living.

Of great concern to the Church are the fates of non-followers. Upon death, the followers of the End Father suffer 13 years of transformation, known as the Breaking, and are subjected to pain and corruption. The spirit eventually becomes one with the End Father, strengthening him. Those who follow neither the Mother nor the Father are immediately reborn; their spirits neither receiving the benefits of the Divine Mother's Embracing or the torments of the End Father's Breaking.

Apocalypse: The Church was doubly crippled by the Night of Fire. Not only have most of its physical structures and followers been lost, so has the faith of many survivors. It seems as if the Divine Mother has lost her battle against the Father and all the efforts of the Church have been for naught. Others have not given up hope and believe that the Divine Mother will see them through this dark time. Those who remain with the Church are the most devout and unshakable in their faith.

Fellowship of the Father's Fury

Motivation: The Fellowship exists to spread chaos and destruction wherever possible. It teaches that the End Father reigns over the Divine Mother and should be exalted. When society crumbles and the world is left in ashes, the End Father's superiority will be proven and he will destroy the Divine Mother. He will then absorb all her power and recreate the world to his own liking. His faithful will be given a place of power and honor in this new world, ruling over it for eternity.

Personality: Secretive, zealous and violent. The Fellowship must stay hidden to avoid being purged by the Church of the Divine Mother or other authorities. Its very nature is one of patient recklessness — waiting for the perfect opportunity to strike, then acting with sudden and sometimes suicidal brutality.

Worshippers have no temples or other permanent meeting places, instead they constantly move and operate in the shadows. They keep their true identities a secret, from each other and the world. They operate in small, unofficial numbers, led by a single leader who serves as a recruiter and planner for their missions of chaos.

The Fellowship's members tend to be either young and reckless or seasoned and cautious. The younger recruits often give their lives during fanatical and dangerous schemes. The elder members treat them as pawns, willingly sacrificing them to spread chaos.

History: The origins of the Fellowship of the Father's Fury are not fully known, but it is nearly as old as the Church of the Divine Mother. Occasionally, the Fellowship is thought destroyed, but inevitably rises again to sow chaos and destruction. They have managed to spread disease, assassinate rulers, and even start wars — but most of their acts have been enacted without anyone knowing they were responsible. Their leadership has remained a mystery, but people from all walks of life have been members. Rumors abound that even an emperor has been included in its ranks.

Afterlife: A follower who gives his life to help further the Fellowship's goals are rewarded with 13 years in the End Father's presence — a time known as a Tempering. During this time, the spirit is strengthened and taught to understand true suffering so they can better spread it in their next life.

Apocalypse: The End Father has won. The world is rightfully theirs for the taking.

Brotherhood of Silent Voices

Motivation: The Brotherhood's purpose is to observe. They do their best to not interfere in the world around them, staying apart from the concerns of normal men. They refuse to become part of the Two Above's struggle, choosing instead to remain as impartial and insignificant as possible. They seek to comprehend the nature of Balance and believe that once it is understood, the mysteries of the universe will be revealed. The world is trying to be understood, one must just be quiet enough to hear it.

Personality: Curious, observant and reclusive. The Brotherhood chooses to remain uninvolved in the greater world. This level of detachment varies greatly among the brothers. Some choose to seclude themselves in remote monasteries, taking vows of silence and dedicating their lives to obscure research. Others live among society, integrating themselves at places and events they deem important, documenting and analyzing the outcome.

The Brotherhood's temples are not places of worship. Rather, they are places of learning and introspection. Few reside within the confines of city walls, typically existing within a self-sufficient enclave or farm. Most of these offer hospitality to all who

seek refuge or knowledge, although some can be aggressive in protecting their isolation. The largest complex is located in Merene, owning its own island in the rugged Imperial province.

History: Established during the Enlightenment, the Brotherhood was originally an offshoot of the Church of the Divine Mother. It was dedicated to collecting and archiving the histories of the Church, but its purpose grew over time. Eventually the Brotherhood started including non-religious academics and even began questioning the teachings of the Church. It officially broke from the Church 200 years ago, but maintains a civil relationship.

Afterlife: The Brothers believe that enlightenment and spiritual strength is gained while living, not during the afterlife. They believe in the Embracing and Breaking, but disagree in its value. By remaining neutral in life, they hope to have their spirit immediately reborn and continue a new life of observation and understanding.

Apocalypse: Much knowledge was lost during the Night of Fire. The Brothers mourn less for the libraries and more for the countless stories, traditions and culture that are gone. Regardless, the mission must continue. There is a new world that must be observed, and the mystery of the Night of Fire must be solved.

Argent Path

Motivation: There is a war being fought between good and evil. Sansehl is the One Light, the true and benevolent god who has created the Argent Path for the virtuous to follow. Those who walk the Path and follow his laws will illuminate the world. Opposing him is Llevalak, his immoral and perfidious bride who was cast off the Path by her husband. She resides in the shadows, attempting to lure others into the darkness with her. She tempts and encourages mankind's ugliest of urges and innermost desires, constantly whispering lewd promises and unsavory enticements.

The laws of Sansehl require discipline, but they are for the good of humanity. The unceasing temptations of Llevalak are insidious and cannot easily be resisted without the aid of the One Light. The Argent Path is not an easy road to travel. It requires faith, constant vigilance and an unselfish spirit. In addition to combating the Temptress, the laws also instruct the righteous to spread the Light and be tireless in their efforts to defend against evil and sin.

Personality: Dogmatic, militant and firm. The Church of the Argent Path follows the laws of Sansehl with unrelenting fervor and does all it can to protect the moral fiber of the faithful. Self-control and spiritual growth is the cornerstone of the Church, which is encouraged through prayer and introspection. Those who succumb to weakness and stumble off the path are forgiven and welcomed back into the Light after they have paid the proper penance, which is often harsh. Those who refuse to accept the Light are treated with pity, and occasionally, disdain.

The Church also recognizes that evil exists throughout the world and must be actively fought. There are numerous knightly orders dedicated to protecting the weak, fighting threats and championing various causes. The most common of these are the Wayfarers, who protect travelers of all kinds and consider any path traveled by the righteous to be an Argent Path.

The Church also funds missionary and humanitarian effort. Feeding the hungry, sheltering the cold and tending to the sick are all tasks that must be undertaken by the faithful, as no one can walk the Path alone and unassisted.

Based in the holy nation of Nascency (see page 21), the Church has spread throughout the civilized world. In addition to their great cathedrals, which can be found in most large cities, there are numerous temple mounds scattered across the landscape. Stout, yet unassuming, these earthwork forts are better known for their armory than their sanctuary.

History: With its true origins lost in time, legends say that the Argent Path was first discovered by a miner trapped in the Primea Mountains. A sinful and heartless man, he feared dying alone in the darkness and wept. His cries were heard by Sansehl, who chose the unworthy miner to be his first Walker and granted him a vision. Suddenly, the man was filled with the One Light and found himself with a deep understanding of the Argent Path and its laws. Given a new purpose, he opened his eyes and found a glowing silver vein that led him out of the mountain. From this single man, the word of Sansehl spread, eventually leading to the formation of an entire nation.

Afterlife: The faithful who follow the Path and refuse Llevalak are rewarded after death. They become one with the Light, part of a greater whole that shines down upon the world to bring comfort to the deserving and push back the shadows of evil. Those unable to stay on the Path are doomed to wander in the shadows, forever looking into the light but unable to enter. This unforgiving afterlife is one of the main reasons the Church is so strict and rigid.

Apocalypse: Members tried to warn the world, but too many failed to heed the Light. Now the entire world is paying the price. The Church believes it was too lax in its enforcement of Sansehl's laws, tolerating the erroneous beliefs of others and turning a blind eye to the immoral actions of those beyond the borders of Nascency. Those who remain follow the Path with increased zeal, spreading the Light to all they meet.

The Mohzaik Pantheon

Motivation: The Gods care little for laws of mankind, and do not exist to inflict morality and enforce adherence to certain codes of behavior. These things are beneath their concern. The Gods exist for two reasons: to be feared and to be thanked. The Warlanders do not worship their Gods because they are filled with love or because they feel a kinship. It is done because the Gods can influence the course of events and are unkind to those who do not pay the proper respects. When good fortune is received, they are to be thanked. When ill fortune falls, they are to be placated in the hopes of forestalling any more of their displeasure.

Scairdaihn: God of war, conquest and domination. The Unyielding. The Scourge. The Red Death. He calls upon those who follow him to wage war in his name and honor him by killing their enemies. He watches over battlefields, giving his chosen courage, strength and victory. His symbol is a blood-red carrion reaper, often shown perched on a cracked skull.

Weylinth: Goddess of luck, risk and change. The Shifting Serpent. The Moon Viper. The Pale Temptress. She is embodied by the moon — ever-changing and ever-watching. Her capricious and unpredictable nature makes her difficult to please. She calls upon her followers to take risks and brave the unknown. It is said she smiles upon the bold and blesses the reckless. Her chosen aspect among men is that of the sand snake. These deadly vipers have a pale opal coloring reminiscent of the moon, and possess a strange poison that is deadly to some and harmless to others. Her symbol is the crescent moon with a snake coiled around it.

Morihan: The Goddess of life, death, and pain. The Crone. The Thorn Hag. She embodies the harsh realities of the Warlands. Pain and death await many of its inhabitants, but she is also a source of respite. Many pray to her to ease their suffering and thank her for bringing new life into the world. She grants her followers the ability to endure great pain and favors those who sire or birth many children. Her symbol is a triangle of black thorns.

Minor Gods (examples):

There are a multitude of minor deities — far too many to list. Some may only be known to single village, the last piece of a shattered religion still kept alive through oral tradition. Others are more widespread, but are diluted mixtures of similar deities, combined into something new. Below are a few examples.

- **Ehmerritt**: The blind God of books and history
- **Orynfell**: The fox God of thieves
- **P'naal**: The cruel goddess of thirst

History: The beliefs of the Warlanders are an amalgamation of the different faiths that have ripped apart and reassembled over the decades. Just as leaders have been replaced, borders have been redrawn, and history has been rewritten, so too has the folklore, religion and customs of its population. Its religion ranges from a central trio of Blood Gods that are accepted nearly everywhere, to a host of minor deities that have never been heard of outside a single village.

Afterlife: There is another world beyond the current world called the Beyond. This is the bridge between the living world and the Gods. After death, one's place in the Beyond is determined by whichever God the Warlander venerated most. Those of great faith and stalwart action will live on in this spirit world as Blooded and are granted the honor of serving their chosen deity in the Beyond. Their spirit is eventually returned to the living world, where they are reborn into greatness. Occasionally, they ascend to the world of the Gods, becoming minor deities themselves. Those who fail to properly honor the Gods during life will become the thralls of the Blooded.

Apocalypse: Much like the Warlands, the Mohzaik faith wasn't affected as much as other religions. Built on destruction and change, the pantheon and its Gods continue on with little upheaval. Perhaps minor deities tied to the natural disasters and doom gained more prominence, but the three Blood Gods remain the most powerful.

Cult of Baranthum

Motivation: Venerating Baranthum, the father of the Oruskan races, the Cult awaits the day when he escapes from his underground prison and unites them. A dark and violent being, he created the races to take on different aspects of himself. The Cult believes that its destiny is to free Baranthum and lead their people to glory. Thus they spread the word of his coming and force others to assist in rituals to hasten his resurgence.

Personality: Cruel, bitter and fanatical. The Cult exists in all levels of Oruskan society with varying levels of prominence and secrecy. As a rule, the more primitive and remote the people, the more outspoken and influential the Cult. Although it doesn't contradict the teachings of the Primalist faith, most villages with a strong Shaman will not have a strong Cult presence. At its most violent and overt, the Cult acts as a press gang to force others into a life of slavery, forcing them to dig toward their imprisoned creator.

Baranthum is not necessarily considered a god. Instead, his is a mythic tale that attempts to validate the Oruskans' seemingly supernatural longing to delve deeper beneath the ground. These places are, in fact, holy to the race. Deep, dark

temples were constructed. Underground complexes and structures were dedicated to their imprisoned creator. The deeper the place, the closer it is to this sacred figure.

History: Legends tell that Baranthum was imprisoned deep beneath the earth by an unnamed entity. Unable to escape, he eventually merged with the earth itself. The Cult has gone through many phases, from near extinction to mass popularity. The last great resurgence of the Cult was during the reign of Khran'doral.

Afterlife: Followers believe that any who dies in service to the cult will be imprisoned with Baranthum and reborn when he is released. In this new life, they will be generals in his army that will conquer the world.

Apocalypse: Followers believe that Baranthum is coming. He is shaking off his bonds. Now is the time for the Oruskans to rise and unite. The Cult is gaining in popularity, spreading across the broken northlands with amazing speed. The newly formed chasms and cracks in the earth only strengthen the power of the creator and serve as a source of inspiration to the cultists.

The Five Pillars

Motivation: All aspects of dwarven life revolve around the Five Pillars. The rules of both their personal life and of their society have been dictated by their Church and faith. It is what gives them strength and has helped them to survive beneath the mountains for so long. While outsiders may feel the Church is somewhat intrusive or stifling, the Church acts the way it does because it must. The world beneath the mountains is a dangerous and unforgiving place, and if the dwarves are to flourish within it, they must be shepherded and protected.

Personality: Omnipresent, demanding and steadfast, the Church has been woven into nearly every aspect of dwarven life. This has been going on for so long that they do not know any other way. From the High Theocrat who rules over both the Church and Cair Dhurn, to the Dwarven Stalwarts who protect the world from the Deep Horrors, to the countless smiths and craftsmen, everyone is motivated by the Five Pillars. Each of the gods is venerated daily, the dwarves laying aside whatever they are doing to stop and give thanks. In addition to this, a worship service occurs every other day that lasts several hours.

The Five Pillars Pantheon

■ **Aldwair**, the Mountain Father, passed down the laws to the first dwarves. He allowed them to rule beneath the mountains, but he is quick to punish those who disobey. His wrath is felt every time the mountain shudders.

■ **Hirnir**, the Mother, is the wife of the Mountain Father. She guides each dwarf through life according to her will. Her blessing is requested at each of life's important moments, hoping she favors the decision. She is known to be fickle, however, and at times her decisions are beyond understanding.

■ **Uyln**, the Forger, is their eldest son. He breathes the spark of life, yet also quenches it. He gives dwarves their ability to craft, gifting them with their imagination and skill. But his price is the soul. It is said that a dwarf who never creates will live forever.

■ **Greulk**, the Blooded, is the hulking brother of Uyln. He fills the dwarves with strength and fury. His gifts of battlecraft and fortitude also came with a price: the temperament and desire to use them in battle.

■ **Vyernir**, the Hidden, is the daughter of Aldwair and Hirnir. She fills the mountains with both riches and horrors. She bestows no gifts upon the dwarves. She merely wanders the undiscovered caverns below, leaving behind wonders to be found as well as perils.

History: The Five Pillars have always been a part of dwarven culture, its history tied to the origins of the race itself. Although always prominent, the Church was not part of the government until about 1,000 years ago. The first priest-king was Fergus III, the third-born son who ascended to rulership after his father and brothers were lost in the Deep Wars of Herrik-Thuun. Over the years, the Church and government have become one. The High Theocrat is chosen from within the Church to serve for life. The Church was supreme within the lives of the dwarven people, its words and laws guiding the prosperous kingdom without question — until a man rose to fame claiming to be a prophet. Valin Stoneson challenged the authority of the High Theocrat and warned of the destruction of Cair Dhurn. This led to a schism under the mountain, which ended with Stoneson and his followers leaving for the Saikin Wastes.

Afterlife: There are only two fates that await a dwarf after death: They either follow the Five Pillars and join the righteous in an eternal paradise called Wair'dhurn, or they become the property of Vyernir and are placed back within the mountain at her whim. They believe Wair'dhurn to be a golden mountain filled an with endless series of caverns.

Apocalypse: The Five Pillars may have fallen along with the mountains they metaphorically held up. Most of dwarven civilization, which revolved around the Five Pillars, is gone. The few dwarves who remain have had their faith shaken to its core. Although the gods were strict, they were thought to be loving and caring. Most dwarves who survived are searching for answers along with their lost kin. The desert dwarves

survived the Night of Fire mostly intact — both physically and with their faith. They have undertaken the task of saving their cousins and keeping the religion strong.

Tsai'zhil, The Horizon's Call

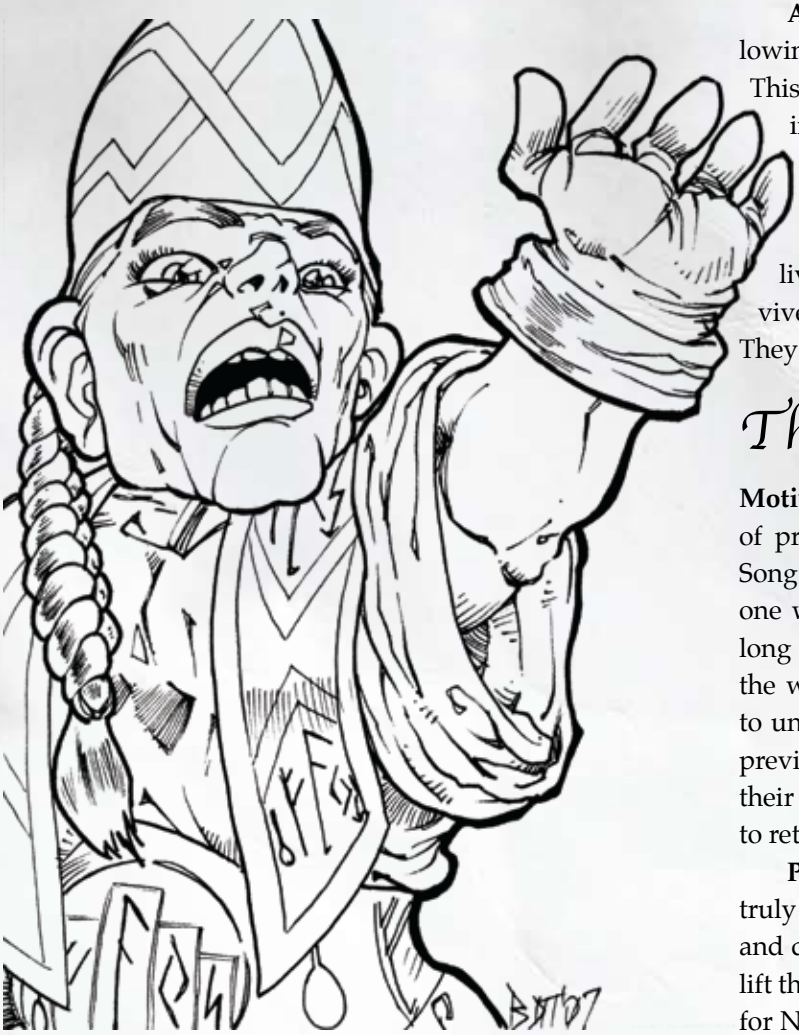
Motivation: To the tattooed folk, nature and the elements around them represent larger concepts that make their journey through life possible. The winds are their destiny, controlling the path of their lives. It is always easier to sail with destiny than against it. The ocean is life itself, filled with uncertainty but seemingly boundless and teeming with possibilities. The rovers' ships represent their faith, not only in themselves, but also their shipmates; one cannot not travel through life alone. The horizon itself is a more abstract concept that represents contentment, accomplishment and inner peace.

Personality: Encouraging, introspective, and accepting. Tsai'zhil is something that is shared by all the rovers, although each follows it in his or her own way. There are no organized services or holy men who preach the Horizon's Call, rather it is taught to their young as one of life's many lessons. These teachings are about learning to understand themselves, their hopes and their place in the world around them. A few have devoted themselves to the philosophy and have spent their lives trying to understand it. While they may be considered wise and accomplished, they are not thought of as holy.

History: The origins of Tsai'zhil are a mystery. Either the rovers do not speak of it, or it has been lost to the seas of time. There are, however, legends of a woman who managed to sail over the horizon and back. Xu Lin's name is invoked whenever someone accomplishes a task that was thought to be impossible and is held in high regard.

Afterlife: When one dies after leading a good life, they become part of the winds, able to watch over and guide their loved ones as they travel through life. They are free to travel wherever they choose and see what truly exists over the horizon. Those who committed terrible sins in life are banished to the darkest depths of the oceans, rooted in place. Those whose life was spent without purpose become the winds that roam over dry land.

Apocalypse: The philosophy of Tsai'zhil is about following the winds of destiny and accepting where it leads. This has served the rovers for countless generations during times of war and grief. But the vast number of dead and missing during the Night of Fire has caused even the wisest to shake their head in disbelief. Never have so many spirits been lost for no apparent reason, their lives so short and meaningless. Still, those who have survived struggle through it and try to find their own path. They can only hope that, in time, the winds will change.



The Chorus

Motivation: The Great Song is silent. What was once a source of pride and inspiration was ripped from the elves. The Song was part of their racial identity, signifying they were one with Nature. Now deafened to its sound, many elves long to rejoin the Chorus and resume their rightful place in the world. To this end, many devote themselves to trying to understand Nature and seek redemption for their race's previous action. They venerate the forests and trees, hoping their penance will lift the Song to their ears and allow them to return to their home.

Personality: Conflicted, hopeful and angry. There is no truly organized religion, though some elves band together and devote themselves to worshipping the forests, trying to lift their song in unison so that it will be louder and stronger for Nature to hear. Others seek to distance themselves from

their ancestral home, hoping that if they act like they don't care, the emptiness inside them will go away. Most struggle silently with their desire to rejoin the Chorus, performing small acts of respect and penance that are woven into their everyday life.

History: The elves once had a deep and powerful bond with Nature, existing within her like a cloud exists in the sky or a leaf in a tree. They were a part of it, truly integrated as part of the natural order of things. In time, the elves' arrogance grew and they broke their bond with Nature, trying to master it. They were cast out and rejected. However, elves remember in their soul how this bond felt. They yearn for it to be renewed, and to hear the Song again. This desire takes many different forms: obsession, depression and even hatred and bitterness.

Afterlife: The elves used to believe that whenever one of their kind died, the Chorus fell silent in mourning, then raised its voice louder — a new voice added. Since the Banishment, their voices have remained unheard. Most believe the dead are cursed to an eternity of futile wailing, their song ignored and transformed into an unending lamentation. A few believe they are forgiven by Nature after death, adding their Song to the Chorus that their living kin can no longer hear.

Apocalypse: Nature has reopened her arms and the Song can be heard again, although it lacks the richness and complexity it once held. For most, this is their greatest hope realized. For others, it is the return of something they have tried to deny every wanting, yet secretly yearned for. Still others feel it is a slap in the face, the simplicity of the Song telling them they were not fully accepted as part of the harmony. Regardless, none were truly prepared for the Banishment to be lifted. There is guilt and confusion, as the joy of hearing the Song stands in sharp contrast to the pain of the Apocalypse and the destruction suffered during the Night of Fire.

Ancestral Stream

Motivation: All races belong in the living world. They are born, live their life and then die. Only the gnomes belong to a second world, a world where only their minds and knowledge exist. This world is known to the gnomes simply as the Stream, stretching from the beginning of time to the end of time. Unlike the living world, a gnome's mind remains in the Stream even after death. Although all gnomes are part of the Stream, only a select few are aware of it, and even fewer (known as Mystics) can "swim" in it, able to find other minds.

Personality: Simple, meditative and respectful. The Ancestral Steam is a linchpin to gnomish society. The information and insight flowing from it has dictated many aspects of their lives. The knowledge gained from their ancestors has given the gnomes a larger perspective than most other races and an awareness that few can comprehend. They see the big picture and worry little about the annoyances of everyday life. They also occasionally receive glimpses into the future, which gives them purpose and drive that others cannot fathom.

History: When the first gnome died, the Ancestral Stream came into being. Generations passed before other gnomes became aware of it, the first wading into it accidentally while dreaming. These first Mystics were treated as odd and delusional, their abilities far afield from the great works of magic and engineering the rest of the race were creating. But since the Forgetting, Mystics are regarded as important members of gnomish society, groomed and trained as soon as their potential is recognized. Treated with deference and respect, they are an important link to the past and a guide for the future.

Afterlife: When a gnome dies, his or her conscious joins the Ancestral Stream, merging with those who have passed before and those who will pass after him. He retains his full personality and knowledge upon entering the Stream, but is filled with a deep sense of contentment and belonging. Many become lost within this collection of personalities when first joining, but eventually they find their place and settle into a timeless, yet pleasant sleep unless awoken by Mystics who seek their advice.

Apocalypse: The Night of Fire stirred up the Ancestral Stream and made it more difficult to access and traverse. Occasional undercurrents and rapids now exist, and rumors have begun to circulate of gnomes lost to the waters. The Stream still acts as a source of strength and a conduit to past generations, but the upstream to the future has become especially cloudy and unpredictable. But such events were foretold, and the surviving gnomes had braced themselves for this eventuality.

Primalism

Motivation: Those in the Northlands have a reverence and awe for the world around them. In order to gain a deeper connection to the power and vastness of Nature, they give her form as their totem animal. This totem provides the faithful with a means to commune and identify with the world around them. They do not seek to gain mastery or deep understanding over the world. Nature is beyond such

things. The sun rises each day because it does. The snows fall because it is time. They accept this. But the ways of their totem animal can be understood and controlled, and by incorporating it into their life, the faithful find an ally in the vastness.

Personality: Controlling, ritualistic and savage. Most are in positions of power within their tribe. Some rule, but the majority of them act as spiritual leaders and advisors, using their gifts to rise above the other Oruskans. Often using force and intimidation, they are accustomed to being feared and their advice heeded without question.

History: As one of the oldest religions, Primalism has existed ever since the first savages cowered at thunder and lightning, felt the fury of a blizzard or looked in awe at the setting sun. Most cultures evolved past this, using their gods, magic or technology to frame Nature in a more understandable light. Oruskans, however, continue to revere Nature and respect her might.

Totem animals and Shamans are an important part of Oruskan culture, forming many of the traditions and values. Every Shaman (and most tribes) adopts mannerisms and habits that mimic their totems — sometimes going so far as to imitate their migration patterns, natural weapons or even appearance. This is especially true of the goblins, who take their relation with Nature more seriously than their cousins.

Afterlife: Death is one of Nature's greatest mysteries. Beliefs vary among tribes and their Shamans — but most ideas of the Primalism afterlife involve their totem animal in some way. Some believe that there is a realm of the dead where everyone either becomes their totem or their totem's prey. Others think that great leaders and warriors are resurrected as their totem. While others are convinced that the dead become one with Nature herself, their essence sometimes linked to a certain place or thing. Fewer still believe that there is no afterlife and that the dead are little more than food for the soil.

Apocalypse: The power and fury of Nature has never been in question, though the sheer destruction from the Night of Fire was beyond anything ever imagined. The fundamental shifts in Nature and the Weave — the extreme weather patterns, Burn, Broken animals, and other, stranger changes — have caused many Shamans to look upon Nature with more fear than reverence. This has caused problems for some of the Shamans who have used their power over Nature to control and intimidate their followers. The Weave-Touched animals have also created some confusion. Some consider them a blessing, others see them as abominations.

The All Within

Motivation: Loranthians believe that all things are filled with spirits. All spirits are part of Gahr Dahl — The One Who Is All, The Everything. All things are connected and in harmony with one another, acting in accordance to the will of Gahr Dahl. The island folk are his chosen people. He watches over them and protects them in return for their faith and worship. His true will is unknown, although there are many different theories that at times compete with one another. Regardless of what his ultimate plan is, they understand that disrupting it will incur his wrath, which can only be calmed through blood and sacrifice. As a result, they are wary of any action that may disrupt the harmony around them or upset the natural order of things.

Personality: Guiding, sacrificial and thankful. Those who can hear the words of Gahr Dahl and speak with spirits are called Listeners. They act as counselors and spiritual guides to their followers, giving advice and explaining the will of their god. Respected by their followers, these Listeners serve the entire community, responsible for its welfare and future. The actual worship of Gahr Dahl is as mysterious as it is bloody. It is practiced deep within the island jungles, within circles of wooden pillars engraved with his many faces. These ceremonies are performed to appease him, and to right any disruptions to his plans they may have caused.

History: Gahr Dahl has always existed, but watched the world silently for many years, judging and watching the different races until he picked the Loranthians as his favorite. He opened their perceptions and allowed a chosen few to hear his words. Those gifted with the ability to Listen were instructed to pass along his will. They gained a new understanding of their place within Gahr Dahl's world and how to communicate with the souls that permeate it.

Afterlife: Those who have passed are not truly dead. Gahr Dahl has simply moved their spirit to another place. While the island folk may weep at the loss of a friend or a loved one, they take great solace in knowing that the deceased is still in the world around them. Because of this, it is not uncommon to see a Loranthian having a one-sided conversation with a stone or tree as if he or she were speaking to the deceased.

Apocalypse: Most of the remaining island folk believe that Gahr Dahl sent the Great Wave as punishment for not following his plan, or for allowing his islands to be despoiled by outsiders. Some believe it to be a reckoning for debt unpaid. Others refuse to speculate, simply accepting the will of their god. The role of Listeners remains largely unchanged, as does the strength of his followers' faith.

The wind whipped through the camp, stirring up ashes from the dying fire. The two travelers pulled their cloaks around themselves more tightly. *The night was getting colder.* For now though, they had other matters to discuss.

"There were many thoughts on the nature of the universe," said the man. **"It seemed to us that things were in Balance.** Life and death, night and day, the turning of the seasons — all of this was evidence of this greater mechanism."

His companion, a gnome, considered the human's words for a moment before responding.

"One should not take such things for granted, as we have seen," he said. **"It was not so long ago that the sun stopped coming up altogether.** Where was your Balance then?"

The man nodded, and threw the final piece of gathered wood onto the fire, which spluttered and flared.

"I think that's proof. ***Whatever caused the Night of Fire unbalanced the world*** so badly that it's taking time to return to normal. The Long Winter was part of that. The damage to the Weave is another."

The gnome thought long, his eyes looking deep into the fire.

"I wonder if this could have been avoided. There may have been already too much damage done. Too much magic freely used, too much power in the Empire. *Too much good being done.*"

"With too much good there will be enough bad to balance it out somewhere, sadly," replied the man. "One might say the Warlands balanced out the Empire, yes?"

"That may be true on a very large scale," said the gnome, "but I'm concerned about how Balance works on a much smaller scale. *Small things are important too."*

The man smiled. He had learned how important small things — and people — could be.

"What of the gods then? Couldn't they keep the Balance in check?"

The gnome first looked doubtful.

"Even if there are gods, as we understand the term," he said, "I can't imagine that the Night of Fire left them unscathed. Anyway, I'd prefer to continue thinking about the problem on a level I can deal with — something I can see and touch."

"Do you think magic was responsible? You'd not be alone. You saw what they did to that mongrel Shaman back in Delane. Poor fool. He had just been trying to help."

The gnome nodded, but then shook his head slowly.

"Yes ... and no. Magic was part of it, I think. There's a reason gnomes don't bother with it, you know."

"And yet you can't tell me what that reason is, can you?"

The gnome ignored him. He had tried to explain the Forgetting before to his friend, but had clearly failed.

"It doesn't matter now. What I'm trying to explain is that I agree that the Balance had something to do with the Night of Fire. I just think that it is affected by everything that happens, not just the big things."

The gnome was silent for a moment.

"Every time we take an action," he said thoughtfully, "*are we determining Balance?*"

He took out a pair of dice from one of his many pouches, and bounced them in his hand for a moment.

"For example, when I roll these, there are a certain number of possible outcomes, correct?"

The man nodded. He felt uneasy, but didn't know why.

"Until the dice settle, that final outcome is unknown. The probability becomes fixed and the universe is forced to act, to restore Balance."

The man looked apprehensively at the gnome and his dice.

"Yes, but on a tiny scale. Plus, ***I don't believe the gods play dice with the universe.*** Nor do mortals."

The gnome looked up.

"But what if everyone, everywhere, rolled at the same time?"

The gnome threw the dice.

Chapter 7: Rules

"I didn't break them. They're just bent a little."

Desolation is a game. Just like any other game, the point of playing it is to get together with friends and have a good time. The rules of *Desolation* exist to help ensure everyone enjoys playing it. The rules should never take away from the fun of the game.

The rules use the Ubiquity Roleplaying System, which is streamlined for fast, cinematic game play. While speed and simplicity are emphasized over detailed realism, players can still make tactical decisions that will directly impact a character's chance of success. The goal is to spend less time rolling dice and more time telling a story. This does not mean, however, that rolling dice is not an important part of the game. On the contrary, dice play is a critical part of resolving character actions, but unnecessary dice rolls should be eliminated — such as when a character is performing a routine task.

Dice

The Ubiquity system uses dice to resolve challenges and determine the success or failure of an action. This is done by rolling a number of dice and counting how many of them roll an even number. Each die that rolls an even number is considered a success. The more successes rolled, the better the outcome of the action.

Example: *Sara rolls five 6-sided dice and gets a 1, 3, 4, 4 and 6. Counting only the dice that rolled even numbers, she rolled three successes.*

The Ubiquity system does not require special dice to play. You can use dice that you already own. Each player should have about 10 dice on hand to play the game. Standard 6-sided dice work well and are easy to come by, but you can use any dice as long as they have an equal number of even and odd-numbered sides—you can even mix and match polyhedral dice or flip coins.

Example: *Scott rolls six dice: a 4-sided, a 6-sided, an 8-sided, a 10-sided, a 12-sided and a 20-sided. He rolls a 1, 3, 5, 9, 12 and 18. Counting only the dice that rolled even numbers, he rolled two successes.*

Rules Overview

Step One: Declare Action

Describe your character's action and determine its type: standard, extended, opposed or reflexive action. Also determine the Skill or Attribute roll required to resolve the action and its type: standard roll, extended roll, opposed roll or reflexive roll.

Step Two: Determine Difficulty

The gamemaster determines the difficulty rating of your character's action based on the task being attempted and the Skill or Attribute involved.

Step Three: Calculate Dice Pool

Calculate your dice pool based on the appropriate Skill or Attribute ratings and add or subtract modifiers. When casting a spell, choose the number of dice to roll up to the maximum dice pool. See the Magic chapter on page 129 for more information.

Step Four: Take the Average

You can take the average of your dice pool on any action except a magic action. For non-magical actions, take the average of your dice pool to see whether you need to roll. If your average successes equal or exceed the difficulty rating of the task, your character succeeds without rolling any dice. Skip to Step Six.

Step Five: Roll Dice

Roll your dice pool and count the number of successes rolled.

Step Six: Resolve Action

Compare the number of successes versus the difficulty rating of the task. If the number of successes equals or exceeds the difficulty, the action is successful. If the number of successes is less than the difficulty, the action's intended effect fails.

Step Seven: Try Again

If your character's action failed, he may try again with GM approval. Trying again imposes a –2 penalty on your dice pool. Return to Step Five.

Time

Time is fluid in a roleplaying game, much like in a book or movie. During the course of a game, time will fly, crawl or even jump around. One thing is certain: Game time will rarely — if ever — pass by in real time.

How the GM controls time affects the pace of the story. He can gloss over unimportant details or slow time down at critical moments. During combat, for example, it may take several minutes to resolve events that occur during just a few seconds of game time. Several weeks of game time, on the other hand, may be covered in just a few real minutes.

There are six basic units of game time that allow the GM to tell stories in a way that makes sense to everyone involved.

■ **Combat Turn:** As the shortest increment of time, a combat turn is approximately six seconds long. It represents the amount of time it takes a character to move and perform a single action, called a standard action (See Actions, below). Combat turns are often packed with action, with all characters involved trying to do something in a short timeframe.

■ **Scene:** This standard increment of time encompasses a single event in one specific location. A scene may include several combat turns, run in real time, or even jump back and forth between the two. The GM may even fast-forward through parts of a scene, but moving locations or starting a new event generally signals a new scene. When in doubt, the GM determines where one scene ends and another begins.

■ **Game Session**: A game session runs from the moment players sit down until they pack up to leave. Game sessions are blocks of real-time set aside to tell a story. The GM should have a plan for each game session, including how to move the story forward and how to provide challenges and rewards for the players. At the end of an ideal game session, players will leave with a sense of accomplishment but still want more.

■ **Story**: A story is one complete tale. It may take several game sessions to tell or just one, but when it is over, the plot is concluded. The characters' adventures may not be over, however, and more stories may be told about them.

■ **Downtime:** Unimportant events may be skimmed over during play. When this is done between game sessions, it is called downtime. Normally this occurs between stories, giving characters a chance to grow and develop over time. Since nothing important occurs, there is no need to roleplay, but characters may gain and spend experience points. The next game session resumes the story with the next interesting event.

■ **Campaign:** A campaign is a series of stories tied together by a common thread, such as characters, a theme, or overarching plotline. As the game continues, the GM and players work together, weaving the storylines together into an epic saga.

Actions

There are four basic types of actions. Some of the things characters try to accomplish can be done quickly, while other tasks may take time to accomplish correctly. Other times, an action can happen in the blink of an eye and take no time at all. However, time is not the only thing that distinguishes different kinds of actions. A character may have someone actively trying to stop her from completing her task. Each type of action is resolved in a slightly different way. The rules for each action are explained below.

Standard Actions

Standard actions are straightforward and can be resolved relatively quickly without opposition. Swinging a sword, jumping across a chasm, casting a spell and picking a lock are all standard actions. Basically, anything that can be resolved with a single dice roll during a combat turn is considered a standard action.

Standard actions are resolved with a standard Skill or Attribute. If the number of successes rolled meets or exceeds the difficulty, the action is successful. If the player rolled fewer successes, the intended action fails. It's as simple as that for all Skills except magic, which can produce unintended effects even if the difficulty is not met.

Example: *Jason's character is trying to pinpoint his location on a*

Ubiquity Dice

While the Ubiquity system does not require special dice to play, Ubiquity dice are recommended to get the most out of the game. These specially designed 8-sided dice dramatically simplify play, allowing you to roll up to one-third fewer dice and simply add up the total.

Each Ubiquity die has a different value and is color-coded for easy identification. Instead of rolling six regular dice, you could roll two d3s, three d2s, or six d1s. You can mix and match Ubiquity dice any way you want as long as the total value remains the same. The probability of rolling a success remains the same as with regular dice.

Using Ubiquity dice with the Ubiquity system is a powerful combination. Rolling fewer dice, less often, lets you focus on roleplaying without missing out on the gaming aspect. It's the best of both worlds!

map from Before. The GM determines that because the map is no longer accurate, trying to determine his location requires a Survival roll with a difficulty rating of 4. Jason makes a Survival roll and only gets two successes. Jason's character can't make heads or tails out of the map.

Extended Actions

Not every action can be accomplished immediately. Some tasks take time to complete, such as deciphering an ancient tome, repairing a suit of armor or climbing a mountain. These are called extended actions. In general, anything that requires more than one dice roll to accomplish or takes more than one combat turn is considered an extended action.

Extended actions are resolved with extended Skill or Attribute rolls. The GM determines the total number of successes required to complete an extended action — typically between five and 10 — depending on the effort required to complete the task. He also determines how much time passes with each dice roll.

Just like a standard action, an extended action has a difficulty rating. Successes in excess of the difficulty count toward the total needed to complete the task. If fewer successes are rolled than the difficulty, they are subtracted from the total number of accumulated successes. This illustrates that some tasks are harder and more complex than others, and thus take more time and expertise to complete.

If a player's average number of successes exceed the difficulty rating of the task (see Taking the Average, below), his character will automatically complete the task after a certain amount of time.

Once the player has accumulated the necessary number of successes, the task is complete. Until that time, the player must keep rolling dice until the extended action is complete, or her character abandons the task. Depending on the nature of the task, the GM may allow the player to keep the number of accumulated successes until her character returns to the task.

Example: *Scott's character is trying to decipher a dwarven tome of symbols. It is a fairly long book, so it is going to take him a long time to translate it. The GM determines that deciphering the text requires an extended Linguistics roll with a difficulty rating of 3. Each roll represents one hour of work, and Scott will need to accumulate 10 successes for his character to complete the translation.*

Scott makes an extended Linguistics roll and gets four successes. Subtracting the difficulty rating of 3, he accumulates one success. On his next roll, Scott only gets three successes, which means that his character hasn't made any progress during that hour of work, but he still has the one success banked from his first roll. On his third roll, Scott gets five successes, which accumulates two more successes, for a grand total of three successes. After three hours of work, Scott's character has deciphered approximately one-third of the text.

Opposed Actions

Occasionally, two characters will compete with each other to accomplish a task — or one may actively try to prevent the other from completing the task at all. For example, two characters may be trying to grab the same weapon or hide from someone. In these cases, opposed rolls are made to determine who prevails. Both standard and extended actions may be opposed by another character.

Opposed actions are resolved with opposed Skill or Attribute rolls. The player who rolls the most successes wins.

If two players roll the same number of successes, neither character is considered the victor. If they were both trying to grab the same weapon, for example, they both end up with a hand on it and must attempt to wrest it away from one another.

In situations where one character is clearly the defender (e.g., when one character is trying not to get hit), a tied roll means the blow landed, but without enough force to do damage.

In instances where two or more characters are racing each other to a goal, such as climbing to the top of a mountain, the first player to roll the required number of successes wins. If both players exceed the required number of successes, the one with the most successes wins. If both players roll the required number of successes simultaneously, their characters reach the goal at the same time.

Example: *Scott's character is trying to wrest a hunk of jerky away from a guttersnipe who just picked it out of his pack. Both players make opposed Strength rolls to see who prevails and they each roll three successes. As the defender, the thief barely manages to hang on to the food.*

Reflexive Actions

Some actions take no time at all to resolve. They happen instantaneously and don't require any thought on behalf of the character. Reflexive actions often happen instinctively, such as trying to grab a handhold before falling or resisting the effects of a poison. Because reflexive actions don't take any time or attention, they normally do not incur multiple action penalties or count toward a character's actions for the turn.

By their very nature, reflexive actions are variants of opposed actions. Resisting a character who is trying to make your character do something unpleasant is a reflexive action. Reflexive actions are resolved with a reflexive Skill or Attribute roll. If the number of successes rolled meets or exceeds the difficulty, the action succeeds. If the reflexive roll is opposed, the player with the most successes wins; ties go to the defending character.

Example: *A rover gypsy is trying to seduce Jason's character. She*

rolls her Con rating and gets three successes. Jason makes a reflexive Willpower roll and gets four successes. His character is not swayed by the woman's advances.

Difficulty

The difficulty rating of an action represents how hard it is to accomplish. The GM determines the difficulty rating of an action based on how hard the task is to perform. The difficulty rating is the number of successes required to complete the task. Any successes over this number represent a greater degree of success. Difficulty ratings for tasks normally range from one to five, but exceptionally difficult tasks may have higher ratings.

Difficulty	Rating
Easy	1
Average	2
Tough	3
Hard	4
Very Hard	5
Nigh Impossible	6+

Example: *Heather's character is trying to fix a hole in the hull of a small boat. Since it is badly damaged, the GM determines that patching the hull requires a Craft roll with a difficulty rating of 3. Heather will have to roll more than three successes to repair the boat.*

Dice Pool

Dice pool represents the number of dice you roll to determine the outcome of your character's action. Dice pool is calculated based on the character's appropriate Skill or Attribute rating for the task being attempted. As a result, the size of the dice pool will vary from character to character and action to action. For all actions but spell casting, a larger dice pool is always beneficial. Because spell casting penalizes failure via Burn, the caster has the option to decide how many dice from his maximum dice pool he will roll to cast a spell.

Skills and Attributes

Virtually every dice roll you make will be based on a specific Skill or Attribute rating. Skills cover most actions that your character will attempt. If your character possesses the appropriate Skill for the task he is attempting, your dice pool is equal to his Skill rating. If your character does not possess the appropriate Skill, his dice pool is equal to the Skill's Base Attribute –2.

Example: *Jason's and Scott's characters are being threatened by a group of barbarians. Jason decides to fight his way out. His character has a Brawl rating of 4, so his dice pool to attack the barbarian is four.*

Scott's character does not have the Brawl Skill, so his dice pool is equal to his Strength rating –2, giving him a dice pool of zero. He's not going to be much help in the fight.

Skill Specializations that apply to a particular action increase the Skill rating used to calculate the dice pool.

Example: *Sara's character is being menaced by a orc and she decides to take the creature out using her short bow. Her character has Archery 7 with a Skill Specialization in short bows, so her Archery rating when using a short bow is 8.*

Attribute rolls are made for any action not explicitly covered by a Skill (such as when a character tries to remember a detail she once heard or tries to resist a poison in her system). In these cases, the dice pool is equal to the appropriate Secondary Attribute rating or double the Primary Attribute rating. See the specific Attribute descriptions for examples of Attribute rolls.

Example: *Jason's character and the Warlander he's been fighting are both trying to grab the same dagger. Because this action is based on speed, the GM has both characters make opposed Dexterity rolls. Scott's character has Dexterity 4, so his dice pool to grab the dagger is eight.*

Scott's character is being attacked by a different Warlander. His Defense rating is 4, so his dice pool to defend himself is four.

Once you've calculated the base dice pool for an action, the next step is to add or subtract dice for equipment and any situational modifiers.

Modifiers

Characters rarely perform tasks in a vacuum. There are situational modifiers that can help or hinder. These modifiers translate into bonus and penalty dice on the task being attempted. Bonus dice are added to a dice pool and penalty dice are subtracted from it. A maximum of 10 dice may be added or subtracted from a dice pool, not counting equipment bonuses. The task fails if the modified dice pool is reduced to zero or less.

Modifier	Example	Dice Pool
A superior bonus	A team of highly trained assistants	+8
A major bonus	Taking extra time	+4
A moderate bonus	A good set of tools	+2
A minor bonus	Had some practice	+1
No modifier	Normal conditions	+0
A minor penalty	Slightly obscured vision	-1
A moderate penalty	Improvised tools	-2
A major penalty	Crippling wounds	-4
A severe penalty	Total Darkness	-8

Equipment

Using the proper tools and equipment for a task gains you bonus dice to your character's dice pool. Using the wrong piece of equipment or having to improvise a tool imposes a penalty to your character's dice pool. In addition, using higher quality tools and equipment will provide additional bonuses, just as lower quality items will have additional penalties. Good equipment is hard to come by in the After, so the GM is well within his rights to penalize players using makeshift or shoddy equipment.

Example: *Jason's character is using a grappling hook to scale a wall. His Athletics rating is 6, and the grappling hook provides a +2 bonus to climbing rolls, so his dice pool to climb the wall is eight.*

The most common type of equipment bonus or penalty is assigned to weapons. Each weapon has a damage rating that is added to the Skill rating when determining the dice pool to attack with that weapon.

Example: *Sara's character is firing her short bow at a charging orc. She has Archery 8 with a short bow and its damage rating would normally be 2L, so her dice pool to attack the orc would be 10. However, she improvised the bow, so the GM has assigned a damage rating of 1L to her short bow. Sara's dice pool to attack the orc with her homemade short bow is 9.*

Note: Weapons and equipment bonuses do not count toward the maximum number of bonus dice that may be added to a dice pool.

Circumstances

There are myriad factors that can affect your character's actions. Your character may be severely wounded, unable to see very well or have some other sort of disadvantage. Some of these factors will help your character and add to your dice pool; many will not, and will subtract dice from your dice pool. The GM decides what circumstances affect your characters actions and how severe the benefit or penalty is.

Example: *Sara's character is badly wounded and trying to pick the lock on a root cellar. Her Larceny rating is 5 and the lockpicks provide a +2 lockpicking bonus, giving her a dice pool of seven. Unfortunately, her current Health is –3, giving her three penalty dice on all her actions and reducing her dice pool to four.*

Magic

Certain spells and magic items can grant bonuses or penalties to various rolls. Such modifiers can include enchanting weapons, altering Attributes and Skills or even changing luck.

Time

Different actions take different amounts of time to perform. For example, translating an ancient text might take a day, fixing a chainmail shirt might take an hour, and shooting a bow might take a few seconds. In general, taking extra time provides bonus dice while rushing penalizes the dice pool for an action. Actions involving magic, such as casting a spell, brewing potions and creating magic items receive no bonuses for taking extra time to accomplish them. The Weave is too unsteady.

Time	Dice Pool
Ten times slower	+8
Five times slower	+4
Two times slower	+2
Normal speed	0
Two times as fast	-4
Three times as fast	-8

Example: *Scott's character is trapped in an underground temple. He hears the rough tongue of Oruskan being spoken and many heavy footsteps coming his way. There's an inscription on the door he thinks might tell him how to open it, but it's in Oruskan. The GM tells Scott that deciphering the inscription will take five combat turns (30 seconds), but the orcs will be on him in three combat turns (18 seconds). Scott's character will have to work twice as fast if he wants to survive.*

Scott's character has Linguistics 6, but suffers a –4 penalty for working twice as fast, giving him a dice pool of two. It's not much of a chance, but if he succeeds, he'll escape in the nick of time.

Skill Synergy and Teamwork

If your character has more than one Skill applicable to the task being attempted, she receives bonus dice to her dice pool. If your character has a skilled assistant helping him, he receives bonus dice to his dice pool. See Skill Synergy and Teamwork on page 76.

Taking the Average

It is important to keep the story moving and not get bogged down rolling dice unnecessarily. Nothing can slow a game down or take drama out of a story faster than rolling a handful of dice to determine whether a relatively straightforward task is accomplished.

The Ubiquity rules address this problem in a special way: Taking the Average. The probability that a die will come up a success is 50/50, just like flipping a coin. Because of this, it is possible to calculate the average number of successes you will roll for any given task by simply dividing the number of dice in the dice pool by two. The result is the number of successes you will roll on average. While it is possible to roll more or fewer successes than this number, it represents the degree of skill your character exhibits without really putting any effort into performing the task. For example, a dice

pool of six will net you three successes on average, meaning your character can handle relatively tough situations without breaking a sweat.

If the average number of successes for a given dice pool is greater than or equal to the difficulty of a task, your character is assumed to have succeeded with minimal effort — all without rolling the dice. This allows the GM to move the story along without slowing down to see whether your character succeeds at relatively simple tasks. As a result, you only roll dice in dramatic situations or when the chance of success is uncertain.

The Magic skill cannot be averaged because of the potential of taking Burn damage when casting.

Example: *Scott's character has a Stealth rating of 6. Taking the Average of his dice pool nets him three successes. He won't need to make a Stealth roll for any Stealth task with a difficulty rating of 3 or less.*

Taking the Average of Odd Numbers

If the number of dice in the dice pool is an odd number, Taking the Average is done a little differently. The dice pool is divided in half, rounded down, and with a "+" sign added to the total to denote the odd die. For example, if your dice pool is seven, Taking the Average nets you "3+" successes. You should roll more than three successes on average, but not always four. In fact, you have about an equal chance of rolling three or four successes on average. Therefore, each time you Take the Average of the dice pool, roll one die. If it comes up a success, use the higher number. If not, use the lower number. In the example above, if the die rolled is a success, Taking the Average yields four successes, or three successes if the die comes up a failure.

Just like with whole numbers, if the average successes equal or exceed the difficulty rating of the task being attempted, your character is assumed to have accomplished the task without rolling the dice.

Example: *Scott's character has a Survival rating of 5. Taking the Average of his dice pool nets him "2+" successes. Each time he Takes the Average of his Survival dice pool, he rolls one die. If it is a success, he nets three successes for the task. If he does not roll a success, he only nets two successes for the task.*

Modifiers and Taking the Average

Because Taking the Average is intended to speed up the game, it makes sense to pre-calculate the number of successes for a Skill roll. However, good and bad conditions will add bonus and penalty dice to the roll. In these cases, each bonus die moves the Average up one step. So, if Taking the Average of a dice pool normally gives you "3+" successes and the GM grants you a bonus die on the task, you net four successes without having to roll any dice. Conversely, if you received a penalty die on the task, you net a flat three successes. By the same logic, if a bonus or penalty die leaves you with a "+", you may roll a die to see whether you gain the additional success.

For example, if Taking the Average of a dice pool nets you "2+" successes and the GM grants you two bonus dice to the roll, the first die brings the total to 3 successes and the second bumps it up to "3+" successes. Assuming that there were no more modifiers, you would roll one die to determine whether your character scores three or four successes.

Example: *Scott's character has a Survival rating of 5, which gives him an average of "2+" successes. If he were to gain a bonus die on his action, his average would increase to three successes. On the other hand, if he were to get a penalty die to his roll, he would only net two successes. Additional bonus and penalty dice continue to increase or decrease average successes in this manner.*

Resolving Actions

With a few rare exceptions, characters' actions do not automatically succeed or fail. You do not normally have to worry about whether your character accomplishes ordinary, day-to-day actions like walking across a room, but when there is danger or a chance that the action will fail, there needs to be a method to determine the outcome. Also, the player may need to know the degree of success or failure of his character's action. Did he succeed spectacularly or just squeak by?

Rolling Dice

The success or failure of an action is determined by rolling dice. The number of dice you roll is equal to the dice pool appropriate for the action, plus or minus any applicable modifiers. When casting a spell, the player may roll up to the maximum dice pool. For other skill checks, the total modified dice pool is rolled and each die that rolls an even number is counted as a success. The total number of successes rolled determines the outcome of the character's action. In general, the more successes rolled, the better the outcome of the action.

Degree of Success

Compare the number of successes achieved (gained by rolling dice or Taking the Average) to the difficulty rating of the action being attempted. The result of the comparison is called the Degree of Success. If the number of successes equals or exceeds the difficulty, the action is successful and the number of additional successes determine how masterfully the action is accomplished. If the number of successes achieved is less than the difficulty, the action fails — and the difference between the two determines how dismally the action fails.

Successes vs. Difficulty	Degree of Success or Failure
+5 or more	Amazing Success
+4	Exceptional Success
+3	Major Success
+2	Complete Success
+1	Simple Success
0	Minor Success
-1	Simple Failure
-2	Complete Failure
-3	Pitiful Failure
-4	Dreadful Failure
-5 or more	Abysmal Failure

The degree of success is usually roleplayed. The character receives more information than she normally would, for example, or her task is completed in less time than usual. Alternately, her failure is even more spectacular, resulting in false information or possibly enough of an error to prevent retrying the action.

In combat, the result is even clearer. Extra successes result in additional damage to the target and insufficient successes result in a clean miss. The difficulty in hitting a target takes into account an opponent's reflexes and toughness. Therefore, not all misses are clean misses. Some attacks hit the target only to slide off armor, catch in clothing, or just not land hard enough to do much damage. This is the case when an attacker rolls exactly the number of successes as his opponent's Defense roll. The blow lands, but is only a scratch or a near miss. An attacker must exceed the target's Defense to do actual damage.

When casting a spell, extra successes can add to the effect of the spell, making it more powerful or giving the caster more control over the spell. However, failures can result in unexpected and sometimes dangerous magical side effects that the GM will determine.

See the Combat chapter for details on attacks and damage. See the Magic chapter for more information on spell casting.

Example: *Scott's character is trying to fix the wagon wheel. The difficulty to fix it is 3. He rolls his modified dice pool and gets two successes—not enough to fix the wheel. Because he only rolled one success less than he needed, it is a Simple Failure. The GM decides that Scott's character may try again to fix it.*

Botch

If your character fails to roll even one success on any of his dice, he suffers a botch. Whenever this occurs, something bad happens to the character: He falls down, miscasts a spell or leaves himself open to attack. In general, the higher the difficulty rating of the task being attempted, the worse it is for the blundering character. Therefore, a botch on an easy task is not as bad as one made while attempting a very hard task, which often has a greater degree of risk associated with it. Botches are also used to determine when weapons and armor become worn, break or wear out. See the Equipment chapter for more information.

Example: *Sara's character is trying to pick the lock on a chest. She makes a Larceny roll and gets no successes—a critical failure. Because picking the lock is difficulty 3, Sara's character has made a fairly major blunder. The GM decides that her character's lock pick gets stuck in the lock and she breaks it trying to get it out. The lock on the chest is now jammed. Sara's character cannot try to pick the lock again.*

Trying Again

If your character fails a task, he may be able to try again depending on the circumstances surrounding the task, and whether the GM allows it. Whenever your character attempts an action that he initially failed, you suffer –2 penalty dice to your dice pool.

Tasks that can be tried again are normally those where failure doesn't have immediate consequences. For example, throwing a punch, missing, and trying to hit your opponent again does not count as trying again. Each attack is considered a new action. Additionally, extended actions do not count as trying again, as each dice roll is still part of the same action. On the other hand, actions such as climbing a tree or building a shelter will count as trying again if your character fails the first time.

Example: *Jason's character failed to find the ruins using an ancient map. After an hour of fruitless wandering, he tries to read the map again. Finding the ruins is difficulty 3, but he suffers two penalty dice on his Survival roll for trying again. Jason rolls his modified dice pool*

Optional: Rolling Large Dice Pools

Anything over 10 dice is considered a large dice pool. Rolling more than 10 dice can be problematic, as you may not have enough dice or can't roll them all at once. For simplicity, Take the Average of the first 10 dice (five successes) and roll the remainder. The average successes are added to the rolled successes to determine the outcome of the action.

Example: Scott's character is shooting his bow at a drake. His modified dice pool to attack the once-mythological creature is 14. Instead of rolling all the dice, he only rolls four dice and adds five averaged successes to the total. He rolls three successes, giving him a total of eight successes on his attack.

and gets three successes. At the end of the second hour of wandering, Jason's character figures out what he did wrong and locates the ruins.

Style Points

As arguably the most important resource in the game, Style points may be spent to give your character a boost and allow him to perform extraordinary feats. You can buy bonus dice, reduce damage, and even boost your character's Talents with Style points. They may also be spent to help your character's friends and allies.

Style points are used to reward players for the kind of behavior that makes the game more fun for everyone involved. The more things you do to benefit the game, the more effective your character will be, and the more fun it is for everyone involved.

Earning Style Points

The GM may award Style points as he sees fit; however, Style points are normally earned through roleplaying and other activities that generally benefit the game. Style points are usually awarded throughout the game, but may be given out at the end of a game session just like experience points.

You may earn Style points during play for a variety of different reasons:

- Pursuing your character's Motivation: 1 pt.
- Succumbing to your character's Flaw: 1 pt.
- In character (roleplaying, humor, etc.): 1 pt.
- Out of character (game report, diary, etc.): 1–3 pts.
- Miscellaneous (hosting games, bringing food, etc.): 1 pt.

There is no limit to the number of Style points you can earn during play; however, to keep it from getting out of hand, the GM may limit you to earning five Style points per game session.

Note: Style points may be tracked on paper, just like a character's Health and experience points, or they can be tracked with poker chips or some other physical object.

Spending Style Points

Style points may be spent for a variety of benefits.

Bonus dice: The most common use of Style points is purchasing bonus dice for a particular action. You receive one bonus die for every Style point spent. These bonus dice are only good for a single dice roll, after which they are gone. Additional Style points have to be spent to get bonus dice on another roll. Bonus dice may also be purchased to improve the average of a dice pool (see Taking the Average, above).

You may not buy more than 10 bonus dice on any one action.

Example: *Brian's character is caught on a mountainside when it begins to shake. He needs to keep his balance or risk falling off the side. His modified Acrobatics dice pool is two. That doesn't give him much of a chance, so he decides to buy some bonus dice. Brian spends four Style points to get four bonus dice, bringing his dice pool to keep his balance to six.*

Taking the Average of his dice pool nets Brian three successes, which is equal to the difficulty rating of the task. Brian's character succeeds in keeping his balance without rolling any dice. Chunks of rock fall all around him, but he clings to the narrow mountain path.

Boosting Talents: Talents may be temporarily boosted with Style points. Your character's Talent is improved by one level for every two Style points spent. The improvement lasts for duration of an entire combat — or an entire scene if it is a non-combat Talent. After this time, the Talent reverts back to its normal level.

Your character must have a Talent in order to boost it. You cannot boost a unique Talent or improve a standard Talent beyond its maximum level.

Example: *Tom's character is in deep trouble. He wandered off alone and now there's a hungry bear charging him. If he is going to survive, he has to make every shot count by hitting the beast where it hurts. Called shots to hit vital areas penalize the attacker's dice pool, but Tom's character has the Accuracy Talent, which reduces this penalty. Tom wants to reduce this penalty as much as possible, so he decides to boost his Talent. He spends a whopping six Style points to boost his Accuracy to its maximum level, which allows him to ignore up to –8 called shot penalties for the duration of the combat. If he can do enough damage with his bow before the bear gets to him, he just might have a chance.*

Damage Reduction: Damage inflicted on your character may be reduced with Style points. Your character takes one less point of damage for every two Style points spent. This represents your character's special status as a player character. Even a former spoiled noble can blunder through combat with nary a scratch. Major villains may also have Style points, making them just as hard to kill as player characters.

Style points may only be spent to reduce damage when it is inflicted. If the GM allows it, however, you may spend Style points to reduce damage later, representing a less severe wound or faster healing ability.

Example: *Sara's character cut down the goblin that was attacking her. Unfortunately, its hunting partner attacked her from behind while she was preoccupied. It landed a lucky blow and did four points of lethal damage to her. This is more than enough to incapacitate her in her wounded state, so she decides to spend some Style points to reduce the damage. Sara spends all four of her Style points to reduce the damage*

by two points. She takes two points of lethal damage, which reduces her Health to 0. She's not dying yet, but if she takes any more damage she's going to be in trouble.

Other: The GM may also allow you to spend Style points for other benefits, such as altering a plot point or making a seemingly random event turn out in your character's favor.

Note: Spending Style points is a reflexive action.

Sharing Style Points

Style points always belong to the player character that earned them. They may never be given away or traded to another character. However, you may spend Style points on behalf of another character.

Your character must do something to explain the expenditure, however, such as say a few words of encouragement or give the recipient a helping hand. A shove or shouted warning are often enough to give another character some bonus dice on her Defense roll, for example. However, because spell casting is accomplished via a personal connection with the Weave and requires knowledge other characters may not have, other characters cannot spend Style points to help a spell succeed.

Example: *Jason's character is trying to protect a young child from a marauding band of horsemen attempting to kidnap her. The girl has Defense 4 and is being attacked by a warrior with a club. He doesn't think the girl stands much of a chance, so he decides to help her out. Jason declares that his character is shoving the girl out of the way and spends two Style points to give her two bonus dice on her Defense roll. As a result, the warrior's attack misses. Jason's character steps in front of the girl and tells her to run away.*

Style Point Options

Gamemasters may alter the value of Style points to suit the style of game they wish to run:

- Legendary—Two bonus dice per Style point (recommended for games set in the Before)
- High Adventure—No spending cap
- Standard Adventure—One bonus die per Style point
- Low Adventure—One bonus die per two Style points
- Gritty Realism—No Style points

In addition, GMs may also wish to limit the sharing of Style points with other characters:

- Shared—One bonus die per Style point
- Limited—One bonus die per two Style points
- Individual—Characters cannot share Style points

Chance Dice

What do you do if you need more dice but you've run out of Style points? Desperate times call for desperate measures. This is where chance dice come into play.

When the odds are against you, you have to take a bigger risk to succeed. If you want some extra dice to roll, you can always ask the GM for chance dice. You may do this at any time, not just when you're out of Style points. In fact, you can spend Style points and get chance dice on the same roll.

Here is how it works: For each two bonus dice your receive, the difficulty rating of your character's task is increased by one point. You may gain up to 10 bonus dice in this manner, which also increases the difficulty rating of the task by up to five points.

Chance dice are added to your dice pool just like normal bonus dice. While you get to roll more dice, you also need to roll more successes in order to succeed. Essentially, you're gambling that you'll roll more successes than you added to the difficulty rating. Increasing the difficulty rating also increases the severity of the blunder your character makes if you fail to roll enough successes. It's a risky business, but you wouldn't do it unless you were desperate, right?

Note: Make sure you have enough dice in your dice pool to cover the number of successes you'll need for your character to succeed in his task. In general, you will want more dice in your dice pool than the difficulty rating of the action. You may not Take the Average when using chance dice.

Example: *Amy's character is trying to control a runaway horse. She is an experienced rider, but the horse was spooked by a fireball. She has Ride 4, but suffers a –4 penalty to her dice pool because of the crazed horse. This gives her a modified dice pool of zero to stop the horse before they reach a quickly approaching cliff. To make matters worse, Amy's character is out of Style points. The horse — and maybe Amy's character — is going over the cliff unless she does something drastic!*

Amy asks the GM for six chance dice, which increases the difficulty rating of stopping the horse. Normally, reining in a horse is difficulty 2, but it becomes difficulty 5 because of the chance dice. This gives her a slim margin of success, but at least she has a chance.

Amy rolls and gets four successes, which is not enough — but it's not as bad as it could be. Amy's character ends up with a simple failure instead of something much worse. The GM decides that the horse trips, throwing Amy's character clear. The horse and the character are hurt, but do not fall off the cliff.

Experience Points

Just like real people, characters learn and grown over time: honing their skills, developing their talents and improving their natural abilities.

Most of what characters learn, however, is beyond the scope of the game. People learn from their mistakes, but learning not to make mistakes in the first place requires common sense, which is not a skill that can be bought. A character growing older and wiser should be roleplayed, not purchased.

In game terms, characters change in more tangible ways. During play, characters earn experience points that represent all the things they learn over time. Players spend experience points to improve their character's Attributes, Skills and Talents — making their character more powerful, well-rounded or interesting.

Gaining Experience Points

The GM awards experience points to each character at the end of a game session. Players write down how many experience points their character has earned, and may spend them between game sessions to improve their character's skills and abilities.

The GM may award characters between one and five experience points per game session. On average, characters should earn about three experience points per game session. Characters may earn more experience points for highly dramatic or eventful game sessions. No matter what, characters should always earn at least one experience point. Even the most dismal failure can be a learning experience.

Characters earn experience points in a variety of ways:

- Automatic: 1 pt. Characters gain an experience point just for being a part of a game session.
- Danger: 1 pt. Characters gain an experience point whenever they face grave danger and manage to survive.
- Roleplaying: 1 pt. Characters gain an experience point whenever the players portray them according to their personality.
- Success: 1 pt. Characters gain an experience point whenever they further the plot or make progress toward their goal by following their motivation.
- Wisdom: 1 pt. Characters gain an experience point whenever they learn something critically important.

The GM may decide to award extra experience points to the characters at the end of a story. Only a couple of extra points should be awarded this way, usually as a bonus for a job well done.

Awarding Experience Points

The GM should be careful when awarding experience points. It can be difficult to strike the right balance between giving out too much experience and not enough. The GM can unbalance the game by giving away too many and, conversely, can cause just as many problems by giving away too few. In practice, awarding three experience points (give or take a point) per game session sets a good pace for character advancement.

In addition, the GM is encouraged to give the same amount of experience points to each character, regardless of their level of story involvement. Giving more experience to only some of the characters may look like playing favorites, and runs the risk of unbalancing the game.

Characters who put forth extra effort and get involved with the story do not go unrewarded, however. Style points should be used to compensate individual player characters without upsetting game balance or the speed of character advancement.

Spending Experience Points

Experience points may be spent to improve your character's Attributes, Skills and Talents.

Players should endeavor to spend experience points on traits that reflect what their character has learned during the campaign. As always, the GM is the final authority on how and where experience points are spent, and may ask for justification for any experience point expenditure.

Experience points may be spent in the following way:

Trait	Experience Point Cost
Primary Attribute	New Attribute Level x 5 points
Skill	New Skill Level x 2 points
Skill Specialization	3 points
Talent	15 points

Note: No one trait may be raised by more than one point at a time. Significant changes in skills and abilities take time and effort to accomplish, and this rule reflects that limitation.

Example: *Matt's character has been saving experience points for many game sessions. His character has been taking a lot of damage, so he raises his Body score from 2 to 3, costing him 15 experience (the new level is 3, multiplied by the Primary Attribute cost of 5 to make the total cost). If, in the future, he wanted to raise his Body score from 3 to 4, it would cost him 20 experience points (the new level of 4, multiplied by Primary Attribute cost of 5 to make the total cost).*

Lenna's back ached. She felt all of her 50 years this morning. The chill air in this long-awaited spring was not doing her old bones any favors. **She winced as she straightened up** from the drying fire, with a series of snap-cracks. Unfortunately, the laundry would not do itself.

Last night, two men had arrived in the village, **delirious and wounded.** The village had taken them in and would nurse them back to health. Right now, their bandages needed changing. She had fresh ones ready, and she would take the soiled bindings to be boiled and cleaned.

Before, she had been part of the support staff for the **Eighth Legion**. She had done laundry then, too, but for thousands of soldiers. The Magisters had always warned her not to damage their precious purple-trimmed cloaks, but she had been good at her job. As part of her cross-training, she had shown the soldiers how to get stains out of almost any material, how to repair leather and linen, and **how to make steel shine** as if with an internal light. Sometimes they'd even listen to her. When the legion marched, resplendent in their red and gold, their armor polished and gleaming, **it was thanks to Lenna** and others like her.

It hadn't always been glorious. It was the legion, after all. There had been terrible battles with more blood and death than she ever wanted to see. **Only the Night of Fire had been worse** than some of the conflicts she had witnessed, especially in some of the Oruskan campaigns. Lenna remembered hiding in terror, just a teenage girl new to the legion, as the rest of the Servians defended themselves against a raiding party of orcs that had surprised the rear lines one evening. ***Two dozen of her friends lay dead*** before the legionnaires had turned up. When they found her *trembling and crying* inside a barrel, they took her out and made sure she was all right. They understood what she had seen, and they made sure that, eventually, she did too. That had been so long ago … ***decades***.

She lifted a basket that she'd filled with neatly folded bandages and left the laundry building to make her way to the hospital tent. The newly formed village was small, but already it was busy with men and women going back and forth. Even children were doing their part. Lenna's job, as it had always been, was to support others, **to make their lives easier and better.**

Suddenly, the air was split by a scream of pain. One of the new arrivals emerged from the hospital tent, **clutching a bloody sword.** His eyes were wild as he whipped the blade at a passing woman. She cried and fell back, her arm bleeding from a deep cut. The man kicked her out of the way and slashed at a villager who tried to grab him, cutting his throat in ***a shower of bright red blood.***

Lenna gasped and dropped the basket she was carrying. The man stared at her, **his eyes desperate.** He clearly had no idea where he was, and for a moment, she felt pity. That didn't last long.

The man charged at her. Lenna didn't move — not until the very last moment. She took two steps to one side and placed her hands very precisely on his sword hand and arm. She bent his arm back and twisted his hand. **The sword fell into the mud.** She thrust her leg out and the man followed the sword to the ground.

It had taken just seconds. Guards began to appear, some taking care of the wounded girl and others grabbing the attacker who was sprawled on the ground. He was making small sounds of pain, *whimpering and crying*. He had no idea what was going on. *Poor bastard*, thought Lenna.

Lenna was groaning herself. Her shoulder ached and her leg was going to be **black and blue** with bruises soon. She noticed that people were watching her with expressions of amazement, if not shock.

"Where did you learn that?" asked one of the guards, clearly impressed.

"*I was in the legion, son,*" she replied. "Now help me pick up this laundry."

Chapter 8: Combat

"I hate violence, so try to stay on my good side."

Violence is a reality of life for most survivors of the Night of Fire. Laws once existed to protect the innocent, but they are gone — along with the nations that gave birth to them. Criminals of every ilk roam freely or set up their own kingdoms via intimidation and steel. Experienced soldiers fight over the scraps of civilization, and even the timid have been transformed into warriors through desperation. But other survivors are not the only threat. The Weave has twisted creatures into crazed beasts with innate magical powers. Even the land, sea and sky seem to be fighting against survivors, with natural disasters occurring more frequently than Before.

Combat Overview

Step One: Roll Initiative

Roll Initiative to determine when your character's actions are resolved during the combat turn. The character with the most successes goes first, and the character with the fewest goes last.

Step Two: Actions

Your character may attack, defend and move each turn. Declare your character's Attack action and determine the Skill or Attribute roll required to resolve it. Defense actions are reflexive and do not need to be declared. Move actions must be declared but do not require a dice roll to resolve.

Step Three: Attack Roll

The first attacker calculates his attack rating, including appropriate modifiers, then rolls his modified dice pool.

Step Four: Defense Roll

The defender calculates his Defense rating, including modifiers. He rolls his modified dice pool and compares the number of successes to his opponent's attack, Spell Damage or Spell Potency.

Step Five: Resolve Attack

If the attacker rolls more successes than his opponent, his attack is successful. Each extra success inflicts one point of damage or, in the case of magic, can expand its effects. If the attacker rolls fewer successes than the defender, his attack missed. If both characters roll the same number of successes, the attacker narrowly misses or strikes the defender without enough force to do any damage. Magical attacks may have other effects that must be resolved (see page 135).

Step Six: Damage

If the attack inflicts damage, mark off the appropriate number of Health levels and resolve any additional damage effects, such as stun, knockback or magical effects. If your character is reduced to negative Health, he falls unconscious. If he is reduced to -5 Health, he dies. After damage is resolved, return to Step Three and go on to the next character in the Initiative order.

Combat Turns

Combat can be confusing. To simplify things, combat is divided into six-second combat turns, making it easier for the GM to keep track of the characters and resolve their actions in order.

Each combat starts with an Initiative phase that determines when each character acts during the turn. This ensures each character has a chance to attempt his or her chosen task during the combat turn.

Initiative

At the beginning of combat, every player involved rolls his or her Initiative rating to determine when to act in each combat turn. The player who scored the most successes takes the first action and the player with the fewest successes goes last. In the case of a tie, the player whose character has the highest Initiative rating goes first. If two characters have the same Initiative rating, the player's character with the highest Dexterity rating goes first. If there is still a tie, then both characters' actions are resolved at the same time. Once a character's Initiative has been determined, it remains the same for the duration of the entire combat, but there are ways to alter it. The order of Initiative does not affect Defense. Even if a character goes last, she can use her Defense without penalties against earlier attacks.



Holding Actions

Sometimes a character will want to hold her action until another character does something in particular. For example, she may want to hold her attack until her opponent draws his sword or shows his head from around a corner. In this case, the held action is resolved before the action that triggered it. Usually, only a character with a higher Initiative would hold an action, but even a character with a low Initiative can hold her action. In this case, she gives up her action in the current turn in order to trigger an action in a later turn. This is one of the few ways a slower character can improve her Initiative.

Surprise

Occasionally, a character may be caught unaware by an attack. Usually this is because of an ambush or an unforeseen accident. When a character is caught by surprise, he does not get to act in the first turn of combat. He still rolls Initiative, however, and may take reflexive actions and defend himself normally.

Combat Actions

There are three different types of actions your character can take in combat: attack, defense and move actions. Your character may perform one of each type of action every combat turn without penalty. For example, your character can move, attack and defend all in the same combat turn.

Your character doesn't have to perform all three types of combat actions if he doesn't want to; however, giving up one action doesn't allow him to perform two of another type. If he wants to give up his defense action to make two attack actions in the same combat turn, he would have to perform the total attack maneuver (see Total Attack, below).

Each type of combat action is described below.

Attack Action

Attack actions are used to attempt to hurt an opponent. The most common attack actions are Melee, Brawl, Magic and Ranged attack. Each Attack action uses a different combat Skill roll to resolve the action. Your character may also use his Attack action to perform a particular combat maneuver (see below) or cast a non-attack spell.

Defense Action

Defense actions are a special type of reflexive action that are used to prevent damage from an attack. Your character's Defense rating represents her ability to both evade attacks and resist damage. Your character does not have to bother thinking about defending herself. She does it instinctively. As a result, you do not have to worry about taking a Defense action. You simply make a Defense roll in response to an opponent's attack action every time your character is attacked.

Move Action

A Move action allows a character to move a certain distance based on his Move rating. Your character may perform a Move action in addition to attacking and defending himself. You do not have to roll any dice to resolve a Move action; your character simply moves the appropriate distance based on his Move rating. Difficult terrain can reduce a character's Move rating.

Combat Maneuvers

Instead of taking a standard Attack action, your character can perform a variety of different combat maneuvers. Combat maneuvers may provide bonuses and penalties to attack opponents or allow your character to do other useful things.

Aim

Aiming improves your character's accuracy and damage with a ranged weapon. Magical spells cannot be aimed, although some magic items can.

For each full turn that your character spends aiming at her target, you gain a +2 aim bonus on your attack roll, up to a maximum +4 aim bonus.

Special: Aiming takes your character's full attention, so she cannot move or actively defend herself. If she is attacked, you only get to roll your character's Passive Defense rating (plus any applicable defense modifiers) for her Defense roll. Your character may continue aiming as long as she doesn't take any damage. Alternately, your character may choose to stop aiming (and forfeit her aim bonus) to defend herself normally.

Block

Instead of making an offensive attack, your character attempts to block all Brawl attacks made against her during the turn. If she is attacked, make an opposed Brawl roll against her opponent, including any appropriate Defense modifiers. If you roll more successes than her opponent, the blow is blocked and does no damage. If he rolls more successes than you, your character takes damage equal to the number of extra successes he rolled.

Normally, only Brawl attacks may be blocked. If your character wants to block a Melee attack, she suffers a -2 penalty on the attempt.

Special: Because your character is actively trying to block Brawl attacks, her normal Defense rating does not apply. She retains her normal Defense rating against other types of attacks, however.

Called Shot

Sometimes your character will want to strike a specific target location, such as an object held in an opponent's hand, or a weak spot. Conversely, your character may want to avoid hitting something — such as a friend grappling with her opponent. Both scenarios require a called shot, and the attack roll suffers a number of penalty dice equal to the opponent's Defense rating or the Size rating of the object being attacked.

Vital Area: Your character can make a called shot to hit a vital area of an opponent. He suffers a penalty on his attack roll equal to his opponent's full Defense rating (including armor and other Defense modifiers), but successes rolled automatically inflict damage on the target. If your modified dice pool is 0 or less, your character's attack automatically misses.

Held Object: If your character wants to hit a held object, you suffer a penalty equal to its Size rating (See Attacking Objects, below). If the person holding the item is trying to prevent it from being struck, you use the base Defense rating of the person holding it or the object's Defense rating (whichever is greater). Successes in excess of Defense roll do damage as normal.

Shooting into Combat: If your character attempts to shoot past a friend to hit an opponent, he makes a called shot with a penalty equal to the amount of cover his target has (see Cover, below). A botched roll would be disastrous for your character's friend.

Specific Location: If your character wants to hit a specific target location on an opponent, refer to the following chart:

Target Area	Attack Modifier
Torso	-1
Limb	-2
Hand	-4
Head	-4
Eye	-8

The result of hitting a specific location is up to the GM to interpret based on the circumstances, but it can be anything from forcing someone to drop a weapon to blinding your opponent.

Cautious Attack

Your character may elect to make a cautious attack, focusing more on his defense than on harming his opponent. Your character suffers a -4 penalty on his attack roll, but gains a +2 bonus on his Defense roll for the remainder of the round.

Charge

When charging an opponent, your character makes a headlong assault using either a Brawl or Melee attack. Charging grants a +2 charge bonus to your attack roll. Your character may move up to her normal move before making the attack, but cannot move again afterward.

Shove: Instead of making a standard charge attack, your character may attempt to shove her opponent rather than damage him. In this case, she makes a touch attack (see Touch Attack, below) against her opponent. If successful, she does no damage. Instead, compare her opponent's Strength rating with the amount of damage your character would have done. If you rolled more damage than his Strength rating, she moves him back 5 ft. for each success in excess of his Strength rating.

If the damage you rolled is less than or equal to your opponent's Strength rating, your character's shove attempt failed and she ends her movement standing directly in front of him.

Special: When making a charge attack, your character cannot actively defend herself. If she is attacked, you only get to roll your character's Passive Defense rating (plus any applicable defense modifiers) for her Defense roll.

Disarm

Your character may attempt to disarm his opponent by knocking his weapon from his hand with a melee weapon, or by stealing his weapon using a hand-to-hand attack.

Make an opposed Melee (or Brawl) roll against the opponent, but you suffer a -2 penalty for striking at his weapon. In addition, your opponent receives a +2 bonus if he is holding his weapon with both hands. If you roll less than or equal to the number of successes rolled by the opponent, your character fails to disarm him. If you roll more successes than the opponent, your character knocks the weapon from his grasp, flinging it 5 ft. away per extra success rolled. Or, if your character was attempting to steal the weapon with a Brawl attack, he now has the weapon.

Dodge

Instead of making an offensive attack, your character attempts to dodge all ranged attacks made against her during the turn. If she is attacked, make an opposed Athletics roll versus her opponent's ranged attack roll, including any appropriate Defense modifiers. If you roll more successes than he does, the shot is dodged and does no damage. If he rolls more successes than you do, your character takes damage equal to the number of extra successes rolled.

Special: Because your character is actively trying to evade ranged attacks, her normal Defense rating does not apply. She retains her normal Defense rating against other types of attacks.

Note: If your character has the Acrobatics Skill, she may use it in place of Athletics when dodging ranged attacks.

Grapple

Your character attempts to immobilize his opponent without harming her. Make a Brawl touch attack (See Touch Attack, below) with a penalty equal to the Size rating of his opponent. If successful, you do no damage. Instead, compare the opponent's

Strength rating with the amount of damage your character would have done. If the damage you rolled is less than or equal to your opponent's Strength rating, your character's grapple attempt fails. If you roll more damage than her Strength rating, your character grabs her. On her next turn, the grappled character cannot attack and must succeed in an opposed Strength roll in order to free herself.

If you roll more damage than twice your opponent's Strength rating, your character pins her, and she only gets to use her Passive Defense rating for Defense rolls.

Magic

Magic can be used in a variety of ways to incapacitate, disarm or distract an opponent. For information on casting spells in combat, see the Magic chapter on page 129.

Parry

Instead of making an attack, your character attempts to parry all Melee attacks made against him. He must have a shield or be holding an appropriate weapon to perform this maneuver. If he is attacked, make an opposed Melee roll against his opponent, including any shield or weapon bonuses, and any appropriate Defense modifiers. If you roll more success than she does, the strike is parried and does no damage. If she rolls more successes than you, your character takes damage equal to the number of extra successes she rolled.

Normally, only Melee attacks may be parried. If your character wishes to parry a Brawl attack, he will inflict damage on his attacker if you roll more successes on your Defense roll.

Special: Because your character is actively trying to parry Melee attacks, his normal Defense rating does not apply. Your character retains his normal Defense rating against other types of attacks, however.

Ready Weapon

Your character draws a weapon and readies it for combat. Most weapons only take a single action to ready, but some weapons may take longer.

Run

Instead of making an attack, your character doubles her Move rating to determine the distance she runs during the combat turn. She may defend herself normally, but is unable to perform any other actions while running.

Sprint

Instead of making an attack, your character quadruples his Move rating to determine the distance he sprints during the combat turn. He may keep up this speed for a number of turns equal to his Body rating. After this time, he may exert himself — and suffer a nonlethal wound — to continue to sprint for another turn. If he wishes, he may continue sprinting until he collapses from exhaustion. After your character stops sprinting, he must rest for a number of turns equal to the number of turns sprinted before he can sprint again. Your character loses his Active Defense when sprinting, as he is unable to fully concentrate on dodging or avoiding blows as he runs all out.

Stand Up

Your character may fall prone as a reflexive action, but standing up requires him to give up an attack action. Your character may move and defend normally after getting to his feet.

Throw

Your character attempts to throw her opponent to the ground with a Brawl attack. Make a Brawl touch attack against the opponent (See Touch Attack, below). Your character suffers a penalty equal to the Size rating of her opponent. If successful, your character does no damage. Instead, compare the opponent's Strength rating with the amount of damage your character would have done. If the damage you rolled is less than or equal to the opponent's Strength rating, your character fails to throw her opponent.

If you rolled more damage than his Strength rating, your character throws him 5 ft. per success in excess of his Strength rating. If this causes your opponent to strike an object and he cannot move further, he suffers a point of nonlethal damage for each 5 ft. he still needs to move. Additional damage may be done depending on where the opponent lands.

Total Attack

When all that matters is taking an opponent down, your character may go entirely on the offensive — disregarding her own safety — and gain a +2 bonus to her attack roll. Instead of making a standard total attack, your character makes two attacks in the same combat turn using the following techniques.

Dual Wield: Your character may make two attacks, using one weapon in each hand. She may make two Melee attacks, two Ranged attacks or one of each. She doesn't even have to attack the same target. However, attacking with two weapons is difficult: Your character suffers a -4 penalty to attack with the weapon in her primary hand and a -6 penalty to attack with the weapon in her off-hand.

Flurry: Your character attacks twice, in quick succession, using a Melee weapon or her bare hands. You give up the normal total attack bonus and suffer a -4 penalty to both attacks.

Rapid Fire: Your character attacks twice, in quick succession, with a ranged weapon capable of attacking more than once in the same round. You give up the normal total attack

bonus and suffer a -4 penalty to both attacks when making a rapid fire attack.

Special: When making a total attack, your character cannot actively defend herself. If she is attacked, you only get to roll your character's Passive Defense rating (plus any applicable modifiers) for her Defense roll.

Total Defense

Your character may focus entirely on defense: blocking blows, parrying strikes and dodging ranged attacks all at the same time. By giving up his attack action, your character gains a +4 bonus to his Defense rating until his next turn.

Trip

Your character attempts to trip her opponent and knock him down. Make a Brawl touch attack against the opponent (See Touch Attack, below). Your character suffers a -2 penalty to her trip attack if her opponent has four or more legs. If successful, your character does no damage. Instead, compare the opponent's Strength rating with the amount of damage your character would have done. If you rolled more damage than his Strength rating, your character knocks him down. If the damage you rolled is less than or equal to your opponent's Strength rating, your character fails to knock her opponent down.

Use Item

Instead of making an attack, your character may use an item or operate a simple machine. He may pull levers or perform similar tasks as long as it doesn't require a Skill roll to accomplish.

Use Skill

Instead of making an attack, your character performs a Skill in combat, such as Diplomacy, Medicine or Magic.

Attack

An attack represents a character's ability to strike and damage her opponent. It not only determines whether your character hits her opponent, but more importantly, how much damage she does to him. Because an attack covers both the power and accuracy of a blow, it is resolved with a single dice roll. Magical attacks are resolved differently than physical attacks. See the Magic chapter on page 129 for more information.

Attack Rating

A character's attack rating represents how powerful and damaging the attack is. Very powerful but inaccurate attacks and weaker but highly accurate attacks may end up with the same attack ratings. One attack uses power to blow through an opponent's defenses, while the other targets his weak spots. Both are equally damaging to the opponent.

Combat Skills

Your character's base attack rating is equal to his appropriate combat Skill rating:

- Ranged Attack: Archery or Athletics rating
- Brawl Attack: Brawl rating
- Melee Attack: Melee rating

Attack Modifiers

There are numerous factors that can modify your character's attack rating. The weapon being used, the size and distance to the target, visibility, conditions and any wound penalties your character has may all affect the outcome of an attack.

Large and Small Character Combat

Everything in *Desolation* is scaled around human-sized characters to speed up play. But what happens when larger or smaller creatures and characters attack each other?

When a larger and a smaller creature or character come to blows, there is no change to their attack ratings or Defense ratings — both creatures have already been scaled to Size 0, which puts them on a level playing field. When both are larger or smaller, however, it's time for a few modifiers.

When two large creatures or characters attack each other, they both receive bonus dice to their attack and Defense ratings equal to the Size of the smaller creature. For example, if a great dragon (Size 4) is attacking a schlekk (Size 2), both creatures receive two bonus dice to their attack and Defense ratings. If both creatures were the same size, they'd both receive bonus dice equal to their Size rating.

When two small creatures or characters attack each other, they both receive penalty dice to their attack and Defense ratings equal to the Size of the larger creature. For example, a Loranthian (Size -1) is attacking a monkey (Size -2) trying to steal his food. Both suffer one penalty die to their attack and Defense ratings. If both were the same size, they'd both suffer penalty dice equal to their Size rating.

Weapon

Each weapon has a damage rating depending on how powerful and accurate it is. Typically, the larger the weapon, the more bonus dice it adds to the attack rating. Because this is an abstract concept, however, powerful but awkward weapons may do just as much damage as lighter, more accurate weapons. Weapons also determine the type of damage being inflicted, either lethal or nonlethal.

Size

Even though the After is home to many giant, rampaging beasts and diminutive races, human-sized characters are the norm. Therefore, everything in *Desolation* is scaled for attacking and defending against Size 0 creatures.

Size 0 characters receive no Size modifier to their attack rating, but larger and smaller characters and creatures do. Larger creatures and characters receive a penalty to their attack rating, representing how hard it is for them to hit human-sized opponents. Smaller creatures and characters receive a bonus to their attack rating, representing how easy it is for them to hit a relatively larger target. These modifiers have already been calculated into the creatures' Attack Rating in the Bestiary on page 224.

Size	Attack Modifier
8	-8
4	-4
2	-2
1	-1
0	0
-1	+1
-2	+2
-4	+4
-8	+8

Note: Human-sized characters do not have any modifiers to attack larger or smaller creatures, as the difficulty of being hit by a Size 0 attacker is already factored into their Defense rating (See Defense, below)

Range

When attacking with a ranged weapon, your character's distance from her target modifies her attack rating. However, different weapons have different ranges where they are most effective. You can hit a target that is farther away with a bow than with a thrown spear, for example. The distance that a weapon may be used to attack a target is its effective range. Attacking a target farther than this suffers a penalty to the attack rating.

Range	Distance	Modifier
Short	Weapon Range	0
Medium	Weapon Range x2	-2
Long	Weapon Range x4	-4
Extreme	More than Weapon Range x4	-8

Visibility

It's hard to attack effectively when unable to see clearly. Very dim light, or very bright light shining directly in your character's eyes, can modify his attack rating.

Visibility	Example	Modifier
Blinding light	Direct sunlight	-8
Bright light	Magical beam of light	-4
Glare	Reflected sunlight	-2
Well-lit	Diffused light	0
Dim light	Candle or torchlight	-2
Near darkness	Moonless night	-4
Complete darkness	Underground cave	-8

Wound Penalties

When your character is seriously wounded, he suffers wound penalties to his attack rating equal to his negative Health rating. In addition, his ability to act is limited (see Health, below).

Attack Roll

The dice pool for your attack roll is equal to your character's attack rating plus or minus any circumstantial modifiers. If your modified dice pool is 0 or less, your character's attack automatically misses.

Roll your modified dice pool and compare the number of successes to the opponent's Defense roll. If you roll more successes than the opponent, your character has damaged him. Each extra success inflicts one point of damage and may have additional effects (See Damage, below).

If you roll fewer successes than the opponent, your character's attack is a clean miss. If you both roll the same number of successes, your character's attack narrowly misses or glances off armor without enough force to do any damage.

Defense

A Defense rating represents a character's ability to evade an attack and soak up damage. Because Defense covers both a character's agility and toughness, it is resolved with one dice roll.

Defense Rating

A character's Defense rating represents how hard he is to hit and how resistant he is to damage. Therefore, frail but agile characters and slow but tough characters may have the same Defense rating: One defender relies on his natural toughness to shrug off blows while the other relies on not getting hit in the first place. Both characters are equally resistant to damage; however, there are situations that require a character to use only one aspect of his Defense rating.

Your character's Defense rating is calculated as follows:

- **Defense** = Passive Defense + Active Defense – Size
- **Passive Defense** = Body rating + Armor and Shield
- **Active Defense** = Dexterity rating

Your character may be limited to using only his Active or Passive Defense ratings against certain attacks, such as Touch Attacks and Area of Effect attacks.

Defense Modifiers

Several factors can modify your character's Defense rating. Your character's Size and armor (if any) are the most common modifiers. Cover, wound penalties and the number of attackers your character faces also affect how effective her defense is.

Size

In *Desolation*, combat is scaled around human-sized characters. Average-sized characters receive no modifier to their Defense, but larger and smaller ones do. Larger opponents are easier to hit, while smaller creatures are harder to strike. Consequently, larger opponents suffer a penalty to their Defense rating while smaller opponents receive a bonus. To make up for this, larger and smaller creatures and characters also receive a modifier to their Health rating. Although larger opponents may be easier to hit, they are also harder to kill. Conversely, smaller opponents may be harder to hit, but they are also easier to kill because they can't take as much damage.

Size	Defense Modifier
8	-8
4	-4
2	-2
1	-1
0	0
-1	+1
-2	+2
-4	+4
-8	+8

Armor

Armor, whether natural or worn as clothing, deflects incoming attacks and prevents blows from doing as much damage as they would without the protection. To represent this, bonus dice from shields and armor are applied to a character's Defense rating. Armor is heavy and restrictive, though, and may also impose penalties on the character wearing it. See the Equipment chapter for specific ratings on shields and armor.

Cover

Taking cover is an excellent way to defend against attacks, especially against ranged attacks. The more cover your character has, the harder it is for attacks to harm her. In game terms, cover provides a bonus to your Defense rating. The more cover you have, the greater the bonus you receive.

Cover	Modifier
Full cover	+8
Major cover	+4
Half cover	+2
Partial cover	+1
No cover	0

- **Partial Cover:** Most of your character is visible to the opponent, such as when hiding behind a small chest.
- **Half Cover:** Half of your character is visible to the opponent, such as when shooting from behind a tree.

Defense and Taking the Average

To speed up combat, the GM may opt to have each character Take the Average of his Defense rating. The result becomes the threshold number of successes that must be exceeded to damage that character. Basically, it turns the opposed attack versus Defense roll into a simple attack roll with a difficulty equal to the average Defense of the target. It sounds complicated, but it's really very simple: If you roll more successes than the opponent's average Defense, your character does that much damage to him.

While Taking the Average of Defense ratings greatly reduces the number of dice rolls in combat, most players like rolling dice to defend themselves — even if it means fewer successes than when they Take the Average. Therefore, the GM may want to use this method only for NPCs and less-important characters to speed up combat and keep the focus on the player characters.

■ **Major Cover:** Very little of your character is visible to the opponent, such as when peering around a corner.
■ **Full Cover:** No part of your character is visible to the opponent, such as when hiding behind a huge boulder.

Multiple Attackers

It's hard to defend against multiple attackers. Groups of opponents can easily outmaneuver and overpower your character; defending against one attacker leaves him open to another. Likewise, multiple attacks from a single defender are similarly challenging to defend against. Your character may only use his full Defense rating against one attack per combat turn. He suffers a -2 penalty to his Defense rating for each additional attack made against him during the same combat turn.

For example, if your character is attacked three times during the same turn, you roll your full Defense against the first attack, suffer a -2 penalty against the second attack, and a -4 penalty against the third attack. This represents how hard it is to defend oneself when beset on all sides. Even very tough characters may be brought down by groups of weaker assailants.

The Block, Dodge and Parry combat maneuvers are also affected by multiple attackers.

Size Bonus: Large creatures are able to handle multiple attackers more easily than smaller ones. For every two levels in Size, a creature may use its full Defense rating against one additional attack per turn. Therefore, a Size 2 creature does not suffer any penalties for being attacked twice during the same combat turn and a Size 4 creature does not suffer any penalties for being attacked three times. A Size 8 creature may defend itself up to five times per turn using its full Defense rating!

This bonus only applies when attacked by human-sized (or smaller) creatures. A larger creature will suffer normal penalties for multiple attacks by creatures of its own size.

Wound Penalties

When your character is seriously wounded but remains conscious, he suffers wound penalties to his Defense rating equal to his negative Health rating. In addition, his ability to act is limited (see Health, below).

Touch Attacks

Sometimes you only need to determine whether an opponent touches your character, such as when she is trying to grapple him or burn him with a torch. Because grapple attacks are not concerned with doing damage to your character, you do not get to use your character's Passive Defense rating for your Defense roll. Likewise, when facing an opponent wielding a torch or some other highly damaging weapon, you only get to use your character's Active Defense rating for your Defense roll.

With touch attacks, your character's size, cover and wound penalties still factor into your Defense roll. Armor does not normally factor in unless your character is being attacked with a dangerous weapon (or when skin-to-skin contact is important).

Note: Touch attacks rarely do damage in and of themselves. Often the amount of damage that would have been done is compared to one of your character's Attributes to determine another effect, such as with a grapple attack. Touch attacks that result in damage (e.g., being attacked with a burning torch) do a specified amount of damage if successful. Extra successes on the touch attack do not increase the amount of damage inflicted.

Area of Effect Attacks

Some attacks, such as explosions, damage everything within a given radius. Because they do widespread damage, there isn't an effective way to dodge such an attack. Characters caught in the radius of an area effect attack only get to use their Passive Defense rating for their Defense roll. Creature size and wound

Caustic Damage

Caustic Damage — most notably that caused by fire, electricity, and poison — is scaled for human-sized characters but would prove a greater or lesser threat depending on the victim's size. To account for this, reduce caustic damage by one point for each two Size levels above zero, or increase it by one point for each two Size levels below zero. For Size 1 or -1 creatures, a "+" sign is added to the damage to indicate the possibility of taking an extra point of damage (see Taking the Average of Odd Numbers, page 168). Larger creatures take no damage from caustic damage that is reduced to zero, but may still feel pain when they come in contact with it.

Example: Clay's character is armed only with a torch when he is attacked by a wild dog. Against an average-sized human, the torch would do 1 point of lethal damage, but the dog is Size -1, so the damage increases to 1+. As with Taking the Average, the "+" indicates a 50% chance of an extra point of damage. In this case, one die is rolled and it comes up a success, so the dog takes two points of fire damage from the torch. Unfortunately, the next opponent Clay encounters is a Giant Bear, which is Size 2. The torch's damage is reduced to zero against the Weave-Touched bear. Burning the bear with a flame that size would probably startle and enrage it, but not injure it.

penalties (if any) are not factors when defending against area of effect attacks, but any cover your character has or armor he is wearing will grant him some protection.

Area of effect attacks made with fire, acid or some other caustic material (see sidebar on the previous page) ignore your character's Active Defense and Passive Defense. The only modifiers that factor into your Defense roll are armor and cover.

Note: While area of effect attacks are very powerful, only the weapon's damage rating is used for the attack roll. Your opponent's Skill rating is not a factor, except when it comes to placing or throwing a weapon into a particular location. This does not normally require a roll on her part, except when accuracy is important.

Defense Roll

The dice pool for your Defense roll is equal to your character's Defense rating, plus or minus any conditional modifiers. If your modified dice pool is 0 or less, your character is defenseless and any successful attacks will inflict full damage.

Roll your modified dice pool and compare the number of successes to the opponent's attack roll. If you roll more successes than your opponent, his attack misses. If you both roll the same number of successes, his attack narrowly misses or strikes your character without enough force to do damage. The blow may have been just a graze or was deflected by armor, for example.

If you roll fewer successes than your opponent, your character has been hit and suffers damage. Each extra success your opponent rolled inflicts one point of damage and may also have additional effects (See Damage, below).

Move

Movement does not require a dice roll to resolve. Your character simply moves the distance allowed by his Move rating for the type of movement he is making.

Difficult terrain, such as rubble, loose stones or thick undergrowth can impede movement. The GM may reduce your character's Move rating while navigating such obstacles. This penalty can range from a minor inconvenience (a -1 for uneven ground or unsteady gravel) to a major problem (-4 or even -5 for walls of thick thorny vegetation or a debris field made up of large jagged boulders). Creative use of Skills, magic and/or equipment can minimize such Move penalties. In the case where Move is reduced to less than zero, a character may have to spend multiple rounds to make any headway.

Move Rating

Your character's Move rating is a combination of her speed and vigor. Strong and agile characters are fast, while weak and clumsy characters are slow. Your character's Move rating is calculated as follows:

Move = Strength + Dexterity*

How far your character moves per combat turn is based on your character's Move rating and the type of movement made.

** Characters with the Athletics Skill may substitute that Skill rating for their Move rating.*

Wounds

Wound penalties reduce your character's effective Strength rating for the purposes of determining her movement and the amount of weight she can carry (See Encumbrance, below). For example, a character with Move 5 and Strength 3 is currently at -2 Health, reducing his Move rating to 3 and his effective Strength rating to 1 for determining how much weight he can carry.

Encumbrance

Carrying too much weight can severely impede your character's movement. While it may be tempting to lug around all your character's possessions, there are limits. Carrying around more weight will either slow your character down or tire him out fairly

Move	Combat (turn)	Swimming (turn)	Climbing (turn)	Horizontal Jump*	Vertical Jump*
1	5 ft.	2.5 ft.	2.5 ft.	2.5 ft.	1 ft.
2	10 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft.	2 ft.
3	15 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft.	3 ft.
4	20 ft.	10 ft.	10 ft.	10 ft.	4 ft.
5	25 ft.	10 ft.	10 ft.	10 ft.	5 ft.
6	30 ft.	15 ft.	15 ft.	15 ft.	6 ft.
7	35 ft.	15 ft.	15 ft.	15 ft.	7 ft.
8	40 ft.	20 ft.	20 ft.	20 ft.	8 ft.
9	45 ft.	20 ft.	20 ft.	20 ft.	9 ft.
10	50 ft.	25 ft.	25 ft.	25 ft.	10 ft.

**If your character does not have a running start, his jumping distance is halved.*

quickly. Both cases can be potentially fatal in the After, where dangerous predators lurk around every corner and one never knows when it will be necessary to make an expeditious retreat.

The amount of weight your character can carry without penalty is based upon his Strength rating.

Strength	Light Load	Medium Load	Heavy Load
1	0-10 lbs.	10-25 lbs.	25-50 lbs.
2	0-25 lbs.	25-50 lbs.	50-100 lbs.
3	0-50 lbs.	50-100 lbs.	100-250 lbs.
4	0-100 lbs.	100-250 lbs.	250-500 lbs.
5	0-250 lbs.	250-500 lbs.	500-750 lbs.

The total weight your character is carrying determines his encumbrance category and the associated penalty (if any).

■ **Light Load:** Your character moves and performs actions without penalty.

■ **Medium Load:** Your character is encumbered and suffers a -1 penalty to his Dexterity and Move ratings.

■ **Heavy Load:** Your character is heavily encumbered and suffers a -2 penalty to his Dexterity and Move ratings.

■ **Maximum Load:** Your character can attempt to carry up to double his Heavy Load weight, but he suffers a -4 penalty to his Dexterity and Move ratings. If this reduces his Move rating to 0 or less, he can pick up the load but not carry it. Each turn your character carries a maximum load he must exert himself (see below).

■ **Exerting:** If your character is encumbered, he may exert himself — and suffer a nonlethal wound — to move and act normally for a single combat turn, or one hour of game time if outside of combat.

Damage

There are three types of damage: lethal, non-lethal and Burn. Most damage is lethal, which means that you will die if you take enough of this type of damage. Nonlethal damage, on the other hand, will only make you fall unconscious if you take enough of it. Massive amounts of nonlethal damage can become lethal, however, so it is possible to die if you take enough damage. Burn damage is taken by spell casters when they exert themselves magically.

Lethal: Cutting, slashing, stabbing, burning and other major trauma that is highly damaging and will quickly kill someone. Most weapons do lethal damage.

Nonlethal: Bruising, fatigue, illness, shock and other such minor traumas that are not immediately life-threatening. Only a few weapons do non-lethal damage — it is often caused by environmental conditions.

Burn: The strain, exhaustion and pain suffered from spell casting is not immediately life-threatening and is quickly recovered with rest. Only spell casters and creators of magic items and magic potions take Burn because of the mental exertion caused by untangling the Weave after the Night of Fire.

Effects of Damage

Stunned: If your character takes more damage in one blow than his Stun rating, he is stunned and loses his next action. However, he may still perform reflexive actions and defend himself normally.

Knocked Out: If your character takes more damage in one blow than double his Stun rating, he is knocked out for one minute per point of damage in excess of his doubled Stun rating. He is defenseless and helpless during this time.

Knockback: If your character takes more damage in one blow than his Strength rating, he is knocked backward 5 ft. per point of damage in excess of his Strength rating. He may take additional damage depending on what is behind him.

Knockdown: If your character takes more damage in one blow than double his Strength rating, he is knocked down in addition to being knocked back. He must stand on his next action.

Continuous Damage: Some attacks will continue to inflict damage over time. Both fire and poison damage, for example,



often inflict damage each combat turn until the fire is put out or the poison wears off. Starvation or exposure to the elements will inflict damage over a longer period of time.

Killing Blow: Helpless, unconscious or dying characters could potentially be dispatched with a single killing blow. The attacker ignores the victim's Defense, inflicting damage with every success rolled on his attack roll.

Health

Your character's Health rating represents how much damage she can take before falling unconscious, suffering wound penalties and dying. When your character's Health falls below 0, she suffers penalty dice equal to her negative Health rating to all actions — if she remains conscious at all.

There are three types of damage: lethal, nonlethal and Burn damage. As their names imply, they represent different kinds of wounds and have different effects on characters.

Lethal damage represents wounds that are immediately life threatening, such as broken bones, lacerations, punctures, etc. If your character's Health reaches 0 because of lethal wounds, she is disabled and is only capable of taking limited action. If her Health falls below 0, she falls unconscious and begins to die. If her Health reaches -5 due to lethal wounds, she dies.

Nonlethal damage represents mundane non life-threatening wounds, such as bruises, fatigue, shock, etc. If your character's Health reaches 0 because of nonlethal wounds, she is exhausted and is only capable of taking limited action. If her Heath falls below 0, she falls unconscious. If her Health reaches -5, any additional damage converts her nonlethal damage to lethal damage on a point-for-point basis.

Burn is equal to the number of failures a character rolls on the Magic skill, Craft Magic Item skill or Create Magic Potion skill when attempting to cast a spell or make a magical item or potion. Burn damage is both mentally and physically draining, causing discomfort and fatigue. Although not immediately life threatening, it is still deducted from the caster's Health. If your character's Health reaches 0 because of Burn damage, she is exhausted, and is only capable of taking limited action. If her Heath falls below 0, she falls unconscious. If her Health reaches -5, any additional damage converts her Burn damage to lethal damage on a point-for-point basis.

Whenever a character takes damage, lethal damage is subtracted first from her Health, nonlethal damage is subtracted second, and Burn damage is subtracted third. The remaining Health total is used to determine if the character falls unconscious or suffers any wound penalties.

For example, a character with a base Health of 4 suffers two lethal and two nonlethal wounds, making her current Health 0. She is badly beaten and exhausted, but still on her feet. Unfortunately, she suffers two more lethal wounds, making her current Health -2. Instead of falling unconscious and dying, however, she is only unconscious because it is the two nonlethal wounds that reduced her Health to -2. Without them, she'd have a current Health of 0 and be merely disabled. If she suffers any more lethal damage, she will start dying.

States of Being

Exhausted: If your character takes enough nonlethal or Burn damage to reduce his Health to 0, he is exhausted and only capable of taking limited action. Instead of attacking, defending and moving all in the same combat turn, he may only perform one of these actions each turn. If he wishes, he may exert himself and perform all three actions normally, but suffers a nonlethal wound immediately afterward, causing him to fall unconscious.

Disabled: If your character takes enough lethal damage to reduce his Health to 0, he is disabled and only capable of taking limited action. Instead of attacking, defending and moving all in the same combat turn, he may perform only one of these actions each turn. If he wishes, he may exert himself and perform all three actions normally, but suffers



a lethal wound immediately afterward, causing him to fall unconscious and begin dying.

Unconscious: If your character takes enough nonlethal or Burn damage to reduce his Health below 0, then he falls unconscious. He will remain unconscious for one minute per point of damage below 0. So, if your character takes three points of damage, reducing his Health to -1, he will regain consciousness in one minute and be exhausted (see above).

Dying: If your character takes enough lethal damage to reduce his Health below 0, he falls unconscious and begins dying. He will continue to take one lethal wound per turn until he receives medical attention or stabilizes on his own (see below).

Dead: If your character takes enough lethal damage to reduce his Health to -5, he is dead, but may be resuscitated if he receives immediate medical attention.

Remaining Conscious: If your character takes enough damage to knock him unconscious, he may try to remain conscious through sheer willpower. Make a reflexive Willpower roll with a difficulty rating of 2. Your character suffers a penalty to his Willpower roll equal to his negative Health rating.

If you roll fewer than two successes, your character falls unconscious as normal. If you roll two or more two successes, your character remains conscious but is considered exhausted (or disabled if suffering from lethal wounds) and suffers a penalty to all actions equal to his negative Health rating. If he takes any additional damage, he must make another roll to remain conscious using the new penalty.

Example: *Jason's character takes three lethal wounds, reducing his Health to -3. Jason wants his character to try to remain conscious, but his character's Willpower pool is 4 giving him a modified dice pool of 1. His character automatically falls unconscious because he cannot possibly roll two successes with one die.*

Stabilizing: If your character is dying, he may attempt to stabilize himself each combat turn. Make a reflexive Body roll with a difficulty rating of 2. Your character suffers a penalty to his Body roll equal to his negative Health rating.

If you roll fewer than two successes, your character continues to die as above, but may attempt to stabilize again next combat turn using the new penalty. If you roll two or more successes, your character stabilizes and does not lose any additional Health. When he wakes up, he is considered disabled and suffers a penalty to all actions equal to his negative Health rating.

Example: *Jason's character has been reduced to Health -3 and is dying. On his turn, he makes a stabilization roll. His character's Body pool is 6 and he suffers three penalty dice on the roll, so his final dice pool to stabilize is three. He rolls the dice and scores two successes. His character stabilizes before he loses any more Health, but he is still unconscious and will be disabled when he wakes up.*

Note: A skilled healer may make attempt to stabilize a dying character. Make a Medicine roll with a difficulty rating of 2. The healer attempting to stabilize the dying character suffers a penalty equal to the injured character's negative Health rating. If he rolls two or more successes, the dying character is stabilized as normal. If he rolls fewer than two successes, the dying character is not stabilized, but he may try again next turn.

Healing

It's a dangerous world in the After, and characters are bound to get hurt. They might eat something poisonous, run afoul of a Weave-Touched creature or have a fight with another survivor. Characters lead dangerous and exciting lives, and that means they are going to need medical attention from time to time if they want to live to tell the tale.

First Aid

First aid can literally be a lifesaver. When properly administered, first aid can reduce the severity of an injury — or even bring someone back from the brink of death.

The most life-threatening aspect of a wound is the shock and trauma that go along with it. Treating an injured person for this can actually reduce the severity of his wound.

Make a Medicine roll to treat a wounded character. Each rolled success heals one point of nonlethal damage, or converts a point of lethal damage into nonlethal. Nonlethal damage is always healed before lethal, representing easing the shock and trauma of the wounded person. Burn damage cannot be treated with first aid.

First aid takes one minute to perform and must be administered within one hour after injury to have any benefit. After the hour is up, the damage becomes permanent and the wound must heal naturally (see below). First aid may be administered each time a character is wounded, but it cannot heal more than the most recent damage.

Example: *Tess' character is in bad shape. She suffered eight points of lethal damage, reducing her Health to -3. Heather's character performs first aid on her. Heather makes a Medicine roll and scores three successes. The first success converts a point of lethal damage into nonlethal, and the second success heals the nonlethal wound completely. The remaining success converts another point of lethal damage into nonlethal, leaving Tess' character with six points of lethal damage and one point of nonlethal. She's still badly hurt, but better off than she was before.*

Healing Help

Healing takes time, but it can be aided with a healer's attention. Normally, nonlethal damage heals at the rate of one point per

day, and lethal damage heals at the rate of one point per week. Under the care of a skilled healer, a character heals much faster. The number of successes rolled by the character treating the patient decreases the amount of time it takes to heal a wound. For example, a character with one lethal and two nonlethal wounds receives the attention of a skilled healer. The healer looking after him rolls three successes, meaning that he will heal three times faster. Therefore, the two nonlethal wounds will heal the first day and the lethal wound two days later. Only time can heal Burn damage, however, at a rate of one point per 30 minutes.

Trying Again

If a character wishes to treat an injured person again, hoping to get a better result, she may do so. But each successive attempt imposes a cumulative -2 penalty on the Medicine roll. The new result, for better or for worse, replaces the previous result.

Magical Healing

Only two magical traditions are capable of healing: Animism and Necromancy. Both require something in return — a sacrifice to the Spirit World in the case of Listeners, and a source of life energy to drain in the case of Necromancers. Characters who seek out their services for healing should be prepared to pay the cost. Magical healing is rare in *Desolation*, and like any magic in the After, it can go awry.

Environment

Environmental damage comes in many forms. Aftershocks from the Night of Fire are common. The weather is unpredictable and dangerous. Your character could have an accident, contract an illness or suffer from exposure to the elements. Depending on the nature of the situation, environmental damage can be either lethal or nonlethal.

Many of the conditions listed below have durations of days, weeks or even months. Tracking the passage of time is difficult during the Long Winter, and immediately after it. Players and characters alike may have no idea how much time is passing in the game. Therefore, it is up to the GM to determine what constitutes a "day" while the sun and moon right themselves.

Deprivation

In the After, the world is desperately low on essentials. Food and water are often in short supply. Going without food or water for an extended period of time is bad for your health. The search for food and water forces many survivors to risk life and limb in the After.

Unlike other environmental sources of damage, your character's Body rating has little to do with how long he can go without food and water before he starts weakening. Instead, it factors into his Health rating that determines how long he can withstand deprivation before expiring.

Dehydration: Your character suffers a lethal wound each day he goes without water. He will continue to take lethal damage until he once again has a steady supply of water.

Starvation: Your character suffers one lethal wound each week he goes without food. He will continue to take lethal damage until he gets a steady supply of food.

Note: If your character goes without both food and water, he suffers damage. Also — as if effects of deprivation weren't bad enough — dehydrated or starving characters lack the energy to heal their wounds. All healing stops until the character regain regular access to food and water.

Disease

The death and destruction caused by the Night of Fire forced many survivors into small, but densely populated shelters during the Long Winter. Becoming infected by a disease or infecting others is a common risk in the After, made all the worse by the general lack of trained medical professionals and medicine. Animism is the only magical tradition capable of curing diseases.

Different diseases pose different problems. Whether battling the common cold or a more debilitating disease, a character is likely to take damage over time, and possibly suffer more serious effects if the malady is left untreated.

Most diseases and illnesses have an Infection rating, which represents the how hard it is to avoid contracting the disease or fight off the illness. Make a Body roll whenever your character is exposed to an illness (see Resistance, page 71) and compare the number of successes to the Infection rating.

If you roll at least as many successes as the disease's Infection rating, your character avoids contracting the disease; however, he may become infected later if he is exposed to it again.

If you roll fewer successes than the Infection rating, your character contracts the disease and suffers its effects. To recover from a disease, make an extended Body roll against its Infection rating. Typically, each roll represents one day of sickness; you will need to accumulate between five and 10 successes to fully recover from the disease. If being tended by a healer, she may substitute her Medicine rating for your character's Body roll.

Sample Diseases and Infections

Beggar's Bloat

Beggar's bloat is one of the most common illnesses encountered by survivors in the After since fields of agricultural crops were

completely destroyed in many parts of the world. It is not caused by starvation, but by deficient nutrition. Lack of fresh food, especially vegetables, will cause beggar's bloat.

Symptoms: The diseased character's skin turns gray; he becomes bloated and his eyes assume a heavy, lidded expression. He loses energy and is wracked with aches and pains: especially in his joints. His gums bleed, his breath is fetid and his teeth may fall out.

Infection: Beggar's bloat is not an infection, but will develop in a number of months equal to a character's Body rating after his last intake of fresh food. After that, the afflicted character will take one nonlethal wound per week until he once again has access to a regular supply of fresh food. In addition, the character is unable to heal wounds while suffering from beggar's bloat, and suffers a -1 penalty to all actions because of his low energy.

Recovery: Long-term medical attention will not cure beggar's bloat, nor is it an illness that can be fought off by a character's immune system. A character will recover normally once he starts eating fresh food again.

Scab Rot

Scab rot has become much more common in the After because of the population explosion of its carriers: scab rats. The disease causes its victims to develop pustules that soon turn into open sores. People and animals can be infected by scab rot when bitten by a scab rat. The diseased bite quickly spreads through the bloodstream into the rest of the body. It can only be passed on via bodily fluids.

Symptoms: At first, the infected character suffers from a high fever, aches and pains and vomiting. Later, pus-filled sores form on the character's body and begin oozing. Then the flesh around the sores becomes black and necrotic. By this point, the character is usually too sick to perform normal activities.

Infection rating: 2 via the bite of a scab rat.

An infected character usually feels fine for a few days. After the first week, the character takes a lethal wound per day until she recovers or succumbs to the disease. Characters infected with scab rot suffer a -1 penalty to all actions due to the painful sores.

Recovery: 2 (10 successes are required to recover from the disease). Each Body roll represents one day of illness, starting from the day scab rot is contracted.

Spore Kiss

Corpse fungi can infect the living and recently dead by invading its victims' lungs. It is especially deadly, killing anyone who contracts it within days.

Symptoms: A persistent bloody cough, followed by fatigue, are the most noticeable symptoms of anyone who has been spore kissed. If the victim succumbs to the infection, slime molds will appear on their corpse within hours, creating a corpse fungi intent on spreading its spores. See the corpse fungi entry in the Bestiary.

Infection rating: 3 via corpse fungi.

Recovery: 4 (four successes are required to recover from the disease). Each Body roll represents one day of illness, starting from the day spore kiss is contracted. Spore kiss will kill its host in a number of days equal to his or her Body attribute. Removing the fungal infection requires magical healing (Base Difficulty 3) or intense healing (difficulty 6).

Swamp Fever

Swamp fever is a vector-borne disease caused by parasites. It is often spread by mosquitoes, and so is more common in swampy environments.

Symptoms: Symptoms include shortness of breath, fever, chills, nausea and feeling lightheaded. Symptoms normally appear about a week after infection. If not treated, swamp fever can lead to coma and death.

Infection rating: 1 (3 if in a swamp, jungle or other area thick with mosquitoes). The parasite that causes swamp fever can only be spread by being bitten by mosquitoes or other blood-sucking creatures.

An infected character may suddenly began to feel chills and feverish. The fever and chills often disappear for a few days, only to return. As the disease progresses, he may experience joint pain, vomiting and convulsions. Death can occur within a week. Characters infected with swamp fever suffer a -2 penalty to all actions because of illness.

Recovery: 2 (10 successes are required to recover from the disease). Each Body roll represents one day of illness, starting from the day swamp fever is contracted. Long-term attention from a healer can be helpful in treating swamp fever if certain tree barks are boiled into medicinal potions — which reduces Recovery to 1.

Drowning and Suffocation

Under normal circumstances, your character can hold his breath for one minute per point of Body rating. In combat, your character holds his breath for one turn per success on a reflexive body roll.

After this time passes, your character will be forced to take a breath and suffer the effects of whatever he breathes in. If he inhales water or thick smoke, for example, he will receive one nonlethal wound per turn until he is able to breathe normally. Your character cannot hold his breath again until he has had a chance to catch his breath.

Lightning

Characters run the risk of getting electrocuted from the frequent natural lightning strikes, including those called down by Primalists and some magic items.

If struck by lightning, no attack roll is made. Your character automatically takes damage based on the intensity of the shock. If an opponent attacks your character with a lightning-enhanced weapon, a touch attack is made (See Touch Attack, above). Your character gets to roll his Active Defense rating against the attack, but loses any armor bonuses from metal or other conducting materials.

The amount of damage done by a shock depends on the power of the electrical charge. Note that lightning is caustic damage (see sidebar on page 182) and will have a reduced effect against larger creatures.

Shock	Damage
Minor (a strong shock)	1 L
Major (an indirect lightning strike)	2 L
Severe (some magical effects)	3 L
Deadly (a direct lightning strike)	4 L

Exposure

Extremely hot and cold conditions can be detrimental to your character's health. Prolonged exposure can even be fatal. Exposure to extreme temperatures does nonlethal damage every hour that you character is without shelter. The amount of damage your character takes is determined by how extreme the conditions are. See the table below for damage ratings.

Temperature (Fahrenheit)	Damage
120 degrees plus	4 N
110 – 120 degrees	3 N
100 – 110 degrees	2 N
90 – 100 degrees	1 N
50 – 90 degrees	0
40 – 50 degrees	1 N
30 – 40 degrees	2 N
0 – 30 degrees	3 N
Below 0 degrees	4 N

Having adequate protection, such as warm furs, will keep your character from suffering from exposure. However, the GM will determine the level to which your character can afford protection. Even the thickest furs won't protect her long when the temperature is ridiculously cold. Also, weather conditions such as rain, wind or high altitude may intensify the damaging effects of exposure.

Falling

To survive in the After, characters need to stay on their toes at all times. In particular, they need to watch their handholds and footing or they may slip and fall. Tremors from aftershocks don't help. Whether they fall 10 ft. off a ladder or hundreds of feet off a cliff, landing is likely to hurt the character.

Most falling damage is nonlethal, unless your character lands on something sharp and pointed, such as jagged rocks. Your character takes one nonlethal wound per 10 ft. he falls (rounded up).

Terminal velocity: Your character reaches terminal velocity once he falls 100 ft. and will take no additional damage for falling farther. Once he's reached terminal velocity, however, falling damage is lethal.

Breaking a fall: If your character has the Acrobatics Skill, he may try to break his fall by grabbing objects to slow down, or by trying to land in a softer spot. The difficulty rating to break a fall is 2, but the GM may adjust it up or down based on circumstances. Make an Acrobatics roll to reduce your character's falling distance. For each success in excess of the difficulty, the character reduces his effective falling distance by 10 ft.

Hard and soft landings: If your character happens to land in a soft spot, such as water or a snow bank, the GM may reduce the amount of damage for the fall, depending on how soft the landing area is. Conversely, if your character lands on a particularly hard surface, such as jagged rocks, the GM may increase the amount of damage she takes or convert it to lethal instead of nonlethal damage.

Fatigue

A character can do without rest or sleep for a short time, but he will eventually suffer ill effects. Your character suffers one nonlethal wound for each day he goes without sleep.

Your character can perform a strenuous activity, such as jogging or heavy manual labor, for a number of hours equal to his Body rating. After this limit, your character suffers a nonlethal wound for each additional increment of time based on his Body rating. The fatigue remains until the character rests or sleeps for eight hours, plus the number of wounds she has suffered.

Fire

Fire is crucial to survival, but it can also be one of the most dangerous hazards faced in the After. Fire consumes nearly everything it touches, and can be an extremely potent weapon. Care should be taken, however, as a fire can easily get out of control and turn on the person who set it.

If burned, your character automatically takes damage based on the intensity of the fire. If an opponent is attacking your character with a flaming weapon, such as swinging a torch, then a touch attack is made (See Touch Attack, above). Your character gets to roll his Active Defense rating against the attack, including armor bonuses, to avoid damage.

In general, the hotter the fire, the more damage it does. Note that fire is caustic damage (see sidebar on page 182) and will have a reduced affect against larger creatures.

Fire Intensity	Damage
Molten rock or metal	4 L
Magical fire (third-degree burn)	3 L
Campfire (second-degree burn)	2 L
Torch (first-degree burn)	1 L

If your character is exposed to flame for more than a turn, anything combustible he is wearing catches fire and he will continue to take damage even if he escapes from the original blaze. Rolling on the ground or jumping into water will normally extinguish a fire and prevent your character from continuing to take damage.

If there is no water available, you must make a Dexterity roll with a difficulty equal to the fire's damage rating to extinguish the fire by rolling on the ground.

If your successes equal or exceed the fire's damage rating, your character puts the fire out and will not continue to take damage. If you roll fewer successes than the damage rating, your character continues to take damage, but may make another attempt to put out the fire on his next turn.

Natural Hazards

Even after surviving the Night of Fire and Long Winter, characters must still navigate a deadly and unpredictable world. The forces of nature and lingering effects from the Apocalypse only add to the dangerous and hostile environment. Aftershocks, extreme weather conditions and shifting landscapes are not uncommon.

To determine how much damage a character suffers from various catastrophes, refer to the chart at right. Players must take an extended action to see if their characters can escape certain death, and how long it will take them. Successes above the required difficulty help speed the character's progress. If fewer successes are rolled than the Difficulty, they are subtracted from the accumulated successes needed to escape danger. Extended Action rolls are explained in detail on page 165.

Players make the appropriate roll listed in the table below. An appropriate Skill roll can be used in place of the Attribute listed. If the number of successes equals the Difficulty, no damage is taken — but no progress is made toward escaping danger and the player must roll again.

If the number of successes exceeds the Difficulty, excess successes are counted toward the total successes needed. No damage is taken, but the player must roll again if the excess successes do not meet the number of total successes needed.

If the number of successes does not equal or exceed the Difficulty, characters take the damage listed, subtract any successes from the total successes needed and roll again. This continues until the character has met or exceeded the total successes needed, or has lost consciousness.

As with any Skill or Attribute check, circumstances will add or subtract from the Difficulty, at the GM's discretion.

Event	Difficulty	Total Successes Needed	Roll*	Dmg.
Acid Rain	1	5	Body to endure effects	1N
Avalanche	4	6	Strength to outrun	1N
Burn Storm	3	6	Body to resist	1N
Earthquake	2	5	Dexterity to avoid crevices	1N
Flood	3	6	Body to avoid drowning	1N**
Hurricane/ Monsoon	4	7	Strength to hold on	1N
Mud Slide	3	7	Strength to swim through	1N
Tidal Wave	4	7	Body to avoid drowning	1N**
Tornado	3	6	Strength to hold on	1N
Volcanoes	3	6	Strength to outrun lava and flying debris	1L

** Substitute appropriate Skill check when applicable*
*** Also see drowning rules, page 188*

Poisons and Toxins

Poisons, toxins and drugs can all be detrimental to your character's mental and physical well-being. They can also have a variety of different side effects, which usually translate into bonus or penalty dice on certain actions. Some poisons and toxins affect your character only once, while others affect her repeatedly over a period of time.

There are several different methods for ingesting a drug or poison. Depending on the specific toxin, your character may have to inhale it, ingest it, inject it or just touch it to

suffer its effects. Animists can poison others with magic (or detoxify them).

There is little defense against ingesting or inhaling a drug or poison. Your character either has to detect the poison before eating it, or hold her breath to avoid inhaling it.

In the case of an injection, your character defends herself normally. If the poisoned weapon does damage to your character, she also has to resist the effects of the poison.

If an opponent is merely trying to touch your character with a poison, such as a cobra spitting venom, then a touch attack is made (See Touch Attack, above). Your character gets to roll her Active Defense rating against the attack (including armor bonuses) to avoid skin contact with the poison.

If the poison's source is a magical spell, your character must use his Body Rating to defend against its Spell Potency. Spell Potency is calculated by adding the Base Difficulty and the caster's Primary Attribute, then Taking the Average and adding any extra successes.

Most drugs, poisons and toxins have a Potency rating, which represents the difficulty of resisting the effects of the substance. A magical poison's potency is determined by the Spell Potency, as per above. Make a Body roll whenever your character is poisoned (see Resistance, page 71), and compare the number of successes to the Potency rating.

If you roll at least as many successes as the Potency rating, your character resists the effects of the poison. However, he may not be so lucky if he gets another dose.

If you roll fewer successes than the Potency rating, your character suffers from the effects of the poison. If the poison inflicts damage, the difference between the number of successes you rolled and the Potency rating is the amount of damage your character takes.

If the poison does damage over time, the Potency rating simply determines if the poison takes effect. The poison will then do damage over time until your character accumulated enough successes on an extended Body roll to get the poison out of your system. Typically, each roll represents one hour. You will need to accumulate between five and 10 successes to fully clean the poison from your system. If being tended by a healer, she may substitute her Medicine rating for your character's Body roll.

Note: Poison is considered caustic damage (see sidebar on page 182) and will have a reduced effect against larger creatures.

Poison Severity	Damage
Deadly poison	4L
Dangerous poison	3L
Strong poison	2L
Weak poison	1L

Sample Drugs

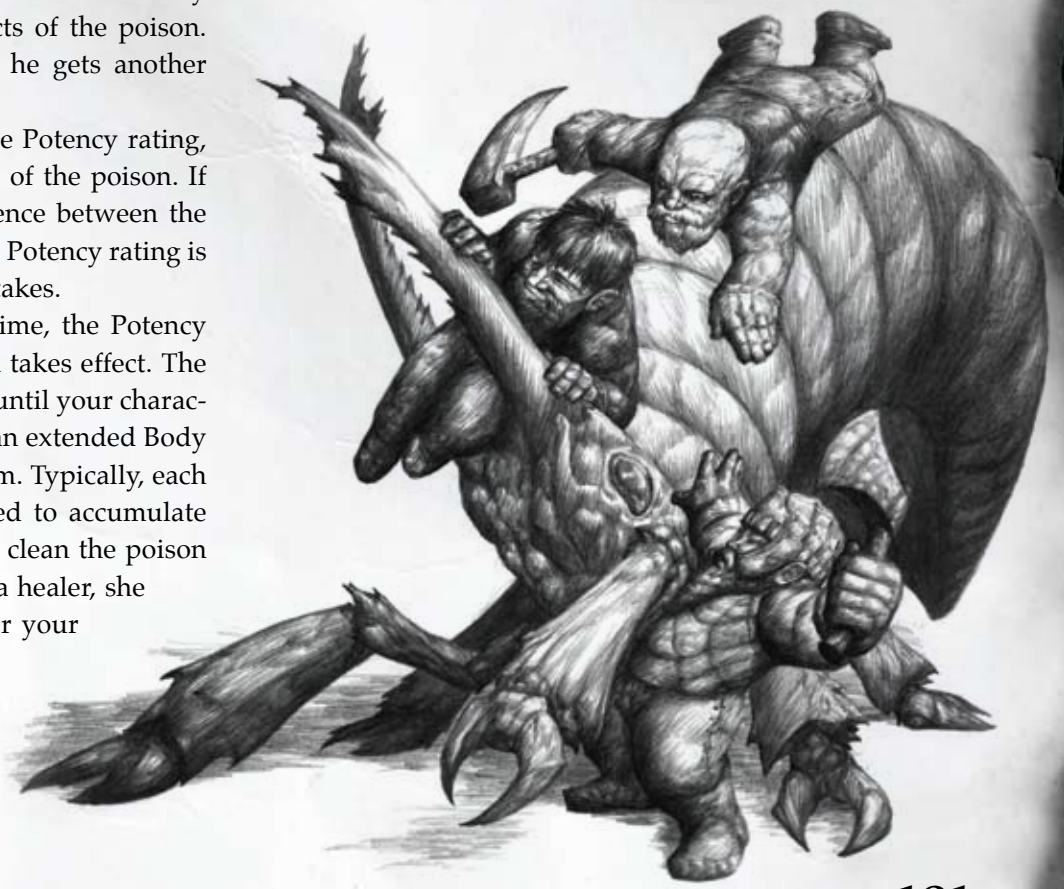
Alcohol

Your character can safely consume as many alcoholic drinks per hour as his Body rating. For each additional drink beyond that, he suffers a -1 penalty to all actions. However, alcohol can temporarily reduce the effects of pain and cold. Drinking alcohol increases your character's tolerance to cold for the remainder of the hour.

The effects of alcohol slowly fade at the rate of one penalty die per hour, until your character is completely sober again. However, if your character has more drinks than twice his Body rating, he will become violently ill and suffer a nonlethal wound. If he continues to drink beyond that, the GM may impose even harsher penalties.

Splint Weed

Splint weed is a hallucinogen originally used by Listeners



to commune with Ghar Dahl. It can be taken in a variety of ways, but whether it ingested or inhaled, it disorients the drugged character and may make him act erratically and possibly see things that aren't there. Depending on the strength of the Splint weed, the character will suffer a -1 to -4 penalty to all actions. However, sometimes the character may experience tremendous insights or visions of the future. The effects normally last for eight hours minus the character's Body rating.

Sample Poisons

Grave Tea

Made from a mysterious combination of herbs and roots from Kar'Danan, this poison is effective even in small doses. Typically purchased in powder form, it is mixed with beverages or applied during food preparation. Its strong, bitter taste can be a giveaway to those expecting assassination. Those suffering from its effects are often mistaken for choking victims as their faces blacken and throats close.

Potency: 3L

Latrine Duty

This clear liquid has been used to taint water supplies in Verelanar for years. This poison can cause the imbiber to come down with a violent case of diarrhea. Those affected by latrine duty do not suffer damage.

Potency: 3N

Weylinth's Kiss

Made from sand snake's venom, this poison is popular despite its unpredictable nature. Half of the population seems to have a natural immunity to the venom, but those who can be affected often suffer a sudden, painless death. Those who are poisoned go very pale right before death, but otherwise resemble someone who has died from natural causes.

Potency: 5L

Venom

There are a wide variety of natural venomous creatures, such as snakes, spiders and scorpions. However, the breaking of the Weave during the Night of Fire caused some new poisonous creatures to awaken, and some Broken creatures to become venomous.

The amount of damage done by a venomous creature is not necessarily determined by its size. Even very tiny creatures can be deadly to humans if their venom is potent enough. However, most venom has potency between 1L and 5L. In addition, some venom can inflict additional side effects, such as paralysis, that will affect the character for a short time.

Attacking Objects

Sometimes a character will want to break an object, such as smashing in a door or breaking a lock. Objects take damage much like people do, but the amount of damage they can take depends on the size of the object and its durability. A small object made of metal will be harder to break than a large one made of glass.

The type of material the item is made out of determines its Defense rating. In this case, the Defense rating of the item represents how resistant it is to damage. Attacking an object is subject to the same modifiers for size and range as attacking an opponent. All successes rolled in excess of the object's Defense rating damage the item.

Material	Defense
Glass	2
Wood	4
Stone	6
Metal	8

Structure

The amount of damage that an item can take depends upon the item's size and quality of construction. To calculate an object's Structure, add the Size modifier below to the object's Defense rating. However, the Size modifier cannot drop an object's base Structure below zero. An object will break as soon as its Structure drops below zero. If its Structure reaches -5, it is destroyed and can never be repaired.

Size	Structure
+8	+8
+4	+4
+2	+2
+1	+1
0	0
-1	-1
-2	-2
-4	-4
-8	-8

Attacking a Handheld Object

When attacking an item held in an opponent's hand, the character must make a called shot to hit the object, using the base Defense of the person holding it or the object's Defense (whichever is greater). Any successes in excess of Defense do damage as normal. See called shot on page 177 for more information.

Example of Play

Jon, Tess and Rick have been playing in Mike's *Desolation* campaign for several weeks, and think they may have finally found the remnants of a library for which they've been searching. Jon is playing Terril, a dwarven warrior. Tess is playing a human Primalist named Chambrai who has an eagle for her totem, and Rick is playing a rover named Hin Mah.

Mike/GM: It appears the old man wasn't lying when he gave you directions to the Library of Galbraith. As you crest a hill and look eastward, you see the remains of what used to be a large building made of white marble. A broken stone wall circles it. Two statues stood guard at the front gate. One is broken but still standing. All that remains of the other is a set of knees.

Tess/Chambrai: Does it match the descriptions I've heard? Would the statues have stood about 30 ft. tall, each holding a brass torch in one hand and a book in the other?

Mike/GM: From this distance you can tell that the statues probably stood about that tall. The statue that still stands is holding a book, but you don't see any brass torches.

Rick/Hin Mah: I have farsight. Can I try to scan the rubble for those torches?

Mike has determined that the brass torches aren't easily seen among the large pieces of stone, especially now that time has taken its toll and the brass has blackened and tarnished. He assigns the Perception check a Tough difficulty (three successes needed), but keeps that to himself.

Mike/GM: Sure, go ahead and make a Perception check.

Jon/Terril: Can I try, too?

Mike/GM: Yes. But you are at a two dice penalty because of the distance. The same goes for Chambrai.

Hin Mah has a Perception of 5. Rick spends a Style point to raise it to 6 and Take the Average, giving him three successes. Chambrai has a Perception of 5 as well, but because of the distance penalty, Tess only rolls three dice. She gets one success. Terril has a Perception of 4. After the penalty, Jon rolls two dice and gets two successes.

Mike/GM: The three of you squint at rubble, trying to pick out anything of interest in its midst. Hin Mah manages to catch a glimpse of something half buried off to the side of the gates — it looks like it is an oversized metal torch that's seen better days.

Rick/Hin Mah: I see the torch. This is the place!

Jon/Terril: Finally. Let's get down there before it's too dark for you guys to see. There's probably something down there that'll need killing and I'm tired of doing it all by myself.

Tess/Chambrai: Sounds like a plan.

Rick/Hin Mah: I am going to move away from these two and shadow them.

Mike/GM: OK … give me a Stealth roll.

Hin Mah has a Stealth rating of 8. Rather than Take the Average, he decides to roll, but only gets one success.

Rick/Hin Mah: Why don't I ever just Take the Average?

Mike/GM: Hin Mah darts off and tries to vanish among the tall grass. However, the pack he's wearing is still clearly visible. (*To Rick*) The grass shields your every move.

Mike/GM: You approach the ruins as the sun begins to set at your back. You find yourself about 50 ft. from the front gate.

Jon/Terril: Is the gate open or closed?

Mike/GM: The gate has collapsed. It looks like it once stood about 15 ft. high and probably held two wooden doors.

Rick/Hin Mah: I creep closer, keeping an eye out for people hiding in the rubble.

Mike/GM: How close to the wall do you want to go?

Rick/Hin Mah: All the way … I'm sure I can handle whatever might be lurking.

Mike tosses Rick a Style point because Hin Mah has the Reckless flaw.

Mike/GM: Rick, make a Perception check.

Rick decides to take the average of his Perception of 5. Because it's an odd number, he rolls one die and gets a success to add to his average of 2+. He has three successes — not enough for him to spot the scab rat coming at him.

Mike/GM: We're in combat, folks. Everyone roll Initiative.

Mike rolls Initiative for the scab rats as a group and gets two successes. Terril has an Initiative of 5, which means Jon rolls five dice. He gets three successes. Hin Mah has an Initiative of 7. Rick takes the average and only gets three successes after rolling one die. Chambrai has an Initiative of 6. Tess rolls very poorly and gets only one success.

Mike/GM: Something has surprised Hin Mah, so he loses his attack this round. Normally he would go first, then Terril, then the creatures, then Chambrai.

Rick/Hin Mah: Oh, come on! I'm never Taking the Average again — I could've rolled more successes!

Mike/GM: Terril, what do you do?

Jon/Terril: I want to get over there as quick as I can.

Mike/GM: A giant rat leaps out of some rocks and lunges at Hin Mah, its mangy body covered with open sores and seeping pustules. Its frothing mouth is filled with yellowed teeth, its eyes encrusted with dried blood and mucus. Closely behind it

are three more that circle Terril cautiously. One of them makes a probing attack, but the other two simply watch.

Mike/GM: Hin Mah is surprised, but can still defend. Defend against three successes. It tries to bite your neck.

Rick/Hin Mah: My Defense is 7, so I can just take the average and avoid the damage, right? I'll just do that.

Mike/GM: You managed to pull back just as its jaws snap shut, its thick saliva spattering against your skin. (*To Jon*) One is trying to bite your leg — defend against four successes.

Jon/Terril: I'll Take the Average of my Defense, which is 9.

Mike/GM: You manage to leap over the snout of the scab rat at the last instant. (*To Tess*) What does Chambrai do?

Tess/Chambrai: I want to cast a spell at one of the rats attacking Terril.

Mike/GM: What kind of spell?

Tess/Chambrai: I want to hurt them … can I create some magical talons to tear into one of those rats from here?

Mike/GM: That seems reasonable enough, since talons are a pretty important part of your eagle totem.

Causing damage to a single target is typically a spell with an average difficulty. However, Chambrai is about 50 ft. away, so Mike is going to add an additional level of difficulty.

Mike/GM: I am going add a level of difficulty to the spell since you are attacking something 50 ft. away. This is a Tough spell and will require three successes.

Though she only needs three successes, Tess decides to roll all her dice.

Tess/Chambrai: I will roll all of them. All nine!

Jon/Terril: What are you do … ?!

Without waiting for the others to change her mind, she rolls her dice and manages to get five successes.

Rick/Hin Mah: Woo hoo!

Mike/GM: You have four failures, which translates to three points of Burn after your Burn Reduction Talent. But you have two extra successes. What do you want to do with those?

Tess/Chambrai: I am going to pour those into the spell, increasing the damage.

Mike/GM: So your spell does two points for the Base Difficulty, plus two points for the increased damage, plus your Intelligence of …?

Tess/Chambrai: 4.

Mike/GM: … which is a total of eight points of damage.

Mike quickly checks the Health of a scab rat and sees that it is 4. He also knows that the average Defense of the rat is 4+. He rolls a single die, hoping to add a success to the average Defense, but fails. The rat suffers four points of damage — enough to disable it.

Mike/GM: Summoning the power of the eagle, you form your hand into a claw and rake the air in front of you. A twin set of wounds are inflicted on the flank of a scab rat by a large ethereal talon. The magical talon sinks deep into the flesh of the vermin. It's badly wounded, but still a threat.

Tess/Chambrai: Take that!

Mike/GM: Chambrai also takes three points of Burn.

Tess/Chambrai: I'm down to 2 Health! I might need to tone down the next spell.

Mike/GM: Back to the top of Initiative. Rick, what does Hin Mah do?

Rick/Hin Mah: I draw my dagger and stab the rat that's in my face! Can I do both of those in one round?

Mike/GM: Not unless you have the Quick Draw Talent.

Rick/Hin Mah: Um … I probably would already have it drawn. I was sneaking into a very suspicious place.

Mike thinks about it for a second. Rick didn't say he was drawing his dagger earlier and just said that he thought it was still sheathed. Mike decides to let it slide and comes up with a compromise …

Mike/GM: For a Style point we'll say you had it handy.

Reluctantly, Rick tosses in a Style point.

Rick/Hin Mah: Like I was saying, I stab the scab rat with the dagger I had palmed so no one else could see it. I'll just Take the Average of my attack and get four successes.

Mike knows the rat's average Defense is 4+, so Hin Mah's attack will be ineffectual.

Mike/GM: Your dagger rakes along the side of the rat, slicing open a boil, but it doesn't cause the rat any real harm.

Rick/Hin Mah: Come on!

Mike/GM: Jon, what does Terril do?

Jon/Terril: I am going to ignore the other rats and try to kill that one Hin Mah just attacked.

Rick/Hin Mah: That's my kill!

Jon/Terril: Watch and learn! (*To Mike*) I want to make a Total Attack against the rat on Hin Mah.

Mike/GM: OK. Swing away. Remember that you are going to lose your Active Defense.

Jon/Terril: No sweat. TASTE THE FURY OF GREULK!

Terril has an attack rating of 12 with an axe and gains two additional dice to roll because of the Total Attack. He rolls and gets eight successes. Because Terril is the second person to attack the rat this round, its Defense drops by two points. This means that its average Defense drops by one point, from a 4+ to a 3+. The attack will inflict at least four points of damage to the rat, killing it.

Mike/GM: With a mighty swing of your axe, the rat is cleft in twain. A sickening smell fills the air as its entrails spill out.

Rick/Hin Mah: I want to make sure it doesn't get on my boots. I had to loot a lot of corpses before I found these.

Mike/GM: Make a Dexterity check vs. a difficulty of 2.

Rick/Hin Mah: Finally, something I can succeed at! I Take the Average of my Dexterity and get three successes.

Mike/GM: Well done. You dance out of the spreading blood as two rats attack Terril's back …

Nothing. No movement for what must have been an hour. If the ruins were occupied, whoever was in there was very quiet.

Gareth started to push himself up off the dirt, then froze. **He thought he saw something move**. The bright sun hurt his eyes, forcing him to blink. A breeze whipped gray dirt into a little dust devil that twirled in front of him. **His stomach rumbled,** but he'd become so used to the sound and the pangs that he barely noticed. He waited.

Still nothing. The scene was unchanged: one stone and mud building — maybe a church — that seemed to be more or less intact surrounded by the partially toppled walls of other buildings, all encircled by the ruins of a rock wall. The wall was still standing tall in places, but mostly lay in piles of stone.

He chalked the movement up to his imagination and rose to a crouched position, leaving the scant cover of the brush he had hid under. Still, he was reluctant to go in. ***Ruins weren't rare, but unoccupied ones were.***

Gareth scanned the horizon. The broken hills and ragged stone outcroppings reminded him of **Greison's rotten teeth** — brown and uneven. The portly tobacco farmer who had provided room and board in exchange for a half-week's work in the fields had always looked out for Gareth. He wasn't like an overprotective parent, but he was there if Gareth needed a few silvers or some advice. He had also thought it his duty to educate his tenant on the finer points of life: women, tobacco and ale.

"Boy," he would always begin as he launched into a favorite speech. The word would grumble from Greison's mouth around the pipe stem that always seemed to be clenched there. "If you wanna pick a good woman, you first gotta learn to pick a sweet leaf and a strong brew. **Sweet and strong and no headache when you're through, that's what you need."**

What I need, thought Gareth, is something to eat. He had a week's worth of food — dried venison he had traded some arrows to a huntsman to get. But he wanted to save it for when he really needed it. Maybe he could find something in the ruins to trade for food. He usually did. At the very least, **he could probably find some rats in the ruins to hunt**. They were about the only thing Gareth had ever taken down. He did get a lucky sling stone shot in on a duck once, but that was months ago.

What would my mother think if she could see me now, he wondered. She used to lay out his clothes for him every morning until the day he left, on his fifteenth birthday. Now he wore an ill-fitting **leather vest he had pulled from a corpse** and a legionnaire's helm he had found on a stake above a shallow grave. He wasn't proud of taking either of them, but **he did what he had to do.** That's why he had dug up that grave, hoping the body would have been buried with a sword. No such luck.

Gareth focused his thoughts back on the present. He hefted **the spear he had made from a broken dagger blade and a broomstick** and ran for what was left of the stone wall that circled the village. He put his back against it, trying to quiet his breathing and his racing heart so he could hear. *Nothing.* He peeked around the wall and saw a familiar site: corpses. But these were fresher than the skeletons of those who had died during the Night of Fire or the Long Winter.

He crept around the wall and over some rubble, keeping an eye out for trouble, but the ruins seemed completely quiet. As he approached the nearest corpse — a woman in ragged clothes — all he could hear were **the flies buzzing her body.** He reached down to turn her over, then stopped. Her skin, bloated and fetid, was covered with orange-brown fungi.

He covered his face with a bandana and backed away. He had heard of villages being ***wiped out by disease.*** He was suddenly very afraid that he might get what killed these people. Then something caught his eye, something that glinted.

He shaded his eyes. It looked like *a sword* lying near a pile of broken wooden beams, not far from the church. Not rusted or broken, but a whole sword from Before. He couldn't pass it up. Not wanting to be in the town longer than he needed to be, he ran to the sword and grabbed it. It was perfect — not a nick on the steel blade. In months of scavenging, he had never come across something so valuable. **Something moved behind him.**

The woman — the corpse he had touched — blocked his way. She stood there, obviously dead, staring at him with oozing eyes sockets. Her arm jerked up like a puppet controlled by a drunken marionette. Gareth swung the sword and ran for the church, the only building still in one piece. He looked over his shoulder and was horrified to see **dozens of corpses jerking up from the ground**. They were rising all around him. *There was no way out.* His path was blocked.

He stopped running and brandished the sword at the closest corpses. He knew the sword — his newfound treasure — couldn't save him. *Tears streamed down his cheeks.*

Chapter 9: Equipment

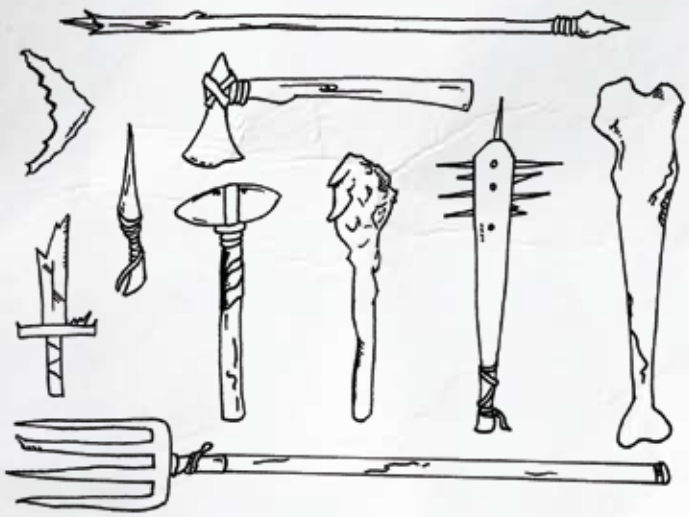
"The only thing separating man from beast is steel."

Acquiring equipment isn't like it was Before. Gone are the Empire's bazaars, with everything imaginable for sale. There are no trade caravans stopping in each community, no shops and very few craftsmen. Scavenging for equipment has replaced shopping for it, and fixing it yourself is often easier than finding someone qualified for the job. Makeshift weapons and make-do clothing are the norm. Well-made equipment is kept under wraps, so as not to tempt thieves. Many villagers in the After would rather turn a sword into a plowshare — even a finely crafted sword from Before.

Weapons

Just because there are few master smiths and fletchers around doesn't mean the world is weaponless. Finely crafted weapons can still be found in the rubble, though most scroungers are happy to find any blade intact. The ratings in the tables are for weapons from Before in good condition, but worn and improvised weapons are common in the After.

Condition: The shortage of smiths has led many to employ ingenuity when crafting weapons. For example, an axehead could be made from a scavenged steel plow, a hammered-down chunk of an old bronze statue, a large animal bone, a chipped stone or anything else that's sharp and can be affixed to a handle. Improvised weapons do less damage than normal weapons and are more likely to break. Rolling a botch while attacking with an improvised weapon breaks it. Likewise, glass weapons will break if a botch is rolled.



Even good-condition weapons can become worn. Worn weapons are chipped, unbalanced, dull, weak or otherwise not as good as they could be. Rolling a botch while attacking with a weapon in good condition will cause it to become worn. Firing and recovering an arrow will cause it to become worn. Scavenged weapons are often worn when discovered. Worn weapons are one botch away from becoming broken. However, broken weapons can still be deadly: A broken sword could be used as a dagger, for example.

Damage (Dmg): The number of bonus dice added to your attack roll when using the weapon. It also indicates the type of damage it inflicts: lethal (L) or nonlethal (N). Improvised weapons do one bonus die less than well-made weapons, unless otherwise stated in the weapon description.

Strength (Str): The minimum Strength rating needed to wield the weapon effectively. A character with a lower Strength rating suffers a –2 penalty to his or her attack roll for each point of Strength under the minimum. Using a two-handed weapon with one hand increases the minimum Strength required to wield the weapon by one point.

Range (Rng): The distance in feet that the weapon is effective before range penalties are incurred; each increment after the first imposes a -2 penalty to the attack roll. For example, if a weapon's range is 20 ft., a -2 penalty will be incurred for targets between 20 ft. and 40 ft. away; a -4 penalty will be incurred for targets between 40 ft. and 60 ft. away, and so on.

Difficulty (Dif): How hard it is to find that type of weapon intact using the Scavenge skill. The gamemaster may adjust this number up or down, depending on circumstances, such as location, how fragile an item is and rarity. Of course, only the GM knows whether the item even exists where the character is looking. A character can't find what isn't there, no matter how great the roll. The difficulties provided in the tables in this chapter assume the character is in the former Empire.

Difficulty	Description in the Before
1	Very common
2	Everyday/common (many per household/village)
3	Uncommon (few per village)
4	Rare (few per city)
5	Very rare (maybe one per city)
6+	Unique/Nearly unique (one/few in the world)

Weight (Wt): The weight of the weapon or item in pounds. Characters that carry too much weight cannot move as fast and will tire out more quickly.

Weapons and Small Characters

Characters who are Size -1 cannot wield all of the same weapons as Size 0 characters. They cannot wield any weapon designated as being two-handed. They can use two hands to wield weapons larger characters can use with one hand. Smaller versions of all listed weapons exist, although they are rare. These weapons typically do one bonus die less than their full-size counterparts and require one less minimum Strength rating.

Melee Weapons

Melee weapons range from simple clubs to finely honed blades of all shapes and sizes. Below are descriptions of the most common melee weapons.

Melee Weapon	Dmg	Str	Dif	Wt
Axe, Hand	2L	2	2	3 lbs.
Axe, Two-Handed	3L	2	4	8 lbs.
Cestus*†	1N	1	1	.5 lb.
Chain*	1N	2	4	4 lbs
Cleaver †	2L	2	2	2 lbs.
Club	2N	2	1	3 lbs.
Club, Two-handed	3N	2	2	8 lbs.
Cutlass	3L	2	4	4 lbs.
Dagger †	1L	1	1	1 lb.
Falchion	3L	2	4	3 lbs.
Flail*	2L	2	3	5 lbs.
Hammer †	2L	2	1	2 lbs.
Hammer, Two-handed	3L	2	4	7 lbs.
Mace	2L	2	3	4 lbs
Mace, Heavy	3L	3	4	8 lbs.
Pickaxe	3L	2	3	6 lbs.
Polearm	4L	2	3	10 lbs.
Quarterstaff	2N	2	1	4 lbs.
Rapier	2L	2	4	2 lbs.
Saber	3L	2	4	3 lbs.
Sap †	1N	1	3	3 lbs.
Scimitar	3L	2	4	4 lbs.
Scythe	3L	2	3	8 lbs.
Sickle	2L	2	3	3 lbs
Spear	3L	2	2	6 lbs.
Spear, Short	2L	1	1	3 lbs.
Sword, Long	3L	2	3	4 lbs.
Sword, Short †	2L	2	2	2 lbs.
Sword, Two-handed	4L	3	5	8 lbs.
Torch, Burning*†	1L	2	1	1 lb.
*Trident**	3L	2	3	4 lbs.

** See weapon description for special rules.*
† Weapons can be wielded in one hand by Size -1 characters without penalty.
Weapons in italics must be wielded with two hands.

Axe, Hand: These are small one-handed hatchets, throwing axes and tomahawks.

Axe, Two-handed: Includes battle axes and more mundane axes used for chopping wood.

Cestus: A strap of leather, sometimes studded with metal, that can be wrapped around the knuckles to maximize punch damage. Your character uses his or her Brawl rating when using a cestus. An improvised cestus suffers no damage penalties.

Chain: Chains can entangle limbs, strangle opponents or simply bludgeon. If using a chain as a ranged weapon, it has a range of 10 ft. Chains longer than 10 ft. cannot be used effectively as a weapon. To entangle an opponent, make a Melee touch attack. If your character's attack is successful, no damage is done. Instead, compare the amount of damage your character would have done vs. an opponent's Strength rating. If you rolled more damage than his or her Strength rating, the opponent is entangled and must succeed in a Strength roll to break free on the next turn. If you rolled more damage than twice your opponent's Strength rating, he or she is entangled and may be either disarmed or knocked down.

Cleaver: A heavy blade found in most taverns.

Club: Clubs include chair legs, sturdy wooden branches and kherahs. An improvised club suffers no damage penalties.

Club, Two-handed: Any large club wielded with two hands, such as small trees or strengthened war clubs.

Cutlass: A long, heavy sword with a slightly curved blade and a large hilt that can bash an opponent in the face.

Dagger: Small-bladed weapons of all kinds, from kitchen knives to heavy blades. Daggers can be thrown up to 30 ft. An Improvised dagger suffers no penalties when used in melee.

Falchion: This single-bladed weapon's edge curves slightly toward the tip. Bigger and heavier than a machete, the falchion also includes a crossbar to protect the wielder's hand.

Flail: A flail is simply a club with at least one spiked metal ball attached to it via a short chain. It is useful when fighting shielded opponents. The chain allows the spiked ball to swing around shields, negating their armor bonus, and find its target.

Hammer: Includes blacksmith hammers, small sledges and other one-handed bludgeoning weapons with a stone or metal head. An improvised hammer suffers no damage penalties.

Hammer, Two-handed: Two-handed hammers include mauls, sledgehammers and warhammers. An improvised two-handed hammer suffers no damage penalties.

Mace: A mace is an iron ball attached to the end of a club to create a lethal bludgeoning weapon. An improvised mace suffers no damage penalties.

Mace, Heavy: Made with a thicker handle with a larger iron ball, the heavy mace is a two-handed bludgeoning weapon. An improvised heavy mace suffers no damage penalties.

Pickaxe: Before, picks could be found in the hands of farmers, miners and other laborers. The sharp point of a pickaxe can inflict tremendous damage.

Polearm: Polearms are large blades attached to the end of a spear-like pole. They are a popular makeshift weapon. An improvised polearm suffers no damage penalties.

Quarterstaff: One of the most common weapons, the quarterstaff is simply a solid staff of hardwood, sometimes with metal tips, that is 6 to 9 ft. long. It is used to deliver crushing blows and jabs. An improvised quarterstaff suffers no damage penalties.

Rapier: Rapiers have thin, slender blades designed for thrusting attacks. The guard of the rapier is often large and ornate, used to catch and deflect an opponent's blade.

Saber: Sabers are long, heavy swords used primarily from horseback. They have a slightly curved, single-edged blade.

Sap: A sap is a small and sturdy leather pouch filled with lead, sand or other heavy material. Its main use is to strike someone on the head in an attempt to knock them out. An improvised sap suffers no damage penalties.

Scimitar: Scimitars include any type of longsword that has a gently curving blade, making them effective on horseback. Scimitars are extremely common in the rover culture.

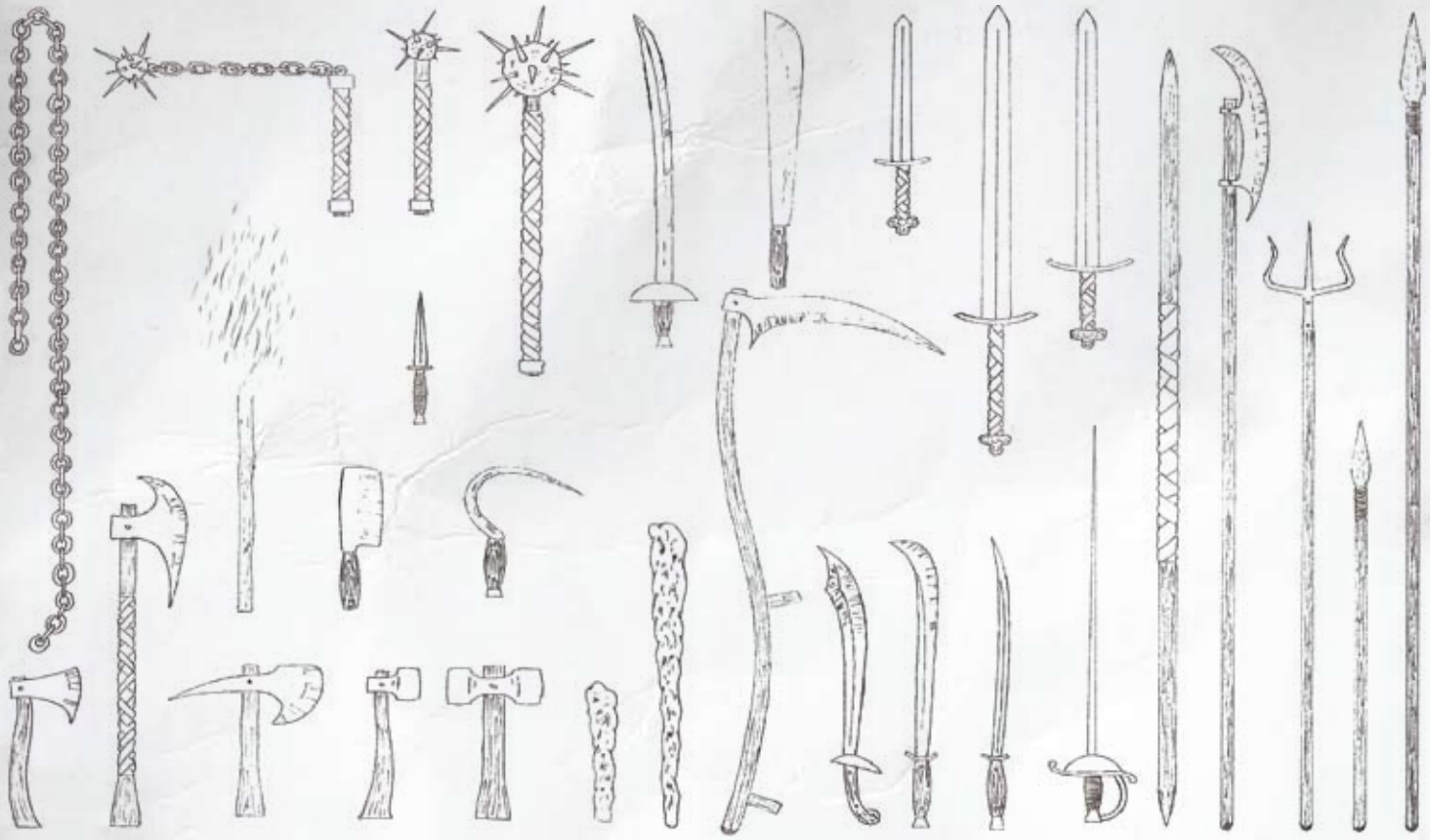
Scythe: The scythe has a long, slightly curved blade attached to a staff. It is a two-handed weapon, and typically has a perpendicular handhold attached to the end of the staff, opposite the blade, and another handhold in the middle of the staff.

Sickle: A scythe's younger brother, the sickle has a shorter, more curved blade attached to a one-handed shaft. The inside of the curve is sharp, allowing it to cut grain — or opponents.

Spear: Whether used by primitive cultures or legionnaires, spears are quite common. Spears can be used as melee or ranged weapons, with a 10-ft. range. An improvised spear suffers no damage penalties.

Spear, Short: Short spears are the same as spears, but are half as long and do less damage. An improvised short spear suffers no damage penalties.

Sword, Long: Longswords are essentially any sword with a blade longer than 24 inches that can be wielded in one or two



hands. They were the preferred melee weapon of the legion.

Sword, Short: Short swords average 18 inches. The double-bladed swords are light enough to be used in the off-hand.

Sword, Two-handed: Two-handed swords include long, heavy broadswords such as bastard swords and claymores. They deliver incredible amounts of damage.

Torch, Burning: A torch is little more than a club with one end lit on fire. As such, it may be used to bludgeon and/or burn an opponent. To burn an opponent, make a Melee touch attack. If your character's attack succeeds, he or she inflicts one point of lethal damage. If an opponent is wearing something combustible — such as loose clothing or has been doused with a flammable liquid — he or she is set on fire and will continue to take fire damage each turn until doused.

Trident: These heavy-duty pitchforks can be used to puncture an opponent or, with a twist at the right moment, catch an opponent's blade and disarm him or her. To disarm a blade-wielding opponent with a trident, make an opposed Melee touch attack and disregard the normal -2 penalty to disarm an opponent. However, your opponent will receive a +2 bonus if he or she is holding the weapon with both hands. If your character rolls more successes than the opponent, you have disarmed your opponent, flinging his or her sword, dagger or knife 5 ft. away for every extra success rolled.

Ranged Weapons

Below are a variety of weapons that can be used to deliver damage from a distance.

Blowgun: A favorite of the island folk, blowguns are mainly for hunting small game. However, their darts are commonly coated with a toxin. The dart need only break the skin for the poison to do its work. Make an Archery attack roll as normal. If your character's attack succeeds, he or she inflicts normal damage. An opponent must then resist the effects of the poison (see Poisons and Toxins on page 190).

Ranged Weapon	Dmg	Str	Rng	Rate	Dif	Wt
Blowgun †	0L*	1	25 ft.	1**	5	1 lb.
Bolas* †	--	1	25 ft.	1	4	2 lbs.
Bow	2L	2	50 ft.	1**	3	2 lbs.
Crossbow	3L	2	100 ft.	1/2**	4	6 lbs.
Crossbow, Heavy	4L	3	150 ft.	1/4**	5	9 lbs.
Crossbow, Light	2L	1	75 ft.	1/2**	5	3 lbs.
Dart †	1L	1	30 ft.	2	3	0.5 lbs.
Javelin	1L	2	25 ft.	1	2	2 lbs.
Longbow	3L	3	100 ft.	1**	4	3 lbs.
*Net**	--	2	10 ft.	1	2	6 lbs.
Sling †	1N	1	50 ft.	1**	1	0.5 lbs.
Whip †	0N*	1	10 ft.	1	3	2 lbs.

** See weapon description for special rules.*
*** Characters with the Instant Reload Talent double this weapon's rate of fire.*
† Weapons can be wielded in one hand by Size -1 characters without penalty.
Weapons in italics must be wielded with two hands.

Bolas: Bolas consist of light weights attached to two or three long, slender cords. They are rapidly twirled and thrown at a target, who becomes entangled as the weights whip around his or her limbs. To entangle an opponent, make an archery Touch Attack. If your character's attack is successful, no damage is done. Instead, compare the amount of damage your character would have done vs. the opponent's Strength rating. If you rolled more damage than his or her Strength rating, the opponent is entangled and must spend a turn to break free. If you rolled more damage than twice the opponent's Strength rating, he or she is

Arrow Types

Bows can shoot a variety of arrow types with different properties. Crafters may not combine the properties of more than one arrow type.

Standard: Typical arrows with a hard, pointed tip that do normal weapon damage.

Blunt: Arrows with a broad, blunt head that do nonlethal weapon damage.

Fire: Arrows designed to ignite a target. They suffer a –1 penalty to weapon damage, but may set a target on fire. Make an Archery touch attack. If your character's attack succeeds, he or she inflicts one point of lethal damage. If the opponent is wearing something combustible — such as loose clothing that has been doused with a flammable liquid — he or she is set on fire and will continue to take fire damage until doused.

Hunting: Arrows with a sharp or jagged head, designed to do maximum damage. They add +1 bonus die to weapon damage. They cost double the normal arrow price.

trapped and cannot escape until rescued.

Bows: Made from wood known for its elasticity, bows use the power of that stored elastic energy to fire arrows.

Crossbow: Crossbows fire bolts, which are shorter than regular arrows. They take one turn to reload after firing.

Crossbow, Heavy: Heavy crossbows take longer to load, but are accurate from greater distances. They take two turns to reload after firing.

Crossbow, Light: Light crossbows take one turn to load after firing, and can be fired with one hand.

Dart: Darts come in various shapes. Some resemble tiny daggers, while others resemble small crossbow bolts. All darts are balanced for throwing. They have the same 30-ft. range as a dagger, but two darts can accurately be thrown at once.

Javelin: Javelins are slender, lightweight throwing weapons. They are ineffective during melee combat.

Longbow: Longer than regular bows and made from thicker wood, longbows require more strength to use. However, they have superior range and penetration.

Net: A net that can be carried and thrown by a single person is 10 ft. long by 10 ft. wide (large enough to capture a Size 0 creature) and includes a trailing rope used to pull the captured victim back. To entangle an opponent, make an archery Touch Attack. If your character's attack is successful, no damage is done. Instead, compare the amount of damage your character would have done vs. your opponent's Strength rating. If you rolled more damage than his or her Strength rating, the opponent is entangled and must spend a turn trying to escape from the net. If you rolled more damage than twice the opponent's Strength rating, he or she is trapped and cannot escape until rescued.

Sling: Slings use either small rocks or lead bullets. Because slings are crafted from simple, easy-to-find materials, an Improvised sling suffers no damage penalties.

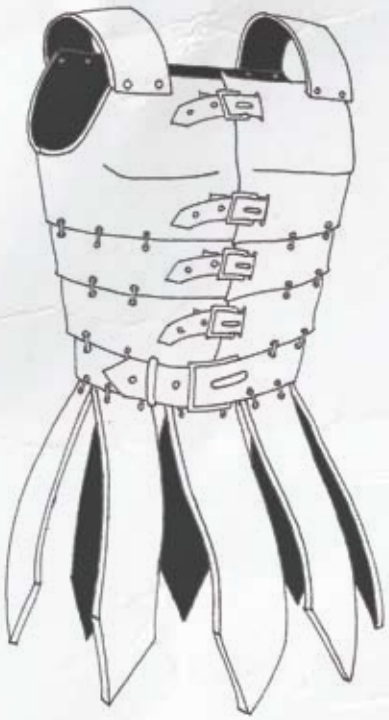
Whip: Whips can entangle limbs, wrap around throats or safely swing a survivor over pits and chasms. Whips do little actual damage, but inflict incredibly painful wounds, and produce a loud crack that can intimidate lesser foes. To entangle an opponent, make a melee Touch Attack. If your character's attack is successful, no damage is done. Instead, compare the amount of damage your character would have done vs. the opponent's Strength rating. If you rolled more damage than his or her Strength rating, the opponent is entangled and must succeed in a Strength roll to break free on the next turn. If you rolled more damage than twice the opponent's Strength rating, he or she is entangled and may be either disarmed or knocked down.

Armor

An ounce of protection is worth a pound of cure, it is said. But whoever said that was never robbed of his breastplate by a mob of villagers who wanted to make shovels out of it.

Condition: The shortage of smiths has led many to employ ingenuity when crafting and repairing armor. Improvised armor often provides one die less Defense bo-







nus than armor in good condition. Rolling a botch while defending with armor in good condition will cause it to become worn. Scavenged armor is often worn when discovered. Worn armor is one botch away from becoming broken. Broken armor needs to be repaired before it can be useful as armor again.

Defense (Def): The Defense bonus provided by the armor.

Strength (Str): The minimum Strength rating needed to wear the armor. A character with a lower Strength rating suffers a -2 penalty to attack rolls for each point of Strength he or she falls below the minimum.

Dexterity (Dex): The penalty to Dexterity is because of the restrictive nature of wearing armor. This penalty affects all Dexterity-related Skills and abilities.

Difficulty (Dif): How hard it is to find that type of armor intact using the Scavenge skill. The GM may adjust this number up or down, depending on circumstances, such as location, how fragile an item is and how rare it is in the campaign. Of course, only the GM knows whether the item even exists where the character is looking. A character can't find what isn't there, no matter how great the roll. The Difficulties provided in the table on page 197 assume the character is in the former Empire.

Weight (Wt): The weight of the item in pounds. Characters who carry too much cannot move as fast and will tire sooner.

Breastplate: The large, breast piece of a suit of plate mail is often worn on its own.

Armor	Def	Str	Dex	Dif	Wt
Breastplate	+3	2	-1	4	20 lbs
Chainmail	+2	2	--	5	25 lbs
Leather	+1	1	--	3	15 lbs.
Hides	+1	1	--	2	10 lbs.
Full Plate	+4	3	-2	8	60 lbs
Shield, Metal	+2	3	--	4	10 lbs.
Shield, Wood	+1	2	--	3	5 lbs.

Chainmail: Armor made of interlocking metal rings.

Leather: Armor made of stiff, hardened leather.

Hides: Mounds of animal skins that create padding. Hides do not suffer the improvised armor penalty.

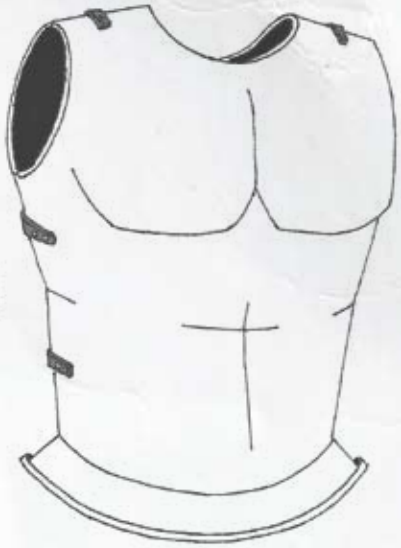
Plate, full: Armor made from thick, shaped pieces of metal that is normally custom-made for its wearer.

Shield, metal: A large, shaped piece of metal strapped to your character's forearm. It prevents your character from using his or her shield hand for anything else.

Shield, wood: A large piece of thick wood strapped to your character's forearm. It prevents your character from using his or her shield hand for anything else. Wooden shields do not suffer the Improvised armor penalty.

Shields allow a character to use his or her full Defense rating against two attacks per combat turn, instead of the normal one attack per combat turn. After the second attack, he or she suffers a -2 penalty to his or her Defense rating for each additional attack made against him or her during the same combat turn.







Everyone was listening carefully. He had that kind of voice. The room was dark, lit by a single candle. **The rain rattled against shutters,** but inside this place they were all safe and warm.

There was a sudden strong gust of wind that shook the whole building. The children whimpered in fear, distracted for the first time since their teacher had started talking. The old man smiled to himself. **Of course they fear the storm**.

The oldest child here had been three years old when the Night of Fire took place. Now, five years later with the worst behind them, they were older, but still children.

"It's all right, children. This building cannot fall. **It's the safest place in the world.**"

Twenty pairs of young eyes turned to look at him, hopeful and uncertain.

"Why? How?" asked a girl. Her name was Ama, the flaxen-haired daughter of a former legionnaire and a rover woman. Like most 4-year-olds, she had a lot of questions.

"Magic," answered the old man. "The stones of this place are etched with runes that make them as strong as iron."

"Isn't that dangerous?" asked Tyl, a 7-year-old mongrel boy.

"No," answered the old man. Sometimes it was best to lie to children.

"Let me tell you a story about magic," he said, and the children forgot the wind and the rain, for a little while.

"Magic once flowed like water. It was wielded *like an artist's brush or blacksmith's hammer*, creating great works of beauty and practicality that enriched lives. It was safe, beloved and trusted. **No one feared it.** Can you imagine that?"

The old man paused. He ran his hand through his fine white hair, thinking. He felt lightheaded, and knew he didn't have much time left. Maybe a day or two. He coughed. It sounded like there was gravel in his chest. He put a soft piece of cloth to his lips. It had **dark splotches** on it when he took it away. It took him a few moments before he could continue.

"When I was a boy, I traveled to the capital of the Empire. It was called Ascondea. Did you know that?"

The children nodded. The old man had told them many stories about the Empire.

"Of course you do. The city was splendid. The towers of the Academy soared, with *elegant arches and delicate flourishes* that seemed impossible. Many of the buildings seemed too slim to stand. I asked my father how they could stay up."

The old man's eyes glittered at the memory.

"He told me it was magic. I didn't need to know any more. Magic. And the first time I saw someone use sorcery in the streets of the city, I suddenly felt like the world had got bigger. A child, about your age, Mika," the man said, pointing to a young girl who grinned back, "ran into the street in front of a horse. I thought she would be **crushed beneath its hooves!** A man in rich-looking robes casually lifted a hand and the girl was ***surrounded by a cloud of blue light.*** She was lifted out of harm's way, and placed safely on the ground next to her mother."

The children were spellbound themselves, caught up in the story.

"Did you ever have magic done on you?" asked Mika, emboldened by being called by name a moment earlier.

The old man nodded.

"Oh yes, oh yes. More than once. There was the time I had my leg broken, and a Loranthian healed it by speaking with the spirits. **Once I had a Beguiler cloud my mind,** and I forgot my own name for a day!"

The children gasped.

"Tell us that story!" shouted Ama, as the old man knew she would. She had a fascination for stories about her mother's people.

He chuckled and *the laugh turned into a painful cough.* He realized the time for his stories would soon be at an end.

"Maybe tomorrow."

The children whispered among themselves, pleased and excited. The old man was pleased as well. He knew that, for a while anyway, they had not thought about the ***deep hunger in their stomachs*** and the fear in their hearts. Some, like Ama, had not thought about their parents, lost in the night. His own sickness had been put aside for a while, too.

For a short time, **the stories had kept their darkness at bay.**

Chapter 10: Storytelling

"The story belongs to the players, not the gamemaster."

Themes

The themes in *Desolation* describe the world that was, and the world that exists after the Night of Fire. In many ways, the themes give shape to the new world that will be built out of the ruins of the old. GMs and players are encouraged to explore the following themes during play.

Loss

It had been a long road. The things they had seen — Jela couldn't bear to think of it. Poor Mala's husband dead, and Jela herself had nearly died, just days before. Was it worth it? With what she saw now, she couldn't be sure.

Jela stood before the ruined remains of her childhood home. The walls had crumbled, blasted apart by the shockwave of the fall of the Primea Mountains, and the entire building looked like it had been scattered apart like the painted wooden blocks she had played with when she had lived here.

What is loss? Many kinds of loss exist, from the subtle to the truly profound, all fresh in characters' memories. Countless millions of lives were snuffed out like candles; more died in the months that followed. Thousands of years of history were reduced to useless memories, while the high culture of the Empire and other nations was turned to dust. Magic itself, possibly the greatest discovery and achievement of most of the races, turned against its wielders and destroyed the most powerful practitioners of the art. The one thing that could have saved the world was gone, and indeed, might now destroy any who tried to use it. Trust turned to fear, and that is an especially awful kind of loss.

Every survivor has lost someone, or something. Everyone shares this sense of loss, and it is like a new culture, a new nation — the Empire of Afterward, the great Kingdom of Desolation. Every time two strangers meet, they can see in each other's eyes that they are the same. But they have to eat and drink. When one draws a sword on the other, both realize that another tragedy is about to occur. Few people take a life these days lightly. Still, they are taken.

Difficult Choices

"There's no point, Jela," Callan pleaded, "it's hundreds of miles away. You have no idea if it'll even be there, and we need you."

Jela had tears streaming down her face, but she had made up her mind.

"I'm sorry," she said, "I can't take back some of the things I said in the Before. But if there's a chance that she's still alive. I have to find her. I have to make things right. I think she'd start at my mother's house. I have to go."

The legionnaire nodded, sadly. He had come to rely on Jela to be his second-in-command since they'd met, and the small rag-tag settlement that they'd helped survive the Long Winter was now almost thriving. It had been two years since the Night of Fire, and Jela had been getting more restless every day. It was time to let her go, but it was killing him.

"Be careful. I'll send Breka and Mala with you. They'd string me up if I didn't. Just … promise you'll come back."

Jela said nothing, but she embraced Callan fiercely, hoping it would say enough.

For most, life Before had few life-or-death decisions. There were exceptions, of course, but most people led uninteresting lives, with little thought to the moral implications of their actions. Now, every day brings new difficult decisions and new moral dilemmas for the survivors. When there's barely enough food for your family, you must decide whether you can afford to feed wounded strangers who arrive at your door. Indeed, it may be dangerous *not* to help them, just in case they return later to take what you would not share. Of course, they may just take it anyway.

Life is Hard

It had taken three months. Breka had died from an infected wound, after a desperate fight and flight from a settlement of cannibals. Mala had stayed with Jela, but missed her husband and had fallen into a deep depression from which Jela didn't think she'd ever recover. A few weeks before arriving at the ruins of the house, Jela had been bitten by something. She'd caught a fever and it had only

been Mala's constant care that had saved her life. Jela was still weak, but she'd made the final few miles to the farmland where she'd grown up, and finally to the broken ruins of her old home. It had been a long, bitter road that had ended in a destroyed house.

Nothing comes easily anymore. Survivors get few breaks, if any. Threats are commonplace. Once-harmless creatures have become Broken or Weave-Touched, making them terrifying and deadly. The weather itself is unpredictable and hazardous. Traveling between settlements is extremely dangerous, and there is no guarantee of a warm welcome at the next village. The fact that everyone has been through the same experience is no promise of solidarity, but more a threat of unpredictability.

Hope

Despite the house being in ruins, the tall wooden staircase still stood, tall and proud, in the midst of it all. Jela remembered how she and her little sister used to play Finder and Keeper throughout the house, and how the staircase was the "safe place" one had to get to in order to win the game. Here it was, still intact.

Jela clambered through the broken stone and wood of her old home until she reached the staircase. She examined its familiar wooden nooks and crannies. Her breath caught in her throat as she found what she'd been looking for. A small knot of wood that gave way with a firm press, and then a door swung open, just large enough for a child to hide inside — and she had, many times. Jela pulled out a box that she knew had been there since she left her family home almost 15 years ago. It was dusty and crushed on one side where the staircase had fallen in, slightly, and damaged it. The contents, however, were completely intact.

In the midst of this shattered world are those few souls who, for whatever reason, made it through the Night of Fire and the Long Winter. They alone believe there's something worth living for beyond a day-to-day existence, and that there is potential for something greater. Time may tell whether their light will stay bright, but for now, despite the tragedy of what's been lost, a sense of hope remains.

Second Chances

Jela pulled out a small cloth doll, handmade long ago by her mother. Button eyes stared back at her, and a stitched-on smile beamed happily. Jela hugged the doll, a flood of memories almost overwhelming her. She felt the paper then, a note pinned to the back of the doll. A piece of paper she'd not put there.

Hands trembling, Jela unpinned the note from the doll, and opened it. At the top of the note was a date — just a month ago. Below that were the words that filled Jela's heart with more hope and light and joy than she thought was left in the whole world.

"I knew you'd find her, sis. Come find me. Head east past the glass forest. There's a settlement. I'll be waiting. Jenta. P.S. I forgive you."

Despite the countless dead, despite the destruction and devastation caused by the Night of Fire and the Long Winter that followed, many things are possible. Long-lost family members can be reunited. Dark pasts can be forgotten and lives can be rebuilt. Anything is possible. Even the dead can come back to life. Second chances are everywhere.

Stories to be Told

A typical *Desolation* campaign starts 18 months or so after the Night of Fire. Characters have lived the majority of their lives before the Apocalypse. Not all of their lives will have been easy, but they will have been relatively normal. Other forms of the genre describe the Apocalypse as a misty forgotten event hundreds or thousands of years in the past, where only overgrown ruins and scraps of legends remain. For the characters of *Desolation*, the memory of how life used to be is still heartbreakingly fresh in their memories.

The world of *Desolation* is one without moral guidelines. Characters can expect no divine intervention to guide them and no artificial alignment systems to reward or punish them for their decisions. Characters must forge whatever path their motivation, personality and history (MPH) guides them toward, and will suffer the consequences or reap the rewards accordingly. The story belongs to the characters, not the gamemaster.

An obvious path is the heroic one: Rebuild the world, make it a better place. Rebuild it into what? The answer is up to the characters — they have an almost blank canvas with which to work. They can rebuild any kind of government. Less-heroic characters can decide to take what they want and instigate whatever dark regime they wish. Bear in mind that there are others out there with the same ambitions, and if they have more resources, then war will follow.

Traumatizing Characters, and Their Players

Some GMs will rightly think that no one really wants to be genuinely upset by participating in a gaming session. The first thing a GM needs to do is gauge players' possible reactions to a game focusing on loss rather than something else, such as a more combat-focused game. It's not for everyone, and it shouldn't be forced on unwilling players. Rebuilding is a more optimistic theme, and can be more of a focus for such groups.

In the After, there are settlements where the survivors are facing the same decisions. Opportunities await, though there are problems ahead, too. The Night of Fire may be over, but the long struggle has just begun — and it's far too early to say whether civilization will survive.

Character Backgrounds

When players are creating their characters, encourage them to use the Before as their playground. They know the Night of Fire is coming, so they can litter their background with as much tragic potential as they like — or none at all. It's worth bearing in mind that the tragic aspects of the setting will not appeal to some, and that's fine. More than enough action and excitement exists in the After. It's still important for all players to have a handle on the life their characters had previously, however, and the GM can find many story ideas within good background concepts.

The Night of Fire

Every character in *Desolation* who plays in a campaign set in the After shares one important experience: They survived the Night of Fire. For many, this will be something they don't want to remember, but it's an event they will never forget. The Night of Fire, along with the Long Winter, are unifying events for the characters (and players) of *Desolation*.

While *Desolation* is intended to be set 18 months after the Night of Fire, a story set during the Apocalypse can be an effective way of starting your campaign. First, it brings characters into the setting of *Desolation* right at the beginning. It can also allow players to experience the singular event that ties every character in the setting together, and to experience the sense of loss and despair that the apocalyptic end of society brings.

The Night of Fire and the Long Winter are excellent ways of bringing together characters with vastly different backgrounds. They are forced to cooperate to survive — or their differences will endanger them even further. Such situations are rich in drama. Below are a few examples of how characters from disparate backgrounds could be brought together into a party of equals because of the events of the Night of Fire.

■ A noble attending an evening market with farmers and a thief who was stalking the noble.

■ Legionnaires and prisoners trapped on the road.

■ Woodsmen and Oruskans facing off in a tense moment, interrupted by the Apocalypse.

■ A family on a rover ship, traveling to the next town.

■ An Ascondean diplomat and his retinue attending a tense meeting in Verelanar.

■ Dwarven merchants, far from home, picking up materials from a mostly mongrel village.

■ Human sailors, buying supplies from a small settlement in Lorant's Scythe.

For the GM, the Night of Fire presents an opportunity to tell the story of the end of the world. Aside from a few set events, the GM is free to interpret the Apocalypse as he or she sees fit, and put a unique spin on how it occurred.

Running the Night of Fire

One interesting story model is to start the game several days before the Night of Fire, in a "business as usual" fantasy game. In this model, magic flows like water (see sidebar "Playing in the Before" below for some ideas), and the characters are typical adventuring types. The Before portion of the game is an opportunity to illustrate certain things that will be lost after the Night of Fire — namely, the power of magic, the grandeur of the Ascondean Empire, and the general level of civilization and order. GMs are encouraged to play up the civility and politeness of the people the characters encounter, and emphasize the overwhelming power and might of the Empire, along with any important themes the GM intends to counterpoint in the After campaign.

Shifting Magic

The Before of *Desolation* is a potentially rich and textured fantasy campaign setting in its own right. This may make it a tempting period for play, either as an extended introduction to a more traditional post-apocalypse campaign, or as a more standard high-fantasy setting. GMs will need to adjust the rules for Burn to reflect how magic functioned Before the Weave was damaged. This will make magic very powerful — indeed, potentially unbalancing — but here are some ideas:

■ Burn only occurs for botches.

■ Allow mages to Take the Average on magic rolls.

■ Allow other players to contribute Style points to Magic rolls.

Using magic during the Night of Fire is extremely dangerous. The source of magic is in flux. Anything could happen when a character casts a spell during the Night of Fire. Here are some examples:

■ Double or triple Burn damage.

■ All Burn damage is lethal damage.

■ Magic may not work.

■ Spells may have drastically different effects than what the caster intended.

Brave GMs (and braver players) will arrange in advance to sacrifice characters to the Night of Fire — such horrific surprises play well and drive home the sense of danger. Characters stuck in the wilderness will consider themselves lucky to find a place to wait out the night, while those in towns or cities may find themselves saving dozens or hundreds of innocents, unwittingly becoming heroes in the last hour of the Before.

If not actually running a game set during the Night of Fire, GMs are encouraged to play out vignettes — quick scenes that illustrate salient features of the disaster.

Some example scenes:

■ A building collapses on top of a mother while her children survive. One character might save the children and take them to safety, while another might try to save the mother.

■ Ordinary people are wildly looting. A character who takes part in the looting will have a different experience than one who simply ignores it. Perhaps a character tries to stop the thieving, meting out punishment instead.

■ An elderly council member has a heart attack while fleeing to safety. The character can run to safety, or try to revive the statesman.

How different characters act during the Night of Fire is fodder for motivations, Talents, Flaws and other interesting story development. A rescued child could become a useful and poignant NPC later, or a bothersome foe might turn out to be that same councilman the group saved during the Night of Fire.

The Calendar

Prior to the Night of Fire, most Sconderan nations used a similar calendar, based upon a standard set by the Concordea, long ago. This system used a 12-month year consisting of 365 days in seven-day weeks. Each month had 30 days, with the remaining five days each year set aside for holidays and festivals. There were some regional variations, but most nations of Scondera shared this calendar.

The date the Ascondea Empire was formed was considered year 1 by most Sconderans. These dates no longer matter to most. After the Night of Fire, most people just started over, numbering the years as one, two or three years After. Likewise, if someone referred to an event "10 years Before," most people understood their meaning.

Keep things moving — ask for skill checks to dodge falling rocks and escape cracks opening in the ground. The vignettes need to keep moving forward and be filled with action and terror. Keep them brief, keep them stressful and keep them exciting. Move between characters, leaving each one with a small cliffhanger, then come back to resolve it a few moments later.

GMs should award generous amounts of Style points and experience points for creative play during such a session. The Night of Fire is an essential part of the *Desolation* setting, and most players should go through it once.

The Long Winter

Just as playing through the Night of Fire can be an interesting experience for players, a session or two outlining the Long Winter can be a useful way to get a campaign started. The primary difference between the two is timeframe. The Long Winter lasted a year. If you include the time between the Night of Fire and the end of the Thaw, that's a total of 18 months. It is possible to run an entire campaign set during the immediate aftermath of the Night of Fire, though it may be more useful to run one or two introductory sessions in order to set flavor for the rest of the campaign.

For any survivors of the Night of Fire, the immediate days and weeks after it were a matter of finding food and shelter, and protecting oneself from other survivors — human, Oruskan, or other more monstrous things. There would be little time for finding answers, though there would be many questions — not the least of which would be "why us?"

As the weeks progress, it becomes clear that help is not coming, that the Empire is gone, and that magic is damaged or broken. Many survivors ban together, either to protect what little they have, or to take from others. The more successful of these groups survive the coming winter, though no one really has any idea how intense or how long it will be. What little time they have to prepare would barely be enough, and in most cases, resources for a three-month winter will not last an entire year. Many will die.

Player characters become part of one of these groups as leaders, slaves, protectors or followers, based on their actions during the Night of Fire. The three months between the Night of Fire and the beginning of the Long Winter is enough time for much to happen. Allegiances once thought strong can be betrayed, and positions thought defensible can be quickly overcome.

Running the Long Winter

The Long Winter session can be played as a series of scenes that portray significant events throughout that time. Each scene could highlight a particular conflict or difficult decision faced by the characters during the Long Winter. Characters who are part of a reasonably civilized community at the onset of winter may find themselves making tough decisions as the Long Winter drags on, and they discover that civilized life is hard to maintain when the supplies run out. Characters who were enslaved by an Oruskan village may count themselves lucky as their orc and goblin masters keep them well fed and warm throughout the Winter. Other characters could try to eke out an existence in the wilderness until the Long Winter comes and they are forced to beg at the gates of whatever settlement they can find, hoping they are not the next meal for the desperate inhabitants.

Characters can be shown how others are surviving — or not — and be given a mirror to hold up to their own lives. If they are decision-makers in a settlement, they could be forced to decide the fates of desperate travelers who come begging. Should they be allowed in, or turned away? If they are allowed in, perhaps the next scene is the new arrivals causing trouble, or even hurting someone in the settlement. The characters then have to decide what should be done with the troublemakers.

A key to the Long Winter is its unexpected length. Many are afraid that it will never end. Eventually, the sun vanishes entirely, and for that week of night many are overcome by despair. At the end of the week, the sun rises and the worst is arguably over. Although some of the coldest days and nights are still ahead, the reappearance of the sun is a symbolic (and literal) turning point for the Long Winter. About 10 months in, the signs of a thaw start, though most mark the end of the Long Winter one year after it began.

The Thaw

After more than a year, the Long Winter's ice and snow begins to melt and fresh water begins to course through rivers and streams — sometimes causing more problems, such as flooding and mud slides. For the most part, however, the Thaw is a great thing. The land is clear and farmers are able to till again, though precious few seeds remain.

The Thaw also marks the time when what's left of the roads open fully and a few brave souls are traveling again. One of the key reasons that the Thaw is a good starting point for the *Desolation* campaign is this ability to move freely. Being able to travel without the worst excesses of the Long Winter restricting movement is critical. Travel is not easy by any means. Roads have disappeared, rivers have moved or dried up, aftershocks could occur at any time and the weather is unpredictable — not to mention the usual dangers of the road.

Storytelling in the After

Why are people traveling?

Many fantasy stories involve travel. Often, it's travel between "mundane" places (a bucolic rural area) and a dark, evil location (a volcanic plain, to dispose of an artifact of vast power). On the way, many fascinating and ancient places are explored, uncovering much of the flavor and history of the world in question, and developing not just the main story, but the personal stories of the characters involved.

In the case of Desolation, the world has been broken and shattered. Travel now reveals how much the world has changed, almost always for the worse. The grand halls and mystic places of Before are either gone or changed in terrible ways, and what's left is dangerous and new. The few learned survivors have little advantage over the uneducated. They are discovering the new world together.

Travel in *Desolation* is part of rediscovering the world. It's finding out what's happened to the town next door, if it's even still there. It's finding out that the mountains have gone, and that instead of farmland, there's a glacier sitting in the middle of nowhere. It's literally a voyage of discovery, and the characters may be the first people to set eyes upon parts of this new world. They will draw the new maps, and they will tell the first tales of what's become of everything.

Arguably, having survived the Night of Fire and the Long Winter, people might be reluctant to risk their lives on the unknown and dangerous roads. However, there are several compelling reasons why people would leave the relative safety of their Long Winter homes:

■ **Finding their home or loved ones.** Some characters may have been far from their own homes when the Night

Scars

Few survivors of the Night of Fire made it through completely unscathed. Players who would like to add physical or mental flaws have every opportunity to do so. Some survivors may just *claim* to have gotten the scar during the Night of Fire. The truth may turn out to be more interesting …

Spreading Stories and Rumors

Relatively free travel during the Thaw allows for some stories and rumors to spread. Legends require transportation. They stagnate and die if they don't move around. The three months between the Night of Fire and the start of the Long Winter was just enough time for stories of the Apocalypse and the part magic may have played to travel. These tales festered in the slow-burning stock pot of the settlements during the Long Winter. Once the Thaw occurred, the stories burst out to spread like a plague across what's left of the world. Reputations and deeds may also be more accurate than they would have been previously, because they have less time to be exaggerated or refuted.

of Fire hit. For many, the last 18 months may have been torture, as they wondered about their own friends and family, not knowing whether they are alive or dead. Now, with the Thaw, they can set out and find the answers they need.

■ **Discovering what caused the Night of Fire.** Some characters will be angry about what happened. Others will simply be curious. What caused the end of the world? The answers are out there, somewhere, and that's reason enough to get on the road.

■ **Trading.** Even for those characters with unswerving loyalty to the place where they spent the Long Winter, chances are the settlement didn't come through unscathed, and help is always welcome. Whether it's food, defenders, or simply some spare supplies, they need to get on the road to trade for, or take, supplies and help.

■ **Rebuilding the world.** For some, what's been lost is unacceptable. The world needs to be rebuilt, and that starts with going to the next settlement and saying hello, or taking it over at the point of a sword. Travel is part of that rebuilding.

■ **Mapping the new world.** It's very clear the world has changed. As the characters travel, they will see amazing new features in the landscape (see page 41 for examples) and will realize the physical geography of the world is significantly different. All the old maps are basically useless. Many passions drive this need to understand the new world, from sheer curiosity to the knowledge that those who have the best maps will have the best chances to seize power.

■ **Looting and scavenging.** For those with nothing, the partially destroyed world is a treasure chest waiting to be opened. What useful items — magic and otherwise — lie in the many ruins that now dot the landscape? Such treasures could turn a pauper into a king, or make all the difference between a village surviving or dying.

■ **Being forced to move.** Sometimes, moving isn't voluntary. An outside threat can force people to relocate, en mass, to another place. This situation could involve more than just the characters; it could involve an entire community, which the group must defend along the way. The "ragtag" caravan of survivors must find a new home, and the journey will certainly be perilous.

That's not to say that all campaigns will involve travel. Staying put after the Long Winter to defend, lead, rebuild or destroy is a perfectly viable campaign model in *Desolation*. See Campaign Models the next page for more information.

Sources of Danger and Conflict in the After

It's been said that the basis of drama is conflict. After the Night of Fire, the world is rife with dangers and dilemmas. The examples below can spark ideas for character and non-player character motivations, or entire story arcs. Mixing and matching the concepts can create better stories than using them on their own.

The Environment

The world itself has changed. Far from being the fairly calm and predictable place that it was Before, the world after the Night of Fire is strange and nearly alien. Unexpected geographical changes have occurred, from the unusual (that lake wasn't there before) to the impossible (tropical islands in the middle of the plains). Aftershocks are a common source of danger. Characters will also need to battle the unpredictable and violent weather.

Other Survivors

Although the majority of people perished during the Night of Fire, hundreds of thousands of survivors still struggle to stay alive with limited resources and not much idea of what's going on. One of the greatest, and most ironic threats survivors may face is each other. A mother who just wants to feed her child could be as dangerous as a fallen knight trying to forge a new kingdom.

The New Empires

As time goes on, new power groups will quickly emerge and roam the land, seeking slaves, soldiers or citizens. This could be a role fulfilled by the characters themselves or others the characters come to oppose. Seeking to rebuild and consolidate through diplomacy or, more likely, war, will be a common source of conflict in the After.

Religions/Cults

Festering away in isolated settlements throughout the Long Winter, the religious had a long time to muse upon the reasons for the Night of Fire and why they were spared. They have time to think about what needs to be done to cleanse the world, and how to make everything better. When the Thaw comes, zealots and fanatics will boil out of their settlements and into the world with bright eyes and blazing souls, ready to rebuild the world — or finish the work of their gods.

The Deep Horrors

The dwarves had fought a near-secret war with the Deep Horrors for generations. Immediately following the Night of Fire, the Deep Horrors are only a direct threat for the dwarves who weren't crushed under the Primea Mountains. However, the Deep Horrors are a longer-term threat for the world in general. Once they emerge from the shattered ruins of the Primea Range, they will quickly fan out, spreading corpse fungi as they go. This could be an entirely different kind of apocalypse, one that might finish off the few remaining survivors.

Warbands

With the Primea Mountain Range no longer the barrier it once was between the lands of the Empire and the Warlands, surviving remnants of warbands will be able to roam east in search of resources and recruits. The threat they represent can be nebulous and distant, as a motivational tool to keep characters moving along, or an urgent problem. They could even capture the party and force them to fight on their behalf. Playing as part of a warband is also a viable campaign model.

Oruskans

The Oruskans of the Northlands were devastated by the Night of Fire, but recovered more quickly than the other races and kingdoms. Now they too are survivors with the same needs and desires as other races. Oruskans, however, may hold grudges of centuries of oppression and imperial raids into their lands, and are better equipped to thrive in this shattered world.

Magic

With the Weave damaged and the risk of Burn part of a mage's daily life, magic is a source of great danger and conflict. In addition to the fear and anger directed toward spell casters, the scramble for surviving artifacts and magical items from Before will only get worse as time goes on. This is especially true for those items that can reduce Burn. Such items are now more than mere toys. They are items of great power that could help rebuild nations, or enslave thousands.

Buildings and structures that relied upon magic for stability and form have either collapsed or are so fragile that they are close to crumbling. These too are sources of danger.

Altered and Awakened Beasts

The damage to the Weave did more than just make magic more difficult to channel. It also infused some of the world's animals and people with magical power and warped others — physically and mentally making them far more dangerous than Before. Weave-Touched and Broken people make formidable opponents or mysterious strangers.

The re-emergence of ancient creatures of legend is also a cause for concern. Some of these Awakened creatures are extremely dangerous, and survivors have enough issues without being poisoned by a wyvern.

Campaign Models

Many *Desolation* campaigns will begin just after the Long Winter ends. Character generation and developing a motivation, personality and history will usually take into account activities during the Night of Fire and the Long Winter. This allows the action to begin when the characters are in a position to start exploring the shattered remains of Scondera. Below are just a few ideas for campaigns. Always bear in mind the characters' motivations and stories; discussing your ideas for the campaign as they create their MPHs will be most helpful. Work with your players to develop the campaign model and character backgrounds together, and you'll be better able to weave all the stories together.

Models can and should change based upon where the story goes. Character decisions will often drive these changes. Sometimes stories naturally come to an end or shift direction.

Heading Home

In this model, the group is already together, far from home. Two or more characters share the same hometown or village. They may have been on a trading mission, acting as caravan guards, legionnaires or Warland mercenaries. They should have had well-established lives in their hometown Before, with families, homes and property. When the Night of Fire occurs, the characters manage to find somewhere to hole up over the Long Winter — unable to make it home in the chaos between the Night of Fire and Long Winter.

The campaign can begin as the group starts their journey home, though one of their first tasks must be to actually find out what direction they should be heading.

Rebuilding

The characters have found a place to call home (perhaps it's

their original hometown, or just where they spent the Long Winter) and decide that it's somewhere worth rebuilding. They must now find resources, vet new arrivals for suitability and protect their settlement from those who would take it. The characters might be leaders, or merely supporters of a non-player character leadership. This campaign is about growth and responsibility — or about power, leadership and violence because rebuilding doesn't have to be noble and democratic.

Keeping hold of what you have is tough, and the campaign will involve defending this new place and the ideals that it now embodies. Eventually, the campaign model may become more abstract as the characters are dealing with other settlements, using diplomacy or strength to build a larger community through trade or conquest.

Lost Family

Characters may have family that have been stolen away by slavers, or taken by a warband, or who may have wandered off in search of the characters themselves after the Night of Fire. This could be a heartbreaking discovery after a long journey home, or could be a quest from the very beginning of the campaign. Either way, this campaign model can be the entire focus for one or more characters, and is often compatible with other models running concurrently.

Once the family has been found, a climactic struggle to rescue them can be an exciting high point to a campaign, and creative GMs (and characters) can find many interesting twists along the way.

The Lost Legion

A patrol of legionnaires (perhaps with civilian support staff and magisters) survive the Night of Fire and work together over the Long Winter. This model differs from others in that the characters decide to maintain their military identity, attempting to keep the legion — and perhaps the Empire itself — alive in the hearts and minds of those they meet. On the other hand, they may decide to be their own army, taking by force what they need. The Empire is no more, after all.

This kind of campaign model can either gloss over a large group's need for food, water and other supplies, or for those players interested in the small details, can be an interesting exercise in the logistics of a tough situation. Raids upon warbands to take their supplies are one thing — attacking a fledgling settlement with no defenses is another. This kind of campaign can quickly test a group's moral mettle.

Against the Deep Horrors

This model is great for dwarves, but it's suitable for any survivors who find themselves near shattered mountains or delving into ruins beneath the ground. With the threat of poisonous bites and the even deadlier corpse fungi carried by one in 20 Deep Horrors, the characters will face overwhelming odds right from the start. Eventually, more creatures may emerge, and the characters will need help. Will they recruit an army, will they bury themselves and their foes in a heroic last stand, or will they flee?

The Question

For most survivors, the greatest unanswered question in their lives will always be "what caused the Night of Fire?" For some, however, this question *must* be answered. It becomes the focus of their lives. This campaign structure is compatible with others, and makes for a good motivation for one or more characters. It will lead the characters toward whatever answer you, as the GM, decides lies behind the Night of Fire. Perhaps the question can never be answered, or perhaps the answer is too terrible to uncover.

Life in a Warband

Getting captured by a warband is a very real threat after the Night of Fire. However, being assured of a regular meal, water and a place to sleep is not a bad deal in the After. Some characters may bristle at the collar around their necks; others may plot and scheme their advancement through the ranks. GMs will need to create supporting NPCs within the warband and focus on the characters during mass battles.

Restoring the Empire

In some characters' minds, the Empire isn't gone, but it does need to be rebuilt. Many citizens keep the flame of Ascondea burning in their souls. This campaign involves bringing together many communities, reinstating the Councils, and rebuilding the infrastructure. The eventual goal is to get imperial law back in place, and make the Empire strong again. This campaign model is quite ambitious, and requires the majority of the group to have the same goals in mind. The fear of magic could feature highly in the game, and the characters will have an uphill battle to overcome it if they hope to reinstate the Council of Magores. This can be an epic campaign, however, sweeping in scope and grand in design.

Personal Conquest

The world is ripe for the picking. Those who believe this now have an opportunity to become the emperors and kings they always believed they should be. With their companions by their sides, the world is their oyster. A campaign like this doesn't have to be bathed in blood, though that can happen. It could also be a story of freeing slaves, rallying the oppressed and leading them.

Storytelling Races

Dwarves

The tragedy of the mountain dwarves, with their entire kingdom crushed beneath the Primea Range, should not be understated. The fact that they had been on the front line of an almost-secret war against the Deep Horrors, protecting the world against their diseased hordes, is lost on most people — but it won't be for long. The Deep Horrors will find their way out eventually, which is a worry of many surviving dwarves.

The desert dwarves, on the other hand, feel validated in their beliefs but are far from smug. If only their mountain cousins would have listened so many years ago. Their attempts to travel back to find their lost relatives — and to stem the coming tide of Deep Horrors — provides a rich vein of storytelling.

Dwarves are also known as master craftsmen and smiths, which make them much sought-after in the After. Some may be enslaved just to make use of their skills.

Most dwarves are deeply religious and will either be guided by their faith or will have forsaken the Five Pillars because of the destruction of Cair Dhurn.

Elves

The outcast elves provide rich and intriguing fodder for stories. Their history and flaws make for interesting reactions from NPCs and players alike. Elementalist elves, especially those with grudges about how their people were treated, can make for good subplots. The very fact that some elves have magic again is an important plot point, and while some are penitent, others may see it as an opportunity for revenge. This can provide an excellent opportunity for creating either helpful NPCs or truly memorable villains (see page 213).

Gnomes

The Ancestral Stream is a useful way of handing out information in small, mysterious ways. The Ancestral Stream allows GMs to give gnome characters pointers and directions through dreams, dropping hints about possible locations of equipment caches and other storylines. GMs are encouraged to use subtle symbolism and downright surrealism when doing so, otherwise gnome players may either feel railroaded or become passive and dependent upon GM hints and direction.

As NPCs, gnomes are handy harbingers of doom (especially in Before sessions). They can be used to lead characters to a hidden cache if the group needs help. Keepers are best kept as NPCs, as they are usually tied to a geographical location (a cache), and can make for interesting foes for characters desperate for supplies. Finder characters can be used to drive stories forward, because they are constantly moving.

Humans

It would be a mistake to automatically think "Ascondean" when playing a human. Several other nations existed (and some still do, which is more than can be said for Ascondea), and many humans live in the Warlands. Even an Ascondean can be from one of several different imperial provinces, each with a distinct cultural background. Humans and Oruskans are still the most populous survivors, though the future is uncertain. In fact, humans may ultimately be less suited for the new environment than other races.

Loranthians/Island Folk

Perhaps no other race is as misunderstood or feared as the Loranthians. From their childlike outlooks, to their rapid aging to their curse magic — Loranthians are a paradox. They humbly thank the spirits for their blessings and their foes' misfortunes. Their communal culture is at odds with the prevailing democracies and monarchies of the west. They have very little respect for personal space or property. GMs can use island folk to curse PCs, to cure them or even to bring a character back from the dead (with proper payment, of course).

Mongrels

Mongrels and their wide variety of physical forms can keep players guessing as to who they are facing. The After represents an excellent opportunity for these outcasts to find a place where they belong, accepted among the larger community of survivors. They can act as intermediaries between the Oruskans and the other races, helping define a new kind of diplomacy. However, many who encounter mongrels after the Night of Fire may mistake them for Broken or Weave-Touched creatures, and mongrels may find themselves in great danger because of this ignorance and fear.

Rovers

Rovers don't need rivers or lakes to be interesting. Rovers can be elegant and exotic characters, both as NPCs and PCs. The fact that only another rover can interpret their complex facial tattoos means that other races can never be sure if that NPC rover is a Beguiler. Most people are not familiar with rovers, or consider their culture in clichéd terms. This makes many uncomfortable — or even fearful — around them, concerned that they will be beguiled by rover magic, or that their loved ones will be seduced away. Still, this is balanced by a compelling draw — their lifestyle and appearance is exotic, and even romantic to some. Such dichotomies make for great drama.

Storytelling Tips

Magic: Low and Dangerous

Desolation is intended to be a low-magic setting. What does this really mean? In *Desolation*, magic used to be both common and powerful. After the Night of Fire, the Weave was shattered, the majority of the world's powerful mages and magical items were destroyed, and magic itself became unpredictable and difficult to use. Magic in the After is uncommon, but it still has the potential to be powerful. With the ever-present threat of Burn, however, magic is also dangerous. Burn, coupled with the fact that many survivors blame magic for the Night of Fire, makes magic risky to use, at least openly.

Gamemasters should use magic sparingly in an After campaign. Players can and will use magic. Let them, but make sure their magic use carries risks as well as rewards.

Too Much Magic?

Lucky rolls can keep Burn at bay while resulting in exceptional magical effects. While this is expected, and can be fun, it can also become too much for a story to take, especially if the majority of the characters are casters. The rest of the world is almost bereft of magic, and a GM may feel forced to introduce more mages and magic into a campaign to balance out the characters. Also, bear in mind the social stigma attached to magic, and the additional threat this could pose for the characters. Plotting stories that do not revolve around magic will be difficult, and may not keep the interest of magic-using characters. Also, when so much magic is around, Style points will be harder to come by, and the competition between characters for the rare magical artifacts may create additional group pressures that aren't so fun. GMs should consider all of these factors when deciding which characters archetypes to allow.

Be Prepared, but Be Flexible

GMs should try to prepare as much as necessary before a game starts, but they shouldn't lock into a storyline or plotline too much. They need to remain flexible enough to react to player actions and adjust the storyline or reactions of NPCs accordingly. Having a solid list of NPCs, with names and motivations, along with a set of locations and an idea of the overall situation that the characters are about to enter into, is usually enough. Let the situation react to the characters in the same way that they will react to the situation.

Pay Attention to Character MPHs

If players spend the time creating comprehensive and fascinating backgrounds as part of their motivation, personality and history, it's the responsibility of the GM to weave threads from those backgrounds into the story that's unfolding around the characters. Don't ignore the MPH: treat them as player-originated story ideas. Imaginative players will drop *plenty* of hints and ideas into their backgrounds. Balance out those plotlines, making sure that no player is ignored, and give everyone equal opportunity to shine.

Balancing Encounters

A weak encounter can lead players and characters to feel bored. On the other hand, repeated encounters that overwhelm a group of characters can ruin a fun experience by reducing resources, depleting Style points and killing characters.

In *Desolation*, GMs are encouraged to stack odds against the characters, rather than pull punches — after all, it's a harsh setting. The key to making such encounters enjoyable (and survivable) is to reward roleplaying and keep the Style points flowing. Even the most miscalculated encounters can be partially redeemed by the generous use of Style points.

Encourage Style point use by giving them out in tough fights. Players are likely to use many at a time to reduce wounds or increase their chances of hitting particularly tough opponents. Make sure that you're giving out enough, and make it clear that entertaining descriptions of character actions (swinging a sword, battle cries and in-character responses to hurt or wounded companions) will earn Style points.

It's best for the GM to use Style points when the players aren't. However, they should be used to pull a particularly interesting NPC out of a bad situation. The players will thank you later if a colorful enemy returns.

Don't Block Players

GMs are encouraged to always try to find a way to say yes — or at least, to not say no — when presented with a situation or desired action by players.

If players want to do something that their characters really just couldn't do, it's OK to let them try and fail. For instance, a character with no Stealth skill who wants to sneak past guards should be allowed to roll at a penalty — and probably will be seen and caught. Failure is fine. It reminds players their characters have limits, and also reminds some

players that they are not sticking to their original character concepts. After earning some experience points, players can buy the skills or talents they need to better match the new direction they wish to take, and all will be well.

Certain things are going to be impossible, no matter how many times a player asks. Finding water in the desert is unlikely. Likewise, while characters lost in a forest might eventually find an old path to follow, they are probably not going to find a signpost telling them where to go. If players are constantly asking whether they can do something different, there's a chance that they might be bored of the story, or the pacing of the scene. Take a moment to evaluate whether they have spent too much time in the desert or the forest. If you can move the story along to the next scene or important event, do so.

Take Notes During Play

Take note of the questions certain players ask, and the ideas they come up with. You can prepare for similar questions in the future and impress the players when you anticipate their actions. Also, if you do throw something apparently random into the story, ensure there's a payoff later. It doesn't have to happen in the same session, and can often be more effective weeks later.

It's also very rewarding if you use note-taking to add consistent nuances to your setting. If the players meet an NPC, and you make up a name on the fly, make sure he or she has the same name the next time they meet. Likewise, keeping track of the names of inns, shops and other locations helps provide a sense of reality and consistency in your game.

Reward Good Ideas

You can reward good ideas in a few ways. You can give out Style points for interesting thoughts or suggestions. You can revisit players' ideas later in a plotline or story, which shows players that you were listening and value their input.

Make Consistent Judgment Calls

If you make a call a certain way, try to always make it that way. It's OK to admit a mistake, but it's better to take the time to make the right call the first time. Inconsistencies will quickly disenfranchise players.

Creating Non-Player Characters

The player's characters are not the only ones in Scondera to survive the Apocalypse. Non-player characters (NPCs) are the other people who managed to make it to the After. Whether they exist as an ally, threat or something in between, NPCs are a vital part of a good story. They should possess motivations, personalities and histories that make them as unique or ordinary as the GM wishes.

To create an NPC, follow the normal character creation process (see Page 62), although steps 8 and 10 should be skipped. The capabilities and experience of the NPC will determine the number of Attribute points, Skill points, Talents and Style points used to build the NPC.

NPC	Example	Attribute Points	Skill Points	Talents	Style Points
0	Weak	9	5	0	0
1	Average	12	10	1	1
2	Talented	15	15	2	2
3	Influential	18	20	3	3
4	Powerful	21	25	4	4
5	Very Powerful	24	30	5	5

Create Great Villains

As a GM, you want to create an enemy who the players want to defeat for the personal satisfaction of victory, not just for the material or advancement rewards.

Below are some tips on creating an adversary that your players will love to hate.

A Rich MPH

A great villain needs motivation, personality, and history just like any other character. Personality quirks, twisted motivations, and unique histories can create an opponent whose name will always be uttered with both contempt and fondness. A realistic antagonist will have his or her own goals and motivations.

Making it Personal

To turn good villains into great villains, tie them to the characters in some way. Here are some ways to get players invested in a new adversary, or make an old one more engaging:

■ Take something of value: Players have an amazing capacity to harbor a grudge and always want to reclaim what is rightfully theirs. Using what was taken against the players is icing on the cake.

■ Involve family and friends: Injuring, killing or even just threatening someone a character cares about is a sure way to get players invested.

■ Wound their pride: Embarrassments can include anything from insulting a character to showing them up. Players do not like their characters to be made to look foolish and will go to great lengths to restore their name or get even.

■ Have a conversation: Talking with an enemy is the best way to learn to hate him or her. If the adversary is able to walk away from such a meeting while the players are unable to prevent it, so much the better.

■ Bend them to the villain's will: No one likes to be a pawn.

Tricking or forcing characters into a situation or plan that helps further the villain's goals can create effective drama.

Player Characters as Villains

Remember that in the world of *Desolation*, there's no guarantee that a character is going to play a hero in the traditional sense; some campaigns may contain characters who would normally be considered villains. The moral ambiguity that exists after the Night of Fire may tempt many into taking what they want using force and guile rather than with honor and diplomacy. There are always more evil people out there, however. Also, characters may feel differently about the path they have elected to follow if they must face a true hero, determined to stop them at any cost.

The Hopelessness of Hunger

The Nutritional Value attribute for creatures allows GMs to determine how much useful food can be gathered from an animal when it has been killed, since even eating cannot be taken for granted in the world after the Night of Fire. With characters forced to hunt and gather food and water just to keep from starving, GMs have an opportunity to realistically portray the harsh reality of the world after the Night of Fire, where characters may have to fight for their next meal.

However, having to play this out each and every time will quickly get stale, causing some GMs to forego dealing with the issue of rations or meals at all. Instead, GMs can quickly ascertain how much food a group can gather each day by allowing the character with the highest Survival skill (or the Hunting specialization) to automatically gather the Average of that Skill in nutrition each day. This represents a couple of hours of hunting throughout the day, and is probably enough to keep most groups alive. Style points can be spent on this roll if some extra food is needed.

Avoiding "Village of the Week" Syndrome

Many TV shows, even good ones, fall into a formulaic pattern, such as *Star Trek* with its "weird powerful alien entity of the week," or *Kung Fu* with its "town in trouble of the week."

Desolation could fall into a similar pattern: The characters travel from one community to another, encounter a problem unique to that community and solve it before moving on. While this is actually a reasonable campaign model for occasional play, it will quickly grow stale unless each community is given a personality, and characters are highly motivated to travel. After all, why wouldn't a sensible inhabitant of the world of *Desolation* not just settle down in the first decent community they come across? While some reasons for travel are outlined in this chapter, the danger of slipping into a dull, episodic format in *Desolation* remains. Here are some hints and tips to avoid this.

Mix it up. Communities aren't that common, and there should be a lot of travel time between them. Plenty of opportunities for adventure exist on the road and in the wilderness. Some reasons are outlined above, and many sample communities are listed in the After chapter (page 49)

Too many twists are boring. If every community the characters visit has some kind of secret or plot twist, the group will come to expect it, and it'll be hard to surprise them. The action should always follow the characters. They are the "stars of the show."

Not every effect needs a cause. In the world after the Night of Fire, strange things are still happening. You can literally have the dead come back to life, or have a sailing ship lying across the middle of a road in a desert. You don't need to worry about explanations: "It was the Night of Fire" suffices.

Flashbacks

Flashbacks are an advanced storytelling technique that, if used correctly and sparingly, can add a great deal of depth and color to a *Desolation* campaign. They can be difficult to use because they require preparation and solid cooperation with players.

Flashbacks can be set in the Before, during the Long Winter, and during the Night of Fire. GMs and players decide in advance upon certain incidents from a character's past that could be relevant to a particular storyline. When the opportunity presents itself (preferably at the start of a session, to minimize disruption on the events of that session's play), a short flashback is played out. The GM and player roleplay a "minigame" for the rest of the players.

For GMs and players in search of especially interesting gaming experiences, the other players can take the part of completely new characters by playing important NPCs from the "flashbacking" character's past.

Flashbacks are best used sparingly, and should always present material relevant to the plotline taking place in the After. A flashback can be used to foreshadow upcoming events, and can be very effective in planting seeds that pay off a few sessions later.

Some other benefits of using flashbacks include reiterating the sense of what's been lost for everyone, not just the player experiencing the flashback sequence, and to draw comparisons between the politics of Before and After. Yet another good use for a flashback sequence is to let a GM pull in players whose characters may have been sidelined by plotlines that have not directly involved their characters.

A Few Good Men

"Please help me! I've done nothing wrong."

This scenario is designed to introduce gamemasters and players to a variety of themes in Desolation, such as making tough choices, the fear and distrust of magic, the isolation of the Long Winter and the clash of cultures in the After.

Characters may have known each other in the Before, met during the Long Winter, or recently met on the road. This should be decided before play begins.

Act One: A Meeting at the Crossroads

The characters are on the road. It was obviously made by the Empire, but now the precisely placed cobblestones are mostly missing. It appears to run through the middle of nowhere. There is nothing but parched earth, scrubbrush and dead trees as far as the eye can see. The characters are very low on supplies, and are both tired and weary. What they need is a good rest, a decent night's sleep and some food and water — they only have enough for two more days. What they really need is a friendly village where they can resupply. Of course, those are hard to come by in the After.

They come to a crossroads where a man and a woman are caged in gibbets hanging from a large dead tree. They are trying to scare off a couple of horribly large, vulture-like creatures — carrion reapers — that are trying to pick at them. On the ground beneath the cages are the mostly eaten bones of several other people. As the characters approach, the scavengers fly off, frightened.

The man in the gibbet is starving and wounded. He has a badly crushed hand that looks black and gangrenous. He wastes no time begging the characters to help him escape.

The woman is young and appears frightened. She doesn't look like someone from the eastern lands. She is human, yet her olive skin and almond-shaped eyes (almost elven) hint that she is from the far south, perhaps even the Saikin Wastes. Her name, shyly given, is Kal Chan, and her accent is exotic.

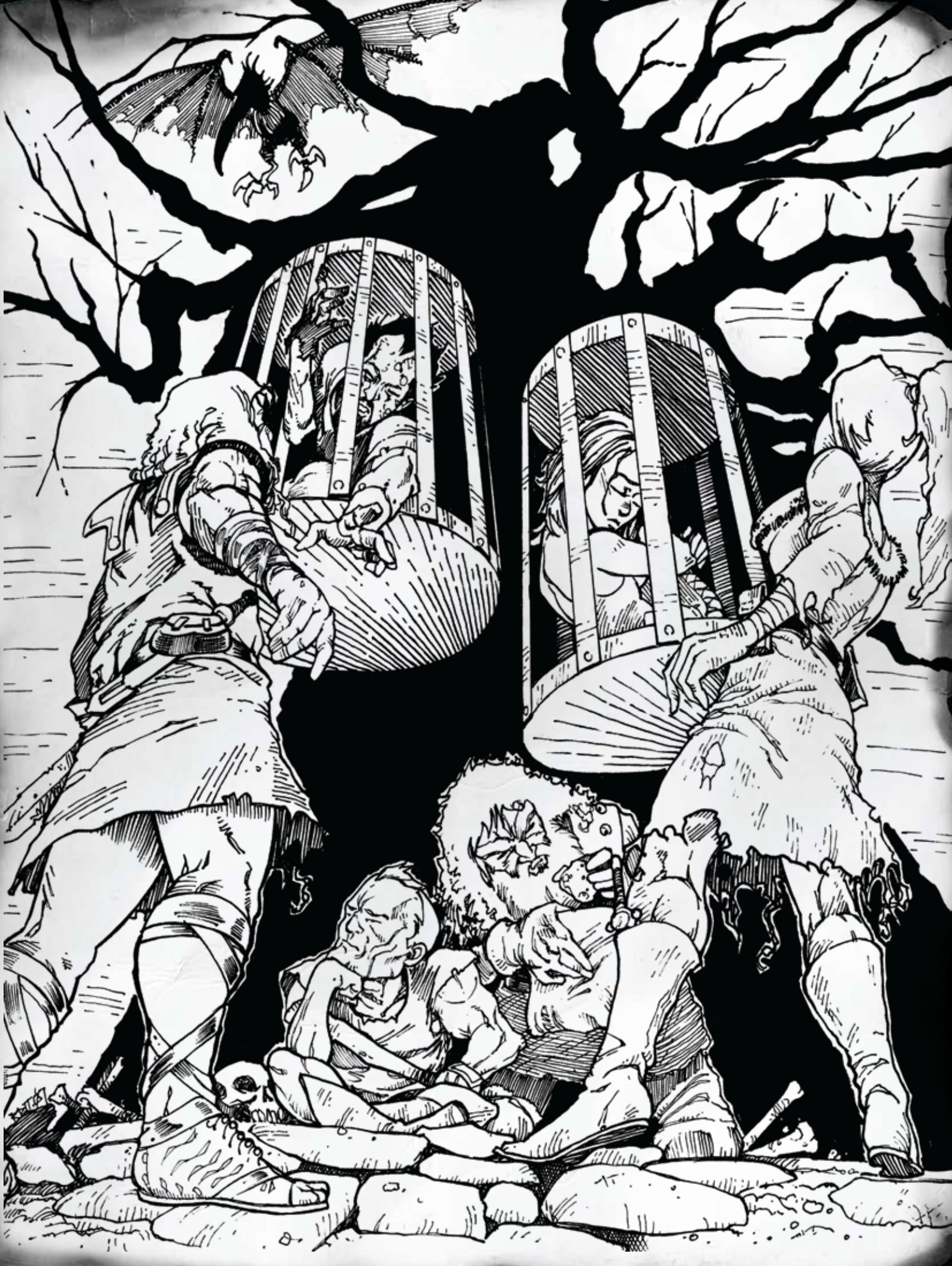
The man's name is Tull. He worked as an apothecary's assistant in Nascency Before. If the characters ask him about his hand, he tells them ruefully that he was accused of using magic in a nearby village. He has some minor skills with healing herbs and poultices, and had been trying to trade his skill in return for some food. One villager got spooked and accused him of sorcery. Suddenly they jumped him and smashed his hand beneath a gristmill stone before exiling him from the village. He had lived there about three months — ever since the end of the Long Winter.

Note to GM: *Any characters with any wilderness experience will know that the birds are not native to the region, and are usually found far to the west, following nomadic tribes or warbands.*

Note to GM: *The situation in the village is not as "anti-magic" as Tull portrays. The reason for his punishment was not so much for his suspected "use of magic" as much as it was his pompous manner and womanizing ways. However, his story should make spellcasting characters feel uncomfortable around the villagers, and may make the village's motivations surrounding the wizard's tower plot seem more based in fear.*

He has no wish to return to the village of Ridge River, but will point the characters in the right direction if they set him free, and give him some food and water. He'll try to make the characters think that the village has a lot of resources worth taking, in a bitter attempt to get them to steal from or ravage the place. If the characters use magic, he will be frightened and hostile, and will try to flee. If he's still imprisoned, he will panic and they will get nothing more from him.

The young woman explains that she is a refugee from a place called Te'shal (characters with knowledge of geography will know that it was a region 1,000 miles south of the Ascondean Empire, in the southern Vastlands — she is



clearly a very long way from home). She was nabbed by the villagers a few days ago for trying to steal some food. She is upset and guilt-ridden, though she's been told that she will be released in a few days. She completely believes they will come back for her, and is worried that if she's freed the villagers will punish her more. She doesn't want to be let out, and adamantly refuses to be freed, though she'll gratefully accept some food and water.

As the characters are talking to (and possibly freeing) the man, the carrion reapers return and, desperate with hunger, they attack. There is one creature per character. The creatures are tough and wiry, but will not fight to the death. If they drop to 1 Health, they try to flee, hopping and flapping away. Smart characters will kill them, and hope that their scrawny corpses are enough for a couple of meals later.

The man will not fight. If he is freed when the carrion reapers attack, he will try to flee immediately. The girl cowers and weeps, but still refuses to be freed. This makes her an easy target for an ignored reaper.

Note to GM: *The carrion reapers will pick one or two characters on which to concentrate their attacks, instinctively knowing there is strength — and possibly safety — in numbers. This will lower their target's Defense on successive attacks. They can attack twice per round with talons. See the Bestiary for a full description.*

Act Two: A Few Good Men

With directions to the village, and a sense of what they're in for when they get there, the characters set off. After a half-day's walk through the ravaged land, they come up over a hill and see a small settlement, surrounded by a makeshift wall built from repurposed stone and wood that looks quite sturdy. A river runs nearby, and in the distance is a ridge of forested hills. It's almost pleasant, especially after several weeks in the broken badlands the group has just traveled through.

As they approach, they notice lookouts on the walls. There is a bustle of activity as the heavy wooden gate is pushed closed. Two bowmen can be seen, carefully preparing arrows. The settlement is on high alert as the group approaches. The words "Ridge River" are crudely carved into the gate.

Before they get too close, a voice shouts out from behind the gate, asking for the characters' names, trades (what useful skills they have) and their purpose here.

If all goes well, the characters are let into the village, though they are carefully watched. They are asked to hand over their weapons. If they refuse, there's no push to take them. They will still be allowed in, but they will be watched more carefully.

If they are belligerent or hostile, they will not be allowed in. If they are actively hostile, they will be attacked by the bowmen, and eventually, by 15 to 20 men and women armed with clubs. If the characters escape or are not admitted into the village, they can wander upon the Tower of Magic in Scene 3 to continue the scenario. If they are captured, they can be given the quest as a means to securing their freedom.

In the village, they are introduced to the "mayor" of Ridge River, Kenly Grent. He is a human in his late 40s with a grey beard and salt-and-pepper hair. Grent will give them a quick tour of Ridge River before leading them to the village square. At the square, they will negotiate some trades for a place to stay and some food. The characters can successfully trade their items, their skills or manual labor for food and shelter.

The village seems pleasant enough, but in the back of the characters' minds are the stories they heard at the crossroads.

If asked, the villagers will admit to punishing the "healer," and will not want to discuss the matter further. If the group acknowledges freeing him, the villagers will be angry, though they will not act against the characters immediately. However, this will create some distrust that will take time and effort for the characters to overcome.

If the characters befriend any villagers, they may find out that Tull the Healer had slept with two council members' wives in an attempt to "help repopulate the lands," which was not at all appreciated by the council members. Still, the excuse of magic was enough to have him severely punished, so the fear of magic is quite real in Ridge River.

The villagers will readily admit to locking the girl in the cage for stealing, and also confirm that they intend to go back and get her in a day or two. If the group admits to feeding her, they are not upset by this. In fact, this act of charity may impress a few of the older villagers. The group may sense that the decision to punish her so harshly wasn't shared by everyone.

One noticeable problem in the village is the lack of a forge. Iron scraps are plentiful, but they have no way of reforging them into something useful. The forge is broken, and no one here has the skills or equipment to repair it.

There are many more men than women here, and any women in the group will get a lot of attention from the younger men. Kenly will be fairly open about the fact that for the village to grow and survive, they need to start having babies, and that means they need to attract women and families. It might make some characters feel uncomfortable, but it's not untrue.

As the villagers get to know the characters, they will tell them that there are some strange things going on, and that they are desperate for help. Not only have they been noticing strange folk in the vicinity (horsemen from distant lands), they have a worrisome thorn in their side: a nearby wizard.

They tell the characters that there is a tower nearby, and within it is a strange man, most likely a wizard. He has told the village that they have just two weeks to provide him with help — a few good men — to assist him with rebuilding his tower. The villagers don't have anyone to spare, but they fear his retribution if they fail to deliver.

The elders want the characters to go and get rid of this mage. However, they feel that if the characters fail, the wizard will have his "few good men" anyway. So, it's a win-win scenario for the village. The players are probably smart enough to figure this out, but the chance to meet with/defeat/steal from a potentially powerful mage may end up being too tempting.

In the event that the characters decide to turn down the offer of work, the villagers nod, understanding. They will instead offer the characters a place to sleep for the night in return for some basic chores and help.

If the characters agree to help the elders, they are given a crude map and directed to a small farm an hour's walk from the village. The farmer there, Aigel Greeley, was the one who spoke directly with the wizard. The farm is on the way to the tower, so the elders will suggest the characters set out first thing in the morning and stop by the farm to speak with Aigel along the way.

That night, while the characters sleep, two strangers on horseback arrive at the village gates. Shouts and the bustle of activity as the village arms itself will wake the characters.

For characters who have encountered Warland raiding parties before, these riders are clearly scouts for a warband.

> ***Note to GM:*** *If the players decide not to go after the wizard, the GM can have a villager drop more hints about powerful magic items, take something of theirs (a personal item) and hold it hostage, or a local farmer could rush in saying that the wizard has taken a child hostage — which he hasn't.*

Ridge River Militia (NPC 1)

Archetype: Militia
Motivation: Defend village
Style: 0
Health: 5

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 1
Dexterity: 2
Intelligence: 2
Strength: 2
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 4
Move: 4
Defense: 5
Perception: 4
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Archery	2	3	5	(2+)
Craft/Varies	2	2	4	(2)
Melee	2	3	5	(2+)
Survival	2	2	4	(2)

Talents

Long Shot: Double weapon range to 100 ft.

Flaws

Intolerent: Outsiders, mages

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bow	2L	0	7L	(3+) L
Club	2N	0	7N	(3+) N

Kenly Grent (NPC 3)

Archetype: Mayor
Motivation: Protect Ridge River, find a wife
Style: 3
Health: 8

Primary Attributes

Body: 4
Charisma: 3
Dexterity: 2
Intelligence: 4
Strength: 2
Willpower: 4

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 6
Move: 4
Defense: 6
Perception: 8
Stun: 4

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Archery	2	2	4	(2)
Craft/Woodworking	4	4	8	(4)
Diplomacy	3	3	6	(3)
Empathy	3	4	7	3+
Melee	2	3	5	(2+)
Survival	4	4	8	(4)

Talents

Iron Will: +1 Willpower rating
Lucky: +2 to roll once per session
Inspire: +2 skill bonus to allies

Flaws

Intolerant: Outsiders, mages
Superstitious: Follows unusual beliefs

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bow	2L	0	6L	(3) L
Longsword	3L	0	8L	(4) L
Club	2N	0	7N	(3+) N

Description

Grent is gruff, curt and serious. He often makes a squint-eyed stare before talking in short sentences. He is nice to ladies. Grent has been a Ridge River man all his life and always will be.

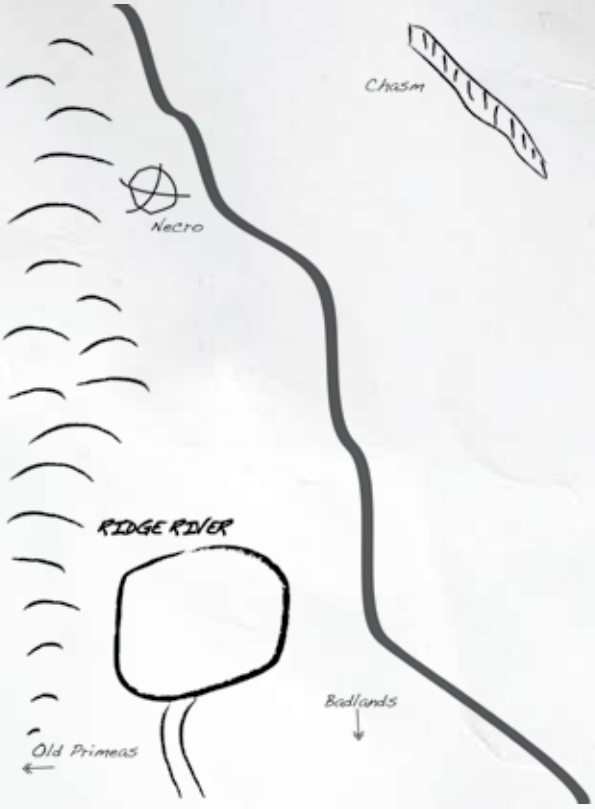
They are dressed in light, but well-made leather armor, and wear bark masks painted with hideous faces — clearly some kind of identifying insignia. They look well-fed. Whatever reason brings them to the village, it isn't hunger.

There is a tense face-off between the horsemen and the villagers. In a chilling reversal of the interrogation faced by the group when they arrived earlier, the horsemen bark out thickly accented questions, such as how many people are in the village, if there is any disease or sickness present, and what skills the villagers possess.

Grent glances at the characters briefly, perhaps looking for some guidance. The characters can make suggestions as to what to say, but if they are silent, Grent just shouts for the strangers to leave the village in peace, and refuses to say more. The characters may suggest attacking the horsemen. After a moment, Grent will nod to the archers, who will down one of the riders. The other escapes with the fallen rider's mount, though an arrow does find his shoulder. Grent immediately regrets the action, but says nothing. The characters will probably notice this.

A great sense of foreboding falls upon the village. If the characters realize that the horsemen are indeed scouts from a roving warband, it may occur to them that the mage could help with the defense of the village if the scouts return with their warband.

The villagers now have both the mage and the horsemen to worry about. Grent hopes that the characters can help with at least one of these problems (the mage). If the characters suggest asking the mage for help, Grent will be deeply skeptical, but may consider the possibility that the mage and the horsemen will kill or at least weaken each other. Grent, as superstitious as he is, is still practical and a good leader, and will be open to the possibility of accepting help from the wizard if the characters can prove he isn't a Necromancer. It seems unlikely, however, and he warns them that they would be fools to approach the tower unready for a fight. He suggests they depart in the morning.



GM's note: *Some characters may wish to remain behind to protect the village, or to give chase to the horsemen. Grent would prefer that they deal with the mage, as he cannot afford to have enemies on two fronts. He knows where the mage is at the moment, and would rather the characters go deal with that problem first. Besides, it's the middle of the night and the scout is on horseback, while the characters are on foot.*

Grent insists upon sending one of his trusted men with the group. If they ask why, Grent just says that he wants to make sure that they find Greeley's farm, and that his friend, Reddy, is also a good friend of Greeley's. They don't have to take Reddy all the way to the mage's tower. It's probably better if Reddy stops at Greeley's because the village may need Greeley's help with the defenses if the horsemen come back.

After a two-hour walk, the characters will arrive at Greeley's farm. It is strangely quiet. A Perception roll of 3 will alert the characters to some disturbed earth or large tracks before they come upon the body of Aigel and his mules. The corpses have been viciously, and recently, mauled and partially eaten. Whatever killed them is nearby, and will attack the characters within moments of the discovery of the corpses.

Initially, one core delver attacks. See the core delvers description on page 226. After a few turns, two more delvers will burst up from beneath the ground and join the attack.

Assuming the characters defeat the core delvers, inside the worms they'll find Greeley's hand and 11 acid-pitted steel arrowheads, which are worn but usable. Greeley's signet ring is still on his ring-finger, and will be proof of his demise for Grent, should he ask for it later. Half of Greeley's body is in the tiny farm house, where there is a dirt floor with a core delver-sized hole in it.

There is little of value around the farm. Characters may find some rusty iron farming implements, but Grent would probably consider them property of the village, should the characters return with them. He will not look favorably on the characters "stealing" from either the dead, or the village.

Act Three: The Tower of Magic

The group travel a half-day to the north along the low ridge of forested hills. At the top of the ridge is a foreboding tower, shaped almost like a skeletal finger reaching 100 feet into the air. Characters with military experience or magical education might recognize it as architecture common in Kar'Danan, the dark kingdom of Necromancy. The characters are relatively sure they are not near Kar'Danan, which drives home the alien way the land now looks, and how things have changed geographically.

The tower overlooks a calm, dark lake, and is surrounded by a swath of healthy pine forest. Even from this distance, it is obvious the tower could do with some repairs. A few smaller outbuildings surround the tower, and these buildings are in worse repair than the tower itself.

As the group moves through the forest, they encounter abandoned skeletal servants of the tower's previous owners. Harmless and easy to destroy, the various skeletons of human adults and children wander silently around the tower, carrying out tasks such as gathering firewood or cleaning pathways through the trees. They are a chilling and poignant reminder of the evil experiments carried out by the Necromancers Before, and may unnerve the characters enough to make them hostile toward the current occupant of the tower.



The current occupant is no evil Necromancer, however. It is Crevin Laughner, a human Sorcerer. He's not particularly powerful, but he was lucky enough to find a cache of magical items in this well-stocked Necromancer's tower that he wandered upon shortly after the Night of Fire. He survived the Long Winter here, thanks to the relics, but he has nearly depleted his supplies.

As long as the characters approach him civilly, he is friendly and open, and pleased to meet someone after all this time. He is talkative, and though not willing to give away many of his relics and artifacts (see below), he is happy to share a few trinkets and to feed and offer water and shelter to the group.

> ***Note to GM:*** *Crevin's magic items are for illustration purposes only, as they are quite powerful. GMs intending to use this introductory scenario as the first game in a longer campaign should change the items as they see fit by destroying them or lowering their potency in order to maintain a balanced campaign.*

He explains that he has tried to make contact with the local village in a genuine attempt to make friends and develop a relationship. When he spoke to Greeley, he was asking to trade the villagers' help in return for helping them with his magic. Because he has been isolated in the tower, he hasn't grasped the fact that he, as a mage, is feared, and that the local villagers would just as soon burn him at a stake. When this is explained to him, he will be genuinely shocked, and will want to "clear up" the misunderstanding by visiting the village and explaining that he's just trying to be friendly. He thinks that by giving the villagers a few of his remaining minor magic items, they will be better disposed to him.

Crevin has about 10 small magic items that he'd be willing to trade for food or service. These items are simple devices such as "fire runes" or self-cleaning plates and cups — nothing that would change or alter the balance of power in a region. However, with the current sentiments against magic, they are enough to get someone killed.

Some items include weapon runes, which make weapons more effective (+1) for a short time (one combat). He does have two items that he isn't willing to trade. One is a gem on a chain, called "Betine's Eye" that provides Burn Reduction 1 (which does not stack with the Burn Reduction Talent), and a polished yew wand that gives him three free successes per day for Sorcery only. He can use this to expand the range or area of a spell, or to do more damage (see Magic, page 129).

Act Four: Just in Time

The characters return to the village with the mage and his "gifts" just in time to find it under attack by a larger group of warriors from the warband that had been scouting it earlier. A large number of warriors are besieging the town, and many villagers are already wounded or dead. Some of the village's structures are on fire.

The characters, along with the mage and his relics, can probably help the village, but their use of magic will not be subtle. They will have to face the prejudice of the survivors — who may be pragmatic enough to forgive them or ignore the life-saving use of magical power.

On a hill, 25 yards or so from the main battle, is a heavily decorated warbander, surrounded by six warriors. It is obvious he is some type of officer in the warband.

If the party does not feel that they can risk openly using magic, they can try the hard way, but these tough warriors are not going to be easy to defeat. Crevin will very much want to use his magic to save his future friends in the village. With his wand and his necklace, he is capable of some fairly powerful attacks, including area damage spells. The GM can have Crevin blasting away at groups of warriors, or helping out characters in distress. Most of the Ridge River folk will be frightened by Crevin, but he is very obviously helping them, so the fear will be tinged with respect, if only a little.

Note to GM: Despite the large numbers of warriors (you can say there are "dozens"), the party will only need to fight a dozen or so if they take on the masses, or the lieutenant and six warriors if they try to skirt the main battle, before a horn is blown and the rest flee. This town is clearly too sour an apple, and the warband will not risk too many losses this day for so few recruits.

If magic has been openly used, the surviving warriors will be carrying news of "powerful magicks" in the hands of the characters. This news could come back to haunt them later, along with the remnants of the defeated warband.

Should the characters fail, they may find themselves the latest recruits into the warband, and that could be the start of another story.

If they succeed in fighting off the warband, the characters will have to deal with the villagers' distrust and hatred of magic. If Crevin or a character used magic during the fight, a small group of villagers may try to kill them as other villagers cheer their victory.

Crevin Laughner (NPC 2)

Archetype: Naive Sorcerer | **Motivation:** Acceptance
Style: 3 | **Health:** 6

Primary Attributes

Body: 3 | **Charisma:** 2
Dexterity: 2 | **Intelligence:** 3
Strength: 2 | **Willpower:** 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0 | **Initiative:** 5
Move: 4 | **Defense:** 5
Perception: 6 | **Stun:** 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Academics/All*	3	4	7	(3+)
Diplomacy	2	1	3	(1+)
Magic	3	4	7	(3+)
Melee	2	2	4	(2)
Ride	2	2	4	(2)
Scavenge	3	2	5	(2+)

Talents

Magical Aptitude: Can cast Sorcery spells
*** Skill Mastery:** Academics

Flaws

Isolated: Does not understand how the world has changed

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Staff	2N	0	6N	(3)

Description

Crevin is young and somewhat bumbling. He is optimistic and friendly.
Equipment: Betin's Eye (Burn Reduction 1), Yew Wand: (3 magic successes per day)

Epilogue

Victorious characters may have had to use magic in order to protect the village. Should this be the case (and Crevin is likely to have used magic), the villagers will be quite fearful and perhaps angry. The characters will have to be careful.

If Crevin is Dead

Should Crevin be dead, the villagers will seize his belongings, and they will be burned (much to some characters' despair) along with his body. Any dead magic-using characters will be burned along with Crevin, and their belongings taken by the villagers.

With the mage dead, the characters have more or less carried out the task assigned. As long as no one has openly used magic, Grent will probably offer the characters a

place in Ridge River if they want it, with the understanding that any females will need to settle down and start having children as soon as possible. If magic was used openly, the characters will be asked to leave Ridge River immediately, but will be given food and water, and some supplies. They'll not be welcomed back again, and it'll be all Grent can do to prevent the villagers from doing any harm to the spell casters.

Characters who feel that the village deserves some retribution should not be discouraged from taking this course of action. However, the characters are certainly outnumbered by the villagers, and would be risking death by visiting vengeance upon the town right now.

If Crevin Lives

If Crevin lives, the characters have the opportunity to introduce the mage to the village under a more controlled situation. If the mage was especially effective in the defense of the village, there may be some chance of dialogue. It's clear that there will be a long road ahead, though a wary truce is clearly in place. If things are handled well, Crevin may have a source of food, and Ridge River may have some extra defenses and a chance to rebuild their forge.

If things are handled badly, Crevin may not get out of the area alive. The archers of Ridge River are good, and Crevin may be dead in seconds. The characters might soon follow.

Long-Term Consequences

The village of Ridge River may have just survived an attack by a marauding warband. This is a great victory indeed, and will result in a bit of fame for those involved. The village may experience more refugees looking for a safe place — not something that Grent or his people really want or need. This victory today may bring longer-term problems. Success, if it gets out, can be a serious problem.

If the characters and villagers are defeated, they may become the warband's latest recruits, which could begin another story.

Warband Leader (NPC 3)

Archetype: Warrior
Motivation: Power
Style: 3
Health: 9**

Primary Attributes

Body: 4
Charisma: 2
Dexterity: 2*
Intelligence: 2
Strength: 4
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 4
Move: 6
Defense: 9
Perception: 5
Stun: 4

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Archery	2	3	5	(2+)
Athletics	4	2	6	(3)
Intimidation	2	3	7 †	(3+)
Melee	4	5	9	(4+)
Ride	2	3	5	(2+)
Scavenge	2	2	4	(2)
Survival	2	2	4	(2)

Talents

****Robust:** +2 Health
† **Skill Aptitude:** +2 Intimidation
Fearsome: Temporarily frighten opponents

Flaws

Overconfident: Foolhardy and sometimes gets in over his head

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Longsword	3L	0	12L	(6) L

Armor	Defense	Str.	Dex.	Cond.
* Breastplate	+3	2	-1	Worn

Description

The warband leader wears a mask made of bark with a hideously smiling face painted on it in garish colors.

Warband Warriors (NPC 1)

Archetype: Warrior
Motivation: Wealth
Style: 0
Health: 5

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 1
Dexterity: 2
Intelligence: 2
Strength: 3*
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 4
Move: 5
Defense: 6
Perception: 4
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Archery	2	2	4	(2)
Athletics	3	1	4	(2)
Melee	3	3	6	(3)
Riding	2	2	4	(2)
Survival	2	2	4	(2)

Talents

***Strong:** +1 to Strength

Flaws

Bloodlust: Goes out of his way to wantonly destroy

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Club	2N	0	8N	(4) N

Armor	Defense	Str.	Dex.	Cond.
Piecemeal leather	+1	1	--	Good

Description

Along with the mismatched garbs of those they've slain, they wear yellow and black painted masks.

The blood sat atop the snowy field like rubies thrown on a white blanket. The warm blood hadn't yet begun to melt down into the snow, telling Jared he was close. The tracks showed him the deer was dragging its feet — **each step becoming more labored**. His game was slowing. He would return to Clear Water **a hero** for bringing back venison.

Jared followed the blood trail into a stand of snow-covered pines. Even without the blood, the trail would have been easy to follow. The underbrush where the deer had passed by was ***knocked clean of the clinging snow*** that coated every branch, bush and plant in the Northlands. After tracking people through the rocky terrain common in the western Warlands, this was **like following the wide cobblestone roads** of the former Empire. It felt better too.

Jared had already tired of seeing **death and destruction** before the Night of Fire. The warband he worked for was a good one. They were good at ambushing, good at looting and good at waylaying caravans. *They were good at killing.* Jared had been one of them, but he always had a nagging feeling that he was meant for something else. **Something better.**

He had found it when he stumbled upon Clear Water, nearly dead. He lied and told them he was a hunter. They welcomed him with open arms. It the many months since, *he found his purpose*. He was one of the primary providers for the people of Clear Water. They respected him, trusted him and needed him.

The cold nipped at his fingers, bringing him back to the present. He had stopped moving, completely lost in his thoughts. He still had an arrow nocked. He shook his head, angry with himself for losing his focus. **Daydreaming out here would get you killed.** There were many beasts in the Northlands more dangerous than the deer he was tracking. He wished his arrow would have downed it instead of wounding it. If so, he would have gutted the deer and been back in town by now.

He looked toward the sun. It was still pretty high in the sky. He might be able to get the deer and still make it back before nightfall if he hurried. He went further into the woods, **trying to move quickly and quietly** as he ducked branches and kept an eye on the deer's trail. He rounded a particularly large tree and spotted his prey.

It was a large doe. It knelt beneath a pine tree, facing Jared. **Blood frothed from its mouth** with each breath that steamed into the cold air. Jared raised his bow, but hesitated. He saw that his arrow in the deer's side had broken off. The second arrow might break on impact, wasting it as well. The deer looked incapable of running anymore. Jared put the arrow in his makeshift quiver, slung the bow across his back and drew his dagger. **The deer made no attempt to move.**

The hunter circled to the left, not wanting to spook the deer. It had suffered enough. He came up beside it and brought his broken sword near its neck. The deer turned to look him, thick steam from its breath escaping its mouth. Somewhere in Jared's mind, he realized that his own breath was not visible in the air like the deer's. But *he wasn't ready for it to breathe fire.*

The deer bleated as the blade touched its neck and ***fire engulfed Jared's face***. He screamed, dropped the blade and tripped as he scrambled backward. The shock was immediately replaced by pain. **His shoved his face in the snow** and rolled away from the deer. His mind struggled to make sense of what had just happened through the agony. *Deer don't breathe fire* was the only thought he was capable of — it ran through his mind again and again. His face felt **as if the skin had been flayed from the bone.**

Jared stared at the deer, the deer stared at him. **Jared shot it twice.** He approached it warily, even though it was obviously dead. He had heard travelers' tales about **strange beasts of legend** being sighted since the Night of Fire. He hadn't believed them. Of course, there were no legends of deer breathing fire that he knew about. A lot of strange things happened in the After. Still, **meat was meat**. He began to gut and clean the carcass. Maybe he could get it back to Clear Water before his eyes swelled shut with blisters.

Then he heard **the bird call that he knew didn't come from a bird**. *It stopped him cold.* He had fought kobolds in the Warlands. He knew some of the sounds they used when they were hunting. He also knew his chances of ever seeing Clear Water again were getting narrower by the moment. Maybe they just wanted the deer. He stood up, backed slowly away from the carcass, **and ran.**

An arrow pierced his thigh. He ran on as best he could. He could feel *the warm blood trickle down his leg*. It left red spots in his tracks, *like rubies thrown on a white blanket* ...

Chapter 11: Bestiary

"I don't like the way that reaper is looking at me."

The Night of Fire was devastating to all life across the Lands of Scondera. However, many animals and beasts survived. Some even find the new world better suited to them. Others are thriving on the ruins of civilization, but may become desperate when pickings get thin.

As Nature twisted during the Apocalypse, it caused some creatures to become especially feral, unnaturally strong and mad. Any creature could have become Broken by the Night of Fire. Likewise, some creatures were touched by the Weave as it ripped apart, and were granted innate magical abilities.

Gamemasters can create their own creatures — including Broken and Weave-Touched creatures — using the common animals tables on page 248, or any creature in the Bestiary as a base. The rules for creating creatures and information on Toughness and Nutritional value can be found on page 246.



Animals

Broken Boars

Broken boars are a breed of boars that were altered by the Night of Fire. Unlike other animals that kill only to survive, Broken Boars are filled with bloodlust. They are often physically twisted in some way, as if their bones are fused together in unnatural places. They are larger than their mundane cousins and have longer tusks. An adult Broken boar can reach 400 pounds.

Broken Boars

Archetype: Broken | **Motivation:** Survival
Style: 0 | **Health:** 10
Nutritional value: 12 | **Toughness:** 2

Primary Attributes

Body: 6 | **Charisma:** 0
Dexterity: 2 | **Intelligence:** 0
Strength: 4 | **Willpower:** 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 1 | **Initiative:** 2
Move: 6* | **Defense:** 7
Perception: 3 | **Stun:** 6

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	4	4	8	(4)
Stealth	2	2	3**	(1+)
Survival	0	4	4	(2)

Talents

Gore: +3 Skill specialization to Brawl/tusks

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Tusks	3L	-1	13L	(6+) L
Bite	1L	-1	8L	(4) L

** Double Move when running*
*** -1 Stealth rolls due to size*

Carrion Reaper

Large, vulture-like scavenger beasts, carrion reapers have a terrible reputation. They are known as followers of armies and wars, feeding upon the corpses left after great battles. They were native to the Warlands in the Before, but can now be found almost anywhere. They especially like the flesh of decaying corpses, and in the months after the Long Winter, they are rarely hungry.

Carrion reapers do not usually pick fights with the living, preferring the dead (or nearly so), but their long saber-like beaks and vicious talons can secure a live meal when necessary. Carrion reapers look more like skinned dogs than birds. Their wings stretch in membranous arcs that are often torn and tattered, barely capable of sustained flight. Thus, many carrion reapers travel by hopping and gliding, and can move quite quickly this way.



Carrion Reaper

Archetype: Animal | **Motivation:** Survival
Style: 0 | **Health:** 4
Nutritional value: 2 | **Toughness:** 1

Primary Attributes

Body: 3 | **Charisma:** 0
Dexterity: 5 | **Intelligence:** 0
Strength: 2 | **Willpower:** 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: -1 | **Initiative:** 5
Move: 7 (3 on land) | **Defense:** 8
Perception: 2 | **Stun:** 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	2	3	5	(2+)
Stealth	5	2	8*	(4)
Survival	0	5	5	(2+)

Talents

Flurry: 2 attacks, both at -2

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bite	2L	+1	8L	(4) L
Talons	1L	+1	7L	(3+) L

** +1 Stealth rolls due to size*

Dirk Wasps

Dirk wasps resemble much larger versions of smaller wasps, except they are almost 1 ft. in length, with a vicious 2-inch barb that they use to repeatedly sting their prey. These giant flying insects hunt together, in packs of four or more, and can bring down animals as large as cows. They lay eggs in the corpses, which hatch days later. Dirk wasps fly almost silently, making their ambushes quick and sudden.

Chirs

Chirs are considered a necessary evil of the Warlands, where they often feed on battlefield dead before the bodies can be infested with corpse fungi. The large canines have a wide stance and are low to the ground, allowing them to amble across the plains for days at a time without tiring. Once they find a blood trail, they follow it incessantly. They have short, mangy hair and a cackling bark. They stand 3 ft. tall at the shoulder and weigh about 250 pounds.



Chirs

Archetype: Animal
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 8
Nutritional value: 4
Toughness: 2

Primary Attributes

Body: 5
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 2
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 5
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 2
Move: 7
Defense: 7
Perception: 3
Stun: 5

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	5	5	10	(5)
Stealth	2	2	4	(2)
Survival	0	3	5*	(2+)

Talents

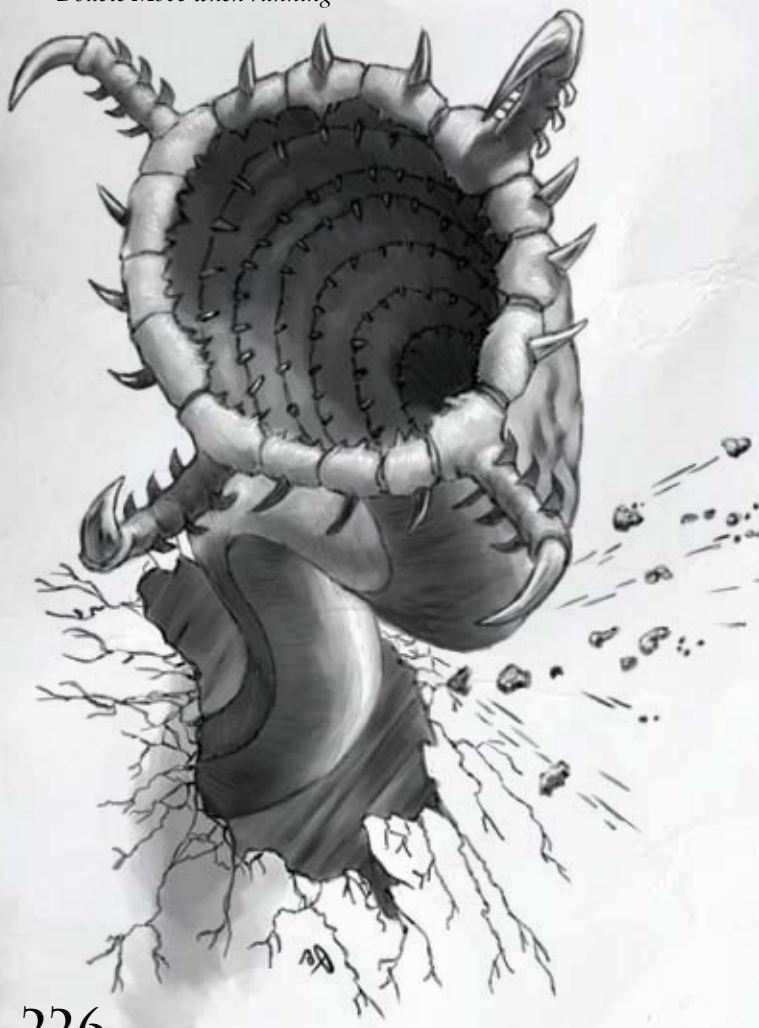
*** Skill Bonus (survival):** +2 to Survival

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bite	2L	0	12L	(6) L

*** Double Move when running*



Core Delvers

Archetype: Animal
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 10
Nutritional value: 12
Toughness: 3

Primary Attributes

Body: 6
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 3
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 6
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 1
Initiative: 3
Move: 9 (through loose dirt, 4 above ground)
Defense: 8
Perception: 3
Stun: 6

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	6	4	10	(5)
Stealth	3	3	7 *	(3+)
Survival	0	3	3	(1+)

Talents

Burrowing: Can move beneath ground
Skill Aptitude: Stealth +2

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bite	2L	-1	11L	(5+) L

** -1 Stealth rolls due to size unless underground*

Core Delvers

These 10-ft. long worm-like animals, approximately 2-ft. thick, attack using their large circular maw — which is lined with razor-sharp, crystalline teeth. Sensitive to vibrations, delvers hunt by sensing the movement of surface creatures, and they often punch up through the earth, surprising their prey. They then violently pull their prey back beneath the ground, often shattering bones and tearing the grabbed limb from their victim's body.

Fall Fishers

Fall fishers are most common in Jherlind, where they lurk behind the region's many waterfalls. The crustaceans cling to the side of mountains, attacking from above with their double stingers and powerful pincers. They can reach 4 ft. long, but weigh only 20 pounds.

Special: Each of the fall fisher's two stingers detach with a successful attack and require one day to regrow.

Dirk Wasps

Archetype: Animal
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 2
Nutritional value: 1
Toughness: 0

Primary Attributes

Body: 1
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 5
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 1
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: -2
Initiative: 5
Move: 6
Defense: 8
Perception: 3
Stun: 1

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	1	1	2	(1)
Stealth	5	5	12*	(6)
Survival	0	4	4	(2)

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Sting	1N	+2	5N	(2+) N

** +2 Stealth rolls due to size*

Fern Spiders

Fern spiders are masters of disguise. They resemble giant ferns common to densely wooded areas so closely that their victims rarely see them before it's too late. Like other spiders, Fern Spiders use paralyzing poison to render their victims helpless, and spin webs to incapacitate them until the spiders are ready for their next meal. Fern spiders can reach more than 3 ft. across.

Special: Fern spiders make a Web touch attack to entangle an opponent (See Touch Attack, page 182). If the attack succeeds, no immediate damage is done. Instead, compare the amount of damage that would have been done to the target's





Fall Fisher

Archetype: Animal
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 5
Nutritional value: 2
Toughness: 1

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 3
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 3
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: -1
Initiative: 3
Move: 6
Defense: 7
Perception: 3
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	3	2	5	(2+)
Stealth	3	5	9*	(4+)
Survival	3	3	6	(3)

Talents

Dual wield: Pincers and stinger can attack two different targets at -4 on each

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Barbed stinger	4L	+1	10L	(5) L
Pincer	2N	+1	8N	(4) N

** +1 Stealth rolls due to size*

Fern Spider

Archetype: Animal
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 4
Nutritional value: 2
Toughness: 1

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 5
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 2
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: -1
Initiative: 5
Move: 7
Defense: 7*
Perception: 2
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	2	4	6	(3)
Stealth	5	2	10**	(5)
Survival	0	2	2	(1)
Web	5	2	7	(3+)

Talents

Camouflage: +2 to Stealth
Poison: (Toxin 3, paralysis)

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools
* **Soft Body:** -2 to Defense

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bite	1L	+1	8L	(4) L
Web	2N	+1	10N	(5) N

*** +3 Stealth rolls due to size and camouflage*

Ostovhore

Archetype: Animal
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 5
Nutritional value: 4
Toughness: 1

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 5
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 2
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 5
Move: 5*
Defense: 6**
Perception: 2
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	2	2	4	(2)
Athletics	2	1	3	(1+)
Stealth	5	5	10	(5)
Survival	0	2	2	(1)

Talents

Advanced Accuracy: Reduces called shot penalty by 4
Finesse Attack: Use Dexterity for acid ink spray

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools
* **Slow:** -2 to Move
** **Soft Body:** -2 to Defense

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Spiked tentacle	1L	0	5L	(2+) L
Acid ink spray	3N	0	9N	(4+) N
Beak	1L	0	5L	(2+) L

Strength rating. If the amount of damage exceeds the target's Strength rating, the target is covered with sticky webs. An entangled character must succeed in an opposed strength roll against the web's Strength of 4 to break free.

Ostovhores

Ostovhores inhabit mountainous regions where they use their natural camouflage to conceal themselves. They subsist on the bones left by carrion, but can defend themselves by shooting acid at their opponents. They attempt to blind anyone who threatens them. Ostovhores have been known to then follow their blinded victims through the hazardous mountains until the inevitable happens and the ostovhore can feast on the bones.

The creatures average 15 ft. from tip to tip of its tentacles, which are clawed and can be used to remove meat from bones. Though their skin is much tougher than their sea-bound cousins, they have soft, boneless bodies that are more fragile than vertebrates of a similar size. They weigh about 75 pounds.

Special: The acid ink spray has the potential to blind prey. Their attack (5N when trying to blind, which includes all penal-





ties and Talent bonuses) can only be resisted by Dexterity plus helmet and/or shield. Each point of damage taken also indicates how many hours the blindness lasts. The acid is painful, but can be washed out with a sufficient amount of water. It has no long-term effects. This attack method is used to hunt animals and creatures who are more likely to wander off a cliff to their doom than intelligent humanoids who can wash out the ink.

Quill Apes

Quill apes were native to the islands of Lorant's Scythe in the Before. Island folk would bait the apes into throwing their long quills — sometimes at their own peril — which the islanders would use as blowgun darts. After the Night of Fire, Quill apes have been found in many regions of the mainland. They are intelligent for animals and have adjusted well to new environments. They fling quills to hunt and defend themselves.

Scab Rats

Scab rats are infested with a flesh-eating disease that can be transferred to anyone with whom they come in contact. The 4-ft.-tall rats scavenge in packs, but hunger can turn them from scavengers to hunters of fresh meat. They have been known to unwittingly wipe out the populations of small communities in the After by spreading disease.



Quill Ape

Archetype: Animal
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 6
Nutritional value: 4
Toughness: 2

Primary Attributes

Body: 4
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 5
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 4
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 5
Move: 9
Defense: 9
Perception: 2
Stun: 4

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	4	4	8	(4)
Athletics	4	3	9*	(4+)
Stealth	5	1	6	(3)
Survival	0	2	2	(1)

Talents

* **Skill Bonus (athletics):** +2 to Athletics

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Quills (throw)	1L	0	10L	(5) L
Quills (punch)	1L	0	9L	(4+) L
Bite	1L	0	9L	(4+) L

Scab Rat

Archetype: Animal
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 4
Nutritional value: 0*
Toughness: 1

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 5
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 2
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: -1
Initiative: 5
Move: 5**
Defense: 9
Perception: 2
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	2	3	5	(2+)
Stealth	5	4	10†	(5)
Survival	0	3	3	(1+)

Talents

Disease Carrier: Infection rating 2 or contract scab rot

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools
Festering Gait: -2 to Move

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bite	1L	+1	7L	(3+) L

** Scab rats are so diseased that they are inedible*
*** Double Move when running*
† +1 Stealth rolls due to size

Special: Scab rot symptoms include fatigue, fever and muscle aches. It may also cause headaches, dizziness, chills, and vomiting. See page 188 for more information.

Schlekk

Archetype: Animal
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 12
Nutritional value: 36
Toughness: 1+

Primary Attributes

Body: 6
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 2
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 6
Willpower: 4

Secondary Attributes

Size: 2
Initiative: 2
Move: 8*
Defense: 8**
Perception: 4
Stun: 6

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	6	2	8	(4)
Athletics	6	2	8	(4)
Stealth	2	2	2†	(1)
Survival	0	4	4	(2)

Talents

** **Thick hide:** +2 Defense

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Tentacle	2N	-2	8N	(4) N
Bite	1L	-2	7L	(3+) L

** Double Move when running*
† -2 Stealth rolls due to size

Schlekks

Schlekks once roamed in great herds through the swamps of Loslolin, where they were routinely harvested for their meat and hides. The large creatures use their tentacles to pluck the wetland grasses they eat. They are normally docile if left alone, but can be deadly when they charge. Schlekks stand 12 ft. at the shoulder and weigh 12,000 pounds.



Wampus Cats

The wampus cat is a feared predator in swampy regions. Its long fur is often so covered with hanging moss that it is nearly invisible in the trees. It is equally at home on the ground, in the treetops or even in the water, where it uses its webbed feet to paddle through deeper areas. It is an ambush



predator, preferring to pounce on its victim from above. It has a haunting wail that strikes fear in the hearts of swamp dwellers, much like a wolf's howl frightens those in the woodlands. The wampus reaches about 8 ft. long and 200 pounds at adulthood.

Creatures stunned by a bite attack remain in the cat's jaws and may be carried away if they are Size -1 or smaller.

Wampus Cat

Archetype: Animal
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 6
Nutritional value: 4
Toughness: 2

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 5
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 4
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 5
Move: 9*
Defense: 8
Perception: 3
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	4	4	8	(4)
Stealth	5	3	8	(4)
Survival	0	3	3	(1+)

Talents

Mobile attack: Can attack without stopping movement

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Claw	2L	0	10L	(5) L
Bite	2L	0	10L	(5) L

** Double Move when running*

Awoken

In the Before, some creatures were so rare that they were thought to have been myths or legends. Some had indeed become extinct, with only stories remaining. Since the Night of Fire, many of these beasts have either been awoken from some magical slumber, or have found form again as a side effect wrought by the shattering of the Weave. As their numbers increase, so does their potential threat to other survivors.

Brotula

Brotula are the sea monsters of rover legend, but like many legendary creatures, the Night of Fire seems to have reawakened them. Since the Night of Fire, these horrors from the sea have even been spotted in freshwater rivers. The beasts are said to have two heads, and can grow to be twice as large as a rover village ship.

Brotula, Lesser

Archetype: Awoken
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 16
Nutritional value: 100
Toughness: 3+

Primary Attributes

Body: 9
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 3
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 9
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 4
Initiative: 3
Move: 10*
Defense: 8
Perception: 3
Stun: 9

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	9	2	11	(5+)
Brawl	9	3	12	(6)
Stealth	3	2	1**	(0+)
Survival	0	3	3	(1+)

Talents

Advanced Flurry: Attack same opponent twice without penalty
Mobile Attack: Move and attack simultaneously

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools
***Slow:** -2 to Move

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bite	4L	-4	12L	(6) L
Bite 2	4L	-4	12L	(6) L
† Ram	4N	-4	14N	(7) N

*** -4 Stealth rolls due to size unless underwater*
† Brotula receive +2 to attack rolls when ramming

Lesser Dragons

Lesser Dragons are much smaller than the Great Dragons of legend, which are now believed to be extinct. Hundreds of years ago, the first Council of Magores cast a spell to make the Great Dragons susceptible to Sorcery and hunted them down. Some Lesser Dragons, such as stonewyrms, cannot fly, and most are little more than animals. Only the drakes have the intelligence and wisdom of the Great Dragons.

Drakes

Intelligent and cunning, drakes are the rarest of the Lesser Dragons. Thought by most to have Awoken during the Night of Fire, in truth the drakes had turned their own existence into something of a legend, reducing themselves to stories and fanciful tales, especially among the peaceful island folk. They lived on the islands of Lorant's Scythe and along the southern coast of the former Empire, using their shapechanging abilities to remain hidden in the Before.

More than 10 ft. long in their natural form, drakes are lithe and dark green in color, with bright coloring around their eyes and ears. Most of the time, however, drakes take the shape of much smaller lizards, only returning to their natural form when they need their wings to fly or when they sleep. They enjoy being around other sentient creatures, though they prefer to stay hidden and observe.

The ability to shape-change into lizards of varying sizes makes it especially difficult for larger prey to track and find drakes, and is perhaps a lesser version of the ability that allowed some Great Dragons to take human form. Unfortunately, the drakes have also inherited the Great Dragon's susceptibility to Sorcery.

After the Night of Fire, drakes are strangely drawn to certain people and places — usually just to watch and observe, but sometimes to help or interfere. Others find that they can now shapechange into forms other than lizards, such as small cats, dogs or other mammals. A few believe that they are truly Awakening, and may regain a heritage they once thought lost.

Drakes can understand Ascondean and Loranthian, but can only speak their own strange chirping tongue.

Drake

Archetype: Awoken
Motivation: Unknown
Style: 2
Health: 11
Nutritional value: 12
Toughness: 4

Primary Attributes

Body: 5
Charisma: 2
Dexterity: 6
Intelligence: 2
Strength: 4
Willpower: 5

Secondary Attributes

Size: 1
Initiative: 8
Move: 10
Defense: 10
Perception: 9*
Stun: 5

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	6**	3	9	(4+)
Stealth	6	2	7†	(3+)
Survival	2	5	7	(3+)

Talents

Shapechange: Can assume an alternate animal form of Size -1 or -2
Agile: +1 to Dexterity
* **Alertness:** +2 to Perception rolls
** **Finesse Attack:** Use Dexterity with Brawl attacks

Flaws

Susceptible to Sorcery: -2 to resist or defend against sorcery
Curious: Lesser dragons receive a Style point whenever their curiosity gets them into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Claw	2L	-1	10L	(5) L
Bite	4L	-1	12L	(6) L

† *-1 Stealth rolls due to size*

Stonewyrm

Archetype: Awoken
Motivation: Survival
Style: 2
Health: 10
Nutritional value: 12
Toughness: 3

Primary Attributes

Body: 6
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 4
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 5
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 1
Initiative: 4
Move: 9
Defense: 11*
Perception: 3
Stun: 6

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	5	4	9	(4+)
Stealth	4	2	7**	(3+)
Survival	0	4	4	(2)

Talents

** **Camouflage:** Receives +2 to Stealth when in rocky areas
* **Skin of Stone:** +2 to Defense

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Claw	2L	-1	10L	(5) L
Bite	4L	-1	12L	(6) L

** *-1 Stealth rolls due to size, +2 to Stealth in rocky areas*

Stonewyrm

Stonewyrms are lesser dragons that resemble 15-ft.-long lizards with gray-black skin that looks like polished stone. They are native to the rocky plains of the southern Warlands. They hunt by remaining very still among stones, waiting for prey to come close enough for them to attack. A stonewyrm's hide is actually quite thick, adding to its natural Defense.

Wyvern

Lithe and aggressive, the snake-like wyverns are found in northern forests, especially those with high treetops on which they can perch. Once considered extinct, they are clearly far from it. Their highly poisonous sting makes them the apex predator in their environment. Brave mongrel hunters favor wyvern barbs for use in making their own poisons, and the poison is also a useful ingredient in potion-making. wyverns are also hunted by griffons, similarly legendary creatures that have returned since the Night of Fire.

Special: If a wyvern's sting inflicts damage, the target must make a Body check against the lesser dragon's deadly toxin (4L). If the character fails, he or she immediately takes an additional 4L damage from the poison.

Wyvern

Archetype: Awoken
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 9
Nutritional value: 12
Toughness: 3

Primary Attributes

Body: 5
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 6
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 4
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 1
Initiative: 6
Move: 10 (5)*
Defense: 10
Perception: 5
Stun: 5

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	4	4	8	(4)
Stealth	6	2	7**	(3+)
Survival	0	4	4	(2)

Talents

Poison: Toxin 4, Damage 4L
Alertness: +2 to Perception

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools
* **Airborne:** Half movement rate on the ground

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Sting	2L	-1	9L	(4+) N
Bite	1L	-1	8L	(4) L

*** -1 Stealth rolls due to size*



Griffon

Archetype: Awoken
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 9
Nutritional value: 12
Toughness: 3

Primary Attributes

Body: 5
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 4
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 6
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 1
Initiative: 4
Move: 10
Defense: 8
Perception: 5*
Stun: 5

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	6	5	11	(5+)
Stealth	4	1	4**	(2)
Survival	0	4	4	(2)

Talents

* **Alertness:** +2 to Perception

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Claw	2L	-1	12L	(6) L
Bite	3L	-1	13L	(6+) L

*** -1 Stealth rolls due to size*

Regnant

Archetype: Deep Horror
Motivation: Expansion
Style: 0
Health: 12
Nutritional value: 0
Toughness: 4+

Primary Attributes

Body: 7
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 3
Intelligence: 2
Strength: 6
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 2
Initiative: 5
Move: 9
Defense: 8
Perception: 5
Stun: 7

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	6	6	12	(6)
Stealth	6	6	10*	(5)
Survival	2	4	6	(3)

Talents

Poisonous Bite: Toxin 5, Damage 4L
Hive Mind: Telepathically communicates with Seethe Warriors and Inspire them, as per the talent

Flaws

Light Aversion: Blinded by bright lights

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bite	4L	-2	14L	(7) L
Pincer	2N	-2	12N	(6) N

** -2 Stealth rolls due to size*

Griffon

These flying creatures of legend resemble a cross between eagles and lions, and were long considered extinct. After the Night of Fire they have been seen again, hunting in the mountains, and seeking their preferred prey, the wyverns. Their powerful beaks pack a deadly bite, and while they might not be as agile or fast as their more reptilian foes, they are equally fearsome.

Deep Horrors

For millennia, the dwarves have fought an unending war. Their enemy, the Deep Horrors, have boiled up from the abyss beneath the Primea Mountains, crashing against the axes and hammers of the dwarves in waves. Immune to the poisons and diseases carried by the hordes, the dwarves have never wavered against the onslaught.

The three most common types of Deep Horror are listed below. There may be others that remain unknown even to the dwarves. This much is certain: With the Night of Fire and the fall of the Primea Mountains, the only line of defense against the Deep Horrors is gone. It is only a matter of time before they emerge upon the surface.

Regnant

Regnants are much larger than the more insect-like seethe warriors and are more intelligent. Their swollen forms are reminiscent of huge larvae. They use a kind of telepathy to control and coordinate the seethes, giving them an advantage in combat — one that is always obvious when it's present. However, regnants make for formidable opponents themselves with their powerful bites and thrashing claws.

Special: If a regnant's pincer damage is enough to stun its target, the target is held and must win an opposed strength roll against the regnant to break free. While a target is in its pincers, the regnant receives +2 to bite the target. However, if it wishes to bite a different target, it must empty its pincers.

Seethe Warriors

Seethe warriors are the ones most commonly encountered by the dwarves. The 6-ft.-long, chitinous monsters boil up from cracks beneath the mountains and into the lower halls, where they rend and tear at any living thing they find. They are tough to kill, and seemingly endless numbers exist deep in the abyss. They keep coming, and the dwarves keep killing

Seethe Warrior

Archetype: Deep Horror
Motivation: Expansion
Style: 0
Health: 9
Nutritional value: 0
Toughness: 3

Primary Attributes

Body: 6
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 4
Intelligence: 1
Strength: 5
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 1
Initiative: 5
Move: 9
Defense: 11
Perception: 3
Stun: 6

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	5	4	9	(4+)
Stealth	4	5	8*	(4)
Survival	1	1	2	(1)

Talents

Poisonous Bite: Toxin 5, Damage 4L
Chitinous: +2 to Defense

Flaws

Light Aversion: Blinded by bright lights

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bite	2L	-1	10L	(5) L
Pincer	2N	-1	10N	(5) N

** -1 Stealth rolls due to size*

them. Fortunately, the dwarves are immune to their poison.

Special: One in 20 seethe warriors carry corpse fungi in the seams of their chitinous bodies, to which they are immune. Dwarves are immune to this variant of the fungi.



Vitiate

Archetype: Deep Horror
Motivation: Expansion
Style: 0
Health: 5
Nutritional value: 0
Toughness: 2

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 6*
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 5
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 6
Move: 11
Defense: 9
Perception: 2
Stun: 3

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	5	4	9	(4+)
Stealth	6	4	10	(5)
Survival	0	2	2	(1)

Talents

Poisonous Bite: Toxin 5, or paralyze
*** Agile:** +1 Dexterity

Flaws

Light Aversion: Blinded by bright lights
Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bite	1L	0	10L	(5) L
Pincer	2N	0	11N	(5+) N

Vitiate

Swift and silent, the vitiate are the smallest of the Deep Horrors reported by the dwarven stalwarts, though they are still around 6 ft. tall. They resemble stooped humanoids, with chitinous shells and compound eyes. They are dreadfully fast on their six legs, though they can rear up on the back four to use the front two as fine manipulators or powerful clubs. Their skin is an oily black color.

Breeding instincts once drove large numbers of vitiate into the lower chambers of the dwarven cities, where they attempted to abduct as many dwarves or other humanoids as possible. They would render their victims unconscious with powerful blows, and carry them back into the lightless depths to be used for food or warm places for Deep Horror larvae to grow. Worse, some dwarves fear that the humanoid appearance of the vitiate hints at an even worse fate for those taken.

Oruskans

Called "beast men" by the humans and dwarves, the Oruskans are often guilty of acting in a less-than-civilized manner — at least by the standards of the Empire. However, for the most part, the kobolds, goblins and orcs at least manage to maintain distinct cultural traditions, with religion, magic and trade between their peoples and settlements. Only the trolls are truly bestial, and are avoided by the other Oruskans. The Night of Fire brought everyone low, but the Oruskans are better positioned to recover more quickly. Perhaps now it's the Oruskans' turn to rebuild the world in their image.

Goblins

Goblins outnumber orcs in the Northlands, where they fight the brutes for control of the forests. They survive by hunting and by hijacking caravans, or looting villages and then selling what they take.

Although about the size of humans, goblins appear a little shorter because they walk with a stooped gait. Most have a sickly green cast to their warty skin, but light- and dark-gray skin tones are also common.

Goblins are by far the most numerous of the Oruskan races, perhaps by a factor of 10 to 1 or more, even after the Night of Fire. Almost as varied in personality as humans, goblins tend to be a little less bright than their orc brothers — and a lot less intelligent than their kobold cousins. However, goblins make up for this in two main ways. They are ubiquitous, and sheer numbers in the Northlands are important. They are also slightly more sociable than the other races — though this isn't saying much. Goblins can make good traders and merchants (the smarter ones, at least) and they are accepted by all the other Oruskan races more-or-less equally, or rather, the other races can bear the presence of goblins with less hate and disgust for slightly longer. However, with their wide, shark-like grins and mouths full of needle-like teeth, goblins do eventually make most folk feel uncomfortable. The more successful goblins are nomads, moving around from place to place, leaving just before they wear out their welcome.

Not all goblins are so comfortable around other races. The vast majority are never seen by humans, and live their lives in the forests of the Oruskan Wilderness, fighting off attacks by the much more aggressive orcs. Goblins are excellent archers, and tend to pick off their opponents at range from a good defensive position. They have much to protect, even as nomads — for the goblins view Nature itself as something that must be defended.



Goblins are fiercely devoted to Nature. Carefully protecting and nurturing the environment related to their totems, goblin Primalists are almost always the leaders of their communities.

After

Even after the Night of Fire, goblins are still the most numerous Oruskan race. However, their most powerful Shamans perished during the Night of Fire. They are now raiders and parasites, attaching themselves to bigger, stronger groups, in hope of grabbing a few scraps and waiting for their chance to either move on to something better, or just to avoid getting killed. They still revere Nature, however, and have not turned their backs on magic — instead they carefully protect and nurture those among them who show the gift for Primal Magic.

Goblin

Archetype: Oruskan
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 4
Nutritional value: 4
Toughness: 2

Primary Attributes

Body: 2
Charisma: 2
Dexterity: 4
Intelligence: 1
Strength: 3
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 5
Move: 7
Defense: 6
Perception: 3
Stun: 2

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	3	3	6	(3)
Climb			7	(3+)
Archery	4	3	7	(3+)
Diplomacy	2	1	3	(1+)
Trading			4	(2)
Melee	3	1	4	(2)
Stealth	4	2	6	(3)
Survival	1	2	3	(1+)

Talents

Instant Reload: Can reload and fire in same turn
Rapid Shot: Attack same opponent twice per round at -2

Flaws

Illiterate: Cannot read or write
Superstitious: Follows unusual beliefs

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Long Bow	3L	0	10L	(5) L
Short Sword	2L	0	6L	(3) L

Kobolds

No one is quite sure where this race of small, cunning Oruskans got their name, but at least one human tribe in the Northlands call them "cold-bolds" in reference to their aggressive, quick raids that usually happen in the dead of night and the middle of winter. Either way, the small, seal-like kobolds are underestimated by the other races, and they prefer it that way. They typically stand about 3 ft. tall and are covered with very short white or brown fur. They wear clothing made from the skins of polar bear, seals, arctic wolves or whatever else they have hunted.

Kobolds are clever and agile adversaries, preferring subterfuge and guile to fighting. When a fight is unavoidable, they attack in large groups — lightning fast — attempting to get in and out quickly and taking only as much as they can carry.

Kobold

Archetype: Oruskan
Motivation: Survival
Style: 1
Health: 3
Nutritional value: 2
Toughness: 2

Primary Attributes

Body: 2
Charisma: 1
Dexterity: 5
Intelligence: 3
Strength: 2
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: -1
Initiative: 8
Move: 7
Defense: 9
Perception: 7
Stun: 2

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	2	2	4	(2)
Larceny	5	2	7	(3+)
Melee	2	2	4	(2)
Stealth	5	2	8*	(4)
Survival	3	2	5	(2+)

Talents

Alertness: +2 Perception

Flaws

Coldborn: -2 to all skill rolls in hot environments

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Dagger	1L	+1	6L	(3) L
Spear	2L	+1	7L	(3+) L
Spear (thrown)	2L	+1	7L	(3+) L
Club	2N	+1	7N	(3+) N

Armor	Defense	Str	Dex
Hides	+1	1	--

** +1 Stealth due to Size*

Occupying wide stretches of the coastline of the Oruskan Wilderness, kobolds live in shanty villages. Unlike other Oruskan races, kobolds tend not to fight amongst themselves, nor do they like existing alongside other Oruskans. On rare occasions they will trade with goblins. Kobolds avoid Orcs as much as possible, and will not raid other Oruskan villages unless times are particularly hard. For the most part, kobolds live off the land and sea, hunting, fishing and trading when it suits them. They keep themselves to themselves, and try to stay out of sight.

After

The Night of Fire was tough on the kobolds, but they quickly recovered. The Long Winter actually turned out to be a very prosperous time for them. The deep cold and the mysterious push of glaciers further south than previously possible created an almost perfect environment for the kobolds, who began to breed quickly and raid deep into the ruins of the Ascondean Empire, finding little or no resistance. In areas where small non-Oruskan settlements did survive, kobolds quickly fell into trading agreements — or simply avoided defended towns in favor of scavenging off the wreckage of civilization.

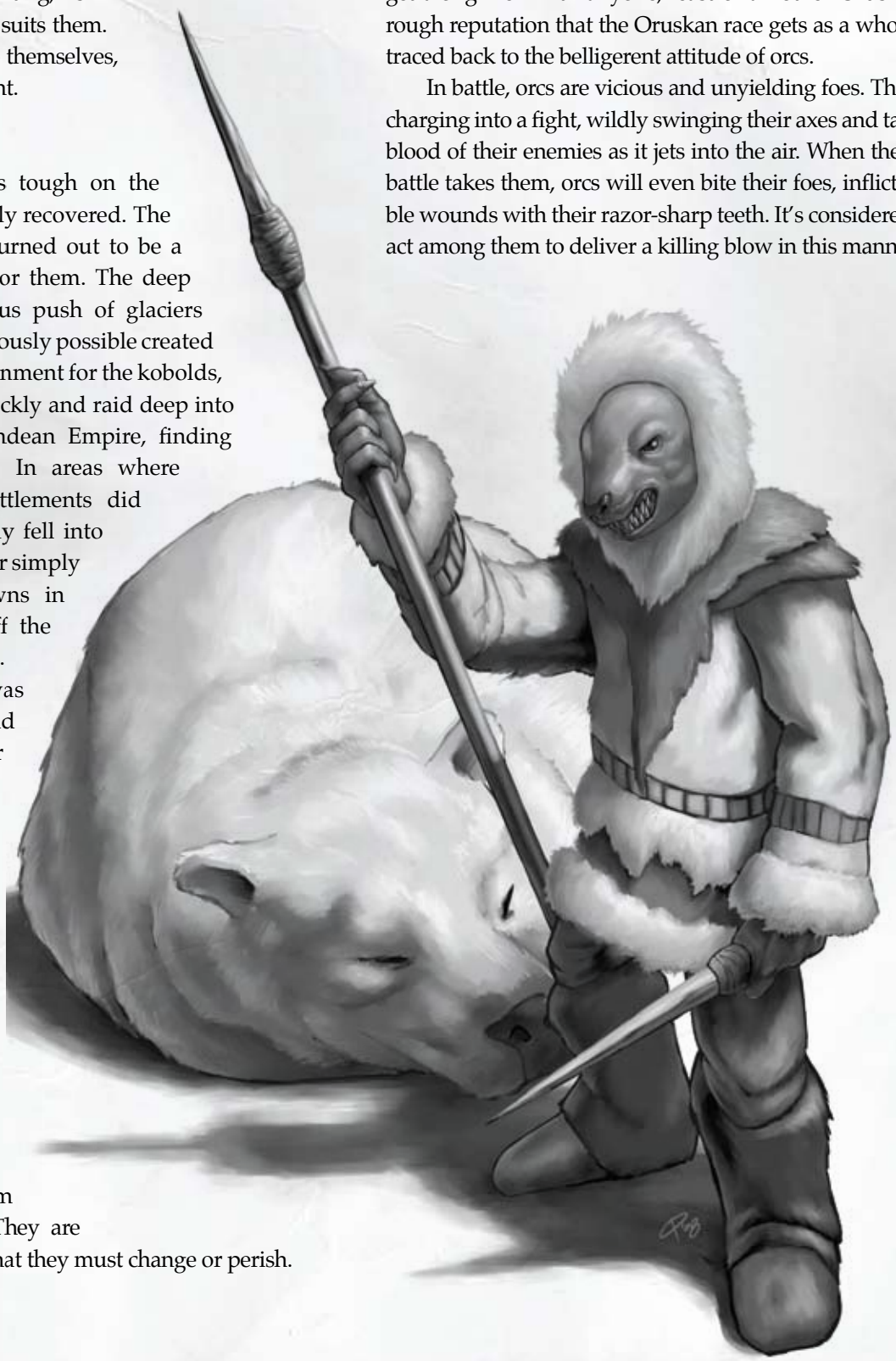
When the Thaw was over, the kobolds found themselves stranded far from the oceans and the ice, which is uncomfortable for many of them.

They are in possession of trading materials, but they need to either deal with the outside world or defend themselves. Typical kobolds in the After find themselves in a strange and thawing world, which makes them feel panicky and hot. They are smart enough to know that they must change or perish.

Orcs

Even the smallest orc is more than 6 ft. tall and weighs more than 300 pounds. Like goblins and kobolds, orcs have sharp teeth, but they are probably the most human-like of the Oruskan races. Orcs, also sometimes called "brutes" (and for good reason) are known for their strength and bad temperament. They do not get along well with anyone, least of all other Oruskans. The rough reputation that the Oruskan race gets as a whole can be traced back to the belligerent attitude of orcs.

In battle, orcs are vicious and unyielding foes. They prefer charging into a fight, wildly swinging their axes and tasting the blood of their enemies as it jets into the air. When the spirit of battle takes them, orcs will even bite their foes, inflicting terrible wounds with their razor-sharp teeth. It's considered a great act among them to deliver a killing blow in this manner.



Orc

Archetype: Oruskan
Style: 1
Nutritional value: 4
Motivation: Survival
Health: 6
Toughness: 2

Primary Attributes

Body: 4
Dexterity: 2
Strength: 5
Charisma: 1
Intelligence: 2
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Move: 7
Perception: 4
Initiative: 4
Defense: 6
Stun: 4

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	5	2	7	(3+)
Brawl	5	2	7	(3+)
Melee	5	4	9	(4+)
Survival	2	2	4	(2)

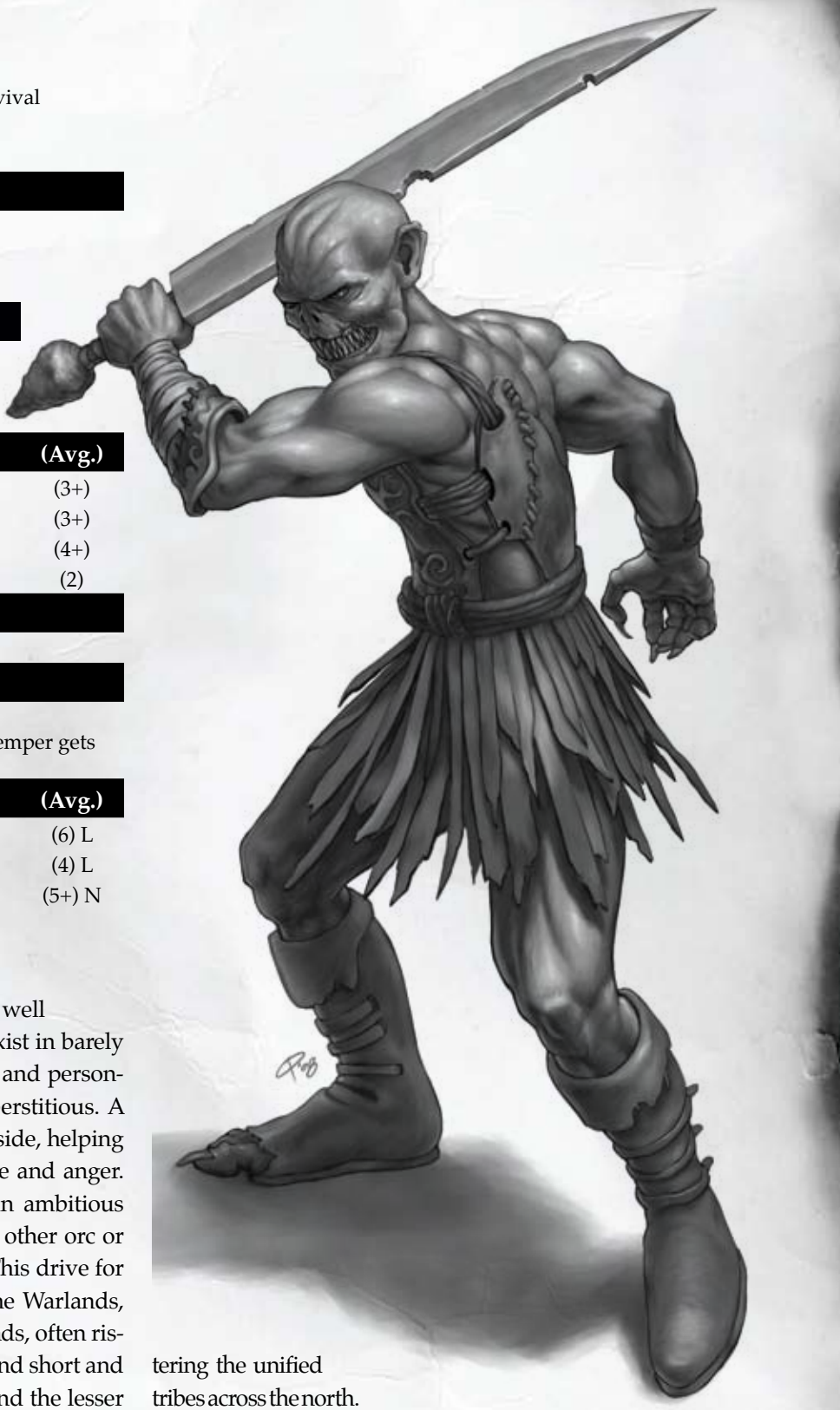
Talents

Strong: +1 strength and maximum strength rating

Flaws

Illiterate
Short-tempered: Receives a Style point whenever temper gets him or her into trouble

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Axe, two-handed	3L	0	12L	(6) L
Bite	1L	0	8L	(4) L
Club	2N	0	11N	(5+) N



Clad in animal hides (sometimes quite well made) and carrying large axes or swords, orcs exist in barely organized tribes held together by the sheer will and personality of a single leader. They are also quite superstitious. A crafty orc chieftain usually has a Shaman by his side, helping him keep control of the seething mass of muscle and anger. Many chieftains are eventually murdered by an ambitious rival from within — but most fall in battle with other orc or goblin tribes as they endlessly vie for territory. This drive for land has sent many orcs south and west into the Warlands, where they spend a fulfilling existence in warbands, often rising to positions of significant power. The rest spend short and brutish lives taking territory from one another and the lesser Oruskan races over and over again.

The last time the tribes were united was under Khran'doral, a mongrel chieftain who led the Black Wing tribe into Ascondea in a successful war against the humans. Unfortunately for the orcs and the Northlands, the war was directly responsible for the formation of the Empire and the legions that swept through the region, burning and destroying the largest orc cities and scattering the unified tribes across the north. Ever since, there have been few attempts to unite the disparate orc tribes.

A typical orc settlement is mostly a collection of stone or mud buildings. Beneath the surface, orcs build tunnels and shafts, delving into the ground as part of their cultural religion (see The Cult of Baranthum, page 157). For the most part, lip service is given to these subterranean structures unless the

settlement happens upon an extensive cave system. This is usually taken as a good sign, and proof that the orc tribe was "meant to be here."

After

Very little has changed for orcs after the end of the world. They remain aggressive and violent; there are just fewer of them. They were always used to taking what they wanted, and that has not changed. However, the loss of the more powerful Primalists did shake many orcs' faith in the world, and many mistrust magic now. They are unlikely to act against a Shaman, especially one of their own tribe, but other non-Oruskan mages are killed on sight, without a second thought.

A few orc tribes that managed to survive in any number are attempting to be more progressive. With the loss of the legions and a clear need to cooperate to survive, a handful have begun opening their village gates to other orcs, and even to other Oruskans willing to work and fight to protect the settlement. This could mark the start of a larger orc civilization in the smoking ruins of the old world.

Troll

Archetype: Oruskan
Motivation: Bloodlust
Style: 0
Health: 9
Nutritional value: 12
Toughness: 3

Primary Attributes

Body: 6
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 2
Intelligence: 1
Strength: 7
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 1
Initiative: 3
Move: 7*
Defense: 7
Perception: 3
Stun: 6

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	7	1	8	(4)
Brawl	7	4	11	(5+)
Melee	7	3	10	(5)
Survival	1	2	3	(1+)

Talents

Strong: +1 strength rating / maximum strength rating

Flaws

Illiterate: Cannot read or write
* **Slow:** -2 to move
Obsession: Battle

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Tree Trunk	4L	-1	13L	(6+) L
Bite	1L	-1	11L	(5+) L
Punch	3L	-1	13L	(6+) L

Trolls

If there is one thing the orcs of the Northlands fear, it's the trolls. The hulking beasts, stand as tall as 12 ft. and weigh nearly 700 pounds. Trolls all have large, wart-like calcium deposits on their bodies, including their knuckles. The sharp deposits on their knuckles makes a troll's fists lethal weapons. Trolls lack the intelligence of other Oruskans. However, what they lack in brains they make up for in sheer muscle and violence.

Trolls are more animalistic than the other Oruskans, but are clearly related to orcs and goblins. Like orcs, goblins and



kobolds, trolls have razor-sharp teeth. Their skin color varies from gray to dark green.

Trolls spend most of their time hunting prey. They aren't fussy about what they'll eat. They are so voracious that they have been known to start eating their opponents during battle, literally ripping chunks of flesh from their foes and forcing the meat into their mouths as they fight on.

Fortunately, trolls are not common, and are mostly found only in the Gelid Mountains that form the northern border of the Oruskan Wilderness, separating it from the glacier fields beyond. From time to time they will wander further south in search of food.

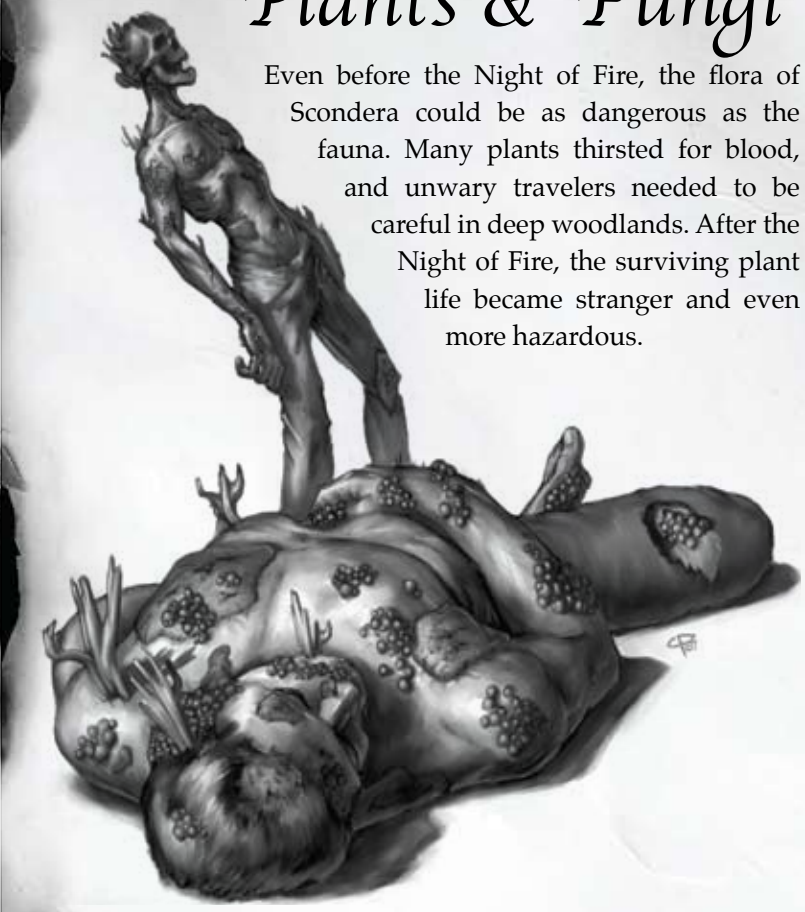
A few trolls have been "tamed" by warbands or particularly cunning orc or goblin tribes. Taming a troll is risky, however, and often ends badly for the tamer.

After

Unfortunately, trolls have not become extinct in the After. If anything, they have flourished in the chaos and destruction. The beasts may even become more prevalent. That's unfortunate for survivors: One hungry troll can tear an entire community of survivors apart in a few short minutes.

Plants & Fungi

Even before the Night of Fire, the flora of Scondera could be as dangerous as the fauna. Many plants thirsted for blood, and unwary travelers needed to be careful in deep woodlands. After the Night of Fire, the surviving plant life became stranger and even more hazardous.



Corpse Fungi

Archetype: Animal
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 8
Nutritional value: 0
Toughness: 3

Primary Attributes

Body: 5
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 2
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 5
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 2
Move: 5*
Defense: 7
Perception: 3
Stun: 5

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	5	5	10	(5)
Stealth	2	4	6	(3)
Survival	0	3	3	(1+)

Talents

Spore Kiss: Infection rating 3.
Lethal Blow: Lethal damage with fists
Mindless: Cannot be affected by Beguiling magic or other mental effects
High Pain Tolerance: Active until -3 health

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools
* **Slow:** -2 move

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Fist	1L	0	11L	(5+) L
Spore Kiss	1N	0	3N**	(1+) N

Note: These stats are for a typical animated human corpse.
*** See special attack rules below.*

Corpse Fungi

Corpse fungi are parasitic slime molds that feed off corpses. Though not sentient, they have the ability to animate the corpses they infest in order to move them closer to other food sources. They multiply by releasing hundreds of spores near living or dead tissue. The spores can be fatal if inhaled, which creates more dead tissue for the fungi to feed upon. Corpse fungi are a well-known danger to battlefield looters in the Warlands, but were less common in more civilized areas of the Before.

Special: Spore kiss can affect the living and freshly killed. Targeted at an opponent's mouth during combat, characters only get Dexterity and helmet/shield bonuses to resist a spore kiss. If the character takes damage from this attack, he or she must make a Body check to resist the infection of spores, against an Infection Rating 3. If the character fails, he is infected by the corpse fungi and will die within a number of days equal to his Body attribute, becoming a corpse fungi within hours of death. See page 188 for more information.

Elven Chokers

The origins of elven chokers stem from the Banishment when elves were cast out of the woodlands by Nature herself. Elven chokers were just one species of plant that became animated during that time and began attacking the elves.

But the plants are not picky about who or what they'll attack. The blood-sucking brambles have survived to this day by feeding on anything that comes within their reach. Though rooted in the ground, elven chokers can lash out up to 10 ft. to ensnare and drain their victims.

Special: Elven chokers make a Brawl touch attack to grab an opponent (See Touch Attack, page 182). If the attack succeeds, no immediate damage is done. Instead, compare the amount of damage that would have been done to the target's Strength rating. If the amount of damage exceeds the target's Strength rating, the target is entangled in the elven choker and takes two nonlethal wounds per turn until he escapes or is choked to death. An entangled character must succeed in an opposed Strength roll against the elven choker to break free.

Elven Choker

Archetype: Plant | **Motivation:** Survival
Style: 0 | **Health:** 6
Nutritional value: 2 | **Toughness:** 1

Primary Attributes

Body: 2 | **Charisma:** 0
Dexterity: 2 | **Intelligence:** 0
Strength: 4 | **Willpower:** 4

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0 | **Initiative:** 2
Move: 0* | **Defense:** 4
Perception: 4 | **Stun:** 2

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	4	2	6	(3)
Stealth	2	4	6	(3)
Survival	0	4	4	(2)

Talents

Skill Aptitude: +2 Brawl rating

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Entangle	2N	0	Special	--

** Elven chokers are rooted in one place, but its briars can lash out.*



Elementals

Elemental entities are not naturally found in the environment unless they have broken free of an Elementalist who summoned them. This can happen if a summoner is killed while the elemental is active. Once free, an elemental is unpredictable and irrational, and may attack anyone — but it's especially drawn to other Elementalists.

The following examples of elementals are those a player would typically summon and attempt to command.

Air Elementals

An air elemental can almost be invisible at times, though it whips up dust and debris when it skims the ground. While flying, it appears as a spinning vortex of mist. It can lift someone up from the ground briefly — either gently or violently. The whirlwind can be anywhere from a few feet in size to 10 ft. or more.

****Special:** Air elementals can make use of their gift of air to make a Brawl touch attack (see Touch Attack, page 182) against an target. If it succeeds, it can lift the target and dash it to the ground for 2N damage.

Earth Elementals

Solid and constructed of the dominant stone or earth in the region, an earth elemental appears as a featureless humanoid form about 6 ft. tall. It attacks with a stony fist, and its surface is tough and rocky, affording it some extra defense.

Fire Elementals

The shape of a fire elemental constantly shifts. It can spread out into a wall, blocking a passage or hiding someone behind flames. It can hurl parts of itself at an enemy. At times, a pair of blazing eyes stare out from within the fire, but there is nothing else remotely human about this entity.

***Special:** A fire elemental is so hot that anyone close enough to attack it using Brawl or Melee must make a Body Roll of 3 or suffer 1N of damage while attacking.

Water Elementals

A water elemental can appear as a delicate shimmering human form or as a raging column of water. It can charge an opponent, engulfing them. This may drown the target, though they can try to destroy the elemental before they succumb.

***Special:** An engulfed character can only do a maximum of 1 point of damage whenever he or she attempts to attack. Also see drowning rules, page 188, because an engulfed character is underwater.

Elementals

Archetype: Elemental **Motivation:** Unknown **Nutritional Value:** 0 **Toughness:** 1

	Air	Earth	Fire	Water
Primary Attributes				
Body	2	4	3	2
Dexterity	4	2	3	3
Strength	3	3	3	4
Charisma	0	0	0	0
Intelligence	1	1	1	1
Willpower	2	2	2	2
Secondary Attributes				
Health	4	6	5	4
Size	0	0	0	0
Initiative	5	3	4	4
Move	7 (double when flying)	5	6	7
Defense	6	8	6	5
Perception	3	3	3	3
Stun	2	4	3	2
Skills (Base/Levels/Rating/Avg.)				
	Brawl: 3/4/7/(3+) Stealth: 4/4/8/(4) Survival: 1/2/3/(1+)	Brawl: 3/4/7/(3+) Stealth: 2/2/4/(2) Survival: 1/4/5/(2+)	Athletics: 3/3/6/(3) Brawl: 3/1/4/(2) Stealth: 3/2/5/(2+) Survival: 1/4/5/(2+)	Brawl: 4/4/8/(4) Stealth: 3/2/5/(2+) Survival: 1/4/5/(2+)
Talents				
	Gift of Air: Can lift a size 0 person or smaller 30 ft. for a short time	**Skin of Stone:** +2 Defense	* **Fiery Aura:** Intense heat	* **Engulf:** Drowning Attack
Flaws				
	Susceptible to Elemental magic: -2 to resist all Elemental magic	**Susceptible to Elemental magic:** -2 to resist all Elemental magic	**Susceptible to Elemental magic:** -2 to resist all Elemental magic	**Susceptible to Elemental magic:** -2 to resist all Elemental magic
Weapon (Rating/Size/Attack/Avg.)				
	Air Blast: 1N/0/8N/(4N) **Air Grasp: 2N/0/Special/(--)	Punch: 2L/0/9L/(4+L)	Punch: 1L/0/5L/(2+L) Throw Flame: 3L (25ft)/0/9L/(4+L)	Punch: 2N/0/10N/(5N) *Engulf: 1N/0/9N/(4+N)

Undead

In the Before, undead were often created by Necromancers who animated corpses. The Night of Fire left countless dead, however, and it's possible that the damage to the Weave could be behind the increased numbers of undead in the After.

Skeletons

Skeletons tend to be humanoid, and are often given strict instructions when animated via Necromancy. Most of the time, they are found as workers, carrying out mindless activities. But they are often used as warriors to be thrown against Necromancers' enemies without concern or regret.

Zombies

Slower and less agile than skeletons, zombies still retain muscle mass, giving them extra strength and power. They are used by Necromancers for heavy lifting and odd tasks — while they remain "fresh," that is. Their rotting bodies often carry diseases, making them favored in attacks against enemy armies.

Special: Characters bitten by a zombie must make a Body roll against an Infection Rating of 1 or become feverish and nauseated (-2 to all Skill rolls) for four hours.

Weave Creatures

When the fabric of magic was damaged during the Night of Fire, pieces of it unraveled and ripped away. Those rogue scraps of power imbued some plants and animals with innate magical abilities. These Weave-Touched creatures can replicate spell effects from various magical traditions, giving them unexpected abilities. The tearing of the Weave also spawned new forms of life. These Weave-Born creatures can include once-inanimate objects now imbued with life, sentient pieces of magical energy and even more bizarre entities.

Gamemasters can create their own Weave-Touched creatures using the common animals on page 248, or any creature in the Bestiary as a base. The rules for creating Weave Touched creatures can be found on page 247.

Skeleton

Archetype: Undead
Motivation: Bloodlust
Style: 0
Health: 6
Nutritional value: 0
Toughness: 1

Primary Attributes

Body: 3
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 3
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 3
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 3
Move: 6
Defense: 6
Perception: 3
Stun: NA

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	3	3	6	(3)
Melee	3	3	6	(3)
Stealth	3	3	6	(3)
Survival	0	1	1	(0+)

Talents

Mindless: Immune to Beguiling magic
High pain tolerance: Ignores nonlethal damage

Flaws

Susceptible to Necromancy: -2 to defend against Necromantic attacks
Reanimated: Can't speak or think independently

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Fist	1N	0	7N	(3+) N
Short Sword	2L	0	8L	(4) L

Zombie

Archetype: Undead
Motivation: Bloodlust
Style: 0
Health: 7
Nutritional value: 0
Toughness: 1

Primary Attributes

Body: 4
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 1
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 4
Willpower: 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 1
Move: 3
Defense: 5
Perception: 3
Stun: NA

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	4	5	9	(4+)
Stealth	1	1	2	(1)
Survival	0	4	4	(2)

Talents

Mindless: Immune to Beguiling magic
High Pain Tolerance: Ignores nonlethal damage
Disease Carrier: Infection Rating 1 or become ill

Flaws

Susceptible to Necromancy: -2 to defend against Necromancy attacks
Reanimated: Can't speak or think independently
Slow: -2 to Move

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Fist	1N	0	10N	(5) N
Bite	1L	0	10L	(5) L

Weave Shard

Archetype: Weave-Born
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 9
Nutritional value: 0
Toughness: 4

Primary Attributes

Body: 5
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 7
Intelligence: 1
Strength: 4
Willpower: 4

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 8
Move: 11
Defense: 12
Perception: 5
Stun: 5

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	7	3	10	(5)
Stealth	7	2	9	(4+)
Survival	0	5	5	(2+)

Talents

Finesse attack: Use Dexterity to calculate Brawl
Immune to magic

Flaws

Feeding Frenzy: Compelled to make total attacks at magic users at +2, but when doing so the shard only uses its Passive Defense rating

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Shock	2N	0	12N	(6) N

Wood Warps

Archetype: Weave-Born
Motivation: Survival
Style: 0
Health: 7
Nutritional value: 0
Toughness: 1

Primary Attributes

Body: 5
Charisma: 0
Dexterity: 2
Intelligence: 0
Strength: 3
Willpower: 2

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0
Initiative: 2
Move: 5
Defense: 7
Perception: 2
Stun: 5

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	3	3	6	(3)
Stealth	2	5	7	(3+)
Survival	0	2	2	(1)

Talents

Camouflage: +3 to stealth in woodlands

Flaws

Bestial: Cannot communicate or use tools

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Slam	2N	0	8N	(4) N

Weave Shards

Weave shards are living magical energy that somehow broke off from the Weave during the Night of Fire. The bluish bolts of energy are incredibly fast. They can drain magic from anything they touch. When given the choice, they will always attack magic users with a single-mindedness that leaves them open to mundane attacks. Weave shards cannot be harmed by magic.

Wood Warps

Wood warps were once ordinary pieces of woodland debris — dead limbs, strips of bark and felled trees. During the Night of Fire, they were infused with new, magical life by the tearing of the Weave. They seem to exist only to defend the woodlands they inhabit, often attacking two-legged invaders just for gathering firewood or hunting.

Wood warps come in many shapes and sizes. Some are no larger than an insect, while others were formed from entire forests.



Creature Creation

Like everything else, the flora and fauna of the land was changed by the Apocalypse. In the Before, beasts were of the mundane sort: ferocious at times, but not magical. That is, unless you believed the ancient tales of dragons and fey that were used to frighten children. When Nature writhed in pain and parts of the Weave unraveled during the Night of Fire, some plants and animals were Broken while others were Weave-Touched. In some cases, both occurred.

Broken

Broken creatures were mutated into hideous versions of their former selves during the Night of Fire. Many were driven mad and are now unpredictable. These mental and physical aberrations continued through the animals' offspring.

Any plant or animal could have been Broken by the Night of Fire in one or more ways. Their size, demeanor and appearance are subject to change. Broken creatures are generally larger and more dangerous than what they evolved (or devolved) from.

To represent a Broken creature in the game, begin with the base plant or animal and add Talents and Flaws from the list below — or any Talent listed on page 84 that may be appropriate. The same Talent can be taken multiple times if needed to create the desired Broken creature.

The general Talents and Flaws from the table below can represent different features. Replace the names listed with more descriptive names for flavor. For example, Increased Defense could be called Stony Skin or Chitinous Shell. Deadly Attack could be called Razor Claws or Jagged Teeth.

Broken Talent	Benefit
Cross-bred	You have working physical features (tusks, claws, antlers, horns, fangs, tail, teeth, hooves, wings, gills, leaves, pincers, spinnerets, etc.) that mundane members of your species do not.
Deadly Attack	+1 to natural weapon rating
Increased Attribute	+1 to a Primary Attribute
Increased Defense	+1 to defense
Increased Size	+1 increase in size
Increased Skill	+2 to a Skill Rating or +3 to specialization
Poisonous	A successful attack also inflicts a 3N poison that could paralyze or reduce attributes.
Sentient Plant	Plant is given +1 Move and +1 Intelligence
Special Movement	Ability to fly, tunnel or swim at normal speed

Broken Flaw	Description
Bloodlust	Attacks the scent of blood, even it's from its own kind
Deranged	Acts unpredictable; doesn't always follow instincts
Docile	Does not acknowledge threats unless provoked
Frenzied	Refuses to leave a fight, even if overwhelmed or injured

Example: *Sara is a gamemaster who wants to create a Broken dog to guard the entrance of a cave. She pictures the beast as a mastiff the size of a pony, with oversized fangs and a mottled hide covered with thick, protective warts. To get things started, she chooses the large dog as a base creature from the list on page 248. She increases the size from -1 to 0 by taking the Increased Size Talent. It also needs to be stronger and tougher. She takes the Increased Attribute multiple times to raise Strength from 2 to 3, Body from 2 to 4 and Willpower from 2 to 3. To reflect the warty hide, she adds the Increased Defense talent. She gives it the Deadly Attack talent twice to make his teeth more deadly. Finally, she adds the Frenzied flaw. The Broken dog's stats are below with the original dog's stats in parenthesis:*

Broken Dog

Archetype: Broken
Motivation: Guardian
Style: 0
Health: 7 (3)
Nutritional value: 4
Toughness: 2

Primary Attributes

Body: 4 (2)
Charisma: 0 (0)
Dexterity: 2 (2)
Intelligence: 0 (0)
Strength: 3 (2)
Willpower: 3 (2)

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0 (-1)
Initiative: 2 (2)
Move: 6 (4)
Defense: 8 (5)
Perception: 3 (2)
Stun: 4 (2)

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	4	3	7	(3+)
Stealth	1	3	4	(2)
Survival	0	4	4	(2)

Talents

Giant: +1 to Size
Ferocious: +1 to Strength, +2 to Body, +1 Willpower
Warty Hide: +2 to Defense
Oversized Fangs: +2 bite Damage

Flaws

Frenzied: Will not leave fight

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Fangs	4L	0	11L	(5+) L

Weave-Touched

Weave-Touched plants and animals were infused with the power of the Weave, gaining spell-like attacks or abilities, which are considered Talents. Because these creatures use their magic instinctively, they do not access the Weave and do not suffer Burn. They are not casting spells, but the innate Weave-Touched abilities can mimic the spell effects found in any of the traditions. These magical gifts are hereditary.

Unlike Broken creatures, Weave-Touched creatures typically do not suffer physical and mental deformations. They are often indistinguishable from their normal brethren until their spell-like abilities are displayed — which is often too late for anyone who has approached them. Of course, a creature could be both Weave-Touched and Broken.

When a new spell-like ability is taken as a Talent, the GM determines its Base Difficulty using the rules in the Magic chapter on page 131 and defines the Talent by noting range, duration and spell effect.

Weave-Touched attacks can take many forms. Creatures may bite, claw, touch, spit, breathe, stare, sting or shoot when magically attacking. Like non-magical attacks, these attacks require a Skill to reflect the creature's ability and an attack rating that is added to the new skill. This new skill always uses Willpower as its Base Attribute. Because Weave-Touched creatures are using magic innately, much as they would a natural weapon, the Base Difficulty is used in place of an Attack Rating. The GM determines whether the target's Defense or appropriate attribute is used to defend or resist the magical attack.

Damage = Skill Rating + Base Difficulty

Of course, magic can be used for more than just attacking. Weave-Touched Talents might permit a stonewyrm to teleport out of danger, a carrion reaper to heal itself when wounded or an alligator to mentally stun its victims before physically attacking. Any spell effect could have been infused into creatures during the Night of Fire.

Example: *Sara wants to mimic a mythical gorgon, so she decides to create a Weave-Touched bull that is able to breathe on people and turn them into stone. She looks at the Magic chapter and decides this would be a very hard (5) Base Difficulty spell for an elementalist to cast. She now defines the Talent by limiting its use to three times a day, setting its duration to one day and giving it a range of 25 ft.*

She must also give the bull a skill to use its innate ability. This is an important Skill for a gorgon, so she gives it a Breath Skill Level of 4. Added to a bull's Willpower of 3, the Breath Skill Rating is 7. The Base Difficulty of 5 plus the Size of 0 plus the Skill Rating of 7 equals the gorgon's Stone Breath attack of 12.

When the gorgon breathes on someone, Sara rolls 12 dice and gets five successes. The target must roll its Willpower x2 to resist the gorgon's breath, or his Dexterity x2 to avoid it. If less than five successes are rolled, the target is turned to stone and will remain that way for one day unless the effect is somehow dispelled. Hopefully the player saved some Style points to help him avoid or resist the gorgon's breath.

Making Creatures Too Powerful

When making an animal Weave-Touched or Broken, it is important to realize that providing enhanced attributes and special abilities can quickly increase the potency of the creature in combat. Obviously, this is the goal, but these modifications can quickly make it overpowered if not kept in mind. See the Toughness rules on the next page for more information.

For a quick comparison between creatures and characters: Most starting characters will have Health ratings of 5 to 7, Defense ratings of 6 to 8, and Attack ratings of 8 to 12.

Gorgon

Archetype: Weave-Touched | **Motivation:** Survival
Style: 0 | **Health:** 7
Nutritional value: 4 | **Toughness:** 3

Primary Attributes

Body: 4 | **Charisma:** 0
Dexterity: 2 | **Intelligence:** 0
Strength: 4 | **Willpower:** 3

Secondary Attributes

Size: 0 | **Initiative:** 2
Move: 5 | **Defense:** 6
Perception: 3 | **Stun:** 4

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	4	3	7	(3+)
Breath	3	4	7	(3+)
Survival	0	4	4	(2)

Talents

Weave-Touched: Stone Breath 3x per day, Base Difficulty: 5, duration: one day, range: 25 ft.

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Stone Breath	5N	0	12N	(6) N
Horns	1L	0	8L	(4) L

Nutritional Value

Most animals can be eaten once they have been defeated in combat. The nutritional value of a creature tells how many people can be fed with the fresh carcass of the animal if properly dressed (Survival 3). Unskilled characters can take half the normal amount of food. Some creatures may be inedible, including those that are diseased or poisonous. Plants provide half the nutritional value of an animal the same size.

Size	Nutritional Value (NV)
-4	.5
-2	1
-1	2
0	4
1	12
2	36
4	100
8	300

Common Animals

Animal	Hlth	NV	Def	Stun	Init	Per	Mv	Size	Body	Dex	Str	Int	Chr	Will	Brwl	Attacks
BIRDS																
Bird of Prey, Large	3	2	5	2	2	2	4	-1	2	2	2	0	0	2	2	Talon 7L (3+L)
Bird of Prey, Small	1	1	6	1	3	2	4	-2	1	3	1	0	0	2	1	Talon 5L (2+L)
Flightless, Large	4	4	4	2	2	2	4	0	2	2	2	0	0	2	1	Kick 5N (2+N)
Flock	3	4	5	2	3	1	4	0	2	3	1	0	0	1	1	Beak 2L (1L)
DOMESTICATED																
Bull	7	4	6	4	2	3	6	0	4	2	4	0	0	3	2	Gore 8L (4L)
Camel	6	4	6	4	2	2	5	0	4	2	3	0	0	2	1	Bite 5L (2+L)
Cat	1	1	7	1	4	2	5	-2	1	4	1	0	0	2	0	Claw 1N (0+N)
Cow	5	12	3	3	1	1	4	1	3	1	3	0	0	1	1	Kick 4N (2N)
Dog, Large	3	2	5	2	2	2	4	-1	2	2	2	0	0	2	2	Bite 6L (3L)
Dog, Small	1	1	6	1	3	2	4	-2	1	3	1	0	0	2	1	Bite 5L (2+L)
Donkey	5	4	5	3	2	2	5	0	3	2	3	0	0	2	1	Kick 5N (2+N)
Goat	2	2	5	2	2	1	4	-1	2	2	2	0	0	1	0	Ram 2N (1N)
Horse	7	12	6	4	3	2	7	1	4	3	4	0	0	2	1	Kick 6L (3L)
Pig	2	2	5	2	2	1	4	-1	2	2	2	0	0	1	0	Bite 2L (1L)
Ox	6	12	5	4	2	1	6	1	4	2	4	0	0	1	1	Gore 6L (3L)
INSECTS AND ARACHNIDS																
Insect, Giant	1	1	6	1	3	2	4	-2	1	3	1	0	0	2	1	Sting 5N (2+L)
Insect Swarm	2	4	4	1	3	1	3	0	1	3	0	0	0	1	1	Sting 2N (1N)
Scorpion	-2	.5	7	1	2	1	2	-4	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	Stinger 2N (1N)
Scorpion, Giant	3	2	5	2	2	2	3	-1	2	2	1	0	0	2	1	Stinger 4L (2L)
Spider, Poisonous	-2	.5	8	1	3	1	3	-4	1	3	0	0	0	1	0	Bite 3L (1+L)
Spider, Giant	3	2	6	2	3	1	5	-1	2	3	2	0	0	2	1	Bite 5L (2+L)
MARINE																
Barracuda	2	2	5	1	3	2	4	-1	1	3	1	0	0	2	1	Bite 4L (2L)
Dolphin	4	4	6	2	5	3	6	0	2	4	2	1	0	2	1	Bump 4N (2N)
Eel	1	1	6	1	3	2	4	-2	1	3	1	0	0	2	0	Shock 2N (1N)
Manta Ray	2	2	4	1	2	2	3	-1	1	2	1	0	0	2	1	Stinger 4L (2L)
Octopus	4	4	4	2	2	2	4	0	2	2	2	0	0	2	2	Squeeze 5N (2+N)
Piranha, School	4	4	4	2	2	2	4	0	2	2	2	0	0	2	2	Bite 6L (3L)
Sharks	6	4	6	3	3	3	6	0	3	3	3	0	0	3	3	Bite 9L (4+L)
Squid, Giant	6	12	3	2	2	3	5	1	2	2	3	0	0	3	2	Squeeze 6N (3N)
Swordfish	3	2	5	2	2	2	3	-1	2	2	1	0	0	2	1	Stab 4L (2L)
Whale	18	300	2	8	3	3	10	8	8	2	8	1	0	2	4	Slam 6N (3N)

Toughness

The Toughness Rating is a general guideline of how dangerous a creature is to fight. In general, a starting character should be challenged by a creature with a Toughness Rating of 2. A party of four should be challenged by two creatures with Toughness Ratings of 4.

The Primary Attribute Points, Skill Points and Talents can be swapped for one another using the following conversion:

1 Primary Attribute Point = 2 Skill Points = 1 Talent

Additional Flaws can be added to enhance the creature. One Flaw can used to gain one of the following: 1 Primary Attribute Point, 2 Skill Points or 1 Talent.

See the table to the right for examples of Toughness Ratings in relation to Attributes, Skills, Talents and Flaws.

Larger creatures gain additional Attribute Points. Although these do not increase Toughness, a plus (+) symbol is placed next to the Toughness Rating. These extra Attribute Points cannot be swapped out for Skills or Talents.

Toughness	Attribute Points	Skill Points	# of Talents	# of Flaws
0	10	10	0	1
1	12	10	1	1
2	15	10	1	1
3	18	10	2	1
4	21	10	2	1
5	24	10	3	1
6	27	10	3	1
7	30	10	4	1
8	33	10	4	1

Size	0	1	2	4	8
Attribute Points	0	0	+3	+6	+12

Animal	Hlth	NV	Def	Stun	Init	Per	Mv	Size	Body	Dex	Str	Int	Chr	Will	Brwl	Attacks
WILD MAMMALS AND REPTILES																
Alligator	5	4	6	3	3	2	7	0	3	3	4	0	0	2	2	Bite 8L (4L)
Ape, Large	6	12	6	3	4	2	8	1	3	4	4	0	0	2	2	Fist 7N (3+N)
Ape, Small	4	4	7	2	5	2	8	0	2	5	3	0	0	2	2	Fist 6N (3N)
Badger	2	1	6	2	2	2	3	-2	2	2	1	0	0	2	1	Bite 5L (2+L)
Bat	-1	.5	8	1	3	2	3	-4	1	3	0	0	0	2	0	Bite 2N (1N)
Bat, Giant	2	1	7	2	3	2	4	-2	2	3	1	0	0	2	1	Bite 5L (2+L)
Bear, Large	9	12	6	5	2	3	7	1	5	2	5	0	0	3	3	Claw 10L (5L)
Bear, Small	6	4	5	3	2	3	5	0	3	2	3	0	0	3	2	Claw 7L (3+L)
Boar	6	4	5	3	2	3	5	0	3	2	3	0	0	3	3	Tusk 8L (4L)
Buffalo	7	12	5	4	2	2	6	1	4	2	4	0	0	2	2	Gore 7L (3+L)
Coyote	3	2	6	2	3	2	5	-1	2	3	2	0	0	2	1	Bite 5L (2+L)
Crocodile	5	4	6	3	3	2	7	0	3	3	4	0	0	2	2	Bite 8L (4L)
Deer	4	4	6	2	4	2	6	0	2	4	2	0	0	2	1	Antler 4N (2N)
Elephant	9	36	5	5	2	2	7	2	5	2	5	0	0	2	2	Stomp 7N (3+N)
Great Cat, Large	8	12	7	4	4	3	8	1	4	4	4	0	0	3	3	Claw 9L (4+L)
Great Cat, Small	6	4	8	3	5	3	8	0	3	5	3	0	0	3	2	Claw 7L (3+L)
Hippo	9	36	5	5	2	2	7	2	5	2	5	0	0	2	1	Bite 6L (3L)
Hyena	4	2	6	3	2	2	4	-1	3	2	2	0	0	2	1	Bite 5L (2+L)
Lizard, Giant	3	2	5	2	2	2	4	-1	2	2	2	0	0	2	1	Bite 5L (2+L)
Lizard, Poisonous	-2	.5	7	1	2	1	2	-4	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	Bite 2L (1L)
Monkey	3	2	7	2	4	2	5	-1	2	4	1	0	0	2	1	Bite 4L (2L)
Rat	-2	.5	8	1	3	1	3	-4	1	3	0	0	0	1	0	Bite 2N (1N)
Rat, Giant	3	2	6	2	3	2	4	-1	2	3	1	0	0	2	1	Bite 4L (2L)
Rhinoceros	9	36	6	5	3	2	8	2	5	3	5	0	0	2	2	Gore 7L (3+L)
Snake, Constrictor	3	1	5	2	2	2	5	-1	2	2	3	0	0	2	1	Squeeze 6N (3N)
Snake, Poisonous	-1	.5	7	1	2	2	3	-4	1	2	1	0	0	2	0	Bite 3L (1+L)
Weasel	-1	.5	8	1	3	2	3	-4	1	3	0	0	0	2	0	Bite 2L (1L)
Wolf	4	2	7	3	3	2	5	-1	3	3	2	0	0	2	2	Bite 6L (3L)
Wolverine	4	1	7	3	2	3	4	-2	3	2	2	0	0	3	1	Bite/Claw 6L (3L)

Note: All common animals have a Toughness Rating of 1 or less

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DESOLATION

Name _____

Player _____

Archetype _____

Race _____

Nationality _____

Primary Attributes

Body		**Charisma**	
Dexterity		**Intelligence**	
Strength		**Willpower**	

Secondary Attributes

Size		**Initiative**	
Move		**Stun**	
		Perception	

Skills

Skill	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)

Combat

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)	Cond.

Armor	Def.	Str.	Dex.	Condition

MPH

Motivation

Personality

History

Style Points

Experience Points

Health

Damage

Lethal | Nonlethal | Burn

Defense

Active

Passive

Talents and Racial Traits

Flaws and Racial Traits

Languages

■ Attributes: 15 pts. ■ Size = See race ■ Move = Dexterity + Strength ■ Perception = Intelligence + Willpower ■ Initiative = Dexterity + Intelligence ■ Defense = Body + Dexterity - Size ■ Health = Body + Willpower + Size ■ Stun = Body ■ Skills = 15 pts. ■ Choose 1 Talent ■ Choose 1 Flaw

Equipment

Item	#	Location	Condition

Valuables

Encumbrance

Light Load	Medium Load	Heavy Load

Description

Age:

Gender:

Height:

Eyes:

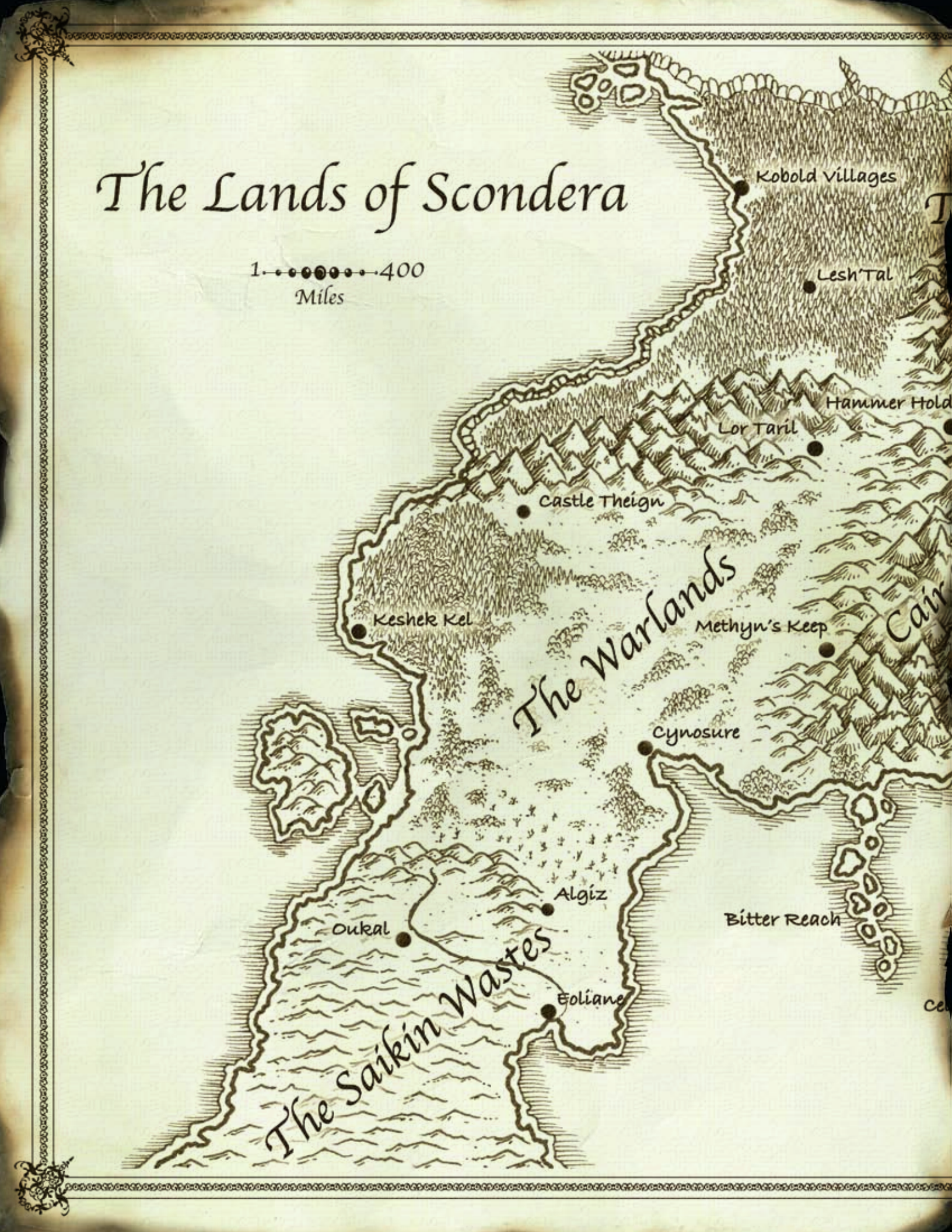
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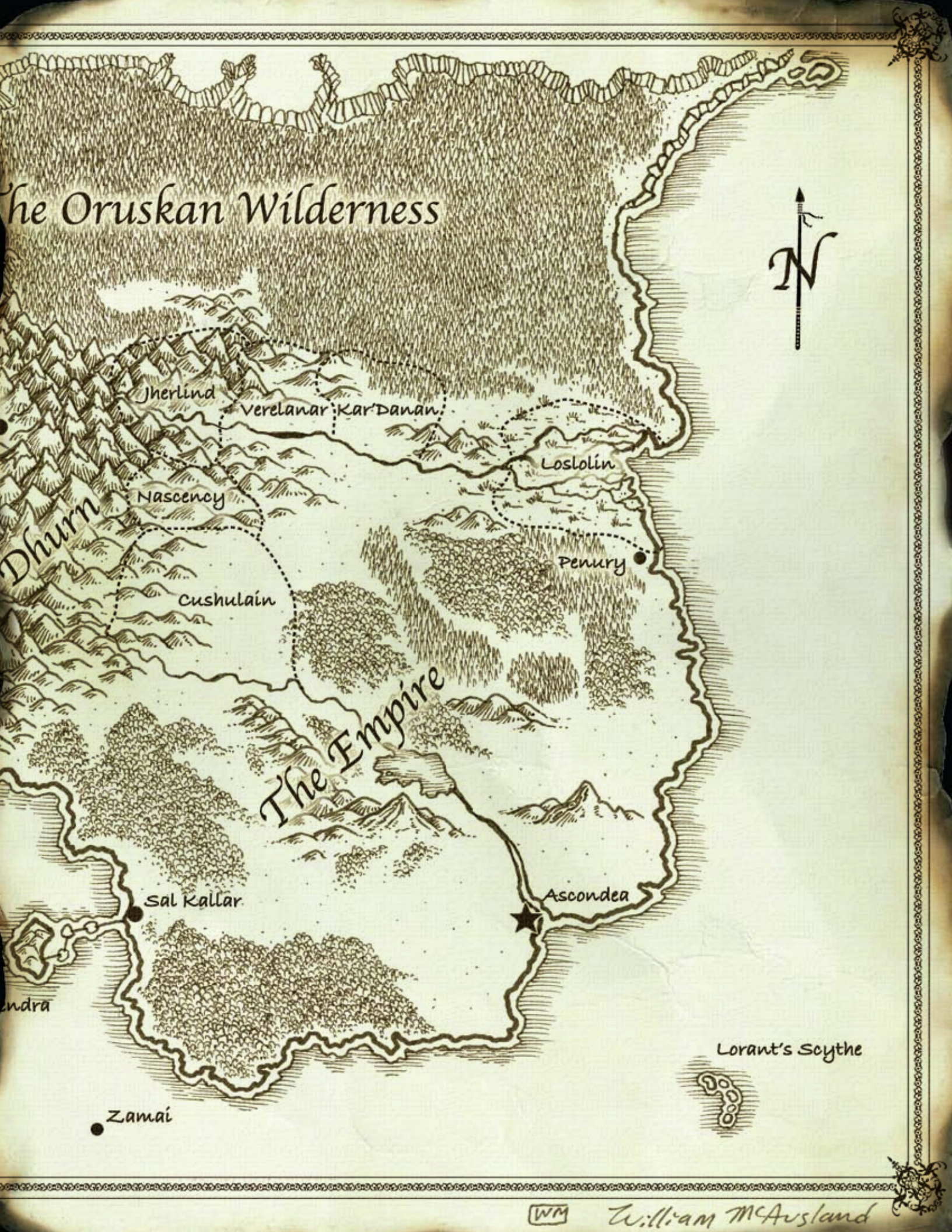
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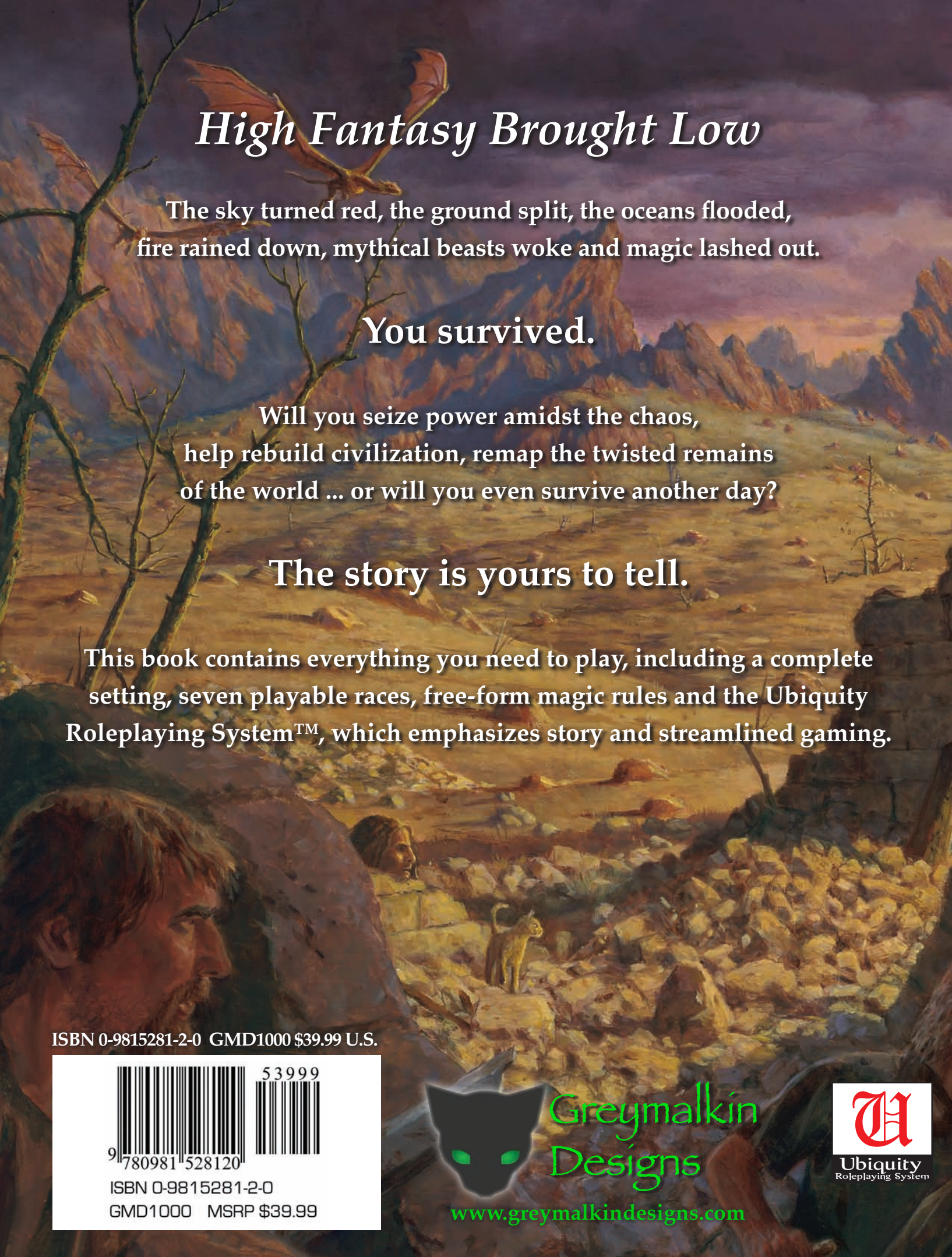
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