

RED MISTS

READING THE DICE

The dice used in *Red Mists* are a bit unique. Each side offers four different elements, broken down as follows:

Number
standard d6 numbers

Result
used to signify
success or failure



Qualifier
used in determining
degrees of success or
failure, as well as any
special effects

Hit Location
used in combat to strike
a specific body part

CORE MECHANICS

There are two kinds of contest in *Red Mists*: opposed and unopposed. Unopposed tests have an obstacle that is not purposefully trying to foil the character. Swimming across a river, finding a secret door, and setting a fire in the rain are examples of unopposed contests; the river doesn't care if you swim it, the library isn't trying to stop you from finding a book, and the rain is unaware that you want to start a fire. Unopposed contests are resisted by difficulty numbers, ranging from 0 to 5.

Opposed contests have an obstacle based on active resistance, usually an opponent's attribute. Bargaining with a merchant for a cheaper price, listening for the approach of a cutpurse, and stabbing at an enemy are all examples of opposed tests because the resistance is active.

Before any dice are rolled, the GM and player should establish the



stakes for both success and failure. The difference between critical, standard, and marginal results may be agreed upon, or matters may be established for standard results only; more severe outcomes can be left to expanding the agreed upon standard results. In all cases, let the intent and the context be your guide. The possible outcomes of a test are:

- 6 (✓ +) critical success, aka *Yes, and*.
- 5 (✓ •) standard success, aka *Yes*
- 4 (✓ -) marginal success, aka *Yes, but*
- 3 (⊗ +) marginal failure, aka *No, but*
- 2 (⊗ •) standard failure, aka *No*
- 1 (⊗ -) critical failure, aka *No, and*

Start out with a number of dice equal to the value of an attribute (reflexes, instinct, savagery, thews, cunning, fortune, or guts). Attributes generally range from 2 to 5. Subtract a number of dice equal to the difficulty rating. In an unopposed test, this is a number based on the GM's assessment of the situation. In an opposed test, the number is based on the opposition's relevant attribute. *Add one die* and then roll your skill pool. Select the highest number rolled as your result. If the difficulty is higher than the number of dice in the pool,

roll a number of dice equal to the difference *plus one*. Your result is the lowest die.

You can improve the size of your skill pool by invoking an appropriate theme, such as ‘pirate’ or ‘barbarian.’ Each theme deemed acceptable by the GM adds one die to your pool. More on that later.

Paul is playing a character named Pelagius, an adventurer attempting to track a brigand through the woods. The GM says the tracking attempt will be an unopposed test based on instinct (ranked at 3). Pelagius has no appropriate theme that speaks to tracking, so his skill pool consists of three dice. The GM declares a difficulty of 2, meaning Paul must subtract two dice from his pool and add one, leaving two dice to determine the outcome of his endeavor. Paul rolls the dice, getting a 6 (✓ +) and a 3 (⊗ +). The best result is the 6, meaning Pelagius has achieved the best possible outcome, a critical success! The GM rules that he not only tracks his enemy but manages to conceal his presence.

OPTION: Opposition dice

If you prefer to have both players and GM roll dice in opposed tests, try this option on for size. Both participants in the conflict assemble a skill pool. The dice results of the non-player character (NPC) cancel the same results of the player character (PC), or the closest die of lower value. For example, an NPC’s roll of 5 would cancel the PC’s roll of 5, or the closest die lower than 5. When all cancellation has finished, if the PC has one or more dice remaining, the highest remaining die reveals the outcome of the his attempt. If the NPC cancels all the dice of the PC, the result of the exchange is based off the lowest die remaining on the table. If all dice are canceled, the round is a stalemate.

Pelagius has tracked his foe and managed to remain hidden behind a tree. He decides he wants to spring out and grapple the enemy to the ground.

The GM believes this constitutes two goals: surprising the enemy and grappling with him. Surprising the brigand will be based on reflexes and grappling will be based on thews. Pitted against Pelagius will be the brigand's instinct and thews.

After some discussion, Paul and his GM agree that, for the surprise attempt, failure will result in the brigand noticing the attack before it lands. Success will allow Pelagius to get the jump on his enemy. If he does, he may proceed to the grapple with success resulting in Pelagius dragging his foe to the ground with a (✓ •), or knocking him to the ground with a (✓ +). They don't specify other results, feeling they have enough of a framework to proceed.

For the surprise test, Pelagius' reflexes of 4 is pitted against the brigand's instinct of 2. That is 4 active dice versus 2 reactive dice. Pelagius rolls a 6, 4, 3, and 2. The brigand rolls 6 and 5, canceling the 6 and 4 rolled by Pelagius. That leaves only 2 and 3 on the table. The best result is a 3 (⊗ +), meaning the brigand detects his approach, but there is a silver lining. Paul suggests the brigand hears Pelagius and turns to face him before the grapple occurs, but that Pelagius is in good position for the conflict, gaining an extra die for the first round of what is certainly looking like a good fight. The GM agrees. It's on to the struggle!

Throughout this book you will see examples provided for various contest results. The combat chapter, for example, illustrates some standard results for successful attack actions. It cannot be overstated that *these are examples only*. When you announce your intention for any contest, you can dictate the desired result ahead of time. The GM may increase or decrease the difficulty based on your plan. If you want to attempt to disarm your opponent, simply announce it. You get your intended goal with a result of 5, a better-than-expected result on 6, and so on. *As long as you and the GM agree on the possible outcomes in advance, you can try anything you want to*. Here is an example of how you can read a result in different ways.

“I will disarm the berserker.”

	+	—
<i>Success</i> <i>(the berserker is disarmed)</i>	<i>the berserker takes an extra 2 points of damage</i> <i>the berserker stumbles; +1d to your next action</i> <i>you take the berserker's weapon</i>	<i>you hurt yourself; take 2 damage</i> <i>you stumble; -1d to your next action</i> <i>you drop your own weapon</i>
<i>Failure</i> <i>(the berserker keeps his weapon)</i>	<i>you gain a 1d bonus to your next attempt at disarming the berserker</i> <i>the berserker's grip on his weapon weakens; reduce his next attack by 1d</i> <i>you disengage without being attacked</i>	<i>your grip on your weapon weakens; reduce your next attack by 1d</i> <i>the berserker attacks you with a 1d bonus</i> <i>you drop your own weapon</i>

You may notice the penalties and bonuses in the example are both a single die. A 1d modifier is usually easy to agree upon. That said, it is nothing more than an example; if you and the GM agree your attempt warrants 2d or more, go for it. Just make sure you both know the stakes before any results are applied.

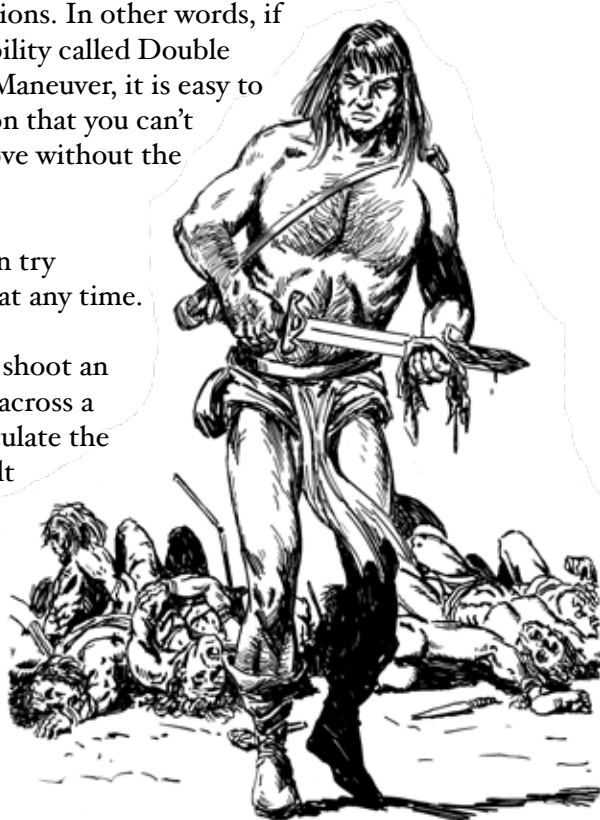
This philosophy means there are no pre-defined abilities in *Red Mists*. While such things can be exciting and rewarding to play with, they

also suggest limitations. In other words, if there is a special ability called Double Flip Decapitating Maneuver, it is easy to reach the conclusion that you can't try that kind of move without the named ability.

In *Red Mists* you can try anything you want at any time.

When you want to shoot an arrow at an enemy across a field, you don't calculate the distance and consult a chart to see if your bow can shoot that far. You ask the GM 'do I think I can hit that guy?' The GM then gives you an answer.

When you want to run across a room and attack two enemies with a single stroke of your sword, you don't need to have reached a certain level of competence to try that. You just tell the GM that's what you want to do. The GM will then tell you what obstacles and potential downfalls are involved (the foes might be ready for your attacks if you don't run fast enough, attacking the second foe is contingent on dropping the first foe, and so on).



CHARACTER GENERATION

Characters in *Red Mists* are experienced freebooters, cutthroats, barbarians, and mercenaries. They have traveled the breadth of the land in search of wealth and adventure. They are driven by riches, bloodlust, restlessness, and vengeance. There is no 'zero to hero' progressions for your character; he's no hero and he's already seen and done things the rest of the world only hears about in tales and whispers. You rely on your instinct, brawn, luck... and maybe darker forces.

STATS

There are three sets of stats used in *Red Mists*: themes, attributes, and impulses.

Themes are the meat of every character's story. They are a record of the adventurer's travels, exploits, quirks, and personality. Themes illustrate where you've been, what you're famous for, what you've done, and how you act.

When a theme is applicable to a contest, you may add one die to your skill pool. You may use as many applicable themes as you like, with GM approval.

Your adventurer begins with eight themes:

- two professions
- two attitudes
- two environments
- two reputations

Your themes are usually expressed in one to four words, such as



‘The Slums of Manifest’ or ‘Growls.’ There are an endless variety of possible theme variants, but here are some (non-exhaustive) examples.

Professions: soldier, barbarian, thief, priest, pirate, assassin, slaver, sorcerer, noble, hunter, prostitute, beggar, escaped slave

Attitudes: don’t touch me, I reject your civilized customs, pleasure before responsibility, wenches are not to be trusted

Environments: steaming jungles of Zhask, Xenthusan brothels, rough waters of the Moonstar Seas, the frozen Highreach tundras, arid plains of Corami

Reputations: slayer of the Brinthian drake, violent drunk, betrayer of the Sovereign Menachaetes, will kill anything for money

Attributes are a measure of your character’s tangible abilities. There are seven attributes: cunning, savagery, guts, reflexes, instinct, fortune, and thews.

- **Reflexes** is used for physical pursuits that require a degree of finesse and coordination such as jumping, sneaking, and brachiation.
- **Instinct** is your acuity, awareness, and intuition. It is used to root out ambushes, assess an NPC’s motivations, and other ‘gut feelings.’
- **Savagery** is the adventurer’s visceral force of personality and ferocity. It is used to intimidate and even terrify enemies.
- **Thews** represents physical strength, toughness, and might.
- **Cunning** is a measure of guile, charm, and improvisation.
- **Guts** is a reflection of the character’s courage, willpower, and resistance to fear and magic.
- **Fortune** is the adventurer’s luck. Fortune may be used in place of each attribute *once per gaming session*. When rolling fortune, you must describe success or failure as a matter of pure luck – good or

bad. Fortune may be rolled after a failed attempt using one of the other six attributes. The initial attempt still fails, but a successful fortune roll somehow reverses the first result.

While grappling with his foe, Pelagius is pushed toward a perilous cliff's edge. Paul rolls Pelagius' reflexes of 4 against a difficulty of 2... and gets a 1! Paul knows Pelagius is in serious trouble, so he rolls his fortune of 3 to get a lucky break. He rolls a 4, saving his bacon! Paul describes Pelagius' dumb luck as a matter of catching his foot on a root sticking out of the ground just as he falls over the edge. He cannot use an reflex-related fortune roll again this session.

Each attribute begins with a score of 2. Distribute 10 further points among them. No attribute may be rated higher than 5 at this stage.

Impulses represent your adventurer's motivations and predilections. Some adventurers are driven by riches, others by lust or vengeance. There are five impulses. Your adventurer begins with 5 points spread among as many as you like. You can, for instance, rank one impulse at 5 or five impulses at 1.

Each gaming session, you may use a point from a relevant impulse to reroll a single unsatisfactory die. If the new result is worse than the original, you can revert to the first roll. Each impulse also grants a unique ability.

- **Debauchery** is the pursuit of base pleasure, from imbibing endless quantities of alcohol to engaging in carnal excesses. You may spend a debauchery point to improve any test result by one (4 to 5, etc) when using alcohol or sexual wiles to gain information or influence an NPC.
- **Plunder** is the desire to take wealth and possessions. You may spend a plunder point to improve any test result by one (4 to 5, etc) when stealing wealth by picking pockets, using stealth, picking the lock of a treasure chest, and so on.
- **Self Preservation** is the impulse to survive no matter what

the cost, even at the expense of others. You may use a self-preservation point to improve any test result by one (4 to 5, etc) when fleeing or fighting defensively.

- **Slaughter** is bloodlust, the urge to inflict violent harm on others. You may use slaughter points to improve any combat test result by one (4 to 5, etc). You may also spend a slaughter point to change the attribute used for determining combat damage. For example, a dagger normally deals damage based on your cunning. You could spend a slaughter point to change the damaging attribute to thews. This is good for a single attack.
- **Obsession** is a single-minded preoccupation that threatens to become all-consuming. Write down one obsession that your character cannot shake. Examples include vengeance against a specific person or group, pursuit of the dark arts, the recovery of a lost heirloom, proving the existence of a mythical beast, and finding your kidnapped brother. When your character's obsession is waylaid, threatened by defeat, or otherwise in jeopardy, you may spend an obsession point to improve any test result by one (4 to 5, etc).

Pelagius is trying to sneak into a sleeping prince's chambers to steal a valuable gem. He has a 'plunder' impulse of 3, meaning he can spend up to 3 points per session to aid in any test related to obtaining wealth. For this test, the GM asks for a reflexes (4) roll against a difficulty of 3. This means Pelagius rolls two dice, which results in a 2 (⊖ •) and 3 (⊖ +) This is hardly the outcome he wants, so his player spends a point of plunder to reroll the die. This time he gets a 4 (✓ -). This is a great deal better, but the - means his success comes with a caveat; the GM tells him the gem will be stolen but the prince will wake up as he exits the room. He elects to spend a second riches point add one point to his 4 for a final result of 5 (✓ •). Much better!

Impulse points are renewed by getting yourself into trouble. Each impulse has its drawbacks. How those drawbacks manifest is a matter of roleplaying your character. An adventurer with points in slaughter might be quick to attack anyone she doesn't trust. Someone with

debauchery could end up passed out in an alley with no clothes and no money. A plunder character might not be able to resist the urge to pick the pockets of a valuable ally. *If the impulsive act doesn't cause you trouble, it doesn't replenish any points.* The plunder character who tries to pick the pockets of his ally only gets impulse points back if the attempt either fails or causes trouble relatively soon (perhaps the ally discovers the missing coins at a critical moment). Points are rewarded when the trouble occurs, and not a moment sooner.

Next to each impulse you have invested points in, make a note of how that impulse tends to get you into trouble. Make it broad enough to allow for flexibility and variation. If you later add points to impulses you don't currently have, you can develop their drawbacks during gameplay.

Pelagius' impulses are Plunder 2 (tempted to steal from companions if given the opportunity), Self-Preservation 2 (will give up an acquaintance or ally when in a tight spot, such as being questioned by authority), and debauchery 1 (can't pass up a gaming table).

DEFIANCE

Every adventurer has a number of points that reflect the character's narrative importance. These are collectively called defiance points (DP). DP are a combination of luck, stamina, skill, and overall capacity for survival. Each character begins with 20 defiance. As you suffer injuries, your defiance is reduced. When your defiance reaches zero, you are defeated. The manner of defeat depends on the situation, but most often indicates the character has fallen unconscious.

GEAR

Your character is fitted with the bare necessities for rigorous travel & adventure. You begin play with the following:

- Two handheld weapons or one ranged weapon & one handheld weapon.

- Light or heavy armor and/or shield, if desired.
- A horse or camel, if desired. Saddle and bridle included.
- Clothing and footwear appropriate to one environment.
- Saddlebags containing iron rations, flint & tinder, a blanket, and bandages. Characters without a horse or camel do not gain these items.
- A wineskin filled with water
- A knife
- A cloak
- A torch
- Rope
- 10 + plunder impulse rating in silver coins
- Two unique items such as pen & parchment, pitons, a sounding horn, a mysterious book, an ancient map, a vial of poison, or the finger bones of The Great Prophet Gurg.

ADVANCEMENT

Characters in *Red Mists* begin play having already experienced many adventures. They've fought in wars, encountered nightmarish creatures, witnessed horrific acts of sorcery, and indulged in decadent behavior.

But they aren't finished.

Adventurers still have much to see, learn, and experience. These new exploits improve characters through Advancement Points (APs). APs may be spent to improve impulse ratings, add themes, and increase attributes. You gain one advancement point by accomplishing any of the following:

- deplete and replenish all of your impulse points
- lose/spend/waste all of your newly acquired wealth in a colorful fashion
- complete an adventure (the success or failure of the adventure is

irrelevant)

You may spend your APs on these aspects:

- Add a new theme. The theme must reflect the character's adventures as played out at the gaming table. This costs one AP.
- Improve an attribute. The AP cost of doing so is equivalent to the cost of your current attribute score. In other words, if you want to improve your cunning from 3 to 4, it would cost 3 AP.
- Add one point per AP to an existing Impulse.
- Open a new impulse at 1 AP per rank. Thus, if you want to open 'Slaughter' at rank 3, it would cost 3 AP.
- add 2 points to your defiance stat

COMBAT

Combat takes center stage in most games of *Red Mists*. Like the sword & sorcery tales it draws inspiration from, combat in *Red Mists* is visceral and bloody. The most satisfying combat achievement for an adventurer is to DICE an opponent. DICE stands for dismember, impale, crush, and eviscerate. Bluntly, you're trying to hack your enemy to pieces.



SKILL POOLS

Like other tests, combat skill pools are based on an attribute. The attribute used depends on what you're fighting with.

Light & medium weapons

reflexes

Heavy weapons

thews

WHAT CAN I DO EACH ROUND?

You can do pretty much whatever you want. Actually, let me amend that: you can *try* pretty much anything you want. There is no turn allotment dictating how many actions you can take. Tell the GM what you plan to accomplish. Whatever it is should be reasonable for a two or three second time frame. The GM will consider the idea and then decide how many actions are being proposed. Some actions, such as taking a few steps, probably won't require any rolls. Others, such as swinging your sword, certainly will. If any action requires a roll, the success of future actions on the turn may be dependent on it.

Pelagius wants to leap over a crate, attack a man-ape with his dagger, and dash off down a hallway. The GM agrees this could be accomplished in one turn, but sees this as two or three actions: a reflexes test for jumping over the crate, an attack with a light weapon (cunning), and perhaps another reflexes test to avoid a reprisal from the man-ape. If jumping over the crate fails, the dagger attack will probably never happen, and neither will Pelagius' retreat into the hallway. The crate-leaping breakdown might go something like this:

6 (✓ +) *the crate is jumped and may make a dagger attack without any resistance from the man-ape.*

5 (✓ •) *the crate is jumped and the dagger attack may commence.*

4 (✓ -) *the crate is jumped but the man-ape is ready. It responds with +1 to its combat dice pool.*

3 (⊗ +) *Pelagius stumbles over the crate but may still attack, albeit at -1d to his attack pool.*

2 (⊗ •) *Pelagius stumbles over the crate and is not allowed to continue with his planned actions.*

1 (⊗ -) *Pelagius stumbles over the crate and drops his weapon. He is not allowed to continue with his planned actions.*

A good rule of thumb is that any result of 4, 5, or 6 allows the adventurer to proceed to the next action, 3 *might* allow it, and 1 or 2

definitely stops things cold.

Rather than divide a multi-action attempt into several dice rolls, the GM may prefer to lump everything into one dramatic test. This is faster than the standard method but requires more improvisation and collaboration between GM and player. The attribute used for the test may be obvious (reflexes would work well as a catch-all in the previous example), or it may require a bit of tinkering. In a case where several attributes would come into play, the GM may consider either of the following:

- Calculate an average attribute score, rounding any fractions up
- If an odd number of attributes is needed, use the attribute with the median score

For a difficulty number, the GM should assess the most difficult part of the attempt, give it a rating, and then add one point for every other test required.

Using the previous example of Pelagius trying to jump out and stab the ape, we might assess a single-test approach in this way: the attribute used will be reflexes (4). The most difficult part of the attempt is attacking the ape (its combat skill is 3), and he is attempting two other actions. That's a final difficulty of 5, meaning Pelagius will roll two dice and take the worse of the two results (five minus four equals one, plus an extra die). If he manages to succeed, he will roll damage against the ape and be on his way out of the room.

WHO GOES FIRST?

There is no rolling for initiative in Red Mists. Combat is simultaneous, meaning you are both considered to be attacking, parrying, dodging, and so on.

SURPRISE

While most combat attacks occur simultaneously, there are instances where one combatant is unprepared for the attack. If one actor is able to conceal her presence (usually through a reflexes or instinct roll),

she may take an action against a fixed difficulty of 1. The foe becomes aware of the aggressor's presence after that initial action *whether the action is successful or not*.

CLASH

It's time to fight! Before you roll any dice, you need to determine the size of your dice pool. This is done as described earlier under opposed tests: subtract the enemy's attribute from the your skill dice, then add one.

On a result of 4-6, you deal damage to your opponent equal to the dice roll (4, 5, or 6) *plus* your weapon's damage bonus (if any). Subtract the damage from the enemy's defiance.

Pelagius attacks his foe with a sword (medium weapon, damage bonus +1). His attack succeeds with a 5, meaning the damage dealt is 6 points.



You might also inflict a crippling injury. If the damage you dealt equals or exceeds the opponent's DICE score, you have DICE'd your foe. The location struck depends on the dice rolled. If the dice pool favors you (in other words, your pool was higher than your opponent's), you select the hit location from any of the dice you rolled *not* used as the attack result.

Pelagius' attack was made with two dice. The results were 5 and 2. The 5 was used as the attack result, so he uses the 2 to determine the hit location (right leg).

If the dice pool is even or favors the enemy, then the enemy determines the hit location.

In a deadly combat against a giant, Pelagius is at a disadvantage; his skill pool is 4 dice while the giant's is 5. This means the pool favors the giant. If Pelagius manages to strike his enemy, the giant (ie, the GM) determines where the blow lands for purposes of DICE.

A DICE'd body part is functionally destroyed (severed, disemboweled, smashed, decapitated... you get the idea).

If you DICE a hit location that has already been destroyed, move the location laterally; left leg to right leg, left arm to torso, right leg to left leg, right arm to torso.

On a result of 1-3, your opponent damages you. Each NPC or monster has a damage stat listing how much damage it inflicts, generally between 5 and 10 points. Subtract the damage from your defiance.

If the head is destroyed by a DICE strike, the victim is killed immediately. If an arm is destroyed, the victim's skill pool is reduced by 2 and it cannot use that arm. If the torso or a leg is destroyed, the victim falls prone and its skill pool is reduced by 2. Moreover, the only movement it may take is crawling. If the torso is DICE'd by twice its normal value, the victim is killed.

USING THEMES IN COMBAT

Themes may be used to enlarge your combat pool if the theme indicates a distinct advantage over your opponent. For example, let's say you are fighting a soldier on a ship. You have the 'pirate' theme and the soldier isn't a seafaring fellow. You clearly have an advantage and may use your pirate theme, increasing the size of your dice pool by one. The GM will tell you if the theme is appropriate to the action you want to take.

Characters and Damage

Adventurers do not suffer DICE. The damage inflicted upon them is dealt to their standard hit point total only. While this may seem patently unfair, it fits the tradition of swords & sorcery characters. They may take beatings, suffer trauma, and even withstand torture (Conan was once crucified!), but they remain largely intact. Monsters and NPCs, on the other hand...

Adventurers reduced to zero defiance fall unconscious. Unconscious characters are frequently captured -- another swords & sorcery tradition!

Adventurers die when they are reduced to zero defiance *and* have no impulse points remaining.

When an adventurer's defiance is reduced to 1/3 or less of his original total, he may use **savagery** in place of his standard combat attribute for any test rolls.

ARMOR AND SHIELDS

Wearing armor and bearing a shield can help your defensive efforts, although perhaps not as much as other games you're used to. Characters in swords & sorcery stories are often minimally clad, right down to a loincloth or chainmail bikini. Yet this lack of defensive garb seems to bear little effect on their survival rate! The same is true of your character. Nonetheless, there are benefits for wearing armor:

- Light armor: reduce damage taken by 1 point
- Heavy armor: reduce damage taken by 2 points
- Shield: reduce damage taken by 1 point

Armor and shields have drawbacks as well:

- Light armor: reduce reflexes by 1 point for jumping, climbing, and other movement requiring a test roll.
- Heavy armor: reduce reflexes and instinct by 1 point each.
- Shield: reduce reflexes by 1 point for any physical action other than melee combat, attacker cannot wield a heavy weapon.

WEAPONS

Any weapon is capable of killing an opponent. Conan dispatches many a foe with a knife, as does the Gray Mouser. No matter what weapon your adventurer chooses, it will serve him well. **Each weapon has a damage rating. This is added to the die result on any successful attack. This, an adventurer wielding a spear who succeeds with an attack roll of 5 would deal 6 damage.**

Weapon type	Damage	Notes
Light (knife, sling, hand axe)	+0	Allowed in most cities, easily concealable
Medium (sword, battle axe, spear, mace, small bow)	+1	Can be used with a shield (except for bows), allowed in some cities, hard to conceal
Heavy (two-handed weapons, polearms, longbow)	+2	Cannot be used with a shield, not allowed in most cities, impossible to conceal

RECOVERY

Adventurers recover their full complement of defiance points with at least four hours of sleep. They regain 10 defiance during a short rest. The length of the rest is unspecified; suffice it to say that it lies anywhere from 10 minutes to a couple of hours.

RABBLE

“Rush in and die, dogs!” R.E. Howard, *The Phoenix on the Sword*

Not every opponent is going to pose a significant threat to your adventurer. Rabble is a catch-all term for the relatively unskilled folk of the realm; villagers, minions, volunteer levy, and the generic faceless masses. These NPCs tend to attack in groups. Their statistics are negligible and not worth detailing. You can kill many of them with a single stroke. When fighting a group of rabble, the standard combat rules are too involved. Use this system instead:

Roll your combat dice pool. For every ✓ rolled, you kill one rabble.

If there are any remaining rabble, you suffer one defiance point of damage. Don't worry about DICE, hit locations, or the combat skill of the rabble. Just hack your way through them at the expense of a few nicks and bruises.

AGGRESSION DICE

If you would like to spice up combat a bit more, you can announce you are acting in a particularly aggressive and reckless manner. This increases the possibility of results, both good and bad.

When taking an aggressive action, any test result of 5 is changed to a 6, and any result of 2 is changed to a 1.



SORCERY

“Arioch! Arioch! Lord of the Seven Darks! Arioch! Blood and Souls for my Lord Arioch!” Michael Moorcock, *Black Petals*



There are three levels of sorcerous effects: prosaic, perilous, and catastrophic.

Prosaic effects are minor and usually brief. Their casting is innocuous unless the sorcerer is under direct observation. Prosaic magic accomplishes things a normal person could manage given the proper resources. The base difficulty number for prosaic magic is 5.

Perilous effects are blatant and often dangerous. Perilous magic generally affects one person, but may affect up to a room full. Effects are usually not achievable by mundane means or, if they are, would necessitate many people, tools, or weeks of time. The base difficulty number for perilous magic is 10.

Catastrophic effects are potentially world shaking. This magic can

affect entire geographic regions, cultures, and bloodlines. Its effects could only be achieved by natural means over a great span of time, if at all. The base difficulty number for catastrophic magic is 20.

Sorcerers invoke magic by using cunning as a base for their dice pool. Any attempt at invocation assumes some form of gesturing and utterance. The difficulty for invoking a sorcerous effect depends on its level of power, as described above. The GM may modify the difficulty based on the nature of magic in her world; if magic is common and powerful, the difficulty will be smaller than a world where it is rare and subtle.

REDUCING THE DIFFICULTY NUMBER

The difficulty ratings for perilous and catastrophic magic are usually very high; too high for a dice pool based only on cunning. The sorcerer must reduce the difficulty to have any chance of a successful invocation. The first way is automatic: **reduce the obstacle an amount equal to the sorcerer's obsession**. He must engage in any number of arcane rites and traditions to reduce it further. Here are some examples of actions that can reduce the number by one point each:

Augmenting Prosaic casting

- Drip your own blood on the ground
- Pluck eyebrow hair
- Concentrate for an extra minute
- Suffer minor, self-inflicted pain

Augmenting Perilous casting

- Sacrifice an animal, such as a goat or sheep (younger is better)
- Tear out a tooth or fingernail
- Burn a lot of incense
- Chant for several minutes to an hour
- Dance for several minutes to an hour
- Walk across burning coals
- Wait for a full moon
- Hold the ritual at a meaningful location
- Scribe a handful of symbols on the ground

Eat the heart of a small animal
Sacrifice your health in the form of a point from thews

Augmenting Catastrophic casting

Sacrifice a human virgin
Perform a self mutilation (sever many fingers, an ear, etc.)
Wait for a lunar eclipse
Hold the ritual at a meaningful location
Dance for hours
Chant for hours
Include several other people, all dancing and chanting
Form a pact with a demon
Light a massive pyre, burning several captives alive
Burn arcane symbols on your body
Scribe dozens or hundreds of symbols on the ground
Eat the heart of a freshly killed human
Sacrifice your health in the form of multiple points from thews

DURATION

If you need to know how long a sorcerous effect lasts, base it on the sorcerer's obsession score. Prosaic effects tend to last seconds or minutes. Perilous effect tend to last hours, days, or months. Catastrophic effects might last several months or even years. Thus, a prosaic curse that gives the target bad breath could last X minutes, where X equal's the sorcerer's obsession rank. If an effect is designed to be permanent, the GM should adjust the casting difficulty by at least 2 for prosaic effects, 5 for perilous effects, and 8 for catastrophic effects.

CORRUPTION AND INSANITY

Sorcerers practice their art at their own peril. As the sorcerer's obsession grows, his body begins to wither and his mind descends into madness.

For every point of obsession over 5, the sorcerer begins the process of physical and mental devolution. When the sorcerous adventurer's obsession reaches 6, and every point thereafter, roll a die. The hit

location revealed on the die indicates what brand of degradation is suffered:

- **Leg or Arm:** physical deterioration; the sorcerer loses one point of thews or reflexes (player choice)
- **Torso:** weakening health; the sorcerer's defiance decreases by 2 points
- **Head:** the road to madness; the sorcerer gains one point of insanity (see below).

Insanity

Sorcerers gain insanity points every time they roll a 'head' result when their obsession rating increases. The effects of insanity depend on how many insanity points the adventurer has amassed. These are roleplaying effects rather than mechanical effects.

- **1 point:** the character's obsession takes the form of a compulsive disorder such as constant mumbling, chattering teeth, picking at skin, removing teeth, or eating insects.
- **2 points:** the character is affected by bouts of extreme paranoia, becoming convinced that others want his secrets. This leads to extreme secrecy, social withdrawal, distrust of allies, and aggressive outbursts.
- **3 points:** insanity; the sorcerer is utterly lost. He becomes an NPC, controlled by the GM.

BRANDS OF SORCERY

There are five kinds of sorcery, each with its own unique place in the swords & sorcery canon. Below are descriptions of each along with suggested - but not definitive - effects. The GM should feel free to revise these effects or change their levels of difficulty as suits her vision of the adventuring world.

Curses are ills cast upon the unwilling. Curses can be inflicted on persons, lands, whole families, and even institutions.

Prosaic

- target becomes clumsy
- target becomes tongue-tied
- target flatulates... a lot

- target's skin becomes itchy all over
- target has a coughing fit
- target loses sense of taste
- target gets the hiccups
- target's chair breaks
- birds defecate on the target
- target's shoelace breaks

Perilous

- any natural illnesses the target contracts last much longer than they normally would
- the target's love for someone turns to hatred
- the target contracts leprosy
- the target falls hopelessly in love with someone he can never have
- target cannot perform sexually

Catastrophic

- an entire tribe will never bear children
- the countryside becomes blighted for decades
- death comes to anyone who touches an ancient tome
- the black plague ravages a nation
- any children borne of the target's loins will be a demon
- a landslide destroys a town lying at a mountain's base

Domination is the literal taking of another's will. The sorcerer uses his own consciousness to wrestle control of the target's mind, forcing it to do things it doesn't want to.

Prosaic

- the target says something socially inappropriate
- the target drops a small item
- the target thinks he has forgotten something
- the target desperately needs to urinate
- the target caresses another's cheek

Perilous

- the target attacks another with lethal intent
- the target crumples to the floor and curls into a ball
- the target forgets who he is and what he's doing
- the target feels suicidal

- the target attempts to ride a dinosaur
- the target frees his slaves

Catastrophic

- the target kills his children while they sleep
- the target declares war on an unsuspecting neighboring country
- the target orders all members of a group to be rounded up and put to the torch
- the target surrenders his country to the rule of another

Mutations are offenses committed at the expense of natural order. Anything that warps growth and form, combines different species, or otherwise transgresses nature is a mutation.

Prosaic

- change target's skin color green
- cause warts to grow on target
- target's nose changes shape

Perilous

- target grows gills on his neck and his feet & hands become webbed
- target grows horns on his head and his feet turn into hooves
- target grows coarse fur on his body
- target grows a prehensile tail

Catastrophic

- transform a young child into a beast capable of apocalyptic destruction
- target mutates into a half-man, half-demon
- target melds into an existing tree, becoming physically part of it but retaining his acuity
- target is warped into a corpulent mass of flesh, muscle, hair, and nondescript appendages. As it slithers about, it leaves a trail of mucus and tears.

Necromancy involves dealing with the dead. The sorcerer disgraces the natural evolution of life and death to accomplish his goals.

Prosaic

- wither a small garden
- cause someone's skin to wrinkle as if aged

Perilous

- animate the corpse of a small/medium animal or human
- speak with a corpse
- induce a rotting disease on one target
- drain 1d6 defiance points per 10 seconds from anyone you touch. You gain the defiance points they lose, up to your maximum.

Catastrophic

- raise an army of the dead
- take the mummified brain of an ancient magician and place it in the skull of a living being
- cause everyone in a large space to age one year per minute

Summoning is perhaps the most dangerous of all sorcerous pursuits. The sorcerer attempts to force or coerce an otherworld being to do his bidding. There are no prosaic effects for summoning.

Perilous

- Summon and treat with a lesser demon
- Invoke a lesser demon's power

Catastrophic

- Summon and treat with a demon lord
- Invoke a demon lord's power

The term 'demon' is actually a catch-all for any otherworld being. As such, demons encompass elementals, aliens, gods, spirits, and actual demons. The more powerful the entity, the more difficult and dangerous the summoning.

There are two basic goals of summoning a demon. The first, called *invoking*, implores the demon to loose some of its power to aid the sorcerer. The demon does not enter the material realm, but instead allows some of its magic to be manipulated by the sorcerer. The second goal, called *treating*, causes the demon to physically appear

and bargain with – or be controlled by – the sorcerer. Invoking is less difficult and less dangerous than treating, but also less powerful. A sorcerer may invoke a fire elemental's power to cause a campfire to burst into an inferno, but a fire elemental that actually appears could cause a hurricane of flame to burn a forest to the ground.

Before making any test rolls, the player must specify the type of demon she wishes to summon. Sample demon statistics are provided in the bestiary section.

No demon wishes to be summoned. A summoning result of 3 indicates the demon decides not to appear or lend its power, but offers reason to believe that future summonings might not be so disagreeable to it. Perhaps the demon will drop a hint or two as to what will act as an enticement for a future summoning. A summoning result of 2 indicates the demon has flat-out rejected the call. A 1 indicates the demon lashes out in anger at the summoner, closes the door to any possible future summonings, or aids the sorcerer's enemy in some way.

Lesser demons tend to have limited powers or abilities that can aid the sorcerer. A lesser wind elemental could whip up a violent wind rather than a hurricane or tornado. A lesser demon of slaughter could take out a small group of people rather than a stadium full of them. A lesser spirit could terrify a group of NPCs but not drive them to madness.

Demon lords are masters of entire otherworld realms. They have powers beyond the ken of mortals.

To treat with a lesser demon, the sorcerer may elect to parlay with it or bind it. Parlaying means the sorcerer bargains with the demon for a favor. Binding it involves forcing the demon to do the sorcerer's bidding. Parlaying is a matter of roleplaying the scene, with the GM acting as the demon. Binding is a contest of will: the sorcerer pits his guts against the demon's ferocity. As with all results in Red Mists, a 4-6 indicate some level of success, while 1-3 indicate some level of failure. The result of success or failure depend on the demon's personality and power. A disastrous attempt at binding a demon of

slaughter is almost certainly going to result in the demon attacking the sorcerer with unhinged aggression or, even worse, mutilating the sorcerer's loved ones (if she has any). A more subtle demon might wait years before unleashing its wrath on the sorcerer, or aid her enemies in a campaign of retribution.

Successfully binding a demon means the creature must do whatever the sorcerer commands, within its own capabilities and limitations. When the act is finished, the demon may be released back into its realm or the sorcerer may attempt to bind it again.

To summon or treat with a demon lord, the sorcerer must know the name of the demon she is attempting to contact. No amount of preparations or complex rites will work without this knowledge. An entire adventure can be based around the character and his companions questing for the demon's name.

No demon lord will agree to a bargain without believing it has come out on top. A clever sorcerer might be able to use her guile to flatter the demon into thinking it has got the better of her. Many sorcerers agree to obviously unfair deals in the hope that they will be able to trick the demon at some point. The danger of such strategy is, needless to say, often not worth the risk.

Binding a demon lord works the same as binding a lesser demon. The sorcerer engages in an opposed contest, setting his guts against the demon's.

Good luck with that.

GAME MASTERING RED MISTS

ADJUDICATING DICE ROLLS

The basics of *Red Mists* can be boiled down to two results: if the player rolls a 4, 5, or 6 she gets what she wants. If she rolls a 1, 2, or 3 her attempt fails. Within these numbers lies a more interesting dynamic, one that qualifies results in a way that allows for greater narrative interpretation.

On the ride side of each die lies a – or + symbol. The – indicates the attempted task is accompanied by an unwanted effect or intrusion. A + means the attempt has been graced with a fortunate bonus effect. Thus, you can achieve success with a caveat (4) and failure with reason for optimism (3).

One thing to always keep in mind: qualifiers are *never* more mechanically or dramatically potent than the success/failure that accompanies them. They are adjuncts to the main action, not the focus.

In interpreting a qualifier, you need to first consider the action's logical progression. Is it possible that a successful attack with a sword could also result in the sword being flung dozens of feet away only to stab an ally on a 4 (✓ –)? I suppose it's possible, but it's hugely unlikely and, more importantly, it seems as potent a result as the original attack. Remember, qualifiers never overshadow the original success or failure. What, then, would be interesting and believable? Ask the player to describe the action and draw your conclusion. If the player describes her character taking a big step and swinging the weapon with both hands, then pulling a muscle might fit the narrative. Leaving herself in a disadvantageous position for the next round's exchange makes sense as well.

In general, a – means something happens that the PC didn't anticipate. She slips in the mud while escaping a wolf pack. She drops her dagger after stabbing at a foe. Her lock picking tool breaks. She makes a social gaffe. She accidentally burns her hand as she throws a

vial of acid. A good default for – qualifiers is assessing a -1d penalty on the character's next action if it is related to the attempt that yielded the – in the first place.

Xethuna strikes a bargain with a merchant for a pack horse (rolling a 4 on a cunning check). The merchant sells her the animal but isn't entirely happy with the deal. Xethuna's next test, where she wants to get a good deal from the merchant on some traveling supplies, will be made with a 1d penalty to her dice pool. Looks like she may have to pay more than she wants for those supplies.

Beneficial qualifiers (+) follow similar logic. The sword attack that gains a + could mean the foe drops a weapon or slips. It may also indicate the adventurer has gained a tactical advantage. When all else fails, a +1d bonus to the character's next action usually works.

The monsters and NPCs described in the next chapter have suggestions for qualifiers. Each creature has one or more – and + symbols. When an adventurer facing the monster receives a result containing a qualifier, take a look at the monster's + – themes to give you ideas of what that qualifier might signify. As always, the + is beneficial to the adventurer, while the – is detrimental. You do not have to use these suggestions; they are provided for ease of play and as a guide to the game's fiction.

TRADITIONS OF SWORDS & SORCERY

While I'm sure most – if not all – of you have read at least a smattering of R.E. Howard, Fritz Leiber, Michael Moorcock, or Edgar Rice Burroughs, a little refresher course might help you with your adventure designs. What follows is a brief account of the themes I've taken into account when designing *Red Mists*. You may not agree with some of these, so please take what you want and dispense with what you don't.

Clothing (or lack thereof) and Sexism

There is a lot of flesh on display in swords & sorcery tales. Characters often wear a bare minimum, with outright nudity not uncommon

either. Much of this has to do with pulp stories being decidedly male-oriented fantasies of one degree or another. Females characters are frequently either damsels in distress or evil temptresses. Both stereotypes leave little to the imagination where revealing skin is concerned. Damsels manage to lose or tear their flimsy clothes while temptresses divest themselves of their garments willingly. In our more enlightened age these elements can seem, at best, silly and, at worst, offensive. I suggest two solutions to dealing with the unsubtle nature of bare breasts and buttocks.

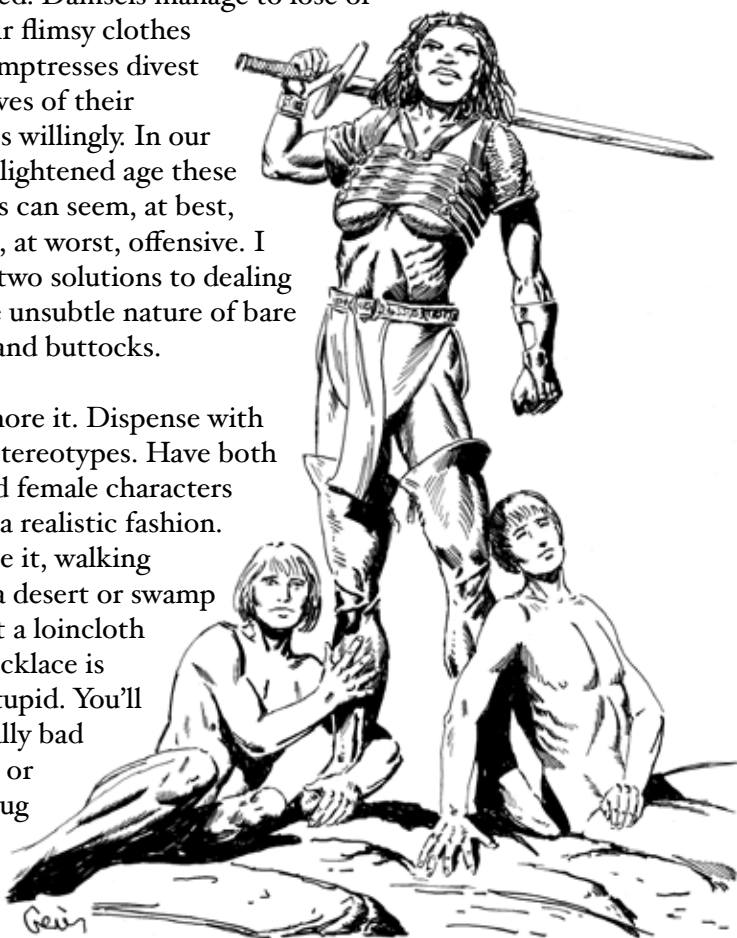
One, ignore it. Dispense with gender stereotypes. Have both male and female characters dress in a realistic fashion.

Let's face it, walking around a desert or swamp with just a loincloth and a necklace is pretty stupid. You'll get a really bad sunburn or lots of bug bites.

And how much

fun is it if every woman in the campaign world is a screaming, fainting waif whose only purpose is to get rescued and reward her savior with her body? Seriously, would you want to play such a character?

Two, impose equal opportunity nudity and sexism. Have both males and females dress in revealing ways. Recognize that both are





equally capable of heroism and helplessness. For every woman walking about with nothing more than a silk scarf and a cloth wrapped around her hips and groin, make sure there's a man whose only adornments are his sandals and a scrap of deer hide covering his manhood. For every female fainting at the sight of blood, make sure there is an effete man in need of a strong protector.

You can also turn tradition on its head by introducing same-sex attraction. While this is nothing unique to us now, it frees the genre from some of its old fashioned shackles and still keeps in step with concepts of highly-verile protagonists.

Morality (there is no good in the world)

Characters in swords & sorcery tales generally aren't selfless do-gooders. Conan loots and pillages for a living. Elric is a servant of chaos. Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser are professional thieves. This can be quite an adjustment for players used to sending their characters on epic quests to foil an ancient evil or rescue kingdoms. This isn't to say the adventurers in *Red Mists* are evil, immoral, or amoral. What they are is *selfish*. They

live for money, sex, drink, or violence... sometimes all four. The idea of crusading for a higher purpose is an alien concept and worthy of derision; only fools risk their lives for no selfish purpose.

Any ‘goodness’ tends to be situational. Conan is a sucker for a helpless maiden or an honorable man. Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser wouldn’t beat up beggars and steal their money. Elric does not wantonly kill and tries, albeit mostly in vain, to do the ‘right thing’ when presented with a moral dilemma. Characters in *Red Mists* will act accordingly, but they won’t seek out wrongs to put right.

Not only is there no true goodness in the world, there is no karma. Selfless deeds won’t bring any reward, spiritual or otherwise. Acts of deceit have no karmic repercussions. The world is cruel, random, and utterly unfair.

Begin in the middle

The classic swords & sorcery stories are short and full of incident. There is no place for long prologues; adventure begins right away. Many short stories of the genre begin in the middle of a furious chase or with the heroes imprisoned in a lord’s keep for trying to steal his hoard. Consider starting your games in a similar style. Present the players with a developing scene and ask them what they do or, better yet, *why* they’re in this situation:

“The three of you are in a small sinking boat along with a young woman screaming in its midst. She is pointing to a large ship bearing down on you. Who is she? Why is your boat sinking? What’s up with that big ship coming your way?”

Use what the players give you during their ‘off time.’ Ask each player what his character does after the last adventure. Ask how he lost his winnings, how he got into trouble, and where he traveled. Take these developments and craft them into the opening scene of the next adventure.

Accomplishments and possession are fleeting

Significant change is not a feature of swords & sorcery, unless it

comes with the death of the main character (hello, Elric). Even when Conan becomes king of Aquilonia, he's usurped fairly quickly. Don't let world-shaking deeds have any lasting effect for good. That vile priest attempting to resurrect Ungol the Serpent God the adventurers killed? Sure, the city might have been saved from his machinations, but his absence leads the way for a two-faced 'savior' to take his place... and this new guy is *much* worse than the other guy.

Likewise, characters shouldn't become too attached to possessions, including weapons. They might end an adventure with a famous sword and a heap of jewelry only to find themselves penniless and armed only with a knife at the start of their next exploit.

Make sure that players understand the short-lived nature of their accomplishments and wealth. Let them know that an item that helps them in the current episode may do them no good in the next one. The magical token they used to defeat the cavemen of the Nether Kingdoms will become a source of trouble for them later, as other factions will track them down and try to steal it from them. If a player becomes genuinely attached to something, such as the Gray Mouser's knife *Cat's Claw*, don't forcibly take it from them. As long as it isn't a game-breaking item, allow it to remain as a signature possession. But don't hand out such baubles willy-nilly; they cease to become special when the character has bagfuls of them. One or two special items per character over the course of their lives is plenty. Remember, part of what makes the swords & sorcery genre unique is the concept of characters making do with what they can scrounge up.

Defeat is part of the adventure

Classic heroic fantasy literature assumes the victory of the main character(s) over the antagonist. Swords & sorcery doesn't necessarily do that. These are hard-luck characters. Elric's life is a series of defeats and pyrrhic victories. Conan is constantly finding himself the lone survivor of a disastrous battle.

Before you begin your game, make sure players do not expect to succeed all the time. Help them understand they may not get away with pillaging the temple or killing the legendary beast of the Sullen Isles. Let them know that fleeing is an option when confronted

with superior forces. Swords & sorcery characters are, above all else, survivors. Part of being a survivor is knowing when to retreat and live to fight another day. It also involves knowing how to spin things your way.

Player one: "Oh man, I can't believe that vampire escaped. Now we won't get paid for killing it!"

Player two: "Who says we won't get paid? As far as I'm concerned we did kill it. The sultan doesn't need to know. After all, we did manage to cut off its hand. That's proof enough."

Life is short -- enjoy it

If characters in these tales could express a philosophy, it might be 'live every moment as if it's your last.' They live day to day, moment to moment. They usually have no plans beyond the next day or two. Reflective of this, characters would rather spend their money on a night of debauchery than storing their winnings in a secret place for future use. Using money wisely is boring!

The threat of death is not much of a deterrent when there is treasure to plunder, ale to be drunk, and courtesans to lie with. The opportunity to die a 'good death' is reason enough to confront ferocious beasts and attempt impossible stunts.

Caution is a watch-word that doesn't fit the spirit of the genre; make sure your players understand this. If you notice one or more of the adventurers shying away from conflict and risk-taking, that is a signal to throw trouble at them. Remind them that characters in this game can take a hell of a beating before dying. Even then, their ultimate fate is largely in the players hands.

Trust no one

Alliances change, promises are broken, and everyone lies. Like the characters themselves, NPCs in *Red Mists* are opportunists. Betrayal is part of the game. Every so often, you should remind your players of this facet by twisting their expectations.

- *The characters are secretly hired by a town official to kill a beast residing on a small island. When they return from their mission, the official declares the PCs heretics for killing the town's sacred totem animal!*
- *A beautiful princess promises to reward the adventurers with positions of power and bags of loot for stopping an invading hoard. While they're gone, she falls in love with her bodyguard and runs away with him, taking her treasure with her...*
- *The crew of a pirate ship captured by one of the adventurers mutinies when they're offered a better deal by a new deckhand who actually works for a rival pirate.*

NPC SORCERY

The rules for PC sorcery are detailed and, to one extent or another, regulated. They are designed to be evocative and challenging. Their invocation can be thrilling and immensely satisfying. NPC sorcery does not follow the same rules and structure. Any satisfaction the adventurers receive from dealing with NPC magicians will be from stopping the sorcerous act rather than loosing it.

NPC sorcerers are usually far more powerful than PC practitioners. They attempt acts that will bring apocalyptic destruction and world changing effects. Most NPC sorcerers encountered by the adventurers are in the midst of attempting one of these twisted acts.

In stopping the invocation, the characters may need to prevent the NPC from obtaining the components he needs, whether that involves actual material items, virgins to be sacrificed, or words to be spoken.

Every sorcerous purpose has its own unique requirements. When designing a ritual, GMs should consider any of the following components:

Sacrifice: the magic will only work with the blood of a very specific person or type of person. Consider people of a unique bloodline, or those born under unique celestial circumstances.

Materia: the ritual must be performed with items of symbolic or historic importance. The bones of an ancient king, the stolen scepter

of a mad priest, or the dagger of a previous sacrifice are all examples.

Time or Event:

the sorcery must be performed at an exact time or during a rare event. The classic example is an eclipse, but there are other things you may want to consider: the birth of a special child, the anniversary of an infamous act, or the crowning of a new king.

Symbols: demonic symbols scrawled on the floor. Glyphs carved into flesh.

Parchment written

with a pen dipped in the blood of a virgin. Whatever the medium, most rituals involve some form of arcane symbols.

Forbidden Texts: the methods needed to perform a ritual are often contained within the dusty, cracked pages of ancient books. The words and gestures required are too complex to memorize, so the text is often placed in front of the sorcerer as he performs.

Chanting: the demon lords must be supplicated or commanded with twisted words and songs. The sorcerer might need to chant these words himself or have a chorus of his servants do it while he performs other necessary acts to invoke the desired magic.



Dance: ritual movement in the form of dance is a common element of rituals involving the summoning of a spirit, demon, or god. A large group of dancing worshippers may be needed to aid the ritual. When the dance reaches a fever pitch, the ritual may be brought to fruition with a sacrifice or other punctuation.

The effects intended by NPC sorcerous rituals are varied. There are no fixed rules for these effects; the goal of adventurers is to stop their implementation from ever occurring in the first place, or to defeat the powers unleashed.

The ideas below are a good starting point for considering what sorcerous plans are a good fit for your campaign.

The Resurrection of the Crocodile King

Purpose: to bring forth the spirit of the dreaded crocodile king and place it in the body of an infant child. Once the ritual is completed, the child will be raised to affect the very specific purposes of the invoking sorcerer...

Ritual: on the exact day and time of the original Crocodile King's death, an infant child must be fed the blood of a crocodile. The dagger that spills the reptile's blood must be made from one of the old king's ribs. A group of 41 adherents – the same number as the king's age at the time of his death – must chant and dance in an undulating ring around the child.

Time Required: one hour.

The Ascension of Vistra Zondhar

Purpose: to transfer the soul of the aging former lover of Emperor Craggenmoor, Vistra Zondhar, into his new bride.

Ritual: the new queen must be called away on a winter errand that will purport to last until spring. In reality, she will be captured and held upon an altar, Vistra Zondhar lying beside her. The sorcerer will then feed them both an elixir that puts the imbibers into an unconscious state. While both women lie in stasis, the sorcerer must plunge his hands into their chest walls, bringing forth a beating

heart from each. The heart of the new queen shall be crushed in the sorcerer's hand as he places Vistra's heart into the younger body. Vistra's old body is to be burned as her new body is buried in the cold ground. As winter ends and spring arrives, Vistra will arise from the earth, a new woman returned from her trip to her none-the-wiser king.

Time Required: 1 hour (ritual), 1 season (winter to spring).

Dirth of the Land

Purpose: to curse Shepherd's River, the source of water for most of the Gulf Valley. Cursing the river will cause crops to fail and bring a pestilence.

Ritual: Before any ritual is performed, the sorcerer must infect himself with a wasting disease such as leprosy. As autumn plowing and fertilizing are underway, the sorcerer must fling into the river a weighted sack carrying a pregnant plague rat, a heap of rotting vegetables, and the loaded bowels of a murderer. As the components sink to the bottom of the water, the sorcerer shall supplicate the gods of pestilence by shedding his own infected blood into the river. As the weeks pass, the river will poison the land. As the land wastes away, so too does the sorcerer's infection.

Time Required: 5-10 minutes for the ritual, 3-4 months for the desired effect.

Of course, not all sorcery involves complex rituals and components. Lesser effects may be achieved by quicker methods, such as:

Sand Gust: the sorcerer blows a handful of sand mixed with the ashes of a desert nomad. The sand and ash mixture swirls about, gathering up dust from the ground and creating a blinding tempest that size of a man. The effect lasts a few seconds.

Automoton: by locking eyes with an adventurer, the sorcerer can gain temporary control of his actions. The GM makes a Cunning check for the sorcerer vs the player's Guts check for his character. If the sorcerer wins, he can have the adventurer do anything he wishes, save suicide. The effect lasts for one round on a 4, two rounds on a 5,

and three rounds on a 6.

Living Earth: the sorcerer pounds the earth with a fossilized bone of some creature. The effect creates an earth elemental in the form of the creature that provided the fossilized bone. The elemental is roughly half as powerful as the original creature and does not have any non-mundane special abilities (so a dragon elemental could not breathe fire). The bone is destroyed once used.

Form of the Serpent: the sorcerer can change into a large constrictor snake.

A Fog is Rising: the sorcerer creates a thick fog, the better to hide the approach of his army. It takes one hour to summon 100 square yards of fog. This assumes normal conditions in a temperate climate. Varying humidity levels can affect casting time and thickness of the fog.

When constructing a sorcerous event, the GM should consider these questions:

If the black magic hasn't yet been invoked, how can the adventurers stop it?

- Kill the sorcerer
- Prevent the sorcerer from obtaining the tools he needs to invoke the magic
- Rescue the intended sacrifice
- Disrupt the ritual (set a fire, swarm the area, steal a vital material component)
- Prevent the ritual from starting on time (delay the actors so they miss the eclipse, force them to take another route to their intended location)

If the ritual has been enacted, how can the adventurers fight its consequences?

- Defeat the summoned creature (kill it, banish it back from whence it came, trick it to attack its summoner)
- Find the means to reverse the sorcery (track down a rival sorcerer, research a tome that reveals the secret to the ritual's undoing, find a magic item that will end the spell)

- Force the sorcerer to undo his work (threats, bargaining, force)

MAGIC ITEMS

Magic items in sword & sorcery stories are rare. They are usually ancient artifacts designed for a single purpose. There are no generic magic swords or mass-produced magic rings. Such items in *Red Mists* follow this format:

Purpose: what was the item made for?

Use: what can it affect and, more importantly, what can't it affect?

Life: can the item be used indefinitely, or does it have a limited lifespan?

Drawbacks: does the item adversely affect its wielder? Does its use have side effects?

With these standard in mind, let's take a look at some magic items that work well for *Red Mists*.

Bane of Shiik the Immortal

Purpose: a dagger forged to kill the immortal god-king, Shiik Blacktongue.

Use: the dagger is the only weapon that can damage the god-king. Against him, it acts like any normal dagger used against a normal human. Against anything else, it ignores the protective value of armor.

Life: the dagger loses its power once the god-king is dead.

Drawbacks: Shiik can detect the presence of the dagger when held within a mile of him.

Juno's Half-finished Amulet

Purpose: the amulet was meant as a prism for the priestess Juno of Paikan to gaze through to keep an eye on her secret lover. Alas, she died before its completion.

Use: the amulet allows the gazer to see what his subject is doing... to a degree. The amulet's owner must bear a lock of the subject's hair for the effect to work. Being unfinished, the images it shows are often difficult to discern.

Life: as long as it stays 'whole,' the amulet's power remains intact.

Drawbacks: the amulet's images can be unreliable and even

deceitful.

The Twine Sash of Gasper, the Mad Fool of Khent

Purpose: Gasper, a traveling minstrel, stole a forbidden book of black sorcery. While he could not make head or tail of its words, he used its long, many folded binding as a sash in mockery. It strangled him so forcefully that it is said his head popped from his neck.

Use: the sash binding's lethal effects are known only to a few. It has been used as a 'gift' to enemies as a sort of peace offering. Any peace is short-lived when the wearer find himself shorter by several inches.

Life: the sash is dry and cracked. It may break before the next time it serves its discovered purpose.

Drawbacks: the longer the sash is carried, the more murderous the carrier becomes.

Dog's Crook

Purpose: the seemingly unremarkable shepherd's crook was created to rent the earth asunder to prevent the passage of the army of Cantar the Usurper through the open plain of Gram. It was never used, as Cantar's army was turned back by a barbarian attack from the west.

Use: the crook may strike the ground and crack it wide open, up to a mile long and several dozen feet deep.

Life: unknown.

Drawbacks: unknown.

MEN AND BEASTS

Damage is listed as three values: the first (and lowest) is the damage dealt to the adventurer when his combat result is a 3. The next two values are dealt when the character respectively rolls a 2 or 1.

Each beast is described using the same attributes as adventurers. The **Sample Qualifier Results** are ideas for the GM to consider when the player's combat attack indicates a qualified result. The listed Themes are a guide to the fiction and may be used creatively by the GM to describe the monster's attitude, how it acts in different situations, and so forth. Sometimes example details of unique abilities are given, such as recovering from the giant spider's poison.

Town Guard

Reflexes	2	Instinct	3
Savagery	2	Thews	3
Cunning	1	Guts	2

DICE	5
Defiance points	10
Damage	4/5/6

Themes: lazy, heard it all before, not paid enough to chase you around, working my way up the ladder, won't say no to a bribe

Items: spear or polearm, light armor

Sample Qualifier Results	
—	+
sound alarm	surrender or flee
help arrives	asleep on the job

Man-Ape

Reflexes 4
Instinct 5
Savagery 5
Thews 6
Cunning 2
Guts 3

DICE 6

Defiance points 25
Damage (fists or bite)
6/7/8

Themes: defend
territory, kidnap the
fairest person in the
group, intimidate with
a roar, beat chest,
stinks



Sample Qualifier Results

-	+
throw enemy	flee if injured and outnumbered
crushing hug	distracted



Giant Snake

Reflexes	4	Instinct	4
Savagery	3	Thews	5
Cunning	2	Guts	2

DICE	7 (head is location 5 and 6, body is 1-4)
Defiance points	30
Damage (bite)	5/6/7

Themes: hide just below the surface, don't attack until they're right next to me, drag into the water

Sample Qualifier Results	
-	+
constrict	

Sample ability : on an attack result containing a -, the snake has constricted its prey, who suffers 3 defiance points damage/round until the snake is DICEd. The snake can only constrict one victim at a time.

Giant Spider

Reflexes	5	Instinct	4
Savagery	3	Thews	3
Cunning	2	Guts	2

DICE	6
Defiance points	18
Damage	4/5/6

Themes: make clicking sound to alert other spiders, lower silently overhead on strand of web

Sample Qualifier Results	
–	+
poison sting	knocked over
wrap in webs	soft underbelly revealed

Sample Poison Effect: the victim of a sting makes a thews roll against a difficulty of 2. The victim makes this roll each round until the poison's effects go away.

6 (✓ +) the poison's effects are gone, and the victim is now immune to any more bites from the species.

5 (✓ •) the poison's effects are gone.

4 (✓ –) the poison is no longer paralyzing the victim, but s/he is sick for one day, reducing all dice pools by one.

3 (⊙ +) the victim is still paralyzed, but receives the next roll to recover at +1.

2 (⊙ •) the victim is still paralyzed.

1 (⊙ –) the victim is still paralyzed and may not make another roll for one hour.



Earth Elemental (lesser demon)

Reflexes	1	Instinct	1
Savagery	3	Thews	7
Cunning	1	Guts	5

DICE 9 (can fight without its head, recovers from any DICE effect to the limbs on a – result)

Defiance points 30

Damage 7/8/9

Themes: make the earth shake, cause avalanche, uproot trees, dumb as a rock

Sample Qualifier Results	
–	+
knock down	water turns me to mud
regrow limb	where did you go?



Demon of Slaughter (lesser demon)

Reflexes	4	Instinct	2
Savagery	6	Thews	5
Cunning	2	Guts	2

DICE	10
Defiance points	30
Damage	8/9/10

Themes: uncontrollable, cannot be reasoned with, indiscriminate killer

Sample Qualifier Results	
-	+
tear flesh	confused
attack again	attack own ally

Sample Effects: on any result of -, the demon tears flesh causing the loss of 1 DP/round until the wound is bound.



Winged Horror

Reflexes	3	Instinct	2
Savagery	3	Thews	6
Cunning	2	Guts	3

DICE	9
Defiance points	30
Damage	7/8/9

Themes: drop victim from a great height, protect eggs, dive bomb

Sample Qualifier Results	
-	+
grasp in talons	tear wing
grasp in beak	smash beak



Earth Shaker

Reflexes	2	Instinct	2
Savagery	4	Thews	10
Cunning	1	Guts	3

DICE	13
Defiance points	40
Damage	8/9/10

Themes: panic & stampede, that smells like something in heat

Sample Qualifier Results	
-	+
knockback	hide in blind spot
trample	confuse monster

