

Evening Core

Introduction

Evening is a tabletop roleplaying game with a focus on dynamic narration, fun tactical gameplay, and easy improvisation.

An evening session plays like this:

1. An ideal group of people, say 3-6 stalwart chums, get together for an evening of play, called a session.
2. Everyone either brings their normal characters already made with that group, or makes new ones for the session.
3. Once everyone is gathered, everyone decides on a format together. Formats tell you what kind of game the session will be. Exploration, combat, social intrigues, heists, and so on.
4. After deciding on the format, the evening begins.

Evening is designed to get you from zero to gameplay with zero prep and minimal bookkeeping. It wants your nights to be as fun and game-focused as possible. The ideal Evening session is one you play entirely off the cuff, with little planning, just because you feel like it in the moment.

Evening plays like most tabletop games: pen & paper, this document, some dice, and some friends are all you need to play. Evening is directly descended from 5E, and has loose, but not total, compatibility with it as a result.

One concept that Evening brings to the table which is (so far) unique to it is the conceit of *formats*. Put simply, formats are styles of play. Tabletop games are ambient things, with loose structure and many work like sandboxes, where you can do anything you want.

Without discarding that essential sandbox nature of tabletop games, Evening puts goals and purpose in front of a game group. With formats, it gives your session purpose and an agenda, a loose scaffold that helps you keep games in motion, and fun.

The Rules

The rule of cool. The main point is to have fun together. If it isn't fun anymore, recalibrate; pause the game and have a real people chat with each other. Take a break and come back when it's fun again. Be kind to each other, help each other out, use safety tools, be respectful.

The narrator has the final say. The narrator may disregard or overrule any rule they like, for any reason, at any time. If the players don't agree, wait until the session's end to discuss the disagreement.

The rule of specificity. More specific rules or systems beat more general ones. For example, broadly speaking, most living creatures are vulnerable to the impacts of poisons, but specific creatures or characters may have a feature which allows them to ignore impacts from poisons. In that case, the more specific ruling takes precedence and the actor is immune to the poison's impact.

Just round down. Fractional outcomes are always rounded down. Things *aren't* until, at last, they *are*.

Dice Checks

Most moments of tension or uncertainty are left to chance in the form of a d20 check. Other dice play into it as well, but the d20 is the most common.

- Anyone can prompt for a check. Often the system or the narrator will get things rolling here, but players can suggest one as well.
- The narrator thinks about how difficult the check should be, usually by consulting a rating level and modifying it. The narrator then decides what the starting effect is: usually this is *standard*.
- Based on how tough the check ought to be, the narrator will assign a target number. They don't have to say it out loud, but they can if they like.
- The player rolls d20, adding any relevant modifiers to the outcome.
- If the total rolled plus its modifiers beat the target number, the check succeeds. Otherwise, it fails.

Target numbers. The target number for the check (sometimes abbreviated as TN) describes how difficult or risky something is. The higher the number, the riskier or more challenging a task is. The lower, the simpler or safer. Narrators are in charge of finding target numbers whenever the rules don't outright specify one.

Here's a rough guideline:

Difficulty	Target Number	Summary
Standard	10	An even chance of success or failure.
Skilled	15	An artisan or expert can do it.
Difficult	20	Rare to see anyone do it.
Extremely Hard	25	Heroes have done it, supposedly.
Impossible	30	An unheard of task, legendary.

Low target numbers. If the TN is incredibly low and there's no chance for failure, don't even bother rolling. The check can automatically succeed. However, if there's even a remote chance of failure, lean towards rolling anyway.

Take effect. If a check succeeds, it *takes effect*. Usually, this means you get a standard effect. However, effect varies on a number of factors. See the [effect](#) section for more information.

Advantage and disadvantage. In some cases, circumstance or a feature will let a character roll with advantage or disadvantage. In both cases, this means you roll 2d20 (which means two d20s at the same time). When you have advantage, you take the highest. When you have disadvantage, you take the lowest.

Modifiers. Many things can modify the outcome of a roll, boosting or penalizing the result. These are called modifiers.

- **Abilities, attributes, and aptitudes.** These are all modifiers that apply directly to any check that uses them. Only one of each can apply to a given check, so if you have two aptitudes that apply, go ahead and use your highest.
- **Features and circumstances.** These are powers characters may have, or general circumstantial benefits from anything, like items and things like that. Don't apply one feature multiple times to the same check.

Group Checks

An entire group of characters might need to make a check, for example if everyone is attempting to navigate a hostile city while in disguise. In this case, the narrator sets a target number normally, but everyone in the group makes a check against that number. If more than half of the group succeed, the group check succeeds. Otherwise, it fails.

Contested Checks

Sometimes a check is actively resisted. In the case of the narrator, this doesn't involve a roll, because it's handled with challenge or threat ratings. However, two characters can face off like this, and in those cases both of them make the same check, with the highest roll winning. If there's a tie, reroll until it breaks.

Effect

Instead of making everything a pass / fail, checks, conditions and feature efficacy are both measured by degrees of success called **effect**. Effect maps circumstances and check results into outcomes, and gives a way for the narrator, players, and the system to make roleplay organically impact things.

Taking effect. If something succeeds, it "takes effect". That means it achieves the baseline outcome, no better, no worse.

Effect level. By default, whenever something takes effect, it does so at the baseline effect level. Increasing the effect level means the action has more impact, and decreasing it means it has less.

Typically the effect level will be **standard**. However, the narrator should feel free to adjust starting effect according to what's going on in play. The more impactful player actions are, the higher the effect level, and vice versa.

No effect. Sometimes an action can have its effect reduced enough that it has no effect. Conversely, sometimes actions can succeed but **begin** at no effect (requiring effort to produce effect).

Assessing effect. Circumstances and intuition should heavily influence effect level. A few things positively and negatively influence effect levels. The narrator factors in everything and then adjusts the effect.

- **Potency.** Take into account the relative power and weakness of everything involved. Stronger people throw harder punches. Fire has greater effect on dry wood.
- **Quality / suitability.** The quality of something factors into effect. Using better tools (or weapons or armor) improves your effect. The opposite is true: poor tools hinder effect.
- **Scale.** The proportion of cause and effect, physical and otherwise, weigh in on effect as well. Titans do incredible damage when they stomp on you.
- **Stunts.** If the character pulls off something incredibly fun or cool, increase their effect level.

Effect level	Summary
No effect	You're too limited to make it happen. Figure out a better way to do it and then try again.
Limited	Something prevents you from giving it your all.
Standard	You accomplish what you wanted to, no better and no worse.
Strong	You do better than expected.
Great	The stars have aligned, and you've done an incredible job.

Interpreting effect levels. What effect levels *mean* is based on the context of the action or check. The overall effect something has is a measure of how impactful the action is, but this means different things. For example, if you're in combat, it might impact your damage dice, but if you're meeting a challenge, it might simply modify how many successes (or failures) you get for a check.

Making checks. Once you've assessed the effect, make a roll. The outcome of the roll has a further impact on the effect.

- If the result is 10 or more higher than the target number, increase the effect by one level.
- If the result is 10 or more lower than the target number, decrease the effect by one level.
- If the roll is a natural 1, decrease the effect by one level.
- If the roll is a natural 20, increase the effect by one level.

These are cumulative. So, for example, if you roll 10 or more lower and a natural 1, decrease effect by two levels.

Increasing effect. If a character feature would increase or decrease effect, it does so after the check is made and adjusts the effect only after everything else is considered.

Structure of Play

By default, gameplay follows a sequence of play which has four major phases. It's possible to go through all four phases within a game session, but you can spend as much time as you like in each phase, so they can stretch out across multiple sessions if that's what makes sense.

Format dependent. By its very nature, the structure of play is ambiguous. This is because *what you do* in your game varies a lot based on the choices your players make when making their characters.

1. Games begin in the **free play** phase. This is a mostly ungoverned phase of the game, designed to allow everyone to play and enjoy their characters and the world. Characters are in control here, deciding what to do, exploring, playing with their **threads**, and living their lives. Free play ends when players decide they want to prepare to engage in one or several of their formats.
2. From there, the **preparation** phase begins. This phase begins once everyone playing has agreed to get ready for showtime, and it does the work to set showtime up. What goes into preparation is normally handled out of character, and it varies a lot based on the formats you pick for showtime.
3. Once preparation is complete, the **showtime** phase begins. Showtime throws the characters into the middle of the action which the setup and preparation phases arranged. Showtime explores the formats, and each format has its own parameters of play and resolution. Showtime ends when all formats have been resolved, successfully or not.
4. When showtime is over, **downtime** begins. This is the space between frames of action, where everyone returns to their home or base of operations. Here, the ramifications of what happened in showtime are given time to breathe. Like preparation, downtime plays out largely out of character, where players discuss what their characters go on to do. Resting, advancement, personal projects, all occur here.

Cyclical. The structure of play is cyclical. After downtime, everyone returns to free play until the next preparation phase begins.

Optional. All of this is *recommended play*, which is to say, it's only there to make coming up with games and playing them easier and more gamelike for everyone, even the narrators.

Winging it. Advanced game groups, or groups in advanced stages of their game, might feel like the structure of play is intrusive. If that's the case, throw out gameplay formats and structure, and wing it: traditional tabletop roleplaying often has no cohesive top-level structure. It's only about playing out a story. If that's what you want to do, nothing stops you.

Formats

Formats are mix-and-match components which help you build out the structure of your game sessions. Based on your preference, your game will surface some formats that might be appropriate for your group. Formats give you concrete things to do, resources to manage, and success and failure conditions for play.

What are formats? Many roleplaying games follow particular game formats, so many formats will be familiar: the dungeon crawl format, the exploration format, the heist format. By naming the formats and giving them structure, they become deliberate parts of how you play your games.

Is this it? There's a few formats presented, mainly in tandem with classes, plus a few ambient ones. Of course it's not comprehensive. Formats are a design space, and one worth exploring further. Edit them, combine them, make up your own.

Which to use? What formats you pick for your games are completely up to you. A number of things will suggest formats to your group, and the [structure of play](#) provides a way to pick different ones for different sessions. Ultimately formats make sense as building blocks to help you make your game your own. Pick the ones you want to play.

Structure of formats. A format has some distinct elements that it has to provide which let you use them in structured play.

- **Name.** The name of the format.
- **Setup.** The setup requirements: how you get started with the format in showtime. This isn't at all uniform, but depends more on the resources the format works with. For example, for a heist format, this might be: Deciding on what the heist is, deciding how to do it, and a roll to figure out how well (or badly) you kick off the heist.
- **Showtime.** This is the actual play structure of the format itself. This is an entire structure of rules that describes how the format works. It is the heist, itself, and it continues until resolved. Typically showtime is designed to engage the characters, present challenges to them, and drain their resources a bit. When showtime is over, the characters should be looking for an opportunity to rest.
- **Downtime.** When showtime is over, what does the format require for rest and recuperation? That's the downtime you need to specify for the format.

Is mingling several formats too much? That's up to you. Some combinations don't make sense, and those will be pretty obvious. Others do: dungeon crawls and heists combine well. Planar exploration and cosmic research combine well. Others dovetail one into the other: planar exploration and cosmic research might lead organically into a dungeon crawl or a heist.

Formats are a tool for you to design your gameplay. Explore them or pick some that you like and stick with them. It's your preference.

Character Creation

Building an Evening character is usually about picking a few key things and then gradually defining the details later in play. So, to begin with you don't have a whole lot to do other than deciding what your foundation looks like.

The process works something like this:

1. You pick your starting abilities: **Finesse**, **Prowess**, **Resolve**. You begin with -1 in each, and have 4 points to distribute.
2. Pick your starting attributes: **Body**, and **Mind**. You begin with -1 in each, and have 3 points to distribute.
3. Pick your beginning origin and class, applying the kits for each.
4. Pick 3 additional aptitudes you like from the options granted to you by origin and class.
5. Determine your health, aptitude bonus (+2), character level (1), and reserves.

Optional: Level adjustments. Usually Evening starts you at level 1, which assumes you're already well on your way. However, if your narrator wants, they can increase or decrease the level. For increases, this is more or less straightforward.

Your narrator can also begin the game at level 0. This is a special level where you have no aptitudes, 4 health, no reserves, and no significant possessions. Level 0 characters gain their first level upon completing their first challenge.

Progression

As your character faces challenges, they grow and advance, gaining in capability and growing into different, evolved characters. Experience points are an abstract measure of how your character has grown and changed over time.

Towers tracks progression with experience points: every time a character resolves a challenge or storyline with a rating that meets or exceeds their current rating cutoff, their character marks one experience point. Every five experience points gained may be spent on a level during downtime.

Gaining experience. You gain one experience point if any of the following things occur:

- You resolve a challenge, threat, or danger with a rating equal to your **minimum advancement rating** or higher.
- You resolve a thread.
- The narrator decides to give you one.

Using experience. Experience matters in two regards:

1. As you accumulate experience, your **total experience** increases. This is used to determine your character's level. Every **5 points** of total experience you earn **levels up** your character by one level.
2. You may also invest individual experience points. This is a temporary allocation, though how often you recoup and adjust your experience investment is limited.

Investment. Investing experience allows you to adjust your character in unique ways, customizing them to fit your needs. During downtime, you may invest your earned experience in the following ways:

- You may invest up to **25 points** of experience adding dice to your reserves, at the cost of **5 points** of experience each. Added reserves are the same die size as your largest reserve die.
- You may invest up to **25 points** of experience increasing the permanent value of your **assets**, at the cost of **5 points** of experience per asset increased. You decide which asset to increase.
- You may invest **5 points** of experience to give a non-player character or object you can carry **plot armor**. The narrator may not directly harm or endanger things with plot armor, but in exchange they may not be used in initiative or to resolve challenges or threads.
- You may temporarily invest **1 point** of experience to increase the effect of a check by one step. Experience invested in this way is recovered at the beginning of your next downtime.
- You may temporarily invest **5 points** of experience to re-roll a check. You must take the new result. Experience invested in this way is recovered at the beginning of your next downtime.
- You may temporarily invest **5 points** of experience to ignore 1 level of injury or exhaustion until your next downtime. This level doesn't go away, but you act as though your overall injury or exhaustion were one less for determining effects. Experience invested in this way is recovered at the end of your next downtime.

Recovering invested experience. At the start of downtime, or upon resolution of a thread, you may choose to release up to **5 points** of invested experience. You lose

whatever benefit you had invested that experience in, but recover the experience to invest in something else.

Leveling up. Whenever you spend experience to level up, you gain in strength, advancing up the character progression chart until you hit level 20. Different levels convey different perks. Your aptitude bonus grows, and you gain a number of features according to what level you've reached.

Character progression. As your character gains in levels, their aptitude bonus increases and they obtain new character features. However, their **minimum advancement rating** also increases, which means future experience can only be earned by meeting greater and greater challenges.

Character Level	Aptitude Bonus	Feature	Minimum Advancement Rating
1st	+2	Character kit, origin kit, class kit, origin level (1), class level (1)	1
2nd	+2	Discipline kit, discipline level (1)	1
3rd	+2	Focus kit, focus level (1)	1
4th	+2	Base feature	2
5th	+3	Origin level (2), class level (2)	2
6th	+3	Discipline level (2)	2
7th	+3	Focus level (2)	3
8th	+3	Base feature	3
9th	+4	Origin level (3), class level (3)	3
10th	+4	Discipline level (3)	4
11th	+4	Focus level (3)	4
12th	+4	Base feature	4
13th	+5	Origin level (4), class level (4)	5
14th	+5	Discipline level (4)	5
15th	+5	Focus level (4)	5
16th	+5	Base feature	6
17th	+6	Origin level (5), class level (5)	6
18th	+6	Discipline level (5)	6
19th	+6	Focus level (5)	7
20th	+6	Class level (6), Base feature	7

Starting at level 0. Some games kick off at level 0. This is a special level that offers no intrinsic bonuses at all. Unless otherwise stated by your narrator, level 0 characters become level 1 at the completion of their first storyline.

The mechanics of leveling up. Depending on the level you've reached, you gain new features and your character's options broaden. Several things happen as you level up:

- You gain access to new **features**, depending on the level you've achieved.
- Your **aptitude bonus** may increase. This bonus applies to any aptitude you have.
- Your **minimum advancement rating** may increase. As this number grows, the number of challenges you can advance from decreases, slowing your ability to earn experience.

Gaining features. As you achieve new levels, you gain features, many of which are called **feature levels**. Feature levels are smaller progression tracks that you can use to fine-tune your character. Much of what you are comes from the features and feature levels you choose.

- **Origin** levels grant you abilities that reflect the identity of your character, and grant you **resources** that allow you to navigate the world.
- **Class** levels grant important abilities to your character, reflecting the identity of your class. They also determine your combat baselines: **defense**, **health**, and **reserves**.
- **Discipline** levels grant you abilities related to your aptitudes, giving you an edge when using those aptitudes, and when you seek out or use **assets** and **wealth**.
- **Focus** levels grant you specialized abilities, distinguishing you from your peers in unique ways. Many focuses will be specializations of your class, but this is not a hard rule: some focuses build on origin, others disciplines, some none at all or a mixture of others.

Feature levels. You can advance features as you choose, using the levels you gain while your character advances. Feature levels obey a few rules:

- Any time you gain a feature level, you can spend that level to advance an existing feature of that kind or learn a new feature of that kind which you already have access to.
- The very first feature of a given kind that you buy gives you extra benefits, often in the form of access to aptitudes, assets, and resources.
- Whenever you purchase a feature with a feature level, its level increases by 1. That means if you use 5 discipline levels to buy 5 different disciplines, you are 1st level in 5 different disciplines. And vice versa.

Origins

Origins are part of the [progression](#) of characters which reflects their ancestry, inheritance, and mastery of self. Origins grant you abilities and grow as you do, as you learn more about who you are and what you're capable of.

At first level. At first level, you gain one origin level. You also gain the origin kit of the origin you select.

At higher levels. As you progress, you gain additional origin levels at 5th, 9th, 13th, and 17th character level. You can spend those to increase the level of your current origins or you can choose to purchase a new origin which you are qualified for.

Multi-origin. You may pick to advance any origin you like whenever you spend an origin level. You have discovered a part of yourself that you didn't know was there and it has become a part of your life, whether or not you like it.

Re-designing your origin. Whenever you would gain an origin level, you may exchange one origin level that you have already spent for a different origin that you qualify for. This moment reflects a discovery of self that fundamentally evolves who you are as a person.

Character Level	Feature
1st	Origin kit, origin level (1)
5th	Origin level (2)
9th	Origin level (3)
13th	Origin level (4)
17th	Origin level (5)

Classes

Every character is different, and brings different skills and approaches, and abilities, to the mix. Classes are the part of [progression](#) which represents that. Classes help establish your features and define how you interact with the game world.

Format. Your character class decides the structured gameplay format you want to play. When beginning a session, your group will either be in an existing format phase or in

downtime. Character classes each bring a format to the menu of options for your next group outing.

At first level. At first level, you gain one class level. You also gain the class kit of the class you select.

At higher levels. As you progress, you gain additional class levels at 5th, 9th, 13th, 17th, and 20th character level. You can spend those to increase the level of your current class or you can choose to purchase a level in a new class that you are qualified for.

Multi-class. You may pick to advance any class you like whenever you spend a class level, provided you qualify for that class.

Re-designing your class. Whenever you would gain a class level, you may exchange one class level that you have already spent for a different class that you qualify for.

Character Level	Feature
1st	Class kit, class level (1)
5th	Class level (2)
9th	Class level (3)
13th	Class level (4)
17th	Class level (5)
20th	Class level (6)

Focus

Focuses are powerful specializations or knacks that distinguish you from the your peers. Focuses are part of the [progression](#) of characters which reflects specializations in your chosen classes, or devotion to a new distinct kind of power entirely.

At first level. At third level, you gain one focus level. You also gain the focus kit of the focus you select.

At higher levels. As you progress, you gain additional focus levels at 7th, 11th, 15th, and 19th character level. You can spend those to increase the level of your current focus or you can choose to purchase a new focus which you are qualified for.

Multi-focus. You may pick to advance any focus you like whenever you spend an focus level.

Re-designing your focus. Whenever you would gain an focus level, you may exchange one focus level that you have already spent for a different focus that you qualify for. You have learned something new and chosen to put aside something you no longer wish to do.

Character Level	Feature
3rd	Focus kit, focus level (1)
7th	Focus level (2)
11th	Focus level (3)
15th	Focus level (4)
19th	Focus level (5)

Discipline

Disciplines are areas of particular interest or study that you have begun to excel at to such a degree that you've become known for it. Disciplines are part of the [progression](#) of characters which reflects voluntary training and discipline.

At first level. At second level, you gain one discipline level. You also gain the discipline kit of the discipline you select.

At higher levels. As you progress, you gain additional discipline levels at 6th, 10th, 14th, and 18th character level. You can spend those to increase the level of a discipline you already have or you can choose to purchase a new discipline which you are qualified for.

Multi-discipline. You may pick to advance any discipline you like whenever you spend a discipline level.

Re-designing your disciplines. Whenever you would gain a discipline level, you may exchange one discipline level that you have already purchased for a different discipline that you qualify for. You have learned something new and chosen to put aside something you no longer wish to do.

Character Level	Feature
2nd	Discipline kit, discipline level (1)

Character Level	Discipline Kit, discipline level (1) Feature
6th	Discipline level (2)
10th	Discipline level (3)
14th	Discipline level (4)
18th	Discipline level (5)

Defense

Whenever you want to avoid or endure danger—getting out of the way of something, shrugging off poisons, blocking attacks—you use your defenses. Defenses are proactive, you find your character's relevant stats, add them up and make a check, adding them to your result.

Defense check formula. Your defense check is the result of a d20, plus an Ability + Attribute + Aptitude Bonus (conditional) + Defense modifier

Applying abilities and attributes. You add your ability and attribute to defense checks. Many features and conditions call out how they may be resisted, and other times the narrator will simply ask for a specific kind of defense.

Some example defense checks:

- Fortitude-based defenses use **Resolve + Body**.
- Reflex-based defenses use **Finesse + Body**.
- Will-based defenses use **Resolve + Mind**.

Applying aptitudes. Some aptitudes specify circumstances where they'll apply to your defense checks. Whenever that applies, you may add your aptitude bonus to your defense check.

Defend for half. If something says "defend for half", a successful defense doesn't negate the effect, it merely reduces it by half (rounding down).

Circumstantial bonuses. Sometimes outside effects apply to your defense result, reducing the target number of the defense check.

- A **limited circumstance** reduces the target number by 3.
- A **standard circumstance** reduces the target number by 6.
- A **great circumstance** reduces the target number by 9.

For example, seeking cover from incoming arrows: if you can get half-cover, that would be *limited*, while three-quarters would be *standard*, and full cover would be *great*.

Resting

Characters can't go non-stop; they need rest. The world may go on and on, but taking a breather and getting a moment to yourself has to happen, just the same. There's two kinds of rest that directly benefit characters: short rests and long rests.

Short rest. Your characters take a little bit of downtime in a safe shelter, for at least an hour, and do nothing tougher than eat, drink, read, chat idly, or tend wounds.

At the end of the short rest, your character may spend some of their *reserves* in order to recover health. Roll a number of die for each reserve spent, adding your *Resolve* + *Body* to the result of each. Your character regains that much health.

Long rest. A long rest is an extended period of downtime at least 8 hours long, usually devoted to at least 6 hours of sleep. The other 2 hours can be chatting idly, eating, or standing watch. If interrupted with any kind of strenuous activity, the long rest must be restarted in order to attempt it again.

At the end of the long rest, your character regains all health and reserves.

Your character can't benefit from more than one long rest in a 24-hour period, and must have at least 1 health at the beginning of the rest in order to gain its benefits.

Reserves

Reserves measure how much your character has left in them, how much harder they can push themselves or how much longer they can last.

Base reserves. Your base reserves are a pool of dice which come from your class levels. Every time you advance a class level, you add a new reserve die to your pool. That means that if you purchase levels in different classes, you could have a reserve pool with a bunch of differently sized dice in it.

Buying extra reserves. You can also invest 1 experience point to get an extra reserve die, up to 5 total experience points. The size of these additional reserves are the same as the

largest kind of die in your reserves. For example, if you have 2d8 reserves and 1d10 reserves, any additional reserves from experience are d10s.

Using reserves. As you play, you can spend your character's reserves in a number of ways.

- After finishing a **short rest**, you may spend as many of your reserves as you like, recovering that much health.
- As a reaction, you may spend one of your reserves when making a **defense check**, adding the result to your check total.
- You may use a bonus action to ignore the effects of exhaustion for a round by spending one of your reserves.

Recovering reserves. You regain all spent reserves after finishing a **long rest**.

Threads

Everything is interwoven, and even the most casual of moments can lead circuitously to unintended consequence. The general cause and effect that carries through your game, tying everything together, are called **threads**.

As the narrator, threads are there to help you track what's going on in the world and to help prompt you and your players. Make a thread whenever you want to track something significant going on in the foreground or background of your story. Whenever something significant occurs in your game, it can either further a thread or it could make a new thread. Whenever a thread ends, something major has occurred.

Making threads. Whenever you discover or create a thread, take a small piece of scratch paper—say, an index card—and write down the name of the thread on it. Give it a short summary of what's going on, and then write down a number between 4 and 12. The longer this number, the longer the thread will influence your game.

Finally, decide on an outcome: something which will happen if the thread resolves. This can be a good or bad thing, and largely decides how everyone responds to it.

Threads and secrecy. There isn't much point in keeping threads hidden. In the case of threads, a little in character and out of character blending makes sense. Threads are often tangible to the characters in the game, and so when you make a thread, tell everyone.

Thread actions. Threads influence your game world in a tangible way. Those moments where your plotlines influence your game are called *thread actions*. They can be good or bad, but they are often significant. Whenever something advances a thread, the thread makes an action of some kind.

Advancing a thread. Threads can advance through deliberate intent, accident, or entirely through random circumstance. Ultimately the narrator decides what thread advances and when, but many of these key moments may trigger a thread advance:

- Whenever someone rolls a natural 1, a thread might advance, and it might trigger a bad thread action. This might also happen if a check misses by 10 or more.
- Similarly, whenever someone rolls a natural 20, a thread might advance, this time in a good way and with a good action. This might also happen if a check succeeds by 10 or more.
- If a *challenge* resolves or fails it could advance a thread.
- Through deliberate intent, for example if a character or antagonist works to advance the thread, doing something important or making a successful check, then advance it.
- At the beginning of a session, or scene, or during downtime, a thread might advance.

There doesn't have to be direct cause and effect for something to advance a thread. Two completely unrelated things can occur, governed simply by the whim of the cosmos.

When a thread advances, mark a tally on the thread to record the moment, and take a thread action.

Whenever you would advance a thread, you can of course also create a new thread instead.

Forestalling a thread. Sometimes the thread advancing is something the characters actively work to prevent. Whenever you might advance a thread, you can also decide that a thread is forestalled instead. When you forestall a thread, remove a mark instead of adding one.

Threads move over time. You may only advance a thread, forestall a thread, or resolve a thread a limited number of times, or else things begin to move too fast for the rest of the game world. After making two such marks, stop until the next scene.

Resolving a thread. When the thread has advanced to completion, it resolves. Whatever the thread foretold occurs, good or bad.

In cases where a thread is forestalled enough that it has no marks left, remove the thread. It is no longer a concern to the story. If it resurfaces organically later, make a new

thread for it.

Continuing threads. Sometimes the resolution of the thread creates new threads. In those cases, if the link between threads is clear, then put the new thread directly on top of the resolved thread. This can be used to model out growing threats, new discoveries, and evolving plotlines.

Player threads. The narrator is in charge of tracking threads, but can create them for any reason at any time. Sometimes this reason will be because a player has requested it, for example to track projects or undertakings their characters want to engage in. These kinds of threads should be highly accessible to player interaction and checks, more so than threads otherwise would be.

Preparing actions. If you want, you can prepare the actions a thread will take. In the area left under the resolution of the thread, write down the actions ahead of time. This can be extra useful in game prep, if you want to queue up some threads for use later and save some time in the game.

Kinds of Thread

There's a lot of stuff you can model with threads, and if you're able to keep track of a variety of different kinds of threads, it'll make a tangible impact on how your games feel and their pacing as well.

Every thread is a mix of a few of these, really, but figuring out what kind of thread you want to make helps in those first few moments of defining it.

Character. Character threads focus on a given character. Whether or not it's a player character is significant, because if too many threads occur about side characters, they could steal the limelight from the players.

Storylines. Storylines are threads that depict a mounting plot or overarching series of interconnected events. Storylines are things like looming disasters, prophecies, or the ironic tragedies that occur between neighboring kingdoms.

Intrigues. Sometimes characters are just up to something. Intrigues are threads that model out agendas being pushed by whoever, for whatever reason. When a faction moves, or someone hatches a dangerous and risky plan, you want an intrigue.

Projects. Sometimes the plot isn't an agenda, it's a creation. A magical working, an archaeological excursion, a hunt for an ancient library, a new invention, an art piece, a grand party. All of these are projects, and they can take front row of the game when done right.

Problems. Obstacles or impending dooms that are closing in on the characters make for great threads. These can be pretty short-term, only lasting for a few scenes, before resolving, or they can be huge session-spanning arcs that drive a lot of moments of consequence.

Making Thread Actions

Putting a thread action into the world is ultimately something up to the narrator. Threads exist almost entirely as prompt structures to suggest times for the narrator to intervene in the story a bit, in fact.

With that in mind, though, here's some suggestions for things you can do when you make a thread action. These are all just suggestions, of course: thread actions ultimately are *features*, and interact with the world exactly like a feature should. That means that there is a lot of potential to structure a thread action and reuse it when you like, as you would any character feature.

Exploding or suppressing outcomes. Whenever someone makes a check, or the next time someone makes a check, you can either explode or suppress the outcome. If it would be only of minor importance, it instead sets off a huge chain of side-effects... or, if it were meant to be the master stroke in a huge plan, it fizzles for some reason or doesn't quite achieve what it should have.

Pain or recovery. Thread actions can do damage, and they can heal it. If you want to exact a price of some health, or return it, go ahead.

Consequences and conditions. Something tragic happening to a character, or exhausting them, or even bestowing some kind of condition on them, can be a reasonable result of a thread action.

Complications. Whenever someone tries to accomplish something, or if they would attempt to accomplish something soon, you can add a complication that makes that task much harder. At its surface, this could be as simple as assigning disadvantage, but in some cases it might make sense to introduce some genuine, tangible complexity that makes that undertaking harder.

Losing or gaining opportunities. Something in the background changes, either revealing a new opportunity or completely shutting one off. The characters are too late to do something they need to do, or else they arrive with ample time to prepare for an ambush.

Giving or taking advantage. As a distillation of the above, whenever a character next does something in the service of the thread, they gain advantage. Similarly, when they next do something to forestall the thread, they suffer disadvantage.

Initiative

There are points of intense action where everyone wants to act at the same time. In order to let everyone have their turn, when those moments happen, everyone rolls initiative and begins to take turns.

When to use initiative. Initiative is useful whenever people need to take turns and not just clamor to be the one to say what they're doing first. At *any* time someone abruptly tries to "beat someone else" by saying an action first, pause play and ask for initiative.

Characters move at different speeds from our real life selves, and initiative models that.

Scenarios where initiative applies:

- Combat.
- Races of any kind.
- Intense arguments where rolling is involved.
- Games where turns might be significant.

The initiative roll. This is a d20 + *Finesse* check. Everyone involved rolls, and order is determined from highest to lowest. Ties roll off against each other until an order emerges.

Joining initiative. In order to join an existing initiative, you must roll initiative, and then your first action happens when that initiative is reached.

Surprise. In cases where some parties joining initiative have established they are catching others off-guard—for example, ambushes—then those parties gain a *surprise round*. Everyone rolls initiative normally, but the surprised parties may not act until the surprise round is over and they've begun their first turn.

The countdown. Initiative proceeds from highest to lowest. When your initiative is up, you may take your turn. Rounds end when everyone has taken their turn. If the initiative is still ongoing, initiative cycles back to the highest and proceeds again.

Rounds. Initiative splits action into *rounds*, which are roughly six seconds in length. Narratively, everyone participating in a round is acting at once, even though initiative dictates the order of resolution.

Turns. Everyone who rolls initiative gets to take a turn every round. Your turn begins on your initiative.

Movement and actions. During your turn, you may take one action, and make one movement.

Bonus action. Many features will mention that they may be used during a bonus action. This action is in addition to your action and movement, and must be used during your turn.

Reactions. Some features and kinds of actions specify that they may be used as a reaction. This action is also in addition to your other actions and movement. You may use a reaction during your turn or during someone else's. You may not use your reaction before your first turn.

Free actions. Some things don't require a roll or much time. Object interactions, speech, and so on. These are called *free actions*. You may use one free action of each kind per turn. For example, you can speak once, you may interact with an object once, etc.

Initiative actions. There are several actions you can take any time you are in initiative play.

- **Interact.** As a free action, you may interact with an object, such as flipping a switch, or picking up a trinket.
- **Ready.** You choose an action available to you, and then you specify a trigger that will cause you to take the action. If the trigger occurs before your next turn, you may use your reaction to take the readied action.

Equipment

Your character's possessions are modeled by their *wealth*, and *assets*.

Wealth. Your character has access to a number of *wealth aptitudes*, usually through their origins or disciplines. Wealth aptitudes represent how exactly your character goes about obtaining and then managing the things they own, or using their wealth to their advantage. How apt (or inept) your character is at this is usually reflected in the number and kind of wealth aptitudes they have.

Assets. These actual things your character has available to them. Assets are *unrealized items*, which you track in abstract categories on your character sheet. In play, you start with no actual items until you need them for whatever reason. When you do, you *leverage your assets*, which is an action that turns your asset into an actual item on your character sheet if successful.

Kinds of asset. There are 5 kinds of asset, each tracked separately. Each kind of asset may be leveraged differently.

- **Equipment.** Equipment may be leveraged to create adventuring gear, weaponry, armor, and other things mechanically useful when meeting challenges or in combat.
- **Lore.** Knowledge, secrets, and information. You accrue and broker these bits of insider info, leveraging them for secret caches, tips about the clandestine, and advantage on information gathering work.
- **Rarities.** Rarities are things like art, treasure, antiques, and things of that nature. Rarities seldom have use in and of themselves, but can be very valuable when attempting to trade or coerce.
- **Supplies.** Food, potions, camping gear and traveling utilities. Supplies are things you couldn't get by without. Supplies are typically used in travel or to weather times of scarcity.
- **Tooling.** Things which help you build, paint, create, and so on. If your character is an artist or an inventor, or a smith, or anything of that nature, tooling gives you the things you need to perform your craft.

Value. Assets have a value, which is represented as a number that begins at 0. Every time you obtain an asset, usually through gameplay, or through advancement or wealth checks, this number goes up. Whenever you successfully leverage an asset, this number goes down. If an asset has a value of 0, you don't have any of it and you can't leverage it.

Asset base. Some features or advancement perks increase your *base* asset value. Whenever you resolve a thread, if your asset value is lower than your base value, you recover the difference.

Example: Your supplies asset has a base of 2. Over the course of investigating a strange hovering castle, you leverage some of your supplies, bringing you down to 1. When you resolve the mystery of the strange castle, you begin your next session at your supplies base of 2, having recovered 1 asset.

Gaining assets. Whenever you gain an asset, you increase a given asset value. For example, if you gain 2 supply assets, increase your supplies by +2. You can gain assets a number of ways:

- After finishing a long rest, you may choose a wealth aptitude and make a check with it against a TN of 10. If successful, you gain one asset of your choice.
- Some features or progression kits often increase your base assets. Whenever your base assets go up, you gain an equal number of assets.
- You may spend 5 experience to increase an asset base by 1.

- You can earn assets through gameplay. For example, looting a ruin could bring you rarities and equipment.

Asset maximum. Your assets represent things you feasibly have on your person, and so they are capped. Unless otherwise stated by a feature, asset value only goes up to 5. Anything past this maximum represents something which you can't carry anymore. Either give it to another character, exchange it for something else, or leave it where you found it.

Spending assets. Assets are a resource that your character can spend for a number of benefits.

- Some actions, or undertakings, cost assets. For example, your narrator may require that you spend 1 supplies asset every day of travel unless your character is skilled at hunting or gathering.
- It's possible to trade or barter with assets, exchanging them during downtime or gameplay. This includes exchanging assets between characters.

Spending assets often represents barter, or liquidating assets for coin to trade or purchase with. Characters may pool their assets to afford costlier expenses. These actions are usually fine to abstract away into an out of character conversation: either your characters can or can't afford some expense, and the details aren't always important to play through.

Example: The characters want to purchase a hideout, which has an expense of 10. Everyone in the 5-character group chips in, spending 2 assets in order to buy the hideout.

Leveraging assets. You may leverage each kind of asset once per day, spending it in order to convert it into a real item or outcome of your choice which you would feasibly be able to have.

At any time, you may ask the narrator to leverage an asset, describing what you want to leverage the asset for. If the narrator approves that your character could plausibly have a given item or achieve a given outcome with the asset, you may make a wealth check to attempt to leverage the asset.

The narrator decides on a target number which represents the difficulty of the wealth check. Roll 1d10 + your wealth aptitude bonus + any other relevant modifier against this target number. If you succeed, mark off one from the leveraged asset, gaining the item or achieving your desired outcome.

If you leveraged the asset for an item you now carry, write it down on your inventory portion of your character sheet and increase your load accordingly.

You may not leverage an asset at 0, and you may not leverage any assets if your load is at maximum capacity.

Load. Load is an abstract number that represents what you're carrying. Everything you can stow in your inventory has a load value from 0 to 3.

- 0 load is miniscule. You can carry an absurd amount of these.
- 1 load is a small item, easy to stow.
- 2 load is a somewhat cumbersome item. It's noticeable to others that you're carrying it.
- 3 load is a large, bulky thing, which is incredibly obvious and difficult to stow.

To figure out your total load, tally up the combined load of everything your character carries. Your load can't exceed your load capacity.

Load capacity. Your load capacity is an abstract number that limits what you can carry. It starts at $4 + \text{Prowess} + \text{Body}$, and has no cap, with a minimum of a load capacity of 2.

Gaining load. Your load starts at 0. Whenever you decide to carry an item or leverage an asset into an item, add that item's load to your load total. If carrying that item would make your load total exceed your load capacity, you either need to give up some items to make room, or you simply can't carry the item.

Resources

Resources are tangible mechanics for ephemeral in-game rewards, both material and social.

Resources work by adding a new section to character sheets which functions kind of like Ability score modifiers. These values range from 0 to 5, but can go higher with supernatural help. Achieving key moments in a game can result in resource bonuses. For example, if you gain the trust of a neighboring monarch, you may gain +1 Influence.

You may use resources to help with specific checks that may be related. Often, like skill proficiencies, the resource itself will tell you what checks it helps with, but you may also negotiate with your GM if you like.

You may be proficient in resources. This works like any kind of proficiency. It doesn't exist as part of the core kit of the game itself, but you can house rule it in with several different approaches.

1. You may grant everyone 1 resource proficiency of their choice.
2. You may do the above, but constrain the choices by character background.
3. You may purchase resource proficiency instead of taking an ability score bonus or feat.
4. You may bundle resource proficiencies in with existing feats where it makes sense.

Using resources has a cost: every time you add a resource to a check, or make a resource check on its own, you reduce the resource modifier by 1.

Movement

How characters, threats, vessels and vehicles, and other things get around during initiative is managed by the movement and range abstractions. Movement isn't dealt with in a precise way, but instead modeled in a way that makes it easier to manage in the moment, and simpler to fit into the narrative.

Squares. Movement can be managed in abstract in one of two ways: theater of the mind, or by map. In both cases, units of movement are referred to as "squares", which roughly equals a square meter.

- For maps, a given square is directly equivalent to a square or hex on the map.
- For theater of the mind, movement in squares helps decide how much must be spent to cross distances, but it is the narrator's job to track position.

Speed. Everything which can move has a *base speed*. Your base speed equals how many squares you can move during your turn when in initiative. In order to move one square, you must spend one speed. At the beginning of every round, you regain all spend speed.

Kinds of movement. Different things move in different ways. Whenever something has multiple kinds of movement, each is listed along with its speed. For example, if something can fly, its speed would be something like "base (8), flight (10)".

Some common kinds of movement are: flight, climbing, swimming, and burrowing.

Difficult terrain. Difficult terrain, winds, waters, etc., double the cost of movement, requiring 2 points of speed for each square.

Range. A range is a band of distance. Everything within and up to a certain distance from you is within that range. So, something within 20 squares is "medium range".

Range	Distance
Touch	1
Adjacent	2
Close	5
Near	10
Medium	20
Long	30

Movement actions. Movement specific actions include:

- **Dash.** As a bonus action, you can spend up to your base speed in additional movement.
- **Get up.** You may spend 2 speed to get up, removing the [prone](#) condition.

Size

Size is an abstraction that measures the space and relative load capacity you might have. Everything takes up some space, and has some amount of load capacity, and the modifiers and baselines for that vary mainly on your size.

Size	Space	Load Capacity
Tiny	1	+0
Small	1	+0
Medium	1	+1
Large	2	+2
Huge	3	+3
Gargantuan	4	+4

Space. The amount of space you take up is basically this: how many squares do you sit in? This is a square number, meaning if your space is 2, you take up 2×2 squares (4 total).

Space determines how much room you need to fight and maneuver effectively, and how much space you can control. It isn't specifically how big you are. It means when you occupy that space, no thing else can occupy it safely.

Load capacity. Your load capacity (as explained in [equipment](#)) is modified by your size.

Getting into smaller spots. You can squeeze through a space that can accommodate a creature up to one size smaller than you are. Squeezing through small spaces like this is difficult terrain: it halves your speed, and you have disadvantage on attack rolls and **Finesse** defenses while you do it.

Environment

Your game can take you to a wide range of different places, each with its own properties and risks. In some games, the environments themselves are the antagonists of the stories. Below are some rules to navigate a few environmental perils.

Falling. Falling from a dangerous height, for whatever reason, results in 1d6 bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet you fall, up to 20d6. You land prone, unless you avoid this damage somehow.

Suffocation. You can hold your breath for a number of minutes equal to $1 + \text{Resolve} + \text{Body}$, but no less than 30 seconds.

Whenever you run out of breath or begin choking, you may survive a number of **rounds** equal to $1 + \text{Resolve} + \text{Body}$, with a minimum of 1 round. At the start of the next turn, you drop to 0 health and begin dying, and you can't regain health or be stabilized until you can breathe again.

Vision. For characters who rely on vision, the environment may interrupt line of sight or cause problems depending on visibility circumstances.

- In an obscured area, such as in dim light, patchy fog, or anything that disturbs vision a bit, you have disadvantage on aptitude checks which rely on sight.
- In heavily obscured areas, such as darkness, thick fog, and so on, your vision is blocked entirely. You have the **blinded** condition.

Lighting. How much or little light there is also plays into general visibility. There are four bands of illumination: blinding, bright, dim, and dark.

- **Bright** light is anything which allows you to see normally, for example, even lanterns or gloomy days, and so on.
- **Dim** light and **blinding** light create an obscured area. An example of dim light would be the area just outside of the torch light, for example. For bright light, it would be anywhere that the light is far brighter than normal.

- **Darkness** is the absence of most light, and creates a heavily obscured area. Darkness would be anywhere underground, or indoors with windows shuttered.

Sustenance. Eating and drinking or other kinds of sustenance are daily requirements. For every long rest you finish without engaging in some kind of daily sustenance, you suffer a level of exhaustion, which can only be removed after you've finished a long rest with sustenance.

- **Rations.** What a character needs as sustenance can vary, but is represented by the abstract unit *rations*. A single ration is enough sustenance for a day.
- **Half-rations.** You can stretch a ration by eating half-rations. You do not recover or lose exhaustion while subsisting on half-rations. If you finish a long rest while subsisting on half-rations, you do not recover health or reserves at the end of the long rest.

Interacting with objects. Usually interacting with the world is a purely narrative thing. You tell the narrator what you're doing, the narrator lets you know what happens. Sometimes there's a consequence, and that is modeled out with other systems, usually aptitude checks.

Harming objects. You can damage objects if your character attempts to. Objects are immune to poison and psychic damage, but otherwise they can be affected by attacks. The narrator can choose to give the object a TN and health, or they can model harming the object out as a **challenge** if that makes sense.

Challenges

The most interesting characters are prone to getting themselves into tricky scenarios.

- It's the middle of the night and you race along a rainy slope, something horrifying and loud clamoring behind you.
- You dive back and forth between two smoldering sabotaged airships, trying to stop the fire and keep them aloft, salvaging what remains of the precious art within them.
- You've just realized the wedding party is full of hidden killers, and you need to quietly identify them and neutralize them without the gentry realizing the danger.
- You've come across a strange cryptographic cipher etched in glowing cyan stone in the heart of the maze. Every time you touch it, it gets a little redder, and you realize it's ticking down towards something ominous.

Each of these are **challenges**, a scenario where you must try to creatively problem solve however you can, and not necessarily just through hacking and slashing your way through. Puzzles, traps, dangers, intrigues, each of these fit as challenges.

Challenges present significant scenes as moments of tension which must be met or else avoided entirely. They put together the results of a bunch of checks, and let them build towards a single resolution.

Use challenges whenever:

- Combat doesn't make sense, but something big is happening.
- Combat *does* make sense, but something big is happening *as well*.
- Life and death are on the line.
- One simple action isn't even close to enough.
- You don't care how the characters do it, just that they get creative.
- There's a chance of failure.
- You want to add tension to the session.

How Challenges Work

A challenge consists of a few parts:

- Its **scenario**, the actual problem or tension the characters are faced with.
- Its **threat**, which is what will happen if the challenge isn't met and resolved.
- Its **resolution**, or what happens whenever the challenge is overcome.
- Its **rating**, which determines how difficult the challenge is to deal with.
- Its **complexity**, representing how much effort the challenge will require.
- Its **urgency**, representing how pressing the challenge is.

A challenge's scenario, threat, and resolution are all largely just short summaries of the problem space, generally you can even put them in a single sentence.

"The glowing cube in maze (scenario) will detonate, obliterating everyone (threat) unless safely defused (resolution)."

Rating. The challenge's rating is a number from 1-10, and determines the base target number for any checks characters make to resolve the challenge.

Base	Target Number
1	3
2	6

Base	Target Number
3	9
4	12
5	15
6	18
7	21
8	24
9	27
10	30

Complexity. The challenge's complexity is also a number from 1-10, but this determines how much effort the challenge takes to resolve. Complexity sets the number of successes required to resolve the challenge, and how many failures will end the challenge unsuccessfully.

Complexity	Successes Required	Failure Threshold
1	3	2
2	4	2
3	5	3
4	6	3
5	7	4
6	8	4
7	9	5
8	10	5
9	11	6
10	12	6

Urgency. This is a timeframe, like *scene*, or *evening*, or *month*, or otherwise it is *none*. Challenges can expand to any length of time if you allow them, and sometimes that's okay for some of them. Other challenges, however, are very finite. Whenever a challenge's urgency is met, if it hasn't already been resolved, it ends and its threat occurs.

Meeting a Challenge

Any kind of aptitude check may be made to meet a challenge. There's no real restriction on how characters can choose to interact with the challenge, though some checks are more suitable than others.

1. Decide on the aptitude. The player describes how their character will meet the challenge, and what aptitude they will use.

2. Determine target number. Figure out the base target number for the check (the challenge rating x 3), and then modify it based on how suitable the aptitude used is.

Action Suitability	Target Number Modifier
Poor	+6
Risky	+3
Fine	-
Good	-3
Perfect	-6

3. Make the check. The player makes their character's aptitude check against the resulting target number.

- **If the check succeeds.** Mark successes in a tally: the amount is determined by the effect level. If the total number of successes tallied equals the success threshold, the challenge is resolved.
- **If the check fails.** Mark a failure in a tally. If the number of failures tallied equals the failure threshold, the challenge's threat occurs.

4. Keep trying, or give up. If the challenge isn't resolved or ended, the characters can either give up or try some more. Giving up means the threat takes place. If they keep trying, start over and keep going until the challenge ends, resolved or otherwise.

Threats

For the protagonists of your game, it makes sense to build out in depth sheets. You want to get to know them, and you want to decide how they grow. But what about their opposition? What about the villains of the story, the dangers in the dark, the monsters just past the horizon?

When you need to create a theater of tactical combat for the characters to fight in, use threats. Threats are creatures that scale and award experience like [challenges](#).

Engaging a threat. Threats are combat encounters. When you engage a threat, roll initiative, and join combat.

Threat Rating

Threats have a rating from 1-10. Rating sets a baseline for how deadly the threat is, determining the number of health dice it gets, and the base target number to avoid its attacks or hit it, its base damage.

Rating	Health	TN	Attacks	Damage per attack
1	15	14	2	12 (2d8 + 3)
2	95	15	3	14 (3d6 + 4)
3	140	16	3	22 (3d12 + 3)
4	185	18	4	19 (3d10 + 3)
5	230	19	5	19 (3d10 + 3)
6	275	20	5	23 (4d10 + 1)
7	320	22	5	30 (4d12 + 4)
8	365	23	5	41 (6d10 + 8)
9	410	24	5	52 (6d10 + 19)
10	455	26	5	62 (6d10 + 29)

Health. This is the health a threat starts at.

TN. Defending against threat attacks, and attacks made against the threat are made against its TN.

Attacks. How many attacks the threat can make every round. How these attacks work are entirely up to you.

Damage per attack. Whenever a single-target attack lands, this is the damage it does.

Balance

Balance on this is still rough. It isn't meant to be perfectly tuned, but it also shouldn't be a scenario where everyone dies instantly or kills the critter too damn fast. [Here's](#) an anydice view into probability of various rolls against threats of a certain TN. [Much](#)

of the numbers in here began with this probability chart and an expectation of 3 rounds of combat for a base creature, +0-3 rounds for each added trait.

Determining Strengths & Weaknesses

Generally, a threat should have one thing it's pretty good at, and one thing it's poor at. Figure those out when you make the threat. You can add more or reduce these, without changing the threat rating. It's up to you.

- Whenever the threat's strength applies, increase its target number by 6.
- Whenever the threat's weakness applies, decrease its target number by 6.

Customizing Damage

To flavor the danger of your threat, you might want to change how its attacks work.

Melee or ranged. The range on any of these attacks can change without impacting things much.

Multiple targets. If an attack should damage multiple targets, halve the damage it does.

Certain damage. If an attack is unavoidable, halve the damage it does, and give characters the chance to make a defense check to halve the damage again.

Boosting damage. The amount of attacks aren't set in stone. Combine attacks together to create larger damage attacks. For example, a threat with 3 attacks at 3d6+4, can be edited to become a threat with 2 attacks, one at 6d6+8 and another at 3d6+4, without upsetting balance.

Exchanging damage. Move dice and modifiers around between attacks. If a threat has 3 attacks at 3d6+4, change that into one at 5d6+6, one 3d6+4, and one 1d6+2.

Damage types. You can make this damage any damage type you like, or any mixture of types. Fire and cold? Go for it.

Traits

Threats come in all shapes and sizes, and some qualities of a threat aren't directly coupled to its rating, but do impact how dangerous the threat is. Those scenarios are modeled with traits. A threat can have a bunch of traits, or none at all.

Behemoth

Behemoth threats are simply gargantuan in size. Double the threat's health.

Champions

Champions are formidable threats, capable of standing alone against an entire group. When you add the champion trait to a threat:

- Increase the threat's target number by +3.
- Double the damage from one of the champion's attacks.

Controller

The threat has two additional abilities.

- The threat may choose to slow targets instead of damaging them.
- The threat's ranged attacks become area attacks, affecting small ranges (either cones, or spheres). This does not decrease the attack damage.

Defender

Defender threats have a carapace or some other kind of evasive, or defensive boost. Add +3 to the target number required to hit them.

Lair

Lair threats have turned their lair into a stronghold which they may use to their advantage in combat. When lair threats engage in combat inside their lair, they gain access to a lair action.

Lair action. You harness your lair to your advantage, either activating traps you've laid or through using its ambient magic or by simply using your home advantage in clever ways.

Lair actions occur on initiative count 20 (losing all initiative ties), and give you access to a list of lair action options determined by your lair.

You may use lair actions only if you would be able to use regular actions. If surprised, you may not use lair actions until after your first turn in combat.

Legendary

Legendary threats are far beyond their contemporaries in every way. Most fall when faced with a legendary threat. When you add the legend trait to a threat:

- Give the threat 3 legendary actions.
- Increase the threat's target number by +3.
- The threat gains 3 legendary resistances.

Legendary actions. Legendary actions are extra actions which can be taken outside of your turn, instead being used at the end of another creature's turn. Legendary actions return at the beginning of your next turn.

You may use legendary actions only if you would be able to use regular actions. If surprised, you can't use them until after your first turn in combat.

Spending legendary actions. Any normal action or bonus action the threat is capable of may be triggered with a legendary action.

Special legendary actions. Some legendary threats will have actions that may only be triggered with legendary actions. These cost 1-3 actions.

Legendary action limit. Unless spending it on something with a legendary action cost, the legendary threat may only use one legendary action at one time.

Legendary resistances. Whenever a character uses magic or a special attack on a legendary threat, it may spend one of its legendary resistances to ignore the effect instead.

Nemesis

Nemesis threats are calculating and plan their attacks out. Give a nemesis threat a special cascade of villain actions.

Villain actions. Villain actions are actions which set up greater and greater effects. They are calculating moves on a battlefield that result in catastrophic outcomes. Using a villain action takes the place of an attack. Only one villain action may be used per round. Villain actions have to be performed in order.

1. Round one villain actions do half damage, but can place conditions or have small side-effects.
2. Round two villain actions can trade damage for effect, such as moving the threat or the targets to more advantageous positions.
3. Round three villain actions are explosive in nature, and do four times the damage or deal some catastrophic effect.

Phased

Phased threats gradually reveal more and more of their power as the fight goes on. Whenever they fall to 0 health, their health fully replenishes, and they gain new traits or abilities.

Multiple phases. Some threats have multiple phases. In these cases, every phase is unique. Remember, each phase adds a minimum of 3 or so rounds of combat on average, so overdoing multiple-phase threats should be reserved only for climactic conflicts.

Swarm

Swarm threats are easy to deal with on an individual level, but come in large numbers. Swarms share one health pool but attack in crowds. When you give the threat the swarm trait, mark down how many are in the swarm. Every

Many locations. Swarms can move parts of themselves into different locations. Whenever anything except the heart location is hit, it perishes, and the swarm must move another there if it wishes to keep using actions there.

Heart location. Swarms have a "heart" that has full health. Finding and attacking the heart is the quickest way to defeat a swarm, and so it should be possible for characters to figure out where the heart is and navigate to it.

In cases where the swarm isn't actually a swarm—say, a small group of gremlins or something like that—the heart location is some kind of captain that the rest follow. In cases where the swarm *is* actually a swarm, it's usually some kind of pit or nest.

Vicious

Vicious threats are specifically dangerous and gain the following benefits:

- Double the damage the threat does per attack.
- They add +3 to the target number for their direct attacks.

Dangers

What happens when your characters are in danger, and they could die, but it isn't exactly an active threat that they can attack? For these, we use **dangers**, which are hybrids of **threats** and **challenges** that give you tools to depict the treacherousness of threats but with the resolution mechanics of challenges.

Facing a danger. Dangers are time-sensitive races and use initiative. When you face a threat, join initiative.

Danger Rating

Dangers have a rating from 1-10. Like threats, rating sets a baseline for how deadly the danger is, and the base target number to avoid its attacks, and its base damage.

Rating	TN	Attacks	Damage per attack
1	3	2	12 (2d8 + 3)
2	6	3	14 (3d6 + 4)
3	9	3	22 (3d12 + 3)
4	12	4	19 (3d10 + 3)
5	15	5	19 (3d10 + 3)
6	18	5	23 (4d10 + 1)
7	21	5	30 (4d12 + 4)
8	24	5	41 (6d10 + 8)
9	27	5	52 (6d10 + 19)
10	30	5	62 (6d10 + 29)

TN. Defense checks to avoid attacks from a danger are made against its TN.

Attacks. How many attacks the danger can make every round. How these attacks work are entirely up to you. Dangers aren't necessarily active antagonists, so "attacks" in this sense means, in essence, "things that can hurt the characters". Explosions, falling stones, etc.

Damage per attack. Whenever a single-target attack lands, this is the damage it does.

Complexity

Resolving a danger is more like resolving a challenge than it is like engaging in combat with a threat, and so dangers have complexity. This works exactly like it does for challenges.

Complexity	Successes Required	Failure Threshold
1	3	2
2	4	2
3	5	3
4	6	3
5	7	4
6	8	4

Complexity	Successes Required	Failure Threshold
7	9	5
8	10	5
9	11	6
10	12	6

Customizing Damage

To flavor the danger of your danger, you might want to change how its attacks work.

Melee or ranged. The range on any of these attacks can change without impacting things much.

Multiple targets. If an attack should damage multiple targets, halve the damage it does.

Certain damage. If an attack is unavoidable, halve the damage it does, and give characters the chance to make a defense check to halve the damage again.

Boosting damage. The amount of attacks aren't set in stone. Combine attacks together to create larger damage attacks. For example, a danger with 3 attacks at $3d6+4$, can be edited to become a danger with 2 attacks, one at $6d6+8$ and another at $3d6+4$, without upsetting balance.

Exchanging damage. Move dice and modifiers around between attacks. If a danger has 3 attacks at $3d6+4$, change that into one at $5d6+6$, one $3d6+4$, and one $1d6+2$.

Damage types. You can make this damage any damage type you like, or any mixture of types. Fire and cold? Go for it.

Combat

Combat is a form of structured play around skirmishes and quick-paced close conflict. It typically models some kind of violence, and tends to end when one or more members of the conflict are subdued, or dead.

Initiative-based. Combat is initiative-based play, and heavily relies on actions, movement, and rounds.

Melee combat. Whenever you are adjacent to your target, you are in melee range and use melee combat rules to fight them.

- **Weapons.** If you are in melee range, you may use melee weapons to make a melee attack. Attempting to use ranged weaponry in melee range imposes disadvantage on the attack roll.
- **Reach.** If you use a melee weapon or have features that grant you a melee reach greater than 1, you may strike anything within that range with melee attacks.

Ranged combat. Whenever you are at a distance greater than close, you are outside of melee range and use ranged combat rules for conflict.

- **Range.** You may make ranged attacks only against targets which you can see within the range specified of your weapon. Some ranged weapons have multiple ranges: a short range and a long range. Whenever you make an attack with the long range, your attack has disadvantage.

Combat actions. Combat actions are actions which are mostly relevant during combat, though they may be used any time you like. Using a combat action when outside of initiative begins initiative before it resolves. Some combat-specific actions include:

- **Attack.** As an action, you may make an attack. Choose a target within your weapon's range, and roll your relevant attack aptitude against the target's defense TN. If you hit, roll the damage specified by the weapon to determine how much health the target loses.
 - A natural 20 is a critical hit. Critical hits always hit. Double all damage dice before determining damage.
 - A natural 1 is a critical miss. Critical misses always miss.
- **Attack of opportunity.** When a target moves in a square adjacent to you, either past you or away from you, you may use your reaction to make a single melee weapon attack against them.
- **Defend.** As an action, you make a defensive stance. You may add 3 to any defense checks made until the beginning of your next turn.
- **Disengage.** As an action, you disengage from combat. You may not be targeted by attacks of opportunity until the beginning of your next turn.
- **Off-hand attack.** Whenever you take the attack action with a one-handed melee weapon, you may use your bonus action to make a second attack with a second one-handed melee weapon.
- **Grapple.** As an action, you may grapple an adjacent target which is your size or smaller. Make a **Prowess** + **Body** + **Athletics** check against the target's TN. If against another player, this is a contested check. Success subjects the target to the **grappled** condition. While grappling, your speed is halved.
- **Shove.** As an action, you may shove an adjacent target which is your size or smaller. Make a **Prowess** + **Body** + **Athletics** check against the target's TN. If against another

player, this is a contested check. Success subjects the target to the [prone](#) condition, or pushes it one square away from you, your choice.

Damage & Health

Harm and deadliness are tracked by measuring how much damage and health things have. Whenever you do harm, you are dealing damage. Whenever you suffer harm, you lose health. If something has a health pool, it can be

Health pool. Your health pool is a reservoir of points that represent a bunch of concepts: will, luck, physical durability. It's important to reiterate that: **health is not just your physical condition, it represents a few things**. Instead of representing each of those things in separate pools, they're "tallied up" into a single pool.

Current health. Your health pool is split into two values: your maximum health, and your current health. Whenever damage of any sort occurs, it is represented as a loss of health from your current pool.

Applying damage. If something deals harm, it specifies how much damage it deals. This is typically a dice formula, like "2d6+2" (or a flat value like "10") paired with a damage type. In order to determine the damage, roll the given dice, including any modifiers, and then apply the resulting damage to the target.

If a damage source would deal damage to multiple targets, roll the damage once and apply it to every target individually.

Modifiers. Some weapons, special abilities, or damage affinities apply to damage rolls. Modified damage results can deal 0 damage, but not negative damage.

- If the target has a **vulnerability** to the damage type, they take double damage from that damage type.
- If the target is **resistant** to the damage type, they halve damage from that damage type.
- If the target is **immune** to the damage type, they ignore damage from that damage type.
- **Critical hits** double the damage dice you roll to determine damage.

Falling to zero. Whenever you drop to 0 health, you are knocked unconscious and must proceed as outlined in the [death](#) section.

Healing. Damage to health isn't permanent, and it fluctuates a great deal throughout conflict and stress. Healing can be represented by a lot of different things, and it can take many forms, just as health itself does. Certain features and systems, such as some kinds of magic, or resting, can restore health.

- When healed, health gained cannot exceed maximum health.
- You may not gain health if you have died.

Temporary health. Some features grant temporary health to targets. These are not considered to be actual health, but are instead thought of as a sort of bubble or ward against harm.

- When you have temporary health, if you would take damage, the temporary health is always lost first. Any spillover carries to your health after your temporary health is exhausted.
- Healing and rest do not restore temporary health.
- Unless otherwise stated, temporary health vanishes at the end of your next long rest.
- Temporary health doesn't stack. If you gain temporary health from two sources, choose the highest of the two.
- If you have 0 health, temporary health will not resuscitate you, though it can protect you from additional harm.

Damage types. All damage sources specify what kind of damage they deal. Damage types don't have their own unique rules or systems, but other features or abilities rely on damage types for their functionality.

Injury

Harm your character endures is typically managed by their health score, but health is fluid. It comes and goes throughout the day. Long-lasting harm that your character carries with them is *injury*. Injury represents your character's physical condition.

Injury is typically caused only by major moments, such as story actions or deliberately through some feature or mechanic. Unlike exhaustion, you don't gradually become more injured by staying up too late.

Levels of injury. Injury is measured in levels, from 0 to 7. Every time you gain a level of injury, that number goes up. Whenever you reach a new level, you suffer an additional penalty as a result, outlined by the level.

Injury level	Effect
0	None
1	-3 to aptitude checks
2	-3 to attack and defense rolls
3	-6 to aptitude checks
4	-6 to attack and defense rolls
5	-9 to aptitude checks
6	-9 to attack and defense rolls
7	Death

Recovery. Injury gradually goes away on its own with time and rest.

In order to heal one level of injury, you must finish a number of long rests equal to the level of the injury. For example, to reduce your injury from 5 to 4, you would need to finish 5 long rests.

In addition to time, healing works: some healing features or actions can accelerate recovery from injury considerably.

Exhaustion

Your characters often tend to aggressively push themselves through the course of the game, burning the candle from both ends, so to speak. Exhaustion is a way of measuring how worn out your characters get, either organically or because of some kind of enemy feature or other.

Some things which can cause exhaustion:

- Failing to take a long rest every 24 hour period.
- Traveling in extreme weather, for example scorching heat or freezing cold.
- Going hungry for too long.

Levels of exhaustion. Exhaustion is measured in levels, from 0 to 6. Each time you gain a level of exhaustion, that number goes up. Whenever you reach a new level, you suffer an additional penalty as a result, outlined in the level.

Exhaustion level	Effect
0	None
1	Disadvantage on aptitude checks
2	Speed halved
3	Disadvantage on attacks and defenses
4	Health maximum is halved
5	Speed reduced to 0
6	Death

Recovery. Exhaustion is permanent, but certain things can reduce levels.

- Certain mechanics or features may reduce exhaustion.
- Finishing a long rest reduces exhaustion by one level, provided you have nourished (had enough food & water to survive).

Death

When reduced to 0 health, your character is struck unconscious. While unconscious, they are close to death and may no longer act. At this point, you have several options available.

In initiative. If you are in initiative, your options are constrained by the initiative. You may not act, but you still have turns within the initiative order. Your options are:

- **Character death.** You may choose for your character to die. If you choose this, at the end of initiative, your character dies.
- **Struggling to survive.** If you choose to attempt to survive, you begin making *death saves* on your next turn.

Outside of initiative. Outside of initiative, characters are more resilient. Unless killed outright, a knocked out character recovers at the end of a scene with one hit point.

Non-player characters. It's up to the narrator if a threat or non-player character perishes or gets death saves. Usually, they don't, but sometimes it makes sense narratively for non-player characters or threats to hang on to life harder.

Killed outright. If your character takes enough damage from a single source that meets or exceeds your total health, they are killed outright.

Death saves. If your character is struggling to survive, they begin rolling death saves. On your turn, **in front of everyone**, roll 1d20 with no modifiers.

- A roll of 1 is **two failures**.
- A roll of 2-9 is **one failure**.
- A roll of 10-19 is **one success**.
- A roll of 20 is **immediate recovery**.

If you roll 3 failures before you roll a 20, or 3 successes, your character dies. If, however, you roll 3 successes or a 20, you recover: you awaken with 1 health and may resume taking bonus actions, and reactions, *immediately*.

Stabilize. As an action, you may administer first aid to an unconscious target and try to stabilize it. Make a **Resolve + Mind + Medicine** check, TN 10. If successful, the target stabilizes. They are at no risk of death, but their health stays at 0 and they stay unconscious. They will regain 1 health and consciousness in 1d4 hours.

Conditions

Conditions are placed on creatures or objects and modify their capabilities in different ways. Conditions modify something else, and are often descriptive of the lasting impact of magic, storylines, or combat.

Are conditions bad? Conditions are simply changes of state, neither good or bad. Often whether or not a condition is helpful or not is... well, conditional.

Removing conditions. Conditions specify the circumstances for their own removal, and may also be countered or expire as specified in whatever event that applied the condition to begin with. Otherwise, conditions do not have an overarching duration.

Stacking conditions. Conditions have no magnitude or stack, inherently. Something either has the condition or it doesn't. More severe versions of the same condition are often modeled as different conditions.

Blinded

- A blinded creature can't see and automatically fails any aptitude check that requires sight.
- The creature has disadvantage on attack rolls, and defense rolls made to avoid attacks.

Charmed

- A charmed creature can't attack the charmer or target the charmer with harmful abilities or magical effects.
- The charmer has advantage on any aptitude checks to interact socially with the creature.

Deafened

- A deafened creature is unable to hear, and automatically fails any aptitude check that requires hearing.

Frightened

- A frightened creature has disadvantage on aptitude checks and attack rolls while the source of their fear is within line of sight.
- The creature can't move willingly closer to the source of its fear.

Grappled

- A grappled creature's speed becomes 0, and it can't benefit from speed bonuses.
- The grappled condition ends if the grappler is incapacitated.
- The grappled condition ends if an effect removes the grappled creature from the reach of the grappler or grappling effect.

Incapacitated

- An incapacitated creature can't take actions or reactions.

Invisible

- An invisible creature is impossible to see without the aid of features or specific senses.
- The invisible creature may only be detected by noise or tracks.
- The invisible creature's attack rolls and defense checks have advantage.

Paralyzed

- A paralyzed creature is incapacitated and is unable to move or speak.
- The creature automatically fails [Prowess](#) or [Finesse](#) defenses.
- Any attack from an adjacent creature which hits it is a critical hit.

Petrified

- A petrified creature is transformed, along with any nonmagical objects it is wearing or carrying, into a solid inanimate substance, such as stone.
- The creature's weight increases by a factor of ten, and it stops aging.
- The creature is incapacitated, cannot move or speak, and is unaware of its surroundings.
- The creature fails any defense checks automatically.
- The creature has resistance to all damage.
- The creature is immune to poison and disease. Any poison or disease in its system already is suspended, not neutralized.

Poisoned

- Poisoned creatures have disadvantage on attack checks and aptitude checks.

Prone

- A prone creature's only movement option is crawling, unless it is able to stand up and does so. Standing up costs 2 speed and ends the condition.
- The creature has disadvantage on attack checks.
- An attack roll against the creature has advantage if the attacker is adjacent to it, otherwise the attack has disadvantage.

Restrained

- A restrained creature's speed drops to 0, and it can't benefit from any bonus to its speed.
- Attack rolls against the creature have advantage, and the creature's attack and defense rolls have disadvantage.

Stunned

- A stunned creature is incapacitated, can't move, and is unable to speak except falteringly.
- The creature automatically fails [Prowess](#) or [Finesse](#) defenses.

Unconscious

- An unconscious creature is incapacitated, can't move or speak, and is unaware of its surroundings.
- The creature drops anything it was holding and falls prone.
- The creature automatically fails [Prowess](#) or [Finesse](#) defenses.
- Any attack from an adjacent creature which hits it is a critical hit.