**Bottom’s Up Campaign**

Beneath the living mirror of heaven, beneath the world of our desires, there are streets with secret names. They connect the back alleys of civilization with the urine-stained vacant lots of the cosmos. They take you to the occult underground.

You can’t call information for the underground’s phone number. It doesn’t advertise in *Rolling Stone*. There are no maps that show its borders. Yet you have been living along its borders for a while now. Maybe you would have known it to see it if only you had full access to your mind. But a large part of your brain is confused and you just don’t see things as they really are.

Or do you?

Player characters are living on the streets. Each has followed their own path to get there, but now that they have arrived they have become part of a different world. Here they have friends, not all of them imaginary. They all suffer from a form of mental challenge that has brought them slowly into the same area of the city. It is here that many of those with the worst issues have congealed, not just because it is the worst part of town, but because here is where they belong. Here is where they have settled because it feels like the right place for them. Not safe, not homey, but just where they need to be.

Character Background

This is a modern day campaign that takes place in a modern day city. Not unlike the World of Darkness, there are things going on under the normal every day veneer than most people see. There is a layer of magic and struggle under that veneer.

Your characters, through whatever method you wish, have become homeless. How long they have been so is up to you. This may not even be the first time you’ve been on the streets. It is also up to the player to decide why they are homeless and why they remain so. Has your family tried to help you out? Why didn’t they succeed?

Also, as you may have guessed, each character has some illness of the mind. It can be of any sort, but should affect their lives greatly. Physical damage, chemical imbalance (or damage), birth defect… whatever the cause, this illness should be related to the character’s life in some way. It will evolve into part of the core of your magical powers. What sort of insanity you choose will inform the kind of character you will become. Consider this an important part of your character creation. Build it into your character with the magical paths available to you later in mind.

Campaign Information

Since I will be running something in the neighborhood of eight game sessions, I am hoping to use this as a test of this system and of my ability (and yours) to work with a game system that relies on a lot of player interaction. This is more of a story building system than a combat system. Power, even at the top end, is pretty low. Also, the system makes a lot of combat impractical. Guns kill people. Recovery from damage can be very slow.

All of that adds up to a game about characters. Make a character that will be fun for you to play, that has goals that you can pursue and will have a desire to act rather than be acted upon. This doesn’t have to be all of you, but enough of you have to help drive the story.

**The official site has a good bit of information:** [**http://ua.johntynes.com/index.php**](http://ua.johntynes.com/index.php)

Character Creation

I know nobody will have the book for this system, and for at least this one short session, that’s just fine. The rules are relatively simple and so is character creation. All you will need is a story for your character, some defining traits, a few stats, and a willingness to help build a bit of story. In fact, we will be using the first one or two game sessions to help build into the things you need to complete your character.

*In Brief:*

* Define your Insanity/Mental Issue
* Define your Obsession
* Define your Passions
  + Fear Stimulus
  + Rage Stimulus
  + Noble Stimulus
* Write up a background – I need at least an outline to work with
* Statistics – There are only four. They must range from 30 to 70. You have 220 points to spend.
  + Body
  + Speed
  + Mind
  + Soul
* Skills – each Stat has skills that fall under it. You get a number of points equal to the Stat to apply to the skills that fall under it.
  + You also get 15 bonus points to spend on any skill you want.
  + No skill can be higher than the stat it falls under.
  + **Free Skills**: All of the following skills start at 15% for free, except for Initiative, which starts at half your Speed score.
    - **Body**: General Athletics, Struggle
    - **Speed**: Dodge, Driving, Initiative
    - **Mind**: General Education, Notice, Conceal
    - **Soul**: Charm, Lying
  + Choose one of your skills to be your Obsession skill. Clearly this must link strongly with your Obsession. NOTE: that you may also gain another Obsession skill when you gain your magical abilities.
* Magic – review the magical section below. Shortly after the start of the game you will begin down one of these paths. Know where you want to your character to end up so you can build towards it from the very start.

*At Length*

*Insanity/Mental Issue*

For the start of this campaign, this is a requirement. This should begin as a very crippling issue for you, likely the reason that you are homeless. However, your characters need not remain insane or damaged. During the game this insanity will morph into your Obsession, and the degree of that insanity that remains will be up to you. Obsession is described below and is integral to your character.

*Obsession*

Nobody enters the occult underground without and obsession. Your obsession is what you live for, what defines your existence, what gives your life meaning. Pick carefully. You want something useful but original. It should also be something easy to express. “Toughness” is a good obsession. “Getting really strong so I can beat people up” is needlessly elaborate.

For gameplay purposes, this will act in a way like your aspect in Exalted. It will inform your best skills and will be the core of your magical powers. Some examples will be listed below.

*Passions*

You don’t go through life like a car on an assembly line. You’re volatile, spontaneous, and committed. The events in your life can have a profound effect on you. There’s something that really scares you, something that ticks you off, and something that inspires you to action. Such is the nature of those that live under the false skin of the world. Without passions, you would be just another drone.

You have three: a **Fear** stimulus, a **Rage** stimulus, and a **Noble** stimulus.

Your passions cannot contradict your Obsession. You are a coherent person.

When you’re in a situation that pushes one of your buttons, you go all spooky-intense. You can opt to either flip-flop or reroll a failed roll during that situation. You only get to do this once per session for each passion. Obviously the GM must agree that the event triggers your passions.

*Fear Passion*

This is what you fear the most. Pointy things? Looking weak in front of people you respect? Whatever it is, it’s the thing that can make you run like a headless chicken.

If you activate your fear passion, you can use the flip-flop or reroll to get away. Run fast. Bust down a locked door. But you cannot use it to attack.

Your fear passion has a connection to your Madness Meters. These are **mental stresses** that record how messed-up you are in the head. There are five such tracks: **Violence**, **Helplessness**, **The** **Unnatural**, **Isolation**, and **Self**. Pick one that synchs up closest to your fear. If you stress rises too high, you have to make a stress check against the linked meter. Madness will be discussed later.

Now, because you are clinically insane, give yourself three “failed” notches in any of those five stress tracks that you want. These represent past trauma of that type. If you wish, you can also place a hardened notch to match any, all, or none of those “failed” notches.

NOTE: I’ll try to describe how madness works a bit later, but it works a lot like you think it does.

*Rage Passion*

What makes you lash out in blind fury? Child abusers? People who have undeservedly been rewarded with the things you work so hard for but cannot obtain? Your rage passion is the thing you must destroy, surpass, or overcome; in whatever form or persona it manifests.

If you activate your rage passion, you can use the flip-flop or reroll to lash out. You might fire a gun, swing a fist, or turn over the tables of the money-changers in the courtyard of the temple. You cannot use if for skilled, careful work. You must lash out immediately in all your volatile, beautiful, uncontrollable rage.

*Noble Passion*

What inspires you to be the very best person you can be? Relieving the worldwide burden of poverty? Getting the money for your grandmother’s operation? Your noble passion is the thing that takes you higher. To avoid your fear you might leave your friends in the lurch. To destroy your rage you might lie, torture, and murder. But to pursue your noble goal you would make sacrifices, risk your own life, and endure terrible suffering for the common good.

If you activate your noble passion you can use the flip-flop or reroll to take a selfless action that furthers your noble goal. You need to do it right away - this isn’t a resource you can use to write a grant proposal. Bust the lock on the warehouse to feed the starving, drive fast to get the child to the hospital, persuade a soldier to let you into the refugee camp. This is a moment to define your highest self.

*Personality*

You guys don’t need an explanation of this. It’s a short description of who you are. Good Cop, Weary Observer, Loner… whatever. These aren’t critical to the game.

However, I do need you to list your Zodiac sign in this section. Yes, this informs your character and can be important to gameplay in odd ways. Pick one that makes sense for your character.

*Background*

It is very important to the development of the story that you have a fairly complete history for your character. We need to know about his or her family, what sort of jobs have you had, past loves… anything that will help us tell an interesting story.

*Gear*

You can have anything that a homeless person might have… as many aluminum cans, shopping carts and old coats as you want. Also make sure to include some personal items from your past or anything that your character considers precious.

*Stats*

There are only four stats in Unknown Armies. **Body**, **Speed**, **Mind**. and **Soul**. Stats can run from 1 to 100. The average human ranges from 30 to 70. Your stats must start in that range.

We are playing a street level campaign, so you have 220 points to distribute between these stats.

**Body** – this is your health, strength and fitness.

30 – Sickly and weak.

50 – Average

70 – As far as you’re concerned, every bottle has a twist-off top. You can do one-handed chin-ups.

NOTE: Your health/hit points = your Body. However, you will NOT be keeping track of your health, the GM will do that. The GM will let you know how you feel.

**Speed** – this is your quickness and responsiveness.

See goofy stat description for Body, you get the idea.

NOTE: Speed is used to determine initiative.

**Mind** – this is your smarts and mental toughness.

NOTE: Mind is helpful to prevent madness.

**Soul** – this is you emotional skill, non-verbal skills, social interaction and magick.

NOTE: Clearly this will be important if we continue this campaign, since it powers your magic. Though this session will be a short game and you will only get your magic, if you want it, pretty near the end.

*Skills*

Skills work on a percentile basis. Skilll ratings range from 1 to 99.

There are three kinds of skill checks.

**Minor:** If you have a 15% or better rating with the skill you automatically succeed in any minor skill check. Minor skill checks occur when there is plenty of time and the task in not difficult or dangerous. Taking a photograph of your house or reading up on Greek history are minor skill checks.

**Significant:** These happen when there is some time pressure or there is a high element of uncertainty. Spending a day hacking an unfamiliar operating system or keeping an eye on your husband in a crowd. For these rolls you have a strong success if you roll under your skill level. If you fail the roll you have a weak success as long as your roll is under the related skill. You only fail if you roll above your stat.

**Major:** All combat rolls are major skill checks, as are any actions you attempt under stress and risk. If it really matters, it’s a major check. To succeed on a major skill check, you must roll under your skill.

**Maximum Skill:** For the start of this campaign, your skills cannot start above 55%.

NOTE: Your skill can never be higher than the skill that governs it.

**Skill Points:** You start with skill points for each stat equal to that stat. So if you start with a Body of 55, you have 55 points to spend on Body related skills.

**Bonus Points:** You also get 15 bonus points to spend on any skills you want, keeping in mind the restriction that a skill can’t exceed the stat it relies on.

**Free Skills**: All of the following skills start at 15% for free, except for Initiative, which starts at half your Speed score.

**Body**: General Athletics, Struggle

**Speed**: Dodge, Driving, Initiative

**Mind**: General Education, Notice, Conceal

**Soul**: Charm, Lying

The free skills are pretty self explanatory, so I won’t waste space explaining them.

If your character grew up on a farm and never learned to drive, you may replace that with Horse Riding. Or if you’re twelve, with Bicycle Riding.

**Skill Names:** You can name your skills whatever you want. Keep in mind that skills not only indicate your ability to take action, but also encompass your knowledge in the field. Your Firearms skill not only shows how well you shoot a gun, but also indicates your knowledge level about firearms: gun care, gun laws, places to buy guns (legal and otherwise), value, etc. The higher your skill the wider and deeper your “penumbra” for that skill is. Someone with a 30 skill in firearms probably doesn’t know any arms smugglers, but someone with a 70 in Egyptology is on a first name basis with a few nationally recognized experts in the field.

**Obsession Skill**: Your obsession isn’t just what drives you. It also governs what your good at. Pick ONE skill as your Obsession Skill. Put a star next to it. *Every time* you use that skill you can choose to flip-flop that roll. You only get one Obsession skill (for now, I’ll probably be allowing one other later), so pick carefully. Obviously it must link closely with your obsession.

**Example Skills:** Because you have to make up your own skills, I figure I’ll list some of the examples in the book to help you along. Otherwise, grab your favorite game system and use some from there. I am including the long descriptions because they give you some idea about the game mechanics. I do, however, have a few notes:

Struggle: If you take this as your Obsession skill (call it Martial Arts or Dirty Boxing), you get Cherries. These are special effects that trigger on rolling a successful match (match is doubles, like 11, 22, 33, etc.). More on Cherries later.

Dodge: Dodging requires your whole action.

Initiative: You have a choice. Either just go on your initiative score, or roll and hope to get a result under your speed. Everyone that succeeds on their Speed check (taking your initiative counts as a success), goes in order, highest to lowest. Then those that failed go in order of highest to lowest.

NOTE: Skills work a little like perks in other games. If you take a skill it will often give a default ability, along with the ability to roll to do exceptional things using that skill or understand something related to it.

*Body Skill Examples*

**Distracting Physique**: There is something about your body that draws stares. Maybe you are almost inhumanly beautiful. Or perhaps you have a massive goiter on your neck. In any event, when someone sees you for the first time, you can make a distracting physique roll. If you succeed, the viewer is freaked out and is at -10% on all skills until you leave his presence. Works on allies too.

**Hold Your Breath**: You can hold your breath a freakishly long time. Normally a person can hold their breath for a number of seconds equal to their body skill. You add two extra seconds for each point in the skill.

**Hold Your Liquor**: Normally, at the point where an un-skilled drinker would start taking penalties, the GM rolls this skill for you. If the roll succeeds, you take no penalties. If it fails, you won’t know it until you try to do something that requires a real roll. You also get an extended ability to drink before a roll is required at all.

**Large And Hard To Move**: You have a low center of gravity and are hard to knock off your feet. Any attack that would normally knock you down will only do so if the roll was over your points in this skill.

**Do-It-Yourself Body Skills**

Others that you might want to develop: Climbing, Boxing, Weight Lifting, Work Without Rest, Marathon Running, Football, Judo, Swimming, Enduring Torture.

*Speed Skill Examples*

**Do Two Things At Once**: Whenever you are successful at a Speed skill with a roll lower than your Do Two Things At Once skill, you may take another action in the same round, as long as it is not mutually exclusive with the Speed skill you used. For instance, you can shoot someone with a gun and then kick them in the same round, as long as your Firearms roll was equal to, or lower than, your Do Two Things At Once skill. However, the second action fails if it is higher than the relevant skill OR your Do Two Things At Once skill.

**Fast Draw**: Normally drawing a weapon takes an action. But if your initiative roll is lower than your Fast Draw skill, then you may draw your weapon and attack with it immediately.

**Snatch**: Grabbing things out of people’s hands or pockets. Not picking pockets, they know you’ve done it when you do it. To do this in combat, you have to roll under your Snatch skill but over your target’s relevant weapon skill. This only applies to held weapons. If they are in a holster or pocket, you can grab them will just a successful skill check.

**Squirrely Reflexes**: You are a jumpy, paranoid person. Your first instinct when a fight breaks out is to run away. Therefore, when you are making an initiative roll you can flip-flop it if the roll is lower than your Squirrely Reflexes skill. You can do this even if the result would be higher than your Squirrely Reflexes skill. For example, if you roll a 24 and your skill is 30, you can flip-flop that to a 42 if you want.

**Do-It-Yourself Speed Skills**

Others you might want to develop: Billiards, Ping Pong, Firearms, Darts, Sleight of Hand, Pick Pockets, Moving Silently, Sprinting, Tennis, Juggling, Horseback Riding.

*Mind Skill Examples*

**Authority**: For whatever reason you are in a position to tell people to do things and have them get done. If you have this skill, it means some real authority, like you are a cop, a priest, a mob boss… someone that actually has power. This is a lot like a background in Exalted. With a skill of 15 you have the Authority of a police officer. A federal agent would be about 30. You can use this to wow the yokels, call for backup and access specialists. But you also gain the responsibilities of the job.

NOTE: For this campaign you cannot start with authority.

**Doublethink**: This skill allows you to briefly convince yourself you really know are not true. “I don’t know what you’re talking about! I didn’t shoot nobody!” It’s a short-term and intense form of method acting that involves suppression your memories under waves of powerful emotion – usually an intense *wish* that it was true. Succeed at this roll and you can lie infallibly because you believe it. The downside of Doublethink is that using it about minor stuff is a rank-2 Self mental stress challenge. Using it on anything important is a rank-5. Stress checks to be explained later.

**Hypnotherapist**: You can put a willing subject into a trance state. You can use this skill to reinforce suggestions, recover lost memories or make the subject quack like a duck. You are qualified to put people under and remove “Failed” dots on their Madness Meter, though this comes with some risk to you. Madness will be explained later. Note that you can also hypnotize unwilling subjects, but you fail with any roll under 40%. It is not possible to hypnotize someone who is unwilling and aware of what you are doing.

**Photographic Memory**: Just like it sounds. It takes a full action to memorize everything in your visual field and you have to do it deliberately. It’s up to you to note what you’ve memorized and when you did it. Then later you will roll to see how well you memorized it. OR you can take **Eidetic Memory**, which allow you to roll to recall anything you paid attention to, but this would require reading the actual book to be able to recall it. This will give you access to a lot more things, but will not allow you to “photograph” pages of the phonebook (for example). You’d have to read the page to remember it.

**Do-It-Yourself Mind Skills**

Others you might want to develop: Automotive Repair, Biology, Locksmithing, Medicine, Strategy, Physics, Psychotherapy, Occult.

*Soul Skill Examples*

**A Friend in the Family**: You have a buddy who is a mobster (or a forensic pathologist, or expert in the occult or whatever). He will help you out with minor things without a roll. Activities requiring risk or considerable effort will not only require a roll but also an explanation. Also, you will lose points in this skill if you only hang out with your friend when it is convenient to you… who needs a friend that is only around when he needs something.

**Aura Sight**: Even though you are not trained in magick, you are aware of auras. If you make a conscious effort you can learn things about a person, though until you are taught how to understand what you see, interpretation of the aura will be for you to figure out.

**Commanding Presence**: You come across as someone who should be obeyed, regardless of whether you have any authority or not. You are the person that can direct people in a crisis and get answers with the flimsiest of pretenses.

**Good Old Whatsisname**: You seem awfully familiar to people. Maybe you just have an average face. Maybe you subconsciously imitate the word choice and accent of those around you. In any case, people frequently mistake your for a distant cousin, old high school acquaintance, frat buddy, etc.

**Hunches**: If you make a successful roll, you get a hunch, which will be explained later. You can try this skill a number of times equal to the tens digit of your Hunches score. You can’t use this skill in combat, though an existing Hunch is valid when combat starts.

**Play Dumb**: You are real good at convincing people that you are about as sharp as a sack of wet mice. Useful for allowing people to underestimate you, or for getting them to tell you more than they meant to in the process of explaining things they *do*  want you to know.

**Vocal Imitation**: You have a knack for imitating sounds with your voice. Useful for doing Bill Clinton at parties, but also for other stuff.

**Sing the Blues**: You may not be musically trained, but you can sing a decent blues riff or doing a decent *Welcome to the Jungle* at karaoke.

**Do-It-Yourself Body Skills**

Persuasion, Acting, Getting Sympathy, Painting, Intimidation, Seduction, Cadging Drinks, Getting Bank Loans, Dancing, Social Worker.

*Unskilled Actions*: You can make a skill check for skills you have no points in. For minor and significant checks your can roll against the appropriate stat with a -30 shift. If you make it, you succeed, but only barely. For major checks you roll what is called a hail mary. Only matched successes and crits will succeed. Again, success this way is minimal. Also, failure for these sorts of rolls is harsh, ranging from minor fumble to major incident. Also, some things are just impossible. You won’t be jumping into an F-15 and flying off with no skill at all.

Basic Game Rules

*Matched Rolls*

A match is when the two digits on the percentile dice are the same (11, 44, 99). This makes the action you are trying to perform more dramatic. A matched successful roll is unusually good. A matched failed roll is unusually bad. Most effects from matched rolls will be determined at the time by the GM, but some matched rolls will generate Cherries. These can be generated using martial arts as an obsessed skill and with the Magick skill. These combat Cherries are similar to critical hits and can blind your opponent for a while, an extra attack or prevent your target from getting beneficial effects from matched rolls for the rest of the comat.

*Minimum Rolls*

In some cases there may be a minimum number for a given roll. This means that you must roll over that number, but under your skill, to succeed. If your skill is less than the minimum roll, you can’t make the attempt.

*Fumbles*

Rolling 00 is a fumble. Worst possible outcome and all that. Fumbles with a firearm cause jams that will take rounds to fix. Fumbles with melee attacks will cause you to take the damage your rolled yourself (stop hitting yourself!).

*Critical Success*

Rolling 01 is a critical success. Best possible outcome. Criticals with firearms mean that the gun does maximum damage, even if that damage is over your skill percentage. With melee you can instantly knockout or even kill your opponent (your choice).

*Flip-Flop Rolls*

In some situations with some skills you may be allowed to flip-flop your roll. This is simply changing the position of the tens and ones digits on your dice if it will help you.

*Shifted Rolls*

If something has a difficulty penalty, the GM may shift your roll. These penalties lower your skill by that amount. So if you have a 56% in Egyptology and you are making a skill check with a -30% shift, your skill is effectively 26% for that roll.

*Hunches*

A hunch is a percentile roll you get to make in advance, then set aside to use the next time you need a skill check. In other words, you know what your next roll will be and can act accordingly. Use it on something unimportant if it is a bad roll or try to save it for something important if it’s good. Regardless, the next time you need to roll, that hunch will be what you roll.

*Spending Experience Points*

* Raise a skill 1 point costs 1 exp.
* Raise a stat 1 point costs 2 exp.
* New Skill costs 10 exp. You start at 10% in that skill.
* You can’t spend more than 3 exp on any skill or 2 exp on any stat at the end of any session. You’ll have to spread them out. Obviously the exception is for new skills.

Stress Checks

There are five categories of mental stress: Violence, the Unnatural, Helplessness, Isolation, and Self. It is quite possible to be casual about violence but completely freak out about the unnatural.

Each stress has two types of notches you can mark off. **Hardened** notches represent stress checks that you have beaten. These are numbered 1 – 10. **Failed** notches represent stress checks that you have failed. These are numbered 1 – 5.

Different stresses have different power ranks, ranging from 1 -10. The higher the rank, the more extreme the stress and the more you’re likely to suffer if you fail the check. If you already have a hardened notch at the same rank as the stress in the same meter, you don’t have to roll. You automatically succeed at the check.

If you are asked to make a stress check and you do not have a hardened notch at that rank, you make a Mind roll. If you succeed, mark off the lowest unmarked “hardened” notch on the appropriate madness meter. If you fail, mark off the lowest unmarked “failed” notch instead and choose one of the three reactions: **panic**, **paralysis**, or **frenzy** (discussed shortly). Failure may have other long-term effects as well.

Hardened and failed notches will affect your character. Obviously hardened notches make you callous toward that particular type of stress, while failed notches make you increasingly more uneasy about it. It is possible to have an equal amount of hardened and failed values in regard to a stress type. This leads to a sort of ambivalence about it, which is not uncommon among people that suffer a lot of exposure to mental stress. For example, you may be hardened to Violence (and have a lot of failed notches as well), but when something gets through it can have a devastating effect.

*Getting Callous*

Once you have resisted *ten* incidents on a meter and have all ten hardened notches filled in, you become jaded about that type of stress and *nothing* in that category can endanger your mind.

This is not a good thing.

You are now cut off from an entire range of emotional experience. You have become a sociopath. You officially become a sociopath when you get ten hardened notches in one stress gauge or your total number of hardened notches in all categories exceeds thirty five. When this happens:

* You can no longer use your passions – Noble, Rage and Fear are things that you can’t relate to anymore. You can no longer use the flip-flops from those passions.
* If you are an Avatar (a type of magic user… more on that later in the game) you can’t use your Avatar skill until you get treatment.

*Getting Crazy*

When you fail a stress check and mark a failed notch, you also freak out in one of three ways: panic, paralysis or frenzy. The player chooses which reaction makes the most sense for the character in the given situation.

* Panic: You run away at high speed. You can take no action but run from whatever it was that made you freak out.
* Paralysis: Indecision, terror… you do nothing but rock silently or scream loudly until the stimulus that caused the stress stops.
* Frenzy: You attack the source of the stress. No dodges, no fancy moves, just beat the crap out of it until it stops making your brain hurt.

Each time you reach five failed notches in any stress you gain a permanent madness. This will relate to your obsession and your personality.

*Mental Help*

You can get help for you madness before and after you become certifiable. To do it before you permanently lose your mind you’ll want to set up sessions with a therapist. After you gain a permanent aberration you will need full-time help for months, but you can be helped.

Combat!

*Initiative*

You can either choose your default initiative, which is ½ of you Speed stat, or you may roll for initiative.

If you choose your default initiative, it is treated as a successful Initiative Check with a value of your default initiative. So if you have an Initiative of 27, you would act as if you had succeeded in an initiative roll with a 27.

If you choose to roll, the value of your initiative is whatever number you roll on the dice. However, it is important to note if you rolled under your Speed stat or not. If you do roll under your Speed stat, you succeeded on your initiative.

Everyone that succeeded in their initiative acts before everyone that failed. Those that succeeded act in descending order, highest roll to lowest. Then all of those that failed act in descending order, highest roll to lowest.

Tied initiatives require a roll-off. Loser’s initiative drops by one.

Ambush Initiative: If you get the drop on someone, you go once before everyone else. Then you get to act as if you succeeded on initiative with a roll that matches your Speed stat. NOTE: This requires complete surprise.

Improving Initiative: If you want, you may spend an entire round attempting to improve your initiative. If you do, you can re-roll or choose to go at your initiative, just like the start of the combat. House Rule: This can only improve your initiative. In the game rules, it appears that you just keep the new initiative, even if it’s worse.

*Attacking*

Drawing a weapon takes one round.

Attack Shifts: There are many things that can give you bonuses or penalties to your combat skills. They range from -30 to 30. For example:

* You are blind: -30
* You are fighting from a very precarious position: -20
* You are on a bad acid trip: -10
* You are using a long hand-to-hand weapon against an unarmed opponent at range: +10
* Opponent is exhausted (ran a marathon): +20
* Opponent is in leg irons and handcuffs: +30

Focus Shifts: This must be declared at the start of the round. This is an intense to focus on one opponent over all other things. You can choose +10, +20 or +30, and apply that to your attack roll that round. However, everyone knows that you have become intent on one target (you stop and glare at them, likely even pointing at them and growling). The drawback to this intense focus is that you ignore others, and anyone attacking you (including the one you are focusing on) gets the same bonus to hit you that you get against your target.

If both you and your target focus on each other, those bonuses will add. You will add your focus bonus and the bonus you get because your target is focusing. However, focus bonuses can never go above 30.

Dodging: On your initiative you can declare that you are dodging. This is all you do that round. When someone successfully attacks you while you are dodging, two things happen.

* First you make a Dodge check with a minimum roll equal to your opponents attack skill. If you succeed the attack does no damage to you.
* If you fail but your opponents attack roll was lower than your Dodge skill, you take half damage (round up).

If you wish to continue dodging next round, you must declare it at the start of the round. If you do then your dodge will apply even to those with higher initiative. It still takes up the rest of your round.

If you have a Dodge skill over 85% it might be possible to do something other than dodge, if it is appropriate.

There are some attacks (magickal ones, for example) that just can’t be dodged.

*Damage*

In general, hand-to-hand attacks do damage equal to the sum of your attack dice. Roll a 34 and you do 7 damage.

Firearms to damage equal to the percentage you rolled on the dice. Roll a 34, do 34 damage. However, most firearms have a maximum damage. A Colt Viper has a maximum damage of 50.

NOTE: Just being shot at triggers a Rank-1 Violence check.

Critical Hits (01)

* Melee allows you to knock out or even kill your target immediately.
* Firearm does maximum damage.

Fumbles (00)

* Melee causes you to hit yourself (or allow your opponent to hit you, twist a leg… whatever) for the damage you rolled.
* Firearms will jam and become unusable until un-jammed (firearms check to fix, takes full round).

Matches

* With weapons that have a +6 damage, does firearm damage (and then add the bonus), with weapons +3 or less, does nothing special.
* Have no effect on firearms.

Multiple Attacks: You can split up your skill up to three times. You choose how you want to do it. You can split your 30% skill up into three 10% attacks on the same person, or two attacks on two different people at 23% and 7%. However you want. If you are focusing, you clearly can only attack one target, though you can do so up to three times. Add your focus bonus before you split up your skill.

Melee Weapons: There are three things to note about a melee weapon.

* Is it big? This basically means that you need to use two hands to wield it.
* Is it heavy? Heavy enough to crack bones.
* Is it penetrating? Cuts or stabs through skin.

Each of these properties gives the weapon a +3 to its damage. A rock is heavy: +3. A sword is heavy and penetrating: +6. A chainsaw is heavy, big and penetrating: +9.

Knives: Knives always do 1 point of damage when they miss in hand to hand combat (regular damage if they hit). This is to represent how hard it is to avoid getting cut at least a little bit when dealing with a knife. Try taking a felt marker away from a small child and you’ll get an idea how this works.

Non-Combat Action: Doing a non-combat action during a fight will take at least two rounds. Some may take longer.

*Wounds*

The GM will be keeping track of your damage. The GM will keep you informed about how much each attack hurt, where it hit you and all that. He will also keep you informed about your overall health.

Wound Penalties

* -25% to 30% of your health: -10% to all your stat checks.
* -60% to 75% of your health: -20% to all your stat checks.

These penalties only apply to stats, not skills.

*Healing*

Healing is done on a per-wound basis. Each wound must be treated separately.

Minor Wounds are those that do up to 10% of your character’s Body stat. These can be fixed using first aid.

To perform first aid you need the right supplies and must make a skill check within an hour of after the injury occurred. You can only get one attempt by an amateur on any wound. A success heals the amount on the dice added together (45 = 9 points). A 10 heals 11.

Attempts failed by an amateur can be rolled for again only by a professional in a proper medical facility.

No matter how good the roll, each wound always leaves 1 point that can only be healed by convalescence.

Major Wounds are ones that do more than 10% of your Body stat in damage. These can only be healed by professionals in a proper medical facility. Help must be acquired within an hour of the wound to be of much help. If you get help within an hour, your doctor can heal that wound for an amount equal to the roll on a successful medical skill check (44 heals 44 damage). If you arrive too late, that success will only grant you the sum of those dice (8 damage). As with all wounds, major wounds leave one point that can only be healed by time.

Convalescence heals 2 points of damage a day. This is complete rest in a proper location.

Permanent Wounds: If you take more than 50 points from a single wound and live, you will be marked with a nice scar and some sort of permanent damage. What that is will be up to the GM and the group. It might be a permanent loss of wound points (5 to 10) or some appropriate skill. Perhaps even the loss of some points from a stat.

Magick

Magick is what happens when the cosmos is consciously channeled by a human being. It is unconscious power filtered and focused by conscious will.

“Magick” is spelled with a “k” to distinguish it from all the forms of magic practiced by the peoples of Earth that do not have real power in them. In days gone by, many kinds of magic still practiced today had such power. But as the civilizations of Earth have advanced and changed, many older magical traditions lost their potency. Modern practitioners of magick dismiss such traditions as “old-school”. They call their own workings “new-wave” or “postmodern”. Of course, in centuries to come these forms of magick will wax and wane just as the old-school varieties have.

*The Nature of Magic*

All magic is **sympathetic**. It’s based on a symbolic relationship between the magickal action and the desired result. That’s sympathetic magick. You make a symbolic connection between your goal and your will. Magick flows on this path, delivering the result you seek, but only if your will is strong enough to channel the magick were you want it to go, and only if your symbolic connections are significant enough to mark the path the magick must travel.

Most magick can be divided into three levels of power: **minor, significant,** and **major.** Majormagick is potent, rare, and dangerous. Significant magick is restricted to people willing to pursue the subject seriously. Minor magick is easily accessible – assuming you have the will and the knowledge to make it work. Normal people don’t.

There are also three styles of magick: ritual magick, adept magick, and avatar magick.

*Ritual Magick*

Most rituals are leftover from old-school, modernist magick, or even older traditions that are non-magical today. Once they were part of a particular faith, such as tribal magick, Christian exorcism, or Kabbalistic divination. Now they are merely recipes devoid of meaning or context, and they work for those with the stones to try them. They are fragile legacies of once-potent beliefs, and with each century fewer and fewer of them retain their power.

The power of ritual magick is limited, and truly powerful rituals are incredibly rare. But some forms of ritual magick have subtle powers imaginative users can unlock. Ritual magick relies heavily on symbolic connections. The kinds of Western Hermetic magick that used eye of newt and toe of frog survive today as specific rituals full of the trappings of supernatural folklore.

Many of the rituals that remain don’t work anymore. Many get passed around by people that claim they work, or heard from someone that they work. There are many trap rituals running around in the world as well.

Finding a ritual is like finding a slice of pizza in the gutter. Are you hungry enough to eat it? After all it *might* be okay.

Here are a few examples that you may or may not encounter:

* Minor Rituals
  + Poison Ward – 1 minor charge – negates poison in a single cup of liquid.
    - Ritual – rotate the vessel though 360 degrees clockwise while saying the word “sushem”. Then rotate it 360 degrees counterclockwise while saying the word “crechab”.
  + Plague of Hiccups – 2 minor charges – When the victim of the spell speaks a chosen word, he is plagued with hiccups for about an hour. Even after it fades, will occur again when the word is spoken again.
    - Harvest ten ripe olives on a moonless night. Press them for their oil. Harvest ten apples by the noonday sun, press them for their juice and ferment it into vinegar. Add this to the oil. Suspend the mixture under and icicle and build a fire under it. Do not remove the mixture until it boils and one drop of water falls into it from the icicle. Let it cool, then drink it at sundown. When you next urinate, save the urine. Sprinkle it on the doorstep of the house of your victim while whispering the word you wish to curse. The cursed word must have at least three syllables and no more than seven.
  + Angel of the Animals – 5 minor charges – target is swarmed with animals for eight hours. They want to touch the person, cling to him. Though not directly harmful, many victims suffocate if they do not struggle, and get nibbled to death if they do.
    - Even more ritual stuff than the one above…
* Significant Rituals
  + SpellBreaker – 2 significant charges – removes the effects of spells, with some restrictions.
  + Washing Your Luck – 3 significant charges – The next three matched failures become matched successes at the same level. So a failure of 88 becomes a success of 88.
  + Summon Unspeakable Servant – Depending on your roll, gain service of lesser, greater or abominable servant.
    - Note that this ritual requires several months of gestation (in you if you are female, in an animal if not) and the expenditure of one of your eyes.
* Major Rituals
  + If any of these remain, they are well hidden. Rumors talk about a few, like “Resurrection Body” and “The Philosopher’s Stone”.
* Proxy Rituals
  + Link yourself to another person, with or without their permission, in order to evade spells aimed at you our use the proxy as eyes, ears and perhaps even a source of power.
* Tilt Rituals
  + Similar to proxy rituals, you tilt the odds slightly in your favor or against an enemy.

*Adept Magick*

Adept magick is for those who are obsessed with a particular worldview, such as the transcendental power of sex, the relationship between commerce and cosmos, or the reckless liberation found in a bottle of liquor. By forcing reality to match their particular view of it, adepts can work magick related to their obsession.

Adept magick is much more narrow in scope than ritual magick, because a given adept only accepts his personal worldview and his sphere of magickal influence if limited as a result. But within that narrow worldview, an adept’s power can be tremendous.

Adept magick does not require the classical mumbo-jumbo and virgin’s pig’s blood often seen in ritual magick. Instead, the adept engages in circumscribed behavior to generate packets of magickal energy known as charges, which he uses to power spells. Charges and spells come in minor, significant, and major forms.

As an adept you walk alone. There may be others that walk your path, and you may learn from them, but in the end you have shaped yourself into the person you are. That guy is somebody else. What he believes about the world and what you believe just don’t fit together.

There are three laws of magick for the Adept.

* **The Law of Symbolic Tension**: You magick is based on paradox.
  + You magick gets its power from the friction between ideas, and it is your ability to walk between contradictory ideas that makes you so unusual.
* **The Law of Transaction**: You get out of it only what you put into it.
  + **Simply put, there is no free ride**. Magick costs charges to use. Charges (minor, significant and major) have to be created by working that edge, touching the paradox. How you do that is dependent on the type of path you follow.
* **The Law of Obedience**: Your magick is the only magick for you.
  + Studying magick isn’t like studying dance. It’s not just about learning a set of skills. You must dedicate yourself to a view of the universe and how it works. You have to live up to your magickal ideals. This means taboos. Do something taboo and your charges will drain away very quickly.

Adapts have three types of spells; blasts, formula spells and random spells.

* Blasts are the way adepts hurt people. They do what it sounds like they do.
  + Some schools don’t have this ability, such as Mechanomancers.
* Formula spells are reliable old favorites, practiced and well-known.
  + These vary by school.
* Random spells are improvised in an emergency to do something very specific.
  + Random magick is harder and will use more or even more powerful charges than formula spells
  + Random magick is narrower. They need to be closer to the core of your school’s teaching or you won’t be able to make them work on the fly.
  + Random magick is less predictable. Weird stuff happens when you do magick without the formula and rituals that guide them.

Adept Schools – here’s a list of the ones in the book.

* Bibliomancer – You are what you read. The pages of the world are secured by the binding of knowledge. The literate shall inherit the earth.
* Cliomancer – You know history is written on the wind of whispers and gossip. Between what really happens and what people believe lies the past you will walk.
* Dipsomancer – You know there is truth at the bottom of a bottle. You never feel even halfway yourself except when you’re drunk. Liquor is your servant, bringing you clarity and power.
* Entropomancer – You know it’s all a roll of the dice. What you risk reveals what you value. Safety is death. Chaos is life. Let go.
* Epideromancer – You know truth is in your veins. Let it out. No one sees your true self until you wear the bleeding mask of pain. Open up. Your body is your temple Plunder it.
* Mechanomancer – You know that a lifetime is but a tick of the clock. The past is nothing. Only the future matters, oil-soaked and clanking, and you are an architect of that future. Cogs and wheels and levers and gears are the machinery of the cosmos made visible.
* Narco-Alchemist – You know when you’re high you can see for miles. The longest journey begins with a single trip. If your mind is your altar then you better alter your mind.
* Personamancer – You know each person is a mask. Identity is a deck of cards, shuffled for every social situation. We each prepare a face to greet the faces that we meet.
* Plutomancer – You know money is honey. It binds civilization together. The transactions of commerce and the transactions of magick are the same thing. You live in the sweet spot at the epicenter of a handshake, and laugh all the way to the bank. They don’t call it the Art of the Deal for nothing.
* Pornomancer – You know the Naked Goddess is alive an magick is afoot. She has inverted the masculine order, emerging triumphant from the very core of female subjugation. Follow her path of Affinity.
* Urbanomancer – You know the city beats with a human heart. You live for back alleys, yowling cats, shiftless bums, well-toned joggers, harried commuters, and all the other denizens that make your city what it is. That’s right: your city. You really know what it means to say you own this town.
* Videomancer – You know the power of the box. TV Guide is you TV Guru. Millions of people concentrating intently on the altar of entertainment cannot help but pump it full of juice. You can tap that juice, reach into the screen and wring pure power from the eyeballs of America. Television is everything.

*Avatar Magick*

Avatar magick has the limited power of ritual magick and the narrow focus of adept magick. In return, however, it does not require an obsessional worldview or the still-beating heart of a sacrificed puppy.

Instead of creating a path between the will and result, the avatar studies the world around her to recognize the well-worn paths that already exist – and then she studiously walks that path every day of her life. Specifically, the avatar adopts behaviors that are symbolically connected to archetypes of humanity. By bringing these behaviors into her daily life, she stays on her archetypal path and gains magickal abilities as a result. She is simply walking the trail that the collective unconscious has blazed, and she can harness that mass will for he own use.

Many avatars have no notion that they are following an archetype. They believe that they are worshipping a particular religious or folkloric figure – a figure who is really just another way of perceiving a universal archetype.

You can be an avatar without truly believing in the agenda of the archetype you follow. Merely the outward symbolic behavior is sufficient. Where the adept is an obsessed visionary, you can be an actor portraying a role.

There are several examples of archetypes to follow in the book. They should be easily understood just by their names. Players are free to make their own. Designing their magic is not very hard. Each archetype has four “channels”. Channels are gained as the Avatar’s skill in their Avatar skill increases. I’ll describe a couple below.

Note that your skill will start at 1% only after a month of studiously playing your role as Avatar and will increase slowly from there.

* The Demagogue
* The Executioner
* The Flying Woman
* The Fool
  + The Fool goes where he shouldn’t, says what he ought not and gets into what is forbidden. The Fool is feckless, random – and undeniably lucky.
  + Taboos: The Fool is never exactly the sharpest knife in the drawer. If your mind score ever goes above 50, you are in danger of thinking too much to be a good fool. The fool is also gullible. Any time a Fool avatar acts suspicious of an individual or circumstance without very good reason, the link to the archetype is weakened.
  + Channels:
    - 1-50: At this level you can find a common object whenever you succeed at an Avatar: Fool check, as long as there is a good possibility of it being where you’re looking and are not of great monetary value. Find lodging, a hairpin you need to pick a lock or perhaps a lead pipe you need to bash in someone’s head.
    - 51-70: Any time you take damage you can make an Avatar: Fool roll to bounce that damage to someone nearby. This costs you your next action and you don’t get to decide who takes that damage.
    - 71-90: You gain the ability to be in the right place at the right time. This is not teleportation, you just happen to be there when something happens. You may be in the same restaurant where two enemies are plotting your demise, or where you need to be to take advantage of a fantastic opportunity.
    - 91+: Whenever anyone tries to harm you, conventionally or with magick, their skill automatically takes a -30% shift. This takes no skill roll from you. But if you are willing to give up your next action, you can forego this automatic protection and try to manipulate chaos to make it even harder on your opponent. You make an Avatar: Fool roll. If you make it, your opponent suffers ten times your roll as a penalty.
* The Masterless Man
* The Merchant
* The Messenger
* The Mother
* The MVP
* The Mystic Hermaphrodite
* The Pilgrim
* The Savage
  + Tarzan. The Yeti. The Savage has cast away the shackles of politeness and civilization and is welcomed by nature. The savage casts aside morals and ethics as well. Likely to be a vicious predator, though may also be a noble beast.
  + Channels:
    - 1-50: If you roll under your Avatar: Savage skill while rolling a Body or Speed based skill, you may add 10 to the roll. That roll is still a success, even if it surpasses the skill being tested. Does not work when using any sort of machine for that skill.
    - 51-70: You can roll your Avatar: Savage skill instead of skills like Climb, Stealth and Run.
    - 71-90: You can speak with animals with a roll under your Avatar: Savage skill.
    - 91+: Any spell or firearm damage done to you from a roll less than your Avatar: Savage skill is reduced by 20. Does not affect damage from animals, unnatural creatures or hand-to-hand damage.
* The True King
* The Warrior

*Multiple Magicks*

The three types of magick are not exclusive. But both avatar and adept magick have taboos, and they rarely align well. You’d end up a psychotic mess, though a powerful psychotic mess.