

Dark Ages Basic Rules



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Introduction

The following basic rules for the **Dark Ages** line are intended to allow players to use any of the hardcover supplementary rulebooks (**Dark Ages: Mage**, **Dark Ages: Werewolf**, **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** and **Dark Ages: Fae**) without having to purchase **Dark Ages: Vampire**. These rules have been excerpted from **Dark Ages: Vampire**, but have had most vampire-specific information and rules removed. They contain only the basics of the game system, stripped of optional rules and much supplementary advice and material. With this in mind, those wishing to play a **Dark Ages: Vampire** chronicle should use that book instead, as many important vampire-specific details have been removed.

Most of this material is taken from **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Some of the weapons and combat systems are taken from the **Spoils of War** sourcebook. We'd like to thank the authors of those books for their work and dedication. Special thanks goes to Matthew J. Rourke for compiling the **Dark Ages** rules into this document.

A World Darkly Lit

"Dark Medieval" best describes the **Dark Ages** setting. At first glimpse, the Dark Medieval differs little from what we know of the Middle Ages. In fact, it is one and the same, at least on the surface. Villagers toil the land, living a short and harsh existence, knowing only the present and the word of God. Priests speak of damnation and salvation, while monks keep the knowledge of the ancients in damp monasteries. All across the continent, feudal lords, from lowly and chivalrous knights to tyrannical kings, rule over all they survey and fight for God in far-off lands. However, beneath the surface, Dark Medieval Europe is a place of horrors and nightmares where vampires, werewolves and demons are all-too real.

Dark Reflections

The Dark Medieval thus blends history and horror. It is a doomsday time when parish priests warn that the signs of the Apocalypse are everywhere and that devils tempt the pious and saintly. Villages and hamlets exist in total isolation, surrounded by deep woodlands filled with the ghastly howls of man-beasts and the chants of witches practicing their damned arts. Across Europe, fortified cities have bloomed with the false promise of safety and freedom. In truth, their crooked cobblestone streets and labyrinthine alleys are virtual prisons from which not even the dead can escape.

The Dark Medieval is flavored with isolation and desolation. Vast miles of untamed hinterland separate villages from cities and hide things that are much worse than monsters. Forests are forbidding expanses, shielded by shadows during the day and illuminated by the faint light of the moon at night. The wind howls through castles, lone sentinels whose walls have been stained red by blood. Superstition and fear keep villages and nobles alike confined to their homes, cowering around feeble candles until morning. In universities and monasteries, scholars and scribes struggle to pierce this uncertain darkness with ancient fragments and half-remembered truths. Kings and counts wage desperate war to keep the darkness at bay, the Church tries to spread the light of Christianity through misguided crusades, and Cainites rule the night.

By Day

To the people of Europe, it is *Anno Domini* 1230 — the 13th Christian century is reaching its midway point. Although it is a time of relative quiet among mortal rulers, the 13th century is still one of strife and unrest. The century started with the bloody and mismanaged Fourth Crusade (1202-1204), redirected by Venetian interests into sacking and destroying Constantinople, the greatest of Christian cities. In England, King John Lackland (1199-1216) signs the *Magna Carta* shortly before his death, establishing the duties and responsibilities of the king to his subjects. His heir, Henry III (1216-1272), finds his power challenged throughout his troubled reign by the powerful English barons, making him a weak king and drawing his attention away from France. Using this to his advantage, Philip II Augustus of France (1180-1223) reclaims most of the

territories in France that the English crown holds. He goes on to establish France as one of the premiere powers in the 13th century with the Battle of Bouvines in 1214. To the east, in the lands of Flanders and Germany, Fredrick II (1212-1250) unifies the nobles of the Holy Roman Empire, the last vestige of Rome, but becomes embroiled in the conflicts and intrigues of the investiture controversy, pitting emperor against pope. In the arid Iberian Peninsula, the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon are encroaching on the Moorish stronghold of al-Andalus. Majorca falls in 1229, Córdoba in 1236, and Seville in 1248, leaving Granada as the sole Moorish city until 1492. Until then, it remains one of Europe's most learned cities, a center of knowledge and scholarship, surrounded and besieged by those who are jealous of its wealth and treasures.

The century is also one of heresy, and it witnesses the birth of the Papal Inquisition. While the most gruesome excesses and witch-hunts are still centuries away, the Church prepares itself to deal with its enemies — both mundane and supernatural. The Albigensians of Southern France, who believe the world to be evil and preach a life of poverty, become the victims of the first crusade called on Christian lands. Soon after, the Teutonic Knights march across Poland, Hungary, Livonia and into Russia under the banner of their black cross, fighting pagans and other infidels in the name of God. In the Holy Land, the century sees four different crusades head for various points along the Mediterranean. For the most part, Christian forces suffer the familiar setbacks of the previous centuries, but these setbacks fail to deter one pope after another from calling for renewed efforts.

This is also a time when the east rides into the west. The great Ghengis Khan dies in 1227, but his successors push into Europe. They overrun Persia in 1231, southern Russia five years later, and they reach as far west as Poland and Hungary in 1241. However, the khans and their horsemen are not the only travelers. In 1271, the explorer Marco Polo leaves for the mysterious East, traveling over lands that no westerner will see again for another five centuries. When he returns, Europe is forever changed.

This, however, is the Europe of history books.

Of History and Fantasy

Set in AD 1230, the **Dark Ages** titles are historical games, deriving a good part of their dramatic energy and focus from real events — the Albigensian Crusade, the conflicts of Emperor Fredrick II and the rekindling of the Guelph-Ghibelline conflict in Italy, to name a few. The games' roots, however, stretch far back to the chaos that spread after the collapse of Rome, a time when a mighty empire fractured and splintered into the many kingdoms that rule Europe in the 13th century. Historically, the "Dark Ages" refer to a short span of centuries, roughly from the fall of Rome to the rise of Emperor Charlemagne in the ninth century. However, the term captures the atmospheric merging of history and horror inherent to the Dark Medieval — hence our anachronistic usage.

Although it is based on fact and history, the core of the **Dark Ages** setting rests in the uncharted spaces between the lines of the history books. Although the lives of kings, popes and monarchs are well documented, we know very little beyond their castles and cities with any degree of certainty. The Dark Medieval night is unknown and uncertain, and the fantastic elements of **Dark Ages** emerge from this uncertainty. This is not the fantasy of elves, dragons and wizards. It is the wonder of a world uncharted, colored by the fear of the unknown. This is a time of terror and daring, of unspeakable evils and unlimited opportunities.

By Night

Superstition rules the Dark Medieval just as much as monarchs and popes do. It is an age when religion and faith provide hope and salvation, but also preach that the Devil and his minions lurk in the night. To the populace of Europe, this is not dogma but reality. The people know that the dark forests hide more than just shadows, and they believe, just as they believe in God, that specters, demons and vampires exist. In this age, farmers attend Mass, praying for forgiveness and salvation, then gather in fields to pay tribute and placate the Old Gods — not because they have no faith, but because they absolutely and completely believe. They believe that evil witches

and warlocks can command the spirits of the dead, calling them from their resting-places to torment the living. When returning from their pilgrimages, commoners and nobles alike have seen strange glyphs carved on stones and heard ethereal music when the moon was full. They know that the Devil waits to tempt the faithful with sin, dooming them to an eternity of carnal torment and grief.

Denizens of a Dark World

The **Dark Ages** setting is home to a host of powerful beings, each driven by intrigues and struggles mostly hidden from mortal view. These conflicts spill over into the human world as myths and folktales, explained away to disguise the often frightening truth: Humans are not alone in the world, and the shadowy creatures lurking in the dark are more than stories told to frighten children.

Vampires

If the daylight world of the Dark Medieval is akin to our own history, its nighttime is a wholly different affair. Once the sun goes down and most God-fearing folk retire to the safety of homes or hovels, vampires come out. These blood-drinking creatures have existed from the dawn of time, and they rule the medieval night. They have courts and kings of their own, and they fight wars and negotiate treaties unknown to the living.

These predators in dead flesh, these immortals, these lords of the night, take center stage in our theater of the macabre. It is their roles that you and your friends undertake in **Dark Ages: Vampire**.

Werewolves

People have their legends. They say that the wolves of the forest are the Devil's children, that they come in the night to steal human babies. They say that spirits that can drive men mad haunt the woods.

The werewolves have their own legends, their own spirits and their own devils. But unlike the humans, who believe in such things out of fear and tradition, the werewolves have seen the world of the spirits, and they know their place within it. These creatures of Rage fight to protect the land and its spirits from corruption and taint, their tribes lurking just outside the boundaries of civilization. It is their roles that you and your friends play in **Dark Ages: Werewolf**.

Mages

In medieval times, the prospect of a mage living down the road or chanting in midnight groves was still believed possible, even if few people ever actually could prove such an assertion. In later years, the belief in wizards and warlocks takes on a fairy tale quality, a relic of a bygone age.

In the Dark Medieval, mages do stride the earth, calling down the will of Heaven or raising up the vengeance of the Earth for reasons all their own. In a world ruled by hierarchy — kings and Popes — mages break all the rules. In **Dark Ages: Mage**, it's your turn to play one of those to whom the rules do not apply.

Fae

Every human culture has legends and folktales of monsters, goblins, spirits and beasts. Some of the creatures are considered helpful, while others prey on humanity itself. Many such creatures are kind and cruel by turns, or are generally vicious but can be tricked or bested by the person who knows just how.

A long truce between the faerie Courts draws near an end, and an ages-old war threatens to begin anew. In **Dark Ages: Fae**, you have the chance to play one of the Fair Folk at a crucial moment in faerie history — will you help prevent the coming conflict, or help your Court crush its enemies?

Inquisitors

The Papal Inquisition, as the history books reckon it, is still several years off. However, in the Dark Medieval, the shadow Inquisition or Holy Inquisition *contra Diabolum enim et alii daemons* (against the Devil and other demons) rose in the first half of the 13th century to combat servants of Satan.

In **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**, you play a member of a secret organization within the Catholic Church dedicated to hunting down and destroying the get of Satan, hunting down demons and other beings of true evil.

The Storytelling Game

Each of the titles in the **Dark Ages** setting is a game — more precisely a storytelling game. With it, you and your friends cooperate to tell a tale (the storytelling part) and overcome challenges (the game part). It's essentially a game of make-believe, in which almost everyone portrays a specific character who grows and evolves thanks to his experiences. Taken together, the experiences of all the characters form a story.

The players of a storytelling game are both the actors in the “play” and its audience. Unlike most other games, the players are not playing against each other (or against anyone, in fact). The objective is not to score a certain number of points or be the first to achieve a particular goal. The players' objective is to have fun telling a good story and to have their characters get what they want. There certainly will be opposition along the way — from rivals and other threats — but the players often cooperate to overcome those challenges.

One player takes on a special role and is called the *Storyteller*. She acts as the narrator of the story and plays the roles of all the other folks whom the players' characters might encounter. So if the players decide that their characters enter a monastery, the Storyteller describes the monastery (including deciding just what it looks like, who's in it and whether it's busy or quiet.) and portrays the monks. From the stoic prior who gives them a quick grunt to the gabby initiate who wants to talk about theology, it all comes out of the Storyteller's mouth. In effect, the Storyteller serves as the players' characters' senses.

The Storyteller then uses all this information to present challenges and opportunities to the players (through their characters). The players then react, moving forward and creating a whole story. Usually the Storyteller has a rough idea of the plot (or at least its set-up) in her mind ahead of time — “The monastery is supposedly haunted, but it is actually the home of a feral vampire who'll need to be reckoned with.” — but the details emerge from the players' actions. Some might want to destroy the rival vampire and claim the monastery as their own domain. Others might seek to befriend him or trade information for safe passage. Thus, acting together, Storyteller and players create a unique tale.

Dark Ages is a game because it uses rules to define how and what characters can do. Unlike a board game, these rules are very loose, and every character can do a wide variety of things. But when a chance for failure arises, the rules call for the use of dice to determine what happens. Various traits (such as Strength, Etiquette and Courage) measure every character's capabilities, and players roll dice based on those traits. Of course, much of the game happens without dice. The best play often occurs with the Storyteller portraying an informant or “bit part” and engaging the players in lively conversation. There's rarely a need to roll dice then.

Chapter One: Rules of the Game

Dark Ages is called a Storytelling *game* because it has rules. Those rules, however, don't exist to limit behavior or keep anyone "in line." They exist to provide the players with challenges and the Storyteller with simple ways in which to adjudicate those challenges. In a larger sense, they exist to help tell the story.

Because the players are both participants and audience, it's critical that they identify with their characters and experience (vicariously) the thrills and chills of the unfolding tale. Just like you hold your breath when reading about a hero who's about to be done in, you'll hold your breath when your character does something risky. Having an impartial way to resolve the situation — Does Anatole make it out of the burning building? Does Lucita get to the prince in time? — helps to maintain that tension. The Storyteller can just decide whether your character succeeds or fails, of course, but that's usually less fun for everyone, because it leaves things open to favoritism. Truly unbiased rulings need some sort of standard or precedent so that everybody knows that everyone's getting the same treatment.

Hence, rules.

Dark Ages uses only a few basic rules to get things done, but these rules can have countless permutations in the context of the game. This chapter covers the very basics, such as rolling dice. More specific, detail-oriented rules can be found throughout the book. Don't worry about mastering all the permutations at once, though. Learn these basic rules first, and everything else will come naturally.

Time

Over the course of the game, time is presumed to pass as it would in the normal world. Tuesday follows Monday, month after month, and so on. There's no need to roleplay out every second that ticks away. There's a huge difference between the speeds at which "game" time and real time pass. Over a four-hour game session, a week, a month or even a year might pass in the setting of the game — or the entire session might detail the events of an action-packed half-hour. You can play out a combat turn by turn, taking it in three-second increments, or you can let months pass away in a few minutes of real time. (The passage of time without players taking any real actions is called *downtime*. Learning to use this little trick can help the pacing of your game immensely.)

To help maintain a sense of the passage of time without resorting to tedious charts and the like, **Dark Ages** uses six basic units to describe game time:

- **Turn:** The amount of time you need to take a fairly simple action. A turn can range anywhere from three seconds to three minutes, depending on the pace of the current scene.
- **Scene:** Like the basic division of plays and movies, a scene is a compact period of action and interaction that takes place in a single location. This could be the storming of an enemy citadel or a moonlit conversation on a parapet. There are exactly as many turns in a scene as the scene requires. A scene might not even have turns if it consists of nothing but dialogue and character interaction.
- **Chapter:** An independent part of a story, almost always played out in one game session. It consists of a number of scenes interconnected by downtime. Essentially, a game chapter is like a chapter in a novel or an act in a play.
- **Story:** A full tale, complete with introduction, rising action and climax. Some stories can take several chapters to complete; others can be finished in one.
- **Chronicle:** A series of stories connected by the characters themselves and their ongoing narrative, possibly even by a common theme or overarching plot.
- **Downtime:** Time that you gloss over with description rather than playing it out turn by turn or scene by scene. If the Storyteller says, "You wait in the courtyard for four hours before the lord's servant summons you," rather than actually letting the characters play out their wait, the

Storyteller is considered to be invoking downtime. Downtime allows trivial or tedious passages of time to go by quickly. One can also use it to let several months, years or even decades pass between stories in a chronicle.

Actions

Over the course of a game, your character will do many things. Some of these tasks are considered *actions*, while others aren't. Speeches and conversations aren't considered actions as such, but just about everything else from throwing a punch at your sire to trying to decipher a code is probably an action. One action typically takes one turn of game time to complete.

It's easy enough to attempt an action. Just tell the Storyteller what your character's trying to do and how she plans to go about it. Most actions — crossing a field or donning armor, for instance — are easy enough to be considered automatically successful. However, if you're trying to cross a field with many pits while being chased by a knight on horseback, or you're trying to don armor in a hurry before an attacker arrives, there's a chance you might fail. So when reasonable doubt arises over whether an action will succeed or not, you may have to roll dice to determine the results.

Reflexive Actions

Not everything that your character actually *does* counts as an action. For instance, shouting a battle cry or sharp warning is considered to take less than a second of game time. You roll no dice, and your character can do this while doing something else. Such a "free action" is called a *reflexive* — in essence, a feat that doesn't require taking an action to accomplish. Of course, you still have to be conscious to perform many reflexives, but they don't get in the way of anything else you want to do in a turn.

Rolling Dice

Although the Storyteller is within perfect rights to declare whether a given action succeeds or fails (usually for dramatic purposes), chance enters into the equation in many cases. Therefore, **Dark Ages** uses a simple, portable form of "chance in a pocket" — dice. To be specific, **Dark Ages** uses 10-sided dice. (You can find these in any game store or even many bookstores.) The Storyteller may need quite a few; players need plenty as well, but they can share among themselves. Ten dice are the most that a beginning character will need at a given time.

You roll dice whenever the outcome of an action is in doubt or the Storyteller thinks that there's a chance your character might fail. Your character's strengths and weaknesses affect the number of dice you roll, and thus directly affect your chances of success.

Ratings

Although your character's personality is limited only by your imagination, his capabilities are defined by his traits, which measure his aptitudes and abilities. Most traits are described by a rating of 1 to 5. A 1 in a trait is barely competent, while a 5 is the pinnacle of human achievement. Most people's traits range from 1 to 3. A 4 in a trait indicates an exceptional person, while a 5 is nearly incomparable — among humans, at any rate. It's also possible to have a 0 in a trait. Such a low rating usually represents a skill that the character never learned. Some traits are measured on a 1-to-10 scale. These special traits, and most of the others, are explained in Chapter Two.

For normal traits, the following scale applies:

x	Abysmal
•	Poor
••	Average
•••	Good
••••	Exceptional
•••••	Superb

Whenever you roll dice, you roll one die for every dot you have in the appropriate trait. For instance, if your character is trying to find something and he has three dots in Perception, you would roll three dice. However, you almost never simply roll the number of dice you have in an Attribute. Raw potential is modified by skill, after all. The most common rolls in the game involve adding the dice gained from an Attribute (inherent aptitudes, see p. 26) to the dice gained from an Ability (learned capabilities, see p. 29).

For instance, if Veronica were trying to find a specific text in the cluttered library of a monastery, the Storyteller might have her player, Lynn, roll Perception + Theology — an Attribute plus an Ability. In this case, Lynn would take two dice for Veronica's Perception of 2, plus as many dice as she had in Theology. Veronica has Theology 4, so Lynn gets four more dice from that. Veronica has a total of six dice to attempt her task. These dice are called the *dice pool* — in other words, the total number of dice you roll in a single turn. Most often, you'll calculate a dice pool for only one action at a time, although you can modify it to be able to perform multiple tasks in a turn.

Of course, you might not need to add an Ability to an Attribute for some rolls. For instance, there's no Ability that will help Veronica heft a large chest. In such cases, Lynn would use only the dice from the Attribute — in this case, Strength.

There is absolutely no situation in which more than two traits can add to a dice pool. What's more, if your dice pool involves a trait whose maximum rating is 10 (such as Willpower, see p. 47), you can't add any other traits to your dice pool. It's effectively impossible for a normal human being to have more than 10 dice in a dice pool.

Other creatures, such as elder vampires or ancient fae, on the other hand, exceed the normal bounds of human flesh, and rules concerning their abilities can be found in their respective supplementary rulebooks.

Difficulties

There's no point in rolling dice unless you know what results you're looking for. Whenever you try to perform an action, the Storyteller will decide on an appropriate *difficulty* and tell you her decision. A difficulty is always a number between 2 and 10. Each time you score that number or higher on one of your dice, you're considered to have gained a *success*. For example, if an action's difficulty is a 6 and you roll a 3, 3, 8, 7 and 10, then you've scored three successes. The more you get, the better you do. You need only one success to perform most actions successfully, but that's considered a marginal success. If you score three or more, you succeed completely.

Naturally, the lower the difficulty number is, the easier it is to score successes, and vice versa. Six is the default difficulty, indicating actions that are neither exceptionally tricky nor exceptionally easy to accomplish. *If the Storyteller or rulebook ever calls for you to make a roll, but doesn't give you a specific difficulty number, assume that the task is difficulty 6.*

The Storyteller is the final authority on how difficult attempted actions are. If the task seems impossible, he'll make the difficulty appropriately high, while, if the task seems routinely easy, the difficulty will be low (if the Storyteller decides you even have to roll at all). Particularly easy or difficult tasks might even demand difficulty numbers of 2 or 10, but such should be extremely rare. A task of difficulty 2 is so easy that it's not really worth the trouble of a die roll, while an action of difficulty 10 is almost impossible. You have an equal chance of botching (which is explained later) as you do of succeeding, no matter how many dice you're rolling.

And, in case it needs to be said, a result of a 10 is always a success, no matter what the difficulty number is.

The following charts should give you a good idea of how to combine difficulties and degrees of success.

Difficulty and Degree of Success	
Difficulty	Type of Task
3	Easy (sharpening a blade)
4	Routine (calming a trained dog)
5	Straightforward (seducing someone who's already "in the mood")
6	Standard (swinging a sword)
7	Challenging (firing an arrow at long range)
8	Difficult (forging a fine blade)
9	Extremely difficult (fighting blind)
Successes	Degree of Success
One	Marginal (landing a glancing blow)
Two	Moderate (making a handicraft that's ugly but useful)
Three	Complete (fixing something so that it's good as new)
Four	Exceptional (making a perfect translation of an obscure text)
Five or More	Phenomenal (creating a masterwork)

Failure

If you score no successes on a die roll, your character fails his attempted action. He misses his punch. His attempt to persuade the prince falls flat. Failure, while usually disappointing, is not so catastrophic as a botch.

Example: *Feodor, a spy, is attempting to eavesdrop on some suspicious activities in one of the halls of the lord's castle, and he is perching precariously on an overhang to do so. Justin, the Storyteller, tells Feodor's player, John, to roll his Dexterity + Stealth (difficulty 7). John rolls and gets 2, 5, 6, 6, 4, 3 — no successes. Justin rules that as Feodor attempts to shift position on the overhang, his foot slides on some crumbling stone, and he loses his balance. The thugs below don't see Feodor, but he is definitely in trouble....*

The Rule of One

Bad luck can ruin anything. One more basic rule about rolling dice is the "rule of one." Whenever one of the dice comes up as a 1, it cancels out a success. Completely. Take the die showing 1 and one of the dice showing a successful number and set them aside. In this manner, an otherwise successful action may be reduced to failure.

Storytellers who want a more cinematic edge to their games can institute a "rule of 10" in which the player can re-roll every die that comes up a 10 and try to get additional successes. This rule is purely optional, however, best suited for people who like especially spectacular play.

Botches

Occasionally, truly bad fortune strikes. If a die roll garners no successes whatsoever, and one or more 1s show up, a *botch* occurs. If 1s cancel out every success and even more 1s remain, the roll is still considered a normal failure. A roll is considered a botch only if no successes came up in the first place.

A botch is much worse than a normal failure — it's outright misfortune. For instance, rolling a botch when trying to run down someone from horseback might result in your horse rearing and throwing you, while botching a Stealth roll might result in your character stepping on a dry twig or tripping over his feet. The Storyteller decides exactly what goes wrong. A botch might produce a minor inconvenience or a truly unfortunate mishap.

Of course, some Storytellers may find that botches are cropping up a little too frequently in their chronicles. In that case, it's the Storyteller's privilege to give everyone, player and Storyteller character alike, one botch "free." In other words, the first botched roll of the session doesn't

count. This rule tends to make life a little easier on the players' characters — but then again, there's less chance of their enemies suffering a run of bad luck either....

Example: *Alexandra, an innkeeper played by Rebecca, is in desperate trouble when twisted monstrosities overrun her stable. In order to make her escape, she must climb up a rope hanging down from the hay loft in hopes of finding a place to hide. Rebecca rolls Alexandra's Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 7) and gets 1, 3, 4, 3, 6. Not only did a 1 occur, but no successes were scored at all, so the action is a botch. The Storyteller rules that the frayed rope snaps under Alexandra's weight. Alexandra starts to run for the kitchens, hoping the creatures won't find her there....*

Automatic Success

Let's face it — sometimes rolling dice gets tiresome, particularly when your character could perform a given action in his sleep. And anything that streamlines play and reduces distractions is a good thing. Therefore, **Dark Ages** employs a simple system for automatic successes, allowing you to skip having to roll for tasks that your character would find frankly mundane.

Simply put, if the number of dice in your dice pool is equal to or greater than the task's difficulty, your character automatically succeeds. No dice roll is necessary. Mind you, this does *not* work for all tasks, and it *never* works in combat or other stressful situations. Furthermore, an automatic success is considered marginal, just as if you'd gotten only one success on the roll. If quality is an issue, you might want to roll dice anyway to try for more successes. But for simple and often-repeated actions, this system works just fine.

There's another way to get an automatic success on a roll: Simply spend a Willpower point (p. 47). You can do so only once per turn, and you can't do it too often since you have a limited supply of Willpower, but it can certainly help when you're under pressure to succeed.

Trying It Again

Failure tends to produce stress, which often leads to further failure. If a character fails an action, he may usually try it again (after all, failing to pick a lock does not mean the character may never try to pick the lock again). In such cases, though, the Storyteller has the option to increase the difficulty number of the second attempt by one. If the character fails yet again, the difficulty of a third attempt goes up by two, and so on. Eventually, the difficulty will be so high that the character has no chance of succeeding (the lock is simply beyond her ability to pick).

Examples of when to use this rule include climbing a wall or interrogating a prisoner. After all, if you couldn't find a handhold or get the prisoner to talk the first time, there's a reasonable chance you might not be able to do it at all.

Sometimes the Storyteller shouldn't invoke this rule. For example, failing to hit someone with a sword, to detect an ambush, or to track a fleeing victim are to be expected in stressful situations. Such failure does not automatically lead to frustration and failed future attempts.

Example: *Sir Jerome, a vassal of the Duke of York, is not having a good night. He's at the table with an envoy from the Holy Roman Empire in some critical negotiations, and things aren't going well. When Jerome wishes to add some references to the great orations of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux to smooth things over with the envoy (who wears a cross about his neck), the Storyteller craftily suggests that Jerome's player, Edward, roll Wits + Etiquette (difficulty 6) in addition to roleplaying his banter. Edward does so — and Sir Jerome fails to realize that his reference to the great Catholic preacher only alienates the envoy, who follows the Armenian Orthodox faith. (The envoy, however, has no difficulty informing Sir Jerome of the fact.) Jerome attempts to make amends, but the Storyteller tells Edward that the difficulty is 7 this time. Jerome is under pressure, and another insult could break negotiations off entirely.*

Complications

The preceding rules should be enough to get you going, and they might be all you ever need for chronicles that favor storytelling over dice-rolling. They don't necessarily cover all instances,

though. For example, what if you're trying to do something while a Storyteller character is actively trying to stop you? What if your companion tries to help you break a code?

The following various ways to complicate matters are intended to bring extra color to games. You certainly don't have to use them, but they might add more realism and suspense to your story.

The following complications are relatively simple and generic, usable to describe a wide variety of actions. For plenty of situation-specific complications, see Chapter Three.

Multiple Actions

Occasionally, a player will want her character to perform more than one action in a turn — for example, striking two different opponents or climbing a ledge while kicking at pursuers below. In such situations, the player can attempt actions normally, though all actions suffer a penalty.

The player declares the total number of actions he wants his character to attempt. He then subtracts a number of dice from his first dice pool equal to the total number of actions. Additional actions lose an extra die from their pools, and the penalty is cumulative. If a dice pool is reduced to 0 or below in this manner, the character may not attempt the action.

Example: *Justin wants his character, Hall, to throw a punch while simultaneously dodging two incoming blows. Hall has Dexterity 3, Brawl 4 and Dodge 3. Justin calculates the dice pool for the punch (Dexterity 3 + Brawl 4 = seven dice), then subtracts three dice from it (because of the three total actions), for a final pool of four dice. The first dodge has a base pool of six dice (Dexterity 3 + Dodge 3), minus four (three for the number of actions, plus one for being the second multiple action), for a final pool of two dice. The final dodge has a pool of one die (six, minus three for the number of actions, minus an additional two for being the third action attempted). Hall had better be pretty lucky.*

Extended Actions

Sometimes you need more than one success to accomplish a task fully. For example, you might have to spend all night tracking down obscure theological references in a library, or climb a cliff face that's impossible to scale in a single turn. If you need only one success to accomplish an action, the action in question is called a *simple action*. But when you need multiple successes to score even a marginal success, you're undertaking an *extended action*. Simple actions are the most common action in **Dark Ages**, but you will have ample opportunity to perform extended actions.

In an extended action, you roll your dice pool over and over on subsequent turns, trying to collect enough successes to accomplish your goal. For example, your character is trying to dig a temporary haven in the forest floor, using only his bare hands. The Storyteller tells you that you need 15 successes to climb down a rope from the top of a cliff to its base. You'll eventually succeed, but the longer you go, the more chance there is of you botching and falling to the rocks below. What's more, if you have only so many turns before a pursuer reaches the top of the cliff to cut the rope, the speed with which you finish your task becomes doubly important. In all cases, the Storyteller is the final authority on which tasks are extended actions and which aren't.

You can usually take as many turns as you want to finish an extended action. (Of course, situations being what they are in **Dark Ages**, you won't always have that luxury.) If you botch a roll, however, you may have to start over again from scratch. Depending on what you're trying to do, the Storyteller may even rule that you can't start over again at all; you've failed and that's that.

Because extended actions are often quite apropos for describing certain feats, they're used frequently in Chapter Three. However, because of the amount of dice-rolling involved, extended actions should probably be kept out of the more intense sessions of roleplaying.

Resisted Actions

A simple difficulty number might not be enough to represent a struggle between characters. For instance, you may try to batter down a door while a character on the other side tries to hold it

closed. In such a case, you'd make a *resisted roll*, in which each of you rolls dice against a difficulty often determined by one of your opponent's traits, and the person who scores the most successes wins.

However, when it comes to determining the degree of success, you're considered to score only as many successes as the amount by which you exceed your opponent's successes. In other words, the opponent's successes eliminate your own, just as 1s do. If you score four successes and your opponent scores three, you're considered to have only one success. These leftover successes are called your *effective* or *net successes*. Therefore, it's difficult to achieve an outstanding success on a resisted action. Even if your opponent can't beat you, he can still diminish the effectiveness of your efforts.

Some actions (arm-wrestling contests, debates, chases) may be both extended and resisted. In such cases, one or the other of the opponents must achieve a certain number of successes to win the contest. Each turn, the opponent who achieves net successes adds them to a running tally. The first to achieve the designated number of successes achieves her goal.

Teamwork

You don't always have to go it alone. If the situation warrants (usually during an extended action such as researching a family tree or decoding an Aramaic inscription), characters can work together to collect successes. If the Storyteller decides that teamwork is possible for the task in question, two or more characters can make rolls separately and add their successes together. They may never combine their traits into one dice pool, however.

Teamwork can be effective in many situations — dog-piling on the sheriff's cruel enforcer, shadowing a hunter or doing research in the library, for instance. However, it can actually prove to be a hindrance in certain situations (including social interaction such as fast-talking or seducing a subject), and one person's botch can spoil the whole attempt

Action Type Summary

Type	Example	Description
Simple	Dodging a blow, Sensing an ambush	Task is completed with one roll and requires (at minimum) a single success. The Storyteller announces the difficulty and the players roll dice. Automatic success is possible.
Extended	Mountain-climbing, Research	Task is completed when a given number of successes are obtained, which may require more than one roll (which provides more chances of botching).
Resisted	Shadowing	A contest of skill between two individuals. They compare their number of successes; the character with the most successes wins.
Extended & Resisted	Arm wrestling	As a resisted action; the contest requires a given number of net successes and may take more than one turn to complete.

Lexicon of Game Terms

Here we define a number of terms used in the rules that first-time players and new Storytellers might not be familiar with.

- **Ability:** These are traits that describe what a character knows and has learned, rather than her physical and psychological make-up. Traits such as Intimidation, Melee and Theology are Abilities.

- **action:** An action is the performance of a deed, which is a consciously willed physical, social or mental activity. When players announce that their characters are doing something, they are taking an action.
- **Attribute:** These traits describe what a character inherently is. Such things as Strength, Charisma and Intelligence are Attributes.
- **Background:** A type of trait that measures social and inherited advantages, such as allies, domains and status.
- **botch:** A disastrous failure, indicated by rolling one or more 1s and no successes on the 10-sided dice rolled for an action.
- **character:** Each player creates a character, an individual he portrays over the course of the chronicle. Although “character” could imply any individual, we use it here to describe the players’ characters.
- **dice pool:** The amount of dice you have in your hand after adding together your different traits. It is the number of dice you can roll for that action.
- **difficulty:** The number from 2 to 10 that measures the difficulty of an action a character takes. The player needs to roll that number or higher on at least one of the dice in his dice pool.
- **Discipline:** One of the mystical powers of vampires, they each have their own trait.
- **downtime:** The time spent between scenes, where no roleplaying is done and turns are not used. Actions might be made, and the Storyteller might give some descriptions, but time generally passes quickly.
- **extended action:** An action that requires a certain number of successes, accumulated over several turns, for the character to actually succeed.
- **Health:** This trait measures the degree to which a character is wounded or injured.
- **net successes:** The number of successes the victor of a resisted action had above those of the loser. Also called “effective successes.”
- **points:** The temporary score of a trait such as Willpower and blood pool — the squares, not the circles.
- **rating:** A number describing the permanent value of a trait — most often a number from 1 to 5, though sometimes a number from 1 to 10.
- **reflexive action:** A situation in which dice might be rolled, but that does not count as an action for the purpose of calculating dice pools. Examples of reflexive actions are soak rolls and Willpower rolls to resist mind control.
- **resisted action:** An action in which two different characters are in direct competition. Both compare their number of successes, and the character with the most wins.
- **scene:** A single episode of the story. A time and place in which actions and events take place moment by moment. A scene is often a dramatic high point of the story.
- **score:** The temporary value of a trait or combination of traits used in a single roll.
- **simple action:** An action that requires the player to get only one success to succeed, though more successes indicate a better job or result.
- **Storyteller:** The person who creates and guides the story by assuming the roles of all characters not taken by the players and determining all events beyond the control of the players.
- **system:** A specific set of complications used in a certain situation. Rules to help guide the rolling of dice to create dramatic action.
- **trait:** Any Attribute, Ability or other character index that can be described as a number (or in terms of dots).

- **troupe:** The group of players, including the Storyteller, who play **Dark Ages**, usually on a regular basis.
- **Virtue:** A type of trait that measures the soul of the character, from her conscience to her courage.
- **Willpower:** A measure of a character's self-confidence and internal control. Willpower works differently from most traits. It is often spent rather than rolled.

The Golden Rule

The most important rule is simple, but all-encompassing: *Above all, have fun.*

This means that if the rules or systems in this book interfere with your enjoyment of the game, feel free to change them. The world is far too big to be reflected accurately in any set of inflexible rules. Think of this book as a collection of guidelines, suggested but not mandatory ways of capturing the Dark Medieval in the format of a game. You're the arbiter of what works best in your game, and you're free to use, alter, abuse or ignore these rules at your leisure.

Chapter Two: Character Creation

Your character is your window into the Dark Medieval world, the fictional persona whose thoughts and actions you'll play out in the course of a chronicle. Chapter One describes the general state of the world **Dark Ages** characters inhabit, but this is your opportunity to take the generalities and turn them into something specific — an individual man or woman, struggling in the complex world of the Dark Medieval. Your character may be a paragon of virtue or an outcast. He may be rich or poor, prominent or reclusive, as you choose within the guidelines your Storyteller provides for your chronicle.

Character sheets allow you to easily record all of your character's salient traits. By taking a brief tour of a sample sheet, you can get to know the basics of character creation and the important characteristics in a **Dark Ages** game. Each **Dark Ages** hardback book has its own character sheet. The **Dark Ages: Vampire** sheet is reproduced at the end of this document for ease of reference.

The character sheet records the following important traits and facts:

Name: Your character's name. Most medieval folk don't have a family name, though they sometimes add an appellation tying them to their place of birth, such as "Gunther of Bremen."

Player: Your name.

Chronicle: A chronicle is a series of stories featuring the same characters. The Storyteller often gives the chronicle a name to suggest the mood he wants to evoke (e.g., "The Last Crusade") or one tied to the group of characters involved (e.g., "Monsters of Manchester").

Nature: This is a one-word archetype that represents your character's true self. Is she a Barbarian at heart? A Caretaker? A Survivor? A complete list of Archetypes appears on page 24 along with their implications.

Demeanor: Another one-word archetype (chosen from the same list as Nature) that represents the face your character shows the world. Taken with Nature, this allows you to get a quick handle on your character's personality.

Concept: This is a phrase that describes the basic idea for your character. It can be anything you want.

Attributes: These traits measure your character's inherent capabilities, and are divided into Physical, Social and Mental Attributes. Attributes are described starting on page 26.

Abilities: These traits measure what your character has learned to do. They are divided into Talents (innate aptitudes), Skills (learned aptitudes) and Knowledges (academic and learned lore). Abilities are described starting on page 29.

Backgrounds: *Backgrounds* are some of the most important and the ones that make your character most special, the edges your character has over others. Most are social in nature, such as Allies, Contacts or Status.

Willpower: Willpower is your character's mental reserve. When push comes to shove, can she dig deep and call on some strength from within? Willpower is discussed on page 47.

Health: When your character gets hurt, you mark off one or more boxes to indicate what her current health level is. Each level limits your character's actions, as discussed on page 79.

I Am, We Are: Working Together

Unless you're playing in a chronicle with just one player and a Storyteller (and not always then), your character is one of several who spend some of their time together. This group isn't just a convenience for game play; it's the fundamental unit of society in each of the **Dark Ages'** several

titles. Solitary characters simply cannot pursue the opportunities that a group can by working together. These groups provide leverage against targets and defense against enemies.

- **Making Contacts:** As you think about who your character is as an individual, also think about her as part of a group. Work with the other players to identify points of contact in the backgrounds you create. Perhaps they were rivals in the past, or they all hail from the same village, or two characters once courted the same woman. The more you consider the group as well as the character early on, the better use you can make of the opportunities that the mechanics of character creation provide.

- **Hearth and Home:** The place your characters occupy should matter, opening up some possibilities and closing off others. One of this game's themes is the differences between the visible, daylight world and the secret truths in the shadows. It's perfectly acceptable for the members of a group to contrast with their environment, but there are limits. A contingent of former Vikings just isn't going to do very well in the midst of Rome or Cairo without very serious changes to their routine: Even creatures as powerful as vampires or werewolves cannot sail longboats through densely populated cities and expect no interference. "Who we are" and "where we are" generally develop in tandem, and you should generally feel free to change one in light of a good idea for the other.

Many good storytelling possibilities follow from characters who are part of their place as it once was, but isn't anymore. The Dark Medieval world isn't stagnant: Wars, crusades, plagues and other upheavals wipe out leaders and whole communities, while advances in farming and other technology turn former wilderness into civilization (by the era's standards). Families and tribes move in search of opportunity or just relief from persecution. In the midst of confusion, the company of one's peers may be very welcome even if they don't especially like each other as individuals — at least they share a frame of reference.

Thinking Medieval

Most people in the Dark Medieval world face contradictory truths, which they try to reconcile as best they can. (Neither cognitive dissonance nor paradox suddenly sprung into being for the 21st century.) While some zealots do hold straightforward, simple views of the world, most people juggle conflicting claims, and the interplay of concepts fuels both passion and doubt. A character yearning for certainty may commit to a course of action despite reservations, or indeed precisely because of them, to feel that she's facing temptation and persevering in her search for truth. Another character who has long held a particular outlook may suddenly stop to reappraise.

- **Order and Chaos:** Most denizens of the Dark Medieval feel that the world was once perfect. Manifestly it's not anymore, and the search for just what causes a chaotic and unjust world is one of the great questions of the age, one to which your character may hope to find an answer. Vampires, inquisitors and mages may become caught in the conflicts between factions and heresies of the Christian church, werewolves may struggle to interpret strange prophecies foretelling their doom, and the fae may seek to discover the causes of the War of Seasons in the hopes of resolving the age-old conflict.

- **Good and Evil:** Your character believes that there is a fundamental source for virtues, and likewise for vices. Just as the world seems uncertain in its orderliness, so in its goodness. Christians, Jews and Muslims all believe that God is essentially good, but many believe that He's given the world over partly or entirely to demonic powers for the time being. Pagans believe that gods and spirits of many sorts contend, and that the outcome of their struggle is by no means guaranteed to favor goodness. Doubters hope or fear that even though there are magical and supernatural powers, they're essentially amoral, lacking any direction except that imposed by acts of will. Almost everyone, of every outlook, agrees that the questions "What's supposed to happen when I act virtuously or wickedly?" and "What is likely to happen when I act virtuously or wickedly?" have very different answers. The brokenness of the world is something accepted as given almost everywhere, except among gatherings of some mystics and the outright foolish.

• **Hierarchy:** Most people in the Middle Ages believe that inequality is an important part of the world. There are superiors and inferiors, and a good society acknowledges this fact so that those who are fit to lead can direct those who are fit to follow. It's in the details that things get complicated. In practice, there are wicked or incompetent rulers in both the secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Coups, wars and crusades stem in part from disagreement over who is fit to rule and why — either the heavens keep silent about such matters, or they reveal signs that lend themselves to more than one interpretation. The idea of fundamental equality is, again, a notion for mystics or for those who despair of justice short of the overthrow of all existing powers. Your character has some thoughts about what the proper lines of authority are and what she should do when they're broken or corrupted, and these thoughts guide her in times of disorder

Character Creation Summary

• Step One: Character Concept

Choose concept, Nature and Demeanor.

• Step Two: Select Attributes

Choose primary, secondary and tertiary categories of Attributes. Start with one dot in each Attribute. Divide 7 additional dots among primary Attributes, 5 dots among secondary Attributes, 3 dots among tertiary Attributes. (These numbers assume a mage, werewolf, vampire or faerie. Inquisitors and other normal humans receive 6/4/3 instead of 7/5/3 in their Attributes.)

Physical Attributes: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Social Attributes: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Mental Attributes: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

• Step Three: Select Abilities

Choose primary, secondary and tertiary categories of Abilities. No automatic Ability dots. Divide 13 dots among primary Abilities, 9 dots among secondary Abilities, 5 dots among tertiary Abilities. (These numbers assume a mage, werewolf, vampire or faerie. Inquisitors and other normal humans receive 11/7/4 instead of 13/9/5 in their Abilities.)

Talents: innate aptitudes

Skills: learned abilities

Knowledges: academic and intellectual lore

No Ability can have more than three dots at this stage.

• Step Four: Select Advantages

Divide 5 dots among Backgrounds. (Each supplementary rulebook contains specific rules regarding Advantages unique to that game.)

• Step Five: Finishing Touches

Spend bonus points: 15 for mage, werewolf, vampire or faerie; 21 for an inquisitor or other normal human being (see costs on p. 18).

(Starting Willpower depends on character type; assume 2 for a mortal.)

Archetypes (Nature and Demeanor)

- **Autocrat:** You were made to lead.
- **Barbarian:** Civilization is the crutch of the weak.
- **Caretaker:** You are your brother's keeper.
- **Celebrant:** Pursue excitement in all things.
- **Defender:** You stand guard over that for which you care.
- **Gallant:** Whatever you do, do it with style.
- **Jester:** The real fools are those who don't see the flaws you point out in them.
- **Judge:** Someone must decide, must make the hard choices.
- **Pedagogue:** The world needs instruction.
- **Penitent:** You are a sinner. Can you make up for it?
- **Rebel:** The order of the world is corrupt. Are you?
- **Survivor:** When the horn sounds on Judgment Day, you will be there.

Backgrounds

- **Allies:** Trusted individuals who share your cause.
- **Contacts:** Sources of information.
- **Influence:** Authority and status among mortals.
- **Mentor:** A sponsor or guide among vampires.
- **Resources:** Property and other sources of value.
- **Retainers:** Personal assistants, both living and otherwise.
- **Status:** Authority and renown among vampires.

Bonus Point Costs

- **Attributes:** 5 bonus points per dot.
- **Abilities:** 2 bonus points per dot.
- **Ability Specialties (max. three per ability):** 1 bonus point each.
- **Backgrounds:** 1 bonus point per dot.
- **Willpower:** 1 bonus point per dot.

Five Steps into Darkness

The process of creating a character is divided into five basic steps, discussed here and outlined in the nearby sidebars. These steps carry you from the kernel of an idea to a complete set of game traits and some concrete facts about your character's background. You may find yourself skipping about the steps somewhat as ideas come to you and you adjust decisions on the fly, and that's perfectly natural. The steps are here to provide you with an easy path, not to limit your wanderings.

Preliminary Assumptions

The rules that follow for building your character make certain assumptions and set some limits. Keep them in mind.

- **Scope.** The rules themselves do not assume that your character must be a particular age, gender or background. The definitions of specific traits given here use common outlooks from the Middle Ages to illustrate their points, but the same scores can just as well describe someone from long ago or far away.

You can change these assumptions to suit the needs of a particular chronicle or the needs of some characters within it. Make sure that the Storyteller and players agree on what's going on. (Discuss rather than leap to independent conclusions that you conceal or neglect to mention.)

Any result can be fine if it works for the people playing in that chronicle; any result can wreak major havoc if assumptions come into conflict.

- **Detail.** The numbers presented here are all deliberately broad, fuzzy definitions. The numbers support roleplaying effort rather than supplanting it, and there's a great deal of room for individual clarification. Two characters of approximately average strength, for instance, may have the same numerical score in the Strength Attribute and yet behave differently in play. In some cases, the Storyteller may grant one player a little bonus on some rolls for the somewhat stronger character or assign the other player an occasional handicapping penalty for the somewhat weaker character. The numbers provide true and useful information about characters. They simply don't tell the whole story.

- **Step by Step.** You have a fixed total of points to allocate to certain characteristics at each step. You'll also get bonus points to spend in the final step, to fill in gaps in your character concept. Note that you'll often wish that you had more points than you do. Keep in mind that your character will improve in the course of play, through experience.

- **The Scale.** There's a standard scale from incompetence to excellence in each trait you'll be rating in the following steps. A score of 1 reflects bare minimal ability, a bit better than lacking the trait altogether, but not much. A score of 2 is average for most people, and 3 is notably above average. A score of 4 is distinctly excellent, the mark of someone with both innate talent and experience. A score of 5 reflects mastery at the level of the world's best. Some special characteristics work on a 1-10 scale instead of 1-5, and they're each described in detail later in this chapter.

- **Teamwork.** **Dark Ages** is a group endeavor, not a solitary one. You have an obligation to your fellow players, just as they do to you, not to wreck the game. Once you and the Storyteller know what you all want to do, you need to work within those guidelines until and unless you persuade the other participants to change. It's trivially easy to make characters who comply with the letter of the rules and even with the spirit of the Dark Medieval world but who are totally unsuited for a particular chronicle: devout Muslims in a chronicle focusing on the secret politics behind the Church of Rome, for instance, or resolutely territorial, stay-at-home characters in a chronicle set up to follow a pilgrimage or crusade.

You can do many things that are sometimes a good idea but unwise for a particular situation. Don't be a jerk about it. Cooperate, and you'll get back better entertainment for everyone.

Storyteller, Troupe and Character

In every game, someone has the final say over what's suitable and what isn't in a particular situation. In the **Dark Ages** setting, that's the Storyteller overseeing your game. The Storyteller lays out guidelines as to what sorts of characters are particularly desirable, or particularly undesirable, and he should work with you in refining your concept. On the other hand, the point of playing with other people is precisely to get more than your own creativity at work, and engaging character concepts may well lead the Storyteller to revise his original plans. Sometimes the characters fit precisely and things get underway without a hitch. More often, there's some adjustment on both sides. Cooperation often gets you more of what you want than obstinacy — and with less hassle.

Most of the time, your character doesn't emerge in a single flash of celestial lightning instantly ready for play. Other players may have suggestions, along with the Storyteller. It's often (though not always) good to work out connections in characters' pasts, strengthening the bonds between them in the history of events before play begins so that if the Storyteller prefers not to focus primarily on strangers getting to know each other, he doesn't have to. Of course, if the chronicle has that as a major theme, then extensive prior connections may be very much a bad idea. Individual circumstances take precedence over all these generalizations.

Your Storyteller should have at least some sense of the rules before character creation begins. Remember while expecting the best that everyone has a first chronicle at some point, and if this is that time, then don't expect instant mastery. In addition, even experienced players sometimes

lose track of details, and they may need to pause to check specific aspects of the game system. White Wolf will not send anyone around to award prizes to those who memorize the whole book first, nor dispatch the jack-booted game police to confiscate copies of **Dark Ages** books from those who continue to rely on the index. Allow room for human fallibility.

Some troupes dive right in to the mechanics of character creation after minimal orientation from the Storyteller. His chronicle idea might take just a sentence or two to explain, or it may require a great deal of qualification and clarification. Some players prefer to spend time discussing ideas and possibilities before getting out the character sheets, too. Experiment a little to find what works for you (and feel free to try alternative approaches from time to time, even after you know one way that suits you well). Listen to your Storyteller's description of what he has in mind and pay attention. Nobody likes endless repetition, and it takes time away from more rewarding pursuits.

Storytellers should generally plan one whole session for character creation and preludes. Supernatural beings (and those who hunt them) are complex characters, who necessarily have personal baggage, and it takes some time for everyone to get a sense for their characters. You'll need to see for yourself whether it's better for everyone to create characters and play through preludes together, or whether it makes sense to work individually with the Storyteller. The more complicated the concept is and the more secrets the character is keeping at the beginning of play, the more suitable individual introductory sessions are. At the end of all this, you should have a character with not just a complete set of numerical ratings but a personality and style, ready for ongoing action.

Step One: Character Concept

Each character begins with an idea. Sometimes it's a personal quirk, sometimes an ability, sometimes a piece of background. You may wish to expand on one of the typical concepts for a clan or road, or try something a little out of the ordinary. Whatever starting point suits you is good as long as it leads to a well-developed character in the end.

You don't need to have all the details lined up at this step. "This is a former Crusader who lost his faith but is now regaining it, in a dark and twisted way," suffices. So does, "I want to play a rebellious peasant who's infiltrating the nobility thanks to clever use of special abilities and working to undermine his enemy's legacy." The steps that follow supply details naturally.

Archetype: Nature and Demeanor

The two aspects of Archetype sum up key features of your character's personality. Nature is the essence of your character's deepest drives. What motivates him beneath it all? In terms of game mechanics, opportunities to satisfy the impulse that Nature expresses let your character regain Willpower. In terms of play, these opportunities gratify the character's most profound instincts and create a sense of completion and fulfillment. Demeanor is the face your character presents to the world, and it is purely a matter of roleplaying. It may be identical to your character's Nature, or it may differ wildly, depending on how duplicitous your character seems. Archetypes serve as useful shorthand for your character's personality and behavior.

Step Two: Choosing Attributes

This is the first step that involves assigning a batch of numbers. Attributes measure broad categories of human (and nonhuman) capability. They come in three categories: Physical (Strength, Dexterity, Stamina), Social (Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance) and Mental (Perception, Intelligence, Wits). Briefly, Physical Attributes cover your character's innate strength, speed and endurance; Social Attributes cover her charm, ability to influence others and her looks; Mental Attributes cover her awareness of the world, intellectual capacity and her speed of insight and response. Full descriptions of all the Attributes appear starting on page 26.

You must choose one category of Attributes as primary, one as secondary and one as tertiary. A character who is fit and fast, reasonably smart but awkward in society would have Physical Attributes as primary, Mental Attributes as secondary and Social Attributes as tertiary. A powerful

charmer who is (at best) middling clever, on the other hand, would have Social Attributes as primary, Physical Attributes as secondary and Mental Attributes as tertiary (or reverse the primary and secondary choices).

All characters begin with one free dot in each of the nine Attributes (except for certain supernatural who may be cursed not to). You divide more dots among each category depending on the priority you've assigned it.

- Divide seven dots among the primary Attributes. If your character's primary category is Physical, for instance, you might add three dots to Strength and two each to Dexterity and Stamina for someone who's very strong and quite fast and tough, or four dots to Dexterity, two to Stamina and one to Strength for someone who's astoundingly fleet, resilient but only of average strength. Tinker with the possible combinations to suit your concept.
- Divide five dots among the secondary Attributes. If your character's secondary category is Social, you might assign three dots to Manipulation and one each to Charisma and Appearance for someone of average looks and charm who's really very good at getting others to do what she wants, or two dots each to Appearance and Charisma and one to Manipulation for a character of significant beauty and charm but only average persuasive power.
- Divide three dots among the tertiary Attributes. If your character's tertiary category is Mental, you might assign one dot each to Perception, Intelligence and Wits for a character who's average across the board, or three to Perception and none at all to the others for a sort of idiot savant of tracking or alertness.

You may find yourself wondering why it is that your character ends up above average in so many ways. It is important to keep in mind that you are not an average human being, but different in some strange and mysterious way. Whether you bear the Curse of Caine or the Gifts of Gaia, you are no longer a mundane human. Likewise, inquisitor characters, since they *are* normal humans, don't receive as many dots to distribute.

Step Three: Choosing Abilities

Abilities are more focused areas of experience. Unlike Attributes, your character doesn't begin with automatic dots in any of them. There are many feats your character can attempt only at a penalty, or not at all, simply because nobody can know everything. As with Attributes, Abilities are divided into three categories: Talents (innate aptitudes and matters one can learn through experience), Skills (abilities requiring training and practice) and Knowledges (academic and other intellectual pursuits).

You must also assign one Ability category as primary, one as secondary and one as tertiary, as with Attributes. A bookworm who's made some effort to acquire non-academic skills but lacks much of anything in the way of physical potential likely has Knowledges as primary, Skills as secondary and Talents as tertiary. An ill-educated woodsman who's seen some of the world as a soldier likely has Talents as primary, Skills as secondary and Knowledges as tertiary. No Ability may finish this step with more than three dots, though you can spend bonus points to raise some later.

- Divide 13 dots among the Abilities in the primary category.
- Divide 9 dots among the Abilities in the secondary category.
- Divide 5 dots among the Abilities in the tertiary category.

Full descriptions of the individual Abilities appear starting on page 29.

Step Four: Choosing Advantages

This step primarily deals with the qualities distinctive to each game title. While the Background Advantage is common to all **Dark Ages** characters and described here, other Advantages such as Disciplines, Gifts, Pillars, and Dominions are detailed in their respective rulebooks.

Backgrounds

The term “Background” is a sort of catch-all that refers to many aspects of a character’s persona and situation that don’t fit into the categories covered so far. Some Backgrounds are mystical internal features unique to each **Dark Ages** title (such as Generation, Totem and Oaths), and those are not covered here. Others, such as Allies and Contacts, deal with the character’s place in mortal society, and some, such as Status, cover the character’s place among their own kind. Full descriptions of the individual Backgrounds appear starting on page 42.

You have five dots to divide among Backgrounds as you wish, though your Storyteller may say that some Background choices don’t fit the character. A destitute wanderer, for instance, has little opportunity to build up many riches, so he cannot plausibly have high Resources without a great deal of justification.

You and your fellow players can pool some Backgrounds, with characters combining their resources for best effect. Backgrounds available for pooling include Allies, Contacts, Influence, Mentor, Resources and Retainers. See p. 45 for further information; the **Dark Ages** sourcebook **Right of Princes** is the definitive work on (among other topics) pooling Backgrounds and what this system can add to the game.

Depending on the nature of the chronicle, your Storyteller may rule some Backgrounds off-limits and others highly recommended or even obligatory. Depending in turn on the roles the characters are to play, the Storyteller may simply give you extra dots to apply to the mandatory elements so that you retain the usual quota of choices. (This is almost always the best way to handle it: If something *must* be, don’t require players to give up other choices for it.)

Step Five: Finishing Touches

The major work of character creation is now over. You have taken a concept and translated it into a character sheet that shows mundane and supernatural capabilities. Likely you also have some areas in which you wish you could improve the scores; these are incentives for play. This step rounds out the character’s description with several traits that come in handy.

Willpower

This trait is also measured on a scale from 1 to 10. A Willpower of 2-3 is about average for most human beings, but each **Dark Ages** title handles Willpower a bit differently. Regardless, almost all players find it wise to spend at least a few bonus points to raise Willpower higher. A character with a Willpower of 3 or less simply isn’t likely to last long.

Bonus Points

At last you can fill in the most annoying or pressing gaps between your sense of what you’d like your character to be and what the points available at each step make possible. You have 15 bonus points to spend (inquisitors receive 21). Dots in different sorts of traits cost different quantities of bonus points, as described in the chart on page 18.

In the earlier steps of character creation, you could put no more than three dots in any given Ability. Three dots represent significant mastery of a field, enough to make your character one of the best at that ability in his region. With bonus-bought dots your character can rise to greater heights, as part of the supernatural prowess that comes with their nonhuman nature. If you raise Abilities to four or five dots, keep in mind what this means: Your character has now become one of the best of the best at those Abilities. If you give your character five dots in Leadership, for instance, you’ve made him in likelihood better at rousing the masses than the king, cardinal and other great leaders of that land. **Dark Ages** certainly allows you to do so, just think carefully when assigning your character such ratings.

The Spark of Life

You presumably began this process with a concept in mind. The actual step-by-step mechanics almost always change your character concept, sometimes in big ways. Now it's time to take stock of the results.

For each Attribute and Ability your character uses often, ask yourself, "How does this show in the world around the character?" Some expertise, of course, leaves no visible mark until it's used... but then the exercise of secrecy is itself something to consider in roleplaying. Wherever your character's ratings diverge significantly from the norm for his society, people are likely to notice *something*, which is all potential fodder for your gaming. Your character should feel vivid and interesting to you, since you'll be spending a fair amount of time with him.

Similar considerations apply to Backgrounds and the other traits. The awe that people feel around a deeply compassionate healer is not like the awe that they feel around a fanatical crusader, for instance. Two members of a roleplaying group might both deal with the same person in their town in very different ways: One knows the constable as an ally, an old friend whom the character shields from the grim realities of the world, while the other knows him as a contact, a useful tool to be discarded or destroyed if he ever becomes inconvenient.

Wherever possible, you should be able to explain your character concept in words — use numbers to support them rather than relying on numbers alone. Saying, "Sir Giles is a perennially smirking middle-aged man who's nonetheless disturbingly persuasive," is a lot more useful in some circumstances and almost always more fun than saying, "Sir Giles has Appearance 2, Manipulation 4 and Presence 3."

The Prelude

The very last "finishing touch" is the character prelude, a brief session of play during which the Storyteller guides you through some of the formative moments of your character's history. There isn't much die-rolling or any grave threats in a prelude, and it can even be reduced to a series of quick questions if need be, but it also provides a lot of useful context for your character. You'll get to play out how you met your mentor or contacts, just where you learned Theology up to level 4, how you met the other characters and other key moments.

Chapter Three: Traits

Nature and Demeanor

The twin faces of a character's archetype, Nature and Demeanor, point at aspects of his personality beyond and beneath any specific aptitude or knowledge. Nature is the "big story" about a character: When everything else fails or falls away, what's left? What's the thing that most drives him in the face of all adversity? That's his Nature. Demeanor is the essence of the character's outward personality. Sometimes it's identical to Nature, when the character simply is what he appears to be. In other cases, it's quite different, whether through deliberate deception, self-denial on the character's part or the accumulation of cover stories and partial truths that define many people and nearly all vampires over time.

Keep in mind that Nature and Demeanor are indicators and summaries, not high stone walls sealing off possibilities. Not all character concepts lend themselves to one of the Archetypes listed here. Where it's appropriate, the Storyteller and player should work together to come up with a definition that *does* suit the character. If it works with a summary label and short description, fine. If not, also fine. What matters is a clear definition of what the character must do for self-fulfillment and the renewal of Willpower, not making it fit a particular word count. The Storyteller's response to a player saying, "I don't quite see anything here that fits my concept," should be, "Then let's modify one of these if we can, and make up a new one otherwise," rather than, "Then you can't play that concept."

The character's inner nature does matter in play, and not just for reasons of roleplaying completeness. The Willpower trait measures the character's available mental, physical and spiritual reserves for moments of greater-than-usual effort. Over time, the character draws on those reserves and they can run out. Significant accomplishments in accord with the character's Nature are the key to restoring lost Willpower. Briefly, when the character achieves the kind of thing toward which his Nature drives, the Storyteller award a single point of temporary Willpower (assuming any has been spent).

Autocrat

The time is out of joint, and you were born to set it right. You thrive when you can take charge and bring order to what's been chaotic. You might be a great leader; you might also have been one of the powerless masses, now serving in a role that was once denied to you. You trust your judgments, and why not? Experience tells you that you're made for special insights into both the world's problems and their solutions.

- Regain Willpower when you lead a group to some significant accomplishment.

Barbarian

Civilization is the trap that the clever set for the weak, and in which they end up snaring themselves. Truly intelligent, brave, strong people understand that sedentary existence only brings you that much closer to the grave, and that what counts is what you achieve as an individual. You respect only actual deeds. Anyone can boast or scheme, but all words vanish in the end. Only deeds remain, having changed the world.

- Regain Willpower when you beat "civilized" competition through your barbaric virtues.

Caretaker

You are, indeed, your brother's keeper. Whether you understand it as the will of God, your duty to your ancestors and the spirits or simply as the obligation of a fully aware human being, you know that the most important obligation is providing for others' needs. Not everyone appreciates your effort, as you already know from bitter experience, but rejection and ingratitude do not give you

license to stop doing what you know you should. There can be no rest until the world is at ease, and that's a long way off.

- Regain Willpower when you put forth significant effort that benefits others without any particular return for yourself. (This isn't martyrdom, just acting for motives other than self-interest.)

Celebrant

The greatest joy in life (or after death) is the only thing worth having. Some particular kind of consummate satisfaction draws you on. Depending on who you are, it may be the ecstasy of prayer, the heady rush of battle, the textures of the finest fabrics... almost anything might be the key to sensual happiness. Whatever it is, you'll do whatever seems necessary to protect that pleasure and enjoy it. You may or may not feel compelled to share the joy with others.

- Regain Willpower whenever you experience a new pleasure within your favored category (using an unfamiliar type of weapon in battle, praying in accordance with a new liturgy or hymnal, wearing a fabric you've never worn before), when you convert another character to a proper appreciation of the pleasure's merits or when you repeat the single strongest pleasure of your chosen sort.

Defender

Everything that matters in the world struggles to survive in the face of its enemies. This isn't necessarily a commitment to tradition, though. The thing you defend may be some fragile innovation or the hope of future progress. You may see your role in martial terms, or otherwise; this is an Archetype for healers and priests as well as warriors. You find your fulfillment in defending the cause to which you've given your allegiance.

- Regain Willpower whenever you successfully defend your chosen object of loyalty from some outside threat.

Gallant

Never mind goals and ultimate conditions: What matters is how you make your way. The most important thing in the world is style in all its manifestations — the right appearance, the right accoutrements, the right speech and actions. You aspire to be the gentleman or lady whose panache sets the tone for the community around you. Romance and rhetoric guide you; morbidity, depression and earnest self-denial are the great enemies.

- Regain Willpower whenever you accomplish a significant task with particular style and grace.

Jester

In a world full of woes, what can anyone do to survive but laugh? In a world full of fools with power, what can anyone do but mock them? You are the one who sees the world as it is (a veil of folly and deceit) and who enlightens others through the subtle ways of humor. They may see only slapstick or broad comedy, but your insights creep past their mental walls and set up camp, so that in the end, the stupid, vicious, clumsy powers that be all fall down. Where there is wholesome laughter and relieved scorn, there is no room for tyranny. Let the world's would-be masters beware, for you strike at the fear that sustains them.

- Regain Willpower whenever you raise the spirits of those in great misery, or whenever you undermine a bully or tyrant by making him the object of ridicule.

Judge

Above all, the world cries out for judgment. Someone must weigh competing wants and needs in the balance, rewarding those who deserve it and punishing the guilty for their offenses. That's you. Whether you hold any official role or not, you are one of the latter-day heirs to Joshua, applying right principle and careful consideration to the tumult around you. You act to resolve conflict and administer justice. It is not necessary for others to appreciate or understand your work; their obedience is sufficient.

- Regain Willpower whenever you settle a long-time dispute or whenever you convince contentious factions to submit to your judgment.

Pedagogue

“But I didn’t know,” says the criminal and the sinner. They protest, but they have a point. Who can do right without being instructed? In the absence of revelation, we must all apply ourselves to the task of learning. Someone must teach others the facts of the world, and that someone is you. You find the greatest joy in correcting error and removing ignorance, whether others appreciate your efforts or not.

- Regain Willpower whenever you see someone survive a significant threat thanks to knowledge you gave them or whenever you can make a point of instruction compulsory, thereby abolishing that ignorance for good.

Penitent

In the beginning there was sin, and in the end there will be judgment. In between, there is your guilt and the world’s, so much wrong that must be acknowledged and for which atonement must be made. Your whole existence is given over to the struggle for redemption. You do everything you can to deny your darker impulses or at least to channel them into some productive, virtuous enterprise.

- Regain Willpower whenever you make a substantial sacrifice to atone for a recent sin. The greater the sin, the more lasting the sacrifice must be.

Rebel

Priests talk of Satan, kings talk of the Jacquerie. They mean the same thing: that nobody should ever dare challenge the existing order. You understand that *everybody* should challenge it, for the existing order is rotten to the core. Authority is your enemy, and you will do whatever it takes to topple it. Impulsive or calculating, patient or rash, you know your enemies. In time, they will know you and fear you.

- Regain Willpower whenever you inflict significant damage on the order you despise.

Survivor

The Day of Judgment may be imminent, or it may be thousands of years off. (More? Who knows how long God will tolerate this mass of sinful flesh and corrupted earth?) Your goal is very simple: to be there when the end comes. You’ll do whatever it takes to survive in the meantime. Alliance and betrayal, devotion and hypocrisy, these are all just tools for you to use when appropriate. You do care about what happens around you, and if you can take others with you on the longest journey, so much the better. It’s just that you won’t let them stop you, if it comes down to that.

- Regain Willpower whenever you survive a serious threat through determination and tenacity, or whenever your leadership allows others to survive a threat that would otherwise have destroyed them.

Attributes

Attributes are qualities that every human being possesses to some degree. A person who lacks any rating at all in an Attribute is either dead or suffering from an extreme supernatural curse, such as vampires of Clan Nosferatu who have Appearance 0. Each Attribute is rated on a scale of one to five dots. A single dot represents the low end of human potential. A rating of 2 is average for humanity taken as a whole, and 3 represents distinctly above-average capability. Four dots make the character one of the best in the region in the quality that Attribute represents, and a character with five dots is one of the best in the world, or at least one of the best likely to ever appear in the chronicle.

Physical

The Physical Attributes measure qualities of the body, such as its strength, speed, coordination, resilience and so on.

Strength

Strength is a character's innate muscle power, governing how much he can lift and how hard he can hit. Strength is the Attribute that provides damage dice for most combat feats, as well as for leaps, shoves and the like.

- Poor. You can lift 40 lbs.
- Average. You can lift 100 lbs.
- Good. You can lift 250 lbs.
- Exceptional. You can lift 400 lbs.
- Outstanding. You lift 650 lbs.; you routinely break the bones of (and otherwise intimidate) anyone who gets in your way.

Dexterity

Dexterity covers the qualities of physical prowess apart from strength, such as speed, agility, coordination and so on. The ability to hit things at a distance and to move gracefully both depend on Dexterity.

- Poor. You are always awkward and often clumsy.
- Average. You get through life without too many embarrassing accidents.
- Good. You move with notable grace, and you can do well at the athletic efforts that attract your interest.
- Exceptional. You could be a professional tumbler or other acrobat, and you have the reflexes to make an outstanding warrior.
- Outstanding. You have the constant grace of a demigod.

Stamina

Stamina includes overall health, toughness and resilience. Characters with high Stamina can take more damage in and out of combat, and they recover more quickly from the injuries they do suffer.

- Poor. Your existence is a constant parade of minor (and major) miseries. In life, you got hurt easily and healed slowly.
- Average. You're of average health.
- Good. In life, you seldom succumbed to the illnesses sweeping around you. In unlife, you resist injury better than many vampires.
- Exceptional. You keep going in the face of challenges that exhaust others.
- Outstanding. Perhaps Adam and Eve were this vigorous before the Fall.

Social

Social Attributes measure how well a character deals with others in various ways. They encompass her appearance, charm, ability to master social graces and so on. Social Attributes provide the dice for rolls to make a good first impression, impress or cow others and understand what's happening in one's community.

Charisma

Charisma is the mysterious quality that lets one person impress and please others through force of personality. Charisma plays a part in efforts to win others' trust and sympathy, and to bring them into alignment with the character's own views and goals.

- Poor. Even your best moments contain many minor gaffes.

- Average. You seldom give unintended offense, and you enjoy reasonable social standing among your peers and neighbors.
- Good. People trust you and enjoy your company without always realizing how much of your outlook they're adopting.
- Exceptional. You naturally lead whatever group you're in.
- Outstanding. You have the confidence of the blessed.

Manipulation

Manipulation is the quality of expressing oneself in ways that get others to agree, even if they don't necessarily trust the character. Where Charisma brings allegiance, Manipulation brings obedience in the present moment, with or without lasting affiliation. Note that Manipulation isn't necessarily dishonest: People can and do use rhetorical tricks in the service of causes that they genuinely believe in.

- Poor. You have a hard time sounding sincere even when you are.
- Average. You can persuade and be persuaded about as easily as anyone else.
- Good. You're accustomed to getting your way.
- Exceptional. You have the makings of a good preacher or inquisitor.
- Outstanding. Your words move all who hear them to aid your cause, and you speak with divine (or demonic) charm.

Appearance

Appearance is the sum of all the factors that make an individual attractive to others. Physical beauty is part of it, but so are one's implicit attitudes, the subtle cues of body movement and poise and many other less obvious features.

- Poor. You're ugly by the standards of your own society and those of many others.
- Average. You're inconspicuous.
- Good. You attract favorable attention almost everywhere you go.
- Exceptional. You stand out in nearly any crowd, for good and ill.
- Outstanding. People routinely compare you to a demigod or angel incarnate.

Mental

Mental Attributes are qualities of the mind, such as reasoning, intuition and sharpness of the senses (which is as much a matter of understanding what the senses tell one as the quality of the sensorial organs). Depending on the individual, high Mental Attributes can represent wide-ranging genius or more focused cleverness.

Perception

Perception is the ability to accurately sense one's environment. It combines keen senses with the intuitive grasp of what may or may not be significant, without needing to pause for labored analysis. It contributes to efforts at concealment and finding what others have concealed, as well as preparing for and defending against ambushes and to interpreting clues.

- Poor. You may be bright but self-absorbed or simply inattentive.
- Average. Subtlety may elude you, but you don't miss the obvious, and you can do all right with the obscure if you have time and good circumstances.
- Good. You're aware of your environment in significant detail without having to strain at it.
- Exceptional. Little can remain hidden from you when you choose to find it. You see all things clearly.
- Outstanding. The book of the world opens its every page to you.

Intelligence

Intelligence includes a character's ability to master facts and knowledge, recall them at need and put them together to produce new insights. Problem-solving and logic lie within the domain of Intelligence. It does not include common sense, moral judgment or other useful qualities, and the

clever but inept scholar is as much a medieval stereotype as a modern one. Depending on the individual, low Intelligence may indicate actual impairment in mental faculties or poor use of one's potential.

- Poor. If you're not actually a half-wit, surely you have less than one full wit.
- Average. You're unremarkable, and you manage to get through life without too much bewilderment.
- Good. You're insightful, and you can count on making sense of many mysteries.
- Exceptional. You learn much, forget little and routinely make innovations in your chosen field.
- Outstanding. You're a latter-day Solomon or Odysseus.

Wits

Wits is the capacity for quick thinking: not necessarily for brilliant intellectual reasoning or even for careful appraisal of the environment, but rapid response based on available information and survival instinct. It also contributes to more deliberate efforts to identify clever courses of action and ways around others' defenses and recall precisely the necessary datum at the key moment.

- Poor. Your jokes fall flat and you're the last to notice.
- Average. You get through life without too many unpleasant surprises.
- Good. You're quick on the uptake, and you often get the best of others when speed is essential.
- Exceptional. You're the one who makes everyone else think, "I wish I'd thought of that."
- Outstanding. You have the Psalmist's gift for the appropriate response for every occasion.

Abilities

Abilities measure your character's capability to undertake specific kinds of tasks. Whereas Attributes measure raw potential in broad fields, each Ability is a much more focused area of knowledge or expertise. Abilities let your character use his potential most effectively and compensate for underlying deficiencies in some cases. A weak but experienced knife fighter can make mincemeat out of a big burly opponent who has no clue how to fight well, for instance, and a priest who lacks personal charisma but understands the principles of rhetoric can defeat a charming but unskilled opponent in debate.

Specialty and Expertise

Most Abilities (with exceptions noted in their respective descriptions) start out with a common body of lore, with many variations and separate branches available depending on a character's culture and circumstances. Specialties measure this property in game mechanics. When your character has a relevant specialty, you roll one more die than usual on tasks that involve it. You purchase specialties with bonus points or experience points; the cost for each appears in the relevant chart. You may have up to three specialties in any given ability, but no more than one can apply to a single roll. So if your character, who has Melee with both the "swords" and the "multiple opponents" specialties, is fighting off three brigands with his broadsword, you still only roll one extra die.

Expertise is a special form of specialty that applies to the Crafts Skill and a few other catch-all Abilities. It is a field of endeavor the character has studied, such as woodworking, forging or boat-building. Expertise works just like a specialty, granting an extra die when it applies, except that it *can* be combined with a specialty (for a maximum bonus of two dice), and that a character can have only as many fields of expertise as he has dots in the governing Ability. Most catch-all Abilities grant one free field of expertise and require that you purchase others with experience or bonus points. They also usually limit the ways in which you can use the Ability if your expertise does not apply. Few architects can hope to forge iron successfully without knowing how, for example. See the individual Ability descriptions for full details.

Acting Without an Ability

There is bound to be a time when you want your character to do something that uses an Ability she just doesn't have. What then? Does the fact that you didn't buy dots in Dodge mean she can't duck when someone screams, "Get down!"? No, not at all. But the fact that you didn't spend points on Medicine *does* mean she doesn't have much hope treating a disease or healing a mortal's wounds.

It's actually when you don't have an Ability that the differences between Talents, Skills and Knowledges become clear. Talents are relatively easy to do by the seat of your pants, Skills are harder, and Knowledges are downright impossible. When you need to roll an Attribute + Ability combination but you don't have the Ability in question, you roll the Attribute alone. That roll is modified depending on what category the missing Ability falls into:

- **Missing Talent:** No additional penalty
- **Missing Skill:** +1 difficulty
- **Missing Knowledge:** No roll possible (automatic failure)

Talents

Talents are matters of innate aptitude, requiring no training to develop, and they improve primarily or exclusively through experience. Characters get better at them only by doing them regularly. It's possible to attempt actions related to Talents that a character doesn't possess. The player simply rolls the character's Attribute dice pool without the benefit of Talent-based dice, but also without penalty. Everyone (or nearly everyone) possesses a rudimentary grasp of each Talent, even without the minimal competence required for one dot's worth.

Alertness

Alertness is the ability to notice things that are going on in one's vicinity, with or without actively searching for them. Most Alertness rolls pair this Ability with Perception, and it generally applies to physical stimuli rather than matters of mood, the soul and so on.

- Novice: You're seldom taken completely by surprise.
- Practiced: Whispers do not go unheard in your vicinity.
- Competent: You maintain a constant vigil.
- Expert: Few hidden things are safe around you.
- Master: Your senses push the boundaries of human potential and rival those of the beasts of the field.

Possessed By: Burglars, Hunters, Messengers, Sentries, Tramps

Specialties: Ambushes, Angelic/Demonic Manifestations, Crowds, Forests, Noises, Paranoia, Traps

Athletics

Athletics is aptitude for physical exertion, be it during relatively formal sports or simply in the course of an active life. Athletic feats that are directly related to combat are covered by Brawl, Dodge, Melee and the other combat Abilities, except in the case of thrown weapons. These require Athletics.

- Novice: You lead a moderately active existence.
- Practiced: You can compete effectively in local sporting competitions.
- Competent: You can support yourself, at least in large measure, with the prizes you win in challenges of physical excellence.
- Expert: Stories of your prowess circulate widely.
- Master: Your reputation precedes you, and would-be rivals feel awe at your ability.

Possessed By: Barbarians, Entertainers, Spearmen, Squires, Warriors, Youths

Specialties: Climbing, Dancing, Juggling, Running, Swimming, Thrown Objects, Tumbling

Brawl

Brawl is the ability to fight unarmed, whether with a specific system of techniques or simply flailing away and relying on one's experience of where and how to strike. Brawling well requires coordination, speed, the ability to withstand pain and the willingness to deal out "unfair" assaults, particularly against strong or quick opponents.

- Novice: You don't immediately fold in the face of a fight.
- Practiced: You've had your share of tussles with neighbors and other local brawlers.
- Competent: You fight with confidence and competence, and you can count on winning or at least coming through a fight and remaining standing.
- Expert: You can take on most opponents and expect to win.
- Master: You do as much with your fists as many soldiers and knights do with their weapons.

Possessed By: Brigands, Bullies, Soldiers

Specialties: Arm-locks, Boxing, Drunken Fighting, Grappling, Showing Off, Throws, Wrestling

Dodge

Dodge is the ability to get out of harm's way, whether in combat or in the face of other sorts of danger. It encompasses the use of cover and agile maneuvering, and it comes from the systematic training of a knight or the rough-and-ready experience and instincts of a thief or brawler. Dodge plays a crucial role in the survival of any character who fights often, greatly increasing his chances of escaping damage.

- Novice: You reflexively avoid most minor sources of injury and show a measure of grace in your movements.
- Practiced: You're hard to hurt unless someone or something catches you by surprise.
- Competent: It takes serious effort for an opponent to hit you; you get out of the way of most thrown objects as well as immediate dangers.
- Expert: Only skilled warriors can expect to hurt you very much.
- Master: Wherever a threat is, you're almost inevitably somewhere else.

Possessed By: Animal Trainers, Brawlers, Criminals, Hunters, Scouts, Soldiers

Specialties: Backstep, Dive, Duck, Find Cover, Horseback, Leap, Sidestep

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand others' emotional states and to present a suitable response — whether the character genuinely sympathizes with others or simply wishes to use them. It's crucial in unraveling motives and helpful in detecting dishonesty.

- Novice: You seem sympathetic to people with whom you share something in common.
- Practiced: You share others' joys and sorrows, even when you haven't made any particular effort at it.
- Competent: You display keen insights into others' souls and enjoy a measure of respect or fear depending on how you use your wisdom.
- Expert: Few people can deceive you. Enemies mutter that you deal with dark powers, and friends believe that God has given you a special perception.
- Master: Nothing human is mysterious to you.

Possessed By: Commanders, Diviners, Gossips, Merchants, Parents, Priests, Tricksters

Specialties: Background Emotions, Emotions, Family Problems, Long-Term Concerns, Personalities, Truths

Expression

Expression is the ability to communicate clearly and appropriately with words, be they spoken or written. Characters with high Expression ratings make their arguments persuasively, regardless

of the extent to which the truth may support them. They can bring out subtle truths or convey subtle deceptions, depending on how they use their ability. Expression, although used when composing written texts, does not cover the ability to actually read and write (that's Academics).

- Novice: Sometimes you find just the right words.
- Practiced: You routinely speak well, and (if you are literate) you can correspond reasonably clearly.
- Competent: You can make a living with the spoken and written word, and you can count on winning arguments.
- Expert: Your sermons, proclamations or other acts of expression garner widespread respect, and others copy your style.
- Master: Your fame runs far and wide among devotees of good style, and others find it nearly impossible to argue against you.

Possessed By: Minstrels, Poets, Preachers, Rabble-Rousers, Teachers

Specialties: Acting, Conversation, Improvisation, Poetry, Preaching, Storytelling

Intimidation

Intimidation is the ability to make others do what you want, not out of respect or conviction but out of fear of the consequences if they disobey. It may include the use of threats, physical force or purely psychological tactics, depending on the individual.

- Novice: You can reliably get your way with much weaker targets.
- Practiced: People around you know that when you make threats, you mean them, and they try not to cross you.
- Competent: You exert the commanding presence of an authority figure, regardless of your actual status.
- Expert: Even those who like you feel some nervousness in your presence, and the masses fear your wrath.
- Master: You are well on your way to becoming one of the legendary tyrants of the age.

Possessed By: Bullies, Commanders, Lords, Thugs, Torturers

Specialties: Blackmail, Overt Threats, Physical Coercion, Politics, Pulling Rank, Staredowns, Veiled Threats

Leadership

Leadership is the ability to make others carry out orders. It doesn't change their underlying outlook or convictions; it lets the would-be leader seem credible and worthy of respect based on whatever their standards are. It's usually rolled with Charisma rather than Manipulation to reflect this distinction.

- Novice: You've organized small ventures in your hometown with moderate success.
- Practiced: You routinely direct small groups of your neighbors and peers.
- Competent: Your duties include the exercise of authority, such as serving as captain of the guard or abbot of a monastery, and you discharge them well.
- Expert: You act capably as a leader of people throughout your region.
- Master: You are, or can be if you choose, a great warlord, pillar of the Church or other famous leader of your time.

Possessed By: Commanders, Constables, Ecclesiastical Authorities, Family Patriarchs, Nobles

Specialties: Commands, Compelling, Friendly, Noble, Oratory, Pious, Stern

Legerdemain

Legerdemain is ability to perform feats of manual dexterity, ranging from picking a purse from a belt, to juggling and feats of trickery such as palming objects. It encompasses the stealth and

concealment involved in using that dexterity without being noticed, such as when palming an object or performing a conjuring trick.

- Novice: You've sometimes taken very small items when nobody was looking and gotten away with it.
- Practiced: You can rob alms boxes and steal from blind beggars with impunity, and you are good enough at sleight-of-hand to entertain local gatherings.
- Competent: You can gracefully make off with nearly anything that isn't nailed down, and you have the polished manner of a professional entertainer, even if that's not your chosen livelihood.
- Expert: When you perform your tricks, they seem genuinely supernatural to most observers.
- Master: People wonder if perhaps supernatural powers are performing the thefts you commit, thanks to your audacity and the lack of any clues left behind.

Possessed By: Beggars, Jesters, Minstrels, Robbers

Specialties: Concealment, Conjuring Tricks, Juggling, Picking Purses

Subterfuge

Subterfuge is the ability to lie convincingly and to conceal one's own motives and feelings. It serves legitimate as well as criminal purposes: Diplomats and even confessors sometimes use it to draw out information from others.

- Novice: You get away with small lies most of the time.
- Practiced: You're seldom questioned about your chosen explanations.
- Competent: You maintain the trustworthy demeanor of a professional thief and liar.
- Expert: Even wise and noble souls are pawns in your schemes.
- Master: Whenever the accusations fly, you're the last one anyone doubts.

Possessed By: Courtiers, Charlatans, Heretics, Minstrels, Spies, Wooers

Specialties: Changing the Subject, Finding Weaknesses, Flattery, Patter, Seduction, Selective Omission

Skills

Skills are all arts that people learn through apprenticeship or other disciplined instruction. It's possible to attempt actions covered by Skills without having enough training for one dot's worth of the Skill in question, but the roll suffers a +1 difficulty penalty.

Animal Ken

Animal Ken is an understanding of beasts' actions and desires. It allows one to predict their behavior, control them in difficult situations and train them.

- Novice: You work well with domesticated animals.
- Practiced: You understand the ways of all the animals that are common in your vicinity, and you can train those species most susceptible to it, such as horses and dogs.
- Competent: You're a skilled hunter and tracker, and you work well even with difficult animals. Everyone in the area knows you're the one to come to when there's animal trouble.
- Expert: No domesticated animal resists your will, and most wild beasts regard you with at least some good will.
- Master: People compare your spiritual harmony with animals to Saint Francis's.

Possessed By: Cavalry, Falconers, Grooms, Hermits, Kennel Masters, Lords

Specialties: Bears, Birds of Prey, Dogs, Farm Animals, Fish, Horses, Rodents, Snakes

Archery

Archery is the ability to use bows, the most common ranged weapon of the era. Experienced archers also know how to maintain and repair their weapons, and even how to make them. Archery covers crossbows and other related weapons. It does not cover spears or other thrown weapons. Using those weapons requires Athletics.

- Novice: You can shoot adequately as long as the situation isn't too distracting. You can maintain a bow, but not repair it.
- Practiced: You can hunt and fight competently with the bow. You can maintain and repair a bow, but not craft a new one.
- Competent: You use a bow with grace and style, and you can make weapons that are respected for their craftsmanship.
- Expert: Warlords and others who need superior archers seek you out.
- Master: Neither distance, darkness nor anything else seems capable of stopping your arrows from going precisely where you want them to.

Possessed By: Bandits, Foresters, Guards, Poachers, Tournament-Circuit Competitors

Specialties: Ambush, Fields, Forests, Horseback, Hunting, Moving Targets, Quick Shot, Target

Commerce

Commerce is the ability to successfully bring goods to market, with all that entails. It includes the ability to evaluate goods and to identify who would want them, a knowledge of trade routes and fairs and skill at negotiating prices. Commerce is a catch-all Ability, and you should choose one class of goods as a field of expertise when you first purchase it. You can buy additional fields of expertise with experience or bonus points within standard limits (see p. 29). You can use Commerce outside your field of expertise to identify potential markets and experts in the field and to negotiate and haggle over just about anything. Evaluating an item or a trade route with which you have no experience is beyond you, and it counts as acting without the required Ability.

In the Dark Medieval, the line between legitimate and illegitimate trade is blurry to non-existent, and Commerce comes into play just as much when buying cheese as when hiring a mercenary, soliciting a prostitute or selling stolen goods. As such, Commerce conveys a general sense of the shadier side of life — what modern folk might call being streetwise.

- Novice: You can get a fair price when you bring the harvest to market.
- Practiced: You can broker exchanges in your field of expertise and know who in the vicinity deals in what trades, legitimate or otherwise.
- Competent: You can make a good living as a merchant or moneylender. You can draw on the expertise of those in other trades without difficulty.
- Expert: You are one of the preeminent experts in your field, and you are rarely (if ever) taken advantage of. No market is closed to you.
- Master: You are a master merchant, expert in commerce spanning the continent.

Possessed By: Artisans, Farmers, Mercenaries, Ne'er-do-wells, Prostitutes, Traders

Specialties: Evaluation, Negotiation, Swindling, Trade Routes

Fields of Expertise: Clothing, Foodstuffs, Livestock, Mercenaries, Relics, Silks, Slaves, Spices, Stolen Goods, Wine, etc.

Crafts

Crafts is a catch-all Ability covering skill at making and fixing things with your hands and evaluating such work by others. Skilled craftsmen produce works known for their beauty as well as their utility. You must choose a field of expertise when you first purchase Crafts and buy additional ones with experience or bonus points within standard limits (see p. 29). You can use Crafts outside your field(s) of expertise to undertake basic repairs and evaluate the craftsmanship

and condition of an object, but not to build anything new. Doing so is considered acting without the required Ability.

In the Dark Medieval, the Crafts Skill covers what will in later centuries become applied sciences such as engineering. Architecture, metallurgy and so on are all fields of expertise under Crafts.

- Novice: You can repair broken goods and make gear that more or less does what it's supposed to.
- Practiced: You can attend to the needs of people in your immediate vicinity for the craft you know.
- Competent: You can make a good living as an artisan or craftsman, and you enjoy the respect of all who call on your services.
- Expert: You routinely make excellent goods that are treasured widely for their elegance and durability.
- Master: You're one of the leading craftsmen in your field, and you can pick and choose from clients across several countries.

Possessed By: Artisans, Farmers, Ladies, Pilgrims, Soldiers, Townsfolk

Specialties: Detail, Evaluation, Fast Work, Invention, Metalworking, Organization, Sanitation

Fields of Expertise: Architecture, Armory, Blacksmithing, Boat-Building, Jewelry, Masonry, Sewing & Embroidery, Woodworking, etc.

Etiquette

Etiquette is the understanding of social customs in one or more cultures and the ability to behave as becomes one of their members. Characters begin with this knowledge as it applies to the land and class into which they were born. Mastery of Etiquette encompasses speech, movement, dress, furnishings and the like.

- Novice: You avoid most social gaffes and seem reasonably well behaved in the culture you know best.
- Practiced: You can conduct yourself without embarrassment in your culture's version of high society.
- Competent: You understand principles of social organization well enough to respond calmly to unexpected and unfamiliar circumstances.
- Expert: Lords and bishops admire your conduct.
- Master: You set the standard to which others try to hew.

Possessed By: Children, Courtiers, Envoys, Guild Masters, Handmaidens, Heralds, Nobles

Specialties: Courty Manners, Family Traditions, Foreign Customs, Peasants, Professional Conduct, Street Culture

Melee

Melee is the ability to fight with hand-to-hand weapons, from sticks and clubs to swords and more exotic weapons, depending on the details of the character's training. Like Archery, Melee includes the ability to maintain one's weapons (and even to make them), but manufacturing metal weapons requires Crafts.

- Novice: You can handle simple weapons and any weapons that are particularly popular in the area where you grew up. You can maintain but not repair a weapon.
- Practiced: You can fight moderately well with common weapons. You can do basic repairs on an axe or other simple melee weapon.
- Competent: You know how to use a variety of weapons well, and you can make a living as a professional soldier if you choose. You can do basic repairs on a sword or more complex melee weapon. You can manufacture simple melee weapons.
- Expert: You routinely distinguish yourself in battles, tournaments and other martial displays.

- Master: Everyone who uses your favored weapons knows your deeds — which may breed challenges as well as respect.

Possessed By: Barbarians, Guards, Lords, Soldiers, Thieves

Specialties: Axes, Clubs, Disarms, Knives, Multiple Opponents, Rapid Draws, Swords, Team Tactics

Performance

Performance is the ability to perform artistic feats. It covers both the technical aspects of the chosen form of expression and the social knowledge of what audiences like. Performance is a catch-all Ability, and you should choose a field of expertise when you first purchase it. You can buy additional fields of expertise with experience or bonus points. Performance is useful outside your field of expertise to evaluate another's skill.

- Novice: You can entertain friends and family when more skillful alternatives aren't available.
- Practiced: You take part in local entertainments on a regular basis, and you do fairly well at them.
- Competent: You can make a living as an entertainer, and you enjoy a reputation as a good one to call upon.
- Expert: Your fellow performers study your work carefully. The masses flock to see you in your specialty.
- Master: You can pick and choose your audiences, and you are always in demand almost everywhere you go.

Possessed By: Musicians, Troubadours, Actors, Ladies, Spinsters, Monks and Nuns

Specialties: Bawdy, Composition, Courtly

Fields of Expertise: Acting, Dance, Percussion, Singing, Stringed Instruments, Wind Instruments

Ride

Ride is the ability to travel astride a horse or other riding animal, keeping it under control in varying circumstances. Experienced riders can fight from horseback, tend horses' common ailments and evaluate the quality of their mounts and related gear. See p. 71 for the details of fighting on horseback.

- Novice: You can get around on a good mount as long as things don't get complicated.
- Practiced: You can hunt, chase and sustain long rides safely, if not always comfortably.
- Competent: Horses hold very few surprises for you, and you can fight from horseback without penalty.
- Expert: You can engage in fancy stunts and keep your horse calm and healthy in the midst of dangerous, rapidly changing situations. You're the one who gets called on when most people fall and fail.
- Master: Alexander the Great and his Bucephelas were no closer than you are with your favored steeds, as troubadours routinely remind their audiences.

Possessed By: Circuit Officials, Crusaders, Huntsmen, Knights, Merchants, Messengers, Nobles, Travelers

Specialties: Combat, Forest, Jumping, Speed, Stealth, Stunts

Stealth

Stealth is the ability to move without alerting others — to enter without permission, remain undetected while about one's self-appointed business and to leave without creating a stir. You generally roll this Skill in combination with Dexterity against observers' Perception + Alertness. It does not cover sleight-of-hand, which is the domain of Legerdemain.

- Novice: You can make your way through familiar places without attracting attention as long as no one's searching very actively for you.
- Practiced: You can hide yourself fairly well in familiar places, and you can hide reasonably well in unfamiliar places that are related to something you know, such as any church following the standard orientation.
- Competent: You move in mysterious ways, and it takes dedicated effort to keep you out of most places you'd like to go.
- Expert: You enjoy the reputation of being able to bypass almost all barriers... which makes you a frequent target of suspicion, as well as valuable to those who have need of stealthy allies.
- Master: You feature in ballads of master thieves, questing knights who make their way into the Grail Castle and others who triumph over all obstacles. Your gift seems holy or wicked depending on how you apply it.

Possessed By: Burglars, Hunters, Scouts, Shy People, Spies

Specialties: Crawling, Crowds, Prowl, Shadows, Wilderness, Tracking

Survival

This is the ability to cope with the challenges of harsh environments: shelter, navigating to civilization, foraging for food and water, hunting and so on. It includes knowledge of the common threats posed by a particular sort of wilderness, such as forest or swamp. Stealth rolls in wilderness cannot include more dice from Stealth than the character has dots in Survival.

- Novice: You can cope with the routine challenges of whatever sort of wilderness was closest to your home.
- Practiced: You won't starve in most environments, though it won't be comfortable until you get to the next settlement.
- Competent: You can get yourself and others to safety in most circumstances, and you can make an effective living off the fruits of hunting, trapping and the like.
- Expert: You can blaze new paths through unbroken wilderness and cope with almost any challenge that the natural world can throw at you.
- Master: The dark powers of the night (and day) in the lands beyond civilization hold no terror for you.

Possessed By: Bandits, Barbarians, Crusaders, Penitents, Pilgrims, Refugees

Specialties: Coasts and Shallows, Deep Sea, Deserts, Foraging, Forests, Hunting, Marshes and Swamps, Mountains, Tracking, Trailblazing

Knowledges

Knowledges are Abilities that require intellectual mastery of information. They almost always require rolls with Mental Traits, though some other sort of Attribute may prove useful occasionally. Apart from the most general popular lore, characters who lack dots in a particular Knowledge can't even attempt an action requiring it. Note that although the descriptions of what characters with various scores in a Knowledge can do refer to formal academic instruction, this isn't the only way to develop a Knowledge. Individual teaching and institutional tutoring in non-academic contexts also let people learn these Abilities.

Academics

Academics covers the standard curriculum of the Middle Ages: the trivium of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic and the quadrivium of arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy. Anyone who attends university learns the lore of the world divided into these two categories. Any character who acquired Academics within the last 300 years must choose the trivium or quadrivium as an initial field of expertise (and can acquire the other one later). Only truly exceptional characters, such as vampires who were created before the rise of medieval universities or self-taught

firstborn fae, can escape this requirement. Any other categories seem strange at best (and actively suspicious at worst) to conventionally educated people.

Your character must know Latin, requiring Linguistics 1, to acquire the second dot in Academics.

- Dabbling: You know rudimentary Latin and the most fundamental authorities in your field of expertise.
- Student: You can construct solid arguments, and you know some of the important commentaries in each area your expertise covers.
- Learned: You can make a living instructing others. You know some Greek and possibly other languages in addition to Latin, and your own commentaries and glosses earn the respect of your peers.
- Scholar: Lay people admire your mind, but they may feel that you've neglected the rest of life for the sake of learning. You can confidently advise potentates on important matters.
- Master: Any library on the subjects in which you specialize seems inadequate without your works.

Possessed By: Court Officials, Monks, Priests, Scribes, Tutors

Specialties: Instruction, Quoting Text, Research

Fields of Expertise: Trivium, Quadrivium

Hearth Wisdom

This is the lore of the people, as opposed to the academy. It's unsystematic, but in its haphazard way, it covers the body of knowledge accumulated by peasants, traders and other people who do not benefit from servants or live in isolation. It includes mundane matters such as which plants and animals are safe to eat in the area, which herbs are good for cooking and for medicinal purposes, signs of impending bad (or good) weather, rules of thumb for resolving domestic disputes and the folk wisdom regarding the dangers (supernatural and otherwise) of the night. Unlike other Knowledges, those characters without Hearth Wisdom can attempt feats that require it, but they do so at a +2 difficulty. Despite its diversity of topics, Hearth Wisdom is not a catch-all Ability with fields of expertise.

- Dabbling: You know all the common fireside tales of your home and you can recall them at need.
- Student: You know the obscure and traditional lore of your region, and very little — even if it's strange and dangerous — takes you by surprise within the fields you know.
- Learned: You quickly acquire the lore of any area you pass through, and others know that when the unseen world makes itself visible, you're the one who most likely knows what to do about it.
- Scholar: You are famous for your knowledge of mysterious affairs, and some fear you because of the potential for pacts with dark forces that your explorations afford.
- Master: Your supreme insights into strange matters make you the target of pleas from individuals both high and low who suffer mysterious depredations.

Possessed By: Farmers, Herbalists, Hermits, Magicians, Matrons, Village Elders, Witches

Specialties: By county or region (southern France, northern France, England, Bavaria, etc.), and Arabic, Cures, Jewish, Omens, Wards

Investigation

Investigation is the ability to systematically examine one's environment and analyze the results. It's the central tool for judicial inquiries, religious searches for heresy and the like. It includes a grasp of the principles of research as well as an eye for detail.

- Dabbling: You regularly see things that others miss, and it's hard for the people of your home to keep secrets if you choose to seek them out.
- Student: You know how to extract information from others without alarming them, and you can unravel many mysteries.

- Learned: You can make a living as a professional investigator for religious or secular purposes, and even if you practice some other trade, your acuity is widely respected.
- Scholar: The most complex and best-concealed matters unravel themselves when you confront them.
- Master: When all other means fail and the holy saints do not choose to intervene directly with supernatural revelations, people who are bedeviled by mysteries turn to you.

Possessed By: Bounty Hunters, Confessors, Constables, Judges, Parents, Spies, Tax Collectors

Specialties: Accounting, Locate Informant, Record-Keeping, Search, Stalking

Law

Law is the body of knowledge about justice and its applications to practical affairs. In the Dark Medieval world, Law covers two wildly different subjects: the organic (not to mention chaotic and contradictory) accumulation of common law based on case-by-case rulings, and the rigorous, academic tradition grounded in Roman law and guided by logic and theology. The higher a character's social rank is, the more the latter dominates. Canon law, the religious law of the Church, draws primarily on Roman law for its assumptions and principles of development, and scholars in canon law have a significant advantage in familiarity when issues of Roman-based secular law arise. The same applies to secular legalists trying to deal with canon law.

- Dabbling: You know all the important laws of your home and a good sample of the less important or less frequently invoked ones.
- Student: You can defend yourself and your comrades against most charges, and you know the grounds on which to accuse others, as long as you've had a while to study the laws of the area.
- Learned: You can make a living as a lawyer or advisor to a court, secular or religious depending on your specialization. People in your vicinity seek you out for legal advice.
- Scholar: Your views on the proper application of law shape practice in wide-ranging areas.
- Master: You're revered as one of the great legal theorists of the age.

Possessed By: Constables, Criminals, Judges, Kings, Lords

Specialties: Canon Law, Diplomacy, Feudal Obligations, Laws of Ownership and Inheritance, Local Law, Sentencing

Linguistics

Linguistics is the knowledge of languages other than the one most common in a character's childhood. Every character begins with one language for free. Growing mastery of Linguistics covers the principles underlying languages, their relations and evolution as well as the contents of specific tongues. Dark Medieval Europe is a warren of dialects and regional tongues, but (at the Storyteller's discretion) you can assume that skill in one major language comes with understanding of its major variants and dialects. Major languages include Latin, Occitan, French (or Francien), English (Middle English), Castilian, the various Italian dialects, the various Germanic dialects, Greek and many more.

- Dabbling: One extra language.
- Student: Two extra languages.
- Learned: Four extra languages.
- Scholar: Eight extra languages.
- Master: 16 extra languages.

Possessed By: Diplomats, Dock Workers, Interpreters, Merchants, Priests, Scholars, Travelers

Specialties: Diplomacy, Politics, Profanity, Technical Terms, Theology

Medicine

Medicine is the lore of the human body (and, to a lesser degree, the body as transformed by vampirism, lycanthropy and other exotic conditions). Depending on a character's particular inclination, it may cover both practical relief of trauma and injury, as well as the academic tradition based in Greek and Roman scholarship, which is often greatly mistaken about the realities of anatomy and physiology. Medicine also covers the knowledge of which herbs and plants are useful for remedying ills.

- Dabbling: You can fix minor wounds and help people recover from fevers, minor infections and the like.
- Student: You can deal with most common problems, not providing luxury or instant relief from misery but at least keeping people alive long enough for normal healing to run its course.
- Learned: You can make a living as a surgeon or other medical professional. If you do something else for a living, such as mercenary soldiering, you nonetheless regularly get requests for aid.
- Scholar: If you devote yourself to treating others, the area in which you live enjoys a particular reputation for health and prosperity. You often achieve new insights into pressing medical problems.
- Master: Popular accounts describe how you and the spirit of Hippocrates work together to cheat the imps of Hell from the dying souls they'd otherwise claim.

Possessed By: Apothecaries, Barbers, Field Surgeons, Ladies, Midwives, Squires

Specialties: Battle Wounds, Childbirth, Diagnosis, Disease, First Aid, Herbs, Minor Surgery, Poison Treatment

Occult

Occult encompasses all the lores of supernatural power, most especially those that derive from formal studies, experimentation and treaties (and hence beyond Hearth Wisdom). Occult generally provides a more focused body of knowledge, with a somewhat higher ratio of truth to error and distortion, but inevitably one field bleeds into the next. Occultists can and do acquire smatterings of information about a great many subjects. The higher a character's Occult score is, the more generally reliable the results of his Occult rolls are. There is a certain overlap between Occult and Theology when it comes to a knowledge of the powers of saints or recognizing the miraculous.

- Dabbling: You know the general framework of the good and evil (and neutral) powers at work in your area.
- Student: You understand many things about the supernatural world. You may have had some direct experience with supernatural beings, though you likely misunderstood at least some of what happened to you.
- Learned: You're known as a scholar of the mysterious, regarded with a hopelessly tangled mixture of fear and respect by those who need you to explain the supernatural to them. You may have regular contact with some sort of supernatural being.
- Scholar: The mysteries of the night society lie open before you. If you possess any significant social rank, some secular or religious authority probably wants you as an advisor.
- Master: The demon named Legion may seek you out for a second try at defeating the age's holiest man, but it won't win.

Possessed By: Heretics, Inquisitors, Judges, Magicians, Pagans, Priests, Satanists, Witch-Hunters

Specialties: Ancient Secrets, Paganism, Qabbala, Sufism, Vampires, Witches

Politics

Politics is the theory and practice of governance: what ancient and modern governors have written and how people respond to authority of various sorts. It includes insights into how people gain power, how they maintain it and how they lose it. High levels of Politics include more theory and more information about the practices of realms far from home.

- Dabbling: You know how things work in your home community, and you can usually use the local system to get what you want.
- Student: You deal confidently with the authorities if you're outside the hierarchy, or confidently with the governed populace if you hold some local office.
- Learned: You know how to make use of the hierarchy at every level that touches your existence, and you can conduct yourself effectively whenever you need to deal with political matters.
- Scholar: You're known widely as a competent governor or advisor, and your comments garner widespread respect.
- Master: People look to you as a modern Plato or Cicero.

Possessed By: Counselors, Courtiers, Heralds, Jesters, Lords

Specialties: City, Feudal Obligations, Heraldry, Historical, Religious

Seneschal

Seneschal is the ability to administer holdings, from households to kingdoms. It covers the knowledge of physical assets and their needs, from crop harvesting to the maintenance of buildings, and the social skills to coordinate others' labor, resolve disputes, keep those who must be paid satisfied and so on. A skilled seneschal can evaluate the state of others' holdings based on personal experience and theoretical knowledge, too.

- Dabbling: You can keep your family's household going smoothly and manage a few other resources as long as there's no intense pressure or stress.
- Student: You can manage a business or manor and keep almost everyone involved reasonably happy.
- Learned: You successfully oversee multiple properties over an extended area, even in times of war, famine and other calamity.
- Scholar: Rulers know that they can give you custody of their lands and goods and get them back in better condition than you received them.
- Master: Preachers illustrate the contemporary significance of the parable of the talents with stories of your accomplishments.

Possessed By: Innkeepers, Knights, Lords, Seneschals, Stewards, Wives

Specialties: Common Households, Farms, Feudal Estates, Inheritance, Noble Households, Religious Orders, Urban Holdings

Theology

Theology is the lore of the queen of the sciences, the study of God's will in all things. It combines historical scholarship with logic and a measure of artistic expression. Theology by itself does not make a character articulate, but it can provide the information necessary for effective persuasion, and it's crucial in evaluating many social matters. Nothing human or physical lies outside the scope of God's commandments, as heretics and the orthodox agree, and there is a theological dimension to political, economic and other disagreements. Keep in mind that, for medieval people, this is not a matter of unfounded supposition and personal conviction, but of knowable truths susceptible to reasoned analysis. It is as rigorous a matter as medicine or ballistics.

- Dabbling: You know the major tenets of whatever faith prevails in your home, and you grasp the essential spirit of common doctrines even when you're unclear on details.
- Student: You know holy writ and important teachings, past and present.

- Learned: You can debate the technical points of right belief, as you understand it, and readily understand the beliefs of others even when you disagree with them.
- Scholar: Heretics and infidels fear to contest with you, and you're a pillar of the community of faith wherever you are.
- Master: You are a latter-day Saint Paul or Saint Peter, depending on whether you turn your attention primarily to winning unbelievers' hearts or ministering to the needs of those who already believe.

Possessed By: Devout Laymen, Heretics, Magicians, Monks, Priests, Troubadours

Specialties: Confession, Debate, Exposition, Heresy, Orthodoxy

Virtues

Average mortals, vampires and inquisitors all have three special traits called Virtues: Self-Control, Conscience and Courage. Rated from 1 to 5 dots, Virtues represent the character's mastery over his baser instincts. Full descriptions appear in **Dark Ages: Vampire** and the uses of these traits are detailed therein (for vampires and the targets of vampiric powers) and in **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** (for inquisitors and the subjects of their blessed powers).

Other supernatural entities do not use these traits so they do not appear in these basic rules. Unless you are using **Dark Ages: Vampire** and **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**, you need not even give average mortal characters these traits. If in doubt, you can substitute Willpower for any of the three.

Backgrounds

Backgrounds measure your character in ways that aren't as innate as Attributes or Abilities. They deal with your character and her connections to the rest of the world: who she knows, what assets she can bring to bear, what reputation she enjoys. As with Attributes and Abilities, Background scores quantify and set boundaries to conditions that characters perceive more fluidly. Your character doesn't think, "I have precisely three friends I can count on for this kind of information," for instance.

Allies

Allies are mortal men and women who support the character. They may be members of his family, friends (from before or after his entry into the supernatural world), fellow members of an organization to which he gives allegiance, or related to him in some other way. Whatever the case, they provide him with aid willingly and without coercion. They're not always available — in crucial moments the Storyteller may limit their availability in varying degrees — and they're not bound to provide aid to the point of suicide.

The details of your character's allies depend on your imagination and your Storyteller's approval. Temporal and religious authorities, people prominent in commerce or a professional, family figures and the like are all possibilities. Describe your character's allies before play begins, so that you and your Storyteller both know what you're talking about.

Storyteller's Option: With your Storyteller's approval, your character's allies can be vampires or other supernatural beings. Your Storyteller may wish to require one more dot than usual for an ally of the same supernatural type as yourself (i.e. werewolf allies for werewolves, mage allies for mage) and two more dots than usual for a ghost or other supernatural ally (i.e. vampire allies for mages, fae allies for werewolves). If you try this approach and your Storyteller agrees, remember that unusual allies may mark your character for attention from powerful forces who regard the alliance as a threat or as something to exploit for the examiner's own ends. Benefit and hazard go hand-in-hand.

- One ally of moderate influence and power in the immediate community.
- Two allies, both of moderate power locally and some influence in the county or region.
- Three allies, one of whom wields significant power, official or otherwise.
- Four allies, one of whom is extremely influential.
- Five allies, one of whom is a major force in an important institution and can provide aid from far away.

Contacts

Contacts are people who are willing to provide the character with information, though they are unlikely to offer any service beyond that. Each level of Contacts includes a specific individual, for whom you should work out a description, and a surrounding “halo” of lower-grade connections throughout a social stratum. If you have a specific contact in the local cathedral, for instance, you can also get at least rudimentary information out of some vicars, deacons and altar boys in the area. If your contact is the harbormaster, you can count on getting some information from sailors, longshoremen and tavern-keepers nearby. The difficulty of rolls to extract information from these secondary contacts is always greater than ones involving the individuals with whom your character deals most often, however — at least 7, and perhaps higher, depending upon how rapidly you want the information or how esoteric the information is.

When your character needs information in the utmost hurry, roll Wits + Contacts against a difficulty of 7. Each success produces a distinct piece of information relevant to the topic. Your character needs potentially useful people in the area for this to work, though. (Even the best roll is unlikely to turn up anything if your character is searching for advice on conditions in the Mediterranean Sea among Scottish peasants, for instance.) To gather information over time, your character can put out queries and wait for the results to trickle back in. Roll Charisma + Contacts against difficulty 7. Each success produces one specific piece of information and takes a week to come in. You can shorten this time to three days per piece by raising the difficulty to 8, or one day per piece by raising the difficulty to 9.

- One major contact and two or three secondary contacts.
- Two major contacts and about five secondary contacts.
- Three major contacts and eight to 10 secondary contacts.
- Four major contacts and 10 to 15 secondary contacts.
- Five major contacts and a great many secondary contacts (almost anyone in the general field of experience in the area may share some information).

Influence

Influence measures the degree to which your character can make her wishes count in mortal society. In most cases, she’s acquired influence through multiple means, including persuasion, bribery, intimidation, direct manipulation of minds and emotions and passing herself off as mortal when necessary. It takes time to accumulate more than a dot or two of Influence in a community of any size, and high Influence ratings are ordinarily the realm of vampires or fae who are prepared to spend years or even decades cultivating their position. Nor is Influence license to do whatever strikes your character’s fancy. It’s always easiest to get institutions to do what they’re already inclined to. Constables need little prodding to arrest suspicious strangers or break up illicit operations whose owners haven’t been paying bribes lately, for instance, but they require more incentive to go out killing apparently innocent bystanders or trying to arrest the most important civic leaders. Roleplaying therefore supports straightforward declarations of Influence use, and more so as the character twists the institution’s purpose and outlook.

(The exercise of the Influence Background contributes a great deal to the inevitable tainting of institutions in the Dark Medieval world. It takes time to discredit or undermine believers in a cause and to replace them with susceptible pawns and leaders who are willing to abandon moral restraint in their sundry pursuits.)

Each level of Influence reduces the difficulty of relevant social rolls by one. Keep in mind that this applies to the field and area in which your character has influence: Influence among the clergy of Provence matters not at all when dealing with the beer brewers of Vienna.

- Moderately influential: significant in the affairs of a city or parish.
- Well-connected: significant in the affairs of a county or diocese.
- Position of influence: a force to be reckoned with throughout several counties or an archdiocese.
- Great personal power: a force in the life of a nation or transnational order.
- Vastly influential: a power behind the throne of the Church, or behind more than one national throne.

Mentor

Mentor reflects the continuing presence of a more experienced individual who takes an interest in the character, providing advice, aid and resources (depending on the mentor's interests). The mentor is not a magic cure for all the character's problems — a sufficiently determined fool convinces the mentor to take his support elsewhere. Nor is the mentor at the character's beck and call, since he presumably has matters of his own to attend to. He is a good source for letters of introduction, historical perspectives on current problems and other relatively discrete, specific assistance.

The mentor is often the individual who ushered a character into the supernatural world (i.e. sire, ritemaster, etc.), retaining social ties after release. It can be any other elder whom the character encounters along the way, however, or even a group of like-minded individuals such as the members of a local Tremere chantry or a group of Red Order monks in a nearby monastery.

- An mentor only slightly older than the character, with little influence, though good wisdom.
- A respected elder.
- An influential and well-connected person (Cainite, Garou, or otherwise) of the area.
- An elder with significant power in surrounding mortal society and strong connections to other communities (Cainite, Garou, or otherwise).
- One of the significant personages of the age (whose full importance you likely don't yet realize).

Resources

Resources are valuable goods whose disposition your character controls. In the currency-scarce Dark Medieval world, these assets may be actual money, but they're more likely to be property of some sort — land, grazing rights, animals, tax claims in kind as well as money and so on. A character with no dots in Resources has enough clothing and supplies to get by, but little margin for luxuries.

- Sufficient. You can maintain a typical residence in the style of the social class you choose and seem unmiserly, even if fits of largesse come seldom. You can maintain a servant or hire specific help as necessary.
- Moderate. You can display yourself as a member in good standing of your chosen community, with the occasional gift and indulgence seemly for a person of quality. You can maintain a small staff of servants. A fraction of your resources are available in letters of credit, readily portable jewelry and other forms that let you maintain a standard of living at the one-dot level wherever you happen to be, for up to six months.
- Comfortable. You are a prominent and established member of your community, with land and property, and the reputation which lets you draw on credit at very generous terms. Trust is as much a key resource as any particular valuable commodity at this level. You can maintain a one-dot quality of existence wherever you are without difficulty, for as long as you choose.
- Wealthy. Troubadours spin tales about the richness of your clothes, the health of your livestock and the beauty of your home. You hold more wealth than many of the local

- authorities (and need to deal with their jealousy from time to time). When you travel, you can maintain a three-dot existence for up to a year, and a two-dot existence indefinitely.
- Extremely Wealthy. Midas, Croesus and you, at least in the popular mind. You have vast and widely distributed assets, with huge staffs and connections to every level of society through a region. You travel with a minimum of three-dot comforts, more with a little effort. Kings and cardinals sometimes come to you for loans.

Retainers

Retainers are servants and companions with personal bonds of loyalty to your character. Depending on the character, they may be actual servants, fellow veterans of a crusade, fellow members of a monastic sect, childhood friends and the like. Work out a description of these retainers and the nature of their commitment to your character so that you and your Storyteller know what to expect in play (and what might make interesting surprises).

Keep in mind when designing retainers that feudalism evolved in large measure to *limit* the power of those in authority. Feudal lords do not have absolute authority: They take oaths committing them to defend their vassals and to attend to their vassals' needs. Retainers ought to matter to the characters, and if characters abuse their retainers, the Storyteller can and should make this a matter for scandal or even legal action by the characters' own lords. Untrammled power is a nightmare of the medieval past, something feared as the source of both physical and spiritual suffering, and it would be greatly out of character for most medieval masters to feel at liberty to treat their retainers any way they might want.

Most retainers are of average ability and competence: In game terms, they have two dots in most Attributes, perhaps three in one or two and relevant Abilities at no more than three dots. If you want to acquire one or more particularly competent retainers, you can do so by merging dots.

- One retainer.
- Two retainers, or one of unusual competence (three Attributes at three dots, most professional Abilities at three dots and one at four).
- Three retainers, or two above-average retainers, or one remarkable retainer (built to the same total as a starting character).
- Four retainers or two above-average and one typical or one remarkable and two typical.
- Five retainers or three above-average or two remarkable.

Pooling Backgrounds

Some Backgrounds lend themselves to joint ownership. Specifically, the members of a group may choose to pool their individual stores of Allies, Chantry, Chapter House, Contacts, Cray, Domain, Flock, Herd, Holdings, Hunting Grounds, Influence, Library, Oaths, Resources, Retainers and Servants (some of which are described here). Other Backgrounds are necessarily individual matters. More information on pooling Backgrounds can be found in **Right of Princes**.

The Anchor

You and the other players choose one Background as the anchor that holds the shared assets together. In most cases, this Background is a physical place the characters claim as their own, which also acts as a meeting ground for the mortals they deal with, a repository for their wealth and so on. (such Backgrounds among the game titles are Domain, Hunting Grounds, Chantry, Holding, and Chapter House) Any of the poolable Backgrounds can serve in this role, however: Mentor might be the key to wealth and connections, the willing if ignorant population on whom the characters feed a source of servants and so on.

No Background pool can have more dots assigned to it than the Anchor Background does. If it's damaged by events during play or between sessions, other assets drift away from the characters' control, and it takes effort to win them back.

Any character contributing to the pool may pull his stake out at any time. The dislocations guarantee some damage: The character gets back one dot less than he put in.

Example: *The members of the coterie of the Chapel de Saint Sebastian build their Background pool around Domain. The physical territory of the chapel and its environs give them the opportunity to interact with important members of the clergy and local nobility and a pool of devout mortals whom they can cow into long-term servitude. They put a total of four dots into Domain and three each into Influence and Retainers.*

Then calamity strikes. A particularly zealous campaign against local heretics leads the authorities to seal off many of the catacombs associated with the chapel, and enthusiastic heretic-hunting guards patrol most of the ones that are left. The Domain rating drops from 4 to 2. Some of the local dignitaries take their prayers and meditations to less turbulent landmarks, so the coterie's effective Influence rating falls from 3 to 2. Scared gentry, uncertain of their own position in the doctrinal war, stay at home more often, so Retainers also falls from 3 to 2.

Sustained effort by the coterie can repair the damage. Many options are available, from intimidating the guards away with monstrous manifestations — or the appearance of saints and angels who caution away sinners from such holy ground, backed by covert use of mental Disciplines to install awe and a sense of unworthiness and guilt among those who see the sight — to straightforward political maneuvering to get the authorities concerned with some other target. As the Anchor Background score rises again, so do the scores of those anchored to it, and it takes only half the usual maturation points to restore these lost associated Backgrounds.

The coterie can also change the Anchor Background. Doing so requires double the usual maturation points to buy the next dot's worth in the new anchor, and the cap remains in effect: Any other Backgrounds rated higher than the anchor are lost. When the loss follows from a change of Anchor Background, there's no cost break in rebuilding them to their earlier levels.

Using Pooled Backgrounds

Pooled Backgrounds are shared resources, essentially the group's communal property. Anyone who contributes to the pool (no matter how much he contributes) has equal access to it. Even if the character donates to only one of the pool's associated Backgrounds, he still has equal access to it. Not everyone can use the pool simultaneously, though. A Herd pool of seven dots can grant only a total of seven automatic blood points a night to the entire coterie. Just how those points are split up depends on the circumstances and agreements between the characters.

Example: *Four players decide that their characters are forming a Background pool. Their anchor is Domain (the trading village of Andersburg), and they wish to get dots in Contacts (from traders and their gossip), Resources (money and goods from local commerce) and Retainers (a few town watchmen). Bill contributes three dots of Domain; Heather contributes another two dots of Domain and two of Resources; Lisa contributes another two dots of Domain (assigned to security), two to Contacts and one to Resources. Finally, Steve — who is short on dots — contributes only one dot of Retainers. This makes the pool Domain 5, Contacts 2, Resources 3, Retainers 1. All the players can have their characters tap this pool equally, even Bill who contributed only a single dot.*

At the Storyteller's discretion, players can agree to place some limits on shared Backgrounds.

Upper Limits

By pooling points, a coterie can get Backgrounds that surpass the normal five-dot limit. This arrangement is normal, and it reflects the advantages of cooperation. A group can secure a larger domain or maintain a larger network of allies and contacts than a single vampire can. There is no absolute upper limit on the level to which a pooled Background can rise, but things can get downright ludicrous if you aren't careful. It's usually best for the Storyteller to impose a 10-dot limit on the Anchor Background (and thus on all others). This limit represents domain over a important trading port or center of pilgrimage or a herd that consists of much of that same center's population.

Variable Traits

Each of these traits shares a quality that sets it apart from the others you've defined for your character so far: They are likely to fluctuate over the course a session, story or chronicle, and not simply as the result of the player improving the traits through experience (see p. 49). In some cases, there are permanent ratings (that act much like other traits) and temporary ratings (that are expended in play). In other cases, the rating simply fluctuates according to the sways of the character's experiences.

The two fluctuating traits covered here are Willpower and Health. Other such traits (i.e. Blood Pool, Rage, Mists, etc...) are detailed in their respective supplementary rulebooks.

Willpower

Willpower measures a character's determination — not courage precisely, nor conscience, but everything that leads to persistence in the face of adversity and to effort that transcends her normal limits in a moment of supreme crisis. It is rated from 1 to 10, but has two ratings: one for permanent potential and one that varies up and down depending on circumstances.

The permanent rating indicates your character's overall will in much the way other traits function. It serves as a dice pool when you must roll Willpower, and it can be increased with experience. The temporary rating varies in the course of play, and you can spend its points for various immediate effects. Doing so makes your character more prone to outside influence, however. When someone challenges your character with Willpower as the difficulty rating, use the temporary rating.

- Spineless
- Weak
- Unassertive
- Diffident
- Certain
- • Confident
- •• Determined
- ••• Controlled
- •••• Iron-Willed
- ••••• Unshakable

Spending Willpower

Willpower serves several very useful purposes in **Dark Ages**, so your character's temporary Willpower score is likely to move up and down faster than any other trait. Be sure that you understand these applications, as they can make the difference between success and failure at crucial moments.

• **Ensuring Success:** Spend one temporary Willpower point to get an automatic success on a single roll. You can spend only one Willpower this way for a particular action and modify only one action in a single turn this way. Nothing cancels out the success, not even rolled botches. If your character puts forth that special exertion, at the least he'll get *something* to show for the effort. When the task involves extended effort, you can spend one Willpower each turn to reinforce the results of sequential rolls.

Note that you must declare your intent to spend Willpower on a roll *before* you actually make the roll. This isn't license to retroactively fix an unfortunate result. First the effort, then the randomization. The Storyteller may also sometimes disallow Willpower modification of particular rolls, for reasons discussed in the Storytelling chapter.

• **Resisting Instinct:** Some actions are nearly automatic: stepping back from a dangerous precipice or barely controlled flame, for instance. Your Storyteller may allow you to spend a Willpower point to have your character avoid the reflexive response. This is a discretionary

matter, and the Storyteller needn't always provide the option, though it's generally suitable. Sustained conquest of reflex may require additional Willpower expenditure a few turns later.

- **Maintaining Sanity:** Spend one temporary Willpower point to restrain a derangement from manifesting for the rest of the current scene. Using Willpower thus repeatedly can weaken most derangements over time and even eventually cure them. Malkavian vampires, however, cannot use Willpower for permanent triumph over the derangement that manifests in them at Embrace, and other specific cases may also resist cure.
- **Overcoming Injury:** Spend one temporary Willpower point to ignore wound penalties as described under Health for one turn. Doing so allows your character to take heroic actions in spite of grave injury, in accordance with a long tradition of special vibrancy on the part of notable heroes (and villains). Incapacitated characters (and those in torpor) can't use Willpower thus.

Regaining Willpower

Running out of Willpower is a very bad thing for characters. Even though they don't look at their character sheets, characters know the feeling of fatigue and the compulsion to act according to a few particularly deep-seated impulses. It's hard for a character with zero temporary Willpower to do much of anything. Storytellers shouldn't be too harsh in letting characters regain Willpower — this venture is not an adversarial one, and the rules do assume that characters can draw on at least a few points of Willpower as circumstances require.

- **Acting In Accordance with Nature:** Characters regain one or more points of temporary Willpower when acting in accordance with their Natures, as described previously (see p. 24). When your character reaches zero temporary Willpower, the Nature overwhelms pretty much all other desires until he can act in a way that qualifies him to regain at least one point of Willpower.
- **Completing a Story:** Your character's Willpower pool returns to its maximum rating at the conclusion of a story-line. This is the point at which your character and his allies have brought resolution to the conflicts facing them and gained the opportunity to rest and reflect after multiple sessions of effort. Limited success may restrict the Willpower your character regains this way, and abject failure may cancel it altogether.
- **Resting:** At your Storyteller's discretion, characters can regain one Willpower as they rise from sleep. This gain reflects the renewed determination that comes with rest.
- **Triumphing:** At your Storyteller's discretion, characters can regain one or more points of temporary Willpower upon achieving some outstanding goal or victory. Overcoming demon-hunters who've penetrated the group's makeshift home, for instance, is often good for some Willpower reinvigoration, as is a decisive victory in a battle of prestige or the popular acceptance of an artistic or other innovation. In addition to these general matters, where the bonus usually applies to all the participants in the success, individual characters may earn Willpower for acting successfully in accordance with their respective Natures. A character who succeeds in several challenges that require (or allow) her to act upon her Nature's imperative within one scene may qualify, as can a character who succeeds in at least one such challenge per scene for several scenes in a row. A number of notable successes of this sort equal to the character's permanent Willpower is a good benchmark for progress, though Storytellers can and should vary the details to fit the needs of the chronicle and the moment.

Your Storyteller may come up with other situations in which it's appropriate for your character to regain Willpower. Feel free to make suggestions, but respect the Storyteller's authority in this matter. In general, the faster the Storyteller restores Willpower, the more "cinematic" and action-oriented a chronicle tends to become, while restrictions on the recovery of Willpower feed (when things work well) a mood of tension and desperation or (when things don't work so well) an unhappy groping for alternatives in the face of repetitive failure.

Health

The Health trait measures just what it sounds like: the extent to which your character is injured or otherwise impaired. There are seven levels of health, ranging from completely uninjured to

outright dead or destroyed. The dice pool penalties described here are not cumulative — characters at Mauled lose only two dice. The dice pool penalties do not apply to soak dice pools or Willpower rolls to abort from announced actions to some other option. The dice pool penalties do apply to damage rolls for Strength-based attacks but not to ones relying on mechanical force like crossbow bolts.

- **Uninjured:** Nothing impedes the character's freedom of action.
- **Bruised:** The character suffers minor nuisance injuries, which may have roleplaying consequences but not mechanical ones.
- **Hurt:** The character has superficial wounds, which do not impair her movement but reduce her dice pool for the turn by one.
- **Injured:** The character has minor but significant wounds, which halve her running speed and reduce her dice pool by one.
- **Wounded:** The character has significant damage, which prevents her from running at any speed faster than her usual walking rate and reduces her dice pool by two. She may not move and then attack. She always loses dice for the divided actions of moving and attacking in the same turn.
- **Mauled:** The character is badly injured and can hobble at no more than three yards per turn. Her dice pool decreases by two.
- **Crippled:** The character is catastrophically injured and barely able to move, at a maximum of one yard per turn. Her dice pool decreases by five.
- **Incapacitated:** The character cannot move and is usually unconscious. A mortal who suffers any more damage of any kind while Incapacitated dies. Special rules for vampires and werewolves can be found in their respective supplementary rulebooks.

Health Summary

Health Level	Dice Pool Penalty	Movement Penalty
Uninjured	-0	none
Bruised	-0	none
Hurt	-1	none
Injured	-1	halve running speed
Wounded	-2	no running; may not move, then attack
Mauled	-2	max. speed 3 yards/turn
Crippled	-5	max. speed 1 yard/turn
Incapacitated	total	cannot move

Experience

Characters who survive grow and change over time. Much of this change happens on the level of roleplaying: New outlooks and behavior do not require mechanical support. Other matters do affect your character's ratings, and that's where experience points come into play. Experience points track the accumulation of learning experiences in night-to-night existence at times when your character is often busy, encountering danger and challenges and otherwise being very busy.

Earning Experience Points

In the end, it is your Storyteller's decision how many points to award after each session and at the end of each story-line. In general, experience points reward successful risk-taking on your character's part, as he rises to the challenges the world presents to him, and good roleplaying on your part. Common awards of experience points include the following.

Per Session/Chapter Awards

- **Automatic:** One point for showing up and making some effort. Your Storyteller should withhold this award only if you fail to take part in the session at all.
- **Learning Curve:** One point if you can provide a cogent explanation of what your character learned about himself and the situation as a result of the session.
- **Roleplaying:** One point (or more) for bringing your character to life through particularly vivid description, dialogue and so on.
- **Heroism:** One point (or more) for courting grave danger in the pursuit of some larger goal. This applies to genuinely life- or unlife-threatening circumstances in which your character has some valid motive. Mere carelessness and frivolous risk-taking don't count; racing against potential death to save an ally does.

Per Story Awards

- **Success:** One point for each character who completed some significant part of her goals. Minor victories count. So do clever adaptations to unforeseen difficulties.
- **Danger:** One point for each character who confronted significant physical or other risk at some point.
- **Wisdom:** One point for each character who contributed something of noteworthy cunning or insight as the coterie planned its actions, or who came up with something intelligent on the spur of the moment when necessary.

Storytellers can use these examples as guidelines — this list isn't exhaustive.

Spending Experience Points

It takes some time to develop more mastery in any field of study. The first dot in an Ability can come in a matter of days (10 – [1 per dot of Intelligence], as a rule of thumb). Raising an Attribute is usually a matter of about a month per dot for sustained dedicated effort, or a few months per dot if your character has other pursuits. Your Storyteller may require that experience points be spent all at the end of this study, or spread throughout the period, so that your character's studies might be interrupted but resumed later without wasting all earlier effort.

Note that Backgrounds aren't modified with experience points but with roleplaying. (Your character actually has to recruit new retainers or expand her domain.) In some circumstances, the Storyteller may allow you to increase well-established Backgrounds (or restore ones that have been downgraded by circumstances) at a cost of the current rating x 2.

Experience Costs

Trait	Cost
Attribute	current rating x 4
Existing Ability	current rating x 2
New Specialty or Expertise	current rating
New Ability	3
Willpower	current rating

Experience costs for other areas, such as Disciplines, Gifts, Pillars or Dominions can be found in their respective supplementary rulebooks.

Chapter Four: Drama

Dark Ages chronicles encompass a wide variety of situations. Characters may find themselves involved in court intrigues in Paris, debating with scholars in Cordoba, warring with the Saracens of the Levant or facing enraged peasants in Transylvania. They need to feed, to shelter from the burning sun and — perhaps — to pass as a mortal in a world where the populace believes that demons rule the night. As Storyteller, you must evenhandedly adjudicate such events, and this chapter provides a framework and tools by which you may do so.

As with all rules in **Dark Ages**, use these mechanics only if they do not interfere with game play and the flow of your chronicle. Let roleplaying take the place of dice pools whenever possible. Use these systems only when there is doubt as to a character's ability to succeed at her desired action.

Dramatic Systems

This section provides systems for dealing with a broad range of circumstances, both mundane and supernatural. These circumstances range from routine matters (such as lifting objects and bartering), to hunting and combat to even more esoteric matters. The list, however, is far from exhaustive. Medieval life has far more eventualities than can be covered in a single chapter, so you should use your discretion in creating new systems or adapting existing ones to specific circumstances. Many of these systems rely on the basic Attribute + Ability dice pool explained on page 8.

Automatic Feats

Automatic feats usually require the player to spend an action, but they are considered routine and do not, under most circumstances, require a die roll.

- **Getting to Feet:** A player can spend an action for a fallen character to get to her feet. If this is her only action, no roll is required. If the character wishes to carry out other tasks in the same turn, the player must take a multiple action (see p. 11) and roll Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 4). If the roll succeeds, the character stands up and may attempt her other tasks. Failure indicates that the character remains on the ground. A botch indicates that the character is injured while attempting to rise, thus incurring a level of bashing damage.
- **Movement:** Characters may walk, jog or run without a player having to roll the dice. Walking characters may move up to seven yards per turn, while jogging characters may move a number of yards equal to $12 + \text{Dexterity}$. A running character may move $20 + (3 \times \text{Dexterity})$ yards per turn. Walking does not count as an action for dice pool purposes (unless the Storyteller decides the character is undertaking something so complex that even casual movement is distracting). Anything faster than that requires the player to take multiple actions. Moving faster than half running speed means the character can undertake no additional actions. Injury may reduce the distance a character can move in a turn while some abilities may increase the movement rate.
- **Readying A Weapon:** A character may draw a knife or sword or nock an arrow in preparation for combat. If the character is taking no other action, no dice roll is required. If the character wishes to ready a weapon while carrying out another action, the player must take multiple actions and roll Dexterity + Melee or Dexterity + Archery (difficulty 4). With one or more successes, the character readies her weapon and can act unimpeded. Failure means the character readies her weapon but has an effective initiative rating of 1. A botch indicates that the character drops her weapon, breaks the bowstring or suffers a similar mishap.
- **Yielding:** A player can temporarily forfeit her character's action and allow the character with the next highest initiative (see p. 61) to act. The yielding character may still act at the end of the turn, but if everyone (all players and the Storyteller) choose to yield in a single turn, no one does anything and the turn ends. Yielding does not count as an action.

Actions within the Dark Medieval

The following systems allow Storytellers to direct the actions of both human and nonhuman characters. As with all systems, players and Storytellers should not feel obliged to use these mechanics and may instead simply use them as a guideline for roleplaying.

Physical Endeavors

- **Climbing [Dexterity + Athletics]:** Scaling vertical surfaces, be they cliff faces or walls, is a staple of those who walk the night. For a character to climb a surface, the player must roll Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 6). This is an extended roll, with each success indicating that the character moves up 10 feet or so. The Storyteller may adjust this distance depending on the difficulty of the climb (perhaps 15 feet per success for an easy slope with lots of handholds or 5 feet per success for a more challenging ascent across a tightly bonded wall). Failure indicates that the character is currently unable to progress on the climb, perhaps unable to find a suitable route or needing to adjust her position before proceeding. A botch, however, can prove disastrous. At the Storyteller's discretion, the climber may become stuck, panic as a result of the height, or fall.

- **Encumbrance [Strength]:** Most medieval folk carry the tools of their trade with them, but there are limits to the amount of equipment that can be transported without encumbering the character. Each may carry 25 pounds of equipment per point of Strength without penalty. If the character exceeds this amount (known as the *encumbrance limit*), increase by one the difficulty of every physical action. Furthermore, every 25 pounds over the allocation halves the character's base movement. (With 1-25 pounds over, the character moves half her normal rate; with 26-50 pounds over she moves a quarter, and so forth.) A character carrying double her encumbrance limit cannot move. There's no need to strictly enforce this rule (say by having players maintain a detailed inventory of their characters' equipment), but it is useful to prevent characters from becoming pack horses.

- **Jumping [Strength, or Strength + Athletics]:** Jumping is a simple task, and short leaps may be made without any die rolls. Longer leaps or those in which a mishap may occur, are rolled against a difficulty of 3. Standing jumps use the character's Strength, while running jumps use Strength + Athletics. Each success allows the character to jump up to two feet vertically or four feet horizontally. A failed roll indicates that the character failed to clear the required distance, though the player may make a Dexterity + Athletics roll to grab onto a ledge or otherwise avoid injury as the character falls. On a botch, the character fails in her attempt to jump, either landing short and injuring herself in the fall or overshooting and slamming into an obstacle, with similar consequences. Characters may attempt to judge the distance required for the leap (and thus the number of successes required). To do so, the player needs three successes on a Perception + Athletics roll (difficulty 6).

- **Lifting [Strength]:** Some nonhumans are capable of superhuman feats of strength, while others differ little from the ordinary people that populate the Dark Medieval. Listed in the "Feats of Strength" table are the minimum Strength values required to lift or damage various items *without* having to make a die roll. (For example, a character with Strength 4 can throw a full barrel without making a special roll to lift it.) At the Storyteller's discretion, the required Strength may be reduced if the character merely wishes to drag (rather than lift/ break) an object.

A character may attempt to lift an item heavier than her Strength allows, but doing so requires the player to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 9). Each success increases the character's effective Strength by one (so a Strength 4 character who gets two successes would have an effective Strength of 6). Failure leaves the character's effective Strength unaltered, but a botch indicates that the character's vain efforts injure her and inflict one health level of bashing damage as a result of muscle strains or dropping the item on her foot.

Several characters may work together to lift an object, each player rolling Willpower separately and combining their successes. The number of characters than can cooperate in lifting an object is at the discretion of the Storyteller.

Feats of Strength

Strength	Feat	Lift
1	Rip a shirt	40 lbs.
2	Smash a chair	100 lbs.
3	Kick through a wattle wall	250 lbs.
4	Smash a barrel	400 lbs.
5	Overturn a laden cart	650 lbs.
6	Rip chain mail	800 lbs.
7	Bend a one-inch-thick iron bar	900 lbs.
8	Lift a horse	1000 lbs.
9	Punch through a palisade	1200 lbs.
10	Lift a laden cart	1500 lbs.
11	Lift a portcullis	2000 lbs.
12	Break a small tree	3000 lbs.
13	Lift a siege engine	4000 lbs.
14	Punch through a stone wall	5000 lbs.
15	Topple a castle wall	6000 lbs.

• **Opening/Closing [Strength]:** Forcing open a locked door with brute force requires a Strength roll (difficulty 6). The number of successes required depends on the type of door and fastening. A single success suffices for the simple latched door of a cottage, while two or three successes are needed for a more solid door or one secured by a bolt. A barred door in a castle requires five or more successes. At the Storyteller's discretion, the attempts to open the door can be an extended action, the accumulation of successes reflecting increasing damage to the door or its frame. Teamwork may also be used for forcing a door, particularly in the case of large portals such as castle gate (which may have a difficulty of 8 and require 10 or more successes to force). On a botched roll, the character takes one level of bashing damage as her shoulder or legs suffer under the battering.

• **Swimming [Stamina + Athletics]:** To swim, a character must have at least one dot of Athletics. Most routine swims do not require any form of roll, but those involving long distances or difficult conditions do. In most cases, the target for this Stamina + Athletics roll is 5, but this can be increased one or two points for difficult circumstances. The specific circumstances determine just when a roll is needed: Long-distance swimming requires a roll after an hour and only one success is necessary to remain afloat, though the difficulty of such rolls increases by one every hour. (This assumes that the character swims at a slow, steady pace of one or two miles per hour. Characters who attempt to swim faster tire more quickly and thus should roll every few hundred yards). Characters in difficult conditions (e.g., a raging river or a rip current) should make a roll every 10 yards. Failure to get any successes doesn't mean the character drowns, rather that she begins to have difficulty and perhaps lose ground. Only on a botch does a character begin to drown.

• **Throwing [Dexterity + Athletics]:** Small objects (those weighing three pounds or less) can be thrown a number of yards equal to 5 x Strength. For every additional two pounds, the distance an object can be hurled decreases by five yards. Streamlined or irregularly shaped objects may travel greater or lesser distances, at the Storyteller's discretion. Throwing an object with any degree of accuracy requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll with a difficulty of 6 (at half or less the potential range) or 8 (half to full range). The size of the target area and the object's characteristics may also modify the difficulty, as may environmental factors such as wind and light. If an object is thrown as a weapon, consult the rules on p. 73. One or more successes indicate that the object lands where it was intended, while failure indicates that the object misses its target area. A botch may be anything from dropping the object (perhaps on the thrower's own toes) to hitting an ally, depending on the circumstances.

Crime and Administration

• **Bribery and Corruption [Intelligence + Politics; Manipulation + Commerce]:** In all bureaucracies, the wheels of state turn more freely if provided with ample lubricants, and Europe is no exception. Knowing whom to bribe to get a guild permit, to free a “wrongfully arrested” acquaintance or to arrange the presence — or absence — of guards on a particular street is an art that many dabble in but which few perfect. Bribing an official is a two-stage process. First, the appropriate official has to be identified, which requires an Intelligence + Politics roll (difficulty proportional to the legality and ease of the desired task). For example, determining the correct official to bribe to establish a market stall is easy (difficulty 3), while identifying a potential source of information on the baron’s guard is challenging (difficulty 7). Failed rolls have no effect, but a botch may result in the wrong people hearing of the character’s efforts. At the Storyteller’s discretion, the player may roll Intelligence + Commerce if the question has to do with trade and goods.

Once a suitable source has been located, she must be approached and convinced to cooperate. Doing so requires a Manipulation + Commerce roll against a difficulty ranging between the official’s Willpower and his Willpower + 3, depending on the legality of the task. Success indicates the official has been bribed and how well: one success indicates that the official is wracked with guilt and may confess his sins, while five successes means the official is ice-cool. Failure indicates that the official takes the money but does not go through with the “favor,” while a botch indicates that she takes action against the bribing character.

• **Buying and Selling [Manipulation + Commerce]:** Although coins are found all across Europe, barter remains the cornerstone of the Dark Medieval economy. Markets and fairs rather than shops are the most common sources of goods (though craftsmen and specialists may well sell from permanent facilities), with farmers arriving at town gates around dawn and completing their business during daylight hours.

Finding common goods in the markets is a straightforward process, which usually takes only a few minutes. Less common items may require a Perception + Commerce roll, the difficulty depending on the commonality of the item being sought. Haggling is the main means of buying and selling goods, particularly when bartering other goods and services rather than using cash. Haggling occurs via resisted Manipulation + Commerce rolls, with the winner receiving a discount proportionate to the number of successes she achieves. One success equates to roughly 10 percent, while three successes drives the merchant down to her minimum asking price. Five successes allow the buyer to talk the merchant into accepting a loss.

• **Gathering Rumors [Variable]:** News is important to the denizens of the Dark Medieval, and it is often exchanged in taverns and markets, each of which is a hotbed of local gossip and an exchange for stories from further afield. Hearing news is a simple matter, requiring a Charisma + Alertness roll, the successes indicating the number and detail of the stories. Sorting out truth from fiction is more difficult, requiring a roll of Perception paired with whichever Ability best covers the subject of conversations. Commerce, Etiquette and Politics are common choices, but not the only ones. Common knowledge is easy to obtain (difficulty 3) but more jealously guarded information is challenging or difficult to come by (difficulty 7 or 8). Of course, a local market (such as at Kings Lynn) is less likely to provide news from across Europe than is a major regional fair (such as those at Troyes or Lübeck).

• **Managing a Household or Business [Variable]:** Managing a business or a major household (such as a lord’s retinue) requires considerable acumen and skill to balance the books and keep things operating at peak efficiency. The primary necessary Ability is Seneschal, but others come into play as well. Managing day-to-day affairs requires a weekly Intelligence + Seneschal roll, the difficulty depending on the complexity of the business/ household and the local economic affairs. Managing day-to-day affairs in a small house in Lincoln is difficulty 4 — largely routine in all but the most strenuous economic circumstances — while managing the king’s fortress in Paris, the Louvre, is at least 7, even in ideal circumstances. Hiring staff requires a Perception + Empathy roll, the difficulty linked to the number of available workers. One success is adequate help, three is good, and five brings in exceptional talent that is an asset to the business or household.

Retaining these staff (and keeping them honest) is part of the regular routine, but where misdeeds occur, handling them requires Charisma + Leadership. Keeping track of finances, stock levels and related items requires a Perception + Seneschal roll (perhaps Perception + Investigation to track down any misdemeanors).

Managing relationships with the local craft and trade associations (called variously guilds, communes and corporations) is often as important as the day-to-day running of the house. Doing so requires a weekly Manipulation + Seneschal roll. Characters who are senior figures in the guild also have to deal with the secular (nobility) and spiritual (clergy) authorities, neither of whom are allowed membership. Dealing with them entails Intelligence + Politics rolls. It should be noted that although Dark Medieval society is riven with gender discrimination, women *are* accepted as a vital part of business, either working alongside their husbands or as owner-operators in their own right.

• **Pursuit [Dexterity + Athletics/Ride]:** Characters may be forced to chase down some quarry or other or to flee from pursuers (such as witch-hunters). Such chases can be resolved simply if one character/ group is clearly faster than the other (see movement) and no opportunities for evasion exist: The faster party simply catches (or escapes from) the slower. However, where the two are of comparable speed or the terrain provides opportunities for evasion, the pursuit is more complex, relying on endurance and cunning rather than raw speed. The following system simulates such pursuits.

Pursuit is an extended action in which each participant rolls Dexterity + Athletics (if on foot) or Dexterity + Ride (if mounted). The target starts the chase with a number of extra successes dependent on her initial distance from her pursuers: one success for every two yards if on foot, one success for every 10 yards if mounted. In each round of the chases, both the target and the pursuer roll the appropriate dice and add the successes to those they have already scored. If the pursuer's number of successes equals or exceeds those of the target, she has caught up and may attempt whatever actions she deems necessary to end the chase. Otherwise, the chase continues. At the Storyteller's discretion, a Perception roll may be needed for a pursuer to maintain sight of her prey. The base difficulty of this roll is between 4 and 6 (depending on the circumstances), and each success of the target beyond that of the pursuer adds one to the difficulty. If the roll fails, the target has escaped (though the pursuer may keep looking). A botch indicates that the pursuer mistakenly identifies another figure as her quarry, or worse. Human characters may chase (or be pursued) for a number of turns equal to twice their Stamina. Each round thereafter imposes a cumulative +1 difficulty penalty to the pursuit/ evasion rolls.

Example: *The thief Adolph flees from the guard Reginald in the streets of Buda. As the streets are busy, the Storyteller judges the base target number for the Perception roll is 6. Adolph's successes total six so far while Reginald has only four, a net difference of two. Therefore, the difficulty of the Perception roll is 8 (6+2). Reginald better have sharp eyes....*

• **Shadowing [Dexterity + Stealth]:** Sometimes one character wishes to follow another without being seen, a process known as shadowing. The shadowing character's player should roll Dexterity + Stealth (difficulty 6), gaining at least one success to avoid standing out at the beginning of the tail. Failure at such a roll does not automatically reveal the tailing character's presence (Storyteller's choice), but a botch almost certainly does. The target character can attempt to detect any pursuers, either as a part of a spy's craft or the result of a slip by the pursuer. To do so, the player should roll Perception + Alertness, opposed by the shadow's Dexterity + Stealth. The base difficulty for such actions is 6, though this may be modified up or down by conditions, such as crowds or familiarity with the terrain. If the target rolls more successes than the pursuer, she spots the tail; otherwise she remains unaware of her pursuer. To minimize the chance of detection, groups of pursuers may work together (which requires special training), constantly "handing off" the shadowing roll so that no one person stands out. Such groups may combine their shadowing rolls.

• **Sneaking [Dexterity + Stealth]:** Combat is not the answer to all problems. In many cases, stealth — sneaking — is much more likely to succeed than a direct confrontation. Characters may attempt to sneak past guards or hide in shadows using caution and skill. Doing so requires a

Dexterity + Stealth roll, the base difficulty of which is 6, though it may be increased by observant watchers or a lack of cover and reduced by darkness, ample cover or distractions. A roll is also made (collectively) for the watchers, using Perception + Alertness against a difficulty of 6 (likewise modified by conditions). If the sneaking character has more successes than the watchers, she sneaks past. If the watchers have as many (or more) successes than the sneaker, she is detected. A botch by the sneaker indicates that she does something that makes her presence obvious, such as walking into the open or stepping on a cat's tail. A botch by the watchers indicates a complete lack of attention, for example talking about last night's events in the tavern or even falling asleep. In situations where it's impractical to account for the traits of all observers, the player makes a simple Dexterity + Stealth roll against a difficulty set to reflect the overall security of the area. Use the number of successes to determine just how well the character remains undetected.

• **Tracking [Perception + Survival]:** Unlike shadowing, where a character closely follows her target, tracking is the skill of following someone by the evidence of his passage alone. The tracker uses footprints, damage to vegetation and other physical signs to pursue her prey, often combined with a large dose of instinct. The number of successes when making the Perception + Survival roll that tracking calls for, details the amount of information revealed. One success allows the tracker to know that her target passed through the area, while three successes allow her to judge how long ago and the number of people in the group. Five or more success allow the tracker to determine the target's speed and weight, as well as any injuries or load (from step patterns, the depth of print indentations and so forth).

The base difficulty for tracking is 6, but it might decrease if the target is a large group or is careless, and it might increase in difficult terrain (like over limestone paving) or adverse weather (such as rain). The signs of passage also fade with time, so the time since the target's passage can increase the difficulty. On a botch, not only has the tracker failed to find her quarry, but her blundering has disturbed the evidence making it impossible for others to pick up the trail. A character can cover her own tracks with a Wits + Survival roll (difficulty 6, modified by circumstances). Each success raises the difficulty for subsequent efforts at tracking her.

• **Inquiry [Perception + Investigation]:** Secrets abound in the Dark Medieval night, be they the identity of the power behind a king or regent, the method of smuggling illicit goods into a city, the reason for a brutal murder or the gathering place of heretics. Searching out the clues — physical, social or psychological — that cast light on these mysteries is a complex matter that varies wildly depending on the circumstances and nature of the investigation. It may be systematic, examining everything in fine detail, or it may be intuitive, relying on leaps of logic by the investigator. The former is more time-consuming but likely to turn up clues (eventually). The latter shortcuts the process for a quicker result, albeit at the expense of accuracy and depth. A single Perception + Investigation roll covers about one day or night of especially systematic work (difficulty 4), roughly a scene of normal work (difficulty 5), and only a few minutes of intuitive work (difficulty 7). One success reveals basic details, while multiple successes provide detailed information and may even allow for deductions based on physical evidence. On a botch, obvious clues are missed or even accidentally destroyed. At the Storyteller's discretion, the process may require an extended action, covering several days or nights of work.

• **Interrogation [Manipulation + Empathy/Intimidation]:** Asking often isn't enough. Sometimes "persuasion" is required to gather the requisite information, and such acts are much appreciated by Dark Medieval rulers. Interrogation can be careful yet clever questioning, leading the target toward subjects about which the interrogator desires information, or it can be far more brutal. Though mental torture is not unknown, physical violence and pain are the main "inducements" at this time, and the services of a good torturer are highly prized. The techniques used vary considerably, especially where supernatural beings are involved. For example, ducking (submerging the target's head underwater) has no effect on a non-breathing vampire, and a werewolf's innate healing ability allows them to repair most injuries quickly. As such, the system here is abstract, requiring the questioner to make a series of Manipulation + Intimidation rolls (difficulty 6) while the target rolls dice equal to her Willpower or her Stamina + 3, whichever is

higher. In cases of mental torture, the target always resists with Willpower. In the case of friendlier persuasion, the inquisitor rolls Manipulation + Empathy against the target's Willpower.

In both persuasion and torture, the questioner gains information if she rolls more successes than the target. The amount and detail of this information is dependent on the net successes of the questioner. If the number of net successes equals or exceeds the target's Willpower, she surrenders to the interrogator and reveals everything she knows. A botch by either party can have a wide range of meanings. For example, the subject may accidentally blurt out information, while an inquisitor may go too far and harm her subject. In the case of vampires or werewolves, a botch may plunge the character into frenzy....

Torture can be carried out only for so long without inflicting serious harm on the target. For every turn of torture, the target loses one health level (physical torture, treat as bashing) or temporary Willpower point (mental torture). If health reaches incapacitated or Willpower drops to zero, the character collapses.

• **Intimidation [Strength/Manipulation + Intimidation]:** Some prefer subtle manipulation, but sometimes a more direct approach is needed, using intimidation or outright threats to persuade recalcitrant individuals. Also favored by base-born rogues, intimidation works passively and actively. Passive intimidation is a result of the character's form and attitude. Crowds in the market part as a tough-looking soldier passes through, or patrons give up a seat to him when he enters a tavern. The higher the character's Intimidation Talent is, the more distance he gets — though some bravos may see him as a challenge and take action. Passive intimidation does not require a roll.

Active intimidation can be subtle or overt, involving intimation or direct threat. Intimated threats require a resisted roll: the character's Manipulation + Intimidation against the target's Willpower. The intimidator must gain more successes than the target to successfully cow her opponent, the net number of successes indicating the degree of success. If the intimidator gets fewer successes than the target, the victim is uncowed. If the character botches, her efforts fail utterly, and the target may even be amused by the pathetic efforts. Direct threats — usually involving violence — work in similar manner but substitute Strength + Intimidation rather than Manipulation. The target may also use her own Strength + Intimidation in lieu of Willpower.

Social Endeavors

• **Carousing [Charisma + Empathy]:** Hedonistic activities may prove useful in influencing others (by buttering up a potential ally or discovering information) or strengthening bonds between characters. The base difficulty is 6, but it may be affected by the Nature of the people involved. A Celebrant both relaxes more readily and has a better chance of influencing others than a Penitent does, for example. The number of successes indicates the degree of accomplishment, while a botch indicates a major mishap (insulting the target, starting a fight, a slip in the character's human façade and so forth).

• **Fast-Talk [Manipulation + Subterfuge]:** Reasoned argument works well among nobles or the clergy, but on the street, quick thinking and a faster mouth are often the difference between a pleasant encounter and the wrong end of a guardsman's spear. Whether truth, lies or something in-between is used, the goal is to convince (or baffle) the target. The speaker makes a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll, while the target rolls dice equal to her Willpower. The difficulty of both actions is 6, and the character with the most successes wins, either convincing the opponent of her veracity or resisting attempts to be bamboozled. If both characters have the same number of successes, their conversation continues for another turn. A botch by the speaker means that she has gone too far, usually by being caught in a lie. A botch by the target means she accepts the speaker's words as truth, and she will argue for its veracity even when presented with evidence to the contrary.

• **Seduction [Variable]:** The process of seduction is a long, drawn-out process involving many steps and a wide range of skills. It is often best handled through roleplaying, but the following system can serve as a useful shorthand.

The first step is approaching the subject and establishing a repartee, which requires an Appearance + Subterfuge roll with the difficulty equal to the target's Wits + 3. One success means the subject's interest has been piqued and he responds favorably. Additional successes reflect increasing interest and reduce the difficulty of subsequent rolls, while a botch means the subject may be uninterested or even offended.

The second step is to build on the initial contact with flirting and witty repartee. Doing so requires a Wits + Subterfuge roll (difficulty of the subject's Intelligence + 3). One or more successes signify that the relationship progresses, and each success after the first reduces the difficulty of subsequent rolls. Failure means the subject departs but remains on good terms with the character (perhaps called away or simply not interested in any romantic entanglements). On a botch, the target is offended by the character's efforts and departs angrily.

The third and final stage requires a Charisma + Empathy roll against a difficulty of the subject's Perception + 3. If the character gets one or more successes at this roll, the subject is interested in taking the relationship further, enamored of the character and willing to become "better acquainted." Any subsequent events may be roleplayed but could involve physical intimacy and/or feeding. Failure at this final roll means that the seduction falters (but may be pursued at a later date) while a botch results in an irrevocable breakdown of the relationship.

Artistic and Academic Endeavors

- **Artistic Creation [Variable]:** Although it is not as renowned as the eras that followed, the Dark Medieval sees the birth of many great works of art. Troubadours create songs, and beautiful craftworks decorate churches and palaces alike. Characters may involve themselves with such endeavors, most often as patrons of the arts but also directly, seeking to create something worthy themselves, be it a painting, tapestry, song or a tale. Depending on their personal inclination, such an endeavor can be a demonstration of their sophistication, an outlet for twisted creativity or an anchor to a lost past.

The creation process varies from character to character and from work to work, but it follows three basic stages: conception, execution and presentation. The player can select the basic theme and style of the work, but a Perception + Expression or Perception + Crafts roll (depending in the type of work) indicates how well the character enacts the idea. The difficulty of this roll varies depending on the complexity of the work. A simple poem has a difficulty rating of 4, while a song that lampoons a prince while outwardly praising him has a difficulty of 8. In the case of static works, such as paintings or sculpture, the number of successes indicates the quality of the work and provides a fair idea of how well it is accepted. Performance works — songs, plays and the like — further rely on the skills of the actors or orators (see "Oration" or "Performance"), but the character's initial rolls indicate the underlying quality. A good performance can improve the reception for a mediocre piece, just as the true quality of a work may still shine through despite a poor presentation. Still, turning a sow's ear into a silk purse is a major challenge....

- **Oration: [Charisma + Expression/Leadership]:** Whether one is addressing the court or inspiring an army, oration is a vital skill in the Dark Medieval. The ability to manipulate other people through the use and delivery of words is a major tool in the arsenal of politicians, generals and the clergy. When a character seeks to sway others in this manner, roll Charisma + either Expression or Leadership. Use the former if the character is enchanting the crowd and the latter for efforts to rouse a crowd to action. The difficulty of this roll is usually 6, but it might increase or decrease depending on the number and attitude of the audience. A small, friendly gathering is much more open to manipulation than a large, hostile crowd. The number of successes indicates the strength of the orator's hold on the audience (if she has no successes, her influence is negligible). A botched oration roll may result in damage to the character's reputation or a friendly crowd becoming hostile. Proper preparation (Intelligence + Expression) might increase or decrease the difficulty of the oration. Spontaneity (real or apparent) makes the speaker appear more genuine, but a well-written speech can make the difference between success and failure.

- **Performance [Charisma + Performance]:** Storytelling, musical recitals and plays involve one or more entertainers performing before an audience. When a character is involved in such

entertainments roll Charisma + Performance. The base difficulty is 6, but it might increase or decrease depending on the audience's mood and the material used. A hostile audience is hard to please, while the quality of a well-written play (see "Artistic Creation") shines through even a poor performance. One success indicates that the performance goes well but is uninspiring. Three successes result in a memorable event that is the talk of the court for weeks. Five or more successes is a truly magnificent performance that is remembered for years. Failure indicates one or more minor problems, while a botch is a truly dreadful performance, one that is remembered for all the wrong reasons.

• **Research [Intelligence + Academics]:** Finding specific information on a subject is often a laborious task. Private libraries are rare, usually restricted to clerical institutions, though some of the denizens of the Dark Medieval have collected books over the years and centuries. Hunting through these tomes (often works of art in their own right) for specific information requires a roll of Intelligence + Academics. When a character is researching a subject tied to another Knowledge (be it Roman law or the secrets of occult rites), roll Intelligence + the *lowest* of Academics or the Knowledge appropriate to the information sought. The number of successes indicates the depth and breadth of information uncovered, while a botch indicates that the character found nothing (or came to erroneous conclusions). However, the scarcity of books means that when consulting their own libraries, the maximum number of successes a character can gain when researching is equal to her Resources Background. This restriction does not apply when using ecclesiastical or university libraries.

Courtly Life

• **Finding Political Allies [Variable]:** Despite popular impressions, brutal political games are not generally played by emotionless automatons but by normal beings with a full range of feelings who are simply ruthless about getting what they want. In getting what *you* want, trustworthy friends and allies are critical. A Perception + Politics roll allows a character to find good allies and a Charisma + Empathy roll to become friends with them. The relative station of the parties and the degree of similarity determines the difficulty.

It takes some time between rolls, at least a few days or nights. The total accumulated successes indicate the strength of the friendship. Ten is an acquaintance, 20 a mild friendship and so on, up to the 80-100 range, which indicates a bond that will last for years (or longer in the case of vampires or fae). Both parties can roll if both desire friendship, but the accumulated successes are not added together — friendship is often unequal.

• **The Poison Tongue [Manipulation + Politics]:** Just as finding allies is critical, turning opinion against a political rival is also often of crucial importance. Doing so requires a Manipulation + Politics roll, with a difficulty determined by the degree of competence and political aptitude demonstrated by one's opponent. Everyone can turn opinion against the court bumbler, but throwing darts at the hero of the hour without seeming petty is very difficult. The number of successes determines the degree of effect. One success plants doubts, five successes changes opinions forever. Note that it can take dozens of manipulations to really effect a change of opinion in the court as a whole. A campaign of whispered slander and insinuation takes months of hard effort to bring to maturation. A botch during this time probably makes the matter into a public feud or even brings about a challenge to a duel.

Sometimes, whispered insinuations aren't enough. Framing someone for a crime she didn't commit is always a popular way to eliminate an enemy. It is particularly effective if she is suspected of committing that sort of crime but hasn't been caught yet. Setting the matter up requires the player to make an Intelligence + Subterfuge roll, with a difficulty based to the legitimacy of the victim. The actual false accusation should be roleplayed out, and many other systems are likely to be put into use in the process.

Sport and War

• **Hunting and Hawking [Variable]:** Hunting serves an important role in medieval society, providing a way for warriors to demonstrate their prowess and hone their skills. First, the hunter

must master tracking to identify and pursue the prey (Perception + Alertness), in turn exercising her riding skills (Stamina + Ride). The usual prey of such hunts are boars and bears, so a rider faces a considerable challenge in maintaining control of her mount once the prey is cornered (Wits + Ride). Finally, the beast must be dispatched, usually by means of a lance or sword, testing the warrior's courage and skill at arms (Dexterity + Melee). Boars may also be hunted on foot with broad spears, a more difficult and dangerous proposition that tests the warrior's courage (roll Willpower) as well as her skill at arms in the close confines of the forest (Perception + Melee). Other forms include the pursuit of deer and wild horses, hunting in this case usually by bow (Dexterity + Archery). Hawking (Wits + Animal Ken) is also appreciated, though often restricted to the loftiest social circles.

• **Maintaining Weapons and Equipment [Perception + Crafts]:** The equipment used in the Dark Medieval is often subject to great stress and wear, and without regular maintenance, it can lose its effectiveness or even break. Most such tasks are simple and routine — oiling a saddle, sewing a tear in a jerkin or attaching a new buckle — but others require a modicum of skill and training. Keeping a weapon in good order is perhaps the most significant and the most commonly ignored by sloppy soldiers. Without regular maintenance — sharpening blades, oiling the mechanisms of crossbow, checking the fastenings on spearheads — weapons become increasingly ineffective and may even break. Armor likewise needs preventative maintenance if it is to provide protection (removing rust, keeping it supple and the straps strong). This work requires a number of minutes each day (and weapons are usually maintained directly after combat), but the player need roll only Perception + Crafts (difficulty 5) once per week of game time. (To maintain appropriate weapons, the player may roll Perception + Archery or Melee instead, although the difficulty is 6.) One or more successes indicate that the character completes all possible maintenance work on her equipment, which remains in usable form. Failure indicates that, although the character tries her best, she misses something. The exact nature of the problem is left to the Storyteller, but suggestions include a strap that breaks (at an inopportune moment), reduced effectiveness of a weapon (-1 damage) or reduced armor effectiveness (-1 soak). A botch indicates that instead of maintaining her equipment, the ministrations actually harm one or more items.

• **Treating Wounds [Variable]:** Medieval medicine is, at best, an imperfect art. Although hospitals and medical colleges exist, most medical care is undertaken by local village women who rely on popular cures discovered through trial and error or passed down from their predecessors, sometimes with explicitly non-Christian elements. That is not to say that such folk cures are ineffective. Indeed, they are just as useful as those administered by supposedly well-educated doctors in many cases, if not more so. The curing of disease is terribly hit-or-miss, but the treatment of wounds, though limited, is effective. Medieval healers of all sorts can ease pain and stop mild infections. The best doctors are said to be Jewish, especially Iberian and Levantine Jews who have access to the Greek medical texts preserved by the Muslims.

The most basic thing a healer can do to help a patient is to reduce her pain. This can be done with various poultices and herbal draughts, as well as splints and other bandages. To do so, the healer's player rolls Intelligence + Medicine or Hearth Wisdom against a difficulty of 5 + the wound penalty of the patient. (If the patient is Incapacitated, the penalty is considered to be 5.) Even a single success halves that penalty for a day.

A healer can also be of significant help to those who are wounded as the result of bashing damage, which isn't life threatening by itself. For a healer to speed recovery from such wounds, the player rolls Intelligence + Medicine against a difficulty of 5 + the wound penalty of the patient. Success halves the patient's healing times for these wounds. A healer can try to help thus with Hearth Wisdom instead of Medicine, but the roll suffers a +2 difficulty penalty.

Given the state of medicine, European healers are of significantly less use in dealing with lethal wounds. Stanching wounds requires a Wits + Hearth Wisdom or Medicine roll against a difficulty of 3 + the wound penalty of the patient. Even one success stops further wounds from bleeding and infection. If the patient is Crippled or Incapacitated, this stabilization lasts an only hour. Actually helping the healing process is significantly harder. When a patient under the healer's

care is ready to make a Stamina roll to heal a level of damage (as outlined on page 81), the healer's player should roll Intelligence + Medicine against a difficulty of 7 + the patient's wound penalty. Each success reduces the difficulty on the patient's Stamina roll by one (see p. 81). At the Storyteller's discretion, the player of a Jewish healer or another who has trained in Saracen lands may make this roll at -1 difficulty.

Any failed roll related to treating a patient means the current effort fails, but the healer can try again after a few hours (or minutes if stanching a wound). Any botch immediately causes an additional lethal wound to the patient.

For more on healing, see p. 81.

Combat Systems

Combat and warfare are likely to be central to many **Dark Ages** chronicles. This section is intended as a guide to martial matters in **Dark Ages** games, with emphasis on rules rather than mood. Players and Storytellers who wish to get a greater understanding of medieval combat may wish to consult book on historical combat and warfare.

The following mechanics attempt to capture the drama and feel of combat without bogging the game down in unnecessary detail. They are, by necessity, somewhat abstract, but they are intended to be true to the limitations and dynamics of combat. The same mechanics apply to both humans and other denizens of the Dark Medieval, though the latter can bring their own unique traits to bear in the martial arena.

As with all aspects of **Dark Ages**, the Storyteller should be flexible. Combat systems are meant to add depth to the game, not detract from the experience.

Types of Combat

There are two types of combat, each involving the same basic system with minor differences:

- **Close Combat:** This system covers unarmed combat and melee. Unarmed combat uses Dexterity + Brawl as its main dice pool, and it can cover a down-and-dirty barroom brawl or an honorable test of skill. Opponents must be within touching distance (one yard) to engage in unarmed combat. Melee involves hand-held weapons such as maces and swords, and it is the principal form of combat in **Dark Ages**. Opponents must be within one or two yards of each other to engage in melee. Players usually roll Dexterity + Melee during melees, unsurprisingly.
- **Ranged Combat:** Armed combat using such projectile weapons as thrown knives, bows and crossbows. Opponents must normally be within sight (and weapon range) of each other to engage in ranged combat. Dexterity + Archery is the common dice pool for bows, and Dexterity + Athletics covers thrown weapons.

Combat Turns

Combat is often fluid, with multiple things happening at the same time or overlapping with each other. For simplicity within the game, a more rigid structure is applied to timekeeping during combat, a series of three-second combat turns used to regulate matters. Each combat turn has three distinct stages: *Initiative*, *Attack* and *Resolution*.

Stage One: Initiative

The first step determines the order in which characters act in each combat turn, preventing disputes over the sequence of events. The action may be anything from an attack to movement to yelling out a (short) message. Each action should be described to the Storyteller in as much detail as it requires, and some may even take multiple combat turns to accomplish.

Every character has an initiative rating equal to her Dexterity + Wits. To determine the order of actions, each player rolls one die and adds the result to her character's initiative rating. The character with the highest score acts first, then the other characters act in decreasing order of

their score. If two characters have the same score, the one with the higher basic initiative rating goes first. If initiative ratings are also tied, the characters act simultaneously. Wound penalties subtract directly from a character's initiative rating.

To reflect the ability of faster characters to react to slower ones, actions are nominated in reverse order, slowest to fastest. This may be an attack, movement or the activation of a game-specific special ability (Disciplines, Gifts, Dominions, etc.). Actions may also be held until later in the turn, either until after a certain point ("I swing at the guard *after* Hans attacks the noble.") or conditional ("If Lydia misses the woodsman, I'll throw a dagger at him."). Such delayed actions may take place at any time after their designated order in the initiative, pre-empting or following the actions of a slower character. If two characters delay their actions to the same point, the one with the higher initiative score for the turn acts first.

In most cases, characters act in initiative order. Delaying actions as outlined here is one exception, but others are defensive actions and multiple actions. A character may undertake defensive actions according to the rules outlined on p. 66 provided she has actions remaining to use.

Multiple actions (whatever their cause) occur at the end of the turn after all characters have had the opportunity to act once. If two or more characters take multiple actions, they take place in order of initiative, save for defensive actions (such as multiple dodges), which happen as needed to avert an attack. All second actions must take place before any third actions take place, and so on. For more on taking multiple actions, see p. 11.

Stage Two: Attack

Although they are not the only actions that one can take, attacks are at the heart of the combat turn. As with general skill use, each attack requires the player to roll dice equal to an Attribute + Ability combination dependant on the type of combat:

- **Close Combat:** Use Dexterity + Brawl (unarmed) or Dexterity + Melee (armed).
- **Ranged Combat:** Use Dexterity + Archery (bows and crossbows) or Dexterity + Athletics (thrown weapons).

If a character doesn't have points in the necessary Abilities, use the rules for acting without an Ability (see p. 30). In brief, the player rolls a number of dice equal to the appropriate Attribute. In the case of Archery and Melee, the attack also suffers a +1 difficulty penalty.

In ranged combat, both the weapon and the conditions may modify the dice pool or difficulty. See "Ranged Attacks" (p. 73) for more details of ranged combat.

The difficulty for most attacks is 6. It can be adjusted for situational modifiers (long range, weapon type). If the player rolls no successes, the attack fails and inflicts no damage. If the result is a botch, not only does the attack fail, but the character may be subject to adverse effects: A bowstring breaks, a blade shatters, or she strikes an ally.

Stage Three: Resolution

The final stage of the combat turn determines the outcome of each character's attacks (or other actions taken during combat), namely the damage inflicted and its nature. The core of this system is expressed here in mechanical terms — a number of health levels of damage inflicted on the target — but it is generally more interesting for the Storyteller to handle this in a narrative manner. "Your broadsword slashes 'round and carves a rent in the monster's chest. It leaps back shrieking as blood pours from the wound," is more appropriate than, "The monster loses three health levels."

The base damage for each attack depends on the character's Strength and the weapon or maneuver being used, but it may be modified by the number of successes rolled in the attack. Each success above the first adds one die to the damage dice pool. These dice are rolled versus difficulty 6, each success inflicting one health level of damage on the target. Damage rolls cannot

be botched, though rolling no successes indicates that no damage is inflicted — the blow glancing off the target's armor or weapon.

Damage Types

Damage may be of one of three types, detailed further in "Health" (p. 80).

- **Bashing:** Bashing damage comprises punches and other blunt trauma that are less likely to kill a victim instantly. All characters use their full Stamina ratings to resist bashing effects, and the damage heals fairly quickly. Bashing damage is applied to the health boxes on the character sheet with a slash (/).
- **Lethal:** These attacks are meant to cause immediate and fatal injury to the target, and they include strikes from swords, spears and other weapons of war. Ordinary humans may not use Stamina to resist lethal effects, and the damage takes quite a while to heal. Unlike bashing damage, lethal damage is applied to the health boxes on the character sheet with an X.
- **Aggravated:** Certain types of attacks are equally deadly to all denizens of the Dark Medieval. Fire, some magical weapons, and the teeth and claws of vampires, Lupines and other supernatural beings cause aggravated damage. Aggravated damage cannot be soaked except by supernatural means, and it takes a very long time to heal. Aggravated damage is applied to the health boxes on the character sheet with an asterisk (*).

Several additional effects take place when a character is subject to massive damage and/ or specific types of attack:

- **Dazed:** After soaking, if the character suffers a number of health levels greater than her Stamina (for humans) or Stamina + 2 (for supernatural beings), she is dazed. She must spend her next available action shaking off the attack's effects. Characters with multiple actions automatically lose *all* actions remaining in that turn but may act normally in the next combat turn.
- **Knockdown:** Some attacks (such as tackles or sweeps) are intended to knock a character to the ground, and a massive blow from a more conventional attack may have a similar effect. (This occurs at the Storyteller's discretion, but a number of attack successes greater than the target's Stamina + Brawl is one option.) If his character is knocked down, a player should immediately make a reflexive Dexterity + Athletics roll. If successful, the character may immediately get to her feet, but she suffers a -2 penalty on her initiative in the next turn. If the roll fails, the character must spend her next action getting to her feet in addition to the initiative penalty. On a botch, she must spend the next turn getting to her feet *and* suffer an automatic level of bashing damage.

Step-by-Step Combat Turn

There are times when it's critical to know just when events, modifiers and effects come into effect during a combat turn. Consult this chart for those questions.

Preliminaries

- **Declare Multiple Actions and Turns Spent Parrying:** All characters can announce taking multiple actions. Declare the total number of actions to be taken but not the nature of these actions. At the same time, characters who intend to do nothing except parry this turn declare so.
- **Roll Initiative:** Everyone rolls one die and adds the total to their initiative rating (Dexterity + Wits). Wound penalties subtract from initiative, but not penalties for multiple actions.

Declaration

- **Declare First Actions:** Every player declares his first action. The player with the *lowest* initiative score declares first, and others do so subsequently based on their scores. Since those with higher initiative scores will act first, however, they can delay their actions to any time later in the order of initiative — as long as they announce it now.

Action

- **Target Announces Active or Passive Parry:** A character who is about to be the subject of an attack (the first action in this part of the turn) and has the choice between parrying passively or some other form of defense should declare which option she is using.

- **Fastest Character Takes First Action:** The character with the highest initiative acts (unless he is delaying the action). If the action is an attack, the player rolls the appropriate dice pool, usually Dexterity plus the Ability tied to the attack form (see p. 62). The difficulty is usually 6, modified by conditions such as range and passive parrying.

If this action is one of several taken without the benefit of some supernatural ability, subtract the total number of actions to be taken from the dice pool.

- **Target Defends:** In a resisted action, the target acts reflexively, and the player rolls the appropriate dice pool. His successes are subtracted from the attacker's successes to determine the net successes.

If the target is being attacked and has an unused action remaining this round, she may abort to a defensive action (dodging or parrying, as appropriate). The defending player first rolls Willpower reflexively to abort (difficulty 6). If successful, she rolls her defensive action (Dexterity + Dodge or the appropriate weapon Ability) and subtracts her successes from the attacker's.

Resolution

- **Action Takes Effect:** If the action is not an attack (and doesn't otherwise cause damage) and the acting player is left with net successes (or the action is automatic), the action takes effect immediately unless the action's specific description says otherwise.

- **Determine Damage:** Determine the attack's base damage and add any net attack successes beyond the first (unless the attack is with a thrown weapon, in which case the additional successes are ignored for damage). Roll that many dice against a difficulty of 6.

- **Roll Soak:** The defending character rolls soak (assuming there are any damage successes). Ordinary humans roll Stamina to soak bashing damage, but they can't soak lethal or aggravated damage. Any soak successes reduce the net damage successes.

- **Apply Attack Damage:** Apply any net damage successes as lost health levels to the defender. Wound penalties take effect immediately, and characters who reach Incapacitated collapse (or may even die). Characters who suffer more levels of damage than they have Stamina (for humans) or Stamina + 2 (for supernatural beings) are dazed.

Repetitions & Finals

- **Repeat for Subsequent Characters:** Repeat the steps under Action and Resolution for each character who still has a first action, starting with the next to act. Characters who took a defensive action have already taken their first action, so they cannot act again until their second action (if any).

- **Repeat for Subsequent Actions:** Repeat the steps under Declaration, Action and Resolution, and the previous point, for each additional action. Players keep their initiative scores but now declare their second actions, take them and resolve them. Those without second (or third, or fourth) actions cannot act — although they may suffer at the hands of those who can.

- **Extended and Delayed Effects:** Extended actions that end this turn, and any action that says it takes effect at the end of the turn, takes effect.

Soak

Everyone can endure a certain degree of physical punishment without sustaining serious injury. In game terms, doing so is called *soaking damage*, and each character has a soak dice pool equal to her Stamina. Normal humans can soak only those attacks that cause bashing damage,

(this reflects the body's natural resilience to such attacks) while a supernatural being is often tougher, and may thus be able to soak lethal attacks. Aggravated damage may be soaked only by supernatural means.

Soaking damage is reflexive, and it neither requires the expenditure of an action nor has its pool reduced by other dice pools (or wound penalties for that matter). The base difficulty of a soak attempt is 6, though weapon and/ or situational modifiers may modify it. Each soak success subtracts one from the total damage inflicted. Like damage rolls, soak rolls cannot be botched.

Example: *Anna is a faerie with Stamina 4. While in her fae mien, she is attacked with a broadsword, and the attacker scores three levels of lethal damage. Anna may soak this damage with four dice (Stamina 4). Anna's player rolls 8, 2, 7 and 5. The 8 and 7 are all equal to or greater than the difficulty of 6, and each reduces the damage inflicted by one level. Anna takes one health level of damage. Had she been human, however, she would not have been able to soak the lethal damage and would have lost three full health levels.*

Armor

Armor provides additional protection against injury, adding dice to the character's soak pool. Add the armor's rating to the character's base soak for the purposes of reducing damage. Some protective equipment, such as a shield, only adds to the soak pool in certain conditions. Light armor provides scant protection but has little impact on the character's movement. Heavier armor provides greater protection but also hinders the actions of all but the strongest or most skilled characters. Characters with either a Melee rating of 3 or higher, or those with a Strength that doubles what is required to use the armor suffer only half the indicated Dexterity penalties when wearing armor. Armor types, their ratings and other specifics are described on p. 75.

Armor can sustain only a certain amount of damage before being rendered useless. If the damage rolled in a single attack equals twice the armor's rating against that type of attack (excluding any bonus for helmets), the armor is destroyed.

Combat Complications

The basic system of initiative, attack and resolution can be used as is for most combat. A quick scuffle or tavern brawl really does not require any more detail. In a world as full of conflict as the Dark Medieval, however, you can expect to deal with combat on a greater scale than that. When dealing with more complex situations — such as skilled combatants at tournament, a pitched battle or dealing with archers — it can be useful to have other systems to fall back on to keep everyone honest. The following mechanics should get you through any combat that comes up.

Many of these complication appear in the form of *maneuvers*, which are the martial equivalent of the various non-combat systems that appear earlier in this chapter. Like those systems, these appear in point form with the appropriate Attribute + Ability combination in brackets (if any). Because of its moment-to-moment, life-and-death nature, combat sometimes needs a few extra details. Therefore, some of these maneuvers have other traits that appear after their plain-English description.

- **Accuracy:** This indicates how many dice, if any, are added to (or subtracted from) the dice pool for the maneuver. A "+2" adds two dice to the pool for that attack, while a "-1" subtracts one.
- **Difficulty:** The basic difficulty for combat actions is 6. This entry denotes any additions to or subtractions from that base for the maneuver. For example, a "+2" increases the difficulty by two (usually to 8 from a base of 6).
- **Damage:** This entry indicates the damage pool for the maneuver.

Basic Modifiers

These modifiers reflect situations and maneuvers that can occur in any type of combat.

- **Ambush:** Any combat in which one combatant is clearly caught unawares by another is an ambush. In such surprise conditions, the attacker (who set the ambush) automatically wins

initiative. The players of ambushed characters each make a Perception + Alertness roll against a difficulty of 8. The number of successes indicates the number of dice available for actions that first turn. Preparing an ambush generally requires a Wits + Stealth roll (difficulty 6) as well as proper cover.

- **Blind Fighting:** Darkness or fighting with impaired vision (blindness, dirt in eyes) imposes a +2 difficulty penalty on Brawl and Melee attacks. Ranged attacks cannot be made while one is “blinded.”

- **Blindsiding:** Attacks from the flank or rear are harder to defend against. Players whose characters attack targets from the flank gain an additional attack die — two dice if attacking from the rear. Shields provide no protection against rear attacks and only protect one flank (see p. 75). Storytellers may allow the target to make a Wits + Perception roll (difficulty 6 against flank attacks, 8 against rear attacks) to avoid being blindsided. To avoid giving the attacker this advantage, they must gain a number of successes equal to the attacker’s Stealth Ability (minimum of one success).

- **Immobilized Targets:** If a target is immobilized but still struggling, add two dice to any attacks made against them. If the target is completely immobilized — tied up, unconscious, etc. — attacks against them hit automatically. In such cases, add two dice to the damage pool.

- **Movement:** A character may move up to her walking distance (see “Movement,” p. 51) and still take an action in a turn. More complex movement, such as jumping, diving or balancing may be distinct actions or impose difficulty penalties on actions, depending on their complexity and the Storyteller’s discretion.

- **Multiple Opponents:** A character who finds herself fighting multiple opponents in close combat has to keep an eye on each one. Her player suffers cumulative +1 difficulty penalties to attack and defense rolls for each opponent after the first (to a maximum of +4).

- **Targeting:** A skilled warrior can target a specific location, accepting increased difficulty in favor of heightened damage or targeted effects. The difficulty (and any additional damage) is dependent on the size of the target and the Storyteller should consider additional effects, depending on the attack and the target.

Targeted Attacks

Target Size	Difficulty	Damage
Large (door)	0	0
Medium (limb, chest)	+1	0
Small (hand, head)	+2	+1
Tiny (eye, heart, lock)	+3	+2*

* *This damage bonus does not apply if the attack is an attempt to stake a vampire (see p. 70).*

Defensive Maneuvers

Soaking damage is all well and good, but it’s better yet to get out of harm’s way all together. Combatants who are under attack can do several things to escape damage, from ducking out of the way, to limiting an enemy’s options of attack with a shield, blocking her strikes blow for blow.

- **Aborting to Defense [Willpower]:** A character may abandon her declared action in favor of a defensive maneuver (e.g. block, dodge, parry) provided she has an action remaining this turn. To switch gears in this way, however, the player must make a reflexive Willpower roll (difficulty 6) or spend a Willpower point. If it succeeds, she may adjust her action as desired, provided the new action is defensive.

- **Blocking [Dexterity + Brawl]:** A block is an interception of an incoming attack with the defender’s bare hands (or another body-part). Only brawling attacks that cause bashing damage can be blocked, though the Storyteller may allow skilled combatants (Brawl 3+) to block bashing

melee attacks. Characters with wearing armor can block lethal attacks. Successes on a blocking attempt reduce the net success of the incoming attack.

• **Dodging [Dexterity + Dodge]:** A dodge is an effort to avoid an incoming attack altogether and is useful against any attack the defender can sense coming (Storyteller's discretion). Even missile weapons such as crossbow bolts — which move faster than the eye can see — can be dodged by diving for cover if the target sees the archer taking aim. The basic difficulty of the attempt is 6, which assumes a typical combat situation such as fighting a single armed opponent in close combat, or having access to cover from arrow fire not very far away. Use the following chart to modify that difficulty as appropriate. A player whose character is suffering multiple simultaneous attacks can divide successes from a single Dexterity + Dodge roll between the attackers, but the difficulty of the dodge attempt suffers a +1 penalty for every attacker past the first. Successes on a Dodge attempt reduce the net success of the incoming attack.

Dodge Modifiers	
Situation	Difficulty Modifier
<i>General Situations</i>	
Multiple attackers	+1 per extra attacker
<i>Close Combat</i>	
Attacker unarmed	-1
Limited mobility	+1
<i>Ranged Combat</i>	
Full cover within half a step	-4
Full cover within diving distance	-2
Partial cover only within three yards	+1
Flat and featureless terrain	+2

• **Parrying [Dexterity + Melee]:** A parry is a block using a melee weapon or shield. It is useful against bashing and lethal melee attacks, and it can even be used to block brawling attacks, although weapons (not shields) used for this purpose suffer a +1 difficulty penalty. The standard difficulty of a parry is 6, but shields and certain specialized weapons have lower difficulties that reflect their special design (see weapons charts, starting on p. 76). Successes on a parrying attempt reduce the net success of the incoming attack. It is not generally possible to parry missile attacks, though in some circumstances it may be possible at the Storyteller's discretion.

Passive Defense

In Europe, shields are the most common piece of equipment used for parrying, but a second weapon sometimes also serves, notably among the Moors. Shields are favored not only because they are effective at actively intercepting incoming attacks (using the parry maneuver), but also because their size allows them to reduce an attacker's effective options and even protect against unseen missile attacks. This "passive" use of a shield or other parrying weapon simply adds to the difficulty of the attacking character. It does not require the defender to take an action, and it applies to all attacks made against the character in that combat turn. Most items have differing scores for missile and melee defense. Shields or parrying devices may only be used to protect the character from attacks from the front or the side where the shield is held. They provide no protection from rear attacks.

It is possible to use passive parrying if one is armed with only a sword and no shield or other parrying item, but only if the character does not attack with that weapon this turn. Assuming the character has actions, however, she may use "active" parry maneuvers.

It is not possible to use active and passive defense at the same time. Defensive devices may be used either to parry attacks or passively defend against them, but not both. The defender can choose which sort of defense the weapon offers on a per-attack basis, however, so it still offers

some protection when her dice pool is exhausted. The player must choose before the dice are rolled for the attack.

Full Defense

Especially skilled combatants (Melee 3+ or Brawl 3+) can dedicate themselves entirely to defense for a turn. The character can do nothing but take a single defensive action over and over again (either a parry or a block), but she can intercept a stunning number of blows in this manner. The player makes her first Dexterity + Melee/ Brawl roll at no penalty and reduces her dice pool by one for every subsequent parry that turn. When she runs out of dice, she can no longer parry.

Example: *Sa'id has Dexterity 3 and Melee 4. Faced by an onslaught of attackers, he decides to spend the turn parrying. He gets to parry the first attack at his full dice pool of seven dice. On the second parry, he rolls six dice; on the third, five dice and so on. All told, Sa'id can parry an astonishing 7 attacks in the turn, although his dice pool is very small for the last few ones.*

Passive defense is not possible during a turn of full defense. It is possible to abort a full defense to another single defensive maneuver. The character is considered to have a single action available to do so, but it ends the full defense for that turn. The usual reason for doing so is if a character is suddenly confronted by an attack that his full defense cannot stop (such as an archer when parrying or a sword-strike when blocking).

Full defense dodging is not possible.

Shield Damage

Parrying devices are of limited effectiveness against strong opponents. A parrying weapon (e.g., dagger, sword) cannot be used if the attacker's Strength is twice that of the defender (or more). Shields may be used against any opponent, but can sustain only limited damage. Whenever an opponent rolls a 10 in a Melee roll, the shield takes a point of damage. For each point of damage to the shield, reduce any passive defensive bonus by one (to a minimum of 0) and reduce the number of dice used in an active parry attempt by one.

Hand-to-Hand Combat

Those who fight bare-handed have more than the basic punch and block at their disposal. Wrestling was a specialty of the Ancient Greeks, and grappling is a staple of most unarmed combat. The following maneuvers cover most standard attack types:

- **Bear Hug/Clinch [Strength + Brawl]:** The attacker attempts to wrap her arms around the target and crush the life from him. It requires the attacker to first get a grip on his target (Strength + Brawl) and inflicts Strength damage. In each subsequent round, the attacker and defender make a resisted Strength + Brawl roll. If the defender has more successes, the bear hug ends, otherwise the attacker may choose to continue or end the attack. A variant of the attack, the clinch, involves both characters attempting to crush the other. In a clinch, both characters sustain damage, and the one with the most successes decides if the attack continues or ends.

Difficulty: Normal

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Strength (bashing)

- **Bite [Dexterity + Brawl]:** Some supernatural creatures, such as werewolves and vampires, may use a bite attack against their opponents. To do so, they must first perform a successful bear hug, grapple or tackle. On the following turn, the creature may bite. Such attacks inflict aggravated damage or lethal damage, depending upon what supernatural abilities are in effect.

Difficulty: Normal

Accuracy: +1

Damage: Strength + 1 (lethal/aggravated)

• **Claw [Dexterity + Brawl]:** Some supernatural creatures, such as werewolves and some vampires or fae, may use a claw attack against their opponents. Such attacks inflict aggravated damage or lethal damage, depending upon what supernatural abilities are in effect.

Difficulty: Normal

Accuracy: +1

Damage: Strength + 1 (lethal/aggravated)

• **Grapple [Strength + Brawl]:** Rather than inflicting damage, a grapple is intended to immobilize an opponent. The initial grapple is a Strength + Brawl roll, which if successful, indicates that the attacker has gripped the target and immobilized her, at least until her next action. At that time, the combatants should make a resisted Strength + Brawl roll. If the attacker has more successes than the defender, the grapple remains (if she so desires). If the defender has more successes, she breaks free. In the event of a tie, the grapple continues.

Difficulty: Normal

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: None

• **Kick [Dexterity + Brawl]:** Kicks in the Dark Medieval are not the roundhouse blows or aerial spins but rather simple front-kicks (though a character may experience such attacks if she strays too far East). The base difficulty of a kick is one higher than normal, and the kick inflicts Strength + 1, though Storytellers may modify these values to better suit the circumstances. As a rule, however, the complexity (and thus difficulty) of a kick increases in parallel with its damage rating.

Difficulty: +1

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Strength + 1 (bashing)

• **Punch [Dexterity + Brawl]:** A simple attack with a fist. The base difficulty and damage values are for a standard punch. Characters wearing heavy gauntlets may inflict greater damage but may also find themselves at a disadvantage (+1 difficulty, +1 damage)

Difficulty: Normal

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Strength (bashing)

• **Sweep [Dexterity + Brawl/Melee]:** In a sweep, the attacker attempts to knock her opponent to the floor by sweeping her legs from under her. This may be carried out with the attacker's own legs, or he may use a staff or similar weapon. If the attacker's roll is successful, the target takes Strength bashing damage and must immediately make a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 8) or suffer the effects of a Knockdown (see "Damage Types", p. 80). If a weapon is used in lieu of the attacker's own limbs, the weapon's damage statistic is used instead of Strength.

Difficulty: +1

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Strength (bashing) or weapon damage; Knockdown

• **Tackle [Strength + Brawl]:** In a tackle, the attacker charges at her opponent and attempts to use momentum to bear her to the ground. The maneuver requires a Strength + Brawl roll (difficulty 7) and if successful, it inflicts Strength + 1 bashing damage. Furthermore, both combatants must make a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 7) or suffer a Knockdown (see "Damage Types", p. 80). Even if he is not knocked down, the target is unbalanced for the next turn and suffers +1 difficulty to any actions.

Difficulty: +1

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Strength +1 (bashing); Knockdown

Melee Maneuvers

The Dark Medieval is not a time of artful fencing and fine rapiers. That doesn't mean that armed combatants are limited to simple strikes and counterstrikes, however. The following maneuvers cover efforts to accomplish special feats in melee combat.

• **Disarm [Dexterity + Melee]:** With this maneuver, the attacker attempts to deprive his opponent of her principal weapon, via strength or finesse. To try to disarm the target, the attacker makes an attack roll (difficulty 7). If successful, damage is rolled normally but neither applied nor soaked. Instead, if the number of damage successes exceeds the opponent's strength, the opponent is disarmed. Failure on the attack roll or insufficient successes means the disarming effort fails (but may be considered a Weapon Bash, see p. 71), while a botch indicates the attacker is disarmed or is struck by the target's weapon.

Difficulty: +1
Accuracy: Normal
Damage: Special

• **Double Knife Strike [Dexterity + Melee]:** Close-in knife fighting doesn't rely on the massive blows and endurance of traditional melee. Instead, it favors speed, lightning reflexes and a succession of smaller blows. Characters using a double strike can divide their dice pools for the action between two or more attacks against the same target, each of which is resolved separately but occurs as part of the same action (hence happening before any other character has a chance to act). Each attack's dice pool receives one additional die but the difficulty of the attack increases by one. Determine damage normally for each attack. The character's Dexterity + 1 is the maximum number of dice that can be used for each attack, and the maximum number of attacks is equal to half her Melee skill (round fractions down).

Difficulty: +1
Accuracy: +1, divided dice pool
Damage: Normal

• **Paired Weapon Strike [Dexterity + Melee]:** Although it is not common until the Renaissance, fighting with two weapons is an old concept. A second weapon — usually a dagger — may be used as a parrying device (p. 67), for attack or a combination of the two. Such fighting techniques are most common among the Saracens (some of whom favor two swords) and the Northern barbarians (who may use two axes). Directing two weapons is not, however, an easy task, and it requires considerable skill and determination. A character must have a Dexterity + Melee pool of at least five dice before she can use two weapons at once for attacking. The weapons can be used in separate actions through the standard rules for multiple actions, or the attacker can use them together for greater damage. Such a paired strike is not easy, however, and it incurs a difficulty penalty.

Difficulty: +1
Accuracy: Normal
Damage: +1 (to the most damaging of the two weapons used)

• **Shield Bash [Strength + Melee]:** Though designed for defense, a warrior will occasionally use a shield as an ad-hoc weapon, bashing her opponent (often in the face) as an attack of opportunity — or desperation. Such an attack may be made only if the target has engaged in melee combat with the attacker in the current turn or the immediately preceding one. Such ad-hoc attacks are awkward (difficulty 8), and they inflict less damage than a regular attack, but the target of a successful shield bash attack suffers a -2 penalty to her initiative in the next turn.

Difficulty: +2
Accuracy: Normal
Damage: Strength -1 (bashing); Special

• **Stake [Dexterity + Melee]:** Staking a vampire (or human!) in the midst of combat is a tricky proposition. It requires strength and precision that is not often possible in the heat of battle. The

attacker must make a Dexterity + Melee roll (difficulty 9) and must inflict at least three health levels of damage to be successful.

Difficulty: +3

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Normal (a staked vampire becomes paralyzed, see **Dark Ages: Vampire**)

• **Weapon Bash [Dexterity + Melee]:** Disarming an opponent is often difficult, and in many cases, deflecting the enemy's weapon is sufficient to give an attacker a decisive advantage. The attacker may deliberately target the opponent's weapon (difficulty 8). If successful, damage is rolled normally but rather than being applied as damage against the target, each success increases the difficulty of the enemy's next attack by one (to a maximum of 10).

Difficulty: +2

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Special

Mounted Combat

Cavalry plays an important role in medieval warfare, though its exact application varies widely. The knights of Western and Northern Europe favor heavy mounts and armor, while the Saracens of the Levant prefer lighter armor and greater agility. In most cases, ownership of a horse marks the warrior as a member of the elite, both a sign of his status and a weapon of war. In Europe, the concept of chivalry is inextricably linked with the nobility and horsemanship. Indeed, the very word stems from the French word for horse, *cheval*.

Individual horses are not unthinking automatons or mindless transports for the characters, but rather living creatures with their own quirks and traits. Some are placid with a longing for turnips, while others are aggressive with a tendency to bite anyone who approaches them (including, in most cases, the rider). When storytelling, keep this in mind and give each horse its own personality.

Traits for various types of mounts appear in the Appendix.

Controlling a Steed

Controlling a horse in combat is difficult and requires great skill. If the character's Ride Skill is equal to or greater than the mount's control rating, no roll or action is required (though injury to the mount may prompt one). Otherwise, the rider's player must roll Wits + Ride to maintain control of the steed in combat. The difficulty is the control rating + 2, and maintaining control requires the character to take multiple actions in order to accomplish much on the battlefield.

Combat Effects

The height advantage of the mounted warrior can often be decisive on the battlefield. Foot soldiers attacking a mounted target suffer a +3 difficulty to all Melee or Brawl attacks unless they are using a long weapon such as a spear. Missile attacks against mounted targets suffer no penalty unless the target is moving at speed. Mounted characters may also use a variety of special maneuvers that take advantage of their height and power (see p. 72). There are some limitations, however; the most noticeable of which is that an effective knight or other mounted warrior must be both a skilled fighter and horseman. Therefore, the major drawback to mounted combat is that any combat Ability used on horseback is limited to that character's Ride Ability.

Example: *A knight attempting to use a sword from horseback has Dexterity 3, Melee 4 and Ride 1. His Dexterity contributes the full three dice to the player's attack pool, but only one die is added for the Ability since the character has a Ride skill of only 1. As such, the dice pool is only four while on horseback, but seven while afoot. Time to improve that Ride ability!*

Characters who suffer damage while mounted should make a Stamina + Ride roll. The difficulty of the roll is at the Storyteller's discretion, but a suggestion is the number of successes the attacker made *before* any soaking is applied. Failure indicates that the mounted character is

thrown from her horse and suffers two to four dice of bashing damage. A botch indicates that the damage is lethal. Thrown characters also run the risk of being trampled (see p. 72).

Horse Archery

Horse archery, the use of a bow from a stationary or mobile mount, is common practice in the lands of the East, notably those of the Saracens and the horse tribes beyond. Accuracy while moving is very difficult, and even the slightest error in timing results in arrows missing the target by yards. Unless the character has the Archery specialty "Mounted," his shots are at +2 difficulty from a horse moving at a walk and at +4 difficulty from a horse moving at a trot or faster.

Lances

The lance is the principal weapon of both European and Saracen cavalry. In Europe, the main use of the lance is to charge down the opponent, though the Saracens also use the lance as a thrusting weapon. The lance permits two types of attacks, charge and thrust.

A character must have a minimum Ride and Melee of 3 each to be able to use a lance effectively from horseback. Otherwise, he is certain to damage himself on a successful attack — the character takes as many dice of bashing damage as he inflicted dice of lethal damage with his lance. This may be soaked as normal. A botch using a lance is generally a terrible thing. The character takes four dice of lethal damage as the lance shatters and narrowly misses impaling him. In both cases, the player should make a Stamina + Ride roll to determine if the character is thrown from his horse.

Use of a lance is punishing business. Characters who have Stamina 1 or who are otherwise below average size cannot use a regular or compound lance. They may use a light lance.

Mounted Maneuvers

- **Lance Charge [Dexterity + Melee]:** The charge is the most common form of lance attack, used by both European and Islamic forces. To make the attack, the player should make a Dexterity + Melee roll against the difficulty of the weapon as per normal combat. The charge does the damage listed with the appropriate lance (see weapons charts, starting on p. 76). Those successfully attacked by a lance charge must make a Strength + Athletics roll or be knocked down. Anyone unhorsed by such an attack suffers two to four additional dice of bashing damage from the fall. Anyone knocked over or unhorsed by a lance charge suffers a +2 difficulty penalty to all actions during the next turn. In theory, vampires might be staked by such attacks, but the difficulty of such a maneuver is two higher than a normal attack. Furthermore, the maneuver requires at least five successes, and it must cause at least three health levels of damage.

- **Lance Thrust [Dexterity + Melee]:** Light and regular lances may also be used while the horse is stationary or moving slowly. Such attacks are used exclusively by the Saracens, and thrusting lance attacks inflict damage dice equal to the rider's Strength. Any botch result requires the rider's player to make a Dexterity + Ride roll against a difficulty of 6 or else fall from the saddle.

- **Mounted Charge [Dexterity + Melee]:** While lance charges are the most glorious mounted attacks, they are not the only time a mounted warrior benefits from his horse's speed and agility. Any warrior attacking from horseback in the same turn in which his mount moves at least half its movement rate adds two dice to her damage pool. Lance charges do not gain this bonus, which is already factored into their damage rating.

- **Trampling [Manipulation + Ride]:** In addition to using them as mounts, some warriors train their horses to be an active part of their arsenal, biting, kicking and trampling opponents on foot. To use this attack, the rider's player makes a Manipulation + Ride roll against a target number of 6. Failure indicates that the target avoids the attack, while a botch leaves both rider and mount open to counter attack (reduce the difficulty of all Melee or Brawl attacks against the rider or mount by four). The target may dodge such an attack if she sees it coming, but may not parry or gain the benefit of defensive equipment such as shields. A prone target may still dodge, but the rider's difficulty number decreases by three. The amount of damage inflicted by the trample depends on the type of horse and is considered bashing damage.

Ranged Attacks

Not all combat takes place when the combatants are within arms reach. Though disdained by many nobles, knives, spears and bows are a staple of medieval armies, providing a means of projecting a unit's reach. The main limiting factor on the use of missile weapons is the need to reload. The base difficulty of all missile attacks is 6, though they are subject to range combat modifiers (see chart). The dice pool to hit is Dexterity + Archery. Most missile weapons take one action to fire and another (or more) to reload. In most cases, this means that weapons cannot fire every round, but exceptionally fast characters may fire and reload in the same turn (see the "Quick Reload" maneuver, p. 74).

Situation	Diff. Modifier	Notes
Target at half-range	-1	thrown weapons only
Target at range	0	
Target at 2x range	+2	
Windy	+1	may not fire beyond range
Dark/Foggy	+2	halve range
Running target	+1	
Mounted target	+2 (trot)/+3 (gallop)	
Ad hoc missile	+2	thrown weapon only
Attacker on horseback	+2/+4	see "Mounted Combat," p. 71

Thrown Weapons

A number of weapons can be thrown, including knives, hatchets, spears and rocks. Like missile weapons, the base difficulty for thrown weapons is 6 (modified by the ranged attacks table) but the dice pool used is Dexterity + Athletics. Unlike regular combat, additional successes on the attack roll do *not* increase the damage. Damage and other game statistics for common thrown weapons appear in the weapons charts, starting on p. 76.

Other weapons (such as swords) may be turned into ad hoc missiles, but they are ill suited to such forms of attack. The basic range of such attacks is three yards per point of the thrower's Strength. These weapons also suffer a flat +2 difficulty penalty as indicated on the "Ranged Combat Modifiers" table. Furthermore, at least two successes are needed for the blade (rather than the hilt or haft) to strike the target and inflict lethal damage. If the attack achieves a single success, any damage inflicted is bashing. Non-weapon items (such as chairs or plates) may also be used as ad hoc missiles, but they only inflict bashing damage. The Storyteller should determine the number of damage dice for the item (and its potential range) depending on its size and nature. For example, a plate can be thrown much further than a chair but is much less likely to inflict damage.

Ranged Maneuvers

- **Aim:** By carefully aiming before loosing her shot, an archer can greatly increase her chances of hitting the target. For every full turn spent aiming, the archer adds a die to her attack pool. The maximum number of dice that can be added in this way equals the character's Perception. The character must have Archery 2 or greater to use this maneuver, and she must have a clear line of sight to the target in each turn she is aiming. If the attacker does anything but aim in this time, the benefits of the aiming are lost immediately. The target of the aim must also be stationary or moving no faster than walking speed.
- **Missile Staking [Dexterity + Archery]:** Although it is very difficult, it is possible to stake a vampire with a carefully placed arrow or crossbow bolt. To attempt a long-range staking, the player must inform the Storyteller and make her attack roll at three levels of difficulty higher than normal (to a maximum of 10). To stake the target vampire, the attack must achieve at least five successes and inflict three levels of damage. At the Storyteller's discretion, a vampire may be

staked accidentally by missile fire if at least one attack die is a natural 10 and the other conditions are met (successes vis-à-vis the staking are determined against the attack difficulty + 3).

Difficulty: +3

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Normal (a staked vampire becomes paralyzed, see **Dark Ages: Vampire**)

• **Quick Reload [Dexterity + Archery]:** Reloading a bow usually takes one turn, but a skilled archer may hasten the process, allowing her to fire every turn. To do so, she must make a Dexterity + Archery roll (difficulty 7) and gain at least two successes. Crossbows cannot be reloaded quickly in this manner. A quick reload does count as an action, so to fire every turn, a character must take multiple actions.

• **Sidearm Throw [Dexterity + Athletics]:** Over-arm is the most common technique for using thrown weapons, simple and accurate, but is not the most deadly. Sidearm throws use more large muscle groups and thus results in a longer, harder throw. The attacker must have sufficient space to swing her weapon though (usually several arm's lengths), and accuracy of the throw is much reduced. Standard throwing rules apply but the difficulty of the attack is increased to 8 *and* the thrower's effective Dexterity decreases by one. Even still, though, her effective Strength increases by one when determining damage dice.

Difficulty: +2

Accuracy: -1

Damage: Normal +1

Medieval Weaponry and Armor

The final "complication" to combat is the specific weapons and armor of the combatants. A wide range of arms and armor are used in the Middle Ages. The following are the most common types, but this list is far from exhaustive. Basic descriptions of these types appear here, but for simplicity of play and presentation, weapons and armor are grouped into general categories that mask much of the variety a character might experience in travels from region to region.

The weapons and armor charts (starting on p. 76) provide the game information for these arms. Additional rules also appear there for some special weapons such as poleaxes and morning stars.

Melee Weapons

The recourse of knights and peasant levies, melee weapons are used in man-to-man combat. They range from the simplest club to the most expertly crafted sword. Most need no introduction, but some of the more esoteric include:

- **Bastard Sword:** A long (roughly three-foot) blade, intended for one- or two-handed use.
- **Great Sword:** With a blade four to six feet long, these two-handed weapons are lethal but unwieldy. They cannot be used from horseback. Not common at this period.
- **Morning Star:** Similar to a mace but with the head connected by the haft by a chain, allowing extra damage but also increased danger to the wielder. (On a botch, the weapon either becomes entangled or strikes the wielder.)

Ranged Weapons

In addition to thrown knives, spears and rocks, the medieval soldiery has access to more sophisticated ranged weapons. Archery is also useful for hunting.

- **Bow, Short:** A small weapon, three to four feet long, intended for hunting. It may be used from horseback (most frequently by Saracen cavalry).
- **Bow, Long:** A powerful, six-foot-long weapon intended for war. It may not be used from horseback.

Cavalry Weapons

Cavalry weapons are specialized arms that take advantage of the strengths of a horseback warrior or compensate for his weaknesses.

- **Lance:** A long, heavy spear intended for use from horseback. The most common cavalry weapon, used to charge opposing infantry or cavalry.
- **Lance, Compound:** A long, powerful lance formed by joining two lances together. Primarily a Saracen weapon it takes great strength to use but causes grievous injury when used well. (Minimum Strength of 4 to use)
- **Lance, Light:** Another Saracen weapon, this is a light and usually hollow lance. It is easier to handle, but it inflicts less damage than its more solid cousins. It is also likely to break when someone uses it.
- **Saber:** A one-handed sword, roughly three feet long, intended for use from horseback.

Armor

The Dark Medieval encompasses a vast range of permutations of armor and protective equipment, which have been simplified into four categories for the purposes of **Dark Ages**. Most common is light armor, worn by city guards and the like, while nobles and the elite soldiery utilize ever-more-sophisticated combinations. The types of damage mentioned are described on p. 80.

- **Light Armor:** Light armor comprises pieces of leather, sometimes hardened by boiling (called *cuir bouilli*), at other times quilted. The padding worn under heavier armor counts as light armor when worn alone. Light armor is resistant to blunt attacks (soak difficulty 6 for bashing and smashing) but provides less protection to hacking and piercing attacks (soak difficulty 7).
- **Composite Armor:** This slightly heavier armor comprises leather reinforced with metal rings and/ or studs, or perhaps light chain mail. Composite armor is resistant to hacking attacks (soak difficulty 6 for bashing and hacking) but still provides lethal protection against smashing and piercing attacks (soak difficulty 7).
- **Heavy Armor:** Heavy armor comprises metal, usually ring or chain mail, over a layer of quilted padding. This is the standard chain hauberk. It provides good protection against bashing and hacking attacks (soak difficulty 5) but remains vulnerable to smashing and piercing attacks (soak difficulty 6).
- **Knight's Armor:** Like heavy armor, knight's armor comprises chain mail worn over leather padding, complemented by bulky gauntlets and leg-guards. It is usually worn with a heavy metal helmet but is *not* the traditional "plate-mail" (which does not come along for several centuries only to be quickly rendered obsolete by the invention of gunpowder). Its soak difficulty is 5 vs. bashing, hacking and smashing and 6 against piercing.
- **Light Helm:** A metal helmet protecting the wearer's head and neck from attack. May include a nose-guard but otherwise the face is open. Usually worn with heavy armor.
- **Heavy Helm:** A full helm protecting the head, neck and face of the wearer. Vision is through a narrow slit or eyeholes. Usually worn with knight's armor.

Shields

Made from wood, leather and metal, shields provide added protection against the rigors of combat. Unlike armor, which warriors wear at most times, shields are generally used only in times of unrest. They cannot be concealed, though most have a leather strap that allows them to be slung on the wearer's back.

There are several types of shield, including:

- **Small Shield:** Usually round and made of wood, either painted or covered with a leather skin, small shields cover only a small part of the body (thus provide no significant passive defense), but they are ideal for parrying.
- **Footman's Shield:** The larger bulk of the footman's shield protects more of the wielder's body but at the cost of maneuverability and ease of parrying.
- **Cavalry Shield:** Long and thin, usually kite shaped, cavalry shields are designed for use on horseback, in which case it is roughly as effective as a footman's shield is on the ground.

Damage and Armor

Weapons fall into four types — bashing, smashing, hacking and piercing — depending on the form of damage they inflict. Bashing damage is described above. Smashing, hacking and piercing damage are all types of lethal damage, also described above. The only difference is how armor interacts with that type of damage.

Bashing (B) damage is damage that can be swiftly healed like bruises, sprains, and minor cuts. Fists and improvised weapons such as chairs and light clubs inflict bashing damage. Smashing (LS) damage is caused by heavier blunt weapons such as maces, cudgels, hammers and staffs. The weapons that inflict smashing damage are often heavy and slow. Rigid metal armor such as coats of plates and plate armor is most effective at resisting it.

Hacking (LH) damage involves chopping edges like swords and axes. The damage is partly smashing injuries to skin and bones, and partly sharp edges designed to cut flesh. This is the most common type of lethal damage. Rigid and soft metal armor such as chain mail, coats of plates and plate armor are the best defense against hacking damage. Piercing (LP) damage results when a great deal of force is applied over a small point or surface such as an arrow, crossbow bolt, spear or atypical kinds of polearms. It is equally effective against all armor types.

Melee Weapons				
Weapon	Damage	Conceal	Min. Str.	Notes
<i>Axes</i>				
Hatchet (melee)	Strength +1LH	C	2	
Hand Ax	Strength +2L	L	3	
Battle-Ax	Strength +5L	N	3	2 Hand
<i>Blunt weapons</i>				
Club	Strength +1B	C	1	
Cudgel	Strength +1LS	C	1	
Mace	Strength+2L	L	1	
Morning Star	Strength +3LS	L	1	Difficulty +1; may strike user on botch
Warhammer	Strength +5LS	N	3	Difficulty +1; 2 Hand
<i>Blades</i>				
Knife	Strength +1LP	P	1	
Dagger	Strength +1LP	C	1	Difficulty -1
Saber	Strength +2LH	L	3	
Broadsword	Strength +3LH	N	2	
Bastard Sword	Strength +4LH	N	4 (3 one-handed)	May be used one or two-handed
Great Sword	Strength +5LH	N	4	Difficulty +1; 2 Hand

Melee Weapons (cont'd)					
Weapon	Damage	Conceal	Min. Str.	Notes	
<i>Long Weapons (no penalty against mounted targets)</i>					
Javelin	Strength LP	N	2		
Pitchfork	Strength +2LP	N	1	2 Hand	
Spear (one-handed)	Strength +3LP	N	2	Difficulty +1	
Spear (two-handed)	Strength +3LP	N	1	2 Hand	
Staff	Strength +2B	N	1		
Pole-ax	Strength + 5LH/+5LS*	N	3	Difficulty +1; 2 Hand	
Lance, light	6 or Strength L	N	2	Fragile; see rules p. 72	
Lance	8 or Strength L	N	3	see rules p. 72	
Lance, compound	9 or Strength L	N	4	see rules p. 72	

* Depending on which head is used, this weapon can be either hacking or slashing.

Ranged Weapons					
Weapon	Damage	Range	Conceal	Min. Str.	Notes
<i>Missile Weapons</i>					
Bow, Long	6 LP	120 yards	N	3	1 turn to reload
Bow, Short	4 LP	60 yards	L	2	1 turn to reload
Crossbow, Light	4 LP	120 yards	L	2	2 turns to reload
Crossbow	6 LP	100 yards	N	2	3 turns to reload
Crossbow, Heavy	7 LP	150 yards	N	4	4 turns to reload
Sling	3 B	50 yards	C	2	1 turn to reload
Staff-sling	4B	75 yards	N	2	1 turn to reload
<i>Thrown Weapons</i>					
Knife	Strength LP	15 yards	C	2	+1 difficulty
Hatchet	Strength +1 LH	20 yards	C	2	+1 difficulty
Javelin	Strength+2 LP	50 yards	N	2	
Spear	Strength+1 LP	40 yards	N	2	
Rock	Strength B	40 yards	P	2	

Armor and Helms					
Armor Type	Soak	Penalty	Min Str.	Conceal	Notes
Light Armor	+1B/+2L	-	1	L	helm required to protect head
Composite Armor	+2B/+3L	-1 Dex	1	L	helm required to protect head
Heavy Armor	+3B/+4L	-1 Dex	3	N	helm required to protect head
Knight's Armor	+4B/+4L	-2 Dex	3	N	helm required to protect head
Light Helm	+2B/+3L	-1 Per	2	N	protects head only; soak bonuses not cumulative with armor
Full Helm	+3B/+4L	-2 Per	2	N	protects head only; soak bonuses not cumulative with armor

Shields and Parrying Weapons

Item	Parry Diff.	vs. Melee	vs. Missile	Notes
Small Shield	4	+0	+0	
Footman's Shield	6	+1	+1	May not be used on horseback
Cavalry shield	6	+1	+1	+2 difficulty when used by footmen
Dagger	5	+0	+0	
Sword	6	+1	+0	

Weapon and Armor Traits

The following traits and notes are used in the adjacent weapon and armor charts:

Damage: The number of dice used to determine damage and its type: B = bashing, LS = lethal slashing, LH = lethal hacking, LP = lethal piercing, A = aggravated.

Conceal: A rough estimate of how easily the weapon or piece of armor can be concealed in clothing. P = may be concealed in a pouch; C = in loose clothing (e.g., a tunic); L = in a long cloak; N = may not be concealed.

Min. Str.: The minimum Strength required to use the weapon or armor.

Range: For ranged weapons, the distance (in yards) to which the weapon can be used without penalty. In most conditions, the weapon can be fired at a target at up to twice this distance at a +2 difficulty penalty.

Soak: For armor, the number of dice added to the wearer's soak dice pool when attacked. Most armors have different ratings for soaking bashing (B) and lethal (L) attacks.

Penalties: For armor, the reduction in the character's effective Dexterity (Dex) or Perception (Per) Attribute caused by wearing the armor.

Parry Diff.: For shields and other parrying weapons, the difficulty of Dexterity + Melee rolls to attempt to parry incoming attacks with the item.

vs. Melee: For shields and other parrying weapons, the value added to the difficulty of Melee or Brawl attacks against the character when using passive defense with the item.

vs. Missile: For shields and other parrying weapons, the value added to the difficulty of Melee or Brawl attacks against the character when using passive defense with the item.

2 Hand: The weapon must be used two-handed.

Fragile: The weapon is prone to breaking. After an attack with it (successful or not) the player rolls a die: on a result of 5 or higher, the weapon breaks and is useless.

Health and Injury

Each character has a Health trait, comprising seven levels that reflect increasingly severe injuries. The ease and permanence of reductions to Health depend on the type of damage inflicted and the nature of the character. Some supernatural beings are more resilient to injury than humans, but they may still be hurt, incapacitated or even destroyed.

The Health Chart

Each character sheet contains a Health chart to allow damage to the individual to be tracked and its effects on their actions assessed. Each box after the first has an associated dice-pool penalty that increases with the severity of the wounds. As the character's condition worsens, it becomes harder to carry out actions. Each point of damage inflicted on the character (after soaking) reduces his health levels by one. The first point of damage, Bruised, has little effect on the

character's actions, but penalties mount until the seventh point, Incapacitated, at which point the character is unable to carry out any actions.

Damage is marked off on the Health chart in different manners depending the nature of the wound, since some types of injury are easier and quicker to heal than others. (See "Applying Damage", p. 79). The lowest checked box denotes the character's current health level. The number to the left of the box indicates the current dice-pool penalty. This penalty is assessed on all dice pools save those associated with reflexive actions (such as soak) as long as the wound remains. Injury also impedes a character's movement as noted on the accompanying chart. Characters with no checked boxes are in full health and suffer no penalties. Those with all boxes checked are Incapacitated — either unconscious or otherwise unable to act.

Level	Dice-Pool Penalty	Effects
Bruised	0	The character is injured, but the wounds have yet to interfere with his actions.
Hurt	-1	Injuries begin to hamper the character's ability to act.
Injured	-1	In addition to increasing difficulty in routine actions, the character is limited to half his maximum running speed.
Wounded	-2	The character is really beginning to feel the effects of his wounds. Actions are more difficult, and he is limited to walking speed.
Mauled	-2	Movement is now very difficult because of the injuries and the character may hobble no faster than three yards per turn.
Crippled	-5	Any action is a major effort, and movement is limited to a crawl (one yard per turn)
Incapacitated		- The character is incapable of carrying out any movement or action and may be unconscious. Regardless, she is unable to carry out any actions. If an incapacitated character sustains further injury, she dies.

Applying Damage

The three types of damage (bashing, lethal and aggravated) are cumulative and the gravest checked box on a character's health chart indicates the character's status and the penalties she suffers. Each damage type is indicated on the same chart, but in a slightly different way. Bashing damage is marked with a slash (/), lethal damage with an X, and aggravated damage with a large asterisk (*). This is done because the different wound types heal at different rates. For the same reason, aggravated wounds are always recorded "highest" (that is with the lowest wound penalty) on the chart, followed by lethal wounds and finally with bashing wounds. This is done by "moving down" bashing and lethal wounds as appropriate. This allows the gravest health levels to be healed first.

Example: *Anna faces off against an angry woodsman who has had enough of her talking. Karsh, the woodsman, first pushes Anna away, slamming her into a nearby tree. This causes two levels of bashing damage, so Anna's player marks off the Bruised and Hurt levels with slashes, like so:*

Health		
Bruised		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated		<input type="checkbox"/>

Anna needs to hold the woodsman's attention so her friends can escape, however, so Karsh picks up his large ax and lays into her. The blow does one level of lethal damage, so Anna's player adds a bar to the Bruised box on his chart (turning the slash into an X) and puts a slash through the Injured box, hence moving the existing two levels of bashing damage down the chart, like so:

Health		
Bruised		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated		<input type="checkbox"/>

Finally, Karsh goes over the edge and reveals his supernatural nature. His hands become large, vicious claws, which he then uses to tear into Anna's flesh. The attack causes two levels of aggravated damage, so the player turns the marks in Bruised and Hurt to asterisks, the one in Injured to an X, and puts slashes in Wounded and Mauled (see below). Anna player now suffers a -2 dice penalty to all actions, and can only hobble a few yards per turn. Thankfully she was given a potion by an old woman who told her it had healing properties. She can only hope the woman wasn't mad...

Health		
Bruised		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated		<input type="checkbox"/>

Damage Types

Characters in **Dark Ages** can suffer injury from a broad range of sources. It may be bruising from punches and kicks, broken bones from a mace or slashes from a sword. A character's physical nature determines her susceptibility to injury and the degree to which she is affected.

Bashing Damage

Bashing damage is unlikely to kill, and it can be healed swiftly. It represents bruises, sprains and similar minor injuries, inflicted by falls, punches and the like. Characters use Stamina to soak bashing damage.

While Bashing damage rarely kills, it can weaken the character to a point where she is more susceptible to other forms of damage. Once the Health chart is full, additional levels of bashing damage cause existing bashing slashes to be replaced with lethal crosses, as bones are broken and internal organs rupture.

Lethal Damage

As the name suggests, lethal damage is more serious than bashing with the potential to kill or maim. Most bladed weapons inflict lethal damage, as do some blunt weapons if targeted appropriately (+2 difficulty). Characters without supernatural bonuses or abilities cannot soak lethal damage at all (save with armor). Any such character at Incapacitated who suffers a level of lethal damage dies.

Aggravated Damage

Aggravated sources of injury are largely elemental or supernatural in origin (e.g., fire, the teeth and claws of supernatural beings, magical weapons). There are only rare instances where human characters suffer aggravated damage, which cannot be healed or soaked save through supernatural means. (These are explained on a case-by-case basis as they occur.)

Healing

The following indicates the length of time required for a human character to heal her injuries. Each level must be healed individually, so someone who has reached Incapacitated through Bashing damage will require 12 hours to heal to the Crippled level, and a further six hours to recover to Mauled.

Bashing Damage

Bashing damage is largely superficial, and it will heal without treatment. Healing bashing damage does not require the player to make a roll. The main factor in such healing is time, though the application of poultices and compresses can alleviate their effects and speed healing. (For details on doing so, see page 60.)

Bashing Recovery Times

Health Level	Recovery Time
Bruised to Wounded	One hour/level
Mauled	Three hours
Crippled	Six hours
Incapacitated	Twelve hours

Lethal Damage

Lethal damage is just that, and it is often fatal. Even minor wounds may become infected and thus become life-threatening, while scars are commonplace.

Characters with levels of lethal damage below Hurt who do not receive medical aid, automatically suffer an additional level of lethal damage per day, reflecting blood loss and infection. After initial medical attention, the ministrations of a healer are not required, provided the character is at Mauled or better. Characters at Crippled or Incapacitated require constant medical care and are usually delirious or unconscious.

Whenever a character seeks to heal a lethal health level, the player should roll a number of dice equal to her Stamina score. The difficulty of this roll is 2 + the number of Health chart boxes

crossed (e.g., a character whose Wounded level is the lowest box crossed has four boxes crossed, so the difficulty is 6). On one or more successes, that level is healed. If no successes occur, the character's situation remains unchanged. On a botch result, the character suffers a new lethal wound and might (if already at Incapacitated) die as a result. The presence of a trained healer may reduce this difficulty, but only in Arabic lands is medicine sufficiently advanced to have an appreciable effect. For more on the effects of healers, see p. 60.

A human character at the Incapacitated level who takes an additional wound (bashing or lethal) dies immediately.

Lethal Recovery Times

Health Level	Recovery Time
Bruised	One day
Hurt	Three days
Injured	One week
Wounded	One month
Mauled	Three months
Crippled	Four months
Incapacitated	Five months

Other Sources of Injury

Though violent physical injury is prevalent in the Dark Medieval, there are many other threats to the average person's life that are less overt and often more deadly.

Disease

Disease is a major factor of medieval life. There are a wide variety of diseases present in the Dark Medieval, of which the most common are:

- **Dysentery (The Flux):** Caused by contaminated water and poor hygiene, dysentery causes gastrointestinal problems in the victim, including bleeding, bowel pains, fever and dehydration.
- **Ergotism:** A result of fungal poisoning (ergot, growing on rye, and thus possibly used in bread), ergotism causes agonizing muscle pains, convulsions, hallucinations and often loss of limbs as a result of gangrene.
- **Idropesie (Dropsy):** Dropsy is the result of a weak heart that is unable to pump blood efficiently.
- **Leprosy:** Leprosy is one of the most significant diseases of the Dark Medieval. It is a degeneration of the nerves, which reduces feeling and exposes the victim to a host of secondary infections that can harm the skin and damage bones, leading to disfigurement and mutilation. It is rarely fatal, but those infected with the disease are cast out of normal society, forced to wear distinct clothing and carry a bell to warn others.
- **Plague:** Various plagues (bubonic, pneumonic and septicemic) permeate the Dark Medieval, becoming mass epidemics in the mid 14th century, devastating the population of Europe. The mortality rate of plague is 50-80 percent, with the period of illness characterized by fever and delirium.
- **Syphilis:** Spread by sexual intercourse (or the transmission of blood), syphilis manifests initially as a fever and minor aches and pains. Eventually the signs become apparent in the form of ulcers and bad skin, though the worst damage is internal, damaging bones, muscles and the brain.
- **Tuberculosis:** The greatest killer of the Dark Medieval, this disease can affect any part of the body, though the lungs are the most commonly affected organs. The disease causes a fever and sweating, and also leads to emaciation and tissue destruction. The symptoms lead to the alternative name for the disease: consumption.

Falling

For every 10 feet a character falls, she suffers one level of bashing damage that may be soaked normally with Stamina. This damage may not exceed 10 levels, but if it reaches that level, it is treated as lethal rather than bashing, and the soak value of armor is halved (round down). Likewise, if the surface on which the character lands has sharp edges (such as spikes) the Storyteller may opt to inflict some or all of this damage as lethal rather than bashing.

Drowning or Suffocation

Characters are vulnerable to drowning if they botch a swimming roll, cannot swim or are weighed down. The length of time a character can survive without air depends on her Stamina. After this period has elapsed, she loses one health level in bashing damage per turn. Once her health chart reaches Incapacitated, the character has drowned, and she dies after a number of minutes equal to her Stamina rating.

Breath Duration	
Stamina	Holding Breath
•	30 seconds
••	One minute
•••	Two minutes
••••	Four minutes
•••••	Eight minutes
••••• •	15 minutes*
••••• ••	20 minutes*
••••• •••	30 minutes*

** Only possible if the character has some means of boosting her Stamina to superhuman levels, beyond the human limit of five dots.*

Fire

Fire is ever present in the Dark Medieval, most often as cooking fires, braziers and torches. It causes aggravated damage and ignores all armor protection. Indeed, metal armor exacerbates the situation by retaining heat. A character whose clothes are on fire, or who is trapped in a fire, continues to take damage until she escapes or extinguishes the flames.

The external signs of fire injury can be truly horrific. For every two health levels of damage caused by fire, reduce the character's Appearance by one permanently.

Fire Effects	
Aggravated Wounds/Turn	Fire Type
1	Torch (limb burned)
2	Bonfire (half the body exposed)
3	Inferno (all body exposed)

Drugs and Poisons

A variety of substances and herbs are used to heal, harm or alter perceptions. Rather than detailing the effect of every drug and poison used during the Dark Medieval, the following are the most common and typical effects.

• **Alcohol:** A character drinking alcohol suffers the effects of being drunk. For every two drinks consumed, reduce Dexterity and Intelligence pools by one die. This effect dissipates at the rate of one die per hour.

- **Bloodroot (Sanguinaria):** Consuming the rare and deadly bloodroot causes three health levels of aggravated damage, while using it as a contact poison (such as on a blade) inflicts two health levels of aggravated damage in addition to any injury caused by the weapon.
- **Food Poisoning (Salmonella):** Characters who consume food contaminated with salmonella become nauseated and suffer a level of bashing damage. The effects of food poisoning wear off after about a day.
- **Hashish:** In common use in the Middle East, hashish has a calming effect, but it also affects the imbibers' attentiveness. A character under the effects of hashish reduces any dice pool involving Perception by one. These effects last for approximately one hour.
- **Hallucinogens:** Hallucinogenic drugs such as cowbane, henbane and nightshade (belladonna) are used as both painkillers and poisons in the Dark Medieval. A character imbibing small quantities of such herbs reduces all dice pools between one and three (depending on the amount consumed by the victim) because of impaired concentration. The effects of hallucinogens last for a number of hours equal to 8 - Stamina.
- **Painkillers:** As with hallucinogens, herbs such as hemlock, mandrake and monkshood are used as both painkillers and poisons. In small doses, they reduce the disabling effects of injury, reducing by one the dice pool penalty inflicted by wounds. The effects last for a number of hours equal to 10 - Stamina.
- **Other Poisons:** Larger doses of hallucinogens or painkillers, or extracts such as arsenic, strychnine or cyanide, can prove fatal. Storytellers may use their discretion when determining system-specific effects for smaller doses.

Derangements

A character's mental state is as important as her physical health, and it is much less controllable in many cases. Some characters have these quirks at the start of play. Others accumulate them during game play at the Storyteller's discretion, usually after periods of intense stress, terror or anxiety.

Derangements are not intended to straightjacket a character, although they unquestionably create challenges for the player and her companions to solve. They also provide opportunities for dramatic roleplaying and storytelling. Madness is a very real part of the Dark Medieval, and those who suffer from it are variously seen as cursed or blessed. In many cases, they respond to outside stimuli in a manner that makes perfect sense to them but is odd to outsiders who do not comprehend their frame of reference. Derangements should not be arbitrary in their effect, but linked to their own internally consistent set of rules. Most often these rules are linked to the origins of the character's derangement and should be agreed upon by the player and Storyteller. For example, a fear of flames might come from a character being tortured with fire by an inquisitor. Some characters have such derangements at the start of play. Others accumulate them during game play at the Storyteller's discretion, usually after periods of intense stress, terror or anxiety.

The system effects of derangements vary from case to case. They usually result from having experienced a truly traumatic event. When appropriate, the Storyteller can ask a deranged character's player to roll Willpower to resist a derangement overcoming the character when presented with a relevant stimulus. The difficulty ranges from 5 to 8 depending on the power of the stimulus.

- **Amnesia:** Amnesiac characters blot out some part of their past, perhaps a horrific incident or even a whole period in their lives. The reasons for this memory loss are almost always stress-related, though physical injury may cause a similar effect. Amnesia usually affects just memory, but in some cases, a character may forget some Abilities and be unable to use them, or be surprised by his ability to do certain things.

- **Catatonia:** A character suffering from this derangement may withdraw from the world entirely at times of stress, remaining largely immobile and unresponsive. Due to the major limiting factors on their actions, catatonia is not recommended as a player derangement.
- **Fantasy:** Some characters cannot accept the real world, so they transpose themselves into an illusory world instead. The scope and degree of this fantasy varies considerably. A character may hold conversations with characters who aren't there, or hear "voices from the gods" commanding him to carry out a wide range of acts. He may also interact with people and institutions of the Dark Medieval in an almost normal manner but with their perception of events skewed by their fantasy. For example, a character may regard himself as Lancelot from the Arthurian legends, on a quest to slay a vile demon or rescue a fair princess. Such fantasies manifest as a quirky outlook, but they are rarely dangerous. They can, however, adversely affect the character's reaction to others, perhaps making them more likely to carry out a mad assault ("The grail lies this way!")
- **Hysteria:** Hysterical characters are unable to control their emotions, and they suffer from severe mood swings.
- **Lunacy:** This madness comes and goes, linked to the cycle of the moon. When the moon is full, the character is manic and delirious, while at the time of the new moon, he may be reserved and melancholic. At other times, he may appear normal and unaffected.
- **Megalomania:** Characters with this derangement believe that they are destined to lead, and they seek to accumulate power, irrespective of their skill and the attitude of others. They believe that those who dismiss their claims are jealous, seeking to hold onto power and deny them their dues. The megalomaniacs believe that these opponents should be destroyed, politically or physically.
- **Melancholia:** Characters with this derangement frequently slip into deep depression, losing interest in their normal activities and becoming withdrawn. When suffering from melancholia, the character's Willpower rating is greatly reduced (half, round up, the normal value) and they have difficulty becoming motivated. These depressive periods often follow failure of a particular action, though they may also result from other psychological factors.
- **Multiple Personalities:** Something in the character's past has caused his personality to fragment into a number of distinct selves, each with its own traits, outlooks and agendas. The number and nature of these personalities should be agreed by the player and Storyteller, as should matters such as the trigger to switch personalities (often emotional stress) and the knowledge each possesses. However, only the Storyteller can decide if the skills exhibited by a personality are real or delusions.
- **Obsession:** Obsessive characters become fixated on a particular activity, person or thing. They may seek to ensure that all objects in their possession are categorized and sorted by type, or they may strive to keep their hands spotlessly clean and thus be constantly washing them. They may become fixated on visiting all the shrines of a particular saint, for instance. Whatever the nature of that obsession is, the target is the center of the character's existence. If he is denied access, he might become agitated.
- **Overcompensation:** An overcompensating character attempts to make up for a flaw in her character (real or perceived) by stressing another aspect of her personality. This limits her actions and skews her perceptions of the world. She may take a "holier than thou" attitude toward others, lecturing them about *their* shortcomings, constantly attempting to take the moral high ground. If the character's own flaws are revealed, the embarrassment would be acute and her reaction unpredictable.
- **Paranoia:** They are jealous of you, or scared. They want to do you in and end your unlife! Paranoid characters believe that they are the victims of persecution, either by an individual or a group. They are very wary of social interactions (+1 difficulty to all Social tests) and fearful that others are in league with their tormentors. Even the slightest thing can trigger a paranoid episode,

prompting the character to withdraw into himself or even strike out in fear. Of course, just because a character is paranoid doesn't mean there aren't people out to get him....

- **Perfectionism:** Perfectionists seek to control every aspect of their lives, often following a rigid set of rules intended to ensure that everything "runs to plan." All their efforts are directed to ensuring that things happen as intended, and if they don't, the perfectionists become agitated, possibly even entering frenzy.

- **Regression:** Characters suffering from regression also have difficulty accepting the real world. However, rather than retreating into a fantasy environment, they retreat into a more simplistic mentality, often that of a child. Such characters are usually heavily dependent on others, both for tasks and decision-making. They are frequently naïve, which may be a boon or a curse depending on the circumstances. This refuge of youth may be permanent, or it may kick in as a result of stress. Some characters retreat even further when placed under great pressure, their mental faculties completely shutting down and leaving them to operate on instinct alone. These episodes result in blackouts and periods of memory loss that may be roleplayed, with the character acting on instinct subject to a predetermined set of guidelines, or abstracted, with the character coming to her senses with no recollection of the last few minutes/ hours/ days.

- **Saint Vitus's Dance:** Technically a disease of the nervous system (known in the 21st century as Sydenham's chorea) rather than a derangement, the effects of Saint Vitus's Dance are thought of as a form of madness by the inhabitants of the Dark Medieval. It causes involuntary movements of the face and limbs, resulting in a dance-like series of movements that persist for days or weeks and then disappear, sometimes permanently but often reappearing after months or years. Often a result of rheumatic fever, Saint Vitus's Dance can spread throughout a group, leading to mass outbreaks of the "madness."

- **Visions:** This derangement leads sufferers to believe that they are granted an insight into the divine through visions, trances and other ecstatic states. During these spells, they may be catatonic, in a trance-like state or rave uncontrollably. Their ability to recall details of the visions is similarly varied, sometimes recalling precise details while having only the vaguest recollections of others. Some details may not resurface until days after the revelation, emerging in response to some external stimulus. These visions may be products of an overactive imagination, or they could, at the Storyteller's discretion and very rarely, reflect a real insight into the unknown.

Appendix: A Dark Medieval Bestiary

Animals are an inescapable part of medieval life. The vast majority of the population lives off the land, works fields with the help of beasts of burden and raises fowl, pigs and goats for meat, eggs and cheese. Wild beasts, from boars and deer to bears and wolves, roam the unending forests. Even in the cities, animals are omnipresent, not only in the form of rats and carrion birds, but in the dogs, pigs, goats and fowl that are part of households of any size. And of course, the medieval knight derives much of his status from his steed. The following bestiary details the more common beasts along with some of the arcane things that haunt the night.

Animal Traits

Like people, animals are represented by a set of traits that quantify their abilities in **Dark Ages**. These traits are similar, but slightly different than those used for humans.

- **Attributes:** Natural animals have five Attributes instead of nine. Their Physical Attributes (Strength, Dexterity, Stamina) function as with mortals, although animals may not be capable of some feats of strength (see p. 53) because of their inability to lift things. Animals have only two Mental Attributes: Perception and Wits. Perception is essentially the same as with mortal humans, as an aggregate of their various senses. Most animals have a high Perception, which can reach levels higher than 5. Wits is a basic measure of the animal's instincts and survival skills. In rough terms, it measures a prey animal's ability to escape predators and a predator's ability to catch prey.
- **Willpower:** Willpower is essentially the same for animals as it is for people: a measure of mental fortitude and resistance to outside influences. Animals cannot spend points of Willpower.
- **Health Levels:** Depending on their size, animals have a varying number of health levels. These are expressed in terms of each level's dice-pool penalty. Animals whose health levels include Incapacitated can survive longer than those without it. Others die when they run out of health levels.
- **Attacks:** Most animals have some form of natural weapon or form of attack, from a horse's kick to a wolf's bite and claws. Biting, clawing and goring generally causes lethal damage. Trampling and kicking causes bashing damage.
- **Abilities:** Animals have ratings in Abilities to represent their natural proficiencies in such things as tracking (Alertness and Survival), using their natural attacks (Brawl) and escaping harm (Athletics, Dodge). Abilities listed in brackets are those typically resulting from training at the hands of humans. (Use common sense in applying these Abilities: Regardless of its Athletics rating, a cat cannot throw a spear!)
- **Control Rating:** Used with riding animals and other beasts of burden, Control Rating is a rough measure of how ornery the animal is. The higher the rating is, the more skill is required of the rider to use the animal effectively (see p. 71).

Beasts of Home and Farm

Cat

Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 4, Wits 4

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Claw or bite for one die (lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Climbing 3, Intimidation 2, Stealth 4 (Empathy 2, Subterfuge 2)

Cow/Ox

Strength 3/5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3/5, Perception 2, Wits 1/2

Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -3, Incapacitated
Attack: Bite for three dice, gore for six (both lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 0/3
Control Rating: 2

Dog/Hound

Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 6, Wits 3
Willpower: 5, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated
Attack: Bite and claw for four dice (lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3 (Dodge 3, Empathy 2, Intimidation 3, Stealth 2)

Horse

Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Wits 3
Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated
Attack: Trample or kick for six dice (bashing); bite for three (lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1
Control Rating: 3

Warhorse

Strength 6, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Perception 3, Wits 3
Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated
Attack: Trample or kick for seven dice (bashing); bite for three (lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Intimidation 2
Control Rating: 3

Horse/Mount Table

Mount	Control Rating	Trample Dam.	Move (y/turn)	Notes
Riding Horse	3	6B	15	
Arab Horse	2	5B	20	Available in Iberia or Saracen lands only.
Warhorse	3	7B	12	
Camel	4	5B	10	Available in Saracen lands only, -1 difficulty to avoid being trampled.
Elephant	4	9B	10	-2 difficulty to avoid being tramples

Mule

Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Perception 1, Wits 1
Willpower: 6, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -2, -4, Incapacitated
Attack: Kick for five dice (bashing); bite for two (lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2
Control Rating: 4

Pig/Boar

Strength 2/4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4/5, Perception 3, Wits 3
Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -4, Incapacitated
Attack: Bite for two/four dice (lethal); boars gore for five (lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2 (Intimidation 2)

Rat

Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Perception 5, Wits 4
Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -5
Attack: Bite for one die (lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 3, Stealth 3

Sheep

Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Perception 1, Wits 1
Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -3, Incapacitated
Attack: None, though rams can gore for three dice (lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 2, Empathy 2

Beasts of Wild and Wood

Bat

Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Perception 6, Wits 2
Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, -1,-3
Attack: Bite for one die (lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 3, Dodge 3, Stealth 2
Notes: Bats can fly at 25 mph.

Bear

Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Perception 3, Wits 3
Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -3, -3, -5, Incapacitated
Attack: Claw for seven dice; bite for five (both lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 2, Stealth 1

Bird of Prey

Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 7, Wits 4
Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -2, -5
Attack: Claw for two dice (lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Intimidation 2 (Brawl 3, Empathy 4, Intimidation 4)
Notes: This template can represent a hawk, crow, raven, owl or even vulture. A bird can typically fly at 25 to 50 mph.

Deer/Stag

Strength 1/3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2/3, Perception 4, Wits 2
Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated
Attack: None/gore for five dice (lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 2, Stealth 2

Hare

Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Perception 5, Wits 5
Willpower: 1, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -2, -3
Attack: Bite for two dice (lethal); rear claw kick for one in desperation (bashing)
Abilities: Alertness 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 1, Stealth 4

Wolf

Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 6, Wits 4
Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated
Attack: Bite for five dice; claw for four (both lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Dodge 1, Stealth 2

Packs and Swarms

Although the traits listed here detail individual creatures, some animals attack en masse. Also, it's quite atmospheric for a vampire or demon to overwhelm its victims with rodent or canine minions. If a swarm of hornets or horde of rats accosts the characters, use the rules that follow.

Instead of trying to determine what each and every member of a pack or swarm does, simply roll to see if the swarm itself harms a character. Narrate the results from there.

Each beast type is given a listing on the following chart. Roll the damage dice pool listed once per turn (difficulty 6) and allow the characters to try to dodge or soak the result. This damage is lethal, or possibly bashing in the case of small or weak creatures. Packs attack once per turn per target and act on the initiative given on the chart.

If a character dodges, he can move normally for the remainder of the turn. Otherwise, his attackers slow him down to half his usual movement. If they score more than three health levels worth of damage in one turn (after the target soaks), or if the player botches an appropriate roll, the character is knocked down and overrun. He can move only one or two yards per turn, and the swarm's damage difficulty falls to 5. Efforts to get back up and continue moving have higher than normal difficulties (typically difficulty 7 or 8).

The health levels listed reflect the amount of damage it takes to disperse a pack or swarm. An additional two health levels destroy the attackers completely. Arrows and small melee weapons (knives, claws, bare hands) inflict a single health level per strike, no matter how many attack or damage successes are rolled (that is, the strike hits only one creature). Large melee weapons (swords, staves, boards) do normal damage (each damage success rolled eliminates one health level of the swarm as a whole), as do large-area attacks (Greek fire, frost storms, gusts of wind). Swarms and packs don't soak.

Depending on the size of the pack, two or more characters might be affected by it and can attack it in return. Anyone who helps an overrun character can be attacked as well. A human can outrun some packs or swarms (those consisting of rats or bugs), but can't hope to outrun others (those consisting of hyenas or birds).

Pack and Swarm Attributes			
Animal	Damage	Health Levels	Initiative
Small bugs	1	5	2
Large bugs	2	7	3
Flying bugs	2	5	4
Birds, bats	4	9	5
Rats	3	7	3
Large rats (one or more feet long)	4	9	3
Feral cats	4	6	6
Wild dogs	6	15	4

Demons and Other Spirits

All Christians know that Lucifer led his host of angels in rebellion against God and that the war in Heaven ended with Lucifer and his lot being cast into the burning pits of Hell for all eternity. The Devil is responsible for tempting Eve to taste the fruit of Knowledge and the subsequent Fall from Paradise, and Lucifer, the Great Satan, and his minions seek to corrupt mortals and take their souls to Hell. In the Dark Medieval world, demons are blamed for curses, plagues, hysteria, madness and a host of other ills. Although their existence not as widespread as most folk believe, demons are at work in the world of the living, and the legions of Hell are very real.

Demons are malevolent spirits that corrupt human souls. They rarely appear or involve themselves directly in mortal affairs. They prefer to work through temptation and subtle manipulation. It is said that a demon cannot force anyone to do anything against her will, he must trick his victims and lure them with honeyed words and promises so that they fall into sin willingly. Demons particularly delight in the corruption of the pure, pious and innocent.

Although the Church considers all spirits "demons," there are actually many spirits that have no dealings with Hell. They are more akin to the fae, associated with wild places and pagan folk, but

the line is a fine (or nonexistent) one for most people. For werewolves, the fae themselves, and some mages, however, that difference is crucial. The spirit that bonds a pack of werewolves has no relationship (or even resemblance, usually) to the blasphemous creatures that infernalists worship.

Sorcerers and wizards are known to deal with demons and other spirits, calling them up and attempting to bind them to do their bidding, or else bargaining with them in exchange for power. Rarely does a wizard end up on the winning side of such a bargain. Demons are patient, and they can corrupt nearly anyone who gives them an opportunity.

Spirit Traits

Spirits and demons have a host of powers at their command. Although spirits rarely appear in physical form, they have many other abilities that allow them to influence others. Those rare spirits that *do* appear in physical form are powerful indeed, and few foes, human or otherwise, can hope to stand against one and survive.

Spirits have different characteristics than physical beings. They are described by four traits: Willpower, Rage, Gnosis and Essence. They also have various powers at their command, known as Charms. Spirit traits range from 1 to 10.

- **Willpower:** This trait allows spirits to take action, things like attacking or moving through the spirit world, much like physical entities use the Dexterity Attribute. Resisted Willpower rolls are used to resolve contests of such things between spirits.
- **Rage:** Rage is a spirit's passion, inner fire and hunger to survive. Spirits use Rage to attack and inflict injury on others, much like physical entities use the Strength Attribute. Rage also determines a spirit's toughness, like the Stamina Attribute.
- **Gnosis:** Gnosis measures a spirit's awareness, and spirits use it for all Social and Mental rolls, as well as most Charm rolls.
- **Essence:** A spirit's Essence equals the total of its other three Traits and is used to power Charms.

Charms

Spirits have a number of powers called Charms at their command. Each spirit has a unique complement of Charms, but some of the more common ones include the following:

- **Corruption:** Demons can tempt and corrupt mortals using this Charm. The demon's player rolls Gnosis to use the power against a difficulty of the target's Willpower. This is an extended action with only one roll allowed per night. The demon's player must accumulate successes equal to the target's Willpower x10 without botching. Once the victim's will is broken he will follow the demon's commands.
- **Disciplines, Dominions, and Gifts:** Demons and spirits may have powers similar those of other beings in the Dark Medieval. They use Essence to power them and roll Gnosis in place of the power's normal dice pool.
- **Immunity:** No earthly fire can compare to the flames of Hell; demons are immune to harm from fire. Likewise, a nature spirit associated with winter might be immune to cold.
- **Investment:** Demons often offer their victims power... for a price. Assume that a demon can grant one or two dots in any area, and that more powerful demons can grant more dots (as many as five or more). Those who strike bargains with demons usually get exactly what they deserve in the end, though. Other spirits sometimes exhibit this trait as well, and they aren't usually any more altruistic in using it.
- **Materialize:** On rare occasions, a spirit may actually appear in physical form. In this case, the spirit's Willpower determines its Dexterity, its Rage determines Strength and Stamina, and its Gnosis determines all of its Social and Mental Attributes. Spirits usually have the same number of

health levels as humans, but more powerful ones may have more, and most regenerate one health level each turn. Killing a spirit's physical form doesn't destroy it, though. Doing so only banishes it back its home realm, invisible to humans, where it regenerates its Essence.

- **Possession:** Some spirits can possess living beings, which requires a Gnosis roll (difficulty of the victim's Willpower). If successful, the spirit controls the victim for as long as it likes, or until it is exorcised. Those who are possessed by demons gain its immunity to fire, and the spirits may be able to use its other Charms through the host, at the Storyteller's discretion.

More information on spirits can be found in **Dark Ages: Mage** and **Dark Ages: Werewolf**. **Devil's Due** is the definitive work for the infernal forces in the Dark Medieval.

Dark Ages VAMPIRE™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature:
Demeanor:
Clan:

Generation:
Concept:
Haven:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○○○○	Charisma	●○○○○○○○	Perception	●○○○○○○○
Dexterity	●○○○○○○○	Manipulation	●○○○○○○○	Intelligence	●○○○○○○○
Stamina	●○○○○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○○○○	Wits	●○○○○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	○○○○○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○○○○○	Commerce	○○○○○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○○○○○	Law	○○○○○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○○○○○	Ride	○○○○○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○○○○○
Legerdemain	○○○○○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○○○○○	Seneschal	○○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○○○○○	Theology	○○○○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
_____	○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○	Courage	○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○		

Other Traits	Road	Health
○○○○○○○○○	_____	Bruised <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	○○○○○○○○○	Hurt -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	Aura: _____ ()	Injured -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	Willpower	Wounded -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	○○○○○○○○○	Mauled -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Crippled -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	Blood Pool	Incapacitated <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Weakness
○○○○○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Experience
○○○○○○○○○		