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# MAKING CHARACTERS

By default, the adventurers are all inhabitants of a wilderlands village that ekes out a precarious living. The adventurers are setting out to address a threat they don't fully understand.

The GM should choose the threat and say what it is. The state the village is in may in affect starting stats, skills, trappings or equipment.

## CREATING ADVENTURERS

Adventurers are created in four steps:

1. Roll ratings for five of the six **stats**
2. Determine **background**
3. Write down the **skills** and **trappings** that come from the background
4. Record additional **equipment**

## STATS

Stats express an adventurer's aptitude in six basic areas:

**Vigor**—physical fitness, strength, agility

**Grit**—hardiness, composure while suffering

**Wits**—insight, alertness, learning

**Sway**—persuasion, charm, and influence

**Panic**—adrenaline, animal terror

**Troth**—trustworthiness, familiarity

The first five stats are determined randomly. Roll on this table five times, and record the rating value for Vigor, Grit, Wits, Sway, and Panic (in order).

d8	Stat Rating
1-2	2
2-5	3
6-7	4
8	5

Troth always starts at a rating of 2. The adventurers are trusted acquaintances, but do not yet have experience working smoothly under the immense pressures of adventuring.

## VILLAGE BACKGROUNDS

Roll d20 to determine character's background. Write down the skills and trappings the background offers.

d20	Role	Skills	Trappings
1-2	Farmer	Labor 3, Farming 3	A hand axe (2)
3	Shepherd	Husbandry 3, Tending 2	A stout crook (2), iron shears (2)
4	Fisher	Boating 3, Weather Watching 2	A small skiff
5-6	Hunter	Bow 2, Hunting 2, Stalking 1	Bow (3), quiver (2), 12 good arrows
7-8	Forager	Foraging 3, Stalking 2, Navigation 1	Trowel (1), dowsing wand (1)
9	Sooth	Tending 3, Commune 2, Rituals 1	An ancestral shrine
10	Factor	Scribe 3, Bond +1	Portable writing set (2)
11	Elder	Farming 3, Speeches 3, Troth +1, Condition: Old	A strongbox in the family home; holds 3 burdens.
12-13	Warden	Survival 3, Navigation 2	An heirloom knife (1), sword (3) or staff (3)
14	Outcast	Threats 2, Survival 2, Condition: Broken Nose	A secret place in the forest to sleep
15	Tinker	Threats 2, Smithing 2, Navigation 1	Ironmonger's tools (3)
16	Groom	Husbandry 3, Riding 1	A stuff brush (1), a blanket (2)
17	Reeve	Riding 2, Arms 2, Troth -1, Bond +1	Riding horse
18	Minstrel	Perform 3, Speeches 2	A simple musical instrument (1-3)

<b>d20</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Trappings</b>
19	Crafter	Craft (choose) 3, Bond +1	A saw (2), hammer and nails (2), or chisels (2)
20	Lunatic	Seeing 2, Survival 1, Troth -1	Crow feathers (1)

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## PLAYING THE GAME

Play is a conversation about the experiences of the adventurers as they unfold.

The GM describes the current situation—what’s happening, what the adventurers see, hear, feel and smell—then asks the players what they do.

The players respond by saying what their adventurers are saying or trying to do. The GM, in turn, describes what happens next, or describes the next interesting situation as the adventurers move towards their goal.

### TESTS OF SKILL

Adventurers regularly try things that are difficult, uncertain, or which could shape unfolding events in a significant way. In these situations, the adventurers’ abilities are tested by rolling dice.

### CHOOSING THE SKILL AND DIFFICULTY

The GM declares the crucial skill or stat that will determine the difference between success or failure. The GM also declares a difficulty rating.

Rating	Difficulty
1	Easy, but with a possible pitfall
2	Requires careful attention
3	Tricky, even for the competent
4	Very difficult
5	Extremely difficult
6	Nearly impossible
7+	Impossible

Sometimes the rules will call for a specific skill and difficulty. The notation Grit/2 means a test of Grit with difficulty 2.

### HARDER THAN IT LOOKS

Sometimes tests are made harder because of specific situations. The notation /+1 means that the difficulty is 1 higher than usual. These could be conditions afflicting the adventurers (see

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“Conditions” on page 18), or it could be temporary situations that nevertheless sound bad.

**Sybs:** *I fire my bow at the orc.*

**GM:** *Okay, that's an Arms/2 test but.. well, you're on a moving wagon, and it's on fire. I'm going to raise that by +1.*

## ADVANTAGES

Under some circumstances, the adventurer making the test will have a clear advantage. Perhaps everyone around them is jeering their debating opponent. Perhaps a *buoyant sphere* is lashed to their back while they climb. In these cases, give them +1 to their Rating for the test.

If it's not obvious, roll unmodified. Let success or failure tell you if it was an advantage or not.

## MAKING THE ROLL

The player then builds a pool of six-sided dice (D6), one for each point of rating their adventurer has in the crucial skill, and rolls them all. Any dice that come up 4 or higher are successes.

If the number of successes is equal to or greater than the difficulty, then the attempt has been a success. If there are fewer, the attempt is a failure.

## EXTRA SUCCESSES

In some situations, the degree of success is important. Beating the difficulty by one or more might mean that success is sweetened with extra effects or benefits.

## DEGREE OF FAILURE

Sometimes it matters how much a test has been failed by. The difference between the difficulty and the number of successes is the degree of failure.

## OPPOSED TESTS

If two sides are opposing one another, both test. Whoever generates the greater number of successes is the winner; if they have the same amount, it's a tie.

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If one side has the relevant skill and the other side doesn't, the underdog is making an Unskilled Test. Once the dice are rolled, treat the skilled side as having one extra success.

## UNSKILLED TESTS

If the adventurer does not have the crucial skill, they can make an unskilled attempt at the task - resolve the test using the skill's base stat, but with a difficulty two higher.

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## WORKING TOGETHER

Helpful companions are essential when facing danger, but helpful companions aren't easy to find. Green adventurers can just as easily get in the way as be helpful. Trusty, experienced companions can act in concert, even when there's no time to coordinate.

### OPPORTUNITIES

If an adventurer's action creates a perfect opportunity for another to follow through, the follow through action has a +1 Rating advantage. This is the safest way to provide help, but it requires forethought.

### HELPING

When an adventurer joins in to help another party member at their task, the helper tests  $\text{Troth}/2$ . If it passes, the helper provides an automatic success to the main test.

### HELPING UNDER PRESSURE

In situations where well intentioned interference can go disastrously wrong (fighting, tight-rope walking), help is not always welcome. Would-be helpers that fail their tests add  $+1$  to the main test's difficulty.

### MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK

When adventurers work together to accomplish a task that can easily be divided up (e.g. digging a ditch), or one where the group is successful as soon as anyone is successful (e.g. tossing a room to find a hidden key), use the help rules as normal.

### STRAIN THE WEAKEST LINK

Other times, the group acts together, but a single failure is significant. Examples include running away from enemies, traversing a tricky ledge, or sneaking past guards.

In these situations, test a group member chosen at random, with Help from the lead adventurer. For large groups, increase the difficulty.

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## ADVENTURING GOALS

Venturing into the wilderness and other dark places is dangerous. Accidents, close calls and the grind of days will use up their resources and weaken them. Having a clear goal protects the group from trying to do too much, and in knowing when to return.

It also helps the group decide what preparations to make and what gear to bring—whether to travel light, to bring along retainers and allies, to supply for a long trip, or arm for battle.

### SUGGESTED GOALS

Explore a defined region of the wilderness to locate settlements and threats. Patrol a known area to find signs of incursions. Find a shorter route through tricky terrain to reach an important area.

Establish a friendly bond with another settlement. Forge a safe a road from one to the other.

Revisit known communities to check on their well-being. Gather rumors. Find a sage or oracle to reveal a truth. Uncover a trove of lore.

Scout a dangerous locale to prepare for a theft, raid or assault. Procure the weapons of war. Eliminate a monstrous threat.

Place a cache of equipment and supplies to extend your next foray's reach. Station a seasoned (or retired) adventurer there to advocate for the adventurers when they return.

Restore a village's accord stones. Recover ancestral artifacts to strengthen ties with the ancestors. Commune with the Powers of a place. Establish a permanent accord with a Power (e.g. a shrine, a stone circle).

Secure a site of strategic importance. Restore a ruin to serve as a shelter or a stronghold.

Find and retain specialist hirelings (mercenaries). Find a skilled master to learn from. Meet the demands of a magical ritual to improve its power.



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# ADVANCEMENT AND EXPERIENCE

In this game, adventurers improve their stats and skills by using them. Each ability accumulates ticks, representing insight and experience acquired while adventuring.

## INSIGHT: EARNING TICKS FOR ADVANCEMENT

When you test an ability and roll either all failures or all successes (including any bonus dice), you earn one tick for advancing that ability.

Declare, “I learned something!” to the group.

This is more likely the fewer dice you are rolling, so relying on allies and bonuses will help you succeed, but slows down your rate of advancement.

## IMPROVING RATINGS

Skills (and Troth) require three ticks in order to advance; stats require six.

As soon as you have earned the necessary number of ticks, erase all the ticks and raise your Rating by 1.

## EXPERIENCE POINTS (XP)

In addition to advancement ticks, adventurers also earn Experience Points. Adventurers start out with no xp, earn them during play, and can spend them in several ways.

## EARNING EXPERIENCE

At the end of each session of play, or when the players have accomplished a major goal, ask these questions. For each ‘yes’ answer, the adventurer earns one xp:

- Did you meet your declared goal? (2xp for truly heroic goals)
- Did you help a community (whether they know it or not)?
- Did you learn something new about the world or its inhabitants?
- Did you suffer from the environment, injuries or curses?

For each ‘yes’ answer, earn one xp.

## SPENDING EXPERIENCE

Adventurers can spend xp in three ways: extraordinary efforts, improving favored abilities, or learning completely new skills.

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## EXTRAORDINARY EFFORT—+1 RATING

Spending 1 xp raises the Rating of an ability by 1 for a single test. Up to 3 xp can be spent this way. The xp must be spent before the dice are rolled.

## KEEN INSIGHT

When you make a test and you *don't* earn a tick, you may spend xp to ignore dice that break the pattern of all successes or failures.

Each xp spent this way removes one die. If the remaining dice are all either successes or failures, you earn a tick for the ability.

This only affects tick-earning, not whether the test succeeds or fails.

***Barset needs to make a Vigor/2 test. His Vigor is 5, so he rolls five dice. Two come up successes, and three are failures, just enough to succeed.***

***Barset hasn't earned a tick, but by spending 2xp, he is able to set aside the two successful dice. The remaining three dice are all failures, so he earns his tick for Vigor.***

## LEARNING A NEW SKILL

In this game, academies and great teachers are exceedingly rare. Skills must be learned on the fly, by watching practitioners.

Whenever you see a skill demonstrated, you may pay 1 xp to learn it.

Adventurers can have a maximum of ten skills. If you already have ten, you have reached your potential for breadth of knowledge.

## STARTING RATING

Each skill is based on some stat or other. When you learn a new skill, the starting Rating is two less than the Rating of the base stat.

## WEIRD SKILLS

It's possible for adventurers to learn very unusual skills this way, even things that are very difficult in a human body. Consult the GM in these situations.

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## THE LIVES OF ADVENTURERS

In ALM, adventurers are hardy, but they will occasionally be killed, eaten, captured, or fall into dark places with no hope of return.

Surviving adventurers will eventually become capable and strong, but the aches, pains and nightmares from previous adventures accumulate and trouble them.

### TROUPE PLAY

The starting set of adventurers makes up the initial roster of active characters, the characters who are going out on forays. Over time, however, the roster will grow.

Replacement and alternate playable adventurers are added to the roster whenever any of these things happens: an active adventurer dies, goes missing, or retires from adventuring.

It's up to the group whether adventurers can be played by anyone, or only the player who originally breathed life into them.

However large the roster is, each player will have only one active character at a time.

### RETIRED ADVENTURERS

Experienced adventurers can be stationed in settlements like villages and towns (see "Settlements and Groups" on page 66). The adventurer must either be entitled to hospitality, be able to work, or be given enough money to pay their way.

Retirement need not be permanent. If the group wishes, they can be reactivated and sent out on the road once more.

While they are stationed, they are assumed to be keeping their ear to the ground to collect rumors and information of use to the party. They are also useful for lining up expedition gear and retainers, saving valuable time when the party passes through to resupply themselves.

### KIDNAPPED, LOST, OR LEFT FOR DEAD

If an adventurer is separated from the party under especially grim circumstances, rather than switching the spotlight on them, they're gone. Maybe they'll find their way home, maybe not.

At the start of each season, they test Troth/2. If they pass, they have returned with a grim tale of their misadventure. If not, they

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test again at the start of each next season, but with a cumulative /+1. Once the difficulty exceeds their Troth, they are surely dead.

## GRAVES FOR THE DEAD

When an adventurer dies, their spirit joins with the Power that rules the land where they died. Losing a character can be a sad or poignant experience. Allow it to be so.

When the party buries a dead colleague, they earn an amount of xp equal to that character's Troth. The player who lost a character takes that same amount and applies it to their next character.

## ADDING CHARACTERS TO THE ROSTER

New characters come from one of five places:

- Home. Roll a new starting character.
- A porter, lantern bearer, mercenary or other retainer travelling with the party. They have Troth 1, or Troth 2 if they have been on more than one foray with the party.
- A character from a community with which the party has a Bond. Impressed by the party and their worthy goals, they have taken up the call. They have Troth 2.
- A character from a nearby community. These characters will generally be outcasts—no respected citizen would throw in their lot with a wandering group of ill repute. They have Bond 0 with their community and Troth 1.
- At the GM's discretion, another NPC known to the party (or travelling with it), either a friend or supporter of their cause.

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# CONDITIONS

Conditions are tags—descriptive words or phrases—which represent problems that adventurers can't easily get rid of, problems that relate to their physical or mental state, their equipment, or how they are perceived by others.

## JUST THE BAD STUFF

Not everything bad going on for an adventurer is a condition; only those things that are distracting, that nag at the adventurer's attention or mind.

Falling into a river with all your gear on is awful; the wet clothing, rusting armor, the sodden backpack and the ink bleeding in your scrolls. This is the Wet condition. In other circumstances, being wet might actually be refreshing; that's not a condition.

## ADDING AND REMOVING CONDITIONS

The GM may give adventurers conditions as a result of failure, when the rules say so explicitly, or as a way of recording something that's happened.

Likewise, conditions are removed whenever the rules say, and whenever it's clear they no longer apply.

## CONDITIONS FLARE UP

The GM keeps track of each adventurer's conditions and uses them to create adversity by having them flare up. At any time, the GM can cause a condition to:

- draw an adventurer's attention away from the big picture
- show signs of impending trouble
- impede (/+1) a test (before the dice are rolled)
- taint a success, or to worsen a failure
- exploit a golden opportunity with a serious consequence

The specific adversity should always relate to the condition that's flaring up.

## PAIN IS GAIN

The GM should keep a running tally of the number of times conditions turn into adversity. Keep a separate tally for each character, and a shared pool for adversity that applies to the entire party. These get paid out at the end of each foray. **TODO: reinstate this.**

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## USING CONDITIONS

Avoid conditions that relate to exhaustion; this is better handled by burdens.

Also, avoid conditions which impose more conditions! The point of conditions is to create complications and remind adventurers how serious a situation they're in, rather than to be a cycle that never ends.

## MEANINGFUL

Conditions should suck. If adventurers aren't trying to get rid of them, they're not annoying enough.