# 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:

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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 separately and healed according to their own rules, 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:

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. There are many other rules in the game which explicitly state that a character gains a point of Fatigue, or Stress, for example.

Fatigue:

Tiredness resulting from physical exertion or illness.

### Gained By:

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.

### Gained By:

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

### Recovery:

1 pt per whole meal

Thirst:

Unfulfilled need for water.

### Gained By:

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

Exhaustion:

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

### Gained By:

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

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

### Recovery:

1 pt per long rest

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.

Incapacitation, Trauma and Death:

This section describes the consequences that Hardship may have on characters; be it temporary incapacitation, or permanent consequences like Attribute reductions, Trauma and death.

Incapacitation:

When a character is Incapacitated, it means that they aren’t able to act in a useful manner until their condition improves and they aren’t Incapacitated anymore.

Incapacitated doesn’t necessarily mean passed out or unconscious – that’s left up to the GM to determine based on the specific circumstances at hand.

If a character is Incapacitated for long enough, they benefit from the effects of having completed a Short, Medium or Long rest (depending on how long exactly they were Incapacitated).

If a character stays Incapacitated for too long (again, up to the GM to determine what “too long” means on a per-case basis), the character dies.

Hardship Roll:

When a player is instructed to make a Hardship Roll for their character, they roll a single 8-sided die. On a 1 or 2, the difficult circumstances take a toll on the character’s physical or mental wellbeing: Re-roll the d8, and:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Trigger** | **Effect** |
| Collapse | 3 + MIG Exhaustion points | Make a Hardship Roll.  The character is Incapacitated until their Exhaustion level is reduced. |
| Dehydration | 5 + MIG Thirst points | Make a Hardship Roll.  The character is Incapacitated until their Thirst level is reduced. If it is not reduced, the character **dies** when they gain the next Thirst point. |
| Critical Injury | Receive a wound of level 5 or more | Roll on the Critical Injury table (described later) and apply the result immediately **(this may result in death)**.  The character is Incapacitated until stabilized. |
| Delirium | 3 + EQU Insanity points | Turn all Insanity points the character has into Stress points, and the character then receives a Trauma (described later).  The character is incapacitated until the end of the scene. |
| Broken Steel | Have 0 Steel and none of the above is fulfilled | Unless at least half of the character’s Steel was reduced by Fatigue, make a Hardship Roll.  The character is Incapacitated until their Steel is restored to at least 1. |

* **On a 1 – 7:** Reduce the base value of the Attribute corresponding to the number rolled by 1 (1: Might, 2: Agility, 3: Reaction,   
  4: Intelligence, 5: Equilibrium, 6: Cunning,  
  7: Presence).
* **On an 8:** The character receives a Trauma.

After a failed Hardship Roll, all subsequent Hardship Rolls in the next 24 hours are passed automatically.

Bad Stuff Table:

The table below describes various bad things that may happen to characters that may cause Incapacitation, call for Hardship Rolls or otherwise complicate (or end) their lives. The effects are applied immediately when one of the conditions in the “Trigger” column becomes fulfilled.

Death:

Well, you know what character death is. You mourn for a few moments, then make a new character because this one wouldn’t be particularly fun to play anymore.

Traumas:

When a character receives a Trauma, their controlling player chooses one from the list below.

From Blades in the Dark:

* **Cold**: You’re not moved by emotional appeals or social bonds.
* **Haunted:** You’re often lost in reverie, reliving past horrors, seeing things.
* **Obsessed:** You’re enthralled by one thing: an activity, a person, an ideology, etc.
* **Paranoid:** You imagine danger everywhere; you can’t trust others.
* **Reckless**: You have little regard for your own safety or best interests.
* **Soft:** You lose your edge; you become sentimental, passive, gentle.
* **Unstable**: Your emotional state is volatile. You can instantly rage, or fall into despair, act impulsively, or freeze up.
* **Vicious**: You seek out opportunities to hurt people, even for no good reason.

Original:

* **Split:** You have two distinct personalities, each manifesting at a different time.
* **Lost:** Your thoughts drift away at the most inopportune of times and you often forget what you were doing or why.
* **Thrillseeker:** You try to fill the void inside with ever more extreme stunts.
* **Liar, liar:** Truth scares you. You compulsively lie, even about small or inconsequential things.
* **Coward:** When it's time to act decisively, you hesitate, freeze up, or try to find a way around it.
* **Hoarder:** Everything you own is precious! You can hardly stand parting with objects you own, though getting more is easy.

Through role-playing their characters’ traumas, players may earn valuable Karma points.

It’s A Madhouse (I’m Insane!):

A character who receives their 4th Trauma goes batshit crazy and becomes unplayable, though not (at least not immediately) dead.

Wounds, Concussions & Healing:

There are a few different levels of wounds, in order of increasing severity:

1. **Light:** Superficial cuts and bruises;
2. **Incisive:** Shallow cuts, contusions, maybe a missing tooth here or there;
3. **Massive:** Deep cuts, fractured bones and dangling skin;
4. **Brutal:** Broken bones, torn muscles, maimed limbs;
5. **Critical:** Serious internal or external bleeding, organs and limbs ripped apart – rain of blood with a chance of death. This category also includes any wound of level 6 or higher.

We call the ability to sustain a wound of a certain level a ‘wound slot’. By default, characters have:

* **4** Light wound slots;
* **3** Incisive wound slots;
* **2** Massive wound slots;
* **1** Brutal wound slot.

Rarely you'll see exceptionally fragile or tough characters be able to take less or more damage. Of course, with monsters, all bets are off.

Critical Injuries:

A critical injury is received when a character receives a level 5 (or worse) Wound. When that happens, roll a d20, adding -2 per level of the Wound above 5, and -1 per previous sustained critical injury. Consult the chart below with your result and apply the effect immediately.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **d20 roll** | **Effect** |
| 20 | No effect |
| 18-19 | Disfigured |
| 17 | Traumatised |
| 16 | Distressed |
| 15 | Brain damage |
| 12-14 | Somatic damage |
| 10-11 | Limb maimed |
| 9 | Lose an eye |
| 8 | Lose a foot |
| 7 | Lose a hand |
| 6 | Lose a leg |
| 5 | Lose an arm |
| 4 | Spinal damage |
| 3 | Arbitrary Death & Dismemberment |
| 1-2 | Instant death |

Whatever the result, it’s permanent. It cannot be healed by anything less that advanced technology, powerful magic or divine intervention (though distinguishing the three becomes difficult at a certain point).

After rolling on the chart, if the character is still alive, roll 3d6. The character dies in that many rounds unless stabilized before the time runs out.

To stabilize a dying character, another character must pass a First Aid test with the DC equal to the level of the wound that knocked the dying character out. This action takes 30 seconds.

After suffering a critical injury, the character also takes one Wound of the highest level he can take.

Losing Wound Slots:

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20 - No Effect:

You were lucky this time – you will suffer no permanent consequences, should you survive. Tis but a scratch!

18-19 – Disfigurement:

Roll a d8 to determine which body part is affected:

* **1:** Head
* **2:** Primary arm
* **3:** Other arm
* **4:** Torso (front)
* **5:** Torso (back)
* **6:** Primary leg
* **7:** Other leg
* **8:** Roll twice (re-roll further 8s) and affect both (also re-roll duplicates)

The affected body part is now visibly scarred or otherwise deformed, though, miraculously, the damage is only cosmetical.

17 – Traumatised:

The near-death experience leaves you traumatised. You received one Trauma from the list.

16 – Distressed:

The intense stress and fear damage your psyche and/or emotional wellbeing,

Roll a d4 to determine which of your Attributes is affected:

* **1:** Equilibrium
* **2:** Cunning
* **3:** Presence
* **4:** Roll twice (re-roll further 4s) and affect both (same Attribute can be affected twice)

The base value of the affected Attribute is reduced by 1.

15 – Brain damage:

A forceful hit to the head damages your brain. The base value of your Intelligence is reduced by 1. Then, roll a d6. On a 1 repeat the whole “Brain Damage” effect.

12-14 – Somatic Damage:

You suffer damage to your muscles, nerves, skeleton or similar.

Roll a d4 to determine which of your Attributes is affected:

* **1:** Might
* **2:** Cunning
* **3:** Reaction
* **4:** Roll twice (re-roll further 4s) and affect both (same Attribute can be affected twice)

The base value of the affected Attribute is reduced by 1.

10-11 Limb Maimed:

Roll a d8 to determine which body part is affected:

* **1:** Throat
* **2:** Primary arm
* **3:** Other arm
* **4:** Torso
* **5:** Groin
* **6:** Primary leg
* **7:** Other leg
* **8:** Roll twice (re-roll further 8s) and affect both (also re-roll duplicates)

The affected body part is severely damaged, though not entirely destroyed.

With a maimed **throat**, your voice is reduced to a rough and silent growl. You can’t shout nor speak for prolonged periods of time without resting your throat.

With a maimed **arm**, you suffer a -2 CM penalty to all actions which require you to use that arm.

With a maimed **leg**, you suffer a -2 CM penalty to all actions which require you to use that leg. Your movement speed is also reduced by 1.

With a maimed **torso**, you receive a permanent level 2 Wound which cannot be healed.

It is left up to the reader’s imagination to determine what a maimed **groin** implies.

9 – Lose an Eye:

One of your eyes is gouged out (roll a die to determine which one if you still have both).

Whenever you attempt a Skill Test with a Skill that depends on Reaction and eyesight, your total Skill Exponent is reduced by 4 for that test.

If you lose both eyes, you are blinded, obviously.

8 – Lose a Foot:

One of your feet is removed (roll a die to determine which one if you still have both).

<Effects?>

You also lose one of your level 1 Wound slots.

7 – Lose a Hand:

One of your hands is removed (roll a die to determine which one if you still have both).

<Effects?>

You also lose one of your level 1 Wound slots.

6 – Lose a Leg:

One of your legs is entirely destroyed (roll a die to determine which one if you still have both).

<Effects?>

You also lose one of your level 2 Wound slots.

5 – Lose an Arm:

One of your arms is entirely destroyed (roll a die to determine which one if you still have both).

<Effects?>

You also lose one of your level 2 Wound slots.

4 – Spinal Damage:

Your spine is badly damaged. You’re paralyzed from the waist down.

You also lose one of your level 3 Wound slots.

3 - Arbitrary Death & Dismemberment:

Re-roll the d20 twice and apply both results.

Re-roll any further AD&D results.

1-2 – Instant death:

Time to roll out a new character.

*“At last, this life’s circuit I leave...”*