

WIZARDS & LIZARDS

CORE RULES



B E T A

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction	3
The Core Loop	3
2. Resolution	4
Attributes	4
Actions	5
Stress	6
3. Tasks and Skills	6
Difficulty	7
Skills	7
Help	7
Contests	7
Exploration	8
Travel	9
Talking to People	10
4. Combat	10
Activation Order	10
Surprise	11
Your Activation	11
Attacking	12
Position	13
Maneuvers and Conditions	15
5. Characters	17
What a Starting Character Has	17
Advancement	18
6. Gear and Harm	18
Weapons and Armor	18
Money	20

Harm and Recovery	20
The death save	20
Getting back up	21
Falling	22
Resting	22
7. Adversaries	22
Attributes	23
Immunities	24
Tiny	24
Resist and Weakness	24
Bane	25
8. Running the Game	25
Building a Challenge	26
Awarding Advancement	26
A Session in Brief	26

INTRODUCTION

Wizards & Lizards puts tabletop skirmish combat and roleplaying rules in a single digest-sized book. One person is the **Game Master** (GM), who describes the world and plays everyone in it. The others each play a character, a hero or villain in a world of high magic and peril.

To play you need this book, a character sheet for each player, and three six-sided dice (3d6).

THE CORE LOOP

1. The GM describes the situation.
2. The players say what their characters do.
3. When the outcome is uncertain and a failure would cost something, someone rolls. Otherwise it simply happens.
4. The GM narrates the result, and the situation moves on.

This one loop runs unchanged in every scene, and a single die ladder resolves every roll. Later chapters cover harm and healing, skirmish combat, the nerve a

character spends, advancement, and the foes a party faces. Wizards & Lizards is a middle-weight game compressed to fit a zine. Separate components extend it into a full campaign: a playbook for each character and a setting book.

RESOLUTION

When the outcome is in doubt, **roll 3d6, add the relevant attribute** (and any skill or situational modifier), and read the result on one ladder:

Total	Result
8 or less	Miss. It goes badly; the risk lands.
9–12	Partial. You do it, but at a cost, compromise, or with harm.
13–17	Success. You do it cleanly.
18+	Critical. You do it, with an extra effect.

These thresholds are fixed: your bonus shifts the roll, never the ladder. Two outcomes are read straight off the raw dice, before modifiers, and no bonus or penalty changes them. A natural **3 or 4** flags a *fumble*: something goes wrong and the GM may make the outcome especially bad, even on a roll a large bonus would otherwise carry to a Success, so no one is ever too skilled to fail. Its mirror, a natural **17 or 18** (the dice all but maxed), is a **Masterstroke**: a character's damaging blow deals **+(level + 1)** extra damage. Because both key off the raw dice alone, each stays a flat ~2% at every bonus, the swingy tail of the ladder. A creature, having no level, simply scores a Critical.

ATTRIBUTES

Every character has four attributes, each from about +0 to +3:

Attribute	What it covers
Might	strength, melee, toughness
Agility	speed, finesse, ranged attacks, stealth, dodging
Wits	perception, lore, magic, awareness
Presence	willpower, command, persuasion, bearing

ACTIONS

An action is a named way of engaging the dice. Six are shared by every character and printed on the sheet:

- **Strike** (Might): attack a foe in melee.
- **Shoot** (Agility): attack a foe at range.
- **Defend** (Agility): dodge, parry, take cover, guard an ally, or hold ground.
- **Maneuver** (Might or Agility): shove, trip, disarm, grapple, or feint.
- **Endure** (the attribute that fits the threat): resist harm, poison, fear, or magic.
- **Skill** (the fitting attribute): attempt any task using one of your skills.

You can always simply describe what your character does. If no action quite fits and the outcome matters, the GM sets the difficulty and calls for 3d6 plus the fitting attribute.

Five resolve on the ladder. Strike and Shoot run on the attack ladder (see Combat); the others read as below. (Defend, Steady, Suppress, Move, Stand, Recover, Interact are stances or upkeep, no roll.) On a **Miss** the risk lands; otherwise:

- **Maneuver**. *Partial*: it half-works, the foe is **Staggered** rather than fully top-pled, or it lands but you overreach and a foe in reach may make one immediate free **Strike** against you (a reaction, costing it no action, once per round); the GM picks the cost that fits. *Success*: your condition lands (Prone, Disarmed, Grabbed). *Critical*: it lands with an extra effect.
- **Endure**. *Partial*: you weather it but pay (a little harm, or briefly Staggered). *Success*: you shrug it off. *Critical*: shrug it off and gain an edge.
- **Skill**. *Partial*: done at a cost or only in part. *Success*: done cleanly. *Critical*: done with something extra, faster, safer, or you learn more.

Bram the hedge-knight swings at a bandit. He rolls 3d6 for a Strike: 4, 5, 2 is 11, plus his Might of +2 makes 13. A clean Success, and the blade bites home for full damage.

A wyrm's venom burns through Mirel, and she must Endure it. The threat is to the body, so the GM calls for Might: the dice land 2, 4, 3 = 9, plus her Might of +1 makes 10. A Partial, in the 9–12 band, she weathers it but pays: a little harm now, and she is briefly Staggered until she shakes the poison off.

STRESS

Stress is your nerve and stamina spent under pressure. You have a stress track of **4 + Presence** boxes. Mark stress to:

- **Push** (1 stress): take +2 on a roll you are about to make, or +1 damage on a hit, or one extra quick action.
- **Resist** (2 stress): reduce a consequence by one step. Shrug off a condition, lessen a wound, or soften a blow.
- **Fuel** an Advanced Action that lists a stress cost, including spellcasting. One with a fixed effect (a set heal, a bolt's damage) simply happens for the cost, no roll; one that must beat a target still rolls.

What you spend for always happens, even the mark that overfills the track: you reach past your limit to get it done.

Faltering. When a spend would carry you past your last box, the effect still lands, then you **falter**: your stress empties to a fresh track and you take a lasting *Shaken* mark. While *Shaken* you are **-1 to all rolls**, and when something frightening confronts you, you must **Endure** it (Presence) or become *Frightened* (see Combat). *Shaken* lifts only with a full night's safe rest.

Breaking. A *Shaken* hero who falters again, overfilling that fresh track, **goes Down**, out of the fight (see Gear and Harm). This is collapse, not a death-wound, so you make **no death save**. Your stress stays **full**: a comrade can rouse you to your feet, but only **rest** clears the track, so until you rest you cannot spend stress again. There is no second wind.

A short rest clears 2 stress; a full night's safe rest clears it all, and lifts *Shaken*.

Doran must clear a widening gap with the guards a step behind. Before he rolls he marks 1 stress to Push, +2. The dice come up 3, 4, 4 = 11; his Agility +1 and the Push make 14, a clean Success where the 12 alone would have been a Partial (a hard landing, a dropped pack). One box of nerve bought the leap, and brought him a box nearer to faltering.

TASKS AND SKILLS

Most of play is the Skill action: attempting something where the outcome matters. Roll 3d6, add the attribute that fits the attempt, add any skill, and read the ladder from the Resolution chapter.

DIFFICULTY

The GM sets difficulty as a flat modifier to the roll. Most attempts are at +0.

Difficulty	Modifier
Favorable	+2
Ordinary	+0
Hard	-2
Daunting	-4

Tools, position, and circumstances shift the roll a point or two more. When an attempt carries no real risk and no time pressure, do not roll; it simply works.

SKILLS

A skill is any named area of training: Stealth, Smithing, Folklore, Riding, Arcana, whatever fits your character and the world. You gain skills from your playbook and from advancement rewards. Playbooks are self-contained and modular; nothing stops a GM or the players from naming a new skill at the table that fits the fiction.

A relevant skill adds **+1** to the Skill action; a mastered skill adds +2. Without a fitting skill you simply roll the attribute. A few specialized things, such as casting spells or deciphering deep magic, cannot be attempted at all without the proper training, which lives in a playbook.

HELP

One ally who can genuinely assist grants **+1**. They share the risk: on a miss, the consequence can fall on the helper instead.

Mirel searches a flooded crypt for a hidden lever. It is dark and the water is rising, Hard, so -2. She has the Searching skill (+1) and her Wits of +1. She rolls 3d6 for a Skill action: 5, 3, 6 = 14, plus +1 +1 -2 = 14. A Success.

CONTESTS

When characters strive directly against one another, an arm-wrestle, a chase, two heralds swaying the same crowd, each side rolls the action that fits **it**, and the sides need not match: one shoves with Might while the other keeps her feet with Agility; one envoy argues with Wits while the other charms with Presence. Compare where each lands on the ladder, and the **higher band wins**, Critical

over Success over Partial over Miss. Land in the **same band** and the higher total takes it. Should the totals tie too, the rawer dice break it, a natural **17 or 18** wins and a natural **3 or 4** loses; with neither edge (or matching ones), it is a deadlock, the struggle holds and the moment passes or escalates. The bonus still sets the band first, so a roll a bonus lifts to a Success beats a natural **17 or 18** a penalty left in the Partial band, the dramatic dice settle only a true tie.

When **many** vie for one prize, a footrace, a scramble, a bidding war, everyone rolls once and the best result wins, ranking ties by total. A long or swinging struggle can run as a few rounds, first to an agreed number of wins. A direct attack on another character is not a contest; it uses the combat roll against their Defense.

At dusk a Kobaloi creeps into camp to cut a pack from a tethered horse. This is a contest, its Stealth against whoever might catch it, and the two sides roll different actions. The thief sneaks on Agility +1 and its Stealth +1, and lands a Success. The party's lookout is dozing and does not roll, but the horse is a sentry of sorts, so the GM rolls its Wits, twitchy and close, that is Favorable, +2, for a Partial. Success beats Partial, so the Kobaloi gets the pack, but the lower band costs it: the horse shies and stamps, and a light sleeper wakes to a small shape bolting for the dark. Now it is a chase, a fresh contest of Agility (or Speed across open ground), run as a few rounds, first to three wins. Catch it and a fight opens on the party's terms; lose it and the camp is a pack and a story poorer.

EXPLORATION

Scouting, searching, and survival use the Skill action with the fitting attribute: spotting an ambush or reading the land with Wits, scaling a wall or moving silently with Agility, forcing a door with Might. Traps are found with Wits and disarmed with Agility (or the Thievery skill).

Where a fight is counted in seconds and overland travel in days (see below), picking through a dungeon or ruin sits between, run in loose **exploration turns** of roughly ten minutes. Down an open, safe passage you simply walk at travel's pace; it is the careful delving, creeping silently, mapping, sounding the floor, working a lock, that is slow by choice. Reckon a turn as about what a cautious party clears between one real choice and the next: a stretch of corridor and a room searched. It is this turn, not the footstep, that any clock in the dark runs on, a guttering torch, a wandering patrol, the watch you keep, so measure those against it rather than counting paces.

The party files into a narrow gorge where the GM has set bowmen on the rim. He calls for a Wits check to notice them; Hadia walks point, so she rolls, and the GM keeps the result to himself; a low number should give nothing away. Her Wits is +1 and her Watchfulness adds +1, but loose scree and failing light make it Hard, -2, for a net +0. The dice read 3, 4, 4 = 11: a Partial. She does not pick out the archers, but the quiet sits wrong, a dislodged pebble, a held breath, and she halts the column a stride short of the killing ground. The fight still comes, but on guard and not flat-footed (see Surprise, next chapter).

A lock opens two ways: **quiet work**, Agility with thieves' tools (and the Thievery skill if you have it), or a **loud break**, Might against the lock, chest, or door, faster but it carries down the hall and may mar what is inside. **Barring or spiking a door** shut is no roll at all; it simply holds, and whoever would force it afterward does so at **Hard or Daunting**, or batters through with time and noise.

A **Partial** is the delver's constant companion: the deed is done, but the price lands in the fiction. The trap is disarmed yet springs a lesser bite; the pick turns the lock but snaps off or rings out; the sneak slips past but is glimpsed or leaves a sign. In darkness or foul weather the GM applies a difficulty penalty.

TRAVEL

Cross the wider world a **day at a time**. Pick a map scale, a hex or an inch to whatever distance suits your setting, and read every mode's pace off that one scale:

A day covers	By
the base rate	on foot, or laden
twice	mounted, by cart, or pack train
three times	by river, sail, or steady current
four times or more	by air, or borne on great magic

A foot-day covers something like **20-30 miles (30-48 km)** of fair country, so set the map scale to make a comfortable day's walk land on the base rate; the multiples follow from there. Forcing the pace can win extra ground for a day or two, at the price of a harder navigator's roll (treat it like rough country).

Each day the party names one **navigator**, whoever best fits the leg, and that character makes **one Skill action** with **Wits** (adding Wayfaring, Seafaring, or Riding if they have it): a **Critical** buys an edge, a day saved, a safe camp, a shortcut found; a **Success** spends the day as planned; a **Partial** still reaches nightfall, but at a cost, a lost half-day, a sprung hazard, supplies or a mount spent;

a **Miss** turns the way against you, lost, weather-pinned, or set upon. Another traveler who scouts, tends the mounts, or keeps the boat may **Help** for the usual +1 (and shares the risk on a miss). Rough country, a night march, or foul weather slow the pace and sour the roll alike; a road, a fair wind, or a true map quicken both. The slowest traveler sets the party's pace.

TALKING TO PEOPLE

Most conversation is just **roleplay, no roll**: when a player makes a reasonable case in character and describes it, the NPC simply responds. Reach for the dice only when the table genuinely doubts the outcome, when an NPC might refuse, see through a lie, or take offense. Then it is an **attribute check the GM assigns: persuading or intimidating** usually leans on Presence, **reading** whether someone means it on Wits, a sly bluff perhaps on Wits as well; the GM picks the attribute the approach calls for and adds a skill if one fits. The ladder shapes the reaction:

- **Success**: they come over, or you read them true.
- **Partial**: a grudging yes with strings, or a true read that costs you (you tip your hand, they name a price, a third party takes note).
- **Miss**: they harden.

Dice sway only the GM's NPCs, not another player's choices.

Doran leans on a wary harbormaster to let the party's boat slip out unlogged. The GM calls it persuasion, so Presence: Doran's is +1, and his Courtesy skill adds +1. The dice come up 3, 4, 2 = 9, for 11 total. A Partial, squarely in the 9–12 band: the harbormaster agrees, but he names his price, a cut of whatever they bring back, and he will remember the debt. They got what they came for, and it cost them.

COMBAT

When violence breaks out, play tightens into rounds. A round is a pass in which every combatant acts once.

ACTIVATION ORDER

Combat is fought between **two opposed sides**. The player characters are a **party**, and they face each fight together as one side, alongside their pets, summons, and allied NPCs. The **Gamemaster** runs the foes arrayed against them as the other side. In a fight the party and the GM are opponents.

The sides **alternate, one combatant at a time**. The side with the highest-Speed combatant activates one of its own first, then the other side activates one, back and forth until everyone has acted. On the party's activation the players decide together which of their unacted combatants goes next, and only that one activates; the GM chooses likewise for the foes. When one side runs out of unacted combatants, the other finishes its remaining ones in a row.

SURPRISE

Sometimes a fight opens with one side unready, an ambush from the rocks, a knife in the dark, a sentry caught dozing. The unready side is **surprised**: the ambushers take the **first activation** regardless of Speed, and each surprised combatant has **one fewer action** (two instead of three) on its first activation. After that opening round the fight runs as normal, side-alternation by the highest Speed.

Whether a side is caught out turns on the **Wits check** to notice the danger (see Tasks and Skills):

- **Success or better**: no surprise. The would-be victim sees it coming, and the fight opens by the usual order.
- **Partial**: half-warned. The ambushers still seize the first activation, but the surprised keep all three of their actions.
- **Miss**: full surprise, both the first strike and a lost action.

Roll only when the noticing is in doubt. A side with no chance to catch the danger, asleep, lured into the open, struck from a hide it could never have seen, is simply surprised, no roll required.

YOUR ACTIVATION

On your activation you take **three actions**, in any order:

- **Strike** (Might): attack a foe within reach.
- **Shoot** (Agility): attack a foe at range.
- **Defend** (Agility): **dodge or parry** one attacker and gain **+2 Defense against every attack from that foe** until your next activation (the whole round, not just the first blow). Each action you spend defending is another +2: **stack** them on one dangerous foe (+4 or +6) or **spread** them across several attackers (+2 each), so an activation slides freely between offense and defense, attack twice and guard once, or turtle behind a full +6. To **guard an ally**, give that +2 to an **adjacent ally** instead of yourself, interposing against one foe (a Defense bonus, not the guardian's blow-catching Intercept). A Defend action may

instead **take cover** for the terrain's cover bonus, or **hold your ground**: each action you spend holding readies a free **Strike**, loosed at the first foe to break from your reach, **one per held action, no foe struck twice**. Spend one and you tax a single escapee; spend two or three and you wall a lane, catching each of the first foes to slip past.

- **Maneuver** (Might or Agility): shove, trip, disarm, grapple, or feint.
- **Steady**: set your stance, take aim. Your next attack this activation is at **+2** (it does not stack with itself).
- **Suppress** (Agility): ready a loaded ranged weapon over an area or a foe's path. The first foe to move into the open there draws your **Shoot** at once, and a hit or partial halts that move. You pay the action now, so this is no stress reaction; it holds until your next activation.
- **Move**: reposition up to your Speed. You may split it across the activation, some spaces before an action and the rest after, but **attacking ends it**: once you Strike, Shoot, or Maneuver against a foe, any movement you held back is lost. So hit-and-run is no basic action (a playbook may grant it); a Disengage is no attack, so you can still thread it through a line.
- **Stand, Recover** (shake one condition), **Interact**, a **Skill** (a task mid-fight; the GM sets the difficulty), or an **Advanced Action** from your sheet (most cost one action, some two; a few are reactions, below).

Multiple attacks wear you down: your second attack roll this activation is at **-2**, your third at **-4**. Mixing in movement, a maneuver, or a guard usually beats swinging three times. **Steady** spends one action to land a single clean blow rather than two ragged ones.

Weapons set their own pace through their **keywords** (see Gear): a **heavy** weapon lands one telling swing an activation, a **reload** weapon fires every other action, **two weapons** let the off-hand add a second Strike (its own action, at the Multiple Attack Penalty). A two-action attack, a heavy weapon's sweep or some Advanced Actions, is a single roll counted as one attack; its price is the two actions it eats, not a worse roll.

You may **mark stress** on your activation as well, to Push an action or to fuel an Advanced Action (see Resolution). A few Advanced Actions are **reactions**: taken on another combatant's activation for **1 stress**, once per round, without spending an action of your own. A guardian's Intercept, catching a blow meant for an ally, is one such reaction.

ATTACKING

Roll **3d6 + attribute + modifiers – the target's Defense**, and read the ladder:

Result	In combat
Miss (8–)	No effect; an alert foe may strike back.
Partial (9–12)	Hit, but at a cost: reduced damage, or the foe counters or breaks away.
Success (13–17)	A clean hit, full damage.
Critical (18+)	Full damage +2, and one condition (your choice).

A natural **17 or 18** on the dice (a *Masterstroke*, see Resolution) adds **+(your level + 1)** damage on top of the band’s result. It is read straight off the raw dice, so no penalty spoils it; a blow that misses outright simply deals no damage to add to.

Defense is how hard you are to hit: Agility + shield + cover; it is separate from **Armor**, which applies to damage, not the roll. **Damage** is your weapon’s value plus any ability bonus (Backstab, a Push), then **–1 on a Partial, +2 on a Critical**, then minus the target’s **Armor** (always at least 1 gets through). Subtract the result from the target’s **Hit Points**. At 0 HP a combatant is **Down and Dying**, out of the fight; a blow past 0 does not overkill. A felled monster dies, flees, or yields; a Dying hero is unconscious and rolls a **death save** on each of their activations (see Gear and Harm).

Bram, now a level-3 knight, brings his sword down on an ogre and the 3d6 land all sixes. That natural 18 is a Critical (full damage +2 and a condition of his choice) and, because the raw dice show three sixes, a Masterstroke too: +(3 + 1) more damage. His medium blade’s 4, plus 2 for the Critical, plus 4 for the Masterstroke, comes to 10; the ogre’s Armor 2 leaves 8 cut from its Hit Points, and Bram spends the Critical to leave it Staggered.

Weapon	Damage	Armor	Soak
Light	3	None	0
Medium	4	Light	1
Heavy	5	Heavy	2

POSITION

Run a fight with tokens or miniatures and a ruler, on freeform ground or a grid. Measure in **spaces**: a space is one inch on the table, or one square or hex on a grid, whichever your table uses. All movement and range is counted in spaces. Reckon a space as about **5 ft (1.5 m)** of ground and one activation as a handful of

seconds: at Speed 2 a single Move is a 3 m stride, and putting a whole activation into moving carries you some 9 m, a quick-time advance under arms (about **1.5 m/s**), brisk and watchful, well short of an open run.

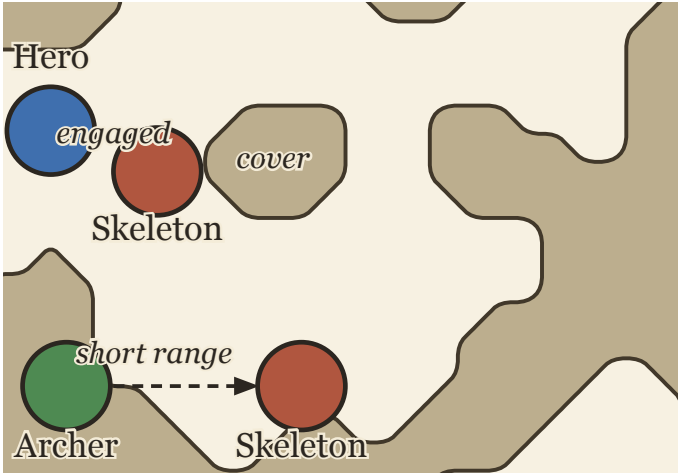


Figure 1: A cavern skirmish measured in spaces: the Hero stands **engaged** with a Skeleton in an adjacent space, while an allied Archer takes a **short-range** shot across the open floor; the rock outcrop is **cover**.

A **Move** carries you up to your **Speed** in spaces (Speed 2 for most; armor or a playbook shifts it). Standing from prone costs one action. Leaving melee is free, but a foe **holding its ground** (see Defend) draws a free Strike as you go. A **Maneuver** to **Disengage** waives it, no roll: for the rest of the activation you may leave the reach of every foe **now** threatening you untouched. It lapses the moment you enter a **new** threat's reach (re-Disengage to peel off that one too, though Disengage and its Move already eat two of your three actions).

You may Move through an **ally's** space, never through a standing foe's; a **downed, unconscious, or prone** foe is no barrier (but a conscious prone foe still holds its ground like any active foe). You cannot **end** an activation sharing a space with another unit unless a trait allows it (a **Tiny** creature may share).

You **Strike** a foe in an **adjacent** space; a **Reach** weapon strikes one two spaces off. A **Shoot** carries to its weapon's **range band**:

Band	Clean range	Long shot (-1)
Short (thrown, sling)	up to 4 spaces	5–8 spaces
Medium (bow, light crossbow)	up to 8 spaces	9–12 spaces

Band	Clean range	Long shot (–1)
Long (longbow, heavy crossbow)	up to 12 spaces	13–16 spaces

A shot past the **long shot** column is out of range. The GM applies flat modifiers for position, to Strike, Shoot, and Maneuver alike:

Situation	Modifier
Charging into melee	+1
Outnumbering the foe (flanking)	+1
Higher ground	+1
Target behind cover	–1 (to hit it)
A long shot (shooting past the weapon’s range band)	–1

These modifiers stack with each other (though never with a copy of themselves) and with a target’s conditions: a **prone, flanked** foe is struck in melee at **+3** (+2 for prone, +1 for the flank).

MANEUVERS AND CONDITIONS

A successful Maneuver inflicts a condition instead of damage. Conditions impose a flat **–2** unless noted, and a creature can bear several **different** conditions at once, each in full. Inflicting one it **already** has worsens it instead (Staggered becomes Stunned; pile on enough and it goes Down, knocked out, not Dying, so no death save).

Pinned by a swordsman she cannot out-fight, Mirel Maneuvers to wrench his blade away rather than trade Strikes. Might or Agility serves; she rolls Might +1 against his Defense: 5, 4, 5 = 14, a Success. The sword skitters across the flagstones, Disarmed, and until he spends an action to draw another he is down to improvised blows. The Maneuver dealt no damage, but it bought the party a round.

Condition	Effect	Cleared
Prone	melee hits it at +2, it acts at –2	Stand (1 action)
Staggered	–2 to its rolls	Recover (1 action), or it fades at its next activation

Condition	Effect	Cleared
Stunned	loses one action	fades at the end of its next activation
Grabbed	cannot move; -2 to act	a Maneuver to break free
Disarmed	improvised attacks only	draw a weapon (1 action)
Frightened	-2 near the source; cannot approach it	Endure it, or the source gone
Ongoing N	N damage each activation, ignoring armor	tend it (1 action), or it runs out
Weakened	takes double from one named kind of harm	Recover (1 action), tend, or it fades

Each clears **one** condition at a time, so a foe buried under several spends an action or an activation apiece to dig free, the price (and the point) of stacking them. An Advanced Action that spends stress may lift more than one at once.

An **ally can clear a condition for you** when the fix is something hands can do from outside, paying the **same action, and the same roll**, it would have cost you, never a free favor. Where the clear is automatic, **tending** your **Ongoing** or putting a weapon back in a **Disarmed** hand, one ally action does it. Where the clear is a **roll**, the ally rolls it: prying you out of a **Grab** is a **Maneuver against the grabber's Defense**, so a strong holder, an ogre's fist, a roc's talon, resists the rescue exactly as it resists your own struggle. One action buys the attempt, not the certainty. A few paths are yours alone, because they are you steadying yourself, **Standing**, **Recover**, **Endure** against fear; and the time-based clears (a **Stunned** foe shaking it off at its next activation) need no action from anyone.

A numeric condition does **not** add up: a second **Ongoing** (or Staggered, or the like) keeps the **worse** value and resets its clock, it never sums. So five small venom-bites still inflict only the single worst dose, not five, and a swarm's threat is its many attacks and grabs, not a runaway tally of poison. One **tend** ends the Ongoing whatever its size.

Some creatures cannot suffer some conditions: you cannot trip or knock **Prone** a ghost, an ooze, a swarm, or anything without legs to take out from

under it; a mindless thing feels no fear; a creature with no weapon cannot be Disarmed. A stat line notes what its kind shrugs off. When a condition will not stick, the Maneuver simply deals its damage (if any) and the GM says why.

Bram is flanked by two bandits. He spends his first action to Strike the leader (clean Success, 4 damage past its leather), then Maneuvers to shove the second prone, then Moves to put a wall at his back. Next round the prone bandit must spend an action to stand before it can close.

CHARACTERS

You build a character with a **playbook**, a guided sheet that asks about your character's past. Each answer, rolled or chosen, grants a little, and by the end a complete adventurer has taken shape. Play through the questions together; the playbooks tie your characters into one another's stories.

WHAT A STARTING CHARACTER HAS

Attributes	one at +2 (your signature), one at +1, two at +0
Skills	three, drawn from your playbook and your past
Advanced Actions	two, one granted by the playbook, one chosen
Hit Points	12 + your playbook's toughness (0 to 4)
Stress	a track of 4 + your Presence
Speed	2 spaces per Move (some playbooks more or less)
Defense	Agility + shield + cover
Kit	a weapon, perhaps armor, and a few useful things

An **Advanced Action** is the special trick of your archetype, a spell, a deadly strike, a thief's craft. Most playbooks may trade one Advanced Action for two extra skills, or the reverse.

If you would rather skip the questions, the GM can hand out a quick array: attributes +2 / +1 / +0 / +0, three skills, and the playbook's granted Advanced Action plus one choice.

ADVANCEMENT

Characters grow over **five levels**. The GM picks how you earn them: a level at each story milestone, or one for every three significant challenges overcome (optionally counting hauls of treasure). Each level:

- **+4 Hit Points**, always.
- On **levels 2 and 4**: gain a skill (new, or deepen one to +2) and an Advanced Action.
- On **levels 3 and 5**: raise an attribute by 1 (to a maximum of +3) and add +1 to your damage. Your playbook says what that raises, weapon damage for most, spell damage for a caster.

By level 5 a hero has about 30 Hit Points, attributes up to +3, five or six skills, four Advanced Actions, and +2 damage.

A **level-0** character, a villager swept into adventure, has reduced Hit Points and no Advanced Actions, and, unlike a hero, gets **no death save**: at 0 HP a level-0 simply falls. Those who survive their first trials become full level-1 adventurers.

GEAR AND HARM

Carry what makes sense for an adventurer. The GM tracks only what matters: weapons, armor, and a handful of notable items. Mundane supplies, a torch, a meal, a coil of rope, are assumed unless scarcity is part of the story.

WEAPONS AND ARMOR

A weapon deals damage by its size, **light** 3, **medium** 4, **heavy** 5, and may carry one or more **keywords** that shape how it fights. Bare hands or an improvised weapon (a chair leg, a thrown rock) deal **2**, and bare hands are **Quick** (below); hurling something not made to be thrown (a rock) costs **1 stress**, the fatigue a sling spares. A **shield** adds +1 Defense. Keywords mean the same on every weapon:

Keyword	What it does
Two-handed	Needs both hands, so no shield.
Heavy	Always two-handed, the hardest hitter but unwieldy: only one Strike an activation . To make that swing tell, a Success or Critical

Keyword	What it does
	knocks the target Prone (Staggered if it cannot be felled), and you may swing all-out , -2 to the attack for +2 damage .
Quick	One action makes two attacks instead of one; the second takes the Multiple Attack Penalty, like any extra attack. Bare hands have it (a flurry of light blows).
Reach	Strike a foe two spaces off: a step beyond arm's length, over an ally, or a charging foe before it closes.
Ranged	Attacked with Shoot , at a distance. Each has a range band (<i>short 4 / medium 8 / long 12 spaces</i>); a shot past it is a long shot (-1), and past that, out of range (see Combat).
Reload N	Spends N actions to reload between shots (crossbow 2 , windlass 5): one telling shot, then a long wind.
Thrown	A melee weapon also hurled as a Shoot (short range).

Some thrown gear deals no damage at all but a **condition**: a **net** or **bola** hurled at short range, a pouch of **caltrops** scattered underfoot. These are a spent resource, you carry only a few, so they buy a moment, not a battle. Two such conditions ride on gear (and on a few monsters, like a spider's Web) rather than on any Strike or Maneuver, so they are defined here, not in the Combat conditions table: **Entangled** (cannot move; -2 to act; one snare can catch up to 4 adjacent; a successful Maneuver or Endure tears free, a miss spends the action) and **Slowed** (Speed halved until your next activation; no -2 to rolls). Each item spells out which it inflicts; the setting's gear cards carry them.

Armor soaks damage but slows you:

Armor	Soak	Note
Light (leather)	1	
Heavy (mail, plate)	2	Speed -1

Armor that soaks 3 or more is the mark of monsters and enchantment, not ordinary smiths, and such a creature always has a weakness worth finding.

MONEY

Coin buys gear, lodging, passage, and favors. Track a rough purse, not every copper; the GM sets prices to the setting and the moment. A new weapon or a night's stay is small change to a successful party; a warhorse or a suit of plate is an expedition's reward.

HARM AND RECOVERY

Damage subtracts from your **Hit Points**. At **0 Hit Points you are Down and Dying**: unconscious, prone and helpless, and bleeding out. A blow that would carry you past 0 simply drops you, there is no overkill, so no single hit kills a hero outright. (This is the heroic baseline; the desperate level-0 funnel is far more fragile.)

You can also be put **Down without Dying**: knocked out, not bleeding out, by a stress **collapse** (see Resolution) or by Staggering piled past Stunned (see Combat). A hero Down this way is out of the fight and helpless, but makes **no death save**; they come round on rest or a comrade's aid. **Dying** is only the 0-Hit-Point state, and only Dying calls for death saves.

THE DEATH SAVE

On each of your activations while you are **Dying**, make a **death save**: an Endure roll using your **best attribute** (the highest of Might, Agility, Wits, or Presence, as written on your sheet), read on the ladder. Anything that aids a roll aids the save, a Push, a Blessing, an ally's reroll; the will to live takes every hand it is offered.

Death save	Result
18+	You rally, conscious and back in the fight at 1 Hit Point .
13–17	You stabilize : still unconscious, but out of danger. Stop making death saves unless harmed again.

Death save	Result
9–12	You cling on, still dying. Save again on your next activation.
8–	You die.

It is an ordinary Endure, so **everything that helps a roll helps you here**: mark stress to **Push** it (+2), a comrade's Blessing, a rogue's Fortune, a reroll. Harm taken while Dying forces a death save **at once**, and a foe who takes the time to finish a helpless hero simply does.

Choosing when to roll. Because your side sequences its own activations (round-robin by default), a dying hero is usually held for **last**: every ally who goes first is a chance to reach them and spare them the roll.

GETTING BACK UP

An ally beside you can act instead of leaving it to the dice:

- **First aid**, a Skill roll with Medicine or a healer's kit: on **13+** you are up at **1 Hit Point**, hurt but standing; on **9–12** stabilized but still Down; on **8–** no progress, and likely trouble.
- **Healing**, a draught or a cleric's Tend or Lift the Fallen, brings you up if it lifts you above 0.
- **Rousing** a hero who is Down but **not Dying** (a stress collapse, a stagger knockout) needs no medicine, only a moment: an ally spends **1 action** to haul them up, or they come round on their own after a short rest. There is no wound to mend, so first aid and healing are for the **Dying**. A hero roused from a stress collapse rises with their **stress still full and Shaken**, upright but with nothing left to spend until a rest clears the track.

A hero who returns from Down rises **Shaken** (see Resolution): the brush with death tells until you sleep it off. Going Down is survivable, but it always carries a cost. A felled **monster** simply dies, flees, or yields, as the GM plays it.

Bram takes a club to the head and drops to 0, Down. His side holds his activation for last: the rogue goes first and reaches him, spending an action on first aid with her healer's kit. She rolls Wits +1 and Medicine +1: 4, 6, 3 = 13, +2 = 15. A Success, so Bram is back on his feet at 1 Hit Point, Shaken. Had no one reached him, Bram would roll his own death save on his activation, and could mark stress to Push it +2 if he dared.

FALLING

A fall deals **crushing** harm, and the longer the drop the more of it your body must weather. For **every 12 ft (about 4 m) fallen**, make an **Endure** roll, **Agility** to twist and land with it or **Might** to take the impact, whichever the GM judges fits the fall (a dead-weight faller, unaware, bound, or unconscious, gets no roll and takes each span in full):

Per 12 ft (4 m)	Crushing damage
Miss (8–)	6 , the span lands hard
Partial (9–12)	3 , you half-roll with it
Success or Critical (13+)	0 , you ride it down clean

So a tumble off a low roof is one easy roll; a cliff or a roc's parting gift is several, and even a sure-footed faller leaves a long drop bruised. Falling **ignores armor**, gravity cares nothing for plate, but **Resist** or **Weakness** to crushing still counts: brittle bones (*Weakness: crushing*) take **12 / 6** a span, a stone-tough hide half. As with any blow there is **no overkill**, so even a killing fall only drops a hero to Dying, the rocks below finish what the GM plays out.

RESTING

- A **short rest** with food and water restores a few Hit Points and clears 2 stress.
- A **full night's** safe rest restores all Hit Points and stress, and clears Shaken.
- The **Medicine** skill, or a healer's attention, mends faster and tends poisons, disease, and lingering conditions.

ADVERSARIES

A creature needs only a short line of numbers and one idea that makes it interesting:

Name: HP · Defense · Armor · Attack +N (damage) · Speed · *special*

The GM rolls a creature's attacks like a character's: 3d6 + its Attack, minus your Defense, read on the ladder. A creature's **tier** (Lesser, Common, Greater, Dire; see Attributes) sets the four attributes it saves with, so the line need only spell out HP, Defense, Armor, Attack, and Speed. Everything else, skills, morale, cleverness, the GM simply plays.

Foe	HP	Def	Arm	Atk	Dmg	Speed
Giant Rat	2	2	0	+1	1	3
Goblin	4	3	0	+2	3	3
Bandit	6	2	1	+2	4	2
Wolf	5	3	0	+2	3	3
Ogre	36	1	0	+3	5	2
Wraith	10	4	0	+3	4	3

A creature's **special** is the one idea it brings to a fight: the wolf hunts in a pack and gains +1 when it outnumbered you; the giant rat is **Tiny** (below), batted aside by a glancing blow but hard to truly crush; the wraith's **Bane is fire** (or a blessed blade), and ordinary steel passes through it untouched.

A swarm's danger comes from how long each body survives, not how hard it hits. A mob of giant rats is more trouble than its hit points suggest, because each is **Tiny**: a glancing blow only swats it away, so the swarm lingers and keeps nipping until the party lands clean blows. Goblins, nimble but fragile, drop to a single blow and rarely land more than a scratch. A band of hardened **bandits**, with the hit points and armor to soak a wound and keep fighting, is a serious fight for a starting party; expect to carry someone home. Give a weak foe a point or two of armor and a few extra hit points and it stops being a nuisance and becomes a threat.

The **ogre** shows how a single big foe stays dangerous against a whole party. It is easy to hit (low Defense) but hard to hurt: a **Tough Hide** turns aside non-magic blows (–3 damage from anything but spells and fire). It strikes with **two fists each activation** (or hurls a rock at a distant foe), and a solid hit **knocks you Prone** (a critical also knocks you back), so you waste an action standing and repositioning while it pounds the next hero. Without those tricks a lone monster simply drowns under four heroes' actions.

ATTRIBUTES

A creature attacks with its Attack, and **saves like a character**, 3d6 + the fitting attribute (Presence against fear or a Rebuke, Might against a shove, and so on). Rather than write four numbers on every line, take them all from its tier and note only the exceptions:

Tier	Attributes
Lesser	+0
Common	+1
Greater	+2
Dire	+3

So the ogre saves at +3 by default; you note that its Might is higher still and its Wits lower. A steadier foe takes a higher Presence, or a flat immunity, the way the mindless dead feel no ordinary terror.

IMMUNITIES

Note in a creature's stat line the conditions its kind ignores. The wraith *cannot be tripped, knocked back, or Grabbed*, there is nothing solid to take hold of; the mindless skeleton *cannot be Frightened*; the great serpent *cannot be knocked Prone*, being already low to the ground. An immunity makes a foe markedly harder, since the party loses the openings those conditions buy, so hand it out deliberately, the way you would any other defense.

TINY

A **Tiny** creature, a rat, an imp, a sprite, is too small and quick to crush with a glancing blow. A **partial** hit (9–12) deals it **at most 1 damage** (an attack that would have hurt it does just 1; one already turned aside by armor does nothing) and bats it flying: it is knocked back, so it spends its next action scrambling into reach. Only a **solid** hit (13+) lands clean. This is why a swarm outlasts its hit points: keep each one's damage low, a Tiny thing nips, it does not maim, and let the threat be numbers and persistence. A dozen Tiny rats make a fitting first scrap for green adventurers. A Tiny creature is small enough to **share a space**: it may end its activation in an occupied space, and other units may end in its. That is co-occupancy only, so a Tiny creature still cannot move **through** a standing hostile (it can perch in a doorway a guard blocks, not slip past to the far side).

RESIST AND WEAKNESS

Between plain armor and an outright Bane sits a softer harm-sensitivity family, named in plain language on the stat line. **Resist (kind)** takes half from that kind of harm (or **Tough Hide N**, a flat $-N$ from all but magic, as the ogre's does). **Weakness (kind)** is its mirror, taking **double** from one named kind, the far-milder kin of Bane. Keep the named kind narrow, and do not hand a whole encounter the same weakness, or the doubling snowballs into a wipe.

BANE

Some creatures are harmed **only** by one named thing, their **Bane**; all other harm passes through and deals nothing. A Bane is a puzzle whose answer is printed in plain sight: the stat line names it (*Bane: fire*), so the table can find and exploit it. A creature the party's weapons cannot touch demands another approach, the right element, a blessed weapon, the environment, a parley, or a swift retreat. Keep a Bane creature low on Hit Points: the party that finds the answer is rewarded, and one that has not yet found it is steered to think, not made to grind.

Telegraphing the Bane. The Bane is only a puzzle if the players can find the answer. Name it in the stat line so you do not forget it mid-fight; more importantly, signal it in play *before* they discover it through futile sword strokes. Useful tools:

- **Describe the immunity.** When the first blow passes through untouched, say so vividly: *the blade slides through the wraith's chest and comes out cold, leaving no mark*. That is the clue, not a punishment.
- **Put the answer in the world.** A local legend, a scratched warning on a dungeon wall, an NPC's offhand remark ("grandmother swore only fire keeps them down") can reach the players before the encounter does.
- **Make it findable by looking.** A Wits or lore skill roll before the fight, or after the first miss, is a fair way to surface the counter: "you recall the old stories — these things fear holy ground and open flame."
- **Do not leave the Bane a surprise the party cannot prepare for.** If the party has had no plausible route to the answer, give them one in the moment; the point is the choice (fight, run, improvise), not the helplessness.

The party's swords pass through the wraith like smoke. Then the cleric remembers the old rhyme, "cold things fear the hearth," and thrusts a torch into its heart, the wraith's Bane, and it recoils as fire bites where steel could not.

RUNNING THE GAME

Your job as GM is to present a living world, play its people and perils honestly, and let the dice and the players' choices steer the story. A few principles carry the whole game:

- **Ask for a roll only when failure costs something.** Otherwise, say yes.
- **Make Partial's sting.** The 9–12 result is the heart of the ladder: success with a price keeps every roll moving the story.

- **Telegraph danger.** Show the trap's worn flagstones, the ogre's reach, the wraith's untouchable chill, before they matter, so choices are real.
- **Set difficulty by fiction, not formula.** Hard is -2, daunting is -4; most things are +0.

BUILDING A CHALLENGE

Match the threat to the party. A pack of Lesser foes (HP 4–6) tests the party's position; a single tough foe (HP 12–20) tests their focus and their tricks; a **Bane** creature tests their wits. Mix freely, and remember morale: foes flee, surrender, or bargain when the fight turns against them.

A hard fight is not as fixed as its numbers look. Trading blow for blow is the deadliest way to meet one; a party that **Defends** its wounded, holds a chokepoint, and focuses fire can carry a fight that a slugfest would lose, so telegraph the terrain and the exits. The exception is a **Bane** with no answer in hand: there a defensive stance only delays the end. Steer such a party to find the counter or to **retreat**, and keep retreat, surrender, and parley live, the deadliest fight is the one neither side can leave.

Terrain is a force multiplier. Because no one may move through a standing foe, a passage one or two bodies wide lets a small line hold off a crowd: only as many attackers as the gap is wide can strike at once, so a swarm's numbers stop counting, and a second rank behind the first is a fresh line for when the front falls. What breaks a held line is not more bodies but **harder** ones, a Dire bruiser whose blow cracks the tank, or a foe that flanks, flies, or shoots over the wall. Build a *hold the door* or *protect the envoy* set-piece around that: give the defenders a chokepoint and name it, then menace it with per-hit power or a way around, not a bigger mob. Whoever shelters behind the line, a caster, a wounded ally, an NPC, is safe only until the last defender drops.

AWARDING ADVANCEMENT

Whichever track you chose, advance the party together. Pace it so a campaign reaches level 5 over its arc, fast enough that growth is felt, slow enough that each new power lands.

A SESSION IN BRIEF

Open on a hook. Let the players investigate, talk, and prepare. Bring a complication to a head. Resolve it in skill, words, or steel. Close on a consequence that opens the next door. Roll for what is uncertain; narrate the rest.

The rhythm of every session: describe the world, ask what they do, roll 3d6 when it is in doubt, read the ladder, and keep the story moving.

Beta: not yet playtested. This is a working draft (version 0.7). Its numbers and procedures are reasoned and simulation-checked, but unproven at the table, so expect them to change between versions. Play it, push on it, and report what breaks.

QUICK REFERENCE

A COMBAT ROUND

Sides alternate, one unit each; the **highest-Speed side activates first**. On your activation, take **3 actions**. Each attack roll after your first this turn takes **-2**, then **-4**. A **reaction** is an Advanced Action: 1 stress, once per round, off your turn.

ATTACK AND DAMAGE

Attack: 3d6 + attribute + mods – target's **Defense** (Agility + shield + cover), on the ladder:

ROLL	RESULT
8–	Miss. The risk lands.
9–12	Partial. Reduced effect; spend +1 stress for the full result.
13–17	Hit. Full effect.
18+	Critical. +2 damage and a condition.

Damage: the weapon's value – target's **Armor** (at least 1 gets through), off **Hit Points**.

Raw 3d6, read straight (no modifier saves or spoils either): a natural 3–4 is a *fumble* (GM worsens it); a natural 17–18 is a *Masterstroke* (+[level+1] damage on a hit).

WEAPON	DMG	ARMOR	SOAK
Light	3	None	0
Medium	4	Light	1
Heavy	5	Heavy	2
Unarmed	2		

Position (flat): charge +1, flank +1, high ground +1, cover –1, long shot –1.

GOING DOWN

0 HP = Down, unconscious. On each of your turns, roll a **death save**, Endure + your best attribute (no magic bonuses):

SAVE	RESULT
18+	Rise, back in the fight at 1 HP.
13–17	Stabilize (out of danger).
9–12	Cling on; save again next turn.
8–	You die.

Push, a Blessing, or any reroll helps the save. Held for last, allies may revive you first (first aid 13+, or healing).

BASIC ACTIONS

ACTION	ATTR	USE
Strike	Might	melee attack
Shoot	Agility	ranged attack
Defend	Agility	cover / guard / hold ground / +2 Defense vs one foe
Maneuver	Mgt/Agi	shove, trip, disarm, grab, feint
Endure	by threat	resist harm, poison, fear, magic
Skill	by task	any task using a skill

Your other actions: **Move** (up to Speed), **Steady** (+2 to your next attack), **Suppress** (ready a shot on an area), **Stand**, **Recover** (shake one condition), **Interact**, or an **Advanced Action** from your sheet. Mark **stress** to **Push** (+2 a roll, +1 damage, or an extra quick action).

Positioning: measure in spaces (1 inch or 1 square/hex). Move up to Speed spaces. Strike an adjacent foe (Reach: 2). Ranged bands: short 4 / medium 8 / long 12 spaces; past the band = long shot (–1), past that = no shot.

Heavy: two-handed, no second swing. A solid hit knocks Prone; may swing all-out (–2 hit / +2 dmg). Heavy sweep = one roll, one attack. Quick (fists): 2 attacks per action, 2nd at the penalty. Defend focus: +2 Defense vs that one foe for the whole turn.

CONDITIONS –2 unless noted

CONDITION	EFFECT / CLEAR
Prone	hit at +2; Stand (1 action)
Staggered	–2 rolls; ends next turn
Stunned	lose an action; ends next turn
Grabbed	no move; break free (action)
Disarmed	improvised only; retrieve (action)
Frightened	–2 near source; can't approach
Ongoing N	N damage/turn, ignores armor

GAMEMASTER’S SCREEN

The opposite cover handles the dice. This one handles your job: charge a fair price, answer a miss, and put a threat on the table fast.

BUILD A FOE

Pick a tier and adjust to taste. *Defis* subtracted from the attacker’s roll. Danger is hit points, armor, and numbers, not bigger damage; the rest gate, not the stat block, sets difficulty. A lone foe is a fair fight for only about one party size, so scale it to the table: hit points for a small band, real minions (not chaff) for a large one, never just bigger damage.

TIER	HP	ATK	DMG	ARMOR	DEF	ACTS	TYPICAL
Lesser	4–6	+2	3	0–1	2	1	goblin, bandit
Common	12	+3	4	2	3	1	soldier, cultist
Greater	18	+3	5	1–2	3	2	gladiator, knight
Dire	30+	+4	6	2–3	3	2–3	ogre, chieftain

WHEN A SKILL ROLL COSTS (9–12)

Give them what they reached for, then charge one price they will feel. (Spells define their own partial: reduced effect, free — or +1 stress for the full result.)

- Advance the enemy’s plan a step.

D6	THE COST
1	A few damage, or 1 stress.
2	A tool breaks, drops, or is spent.
3	They draw notice; a foe acts or arrives.
4	It takes longer; a clock ticks on.
5	Partial only; they give ground.
6	A hard choice: this or that, not both.

A partial that costs nothing wastes the roll.

WHEN THEY MISS (8–), MAKE A MOVE

Lead **soft** (a threat, time to react); go **hard** (it lands) if they let it stand.

- Deal damage, or inflict a condition.
- Separate them, or pin them in place.
- Spend or spoil a resource they counted on.
- Turn their own move back against them.
- Reveal an unwelcome truth, or worse danger.

NPC REACTION (3D6)

When a stranger's response is genuinely uncertain, roll. Shift it for how the party approached: a gift, a threat, a shared foe.

3D6	MOOD
5–	Hostile. Acts against them.
6–8	Wary. Guarded; wants assurance.
9–12	Neutral. Hears them out.
13–15	Receptive. Inclined to help.
16+	Warm. An ally, for now.

FOE TRAITS (ADD ONE OR TWO)

- **Multiattack:** two strikes in one action.
- **Resist (kind):** takes half from that kind of harm. **Weakness (kind):** takes double.
- **Knockdown:** a Success or Critical hit leaves them Prone.
- **Venom / Fear / Grab:** a hit inflicts On-going / Frightened / Grabbed.
- **Tiny:** a Partial deals it max 1 damage and bats it flying (knocked back); only a solid hit lands clean. A swarm outlasts its hit points.
- **Bane (type):** harmed *only* by that type; all else passes through. The Bane is its own telegraphed counter, name it in the stat line.