

Altars and Archetypes is designed to be ultra fast and simple. It is fairly free-form and should allow a great deal of flexibility. It was written with the sword and sorcery genre in mind but you should be able to use it for any genre with the possible omission/addition of a rule or two here or there. The core mechanic of the game is essentially *skill die vs difficulty die*, although rather than *skills* per se characters are described by *archetypes* which each represent a broad range of skills and qualities.

This game borrows inspiration and ideas from *Risus*, *Dungeon Squad*, *Polities*, and *Simple 20*. *Altars and Archetypes* is released under a creative commons license and is free to reproduce, create content for, or hack to make your own game so long as anything you use it for is free as well.

Apart from aiming to be the simplest, funnest, and fastest game that it could be this game bases itself on a few assumptions:

- An exhaustive list of *every* skill a character knows is not only unrealistic, but it also hampers spontaneity and fun.
- A simpler and more abstract mechanic allows for greater flexibility.
- Characters tend to embody well-worn archetypes. However, these may be combined in many ways. A famous hero of S&S for example: *Barbarian Warrior*, *Thief* and sometimes *Pirate*.
- Polyhedral dice are fun to roll.
- Math is not fun.



WHAT YOU NEED

- Each participant should have access to a pencil, paper, and polyhedral dice - from **d4** up to **d20**.

THE BASICS

- Characters are described with *archetypes*, each having a die associated. All characters also have an *initiative* die. *Archetypes* define broad sets of related skills & qualities.
 - Examples of *archetypes*: Warrior, Hunter, Blacksmith, Necromancer, Sailor, Explorer etc.
- *Archetypes* are not “character classes”; they refer *only* to what is essential to their definition. “Thief” refers only to skills/qualities that make a thief a thief. “Ranger” refers only to woodsman type skill/qualities and not to combat skills as combat is not what defines the Ranger as an archetype.
- *Archetypes* should be reduced to basic elements as much as possible. Some *archetypes* will still overlap. This is not a problem.
- *Archetypes* can be used to perform *any* action related to the broad set of skills/qualities that defines them. It should be self-evident what general sort of skills/qualities an *archetype* relates to. If it isn't, tweak the wording until it is.
- This game uses polyhedral dice to represent levels of these skills/qualities as well as degrees of difficulty. **d4** represents no particular skill/capacity, or an “easy” difficulty.
 - The step scale: **d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, d20**
 - This may be extended for epic-level campaigns by adding a 2nd die: **d20+d4, d20 +d6** etc.

CHARACTER CREATION

- Each character has a **d6**, a **d8**, a **d10**, and a **d12** to assign to 4 things: *initiative*, and 3 *archetypes*.
 - For eg: “Kel'tur: Woodsman **d12**, Druid **d10**, Initiative **d8**, Warrior **d6**”. This describes a person who is an experienced survivalist, knows the spirits of nature, is relatively quick on their feet, and has been in combat before but is by no means an expert.
- Race/species may be selected freely in most cases. If racial abilities are necessary, treat the race as an *archetype* and assign it one of the above dice.
- Selecting *archetypes* is free-form but GMs may ask for fine-tuning. The GM should ensure that *archetypes* are campaign-appropriate. Players are encouraged to select *archetypes* that establish the campaign world (*Priest of Erlik* vs. *Priest*).
- All player characters begin the game with **10 health points**.
- Players should pen a brief background and description that merges all of a character's diverse elements into a coherent fictional person.

EQUIPMENT

- Players should write down everything their character has on their person (subject to GM veto). It is important that equipment be kept track of throughout the game.

RELEVANCE OF ARCHETYPES TO ACTIONS

- An *Archetype* is relevant for any action involving the skills that define it:
 - For example: *Thief* may be used for any action concerning sneaking around, stealing, hiding, smuggling, selling stolen goods, break-ins etc.
- GMs should be charitable and take a player's description of the action into consideration.
- Actions which require no skill as such but rather a basic quality (strength, agility etc) an *archetype* which is universally associated with that quality may be rolled.

ASSIGNING DIFFICULTY DICE

- The GM assigns *difficulty dice* somewhat subjectively but should use the following as a guide:
 - **d4** for easy actions and **d20** for actions requiring superhuman skill/ability, with the other dice on the step-scale falling in between.
 - The GM is ultimately free to assign *any* dice (including multiple dice) they feel represents the difficulty of an action, especially in epic campaigns. Just remember that math is boring.
- *Difficulty dice* are assigned to specific actions: A given door may be **d10** to smash, **d6** to pick the lock etc. Unrealistic actions should be made suitably difficult.
- If an action relates to highly specialized or arcane knowledge the *difficulty dice* for a layperson (lacking a relevant *archetype*) will be higher than for those who possess a relevant archetype. Magic is an example of where this may apply.

RESOLUTION MECHANICS

Archetype Die roll vs. *Difficulty Die* roll. **Margin = degree of success/failure**

- Most actions do not require mechanics. Trivial actions (eat, sheathe a sword) are automatic. When an action is either significantly difficult or important to the story dice should be rolled.
- A player rolls a die representing their attempt, and a die is rolled representing difficulty. If the player's roll is *equal* to or *higher* than the difficulty roll the attempt is a success. The *margin* by which they succeed or fail determines the degree of success/failure.
- Any character can attempt any action. If a character has an *archetype* which relates to the action they roll that *archetype's* die. Otherwise they roll a **d4**.
- Difficulty dice can be rolled by the GM or by the player performing the action. This is a matter of preference. The GM always *assigns* the difficulty die of course. It is a good idea to have two different coloured sets of dice to avoid confusion: one colour *always* representing difficulty/NPCs and the other *always* representing the PCs.

OPPOSED ROLLS

- When a character attempts an action on another being against their will, an *opposing roll* will be made instead of a *difficulty die* roll.
- The target rolls whatever die is relevant to their attempt to *resist* the action. If they have no relevant die or are unable to actively resist they roll a **d4**. This also applies to *resistance attempts* deemed wildly inappropriate for the situation by the GM.
- The action is either successful, or successfully *resisted* depending on which die roll is higher. In the event of a tie, *resistance* wins. The *margin* indicates degree of success/failure (and *damage* in combat). A successful *resistance* attempt means only that the action is avoided.

ACTION POINTS

- If a player spends an *action point* while declaring an action they may add a **d4** to their roll. The GM distributes *action points* in whatever way suits the campaign. **1** per adventure is suggested.

SITUATIONAL MODIFIERS (optional)

- If a player describes an action in a way that explicitly takes advantage of a situation, they get to throw a modifier (an extra die) along with their roll. The results are added together for the total check result. The GM may do likewise for NPCs.
- The die thrown for a single advantage is always a **d4**, for *two* advantages a **d6** and so on.
- There are no negative situational modifiers. The GM takes circumstances that work against a character into consideration when assigning *difficulty dice*.
- *Resistance* attempts do not receive modifiers unless the defense was prepared *beforehand* and the advantage mentioned explicitly.

THE COMBAT ROUND

- Combat is played out in rounds, each representing a few seconds. There may be situations (siege, naval combat) where rounds represent longer periods. Use common sense.
- At the beginning of each round, each character involved rolls their *initiative* die. Characters act in order of the results from highest to lowest. Each character may perform **1** action per round.
- *Resistance* attempts may be performed out of initiative order. However, such an attempt counts as that character's action for the round. This leaves them open to any other attacks that round.

COMBAT: RESOLUTION

- Combat actions are resolved like any other action. Most rolls will be opposed due to the nature of combat.
- For *attacks* (any action intending physical harm), the *margin* of success indicates *damage* in *health points* provided that the means/weapons are appropriate.
- *Resistance* rolls are made with whatever *archetype* is relevant to the resistance attempt. If a character is unable/unwilling to resist an attack they roll a **d4** for their side of the opposed check.

COMBAT: DAMAGE

- The *margin* of a successful *attack* will be deducted from the target's *health points*.
- The above assumes the use of appropriate weapons/means. If not, the margin indicates a degree of whatever effect is appropriate (subduing, distance pushed back, embarrassment, tickling etc). Improvised weapons deal *half damage* unless they are obviously as lethal as a weapon.

NON-COMBAT DAMAGE

- The GM assigns non-combat threats a die representing the severity of the threat, and characters make opposing rolls to resist the threat. The *margin* of a failure indicates *damage*.
- At other times non-combat damage results from failed action attempts. The *margin* of failure indicates damage in such cases.
- Situations may also arise where damage occurs as a certainty without any possibility of resistance; Here the GM needs only to decide what die to roll for the damage.

HEALING

- For each day of rest a character recovers **1** *health point*.
- If a *healing* skill is used make an appropriate roll. *Health points* equal to the *margin* will be restored over the rest period. With supernatural healing *health points* are recovered **instantly**. Difficulty dice should reflect severity of wounds. Only **1** such attempt may be made per day.

MAGIC & SUPERNATURAL POWERS

- Magic uses the resolution mechanics with a few tweaks: A player declares their attempt to use magic to a specified end and the GM assigns the task a difficulty. Relevant dice are rolled and success/failure is determined. If the attempt succeeds the spell works as the caster intended. Otherwise it goes awry.
- Any attempt to use magic or supernatural-powers will cost a character **1 health point** whether or not the attempt succeeds. This is to account for the mental/physical/spiritual exhaustion associated with wielding magic/supernatural powers.
- The GM should use *how powerful the intended effects are* as a guide for determining difficulty: The more powerful the intended effects, the more difficult the attempt should be.
- The GM may require that special conditions be met in some cases (the stars are right, holy site, ritual, special material components/artifacts etc.)

MAGIC & THE SUPERNATURAL IN COMBAT

- Any magical attempt which is not intended to cause direct physical harm will be resolved in the same way during combat as at any other time.
- Magic intended to cause physical harm (*blasting magic*), is resolved slightly differently:
 - The target(s) of the spell make *resistance* rolls as with physical combat. They must declare their intentions as the spell is being cast.
 - A *difficulty die* is also thrown to determine if the spell works properly. For area-of-effect spells the difficulty should be fairly high.
 - If the spell works properly, the *margin* (caster vs target) indicates *damage*. If the target rolls higher than or equal to the caster they have avoided any damage.

MAGIC ITEMS & TREASURE

- Magic items should have a specified power. Some powers will have a die associated while others will just be explained unambiguously. Powers should be limited in scope and/or how often they may be used. A die associated with a power is rolled in *addition* to the *archetype* die rolled to use the item.
 - Examples: Staff of Lightning (*shoot lightning d4*, once per day), Sword of Demon Slaying (*double damage vs demons*)
- Player characters are also likely to find treasure. Treasure doesn't really do anything in the game except allow characters to buy stuff, which admittedly is pretty important... even adventurers have to eat!

ADVANCEMENT

- Upon completing an adventure, player characters receive **1** experience point each.
- By spending an experience point, a character may advance one of their dice by *one* step. Experience points may also be spent to increase max *health points* at a cost of **1:1**.
- Characters may gain additional archetypes by spending an experience point and having an in-game reason (training, new experiences etc.) Such *archetypes* begin at **d6**.

MONSTERS

- **All** monsters have an *initiative* die and *health points*.
- Some (humanoid) monsters are defined like player characters, with any number of *archetypes* that the GM deems appropriate.
- Some monsters are defined by words or phrases (with dice associated) which describe the monster and may be used to perform actions wherever relevant. Examples: Big, Scary, Fire-breathing, Claws, Demonic, Monstrous, Strong etc. 2 or 3 is usually plenty.
- Some monsters may utilize a combination of the above methods.
Eg: Hell Knight: *warrior* d8, *demonic* d10, *initiative* d6, *health points* 15.

CREATING ENTIRELY NEW ARCHETYPES

- Playing the role of a fictional person in a world of the GM's imagining may necessitate the creation of entirely new *archetypes*. This is in no way discouraged.
- In order to create an *archetype* that has no pedigree in the real world or other fictional worlds: make a note on the back of a character sheet or anywhere else handy. Write the name of the *archetype* you are creating followed by a brief definition as if you were writing a dictionary entry. The definition need not be long. Follow the definition with a few bullet points if necessary to illustrate what sort of a role this sort of person plays in the world, and what sort of activities or equipment they specialize in. That's it!

SAMPLE ARCHETYPES (to kickstart your imagination)

- Amazon, Alchemist, Assassin, Barbarian, Bard, Beastmatser, Conjurer, Demonologist, Doxy, Drug Dealer, Evoker, Enchanter, General, Gladiator, Herbalist, Highwayman, Hunter, Knight, Labourer, Medic, Merchant, Monk, Necromancer, Peasant, Pirate, Psionic, Revolutionary, Sage, Summoner, Thief, Warlock, Warrior etc.

Altars and Archetypes

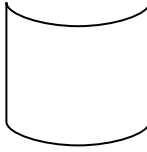
Character Sheet

Character Name

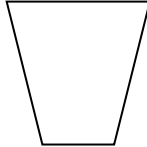
Species, Land of Origin etc.

Age/Gender

Health Points



Action Points



Character Sketch/Symbol

DICE:

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Experience Points:

Equipment/Treasure:

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL & OPTIONAL RULES

ALTERNATIVE STARTING DICE

- For games with a greater sense of character progression change the starting dice. Try 2 **d6s**, and 2 **d8s**.
- For another alternative, have characters begin with only **3** dice: 2 for archetypes and 1 for initiative. Characters may gain additional archetypes during play as outlined in “advancement”.

ARMOUR

- The rules assume all characters to be wearing armour that would be generic in a campaign world. This includes a degree of natural armour for monsters. If a character loses their armour or it becomes damaged, they suffer *double damage* from hits. Use this only when relevant to the story. At all other times, assume all characters to be normally armoured.
- Armour with additional effects may also exist in a campaign at the GM's discretion. The effects should be explained unambiguously in the item's description.
 - Examples: *Chain Mail: -2 Slashing Damage*, or *Silk Vest: -1 Arrow Damage*, or *Full Plate: ½ Physical Attack Damage*. These examples would reduce slashing damage by 2, reduce arrow damage by 1, and halve all physical attack damage respectively.