

README

Thresholds System Reference Document (v.0.1)

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Index

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Overview

⚠ **Caution**

Essentially copied directly from Cairn SRD.
May need revision.

Thresholds was written with the following design philosophies in mind:

Neutrality

The GM's role is to portray the rules, situations, NPCs, and narrative clearly, while acting as a neutral arbiter.

Classless

A character's role or skills are not limited by a single class. Instead, the equipment they carry and their experiences defines their specialty.

Death

Characters may be powerful, but they are also vulnerable to harm in its many forms. Death is always around the corner, but it is never random or without warning.

Fiction First

Dice do not always reflect an obstacle's difficulty or its outcome. Instead, success and failure are arbitrated by the GM in dialogue with the players, based on in-world elements.

Growth

Characters are changed through in-world advancement, gaining new skills and abilities by surviving dangerous events and overcoming obstacles.

Player Choice

Players should always understand the reasons behind the choices they've made, and information about potential risks should be provided freely and frequently.

Principles

The GM and the players each have guidelines that help foster a specific play experience defined by critical thinking, exploration, and an emergent narrative.

Shared Objectives

Players trust one another to engage with the shared setting, character goals, and party challenges. Therefore, the party is typically working together towards a common goal, as a team.

[back to index](#)

Principles for GMs

Caution

Copied directly from the Cairn SRD.

Information

- Provide useful information about the game world as the characters explore it.
- Players do not need to roll dice to learn about their circumstances.
- Be helpful and direct with your answers to their questions.
- Respond honestly, describe consistently, and always let them know they can keep asking questions.

Difficulty

- Default to context and realism rather than numbers and mechanics.
- If something the players want to do is sincerely impossible, no roll will allow them to do it.
- Is what the player describes and how they leverage the situation sensible? Let it happen.
- Saves cover a great deal of uncertain situations and are often all that is necessary for risky actions.

Preparation

- The game world is organic, malleable and random. It intuitively makes sharp turns.
- Use random tables and generators to develop situations, not stories or plots.
- NPCs remember what the PCs say and do, and how they affect the world.
- NPCs don't want to die. Infuse their own self-interest and will to live into every personality.

Narrative Focus

- Emergent experience of play is what matters, not math or character abilities. Give the players weapon trainers and personal quests to facilitate improvement and specialization.
- Pay attention to the needs and wants of the players, then put realistic opportunities in their path.
- A dagger to your throat will kill you, regardless of your expensive armor and impressive training.

Danger

- The game world produces real risk of pain and death for the player characters.
- Telegraph serious danger to players when it is present. The more dangerous, the more obvious.
- Put traps in plain sight and let the players take time to figure out a solution.
- Give players opportunities to solve problems and interact with the world.

Treasure

- A Treasure is specific to the environment from where it is recovered. It tells a story.
- Treasure is highly valuable, almost always bulky, and rarely useful beyond its worth and prestige.
- Relics are not Treasure, though they are useful and interesting.
- Use Treasure as a lure to exotic locations under the protection of intimidating foes.

Choice

- Give players a solid choice to force outcomes when the situation lulls.
- Use binary "so, A or B?" responses when their intentions are vague.
- Work together with this conversational progress to keep the game moving.
- Ensure that the player character's actions leave their mark on the game world.

Die of Fate

- Occasionally you will want an element of randomness (e.g. the weather, unique character knowledge, etc.).
- In these situations, roll 1d6. A roll of 4 or more generally favors the players.
- A roll of 3 or under tends to mean bad luck for the PCs or their allies.

Principles for Players

Caution

Copied directly from the Cairn SRD.

Agency

- Attributes and related saves do not define your character. They are tools.
- Don't ask only what your character would do, ask what you would do, too.
- Be creative with your intuition, items, and connections.

Teamwork

- Seek consensus from the other players before barreling forward.
- Stay on the same page about goals and limits, respecting each other and accomplishing more as a group than alone.

Exploration

- Asking questions and listening to detail is more useful than any stats, items, or skills you have.
- Take the GM's description without suspicion, but don't shy away from seeking more information.
- There is no single correct way forward.

Talking

- Treat NPCs as if they were real people, and rely on your curiosity to safely gain information and solve problems.
- You'll find that most people are interesting and will want to talk things through before getting violent.

Caution

- Fighting is a choice and rarely a wise one; consider whether violence is the best way to achieve your goals.
- Try to stack the odds in your favor and retreat when things seem unfavorable.

Planning

- Think of ways to avoid your obstacles through reconnaissance, subtlety, and fact-finding.
- Do some research and ask around about your objectives.

Ambition

- Set goals and use your meager means to take steps forward.
- Expect nothing. Earn your reputation.
- Keep things moving forward and play to see what happens.

[back to index](#)

Character Creation

✕ Missing

This section is very much a work in progress.

Name, Age and Background

The first thing you need to decide when making your character is their age, or more specifically, if they are a **Teen** or an **Adult**.

⚠ Caution

Consider inserting a roll to randomly determine which age group the player character. Something with a bit more weight than a simple coin flip, probably biasing toward an Adult.

TEEN

When creating a teenager, choose an age between 11 and 18, or roll $(1d8+10)$.

✎ Note

Possibly adjust this spectrum to be 12-19 $(1d8+11)$.

Next, choose or roll for your **Label** to determine your starting equipment and relevant skills.

⚠ Caution

Consider a Teen getting an attribute adjustment: +3 to Heart, -1 to Mind, -2 to Body.

Actually, the same concept could be built into *Tags* applied to the individual Label that a Teen starts with. This would allow Advantage/Disadvantage to handle the heavy lifting of the idea without a numerical modifier that doesn't account for the differentiation between say **Strength** and **Speed**, which are both governed by the **Body** attribute score.

ADULT

When creating an adult character, choose an age between 18 and 56, or roll (2d20+16).

Next, choose or roll for your **Background** to determine your starting equipment and relevant skills.

ABILITY SCORES

Player Characters (PCs) have just three attributes:

Body, **Mind**, and **Heart**. When creating a PC, the player should roll 3d6 for each of their character's ability scores, in order. They may then swap any two of the results.

Example:

Dani rolls for their character's **Body**, resulting in a 2, a 4, and a 6, totaling 12. The next two ability rolls result in a 9 for **Mind** and a 13 for **Heart**. They decide to swap the 12 and the 9, for a character with 9 **Body**, 12 **Mind** and 13 **Heart**.

Stamina

Caution

Changing Hit Protection to Stamina. This will help further separate from the idea that HP equates health and the literal vitality of a character. It also then makes more sense that a character can recover their **Stamina** with just a few short minutes of rest, while attribute damage takes longer to recover. Will need to rework the text a bit and possibly rename the **Scars**.

Roll 1d6 to determine your PC's starting **Stamina**, which reflects their ability to avoid damage in combat. **Stamina** does not indicate a character's health or fortitude; nor do they lose it for very long (see **Healing**). If an attack takes a PC's **Stamina** exactly to 0, the player must roll on the **Scars** table.

INVENTORY

Caution

Mostly copied from the Cairn SRD.

Characters have a total of 10 inventory slots: a backpack with six slots, one slot for each hand, and two slots for their upper body (such as the belt, chest, or head). The backpack can also double as an emergency pillow, provided its contents aren't *too* lumpy.

Most items take up one slot, and small items can be bundled together. Slots are abstract and can be rearranged per the GM's discretion.

Bulky items take up two slots and are typically two-handed or awkward to carry. Anyone carrying a full inventory (e.g. filling all 10 slots) is reduced to 0 **Stamina**.

A PC cannot carry more items than their inventory allows.

STARTING GEAR

Money:

Caution

Consider moving the starting gear section?

A Teen will start with (1d8x10) \$USD.

An Adult will start with (2d20x10) \$USD.

Note

These die values are tied to the same dice rolled to determine the character's age. If the age die for a Teen gets changed to 1d10, this will also need to be updated.

Caution

Is there anything considered to be standard enough that virtually all characters would have said items on them upon creation?

Name & Background (d20)

Caution

Does it make sense to include a table of Male and Female names to help players come up with something, or is the modern world reasonably familiar enough that players can be expected to handle that on their own?

Rules

Missing

This section is still a work in progress.

Abilities

Each of the three **abilities** are used in different circumstances (see **saves**, below).

Strength (STR): Used for saves requiring physical power, like lifting gates, bending bars, resisting poison, etc.

Dexterity (DEX): Used for saves requiring poise, speed, and reflexes like dodging, climbing, sneaking, balancing, etc.

Note

Body: Used for saves requiring physical capability, including feats of both strength and speed. Lifting, bending, dodging, climbing, sneaking, balancing, resisting poison, etc.

Willpower (WIL): Used for saves to persuade, deceive, interrogate, intimidate, charm, provoke, manipulate spells, etc.

Note

Mind: Used for saves requiring mental prowess, including both knowledge and intuition. Solving puzzles, spotting differences, picking locks, discerning illusion from reality, resisting charms, etc.

Note

Heart: Used for saves requiring inner fortitude, including acts of both courage and compassion.

Saves

A save is a roll to avoid bad outcomes from risky choices and circumstances. PCs roll a d20 for an appropriate ability score. If they roll *equal to or under that ability score*, they pass. Otherwise, they fail. A 1 is always a success, and a 20 is always a failure.

Caution

Update the example to fit the implied setting.

Example: *Bea encounters a group of heavily-armed Goblins standing guard before a tunnel entrance. Her player carefully plots a course, recognizing that her 13 DEX makes sneaking past the guards the best option. She rolls a d20, and resulting in a 10 – a success!*

Deprivation & Fatigue

A PC **deprived** of a crucial need (such as food or rest) is unable to recover **Stamina** or ability scores. Anyone deprived for more than a day adds **Fatigue** to their inventory, one for each day. Each **Fatigue** occupies one slot and lasts until they are able to recuperate (such as a full night's rest in a safe spot).

PCs can also gain **Fatigue** through events in the fiction.

Healing

Resting for a few moments to catch your breath will restore lost **Stamina**, but leaves the PCs exposed. Ability loss takes longer to recover from. It can take as much as a week's rest and could require the aid of a medical professional or other appropriate source of expertise. Some of these services may be free, while more expedient recovery may come at a cost.

Armor

Before calculating damage to **Stamina**, subtract the target's **Armor** value from the result of damage rolls. Equipment can provide a bonus to defense (e.g. +1 Armor), but only while the item is appropriately held or worn.

No one can have more than 3 Armor.

Reactions

When the PCs encounter an NPC whose reaction to the party is not obvious, the GM may roll 2d6 and consult the following table:

2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12
Hostile	Wary	Curious	Kind	Helpful

Morale

Enemies must pass a **Heart** save to avoid fleeing when they take their first casualty and again when they lose half their number. Some groups may use their leader's **Heart** in place of their own. Lone foes must save when they're reduced to 0 **Stamina**. Morale does not affect PCs.

Wealth & Treasure

The value of a currency is dependent entirely upon where you are while in possession of it.

Treasure is highly valuable, usually bulky, and rarely useful beyond its value. It can be a lure, taking PCs to exotic and even dangerous locations, and is often under the protection of intimidating foes.

Individual towns and settlements barter and trade based on the local rarity and value of an item or commodity.

Combat

Caution

Some of this may need to be cleaned up and adjusted.

Rounds

The game typically plays without strict time accounting. In a fight or circumstance where timing is helpful, use rounds to keep track of when something occurs. A **round** is roughly ten seconds of in-game time and is comprised of turns.

Actions

Caution

Consider changing distance references to the Close, Near, Far system.

On their turn, a character may move up to 40ft and take up to one action. This may be attacking, making a second move, or some other reasonable action.

Each round, the PCs declare what they are doing before dice are rolled. If a character attempts something risky, the GM calls for a save for appropriate players or NPCs. All actions, attacks, and movements take place simultaneously.

Turns

The GM will telegraph the most likely actions taken by NPCs or monsters. At the start of combat, each PC must make a **Mind** save to act before their opponents.

Caution

Update this example.

Example: *Bea has accidentally stumbled onto the stomping grounds of a massive Wood Troll. In order to make a move before the Troll, she makes a DEX save. She fails, and the Troll gets to attack first.*

Attacking & Damage

The attacker rolls their weapon die and subtracts the target's armor, then deals the remaining total to their opponent's **Stamina**. Unarmed attacks always do 1d4 damage.

Caution

Update this example.

Example: *The Wood Troll roars, swinging its club at Bea, who has 5 HP. The club does 1d10 damage and the Warden rolls a 4. They subtract 1 to account for Bea's leather armor, leaving Bea with 2 HP remaining.*

Multiple Attackers

If multiple attackers target the same foe, roll all damage dice and keep the single highest result.

Attack Modifiers

If fighting from a position of weakness (such as through cover or with bound hands), the attack is **impaired** and the attacker must roll 1d4 damage *regardless* of the attacks damage die.

If fighting from a position of advantage (such as against a helpless foe or through a daring maneuver), the attack is **enhanced** , allowing the attacker to roll 1d12 damage instead of their normal die.

Dual Weapons

If attacking with two weapons at the same time, roll both damage dice and keep the single highest result.

Blast

Attacks with the **blast** quality affect all targets in the noted area, rolling separately for each affected character. Blast refers to anything from explosions to huge cleaving onslaughts to the impact of a meteorite. If unsure how many targets can be affected, roll the related damage die for a result.

Scars

When damage to a PC reduces their **Stamina** to exactly 0, they are sometimes changed irrevocably. See the **Scars** table for more.

Critical Damage

Damage that reduces a target's **Stamina** below zero decreases a target's **Body** by the amount remaining. They must then make a **Body** save to avoid **critical damage**. Additionally, some enemies will have special abilities or effects that are triggered when their target fails a **critical damage** save.

Any PC that suffers critical damage cannot do anything but crawl weakly, grasping for life. If given aid and rest, they will stabilize. If left untreated, they die within the hour.

Ability Score Loss

If a PC's **Body** is reduced to 0, they die. If their **Mind** is reduced to 0, they are delirious. If their

Heart is reduced to 0, they are miserable.
Complete **Mind** and **Heart** loss renders the character unable to act until they are restored through extended rest or by extraordinary means.

Unconsciousness & Death

When a character dies, the player is free to create a new character or take control of a hireling. They immediately join the party in order to reduce downtime.

Detachments



Considering removing this rule entirely.

Large groups of similar combatants fighting together are treated as a single **detachment**. When a **detachment** takes **critical damage**, it is routed or significantly weakened. When it reaches 0 **Body**, it is destroyed.

Attacks against detachments by individuals are **impaired** (excluding blast damage).
Attacks against individuals by detachments are **enhanced** and deal blast damage.

Retreat

Running away from a dire situation always requires a successful **Body** save, as well as a safe destination to run to.

Scars

When an attack reduces a PC's **Stamina** to exactly 0, they are uniquely impacted. Look up the result on the table below based on the total damage taken:

1	Lasting Scar: Roll 1d6 1: Neck, 2: Hands, 3: Eye, 4: Chest, 5: Legs, 6: Ear. Roll 1d6. If the total is higher than your max Stamina , take the new result.
2	Rattling Blow: You're disoriented and shaken. Describe how you refocus. Roll 1d6. If the total is higher than your max Stamina , take the new result.
3	Walloped: You're sent flying and land flat on your face, winded. You are deprived until you rest for a few hours. Then, roll 1d6. Add that amount to your max Stamina .
4	Broken Limb: Roll 1d6 1-2: Leg, 3-4: Arm, 5: Rib, 6: Skull. Once mended, roll 2d6. If the total is higher than your max Stamina , take the new result.
5	Diseased: You're afflicted with a gross, uncomfortable infection. When you get over it, roll 2d6. If the total is higher than your max Stamina , take the new result.
6	Reorienting Head Wound: Roll 1d6 1-2: Body , 3-4: Mind , 5-6: Heart . Roll 3d6. If the total is higher than your current ability score, take the new result.
7	Hamstrung: You can barely move until you get serious help and rest. After recovery, roll 3d6. If the total is higher than your max Body , take the new result.

8	Deafened: You cannot hear anything until you find extraordinary aid. Regardless, make a Mind save. If you pass, increase your max Mind by 1d4.
9	Re-brained: Some hidden part of your psyche is knocked loose. Roll 3d6. If the total is higher than your max Mind , take the new result.
10	Sundered: An appendage is torn off, crippled or useless. The GM will tell you which. Then, make a Heart save. If you pass, increase your max Heart by 1d6.
11	Mortal Wound: You are deprived and out of action. You die in one hour unless healed. Upon recovery, roll 2d6. Take the new result as your max Stamina .
12	Doomed: Death seemed ever so close, but somehow you survived. If your next save against critical damage is a fail, you die horribly. If you pass, roll 3d6. If the total is higher than your max Stamina , take the new result.

[back to index](#)

Rules Summary

ACTIONS

On their turn, a character may move up to 40ft and take up to one action. Actions may include attacking, making a second move, or other reasonable activities. Actions, attacks, and movements take place simultaneously. Whenever turn order is uncertain, the PCs should make a **Mind** save to see if they go before their enemies.

Retreating from a dangerous situation always requires a successful **Body** save, as well as a safe destination to run to.

× **Missing**

Update this information below.

ABILITIES

STR: Brawn, prowess & resistance.

DEX: Dodging, sneaking & reflexes.

WIL: Persuasion, intimidation & magic.

SAVES

- Roll a d20 equal to or under an ability.
- 1 is always a success, 20 is always a failure.

Stamina

Stamina indicates a PC's ability to avoid getting hurt. It is lost during combat & recovered after a few moment's rest.

INVENTORY

PCs have 10 inventory slots: four on their body and six in their backpack. Most items take up a one slot, but smaller items can be bundled. **Bulky** items take up two slots and are awkward or difficult to carry.

Filling all ten item slots reduces a PC to 0 **Stamina**. PCs cannot carry more than their inventory allows.

DEPRIVATION

Deprived PCs cannot recover **Stamina**. If deprived for more than a day, they add a **Fatigue** to inventory. **Fatigue** occupies one slot and lasts until they can recover in safety. This effect is cumulative.

HEALING

A moment's rest will restore lost **Stamina**, but may leave the PCs vulnerable. **Ability** loss may require up to a week's rest and medical aid.

COMBAT

The attacker rolls their weapon die and subtracts the target's **Armor**, then deals the remaining total to their opponent's **Stamina**.

Before calculating damage to **Stamina**, subtract the target's **Armor** value from the result of damage rolls. Some equipment may provide a bonus defense (e.g. +1 Armor), but only while the item is held or worn.

No one can have more than 3 Armor.

Unarmed attacks always do 1d4 damage. If **multiple attackers** target the same foe, roll all damaged dice and keep the single highest result. If attacking with **two weapons** at the same time, roll both damage dice and keep the highest.

If an attack is **impaired**, the damage die is reduced to 1d4, regardless of weapon. If the attack is **enhanced**, the attacker rolls 1d12. Attacks with the **blast** quality affect all area targets, rolling separately for each.

DAMAGE

If an attack takes a PC's **Stamina** exactly to 0, the player rolls on the **Scars** table.

Damage that reduces a target's **Stamina** *below* 0 decreases their **Body** by the remainder. They must then make a **Body** save to avoid **critical damage**. Failure takes them out of combat, dying if left untreated.

Having **Body** 0 means **death**; having **Mind** 0 is delirium; having **Heart** 0 is dispirit.

[back to index](#)