# 5. Mortals’ Hardships

It’s a tough world out there. Many dangers and difficulties await, and they can take a toll even on the most resolute of adventurers. Nobody can go on indefinitely; eventually, everyone needs to take a break to rest, recuperate and gather strength before venturing forth. In-game, this cycle is modelled by the Steel and Hardship mechanics.

Steel:

Steel is a stat used to describe characters’ overall physical and mental wellbeing. The name is intentionally vague because it is an abstraction of bodily strength, self-control and willpower. A character’s maximum Steel is equal to their:

**[MIG] + [EQU] + [PRE]**

As they suffer various Hardships (described in the continuation of this chapter), their Steel will progressively decrease. At a certain point, they will become weakened. Should their Steel ever reach 0, they’ll get temporarily incapacitated, and potentially suffer permanent consequences.

Hardships:

There exist several types of Hardships, such as Fatigue, Stress and Wounds. Though they are all tracked and healed separately, they all affect Steel in the same way, on a 1 to 1 basis. No matter if it’s your Fatigue, Hunger or Stress that goes up by 1, your Steel always goes down by 1.

Low Steel Limits Focus:

The number of Focus points a character spends on any singular Skill Test must always be **lower** than their current Steel, regardless of their overall Focus score.

**Example:** If the character got badly wounded and now has only 3 Steel remaining, that means he can use, at most, 2 points of Focus for any given test. Ouch. Better go get patched up.

Types of Hardship:

Steel <= 0: Incapacitated until recovered

Special Rule Breakdown: Permanent Trauma

In the following text, each type of hardship will be explained in greater detail, along with information on how it’s gained and recovered from. Note that these are not exhaustive lists of ways to get and lose hardship points, but merely the most common examples.

Fatigue:

Tiredness resulting from physical exertion or illness.

Fatigue is gained from physically straining tasks – whenever a character does something physically taxing, the GM can set a DC and call for an Athletics skill test. If the result of the test doesn’t meet the DC, the character gains a number of Fatigue points equal to the difference.

Recovery: Short/Medium/Long rest

**Special rule:** Whenever a character is to gain a Fatigue point, he may instead turn an existing Fatigue point into an Exhaustion point.

Hunger:

Lack of energy caused by not being able to eat for a long time.

Not eating for a full day gives the character 1 Hunger point.

Recovery: 1 pt per whole meal

**Special rule:** -

Thirst:

Unfulfilled need for water.

Not drinking anything for about 6 to 8 hours nets the character 1 Thirst point.

Recovery: 1 pt per liter of water or other drink

**Special rule:** Characters can endure a maximum number of Thirst points equal to 4 + MIG. After that, they become incapacitated, and will die if they don’t drink something soon.

Exhaustion:

A more severe form of physical fatigue that is harder to recover from.

As explained in the entry on Fatigue, characters can gain Exhaustion points by pushing themselves further when their bodies are already on the brink. Long-term costs for short-term benefits.

Sleep deprivation can also lead to Exhaustion. Spending 24 hours without a proper Long Rest earns the character 1 Exhaustion point.

Recovery: 1 pt per long rest

**Special rule:**Get X or more Exhaustion points = trigger the Exhaustion breakdown

Stress:

Mental strain and tension caused by having to deal with difficult and adverse situations.

Stress points are predominantly gained from the Effort mechanic.

Otherwise, they can be gained when characters go through highly disturbing situations – having a close encounter with death, witnessing gruesome crimes, losing valued possessions etc. Same procedure as for Fatigue, except that it can be resisted by Composure or Willpower (whichever is higher).

Characters can reduce their Stress by doing things they find relaxing - these things can range from taking bubble baths or charming fair maidens to starting tavern brawls - depending on the characters' personalities.

Upon finishing such an activity, the GM determines the maximum number of Stress points it can remove - going from 1 for something basic, like eating a good meal, to 5 for something extraordinary. Then the characters rolls a Composure or Willpower test (whichever is better) and removes a Stress point for each success generated up to the number decided by the GM. No test is gained for Composure or Willpower this way, nor can Effort be used for this purpose.

The GM may add advantage or disadvantage to the roll, if the character is doing something he really likes, or something he's not too passionate about.

**Special rule:** Whenever a character is to gain a Stress point, he may instead turn an existing Stress point into an Insanity point.

Wounds:

Physical harm done to one’s body.

All rules related to gaining this type of Hardship and recovering from it are described in chapter   
X: Anatomy of Injury.

Insanity:

Serious damage to one’s mental condition and stability.

Insanity points can be gained with stress burnout , as described in the entry on Stress.

Other than that, it can also be gained in supernatural, otherworldly, or otherwise mind-bending encounters (prevented by a successful Cognition or Composure skill test).

Insanity is generally difficult to recover from, and usually requires either long-lasting therapies or magical treatment.

**Special rule:**Characters can endure a maximum number of Insanity points equal to 2 + EQU. If they exceed that, … + trauma

Broken Steel:

When a character’s Steel reaches 0, they give in to their plights. This has two effects:

* The character is Incapacitated until their condition improves and their Steel is restored to at least 1. Note that “Incapacitated” doesn’t necessarily mean unconscious – this is left for the GM to determine depending on the situation at hand. It does, however, mean that the character can’t act in a useful manner until they recover.
* Immediately upon reaching 0 Steel, roll a d6. On a 1, the hardship takes a toll on their wellbeing. Randomly choose one of the character’s Attributes (for example, by rolling a d8, re-rolling if you get an 8) and reduce its base value by 1. Skip this step if half or more of the character’s Steel was lost due to Fatigue.

Traumas:

As stated in the introduction, a character suffers a Breakdown when their Focus penalty from Hardship exceeds their base Focus value.

When that happens, the GM needs to determine what is the predominant type of hardship on the character’s hardship track. Now, as hardship is a storytelling device as much as it is a game mechanic, there are no hard rules as to what “predominant” means exactly. Instead, the GM should work with the player to decide what would be the most appropriate for the situation. The exception to this is when a “special” condition of one of the Hardship types triggers and immediately gives the character a Breakdown.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Type** | **Effect** |
| Fatigue | - |
| Hunger | -1 to #MIG or #AGI (player’s choice) |
| Thirst | -1 to #MIG or #AGI (player’s choice) |
| Exhaustion |  |
| Stress | -1 to any Attribute (player’s choice), 1 Trauma |
| Wounds | - |
| Insanity | -1 to one mental Attribute (player’s choice), 2 Traumas |