

TAVERN TALES

v1.01

This rulebook is a ROUGH DRAFT and therefore subject to change.

This PDF does not perfectly represent the final layout, content, or art.

taverntalesrpg.com

Version 0.9 to 1.0 Changelog

The 1.0 is perhaps the largest TT update yet. The game has undergone significant changes to become more intuitive, flexible, and story-driven.

UPDATE PHILOSOPHY

- Convert mathematics into cinematics.
- Remove weak, clunky, or muddled mechanics.
- Increase simplicity; decrease complexity.
- Promote customization.
- Help players/GMs use TT the way they want to use it, not the way I think they should use it.
- Unify mechanics to promote elegance and intuitive rules.

CORE MECHANICS

- The core dice mechanic has been simplified and codified with Tales. 8+ gives players a Good Tale. 13- gives the GM a Bad Tale. Players and the GM can both tell Neutral Tales.
- The game engine has been unified under the “Challenge” mechanic. Life, damage, and toughness have been removed., which enables players to fight monsters in methods other than attacks.
- You can no longer roll to bolster. You can still bolster, but you achieve it through story-based actions or traits rather than rolling dice.
- Keywords have been significantly condensed.

GM

- 1.0 introduces a new mechanic, worldbuilding, that will help the GM create content spontaneously.
- 1.0 also introduces interludes as a way to vary sessions.

CHARACTER CREATION

- The level-based system has been changed to an XP-based system to permit more flexible char creation.

THEMES AND TRAITS

- Many traits have been added, removed, relocated, and changed.
- There are now 2 universal traits, which don't have a theme or category. They follow special rules and are found at the start of the Themes chapter.

ITEMS

- Items now have item traits, similar to theme traits. The item traits are a bit sparse at the moment. I hope to expand them.
- Treasure has been abstracted.
- Inventory has been abstracted.

ENCOUNTERS

- The encounters section provides material for combat / exploration / interaction encounters. Following TT's emphasis on customization, these entries are designed to help GMs build their own custom content, rather than telling the GM what content to use.

MINIONS

- The game now has rules for minions.

If you like or dislike any of these changes, please let me know. The game still needs a lot of polish. I will continue to work on the game before, during, and after the Kickstarter. Your input can help me refine TT.

Tavern Tales' Future Development

I plan to launch a TT Kickstarter early 2016, ideally in January. TT's future depends heavily on how well the KS does:

Funded!

1. Hire artists and graphic designers.
2. Get feedback from fanbase.
3. Expand/polish/tweak the rules while artists work.
4. Publish a free no-art PDF of the rules online.
5. Publish the book.
6. Visit conventions to promote TT, meet fans.
7. Support TT with future expansions (sci-fi book, maybe?)

Not Funded

1. Get feedback from fanbase.
2. Expand/polish/tweak the rules based on feedback.
3. Release a free no-art PDF of the rules online.
4. Leave the game as-is and stop supporting it.
5. Cry. :(

Version 1.0 to 1.01 Changelog

- Fixed a few typos
- Added some quickstart XP arrays to the character building chapter.
- Changed the term “Universal traits” to “General traits” in the Themes section.
- Added the item trait Flashy.
- Combined several environment-based item traits into a single trait.
- Added an entry in the Themes section that gives players the tools to build their own traits.
- Added a section in Chapter 3 explaining that Challenges are optional and not necessary. Explained alternatives to Challenges. This section provides examples for when to use Challenges, and when to not use challenges.
- Removed the player veto rule and replaced it with a section encourage players to have an open discussion about expectations and tone for the game. Find the new section in Chapter 6 under the Session Zero section.
- Added some clarifying details to the Death and Ending Your Story section in Chapter 5,

A Letter to TT Fans

Originally, I never set out to build an entire RPG. I was just bored one night and decided to tinker with the rules of another RPG I was playing. My whim became an idea, and my idea became an obsession.

Months later, I had designed the original Tavern Tales rules. Of course, it wasn't called "Tavern Tales" back then — my friends affectionately called it "DnDabney."

And oh man was it a disaster. Just an utter catastrophe. The rules were terrible, the mechanics made no sense, and the story fell apart around my players. However, my friends liked some of my ideas and encouraged me to fix the game's problems.

Rinse and repeat this process several dozen times over the next five years. My gaming group served as my own personal RPG guinea pig. Imagine a group of level 1 adventurers fighting through Gygax's infamous Tomb of Horrors. It was like that, except that instead of traps and monsters, they endured bizarre rules and characters that were cobbled together like Frankenstein's monster.

Wesley, Parker, Cory, Sean, Jason — Thanks. I couldn't have made it this far without your guidance and patience. And thanks also to Nicole for supporting me throughout this crazy process.

Several hundred versions later, I released TT into open beta in April of 2014. I actually thought TT was good back then — Ha! Looking back, I can't help but cringe at how terrible those rules were.

Luckily, TT attracted a small but enthusiastic community of fans. I've had countless conversations with my fans over the past 1.5 years, and together we've grown TT to what it is now.

I realize that TT's evolution has been a bit frustrating for some. TT changed on a weekly (sometimes daily) basis, which made it difficult to run a long-term campaign. I wanted to say thanks to you, too. I couldn't have brought TT to where it is now without your feedback and enthusiasm.

As we move toward the Kickstarter, I honestly have no idea what the future of TT will be. Maybe it will flop. Maybe it will become a fantasy staple. Maybe it will briefly flare in popularity and then slowly fade into history.

I don't know, but I do know that this has been an incredible journey for me. I love RPGs, I love designing games, and I love Tavern Tales. Even if the Kickstarter crashes and burns, I have no regrets because I was doing what I love with other people who share my passion.

I've always followed one simple design philosophy: design the game I want to play. If I love it, then other people will probably love it too. And if they don't, at least I have something I can be proud of. The game's not perfect — it still needs to be polished and expanded — but I'm honestly proud of what I've created.

I've done everything I can to bring TT to where it is now, but now its fate is in your hands. TT needs funding to reach the next step.

Ultimately, it's up to you to decide what Tavern Tales is worth to you. Tavern Tales is and always will be free. This has never been about money for me — it's about passion. I'm passionate about RPGs and this game, and I hope that other people are passionate about it as well.

If you love Tavern Tales, please consider supporting the Kickstarter. I'm basically a one-man operation, and designers like me rely on community support to bring our ideas to life.

But if you don't have the money to support TT, that's fine. I designed TT because I want people to enjoy it, not because I want to make a profit. I just want people to have fun. So, please enjoy this game.

If you have any thoughts about how I can improve it, don't hesitate to contact me at tavernalesrpg@gmail.com.

- Dabney Bailey

Chapter 1: Getting Started

Tavern Tales is a fantasy-themed tabletop roleplaying game (RPG) that invites players to take on the roles of powerful heroes who fight dangerous monsters, explore exotic locations, and interact with amazing characters. RPGs are unique in the world of games in that there is no ultimate objective. Players don't win or lose—they simply make decisions and see where the adventure takes them. An RPG is a collaborative story where everyone affects the outcome.

Tavern Tales is played across one or more sessions, which typically last several hours. Past that, it's entirely up to your gaming group to determine the scope of your game. Do you want to play a short and sweet one-shot that only lasts a few hours? Would you rather play an epic ongoing campaign that consists of dozens of sessions? The choice is yours!

Before You Start

You'll need a few basic supplies to play Tavern Tales:

- Pen and paper.
- Three twenty-sided dice (d20), preferably enough for each player to have their own set.
- This rulebook.
- 2-6 friends.
- Optional: A battlemat and miniature figures.

It's generally agreed that the sweet spot for a roleplaying game is 4-6 players, but tastes will vary between gaming groups. One of you will play as the Game Master (GM), and the others will be the players.

Make Tavern Tales Your Own

Tavern Tales is designed to be modular, which means that many of the rules are optional. You should feel empowered to customize the game however you want. Ultimately, this is *your* game. The only people who matter are you and the people you're playing with. You're free to use, ignore, or add as many rules as you like. That's the first rule of Tavern Tales: You and the people you're playing with are in charge of your game.

Work Together

Roleplaying games require a lot of teamwork. The players and the GM need to work together to create an enjoyable experience for everyone. The game intentionally leaves gray areas so that players can flex their creative muscles and interpret the game in interesting ways. So,

the players and the GM need to work together to come to an agreed-upon interpretation of the rules.

The GM and the Players

Everyone who plays Tavern Tales is either the GM or a player.

The Players

Each player will create their own player character (PC) that they will use during the game. Your PC can be anyone or anything imaginable. For example, you might play as a feral barbarian, a scholarly wizard, or a crafty rogue.

The GM

One of you plays as the GM. The GM controls everything in the world *except* the players: the weather, the setting, the events, and non-player characters (NPCs).

Chapter 2: Telling Tales

The core mechanic in Tavern Tales is a **Tale**. Basically, a Tale is something that you say about the world or your character, and by saying it you make it true. For example, you might say “I kick in the door and rush into the other room.” This is a Tale because it describes what’s happening in the story. Tales can be as short as long as you like; most Tales are 1 or 2 sentences.

Every Tale falls into one of three categories: Good, Neutral, or Bad. These terms are subjective, so Tales are Good, Neutral, or Bad *through the eyes of the players*.

Good Tales

Good Tales have a significant, positive impact on the story for one of the players. Think of Good Tales as moments in the story when the hero triumphs over adversity. The players are in charge of telling Good Tales. Here are a few examples:

- I slash the orc with my sword.
- I dive out of the way of the rolling boulder.
- I grab the rope and swing across the open chasm.
- I silently pick the lock on the massive iron door.
- I chat with the locals and gather valuable rumors.

Neutral Tales

A Neutral Tale is anything that doesn’t have a significant impact on the story. Both the GM and the players are in charge of telling Neutral Tales. Here are a few examples:

- I draw my sword.
- I move across the battlefield.
- I kick over the tavern table.
- I put on my camouflaged cloak.
- I flash a warm smile at the guard.

Neutral Tales can also be descriptive. Descriptive Tales don’t affect the story whatsoever; they simply help everyone visualize the action. Here are a few examples:

- My muscles ache from the long march.
- Blood drips down my arm.
- A dragon roars in the distance.
- The soldier wears a green tunic and a silver helmet.
- My sword shines in the light of the campfire.

Neutral Tales may not be as flashy as Good and Bad Tales, but they are very important to the game because they help set the scene. Whenever someone takes their turn, they should tell at least 1 Neutral Tale.

Bad Tales

Bad Tales have a significant, negative impact on the story for one of the players. Think of Bad Tales as moments in the story when things take a dramatic turn for the worse. The GM is in charge of telling Bad Tales. Here are a few examples:

- The dragon bites you.
- You get lost while exploring the forest.
- You step on a pressure plate, triggering a trap.
- Your request offends the locals.
- Your wound becomes infected.

Gameplay Sequence

Gameplay is divided into turns. When it’s your turn, you have a chance to tell Tales.

The turn order is roughly as follows: GM → Player 1 → GM → Player 2 → GM → Player 3, etc. Continue this process until each player has had a turn. Then, start the process over again.

It’s up to the players to decide their turn order. However, it might make sense for the GM to specifically call for a specific player to act. For example, if a monster is charging at a player’s character, then it makes sense for that player to take the next turn. Otherwise, it’s generally easiest to go clockwise around the gaming table with the GM taking a turn in between each player.

On Player Turns: Tell at least 1 Neutral Tale, preferably more. If you attempt something risky, the GM will tell you to roll dice (more on that later). Depending on the roll, you can tell 1 and only 1 Good Tale.

On GM Turns: Tell at least 1 Neutral Tale, preferably more. Depending on the player’s roll from the previous turn, you can tell 1 and only 1 Bad Tale.

On your turn, you can tell as many Neutral Tales as is logical. For example, opening a door is a common example of a Neutral Tale. If your turn only lasts a few seconds of in-game time, then you can open as many doors as is logical during that time.

Risks and Rolling Dice

Every story has dramatic moments when the hero could triumph or fail. These moments are called Risks. When a player encounters a Risk, they roll dice to determine the outcome. The dice rolling process is as follows:

Step 1: A player’s character does something risky

If a PC does something risky on their turn, the GM tells that player to roll a stat. There are 4 stats:

- **Brawn** when you’re strong and powerful.
- **Finesse** when you’re quick and agile.
- **Mind** when you’re observant and clever.
- **Spirit** when you’re charming and courageous.

You can read more about the stats in Chapter 5. For now, all you need to know is that each stat has a number that typically ranges from -1 to +3.

Here are a few examples of risky actions:

- I attack the dragon with my sword.
- I dive out of the way of the boulder.
- I climb the castle wall.
- I search the forest for tracks.
- I try to seduce the guild leader.
- I convince the guard to let us pass.

Step 2: The player rolls 3d20

The player rolls three twenty-sided dice (abbreviated 3d20). The player selects the die with the middle value. For example, a roll of 1, 10, and 20 would use 10.

Step 3: The player adds the appropriate stat

The player adds the appropriate stat to the selected die. For example, suppose you have +1 Spirit and roll 1, 10, and 20. You add +1 to the roll of 10 to get a final result of 11.

Step 4: Check for 8+ or 13-

If the result is 8 or higher (8+), the player can tell a Good Tale. If the result is 13 or lower (13-), the GM can tell a Bad Tale on the GM’s next turn. These two values overlap, which means that a Good AND Bad Tale happen on a result of 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, or 13.

The GM Never Rolls Dice

The story focuses on the players, so they’re the only ones who roll dice. The GM gets to tell Bad Tales based on the players’ rolls.

4 Rules for Telling Tales

All Tales must follow these four basic rules.

Rule 1: Be Logical

Tale must be reasonable and logical. Everyone has to adhere to the laws of physics and common sense. Of course, things like magic might bend the rules, so what’s considered logical changes based on context.

Rule 2: The GM Can Veto

It’s the GM’s job to make sure that everything is fair and reasonable. The GM can veto a Tale, but this should generally be avoided as much as possible. If the GM vetoes more than once or twice a session, then something is wrong; either the players are being unreasonable, or the GM is being too strict. A vetoed player can tell a different Tale instead.

Rule 3: You Can’t Negate

A Good Tale can’t prevent a Bad Tale, and vice versa. This is typically only relevant on results between 8 and 13. You can’t say, “My Good Tale is that the GM can’t tell a Bad Tale.” This is boring because nothing happens.

Rule 4: Use the Rolling Player’s Perspective

Use the rolling player’s perspective to determine what’s Good, Neutral, or Bad. For example, suppose that the PCs disagree about what to do with a captured villain. The paladin wants the villain to stand trial, while the rogue wants to assassinate the villain. The paladin attempts to convince the locals to arrest the villain and rolls the dice. On an 8+, the paladin can use the Good Tale to say that the locals arrest the villain, even though the rogue considers this to be Bad.

When a player rolls 13- and creates a Bad Tale, the GM is encouraged (but not required) to make that Bad Tale affect that player.

Deciding Risks

The GM’s most important job is deciding which Neutral Tales count as Risks. Use these guidelines:

It’s a **Risk** and requires a Good Tale if:

- Something is at stake.
- It’s risky and/or dangerous.
- It’s dramatic, exciting, or interesting.
- It imposes the player’s will on something else.
- Succeeding could significantly help the player, and failing could significantly hurt the player.

It's **not a Risk** and requires a Neutral Tale if:

- It's mostly descriptive.
- It's a mundane activity like cooking or walking.
- It doesn't make things significantly better or worse.
- It's something that the PC does "on the way" to a more important action, like running to a dragon (unimportant) to hit it with a sword (important).

The Same Action Can Require Different Tales

The same action might require different Tales depending on the situation. For example, suppose that one of the players is playing a druid with the following trait:

Verdant Growth

You can reshape 1 space of plant matter however you like, or cause far plants to grow as if they had 100 years of uninterrupted growth.

***Describe:** Causing vines to twist and grow, shaping wood like clay, creating an explosion of rampant growth.*

When the group stops to camp for the night, that player says, "I'm going to reshape the roots around the campsite to create benches." This isn't risky, so the player can accomplish this with a Neutral Tale. The player isn't affecting the story in any meaningful way — it's just an interesting detail that the player added to give the scene more personality.

That night, zombies approach the camp, forcing the PCs to run to a nearby abandoned hunting lodge. The druid slams the door shut and says, "I use my druidic magic to fuse the wooden door with the walls so that it can't be opened." Even though the druid is using the same trait as before, this is a Risk. Succeeding would mean that the door is safely locked, whereas failing could mean that a zombie pushes open the door and bites the druid. The player will need to roll dice to resolve the Risk.

Mixed Results

A mixed result occurs when a player rolls between 8 and 13, which means that a Good Tale and a Bad Tale happen. Typically, this means that the action has some sort of consequence associated with it, or that something bad happens immediately afterward. In the above example of the druid sealing the door, suppose that the player rolled a 10 for a mixed result. The player uses the Good Tale to seal the door. The GM could use the Bad Tale in any number of ways:

- The door is sealed, but if you want it to stay sealed you need to continuously focus your magic on it.
- You seal the door... but it looks like a few zombies were already in the cabin!
- As soon as you seal the door, you feel a blade against your back and hear, "Who the hell are you?! Get out, now!"

Increasing and Decreasing Rolls

Not all rolls are equal. Tavern Tales uses the increase/decrease system for extremely easy/difficult rolls.

Increased Rolls

If an action is extremely easy, increase the roll. Increased rolls use the highest d20. For example, an increased roll of 3, 9, and 17 would use 17.

Example: Shooting a house with an arrow.

Decreased Rolls

If an action is extremely difficult, decrease the roll. Decreased rolls use the lowest d20. For example, a decreased roll of 3, 9, and 17 would use 3.

Example: Shooting a fly with an arrow.

Multiple increases and decreases cancel out. If you increase a roll twice and decrease it once, then the final roll is increased once.

Treat rolls increased twice or more as 20, 20, 20.

Treat rolls decreased twice or more as 1, 1, 1.

Bolstering

If you're bolstered, you can spend your bolster to increase a roll to do something specific. Examples:

- You're bolstered to fight a dragon.
- You're bolstered to get out of trouble.
- You're bolstered to break into the fortress.
- You're bolstered to explore the cave.
- You're bolstered to understand magic.

Bolstering typically comes from traits or extensive preparation. For example, suppose that your group needs to pass through a dangerous jungle. The group's bard purchases a map of the jungle, so the GM says that the bard is bolstered to explore the jungle.

Expiring Bolsters

Bolsters eventually expire. Typically, you lose unspent bolsters after you miss your opportunity to use them. For example, suppose that you're bolstered to navigate

the jungle. If you pass through the jungle without using your bolster, you've missed your chance. You lose that bolster.

Bolstered NPCs

NPCs never roll dice, so they can't increase their rolls. Instead, NPCs can spend their bolsters to make players decrease a roll. For example, if a monster has "You're bolstered to fight," then the GM could spend it to make a player decrease a combat roll involving that monster.

Chapter 3: Challenges

Some obstacles that players encounter can't be solved by a single roll. These are called Challenges. Challenges require a tremendous amount of effort, time, or resources to overcome. They're typically composed of multiple Risks. For example, compare climbing a wall with climbing a mountain. Climbing a wall might only require 1 Good Tale. Climbing a mountain, however, might require many Good Tales; each Good Tale brings you closer to the summit. Here are some examples of Risks and Challenges:

Risks	Challenges
• Punching an enemy.	• Slaying an enemy.
• Exploring a room.	• Exploring a dungeon.
• Picking a locked door.	• Infiltrating a castle.
• Climbing a wall.	• Climbing a mountain.
• Charming a person.	• Charming a crowd.
• Gathering a follower.	• Gathering an army.

As you can see, Challenges are typically composed of multiple Risks. For example, suppose that you are trying to infiltrate a heavily guarded castle to steal a priceless artifact. Here are a few Risks you might encounter while trying to overcome that Challenge:

- Spy on the castle to learn its vulnerabilities.
- Climb over the outer wall to access the courtyard.
- Sneak past the patrol.
- Steal keys from a sleeping or distracted guard.
- Subdue guard dogs with drugged meat.
- Find the hidden door to the treasure vault.
- Bypass the trap protecting the vault.
- Escape with the treasure.

The GM doesn't need to predetermine what Risks a Challenge will have, though the GM can if they want. Ideally, the GM should let Risks naturally occur based on context, logic, and the PCs' actions.

Challenge Number

Challenges have a Challenge Number (CN), which is decided by the GM. The higher the number, the more difficult, resilient, or time-consuming the Challenge is. For example, here a few different CNs:

- Sneaking into a house: CN 2
- Sneaking into a fortress: CN 5
- Sneaking into the royal castle: CN 10
- Sneaking into a dragon's lair: CN 20

CN is represented by boxes. Draw a line after every fifth box so that they're easier to count. For example, CN 8 would look like this:

□□□□□|□□□

Whenever a player tells a Good Tale towards overcoming a Challenge, the GM marks **at least** 1 box. When all of the boxes are marked, the PCs successfully overcome that Challenge. It's up to the players to narrate how they succeed. For example, suppose that the players are climbing a mountain with a CN of 5, and they mark the last box. At that point, they can narrate the rest of the climb however they want.

If it's logical, players can work together and pool their Good Tales toward a common goal. For example, if players are working together to slay a group of monsters, then each players' Good Tale will contribute toward overcoming that Challenge.

Some Challenges don't allow for collaboration. For example, if one player is participating in a marathon and the other players are watching from the sidelines, then only the runner's Good Tales can contribute toward winning the race.

Tales Still Do Things

The most important thing to remember with challenges is that Good and Bad Tales still affect the story. The players aren't just rolling dice to hit the CN. Tales should always affect the story in a meaningful way.

Shortcuts, Detours, and Delays

The CN gives the GM a rough idea of how difficult a Challenge will be for the players. However, Tavern Tales is not a game that focuses on numbers; the GM and the players should look beyond the CN.

The most important part of a Challenge isn't the CN — it's the story surrounding the Challenge.

The players' actions can fundamentally affect how the Challenge proceeds. In the below examples, suppose that the players are trying to retrieve a magic artifact at the summit of a tall mountain. The GM decides that the mountain has a CN of 15.

Challenge: Climb to the mountain summit

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Shortcuts

Shortcuts speed up the challenge by allowing a player to mark more than 1 box. For example, suppose that one of the PCs has a magical ring that will open a portal 1 mile away. The player rolls the dice and spends the Good Tale to activate the ring, opening a portal halfway up the mountain. Even though that player only spent 1 Good Tale, the GM should mark more boxes than normal. Since the player teleported halfway up the mountain, it's logical for the GM to mark 7 boxes which is about half of the Challenge's boxes.

Detours

A detour is when players completely avoid the original challenge in favor of a different (typically easier) challenge. For example, suppose that one of the players can fly. Flying to the mountain summit will be much easier than climbing, so the GM gives that player a different challenge with a lower CN.

Challenge: Fly to the mountain summit.

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Alternatively, suppose that the players discover that a clan of dwarves lives on the mountain. Rather than sneaking through the dwarves' territory, the players decide to enlist their help. The GM gives the group a different challenge.

Challenge: Convince the dwarves to retrieve the artifact from the mountain summit

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Detours might be harder or easier than the original Challenge, depending on context. They might also not work out as the players intended. For examples, the PCs might successfully convince the dwarves to retrieve the artifact from the mountain, only to discover that the dwarves decide to keep it for themselves.

Delays

Some events may delay or set back the players. In these cases, the GM might mark fewer boxes than normal, or possibly even remove marks from boxes. For example, suppose that the PCs are climbing a mountain and one of them falls into a ravine. The players decide to rescue their stranded friend, so the GM gives them a detour.

Challenge: Climb down the ravine

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Since the PCs are climbing down the ravine to rescue their friend, the GM might say that every box they mark

in this Challenge removes a mark from the original challenge. After all, they're traveling farther away from their original goal.

Remember: A Challenge is a Story, Not a Number

Try to avoid thinking of Challenges as a number. If the players keep saying, "I spend my Good Tale to climb up the mountain," then they're missing the fundamental point of Challenges. They can spend their Good Tale to do all kinds of interesting things, like find a cave to rest for the night, discover supplies from a dead and frozen explorer, or sing a traveling song to lift everyone's spirits. These out-of-the-box Tales are much more interesting, and they increase the chance that the GM will give you a convenient shortcut or detour.

If you're fighting a dragon, don't just spend turn after turn saying "I hit it with my sword." Think about the dragon as an *actual* dragon. How would you kill it? Check its hide for a missing scale. Slice holes in its wings so it can't fly away. Neutralize its fire breath with powerful frost magic. Taunt it so that it becomes infuriated and makes a mistake. These Tales are much more interesting and rewarding!

Playing it Safe

Since theoretically any Tale can contribute toward overcoming a Challenge, some players may be tempted to play it safe with their Good Tales. For example, instead of climbing the mountain, the players might spend their Good Tales to do things like gather supplies, get advice from local climbers, and survey the terrain. It's perfectly fine if players tell safe Tales in moderation. However, if they overdo it, the GM can punish the players with detours or delays. The GM could say that the players' actions redefined the Challenge to something mundane (from "Climb the mountain" to "Learn a lot about the mountain"), or that the players have gotten all they can out of playing it safe. If they want to mark more boxes, they'll have to start taking real risks.

PC Challenge Numbers

Player characters also have Challenge Numbers. When you start a game of Tavern Tales, everyone should discuss the game's overall feel to select the PCs' starting CN. Here are a few suggestions based on tone:

- Gritty: 1-2
- Dramatic: 3-4
- Heroic: 5-6
- Epic: 7+

The higher the players' CN, the more resilient they'll be against harm and danger. The recommended starting CN for new players is 3. This number is low enough that they'll feel like fledgling adventurers, but not so low that they'll constantly be on the brink of death. As the PCs complete quests and become more powerful, the GM may consider increasing their CNs.

When a player suffers a Bad Tale during a Challenge, they mark one of their boxes. When all of their boxes are marked, that player is overcome by the challenge, giving the GM free reign to tell a Bad Tale that is much worse than normal. The severity of the Bad Tale depends on context, the GM, and your gaming group's preferences. Here are some examples:

- The king accuses you of treason, and the guards haul you off to the dungeon.
- The frigid weather causes you to lose all sensation in your hands, and your fingers start turning blue.
- A wave from the storm flings you off the ship.
- The dragon bites off your arm. You pass out from the blood loss and pain. You'll die in a few minutes if the bleeding continues.
- The orc pushes you off the cliff, causing you to fall to your doom.

Yes, death is a possible consequence. When you start a game of Tavern Tales, your group should have a discussion about when it's appropriate to kill a PC. Should players potentially face death when all of their boxes are marked, or should they only face death in extreme circumstances?

Conditions

Conditions are ongoing effects that harm someone physically, mentally, or socially. Here are some example conditions:

- Amputated arm
- Deep chest wound
- Hungry and thirty
- Hopelessly lost
- Wanted: Dead or alive

Instead of writing their CN boxes horizontally, players write them vertically like this:

- _____
- _____
- _____

When you gain a condition, write it in one of the blanks that has a marked box to the left; if the box isn't already marked, mark it. You can't clear boxes that have a condition next to them because the condition is preventing you from performing at your peak capabilities.

For example, if you have the condition "Wanted: Dead or alive," then you have a constant nagging fear in the back of your mind. You have trouble sleeping because you're afraid of being ambushed at night. You suspect everyone you meet of going after the bounty on your head. This constant paranoia and stress prevents you from performing at your best.

Acquiring Conditions

Players can acquire conditions in 3 ways: traits, bad decisions or running out of boxes.

Traits

Traits can inflict unique conditions. These traits generally provide guidelines for how to use the conditions.

Bad Decisions

If a player makes a bad decision, the GM can give that player a condition. For example, if a PC throws a pie in the king's face, the GM can give the condition player "Wanted for treason." Players typically won't be this suicidal, but they will occasionally take extreme risks, such as trying to leap over a spike pit. If that player rolls poorly and falls, it's very reasonable for the GM to give a condition like "Broken legs" or "Punctured lung."

Running Out of Boxes

When all of a PC's boxes are marked, the GM can give that player 1 condition in addition to telling a free Bad Tale that is much worse than normal.

Clearing Boxes and Conditions

Players clear all of their boxes (except those with conditions) whenever they finish a challenge. They finish a challenge when they overcome it, abandon it, or are defeated by it.

You clear conditions whenever it's logical to do so. For example, suppose a player's character sheet looks like this:

- Broken arm
- Lord Hale wants my head
- _____

This player is nearly overwhelmed by conditions. It will only take 1 Bad Tale to defeat this player in a Challenge. So, the player will probably need to focus on clearing these conditions as soon as possible.

Healing the "Broken arm" condition is fairly straightforward: set the arm in a cast and wait for it to heal. Players may be able to accelerate this process with magical healing, medicine, or professional care.

Clearing the condition "Lord Hale wants my head" isn't quite as clear-cut. The player could pay Lord Hale to get on his good side, leave the region to escape Lord Hale's reach, or simply assassinate Lord Hale to remove the problem altogether.

When you clear a condition, you also clear the mark in the corresponding box.

Use Conditions Against Players

Conditions aren't just words on a character sheet. They're meaningful consequences that are supposed to annoy, hinder, and harm the affected player. As the GM, it's your job to constantly remind players of their conditions. When they roll a Bad Tale, use one of their Conditions against them by inflicting a penalty or worsening their condition.

For example, suppose a PC has a tough fight with a monster and gains the condition "Deep claw wounds." The player ignores the wound and continues adventuring. The GM can use Bad Tales to make that PC suffer from the untreated wound. Here are some examples:

- The monster strikes you on your unhealed wound, ripping the scabs off your tender flesh. Change your condition to "Bleeding claw wounds." You're losing blood, and fast.
- You successfully navigate through the swamp, but your claw wounds are now swollen and oozing a frothy yellow puss. Change your condition to "Infected claw wound." You also have -2 brawn because the disease is sapping your strength.
- Climbing the mountain is too much for you with that wound. You pass out from the pain.
- You hear a predatory roar in the distance. It seems that something has picked up your blood trail.

Make it clear to players that they ignore conditions at their own peril.

Tavern Tales doesn't have a pre-defined list of conditions. It's up to the players and the GM to create and use conditions in logically fitting ways. Just ask yourself, "What would make this condition worse?" If that happens, the GM can use a Bad Tale to make the condition worse. Here are a few sample progressions:

- Disliked → Despised
- Corrupted → Cursed
- Concussed → Comatose
- Hungry → Starving → Dying
- Traumatized → Neurotic → Insane

NPC Conditions

NPCs can gain conditions. Treat them the same as PC conditions.

Combining Challenge Numbers

The GM can combine CNs into a single Challenge. This typically only happens in combat encounters when the players face multiple monsters. For example, suppose that the PCs are fighting the following opponents:

- Zombie, CN 2
- Orc Warrior, CN 4
- Dragon, CN 8

These monsters collectively have a CN of 14, so the GM can combine them together.

Challenge: Defeat the monsters.

||

When a player marks a box, they can ask the GM if this is enough to defeat anyone. If it is, the GM can let the player defeat one of those monsters.

For example, suppose that the PCs fight the monsters and achieve the following:

||

A player asks if this enough to defeat anyone. The GM tells the player that this enough to defeat the Orc Warrior or the Zombie. The player decides to slay the orc and describes immolating the orc with fire magic. The GM then scribbles out 4 of the marked boxes to represent that the orc is removed from the fight.

But... I don't want to use Challenges!

That's perfectly fine. Challenges are a tool for the GM to use (or not use) whenever you want. Some GMs might prefer a more organic and fluid GMing style that doesn't use Challenges. In these situations, you simply

Chapter 4: Movement and Spaces

resolve conflicts based on what is logically appropriate. For example, suppose that the players want to explore a forest to find ancient ruins. If you want a more structured approach, you can say that the forest has a Challenge Number of 8. After the group accumulates 8 Good Tales, they locate the ruins.

Alternatively, the GM might use a more fluid approach that doesn't involve a Challenge. The GM can resolve rolls as normal — Good Tales mean good things happen and Bad Tales mean bad things happen. When and how the players find the ruins depends on the players' actions. If the ruins are near a lake in the middle of the forest, then obviously the players won't locate the ruins until they search near the lake.

Most GMs will prefer to use a mix of Challenge and non-Challenge encounters. In general, Challenges are more suited for encounters that have a clear, well-defined objective. Consider using Challenges when there is a very clear winner and loser, or a very clear success state and failure state. Challenges are ideal for combat encounters because there is a very clear success state (you defeat the monsters) and a very clear failure state (the monsters defeat you).

Here are some examples:

- Defeating monsters in combat.
- Climbing to a mountain summit.
- Picking a complicated lock on a door.

Resolving encounters without a Challenge is generally better when the objective is unclear and doesn't have an obvious end point. This approach allows the GM to spontaneously resolve conflicts based on what is logical. Consider using the non-Challenge approach when there isn't a clear winner or loser, or there isn't a clear way to measure success or failure. Non-challenges are ideal for wandering and exploration because you don't know what you'll discover, and when you'll discover it — you just keep exploring until you find what you're looking for.

Here are some examples:

- Searching for hidden treasure.
- Talking to locals to gather information.
- Sailing west until you find land.

Players accrue Bad Tales as normal during non-Challenges. The difference is that players aren't defeated when they mark all of their boxes. Instead, that player clears all of their marked boxes and the GM tells an

especially detrimental Bad Tale against them. At that point it's up to the players to decide if they want to press on.

As the GM, experiment with both approaches to find what fits your gaming style. Some GMs will prefer a clear and well-defined approach with Challenges, and other GMs will prefer a looser and more organic approach. You'll probably find that the ideal solution is a mix of both approaches, depending on the situation.

Moving

Moving may qualify as a Risk depending on context. Non-Risky movements include simple, everyday movements such as standing up from a chair, walking across a room, going up stairs, or climbing a ladder. These movements aren't risky, so you don't need to roll.

Some movements are Risks. These include walking across a tight rope, sneaking past a guard, or climbing a cliff. These actions require a Good Tale, so they occupy your whole turn; you can't cross a tight rope and attack, because both of those actions require a Good Tale.

Spaces

A space is however much physical space a creature occupies. Every creature in Tavern Tales occupies 1 space regardless of how big it is, so the size of 1 space is relative. For a human, 1 space might only be a 5-foot by 5-foot area. For a dragon, 1 space might be a 50-foot by 50-foot area.

If a rule references spaces, use the space of whatever creature is doing the action. For example, suppose a trait says "Fling a creature 5 spaces away." A 5-foot human can fling something 25 feet away, and a 50-foot dragon can fling something 250 feet away.

Distance

Tavern Tales uses 5 common distances, which have both qualitative and quantitative measurements.

- **Touch:** Physical contact, or adjacent spaces.
- **Near:** Several steps, or 3 spaces.
- **Close:** A room, or 5 spaces.
- **Far:** A building, or 10 spaces.
- **Very Far:** Several buildings, or 20+ spaces.

A distance includes all shorter distances. For example, If you can make an attack out to a far distance, you can also attack creatures that are in a close, near, or touch range.

How far you can move depends on context and the length of your turn. However, all creatures have a default movement of close (5 spaces) in combat. You can typically move up to 5 spaces and attempt 1 action that requires a Good Tale. You don't have to move the full 5 spaces if you don't want to.

Battlegrid vs Theater of the Mind

RPG players typically favor one of two play styles: battlegrid or theater of the mind. Tavern Tales accommodates both of these options.

Battlegrid

The battle grid approach uses game miniatures and a battle map to create an accurate representation of the terrain. If you prefer this method, each space typically represents 1 square or hex in the battlegrid (unless the creature is bigger or smaller than 1 space).

Theater of the Mind

Gamers who use the theater of the mind approach prefer to imagine the action. Don't worry about exact numbers and measurements. Instead, focus on the game's qualitative descriptions. A big creature is big — you don't need anything more complicated than that. Just go with what feels right. This style is meant to be loose and intuitive, so don't let math slow you down.

Chapter 5: Building a Character

Tavern Tales allows you to play as virtually anything imaginable. Do you want to be a feral barbarian who charges into battle? How about a crafty rogue who uses stealth and deception? Your only limit is your imagination! But before you draw your magical sword and start slaying monsters, you first have to create your character. Follow the steps below to build your character, recording each decision on your character sheet.

Step 1: Come up with a Concept

The first step is the most important because it affects every other decision during character creation. You must come up with a core concept for your character. Here are a few things to consider:

- Where does your character come from?
- What is your character's race and nationality?
- How does your character fight, explore, and socialize?
- What sets your character apart?

Tavern Tales accommodates virtually any character concept imaginable, so feel free to come up with something truly unique.

Dabney, a new player to Tavern Tales, talks to his GM about the upcoming game. The GM explains that the game will focus heavily on exploration, so Dabney decides that he wants to play as a ranger. A master woodsman would be the perfect character for charting the savage wilderness!

Step 2: Spend XP on Stats and Traits

All players start the game with experience (XP). The default starting XP is 10, but some GMs may want to change the starting value. You can spend XP on stats and/or traits.

Stats

Every character has four stats: Brawn, Finesse, Mind, and Spirit. Whenever you make a 3d20 roll, you assign the corresponding bonus or penalty from that stat. For example, a soldier has +3 Brawn, +2 Finesse, +1 Mind, and -1 Spirit. The soldier wants to climb a rock wall, which the GM decides is a Brawn roll. The player rolls 3d20 and adds +3 to the middle die to determine the final result.

Brawn

Brawn is a measure of physical fitness, might, bodily awareness, presence, athleticism, and strength.

Roll when you're:

- Brutish and strong.
- Direct and forward.
- Physically powerful.
- Forceful.

Examples:

- Pick up a boulder.
- Intimidate someone.
- Kick down a door.
- Make a harsh demand.

Finesse

Finesse relates to agility, grace, subtlety, precision, delicacy, and speed.

Roll when you're:

- Subtle and smooth.
- Agile and graceful.
- Deceptive and sneaky.
- Quick.

Examples:

- Tell a lie.
- Walk a tightrope.
- Hide in the shadows.
- Dash to cover.

Mind

Mind involves logic, knowledge, memory, perception, and intuition.

Roll when you're:

- Shrewd and intelligent.
- Observant and wise.
- Witty and clever.
- Logical.

Examples:

- Research in a library.
- Check a room for clues.
- Outsmart someone.
- Solve a puzzle.

Spirit

Spirit involves willpower, force of personality, morale, and fighting spirit.

Roll when you're:

- Tough and determined.
- Passionate.
- Charming.
- Lucky.

Examples:

- Hold your breath.
- Give a fiery speech.
- Seduce someone.
- Gamble.

The GM will tell players what stat to use when they make a roll.

Buying Stats

To upgrade a stat, spend XP equal to the new value of that stat. All of your stats start at 0, and you can't upgrade a stat beyond +3. For example, upgrading Brawn from 0 to +1 costs 1 XP. Then, upgrading it from +1 to +2 costs an additional 2 XP for a total of 3 XP.

Dabney decides that his ranger needs high Finesse to be an effective marksman. He also wants high Mind since rangers need to be perceptive. Rangers have a reputation for being gruff loners, so he places the least value on Spirit.

- He spends 1 XP to bring Brawn to +1.
- He spends 3 XP to bring Finesse to +2.
- He spends 3 XP to bring Mind to +2.
- He leaves Spirit at 0.

Dabney has spent 7 of his 10 starting XP, so he has 3 left over. He decides to save that XP for traits.

At character creation, you can reduce stats below 0 to gain extra XP. Putting a stat at -1 gives you 1 XP. Putting it at -2 gives you an additional 2 XP, and so on. You can't reduce stats below -3. You can later remove these penalties by spending however much XP the penalties gave you. For example, increasing a stat from -2 to -1 costs 2 XP.

It may be difficult to represent your character through stats alone. You can easily round out your character with traits. For example, suppose you want to play a character who was raised by wolves. Your character should probably have low Mind to represent a poor education. However, wolves are excellent trackers, which typically uses Mind. Should you give your character low Mind or high Mind? In this case, you may want to give your character low Mind and purchase a trait to enhance your tracking ability. That way, your character will be uneducated and still be an excellent tracker.

Buying Traits

Traits are unique abilities that can imbue your character with life and personality. Traits are organized by themes to provide inspiration.

Traits are further divided into three categories: combat, exploration, and interaction. To gain a new trait, spend XP equal to the new number of traits *in that category*. For example, buying your first combat trait costs 1 XP. Buying your second combat trait costs 2 XP. Buying your third combat trait costs 3 XP, for a total of 6 XP spent on combat traits. Then, buying your first exploration trait only costs 1 XP. There's no limit to the number of traits you can have, and you can select traits from as many or as few themes as you like.

Dabney has 3 XP left over from buying stats. He decides to spend his XP as follows:

- First, he spends 1 XP to buy Eagle Eye, a combat trait from the Tracking theme. He briefly considers spending his 2 remaining XP to buy another combat trait, but decides against it.
- He spends 1 XP on Lay of the Land, an exploration trait from the Tracking theme.
- Finally, he spends 1 XP on Beast Master, an interaction trait from the Beast theme.

10 XP Quickstart Arrays

These are common ways to spend 10 XP.

3, 2, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0

3, 2, 1, 1, 1, 0, -2

3, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, -1

2, 2, 2, 1, 0, 0, 0

2, 2, 2, 2, 1, 0, -2

1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1 (3 XP left over)

Step 3: Select Starting Gear

Refer to the Items section for starting gear.

Step 4: Change Your Aesthetics

You are in complete control your character's aesthetics (often called "flavor" or "fluff"). You can play whatever you want: a human, a dragon, a mechanical golem, or whatever else you please. You can also change the aesthetics of your traits. If a trait lets you shoot fireballs, you can rename it to "Ice ball" and shoot explosive blasts of ice instead. These aesthetic choices are acceptable as long as they don't affect your capabilities. For example, you can't say that you have huge muscles and therefore deserve a +1 bonus to Brawn. Similarly, saying that you're a dragon doesn't mean that you instantly gain the ability to fly. You might have wings, but you need a trait that lets you fly before you can use them.

Dabney decides that he wants to put a twist on his ranger by playing as a humanoid plant creature. Dabney describes his character's bark skin and leafy hair to the other players.

Another player, Wesley, is playing as a frost mage. Wesley also rewrites some aspects of his character to match his frost wizard concept. For example, Wesley took the trait Barrier from the Arcane theme. He renames it "Ice Wall."

Wait, where are the races?

In roleplaying games, players tend to think of their characters as a combination of race and training, such as a dwarven paladin, human wizard, or elven rogue. Tavern Tales doesn't use this race-class duality.

Themes and traits are tools that allow you to build your race and your class. For example, elves are typically portrayed as nature lovers who wield bows. If you want to play as an elf, you could take traits from the Nature or Tracking themes to represent your elven heritage. If you're playing in a setting where elves pursue the magical arts, you might take traits from the Arcane theme to represent your innate magical affinity.

Advancement

As you adventure in Tavern Tales, you will learn from your experiences and become stronger. The requirement for advancement is simple: do interesting things.

Of course, the definition of "interesting things" varies depending on the gaming group. One gaming group might prefer dungeon crawls and monster battles, while another gaming group might prefer political intrigue. For that reason, Tavern Tales doesn't rigidly define character advancement. It's up to your gaming group to work together to determine a character advancement option that works best for you. Here are some of the most popular advancement options:

- **Combat:** Kill a dangerous monster.
- **Exploration:** Explore a perilous dungeon.
- **Interaction:** Resolve an interpersonal conflict.
- **Quest:** Complete an adventure.
- **Personal:** Explore your backstory.
- **Roleplay:** Have in-character conversations.
- **Sandbox:** Go out into the world and find adventure.
- **All of the above!**

It's important for the GM and the players to clearly communicate so that everybody knows the driving purpose of the game. Is it to kill monsters? The GM should reward players for running into battle. Is it political intrigue? The GM should reward players for attending a masquerade. Most gaming groups will use a combination of these factors, possibly even all of them. When the GM feels that the players have sufficiently advanced, the players each gain 1 XP.

Upgrading Traits

Instead of increasing your stats or buying a new trait, you can upgrade a trait you already have. Upgrading a trait costs the same as purchasing a new trait in that category. For example, suppose you have 3 exploration traits. You would need to spend 4 XP to upgrade an exploration trait. Then, if you wanted to acquire or upgrade another exploration trait, it would cost 5 XP.

Tavern Tales intentionally doesn't offer clear instructions for upgrading traits. You and the GM should collaborate to create a balanced effect. In general, upgrades should enhance a trait's existing capabilities, and they should be approximately as powerful as if you'd purchased a new trait. Also, your upgrade should follow Tavern Tales' core principles: the most important is "think cinematically, not mathematically." Try to avoid upgrades that give you bigger numbers. Here are a few examples of how you might upgrade a trait:

- Use the trait more frequently.
- Increase the trait's duration, range, or area of effect.
- The trait's drawbacks are less severe.
- The trait is more precise or flexible.
- You can use the trait much more quickly.

Earlier, Dabney acquired Gut Instinct, an exploration trait from the Savagery theme. He begins a conversation with the GM:

Dabney: I really love Gut Instinct and I want to get more use out of it. Can I upgrade it?

GM: Sure, what do you have in mind?

Dabney: Well, I like the idea of my character being so attuned to his instincts that it's practically supernatural. I was hoping that I could get extra information when I use it.

GM: That sounds reasonable.

Dabney: How about I add this line of text: "Whenever you use Gut Instinct, the GM must tell you something important about what your instincts are sensing."

GM: That sounds good to me! Write it on your character sheet. We'll see how that upgrade plays out during this next session. Afterward, we'll talk again to see if we both think it's balanced. Sound fair?

Dabney: Yep!

Restricting Upgrades

By default, Tavern Tales doesn't place any restriction on upgrades. Your gaming group may want to restrict upgrades to prevent players from creating overly spe-

cialized characters. For example, the GM might say that players can only have a maximum of 3 upgrades.

Retraining

You can change some aspects of your character by retraining. To retrain, your character simply needs to take a week off from the adventuring life and rest. It's a good idea to retrain in between sessions so that it doesn't disrupt gameplay. You can retrain the following:

Traits: Replace one of your traits with a new trait. The new trait must be the same theme and category as the old trait. If you remove an Arcane combat trait, the new trait must also be Arcane combat. You can't remove upgraded traits.

Upgrades: If one of your traits is upgraded, you can change that upgrade to a different upgrade.

You can't retrain stats.

Death and Ending Your Story

Every story must end. When you build your character, spend some time thinking about how you want your character's story to end. You might initially think that dying is a bad thing, but is it really? Your PC dying gloriously can be a very memorable experience for you and your friends.

Typically, player death occurs when a player marks all of their boxes, and the situation logically warrants it. For example, if you mark all of your boxes in a fight against a ruthless dragon, it might be logical to say that the dragon destroys you. If you mark all of your boxes during a freezing blizzard when you're out in the middle of nowhere, it might be logical to say that you freeze to death. In contrast, if you mark all of your boxes while chatting with people in a bar, it's probably not fitting to say that you die. Why would that kill you? It's probably more logical to say that you get banned from the bar, or that you get too drunk and unintentionally anger the wrong person.

This is where your game's tone is important. Players in a dark and gritty game will be more vulnerable to death than players in a bright and heroic game. Some gaming groups like the constant, oppressive threat of player death because it keeps things tense and exciting. Other groups like games where players are hard to kill because they want to feel like larger-than-life heroes.

When death comes for you, it's your right to decide how you die. You temporarily take control over the story to describe what happens. For example, suppose that a dragon slashes you with its claws and hurts you enough to kill you. It's now up to you to decide how you die: perhaps the dragon devours you whole, incinerates you with fire breath, or delivers a fatal wound that will allow you to hold on for about 30 seconds after your companions rush to your side. You can't use this rule to stay in the fight longer than you should, or hold out for extra healing. Death is coming for you, period. Use this opportunity to cough up blood, say goodbye to your companions, or reveal a huge secret.

You can't use your death to perform excessively heroic acts. For example, if a dragon kills you, you can't say that you take the dragon with you. If you want to do something dramatic when you die, consider taking the trait Death Throes from the Undeath theme.

Chapter 6: Building a World

There are two common approaches to running an RPG: module or sandbox.

Module

A module is a premade adventure. The GM plans out the adventure and has a general idea of what to expect during the game.

Advantages

- Preparation makes the game more polished.
- The GM knows what to expect.
- Generally preferred by GMs who like to plan.

Disadvantages

- The adventure is less spontaneous.
- Requires players to “stick to the script.”
- The GM can run out of material and get stuck.

Sandbox

In sandbox games, the GM adapts to the players and spontaneously creates adventures based on context.

Advantages

- More spontaneous and organic.
- Can lead to interesting and unexpected adventures.
- Players have more freedom.

Disadvantages

- Requires an extremely creative GM.
- Adventures are typically less polished.
- The game can feel directionless if players don't take charge.

Neither approach is better than the other. It's entirely up to you to find a GM style that suits your unique tastes. Many GMs will prefer a mix of planning and spontaneous creativity. Tavern Tales accommodates whichever play style you prefer. If you're new to Tavern Tales or RPGs, it's recommended that you start with module adventures.

Handling Neutral Tales

How your players handle Neutral Tales will have a major impact on your game. In many other RPGs, the players control their characters and the GM controls everything else. When the players arrive at a new town, it's typically the GM's job to describe the town and the townsfolk.

However, Tavern Tales is a little bit different. The players and the GM can tell Neutral Tales whenever they want, which means that players might have control over the game world. Creating an entire game world can consume a lot of brain power, so the GM may find it beneficial to outsource this creative task to the players. Discuss the options below with your gaming group to find a comfortable level for your game.

Low Player Control

Players can tell Neutral Tales to describe their own characters and nothing else. This is ideal for module-based games, because the players won't disrupt what the GM created. Example:

- My cloak flaps in the wind.
- My stomach growls from hunger.
- I wipe the blood from my sword.

Moderate Player Control

Players can tell Neutral Tales to describe some of the features of the world around them, mostly focusing on aesthetics. Basically, the GM gives the players permission to help build the world. For example, suppose a player wants to go to a tavern. The player can invent the tavern and describe it to the other players. This doesn't disrupt the game much because the GM was probably going to invent a tavern anyway. So, why not let the player do it? Example:

- I travel to the Hooting Owl tavern, which is a humble stone building. A surly looking dwarf is working at the bar. A group of sailors are clearly drunk and are singing sea shanties. I walk to the bar and order a drink.

High Player Control

In the most extreme version, players can declare *anything* with a Neutral Tale (as long as it's Neutral). A player can invent an entire quest, including the reward. Obviously, it's up to the GM to step in if a player goes too far. This approach is ideal for experienced players in a sandbox game. The GM doesn't need to plan because the players and the GM can work together to spontaneously create a quest. For example, suppose the players enter a new town. The GM could allow each player to add something to the town. Perhaps one player says that there's a hidden thieves' guild operating in the docks, and they're looking for someone to assassinate a merchant. Perhaps another player says that some of the villagers are werewolves.

Adventure Seeds

In real life, seeds are tiny, light-weight, and hold a lot of potential. If you plant a seed, it might grow into something unexpected.

Adventure seeds are like real-life seeds. They're small, simple, and can grow into a full adventure whenever the need arises. Each seed is a sentence, like “There's an abandoned silver mine in the mountains.” Regardless of whether you're playing a module or a sandbox game, it's a good idea to plant seeds throughout the game world.

Seeds are incredibly useful because the GM and the players can use them when the need arises. For example, suppose you add the seed “There's an alchemist guild in town.” Players can use this seed in their adventures. Perhaps they'll buy healing potions from the guild, or perhaps they'll find out that someone was poisoned and they need information about poisons. Also, the GM can use this seed for inspiration. If the GM needs quest ideas, the GM could say that an acidic ooze escapes a lab, or that the alchemists need explorers to track down rare alchemical reagents. Here are a few example seeds for an arctic town:

- The barbarian Stag Clan roams the western tundra.
- A magic aurora happens every new moon.
- A human town rests next to a frozen lake.
- The villagers are in a dispute over land rights.
- There's a monster asleep under the frozen lake.

GMs who prefer to run modules should flesh out these seeds. What's the monster under the lake? Why is it asleep? What will it do when it wakes up? GMs who prefer sandbox games don't need to answer these questions because they'll be spontaneously answered during gameplay. Here's an example:

Seed: There's a monster asleep under a lake.

A PC asks the locals about the monster, so the GM has the player roll Spirit. The player and the GM can spend Good, Neutral, or Bad Tales based on the roll to spontaneously decide the answer.

Good Tales

- The monster is benevolent.
- There's also treasure under the lake.
- The monster is a source of powerful magic.

Neutral Tales

- Rumor has it that a hermit who lives in the tundra is the only person who knows the monster's identity.
- The monster has been frozen for over 500 years.
- Some villagers claim that the monster speaks to them in their dreams.

Bad Tales

- The monster will destroy the town if it wakes up.
- The monster is a demon that's trying to melt the lake with hellfire. The villagers must use frost magic to keep it trapped, but their local ice wizard has gone missing.
- Anyone who crosses over the lake becomes possessed by the monster.

Worldbuilding

Worldbuilding is a process that allows everyone to work together to flesh out your game world. It works in the following way:

1. The worldbuilder invents something about the world. The worldbuilder can be a player or the GM.
2. Each other person asks the worldbuilder 1 question about whatever was created.
3. The worldbuilder can answer the question, or let the person who asked the question answer it.
4. Continue until everyone has asked the worldbuilder 1 question.

Worldbuilding is a great tool that can help you develop ideas on the fly. For example, suppose that the players unexpectedly decide to charter a ship a sail across the sea. The GM might worldbuild the ship and crew.

GM: Let's worldbuild the ship! You charter the Mako, a lightweight cargo ship.

Wesley: What are they transporting?

GM: Iron ore and silk.

Cory: What battle damage does the ship show?

GM: Oh, interesting question. You can answer that.

Cory: There are long gouge marks along the port side from a kraken attack. Also, they have a new mast because the kraken ripped out the old one.

Parker: How'd the crew survive the kraken attack?

GM: Hmm, let's see... The first mate is a highly skilled alchemist named Karrick. He threw barrels of poison into the ocean during the attack, which scared off the kraken.

You're encouraged to use worldbuilding frequently. Worldbuilding will make players feel more invested

in the game world, and it can inspire the GM. Keep in mind that worldbuilding can last more than one round. If you like, everyone can ask two or three questions to create very robust lore.

If you are playing a sandbox game, let players worldbuild frequently with their Neutral Tales. If you are playing a more module-based game, then the GM might want to restrict worldbuilding.

Also, keep in mind that worldbuilding can be Good or Bad instead of Neutral. For example, suppose that the players are looking for people to help them break one of their friends out of jail. If a player rolls 8+ to find aid, the player might ask the GM for permission to world-build a helpful organization, such as a Thieves' Guild.

Session Zero: Creating a Game World

Before you start your first session of Tavern Tales, consider collectively building the game world. This process is simple: everyone takes turns worldbuilding until the world is fleshed out. Here's an excerpt of how your session zero might go:

GM: OK, we've established that the world is mostly covered in ocean with a few island nations. Who would like to worldbuild next?

Nicole: I'll go. Since there's such little land, druids have built islands out of floating plants. They intertwine roots and vines so that the plants stay together.

GM: Are these common? What are they called?

Nicole: They're called Sea Groves, and yeah they're fairly common. You frequently see a few Sea Groves anchored near any island.

Sean: How big are they?

Nicole: I'd say on average they're about the size of a football field.

Jason: What magic do they use to make the islands?

Nicole: You can answer that.

Jason: Islands have what's called a Heart Tree at their center, which is bonded to the island's druid. If the Heart Tree dies, the druid and the island dies with it.

During session zero, it's also a good idea to have a group discussion about the game's tone and everyone's expectations. Everyone should have a chance to express their preferences. This is a good opportunity to decide what things are off limits for your game. For example, does your group think it's appropriate to explore adult themes

like torture? Will your game be light-hearted and heroic? Dark and gritty? Realistic? Collectively agreeing on a tone for your game can ensure that everybody starts each session with the same expectations.

Interludes

In RPGs, the action always follows the players. This may leave you wondering about things that happen away from the PCs' gaze. If you like, your group can explore these events through interludes. An interlude is a one-shot adventure within your game that uses different PCs. Basically, everyone stops playing their characters for one session and instead plays a different character. Interludes have several advantages:

- They let players take a break from their characters to play someone new and different.
- The GM can take a break from GMing for a session while someone else GMs.
- Interludes help you build a rich, exciting world.
- Announcing an unexpected interlude can keep the game fresh and exciting.
- Players are more likely to bond with NPCs if they get a chance to play as them.
- They allow players to view the world from a different perspective. Playing as misunderstood villains or terrified villagers can be a very eye-opening experience.

If you're planning on running an interlude, it's a good idea to make characters before the session starts. Character creation can be very time-consuming, so cutting out this step will allow you to jump straight into the action. Also, it's important to work with your GM. If you're a player and you're planning on running an interlude, make sure that you get permission from your GM ahead of time. The general rule is that the person who introduces the interlude should be the GM. Here are a few example interludes:

- Play as NPCs from a previous adventure to find out what happened after the adventurers left.
- Play as villains or monsters who are working together on an evil plot. This interlude can set the stage for the adventurers to show up next session. Can the players defeat the evil that they created?
- One of the characters tells a story from their past. Everyone plays as an important person from the story.
- Play as minions embarking on an important mission.
- Play as an area's previous inhabitants to discover what happened before the PCs arrived.

Chapter 7: Minions

Roleplaying Minions

Once a player acquires a minion, the GM hands control of that minion to that the player. It's the player's responsibility to roleplay that minion appropriately. For example, suppose a wizard hires a barbarian minion who despises magic. The player should roleplay that barbarian as disliking the wizard. In fact, it might even make sense for the player to have the barbarian betray the wizard if the situation calls for it.

If players don't roleplay their minions appropriately, the GM can step in and take back control of the minion.

A minion is an NPC who serves someone else. Common examples of minions include a necromancer's undead zombies, a ranger's loyal animal companion, and an artificer's robots.

Typically, the GM has control over NPCs. However, minions are considered to be part of a character, so players have full control over their minions. Players roll on behalf of their minions, control their minions' actions, and roleplay what their minions say.

For example, suppose a player is playing as a paladin who controls an order of knights. That player can decide what those knights do and how they behave. If one of those knights attempts a risky action, the player rolls on behalf of that knight, using that knight's stats. The knights are effectively an extension of the paladin.

Contracts

Minions won't serve you for free. Every minion requires a contract, which is an agreement about the minion's services. The term "contract" isn't literal — you don't need your minion to sign a contract (though you're welcome to do that if you like). Contracts also include verbal and implicit agreements.

The wording for contracts is as follows:

“ _____ will _____ in exchange for _____.”
[Minion] [do this] [something]

Here are some example contracts:

- Barktholomew the Dog will serve you loyally in exchange for food and companionship.
- Gerald the Scout will lead you through the mountains in exchange for a bag of gold coins.
- Hargaesh the Demon will help you slaughter your enemies in exchange for 1 favor to be redeemed at a later time.

There aren't any strict rules for determining the parameters for your contracts. When you want to gain a minion, collaborate with the GM to determine the contract terms. Generally, stronger creatures will make more demands than weaker creatures.

Chapter 8: Special Rules and Keywords

6 Random but Important Rules

1. Specific rules take precedence over general rules.
2. Some rules are intentionally vague. It's up to the gaming group to interpret these rules.
3. Infinite loops stop after 1 cycle of the loop.
4. When in doubt, use the most logical and thematically appropriate interpretation of the rules.
5. The GM gets the final say on everything.
6. Have fun. If changing the rules would make your group have more fun, do so.

The Arbitration Rule

Your group will occasionally disagree about the rules during a game. This usually happens during rolls; the player thinks one stat is appropriate, and the GM thinks a different stat is appropriate. If the dispute is **minor and doesn't significantly affect gameplay**, players should win these disputes by default. Write down the dispute; after the game ends, everyone should have a discussion about the rule to come to an agreed-upon understanding. The arbitration rule should prevent tiny disputes from slowing down your game.

Optional Rule: 2d10

Instead of rolling 3d20, your gaming group might consider using two 10-sided dice (2d10). Add the results of the two die together. For increased rolls, roll 3d10 and choose the two largest values. For decreased rolls, roll 3d10 and choose the two lowest values.

3d20 and 2d10 both have a curved distribution, which means that middle results (10 and 11) will occur much more often than extreme results (1 and 20). 2d10 has a sharper curve than 3d20, so 2d10 will produce significantly more rolls of 10 and 11 than 3d20 will.

Optional Rule: Critical Rolls

A critical roll occurs whenever any of your d20s match. For example, a roll of 9, 9, and 14 is a critical roll.

Any resulting Good Tales are much better than normal. Any resulting Bad Tales are much worse than normal. A triple critical (such as a roll of 12, 12, 12) is even more extreme than a normal critical.

It's up to your gaming group to decide how extreme critical rolls are. Criticals will make your game feel more explosive and chaotic.

Optional Rule: Alternative Stats

You can easily replace the default 4 stats with your own list of stats. Here are a few possible alternatives:

- Mind, Body, Spirit
- Dark, Heroic, Comedic, Romantic, Mysterious
- Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma

If you create your own list of stats, remember that players need to spend XP on stats. The more stats players have, the more XP it will take to increase them all.

Keywords

A keyword is a word or phrase that represents a common rule. All keywords are underlined.

Bolster

Players can spend their bolsters to increase a related roll. The GM can spend NPC bolsters to make a PC decrease a related roll. Refer to Chapter 2 for rules about increasing and decreasing rolls. Unspent bolsters eventually expire.

Collaborate

Traits that tell you to collaborate are intentionally vague and ambiguous. Work with the GM to create a balanced and thematically appropriate effect. Collaborations should be an ongoing process. For example, you may discover that an effect is too strong or weak after a few sessions, so you and the GM should rebalance the effect.

Conditions

A condition is anything that temporarily affects your capabilities or status. Refer to Chapter 3 for more details.

Defense

Defenses make you more resilient during Challenges. Defenses grant 1 or more boxes, which function the same as Challenge Number boxes. However, defenses have unique requirements that allow you to mark them only in specific situations.

Minions

A minion is a creature that serves another creature through a contract. Refer to Chapter 7 for more details.

Shrine

A shrine is a divine conduit that allows a specific deity or set of deities to affect the mortal world. Refer to the Faith theme for more details.

Temporary Trait

A temporary trait is any trait that you did not spend XP to acquire. Temporary traits come from a variety of sources: magic items, potions, spells, etc. They're free and don't affect the XP cost of buying other traits. You can't upgrade temporary traits.

Worldbuild

Worldbuilding is a collaborative process wherein the players and the GM work together to create something about the game world. One person is in charge of the worldbuilding event, and the other players support that player. Refer to Chapter 6 for more details.

Zone

A zone is an area of effect. If a trait affects a zone, collaborate on logically fitting zones that you can create with that trait, and write them into your trait. Here are a few example zones:

- **Blast:** An explosion that affects 1 space and adjacent spaces. Blast attacks can be melee or ranged.
- **Cone:** A 90° cone that extends out to a close distance. Cone attacks are considered to be melee.
- **Line:** This is a line of spaces that extends out to a far distance. Lines attacks are considered to be ranged.

Theme Intro /Art

Themes

Themes are loose groupings of traits. You can mix and match themes however you want to build your character.

Themes serve two purposes. The first is to inspire you. Themes group together similar traits to give you an idea of what a cohesive character might look like. The second purpose is organization. Themes provide a fairly reliable way to find certain traits. For example, suppose you want to play a wizard who specializes in lightning magic. You might want to check out the Arcane and Elements themes because they will probably have traits that fit your character.

Traits

Traits are your PC's special qualities or capabilities. They are arguably the most important part of your character because they set you apart from everyone else.

Each trait has a grey box beneath it, which offers descriptions and examples. These boxes have no mechanical bearing on the game whatsoever, so you're free to ignore them. However, Tavern Tales relies heavily on descriptions. You are encouraged to describe your character and actions in interesting ways. Using the boxes for inspiration can help you paint a vivid and exciting picture with your descriptions.

Spending Tales on Traits

The situation determines whether or not players need to roll to use a trait. If it's risky, you need a Good Tale. If it's not risky, you only need a Neutral Tale. For example, the Arcane trait Teleport reads "You can teleport." If you perform a risky or significant action, such as teleporting from a dungeon back to town, then you need to spend a Good Tale. If you're hanging out at a tavern and teleport to the bar, then you can do that as a Neutral Tale.

In general, traits that begin with the phrase "You can..." might require a roll.

Changing Traits for the GM

Traits are worded for the players' convenience, which means that the wording might not work for the GM. The GM should change the wording of certain traits to make them usable for NPCs. For example, if a trait says, "You can immediately tell a Good Tale," the GM should change it to "You can immediately tell a Bad Tale."

How to Read a Trait

Here's a sample trait from the Arcane theme:

Teleport

You can teleport. Collaborate on what that entails.

Describe: *Vanishing in a puff, rearranging spacetime, opening a wormhole, stepping across dimensions.*

How it Works: *You must have been there before, requires line of sight, requires intense concentration.*

Each trait has 3 components: The trait name, the effect, and the lore.

Trait Name: The title is the large, bold phrase at the top of the trait. You can and should change the trait's name to fit your unique character.

Effect: The effect is in the middle of the trait. The effect describes what the trait does, and how you can use it. Underlined words are keywords (refer to Chapter 8). Many traits, such as Teleport, are intentionally ambiguous so that the players and the GM can work together to determine how the trait should work in your game.

Lore: The lore is contained within a grey box beneath the trait. The lore has no mechanical bearing on the game whatsoever — it's there to inspire you, give examples, and remind you to be descriptive with your traits.

General Traits

Tavern Tales has two general traits. These traits are so all-around useful and customizable that they don't fit into a single theme or category.

Treat general traits as if they're in their own unique theme and category. So, buying the first one costs 1 XP, the second one costs 2 XP, the third costs 3 XP, etc.

These traits are extremely generic and need to be re-flavored to fit your character. Find the two general traits on the next page.

Authority

You are an authority on a topic of your choice. You have as much authority as the GM to declare things about the game world related to your topic. You can do the following:

- Spend a Neutral Tale to worldbuild something neutral related to your topic.
- Spend a Good Tale to worldbuild something beneficial or positive related to your topic.
- Spend a Good Tale to have the GM honestly answer 3 questions related to your topic.

Describe: *Recalling a fact from a book, a story where you learned the fact, making a shrewd observation.*

Topics: *Alchemy, magic, history, politics, religion, geography, a country, architecture, elves, the sea.*

Examples

Loremaster: You're an authority on legends and history.

Sailed the 7 Seas: You're an authority on the sea.

Raised by Wolves: You're an authority on beasts.

Expert

You're bolstered to do something. Collaborate on what you're bolstered to do. After you spend your bolster, you regain it when your situation sufficiently changes.

Describe: *Drawing from your experience, relying on muscle memory, your natural talent and expertise.*

Examples

Beginner's Luck: You're bolstered to do something you've never done before.

Titan Slayer: You're bolstered to fight the biggest, scariest opponent.

Charming Smile: You're bolstered to charm and seduce.

Building Your Own Traits

Homebrewing is an intrinsic part of RPGs. Inevitably, players will come to the GM with custom trait ideas. It's up to your gaming group to decide if custom traits are allowed. Consider using this section as a rough guideline when you design your own traits.

First, look through the themes for similar traits. Tavern Tales has a very extensive list of options, so there's a good chance there's already a similar trait. In the interest of efficiency and balance, you're probably better off modifying an existing trait rather than building a new one from scratch. At the very least, this process will familiarize yourself with trait mechanics and balance.

Balance

The most important factors to consider when balancing a trait are effect and frequency. The more potent the effect, the more powerful the trait is. Also, the more frequently players can use the trait, the more powerful it is.

This highlights the differences between passive and active traits. Passive traits are "always on," so they typically have less powerful effects to compensate. In contrast, active traits can only be used in certain situations, so their effects can be more powerful.

There are a few tricks you can use to control trait power. If your custom trait feels too strong, consider applying one of these modifications:

Collaborate on how you charge this trait. Spend the charge to...

Collaborate on 3 feats, each with 2 boxes. When you complete a feat, mark its box. Clear 3 boxes to...

- Absorb magical energy from a powerful font
- Write spells in your spellbook.
- Discover something magical.

When you fulfill [specific conditions], you can...

Remember that balance is an ongoing process. Don't expect to create a perfectly balanced trait on your very first try. Ask your group for advice on how you can create balanced effects. Also, consider periodically revisiting a trait. Sometimes, you have to play a few sessions before you can fully grasp a trait's power.

Principles

Follow these guidelines when you design your trait:

- Focus on cinematics rather than mathematics. Imagine what it looks like when you use the trait. If it's flashy and obvious, then you probably did a good job of making your trait cinematic. If your trait overly focuses on numbers (such as dice rolls and Challenge boxes), then it's probably too mechanical.
- Don't go overboard with effects. In general, each trait should just do 1 thing.
- Do cool stuff!

Art

Alchemy

Many see alchemy as the study of matter; others view alchemy as the study of change. In truth, both are correct, for alchemy is the study of everything. What doesn't fall within its domain? Everything in the universe — from the tiniest speck of dust to the massive, ever-burning sun — owes its existence to chemistry. If matter and energy are the building blocks of reality, then alchemists are grand cosmic architects who rival even the gods themselves in their mastery over the physical world. Alchemists destroy matter in a way that would humble even the most fearsome warlord, breaking down objects into their most fundamental pieces. Alchemists create new wonders in ways that artists could never hope to match, brewing new chemicals that were heretofore unseen. When you understand the inner workings of the universe, the possibilities are endless: you could bottle sunlight, brew glory, or even unlock the hidden process for turning lead into gold. So, master chemist, what will you brew into your next bubbling concoction?

Examples of alchemy characters include:

- A hermit lives in the swamp, where he brews fish eyes, pickled fireflies, and muddy water into potent elixirs.
- A chemist travels the world in search of rare and exotic materials to create the elixir of eternal youth.
- Hidden in her secret lair, an assassin creates deadly poisons for her next kill.

Combat

Acid

You can dissolve a handheld item or an equivalent amount of material.

Describe: Sizzling chemical, acrid scent, bubbling green liquid, reducing something to frothy sludge.

Biohazard

You can expend a chemical that you did not create to tell a free Good Tale.

Chemicals: Black powder barrel, vial of acid, goo puddle, mushrooms, pool of monster blood, thick smoke.

Describe: Causing a chemical reaction, adding a spark to explosives, identifying a chemical's properties.

Reactions: Explode, catch something on fire, heal someone, blind, create a thick cloud, poison, create fireworks.

Flashbang

You can create an incredibly bright flash and loud bang in a zone. Creatures in the zone gain the condition “Blind and deaf” until the effects fade.

Describe: Bottled sunlight, sonic crystals, volatile chemicals, shattering a sun crystal, fireworks, a bright flare.

Healing Potion

You can spend reagents to create a healing potion. Anyone who drinks it heals as if they received 1 day of uninterrupted bed rest and medical attention. Then, they gain the condition “Hungry and tired.”

Describe: A bubbling red liquid, a sweet-tasting potion, medicinal salves, brewing the potion in your lab.

Reagents: Curative herbs, pure water, bottled sunlight, tree sap, crushed fruit seeds, enriched blood, sugar.

Inoculated

Gain the defense “Inoculated □.” Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale related to chemicals. Also, you're immune to poison, disease, and related conditions.

Conditions: Disease, poison, venom, parasites, infections, blood curse, forced transformations.

Panacea

You can spend reagents to create a panacea. Anyone who drinks it replaces all condition related to physical ailments with “Hungry and tired.” Physical ailments include things like poisons, diseases, and curses, not wounds like broken bones or severed arteries.

Describe: Distilled water so pure it washes away anything, drink an antitoxin, release cleansing vapors.

Conditions: Disease, poison, venom, parasites, infections, blood curse, forced transformations.

Reagents: Distilled water, bottled cloud, soap, clear parchment pulp, spring water, a new leaf, starlight.

Poisonous

You have a poison. Collaborate on its properties. Creatures you poison gain the condition “Poisoned” and slowly start to suffer symptoms.

Describe: Injecting poison, venomous fangs, a toxic vial, poison-tipped blow darts, venom-coated weapon.

Symptoms: Muscle weakness, nausea, eventual death, paralysis, hallucinations, paranoia, anti-coagulation.

Tranquilizer

You have a tranquilizer. Collaborate on its properties. Creatures you tranquilize gain the condition “Tranquilized” and slowly start to lose faculties.

Describe: Brewing the chemical in your lab, loading it into a delivery system, how their senses go numb.

Faculties: Consciousness, sight, sense of feeling, ability to move, ability to talk, a certain trait, emotions.

Exploration

Oil Slick

You can create an extremely slippery zone.

Describe: Spew oil from a hose, shatter a goo flask, secrete from oily glands, shatter an oil barrel.

Philosopher's Stone

You can turn certain materials into treasure. Collaborate on what materials you can transform.

Describe: Changing their chemical structure, reshaping reality, turning lead into gold, rebuilding atoms.

Thermite

You can spend reagents to create thermite. Anyone can spend about 1 minute setting it up to activate it. Once activated, it slowly and continuously burns a one-space tunnel through absolutely anything in whatever direction the user likes for several minutes. Thermite is absolutely unstoppable until it naturally burns out.

Describe: Billowing smoke, choking miasma, chemical fumes, bubbling chemicals, the acrid scent.

Reagents: Metal oxide, rust flakes, copper powder, gun powder, kindling, bottled flame, lamp oil, aluminum.

Adamanthesive

You can adhere two things together. After about 1 minute, they're permanently bound together. Collaborate on what dissolves the adhesive.

Describe: Alchemical glue, fusing molecules together, never-melting ice, stitching together the fabric of reality.

Dissolves By: Time, extreme heat or cold, a certain chemical, a magic phrase, pure distilled water, starlight.

Field Alchemy

You can harvest rare reagents. When you do, the GM tells you what trait the reagent contains. You can perform alchemy to transform the reagent into an elixir. Anyone who drinks it gains that trait as a temporary trait for several minutes.

Describe: Mixing chemicals in a lab, distilling essence, bubbling liquids, growing magic crystals, mad science.

Reagents: Moss, monster blood, powdered monster bone, venom, mushrooms, tree sap, magic crystals.

Mutagen

You can spend reagents to create a mutagen, which can cause any effect imaginable. Collaborate on your mutagen's effects. For every beneficial effect your mutagen has, the GM gives it a detrimental side-effect.

Describe: Brewing a bubbling potion, harnessing raw chaos, bottling a chain reaction, special lab equipment.

Effects: Reduce a building to acidic sludge, transform someone into a monster, cause a HUGE explosion.

Reagents: Unstable chemicals, powerful bases, caustic acids, radioactive metal flakes, mithril flakes.

Side-Effects: It's highly unstable, its radioactive, you mutate hideously, the fumes are toxic, it drains you.

Interaction

All-cohol

You can spend reagents to create all-cohol. Anyone who drinks so much as a sip instantly gains the condition “Drunk” and must act accordingly.

Describe: *Distilling the alcohol, the fermentation process, ruddy cheeks and slurred speech, how it tastes.*

Reagents: *Yeast, barley, pure alcohol, liquor, wheat, hops, grains, distilled water, grapes, ripe fruit.*

Drug

You can spend reagents to create an addictive drug. Collaborate on the drug’s properties.

Administered By: *Ingestion, inhaling via smoke, injection, inhalation through the nose, skin contact.*

Describe: *Growing special plants, brewing in your lab, wearing a gas mask and gloves, breaking bad.*

Properties: *Extreme elation, hyperactivity, absolute fearlessness, itchy hives, sleeplessness, the munchies.*

Reagents: *Herbs, roots, crushed leaves, powdered seeds, dissolved tree bark, lizard oil, swamp gas, fumes.*

Love Potion

You can spend reagents to create a love potion. Anyone who drinks it gains the condition “Enamored” and falls in love with the next person they see who is of a race and gender they normally find attractive.

Describe: *Light and fruity pink liquid, butterflies in their stomach, distilling the essence of desire.*

Reagents: *Butterfly wings, wine, strawberries, chocolate, hair from a virgin, sugar, sweat, spring water.*

Perfume

You can give something an incredibly pleasant or unpleasant scent for about 1 day. If it’s pleasant, creatures are inexplicably drawn to the scent and gain the desire to possess the scent’s source. If it’s repulsive, creature are disgusted by it and don’t want to be near it. This may have the opposite effect on creatures like undead and vermin that are attracted to disgusting smells.

Describe: *Heavenly scent, heady aroma, relaxed and pleasant feeling, euphoria, being light headed.*

Pheromones

Collaborate on a base emotion or instinct. You can emit pheromones in the air. Anyone who breathes in your pheromones gains the condition “Instinct-Driven” and experiences the selected emotion or instinct with increasing intensity.

Describe: *Musky scent, dilated pupils, mixing animal pheromones, working in your lab, altered biochemistry.*

Emotions and Instincts: *Survive, reproduce, find a pack, lust, fear, rage, hunger, envy, joy, sadness.*

Snake Oil Salesman

You have a 50% discount on all purchases, and a 50% markup on all sales.

Describe: *Flashing a warm smile, giving a sales pitch, haggling down the price, “But wait, there’s more!”*

Art

Arcane

There are some who seek to look beyond the veil to unravel the mysteries of the universe, unlocking ancient power that was never intended to fall into mortal hands. These masters of the arcane arts bend the universe to their will by breaking the laws of physics and inventing new laws at whim. They fling fireballs as easily as an archer might launch an arrow. They warp space and time to create portals that span across continents. They bind their enemies under powerful spells to leave them as helpless as newborn kittens. Do you dare to rip apart the fabric of spacetime to tinker with reality? Unfathomable power awaits those foolish or brave enough to try.

- An aged wizard spends his days poring over tomes to create a new spell.
- A war mage devastates his foes with orbs of raw energy and powerful hexes.
- A scientist researches bizarre magical anomalies hoping for the next big scientific breakthrough.

Combat

Barrier

You can create a wall (max 1) of 20 spaces or less that lasts a few minutes. Shape it however you want, but don't imprison anyone.

Describe: *Creating a wall of force, conjuring a wall of iron, dividing reality with an impenetrable barrier.*

Counterspell

Collaborate on how you charge this trait. At any point, spend the charge to make someone's Tale utterly fail.

Charge: *Write runes in your spellbook, enchant your staff with a null-spell, meditate in total silence.*

Describe: *Turning their power against them, activating a ward, triggering a contingency, casting an anti-spell.*

Dispel

You can destroy or suppress magic.

Describe: *Stealing magic, purging dark magic, teleporting energy, reshaping reality, siphoning magic.*

Evocation

You can create an explosion in a zone.

Describe: *Explosion of arcane energy, beam of pure energy, cone of force, burst of raw chaos all around you.*

Magic Resistance

Gain the defense "Magic Resistance □." Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale related to magic. You're then immune to that specific magic for several minutes.

Describe: *Conjuring a spell shield, your magical blood, have a resistant spirit, your spell-ward tattoos.*

Magic Missile

You don't need ammo to make ranged attacks, and your projectiles can turn corners to seek targets.

Describe: *Conjuring orbs of energy, shooting blue lights, firing laser beams, creating ammo from the ether.*

Metamagic

Collaborate on a resourced associated with this trait, and how you acquire that resource. You can have 3 of that resource at a time. Spend 1 resource to choose 1 effect for your action:

- It's much subtler or flashier.
- Approximately double the range.
- Approximately double the duration.
- Delay it from activating for a few minutes.

Describe: *Infusing your spells with mana, activating runes, shouting words of power, using crystals.*

Resources: *Meditate to gather mana, inscribe symbols in a spellbook, gather energy from magical leylines.*

Rewind

You can rewind someone, returning them to their status about 1 minute ago. Then, you can't use Rewind again for about 1 minute.

Describe: *Turning back time, jumping into a wormhole, reversing time's flow, casting chrono-magic.*

Status: *Inventory, wounds, location, treasure, temporary conditions, memories, physical condition.*

Warp Time

You can accelerate or decelerate someone for a few minutes. Accelerated creatures move about twice as fast as normal. Decelerated creatures move about half as fast as normal.

Describe: *Casting a chronomancy spell, reversing the flow of time, opening or closing the time stream.*

Exploration

Place of Power

Whenever you encounter a place of power, collaborate on what power you can draw from it.

Describe: *Pulling forth a geyser of pure energy, devouring raw magic, bending energy to your will.*

Places: *Ley line, magic anomaly, dragon graveyard, primeval grove, heart of the mountain, sun temple.*

Power: *Amplify a trait, gain a temporary trait, deal more damage there, heal more quickly, enhance a stat.*

Ritual

Whenever you want, tell the GM a powerful effect you want to achieve. The GM will tell you what you need to do to complete a ritual. If you fulfill the requirements, you achieve the desired effect.

Describe: *Performing an ancient ritual, reciting magic phrases, chanting around a glowing circle.*

Effects: *Eternally seal a creature in a prison, raise a sunken ship, make a magic effect permanent.*

Requirements: *Visit a special location, sacrifice treasure, chant with other wizards, obtain a special item.*

Teleport

You can teleport. Collaborate on what that entails.

Describe: *Vanishing in a puff, rearranging spacetime, opening a wormhole, stepping across dimensions.*

How it Works: *You must have been there before, requires line of sight, requires intense concentration.*

Wizard Eye

You can create an eye-sized item. You can see, hear, and sense through it whenever you want. It's permanent and immobile, or it flies wherever you want and lasts for about 1 hour.

Describe: *Conjuring a floating disembodied eye, enchanting a crystal ball, activating a magic drone.*

Alter Time

You can alter time. Collaborate on what you do.

Alter Time: *Undo an event, slow down time in an area, travel to the far future or distant past, restore youth.*

Describe: *Changing the flow of times, casting powerful chrono-magic, stepping out of the time stream.*

Cantrips

You can perform minor magic tricks. You can do virtually anything with these tricks so long as the effect is comparatively weak.

Describe: *Performing sleight of hand, creating a minor illusion, dazzling with showy magic, casting rote spells.*

Tricks: *Inscribe a permanent glowing rune, make a handheld item vanish or appear, light candles in a room.*

Detect Magic

You can experience magic with your normal senses.

Describe: *Seeing swirls of magic, how magic sounds, the stench of necromancy, the glow of divine magic.*

Illusion

You can create a convincing illusion that lasts for several hours.

Describe: *Bending light and shadow, creating a faerie illusion, deceiving their minds, casting twilight magic.*

Invisibility

You can touch something to turn it invisible for several hours. Collaborate on what causes the invisibility to flicker, fade, and end.

Describe: *Bending light and shadow, creating a faerie illusion, deceiving their minds, casting twilight magic.*

Interaction

Apprentice

You can designate 1 of your minions (max 1) as your apprentice. Their disposition toward you significantly improves and the end of their contract becomes “in exchange for guidance and hands-on training.” When you gain XP, your apprentice gains that much XP as well.

Describe: *Leading by example, explaining the intricacies of your craft, testing their skills, bonding with them.*

Familiar

Create a minion with half of your XP and the contract “_____ will loyally serve as your lab assistant, pet, and familiar in exchange for basic necessities.” If lost, collaborate on how you replace it.

Describe: *Summoning a familiar, growing it from a drop of your blood, enchanting an animal to serve you.*

Familiars: *Imp, cat, frog, snake, mouse, dog, monkey, small robot, raven, owl, drakeling, mana dragon.*

Flawless Logic

You are far more persuasive with logic, reasoning, and evidence. You can sway others in situations when logic would normally fall on deaf ears. Collaborate on how your logical arguments exceed normal limitations.

Describe: *Listing the facts, reaching a logical conclusion, using your sharp mind, outwitting someone.*

Gentleman and a Scholar

When you show someone respect, they will match the amount of respect you show them until you show them disrespect.

Describe: *Wearing a monocle, bowing graciously, giving a firm handshake, showing due respect.*

Just an Old Man with a Walking Stick

You can make someone grossly underestimate you until they see proof to the contrary.

Describe: *Leaning heavily on your cane, acting awkward and socially inept, acting naive and harmless.*

Mutual Edification

When you honestly reveal information to someone or answer one of their questions, they must share equally important information or answer an equally sensitive question.

Describe: *Proposing an exchange, tricking them into talking, showing scholarly respect, educating each other.*

Pedantic

You can make people listening to you gain the condition “Bored and Sleepy.”

Describe: *Talking in one long incredibly unbroken sentence, your monotone voice, droning on and on.*

Topics: *Spore varieties, extended noble lineage, Agazar’s Third Law of Arcano-Kinetics, ancient texts.*

Polyglot

Collaborate on which additional languages you know.

Describe: *How you learned another language, the language’s accent, speaking a sentence in the language.*

Art

Artifice

Soldiers often say that the sword doesn’t make the man, arguing that skill at arms is more important than strength of steel. Artificers roll their eyes at that statement—or at least, they would if they weren’t too busy carving magic runes into a indestructible sword. Or setting enchanted rubies into a suit of armor that renders the wearer immune to fire. Or placing gears into a steam-powered bull large enough to level a fortress. Those who doubt the power of craftsmanship have clearly never experienced the beauty of creation. Truly, a single act of creation can change the world. How will you leave your mark? Will you build something that world has never before seen? Will you forge a sword capable of slaying dragons? Will you construct thick city walls to protect those you love? Fire up the forges, young artisan, and prove to the gods you, too, have mastered the art of creation!

- A legendary blacksmith carves ancient runes into weapons, imbuing them with powerful magic.
- After losing his arm to a dragon, a warrior builds a clockwork arm for himself and sets out to even the score.
- A mad scientist experiments with bizarre gadgets and gizmos, pushing the limits of science and morality.

Combat

Armor Plating

Defenses you gain from armor and shields each grant 1 additional box.

Describe: Steam-powered absorption plates, glowing symbols, thick chainmail, dragon-scale armor plating.

Arsenal

Draw a symbol next to 3 of your inventory slots. Items you place in these slots vanish from reality (but still occupy slots). No one else can access these items. Whenever you want, you can call any of these items to your person, or make them vanish again.

Describe: A sword appearing in your hand, summoning your hammer from the heavens, morphin' time.

Deflect

At any point, you can break one of your weapons, shields, or armor worth at least 1 treasure to completely avoid a Bad Tale related to being attacked.

Describe: Sparks flying when blades clash, your ablative armor, taking the hit with your shield.

Dismantle

You can destroy a personal item, such as a weapon or suit of armor.

Describe: Striking a structural weak point, breaking it in half, matching its vibration frequencies.

Enchant

You can give a touched item 1 item trait (max 3) as a temporary trait for several hours.

Describe: Etching runes on its surface, treating it with magic oils, altering its molecular lattice structure.

War Machine

You can spend materials to create a war machine with half your XP. It's inert without a pilot. The pilot uses the machine's attributes instead of their own.

Describe: Steam-powered gears, shining metal, smoke billowing from a furnace, blinking lights, a console.

Machines: Power armor, steam-powered catapult, submarine, elemental cannon, clockwork steed, spider tank.

Materials: Scrap metal, saw blades, shields and armor plating, rubber tubes, copper wires, gears, gizmos.

Warhead

You can spend materials to create a warhead. Once activated, it gathers power for about 1 minute and then explodes, causing massive damage out to a far distance. Only one attempt can be made to disarm it.

Describe: Bundle of explosives, glowing spell-bomb, antimatter emitter, napalm tank, portable black hole.

Gathers Power: Ominous humming that grows louder, burning fuse, running hourglass, deep rumbling.

Materials: Oil, high explosives, firing pins, wire, metal casing, unstable chemicals, magic runes, gunpowder.

Exploration

Pocket Plane

You have an extradimensional space, which is a miniature universe. Collaborate on its properties. On your turn, you can open or close a portal to it.

Describe: Opening a door in the air, a floating island in space, a featureless room, an empty white nothing.

Properties: Size, temperature, if there's fresh air, appearance, dangers, flaws, how large the portal is.

Prosthesis

You can create a prosthesis and attach it to someone. Prostheses compensate for physical disabilities and can remove permanent conditions, such as amputations.

Describe: Attaching it through gruesome surgery, building it in a workshop, collaborating with the recipient.

Prostheses: Steam-powered arm, goggle eyepatch, golem leg, metal skin plates, clockwork heart.

Tool for the Job

You can instantly create an item, which persists as long as it's in your presence. You have 1 rune to spend as if it's treasure to buy item traits for these conjured items. You can sacrifice 1 treasure to give this trait +1 rune. Conjured items refund their runes when they expire.

Describe: Conjuring a tool out of nothing, creating a sword out of sunlight, making a shield out of ice.

Items: Sword, shield, suit of armor, candle, rope, chalk, water skin, hammer, nails, crowbar, pouch, hand drill.

X-Ray Vision

You can see through materials. Collaborate on what material you can't see through.

Can't See Through: Metal, wood, magic, stone, organic matter, smooth surfaces, things that are green.

Describe: Donning X-ray goggles, emitting X-ray pulses, peering through a magic gem, your eyes changing color.

Forge

You can spend materials to create a magic item, or improve an existing item. Collaborate on the item's properties. Stronger materials create more powerful items.

Describe: Hammering metal at a forge, performing the magic item naming ritual, imbuing an item with magic.

Materials: Iron, steel, mithril, metal from a meteorite, glowing crystals, dragon scales, blood oak, demon hide.

Grappling Hook

You can pull yourself to a far object, or pull it to you (whichever is more logical). If you or your target is falling, you can use this instantly.

Describe: Launching a grappling hook, throwing a tether, using a web-shooter, firing a magnet gun.

Identify

When you examine a magic item, the GM must tell you all of its properties. Then, collaborate on 1 additional property that you discover or unlock.

Describe: Reading an item's aura, recalling its history, noticing tiny details that tell a deeper story.

Questions: How is this blade connected to demons? What happens when this shield touches sunlight?

Ingenuity

Your ability to fix, build, and deconstruct exceeds normal limits. Collaborate on what you're capable of doing.

Describe: Tinkering with gears, your expert craftsmanship, intuitively understanding how it works.

Mobile Fortress

You can spend materials to make a structure mobile. Collaborate on how it moves.

Describe: Steering the ship, activating a gravity reverser, fueling the steam engine, triggering magic runes.

Mobility: Floats on water, hovers a few inches off the ground, flies, rolls, teleports to a visible spot at dawn.

Interaction

A Thing of Beauty

You can make someone obsessed with a visible item worth at least 1 treasure. They gain an overwhelming desire to possess it, or they focus on it while ignoring their surroundings.

Describe: *Swinging a hypnotic pocket watch, showing a glittering gemstone, showing how the gears work.*

BEHOLD!

You can make everyone believe that an item does something specific, even if it doesn't. They cease to believe if they closely inspect the item.

Describe: *Using words too big for anyone to understand, grandiose threats, cackling madly.*

Buyer's Market

In addition to what the GM decides is available at every market, shop, or fence you encounter, you can decide 1 additional thing that's in stock.

Describe: *Having a keen eye, knowing the best markets, tracking down merchants, sending order requests.*

Communicator

You can spend materials to create a communicator. Creatures with one of your communicator can communicate with each another.

Describe: *Handheld device, resonating sonic crystals, bottled air elementals, gizmos linked by ethereal threads.*

Crazy Enough to Work

When you explain a plan that is even theoretically possible, it becomes perfectly feasible. The GM can't cite logic, physics, or difficulty as reasons to decrease your rolls to enact the plan. Also, you're bolstered to enact your plan.

Describe: *Cackling madly, created absurdly complicated blueprints, using technobabble, showing your math.*

Don't Push that Button!

If you warn somebody not to do something harmless and they do it anyway, tell a free Good Tale about how they made a terrible mistake.

Describe: *Using big words to confuse them, implying terrible consequences, acting like you know a secret.*

It's Dangerous to Go Alone, Take This

When you give someone a new or improved item, they're bolstered to use that item.

Describe: *Use small words to explain how it works, giving the right tool at the right moment, enchanting it.*

Spark

You can give an item sentience. Collaborate on its personality, and if it can move and communicate. It gains XP equal to half your total XP. Its disposition toward you significantly improves.

Describe: *Inscribing a mind rune, enchanting it, giving it a True Name, igniting it with the life spark.*

Art

Bardic Lore

Truly, the pen is mightier than the sword. Just think of how many people have been sent to their deaths at the stroke of a pen, how many marriages have crumbled because of a romantic poem, and how many plans have been ruined due to a clever lie. Those who pursue the subtle arts of bardic lore understand the true value of people, wielding inspiration like a blade and intrigue like a shield. With a pen in your hand, a sword on your belt, and a song (or perhaps a maiden) on your lips, how will you write your own legend?

- A witty jester entertains the king with his jokes, all while subtly influencing the wealthy elite.
- A bright-eyed bard travels the land, learning new legends and singing songs of lost heroes.
- With his rapier and his feathered cap, a dashing swashbuckler is a danger to seedy criminals and lovelorn maidens... but for very different reasons.

Combat

Boost Morale

When you rest for the night, you can bolster each of your present allies to do something during the next day. Decide immediately what they're bolstered to do.

Describe: Exaggerating the day's adventures, cracking jokes, playing tunes, telling a story, keeping spirits high.

Duel

You can challenge someone to a duel. Others can't interfere with your duel until one of you wins the duel.

Describe: Telling them to prepare to die, challenging them, clashing swords and grinning at each other.

Feint

You can make someone hesitate, flinch, or suffer a moment of doubt.

Describe: Surprising them with impressive swordplay, insulting their mother, upstaging them, mocking them.

Flair for the Dramatic

Whenever things take a turn for the worse and you're in serious danger, you're bolstered.

Describe: Spitting out blood and laughing, showing your fighting spirit, improvising, a last-ditch effort.

Serious Danger: Some of your allies have been defeated, you're falling to your doom, you're surrounded.

Inspire

You can bolster an ally to fight.

Describe: Giving a riveting speech, encouraging others, performing, singing a tune, playing an instrument.

Raise Spirits

Alcoholic drinks heal you as if they're healing potions (refer to the Alchemy theme), except that they give you the condition "Drunk" instead of "Hungry and tired."

Describe: Drinking to dull the pain, celebrating with a cold one, chugging, being a typical adventurer.

Drinks: A bottle of wine, a massive stein of ale, a flask of liquor, a line of shots, a few mixed drinks.

Steal the Spotlight

Collaborate on how you charge this trait. Spend the charge to steal the GM's Bad Tale and turn it into a Good Tale.

Charge: Do something unnecessarily risky, gain a crowd's attention, steal all the credit, gain a reputation.

Describe: Shouting over them, doing something dramatic, countering them in a spectacular display.

Swashbuckler

Gain the defense "Swashbuckler ☐☐." Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale while taking unnecessary risks.

Describe: Flair and panache, leaping head-first into danger, your devil-may-care attitude, laughing.

Unnecessary Risks: Swinging over a lava pit, fighting on a ledge, insulting a deity, trying to ride a dragon.

Exploration

Dramatic Entry

When you make a dramatic, flashy, or dangerous entrance you're bolstered to do anything. If a lot of people watched your entrance, you're bolstered again.

Describe: Swinging in on a rope, walking out of an explosion, riding in on a unicorn, kicking down the doors.

Jack-of-All-Trades

You can gain any trait as a temporary trait (max 1). Collaborate on how that trait is flawed.

Describe: Pulling an ace out of your sleeve, getting beginner's luck, improvising, seeing your training pay off.

Flaws: It's imprecise and messy, it's exhausting, it's less potent, you need a special tool, it's loud and obvious.

Story Teller

While investigating something, you can announce that you heard an interesting story about it. Everyone at the gaming table quickly decides how much time they want to devote to an interlude (refer to Chapter 6). GM an interlude. Whatever happens in the interlude is what actually happened with whatever you were investigating.

Describe: Telling a story around a campfire, recalling a local legend, telling your friends a tale at a tavern.

According to Legend

When you start a quest or enter a new region, tell the GM that according to legend, something powerful exists in the area. The GM will give you a cryptic clue about where to find it. If you find the source of the clue, you locate the legendary power.

Clue: Where two trees intertwine, the deepest and darkest part of the cave, surrounded by a thousand corpses.

Describe: Sharing a story you heard, mentioning a rumor, putting together clues from history books.

Power: Lost treasure, magic shrine, portal to another world, underground dungeon, unhatched dragon eggs.

Comedy and Tragedy

Show your gaming group a "Comedy and Tragedy" token. At any point, give it to the GM to tell a free Good Tale; take it from the GM to have the GM tell a free Bad Tale. Start each session with the token in your possession.

Describe: How your fortune turns, an exciting plot twist, a shift in tone, poetic justice, how fate intervenes.

Interaction

A Night to Forget

Whenever you engage in drunken revelry, you can announce it's a night to forget. The GM tells you where you wake up and gives you 1 condition. Write on your character sheet that you have 1 fuzzy memory (max 5). Cross off a fuzzy memory to suddenly remember what you did that night, and how your actions that night somehow benefit your current situation.

Describe: *Buying drinks for everyone, going bar hopping, visiting the brothel, throwing a wild party.*

Benefits: *You've been here before, you seduced the evil villain, there's a magic item in your pocket.*

Cameo

When you earn an NPC's respect and good will, write their name on your character sheet. Cross off their name to have them show up.

Describe: *Bumping into them randomly, them saving you in the nick of time, spotting them in a crowd.*

Fame and Infamy

Collaborate on a reputation for yourself (it doesn't have to be true). Whenever you like, others know your reputation, believe at least part of it, and act accordingly.

Describe: *Showing a signature scar or tattoo, giving your full name, saying "Don't you know who I am?"*

Reputations: *Assassin who never fails, magically cursed, the land's greatest duelist, a legend in the bedroom.*

First Impressions

When you first meet someone, the GM must answer 1 question about them.

Describe: *Reading their body language, going with your instincts, getting a general vibe, noticing a detail.*

Honeyed Words

You are far more charming and convincing. You can sweet-talk others to do things that they would normally refuse. Collaborate on how your charm exceed normal limitations.

Describe: *Giving an impassioned speech, calling in a favor, subtly manipulating someone, being charming.*

Rumors

At any point, you can have the GM tell you 2 facts and 1 lie about whatever you're investigating.

Describe: *Overhearing gossip, trading for information, remembering rumors you heard while in town.*

Small World

You can recognize an NPC as an old acquaintance. Explain how you know each other and how they feel about you.

Describe: *Recognizing your old stomping grounds, looking up an address, hearing so-and-so is in town.*

Old Acquaintances: *Drinking buddy, cousin, former adventuring partner, old flame, business partner.*

Wingman

When you enter someone's good graces, bolster an ally to socialize with that person.

Describe: *Chatting up your friend, telling them what to say, lightening the mood, making introductions.*

Villainous Monologue

You can make someone start rambling about whatever's important to them until they reveal too much.

Describe: *Letting them think they've won, buying them a drink, shouting "You'll never get away with this!"*

Art

Beast

Survival of the fittest: in the wilderness, this is the one and only law that matters. There are no morals, no civilized values — only the strong and the dead, the predators and the prey. The wilderness is the ultimate crucible, forging beasts over millions of years into perfect killing machines. Their claws are sharper than swords; their scales are thicker than plate armor. What warriors spend decades training to master, predators already know by instinct. Their advanced adaptations — gills, wings, and enhanced senses — ensure that no prey ever escape their constant hunger. You are the product of countless generations, a finely-honed creature crafted by mother nature herself to do one thing: survive. It is now your turn to survive the trial of blood and fang. Will you be the hunter, or the hunted?

- Given sentience by a druid, an intelligent wolf hunts the human trappers who butchered his pack.
- A shaman draws power from her spirit animal, an ethereal bear that has protected her bloodline for generations.
- A naga, a terrifying hybrid of man and serpent, raids coastal fishing villages to secure bloody sacrifices for his shark-toothed god.

Combat

Envelop

You can put a smaller creature inside of you. They can't escape until you're defeated or you let them, and they gain the condition "Crushed" or "Digested" (your choice) while inside of you. However, physical conditions that they inflict on you are much worse than normal.

***Describe:** Swallowing someone whole, wrapping with tentacles, constricting them with your snake-body.*

Fight or Flight

Collaborate on what constitutes being close to death. When you're close to death, increase all rolls to fight or flee (choose one) until you're safe.

***Describe:** Acting like a cornered beast, running on instinct, becoming feral, doing whatever it takes.*

Fling

You can fling a creature that's smaller or lighter than you a close distance.

***Describe:** Knocking them aside with horns, slamming into them, biting them and flinging them into the air.*

Gorgon's Gaze

You can set someone (max 1) under your gaze. While under your gaze, they move half as fast as normal and have the condition "Turning to Stone."

***Describe:** Your serpentine eyes, freezing them with your baleful gaze, poisoning their mind and muscles.*

Rend

You can attack someone to give them the condition "Bleeding Out."

***Describe:** Going for the jugular, ripping their flesh to shreds, anti-coagulant venom, disemboweling them.*

Trample

You can charge more or less in a straight line, moving through other creature's spaces. Melee attack each creature you move through.

***Describe:** Crushing them underfoot, bull rushing past them, turning ghostly and ripping through their souls.*

Tooth and Nail

Give your body 5 item traits. These don't affect the cost of future item traits for your body.

***Describe:** Glossy chitin armor, thick scales, serrated teeth, curved talons, a tail with a barbed stinger.*

Exploration

Burrow

You can slowly burrow through the earth. If you like, leave behind a 1-space tunnel.

***Describe:** Digging with heavy claws, slithering through soil like a worm, pushing apart rock with your mass.*

Cheetah's Swiftess

Collaborate on how you're much faster than normal, and how quickly traveling like this exhausts you.

***Describe:** Sprinting at top speed, running in leaps and bounds, charging across the open plains.*

Enhanced Senses

Collaborate on an enhanced natural sense that you have.

***Describe:** Studying others with slitted cat-eyes, sniffing the air or the ground, your ears perking up suddenly.*

***Senses:** Bat-like echolocation, wolf-like sense of smell, cat-like night vision, rabbit-like sense of hearing.*

Kaiju

Collaborate on how you're bigger or smaller than normal.

***Describe:** Tiny frame, high-pitched voice, massive size, shaking the earth with each step, booming voice.*

Spin Web

You can produce sticky or non-sticky web strands that are stronger than steel chains. If sticky, they powerfully stick to everything other than you that they touch.

***Describe:** Spinning a deadly web, dangling strands from the ceiling, platinum strands that glimmer faintly.*

Swarm

You can disperse into a swarm or reconstitute around one of your component pieces. At the GM's discretion, losing parts of your swarm may harm you.

***Describe:** Falling apart, vanishing in a cloud of creatures, scattering into holes and cracks, dispersing.*

***Swarm of:** Rats, bats, snakes, ants, bugs, leeches and worms, flies, motes of light, woodland creatures, birds.*

Wall Climbing

You can adhere to any solid surface, including ceilings.

***Describe:** Holding on with powerful claws, adhering with sticky feet, attaching with webbing or sticky goo.*

Interaction

Awaken Beast

You can give an animal human-like intelligence and the ability to speak. Collaborate on its personality. Its disposition toward you significantly improves.

Describe: *Unlocking its mind, giving it a fragment of your consciousness, accelerating its evolution.*

Alpha

When you defeat a beast, you can force it to become your minion with the contract, “_____ will loyally serve you in exchange for indulging its instincts.”

Describe: *Holding your teeth to their neck, staring them down, integrating them to your pack, a battle of will.*

Beast Master

You can communicate with animals.

Describe: *Growling and grunting, reading each other's minds, understanding the animal's chittering as words.*

Call of the Wild

You can cause all animals in the region to follow a basic instinct of your choice.

Describe: *Unleashing a primal roar, provoking their instinct, starting a stampede, releasing pheromones.*

Instinct: *Stampede, gather around a certain location, calm down, flee the area, protect this territory.*

Gift of the Pack

You can give all of your far allies one of your traits (max 1) as a temporary trait for as long as they're in your presence.

Describe: *Leading your pack, spreading a hive mentality, having monkey see monkey do, moving as one.*

Hive Mind

Collaborate on which creatures are in your hive mind. Creatures in a hive mind share consciousness; when one learns something, everyone else in the hive learns it as well.

Describe: *Sharing your consciousness, ruling as the hive queen/king, forming a primal bond.*

Play Possum

You can look convincingly dead for as long as you like.

Describe: *Going limp, your skin taking on a ghastly hue, exaggerating your wounds, slowing your heartbeat.*

Art

Command

Who is it the most powerful person alive? Is it the mighty swordsman who can defeat any other foe in single combat? Is it the clever wizard who has mastered thousands of spells? Is it the crafty rogue who can go anywhere unnoticed? No—the most powerful man alive is whoever has the biggest army. Commanders and kings understand that power doesn't lie in trivial things like swordplay or magic. It lies in people. It lies in loyalty. It lies in the ability to issue a single command and watch as your army burns your enemy's kingdom to the ground. You can wield such power. By mastering diplomacy and statecraft, you can amass an army like the world has never seen. Rally an army to your side, lord commander, and lead your people to war!

- A necromancer hides within a catacomb, biding his time while he amasses an unstoppable skeletal army.
- With a riotous crowd of peasants behind him, a fiery-eyed visionary leads a revolt against an oppressive regime.
- A decorated commander oversees the fortification and defense of an invaluable fortress.

Combat

Abandon All Hope

When you fight enemies who have seen warnings of your power or ferocity, gain 1-3 Good Tales to show them why they should have heeded your warnings.

1 - Ominous (war drums in the distance)

2 - Obvious (you decapitate their emissary)

3 - Horrific (a pile of corpses with your flag at the top)

Describe: *Crushing their hope, spreading fear and menace, emboldening your troops while terrifying theirs.*

Warnings: *Roar in the distance, war drums, haka dance, pile of corpses, decapitated heads on pikes.*

Banner

You can baptize an item worth at least 1 treasure in the blood of worthy foes (literally or metaphorically). The item becomes your banner (max 1). You and allies each gain the defense “Under a Banner □.” Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale related to battle while the banner is visible. If it’s lost or destroyed, you and allies gain the condition “Demoralized” until it’s replaced. Banners are inherently flashy and attract enemies’ attention.

Banner: *Flag, coat of arms, shield with an emblazoned symbol, glowing arcane symbol, skull on a pike.*

Describe: *Waving a banner, getting inspiration from a greater cause, holding it above the battlefield.*

Give Order

You can give your ally an order and your unspent Good Tale. They resolve the Good Tale instead of you, but only if they use the Good Tale to follow your order.

Describe: *Shouting a command, warning someone of incoming danger, call for a flanking maneuver.*

Shake it Off

You can make someone ignore all conditions that they can logically ignore for about 1 hour. Then, draw a symbol next to those conditions. Those conditions can’t be affected by your Shake it Off again.

Describe: *Inspiring them to press on, yelling at them until they stand back up, getting their adrenaline going.*

Victory Rush

When you win a fight or overcome a challenge, bolster yourself or an ally to do something of your choice.

Describe: *Feeling alive, reveling in your triumphs, standing over your fallen foes, sharing in glory.*

War Cry

When you enter combat, bolster one of your allies to fight.

Describe: *Giving a riveting speech, throwing back your head and giving a war cry, shouting “CHARGE!”*

Exploration

Mount

You can gain a minion (max 1) with half of your XP and the contract “_____ will loyally serve as your mount in exchange for basic necessities.”

Describe: *Building a mount, calling it from the ether, ordering one from your organization, taming a beast.*

Mounts: *Horse, unicorn, hippogriff, griffon, manticore, dragon, boar, shark, bear, wolf, lizard, wyvern, spider.*

Reinforce

You can spend resources to fortify a location beyond what is normally possible. Collaborate on what fortifications you can provide, and how you achieve them.

Defenses: *Walls withstand siege attacks, there’s an anti-magic field, your moat attracts magic beasts.*

Describe: *Buttressing the structure, casting protective wards, consecrating the land, infusing it with magic.*

Stronghold

You own a heavily defensible, self-sufficient stronghold. Collaborate on the stronghold’s properties. If you like, it has staff dedicated to upkeep. They’re your minions with the contract “_____ will maintain your stronghold in exchange for safely living there.”

Describe: *Overseeing your staff and subjects, reinforcing walls, securing territory, negotiating with neighbors.*

Strongholds: *Wizard tower, keep, fortress, cave system, battleship, tree-top fortress, extradimensional castle.*

Fortified

Gain the defense “Fortified □□□.” Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale while in a fortified location you control. The maximum number of boxes you can mark depends on your fortifications:

□ - Light fortifications (boarded cabin, bottleneck)

□□ - Strong fortifications (keep, cave)

□□□ - Heavy fortifications (castle, fortress)

Describe: *Invading neighboring territory, claiming land for yourself, taking the spoils of war, stealing resources.*

Just as Planned

You can write down an event that’s out of your control. Seal it in a document with a code name on it and give it (max 5) to the GM. When the event happens, the GM opens the document and reads it. If the GM agrees that you predicted the event, tell as many Good Tales as you like until the odds are significantly in your favor.

Describe: *Creating a master plan, building contingencies, creating Plan B, preparing for the future.*

Interaction

Basic Training

You can train your minions to give each 1 XP (max 5 XP per minion).

***Describe:** Commanding your minions, inspiring them with your presence, leading by example, training them.*

Call in the Cavalry

You can designate some of your minions as cavalry and send them off to wait and prepare. You can have your cavalry arrive at your location, just in time.

***Describe:** Blowing a war horn, giving a signal, seeing them over your enemy's shoulder, shouting "NOW!"*

Companion

Gain a minion (max 1) with half your XP and the contract "_____ will loyally serve you in exchange for being treated like a friend or trusted servant."

***Describe:** Keeping a squire, teaching an apprentice, keeping a mercenary on retainer, traveling with a friend.*

Draft

When you acquire minions, you can acquire twice as many as normal.

***Describe:** Promising gold and glory, inspiring others to action, leveraging your social connections, paying well.*

Fealty

When you achieve glory, minions who shared in your rewards replace the second half of their contracts with "in exchange for nothing."

***Describe:** Appealing to their patriotism, building loyalty, forging bonds of honor, ruling with an iron fist.*

Initiation Vows

Collaborate on a vow. All of your minions follow that vow, no matter the cost.

***Describe:** Creating a strong culture, forcing them to swear an oath, binding them by blood.*

***Vows:** Never reveal secrets, uphold honor, defend the leader at all costs, fulfill a deity's dogma, stay hidden.*

Marshal Forces

Collaborate on a special type of minion that you can create beyond what is normally possible, and their contracts. Their disposition toward you is significantly improved.

***Describe:** Turning corpses into zombies, building robots from scrap, laying eggs that hatch into spawn.*

Art

Dragon

There is no creature more legendary, more powerful, more feared, more awe-inspiring than the dragon. These engines of destruction carve paths of terror through the land, annihilating whole armies and burning the countryside. Mortals who dare oppose dragons are reduced to cinders, while those with the wisdom to offer dragons tribute can bask in their draconic patron's glory. Spread your wings and set the sky aflame, mighty dragon! Prove to the world that your power is unmatched!

- An ancient dragon jealously guards a massive pile of gold deep within his mountain home.
- After drinking the blood of a dragon, a young adventurer discovers he has gained the ability to breathe fire.
- A line of humans have glimmering green scales and supernatural strength. According to legend, their bloodline was sired by a dragon who took the form of a man.

Combat

A Dragon Never Forgets

After someone wrongs you and gets away with it, write their name on your character sheet. Cross off a name to tell a free Good Tale to get revenge.

Describe: *Brooding in your lair, plotting vicious revenge, monologuing, hatred burning in your eyes.*

Carnage

Physical conditions you inflict are much worse than normal. Collaborate on what that means.

Describe: *Tearing off an arm, burning their skin, breaking a bone, plucking out an eye, ripping skin to shreds.*

Dragon's Breath

Collaborate on how you charge this trait. Spend the charge to attack all combatants, excluding you.

Describe: *Breathing fire, causing an avalanche, roaring so loud their ears bleed, blasting air with your wings.*

Like Crushing Insects

Instead of rolling to overcome a risk on your turn, you can gain a free Good Tale to defeat 10 or fewer minions in whatever horrific fashion you please.

Describe: *Crushing them underfoot, ripping out their guts, reducing them to ash, flinging them away.*

Scales Like Tenfold Shields

Gain the defense "Scales Like Tenfold Shields □." Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale from a weapon. When you do, that weapon shatters, breaks, or is otherwise rendered temporarily unusable.

Describe: *A sword shattering on your hide, knocking away a hammer, igniting a bow in dragonfire.*

Stoke the Furnace

You can gather power. When you tell a Good Tale, you can release all of your gathered power to make your Tale more powerful. Collaborate on what that means.

Describe: *Fire burning in your throat, glowing eyes, the ground shakes, electricity sparks around you.*

Power: *An explosion is bigger, break down a wall instead of a door, shoot a spell much farther than normal.*

Exploration

Gem-Encrusted Hide

You can destroy a magic item to make it permanently part of you, as if you are now the magic item. When you're slain, the items (or at least the parts necessary to reforge them) can be recovered from your corpse.

Describe: *Magic coursing through your veins, feeding on raw energy, storing treasure inside of your body.*

Lair

When you sleep in a place that you control, you can designate it as your lair. Gain the defense "Lair □□." Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale while in your lair. Alternatively, mark a box to increase a roll related to your lair.

Describe: *Shaping the world in your dreams, imposing your will on the terrain, attracting wildlife like you.*

Lairs: *Volcano filled with magma pools, sub-zero glacier, humid jungle, fetid swamp, maze-like tunnels.*

My Precious

You know the exact location of items worth at least 1 treasure that you've touched before. Also, the GM must answer honestly whenever you ask how much something is worth.

Describe: *Feeling the pull of gold in your blood, your gold-colored eyes, covetously hoarding treasures.*

Smokescreen

You can fill all far spaces with thick, obscuring smoke or fog.

Describe: *Stoking the flames, breathing smoke and ash, boiling water into steam with your fire breath.*

Interaction

Pride

Gain the defense “Pride ☐.” Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale related to damaged reputation or social status. Then, gain a free Good Tale to improve your reputation or social status.

Describe: Looking down at your inferiors, your regal bearing, building a fearsome reputation.

Serve or DIE!

Whenever you torture or kill one of your minions, your other minions who watched you change the end of their contract to “in exchange for not being tortured or killed.”

Describe: Devouring a weak link, crushing them like an ant, finding their lack of loyalty disturbing.

Terrifying Glory

You can make everyone stop what they’re doing and give you their undivided attention, even if for just a few moments.

Describe: Bellowing a command, doing something terrifying, showcasing your incredible grandeur.

Tribute

After you showcase your incredible power, name a person or organization who knows what you did. They freely offer you a tribute.

Describe: Warning that they’re next if they don’t pay you, terrifying peasants, showcasing your grandeur.

Tributes: A seat of honor at a major event, treasure, minions, land, a promise not to enter your territory.

You Are All Beneath Me

Whenever you want, unimportant NPCs instinctively treat you like royalty, showing you incredible respect or terror.

Describe: Looking down at them, intimidating them with your power, threatening their pathetic lives.

Art

Elements

Is there any force in the world more powerful than the primal elements? Earthen mountains reach into the clouds, humbling even the tallest manmade tower. Air creates wind-tossed thunderstorms that steal the warmth from the living. Water is the origin and sustainer of all life, so much so that it flows through our veins. Fire consumes all, bringing complete destruction to anything it touches. Look inside yourself, brave elemental. Which elements rage within your soul?

- A frost witch lives in solitude in her ice castle and freezes any who dare approach.
- Born of the earth itself, a tough explorer delves into the earth’s deepest caves for exotic gems.
- A raging storm gains sentience, coalescing into human form with piercing blue eyes and cloud-white skin.

Combat

Affinity

Collaborate on a threat you're completely immune to, and another threat that you're especially vulnerable to.

Describe: Immunity to flames but weakness to frost, immunity to magic but weakness to physical harm.

Blaze

You can create a damaging zone for several minutes.

Describe: Setting the ground ablaze, growing razor-sharp ice shards, generating a lightning field.

Cataclysm

You can start a natural disaster. Once started, the disaster is out of your control (but you might be able to influence it).

Cataclysms: Tornado, hurricane, earthquake, blizzard, heat wave, dust storm, thunder storm, gale force winds.

Describe: Unleashing raw elemental power, shattering nature's balance, turning your emotions into magic.

Frostbite

You can freeze less than 1 space of material in ice.

Describe: Locking them in ice, freezing their blood, covering them with frost, surrounding them in earth.

Immolate

You can give something the condition "On Fire."

Describe: Igniting their clothes, setting their soul ablaze, surrounding them in blue fire, elemental havoc.

Electrocute

You can paralyze someone for a second or two.

Describe: Electricity arcing from person to person, throwing a bolt of lightning like a javelin.

Path of Fire

You can leave behind a trail of harmful elemental fury in all spaces that you vacate. The trail lasts a few minutes.

Describe: Leaving fire in your wake, creating a deadly static field, raising earth spikes, creating frost shards.

Exploration

Shape Element

Collaborate on an element. You can create 1 space of that element, or manipulate several spaces of that element.

Describe: Practicing element-bending, extending your hand and commanding the elements to respond.

Terraform

You can reshape the landscape. The terrain changes over the course of days or weeks (GM's choice).

Describe: Growing a mountain, diverting a river, burrowing a cave, opening a chasm, flooding lowlands.

Tremors

You can sense the movements of things touching the earth within about 1 hour's travel in all direction. Also, you can put your ear to the ground to hear the vibrations of very distant things.

Describe: Feeling the earth tremble beneath your feet, sensing subtle vibrations, hearing the earth rumbling.

Water Breathing

You can breathe water and ignore extreme pressures associated with deep water.

Describe: Growing gills, infusing your body with primal water, creating an air bubble around your head.

Control Weather

You can change the weather to anything that the region could reasonably experience this time of year. The weather changes in a few minutes or hours (GM's choice).

Describe: Changing the air pressure, creating moisture, bringing in a cold front, shaping the clouds.

Clutch of Earth

You can change the effects of gravity in the area.

Describe: Changing magnetic fields, altering earth's density, enhancing the pull of gravity.

Earth Walk

You can move through stone, metal, and earth as if they have the consistency of mud. You can breathe normally and sense your surroundings while in these materials.

Describe: Changing magnetic fields, altering earth's density, enhancing the pull of gravity.

Flight

You can fly. Collaborate on how this trait works.

Describe: Sprouting wings, running across the air as if it were solid, riding on powerful winds.

How it works: You need safe take-off and landing zones, it's exhausting, you can carry a few others.

Iron Body

You weigh up to 20 times more than normal and can't be forcibly moved.

Describe: Rocky skin, iron-hard bones, the gravity of earth pulling you, a body made of stone and crystals.

Interaction

Calm the Storm

You can make others become significantly more passive, calm, and reasonable. This ends if someone acts threateningly toward them.

***Describe:** Quenching the fires that rage in their hearts, creating a soothing breeze, soothing their inner turmoil.*

Fan the Flames

You can significantly intensify whatever emotions creatures are currently feeling.

***Describe:** Adding fuel to their passions, igniting their souls with elemental energy, sparking their desires.*

Port in the Storm

You can find a safe haven that will safely harbor you and your allies for as long as you stay there. The locals will freely offer some sort of aid, or the aid will already be there if the safe haven is unpopulated.

***Aid:** Food and shelter, fresh weapons or armor, information, guides, minions, medical attention, potions.*

***Describe:** Sensing a safe area, feeling the air is calmer over there, following a soothing wind, following warmth.*

***Safe Havens:** Hidden cave, a house owned by friends, politically neutral ground, forgotten cabin in the woods.*

Still Air

You can give something the condition “Silenced” for several hours. Silenced things can’t make any noise whatsoever.

***Describe:** Freezing air in place, absorbing sound waves with the earth, keeping the air perfectly still.*

Words on Wind

You can name someone and speak a few sentences. They will hear your message after a few moments. Then, they can speak a few sentences; their message returns to you in a similar fashion.

***Describe:** Projecting your voice through the air, sending a message to the four winds, exhaling an air elemental.*

Art

Faith

Some say that you can measure a person by their friends. If that’s true, then what can you say of someone who has forged an alliance with the gods themselves? Such is the power of the faithful. These conduits of divine might spread their god’s dogma throughout the land, sharing blessings with their brothers and smiting foul heathens with righteous fury. The gods are eager to share their power with devoted followers... but which deity will you champion?

- The orc shaman of a tribe communes with spirits to determine the best time to march to war.
- A cleric prays to a pantheon of gods, requesting that they aid him on his mission.
- A devout paladin leads an inquisition against heathens who would dare defy the will of his god.

Combat

Bless

You can give someone (max 1) the defense “Blessed ☐” for several hours. They mark it when they suffer a Bad Tale related to harm.

Describe: *Praying for divine protection, anointing them with sacred oils, warding them against evil.*

Blinding Light

You can give someone the condition “Blind” until their vision clears.

Describe: *Emanating divine light, your glowing weapon, a shaft of golden light, searing sunlight.*

Crusade

Whenever you fulfill your deity’s dogma in a meaningful way, you’re bolstered to fight.

Describe: *Finding strength through faith, praying for divine strength, cleansing your sins before a fight.*

Lay on Hands

You can touch someone to heal 1 of their physical or spiritual conditions. Then, the GM tells them how long they’re immune to your Lay on Hands (the stronger the condition, the longer the immunity).

Describe: *Your hands glowing with radiant warmth, pouring your deity’s energy through your body.*

Martyr

When you’re physically harmed, bolster one of your allies to avenge you. When you’re physically defeated, bolster all of your allies to avenge you.

Describe: *Making a sacrifice for the greater good, inspiring others through your steadfast faith.*

Shield of Faith

Gain the defense “Shield of Faith ☐.” Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale while furthering your deity’s dogma. Then, gain a free Good Tale related to your deity’s domains.

Describe: *Earning your deity’s protection, standing strong in defense of your faith, creating a light shield.*

Smite

If you attack someone that your deity despises, destroy them outright. If they’re more powerful than you, give them a crippling condition instead.

Describe: *Your sword burning with holy fire, your deity filling you with divine wrath, casting them into hell.*

Turn

You can repel far creatures that your deity despises. They can’t approach you, but you can approach them.

Describe: *Lifting your holy symbol, shining divine light that burns them, asking your deity to protect you.*

Exploration

Pilgrimage

When you reach one of your deity’s holy sites, you’re bolstered three times to do anything.

Describe: *Using church contacts, receiving a vision on the path to sanctuary, completing a sacred journey.*

Sanctuary

When you enter one of your deity’s holy sites, name 1 threat. Until you leave, that threat cannot enter the holy site or harm anything in the holy site.

Describe: *Praying for blessed sanctuary, activating holy wards, rebuking foul heathens, finding inner peace.*

Scry

You can view and sense distant areas as if you’re standing there. Collaborate on how this trait works.

Describe: *Receiving a vision, see a distant area in a dream, look down on the area from the heavens.*

How it works: *You must have been there before, the area must embody your deity or one of its domains.*

Consecrate

You can turn a worthy feature of the terrain into a permanent shrine to your deity.

Describe: *Anointing the earth with holy oil, a pillar of light illuminating the area, blessing the holy ground.*

Worthy Features: *Grand church, statue of your deity, heathen’s grave, representation of your deity’s domain.*

Light

You can illuminate something in bright light, which lasts for as long as you want. Collaborate on something very general and vague that causes the light to change color or glow more brightly. Also, collaborate on what causes the light to fade.

Changing Light: *Someone’s approaching, you have strayed from the path, there’s hidden danger here.*

Describe: *Your eyes glowing with divine light, seeing the world as your deity sees it, knowing the one truth.*

Fade: *Time, the light is exposed to something your deity despises, the sun sets, the light can be washed off.*

Miracle

When the GM agrees that you significantly advance your deity’s dogma, write on your character sheet that you hold your deity’s favor. Cross it off to perform a powerful miracle that falls under your deity’s domains.

Describe: *Praying to your deity for sacred power, serving as a conduit for divine wrath, doing the impossible.*

Miracles: *Resurrect the fallen, receive a vision, know the divine truth, banish a heathen to another realm.*

Interaction

Atonement

You can give a defeated creature a quest, which becomes their foremost goal in life. If they complete it, their disposition toward you significantly improves.

Describe: Promising redemption, showing them the one true path, offering mercy and understanding.

Chosen One

Fellow worshippers of your deity regard you as the chosen one, a divine representative of your deity. They treat you accordingly and will go out of their way to help you.

Describe: Declaring yourself a prophet, your divine blood, rising to the highest rank in your religion.

Inquisition

You can force someone to honestly answer 1 question if they're injured, or all of your questions if they're defeated.

Describe: Torturing them, intimidating them, breaking their spirit, turning the screws, punching their wound.

Judgment

You can sense sin. Collaborate on what that entails.

Describe: Seeing a dark stain upon their soul, reading your deity's divine ledger, feeling profane corruption.

Pray

Your deity responds to your prayers (in some form or another). Your deity must reveal their will to you and may also reveal things related to their domains.

Describe: Hearing your deity's voice, seeing a sign that reveals your deity's will, feeling the right choice.

Proselytize

You can give someone the immediate urge to fulfill part of your deity's dogma, or convert to your faith (their choice).

Describe: Preaching, giving a fiery sermon, manipulating their guilt and passion, promising divine rewards.

Rabble Rouser

You can stir up a crowd to become incredibly passionate, motivated, and extremist about something they care about. Unless stopped, their extremism spreads and grows.

Describe: Appealing to their sense of duty, giving them a righteous cause, obligating them through scripture.

Zealotry

Add "or fulfilling your deity's dogma" to the end of your minions' contracts.

Describe: Appealing to their sense of duty, giving them a righteous cause, obligating them through scripture.

Creating Your Deity

Shrines

A shrine is a structure that serves as a divine beacon. Shrines can be any size or shape; here are some examples:

- A mountain-sized statue
- A church
- Standing stone pillars
- A twisted tree
- A carving on a rock or tree

Each shrine is devoted to a specific deity or group of deities. For example, a shrine devoted to the Goddess of Wind and Music serves as a divine conduit to that specific deity. That Goddess can interact with the mortal world through that shrine.

Deities bless those who perform sacred acts before shrines, and curse those who perform profane acts before shrines. It's up to the GM to decide how much power deities can exert through their shrines, and under what conditions. Here are a few examples:

- A cultist sacrifices a weeping victim at the Blood Shrine. The victim reanimates as an undead servant under the cultist's command.
- A scholar gifts a rare tome to the Lectern of Knowledge. In return, the Goddess of Knowledge answers one of the scholar's questions.
- Guards interrogate a thief before the Obelisk of Truth. The thief dares to lie in his presence, so his tongue ignites in flame.
- A peasant steals from the collection plate at the Church of Winter. Her home becomes chilly, no matter how warm it is outside.

In Tavern Tales, you get to decide what deity or deities your worship. Use these guidelines to create deities. However, check with your GM first. Your GM may want to use a unique setting where the deities are already established. In that case, the GM should work with you to modify the pre-established pantheon to suit your tastes. Your deity is considered an extension of your character, and you have complete control over your character. Therefore, your desires for your PC's deity should take priority over the game world's lore.

Step 1: Write a Description

First, write a basic description of your deity. Did she give birth to the universe? Was he a mortal who ascended to godhead? Are they a pantheon of feuding deities?

Step 2: Determine your Deity's Domains

Each deity has a set of domains, which are portions of reality that the deity controls. Basically, what is your deity the deity "of?" For example, your deity could be the Goddess of Silence and Shadow, or the God of Fire, Passion, and Alcohol.

Step 3: Write your Deity's Dogma

Your deity's dogma is a set of beliefs, rules, and practices. Dogmas should tie into the deity's domains. Here are a few examples:

Goddess of Silence and Shadow

- Take action under the night's protective shroud.
- Collect secrets, for they are the sharpest blade and the strongest shield.
- It is better to silence your enemies than destroy them, for then you alone know their secrets.

God of Fire, Passion, and Alcohol

- Flame others' passions.
- Pray before an open fire, which burns away sin.
- Find what sets your heart ablaze and pursue it.
- Take communion with fiery alcohol, and revel in your divine drunkenness

Step 4: Determine Your Religion

Presumably, your PC won't be the only person who worships your deity. Work with your GM to determine your deity's religions. Religions can be diverse and even contradictory. In fact, some religions might despise each other even though they worship the same deity.

Sample Deities

Sorin

God of Sand, Decay, and Time

According to the ancient stone tablets, Sorin was the divine entity that flipped over the Hourglass of Eternity, which created the universe. When the hourglass runs out of sand, Sorin will flip the hourglass over again, destroying the universe and creating a new one in its place. Until that time come, Sorin patiently watches the world as empires rise and inevitably crumble to dust.

Dogma

- Be patient. There is a time for everything.
- Destroy things that persist beyond their time.
- Find beauty in fleeting moments.
- When you pray, discard a grain of sand to represent the life and time you have lost.
- Do not mourn that which is lost, for all things must end.

Religion

Worship of Sorin is typically found in deserts, where sand erodes even the strongest structures and serves as a constant reminder that nothing lasts forever. Long-lasting religions fly in the face of Sorin's teachings, so most religions last for a few decades before they wane and disband.

The most popular current religion is known as the Legacy of Dust, which is centered in a monastery deep in the Sandglass Desert. Monks live ascetic lives of discipline and quiet contemplation. They practice martial arts by repeatedly punching stones until they're ground into sand. Some say that the strongest monks, the Dust Masters, can turn a person to sand with a single punch.

Niza

The Battle Mother

Myths tell of Niza, a goddess who lost her twin sons in a feud between her pantheon and a rival pantheon. Enraged, she forged the bones of her slain children into weapons and armor and waged a one-goddess war against her fellow deities. She has slain several dozen celestials and has vowed not to rest until she paints the night sky red with divine entrails.

Dogma

- Protect your loved ones.
- Family is more important than everything.
- To someone who has nothing, an act of kindness is everything.
- Distrust authority, for they will hurt you and those you care about for power.
- Love and hate are two edges of the same blade. Choose wisely how you swing your sword.

Religion

Unsurprisingly, Niza-based religions are banned in many places throughout the world. Between the religion's bloodlust and contempt for authority, governments fear that Niza's teachings could lead to full-scale revolt.

Nizan religions may be outlawed, but that doesn't stop people from privately worshiping the Battle Mother in the privacy of their own homes. Niza is especially popular among women and mothers, who draw strength and courage from the Goddess' ferocity.

Niza worship is also relatively common among barbarian tribes, which are often warlike and matriarchal. The largest such tribe, the Clan of the Feathered Braid, dominates the northern tundra. Shamanesses marked by brown eagle feathers in their hair braids provide spiritual guidance and perform sacred rituals.

Art

Martial Arts

Mind, body, and spirit: these are the three components of self. To find harmony between them is to achieve oneness with the universe. When that happens, all is possible: the body grows as tough as iron and as fluid as the wind; the mind discovers perfect clarity; the soul achieves supreme enlightenment. Meditate on your purpose, young disciple, and behold your infinite potential.

- In a temple nestled high atop a mountain, a monk practices martial arts to achieve enlightenment.
- A nameless warrior wanders the countryside, dispensing ancient wisdom to all those willing to listen.
- A dwarf spends his evenings in the local tavern and wrestles anybody who looks at him the wrong way.

Combat

Catch Blade

Gain the defense “Catch Blade □.” Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale from something small enough that you can catch with your empty hand. If it’s a weapon, you can take it from the attacker.

Describe: *Catching a sword between your hands, grabbing an arrow before it strikes you, punching a spell.*

Crane Stance

If you are not yet attacked in combat and someone charges you, prevent their attack and tell a free Good Tale against them.

Describe: *Waiting in a defensive stance, giving them a chance to stand down, being passive like the waves.*

Drunken Master

When you’re drunk, you’re bolstered to fight. If you’re extremely drunk, you’re bolstered three times to fight.

Describe: *Wobbling in a confusing rhythm, using the alcohol to fuel your energy, hiccuping, ruddy cheeks.*

Finisher

You can knock out a creature that isn’t significantly more powerful than you. Collaborate on how this trait works.

Describe: *Delivering an uppercut, putting them in a sleeper hold, paralyzing them with a special technique.*

Fist of the East Star

If a creature you damaged in the last several minutes dies, you can have it remain alive but incapable of fighting. For the next several hours, you have total control over their biology.

Affect their Biology: *They explode, their arm breaks, they fall asleep, they’re permanently paralyzed.*

Describe: *Hitting a pressure point, striking their sacred chakra points, using a forbidden death technique.*

Iron Grip

Once you grab something, nothing can forcibly break your grip except amputation or defeat.

Describe: *Grabbing on with an iron grip, using a wrestling move, putting their limbs in a lock, jumping on.*

Judo

You can make a creature hit itself.

Describe: *Turning back their momentum, using their size and recklessness against them, tripping them.*

Pressure Point

When you exploit a creature’s weakness, tell a free Good Tale against it.

Describe: *Striking their most vulnerable spots, hitting their chakra points, hurting a nerve cluster.*

Stunning Palm

You can make a melee attack that causes the target to skip their next turn. Then, they’re immune to your Stunning Palm for several minutes.

Describe: *Stunning them with a blow to the head, incapacitating them with a kidney shot, locking their chakra.*

Exploration

Balance

When you experience extreme imbalance, write the imbalance on your character sheet. Cross it off to gain a free Good Tale to balance the scales.

Describe: *Pursuing moderation and balance, observing yin and yang, restoring order, seeking true harmony.*

Centered Breath

You can hold your breath for about 1 hour, and you can only need about 1 hour of sleep instead of the normal amount.

Describe: *Meditating quietly, controlling your breathing and pulse, benefiting from harsh training.*

Enlightenment

You can ask any question, which the GM must answer. Collaborate on how this trait works.

Describe: *Understanding the inner workings of the universe, achieving true understanding, seeing the truth.*

Leaping Tiger

Collaborate on how much higher and farther you can jump than normal. Also, you can wall jump.

Describe: *Making great leaps, gliding through the air, jumping from wall to wall, leaping with the wind.*

Light Feet

Collaborate on how much farther than normal you can fall without suffering harm. All solids and liquids can support your weight.

Describe: *Balancing on a single blade of grass, leaping with the grace of a cat, falling like a feather.*

Split the Mountain

Your ability to damage structures exceeds normal limits. Collaborate on what this entails.

Describe: *Breaking rocks during training, kicking down doors and walls, splitting a tree in half with a chop.*

Third Eye

You can perfectly see everything within a far distance, stripped away of all illusion and deception; you see things as they truly are. This functions even if you’re blind.

Describe: *Using supernatural senses, seeing things as they truly are, sensing everything within your ki aura.*

Interaction

Karma

When you perform a sacrificial good act that doesn't benefit you whatsoever, write on your character sheet that you gain 1 Karma (max 3). Spend 1 Karma to tell a free Good Tale.

***Describe:** Balancing the cosmic scales, achieving harmony, completing a karmic cycle, getting a fair reward.*

Pacifist

Gain the defense "Pacifist ☐." Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale while pursuing nonviolence or showing mercy. When you do, name an immediate impending threat; it won't come to pass, or it will be much less severe if it does come to pass (GM's choice).

***Describe:** Extending your hand to an enemy, disarming a foe and leaving them unharmed, seeking peace.*

Sensei

When you give someone in-depth and thoughtful advice, they're bolstered to follow your advice.

***Describe:** Seeing what they cannot, understanding the bigger picture, telling a fable to convey a lesson.*

Training Montage

You can retrain in about 1 hour instead of 1 week. Others who train with you during this time can also retrain.

***Describe:** Working out, sparring, singing Eye of the Chimera, pushing each other beyond your limits.*

Art

Nature

Man against nature—it is a popular theme in countless legends and bardic songs. Sometimes the hero can brave the untamed wilderness, but other times the waves swallow his ship whole, or the unforgiving cold of the frigid north drains the warmth from the hero's veins. As civilizations struggle against the ever-encroaching wilderness, the druids and the mystics of the world ask, "Why fight it at all?" These naturalists empower themselves with the vibrant life that courses through massive trees. They master the endless cycle of life and death, ensuring prosperity for their allies and death for their foes. They commune with an ancient, primordial force that has thrived since the dawn of time. What choice will you make? Will you fight for survival against the wilderness? Or will you join with it and harness the power of nature itself?

- A druid defends his forest against hunters and defilers.
- Found at the edge of a forest, a young half-fey possesses unearthly beauty and a deep connection to the wilderness.
- A sentient tree travels the forests of the world in search of others who are like her.

Combat

Entangle

You can bind someone to their location until their bindings are destroyed.

Describe: Growing roots to ensnare its feet, wrapping it in vines, lashing it with a thorny vine-whip.

Faerie Fire

You can give someone the condition “Faerie Fire” for several hours. They glow and cannot successfully hide, no matter what. Their silhouette is faintly visible through opaque surfaces.

Describe: Illuminating them in an otherworldly blue glow, surrounding them with buzzing faeries.

Roots

You can root yourself to the ground. You can't be forcibly moved unless the ground you're rooted to is moved. While rooted, you have the defense “Rooted □□□.” Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale related to physical harm.

Describe: Joining with the earth, entrenching into the ground, growing roots and vines that grab on.

Thorns

When someone attacks you skin-to-skin, gain a free Good Tale to harm them. Wearing thick clothes or armor may suppress this effect (GM's discretion).

Describe: Thorns growing out of your skin, your nettle-like skin, poisonous toxins oozing from your pores.

Undergrowth

You can create a zone for several minutes. Creatures other than you move through it about half as fast as normal.

Describe: Creating thick underbrush, raising roots to trip feet, growing wooden spikes from the earth.

Exploration

Druidic Stones

You can imbue the terrain with one of your traits. Creatures in the terrain have that trait as a temporary trait.

Describe: Creating standing stones with glowing runes, attracting magic will-o-wisps, empowering nature.

Faerie Ring

You can walk in a circle to create a faerie ring. Collaborate on how everything inside the circle is hidden.

Describe: Casting fey magic, creating a glamour, draping a curtain of light and shadow over the area.

Hidden: Wisps confuse intruders, the contents look like part of nature, a maze-like forest disorients travelers.

Favored Terrain

Collaborate on a biome. Gain the defense “_____ Master □□,” with the name of your biome in the blank. Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale that relates to that biome. Alternatively, you can mark it to increase a roll related to your biome.

Biomes: Underground, plains, forest, urban settings, the open sea, jungle, desert, tundra, swamps, mountains.

Describe: Drawing from past experience, knowing how to use the terrain, attuning to nature around you.

Fortress Seed

You can create a fortress seed (max 1). Plant it and name a structure. The seed grows into that structure in a few minutes or hours, depending on size.

Describe: Harnessing nature's power, causing rampant growth, how vines and roots grow explosively.

Structure: Bridge, building, wall, fortress, door, boat, ladder, stairs, tree, fence, wagon, statue.

Tree Meld

You can move through wood as if it is the consistency of sap. You can breathe normally and sense your surroundings while in wood.

Describe: Turning your skin into wood and vines, melding with the tree, swimming through the wood.

Verdant Growth

You can reshape 1 space of plant matter, or cause far plants to grow as if they had 100 years of uninterrupted growth. You can cause plants to bear fruit in this way.

Describe: Causing vines to twist and grow, shaping wood like clay, creating an explosion of rampant growth.

Wild Step

Rough natural terrain such as mud, thick roots, or snow never hinders your movement. Also, you don't leave behind any tracks.

Describe: Stepping lightly, running like beasts of the wild, nature changing to accommodate your steps.

Will-o-Wisp

You can create a will-o-wisp, which is a very small but eye-catching guide. Name someone and describe something. The wisp will intelligently guide that person to the closest place that matches your description. It has supernatural knowledge and can locate anything that isn't hidden. They fulfill their purpose eternally unless you dismiss them or they're destroyed.

Commands: Bring villagers here, lure bandits to my trap, bring my allies to me, guide me to safety.

Describe: Conjuring a mote of light, following a bird, calling a pixie to serve you, following a shooting star.

Interaction

Fey Beauty

You are supernaturally attractive. Others are significantly more inclined to seek your romantic affection. Collaborate on what this entails.

Describe: *Flawless skin, deep eyes, lovely curves, pouty lips, flowing hair, strong jawline, high cheekbones.*

Awaken

You can animate a plant into a living, thinking, mobile creature. Collaborate on their personality. Their disposition toward you significantly improves.

Describe: *Awakening its sleeping soul, accelerating its growth, giving it the primal gift of consciousness.*

Commune

You can communicate with nature guardians. Guardians are powerful spirits that represent the biome where they live. They seek to protect their biome and hold incredible power it.

Describe: *Performing a tribal dance, burning incense to awaken the spirit, seeing it manifest under starlight.*
Guardians: *Silver stag in the tundra, lava beast in a volcano, ancient tree in the forest, water spirit in the sea.*
Power: *Reshape the land, control local animals, know everything that happens within their biome.*

Fey Curse

You can relinquish power you have over someone to curse them. The more power you relinquish, the stronger the curse. Collaborate on the curse's effects and what lifts the curse.

Curses: *Sleep until they're kissed, they can't leave a forest, they turn to stone at daytime, they lose their voice.*
Describe: *Saying a magic poem, casting a powerful enchantment, twisting their fate-strands, hexing them.*
Relinquished Power: *They break your deal, they grovel at your feet, you hold their most prized possession.*

Fairy Gold

You can make an item (max 1) look like 5 treasure for several hours.

Describe: *Casting a fey glamour, deceiving with an illusion, altering its appearance, enchanting their desires.*

Tree Speaker

You can communicate with trees and other large plants.

Describe: *Hearing voices in the creaking wood, drawing forth their tree-soul, speaking through the earthmother.*

Art

Occultism

Lurking in the shadowy corners of the universe are dark entities far beyond our understanding. They gaze upon mortals with equal parts disgust and hatred, patiently plotting ways to plunge the world into darkness and misery. Wise men turn their backs on these dark entities. But for some adventurers, ambition far outweighs wisdom. Power-hungry cultists and warlocks readily embrace these dark patrons, signing infernal contracts to sacrifice their souls in exchange for unnatural power. You could join them... all you need to do is sign a contract in blood. After all, when it comes to fulfilling one's darkest desires, everyone has a price. What is yours?

- A warlock signs a contract with a demon to gain infernal power in exchange for servitude.
- An astronomer gazes at the stars and discovers a dark entity that grants her forbidden knowledge.
- After getting lost in the woods, a girl meets a twisted forest spirit that allows her to join the eternal hunt.

Combat

Blood Link

You can link 2 willing creatures, designating one as the giver and the other as the receiver. Any harm the giver suffers is instead transferred to the receiver. The link ends when either person wants it to end. If you link a defeated creature, they don't have to be willing and the link doesn't end when they want it to. Collaborate on what ends it.

***Describe:** Stitching their souls together, creating a thaumaturgic link, altering the strands of destiny.*

Blood Sacrifice

You can give yourself a condition and bolster to do anything.

***Describe:** Sacrificing your blood to your patron, flagellating yourself, letting your parasite feed.*

Pound of Flesh

You can give someone an exact copy of one of your conditions.

***Describe:** Making them pay blood for blood, evening the cosmic scale, getting bloody revenge, causing recoil.*

Terrify

You can give someone the condition "Terrified."

***Describe:** Showing them their worst nightmare, giving them a glimpse of your patron, using dark magic.*

Vessel

You can mark a creature you're touching (max 1) as your vessel. You can use your traits through your vessel as if you're standing at their location.

***Describe:** Using blood magic to control its muscles, treating its soul like a puppet, sharing your power.*

***Marks:** A tattoo that glows with hellfire, a scar-rune, a glowing symbol floating above their forehead.*

Voodoo

If you destroy or defile something that is important to someone else, gain a free Good Tale to tell against them.

***Describe:** Creating a voodoo doll, using thaumaturgy magic, corrupting their essence, your dark ritual.*

Exploration

Cast into the Void

You can open a 1-space hole to the void for several minutes. The void is in an endless, empty nothing. Anything cast into the void is gone for all eternity.

***Describe:** Cutting open a bloody wound in the universe, opening a portal, creating a swirling black hole.*

Circle of Binding

You can walk in a circle. When you're finished, create a barrier along the circle. Absolutely nothing can cross the barrier except light and sound. Collaborate on what breaks the circle.

***Breaks the Circle:** Time passes, an item touches it, you touch the circle, a secret word is spoken, night falls.*

***Describe:** Drawing runes in chalk, lighting candles in a ring, creating a magic circle, using pact magic.*

Conjuration

You can link a creature you're touching with an item you're touching, or to a new item you create. Whoever holds the item can expend the link to instantly summon the linked creature to the item's location.

***Describe:** Pulling on a soul-tether, opening a portal to the destination, conjuring it in a puff of smoke and fire.*

Darkness

You can create a zone of pure darkness for about 1 day. No light can enter the zone.

***Describe:** Spreading magic, spilling your patron's blood on the earth, weakening the barrier between realms.*

***Descriptors:** Hellish, web-strewn, rotten, sacred, verdant, crawling, swampy, barren, nightmarish.*

Defile

You can give the terrain a descriptor outside of what is natural for that terrain. Collaborate on how the terrain gradually shifts to match your descriptor.

***Describe:** Spreading magic, spilling your patron's blood on the earth, weakening the barrier between realms.*

***Descriptors:** Hellish, web-strewn, rotten, sacred, verdant, crawling, swampy, barren, nightmarish.*

Portal

You can create a portal (max 5). Anyone who enters one of your portals can emerge at one of your other portals.

***Describe:** Creating teleportation stones, building waypoints, creating a wormhole, opening a portal.*

Interaction

Binding Contract

If you like, contracts and agreements you sign or mediate are magically enforced. They can't be violated by any means (Agreeing to the contract "You can't speak of an event" means you literally lose the ability to speak of it forever). The contract or agreement must mention that the terms are binding.

Describe: *Signing a pact in blood, binding their soul to service, write your contract into universal laws.*

Blissful Agony

You can make a creature you're touching experiences any physical sensation you want. This doesn't cause physical harm.

Describe: *Bringing them to the brink of ecstasy, inflicting terrible agony, toying with their skin, torture.*

Dark Bargain

Your patrons can perform favors for you, but always at a proportional cost. You have a patron, which is a powerful entity that can grant you power, favors, or knowledge, but always at a cost. Collaborate on your patron.

Cost: *Sacrifice an innocent in their name, start a cult in their honor, further their goals, offer part of your soul.*

Describe: *Conjuring them in a summoning circle, drawing them forth from the ether, hearing their voices.*

Patrons: *Demons, angels, otherworldly horrors from beyond the stars, spirits of the land, Death itself.*

Deal with the Devil

After talking to someone, you can learn the one thing that they want more than anything else. If you provide them with that thing, you gain complete and total control over them; the GM or player hands control of that character over to you.

Describe: *Purchasing their soul, making an offer they can't refuse, eternally enslaving them to your will.*

Shatter Mind

You can give someone a psychological condition.

Describe: *Ripping their mind apart, shattering their fragile psyche, giving your patron access to their mind.*

Psychoses: *Schizophrenia, sociopathy, a crippling phobia, paranoid delusions, hallucinations, obsessiveness.*

Soul Gem

You can transform the souls of dead, worthy creatures into treasure (the GM decides how much).

Describe: *Coalescing their soul into a black gem, trapping their spirit in a jar, trading souls for favors.*

Creating a Patron

In Tavern Tales, you get to decide what sort of patron you follow. You can create a patron for your character to follow by using these patron creation guidelines. However, check with your GM first. Your GM may want to use a unique setting where the patrons are already established. In that case, you may be able to work with your GM to modify the established patrons to suit your tastes.

Step 1: Write a Description

First, write a basic description of who your patron is and what it seeks. Is your patron a demon from hell? Is she a fey queen who delights in tormenting mortals? Is it a dark monster that dwells at the bottom of the ocean? Be creative as you come up with the origin of your patron.

Step 2: Determine Your Patron's Stats

The biggest difference between patrons and gods (from the Faith theme) is that patrons are much more involved with the world. Gods are cosmic entities who work in subtle and mysterious ways. They have millions of worshipers and rarely speak to any of them.

Patrons are less powerful than gods, but they make up for it by being more involved in the lives of mortals. Because patrons have fewer followers, they can afford to interact with each individual follower. When you call to your patron, your patron will probably answer you.

As a result, there might be a situation where you encounter your patron face-to-face. Work with your GM to stat out your patron. In addition, all patrons are immortal in one way or another. Killing your patron may get you out of a deal you made with them, but sooner or later your patron will be back.

Step 3: Determine Your Patron's Personality

You have some control over how your patron acts and behaves. Give your patron 2-4 instincts (corrupt the innocent, spread nightmares, destroy beautiful things, etc). However, for every personality characteristic you give your patron, the GM can give it an instinct as well.

Expect to disagree with your patron, even if you design your patron so that its motivations and personality coincide with your own. Patrons treat their followers like pawns or playthings, forcing them to make sacrifices or perform favors in exchange for power.

Is your Patron Evil?

The Occultism theme is perfect for morally ambiguous characters who want to serve dark entities. However, you are under no obligation to make your patron evil. It's entirely up to you to decide what your patron is like as long as you and your patron disagree from time to time. For example, you may want your patron to be a benevolent angel who spreads happiness throughout the world. Perhaps your angel patron wants you to sacrifice your health and happiness to serve others, or perhaps your angel demands that you purify yourself through self-mutilation whenever you do something sinful.

Sample Patrons

Tch'gzagz

The Thing Behind the Sun

Tch'gzagz desires one thing and one thing alone: to be forgotten. It hides behind the sun so none may ever lay eyes on it.

But hidden things cannot remain hidden forever. Long ago, a cabal of astromancers using powerful magic accidentally learned of Tch'gzagz's existence. This knowledge permanently linked the astromancers with Tch'gzagz, which slowly corrupted the wizards. Tch'gzagz promised unimaginable power to anyone who destroyed all evidence of its existence.

Servants of Tch'gzagz are now in a constant struggle with each other as they strive to remove all evidence of Tch'gzagz from existence. The most fanatical servants sacrifice themselves to their burning patron, while the more ambitious patrons hunt down other servants like animals. When one servant captures another, they typically burn out the captive's eyes to represent the destruction of their dark knowledge.

Serving Tch'gzagz

Tch'gzagz is a secretive and reclusive patron that will only communicate with servants under dire circumstances. It loathes being known and only interacts with mortals only out of necessity. The last person to know of Tch'gzagz's existence will gain unbelievable power, but Tch'gzagz will also try to destroy the sole survivor so it can return to its peaceful, hidden existence.

Secrets are more valuable than gold to servants of Tch'gzagz. The only way to guarantee an audience with The Thing Behind the Sun is to reveal a terrible secret. This act shows that the servant is skilled enough to track down evidence, and it is also a subtle threat that the servant will share Tch'gzagz secret with others if Tch'gzagz does not manifest.

Lilith

Queen of the Succubi

According to legend, Lilith tempted the deities into creating sin, agony, and chaos. Since none of these things existed before, the deities had no way of knowing that they were about to make a terrible mistake. She promised that their creation would make the universe much more interesting.

In her defense, she technically wasn't lying.

Almost immediately, the deities fell into a savage civil war that nearly ripped the universe apart. Lilith watched from the sidelines, laughing.

When the deities reached an uneasy truce, they banished Lilith to the pits of Hell, where she would suffer for eternity. This proved to be another trick — Lilith delighted in sin and suffering, and found her new home to be a paradise.

She now spends her time tempting mortals into making foolish decisions, promising power or glory in exchange for deprave acts.

Serving Lilith

Lilith is a cruel and devious patron who delights in torturing others. She sees her servants as tools and playthings to further her dark agenda.

She is one of the most proactive patrons, and will even go out of her way to contact and tempt the uninitiated. She likes to offer powerful favors for minor but evil acts, such as "Steal something from a stranger and I will save your sick family member." She then offers weaker and weaker favors in exchange for crueler and crueler acts. It typically isn't long before once upstanding members of society are willing to torture and murder others in exchange for a warm meal or a pat on the shoulder.

Art

Psionics

A mind is a terrible thing to waste. This is especially true when you can use your mind to read thoughts, levitate objects, and force choke all who dare oppose you. Such is the power of psions, who turn their energy inward to unlock the infinite potential of their own minds. They sharpen their wit the same way warriors sharpen their blades, transforming their raw intellects into deadly weapons capable of crushing skulls with a simple thought. They fortify their willpower the same way a blacksmith tempers steel armor, building an impenetrable defense that transcending physical limitations. Look inside yourself, psion, and behold the awesome power that lies dormant within you. What fragments of your power will you awaken first?

- A quiet maid reads the minds of her royal employers, selling their darkest secrets to the highest bidder.
- Born small and frail, a young psion learns how to levitate swords and becomes the most feared duelist in the land.
- A powerful psychic travels from plane to plane hoping to unlock the secret of the universe.

Combat

Archon

Whenever you want, you can become completely invulnerable to all harm for a few seconds. Then, the GM gives you a condition. Archon can't make you immune to conditions you acquire through this trait.

Describe: *Your skin taking the color of a starry night, becoming pure energy, showing your true form.*

Confusion

You can give someone the condition "Confused" for several minutes. Confused creatures have difficulty distinguishing friend from foe.

Describe: *Disrupting their natural brain waves, filling their minds with nightmarish thoughts.*

Erratic Behavior: *Attack an ally, move somewhere disadvantageous, throw away something valuable.*

Force Wave

You can push everyone in a zone a close distance away, or one creature a far distance away.

Describe: *Releasing a shock wave, emitting a psi pulse, unleashing an explosion of telekinetic energy.*

Lobotomize

You can attack a creature and describe one of its capabilities. If the creature has any traits associated with that capability, they lose 1 of those traits for several hours.

Describe: *Suppressing their memories, preventing their mind from acting, locking their abilities with magic*

Projection

You can take actions as if you're standing in any far space.

Describe: *Animating your weapon, projecting a psychic version of yourself, bending reality with your will.*

Reverse Trajectory

Collaborate on how you charge this trait. Spend the charge to send a ranged attack back at the attacker.

Describe: *Using telekinesis to send back an arrow, unleashing psychic recoil, absorbing power to shoot it back.*

Exploration

Astral Projection

You can travel to another dimension or plane. You may bring close creatures with you. Collaborate on what other dimensions or planes exist.

Describe: *Your spirit leaving your body, going on a dream-quest, stepping into the nonphysical realm.*

Planes: *Astral Plane, Dreamscape, Shadow Realm, a person's subconscious mind, heaven, hell, the afterlife.*

Perfect Mind

You have a perfect memory, and you can instantly complete complex mental exercises.

Describe: *Closing your eyes to think for a moment, copying something into your brain, being a genius.*

Instantly: *Perform a calculation, create an elaborate story, read a book, write a play in your head.*

Pre/Postcognition

You can experience the future and/or past. Collaborate on how this trait works.

Describe: *Receiving a vision, gazing through the time-stream, calculating the sequence of cause and effect.*

Sensory Link

You can forge a link with a creature you're touching. For the next day or so, you can experience the world through their senses whenever you want.

Describe: *Your eyes changing to their color, seeing and hearing things that aren't present, feeling auras.*

Telekinesis

You can exert telekinetic force. Collaborate on how this trait works.

Describe: *Manipulating mass, concentrating intently, exerting force with your mind, changing gravity.*

How it Works: *You can't lift more than your weight, precision requires intense concentration, it's exhausting.*

Interaction

Mind Control

You can control the mind of a visible creature that isn't significantly more powerful than you. Collaborate on how this trait works.

***Describe:** Overpowering their pathetic will, enslaving their mind, implanting your thoughts and desires.*

***How it Works:** They struggle to break free, it gives you a crippling headache, you can't move while doing it.*

Brainwash

You can add or remove a memory or personality trait from someone you're touching. You can't make them forget how to do things (talk, read, cast spells, etc).

***Describe:** Devouring a memory, deleting a brain wave, brainwashing them, cutting out part of their mind.*

Read Mind

You can hear visible creatures' thoughts. Collaborate on how this trait works.

***Describe:** Listening to their thoughts, leeching their brain waves, seeing their dreams, feeling their desires.*

Telepathy

You can telepathically communicate with far creatures.

***Describe:** Sharing a collective consciousness, hearing what each other says, speaking via a shared mind-cord.*

Share Memory

You can share memories with creatures you're touching. They gain any of your memories you like, and you gain any of their memories they like.

***Describe:** Accessing their subconscious, dreaming their dreams, giving them a vision of what you experienced.*

Art

Savagery

Might makes right! Don't agree? Try arguing that point after someone stronger than you mounts your head on a pike. Savage warriors embrace the primordial rule of survival of the fittest, relying on instinct and brute strength to destroy their enemies. Some weak-willed people think that civilization leads to safety, but the truth is that laws make men docile. Real power comes from raw, unbridled rage—that roiling fury that makes you want to flip over a table and gouge someone's eyes out. What makes your blood boil, mighty warrior? Are you enraged by the injustices of corrupt societies? Do you sneer defiantly at the sight of a hulking, bloodthirsty monster? Then lift your weapon and show your enemies the true meaning of power!

- A muscled barbarian wanders the frozen tundra, slaying monsters in search of fame and fortune.
- A young boy is found in the wilderness, apparently raised by wolves. He fights with a primal savagery that no civilized man can match.
- After getting hit with the green energy of an arcane spell gone awry, a mild-mannered wizard gains godlike strength when he gets angry.

Combat

Bloodlust

Gain the defense “Bloodlust ☐.” Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale that physically damages you. Then, gain a free Good Tale to make an attack.

Describe: Using the pain to fuel your rage, reveling in glorious bloody combat, returning the favor.

Cleave

You can make a melee attack against as many adjacent creatures as you like.

Describe: Attacking in a flurry, cutting through foes, spinning in a blade tornado, releasing an explosion.

Impale

When you attack someone with a melee or throw weapon, you can give your target the condition “Impaled.”

Describe: Pushing a spear through their stomach, embedding your hammer in their armor.

Rage

You can give yourself the condition “Enraged.” While enraged, increase all rolls to destroy.

Describe: Harnessing the pain, entering a primal rage, attacking recklessly, leaving yourself open to attack.

Rampage

When you defeat a worthy foe, gain a free Good Tale.

Describe: Entering a blood-fueled rage, slaughtering foe after foe, standing atop a mountain of corpses.

Sticks and Stones

Every item you hold has the Melee and Thrown item traits for free, as well as 2 other item traits of your choice. They lose these extra traits when they leave your hands.

Describe: Using whatever’s available, clubbing someone with a femur, beating someone with their own arm.

Unbroken

Collaborate on how you charge this trait. Spend the charge to remove 1 physical condition from yourself that you can logically remove. Then, gain a free Good Tale.

Describe: Breaking free, getting an adrenaline rush, screaming in anger, overcoming with your burning rage.

Exploration

Gut Instinct

At any point, you can have the GM describe your gut reaction, which gives you vague but accurate information about your surroundings.

Describe: Getting a bad feeling, thinking that person is off somehow, feeling the hair on your neck stand up.

Pillage

When you destroy a worthy structure, you can find at least 1 treasure among the rubble.

Describe: Finding gold in the ash and rubble, looting priceless art, taking whatever you want, looting stores.

Siege Breaker

Your ability to destroy the terrain exceeds normal limits. Collaborate on what you can do.

Describe: Shoving someone through a wall, chopping a support beam, kicking down the door, smashing a table.

Superstition

Collaborate on what bring good and bad luck. These superstitions are now true for you and everyone you can see; good luck causes good things to happen, and bad luck causes bad things to happen.

Bad Luck: Washing off the blood of your enemy, fighting with a broken weapon, dishonoring the dead.

Describe: Following ancient traditions, distrusting modern society, carrying fetishes and good luck charms.

Good Luck: Hunting under a new moon, earning a virgin’s kiss, getting punched by a stranger, a foggy dawn.

Vision Quest

When you start a quest, tell the GM something you want to know, understand, or see. The GM will give you a vision, sign, or epiphany that reveals that information to you.

Describe: Receiving a message from your ancestors, having a prophetic dream, speaking to your spirit beast.

What is Best in Life?

Collaborate on 3 things that are best in life. When you complete all 3, you and allies who helped you each gain 1 XP.

Best in Life: Crush your enemies, see them driven before you, hear the lamentations of their loved ones.

Describe: Reveling in your successes, reflecting on your triumphs, obtaining glory, amassing power.

Interaction

No Escape

When someone flees from you or otherwise tries to avoid your wrath, you can tell a free Good Tale against them.

***Describe:** Calling them out by name, embarrassing them in front of their peers, mocking their honor.*

Instigator

You can choose someone. A fight or conflict breaks out involving them.

***Describe:** Goaded someone into action, spreading rumors, starting trouble, shouting “Fight! Fight! Fight!”*

Intimidating

You are far more intimidating than normal. You can intimidate creatures that would normally wouldn't flinch at threats. Collaborate on how your intimidation exceed normal limitations.

***Describe:** Threatening them with violence, torturing them, pushing your weight around, exploiting fear.*

Noble Savage

Gain the defense “Noble Savage □.” Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale that relates to laws, high culture, and the trappings of civilization. When you do, choose someone; their disposition toward you significantly improves.

***Describe:** Your simplistic ways, your adorable naiveté, following the laws of nature instead of the laws of man.*

Not Getting Paid Enough

Whenever you do something impressive, you can choose a minion who watched you. They immediately abandon their contract.

***Describe:** Proving that they're no match for you, terrifying them with your might, letting them run away.*

To the Victor

When you destroy someone or conquer territory, choose something they had that would normally be difficult for you to obtain. Everyone acknowledges that it's your now.

***Describe:** Crushing their hope like you crushed their leader's skull, making an offer they can't refuse.*

***Go the Spoils:** Their minions, their lovers' affection, their legal property, their social status.*

Warchief

Add “or getting them into a good fight” to the end of your minions' contracts.

***Describe:** Indulging their bloodlust, promising them spoils of war, provoking their savage nature.*

Art

Thievery

Some fight for honor. Others fight for a cause. But thieves? They're motivated by one thing: precious, precious gold. The world is filled with powerful magic items and glittering gemstones. Why should they be left to gather dust in some ancient tomb? All you have to do is pick a few locks, sneak past a group of oblivious guards, disarm a trap or two, and untold riches could be yours! What marvelous treasures could await you in your adventures?

- An elite assassin sneaks through the shadows, studying his marks from afar before striking.
- A pirate queen uses dirty tricks the element of surprise to catch merchant ships unaware.
- A street urchin nimbly darts through a crowd, relieving people of their heavy coins.

Combat

Assassin

You can have the GM tell you all of a visible creature's weaknesses.

Describe: *Learning their habits and routines, finding an exploitable weakness, studying their body language.*

Duck

Collaborate on how you charge this trait. Spend the charge to make an attack meant for you hit the next most logical target instead.

Charge: *Get safely out of danger, frame someone for your crime, have a drink and talk about your close call.*
Describe: *Leaping out of the way, pulling an enemy in front of you, ducking and covering your head.*

Misdirection

If you like, enemies can't attack you as long as there are other viable targets.

Describe: *Looking nonthreatening, drawing attention to someone else, hiding behind an ally, running away.*

Sneak Attack

When you attack an unsuspecting and vulnerable victim, you can defeat them however you want. If they're significantly more powerful than you, give them a brutal physical condition instead.

Brutal Conditions: *Slit throat, broken bone, gouged-out eyes, bloody amputation, severed arteries.*
Describe: *Knocking them over the head, choking them out, stabbing them in the back, slitting their throat.*

Tumble

Gain the defense "Tumble ☐." Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale that you can logically dodge. When you do, remove or temporarily suppress (whichever is more logical) a condition that restricts your movement, and you can immediately move.

Describe: *Diving out the way, running for safety, swinging away on a rope or vine, ducking into a ditch.*

Exploration

Cloaked in Shadows

Gain the defense "Cloaked in Shadows ☐." Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale while hidden or obscured. Then, you vanish; not even the GM knows where you are. On your next turn, tell the GM where you're hiding (though you can stay hidden in your new location if you like).

Describe: *Ducking into the shadows, taking a glancing blow from their bad aim, repositioning to a better spot.*

Escape

You can escape your current predicament and bring as many others as you like with you. The GM gives you a condition based on how you escaped. You can't use this again until you lose that condition.

Describe: *Vanishing in a cloud of smoke, pulling a lever to reveal an escape tunnel, disappearing in the crowd.*

Eye for Treasure

When you find treasure, find 1 extra treasure.

Describe: *Finding extra hidden valuables, getting a good price for your treasure, pocketing valuables.*

From the Shadows

Once each time while hiding, you can perform an action that would normally break stealth and reveal your location without breaking stealth. Absurdly obvious actions (jumping on a table and yelling) will reveal you as normal.

Describe: *Returning to the shadows, doing something before anyone notices, waiting for the perfect moment.*

Hideout

You can establish an unpopulated area as your hideout. Your hideout is much harder than normal to locate. Collaborate on why it's so difficult to locate.

Describe: *Establishing a false front, installing a hidden door, hiding it in a hard-to-spot alley or cul-de-sac.*

Silence and Shadow

If you like, everything you do is completely noiseless. Also, you can dim or extinguish a visible light source until someone takes the time to rekindle the light. You can't dim celestial bodies, such as the sun.

Describe: *Landing like a cat, snuffing out a candle, using shadow-magic on a torch, spreading gloom.*

Stash

When you enter a new region, tell the GM where there's a hidden stash. If you reach the stash, it has supplies that happen to be useful for your current predicament.

Describe: *Digging up buried treasure, looting a secret thieves' guild stash, hiding away supplies for later.*

Trap Finder

Gain the defense "Trap Finder ☐." Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale related to traps. Also, the GM must answer honestly whenever you ask if there's anything hidden here.

Describe: *Searching for hidden panels, relying on your acute sense of touch, listening for a soft "click."*

Without a Trace

If nobody has seen you for several minutes, you can vanish without a trace. Nobody knows where you are (including the GM), so you skip all of your turns. At any point, reappear anywhere that you logically could have reached during that time.

Describe: *Throwing down a smoke bomb, disappearing into a forest, emerging when they least expect it.*

Interaction

Black Market

Whenever you want, you can have safe and discreet access to criminal resources.

Describe: *Hearing whispers, reading thieves' symbols carved into buildings, leveraging back alley contacts.*

Resources: *Fence, lookouts, assassin, thugs for hire, informant, smugglers, poisons, controlled substances.*

Everything Has a Price

You can spend 1 treasure to gain 1 Good Tale. If there's no one to pay when you use this, explain how a purchase you made long ago is now paying off.

Describe: *Greasing palms, bribing officials, hiring a professional, putting a scheme into motion.*

Mastermind

You can orchestrate a grand plan (max 1), giving as many allies as you want a job related to your plan. Write their jobs on your character sheet. When one of them fulfills their job, check their job. Cross off a checked job to gain a free Good Tale toward executing your grand plan.

Describe: *Organizing the score of a lifetime, tricking others to do the dirty work, your criminal genius.*

Jobs: *Take out the guards, discover the pass code, steal the gate keys, stand guard, secure an escape route.*

Second Identity

Collaborate on a complete second identity for yourself.

Describe: *Changing your accent, walking differently, roleplaying a completely different personality.*

Second Identity: *Name, family friends, contacts, paperwork, home, reputation, history, wardrobe, job.*

Spy Network

You have an extensive spy network. Collaborate on what they're targeting. Your spy network can provide you with intimate, useful information about their target whenever you want. You can change their target, but it takes time and/or resources.

Describe: *Meeting cloaked figures, getting a package from a drop-off zone, and NPC slipping you a letter.*

Targets: *A certain city, politicians and nobles, armies and troops, the elves, pirates, merchants.*

Sudden but Inevitable Betrayal

You can reveal that someone who isn't significantly more powerful than you was secretly your minion all along.

Describe: *Giving the secret signal, nodding at your hidden ally, executing your master plan, shouting "NOW!"*

Tamper with Evidence

You can lose all heat you and your allies have for a crime. If you have an item that belongs to someone else, you can convincingly frame that person for the crime or event instead.

Describe: *Wiping down finger prints, destroying clues, planting evidence, misleading investigators.*

White Lie

You can convince others of lies that would normally be unbelievable. Collaborate on what now constitutes a believable lie for you.

Describe: *Telling a white lie, manipulating someone with your wit, leading them to assume the wrong thing.*

Art

Tracking

Some look out into the horizon and see only uncertainty and danger. They turn their backs on the unknown and opt for the safety of a simple life. But not trackers. These courageous trailblazers gaze into the wilderness and see a world filled with adventure, opportunities, and wonder. They have climbed the tallest mountain and looked down upon the world like gods. They have plumbed the deepest caves to unearth secrets never intended to see the light of day. They have crossed the widest oceans to discover unknown lands. Trackers' motives are as diverse as the regions they explore. Some hunt elusive game animals. Some seek the bounty of a wanted criminal. A chosen few are simply in it for the thrill of discovery. So, strap on those well-worn boots and grab your traveling pack! What will you discover as you explore the great unknown?

- A relentless bounty hunter tracks wanted fugitives.
- An explorer travels the world in search of ancient artifacts and mysterious treasure.
- From deep behind enemy lines, a scout tracks enemy troop movements and relays the critical information back to her allies.

Combat

Black Arrow

You don't need to roll to attack with your very last ammo. If the attack is even theoretically possible, you hit with perfect accuracy and incredible power. Collaborate on what incredible power means.

Describe: Making a desperate shot, putting your hope into your last arrow, drawing a special ammo.

Incredible Power: Knock them back, knock something out of their hand, your projectile pierces through.

Called Shot

You can make an attack to inflict a condition on an arm, leg, or similar appendage.

Describe: Aiming for a weak spot, hitting them where it hurts, firing a poisoned arrow, striking true.

Conditions: Arrow to the knee, hamstring, shot through the hand, broken tail, tattered wings.

Cover

When you're behind cover that you've never used with this trait before, gain the defense "Cover ☐." Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale that can be mitigated by that cover. Moving to sufficiently different cover gives you a new defense with an unmarked box.

Describe: Diving behind a wall, ducking under a bush, crouching behind a cart, hiding in a trench.

Eagle Eye

Collaborate on how the distance of your ranged attacks exceeds normal limitations.

Describe: Arcing your bow for maximum distance, drawing a bead with your rifle, aiming carefully.

New Limits: A mile, anything you can see, anything under the open sky, several blocks, the moon.

Favored Enemy

Collaborate on a type of creature. When you spend a Good Tale to harm a creature of that type, gain a second free Good Tale to harm them.

Describe: Training to take down your foe, fighting with pure anger, knowing how to take down that foe.

Foes: Dragons, wizards, beasts, citizens of the Golden Kingdom, elves, undead, vampires, aquatic beasts.

Set Trap

You can create a well-hidden trap. It triggers when a creature other than you is close enough to touch it. Collaborate on its effects.

Describe: Hiding a trap under leaves, stringing a tripwire, digging a hidden pit, placing a bear trap.

Effects: Explode, trigger a loud alarm, spew poison, create a pit, catch fire, ensnare them in a net.

Volley

You can make a ranged attack against 2 creatures.

Describe: Launching a volley of arrows, dual wielding pistols, shooting rapid-fire, spraying bullets.

Exploration

Deduce

When you investigate a scene, the GM must describe what happened as if you were there watching it unfold.

Describe: Reading their tracks to determine what happened, following the trail, deciphering the evidence.

Know the Path

You can name a visible creature as your quarry (max 1). The GM must answer honestly whenever you ask where your quarry is. They stop being your quarry when they die or you touch them.

Describe: Reading tracks, following your instincts, using your soul compass, tracking their scent.

Lay of the Land

You can have the GM create a map of the region and show it to you.

Describe: Examining the landscape, scanning from a high vantage point, feeling the earth beneath you.

Reconnaissance

When you extensively observe something, you're bolstered to confront, overcome, or avoid that thing. The longer you observe, the more bolsters you accrue (max 5). You can report your findings to transfer any of these accrued bolsters to others.

Describe: Following enemy troop movements, scouting ahead, patrolling the wilderness for your prey.

Survival Skills

You can survive indefinitely off the land, no matter how harsh the conditions. You can also provide for about a dozen other people. When you sleep in the wilderness, treat it as comfortable bed rest with medical attention.

Describe: Identifying native species, living off the land, relying on instinct, hunting prey, foraging for food.

Trailblazer

Gain the defense "Trailblazer ☐." Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale while exploring. Also, you have a perfect sense of direction.

Describe: Venturing forth into the great unknown, go where no one has gone before, watching your footing.

Vigil

You're always considered to be watchful and alert, even while asleep. Also, the GM must answer honestly whenever you ask if you're in impending danger.

Describe: Sleeping with one eye open, watching your surroundings, listening to your instincts.

Interaction

Deputy

Collaborate on how you're a representative of the law, and what special privileges and resources this status grants you.

Describe: Flashing a badge, reciting your official title, showing a warrant, leveraging political connections.

Resources and Privileges: You can arrest people, local peace keepers help you, some laws don't apply to you.

Detective

Three times each quest, you can have the GM give you a clue about whatever you're currently investigating.

Describe: Watching their eyes, reading their body language, noticing discrepancies in their stories.

Lone Wolf

You can have others generally ignore you as long as you don't draw attention to yourself. Afterward, they forget everything about you, vaguely remembering you as just some person.

Describe: Pulling up your hooded cloak, hanging in the shadows, keeping to yourself, giving the cold shoulder.

Perks of the Job

When you accept a quest, explain what extra aid you obtain for free.

Describe: Asking for an advance, attracting aid due to your fame, leveraging your contacts, getting lucky.

Aid: Gain part of the reward upfront, learn useful information, attract minions, acquire special tools.

Skeptic

The GM must answer honestly whenever you ask if someone is lying.

Describe: Watching their eyes, reading their body language, noticing discrepancies in their stories.

Trophy

You can collect 1 trophy from each dead worthy creature. These trophies are worth 1 treasure for every 10 XP the creature had. If the creature was especially well known, the trophy is worth twice as much.

Describe: Wearing the trophy around your neck, hanging it from your belt, mounting it on your wall.

Trophies: Bloody head, your enemy's shattered weapon, tooth necklace, pelt, skull, patch of tattooed skin.

Art

Transformation

Adapt to survive; this is a fundamental rule of the universe. Each new sunrise brings with it the chaos of infinite possibilities: your closest friend could betray you; nations could rise or fall; a new discovery could revolutionize our understanding of the universe. You could either futilely cling to the old ways as the future renders you obsolete, or you can adapt, evolve, and transform yourself to thrive in this new world. Shifters embrace the chaos of change. When they gaze into tomorrow, they imagine the countless possibilities of what they could become: king, assassin, lover, hero, villain — everything and anything. These shifters understand that chaos flows both ways. The future has the power to change us, but we also have the power to change the future. Are you strong enough to change the world?

- A soldier turns into a vicious werewolf under the light of a full moon.
- A master spy shapeshifts into members of royalty to spy on the government.
- After transcending the mortal coil, a spiritual monk embraces no form by growing multiple limbs.

Combat

Clone

You can create a clone of yourself that's a separate character you control. Collaborate on how this trait works.

Describe: *Splitting in half, popping into existence next to yourself, growing a clone in a tube, self-replicating.*

How it Works: *You have to grow your clones in a lab, they're treacherous, the process gives you a condition.*

Doppelganger

Write your personal XP total on your character sheet. When you kill a creature, you can have the GM give you their character sheet. You become identical to them in every way and use their character sheet. Transfer your gear, personal XP, and this trait to the new character sheet. If your new character sheet has more XP than your personal XP, gain a condition that you can't remove until you change character sheets. You can return to your original character sheet at any point, but you forever lose the stolen character sheet.

Describe: *Stealing their whole identity, changing your form, absorbing their essence, changing skin.*

Evolve

When you retrain, you can lose a stat, trait, or upgrade to refund all of the XP you spent to purchase it. Spend that XP however you like.

Describe: *Adapting to the environment, growing from your experiences, incorporating foreign DNA.*

Mimic

When you see a creature use a trait, you can gain that trait (max 1) as a temporary trait for several hours.

Describe: *Copying whatever they do, assimilating their DNA, reactively adapting, evolving, changing your soul.*

Morph Item

You can replace 1 item trait on an object you're touching with a different item trait.

Describe: *Adapting to your weapon, bending the wood and metal, transforming it into an entirely new item.*

Polymorph

You can change a willing or defeated creature into a different creature. They refund all of their XP, which slowly returns over a few days or weeks. They can spend it however they want to suit their new form.

Describe: *Hexing them with dark magic, reshaping skin and bones, mutating them, reweaving their soul.*

Regenerate

You heal about twice as fast as normal. Also, you heal things that are otherwise unhealable.

Describe: *Wounds spontaneously closing, regrowing an arm, stitching your flesh together, magically healing.*

Unhealable Things: *Amputated hand, lost eye, missing teeth, burn scars, tumorous growths, paralysis.*

Shapeshift

Create a second character sheet that always has the same XP as your main character. You can shift forms, changing character sheets in the process. Keep your conditions, marked boxes, and gear. Collaborate on how this trait works.

Describe: *Twisting and reshaping your skin, rapidly evolving, switching places with your shadow.*

How it Works: *You can't control when you transform, your alternate form is bloodthirsty, shifting drains you.*

Exploration

Alter Size

You can change your size for a few hours. Collaborate on how much you can change your size.

Describe: *Warping space around you, accelerating your metabolism, harnessing your titan blood.*

Chameleon Skin

If you're perfectly motionless, you're invisible.

Describe: *Surrounding yourself in an illusion, changing your skin color, becoming transparent.*

Chaos Theory

You can do something mundane to begin a chain of events (max 1). Every 30 minutes or so (real-time), the next player to the left rolls to determine how the chain of events escalates. Good Tales make the chain better; Bad Tales make the chain worse. At any point, you can make a final roll to end the chain of events.

Begin the Chain: *Pet a dog, give a beggar a gold coin, drop a nail, fire an arrow randomly into the distance.*

Describe: *Manipulating events, embracing the random chaos of the universe, relying on pure luck.*

End the Chain: *Help arrives, something explodes, someone dies, a building collapses, a war starts.*

Clay Body

Your body can be malleable like clay or rubber.

Describe: *Stretching your muscles, popping your bones out of joint, becoming like clay or water, bending.*

Things You Can Do: *Squeeze through a keyhole, reach a distant item, pull your hands out of manacles.*

Perfect Replica

You can spend materials to create a perfect duplicate of an item.

Describe: *Casting a flawless illusion, crafting something with pure artistry, creating a magic replica.*

Materials: *Whatever the original item was made of, wood, steel, textiles, earth and stone, magic dust.*

Shape Flesh

You can transform into an object or back to your original form. While you're an object, you retain your senses and you can't act except to use this trait.

Describe: *Morphing, changing your skin, warping reality, transferring your soul to a physical vessel.*

Transmute

You can change an object's properties, or change an object into a similar object.

Describe: *Morphing, changing physics, warping reality, rearranging molecules, transmuting elements.*

Properties: *Hardness, transparency, weight, density, color, smell, texture, size, conductivity, buoyancy.*

Similar Objects: *Sand into stone, coal into oil, wood into paper, ore into ingots, seawater into fresh water.*

Interaction

A Thousand Masks

You can change your appearance to another similarly sized creature. Collaborate on how this trait works.

Describe: Putting on a perfect disguise, changing bodies, morphing your phase, creating an illusion.

How it Works: You must have touched them before, you leave a telltale flaw, you can't sustain it for long.

Change of Heart

You can reverse part of a creature's personality for several hours.

Describe: Warping their mind, inverting brain waves, reversing the polarity, changing their alignment.

Reverses: Trust into mistrust, hate into love, curiosity into disinterest, lawfulness into lawlessness.

Cosmic Trade

You can permanently trade parts of yourself with a willing creature.

Describe: Switching parts of your souls, swapping body parts, changing bodies, reshaping reality.

Trade: Faces, bodies, stats, traits, personalities, minds, destinies, traits, conditions, beauty for brains.

Gestalt

You can fuse with other willing creatures and become a single entity with all of your combined strengths and weaknesses. Collaborate on what this entails. This ends when any participant wants out.

Describe: Fusing with gem magic, absorbing their bodies, initiating morphing time, forming the head.

Entails: Takes less damage, gain access to all traits, grow in size, use the highest stats from each person.

It Was Me All Along!

If nobody knows where you are, you can reveal that an unimportant NPC was secretly you all along.

Describe: Pulling back your hood, taking off your mask, morphing to your true form, staging a grand reveal.

Takes One to Know One

While you are impersonating someone, the GM must answer all of your questions about your role's mannerisms, habits, and knowledge if the answers would help you perform that role. Explain how you know this information.

Describe: Copying body language perfectly, creating a flawless disguise, studying your mark, acting.

The Curse

Collaborate on how you curse others. When you curse someone, refund half of their XP. Change their aesthetics and spend their XP however you like to make them more like you. Their disposition toward you significantly improves.

Describe: Infecting their bloodstream, hexing them with magic, leaving a mark on their skin, cursing them.

Spread By: Draining their blood, biting them, giving them a parasite, performing a tribal ritual.

Transform Into: Vampire, werewolf, zombie, ghost, horrific Old One, assimilated insectoid, drone.

Transcendent Voice

You can perfectly replicate any sound you've heard before, including volume.

Describe: Perfectly mimicking a sound, recording a sound in you mind, transforming your vocal cords.

Art

Undeath

For some, death is only the beginning. These undead push aside the dirt and slowly climb from their dark graves as flesh peels from their bones. Their tortured souls materialize and hover in the air, as if a cold, blue flame suddenly ignited. They awake on the tables of cruel necromancers and feel an unnatural hunger twist their stomachs. Undead wander the land with a single-minded purpose, incessantly searching to fulfill some dark desire. What is it that ripped you back from the blissful rest of afterlife? Was it unfinished business? Dark magic? An eternal hunger for human flesh? Whatever drives you, the living shall have no respite. Death has come for them.

- A necromancer reanimates the corpses of her enemies to do her bidding.
- A death knight serves his dark god with a blade that drains the energy from his foes.
- Awakened as if from a dream, an undead gains sentience and sets out on a journey to discover what killed him.

Combat

Dead Nerves

Gain the defense “Dead Nerves □.” Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale that an undead creature could ignore. If that Bad Tale gave you a condition, completely ignore all negative effects associated with that condition.

Describe: Ignoring a fatal wound, unnatural resilience, undead anatomy, your rotten organs.

Ignore: Your guts spilling out, carry around your decapitated head, ignore a sword through your heart.

Death Throes

Collaborate on something powerful that happens when you die.

Describe: Your soul exploding, uttering a final curse, completing your most powerful spell, finding vengeance.

What Happens: Explode in necrotic energy, take your attacker with you, return as a ghost, curse someone.

Death Watch

Whenever you or one of your closest allies would die, they instead hold onto life for several minutes or hours, depending on the severity of their injuries. During this time, they can be healed as normal to potentially avoid death. Also, the GM must answer honestly whenever you ask how close a creature is to death.

Describe: Hiding them from Death, altering their anatomy, extending their life with necromancy.

Drain Soul

You can take a dying or recently dead creature’s soul. Write it on your character sheet (max 5). Others can’t interact with the soul (such as to resurrect it or communicate with it) without your consent. Also, you can forever obliterate the soul to temporarily gain some of its power. Collaborate on what that entails.

Describe: Soul strands rising to your clenched fist, capturing its spirit in a gem, devouring its essence.

Power: Increase one of your stats, bolster to do what it did well, gain a temporary trait, summon its spirit.

Plaguebearer

Collaborate on a disease that you carry, and how it spreads. You’re immune to it.

Describe: Pallid skin, sunken eyes, pus-filled boils on your skin, black blood, skin covered in a sheen of sweat.

Plague: Virus, bacteria, worm parasites, fungal mushroom spores, dark curse, the seed of a corrupted plant.

Symptoms: Vomit and nausea, painful boils, extreme fever, necrosis, coughing, weakness, eventual death.

Transmitted by: Skin-to-skin contact, damaging someone, bodily fluids, drawing a rune on their skin.

Reanimate

Collaborate on a death condition and how quickly you reanimate. If you die and your death condition isn’t met, you return to life.

Death Condition: Staked in the heart, decapitated, killed when your phylactery is destroyed, poisoned.

Describe: Crawling out of a shallow grave, coalescing from death, pulling yourself out of the spirit realm.

Touch of Death

You can kill a creature that isn’t significantly more powerful than you. Collaborate on how this trait works.

Describe: Ripping apart their soul, turning their blood to acid, decapitating them, withering their flesh.

How it Works: Lose a fraction of your soul to fuel the spell, they haunt you afterward, you anger Death itself.

Exploration

Bloodseeker

You can hear far heartbeats with perfect accuracy. While focusing on someone, you can sense and understand every part of their physiology as if you’d dissected them and carefully studied every body part.

Describe: Hearing blood course through their veins, noticing subtle changes in their physiology.

Sense: Smell disease, hear a nervous heartbeat, feel the warmth of arousal, see pregnancy, taste their fear.

Despoiler

You can cause far plants and objects to wither and decay.

Describe: Withering plants to dry husks, rusting metal, spoiling food and water, warping wood, cracking stone.

Eternal Hunger

You no longer need to eat or drink. Collaborate on 1 new need that you must fulfill at least once a week or starve. When you excessively indulge this need, you heal as if you received 1 day of bed rest and medical attention, and you’re bolstered to do anything.

Describe: Cold skin, no pulse, you don’t bleed when you’re cut, obsessive desire, growling stomach.

New Needs: Drink blood, eat nightmares, consume souls, feast on fear, absorb magic, devour nightmares.

Haunt

You can awaken the terrain. It becomes sentient and gains XP equal to half of your total XP, which it can spend however it wants. Collaborate on its personality. Its disposition toward you significantly improves.

Describe: Spilling your blood into the earth, binding a spirit to the land, corrupting the area, enchanting it.

Terrain Actions: Open and close doors, attract or repel creatures, alter its geography, a ship sails itself.

Pierce the Veil

You can see the spirit world. Collaborate on what that entails.

Describe: Looking through ghost eyes, shifting your soul, your eyes going black, seeing dead people.

Entails: See recently dead spirits, murderers appear to have blood-stained hands, see where a death occurred.

Unlife and Unlimb

You can attach and reattach your body parts. You control your detached body parts and sense the world through them. You can instantly heal some conditions (such as an amputated arm) in this way.

Describe: Watching through an eyeball, crawling with a hand, pulling your guts back inside yourself.

Wraith

You can become ethereal or return to your normal form. Ethereal things pass through non-ethereal things like a ghost, and vice versa.

Describe: Taking a ghostly form, crossing dimensions, turning to mist, becoming a living shadow.

Interaction

Aura of Death

You can give all far creatures the overwhelming desire to leave the area.

***Describe:** Whispering dark words, creating a sudden chill, giving people an unsettling feeling in their gut.*

Banshee's Wail

You can emit an incredibly loud sound. Far creatures gain the condition "Deaf" until the ringing stops. The sound also shatters glass and shakes structures.

***Describe:** Screaming the cries of the dead, wailing in agony, speaking with death's otherworldly voice.*

Braaiins

You can gain some of a dead creature's knowledge and memories.

***Describe:** Eating its brains, consuming its soul, enslaving it in the afterlife, absorbing its brain waves.*

Charon's Toll

You can sacrifice 1 treasure to negate 1 Bad Tale.

***Describe:** Burying coins to pay Death's toll, turning treasure into ash, giving coins to a shadowy hand.*

Medium

You can speak to the dead. You must have access to part of a creature's body, or something that was important to it in life.

***Describe:** Opening a door to the afterlife, tugging at a soul strand, sending your voice into the grave world.*

Possess

You can vanish and take control of a corpse or vulnerable creature. Use its stats and traits instead of your own, but you retain this trait. If the body you're possessing has more XP than you, gain a condition you can't remove until you end the possession. Your host can attempt to rebel against your possession.

***Describe:** Overpowering its soul, becoming a spirit and moving inside of it, infecting its thoughts.*

Revenant

You can return a dead creature to life. Give them a quest. They remain alive as long as they treat that quest as their foremost goal in life. Collaborate on what happens after they complete their quest.

***Describe:** Giving them a second chance, letting them tie up loose ends, ripping them out of the afterlife.*
***After the Quest:** They can do as they please, they can pursue 1 quest of their own choosing before dying.*

Art

Warfare

Warriors make history. They're the ones who slay dragons, who dethrone kings, who stand tall among the brutal carnage of a blood-soaked battlefield and raise their swords in triumph. Some of these men-at-arms have humble origins, taking up weapons in defense of home and family. Others pursue bloodshed as if they are born for it, traveling the land to train under exotic blademasters and master tacticians. Regardless of their past, all warriors follow the one universal truth of combat: kill your opponent before he kills you. And they're damned good at it. Every veteran warrior carries remnants of his past triumphs—each scar a reminder of a wound that could have been his last, each notch in his sword a lesson learned in the importance of precise swordplay. Even now, countless warriors are training for the day when they meet you in battle. Will you be strong enough to vanquish them? Take up arms, warrior, and prove to the world that today is not your day to die!

- The captain of the town guard leads his troops in the defense of an isolated community.
- A master swordsman travels the land in search of a worthy opponent.
- After winning his freedom in a gladiatorial slave arena, a fierce warrior begins his life as a mercenary.

Combat

Disarm

You can disarm someone. They drop a held item, which lands in a close space. If you have a free hand, you can catch the item instead.

Describe: *Attacking in a flurry, cutting through foes, spinning in a blade tornado, releasing an explosion.*

Every Scar a Lesson

Whenever you're defeated by a worthy threat, gain the defense "Scarred by ____ □." Write the threat in the blank. Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale related to that threat.

Describe: *Jagged cut, burned skin, crooked finger, missing tooth, glowing rune-scar, dented armor.*

Threats: *Dragon, bug, beast, sword, trap, soldier from the Southern Kingdom, wizard, rogue, frost, fire, acid.*

Guardian

You can intercept attacks if you're in a position where you can logically do so.

Describe: *Interposing yourself, diving in the way, lifting your shield over someone, shoving them behind you.*

Kensai

Give one of your weapons a name. It is now a magic item, but only in your hands. Collaborate on its effects. Absolutely nothing can forcibly remove it from you. If lost, it miraculously finds its way back to you in less than a day.

Describe: *Performing a sacred blade ritual, carving the weapon's name into it, baptizing the weapon in blood.*

Miraculous Return: *Trip over it in the woods, find it on the next corpse you loot, find it for sale in a shop.*

Shove

You can push someone back as far as you can normally move. Move into the spaces they vacate.

Describe: *A powerful bull rush, lowering your shield and charging forward, making them dodge backward.*

Tough as Nails

Gain the defense "Tough □□." Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale that you can ignore with sheer toughness.

Describe: *Scarred skin, thick muscles, shining armor, good old-fashioned grit, raw willpower, magic tattoos.*

Exploration

Arena

When you set foot on a battlefield, tell the GM about a strategic asset on that battlefield.

Describe: *Examining the field with a tactical eye, noticing an important detail, exploiting the terrain.*

Assets: *A platform that will crumble from a good hit, a hidden trap, ample cover, a bottleneck.*

Grit

Your endurance exceeds normal limits. Collaborate on what this entails.

Describe: *Setting your jaw and powering through, shrugging it off, ignoring pain and aching muscles.*

Capabilities: *Run a marathon, carry an unconscious ally for hours, ignore your biological needs for a week.*

Guard Duty

While you're paroling, guarding, or escorting, you have a basic understanding of everything that happens in and around whatever you're protecting. Also, you can completely negate 1 Bad Tale against whatever you're guarding during this time.

Describe: *Keeping an eye out, watching the shadows, establishing lookouts, guarding the area, setting patrols.*

High Ground

When you reach an area's most tactically advantageous position, immediately tell a free Good Tale.

Describe: *Using the high ground to cut down foes, getting a better vantage point, controlling a bottle neck.*

Strong Back

You have +5 inventory slots.

Describe: *A huge backpack, strong muscles, broad shoulders, bearing the burden, wearing heavy armor.*

Titan's Strength

Your ability to lift and carry heavy weights exceeds normal limits. Collaborate on what this entails.

Describe: *Your veins pulsing, straining your muscles, gritting your teeth, heaving something over your head.*

Veteran

You can have the GM tell you what dangers to expect. Explain how you know this information.

Describe: *Knowing what to do from past experiences, noticing a tell-tale giveaway, keeping a watchful eye.*

Interaction

Blood on the Wind

Whenever someone important to you is in danger, you know their exact location and what sort of danger they're in.

***Describe:** Feeling it in your gut, the hairs on the back of your neck standing up, getting a dark premonition.*

Bushido

When you show an enemy profound mercy or respect, their disposition toward you significantly improves. Also, write on your character sheet that you hold their debt. Cross it off to have them pay off that debt.

***Describe:** Earning karma, holding others to a high standard, bringing out the best in others.*

Cold Read

You can have the GM tell you all of a visible creature's traits.

***Describe:** Reading their body language, getting a gut feeling, making guesses based on their equipment.*

Enemy of My Enemy

When you harm, hinder, or disrupt an enemy, you can have the GM tell you of one of your enemy's enemies. Their disposition toward you significantly improves. Explain how you know this information.

***Describe:** Teaming up, forging an alliance, putting petty grudges aside, using each other towards your goals.*

Get Their Attention

You can make everyone present think that you are by far the biggest threat until they see evidence to the contrary.

***Describe:** Performing a deadly weapon maneuver, looking deadly and intimidating, pissing them off.*

Gladiator

After you win a fight, choose someone who watched you fight. Tell the GM how they henceforth feel about you.

***Describe:** Showboating, an incredible display of power, pleasing the crowd, flexing your muscles.*

***How they Feel:** Don't cross them, they're so sexy, I need to befriend them, I never want to fight them.*

Iron Sharpens Iron

When you train with others, you can gain 1 of your training partner's traits (max 1) as a temporary trait for about 1 day. Each of your training partners can similarly gain 1 of your traits (max 1) as a temporary trait for about 1 day.

***Describe:** Practicing weapon drills, trading war stories, forging spiritual bonds, swearing oaths of loyalty.*

No One Left Behind

You can save someone from any threat imaginable. However, your fates are now intertwined until both of you are completely safe and have no conditions. If one of you gains a condition or dies while your fates are intertwined, the other does as well. You can't use this trait on someone if your fates are already intertwined.

***Describe:** Leaping to their rescue, dragging your ally to safety, grabbing them as they fall over a cliff ledge.*

War Stories

After you defeat a worthy foe or accomplish a worthy deed, write it on your character sheet. Cross it off to share the story with others. Their disposition toward you significantly improves, or they're intimidated by you and back down (their choice).

***Describe:** Telling them your body count, explaining what true danger really is, telling tales in a tavern.*

Items

Items

Inventory

Creatures have 5 inventory slots. Each slot represents 1 handful of stuff. Essentially, each inventory slot can hold anything that you can carry with 1 hand. Large items that require 2 hands to carry (such as a two-handed axe) take up 2 inventory slots. A handful of small items (such as rings or keys) take up 1 inventory slot.

Treasure

Treasure is abstract in Tavern Tales to avoid excessive bookkeeping. Your gaming group needs to work together to determine the value of 1 treasure, which can change during the game. Here are a few examples of what 1 treasure might be worth:

- To a street urchin, 1 treasure is a loaf of bread.
- To an adventurer, 1 treasure is a bag of coins.
- To a warrior-king, 1 treasure is a pile of gold.

Players ignore all treasure gains and losses that are below 1 treasure. These gains and losses are considered to be so trivial that they don't affect your finances at all. For example, suppose your group decides that 1 treasure is worth a bag of gold coins. If you notice a gold coin on the street and pick it up, you won't gain any treasure because it's below your threshold. Similarly, if you spend a few coins on a mug of ale at a tavern, you won't lose any treasure.

A single piece item can be worth more than 1 treasure. For example, a perfect diamond might be worth 3 treasure and a golden-plated shield might be worth 5 treasure.

The number of slots that treasure occupies depends on its size and weight. For example, compare a perfect diamond 5 treasure with a chest full of gold coins that's also worth 5 treasure. The diamond would take up less than 1 slot, while the treasure chest would occupy many more slots. In fact, players may acquire so much treasure that it's difficult to transport it all. There's a good reason why dragons have to guard their gold!

Item Traits

Like theme traits, item traits are divided into combat, exploration, and interaction. Items acquire item traits the same way that players acquire theme traits. The big difference is that you spend treasure instead of XP to buy item traits.

To buy an item trait, spend an amount of treasure equal to that item's new number of traits in that category. For example, giving an item its first combat trait costs 1 treasure. Giving it a second combat trait costs 2 more treasure. Giving it a third combat trait costs 3 more treasure for a total of 6 treasure. Giving the item its first exploration or interaction trait would only cost 1 treasure.

Upgrading Your Body

You can purchase item traits for your body. This will allow you to attack with fists, block weapons with thick scales, or have a long rope-like tongue. Buying item traits for your body functions the same as buying item traits for items. The only difference is that these item traits are permanent because they are now part of you.

Starting Equipment

By default, PC start the game with 2 treasure, which they can spend however they like on items. They also start with enough similar, miscellaneous items to occupy 1 inventory slot. For example, here are some starting character inventories:

Wizard

- Magic Staff: Melee (Enchanted)
- Wizard Academy Robes: Official
- Spellmaking Gear: Spell book, quill, ink.

Sea Captain

- Cutlass: Melee (Light)
- Shark-Skin Armor: Defensive
- Sailing Gear: Compass, collapsible telescope, gloves

Noble

- Ostentatious Clothes: Ornamental
- Noble Gear: Monocle, signet ring, gaudy brooch
- 1 treasure

Combat

Defensive

The item grants the defense "Armor □." Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale that armor can logically mitigate. This trait can be applied to armor and shields more than once; each time it is, the item occupies 1 more inventory slot than normal.

***Describe:** Blocking with a shield, parrying with a sword, deflecting a spell with a runed spell-gauntlet.*

Melee

You can make touch melee attacks. If you make a touch attack without this trait, decrease the roll. Also, choose one:

- **Heavy:** Roll brawn to attack with this weapon.
- **Light:** Roll finesse to attack with this weapon.
- **Enchanted:** Roll mind to attack with this weapon.
- **Inspiring:** Roll spirit to attack with this weapon.

***Describe:** Cutting with a sword, stabbing with a dagger, bashing with a hammer, thrusting with a spear.*

Ranged

If you make a ranged attack without this item trait, decrease the roll. This weapon has 3 ammo. If you have ammo, you can make far ranged attacks. After an encounter when you made a ranged attack, lose 1 ammo. Also, choose one:

- **Heavy:** Roll brawn to attack with this weapon.
- **Light:** Roll finesse to attack with this weapon.
- **Enchanted:** Roll mind to attack with this weapon.
- **Inspiring:** Roll spirit to attack with this weapon.

***Ammo:** Arrows, bolts, bullets, magic orbs, black powder, alchemical cannisters, psi-crystals, ki runes.*

***Describe:** Firing a bow, shooting a pistol, blasting with a shotgun, hurling fireballs from a wand.*

Thrown

The item functions as having the Ranged trait, except that the ammo is the weapon itself. Recover the item to restore the ammo.

***Describe:** Throwing a spear, hurling an ax, flicking out a few shurikens, throwing a spinning blade.*

Reach

Increase the weapon's range one step, such as from touch to near.

***Describe:** A long-hafted spear, a sinuous whip, a rifle with a scope, a powerful composite longbow.*

Exploration

Camouflage

If you remain perfectly still in an environment that resembles this camouflaged item, increase rolls to hide. This item trait can only be used on clothes and armor.

Describe: Strange patterns, plants stitched into the fabric, splotches of color that match the background

Environments: Forest, jungle, frozen wasteland, ocean, desert, mountain, fields, caves.

Convenient

This item occupies 1 fewer inventory slot.

Describe: Lightweight material, convenient travel hook or strap, getting used to its weight, compact size.

Discrete

Increase rolls to hide this item.

Describe: Small and compact size, unique shape that makes it ideal for hiding, dull color, camouflage.

Environmental

Collaborate on a biome. The item grants the defense “___ □.” Write the biome into the blank. Mark it when you suffer a Bad Tale related to that environment.

Describe: Fur-lined winter coats, billowy and shaded desert gear, buoyant and sleek swimming equipment.

Floats

This item floats well enough that it can support a person's weight indefinitely, like a life ring.

Describe: Natural buoyancy, flotation devices, air bubble pockets, glowing wind-runes, lightweight material.

Glowing

You can make this item glow like a torch for about 1 hour.

Describe: Glowing fire-runes, a lantern that dangles from a hook, a faint magical glow, a bundle of oily rags.

Sealed

This provides about 10 minutes air. Collaborate on how you refresh the air supply.

Describe: Glowing life-runes or air-runes, an air bladder, pressured helmet, face mask with tubes.

Useful

This item also functions as a tool.

Describe: Getting extra functionality, using it the item in a clever and unexpected way.

Tools: Whip serves as rope, pistol serves as flare gun, ax cuts down trees without dulling or breaking.

Interaction

Disguised

This item looks like something else.

Describe: A hidden compartment, a decorative casing that hides what it really is, a misleading paint job.

Disguises: Armor resembles normal clothes, sword hidden in a cane, gun resembles a musical instrument.

Flashy

This item is exceptionally eye-catching and fashionable. People notice it, remember it, and talk about it.

Describe: Beautiful glittering gemstones, terrifying barbs and spikes, glowing arcane runes, shining leather.

Official

This is an official item of a certain organization. Others recognize it as belonging to that organization.

Describe: Tabard, inscribed symbol, official color patterns, recognizable craftsmanship, coat of arms.

Ornamental

This looks expensive, tasteful, and valuable. It's worth much more than normal on the market.

Describe: Socketed gemstones, beautiful filigree, expert craftsmanship, gilded exterior, lovely sheen.

Personalized

Collaborate on special conditions the user has to meet before using the item.

Describe: Saying the secret password, attuning to the item's spirit, completing the activation sequence.

Magic Items

Magic items in Tavern Tales are highly versatile and customizable. Rather than explicitly telling you what a magic item does, each entry asks several questions about the magic item and provides possible answers. As the GM, you can choose any answer you want, or even invent new answers. This approach allows you to scale magic items to match the adventurers' power. For example, you can select weak answers for upstart adventurers, or strong answers for true veterans. You might also leave some questions unanswered to control a magic item's power, or to let the players unlock additional powers at a later time.

Getting Players Involved

Consider letting your players answer magic item questions. Giving your players a chance to determine a magic item's effects will make them feel more invested in the game. Several options are listed below.

Let them choose

Ask a question and give a range of answers. It may be necessary to tweak some of the answers so that they are all approximately equal in power.

Ask them an open-ended question

Ask an open-ended question and let your player figure out the details. They might come up with creative options that you never considered.

Unlock its true power

Since magic items are variable, you could say that magic items start off weak. Players could unlock a magic item's true potential through in-game feats (uncover the item's history, bond with it, pour magical energy into it, etc).

Reward and punishment

You may want to altering a magic item's power based on player actions. For example, suppose a magic item is locked away in a chest. If a player makes an incredible roll to pick the chest's lock, you might pick a stronger answer. If the player made a terrible roll, you might say that the magic item is cursed. Basically, the player's roll determines how strong the magic item is when the chest is unlocked.

Discover its history

Every magic item has a story. Rather than immediately telling players what a magic item does, you could tie a magic item to its legend. Before players can use a magic item, they must first investigate its history. The more they reveal, the more powerful the magic item becomes.

GM: You discover a sword among the ruins. There are runes on its surface — it's obviously magical.

Player: Cool, what's it do?

GM: Who knows?

Player: Heh, fine. I'll go to the temple, then. Maybe the priest who hired us knows something about it.

[Later] **GM:** Alright, you're back at the temple.

Player: I approach the priest and show him the sword. "Do you recognize this? We found it in the ruins."

GM: He scrunches up his nose and looks it over. "Hmm... I've never seen it before, but I saw one of these runes in a holy text. It's the sigil of an angel called Dariel, I think."

Player: That's a great lead! If the priest is fine with it, I'll research the rune in the temple library. I'm looking for everything I can find about angels.

GM: Sounds like a Mind roll.

Player: I was thinking the same thing. Ha! I rolled 21! I find an entry about how Archangel Dariel forged Flamedrinker to slay a demon named Agkor. As soon as the knowledge enters your mind, the runes on the sword emit golden light. How about this? The sword tells me the location of the closest demon.

GM: 21 is a great roll. You can be more ambitious.

Player: Archangel Dariel speaks to me through the blade. He's an expert on all things demonic.

Adorinel, the Legacy Circlet

The wearer has access to the minds stored within it.

What minds are stored within it?

- Everyone who previously wore the circlet.
- Members of a lost community.
- Important members of a certain group (wizards, generals, angels, etc).

What expertise do they offer?

- General knowledge from a wide range of categories. Each person has a lifetime of experience to share.
- The inhabitants are all experts on one specific topic. Together, they hold more knowledge about that topic than every library combined.
- Sage wisdom. They seem to know the answers to profound cosmic questions, but they protect those secrets with cryptic half-answers.

How does the wearer communicate with them?

- You go into a trance, and your mind enters a dream-like realm where the inhabitants await you.
- When you call upon an inhabitant, they appear before you (and only you) like a ghost.
- You can telepathically communicate with one inhabitant randomly chosen each evening.

According to legend...

- When a psychic plague began driving the people of her village insane, a young psion created this circlet to preserve the wisdom of her people.
- When heroes die, they go to the hallowed Vault of Heroes, where they counsel deities and other cosmic entities. This circlet is effectively an invitation to attend the Vault of Heroes at will.
- The circlet forms permanent psychic connections with others, like the center of a vast, unbreakable web. Their minds are linked across time and space, life and death.

Akik's Eye

This crystal orb shows distant events and locations.

How do you use it?

- Just look into it.
- Put it into your empty eye socket.
- Light candles, burn incense, and chant.

What does it show?

- The past or the future; never the present.
- Anywhere, so long as the eye has been there before.
- What it wants you to show. It always shows you something important, though it's not always clear why it's important.

Do others know they're being viewed?

- No, it's completely stealthy.
- Creatures under the gaze of the Eye have a disturbing, creepy feeling that they're being watched. The feeling is so unsettling that it typically wakes people up.
- A giant glowing orb appears at the viewing location.

According to legend...

- An adventurer visited Akik, a seer who was rumored to know the future. When Akik tried to read the adventurer's fortune, she saw her own gruesome death. Terrified, she refused to finish the reading. The outraged adventurer then slaughtered the seer and plucked out her eye.
- The wizard Akik was the world's greatest diviner, capable of spying on anything and anyone the world over. His favored crystal ball absorbed a fraction of his power over the years.
- This orb contains an imprisoned shaft of sunlight. When released, it flies off to the desired destination and then returns to provide a vision of a far-off place.

Bunsen's Burner

This device shoots the backpack's contents. The nozzle has dials and levers on it.

What's in the backpack?

- Four cannisters that can be loaded with potions.
- Acid, fire, or poison.
- Lava.

How does it recharge?

- Pour raw chemical reagents into the backpack.
- The backpack naturally replenishes itself.
- The backpack replenishes its contents so quickly that the pressure must be relieved at regular intervals. Otherwise, it may explode catastrophically.

What happens if the backpack is damaged?

- It breaks.
- Chemicals spill across the ground, or the pressurized contents launch the wearer in a random direction.
- Kaboom!

What do the dials and levers do?

- Reveal how much fuel remains.
- Switch between the different chemical contents.
- Initiate a powerful chemical reaction that will eventually cause a massive explosion, destroying the item.

According to legend...

- An alchemist attached this device to the gullet of a mechanical dragon for Prince Bunsen's lavish coronation ceremony.
- Originally built to distribute healing potions to troops, the military transformed this device into a flame thrower.
- The backpack is a containment cell for the everburning heart of the fire sorcerer Bunsen.

Cuervo, the Hunter's Companion

The wielder can summon Cuervo, a loyal raven.

What is Cuervo?

- A normal raven with above-average intelligence. He can carry small objects, though he's ideally suited for scouting. He caws when he sees danger.
- A giant raven big enough for a person to ride on his back.
- A spirit raven that can find literally anything. Simply name it, and Cuervo flies off toward it.

How do you summon Cuervo?

- Say its name.
- Pluck one of the bow's feathers and cast it into the air.
- Fire an arrow skyward. The arrow turns into Cuervo.

What happens if Cuervo dies?

- He can't be resummoned for a while (GM's discretion).
- One of the raven feathers on the bow blows away (it starts with 1d6). The bow loses its magic when all of the feathers are gone.
- The bow splinters into a hundred ravens, which fly off.

According to legend...

- Cuervo was a raven that followed a hunter throughout the wilderness, faithfully scouting ahead and helping the hunter track prey. Eventually, the bird died and the hunter kept some of his feathers as an adornment on the bow. Until the end of his days the hunter could always rely on his friend's spirit to guide the way.
- When the Raven God clashed with a chaos titan, some of its feathers fell to earth. A fletcher named Cuervo gathered the feathers and created this bow.
- After accidentally slaying his friend with a misfired arrow, an archer vowed to never shoot a bow again. He stripped the feathers from his arrows and tied them to his bow.

Emperor Yang's Teapot

A group of people believe that the last person to drink tea brewed from this teapot is their rightful ruler.

Who believes this?

- A small group of traditionalist knights.
- An entire religion.
- A nation.

Are they compelled to believe this?

- Yes, they have no choice. The magic is binding.
- Yes, but it's far from mind control. They deeply respect and love their ruler and happily obey, almost like a close parent-child relationship.
- No, it's just a cultural belief. In fact, the teapot holds no magic at all. Its only power is the power that people choose to give it.

What happens if the teapot is destroyed?

- The people will rise up to obliterate their former ruler.
- The people revile their former ruler.
- The custom ends; they'll need a new way to select their ruler.

How's the tea?

- Delicious.
- Bitter.
- Glows like molten gold.

According to legend...

- Royalty of the Yang Dynasty must complete the sacred tea ritual before rightfully taking the throne. This teapot is the focal point of the ceremony.
- A goddess disguised herself and visited an old tea farmer. Pleased by his gracious hospitality, the goddess enchanted his teapot so that he would have the authority to rule the land.
- Emperor Yang sired no children, so he decreed that his legacy would live on in his favorite teapot.

Eye of Night

The possessor can behold darkness.

What darkness can you see?

- Light and darkness are inverted for you. Dark areas are as clear as a well-lit day, and bright areas are gloomy.
- You can see the darkness of a person's soul, which hangs about them like a dark storm cloud.
- Whenever you close your eyes, you witness dark and terrible events that have not yet unfolded.

How do you use it?

- Keep it on your person.
- Grasp it tightly and it vanishes, fusing with your soul.
- Press it into your forehead, where it physically fuses with your skull. It becomes a third eye as black as midnight itself.

What does the eye do at midnight?

- You take on the visage of the Eye of Night's true form until sunrise.
- It shows you what it wants you to see.
- It takes control of you for a few minutes.

What is the cost?

- It bonds with you. You're stuck with it until you die.
- Sunrise makes you physically ill.
- You are incapable of sleeping at night.

According to legend...

- In much the same way that a person can become sick, a ray of sunlight can become infected by darkness. This stone contains a beam corrupted light.
- This is the disembodied eye of a night drake, who are said to be able to see rays of shadow the way humans see rays of sunlight.
- Only one explorer has ever found the edge of the world. He reached down and picked up a pebble from the horizon where night meets day.

Hourglass of Yesterday

This hourglass manipulates time.

What happens when you flip it over?

- Time freezes for everything except you.
- Time rewinds exactly 1 day.
- Time accelerates for you, allowing you to move much more quickly for a short time.

What toll does it take?

- You age rapidly.
- Temporal guardians cast their baleful eyes on you for violating cosmic laws.
- It takes a very long amount of time for the sand to run through so it can be used again.

What happens if you break the glass?

- You're thrown through time.
- You age a thousand years in a few seconds.
- Sand gets everywhere.

According to legend...

- The universe began when the Hourglass of Eternity was turned over. Someone managed to remove some of the sand and used it to create the Hourglass of Yesterday, thus shortening the universe's lifespan.
- After his family was tragically slain by a tidal wave, the deranged wizard Xon devoted his life to draining enough energy to turn back the clocks. He succeed and crafted this magic item, but was crushed to discover that his life's work only amounted to 24 hours of time travel.
- Technically, the hourglass doesn't exist yet. Someone will create it tomorrow.

Gladius

The wielder gains some of the martial prowess of the last wielder.

What power do you channel?

- Gain 1 of their combat traits as a temporary trait.
- Learn everything they knew about combat.
- Replace all of your combat traits with theirs.

How do you connect with the last wielder?

- When you sleep, you dream of their battles.
- Gain some of the last wielder's personality traits, as determined by the GM.
- In the heat of battle, you may become possessed by the last wielder.

What happens if you lose the sword?

- The sword pulls at you. Retrieving it becomes your foremost goal in life.
- The sword forsakes you. You may never wield it again.
- You permanently lose a fraction of your combat prowess (a combat trait, knowledge, stats, etc), locked away forever inside the sword.

According to legend..

- A soldier took this sword to war and used it to kill his enemies. That soldier died, so the sword found itself in the hands of another warrior. So it went, battle after battle. This sword has been wielded by hundreds of soldiers, and has slain untold thousands.
- The legendary gladiator Tetrates used this blade in a 99-match victory streak before dying in his 100th match — just one victory away from winning freedom.
- This was the only weapon recovered from the great Battle of Cavorus. Some say that if you put your ear against the blade, you can hear the distant sounds of that bloody battle.

Gourd of Morning Dew

This container magically replenishes liquid placed in it.

When does it replenish its contents?

- Constantly - one drop every second.
- Every day at sunrise.
- As soon as its empty.

When can you replace the liquid?

- When the gourd is coated with morning dew.
- After it's been upturned and empty for a full day.
- Whenever you want. Just dump out the old liquid.

Does it have any restrictions?

- No potions. The magic of the potion interferes with the magic of the gourd.
- It can only hold liquids that a gourd could normally hold, so no acid or lava.
- Only the person who put the liquid into the gourd can use its replenished liquid. To everyone else, the gourd pours plain water.

According to legend...

- A wine-loving adventurer found the world's best wine in a bottle of 412 Greyvine. He hired an alchemist to find a way to preserve the vintage indefinitely. It was a terrible mistake: with an infinite supply of the world's most delicious wine, he drank himself to an early grave.
- A pious alchemist sought to distill sunlight itself. She never succeeded, but she developed a potion container that draws from the sun's replenishing energy.
- For centuries, shamans would use this gourd to collect morning dew, which they used in their vision quests. This gourd gradually absorbed the shamans' magic and now continues to perform their morning ritual.

Key to Nowhere

Any door unlocked with this key temporarily becomes a portal to Nowhere.

What is Nowhere?

- An extradimensional space the size of a house.
- An empty, endless void.
- Another universe.

How long does the portal last?

- Just a few minutes.
- Until the door closes.
- Until the key relocks the door, returning the door to normal.

Does it work on any door?

- Yes, even doors without keyholes. A keyhole magically appears when the key comes close.
- The door has to have a keyhole.
- The key only works on doors that go nowhere important, like doors to storage rooms.

What happens on the other side of the door?

- They see the portal to Nowhere, too.
- The portal closes if someone opens the other side of the door.
- The other side of the door won't open, no matter what.

According to legend...

- This key spontaneously came into existence when someone finished crafting Nowhere. But that leaves another question: Who built Nowhere?
- Nowhere was originally the home of the first wizard, who created the universe because he got tired of his cramped living quarters.
- Nowhere is the true universe. The universe we know is basically just Nowhere's backyard.

Many-Sided Coin

This coin shows a beast on each side.

What happens with the face-up beast?

- The GM gives you a temporary trait that represents that beast. You have it until the coin is flipped again.
- The beast appears next to the coin, loyal to whomever flipped it. It disappears when the coin is flipped again.
- You transform into that beast for about 1 hour.

What happens after you flip it?

- Both coin faces change to a new beast.
- The face-up side changes to a new beast.
- The face-down side changes to a new beast.

What sort of beasts does it show?

- Mundane beasts (cat, bird, fish, etc).
- Magical beasts (unicorn, dragon, manticore, etc).
- Similar creatures (mammals, reptiles, birds etc).

According to legend...

- The knights of an ancient order each carried a magic coin bearing a beast. A warlord defeated them all and smelted the coins to combine them into a single, all-powerful coin.
- When a group of powerful adventurers visited the gods, the rogue challenged the Goddess of Luck to a coin toss. He lost, but he never expected to win. He watched where she stowed the coin and later pick-pocketed it.
- Aso and Osa are twin spirits that collectively form Asoosa, the God-Goddess of Nature. They represent nature's dual components: predator and prey, growth and decay, sun and moon, male and female. Each summer solstice, they flip this coin to determine who will control which domains for the year. When they're done, one becomes predator and the other becomes prey so they can begin their year-long hunt.

Orgada's Fang

This dagger drips venom from its hollow tip.

What does the venom do?

- Inflict a wound every couple of seconds.
- Make victims physically weak.
- Cause extreme hallucination and eventually insanity.

How can the poison be cured?

- A general antidote will do the trick.
- There is only one known antidote, which requires special materials.
- Complete a vision quest.

Can its venom be harvested?

- No, the poison deteriorates within minutes of leaving the dagger.
- You can extract 1 dose of poison every day or so.
- It constantly produces harvestable venom, which degrades after about 1 hour.

According to legend...

- Orgada, the Queen of Serpents, was a deadly basilisk whose very touch was death. Adventurers slew the beast and transformed her tooth into a potent weapon.
- Before embarking on a vision quest, would-be chieftains of the Emerald Snake Clan would prick their fingers on their holy clan artifact. Those who completed their quest in time would receive the antidote and gain the right to rule the clan. The antidote recipe is a closely-guarded clan secret, or perhaps lost to the ages.
- A skilled rogue used this dagger to pierce the poison heart of a corrupted dryad. The dagger absorbed a fraction of the dying fey's poisonous blood.

Talia's Eternal Blade

This weapon exists outside of the spacetime continuum.

What does it cut?

- Anything. No material is too strong.
- Magic. It slices through spells and enchantments.
- Reality. It cuts open portals to other dimensions.

How can it be destroyed?

- This sword is utterly and completely indestructible. Not even the GM can destroy this weapon. When the universe ends, this sword will remain.
- A powerful dispelling or magic-draining effect will shatter it like glass.
- It will vanish if it ever crosses the border between dimensions.

How does it warp reality?

- Struck creatures teleport to a random nearby location.
- Once every so often (the GM decides when), the wielder can teleport as per Blink from the Arcane theme.
- Creatures slain by this blade are erased from existence.

According to legend...

- During her fruitless quest for eternal youth, Talia the chronomancer discovered a material that exists outside of the spacetime continuum. She crafted a sword out of the material to fund her research..
- Talia, an apprentice swordmage, botched a dangerous teleportation spell. Talia vanished from existence, but her sword appeared at her teleportation destination.
- Talia was a cosmic entity charged with dividing reality into its component pieces. She used this blade to slice apart the various universes.

Well-Wishing Whiskey

Luck befalls those who make a toast with this whiskey.

What happens when you drink a toast?

- Toasters increase all rolls they make to fulfill that toast for the next day or so.
- The toast becomes true, like a wish has been granted.
- Drinkers form deep, life-long bonds with each other. They henceforth regard each other as their most valued friends.

What happens with the leftover bottle?

- Whoever breaks it loses their closest friend.
- Nothing. It's just a bottle.
- It smells of whiskey forever more. The scent invokes powerful feelings of fond nostalgia and camaraderie.

How's the hangover?

- Blissfully absent.
- Like a dragon is trying to break out of your skull.
- It wipes everyone's memory of the toast. Drinkers privately write a toast on a piece of paper and give them to the GM, who secretly chooses one. That's the toast everyone made last night.

How's it taste?

- Dry and sweet, with a smooth finish.
- Rich and complex. Packs a punch.
- The way friendship would taste, if you could drink it.

According to legend...

- The distillation process uses wishing well water.
- The God of Booze and Valor created this drink for special occasions.
- For decades, an explorer visited every site where something truly great happened. She searched the hallowed ground and gathered a few handfuls of grain. She used these to create a grain mash to distill the whiskey.

Encounters

Encounters

An adventurer is nothing without adventure! As the GM, it's your job to come up with exciting and challenging encounters for your players.

It's important to remember that Tavern Tales places equal emphasis on combat, exploration, and interaction. Players will have a diverse array of traits, so they'll be eager for opportunities to use them. This section provides encounters for each category of play.

You are free to mix and match these encounters however you want. For example, you might say that manticores (monster) are nesting at the top of a craggy mountain (location). You are certainly welcome and encouraged to use elements of all three encounter types in your adventures.

Art

Combat: Monsters

Monsters are combat-capable creatures that adventurers may encounter. Despite the term “monsters,” these creature’s aren’t necessarily evil or monstrous. They could become trusted allies, loyal minions, or fearless mounts. However, it’s much more likely that they will serve as deadly adversaries. Monsters are at the core of many adventures, providing the story with a suitable antagonist.

Customizing Monsters

Rather than providing detailed attributes for each monster, Tavern Tales encourages GMs to build their own monsters.

Stats

Monsters don’t roll dice, which means that they almost never use their stats. Therefore, you can ignore stats when you build your monster. Since players have to divide their XP between stats and traits, simply cut your monster’s XP in half. Spend half on traits, and ignore the other half—assume it’s being spent on stats.

There is one big exception. If a player acquires a monster as a minion, that player can roll on behalf of that monster. If this happens, simply spend the monster’s remaining XP on stats.

Extra Powerful Monsters

You may want to create extra powerful monsters that can deal more damage, withstand extra hits, or use special abilities. Feel free to invent traits and go with whatever seems logical. Most monsters exist to die in RPGs anyway, so don’t sweat the details. However, new GMs typically lack a deep understanding of game balance, so they should generally avoid bending the rules. Run your players through a few fights to get a feel for their capabilities before you throw them up against extremely powerful monsters.

Astral Watcher

These trans-dimensional watchdogs patrol the space between universes. They relentlessly track down any who threaten the fabric of reality, dragging their quarry into the Void.

- Hunt in a pack
- Lair in the Void
- Protect spacetime
- Sniff out prey

Why do they guard the universe?

- They’re simply protecting their territory.
- They were bred for this purpose.
- This is how they hunt. They can smell when someone violates a universal law, so it’s similar to a pack of wolves smelling a blood trail.

What do they hunt?

- Anyone who tampers with the fabric of reality.
- Creatures that violate spacetime by teleporting or time traveling.
- Those who seek Occultism patrons from the dark monsters that sleep in the endless void between stars.

What happens when they start a hunt?

- Their quarry can hear their unearthly howls echoing from the hollow sky.
- They foreshadow their arrival days in advance with gravitational anomalies. Areas around their quarry will experience increased or weakened gravity, which intensifies as the watchers near.
- Within minutes, black hole portals open up near the quarry and astral watchers leap out.

What is the Void?

- The empty space between stars.
- Another dimension, which is a dark and twisted version of our own. Creatures live on shattered fragments of planets floating through an empty nothing.
- Nothing. Literally nothing — just endless blackness.

Weaknesses

- Bright light.
- Beholding their true form.
- Manipulating space and time.
- Strong gravity.

Combat

Death Throes - Undeath

Exploration

Cast into the Void - Occultism
Enhanced Senses - Beast
Teleport - Arcane

Art

Adventure!

- A wizard has lost something incredibly valuable (an apprentice, familiar, spellbook, etc) in the Void. The only way to find the lost item is to let astral watchers drag adventurers into the Void so they can retrieve it.
- An alien Occultism patron has been spreading nightmares and darkness across the mortal realm. Nobody has been able to stop it because it lives in the darkness between the stars. Perhaps the adventurers could capture an astral watcher and use it to access the patron’s sidereal realm.
- Somebody important (perhaps one of the adventurers?) is being hunted by watchers. No matter how many watchers are killed, they just keep coming. The only way to get rid of them is to make them lose the scent trail by repair whatever damage was done to the universe.

Feelings: *Faint pull of gravity, cold emptiness*

Sights: *Body shaped like a hole in the universe, glowing eyes pulse like supernovas*

Smells: *Ozone*

Sounds: *Baying howl, snarling barks*

Interaction

Shatter Mind - Occultism

Art

Adventure!

- A swarm of burst beetles threaten to ignite or poison a vineyard. They can't be killed because their chemicals will leak into the soil and taint the crops. The vineyard owners seek someone who can lure the beetles away.
- A burst beetle infestation plagues a small village. What's worse, rats have begun preying on the beetles. Half of the rats die off, and the other half mutate into dog-sized monstrosities.
- Burst beetle queens are gathering in the forest for mating season. An herbalist will pay a handful of gold coins for every handful of burst beetle egg sacs.
- Someone is suffering from a rare disease. The only known cure is the potion of an incredibly rare pink burst beetle.
- Sentient frogmen consider burst beetles to be the peak of culinary excellence. They need someone to gather a wide variety of burst beetles to serve as the main course for an upcoming wedding ceremony.

Weaknesses

- Piercing weapons
- Antidotes and neutralizing agents

Combat

Acid - Alchemy
 Poisonous - Alchemy
 Death Throes - Undeath

Exploration

Wall Climbing - Beast

Interaction

Drug - Alchemy
 Pheromones - Alchemy

Burst Beetles

Strangely, these insects contain alchemical potions in their abdomens. An adventurer can come back from the brink of death by swallowing a burst beetle that contains a healing potion. Just make sure to swallow one that contains a healing potion, and not one that contains sulfuric acid.

- Eat plants
- Lay eggs in hidden places
- Gather in swarms
- Spray chemicals

Why do their bodies contain potions?

- It's a natural evolved defense mechanisms.
- Alchemists mutated burst beetles as a way to easily harvest chemicals.
- They feed on alchemical reagents. As a result, potions naturally metabolize in their stomachs.

Where are they found?

- They favor verdant areas where they feed on plants.
- They prefer dark areas like dungeons and caves where their chemicals won't dry up.
- They are common pests in cities and farms.

Are they valuable?

- They are practically worthless because their potions are too hard to predict.
- Alchemists will pay handsomely for live burst beetles.
- Burst beetle egg sacs ("alcaaviar") are literally worth their weight in gold.

Is there a way to predict their contents?

- Nope. Cross your fingers.
- It's doable with a little bit of labwork.
- The beetles are color-coded (green means poison, red means explosives, blue means healing, etc).
- A skilled alchemist can identify a burst beetle's potion simply by looking at it.

- **Feelings:** *Wriggles all the way down if swallowed, thick fluid, smooth chitin*
- **Sights:** *Glossy black chitin, translucent abdomen filled with glowing opalescent chemical*
- **Smells:** *Acrid chemicals*
- **Sounds:** *Thrumming wings, wet pop, scraping chitin*

Demon

Born of shadow and fire, demons are cruel otherworldly creatures that exist only to spread terror and misery throughout the mortal realm.

- Corrupt the innocent
- Obtain mortal servants
- Lie and deceive
- Spread evil

How do they enter the mortal realm?

- They're summoned, typically by fools.
- They enter the world when the barrier between hell and the mortal realm. Typically, this occurs during tragic events or on special days of the year.
- They come as go as they please, but mysterious rules restrict them from waging all-out war against mortals.

How does they become Occultism patrons?

- Any mortal who learns the name of a demon gains power over it.
- Demons sign bloodpacts, offering a fraction of their demonic power in exchange for servitude.
- Ambitious warlocks forcefully bind demons. A demon is simultaneously a warlock's greatest enemy and greatest ally.

Do they follow rules?

- No, demons can do as they please.
- Hell is a strict hierarchy between greater and lesser demons. As a result, demons must often follow the orders of their superiors or risk terrible consequences.
- Yes, demons are bound by the ancient scripts of hell, which limit their ability to influence mortals.

- **Feelings:** *Scalding heat, crushing despair*
- **Sights:** *Curved obsidian-black horns, glowing eyes burn with malice, leathery bat wings*
- **Smells:** *Sulfur and smoke*
- **Sounds:** *Wicked laugh full of contempt, the tortured wails of the damned, crackling fire*

Combat

Terrify - Occultism
 Fling - Beast
 Carnage - Dragon
 Immolate - Elements
 Path of Fire - Elements

Exploration

Defile - Occultism
 Flight - Elements
 Darkness - Occultism

Art

Adventure!

- A practitioner of the Occult is ready to summon a demon and bind it to her service. She has the necessary protection spells in place. She wants some extra muscle to protect her during the conjuring... just in case.
- Cultists are ritualistically sacrificing villagers to summon their dark lord. The ritual will be complete when the altar overflows with the blood of the innocent.
- A wizard didn't read the fine text of his contract with his new imp familiar, and now he's being tortured in the pits of hell. Storming hell is a suicide mission, so the adventurers need to find a legal loophole or convince the mischievous imp to end the contract.
- Strange things have been happening around a small village. The mother of a young boy is convinced that a demon has taken control of her son. Her husband thinks she's delusional.

Weaknesses

- Holy sites
- Exorcisms
- Light
- Superstitious wards

Interaction

Possess - Undeath
 Binding Contract - Occultism

Dragon

These scaled terrors are among the most feared creature in the land. Adventurers would avoid them entirely if not for the fact that dragons have a habit of sleeping on piles of treasure.

- Amass treasure
- Indulge your vanity
- Hold an eternal grudge
- Prove your superiority

What types of dragons are there?

- They vary slightly in size and color, but for the most part a dragon is a dragon.
- There are dozens of different types, each associated with an elemental force.
- Dragons are as diverse as mammals. Some fly, some swim, some are nocturnal, some talk, some are bestial, some are huge, some are small. All are dangerous.

How can someone appease a dragon?

- Offer tribute. Dragons feel somewhat protective of people who give them treasure, but they would never admit it.
- Shower them with praise and compliments. Worship them. Pledge your life to them. Then, they *might* tolerate you.
- That's like asking, "How can a cockroach appease a human?" It's just not possible.

What do dragons hoard?

- Gold, gemstones, and precious metals. If it glitters, a dragon will want it.
- Whatever interests them. All dragons hoard, but they rarely see eye-to-eye on what's worth hoarding. One dragon might hoard books, while another might hoard plants and beautiful flowers. In any case, a dragon's hoard far exceeds any human collection in quality and beauty.
- Bones from adventurers foolish enough to believe the silly myth that dragons hoard gold.

- **Feelings:** *Iron-hard scales that are hot to the touch*
- **Sights:** *Leathery wings, shining scales, reptilian eyes look at you with disdain*
- **Smells:** *Smoke, burned flesh*
- **Sounds:** *Deep rumbling, distant roar*

Combat

Immolate - Elements
 Dragon's Breath - Dragon
 Scales Like Tenfold Shields - Dragon
 Stoke the Furnace - Dragon
 Abandon All Hope - Command

Exploration

Lair - Dragon
 My Precious - Dragon
 Flight - Elements
 Smokescreen - Elements

Art

Adventure!

- A dragon claimed a village as part of its territory and demands tribute. The villagers have amassed a treasure chest full of valuables. They need someone trustworthy to escort it to the dragon's lair and humbly beg that their village be spared.
- A thief managed to steal a handful of 11 gold coins from a dragon hoard. To a dragon, theft is the most terrible insult imaginable and *must* be rectified. The dragon promises a full treasure chest of gold for the return of *each* of the 11 coins stolen from her hoard. She also promises a magic item of unfathomable power to anyone who can bring her the thief.
- A village has existed peacefully on the outskirts of a dragon's territory for centuries. Another dragon has started lairing nearby, and now the village lies in both dragons' territory. The villagers aren't sure what to do; bowing to one dragon will insult the other, and bowing to neither will infuriate them both. They need either expert negotiators or a full-scale evacuation.

Weaknesses

- Its one missing scale
- The flame sac in its gullet
- Vanity

Interaction

Tribute - Dragon
 Pride - Dragon
 Serve or DIE! - Dragon
 Terrifying Glory - Dragon

Art

Adventure!

- Miners magically enslaved earth elementals to help them mine. Something has disrupted the control runes, and now the earth elementals are rebelling against their former masters.
- A malicious fire elemental is spreading fire everywhere it goes. It's already burned down a few houses and threatens to expand its all-consuming fire to an entire city. Thousands could die if it's not stopped.
- A pact formed between sailors and a group of air elementals has expired. The sailors need adventurers to travel to a storm-swept island to negotiate for another year-long agreement of favorable winds.
- A water elemental sleeps in a small pond, dispensing wisdom and magical gifts to anyone who comes to it seeking aid. Poison seeps into the pond from upstream, making the elemental vicious and cruel. Find the source of corruption to restore the elemental.

- **Earth:** *Rumbling, plumes of dust, hard jagged rock, glittering crystal fragments*
- **Air:** *Whirling debris, howling wind, hair and clothes buffeted, cold wind causes goosebumps*
- **Fire :** *Choking smoke, oppressive heat, the heat stings your eyes, crackling*
- **Water:** *Churning water, bubbly froth, clouds of mist, cool water, strong current*

Combat

Any from the Elements theme.

Exploration

Any from the Elements theme.

Interaction

Any from the Elements theme.

Elemental

Elementals are beings of pure elemental energy. There are as many different kinds as there are elements.

- Act like your element
- Live in your element
- Despise your opposite
- Spread your element

Where do they come from?

- Elementals appear naturally, like how a storm cloud appears seemingly out of nowhere.
- They spawn in areas of intense elemental activity, such as fire elementals appearing during a volcanic eruption or wildfire.
- They do not exist naturally, and can only appear through direct magic intervention. Wizards create them, or perhaps summon them from another realm.

How do they view people?

- They don't notice or care about people any more than a hurricane cares about people.
- People are alien and confusing to elementals. How can they need water to live, but die from too much of it? How can they be warm with no fire?
- Elementals have personalities just like people do. Earth elementals might be patient and slow, while fire elementals might be passionate and hot-tempered. They tend to like people who exhibit their qualities.

Are they solitary?

- Yes. Elementals are too rare to travel in groups.
- No, they gladly serve anything that embodies their element (a fire elemental might delight in the company of a fiery demon or dragon).
- No, they occasionally form shaky alliances in their eternal war against their opposites. Air elementals might align with fire or water elementals against their earthen rivals.

What types of elementals are there?

- Just four: earth, air, fire, and water.
- There are a huge variety of elementals, including void, sand, wood, metal, magic, death, and dark, and light.

Weaknesses

- Their opposite element (earth vs air, fire vs water)
- Glowing crystal heart

Forgeling

These automatons exist for one purpose alone: build copies of themselves. They single-mindedly gather scrap and magic energy sources to build new forgelings, which in turn go forth and do the same.

- Build copies of yourself
- Dismantle objects
- Collect scrap
- Work in a workshop

Why do they build copies of themselves?

- They must. It is their prime directive.
- They enjoy building things.
- They know they must bolster their numbers to survive as a species.

What powers forgelings?

- Elbow grease, apparently. A forgeling can turn a bunch of inert materials into a robotic creature.
- Fuel such as oil and coal, which they consume voraciously.
- Magic. They gather magical components (especially magic items), which they break down to power their new creations.
- A soul. A forgeling sacrifices a living creature during the creation process. The soul is converted into raw energy, which powers the new forgeling.

What do they think of people?

- People and animals are tools. A forgeling looks at a person the way a person looks at a wrench.
- Living creatures act illogically and their squishy gears are bewildering.
- Forgelings form strong symbiotic relationships with people. They often build houses and repair broken equipment for people in exchange for scrap.

- **Feelings:** *Slimy grease, cool metal*
- **Sights:** *Mismatched parts, sparks, whirling gears, metal plates*
- **Smells:** *Smoke and oil, burning metal*
- **Sounds:** *Monotone voice devoid of emotion, screeching metal, whirring gears, clanking metal*

Combat

- Enchant - Artifice
- Dismantle - Artifice
- Deflect - Artifice

Exploration

- Forge - Artifice
- Identify - Artifice
- Prosthesis - Artifice
- Tool for the Job - Artifice
- Ingenuity - Artifice

Art

Adventure!

- A group of forgelings have begun digging up a graveyard to harvest stone, wood, bones, and the metal armor that some warriors were buried in. Stop the mechanical grave robbers from defiling the dead!
- A merchant stole a gizmogrank, a specialized tool that the forgelings need to create more of their kind. She's using it as leverage to force the forgelings to build things for her, and is making a fortune. The forgelings beseech the adventurers to return their stolen tool.
- A single forgeling sneaked into a castle armory, where it quickly multiplied into 50 forgelings overnight. They've driven out the castle's inhabitants. They must be stopped before they gain access to the magical vault and construct an army of automatons.
- Forgelings acquired a critically important item and incorporated it into a new forgeling. The item must be retrieved at any cost. Figuring out which of the forgelings has the item in its body could be tricky, especially if they think the adventurers want to dismantle them.

Weaknesses

- Throwing a wrench in their gears
- Power source (furnace, battery, magic orb, etc)

Interaction

- Marshal Forces - Command

Homunculus

Bizarre alchemical concoctions run through the veins of these manmade constructs. Alchemists have been known to use them as lab assistants, guards, or experimental test subjects.

- Gather knowledge
- Obey or rebel
- Perform alchemy
- Seek life's meaning

Do they have free will?

- Their alchemical hearts compel them to serve their creators.
- Homunculi are distinct from golems in that they inherently have free will and human-like intelligence.
- Newly made homunculi are incredibly intelligent when they are first born, but they slowly lose their wits as the chemical reactions in their brain gradually die down.

How are they made?

- The elixir of life runs through their veins. The elixir is fairly easy to brew, so homunculi are common servants in laboratories.
- Artificially creating life is widely regarded as an abomination, so most records of the homunculus creation process have been burned and lost to the ages.
- Alchemists siphon their own blood into a homunculus. This is an exhausting and dangerous process that takes about 2 months to complete safely.

What are their personalities?

- Homunculi exhibit some of the creator's personality traits.
- They tend to be somewhat nihilistic and brooding as they contemplate their place in the universe. Is their true purpose in life to serve their master? Is it even accurate to say that they have a "life?"
- Homunculi are much like the chemicals that give them life: volatile, unpredictable, and violent.

- **Feelings:** *Skin throbs with chemical churning, slightly cool skin, stinging eyes from trace airborne chemicals*
- **Sights:** *Colorful chemical-filled veins, chemical stains, sickly pale skin*
- **Smells:** *Caustic chemicals*
- **Sounds:** *Struggling voice, bubbling chemicals*

Combat

- Death Throes - Alchemy
- Poisonous - Alchemy
- Inoculated - Alchemy
- Evocation - Arcane

Exploration

- Detect Magic - Arcane
- Mutagen - Alchemy

Art

Adventure!

- The chemicals fueling a homunculus have begun to decay. Its master chose to discard it like trash rather than refuel it with new chemicals. Desperate and afraid, the homunculus needs help breaking into a laboratory so that it can brew the necessary chemicals to keep itself alive.
- A homunculus servant loathes its slavery and dreams of freedom. It seeks adventurers who can smuggle it to safety, but it would rather somebody assassinate its master.
- A group of homunculi (known as a "lab") have been living in nearby abandoned ruins for years. An alchemist wants to harvest reagents from their bodies.
- An alchemist has created a particularly potent rage serum, which he must distill within homunculi for three days. He fears that the homunculi could become violent during that time, so he needs a group of adventurers to keep him and his lab safe while the rage serum completes the distillation process.

Weaknesses

- Neutralizing agents
- Bleeding their potion-blood out
- Sparking a chemical reaction

Interaction

- Polyglot - Arcane

Lich

A lich is a person who cheats death by locking their soul within a phylactery. So long as the phylactery remains intact, this undead creature can survive indefinitely.

- Complete your life's work • Scheme
- Hoard secrets • Protect your phylactery

What is a phylactery?

- Any sort of container (jar, box, coffin, etc).
- It can be anything as long as it bears magical lich runes.
- A living creature. Soul can only be tethered to flesh.

What happens if the phylactery is destroyed?

- The lich dies instantly.
- The lich's soul returns to its body, making it mortal.
- The soul attempts to flee and find a new phylactery.

Where must the phylactery be kept?

- Somewhere close. A lich becomes less powerful as the distance to its phylactery increases.
- Anywhere is fine, but a lich must regularly perform maintenance on it (once every month or so).
- It can be anywhere, so liches spend most of their time coming up with convoluted ways to hide their phylacteries from the inevitable adventuring party.

Why wouldn't adventurers destroy a phylactery?

- A full phylactery is worth a life. You can save someone from dying by sacrificing the soul to Death.
- Anyone who possesses a phylactery holds incredible power over the lich.
- Liches typically protect their phylacteries with powerful wards. Anyone who damages it will likely suffer a terrible curse.

How does someone become a lich?

- Anyone can become a lich as long as they have a phylactery.
- A complicated, expensive, and taboo magic ritual.
- There isn't one specific process. Becoming a lich is as varied as cooking a stew — each culture has its own recipe.

- **Feelings:** *Chill in the air, paper-thin skin*
- **Sights:** *Glowing eyes, decayed skin, visible bone*
- **Smells:** *Musty air thick with mildew, Rot and decay*
- **Sounds:** *Raspy voice*

Combat

Drain Soul - Undeath
 Touch of Death - Undeath
 Reanimate - Undeath
 Magic Missile - Arcane
 Dispel - Arcane

Exploration

Wizard Eye - Arcane
 Illusion - Arcane
 Forge - Artifice

Art

Adventure!

- After a wizard passed away, her heirs divided up her property and sold most of her magical trinkets. Her family had no idea that her death was temporary, and that a magic box they sold was her phylactery. Now, the lich needs someone to track down her phylactery.
- A lich is amassing a massive undead army to conquer the world. The group needs to find the lich's phylactery — and fast — before his army marches.
- Adventurers discover that a cruel lich is using an innocent child and his phylactery. Can the adventurers destroy the lich while sparing the child?
- A lich was captured by pirates and kept in magical shackles. The ship sank, and now the lich is eternally trapped at the bottom of the ocean. Her spell calls out to adventurers along the coast. She begs them to rescue her; if that's impossible, she asks them to destroy her hidden and well-guarded phylactery so her unbearable imprisonment can finally end.

Weaknesses

- Phylactery

Interaction

Revenant - Undeath
 Marshal Forces - Command

Manticore

Terrifying hybrids of lion, scorpion, and bat, manticores are deadly predators that soar through the skies in search of prey.

- Build a lair • Hunt for food
- Defend your territory • Soar high in the sky

Are manticores solitary or pack animals?

- They hunt alone, only joining with other manticores during mating seasons.
- They form loyal, lifelong mating pairs. Males are larger than females, but females are much faster.
- Manticores gather in deadly groups of 3-5 known as "a spike of manticores."

Are they territorial?

- Manticores never fly more than 5 miles away from their nest, which they defend viciously.
- Manticores are migratory predators that follow the movement of their prey (typically herd animals).
- A single manticore typically has 2-4 lairs, which they fly between regularly. The world is peppered with forgotten manticore lairs filled with the bones and treasure of their human prey.

Can they be tamed as mounts?

- They can be trained like a horse to obey a rider
- Manticores are viciously feral and will turn on their riders at the first opportunity.
- These loyal creatures have a natural urge to bond with another. They typically bond with a mate, but a manticore raised in captivity will develop a strong bond with a trainer.

- **Feelings:** *Soft fur, needle-sharp barbs*
- **Sights:** *Leathery bat wings, tail barbs shine with poison, tawny fur*
- **Smells:** *Earthy musk from natural oils coating its fur, urine used to mark territory*
- **Sounds:** *Leonine roar*

Combat

Poisonous - Alchemy
 Fling - Beast
 Rend - Beast
 Tooth and Nail - Beast

Exploration

Flight - Elements
 Enhanced Senses - Beast

Art

Adventure!

- A manticore has flown off with Jedidiah's prize pig. Without it, he has no chance of winning first place at the harvest festival!
- A child was bitten by a snake and is on death's door. The only known antidote is a distilled toxin derived from manticore spines.
- A rich, spoiled noble's son is excited to use the new crossbow that daddy got him, and he's decided that a manticore is the perfect sport. He seeks a group of adventurers who can help him track one down.
- The alchemist originally responsible for creating manticores is on the verge of mutating a new monstrosity: bearspiders. Her forest workshop is guarded by manticores and cockatrices.

Weaknesses

- Their cubs
- Underbelly
- Wings

Interaction

Alpha - Beast

Ooze

These mindless organisms exist for one purpose alone: absorb more biomatter. They are found in caves and dungeons where the cool, dynamic environment keeps them moist.

- Absorb biomatter
- Stay cool and moist
- Divide
- Act mindlessly

How do they reproduce?

- When they absorb enough biomass, they split into two identical oozes.
- Massive “mother oozes” leave trails of tiny oozes in their wake. The only true way to eliminate an ooze infestation is to destroy the mother ooze.
- Alchemists have been trying to discover the answer to that for millennium and they’re no better off than when they started. All they know for certain is that they seep up from cracks in the ground during spring and return underground in fall.

How strong is their acid?

- Fairly weak. They slowly dissolve organic material.
- Potent. Anything organic immersed in an ooze will disintegrate within minutes.
- Incredibly dangerous. Everything they touch liquefies.

How many kinds are there?

- There’s basically only one type of ooze. The only real difference is their size.
- There’s only one type of ooze, but individual oozes gradually take on the properties of whatever they absorb, resulting in incredible diversity.
- There are a handful of basic types: acidic oozes, cube-shaped oozes, lava oozes, and so forth.

- **Feelings:** *Burning acid, wet impact, oily slime*
- **Sights:** *Ripples and jiggles, translucent jelly, flecks of partially dissolved flesh*
- **Smells:** *Acrid chemical smell, decay*
- **Sounds:** *Sloshing and bubbling, splat*

Weaknesses

- Extreme heat dries it out
- Extreme cold freezes it
- Its stupidity

Combat

Acid - Alchemy
Trail of Fire - Alchemy
Affinity - Elements

Exploration

Oil Slick - Alchemy
Wall Climbing - Beast

Interaction

Art

Adventure!

- The alchemist’s guild needs an ooze sample for a new acidic compound. They need someone who’s strong and clever enough to retrieve a live ooze sample.
- A slime crawled into a castle’s sewage pit. At first it was tolerated, and then it was celebrated. The ooze indiscriminately sucked up all biological material, including foul-smelling offal. It has now grown to the size of a barn and threatens to climb up out of the sewers and consume the castle inhabitants.
- Last year, a passing frost mage saved a terrorized village by freezing a gigantic ooze in a block of ice. The ooze has been harmless all throughout winter, but that is about to change. Brace yourself; spring is coming.
- A freak storm caused fist-sized oozes to rain from the sky. Whole fields have been reduced to acidic swamps, houses have been half-melted, and countless livestock are dead. Could the nearby potion factory be to blame?
- Legendary adventurers have defeated a massive monster of unimaginable power. They left weeks ago, and now the gigantic monster’s corpse smells just awful. Villagers haven’t gone near it, so nobody noticed that the monster’s acidic stomach bile crawled out and has begun devouring local wildlife.

Siren

These aquatic creatures are masters of vocalization, capable of mimicking any sound.

- Find an audience
- Listen to lovely sounds
- Lure people to you
- Mimic sounds and music

Why do they sing?

- To entice sailors to their watery graves.
- Because they enjoy it. The fact that it attracts sailors is simply an unintended side effect.
- To attract people for pleasant conversation, merriment, and (in rare cases) wave-swept trysts.

What are they like?

- Bestial. They have the face of a human, but the soul of a shark.
- As diverse as people are. They’re kind, curious, cruel, ambitious, and everything in between.
- Vain and self-centered. They take tremendous pleasure in the attention they get from people. Some sirens have even been known to capture people for a permanent audience. They treat their captives as slaves, pets, or lovers.

Are they solitary?

- Yes, they’re far too vain to let other sirens drown out their songs.
- No, they gather in groups known as “A chorus of sirens.” They weave together songs in perfect harmony.
- They are as diverse as people. Some are loners, while others enjoy company.

- **Feelings:** *Smooth scales, soft skin, wet hair*
- **Sights:** *Sun-tanned skin, sleek face, sea-blue eyes*
- **Smells:** *The ocean, possibly perfume*
- **Sounds:** *Unearthly music, melodic voice*

Weaknesses

- Being silenced.
- Can’t walk on land.
- Sonic-based attacks.

Combat

Inspire - Bardic Lore
Steal the Spotlight - Bardic Lore

Exploration

Enhanced Senses - Beast
Water Breathing - Elements

Art

Adventure!

- The crew of the Songcage sails the seas in search of sirens, which they capture and sell to carnivals, playhouses, and other establishments. A siren beseeches the adventurers to stop the slavers and free her kind.
- A note in the a bottle reads: “Help! I was shipwrecked near Coral Island. Sirens slaughtered my crew and hold me captive!” The person who wrote the note is a traveling bard. The sirens force him to play music for their endless songs.
- A fishing village often trades with a group of friendly sirens. Each year, they hold a festival where the sirens join the community on their docks and sing beautiful songs. Use this festival as an opportunity to world-build, roleplay, and introduce other quests.
- Sirens have wrecked countless ships along the shores of a rocky island. Untold treasure rests untouched just beneath the waves. Anyone who can safely reach the island and silence the sirens could make a fortune.
- A siren dreams of living among the humans where she can sing for adoring crowds. She’s been collecting pearls and precious coral for years to fund her excursion. She needs adventurers to serve as her bodyguard until she gets established.

Interaction

Fey Beauty - Nature
Banshee’s Wail - Undeath
Fan the Flames - Elements
Still Air - Elements
Honeyed Words - Bardic Lore

Art

Exploration: Locations

Locations are exotic and unique areas. You can use locations as backdrops for your adventure, or use locations as the adventure itself. “Mankind against nature” is a classic trope in adventures. Surviving a brutal blizzard, navigating a magical forest, or escaping a collapsing cave can give your players an exciting experience.

Graveyard

Graveyards are deeply sacred sites where people bury their dead. However, in a world where the dead can return to life, graveyards are also sources of adventure.

Are there any wards against the undead?

- No. It’s generally a good idea to stay away from graveyards after dark...
- Most communities protect their graveyards with iron gates, sealed tombs, and regular patrols. Anything less is asking for a zombie outbreak.
- Local churches often consecrate graveyards and perform divine rituals to ensure that the dead stay dead.

How are the dead preserved?

- They’re buried underground in coffins.
- They’re burned. Their ashes rest in sealed urns.
- Each family keeps a shrine to their ancestors, typically showing statues of their most revered family elders. The statues solemnly watch over family crypts.

What happens at night?

- Thick fog blankets the graveyard. Those who enter the mist see dark figures skittering through the shadows.
- You can hear the haunting whispers of the dead.
- Will-o-wisps float among the gravestones. Locals claim that the lights are the spirits of the dead seeking a way to the afterlife.

Adventure!

- People are beginning to rise from their graves, seemingly at random. What could be the cause?
- With the exception of the shaman, all members of a tribe are forbidden from entering their sacred burial ground. The shaman frequently visits the burial ground to commune with the ancestors, but he didn’t return from the last trip. The tribe needs a neutral outsider unbound by their ancient traditions to retrieve their lost shaman.
- A necromancer has completed the necessary ritual to turn his dead bride into a lich so they can be together forever. He can’t get caught with incriminating dark magic, so he needs someone to smuggle her buried corpse out of the local cemetery.
- The adventurers need crucial information, which no living person knows. Luckily, the holiday Dia de los Necros approaches, when people can communicate with the spirits of the dead. The adventurers need to reach a distant graveyard before the holiday ends.
- A grave robber uncovered something that terrified him to his very soul. He knows it needs to be stopped, but going to the authorities will get him thrown in jail. He needs discrete adventurers who can look into the unspeakable evil.

Descriptions

- **Feelings:** *Still cold air, soft earth underfoot, chill up your spine.*
- **Sights:** *Grey headstones, grave moss, solemn statues, dark clouds overhead, pale moon.*
- **Smells:** *Fresh earth, rot, wet dirt.*
- **Sounds:** *Hooting owl, screeching bat, eerie silence, chirping crickets.*

Landmarks

- **Freshly dug-up grave**, rich earth is piled around. The coffin is empty.
- **Hanging Tree**, where the guilty are hanged before being dumped into an unmarked grave.
- **One of the player’s tombstones.** The date says that the hero will die today.
- **Shrine**, most likely to the deity of death or ancestors. Perform an act of faith before the shrine (make an offering, swear a divine oath, obey the deity’s dogma, etc) to potentially gain a blessing. Refer to the Faith theme.
- **Sealed Tomb** of a wealthy local family or long-forgotten hero. Some say that treasures wait within.

Art

Jungle

Wild and teeming with life, jungles pose a threat to even the most seasoned adventurer. The tropical weather and heavy rainfall create ideal conditions for exotic wildlife.

Who's the king of the jungle?

- A great cat, which silently stalks her prey from the shadows. None have seen her — only the bloody remains of her latest victim.
- An impossibly large ape with a heart of gold.
- A gigantic lizard, ferocious and ever-hungry. Its thunderous footsteps cause the ground to tremble.
- The wasp queen, who rules from her mountain-sized hive. Her massive workers collect nectar from the jungle's diverse flowers.

What ruins does it hide?

- A stepped pyramid where shamans offered blood sacrifices to their winged sky serpent goddess.
- The lost city of the elves, which was abandoned under mysterious circumstances.
- The ruined fortress of an ambitious noble foolish enough to believe that he could tame the jungle.

What are the biggest threats?

- Venomous plants and creatures. All it takes is one pinprick to die. Watch your step.
- The wildlife. Giant beasts will feast on your entrails.
- The natives, who are aggressive toward outsiders.

Art

Adventure!

- Archaeologists hope to uncover the ruins of an ancient civilization, which is said to lie at the heart of the jungle.
- Natives regularly offer a living sacrifice to their ravenous beast-god so it won't consume their entire community. Their newest sacrifice, which has been bathed in ceremonial herbs and butter, has escaped! Recover the sacrifice to save the village... or, help the innocent person escape, dooming the village in the process.
- Witch doctors from local tribes haven't woken up from their sacred dream quests. According to legend, the souls of the witch doctors complete a holy pilgrimage to the mountain at the heart of the jungle, where they commune with the dead. Are their souls being held captive?
- A wealthy noble with a magic bow set out an expedition to kill a dire lion that he could mount on his wall. It's been weeks since anyone heard from his expedition. His baroness mother will pay handsomely for his safe return.
- The mangled corpses of terrifying beasts have been found along the edge of the jungle. The corpses are showing up closer and closer to a nearby human settlement. Divert whatever is doing the killing before there's a massacre.

Descriptions

- **Feelings:** *Sweat and clothes stick to you, oppressive humidity, stinging insect, warm rain.*
- **Sights:** *The most beautiful flower you've ever seen, birds with exotic plumage, thick green canopy.*
- **Smells:** *Fragrant flowers, pollen, rich earth, musky scent of life.*
- **Sounds:** *Screeching birds, cawing monkeys, pattering rain, distant roar from an unrecognizable beast.*

Landmarks

- **Canopy**, road-sized branches of massive trees twist together in a living web. It's a whole new world up there.
- **Giant trees** as wide around as fortresses.
- **Primordial Valley** forgotten by time. Dinosaurs and dog-sized insects prowl the land.
- **Rope Bridge** covered in vines and moss that creaks in the wind.
- **Surging River** hides hungry river-dwelling beasts.
- **Waterfall** spills from the top of a great cliff into a pristine blue pool below.

Mine

Mines supply nearby communities with a steady stream of raw materials and income. The work is as backbreaking as it is dangerous; cave-ins, gas leaks, and subterranean monsters threaten miners.

What's being mined?

- Coal.
- Gemstones.
- Precious metals (gold, iron, silver, etc).

Who's running the operation?

- A greedy prospector who cares more about quotas than the lives of his workers.
- The local town, which collectively owns the mine. As such, a council of elders or politicians make all of the important decisions.
- A merchant excited to get a return on her investment.

What tools do the miners use?

- Just the basics: pickaxes, shovels, and mine carts.
- Advanced gear like cranes, elevators, and water pumps.
- Magic equipment like glowing helmets, hovering mine carts, and explosive magic.

What's on the other side of that cracked wall?

- A fungal forest, thick with spores.
- Giant bats, cave lizards, or other subterranean beasts.
- A lost dungeon that the locals thought was only a legend.

Art

Adventure!

- Help! A cave-in has trapped miners deep beneath the earth. They have three days of air at most.
- Miners claim that they hear *something* skulking in the deepest tunnels. The miners refused to enter the mines after a pair of miners (disappeared / went mad / received bizarre wounds when their lamp went out).
- A prospector found a gas leak. The adventures must locate the source so it can be isolated or burned off. Hopefully, it's just a deposit of natural gas and not the noxious breath of some terrible creature.
- Deep in the mine, the adventurers' lights mysteriously go out all at once, plunging them into total darkness. Can they blindly find their way out of the mines?
- A very young dragon hoping to secure a lair and build her hoard moved into a mine, claiming it as her own. The locals are angry that their livelihood has been stolen, but terrified to act. They want somebody to enter the mine and negotiate with the dragon.
- The miners dug too deep and reached the insidious underworld below, where horrible shadow beasts, dark elves, and fungus-people rule a sunless world.

Descriptions

- **Feelings:** *Oppressive feeling of weight and darkness, claustrophobia, cool stone.*
- **Sights:** *Flickering lantern light, dust falls from the ceiling, metal mine carts.*
- **Smells:** *Sulfuric smell of natural gas, wet soil and earth, stale air.*
- **Sounds:** *Low rumble, Rhythmic "tink tink tink" of distant miners, echoes.*

Landmarks

- **Bat vents**, cracks in the walls that spew a torrent of screeching bats each day at sundown.
- **Cave-in site** where a miner was lost a few months ago. He's still buried somewhere beneath all that rubble.
- **Gas tunnels**, filled with explosive and toxic vapors that are heavier than air. The lowest tunnels are thick with the vapors, but the upper tunnels are relatively safe.
- **Mine carts** poised enticingly at the top of a steep incline. All anyone would have to do is jump in and release the brake...
- **Mother lode** hidden away in some deep corner of the cave. It's worth a fortune, literally.
- **Pit**, roped-off and ominous. If a rock is dropped into it, more than 10 seconds pass before it hits bottom.

Ship

Seafaring vessels are one of the most popular methods of long-distance travel. Find a good ship and a knowledgeable captain, and the world is your oyster.

What type of ship is it?

- **Battleship:** Capable of carrying dozens of weapons and more than a hundred fighting sailors, these ships are not to be trifled with. Includes galleons, frigates, catawars, etc.
- **Caravel:** Typically outfitted for mundane tasks like fishing or transporting cargo.
- **Galley:** Favored by slavers, these ships rely on oars rather than sails. They stick to the coast.
- **Schooner:** Fast but fragile, these ships rely on speed and maneuverability to evade conflicts.

Is it magical?

- No, it's just wood, wind, and manpower.
- The ship is a living plant sustained by druidic magic. Its hull regenerates and leaf-like sails catch the wind. Sentient vines grab sailors who fall overboard.
- Empowered with elemental magic, the ship can change water currents, create powerful waves, and summon gusts of wind.
- A hidden extradimensional room in the cargo hold protects the ship's most valuable treasure.
- The ship's figurehead is a shrine to an ocean deity.

Who are the sailors?

- Grizzled sea pirates. Eye patches, peg legs, and indescribable stench abound. Yarr, matey!
- Current or ex-military professionals. Disciplined and competent, they operate the ship like a well-oiled machine.
- Bizarre sea-faring creatures (weresharks, sea elves, cultists of the Deep One, etc).

How do sailors pass the time?

- Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum! Or more like barrels and barrels of rum.
- Gambling (poker, arm wrestling, dice, etc).
- They spar on the deck. Losers have to cover the winner's shift.

What sets the ship apart?

- Multicolored bandannas hang from the rigging, each one commemorating a lost sailor.
- It bears obvious battle scars. How is this still floating!?
- The ship and crew are from a distant, exotic land.
- It has a bizarre shape (clam, horse, fortress, etc).

Adventure!

- A merchant is shipping valuable cargo across pirate-infested territory. She needs adventurers who can protect the ship against inevitable pirate attacks.
- Fog gathers across the water. Last time you were at port, you heard a drunken sailor tell a story of a ghostly pirate ship that attacks from the mist.
- At night, sea beasts skulk onto the ship and drag sailors to a watery grave. Fight them off or die!
- The storm of the century threatens to tear the ship apart. Do what the captain says and hang on for dear life, or you'll be swept away under mountain-sized waves.

Descriptions

- **Feelings:** *Warm sun on your skin, painful sunburn, splash of water, gut-churning nausea*
- **Sights:** *Beautiful figurehead shaped like a mermaid or dragon, sparkling water, foam, waves*
- **Smells:** *Salty sea spray, dead fish, low tide*
- **Sounds:** *Creaking wood, groaning rope, cawing seagull*

Landmarks

- **Battlements**, where cannons, catapults, or ballistae stand at the ready. Barrels of highly explosive gunpowder may be nearby.
- **Captain's quarters.** You're not allowed in.
- **Cargo hold** is massive and holds countless crates and barrels. It's pretty much the only place on the ship where someone could hide.
- **Crow's nest.** Increase rolls to spot distant objects while you're up there.

Sunken Ship

A bad day for a ship captain is a good day for adventurers. Sunken ships promise treasure for anyone brave enough to explore their shadowy depths.

Why did the ship sink?

- A naval battle ripped holes in its hull.
- The ship came too close to jagged rocks.
- A horrendous sea beast attacked the ship. Perhaps it's still nearby...

Is it accessible?

- No, it's far too deep for a normal person to reach. Special equipment or magical gear is necessary.
- Underwater plants or sea vents release bubbles, which get trapped on the underside of rock arches. Adventurers can swim from one air pocket to another.
- The water here is shallow enough that someone could swim down and explore the ship for 30 seconds or so. Staying any longer is risky.

What was its cargo?

- Precious metals worth a considerable sum.
- Silks and spice that have long-since deteriorated.
- Alchemical or magical materials, which have mutated the surrounded seascape.

What creatures dwell within it?

- Giant crabs that scuttle across the lowest parts.
- Sharks, restless and ever-hungry.
- Eels glare at trespassers from within their shadowy dwellings.
- The undead remains of the sailors, bound by some curse or unfinished duty to protect the cargo.

Adventure!

- The queen's prized ship was sunk under mysterious circumstances. Her lead shipwright needs adventurers to swim into its hull and unleash a bottled air elemental, which will bring the ship back to the surface where it can be repaired.
- The mast of a sunken ship juts tantalizingly from the water. Where there's a sunken ship, there's treasure.
- The ship explored mysterious, uncharted waters that sink any ship that enters. A wax-sealed scroll case hidden somewhere in the ship should contain the captain's log and her maps, which could finally reveal the secret of the impassible sea.
- Strong currents dragged the ship into an underground cave with an air pocket, where it's now beached underwater. Its glittering treasure is guarded by aquatic cave monsters.
- The ghost pirate ship prowls the moonlit sea and drags sailors to a watery grave. The only way to stop the ghost pirates is to find where the sunken ship rests at day and destroy the captain.
- Retrieve the bones of an important figure who sunk with the ship so that he can receive a proper burial.

Descriptions

- **Feelings:** *Cold salt water, tug of the current.*
- **Sights:** *Algae-covered nets, barnacles and coral on the hull, bioluminescent jellyfish, tattered sails.*
- **Sounds:** *Churning water.*
- **Tastes:** *Salt and more salt.*

Landmarks

- **Air-filled barrel** floats on the ship ceiling. If broken open, it could provide a few breaths of air.
- **Captain's quarters** undoubtedly holds a treasure chest or other valuable trinkets.
- **Giant clam** clamps down suddenly on a leg or ankle, locking someone in place.
- **Hole choked with anemone and urchins.** Swimming through without getting stung could be tricky.
- **Hull breach** opens into the heart of the ship.
- **Jagged coral** rips open skin and possibly poisons creatures that get too close.
- **Kelp patches** provide cover from aquatic predators.
- **Underwater current** threatens to pull you away if you get too close.

Art

Art

Art

Temple

Temples are as diverse as the deities they represent.

What deity is worshiped?

- A common, recognizable deity (sun, life, justice, etc).
- A rare, specialized deity (the sea, dwarves, sand, etc).
- A pantheon.

What is the hierarchy?

- One or two clerics oversee this small, humble temple.
- A head cleric leads an order of paladins, clerics, and disciples.
- This temple is simply one extension of a massive, nation-spanning religious organization.

How do they worship?

- A head religious figure preaches to silent worshipers, who sit in the pulpit.
- Sacred rituals (taking communion, symbolic sacrifices of property or blood, dance and song, etc).
- Worship is a solitary event. Statues and shrines are available to worshipers, who come and go as they please. Temple attendants are available if someone wants to talk, but for the most part people pray alone.

What offering is expected?

- Coin: The clerics like to remind visitors of the collection plate near the entrance.
- Respect: Visitors must make a profound show of respect and humility (remove shoes before entering the temple, bow before a statue and offer a prayer, crawl across the threshold as a sign of subservience, etc).
- Service: Before entering, visitors must stand before a shrine and swear to uphold the deity's dogma.

Adventure!

- The deity has withdrawn from the temple. The head priestess is aware of her deity's absence, but her congregation hasn't seemed to notice. Why has her goddess forsaken them? Investigate to find out.
- A particularly pious adventurer feels a strong calling to a temple. What awaits them there?
- Heathens from a rival or pernicious religion are establishing a temple nearby. Stop them before they corrupt the region with their profane deity.
- A fiery prophet claims to predict the future. Indeed, some of his predictions have come true. After gaining a cult-like following, he locked herself and her congregation in the temple. Locals have noticed strange lights and noises emanating from the temple at night.
- Cultists will sacrifice a human at midnight to channel the power of their dark god. Stop the sacrifice before the ritual is complete.
- An angel has descended from the high heavens and is leading an inquisition against sinful mortals. Her followers have turned a temple into a veritable fortress.

Descriptions

- **Feelings:** *Sense of inner calm and awe, warm light.*
- **Sights:** *Softly glowing candles, stained glass windows streaming multicolored light*
- **Smells:** *Burning braziers filled with a heady incense.*
- **Sounds:** *Deep and solemn religious chanting, ringing bell, fiery sermon, peaceful silence.*

Landmarks

- **Holy Relic;** according to legend, the deity of the temple used the relic in ages past. It could hold unimaginable power, but nobody knows for certain because the religious order won't let anybody near it.
- **Graveyard or Crypt** where adherents to the faith are buried. Many people believe that corpses buried on holy ground won't reanimate as undead monstrosities.
- **Library** where the faithful study their deity's sacred texts in an unending search for divine enlightenment.
- **Prayer Circle,** the clerics claim that a devout paladin used the circle to bind a dark entity ages ago. That could just be a rumor, though.
- **Shrine,** perform an act of faith before the shrine (make an offering, swear a divine oath, obey the deity's dogma, etc) to potentially gain a blessing. Refer to the Faith theme.

Art

Interaction: Events

NPCs give players chances to interact and roleplay. However, an NPC without an overriding conflict is just an extra. Events provide direction and a unifying problem that the players need to work together to resolve.

Harvest Festival

Peasants are simple folk with simple lives. Small communities break up the humdrum of daily life with extravagant harvest festivals. These celebrations typically take place in autumn when the food stores overflow with the year's harvest.

What's for dinner?

- Corn pudding, roast okra, stuffed turkey, pumpkin stew, biscuits with honey-apple butter.
- Fried tofu, sweet rice balls, smoked duck eggs, pork dumplings with chives, mango pudding.
- Beer-brewed bratwursts, fermented sour cabbage, goat cheese, salted pretzels, an absurd amount of ale.

What are some traditions?

- Before eating, everybody says what they (are thankful for / remember fondly / hope to accomplish next year).
- An enormous bonfire is set ablaze. If it dies before morning, winter will be harsh and long. Villagers throw things into the fire to ensure it burns brightly.
- Families visit the cemetery to pay respect and beseech their ancestors to ward off evil spirits.

What's the main event?

- The grand feast! A smörgåsbord overflows with delectable local dishes. Eat until you can't move.
- The dance, where happy couples perform cultural and festive dances to the tune of rustic instruments.
- The story. An elder recounts a gripping and inspiring tale from the community's history that happened centuries ago on this day. Perhaps a group of adventurers saved the community from certain doom.

What's the mood?

- Jovial and neighborly. Smiles all around.
- Somber and respectful. Bow your head in silence.
- Pious and hopeful. Today, we celebrate life.

Art

Adventure!

- The annual pie eating contest is at noon. Big Joe Williams is expected to win for the sixth consecutive year. Can nobody beat him!? The first place prize is that you got to eat all that pie.
- A family feud threatens to ruin the festival. Keep the peace between the two families before somebody starts throwing punches.
- As guests of honor, the adventurers are expected to put on some sort of performance or give a speech. A story of their most epic adventure would do nicely.

Descriptions

- **Feelings:** *Grumbling stomachs; when do we eat?! Grumbling stomachs again; why did you eat so much?*
- **Sights:** *Colorful streamers, peasants' nicest clothes*
- **Smells:** *Roasted meat, cooling pies, crisp autumn air*
- **Sounds:** *Giggling children, festive music from lutes and woodwinds*
- **Tastes:** *The best food you've ever tasted.*

People

- **Baker.** She makes the best sweet cakes this side of the great sea. Just wait until you try one!
- **Farmer's Boy,** who's done with this dull life and sees his big chance to join an adventuring group.
- **Logger,** who always manages to drink too much and make a fool of himself.
- **Smith's Daughter** with adorable freckles and striking red hair. She just came of age and the boys can't keep their eyes off her.
- **Village Elder,** who will give the commencement speech or opening prayer. She leans heavily on a gnarled cane.

Imprisoned

Adventurers don't always save the day. Sometimes, they get the snot beat out of them and dragged off to a holding cell. Things are looking grim for our intrepid heroes!

Why can't they escape?

- Iron bars and shackles, simple but effective.
- Magical wards.
- Circumstance; escaping is more dangerous than staying (their captors will slaughter captives if they escape, they're in the middle of a dangerous wilderness, someone even worse would capture them if they escaped, etc).

Is there torture?

- No, they treat their captives humanely — relatively speaking, anyway.
- Psychological torture (taunting guards, a feral monster in the next cell can't quite reach the imprisoned adventurers, the cell is in total darkness, etc).
- Physical torture (captives don't get protection from harsh weather, captives are starved, interrogators use hot irons and whips, etc).

What's the best chance of escape?

- That crack in the wall. When you get close, you can feel cool, fresh air.
- A prisoner rebellion. Captives outnumber the guards five-to-one. If only there were a way to organize everyone without tipping off the guards...
- Sympathy or incompetence. One of the guards is an obvious weak link, either because he can't do his job or because he feels sorry for the captives.

What's the hidden threat?

- Impending insanity. A disproportionate amount of captives have mysteriously lost their mind. The longer you're imprisoned, the more likely you are to begin experience disturbing whispers and otherworldly nightmares.
- Vanishing. Every week or so, a captive goes missing without a trace. The guards don't seem to notice or care, but the prisoners whisper among themselves about the possible cause.
- The other prisoners. Prisoners spend most of their time in general population, where the guards let the prisoners do as they please to each other. Prison gangs are common, and prisoners often die over fights for food scraps.

Adventure!

- The client needs someone broken out of prison. Getting in should be easy; getting everyone out is where things get tricky.
- A prisoner knows a vital secret, but her captives won't let anyone near her. Perhaps someone could go undercover as a prisoner and speak to her.
- One of the adventurers has been captured! His friends need to save him before the torture starts.
- A fellow prisoner has been hatching an escape plan for years. He's got everything worked out. The group of tough-looking adventurers that the guards dragged in are just what he's been waiting for. He knows exactly what to do and when to do it — he needs the adventurers' fighting skills in case things go south.

Descriptions

- **Feelings:** *Can't get warm (or cool) no matter what you do, claustrophobia, heavy iron shackles*
- **Sights:** *Perpetual darkness, stale food caked with mold, gaunt prisoners, stringy hair and filthy clothes*
- **Smells:** *Human filth, mold, damp rot, the worst thing you've ever smelled coming from a bucket in the corner.*
- **Sounds:** *Squeaking and skittering rats, jingling chains, a distant echoing scream of pain.*

People

- **Interrogator,** eager to begin the torture.
- **Gaoler,** a ring of keys hang tantalizingly from his belt.
- **Guard** who brings the food. There's pity in her eyes.
- **Prisoner,** who's clearly been there for a while.

Art

Masquerade

Masquerades are what happen when members of the ruling class have too much money and time on their hands. Attendants wear beautiful masks to enjoy an evening of flirtation and intrigue.

Who's throwing the masquerade?

- A vain noblewoman looking for an excuse to show off her newest diamond necklace and parade her wealth.
- The newest merchant lord, who hopes to make important business connections.
- The queen, eager to find suitors for the princess.

What happens at midnight?

- Everyone removes their masks.
- A prize (a beautiful but impractical magic item) goes to whomever can correctly guess which mask the host/hostess is hiding behind.
- You dance with the person wearing your matching mask.

What is everybody talking about?

- Countess Julianna's emerald-studded panther mask.
- The 60-course desert platter, which includes candied roses and baklava drizzled with giant bee honey.
- Duke Higginbottom, who was just caught in the servant's quarters with his hand up one of the maid's skirts.

People

- **Handsome Knight**, the city's most eligible bachelor. He wears a horse mask to draw attention to his legendary skills as a jousting.
- **Head Butler** who turns up his nose at uncouth adventurers.
- **Prince**, who is well into his drink and flirting with a trio of low-ranking noblewomen who laugh too much at his slurred jokes. He wears a gaudy lion mask.
- **Wealthy Lady**, the richest person within a hundred miles. She wears an ostentatious emerald and sapphire peacock mask.

Adventure!

- Before the adventurers can win a high-paying contract, they must first meet the client at a masquerade as a show of respect.
- One of the adventurer's contacts claims that "a person in a wolf mask" will meet a spy and divulge secret information about an important quest. If the adventurers want to finish their mission, they'll need to intercept the secret message.
- After a few drinks, a masked person is making not-so-subtle "come hither" gestures at one of the adventurers. To make matters more complicated, that person is wearing a wedding band and becomes more forward (and drunk) as the night wears on.
- Someone wearing an identical mask to one of the adventurers committed some heinous crime (insulting the king, theft, murder) and vanished. Now, everyone thinks the adventurer was responsible.
- A man in an onyx dragon mask watches the party from an isolated corner, watchful and patient. Strangely, nobody but the adventurers seem to notice him.
- "You there!" a nobleman says to an adventurer. "More wine! And be quick about it! Gods, the help here is so slow."

Descriptions

- **Feelings:** *Cool mask against your face*
- **Sights:** *Bright masks adorned with feathers and gemstones, pompous choreographed dances, plunging necklines, silk dresses, neatly pressed doublets.*
- **Smells:** *The banquet, expensive perfume, freshly picked bouquets*
- **Sounds:** *Gossiping, flirtatious laughs, high-class music.*
- **Tastes:** *Sizzling manticore steaks, creamy roasted pumpkin soup, white truffle pasta garnished with gold foil, coconut dark chocolate mousse.*

Negotiation

Things have gone too far. It's time to see if the rival factions can work out some sort of peaceful resolution.

Where's the negotiation taking place?

- In the middle of an open battlefield. On either side, two armies wait for the signal to charge.
- On the enemy's turf. They've got the advantage. Let's hope they follow the rules of hospitality.
- On neutral ground where both sides are exposed.

Who shows up for the enemy?

- The leader. They're not messing around.
- A high-ranking officer. This shows respect and caution in equal measures.
- A low-ranking representative. This is a slap in the face.

What demand do they make?

- A sacrifice. It's only symbolic, but it shows that you're serious about negotiating.
- Death. Someone's responsible for a great affront against the enemy. Bring their head, and then negotiations can begin in earnest.
- A solution that makes them look good. They want to negotiate even more than you do, but something's stopping them (orders they can't defy, they can't appear weak, circumstance, etc). Help them find an out and they will gladly give into your demands.

What unexpected advantage do they have?

- The information you gathered is completely wrong. It seems that they distributed false information and everyone bought it.
- Everyone was supposed to come unarmed. They've hidden weapons nearby.
- This negotiation was a diversion. While you were busy talking, they secretly moved into your territory and seized a vital asset.

People

- **Banner Bearer**; too young to fight and too old to escape the draft, he's in way over his head. The poor kid is sweating.
- **Hostage**, looking rough but still breathing. She slumps weakly in the iron grip of two thugs.
- **Negotiator**, convincing her could end this conflict once and for all.
- **Saboteur**; he doesn't want the negotiation to happen and he will gladly sabotage it if the opportunity presents itself.

Art

Adventure!

- The thieves' guild relies on anonymity for survival. They need a neutral representative to negotiate on their behalf and liberate an asset that the guards seized.
- A traveling merchant doesn't have the muscle to enter unexplored territory alone. She needs a group of mercenaries to watch her back while she offers a tribute to the local warlord and negotiates trade routes.
- The adventurers are brutal killing machines and the enemy can't take it anymore. One of the enemies limps towards the adventurers, waving a white flag. Do they really want to sue for peace, or is this some sort of last-ditch trap?
- Warring nations are one signature away from ending a decades-long conflict. They've convened a meeting on neutral ground to draft and sign a treaty. Spies indicate that somebody will attempt to sabotage the event. While the diplomats are writing the treaty, the adventurers are to sniff out a saboteur and *discreetly* remove the problem.

Descriptions

- **Feelings:** *Firm grip from a tense handshake.*
- **Sights:** *Sweat trickles down someone's face, watchful eyes, white flag.*
- **Smells:** *Tea or alcohol to soothe frayed nerves.*
- **Sounds:** *Flapping banner, war drums or war horns signal an enemy's arrival.*

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Adventure!

- No, that's my child! Please don't let the guards (burn, hang, decapitate) him!
- The enemy (nobles, rebels, town guards) are about to make a move. The other faction will pay handsomely for information about their plans.
- The enemy is about to slaughter a family — whether or not they deserve it is irrelevant. Sneak the family out of the city to safety. There might be a safe route through the city's sewers.
- Something's wrong... These people are far too angry for it to be natural. Could someone, or *something*, be behind it all?
- The conflict would be over if somebody could sneak behind enemy lines and eliminate the leader (high-ranking noble, captain of the town guard, charismatic rebel, etc).

Descriptions

- **Feelings:** *Emotional intensity, the spirit of rebellion bubbling up inside of you.*
- **Sights:** *Shattered storefront windows, doors nailed shut, looters rush past with armfuls of goods, orange glow of a burning building illuminates the night sky.*
- **Smells:** *Smoke, freshly spilled blood.*
- **Sounds:** *Hushed conspiratorial whispers, revolutionary song, shouts of combat in the distance.*

Rebellion

The people are restless and the flames of revolution are spreading. Members of nobility enact harsh laws while the peasants seethe with hatred. In the middle of it all, the local military is struggling to prevent a riot that everybody knows is coming.

Why are the people angry?

- Unfair taxes.
- Somebody precious to them (child, priest, small business owner) was publicly executed.
- The town guard or the thieves' guild abuse and kill peasants at whim. The nobility doesn't lift a finger.

Why don't the nobles give in?

- Hah! Nobles bow to the demands of the filthy masses? Preposterous!
- They simply can't. The people want something that the nobility can't offer (food after a drought, refuge from an approaching army, safety from a plague, etc).
- The aristocracy can't come to a consensus vote due to bitter infighting and family rivalries.

What's the last straw?

- A fight breaks out between guards and drunken peasants. The well-armed guards massacre the peasants.
- Guards drag people from their homes to search for dissenters.
- A group of peasants corner a young noble's daughter in the wrong part of town and do unspeakable things to her.
- A minor crime escalates into a public execution when a furious guard sets out to make an example of the troublemaker.

What tragedy looms on the horizon?

- Mass public executions.
- An unstoppable fire spreads across the city, matching the rebels' burning rage.
- A furious mob surges through the noble district, destroying buildings and dragging wealthy families onto the street for lynchings.
- A calculating puppet master eager to exploit the chaos.

People

- **Inspector**, an uncompromising guard who wants to infiltrate and spy on the rebels.
- **Heartless Duchess**, who sees the rebellion as an excuse to sadistically crush dissenters.
- **Idealistic Rebel Leader** with fire in his eyes.
- **Terrified Family** caught in the middle of the rebellion. They just want to escape in one piece.

Setting Camp

Camping is a necessity for life on the road. This mundane activity can offer a great opportunity for roleplaying between the players.

What's for dinner?

- Week-old rations, dry and chewy.
- Rabbit stew with wild herbs and taters.
- A slab of meat from whatever monster you killed today. Judging by the way the meat pops and sizzles angrily above the fire, the beast may take its revenge on your stomach.

Why is this a good camping spot?

- An overhanging rock or tree branch provides shelter from the weather.
- The high ground should make it easy to spot anyone approaching the camp.
- A nearby stream or pond provides fresh water to clean off sweat and grime.
- Thick plants block the light of their campfire from potential spies.

Hold! Who goes there?

- Another adventuring party. They carry a fresh kill (rabbit or pheasant, perhaps). They're happy to share their meal if the heroes share their fire and a few good adventuring stories.
- A traveling merchant. Interested in buying anything?
- One of the enemies that the adventurers have been sent to kill. It wants to defect or surrender. Or perhaps lure the adventurers into a trap?
- A wide-eyed local who's amazed to be in the presence of real adventurers.

What is visible in the night sky?

- A constellation. Ask a player to name it and recount its legend.
- The moon, which casts the landscape in a pale, silvery glow. Tell a player that this reminds them of the last time they were under the moon alone. What happened then?
- A distant planet, visible as a bright and uniquely colored point of light. Folklore claims that the planet is an omen for heroes. Ask a player what omen the planet represents, and what it could mean for the current adventure.

People

- **The adventurers themselves!** The campfire is a chance to get away from it all. Don't be afraid to have a scene that focuses entirely on the players.

Adventure!

- The adventurers need to wait for something (dusk, a signal, the scout's return, etc) and have time to kill. As the GM, set a stopwatch for 10-30 minutes and tell the players to roleplay a fireside conversation.
- Someone wakes up early. The adventurer who was supposed to be standing watch is mysteriously missing. Where could they be?
- Everyone is awakened by an identical nightmare.
- Some of the valuables and supplies are mysteriously missing when morning comes. Is one of the adventurers stealing from the others?
- Story time! One of the adventurers tells a story about their past adventures or a popular legend to provide entertainment before they turn in for the night.
- The heroes have a quest to investigate a strange anomaly that appears sporadically in a specific area. All they can do is set up camp and wait for the anomaly to occur.

Descriptions

- **Feelings:** *Aching feet, blisters, sore muscles, cool air, warm campfire.*
- **Sights:** *Orange glow, burning campfire, black sky, twinkling stars, worn-out faces.*
- **Smells:** *Smoke, cooking meat, dinner, body odor.*
- **Sounds:** *Crackling fire, bubbling stew, hooting owl.*

Art