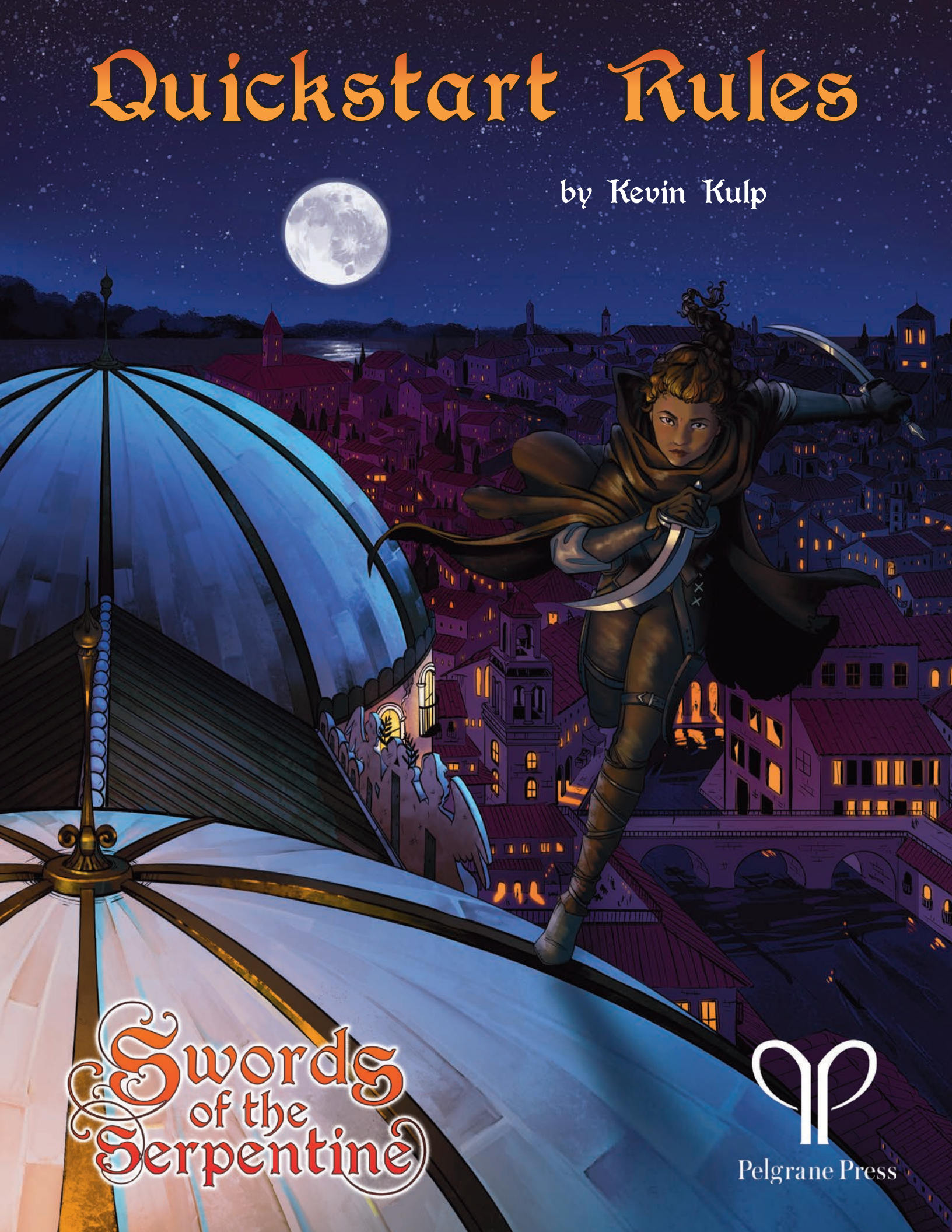


Quickstart Rules

by Kevin Kulp



Swords
of the
Serpentine



Pelgrane Press

Swords of the Serpentine 101: How to Play

The Basics

- Use **Investigative abilities** you have rank 1 or more in to find leads and gather clues.
- Spend **Investigative ability pool points** to get powerful effects.
- You have political **Allegiances** who can give you information or lend you a hand.
- Use **General abilities** to take actions. Roll a d6 (before you roll, you can spend points from that General ability's pool) and try to match or exceed a **Difficulty** number (usually 4).
- Spending **Corruption** lets you cast powerful spells or inflict exceptional damage, but corrupts either your body, or your friends' Morale and the world around you.

To Attack

- The GM decides who has Initiative and goes first. The 1st person takes their action and designates who goes 2nd, whether friend or foe. The 2nd person decides who goes 3rd. This passing of Initiative continues until everyone (Hero and Adversary) have gone. The last person to go in the round decides who goes next in the next round; it can be themselves, allowing them to go twice in a row.
- To attack someone, tell the GM you're using **Warfare** (to attack someone's Health), **Sway** (to attack their Morale), or **Sorcery** (which targets either Health or Morale, decided when you create your Hero), and whether you want to spend points from that combat ability to add to your attack roll.
- Roll a d6. You're trying to meet or beat your target's **Health** or **Morale Threshold**, usually a 3 or 4. That means spending 3 points from your ability will automatically succeed in most situations.
- If you can rationalize how spending an Investigative point might boost your attack, it gives you +3 on an attack roll.

- If the roll applies to any of your Three Best Things in Life, you can check that off for the adventure and gain +1 on your die roll (usually used to turn misses into hits, and hits into crits).
- If your attack ability rank 8 or higher, and you exceeded your roll by 3 or more, you automatically attack an additional nearby foe for every 3 points you exceed the target by (so one extra target at 7, two extra at 10, etc.). Getting a high attack result is a great way to defeat multiple Mooks at once.
- You can use a **teamwork attack** instead of leaping in to attack yourself, giving an ally your attack's damage; this lets you use Morale damage when attacking Health, or vice versa.

To Damage

- If your attack hit your target, you **normally inflict 1d6 +1 damage**. That +1 damage modifier may vary a bit if you're using a weapon.
- Your **minimum result on that damage die roll** is the number of points (up to 6) you spent while attacking.
- If your attack exceeds the target number by 5 or more, you score a **Critical Hit** and do an extra die of damage.
- You can **boost that damage** by another 1 die or more by spending **Investigative points**, if you can explain to the GM how that ability can help hurt your target more.
- The damage you inflict (and is inflicted on you) is reduced by **Armor** (for Health) or **Grit** (for Morale).
- Use **Maneuvers**, p. 6, for combat stunts or manipulating people: the target takes damage if they don't allow your Maneuver to affect them.

Your Hero

- ☞ **Sentinels** have an eye for detail, an exhaustive knowledge of rules and regulations, and a keen sense for criminal activity. Some Sentinels can sense ghosts and see into the spirit realm that overlays the true world.
- ☞ **Sorcerers** may know rare and hidden secrets, know how to heal the sick (or how to kill them more quickly), be able to prophesize the future, and know the corrupt path to raw sorcerous power. There's no "good" magic when it comes to Sorcery; the most powerful sorcery causes Corruption, and externalized Corruption is illegal because it spiritually pollutes the area around you. You can internalize Corruption instead, slowly changing your appearance but keeping the city safe.
- ☞ **Thieves** specialize in secrets; they know the alleys and canals of Eversink better than anyone else, they may be incredibly lucky, they're skilled at gathering information through illegal means, and they're tied into the web of gossip and scurrilous rumor that circulates throughout the city.
- ☞ **Warriors** are experts at the art of warfare. They are likely skilled at surviving in the wilderness, battling monsters, spotting their foe's physical and mental weaknesses, and understanding deadly battle tactics.

Describing Your Abilities

Swords of the Serpentine pays attention to the mechanical results of your abilities, leaving it up to you to describe how they work and what they look like. You can and should describe your abilities however you wish. For instance, the GM won't make you roll an Athletics test to swing on a chandelier unless that swing is meant to give you a mechanical advantage.

Investigative Abilities

Investigative abilities are how you learn things in *Swords of the Serpentine*.

- ☞ Investigative abilities include Social abilities, Profession abilities, and Allegiances, which define what you know, how you find clues and leads, and how you interact with other people in the world.
- ☞ These abilities always allow you to gain information without ever having to roll a die or spend points.
- ☞ These are measured on a scale of 0 (you can't attempt it) to 1 (you're proficient in it) to 3 (you're superb at it) to 5 (you're the best most people will ever meet).
- ☞ You can spend your Investigative pool points for special advantages and benefits, as noted below. You don't get worse at that ability when you do so.
- ☞ Once spent, these never Refresh until the next adventure.

Spending Investigative Points for Special Bonuses

Spending an Investigative ability point puts the narrative focus on your character and is one of the most important (and fun) tactics in the game. Spending a point lets you grab narrative control to accomplish something exciting you might not otherwise have been able to pull off.

You can spend an Investigative pool point to do any one of the following.

- ☞ add +1 die of damage (per Investigative point spent) to a successful attack
- ☞ gain a +3 bonus on a related General ability test (including attacks and Maneuvers)
- ☞ gain Armor 4 or Grit 4 for one round
- ☞ increase your Health or Morale Threshold by +3 for one attack
- ☞ give supporting characters a favorable impression of you
- ☞ stretch the definition of the ability you're using, granting you a lead that would ordinarily be gained with a different ability than the one you have
- ☞ create one of the specific effects noted under the ability's description (below)
- ☞ create a unique special effect that you and the GM agree is balanced with others on this table

The spend needs to make sense in-game; if you want someone to like you, spend points of Charm, not Intimidate. The more points you spend, the greater and more important the effect. If you're spending points to add to damage, all the points you spend have to come from the same ability.

List of Investigative Abilities

Social Investigative Abilities

- ☞ **Charm:** people like you or find you attractive
 - » *Sample spend: make a Supporting character like or become infatuated with you*
- ☞ **Command:** people listen to you when you order them around
 - » *Sample spend: get crowds to follow your orders*
- ☞ **Intimidation:** others find you terrifying
 - » *Sample spend: bully a Supporting character into obeying you*
- ☞ **Liar's Tell:** you usually know when you're being lied to
 - » *Sample spend: gain great insight into why the person may be lying*
- ☞ **Nobility:** you fit in with the upper crust, who treat you with special privilege
 - » *Sample spend: manipulate others through your social status*
- ☞ **Servility:** you fit in with common people, and tend to fade into the background
 - » *Sample spend: cause an attacker to target someone different because you don't appear to be a threat*
- ☞ **Taunt:** you can make people angry enough to monologue at you
 - » *Sample spend: goad enemies into fighting with each other, or draw an attack to you that was meant for someone else*
- ☞ **Trustworthy:** people want to trust you unless you give them a reason not to
 - » *Sample spend: lie without anyone immediately questioning you*

Sentinel Investigative Abilities

- ☞ **Felonious Intent:** you can spot warning signs of crime and criminal behavior
 - » *Sample spend: generate a contact, a minor criminal from your past who owes you a favor*
- ☞ **Laws & Traditions:** you know the (often obscure) laws and traditions of wherever you live
 - » *Sample spend: make up an obscure law, tradition, or loophole that is true for the rest of the campaign*

- ☞ **Spirit Sight:** you can see into the spirit realm, and may sense ghosts or Corruption; you can talk to and see ghosts
 - » *Sample spend: briefly pull a ghost into the real world for a scene*
- ☞ **Vigilance:** you notice tiny details others might miss, making you seldom Surprised
 - » *Sample spend: see something that you'd otherwise miss; or seize the initiative order from a foe, because you see exactly the right time to jump in*

Sorcerer Investigative Abilities

- ☞ **Corruption:** you can tap into the foul source of Sorcery for knowledge and power
 - » *Sample spend: create powerful magical effects at the cost of creating Corruption in you or around you.*
- ☞ **Forgotten Lore:** you know facts, legends, and trivia others have long forgotten
 - » *Sample spend: establish a new fact about the world at a time when it's immediately advantageous to you*
- ☞ **Leechcraft:** you can diagnose ailments and know how to cause or heal diseases, injuries and poison
 - » *Sample spend: heal an ally 6 Health*
- ☞ **Prophecy:** you can prophesize secrets from the past, present or future
 - » *Sample spend: gain +3 on one Stealth test for you and all your allies, or trigger a Flashback as if you had the Flashback talent from Preparedness*

Thief Investigative Abilities

- ☞ **City's Secrets:** you know the back streets and hidden truths of cities
 - » *Sample spend: travel across Eversink at roughly double speed by using underground shortcuts; or establish a new architectural feature in a building, such as a secret door or passage*
- ☞ **Ridiculous Luck:** you're far luckier than most people, and stumble on leads others might miss
 - » *Sample spend: generate a lucky coincidence when you need one*
- ☞ **Scurrilous Rumors:** bribery, gossip, and whispered secrets help you learn what others have done
 - » *Sample spend: start rumors that affect someone else's reputation, whether for better or worse*
- ☞ **Skulduggery:** you can find out hidden information through reprehensible methods such as blackmail, spying, and shadowing
 - » *Sample spend: Gain a second action in one round, as long as that action is used to Hide*

Warrior Investigative Abilities

- ☞ **Know Monstrosities:** you know legends or secrets about non-human creatures, including their tactics and motivations
 - » *Sample spend: Manipulate a monstrosity into a tactical position you desire, such as tricking them into a trap*
- ☞ **Spot Frailty:** you can exploit weaknesses in armor, objects, and structures; and even someimes in peoples' personalities, allowing you to manipulate them emotionally; when attacking you ignore one point of Armor or Grit for every rank you have
 - » *Sample spend: heroically smash, break or destroy something non-magical*
- ☞ **Tactics of Death:** you can read fight scenes and understand military tactics
 - » *Sample spend: gain a second action in a round, as long as that action is used to attack*
- ☞ **Wilderness Mastery:** you can navigate, survive, and even thrive outside of cities
 - » *Sample spend: stampede a herd of animals, from rats up to cattle; the more points spent, the greater the effect*

List of Allegiances

Allegiances are treated like Investigative points. Gain clues and information from the political factions you have as Allies (and will probably need to go speak with someone in the faction first). Allegiances include Enemies, political factions that hate you for something you've done in the past (you decide why and tell the GM).

Temporary Allegiances, where you have a pool point that can be used once and is then gone, are called Favors and Grudges.

You can spend Ally pool points to gain a favor from people in your factions. Enemy pool points are used against you by the GM. Google "Pelgrane Serpentine Manipulating Politics" for more information.

- ☞ **Ancient Nobility:** dissolute but infinitely proud, clinging to their social graces and ancestral superiority within their crumbling mansions.
- ☞ **Church of Denari,** goddess of Commerce and Civilization: every exchange of money is a prayer to her sly wisdom and obsession with trade that defines the city itself. Her priests are moneylenders who hunt down Sorcerers and carry out her will.
- ☞ **City Watch:** under-funded, under-respected, and the hardest working employees in Eversink.

They're responsible for enforcing order, solving murders, and bringing the guilty to the gallows.

- ☞ **Commoners:** no one remembers the under-class, but the commoners look out for their own, and there's a lot more poor in Eversink than there are nobles.
- ☞ **The Guild of Architects and Canal-Watchers:** this powerful guild ensures Eversink's architectural stability, and thus enjoys significant political sway within the city.
- ☞ **Mercanti:** the new-money nobility of Eversink, church-blessed families whose iron grip on guilds brings in the trade that powers the city.
- ☞ **Mercenaries** (including House Armies): hard-living professional warriors who stay loyal just as long as their pay doesn't run out.
- ☞ **Monstrosities:** most people have never seen one, but there are rumors that a loose community of non-humans live within (or underneath) Eversink.
- ☞ **Outlanders:** an unorganized and unpredictable group of barbarians, travelers, tourists, professional adventurers and piratical scoundrels seeking some quick coin.
- ☞ **The Sorcerous Cabal:** Sorcery is considered inhuman, unnatural, and antithetical to the grace of the goddess Denari. If one or more Sorcerous cabals exist, they're a threat to everything right-thinking people love.
- ☞ **Thieves' Guilds:** the dozens of smugglers and thieves' guilds are a shadowy power in the city, and they manipulate power most people don't even suspect exists.
- ☞ **The Triskadane:** anonymous rulers of Eversink, their secret police, and the vast government bureaucracy of committees that keeps the city functioning as well as it does.

General Abilities

General abilities are how you accomplish things in *Swords of the Serpentine*.

- ☞ General abilities are how you get things done. These define your capability when taking action through burglary, hiding, fighting, and the like.
- ☞ These are measured on a scale of 0 (you can't attempt it) to 1-3 (you're a dabbler) to 4-7 (you're good at it) to 8+ (you're an expert at it).

- ✧ Experts gain special bonuses called Talents when they have 8+ ranks in a General ability.
- ✧ When you use a General ability you'll usually spend one or more ability pool points (representing the amount of skill and effort you're putting into it) and add them to a die roll (representing the amount of luck you're trusting to), typically trying to hit a target Difficulty of 4.
- ✧ Spending 3 points of a General ability usually guarantees success, since 3 spent points plus a minimum 1 on the die equals or exceeds the standard target Difficulty of 4.
- ✧ Defeating enemies and solving problems allows you to refresh spent General abilities throughout the game

List of General Abilities

- ✧ **Athletics:** Physical activities such as running, jumping, and climbing.
 - » *Talent: Dodge or parry Warfare attacks if you make an Athletics test that is higher than the Attack result that hit you.*
- ✧ **Bind Wounds:** Heal someone else 2 Health points, or yourself 1 Health point, for every 1 Bind Wounds points you spend.
 - » *Talent: Heal yourself as efficiently as you heal others.*
- ✧ **Burglary:** Pick pockets, open locks, sleight of hand, steal things.
 - » *Talent: Pick pockets as a free action.*
- ✧ **Preparedness:** Roll a test to have what you need, when you need it.
 - » *Talent: Set up Flashbacks where, on the fly, you establish schemes and plans that have already been carried out or put into place.*
- ✧ **Stealth:** You move unseen.
 - » *Talent: You can appear and pop up wherever and whenever you want to.*
- ✧ **Sorcery:** Use your Sorcerous Spheres to attack someone's Health or Morale (depending on your choice when creating your Hero).
 - » *Talent: You may injure more than one target on a high attack roll, as noted on p. 2.*
- ✧ **Sway:** Use fear or persuasion to attack someone's Morale. You can spend Sway to restore someone else 2 Morale points, or yourself 1 Morale point, for every 1 Sway points you spend.
 - » *Talent: You may injure more than one target on a high attack roll, as noted on p. 2.*
- ✧ **Warfare:** Use a weapon to attack someone's Health.

» *Talent: You may injure more than one target on a high attack roll, as noted on p. 2.*

Refreshing General Abilities

Defeating Adversaries and solving problems earns the group Refresh tokens. Shared in a communal pool between everyone in the the group, players can claim Refresh tokens to recharge their General ability pools on a 1:1 basis. The goal is to keep Heroes in the fight, not to keep them at full strength, and so they'll Refresh on average slightly less than half the points they typically spend. A monster's Refresh value is noted in their stat block; Mooks provide 1 point per Mook.

Maneuvers

When you want to achieve a non-damage effect against a foe, use a Maneuver. Your target must choose to accept the effect you specify or take damage; the higher your attack result, the more damage they take if they decline to suffer the Maneuver's effect. Maneuvers only affect one target unless it makes sense for the GM to say otherwise (like when you're dropping a chandelier down into a crowded room).

To perform a Maneuver, roll a successful Sorcery, Sway or Warfare attack (depending on what kind of Maneuver you want to perform) against the target's Health or Morale Threshold as appropriate. If successful, the attack does no immediate damage, but the result sets the Difficulty. The defender must either accept the Maneuver's effect or suffer Health or Morale damage equal to the Difficulty -2: their choice.

Sample Maneuvers

- ✧ Disarm a foe with a Sorcery or Warfare attack (they take Health damage or whatever they're holding is knocked out of their hands, requiring an action to pick up).
- ✧ Persuade someone with a Sway attack, or a Sorcery attack with an appropriate Sphere such as emotion control (they take Morale damage or do what you've asked them to).
- ✧ Sorcerers also use the Maneuver rules when targeting foes with particularly powerful, unique spells.

Difficulty Number Quick Reference

Difficulty Number	Level	Example
3	Easy	Sneaking past a sleeping guard
4	Normal (default)	Sneaking past an awake guard
6	Hard	Sneaking past an awake, alert guard
8	Very Hard	Sneaking past an awake, alert guard with a guard dog
10	Exceptionally Hard	Sneaking past a well-lit watch-post full of alert guards, watch dogs, and vigilant geese
12	Nearly Impossible	As per Difficulty 10, except they have a prophet or they've been warned you're coming

Sorcery Quick Reference

Your rank in Corruption reflects your raw power, your rank in Sorcery reflects your finesse, and your Spheres reflect the themes your sorcery takes.

Sorcery is a combat General ability that targets either Health or Morale. You can:

- ☞ attack with it normally (Damage Modifier +1), describing the effect as themed by your sorcerous Spheres
- ☞ describe any unopposed, regular activity that most people could do as coming from Sorcery
- ☞ use any Investigative ability, or spend any Investigative pool point, and describe the standard effect as coming from Sorcery
- ☞ create standard Maneuvers

Corruption is the Investigative ability that gives your magic its true reality-bending power. The more ranks of Corruption you have, the more powerful a Sorcerer you are. Every time you spend a point of Corruption, you must address it.

Spend pool points of Corruption to:

- ☞ affect lots of targets or do exceptional damage (an extra one die+3 damage for each Corruption point spent)
- ☞ do less damage to everyone in a bigger area
- ☞ create non-standard unique spells
- ☞ create Maneuvers that aren't covered by an ability you already possess

What Happens When You Spend Corruption?

Internalized Corruption

- ☞ Make an immediate Health test with a Difficulty of 3 + 1 per point of Corruption spent
- ☞ If you succeed, change one small thing on your body.
- ☞ If you fail, change one noticeable thing on your body.
- ☞ To make a Health test, roll a die and try to get 4 or higher; before you roll you can spend points off your Health to raise the number

Externalized Corruption

- ☞ Allies (and only allies) within Medium range must make a Morale test with a Difficulty of 3 plus the number of points you spend, and a Loss of 4.
- ☞ The world around you sickens, polluting and burning away reality in the location.
- ☞ To make a Morale test, roll a die and try to get 4 or higher; before you roll you can spend points off your Morale to raise the number

Health Quick Reference

Health: 0+	Health: -1 to -5	Health: -6 to -10	Health: Below -10
HEALTHY	HURT	SERIOUSLY WOUNDED	DEFEATED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You aren't physically injured in any meaningful or lasting way. You may look bruised or battered, however. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediately make a Difficulty 4 Health test to stay conscious. Difficulties of all General ability tests increase by 1 until at or above 0 Health. Can be healed normally with the Bind Wounds ability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediately make another Difficulty 4 Health test to stay conscious. Healing is only half as effective on you as normal. Lose an additional Health point every half hour until stabilized. Difficulties of all General ability tests increase by 2 until at or above 0 Health. Difficulties for General ability tests remain raised by 1 for the rest of the adventure as you heal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You're removed from the conflict. The attacker decides in what way you are defeated. Investigative spends (when conscious) are sharply limited. You may no longer take actions during this scene. If slain, hope that your loved ones have a funerary statue crafted for you, so that your soul isn't denied the afterlife.

Morale Quick Reference

Morale: 0+	Morale: -1 to -5	Morale: -6 to -10	Morale: below -10
RESILIENT	UNSTABLE	PANICKED	BROKEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to think and act as normal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediately make a Difficulty 4 Morale test to stay active in the scene. If you fail, tell the GM why you are no longer active (fainted, afraid, etc.). Difficulties of all General ability tests increase by 1 until at or above 0 Morale. Morale can be bolstered normally with the Sway ability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediately make another Difficulty 4 Morale test to remain active in the scene. If you fail, tell the GM why you are no longer active (fainted, afraid, etc.). Using Sway to bolster your Morale is only half as effective as normal. Difficulties of all General ability tests increase by 2 until at or above 0 Morale. Difficulties for General ability tests remain raised by 1 for the rest of the adventure. 	<p>Choose one:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you don't become Treasonous (see below), you're removed from the conflict. Develop mental and spiritual instabilities that plague you going forward. Investigative spends (when conscious) are sharply limited. You are forever more vulnerable to possession by ghosts.