Chapter One: Core Rules

Despite its size, *this is not a complete game.* In order to use **Exalted: Demake Edition** (**EXD**), you'll need access to at least one version of the **Exalted** core rulebook, be it First, Second, or Third Edition. You should *probably* also have one of the 20th Anniversary Edition **World of Darkness** core rulebooks: **Vampire: The Masquerade 20th Anniversary Edition**, **Werewolf: The Apocalypse 20th Anniversary Edition**, **Mage: The Ascension 20th Anniversary Edition**, **Wraith: The Oblivion 20th Anniversary Edition**, **Changeling: The Dreaming 20th Anniversary Edition**, or **Vampire: The Dark Ages 20th Anniversary Edition**, but it's not *technically* required.

Exalted: Demake Edition uses a heavily customized variant of the Storyteller System, intended to facilitate playing **Exalted** in a faster, simpler, rules-medium format that stylistically feels congruent with the 20th Anniversary **World of Darkness** engine but doesn't duplicate it. The goal is to capture the intuitive, bounded design and tight math of the original Storyteller engine (don't laugh: a lot of the work laid on top of it over the years was sloppy, certainly, but the underlying bell curve and built-in levers to manipulate it are very well-constructed), but to get rid of its many archaic and cumbersome elements which have since become outdated relics of 1990s game design standards.

Traits and Ratings

Characters have a number of traits that describe their capabilities. These are generally rated from 0 to 5, like the rating of a film or game. A 1 demonstrates that the character is bad at something, while a rating of 5 means they are world-class at whatever the trait measures.

Dice Pools

Exalted: Demake Edition uses pools of ten-sided dice. These are formed by combining an appropriate Attribute with an appropriate Ability, looking at the rating of each of them, and rolling that many dice.

Reading the Dice

All rolls are made against a *difficulty*, a number ranging from 3 to 9. When you roll a dice pool, compare each die to the roll's difficulty. If the number on the die is equal to or higher than the difficulty, the die generates a *success*.

However, dice are also subject to *the rule of 1s*: Any die showing a 1 negates one success.

If, after subtracting 1s, any successes remain, then the action has been successful.

If the roll generates no successes, or has all of its successes removed by 1s, then the action has failed.

Caste Traits

Most Exalted have *Caste Abilities*, special traits which through which their divine blessings flow. **Rolls utilizing a Caste Ability are immune to the rule of 1s.**

A few Exalted instead have *Caste Attributes*. Rolls using Caste Attributes are also immune to the rule of 1s.

Actions vs Rolls

An **action**, generally speaking, is an Attribute + Ability roll — something a character has *done*. Rules sometimes specify that they modify or trigger off of characters taking an action. This is what they mean. The system occasionally contains other rolls, such as Willpower rolls, Essence rolls, and damage rolls. These are dice rolls, but are not considered actions unless otherwise specified.

Setting Difficulty

A roll's difficulty determines how hard it is to accomplish. A low-difficulty action is something that would be easy even for an untrained and uncertain individual. A high-difficulty action is something that would challenge even a renowned professional. *Difficulty can never be lower than 3 or higher than 9, regardless of any modifiers in play.* If the rules would seem to suggest that a roll's difficulty should be lower than 3, the roll is instead difficulty 3. If they suggest that it should be higher than 9, it is instead 9. There are no exceptions to this rule anywhere in **EXD**.

If no other guidance is given, assume that the default difficulty for a roll is 6.

Generally, unless something says otherwise, the Storyteller determines an action's difficulty. Use the following chart to do so:

Difficulty	Description
3	Very easy, but failure is possible (following an ill-maintained road in a storm)
4	Easy (following a game trail through rough country)
5	Straightforward (puzzling out a map with an ink stain across part of it)
6	Standard (most actions a hero might undertake; navigating across a forest without a map)
7	Challenging (undertaking a standard action in a hurry or with complications; navigating the same forest at night)
8	Difficult (actions that even an expert would find daunting; smashing through a strongly reinforced door)
9	Extremely difficult (actions at which even a hero will probably fail; devising a riddle that stumps a trickster god)

Degrees of Success

The more successes rolled, the better the result. For most actions, this has no prescribed hard-and-fast result, and is a narrative convention. Certain special actions will use this framework to tell you exactly how different levels of success differ from one another. Your basic guideline, however, is this: "One success is good, more successes is always better."

Successes	Result
1	Basic: The action succeeds, but crudely. There may be consequences or problems.
2	Successful: The action does what it was supposed to do.
3	Elegant: The character succeeds, and only the ungracious would complain about the outcome.

4   Exceptional: The character not only succeeds, but does so impressively, possibly gaining some additional benefits.

5+   Superb: The character's success is perfect, granting better results than anyone might have anticipated.

Stunts

In system parlance, a stunt is any action a character takes which the player bothers to describe in detail, particularly if the action is dramatic, flashy, or otherwise cool. Speaking out a character's dialogue rather than simply declaring "I go and convince him to help us" is a stunt. Saying "I roll out of cover and send an arrow toward his knee" rather than simply going "I shoot him" is also a stunt.

Consistently performing stunts earns a group additional experience points at the end of each session.

Styling

When an Exalt or other heroic character performs a stunt, doing so in a ridiculous or flashy way never inflicts a penalty or increases the difficulty of her action. "I kick this guy in the stomach" has exactly the same difficulty as "I swing around a lamppost and kick this guy in the face with both feet, sending him crashing into an applecart." If a character has the option to simply walk down the stairs, she can instead opt to ride down the banister or simply jump dramatically down over the railing with no issues. Styling with a stunt further means that characters always have time to dramatically shout out their philosophical convictions before dodging an arrow rushing toward their face.

Styling with a stunt also provides a degree of narrative insurance, making dangerous actions (like leaping from one collapsing tower through the window of another) less suicidal than they appear. When a character performs a reckless stunt in a cool way, they are guaranteed to have some opportunity to mitigate the consequences of failure if the action doesn't work out. In the above example, if the leap fails, the Exalt should then have the chance to grab hold of a protruding bit of masonry rather than simply falling immediately to her death. It is the nature of the cosmos in the Second Age of Man to be forgiving with those that entertain it.

Spending Willpower to Re-Roll

Once per scene, after making a roll, a protagonist's player may decide to spend a point of Willpower to make the roll again. Willpower re-rolls may be used on *any* single dice pool, and the re-roll continues to benefit or suffer from any enhancements, bonuses, or other modifiers which acted upon the roll originally. The player may keep the result of their choice.

> For Those We've Left Behind
>
> A few traditional standbys of **Exalted** may be conspicuous by their absence here. If you're wondering what the rules are for specialties, there aren't any. They've been tossed as offering more in the way of dice roller fiddling than meaningful character distinction. Either they applied 100% of the time (Melee: Swords) or they made you constantly stop and ask the Storyteller if they were applicable (Awareness: Keen Hearing). Fuck it. Gone.

Next plot in the graveyard: grappling rules. No independent rules for grappling! Attacking a character already stops them from moving that round as a basic system function, so you don't need a special complicated roll to make someone sit still. If you want to choke someone out with a headlock, that's just a regular ass Brawl attack with a stunt now.

Also gone: Flurries. No basic multi-actions. Slow things down too much. Exalts can be plenty strong without everyone falling asleep while you roll out six attacks.

Bashing and lethal damage have been done away with as separately tracked categories, obsoleted by this edition's new damage and wounding systems, although Aggravated damage is still in play.

Further included among the fallen: botches. High difficulties are fairly common in **EXD**, and high difficulties produce lots of botches. Combat is not, generally, intended to degenerate into slapstick. As a result, botches have just been removed. Adjudicating a botch every now and then is fun and flavorful. Having them fire off all the time is either tedious or pushes the story into farce.

Finally, spending Willpower now lets you do a re-roll once per scene, rather than giving you a bonus success. Deterministic success and failure is sort of boring, but bad-luck insurance is handy to have.

Complications

The above rules describe a basic dice roll. The system contains a few slight permutations on this formula, which are all built out of the essential building-blocks described above.

Extended Actions

Sometimes an action takes the form of an extended labor whose duration or outcome may both be uncertain. These are *extended actions*. They take the form of a normal roll, or rather a series of normal rolls, with two additional qualities: a *goal* and an *interval*.

An extended action's goal is the total number of successes the character must acquire to complete the action successfully.

An extended action's interval describes how much time she must spend applying herself to the action before she is allowed to make another roll.

In an extended action, the character applies herself to a task and then makes a roll against a difficulty set by the Storyteller, then sees how many successes she has accumulated. If it meets the goal, the action succeeds. If not, then she must continue working at the action until the interval time has elapsed again, at which point she may roll once again and add any new successes gained to the successes she has already generated. She then checks to see if this new total meets her goal. If not, she continues.

Sometimes a character can walk away from an extended roll and return to it later. Sometimes matters are urgent and time is short, and only a certain number of rolls may be permitted before the action automatically fails; if this limit exists, it's called a *terminus*. These matters are up to the Storyteller and her interpretation of what's going on in the story.

A failure during an extended roll simply means that the interval has been spent fruitlessly and no new successes have been generated. Two failures in a row generally ruins the entire effort and forces the character to discard all accumulated successes and start over.

Contested Actions

In a contested action, two characters are struggling with one another. Both characters make appropriate rolls, and the character who generates the most successes triumphs. If the characters generate equal successes, a contested roll might become an extended roll, with each trying to become the first to gain more successes than the opponent.

Penalties

When a character suffers an ongoing problem that makes everything harder for them, this is represented as a dice pool penalty. The most common source of such penalties is being injured. **Under no circumstances can dice pool penalties reduce a supernatural being's dice pool to less than one die.** Mortal dice pools *may* be reduced to 0 by dice pool penalties.

Dice penalties generally only affect actions. That is to say, they **don't affect damage rolls, Essence rolls, Willpower rolls, or defensive calculations** unless they say they otherwise.

Finally, **penalties are applied after bonuses**. An Exalt with a Strength + Brawl pool of 6 who then uses a Charm to add +6 additional dice, while suffering a –7 dice Wound penalty, would roll a final total of 5 dice (6 + 6 = 12 – 7 = 5).

Teamwork and Assistance

In some situations, protagonists might try to join their efforts toward a common goal such as pushing aside a heavy boulder or appealing to a powerful god for assistance. In these cases, the players select the most qualified protagonist to undertake the task. She and she alone rolls to accomplish the feat, but if she's helped by other qualified characters, the difficulty of the action is reduced by –1.

"Qualified" in this case means that the Storyteller judges that the assisting characters have enough expertise to matter. A small child can't provide meaningful assistance in moving a boulder, but a protagonist with Strength 3, Athletics 2 has enough muscle to matter. This rule usually comes up during social scenes, when several players jump in to push an argument on an antagonist. Ultimately, only the most persuasive protagonist rolls to see what happens, but the difficulty is lowered because her comrades helped.

Teamwork can't be used to boost attack rolls in combat unless some special rule permits it.

Types of Characters

The older versions of **Exalted** used symmetrical rules for players' characters and those controlled by the Storyteller, which is to say, all characters operated using the same rules. **EX3** offers Quick Characters as a somewhat more lightweight option, but, speaking as the guy who designed the QCs, they're not lightweight enough. **EXD** doesn't bother with character symmetry, as one of its primary goals is to make running **Exalted** less of a complicated ass-ache for the Storyteller. Instead, **EXD** features three sorts of different characters: *Protagonists, antagonists*, and *groups*.

Protagonists are the characters players control. They use rich, crunchy rules with lots of options for customizing their place in the story and their supernatural powers.

Antagonists are the characters the Storyteller controls. They use the same basic task-resolution rules as protagonists, but have greatly simplified traits and do not have many expendable resources to track. (Yes, they're called antagonists even if they're friendly.)

Groups are large mobs of antagonists, which use a few additional rules to represent them as a combined collection of traits, rather than making you fight 1,000 conscript-soldiers one-by-one.

Rules for antagonists and groups are in Chapter Twelve, since they're something that mostly just the Storyteller needs to worry about.

Time

EXD uses the familiar framework for tracking time dramatically:

Turns are the shortest dramatic measure, the time it takes for a character to perform a single action. Combat is timed in turns. Narratively, a turn generally lasts for only a few seconds — three to six, say.

Rounds are a measure of combat time, describing the time it takes for all characters in a *scene* to take their turn. Narratively, a round usually lasts somewhere between fifteen seconds and three minutes.

Scenes are the fundamental building block of the game. When the focus changes and something else is happening or the location changes, a scene is over. If a scene needs to be abstracted out into narrative time, assume they usually last about twenty minutes on average, but *can* be significantly shorter or longer. Many supernatural powers end when a scene does.

Sessions consist of the time encompassed by everyone getting together to play the game, usually spanning several real-life hours and encompassing several scenes. You get experience points at the end of a session. Sessions aren't intended to correspond to narrative time at all, they're purely a player-facing element.

Stories are a collection of sessions that make up a connected, coherent narrative — the sessions, taken together, tell the story of how the Circle traveled to the city of Gem and gained the patronage of the Despot, for example. You also get experience points at the end of a story. Stories can differ substantially in length, particularly between different Storytellers. This game assumes that a story lasts for *roughly* three to five sessions. If you resolve a story in one session sometimes, that's fine, and if you have a big story last ten sessions, that's also okay, but if you routinely run stories lasting 12+ sessions (I have seen groups like this before), be aware the rules are written around the assumption of something *much* shorter than that and adjust accordingly, or your sorcerers in particular are going to be in a world of pain.

Your **chronicle** is the great arc of the game's narrative, spanning numerous connected stories. Once you retire your protagonists, the chronicle is over.

Downtime is time that passes in the narrative which is not actively played out. It passes between scenes, sessions, and stories. Downtime might narratively last for anywhere from a few hours to a century.

Time and Action Economy

The **Exalted Demake** uses three types of actions: *simple actions*, *swift actions*, and *reflexive actions*. This distinction is primarily important during combat, when action timing becomes crucial.

Simple actions take up most of your attention. You can take one simple action once per round, during your turn. The most common simple action is attacking an enemy.

Swift actions take up far less concentration than simple actions, and as such can be executed alongside simple actions. You can take one swift action once per round, during your turn. The most common swift action is movement.

Reflexive actions can be performed with almost no concentration or effort; often they're done without even noticing you're doing them. They occur whenever it makes sense for them to occur (such as rolling Perception + Awareness to notice an ambush), and do not have to occur on your turn. The most common reflexive actions are attempts to perceive or detect something, resist something, or say a few quick words.

Your turn is over once you have taken a swift action and a simple action, or opted to do nothing with those actions.

> Advanced Difficulty Modifiers
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> When Charms enter the picture, an action can end up with a *lot* of effects simultaneously modifying its difficulty. Broadly, what you do is stack up all the things that increase an action's difficulty, then subtract all the things that might lower it. While you'll never *roll* a difficulty that's higher than 9 or lower than 3, you treat modifiers as though they can push a difficulty number past those boundaries while figuring them out.
>
> **Example:** Let's say we're dealing with a whole bunch of ongoing effects happening to a roll at once. It started as difficulty 8, then a Charm increased its difficulty by +2, another Charm increased its difficulty by +1, and a third effect added another +1 increase. Right now it is, notionally, difficulty 12. But there are also other effects in play that apply a –2 difficulty modifier, another –2 difficulty modifier, and a –1 difficulty modifier. As a result, the final result ends up being difficulty 7. If you'd stopped counting the modifiers when they hit 9, you'd have ended up with difficulty 4 instead, and that would have been wrong, so don't do that. (If you can't remember whether to add or subtract first, don't worry about it; the nature of mathematics means you'll end up with the same result either way.)
>
> That example is deliberately sort of absurd, but if you've got a battle-optimized Dawn Caste in your Circle scraping together every Defense boost he can find, this sort of thing can happen once in a while.

Combat

Exalted are beings of deep passions and conviction, and regularly try to kill one another when those convictions differ. Violence is a sadly regular feature of the Second Age of Man, and when it appears, the only options are to succumb to it or fight back. For those who choose the second option, the combat rules exist.

Combat consists of five basic elements: *Pace*; *attack and defense*; *damage and resistance*; *health and injury*; and *space and movement*. This chapter will deal with all of these things from the perspective of protagonists. Antagonists also use all of these concepts, but interact with them in a greatly simplified way outlined in Chapter Twelve. If, due to some great tragedy coming to pass, two protagonists battle one another, they both apply the rules found here.

The Pace of Battle

This is the principle of battle:

Whoever started the fight acts first. That is to say, the first to draw their blade, the first to decide to attack, the first to declare "I punch him in the face." That character initiates the violence.

After that point, **alternate between antagonists and protagonists taking turns** until every character present in the scene has taken a turn.

When it is time for the protagonists to take a turn, the players decide among themselves which protagonist who has not yet taken a turn will act. If all protagonists have already acted, none of them acts until the next round begins.

When it is time for the antagonists to take a turn, the Storyteller decides which antagonist who has not yet acted will take a turn next. If all antagonists have already acted, none of them acts until the next round begins.

Once *everyone* has taken a turn, resolve any Charms or other rules that occur after all characters have taken their turns, and then proceed to the next round. Whichever group (antagonists or protagonists) started the fight gets to take a turn first, and then the rest of the round once again plays out in alternating sequence.

No protagonist or antagonist can take more than one turn per round unless some special power or rule they possess states otherwise.

If both protagonists and antagonists have special rules which resolve at the end of a round, alternate between the two groups beginning with whichever is the aggressor in the scene.

Holding the Initiative

The group of disputants who start a fight are said to *hold the initiative*. This means that they're the ones taking the first turn in each round of combat. Once one side holds the initiative, they generally continue to do so for the rest of the battle unless some special rule says otherwise.

Showdowns

Sometimes all parties arrive prepared for violence and leap into action at more or less the same time, such as at a martial arts tournament. In this case, the canniest fighters make a contested (Wits + Awareness) roll against difficulty 6, using teamwork rules (see p. XX) in the case of showdowns with more than two participants. In the case of a tie, keep rolling. Whoever gains more successes holds the initiative.

Cutting in Line

Immediately **after another protagonist has finished taking a turn**, one protagonist who has not yet taken her turn may spend a point of Willpower to immediately do so, without waiting for an antagonist to take a turn. This is known as "cutting ahead" or "cutting in line." Two protagonists may not cut ahead in a row; that is to say, protagonists cannot take more than two uninterrupted turns back to back by spending Willpower unless some other rule states otherwise.

Cutting in line is not possible during the opening round of an ambush or other unexpected assault.

> I Kill Everyone I Meet, Forever!

The perceptive will surely have noticed that these rules give a substantial reward for always starting fights, in that the aggressor always gets the first hit in. This is true. The problem of this approach is that you are known to start fights at the drop of a hat, and eventually your peers and foes are going to become aware of this fact and begin treating you accordingly.

Those who completely embrace violence with all of their being become very good at it. The only drawback to this is that you have completely embraced violence with all of your being.

Attack and Defense

The most common thing that will happen during combat when a protagonist takes their turn is that they will attack someone. This involves rolling a dice pool against an appropriate difficulty to see whether the attack succeeds or not.

Making an Attack

To make an attack, roll (Strength or Dexterity) + (Archery, Brawl, Martial Arts, Melee, or Thrown) against a difficulty equal to the target's Defense rating. If any successes are generated, the attack succeeds and you hit your target.

The weapon used for the attack determines what Attribute and Ability are combined to make the attack roll. Weapons are found later in this chapter, starting on page XX.

Receiving an Attack

Receiving an attack works the same way. Every protagonist has a **Defense** trait that determines how difficult it is to hit her.

The difficulty of attack rolls directed at a protagonist is equal to her Defense rating, but, as always, an opponent cannot be forced to roll against a difficulty lower than 3 or higher than 9 even if Defense exceeds this range.

All protagonists by default have Defense 5, which is then modified based on their fighting style and what sort of armor they're wearing (see pp. XX-XX).

There is no maximum cap on how high your Defense can rise, nor a minimum value below which it cannot drop, meaning that Defense could potentially be a negative number (while your attackers would still roll against difficulty 3, this could potentially make it very difficult to accumulate enough bonuses to raise your Defense to a useful value).

When stunting, you can describe your defense however you like, so long as it makes sense in the fiction of the ongoing scene.

Dodging Attacks

Dodge is a special rule with an associated Dodge value that can be invoked in response to an attack roll, *after* the roll is made, by spending 1 Willpower. Each time Dodge is applied against an incoming attack, a number of successes on the attack roll equal to your Dodge value are discarded. This can potentially reduce an attack to 0 successes, protecting you completely.

Each time you invoke your Dodge, its value drops by –1.

Each time you Stagger or incapacitate an opponent with an attack, you may choose to increase either your Dodge *or* your Block value by +1.

Your **base value** for Dodge is equal to the Dexterity rating on your character sheet – your current total Wound penalties. When you awaken from a full night's sleep or an equivalent period of rest (through meditation, etc), Dodge resets to its base value. If, at the end of a scene, Dodge is higher than its base value, it drops to its base value.

A number of factors, such as your fighting style or the armor you wear, can impose modifiers to your Dodge base value. If your Dodge base value changes during a scene (such as by discarding your weapons to use the *unarmed* fighting style, or by suffering a new Wound penalty), immediately adjust your current Dodge value by the difference (in the case of switching to unarmed fighting, you'd increase your Dodge by +1 for as long as you remained unarmed).

Modifiers to your base value remain so long as the condition that modified it remains true (generally this means that you're wearing a certain kind of armor, using a certain fighting style, suffering from Wounds, or using a Charm). Other changes to your Dodge rating (such as increasing Dodge when Staggering enemies or lowering Dodge after invoking it) remain until a rule causes you to reset your Dodge to its base value.

There is no maximum cap on how high your Dodge can rise, nor a minimum value below which it cannot drop, meaning that Dodge could potentially be a negative number due to various modifiers (although you cannot invoke your Dodge if your Dodge is presently rated 0 or less).

A single attack cannot have both Dodge *and* Block invoked against it.

In summary: **Base Value = Dexterity – Wound penalties + modifiers from armor and fighting style**. Reset to base value upon awakening, or at the end of a scene *if* Dodge is higher than its base value.

> Conditional Dodge and Block Modifiers
>
> Sometimes a special rule will modify your Dodge or Block value in a particular circumstance. Usually, the modifier is "against this particular attack," though there are others you'll see, such as the Night Caste anima power, which gives +1 Dodge against people who don't know your identity while your anima is flaring. In all such cases, the modification only applies within the circumstance that created it and for the duration that the circumstance remains valid, rather than modifying your entire Dodge or Block rating until you reset to base value.

Damage and Resistance

When an attack hits, injury usually follows.

Inflicting Damage

After successfully striking an opponent, create a dice pool equal to your weapon's Damage value ("base damage") plus the number of successes on your attack roll ("threshold damage"). Roll this pool against a difficulty equal to the target's Soak rating. The target suffers a number of levels of damage equal to the successes rolled.

Resisting Damage

Again, it works the same way when you are struck by an attack. Your **Soak** value is a trait that determines how difficult it is to hurt you.

The difficulty of damage rolls directed at a protagonist is equal to her Soak rating, but, as always, an opponent cannot be forced to roll against a difficulty lower than 3 or higher than 9 even if Soak exceeds this range.

Soak is based on your armor's Soak value (see p. XX), modified by your Stamina rating as follows:

If you have Stamina 1, modify your Soak rating by –1.

If you have Stamina 4+, modify your Soak rating by +1.

There is no maximum cap on how high your Soak can rise, nor a minimum value below which it cannot drop, meaning that Soak could potentially be a negative number (while your attackers would still roll against difficulty 3, this could potentially make it very difficult to accumulate enough bonuses to raise your Soak to a useful value).

Blocking Damage

Block is a special rule with an associated Block value that can be invoked in response to a damage roll, *after* the roll is made, by spending 1 Willpower. Each time Block is applied against an incoming source of damage, a number of points of damage equal to your Block value are discarded. This can potentially reduce an attack to 0 damage, protecting you completely.

Each time you invoke your Block, its value drops by –1.

Each time you Stagger or incapacitate an opponent with an attack, you may choose to increase either your Block *or* your Dodge value by +1.

Your **base value** for Block is equal to the Strength rating on your character sheet – your current total Wound penalties. In all other respects (resetting to base value, etc) Block works exactly the same way as Dodge.

In summary: **Base Value = Strength – Wound penalties + modifiers from fighting style**. Reset to base value upon awakening, or at the end of a scene *if* Block is higher than its base value.

> ### Unblockable and Undodgeable
> Some attacks cannot be Blocked or cannot be Dodged. An undodgeable attack cannot have a Dodge invoked against it. An unblockable attack cannot have a Block invoked against it.

Health and Injury

Protagonists measure the state of their health with a simple trait of the same name. Health is a value which is depleted when you take suffer damage, and which heals over time with rest.

By default, protagonists have a maximum of 7 Health. Certain Charms can modify this value.

When you take damage, mark off an amount of Health equal to the damage taken.

When all of your Health is depleted by damage, you are *incapacitated*.

Stagger Threshold

Protagonists also have a value known as a *Stagger Threshold*. This is determined by their armor (see p. XX). When you suffer damage from a single attack equal to or greater than your Stagger Threshold, you are both *Staggered* and *Wounded*.

Staggered

When you suffer damage from a single attack equal to or in excess of your armor's Stagger Threshold, you suffer a Wound and becomes Staggered. Being Staggered is a system state that lasts for the rest of the round it happens in. While Staggered, you cannot spend Willpower and if you have not already acted, you must wait to take your turn until all of your non-Staggered allies have already acted. Additionally, some rules, powers, and Charms key off of being Staggered or Staggering opponents. In particular, many Charms end their durations when their user is Staggered.

Finally, each time you Stagger an opponent with an attack, you may choose to increase either your Dodge *or* your Block value by +1 for the rest of the scene. Incapacitating an opponent also counts as Staggering them for this purpose.

Inflicting and Suffering Wounds

When you inflict damage to a target equal to or in excess of their Stagger Threshold (or when an enemy does this to you), then in addition to being Staggered, your target also suffers a Wound.

When you suffer a Wound, note it down on your character sheet. This Wound, along with its effects, persist until you are able to heal it or otherwise mitigate it. Wounds tend to linger, inflicting significant complications and penalties.

Some Wounds are "lasting Wounds." Even after the Wound is healed, its penalties are permanent unless repaired with some form of powerful healing magic. Only very extreme injuries leave lasting Wounds on the Exalted.

Whenever you have a greater number of Wounds than your Stamina rating, you must decrease your maximum Health rating by –4 for each Wound in excess of Stamina until the excess Wounds heal. If this ever reduces your maximum Health to 0, you are dead. Lasting Wounds that have already been healed don't count toward this total.

Wound Penalties

Most Wounds inflict a "Wound penalty." The total aggregate of your Wound penalties from all Wounds are subtracted from the dice pool of all of your actions and from your base Dodge and Block values. Wound penalties are not subtracted from damage rolls or Essence rolls.

Common Wounds and Wound Rules

When you inflict a Wound, you must also describe and record its nature.

Generally, the type of Wound inflicted by an attack will be determined by the weapon used, but this can be modified by stunts and styling. In particular, most weapons can be "pulled" with a stunt, and made to inflict bruised Wounds (such as by striking an opponent with the pommel of a sword rather than its edge).

To inflict any of the Wounds marked as "severe" with an attack that does not normally create them, you must *describe an appropriate stunt* and spend 1 Willpower. Unarmed fighters may

also use a stunt and spend 1 Willpower to inflict "lacerated" or "burned" if they wish, such as by hip-tossing an enemy into a fireplace or slamming him into a weapon rack.

While a Wound remains unhealed, all of its rules remain in effect.

A list of Wounds and their associated rules, follows:

• **Blinded (severe):** You've suffered an injury to your face that makes it difficult or impossible to see clearly. For protagonists, this generally indicates an injury that will heal in time, but for antagonists, one or both eyes may be gouged out or otherwise permanently ruined. If you've been blinded, the difficulty of all actions that depend on sight increases by +2. Healing from a blinding Wound takes two weeks for a mortal, or five days for an Exalt, assuming that the eyes were not totally destroyed.

• **Bruised:** You've been substantially roughed up, badly enough that you're really feeling it, but haven't sustained any more specific injury than that. You suffer a –1 Wound penalty for each time you suffer this wound. Recovering from this Wound requires three days of rest for a mortal, or one day for an Exalt.

• **Burned:** You've suffered serious burns, either from extreme heat or some caustic chemical, charring or melting part of your body and inflicting a –1 penalty to your Appearance rating each time you suffer this Wound. You also suffer a –2 Wound each time you suffer this Wound. Healing from this Wound takes two weeks for a mortal, or five days for an Exalt. Mortals who heal from this Wound no longer suffer a Wound penalty, but their Appearance loss is treated as a lasting Wound.

• **Dazed:** You've suffered a major blow, perhaps had your bell rung. It feels like the world is swimming around you. You can't cut ahead or make re-rolls by any means, mundane or magical. Recovering from this Wound requires three days of rest for a mortal, or one day for an Exalt.

• **Disabled Arm (severe):** One of your arms has been badly injured and won't do what you want it to. Important muscles or tendons may be cut. Bones are probably broken. For antagonists, this injury might represent a totally severed limb. The disabled limb can't be used to do anything. Whatever weapon you were holding in the damaged hand is disarmed (see p. XX). You lose access to all fighting style benefits. Any non-combat action which really wants two hands to perform effectively (such as crafting or providing medical treatment) increases its difficulty by +1. Suffering this injury twice disables all weapons other than unarmed attacks (you can still kick, bite, and so on), and makes many tasks requiring manual dexterity either impossible, or even with a creative stunt transforms them into a difficulty 9 action demanding multiple successes (a legendary thief might, after all, be able to operate lockpicks with her teeth). Healing from this Wound takes two weeks for a mortal, or five days for an Exalt. This is a lasting Wound for mortals, and if the limb was completely severed, it is a lasting Wound for Exalts as well.

• **Disabled Leg (severe):** One of your legs has been badly injured and will not support your weight. You might have been hamstrung, or suffered a broken bone, or the limb may simply be mangled. For antagonists, this might also represent a completely severed leg. All of your movement is complex movement, and the difficulty of Athletics rolls to get somewhere quickly are increased by +2. If you suffer this wound twice, movement becomes a simple action unless you have some sort of mobility device to assist you and actions to move around quickly or nimbly increase their difficulty by +3. Healing from this Wound takes two weeks for a mortal, or

five days for an Exalt, assuming that the limb was not severed outright. This is a lasting Wound for mortals, and if the limb was completely severed, it is a lasting Wound for Exalts as well.

• **Drained:** Your body has been subjected to some significant event that robbed its vitality, such as significant blood loss, poisoning, a direct mystic attack against your Essence, or a major sickness. This is also the default sort of Wound inflicted by Charms and other powers which damage their user upon activation. You suffer a –1 Wound penalty and your Stagger Threshold is reduced by –1 for each time you suffer this Wound. Recovering from this Wound requires a week of rest for a mortal, or three days for an Exalt.

• **Lacerated:** You've been generally perforated or lacerated, and are hurting bad. You suffer a –2 die Wound penalty for each time you suffer this Wound. Recovering from this Wound requires a week of rest for a mortal, or three days for an Exalt.

• **Maimed (severe):** You've suffered some sort of crippling injury not covered by more specific categories like blinded or disabled arm or leg, such as a broken spine, horrible disfigurement or even flaying of the face, specific damage to a major organ, or loss of generative organs. Because this is a catch-all, its results are variable. You might suffer +1 difficulty on all rolls related to endurance, recovery, and general health (for organ damage), treat all swift actions as simple actions (for a broken spine), increase the difficulty of all Appearance rolls by +1 for mutilation, or, well, the consequences of taking an axe to the crotch speak for themselves. Healing from this Wound takes six weeks for a mortal, or two weeks for an Exalt. Maimed Wounds are generally lasting Wounds against mortals. The Exalted only treat them as such if the body part being targeted is entirely amputated.

• **Mauled (severe):** You've suffered some sort of catastrophic damage such as being crushed under a building, caught in a massive explosion, or totally impaled with a weapon. You suffer a –3 die Wound penalty for each time you suffer this Wound. Healing from this Wound takes six weeks for a mortal, during which time they must rest in bed around the clock; or two weeks for an Exalt.

> Wound Oddities
>
> You will have noticed that some Wounds are substantially more severe than others. This is by design. **EXD**'s injury system is intended to handle both bareknuckle martial arts tournaments and being bitten by hungry dinosaurs.
>
> If the damage you suffer when you are Wounded is Aggravated (see p. XX), then note that your injury is an *Aggravated Wound*. Healing magic is often ineffective against Aggravated Wounds

Incapacitation

When your Health is reduced to 0 by damage, you are *incapacitated*. While incapacitated, you are unconscious, cannot act, and your Stagger Threshold is reduced to 1+. In the best case, you're just knocked out. In the worst case, you may never get up again.

If you're a protagonist and you are incapacitated, you are knocked out. You'll awaken some time after the end of whatever event or circumstance took you down. If you had any Wounds, one of them is upgraded into an Aggravated Wound. If they were all already Aggravated, congratulations, life is already bad enough that it doesn't get any worse. If you have more Wounds than your Stamina rating, you are *dying* and will perish after a dramatically satisfying

period of time has elapsed if not stabilized with a (Dexterity or Intelligence) + Medicine roll against difficulty 8 (or some other Storyteller intervention to save you).

Antagonists who get incapacitated are either knocked out, dying, or dead according to whatever makes the most sense given how they got taken out, any Wounds they might have, and how narratively important they are. As a general rule of thumb, most antagonists who get punched out are unconscious, most antagonists who get hit with a daiklave just die, and important antagonists are much more likely to live to fight another day than First Age Tomb-Guarding Blood Ape #7.

To repeat and stress this, **this game does not assume that most incapacitated protagonists are dead**. You're **supposed to be able to lose fights and survive**. Fights in this system tend to be pretty dangerous, and the intent is that, in most situations, protagonists who suffer defeat will have their goals thwarted as they recuperate from their near-death experience, rather than being stabbed on the ground over and over until they're well and truly dead for good. Players should feel confident taking risks and doing cool things without worrying that the character they've invested months of work and interest in will suddenly explode. Antagonists, meanwhile, are more fragile because they're less vital to the continuing narrative. Battles with certain death as the stakes are intended to be rare and players should generally be aware of what they're getting into.

This also means that the resiliency of protagonists is not a diegetic element of the world. Usually, anyone impaled with a daiklave simply dies, even an Exalt. It is not normal for enemies to beat on a fallen and unmoving opponent until she's red paste to make sure she's dead.

Getting back to the rules, it's worth noting that a single attack can both Stagger *and* incapacitate a target, if it does enough damage. In this case, the Wound is inflicted before incapacitation, meaning it probably gets upgraded into an Aggravated Wound immediately. Wounds suffered while you're already incapacitated aren't forcibly upgraded into Aggravated Wounds.

Finally, **each time you incapacitate an opponent with an attack, you may choose to increase either your Dodge *or* your Block value by +1.** In the event that a single attack both Wounds *and* incapacitates its target, it only triggers this benefit once.

> Death and Fine-Tuning
>
> Different groups have different attitudes toward character death. This book has no interest in passing judgment over anyone's tastes. The incapacitation rules presented here act as a neutral "default." Common modifications include allowing players to decide whether or not they've killed antagonists dispatched with deadly weapons or merely injured them too badly to keep fighting; making deadly weapons always kill protagonists on incapacitation; or always giving players a say in whether their protagonists are slain or merely taken out of action. All of these modifications are fine. Talk it out among your group if someone wants to use any of them.

Healing Injuries

Mortals take a very long time to recover from their wounds, and often suffer permanent infirmity if the wounds were of a serious nature. Exalted, on the other hand, cannot bleed to death unless subjected to unbelievably gruesome damage, never die from wounds becoming infected, heal from injuries quickly, and always heal perfectly without any permanent consequence other than, at most, a cool scar.

When recovering from Wounds, injuries heal one at a time in order from most to least deadly. Upon healing from an injury, erase the recorded Wound and the mark in its associated wound threshold.

Mortal Healing Times

Mortals erase one level of damage from their Health track after two days spent without undertaking any particularly strenuous activity. Only once there is no damage left in their Health track can they begin healing Wounds.

Wounds are healed in the following order, in the listed time:

Maimed and **mauled** Wounds take six weeks to heal.

Burned, **blinded**, **disabled arm**, and **disabled leg** Wounds take two weeks to heal.

Drained and **lacerated** Wounds take one week to heal.

Bruised and **dazed** Wounds take three days to heal.

Exalted Healing Times

Exalts erase one level of damage from their Health track every two days, even if they are highly active during that period; or they erase one level of damage after a day spent without strenuous activity. Only once there is no damage left in their Health track can they begin healing Wounds.

Wounds are healed in the following order, in the listed time:

Maimed and **mauled** Wounds take two weeks to heal.

Burned, **blinded**, **disabled arm**, and **disabled leg** Wounds take five days to heal.

Drained and **lacerated** Wounds take three days to heal.

Bruised and **dazed** Wounds take one day to heal.

Space in Combat

Scenes, particularly combat scenes, occur in a series of *zones*. A zone is a conceptually defined space in which acrobatic, energetic characters might interact with one another during an action scene. Zones aren't measured in square feet, but rather in narrative boundaries. A teahouse, for example, might be broken into zones such as *the kitchen*, *the dining area*, *the second floor*, and *the street outside*.

Conceptually linked groups of zones are themselves contained within larger abstract spaces called *sectors*. The entire teahouse described by the zones outlined above, for example, could make up one sector.

Conceptually linked groups of sectors, in turn, are encompassed within even larger spatial divisions called *districts*. The above teahouse sector, along with the adjacent streets and buildings for several blocks around it and their corresponding sectors, making up an entire neighborhood of a city, might be a single district.

Ranged Attacks

Brawl, Melee, and most Martial Arts attacks can only target enemies within the same zone.

Thrown attacks can target enemies within the same zone or in an adjacent zone.

Archery attacks can target enemies within the same zone or up to two zones away. Archery attacks made against enemies in the same zone suffer a –3 dice penalty.

These range rules are all subject to common sense, of course. An archer outside of a building can't shoot someone inside if all the doors and windows are shut, even though they're only one zone away.

Combat Actions and Complications

Most of the time, combat consists of characters moving and attacking. But there are other things a character can do with her turn. Most of these are standard actions, and will end the character's turn.

Simple Combat Actions

A character may take one simple action on her turn during combat. The following are a list of potential simple combat actions:

Argument

Characters may use a simple action to deliver a complex or emotionally impactful argument, entreaty, or oratory, or otherwise to utilize the social influence rules (see p. XX) in combat. Simply yelling a few words to a comrade to communicate basic information or issuing a simple command ("Look out behind you!") is reflexive and may occur at any time.

Attack

Attacking is the most common combat action taken in **EXD**. It is detailed extensively in previous sections of this chapter.

Desperate Escape

You try to cut and run, and to escape from battle. This uses up both your simple *and* swift actions, allowing you to flee to an adjacent zone even if you've already been struck this round, but at a cost of lowering your Defense to 3 until your next turn. If this places you at least two zones away from all opponents, *or* if you have no remaining allies participating in the fight, you are now *attempting to escape*, and must make an extended, contested (Dexterity + Athletics) roll against those attempting to pursue you. By default, this is against difficulty 6, though if you are forced to employ complex movement (see p. XX) this increases the difficulty by +2. Being mounted reduces the difficulty by –2, and transforms the desperate escape roll into (Dexterity + Ride). Gaining two more total successes than your pursuer(s) means you have gotten away.

If any of your pursuers accumulates two more successes than you, you are caught. If caught by a pursuer, you cannot attempt a desperate escape again until a number of rounds have passed equal to the successes by which the pursuer beat your total when he caught you.

Protect

You may use a simple action to dedicate yourself to protecting another character in the same zone. Until your next turn, the character you're protecting adds your Block value as a bonus to his Defense value, and you can invoke your Block to protect him if you wish.

Vanish

The character may conceal herself from her enemies, if there's anywhere for her to hide or any way for her to plausibly go to ground. This is a (Dexterity + Stealth) simple action with a difficulty set by the Storyteller based on the availability and quality of hiding places within the character's current zone.

Anyone who wishes to target a character who has vanished must score more successes than she did on a reflexive (Perception + Awareness) roll (again, with a difficulty set by the Storyteller based on the quality and density of available concealment).

A character is no longer in hiding once she takes some obvious action. If she launches an attack from hiding, its difficulty is lowered by –2.

Unrolled Actions

Sometimes you'll need to use up your simple action without an associated dice roll to do something concentration-intensive but not uncertain, such as pulling up a bucket on the end of a rope or activating a particularly demanding Charm.

Swift Combat Actions

A character may take one swift action on her turn during combat. She must always take her swift action *before* her simple action. The following are a list of potential swift combat actions:

Hold Steady

If you remain in the same zone you started the round in and don't use any of the other listed swift actions, you have chosen to *hold steady*. Narratively, holding steady doesn't necessarily mean you're standing still. You can reflexively move around inside of the zone you're in while holding steady, leaping across tables, dodging enemy attacks, doing bar slides and the like. If, for whatever reason, you are disallowed from taking any swift action at all, you are treated as having used this action.

Move

By using a swift action on her turn, a character may move from her current zone to an adjacent zone. The following restrictions apply:

• There must be a path that she can logically follow to reach that zone (such as going up the teahouse stairs to the second floor).

• She cannot use a move action if she has already been struck by an attack during the current round, even if that attack inflicted no damage.

• If this path is perilous or uncertain, such as jumping across a long gap or scrambling up a crumbling stone wall, then you may have to succeed at a (Dexterity + Athletics) roll in order to perform the move action.

> Complex Movement
>
> Sometimes when a character opts to use a swift action, particularly a move action, it will be to undertake some particular sort of movement that is not freewheeling acrobatics or traversing from zone to zone across a clear path. Examples include climbing up a wall, squeezing through a tight gap to get into another zone, or running toward a swamp pontoon through hip-deep water. These are all considered forms of *complex movement*.

Complex movement imposes a –3 die penalty on whatever other actions the character takes during that round, be they simple, swift, or reflexive. Remember that if a character is, for example, climbing to look cool and could have just as easily have taken the stairs, it's a stunt and counts as normal movement, since stunts ensure actions are never more difficult if they're needlessly elaborate for the sake of coolness. On the other hand, moving over difficult terrain such as a steep slope covered in loose, shifting flakes of shale definitely counts as complex movement. So does swimming.

Re-Arm

This swift action is used to retrieve your weapon from within the same zone after being disarmed, to pick up weapons that you find in the environment, and to change which weapon you have available and ready to use. Re-arming is always considered complex movement.
You cannot use a re-arm action if you have already been struck by an attack during the current round, even if that attack inflicted no damage.

Rise

You use a swift action to spring back to your feet after being knocked down. Rising is always considered complex movement.
You cannot use a rise action if you have already been struck by an attack during the current round, even if that attack inflicted no damage.

Take Cover

When you *take cover*, you are considered to be *in cover* so long as you don't use any other swift actions other than re-arm or hold steady.

There are two forms of cover: partial cover and total cover.

Total cover completely blocks access to a character. A character behind a solid wall is in total cover. It is impossible to target a character in total cover with attacks, unless the attacker can find an angle that gives him a shot. For example, enemies on the same side of the solid wall as the hiding character could attack her with no trouble. A character in total cover likewise cannot make attacks through it.

Total cover is primarily intended to defend against opponents in the same zone, as it is impossible to direct attacks across zones if there's a solid wall separating them even without the desired target taking cover.

Partial cover gives a character limited protection from ranged attacks. A character crouching behind an overturned table is in partial cover, as is one trading arrow volleys around a tree. Partial cover grants +1 Defense, +1 Soak, and +1 Block, but only against ranged attacks.

Cover is contextual, and heavily defined by the narrative of the battle and the agreed-upon layout of the available scenery. Leaving cover is reflexive and can be done at any time.

Combat Complications and Conditions

There are a few unusual conditions that come up frequently, particularly once Charms start getting used. They're consolidated here for ease of reference.

Aggravated Damage

Some attacks which exploit a supernatural being's special weakness, or which are imbued with terrible destructive mystic power, may inflict a special form of damage known as *Aggravated damage*. Aggravated damage inflicted on a character should be noted separately from normal damage, as it is often immune to magical healing. If Aggravated damage causes a Wound, that Wound is considered Aggravated. Magical healing is often likewise ineffective against Aggravated Wounds.

Ambush and Unexpected Attacks

It is possible to blindside enemies with attacks made from concealment during a fight. When a character attacks from stealth, she reveals herself and her attack is considered to be *unexpected*. Unexpected attacks gain Overwhelming (–2) and are unblockable and undodgeable.

When one entire band of allied characters opens a battle by attacking from stealth, the result is an *ambush*. All of the ambushing group's attacks are unexpected, and during the first round, the ambushed group cannot take any turns until *all* of the ambushers have taken their turns.

Brutal

Brutal is a special quality of some attacks which inflict particularly grievous damage to the target, such as explosions, jaws full of flesh-tearing teeth, and attacks imbued with destructive magic. A Brutal attack inflicts a penalty to the target's Soak rating against it. The value of this penalty is always noted in parentheses, such as "Brutal (–2)." If an attack gains multiple instances of this rule from various sources, their penalties stack.

Darkness, Blindness, and Invisible Enemies

If you've been temporarily blinded, as a general thing, the difficulty of all actions that depend on sight increases by +2.

If you're fighting someone you can't see, either because you're blind, it's pitch dark, or they're invisible, their Defense gains a +2 bonus against you.

Disarmed

By spending 1 Willpower when making an attack, a protagonist can attempt to disarm an opponent. This attack inflicts no damage; instead, if it successfully strikes the target, they are disarmed. Natural weapons such as fists or claws cannot generally be disarmed.

When a protagonist is disarmed, this generally means the character loses one of her weapons, which falls to the ground within the zone she occupies, forcibly equipping her with unarmed attacks unless she has another weapon in her other hand.

When an antagonist is disarmed, reduce his base damage by half (round up) unless he's already fighting with natural weapons.

Retrieving a discarded or disarmed weapon within the same zone or claiming a weapon from the environment requires the use of a re-arm swift action.

Fierce

Fierce is a special quality of attacks which are especially fast, confusing, or otherwise hard to avoid. If the target of a Fierce attack invokes Dodge against it, then after the attack resolves, they lose 1 more Dodge than they otherwise would normally. Generally, this means they reduce their Dodge by –2. If an attack has Fierce from multiple sources, it does not stack.

Heavy

Heavy is a special quality of attacks which are especially powerful, weighty, or otherwise hard to block. If the target of a Heavy attack invokes Block against it, then after the attack resolves, they lose 1 more Block than they otherwise would normally. Generally, this means they reduce their Block by –2. If an attack has Heavy from multiple sources, it does not stack.

Knocked Prone

When a character is knocked prone, she must use a rise swift action to climb back to her feet. If she remains prone, she cannot use the move action and her attack rolls suffer a –2 penalty.

Mounted Combat

There are few things more fearsome than a mounted fighter to those not similarly equipped. A protagonist fighting from atop a battle-trained mount can use the highest of her or her mount's Defense, and can treat Ride as a defensive Ability in order to calculate her own Defense.

While mounted, a character can use a move action before *or* after her simple action. If she launches a close-range attack against a non-mounted character immediately after arriving in a new zone, she adds +2 to her base damage.

If fighting on a mount *not* accustomed to or suited for battle, the character's Defense rating is penalized by –1, and unless she succeeds at a reflexive difficulty 7 (Wits + Ride) roll at the beginning of the battle, all of her actions suffer a –3 dice penalty.

Overwhelming

Overwhelming is a special quality of attacks which are notably overpowering, swift, or all-encompassing, making them difficult to avoid. An Overwhelming attack penalizes the target's Defense by the amount listed against that attack, such as "An attack enhanced by this Charm is Overwhelming (–1)." If an attack gains multiple instances of this rule from various sources, their penalties stack.

Piercing

Piercing is a special quality of attacks which are particularly likely to strike through protection on a target's vitals, or which enervate the target or otherwise render him more prone to serious injury. A Piercing attack penalizes the target's Stagger Threshold by the amount listed against that attack, such as "Damage from this attack is Piercing (–1)." If an attack gains multiple instances of this rule from various sources, their penalties stack.

Preparing and Retrieving Weapons

Unless a character is ambushed, she is considered to have her weapon of choice ready to use when combat begins. Unarmed attacks are *always* available (in a pinch, a character can simply reflexively drop whatever she's holding to employ them). If a character wishes to draw her weapon or switch her equipped weapons once a fight is underway, she must use the re-arm swift action.

Stall

A character may opt to delay taking her turn until later in the round, jumping in at any time after the rest of her allies are done acting. If she doesn't act *at all*, she may cut in line during the following round without paying Willpower; or, if the first turn belongs to her enemies, may

spend 1 Willpower to act first *before* any of her enemies have had a chance to act, changing the action sequence for the rest of the battle. This is potentially useful as a way to undertake desperately needed movement to another zone while on the back foot and being consistently targeted by enemies.

Temporary Health

Sometimes a Charm or other power will grant a character "Temporary Health," usually for the rest of the current scene. At the end of whatever duration it lasts for, Temporary Health vanishes. When it does so, any damage marked into it vanishes along with it, although Wounds gained due to damage inflicted against Temporary Health remain.

The practical result of this is that a character can suffer a greater amount of damage than her Health rating would normally be able to handle, but when her Temporary Health vanishes at the end of the scene, she doesn't immediately drop unconscious or dead by being saddled with more damage than her returned-to-normal Health value can hold.

Unblockable

Some rare attacks are so overwhelmingly powerful that it is simply impossible to Block them. Block cannot be invoked against an unblockable attack.

Undodgeable

Some rare attacks fill all the space around their target, such that it is simply impossible to Dodge them. Dodge cannot be invoked against an undodgeable attack.

Weaponry and Armor

While some Exalted are personally powerful enough to face their enemies with merely their own two fists and an impressive physique, most of those who go to battle in Creation do so with weapons to kill their enemies and armor to protect themselves from harm. Both are highly efficacious.

Weapons and armor are considerations for protagonists. While antagonists certainly show up bearing arms and wearing armor, they do not actually use these weapon and armor rules to determine their traits. Those are determined off of a simplified rubric explained in Chapter Twelve.

Fighting Style

There are five basic loadouts that you'll see combatants use. The mechanical benefits of each are blatantly and unashamedly written with an eye toward making them all competitive with one another. *In reality*, a guy with a sword and shield is almost always better off than a guy using one hand to hold a sword and the other one for jack shit, but this isn't reality, it's an action movie. Fighting like a fencer or samurai is cool so it needs to be viable.

Antagonists do not employ these fighting styles. They are for protagonists only.

Sword and Board: The sword in this case isn't necessarily an actual sword — most soldiers prefer spears — but the point is, the character fights with a weapon in one hand and a shield in the other. The benefit of this arrangement is that the shield provides +1 to the character's Defense rating and +1 to her base Block value while she is using it.

Freehanding: The character carries nothing but a single one-handed weapon, which she can freely switch between a single or two-handed grip. Thanks to this versatility and her greater ability to use feints and tricks by switching hands, or to use a free hand to wrestle with an opponent, once per battle the character may Dodge without spending Willpower and once per battle she may Block without spending Willpower.

Two-Handing: The character carries a huge weapon requiring two hands to use effectively. In addition to the high Damage value of two-handed weapons, when someone attempts to block a two-handed weapon, they suffer a –1 penalty to their Block against their attack. If forced to use a two-handed weapon in one hand, the weapon's Damage value is reduced by –2 and it does not penalize the target's Block value.

Dual Wielding: The character fights with a weapon in each hand. If the weapons are of different kinds, then the character may choose to attack with either weapon on any given turn. Once per scene, after making an attack which fails to damage its target, the character may immediately and reflexively attempt the attack again. This does not cost Willpower or use up her once per scene re-roll (it is not treated as a re-roll at all, but rather as an entirely new attack), and any Charms that enhanced the first attack attempt still enhance the second attack attempt.

Unarmed: The character fights with only those weapons nature has provided her, generally meaning her fists and feet. While fighting unarmed, she increases her base Dodge value by +1 and her base Block value by +1.

These fighting styles encompass all five combat Abilities. Bows and firewands are two-handed weapons. Throwing weapons are usually freehanded, but *could* be dual wielded or even used with a shield.

Weapons Traits

A character's choice of weaponry determined what dice pool she attacks with, how close she must be to her target, and how damaging her attacks are. Some weapons also have other special qualities.

A weapon's **Attribute** describes whether it is aimed with Strength (S), Dexterity (D), or the character's choice of either (S/D).

A weapon's **Ability** describes what combat skill is normally rolled when making attacks with it: Archery, Brawl, Martial Arts (MA), Melee, or Thrown.

A weapon's **Damage** determines how many dice of damage are rolled (before threshold damage from attack roll successes are added) when a character strikes with the weapon.

A weapon's Wound describes what kind of Wound it normally inflicts when it Staggers an opponent.

One-Handed Weapons

These weapons can be effectively wielded with one hand, leaving the other free to use a shield or a second weapon.

Name	Attribute	Ability	Damage	Wound
Axe/Chopping Sword	S	Melee	5	Lacerated
Club*	S	Melee	4	Bruised

Name	Attribute	Ability	Damage	Wound
Improvised Weapon*	S/D	Brawl/MA	4	Varies
Katar/Tiger Claws*	S/D	Brawl/MA	4	Lacerated
Knife*	D	Melee	4	Lacerated
Mace/Hammer	S	Melee	5	Lacerated
Shield Bash*	S	Melee/MA	4	Bruised
Staff*	D	MA	4	Bruised
Slashing Sword/Spear	D	Melee	5	Lacerated
Straight Sword	S/D	Melee	5	Lacerated
Unarmed*	S/D	Brawl/MA	3	Bruised
Whip*	D	Melee/MA	4	Bruised

* Weapons marked with one asterisk are considered nimble weapons. When wielding only nimble weapons, the first attack that strikes the character each round does not prevent her from using a move action. Only after being struck twice before her turn is she prohibited from using a move action.

Two-Handed Weapons

These weapons require two hands to wield effectively due to their sheer weight and size.

Name	Attribute	Ability	Damage	Wound
Great Sword	S/D	Melee	7	Lacerated
Lance	D	Melee	7	Lacerated
Polearm/Halberd/Great Axe	S	Melee	7	Lacerated
Sledgehammer	S	Melee	7	Lacerated

Ranged Weapons

These weapons can be used to attack characters in other zones. **Thrown** weapons can attack characters in directly adjacent zones. Most **Archery** weapons can attack up to two zones away and use the two-handed fighting style. Archery attacks made against enemies in the same zone suffer a –3 dice penalty.

Name	Attribute	Ability	Damage	Wound
Baton/Rock*	S/D	Thrown	4	Bruised
Boomerang**	D	Thrown	4	Bruised
Bow/Crossbow	D	Archery	5	Lacerated
Chakram/Knife/Shuriken*	D	Thrown	4	Lacerated
Firewand***	D	Archery	6	Burned
Hatchet	S	Thrown	5	Lacerated
Javelin****	D	Thrown	5	Lacerated

* Weapons marked with one asterisk are considered nimble weapons. When wielding only nimble weapons, the first attack that strikes the character each round does not prevent her from using a move action. Only after being struck twice before her turn is she prohibited from using a move action.

** Returns when thrown, also nimble

***Firewands must be wielded with two hands, can only attack one zone away, and do not suffer a penalty for attacks against targets in the same zone. Each time they are fired, it is a Resources 2 expenditure.

**** Javelins use the rules of an Archery weapon, save that they can be wielded with one hand.

Artifact Weapons

Artifact weapons use the same basic rules as mundane weapons, at least when being used to cut someone's head off. Further rules for artifacts can be found in Chapter Nine.

One-Handed Artifact Weapons

Name	Attribute	Ability	Damage	Wound
Grimcleaver/Reaver Daiklave	S	Melee	7	Lacerated
Razor Claws/Slayer Katar*	S/D	Brawl/MA	6	Lacerated
Short Daiklave*	D	Melee	6	Lacerated
Goremaul	S	Melee	7	Lacerated
Wrackstaff*	D	MA	6	Bruised
Longfang/Reaper Daiklave	D	Melee	7	Lacerated
Daiklave	S/D	Melee	7	Lacerated
Smashfists**	S/D	Brawl/MA	5	Bruised
Direlash*	D	Melee/MA	6	Lacerated

* Weapons marked with one asterisk are considered nimble weapons. When wielding only nimble weapons, the first attack that strikes the character each round does not prevent her from using a move action. Only after being struck twice before her turn is she prohibited from using a move action.

** Nimble. Can be wielded with the unarmed fighting style, despite not being a natural weapon.

Two-Handed Artifact Weapons

These weapons require two hands to wield effectively due to their sheer weight and size.

Name	Attribute	Ability	Damage	Wound
Direlance/Grand Grimscythe	D	Melee	9	Lacerated
Grand Daiklave	S/D	Melee	9	Lacerated
Grand Grimcleaver	S	Melee	9	Lacerated
Grand Goremaul	S	Melee	9	Lacerated

Ranged Artifact Weapons

These weapons can be used to attack characters in other zones. **Thrown** weapons can attack characters in directly adjacent zones. Most **Archery** weapons can attack up to two zones away and use the two-handed fighting style. Archery made against enemies in the same zone suffer a –3 dice penalty.

Name	Attribute	Ability	Damage	Wound
Infinite Chakram/Skycutter*	D	Thrown	6	Lacerated
Powerbow/Siege Crossbow	D	Archery	7	Lacerated
Dragon Sigh Wand**	D	Archery	8	Burned

* Returns when thrown, also nimble

**Dragon sigh wands must be wielded with two hands, can only attack one zone away, and do not suffer a penalty for attacks against targets in the same zone. Each time they are fired, it is a Resources 2 expenditure.

Armor Traits

There are many kinds of armor in Creation, of varying designs and costs. Some are enormously prestigious, some are ugly and utilitarian, some are all a poor conscript can afford. In-fiction, protagonists care about all of these things, but for the purpose of our rules, armor has been boiled down to unarmored, light, and heavy stat blocks. This is in the service of both simplicity and fun. If you want your deadly vagabond to wear tattered, rivet-studded leather strips that blow in the wind, cool, we'll give him the same protection we would a sensible man with a chain shirt and iron cap. In reality, no soldier in his right mind ventures onto a battlefield without a helmet. But helmets cover up your awesome hairstyle and face tattoos, so these rules don't care whether you're wearing one.

A class of armor has five values:

Armor's **Defense** value acts as a modifier to your Defense rating while you're wearing it.

Armor's **Dodge** value acts as a modifier to your base Dodge value while you're wearing it.

Armor's **Soak** value sets the baseline for your Soak rating while you're wearing it.

Armor's **Stagger Threshold** determines how much damage has to be inflicted on you in a single hit in order to Stagger you.

Armor's **Fatigue** value describes the difficulty modifier it imposes on rolls to perform extended strenuous activities while wearing it. Further, because wearing armor is generally uncomfortable and draining, and the strain of using it builds up over time, when you go to sleep at the end of any day you mostly spent wearing armor, or in which you engaged in a strenuous battle while wearing armor, you must make a (Stamina + Resistance) roll in order to successfully regain Willpower. The difficulty is (5 + armor's Fatigue modifier). If the armor's modifier is +0, you don't need to roll.

Class	Defense	Dodge	Soak	Stagger	Fatigue
Unarmored	+1	–0	4	2+	+0
Light	–0	–1	5	3+	+2

Class	Defense	Dodge	Soak	Stagger	Fatigue
Heavy	–1	–2	6	4+	+3

Artifact Armor Traits

As with artifact weapons, these are just the rules for how well the armor keeps your insides on your insides. Other rules are found in Chapter Nine.

Class	Defense	Dodge	Soak	Stagger	Fatigue
Light	–0	–1	6	4+	+1
Heavy	–1	–2	7	5+	+2

> Influence vs Mind Control
>
> Although the **Exalted Demake** doesn't have keywords, the "psyche" concept from **EX3** is alive and well here.
>
> As a Storytelling consideration, characters might come to regret things they've been talked into doing through social influence, but that happens in the same way it does in the real world: if they prosper, they're happy; if they do ill-considered things, or things don't work out well for them, they become resentful. That's how things basically unfold even if a Solar used Excellence of the Blazing Sun to roll 20 dice on his (Manipulation + Presence) action: people think they got swindled, sold a bill of goods, or given bad advice. Someone might decry this as mind control, but if they do, they're trying to deflect blame from their actions or to stir up ill-will against the character they feel used by. It's not mind control. They just got fast-talked by someone very persuasive.
>
> On the other hand, there are plenty of Charms that entirely bypass the social influence system, such as Hypnotic Tongue Technique or — God help you — Irresistible Succubus Style. These *are* straight-up magical mind control, and people will respond to them as such. Their friends will probably notice the target is acting strangely. Once the magic abates, the target usually realizes she wasn't herself and that something was done to her. Such effects are very, very powerful, but using them cavalierly tends to breed a lot of resentment and fear of the character, and is a good way to make enemies if directed against anyone with the power or influence to retaliate later.

Social Influence

For almost five thousand years, the Chosen have attempted to forge lasting peace and justice in their world by picking up daiklaves and killing those who oppose them. This has never worked, but do not despair! If attempted for another five thousand years, and then five thousand more, perhaps you shall be the one who finally carves a bloody fuller that uncovers the perfect world.

For those of less violent disposition, there's talking.

Before getting into the specifics, **this is the essential gist of all the systems that follow:** *everyone has motives, and if you want them to do something for you, those motives need to line up with what you want.* Say you need help moving all your crap into your new upstairs apartment. If you ask a stranger to help you, he's going to say no. If you ask your friend to help you, well, he doesn't *want* to spend most of his weekend doing that either, but he probably will

anyway because he's your friend. If you don't have a friend around and *have* to convince the stranger, you'll need to bribe him, threaten him, or figure out a way to convince him that helping you move aligns with his goals or beliefs so that he's willing to do it.

Social Traits

Characters have two traits that are used to interact with the world socially and to resist the intrigues of schemers and the entreaties of true-hearted revolutionaries. These are Nature and Intimacies.

Nature

Described in greater detail in Chapter Two, Nature describes the bedrock characteristics of a person's heart and soul. Both protagonists and antagonists have a Nature (though it's common not to bother to assign an antagonist's Nature unless the Storyteller anticipates players will talk to him). Broadly speaking, it is impossible to compel a character to violate their Nature without *extremely* powerful magic.

Intimacies

All **EXD** characters have *Intimacies*, special ties or principles that are of utmost importance to them. (Again, antagonists probably won't have theirs filled in unless they're expected to stick around for a while.) Generally these are articulated either as a personal tie and the context for that tie, such as "My wife (love)," "The Despot of Gem (hatred)", or "Great Forks (civic loyalty)," or else as a statement of the character's personal philosophy or values, such as "I never expect anyone to look out for anyone but themselves," "Those who prey on the weak must be punished," or "With great power comes great responsibility."

Most protagonists have three Intimacies. If an Intimacy becomes irrelevant or impossible to sustain (for example, if a character succeeds in killing the Abyssal who murdered her family), she can adopt a new Intimacy to replace it at the beginning of the next story. Alternately, at the end of a story a protagonist's player can voluntarily abandon and replace a single Intimacy that she feels is no longer relevant to her character.

Intimacies act as shields to protect characters against being talked into acting against their own interests, but also weak points which may be used to goad them into ill-considered action that aligns with their ideology or passions.

Aim

Generally, social influence will be attempted with one of two objectives: *changing someone's mind* or *getting someone to do something*.

Changing someone's mind involves making compelling arguments or evoking particular emotional states, and is accomplished by using the **inspire** social action.

Getting someone to do something involves matching up your desire with their motives, and is accomplished using the **persuade** social action.

Finally, there is a third social influence action, in which you **read intentions** to discover more about the person you are attempting to influence.

Inspire Actions

If you don't have a good path to persuade someone, or are just looking to make some friends or enemies for later, you can always attempt to change the hearts and minds of those you meet. If they don't care about your struggle, convince them to care. Or befriend them outright, so they're inclined to do a favor because you, their friend, are asking about it.

Inspiring someone is a social action using a social Attribute matching the approach you're using + one of the following Abilities: Empathy, Linguistics, Performance, Presence, or Socialize. For example, stirring up patriotism toward your homeland with a stirring performance of its anthem would be (Charisma + Performance). Select a combination that matches whatever it is you're trying to do and roll it against a difficulty of the target's Willpower (if attempting to inspire a group of listeners, roll against the highest Willpower present). Your objective here isn't to get someone to *do* something, but to make them *feel* a certain way.

Once an inspire action has failed against a particular target, they are immune to repeated attempts for the rest of the story unless the new attempts take some notably different tack (switching from a rousing anthem to an telling a highly-propagandized story, etc).

If an inspiration attempt succeeds, the target or targets either *gain a temporary Intimacy*, *doubt an existing Intimacy*, or *are swept up in a feeling*, depending on what you were trying to do.

Temporary Intimacies: If you were trying to convince them to a certain point of view, and they did not already harbor any Intimacies around that subject, then when you succeed they gain a *temporary Intimacy* according with your inspiration. This behaves in all ways as a regular Intimacy, save that it can exceed the normal limit of having only three Intimacies at a time, and it vanishes at the end of the current story.

Note the number of successes rolled when creating a temporary Intimacy. If this is equal to or greater than the target's Willpower rating, then you have created a true Intimacy instead. If this means that the target has more than four Intimacies, they will be forced to discard one of their Intimacies at the end of the current story.

While it lasts, a temporary Intimacy may also be *reinforced*. Once per scene, in any scene after the one in which a temporary Intimacy was created, an inspire action may be used to strengthen it. Note the successes rolled and add them to the total amount of prior successes which have gone into the temporary Intimacy. If this new total matches or exceeds the target's Willpower rating, the temporary Intimacy becomes a true intimacy.

A character may also choose, at the end of the story, to voluntarily upgrade a temporary Intimacy into a permanent Intimacy rather than discarding it.

If the target finds the inspire outcome objectionable, he may, on the spot, spend 1 Willpower to reject it, so that the temporary Intimacy does not form or is not reinforced. If accepting the temporary Intimacy would conflict with his Nature, he doesn't have to spend Willpower to reject it. This can only be done at the time the action is performed; a character cannot, several hours or days later, decide that the temporary Intimacy is inconvenient and spend Willpower to be rid of it.

Doubting an Intimacy: If you were trying to convince them to a certain point of view, and they already harbored an Intimacy that conflicts with this position, then when you succeed their Intimacy is transformed into an *Intimacy in doubt*. A doubted Intimacy is effectively disabled for the rest of the current story.

Note the number of successes rolled when casting an Intimacy into doubt. If this is equal to or greater than the target's Willpower rating, then the Intimacy is removed completely.

While an Intimacy is in doubt, it can be further *undermined*. This works exactly the same as reinforcing a temporary Intimacy, culminating in destroying the Intimacy.

If the target finds the inspire outcome objectionable, he may, on the spot, spend 1 Willpower to reject it, so that the Intimacy is not cast into doubt or undermined. If casting the Intimacy into doubt would conflict with his Nature, he doesn't have to spend Willpower to reject it. This can only be done at the time the action is performed; a character cannot, several hours or days later, decide that he *does* trust his wife and spend Willpower to no longer doubt his Intimacy toward her.

Temporary Intimacies and Intimacies in doubt can both be reinforced or undermined with additional inspire actions, as well. After you cast someone's trust in his wife into doubt, one of the target's friends might come along later and use another inspire action to attempt to reinforce the faltering Intimacy. Any successes rolled would negate yours, potentially removing the Intimacy from doubt. The same process can be used to break down a temporary Intimacy, destroying it prematurely.

Being swept up in a feeling occurs when you succeed at an attempt, not to make the target think a certain way about something, but simply to experience a powerful emotional response. Being swept up in a feeling lasts for the rest of the current scene. It has two effects:

First, persuade and inspire actions which appeal to the target's current emotional state lower their difficulty by –2.

Second, a powerful emotion is considered to be equivalent to a mid-grade bribe for the purpose of persuade actions (see below). Essentially, what you're offering is "if you do this thing that aligns with your current emotional state, it will feel very satisfying."

Being swept up in a feeling can also be rejected by spending 1 Willpower. No Nature provides protection from feeling particular emotions.

Persuasion Actions

Persuasion actions are a bit more involved than inspire actions. When you want someone to do something, the first thing you need to consider is the *scope* of the request.

Scope

All persuasion attempts are not created equal.

Getting people to inconvenience themselves isn't too hard if you're charismatic, manipulative, or just plain hot enough that people regularly make fools of themselves to please you. But getting someone to *really stick his neck out* for you… that's hard.

And so, social influence based around *getting someone to do something* falls into two broad categories: *inconveniences* and *ordeals*.

An **inconvenience** is any request that would cost the target a small amount of his time or resources, or which asks him to subject himself to very minor risk (being scolded by his wife, being a few minutes late to an appointment). Asking someone to break a social taboo he doesn't

really care about and isn't likely to get caught violating is an inconvenience. Asking a farmer to let you ride in his haycart for an hour until you reach town is an inconvenience.

An **ordeal** is any request that would cost the target a significant investment of time or resources, or subject him to meaningful risk or danger to either his livelihood or his person (having his wife leave him, offending a wrathful god). Asking someone to subject himself to serious social or legal repercussions is an ordeal. Convincing a farmer to cut off his finger so that you can use it as a blood offering to pacify an angry ghost is an ordeal.

Persuading People

Persuasion rolls are constructed exactly the same way as inspire rolls: A social Attribute + one of Empathy, Linguistics, Performance, Presence, or Socialize are all likely candidates, rolled against a difficulty of the target's Willpower rating or the highest Willpower rating in a group. For example, to use the standards of etiquette and the expectations of society to maneuver someone into doing what you want out of a sense of obligation, roll (Manipulation + Socialize).

You can get characters to assent to an inconvenience with nothing but a successful social roll, but in order to get them to agree to an ordeal, you need to offer them something. "Something" means either appealing to their Nature or an Intimacy, or offering them something they want (a bribe) that they consider to be of commensurate value with the request, or something they *don't* want (a threat) that they consider to be of commensurate unpleasantness to be worth acceding to the request to avoid.

Inconveniences: When you target someone and succeed at a roll to request an inconvenience of them, they generally do what you want them to do.

If the target has an Intimacy that aligns with what you're asking for, or if it aligns with their Nature, lower the difficulty of the persuade action by –2. If the target has an Intimacy that *conflicts* with the request, increase the difficulty by +2.

If the target *really* doesn't want to perform the inconvenience you're asking for, they can spend 1 Willpower to reject it. If the inconvenience conflicts with their Nature, they do not have to pay anything to reject the request.

Ordeals: Ordeal requests automatically fail unless they accord with one of the target's Intimacies, his Nature, or you offer him a sufficiently motivating bribe or threat.

If you meet one of these criteria and succeed at a roll to request an ordeal of them, they generally do what you want them to do.

If the target *really* doesn't want to perform the ordeal you're asking for, they can spend 1 Willpower to reject it. If the inconvenience conflicts with their Nature, they do not have to pay anything to reject the request.

In either case, once a persuade attempt has failed (either through bad dice luck or rejection) it can't be attempted again during the same scene unless a different tack is taken (switching from reasoned appeals to threatening to cut the target's balls off, for example).

It's worth taking a moment to discuss intimidation and the Chosen. The Exalted are very powerful beings, and know that they're very powerful beings. A huge angry off-duty soldier threatening to peel your face off and eat it if you don't do what he wants is plenty of inducement for *most* people to do what he wants, but the majority of Exalted are well within their rights to

blow him off at no cost because they know he has no prayer of actually hurting them in a fight. If he threatens their loved ones, that might be another matter, but broadly speaking, direct threats of physical violence only work when there's some reason to think the speaker can back them up.

Read Intentions Actions

During a scene of social interaction, or a scene where a character appears to wear their heart on their sleeve in some way (leaping into a dangerous situation while shouting about one's motives is a staple for the genre), a character may attempt to scrutinize another character's behavior to figure out what *really* makes them tick. This is a **read intentions** action.

This requires the target to have first done something potentially revealing: made a substantial proposal, asked for a favor, or murdered someone in a fit of rage, for example. Small talk over dinner isn't sufficient to attempt to read someone's intentions. Make a (Perception + Empathy) roll. **If the target is an antagonist**, this roll is made against a difficulty set by the Storyteller based on how much they believe the target revealed himself during the scene and how sneaky he is. **If the target is another protagonist**, this roll is made at difficulty (4 + target's Manipulation). Success will reveal something of the target's true thoughts and motives during the scene. One success generally isn't enough to get more than a sense of honesty, duplicity, or motives that are more complex than they appear. Three or more successes may reveal an Intimacy. Five or more successes could reveal the target's Nature. This can only be attempted once per scene.

Fighting Against Influence

Sometimes social influence scenes can get pretty complex, and one character may wish to intervene on another's behalf, or the "influence" may quickly become an argument or debate. These situations are all represented by the **counterargument** action.

A counterargument is, essentially, contesting someone else's attempt at social influence with a contradicting one. If someone tries to inspire you by detailing the many admirable features of the Immaculate Philosophy, you might decide to mount a counterargument running down the many ways it is self-serving and flawed, for example; or, if you see someone talking your friend into selling his horse at far below its value, you might jump in to convince him he's being conned.

In all of these cases, the character making the counterargument constructs a dice pool in exactly the same fashion they would for an inspire or persuade action, then rolls it against a difficulty of the Willpower rating of the speaker they're attempting to counter. Their successes are then subtracted from the speaker's successes, before the original inspire or persuade action can finish resolving.

In the case of whirling debates between opposing viewpoints in a group, to keep matters simple, no matter how many people jump in to contribute to the discussion or argument, simply use the rules outlined above for persuade, inspire, and counterargument actions, backed up by the teamwork rules found on page XX.

Prayer

While spirits can be argued or debated with in the same fashion as any other character when confronted face-to-face, they can also be enticed from afar through prayer. Petitioning a god for any sort of favor via prayer is a Charisma + (Linguistics or Performance) roll. The difficulty to attract a god's notice at all is generally 9, though well-considered sacrifices can lower this by –1

or –2, and being a properly ordained priest of the god lowers the difficulty by a further –1. Depending on how distant, powerful, and widely revered the god is, it may require anywhere from one to a *very great* number of successes to attract his attention.

Solars of the Zenith Caste, Lunars of the No Moon Caste, Abyssals of the Midnight Caste, and all Sidereals are considered to be ordained priests of any and every god they might offer prayer to.

Other Deadly Hazards

The Exalted are highly resistant to mundane poisons, never contract minor illnesses, and can bounce back easily from even the most ferocious mundane disease.

Those around them are not so lucky.

Poison

Poison is a ticking clock threat. Whether administered in a character's food or drink, applied with a stealthy blowdart, or used to envenom a weapon, it either tests an Exalt's toughness or starts a race to apply an antidote before it's too late. Thus:

When a character is subjected to poison, she must immediately make a Stamina + Resistance roll against the poison's difficulty rating. Regardless of the outcome, the victim suffers the poison's listed penalty to all actions for its *duration*. At the end of that duration, she also suffers damage equal to the poison's damage rating, minus the number of successes she got on her resistance roll. The character's Stagger Threshold against this damage is always calculated as though she were unarmored.

A character who is immune to poison simply ignores both damage and penalty.

Treating poison requires an Intelligence + Medicine roll against a difficulty set by the Storyteller to figure out what kind of poison is in play and thus what antidote is needed (assuming it's not blindingly obvious, as when the attending physician saw a cobra bite the patient with her own two eyes; in that case, skip the diagnosis), followed by a difficulty 6 Intelligence + Medicine roll to apply a correct counteracting dosage if the proper antidote is available; if not, improvising something to serve in its place increases the roll to difficulty 8. Success immediately counteracts the poison, negating its penalty and reducing the damage inflicted at the end of its duration by the number of successes rolled. This reduction stacks on top of any mitigation already gained by the patient's Stamina + Resistance roll.

Multiple doses of poison must be resisted independently, and can stack their damage, but only the worst penalty applies.

Poison	Difficulty	Damage	Penalty	Duration
Alchemical poison	6	8	–1	10 minutes
Arrow frog venom	8	7	–4	6 hours
Court poison	7	8	–3	3 hours
Demon venom	8	9*	–4	12 hours
Howling lotus	9	7	–3	2 hours
Plant toxin	7	4	–2	10 hours

| Serpent venom | 6 | 3 | –2 | 1 hour |

* Demon venom inflicts Aggravated damage if not successfully resisted.

Deadly poisons such as those listed above tend to inflict mauled Wounds on mortals, but Exalted and similarly robust supernatural beings merely suffer drained Wounds from all save demon venom.

Poison damage cannot be Dodged or Blocked.

Sickness and Disease

Diseases are transmitted and contracted by various means. If potentially exposed to a disease, a character must roll Stamina + Resistance against a difficulty of its *virulence*; failure means she has contracted the disease.

Exalted do not follow any of the normal rules for mundane disease. If infected with a mundane disease, Exalted simply suffer a –2 penalty and are potentially infectious to others. Each morning at sunrise, an Exalt may make a Stamina + Resistance roll against difficulty 6 to 8 (depending on how serious the disease is, as judged by the Storyteller) to throw off its effects.

For mortals, disease is one of the greatest terrors in the world, capable of invisibly slaying entire cities or nations. Without medical treatment, mortals are generally helpless in the face of disease. A mortal protagonist left to the mercy of an untreated disease may make a difficulty 9 Stamina + Resistance roll to miraculously survive it; antagonists are not so lucky. In either case, medical treatment is *strongly* recommended in those cases where it is possible (some diseases have no known effective cure without recourse to potent healing magic).

Treating a disease requires an extended Intelligence + Medicine roll, made at one-day intervals, against a listed *difficulty* until the required *goal* is accumulated in successes. Afterwards, the patient may make a roll of Stamina + Resistance against difficulty 6 each day at sunrise to attempt to throw off the malady (antagonists roll with Expertise instead); three consecutive failures indicate a relapse and the need for another round of treatment.

Cholera

Cholera is marked by dizziness, vomiting, and ceaseless diarrhea, leading to severe dehydration. Roughly half of those who contract cholera die from it. Because of the manner in which it spreads, cholera tends to manifest in widespread outbreaks that scythe through entire communities, and is the especial bane of besieging armies. Cholera has broken far more sieges in the Second Age than military action. There is a delay of about five days between contracting cholera and the appearance of its symptoms.

Cholera is generally contracted from tainted water supplies or foodstuffs, particularly when contaminated with the feces of livestock or people. Cholera victims are also contagious to others via direct contact.

Virulence: 7

Difficulty to treat: 6

Goal: 3

Untreated Diagnosis: Once symptoms set in, make an untreated disease recovery roll once per day. Each failure inflicts one drained Wound. These Wounds cannot naturally heal while the disease persists.

Malaria

Malaria causes fever, chills, fatigue, and copious sweating, coming and going in waves. In particularly severe cases, these symptoms are joined by dehydration, stomach pain, and internal bleeding, leading to death. The disease tends to progress over the case of one to four weeks, after a highly variable incubation period.

Malaria is contracted from mosquito bites and is not contagious between humans.

Virulence: 5

Difficulty to treat: 6

Goal: 3

Untreated Diagnosis: Once symptoms set in, make an untreated disease recovery roll once per week. Each failure inflicts one bruised Wound. These Wounds cannot naturally heal while the disease persists.

Plague

The most feared of all standard diseases, plague is signified by swollen, red-black nodules that appear at the neck, armpits, and groin, accompanied by high fever, coughing, and eventually delirium. Eight in ten victims die within days. The disease burns hot and fast, incubating for two to six days and then ravaging the victim for three days or so, at which point the patient either recovers or dies.

No one is quite sure what starts plague outbreaks, but they spread like wildfire. Plague is very highly contagious, able to spread through even casual contact with victims or just about anything they've come in contact with. The only guaranteed defense against plague is to avoid an area experiencing an outbreak until the disease has entirely burned itself out. Plague has been known to depopulate entire regions.

Virulence: 8

Difficulty to treat: 8

Goal: 4

Untreated Diagnosis: Once symptoms set in, make an untreated disease recovery roll once every 36 hours. Each failure inflicts one drained Wound. These Wounds cannot naturally heal while the disease persists.

Smallpox

Among the worst of the human diseases, smallpox is marked by a very high fever, muscle aches, and chills lasting for about four days, followed by a widespread rash that develops into pustules. By day nine, the pustules burst and scab over. Approximately 30 percent of smallpox victims die, while the rest are left permanently scarred by the bursting pustules. The disease has an incubation period of 9 to 12 days between infection and the initial onset of fever.

Smallpox is an *extremely* virulent airborne disease; a breeze working its way through a boarding house can carry the disease from one infected resident to spread the sickness to everyone else living there, even without ever being in the same room as the initial victim. Smallpox also clings to a patient's clothes, bedding, and other belongings, and so when it appears, it tends to do so in spectacular outbreaks. The disease's only mercy is that if a patient survives infection once, she is permanently immune thereafter.

Virulence: 9

Difficulty to treat: 7

Goal: 4

Untreated Diagnosis: Once symptoms set in, make an untreated disease recovery roll every three days. Each failure inflicts one lacerated Wound. These Wounds cannot naturally heal while the disease persists.

Puppeteer's Plague

This magical disease was made infamous by the Mask of Winters by his use of it as a weapon of war. Puppeteer's plague infects the marrow of its victims, bringing their bones to hideous Unquiet animation within the patient's still-living body. The disease begins with restless itching, then proceeds to seizures, fugue states, and somnambulistic periods in which the victim's consciousness is suppressed and her skeleton commits horrendous acts of violence. Finally, the victim's skeleton tears its way free of her body, becoming an Unquiet horror known as a bonesider.

Puppeteer's plague occurs as the result of eating the meat of beasts that have fed on human flesh, and can also be contracted from wounds inflicted by bonsiders.

Virulence: 5

Difficulty to treat: 8

Goal: 5

Untreated Diagnosis: Once symptoms set in, make an untreated disease recovery roll once per day. Each failure inflicts one lacerated Wound. These Wounds cannot naturally heal while the disease persists. As a magical disease, puppeteer's plague can kill Exalts, although they suffer only bruised Wounds until their Wounds exceed their Stamina rating. In either case, if the victim is killed while infected (either by the disease itself or by other means), their skeleton tears free of their flesh.

The Great Contagion

The most horrifying disease in history, this magical contagion slew nine-tenths of all living things once upon a time. It is mostly considered a historical disaster, and is not known to naturally persist in any form in modern times, although a few sorcerers are whispered to possess live samples of the Contagion. In many respects it resembles common plague, producing the characteristic swelling and other symptoms, along with a greenish tinge to the flesh. It has an incubation period of two weeks, followed by a three-day burn cycle. Patients are massively contagious from the first moments of infection, long before symptoms show, able to transmit itself by even the most casual contact. Most terrifying of all, the Great Contagion was able to effortlessly cross all known species barriers, spreading far and wide by infecting birds, rats, and

even insects and plants. Thankfully, since the Scarlet Empress directed the mystic power of the Realm Defense Grid against the disease, its ability to infect across species lines seems much reduced or entirely destroyed, and so on the few occasions when some fool has unleashed it during subsequent centuries, it has eventually burned out without becoming an all-encompassing pandemic.

Virulence: 9

Difficulty to treat: The Great Contagion in its original form was untreatable by conventional or even most magical means. Modern samples or reproductions are difficulty 9.

Goal: 10

Untreated Diagnosis: Once symptoms set in, make an untreated disease recovery roll once every day. Each failure inflicts one drained Wound, which cannot heal while the disease persists. As a magical disease, the Great Contagion can readily kill Exalts, who must roll at least two successes on their untreated recovery roll to throw off the Great Contagion, while mortals must roll at least *three* successes.

Hazards and Traps

Sometimes it's dangerous and potentially deadly just to be somewhere, be it because that place is on fire, collapsing with you inside of it, or filled with deadly First Age traps. In any event, use the following rules to survive these dangers:

Hazards are ongoing environmental threats that endanger you for as long as you're exposed to them. Hazards have four traits: *difficulty, damage, Wound, penalty,* and *interval.*

To survive a hazard, you must make a reflexive roll to resist it. Generally this is either a (Dexterity + Athletics) roll, representing trying to avoid the hazard, or (Stamina + Resistance), representing trying to tough it out without excessive injury. By using a stunt, some other roll might be substituted if it seems appropriate, such as (Wits + Ride) to avoid it with your horse, (Dexterity + Melee) to knock aside flying hazards, or even (Wits + Sail) to mitigate the hazard with expert seamanship.

A hazard's *difficulty* dictates the difficulty of this roll. Its *damage* determines how much damage you suffer from exposure to it, minus the successes you rolled on your resistance roll. *Wound,* of course, determines what kind of Wounds the hazard inflicts if it Staggers you. A hazard's *penalty* is the dice pool penalty inflicted on all your actions while you remain exposed to it (including your resistance rolls, alas). Finally, *interval* determines how long you can be exposed to a hazard before you have to roll to resist being damaged by it again.

Most hazards can be either Blocked or Dodged. In both cases, their damage value is directly decreased by your Block or Dodge value, whichever you pay to invoke.

Unless otherwise indicated, a character exposed to a hazard must resist its damage at the beginning of each of her turns while she remains exposed to it.

Hazards increase their penalty by –3 against groups.

Hazard	Difficulty	Damage	Wound	Penalty	Interval
wAcid bath	6	4	Burned	–0	1 round
Bonfire	7	3	Burned	–0	1 round

Burning building	6	3	Burned	–0	1 minute
Tomb beetle swarm	7	3	Lacerated	–1	1 round
Lava	9	5	Burned	–2	1 round
Severe heat/cold	5	2	Drained	–1	1 hour
Severe sandstorm	6	3	Lacerated	–2	1 minute
Magical ice storm	8	4	Lacerated	–2	1 minute
Silent Wind of Hell	9	5	Drained	-3	1 round

Traps and **one-time hazards** work the same way as other hazards, but have usually have no penalty and always have no interval. Those subjected to them must resist them as soon as they encounter the one-time hazard, rather than at the beginning of their turn..

Traps and one-time hazards also inflict a –3 penalty against rolls by groups to resist them, even when they otherwise do not have a penalty.

Falling Damage

Characters can fall one zone without suffering any real damage. Vertical zones are assumed to encompass roughly one floor of a building.

Characters who fall for 2 or more zones are subjected to a one-time hazard which must be resisted with either (Dexterity + Athletics) or (Stamina + Resistance). This roll is made against difficulty 8, or difficulty 4 if falling into water or some other similarly yielding surface. The hazard has damage equal to twice the number of zones fallen (bruised, or mauled if the damage inflicted is twice or more the character's Stagger Threshold).

This one-time hazard caps out at 20 damage, as a falling character eventually reaches terminal velocity.

Surviving the Wyld

Characters exposed to the shifting tides of the Wyld risk corruption as it reinvents the world from moment to moment and hour to hour. This occurs according to the following rules:

Wyld Intensity

The stability of the world can be measured in six states:

Creation

The vast majority of the world is made up of the lands of Creation, where the Wyld's power holds no meaningful sway.

Tainted Lands

Tainted lands are areas which once fell under the Wyld's corrosive power, but which have since been cleansed of its taint. They may display bizarre remnants of the Wyld's influence, such as fantastically-shaped rock formations or strange animals, but those dwelling within a tainted land are at no risk of mutation.

Bordermarches

Bordermarches are the shallow places where the tides of chaos lap against the shores of the real. Transformations here occur slowly, and Creation's laws predominate — it's just that they're sometimes reinterpreted creatively. It's generally safe to make brief sojourns into the bordermarches of the Wyld, at least in terms of mental and physical integrity, but long-term habitation or extended voyages are risky.

Bordermarches fluctuate with the phases of the moon, reaching farther inland when the moon is full and receding when Luna hides her face.

Middlemarches

Middlemarches are those places where the Wyld's energy holds powerful sway over the land. The laws of Creation still set the fundamental template for middlemarches, but that template is reinterpreted in baroque and bizarre ways, and change is frequent enough to witness from day to day. Travel into this depth of the Wyld without mystical protection is not advised.

Far Shoals

The far shoals are the point where stable Creation slowly scales off into the purity of chaos: the last bastions of stability and order in the face of the Wyld. They are still recognizable landscapes, but they shift quickly enough for the naked eye to track changes from hour to hour and sometimes minute to minute. The far shoals are usually places of significant danger, both because of the powerful Fair Folk who prowl here and because of the nature of the environment itself. When it is not being dream-sculpted into a weapon by the lords of Faerie, the land is usually powerfully influenced by the nearest elemental pole.

The Lands Beyond Creation

What waits beyond the edges of the far shoals could more accurately be described as "chaos." Colors, concepts, and ideas blend together. Time and distance are only vestigially relevant as concepts, because a visitor brings some expectation of them with her. If coherent lands and milieus appear in the Lands Beyond Creation, it means that a traveler has been engulfed by one of the unshaped Fair Folk, and will likely soon be assailed with hostile glamours.

Mutation

After a certain period of time lingering in the Wyld, the forces of chaos *will* attempt to remake a character's body (or, occasionally, her mind). How frequently this occurs depends on the band of the Wyld the character is traveling in. After the specified amount of time has passed (roughly; Wyld mutation isn't an exact science, and some regions are unusually sedate while others are uncommonly dynamic), a traveler must roll Willpower + Essence against a difficulty found on the Wyld Resistance table. Dragon-Blooded and Liminals add one extra die to this roll, most other Exalted add two, and Solars, Abyssals, and Infernals add three. If the roll succeeds, the character resists being mutated. For now.

Wyld Band	Interval	Difficulty
Bordermarches	Monthly	7
Middlemarches	Weekly	7
Far Shoals	Daily	8
Lands Beyond	Hourly	8

There is a degree of acclimation possible within the Wyld. Once a character already has a Wyld-inflicted mutation, they resist further mutation as though they were in a region of the Wyld one degree less severe than they truly are. The bordermarches don't become as harmless as tainted lands are, but their interval does drop to once per year at difficulty 6, allowing semi-stable bands of mutants to live within the Wyld's edge.

Suffering Mutation

If a character fails their Wyld resistance roll, roll a single die. If the result is even, they gain an Uncanny feature (see p. XX) chosen by the Storyteller. If the result is odd, they gain a taint from the list below, again chosen by the Storyteller:

• **Allergy:** The character has a severe reaction to some particular substance, such as iron, grass, or blood. Just being near it will set her to sneezing and coughing; direct contact subjects her to an environmental hazard with difficulty 6, damage 2 (drained), –1, one minute.

• **Atrophy:** Some element of the character becomes withered and weakened. Select one Attribute. All rolls using it increase their difficulty by +1.

• **Blind:** The character's eyes either stop working, or vanish altogether. See page XX for blindness rules.

• **Derangement:** The Wyld warps the character's thoughts, twisting them out of true. She gains a Derangement (see p. XX).

• **Diet:** The character can only consume and digest a limited range of substances. This could be anything from raw meat to small pebbles to flowers. This taint is often accompanied by further adjustments to the mutant's mouth and stomach.

• **Freakish:** The character's appearance is changed in some overtly inhuman fashion that marks her as a Wyld mutant, but which does not provide any utility or necessarily render her repulsive to behold. Examples might include strange coloration or patterning of various body parts, animal features like a cockscomb, or oddities like extra hands growing out of her arms and legs, which permanently clasp the limbs they're attached to. Nearly all communities in Creation that do not themselves dwell in the Wyld are extremely prejudiced against anyone bearing the Wyld's corrosive touch.

• **Hideous:** The Wyld has rendered the character monstrously frightening or disgusting to behold. She may be difficult to identify as human. Her Appearance rating is set to 0 and cannot be raised.

• **Fragile:** The character's bones are easily broken. Increase all of her Wound penalties by +1.

• **Plaguebearer:** The character becomes host to a communicable disease, quite possibly of supernatural character, of which she cannot be cleansed. The disease may or may not affect her.

• **Sickly:** The character heals slowly and poorly. If Exalted, she heals like a mortal. If mortal, she doubles her healing times.

• **Slow:** Something has happened to the character's legs. They may have been twisted, or perhaps they're gone altogether and she must ooze about like a slug. All of her movement is now complex movement.

Curing Mutation

Wyld Mutation is generally irreversible, and is enormously feared as a result. Though Terrestrial physicians have struggled for centuries, the Dragon-Blooded have never successfully developed a Charm to revert transformations inflicted by the Wyld.

As a result, a character changed by the Wyld's touch faces a daunting challenge if she is unwilling to live with what has been done to her. Mortals are usually just out of luck, and even the Exalted generally lack easy answers. The Solar Exalted can cure Wyld mutations with the Charm: Order-Affirming Blow, but the Solar Exalted are newly-returned to the world and only a tiny handful of them have developed that particular Charm or possess the aptitude and inclination to ever do so in the future. An Aptitude 5 sorcerous working can strip away a Wyld mutation, but this is a considerable challenge for a Terrestrial sorcerer — again, the demand for such a service vastly outstrips the number of beings able and willing to render it. Finally, a few spirits possess powerful healing or order-restoring miracles that are able to cure Wyld-imposed afflictions. It can be taken as a given that they will not grant these gifts for nothing.

Naval Adventure

No, we're not going to do "in-depth Sail rules." Sail works like all the other Abilities: when you want to make your boat or ship do something that seems dicey, roll it along with an appropriate Attribute against an appropriate difficulty to see if you can pull the thing off.

We *are* going to do a naval conflicts framework, and talk a little bit about ships, because Sail tends to get used as a tentpole Ability that Western chronicles, in particular, get built around in a way other Abilities just don't; and because most people are really not familiar with how historical naval warfare worked. It's surprisingly unlike World War II era artillery-and-bomber slugging matches, and *shockingly* unlike the arcade-action cannon volleys of *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*.

This system is also, I should say up front, designed as a protagonist-centered storytelling framework, not a combat sim. I could do an entire naval battle simulator as its own game, and have in the past made the mistake of trying to put exactly that thing into the game, but the truth is that a single Solar Exalt is usually several orders of magnitude more dangerous than the entire warship she's sailing on, so that approach is not the best way to do it.

Naval Realities

Before we get into the rules, I'm going to do two things: make a recommendation, and de-mystify some conceptions about sailing vessels dating from the ancient world up to the Age of Sail.

First, I want to flog the **Exalted** First Edition sourcebook **Savage Seas**. It is the best-written primer on fantasy sailing you'll ever see, and if you're going to do a chronicle that mostly involves sailing from place to place, you are doing yourself a *grave disservice* by skipping it. **Savage Seas** is a goldmine in terms of lending verisimilitude and neat details to your game, like just how navigation works on a flat world without any such thing as "magnetic north."

That being said, the first thing you need to understand is that Hollywood lied to you. *Most of the ships in Exalted are not cannon-armed tall ships, and even if they were, battles from that era didn't work like they do in the movies.*

Pursuit

The fastest ship in Royal Navy during the Age of Sail, the *Endymion*, could, under optimal circumstances, hit about 14 and a half knots (about 16 and a half miles per hour, or 27.6 km/h). That's with a cooperating current, ideal wind conditions, and all of its sails open. If it wanted to actually be able to steer, we're talking more like 11 knots (12.6 mph). That's the tippy-top end. Most ships of the period **Exalted** is drawing its vessels from tend to operate more in the 4-to-6 knot range: about five miles per hour, six and a half when really piling it on.

Let me underline my point with this sentence: *Naval pursuit occurred at the speed of a brisk jog*.

The ocean is basically flat, and under good weather conditions, you can see out until your view is blocked by the curvature of the Earth. That's about three miles with your eye right up against the water, about 12 from the crow's nest atop a mast. Creation doesn't have a curvature, but it does have water vapor and atmospheric interactions at water level that I'm going to assume produce about the same practical result because nobody is paying me to make this book, and I would need to be paid a very great deal to do all the math necessary to figure out how far you could see before atmospheric factors fuzzed out your view on a flat planet.

So, when a pirate ship spots a merchantman, or a patrolling Realm warship spots a pirate ship, or enemy vessel, or whatever, what generally happens is that the more dangerous ship tries to close with the less dangerous one, which tries to escape.

This is very often a case of one ship doing an average of 4.1 knots chasing another ship doing 3.8 knots, with the two captains frantically trimming and deploying their sails in different configurations to figure out how to squeeze the most possible speed out of their vessel while dealing with shifts in the wind and the behavior of the currents. The differential in that example, for those of you who don't like doing math any more than I do, is 0.3 knots, which you could also express as *zero point three-four miles per hour*.

One of these ships is gaining on the other one at roughly the speed of a very energetic box turtle. If an enemy ship is spotted 12 miles away and pursuit begins immediately, and the ships are remotely a match for one another, there's every likelihood this nail-biting chase will take about *thirty-five hours* before the ships close with one another. Or at least it would be if not for one little wrinkle in the otherwise straightforward business of sailing in a straight line at the guys you're trying to plunder/sink:

Nightfall. For ten to twelve hours per day, the ocean is dark. If the captain of the vessel being chased has anything resembling a brain in his skull, he'll douse the lights, beat to death any man who makes a noise louder than a whisper, and do his best to shift off in a direction his pursuer doesn't expect. The pursuing ship's captain, meanwhile, needs to anticipate what his quarry will try to do during the night to give him the slip, and adjust accordingly. He will also be dousing all his lights and silencing his men so that if he guesses well, his opponent won't realize he's sailing into a trap. As a result of these "blind" nighttime maneuvers, it is entirely possible for two ships to find themselves within bowshot come sunrise, or for the fleeing vessel to be all the way over on the horizon in some unexpected direction (or even to have vanished altogether, if it is really lucky). As a result, "thirty-five hours" is an *optimistic* estimate, because nighttime maneuvers

can easily make a naval pursuit last for anywhere from half a day to two weeks of relentless, no-holds barred sailing and nocturnal tricks.

Sometimes it isn't like that of course, sometimes you have a fat wallowing merchantman being set upon by swift pirate sloops, and the only prayer is that they spot you just before sunset or that you have fighting ships of your own to fend them off. Still: that's the historical baseline. Creation, of course, has magic. It has spirit allies. It has Exalted look-outs who can see in the dark. It has sorcerers who can conjure favorable winds. But until those things intervene, that is the baseline reality. The ocean is huge, ships are slow, and a "chase scene" is usually several days of grueling endurance sailing while anxiety eats the crew alive, either that they will be caught and butchered or that their quarry will escape, leaving them bereft of profit and glory.

Battle

Yes, **Exalted** has battle magic and First Age blasto artifacts. We'll get to them in a minute. First, let's talk about the vast majority of ships that have to do without these things.

Most ships in Exalted do not have cannons. Firedust is not the same thing as gunpowder. It produces substantially more heat than force, and is a poor propellant. "Artillery"-capable ships are uncommon, and those that have the capacity generally use small siege weapons such as deck-mounted catapults. These weapons are slow and inaccurate, and are mostly seen in large merchant flotillas arrayed around hopelessly slow treasure ships with no prayer of outrunning attackers; instead of speed, their escorts have gone in for firepower and a "fortress" strategy.

Still: the Age of Sail casts a long, long shadow in the popular imagination, so let's go ahead and dispel its illusions, because they're applicable to ships in general.

Here's the big thing to understand:

It's really extremely difficult to sink a ship that is trying not to be sunk. Ships are designed, above all other things, to float, and to continue floating even after a very great number of things have gone wrong. A quick ship-death is generally the work of hurricanes and reefs, not other ships.

During the Napoleonic Wars, the apex of real-history naval warfare, it took an absolutely heroic pounding with cannons to sink a ship. It did not take a dozen direct hits with cannonballs; it generally took well over a hundred. Once ships got into cannon range, particularly if all they could fire were forward or chaser guns, the resulting exchange of fire could last for more than a full day. Bilge pumps are *very effective* at removing water from a ship. Ships whose owners give even a tiny amount of a shit about their investment carry enormous quantities of spare timber, rope, and pitch with which to repair and replace damage to the vessel. A ship that has been holed beneath the waterline, depending on the severity and number of the breaches, can sometimes limp along for several weeks before finally sinking, rotating the crew through man-killing ceaseless operation of the pumps while the engineers do everything in their power to slow the rate at which the ship takes on water. Generally, naval battles of that era did not primarily try to aim for an enemy's hull; they aimed for the masts and rigging, aiming to slow their enemy down, reduce its maneuverability, or, in the best of all possible worlds, to de-mast him. Once a ship can no longer move or maneuver, it can be killed at leisure. These are, of course, much smaller targets than the hull, and much easier to repair by sending crewmen up to splice cut lines, patch holes shot into sails, or even rig up entire replacement sails, so long as an entire mast doesn't get knocked off.

In Creation, the same is true of deck-mounted siege weapons. Baskets of heavy stones, siege crossbow bolts, and other ranged attacks are generally more of a threat to the crew on deck than the ship itself, and are generally aimed to tear up a ship's sails rather than to batter its hull in any case. The deck and hull are sturdy. The sails and ropes are not.

As mentioned, cannons or cannon-equivalent devices are not really much of a concern in Creation, as equivalents such as siege weapons and First Age weapons are uncommon. Instead, naval combat generally begins at the range of whatever missile weapons the crew has access to, which is to say, bows. The purpose of exchanging missile fire is not to sink or generally even to damage the enemy ship, but rather to deplete its crew, slowing the vessel down and softening it up for an eventual boarding action.

Boarding is the real main event of 95% of naval battles in **Exalted**. The two ships are lashed together with grappling hooks, attackers attempt to climb aboard (often under continued covering fire by archers or slingers to clear the rail until the very last second), and then a gory melee ensues.

Another thing worth keeping in mind when thinking about **Exalted** naval battles: **Sinking an enemy ship is rarely the most-desired outcome.** Ships are *very expensive* and they *don't care who they're being used by*. A very great number of the Realm's merchant ships and battleships began their lives as the property of some rival power, or as pirate ships. They can be re-sold, pressed into service, or, at the very least, commandeered and used to haul their treasure into *your* home port before disposing of them. Even a very badly mauled ship is usually better dragged back to port and repaired rather than sunk.

Fire is another element much more spoken-of than seen. Fire arrows are highly ineffective in actually setting things on fire to begin with, particularly things as damp as the deck and rigging of a naval vessel; and any competently-run vessel has a fire brigade ready to douse any flames that *do* catch with water and sand promptly. Burning oil is almost never employed, as it is difficult to deliver and can backfire very easily.

There is, of course, one other naval weapon worth mentioning, and the one most likely to result in the destruction of its target: the ram. Rams are generally associated with long, low-to-the-water galleys with banks of oars, which are accelerated to terrible speeds once they close with their target by teams of rowers. The Realm is the most notable employer of ramming ships with its infamous coastal defense triremes. The problem of this sort of ship is that, because it is a sleek, long, low-hulled design, it is best deployed in coastal waters and ill-suited to the rigors of the open ocean weeks from shore. That isn't to say you never see war-triremes on the open sea, but they're generally clustered around massive, slow support ships — "trireme tenders" — whose job is to shepherd them to some new destination or some major assault on a fixed target. They're very poor at open-sea pirate hunting or anything else requiring long-range search and pursuit. Ramming ships are generally seen defending ports or leading attacks on them.

Now, all this being said, the presence of the Chosen complicates naval battles tremendously. Sorcery is often able to replicate the function of deck artillery, or even to set rigging ablaze. A single Solar may very well be able to leap several miles onto the deck of an enemy ship and single-handedly kill everyone aboard. Unless the enemy has battle magic or supernatural assistance of their own, there's often nothing they can do about this but surrender or sink. First Age weapons are similarly massive advantages; a lightning ballista or implosion bow can blow off masts, shred sails and rigging, and wreak slaughter on crew, although they're generally not

destructive enough to outright sink a vessel without sustained pounding. All of these things are roughly cannon-equivalent in terms of efficacy. You don't *generally* start one-shotting entire ships until you get into First Age heavy artillery of the sort only found on ancient magical warships, or Solar Circle Sorcery.

Basically, the thing I am trying to tell you, the thing I have spilled… let me see Jesus Christ over 2,000 words on, to get here, is this:

Naval conflict is, at its heart, a *very* long, stressful pursuit, largely decided by the quality of the ships and crews involved and whether or not the two captains can outsmart one another at night, finally culminating in two ships tying up and having a regular-ass combat system fight scene sprawling across their smashed-together decks. It's several days of fear and anticipation culminating in a spasm of hideously intense violence (or the pursued ship simply surrendering once it's clear they have absolutely no hope of escape and that fighting back will just get them killed; that also happens a lot).

Exalts get to enter this dynamic with all kinds of horrifying cheat codes.

That being said, on to the rules.

Ship Profiles

To start, we're going to compress every kind of nautical vessel you might potentially get ahold of into a number of small, simple profiles. Whatever is keeping you out of the water will have exactly *one* of these profiles:

None: Nothing is keeping you out of the water. You're swimming, or using magic to walk on the water. Unless you have some kind of serious speed-enhancing magic, you don't even get to roll in pursuit or escape scenes. Ships may not be very fast, but they're *much* faster than even a Water Aspect can swim without Charms, sorcery, or artifacts boosting them.

Improvised Vessel: You're a raft, some floating debris, a big log, or the like. If you can steer at all, it's probably with a paddle or a single sheet tied to a pair of sticks. You don't get to roll in pursuit or escape scenes unless it's against another improvised vessel or a small vessel, and the difficulty of all drama, perilous navigation, and weathering the storm scenes is +3.

Small Vessel: You are in something not designed for serious deep-water operation, like a canoe or jolly boat. +3 difficulty in escape and pursuit scenes, +1 difficulty in all other sorts of scenes *except* for perilous navigation, where you enjoy –2 difficulty for being so small and nimble.

Coastal Vessel: You can participate in all manner of scenes, though +1 difficulty in the open ocean well out of sight of land, and +2 difficulty specifically for weathering the storm on the open sea. Both triremes and pleasure yachts tend to fall into this category.

Swift Ship: You're designed for scouting, evasion, and pursuit. –1 difficulty for escape and pursuit scenes, +1 difficulty for weathering the storm.

Merchantman: You're a balanced ship, capable of hauling a respectable amount of cargo, and acceptably maneuverable. You are not the fastest thing on the water. No modifiers.

Heavy Vessel: You're either a support ship or a treasure ship, designed to haul enormous amounts of cargo, gear, or a small army of men. Alternately, you might be a flagship with deck-mounted First Age weapons scavenged from other sources. +1 difficulty for escape and pursuit

scenes, as well as perilous navigation. –1 difficulty for weathering the storm; you're built to survive just about anything.

First Age Ship: You can probably propel yourself without the need of any wind at all if you've got a strong Hearthstone powering your Essence-driven paddlewheels. –2 difficulty for all rolls, essentially impervious to damage from anything less than heavy-duty battle sorcery or First Age weapons. You might have such weapons or your own, or they might have been long ago removed and retrofitted onto other ships, as is the case with nearly all magical ships in the Realm's navy.

Crew Modifiers

The quality and number of a ship's crew matters *tremendously*. Incredible acumen and exceptional leadership, such as that exhibited by the Exalted, is of very little use if the sailors being commanded are mostly dead or simply don't know how to do the jobs they're being expertly ordered to do. When you make a Sail roll, modify it according to the following factors:

• **Vessel's crew is incompetent:** If the crew are mostly untrained as sailors, increase the difficulty by +1.

• **Vessel's crew is exceptional:** If the crew are mostly veteran able seamen, with sailing Aptitudes and an Expertise pool in the 6+ range, lower the difficulty by –1.

• **Vessel is significantly undercrewed:** If the ship doesn't have enough sailors available to follow orders to run it properly, increase the difficulty by +1.

Ship Damage

Various events can damage a ship. When a ship takes damage, increase the difficulty of all Sail actions to operate or command it by +1.

Once a ship has accumulated 3 damage, it is *sinking*. As mentioned above, this is generally a slow process rather than a sudden catastrophic one. The captain must direct emergency efforts to pump the bilges, do emergency patches, and otherwise keep the ship afloat long enough to reach some safe harbor where it can be properly repaired.

Every 6 hours, the ship gains 1 Instability per point of damage it has suffered above 2, and the captain makes a (Charisma or Appearance) + Sail roll against difficulty 9 to inspire the exhausted crew to push themselves beyond endurance to keep the ship afloat. Each success removes 1 Instability. If the ship reaches 5 Instability, it vanishes beneath the waves.

If a ship is carrying adequate supplies of timber and other supplies and has a competent engineer, it can attempt to repair damage while at sea, but this requires 24 hours of work to repair 1 Damage, during which time only one roll may be made to reduce Instability, rather than the normal four, and no other sort of rolls (such as to avoid pursuit, or weather a storm) can be made.

As mentioned above, First Age ships are generally impervious to damage from anything other than direct battle magic. They can smash into reefs without harming anything other than their paint and laugh off hurricanes. Improvised and small vessels, by contrast, begin sinking as soon as they receive 1 damage, and accumulate 1 Instability for every point of damage they have.

Scene Types

Next, we're going to break down the several varieties of action scenes that you're likely to run into in a ship, with naval battles receiving their own special consideration at the end.

Drama

A ship is a sector unto itself, made up of several zones, and any sort of dramatic scene might occur on it: battles, social scenes, sneaking about stealing cargo below deck, and so on. These use the normal rules of the game.

Naval Escape

When protagonists encounter a hostile vessel and wish to escape from it, this is an extended, contested roll of (Wits + Sail) against difficulty 6 (as modified by ship profiles, crew status, and any other relevant factors, such as rough weather). This represents the efforts of the contesting captains to take advantage of the wind, modify the number and trim of their sails, and use currents to their favor. Make this roll at one-day intervals.

Each night of the pursuit, the two captains make a contested (Intelligence + Sail) roll, the protagonist to outwit her pursuers, the antagonists to anticipate their quarry's gambit. Remove one accumulated success from the total of each pursuer who gains fewer successes than the protagonist. For each pursuer who gains more successes than the protagonist, remove one of her successes. Ties do nothing.

If at any point the protagonist manages to accumulate 5 more successes than one of her pursuers, they lose track of her. If at any point one or more of her pursuers accumulates 5 more successes than the protagonist, he has brought her to heel, and may choose to either immediately bring her to battle, changing the scene to a naval combat, *or* may stalk her while signaling to his allies and wait for them to catch up and reinforce him; if he chooses to do so, the protagonist must choose between losing 3 of her accumulated successes and continuing the attempted escape, or immediately turning and giving battle before any reinforcements can arrive.

Naval Pursuit

When a protagonist attempts to chase down another vessel, use the same rules as in a naval escape scene, save that if the protagonist accumulates five more successes than her quarry, she has brought them to heel and may force a battle; or else give them the choice of abandoning 3 successes or turning to fight her, if she stalls for time and tries to steer them into still-pursuing allies.

If the pursued ship has escort vessels, they are always able to choose to advance and give battle in its place, unless somehow lured away from the vessel they're protecting.

Perilous Navigation

In a perilous navigation scene, the protagonists attempt to safely navigate their ship through dangerous waters such as narrow passages or mazes or submerged reefs. This is a straightforward (Wits + Sail) roll against a difficulty based on the severity of the danger. Failure results in damage to the ship *and* forces the captain to choose between attempting the roll again or abandoning her course. If the ship is damaged, suffer +1 difficulty to all rolls to command it until it undergoes repairs. Failing more times than the captain's Sail rating fatally damages the ship (it must safely beach itself or limp to a nearby port, or else slowly sink), or strands it on a reef or shore, such that only heroic efforts or the rescue efforts of another ship can get it sailing again.

Weathering the Storm

Weathering horrendous weather on the open seas works much like perilous navigation, save that there's no option to abandon the effort and take a safer route. One (Wits + Sail) roll must be made every day and every night until conditions improve, the difficulty depending on the severity of the tempest. A failure damages the ship, while failing more times than the captain's Sail rating leaves it helplessly crippled as it loses its masts or a great number of crew are swept overboard, inflicting 3 damage.

Naval Combat

Naval combat is fairly simple. Once two ships close into threat range of one another, they generally lock up and a boarding action begins.

Closing In

Each ship is its own sector, made up of several zones, and the sea between and around them is another sector. At the beginning of a naval combat scene, the two vessels are three zones of open sea away from one another. All artillery is capable of firing at this range, and any battle sorcery that can attack from that far away may also be used, either to target the enemy crew or the ship itself, potentially inflicting 1 damage to the ship depending on the power of the weaponry or magic employed.

The two ships close on one another at a rate of 1 zone per round until there are 0 zones separating them, at which point the boarding action generally begins.

Boarding Actions

A boarding action is, quite simply, a standard battle scene taking place between the crews and heroes of two or more ships. The enemy crew is usually a group, possibly being led by a few individual characters in the form of commanding officers, Exalts, etc. Crossing the enemy rail, if it is being actively defended, requires complex movement.

It's that simple, really. Chase the enemy down, close with them, run a fight scene.

If you want to hang back and pound them with magic, arrows, or catapults, the target ship will generally attempt to close with *you* so they can fight back with a boarding attempt of their own. Maintaining distance is a contested simple action of (Wits + Sail) between the vessels' commanders, with the vessel attempting to close rolling against difficulty 6 and the vessel attempting to stand off rolling at difficulty 8. Whichever side succeeds may choose whether the two vessels maintain distance or come one zone closer to one another. If one of the commanders is otherwise occupied (such as by casting battle sorcery) and does not wish to use her simple action in this fashion, then the other vessel maneuvers as it wishes uncontested.

There isn't a mechanic to abort out of a combat scene without the ships coming to blows, unless both sides mutually decide to abandon the attempt to close and fight in close quarters. The pursuit or escape scene already established that the quarry's attempts to avoid a mauling have failed, so they don't get a further attempt to avoid battle here.

But What If

So, you've just thought up a situation not covered by these rules, or more likely, one of your players has.

That's fine. Here's the terrible secret of the naval rules: they're not really rules, they're storytelling suggestions and guidelines that do some of the work for you in advance. If the players summon a Cirrus Skiff or, God help us, the Chariot of the Blazing Sun and decide to just fly over to the fleeing enemy ship and fuck them all up with Flight of the Brilliant Raptor bombardments, don't try to force them onto the framework provided here. It's there to help you, not constrain you. Let them just fly over and run a combat scene, or devastate the helpless mortals below, or whatever, as seems appropriate. Sidereals who can make ships teleport through subspace obviously bypass gigantic whacks of this system. An alternative to riding out a hurricane is bribing a god to calm the storm. Exalts have lots of options. Again: *this is actually just a set of framing ideas for stories and pre-built helpful system bits*. It is there to help you, *not restrict you*. If using it doesn't seem to make sense, *don't*.

Setting up the Game

The **Exalted Demake** has rules for what you do in the middle of a session, how to see if you cut the guy in half with your daiklave, whether or not you convinced that guy to help you assassinate the prince, of course it does. It also has rules for *how to play the game:* how to build and start a chronicle. These are as important as the combat rules and character creation rules.

21st century technology makes following this process much easier than it used to be, as games can be planned asynchronously over remote messaging software, multi-participant voice calls, and so on. Indeed, many people play the game entirely in this fashion without ever being in the same room as any of their fellow players.

Step One: Assemble the Group

The first step in playing the **Exalted Demake** is to figure out who's playing. The game runs best with three to seven players, but can be pushed above or below this number for expert groups. One of these players will take the role of the Storyteller; the rest will make and control a particular hero. The story being told by the assembled group is one about the exploits of these heroes.

The following rules must be followed when assembling a group:

• **Ensure compatible personalities**. If the group has played together before, great. If it's a new group, establish some sort of opportunity to socialize, talk about games, talk about entertainment media, and just generally ensure that everyone gets along. If two or more of the players have a personality conflict or find one another annoying, your game is going to break up prematurely when one or both of them gets fed up and quits, or when they pull the group apart into conflicting cliques.

*Ultimately, playing **Exalted** is about spending time with friends doing a fun activity together.* You don't have to be friends when you start playing, but you'd better build a group where the possibility exists that you will become friends over the course of the game. Otherwise, your chronicle will not succeed and will die a premature death.

• **Ensure compatible schedules**. Figure out how often the group wants to play, and when everyone is available to do so. Quickly discuss whether people are okay with the group running without them if it happens that they can't make it.

Step Two: Establish Expectations and Boundaries

Once you've found a group of people who all want to play **Exalted** and will get along while doing so, you need to make sure you all want to play the *same* game of **Exalted**.

Exalted is a *big game*. There are a *lot* of ways you can play it, and most of them will work… but only if everyone wants to do that. If you have one player who shows up wanting an absurd, over the top, beer and pretzels action romp, and another who wants a serious game of politics, passion, triumph, tragedy, and gritty consequences, you are going to end up with two unhappy players and a game that ends up wrapping early because nobody's really grooving on what's happening. *Do not overlook this step. This sort of expectation mismatch has killed more games than anything else I have ever seen in 30+ years of gaming,* including scheduling conflicts.

You also need to *play responsibly*. People have boundaries. People, especially people you don't know super well yet, have things that they don't want to think about during entertainment activities. Or, things they *very much want to think about*.

So, here's the thing with the **Exalted Demake**. I am not interested in telling you that you're having fun wrong. I am not interested in calling you a stupid babyshit loser for not wanting to take my favorite game setting super seriously. I am not interested in calling you a revolting pervert for wanting to use **Exalted** as an ERP platform. I am not interested in praising you for matching my tastes or excoriating you for wanting something I don't. Have a heartbreaking epic tragedy. Have a hysterical action farce where everyone pilots giant robots. Run an erotically-charged thriller. I don't care.

Here's what I do care about: making sure *you are going to have a successful game*, which means a game that everyone at the table is on-board with playing. In pursuit of that, once you have the group together, you're going to fill out a Chronicle Sheet.

Chronicle Sheet

Chronicle Name:

Storyteller:

Players:

Lethality:

Tones:

Topic	Forbidden	Referenced	Approved	Embraced	Opt-Out
Gore	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Racism	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Sex	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Sexism	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Sexual Violence	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Slavery	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Torture	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	_____
_____	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	_____
_____	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	_____

_____   [   ]   [   ]   [   ]   [   ]   _____

How to Use the Chronicle Sheet

Write in the name of your chronicle if it has one, along with who the Storyteller and players are. That's all self-explanatory. Then, discuss and record the following subjects:

Lethality

By default, the **Exalted Demake** has a lethality level of "relaxed" where players' characters are concerned. The default result of being stabbed in the torso until incapacitated is that you are *felled*, out of action, and in bad shape, but not in immediate danger of death. Death is the result of getting taken out when already horribly wounded from previous battles (not something that will generally sneak up on you) and not being rescued when you are *dying*, or deciding that death would be a dramatically appropriate consequence.

Some groups will want to play in what feels like a more harsh, arbitrary, and unforgiving world. For these groups, a seriously or severely incapacitated protagonist is *dying* and one taken out by critical damage is *dead*, straight-up. This is the game's "deadly" setting.

Other groups are interested in telling a story where the dice introduce uncertainty in the course of how the story will go, not whether the story will suddenly end or not. For this sort of game, record "optional." Character death here is opt-in, and only occurs with player consent.

If you want to arrive at some other place, you can, and write down something appropriate for it. Just make sure everyone agrees on what it means.

Tones

Have a group discussion about tone and story goals. Figure out if people are looking for a dramatic, no-holds-barred campaign about the glories and horrors of Dragon-Blooded imperialism, or a kung-fu western where heroes roll into town and beat the shit out of the bad guys. **If you skip this step, you are putting your chronicle in terrible danger.**

Tone can have several valid answers, and it's not unusual for a Chronicle Sheet to have a tone that reads something like "Slice of life, occasional heavy themes alright, no global-stakes bullshit" or "Horrors of war, challenges of responsible rule, occasional comedy is OK." This isn't about finding a single word that everyone is happy with, it's about setting and agreeing upon expectations: what kind of focus or tone do people *want* from their game? What do they *not* want? Everyone has to participate in this stage, detailing what will make them happy and what will prevent them from having fun. If hard conflicts appear here, maybe think about a different campaign basis or reconfiguring the player line-up, because if someone compromises all the way they're probably not going to have a great time and now there are cracks in your foundation.

> Being a Fucking Adult
>
> Several times in this section, I'm going to suggest that if you reach certain impasses, you dissolve the group and form a new one. That's because I've played a lot of games and seen a lot more, over the course of decades, and there are certain things you can do during game set-up that basically amount to installing a time bomb in your game. If four players have their hearts set on an ultraviolent splatterfest black comedy Abyssal romp and this makes the fifth player nauseous, you have three options: Find a different chronicle idea that all five players like; watch the game

fall apart as one player makes excuses not to show week after week, or sits around disengaged and disinterested until everyone else stops having fun too, or whatever other dysfunction makes the chronicle peter out after five or so sessions; or *have player five not play in this chronicle*.

Let me be clear: You are *not* being an asshole by "kicking your friend out." You are saving five adults from wasting their time and one of them from maybe throwing up in the middle of a voice-over-IP call. Breaking and reforming the group is a *much better and more responsible option than starting a doomed chronicle*, which will at best leave a group of people annoyed and dissatisfied, and at worst leave someone traumatized.

Topics

Exalted is, by default, a mature game for adults, dealing with adult themes. But lots of adults have gone through some shit in their lives, and may not want to think about it in their Saturday evening social entertainment activity.

So: topics. Go through the topics on the Chronicle Sheet with the group, and settle on a value that the chronicle will be calibrated to for each of them. There are also several blank spaces provided in case players want to volunteer additions to the topic list that are important to them, like violence against animals, violence against children, or, shit, I don't know, spiders.

For each topic, choose one of the following settings:

• **Forbidden** topics may not appear in the game at all. If spiders are **forbidden**, then they never show up, nobody talks about them, there are no plot points involving them, no spider gods, nothing that reminds people of spiders, nothing. They don't even show up in anyone's backstory in a way that would make them ever get referenced in-session. If a player declares a topic **forbidden**, it is not up for voting upon or debate. Players cannot be argued or negotiated away from a **forbidden** topic. **Forbidden** takes precedent over all other considerations. This means that the topic coming up will ruin that player's afternoon. If this is a deal-breaker for the rest of the group, then you need to assemble a different group and run a different game. *Do not strongarm a player into recanting a **Forbidden** rating for everyone else's sake.*

• **Referenced** topics can come up in the game, but not be played out "in the scene." If spiders are **referenced**, then you might find a First Age ruin that is dense with cobwebs, but you will not run into their spinners. You might hear about the Mountain of the Spider God, but you will not go there.

• **Approved** topics are fine to appear in the game, but not in a focal capacity. If spiders are **approved**, then you can throw a giant wolf spider at the group, or have a spider-themed Lunar show up, or whatever. You won't, generally, have a character buried alive by thousands of spiders and lovingly describe the experience in graphic detail.

• **Embraced** topics are things the players are all fine having the game not only feature, but focus on. If spiders are **embraced** then you are free to go wild with the spider-horror.

• **Opt-Out** is a *modifier* to a **referenced**, **approved**, or **embraced** rating. Rather than being a chronicle setting, it is something a specific player (or players) signs off on. A player choosing to **opt-out** of a topic means that they're fine with its rating sitting where everyone else wants it, as long as their character is never directly involved. For example, a chronicle might have spiders

approved, but one player chooses to **opt-out**: spiders can show up, but you won't have them crawling all over that player's character, and you won't do spider-heavy stuff in any scenes they're in.

It should also be noted that a chronicle sheet is a living document, and these ratings can change as groups decide certain subjects are too heavy for them, or as new plot developments make them interested in exploring things they previously thought they wouldn't want to. Players are free to change their opt-out status at any time, as well.

What follows is a very brief discussion on particular use of common sensitive topics that may arise in **Exalted**:

Gore

The Chronicle Sheet doesn't provide a space for "violence" because it's fairly intrinsic to **Exalted**. That isn't to say you can't add one — you certainly can — but probably most groups are fine with violence. The Time of Tumult is a violent age. How *graphic* the destruction of the human body is going to be… that's another matter. With gore **forbidden**, violence and scenes of death and disaster top out at PG: a tasteful splash of blood, a still body, that's it. **Referenced** gore is tricky, because this category is about explicitness. In a **referenced** chronicle, you might say that in the wake of a Lunar attack, the guards were torn limb from limb, but no more detail than that is needed. **Approved** gore means it's fine if things get explicit once in a while. A guy loses an arm. A bandit gets slung into the wall so hard he explodes. A man slides into a hundred pieces after standing in front of Death of Obsidian Butterflies. There are moments of jaw-dropping violence, but not all the time: just where it's dramatically most potent. **Embraced** means the Liminal player gets free reign to talk about how they put themselves back together. It means the Abyssal gets to stunt her heart out with Artful Maiming Onslaught. It means nobody minds detailed descriptions of intestines slithering out of — well, you get the idea. This is not to say that every session has to be a splatterpunk fiesta, simply that there's no expectation of punches being pulled. A player who **opts out** is essentially asking the other players to dial it down in scenes their character is involved in.

Racism

Bigotry is rife in the Age of Sorrows, but it doesn't work quite the same way as it does in the modern world. The faux-Darwinian evolutionary junk science that underpins modern racism — "I can prove, somehow, that I'm better than you" — simply does not exist in the world of **Exalted**. People are, instead, generally cultural chauvinists. They believe their way of life is better than someone else's. Or, they are xenophobic: afraid of strangers and their unclean, foreign ways. This does mean that travelers are often cut some degree of slack in Creation, as they are expected to be strange and ignorant, although being *too* strange and ignorant is a good way to raise suspicions of being fey-touched, and that gets you stoned to death.

The Realm believes it is better than everyone else by dint of its vast wealth and cultural sophistication, deeming the rest of the world "barbarians." This is because of their upbringing, rather than their ethnotype; the Blessed Isle is enormous and contains several distinct ethnic sub-groups within its borders, and centuries of Dragon-Blooded promiscuity means there are Dynasts of every build, color, and ethnotype imaginable. Nonetheless, this sort of cultural chauvinism is still a type of bigotry, and lands close enough to racial discrimination for many players that it falls under this category's header.

Generally, hardcore, bitter hatred toward a cultural or ethnic group is based on a history of rivalry, raiding, warfare, or other competing interests, rather than a belief in some intrinsic higher quality of being. This *can*, of course, express itself as mockery and hostility rooted in phenotypic features; Linowans have a number of unflattering terms for Haltans based on their green hair and agile toes, for example ("monkey fucker," etc), but their hatred for Haltans is rooted in centuries of religious and resource conflicts, not in a deep-seated belief that green hair is intrinsically inferior to the brown shades that predominate among the Linowan.

Beastfolk and Wyld mutants, on the other hand, face targeted and very active discrimination in most parts of Creation, either for fear that they are stalking horses for the Fair Folk or simply because they are so odd-looking and different that people assume they must be of monstrous character as well as appearance.

When racism is **forbidden**, the topic of appearance-based discrimination simply never comes up in games. Where it is **referenced**, it will feature in a muted fashion; a Dynast displays a superior attitude, but does not refer to the locals as "stinking barbarians." Where it is **approved**, characters may openly express bigotry toward other characters. Where it is **embraced**, this rhetoric might uneasily mirror real-world rhetoric, or act as a defining feature of a character's story (in the case of mutant or beastfolk protagonists). When a player chooses to **opt-out**, they are accepting a story set in a world where discrimination is a thing, as long as it isn't directed at their character.

Sex

I don't need to tell you what sex is. It's a big motivator in Creation. People fuck. Gods like to fuck. Sitting in your living room listening to your friend describe his character fucking… thaaat's not for everyone. As a **forbidden** topic, sex and sexuality just doesn't come up in the game beyond "Hello, this is my wife." As a **referenced** topic, it can be a plot point, but not a central scene-focus. For example, a Dynast might talk about his family trying to push him into a marriage with someone he feels no attraction to. As an **approved** subject, the game can feature sex, but not explicitly. Seduction scenes end in tasteful fades-to-black. When **embraced**, explicit sexual content is permitted in the story. When running this setting, it is a *very* good idea to get a clear picture of just how explicit "explicit" means before the game starts. When a player chooses to **opt-out** of sex, their character will never be propositioned or otherwise pushed into a sexual situation that they do not initiate.

Sexism

While overall more egalitarian than the modern day in many respects, sexism is still fairly common in the world of **Exalted**. The Realm is matriarchal and establishes a glass ceiling that pushes back against male elevation to high social status under a dominant cultural belief that men are irresponsible and lacking in both proper judgment and self-control. Many other societies outside the Blessed Isle, especially in the West, are sexist in the regular old way we're all accustomed to. Like racism, this is a topic that many people just don't want to deal with in their entertainment time. When sexism is **forbidden**, nobody brings it up. When it's **referenced**, it's a misfortune that sometimes befalls Storyteller characters. When it's **approved**, it may feature as a plot point, but generally not in a pointed or especially demeaning fashion. **Embraced** sexism is, well, it's sex-based discrimination, sometimes culturally embedded, sometimes personal and ugly. If a player decides to **opt-out**, then they're okay with it being a thing the rest of the world

or even the other players can deal with if they want to, but they do not want their character discriminated against.

While on this subject, I'm going to hit a couple of related topics that don't have their own default categories because targeted discrimination against them is unusual in Creation, but which are worth talking about anyway.

Creation is culturally closer to the ancient world than the modern one, and doesn't generally have the concepts of homosexuality or bisexuality as intrinsic state-of-being level orientations, although it has *many* people that a modern audience would identify *as* homosexual or bisexual. In the Realm this is considered completely normal and unremarkable, and a person's sexual tastes are viewed as exactly that, comparable to preferences in food or music rather than defining and immutable elements of personality. This is a common view in much of the rest of Creation as well, although legal codes differ wildly depending on the structure of societies and assumptions about family units, marriage rights, inheritance laws, and so on. Same-sex marriage (or equivalent bindings) are *unusual* in Creation but not *unknown*. A minority of cultures feature them, a majority do not, and a second minority have some convoluted way to achieve that status; the Delzahn nomads, for example, do not allow individuals of the same *gender* to marry one another, but have a cultural institution through which an individual may become recognized as a gender not matching their physical sex, at which point they would be free to marry an individual of the same physical sex but of legally differing gender.

Broadly speaking, homophobia is uncommon in the Age of Sorrows, and generally restrained to a few unusual cultures with extremist views, or to individuals with personal motives for their discriminatory views.

Similarly, Creation doesn't broadly have the distinct concept of being transgendered, but it definitely has people that a modern audience would recognize as trans, as well as individuals who at first *seem* to fit into that category, but ultimately don't. The aforementioned Delzahn institution — the Dereth — contains individuals choosing to live as the gender that truly accords with them. It also contains individuals who simply want to live according to the cultural roles and laws Delzahn society assigns to the opposite sex, which are very different from the expectations and responsibilities of their birth sex (only men are permitted to be warriors, for example, and so a woman who wishes to pursue the arts of war becomes legally male). Finally, some Delzahn become Dereth in pursuit of a particular romance; Delzahn society expects men to court women, but doesn't particularly care what sort of genitals the men or women in question possess. A modern viewer could identify straight, gay, transgendered, and cisgendered Dereth (as well as straight, gay, trans, and cis non-Dereth Delzahn), but Delzahn society doesn't make such distinctions. I'm focusing on the Delzahn and the Dereth because they're elaborated on in the official game materials (read **Scavenger Sons**! It's great!), but there are a lot of other idiosyncratic institutions scattered across Creation where trans individuals might find self-expression. There are also, of course, plenty stuck in societies with no such outlets. In general, cultures that don't have formal institutions for exploring gender non-conformity find the whole concept strange and alarming, but most cultures in Creation are fairly parochial and expect outsiders to be strange and alarming as a matter of course.

The Realm is worthy of special notice as being one of the very few cultures in the Age of Sorrows that *does* have an articulated concept of gender transgression that maps to the modern notion fairly closely, because one of its five central holy figures, Daana'd, was gender non-

confirming, living as a woman despite not having been born with a woman's body. As such, asserting a physically contrary identity in the Realm is treated as an intrinsic *social* right (and in some precincts considered an auspicious act, particularly for Water Aspects), but one with limited legal acknowledgement. In a sexism-**approved** or **embraced** chronicle, mortals are legally permitted to marry according to their acclaimed gender, but Dragon-Blooded are forbidden from marriages which are incapable of producing children. This isn't an insurmountable barrier, since accredited sorcerers can create offspring via rituals or neomah-summoning, and there are rare and expensive magics which can realign a person's physical sex, but the Realm is suspicious that these solutions harm the likelihood of a couple producing Exalted offspring, so it generally takes some rigorous convincing before a Great House will approve a marriage founded upon them. In a **referenced** chronicle or one where a player has chosen to **opt-out**, these are problems other people have to deal with. In a **forbidden** chronicle, the Empress was unsuccessful in imposing her draconian will over her offspring on this matter, and the Realm has universal marriage equality.

If you want to break out homophobia and transphobia to their own subjects instead of shuffling them under the sexism header, you are of course free to do so.

Sexual Violence

Rape. Like sex, I don't need to explain this concept to you. This is the one most likely to get slammed directly into the **forbidden** category by many groups, and if someone sends it there, do us all a favor and *don't* ask them to justify or explain their decision. When sexual violence is **referenced**, it can appear as backstory or plot set-up, but won't feature directly in game sessions. When **approved**, it can be a plot element, but not something played out or directly depicted at the table: again, like sex, it's a "camera tastefully goes to another scene once it's clear what's about to happen" situation. When **embraced**… well, you're adults. I'm not going to tell you your business. If *anybody* at the table wants a setting below **embraced**, for God's sake don't set this at **embraced**. This is also a category where a lot of players are going to **opt-out**, in which case sexual assault cannot happen to their character *or* occur in a scene their character's part of.

Slavery

Creation is, lamentably, a place where slavery is exceedingly widespread, although its specific permutations vary widely. Nearly every polity in Creation has its own laws regulating what is or is not permissible under the institution, and in some places — some of them fairly high-profile, such as Nexus — slavery is entirely outlawed. (Not that this stops Nexus from operating as a massive clearinghouse for the transportation and sale of slaves to foreign markets, via the legal dodge of owners forcing their slaves to sign documents proclaiming themselves voluntarily bonded servants while they are moved through the city and then selling the bond of indenture rather than the person directly.)

Like racism, slavery in the setting is generally pre-modern and not based off of grotesque pretentions of innate genetic superiority, but instead is viewed as a simple state of misfortune into which some people are cast: a necessary evil by which societies prosper and men profit. People are commonly enslaved due to debt, because they lost a war, or as a form of criminal punishment. Societies where slavery is a heritable state imposed on the children of slaves exist, but are unusual. In many slave-owning societies, slaves have limited rights and protections, and slavery is often conditional or of strictly limited duration.

Unlimited chattel slavery of the sort modern audiences are familiar with thanks to the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade, wherein slaves are legally considered unpeople with no rights or protections of any kind, is unusual but sadly not unknown, and is mostly associated with two polities. One is the Guild, which often launches armed raids on isolated settlements and captures entire populations to feed the voracious appetites of foreign slave markets, to work in its own plantations and factories, or — most abhorrent of all — to sell to the Fair Folk in exchange for faerie magic.

The other, unfortunately, is the Realm. Citizens of the Blessed Isle absolutely may not be enslaved under any circumstances, but no such protection extends to the people of the Threshold nations under the Realm's rule. Mortals are also forbidden from owning slaves in the Realm; only the Dragon-Blooded are afforded that privilege, under the theory that the enslavement of foreign barbarians by the Exalted is spiritually edifying and purifying. A life of absolute obedience to the Chosen, according to the Immaculate Philosophy, cannot do anything but improve a soul's standing in its next life. The Immaculate Order preaches strongly against the cruel mistreatment and exploitation of slaves, but Dynasts seem less keen to heed this element of their sermons than the parts where enslavement is spiritually beneficial. House Cynis, makes a very substantial part of its income from *renting* Dragon-Blooded owned slaves out to mortal Dynasts and patrician on a short or long-term basis.

In general, the average view of people in Creation is that slavery is a great evil. While many then shrug and dismiss the institution as necessary or inevitable in an era filled with great evils, others do not. For as long as slavery has existed, so have abolitionists. In some nations these sentiments are limited to disaffected grumbling, but others feature active abolitionist movements, either as activist blocs within its national political discourse, or outlaw direct action groups which act to liberate and shelter enslaved peoples.

Now, some people are grinding their teeth after reading the above material, and they have every right to do so. For some players, this is an interesting historical treatise describing yet another kind of asshole for their character to beat up; for others, it's something that happened to ancestors whose names they know, a hideous cultural legacy whose social and economic repercussions they're still struggling under to this day. It may not be something they particularly want to reckon with as part of their swords-and-sandals entertainment. When slavery is **forbidden**, it does not come up in chronicles. You don't see slaves, nobody talks about slaves, it's just not a thing. When **referenced**, slavery is background scenery, but not a plot-driving element. A Guild factor may be described as having made his fortune in the slave trade, but you don't actually see people toiling in chains in the fields. When **approved**, slavers might round up the folks in a character's hometown, forcing the Circle to track them down and kick the shit out of them. Characters might even own slaves, but the horrors of slavery are mostly elided. When slavery is **embraced** (there's a weird thing to type), the subject can feature in the game in all its realistic horror. When a player chooses to **opt-out** of slavery, they don't want to be directly involved in scenes dealing with mistreatment of slaves or characters being enslaved, and they *definitely* don't want anyone to try to enslave their character.

If this topic ends up set anywhere more restrictive than **embraced** or if players **opt-out**, it might also be a good idea for the group to discuss the issue of supernatural mind control and loss of free will.

Torture

You know what this is. If torture is **forbidden**, then it never happens on-screen. It never happens off-screen. It doesn't get referenced. It doesn't even show up in a character's backstory in a way that would make it ever get referenced in-session. If torture is **referenced**, then you might find a torture dungeon (unoccupied), or rescue a prisoner who was tortured (without going into details), or have torture in a character's backstory, but nobody will ever be tortured during a scene the players act out. If torture is **approved**, a character might be tortured as part of a plot point, or torture a captive, or it could be an active part of the ongoing story, but it would be resolved with a few Stamina + Resistance rolls, not extolled in graphic detail. If torture is **embraced** (man, that's another weird sentence) then a torture scene might linger on the details of broken fingers and extracted teeth, or a rescued prisoner might have the abuses they've suffered described with some detail. If a player chooses to **opt-out**, torture may feature as an element of the chronicle, but that player's character will specifically *never* be tortured or forced to be directly involved in a torture scene.

Rules Glossary

A list of common rules terms are collected here for your convenience.

Action: Something a character does with game consequences. Actions generally involve rolling an Attribute + an Ability, but sometimes an action can be unrolled.

Aggravated Damage: A type of *damage* that is resistant to magical healing.

Brutal (–X): A quality of an attack which penalizes its target's *Soak*.

Caste Attribute/Ability: A trait which, when it forms part of a dice pool, grants immunity to the *rule of 1s*.

Damage: Marks placed in a target's health track by attacks, traps, environmental harm, and so on.

Defense: The difficulty to hit a character.

Difficulty: The number that rolled dice must display to count as successes.

Fierce: A quality of an attack which makes it more costly to Dodge.

Health: A track which measures a character's ability to absorb damage.

Heavy: A quality of an attack which makes it more costly to Block.

Overwhelming (–X): A quality of an attack which penalizes its target's *Defense*.

Piercing (–X): A quality of an attack which penalizes its target's *Stagger Threshold*.

Reflexive action: An *action* which does not use up your turn, such as noticing an ambush or resisting poison.

Rule of 1s: The fact that each 1 produced by rolling a dice pool subtracts one *success* from its total. Applies to all rolls in the system unless otherwise noted.

Simple action: An *action* which occurs on your turn and demands the lion's share of your effort and attention.

Soak: The difficulty to damage a character.

Staggered: A vulnerable state persisting until the end of the current round that a character enters upon suffering a *Wound*.

Stagger Threshold: The amount of damage that must be inflicted in one hit for a character to be *Staggered*.

Success: A die showing a number equal to or higher than a roll's *difficulty*.

Swift action: An *action* which occurs on your turn and uses only a small amount of effort and attention.

Wound: Narratively significant injuries inflicted on a character.