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# *Character Backgrounds: an optional Skills system*

## **Introduction**

*Castles and Crusades* is a marvelous implementation of the d20-based open game rules set. It is streamlined, fast-playing, and simple to learn. The rules fade into the background, allowing story and character to take precedence over strategy and tactics. And yet, with the Primes system in place, characters are still as varied in concept and ability as they are in more detailed skill- and feat-based iterations of the system.

Unfortunately, the drawback to a lack of a concrete skills system is twofold. First, characters can attempt to do things that they by rights shouldn't be able to do (how does a fighter spawned from a peasant farming community know how to perform surgery, for example). Second, characters gain no bonuses to actions based on a creatively constructed or well-detailed background.

Both of these issues can easily be solved through the introduction of a basic backgrounds system. In this article, we will explore a simple means to create a background for characters that allows for greater character customization and is completely modular with the Primes system already in place.

## **Determining Backgrounds**

To determine background randomly, all players should roll 1D4 at character creation. The result determines the number of medieval professions to which the character was exposed before beginning his life as an adventurer. Then, the player rolls on the table below for each profession. If a given profession comes up twice, the player can re-roll or choose to have that profession at an improved level (see "Using Backgrounds," below).

Alternately, for those who dislike random determination of character backgrounds, each player can script out his character's back story as he likes, and then work with the CK to choose appropriate backgrounds from the list below. CK's should be careful to adjudicate this more freeform method closely, to maintain balance in the game, and in no case should a player ever have more than 4 backgrounds.

**Table: Character Backgrounds**

D20 roll	Background
1	Blacksmith
2	Carpenter
3	Mason
4	Cobbler
5	Tailor
6	Tanner
7	Weaver
8	Merchant
9	Fisherman
10	Farmer
11	Miller
12	Brewer
13	Healer
14	Noble
15	Huntsman/Trapper
16	Soldier
17	Stable Hand
18	Rat Catcher
19	Innkeeper/Cook
20	Thatcher

Note that these professions do not necessarily represent a station the character was born to; but one he was exposed to enough to understand on some level. A character with the Noble background, for example, understands the workings of castle and noble life, but this could be from being a servant in a castle and not necessarily a born noble. Under no circumstances

should these backgrounds replace any class ability; the rules for mimicking cross-class abilities still apply. Thus, a fighter with the Hunter/Trapper background may attempt to track using his attribute as though it was Prime, but still does not add his level as a bonus to the roll, since Tracking is a Ranger class ability.

## Using Backgrounds

These 1 to 4 professions represent a character's previous occupations or apprenticeships, those careers the character tried or held before taking up a life of adventuring. In these areas, the character has had special training or experience that provides bonuses in certain situations. Any time a character is able to call upon his life's training or experience, he gains the same benefit as though he was using a Prime Attribute, even if the attribute related is not normally Prime. If the attribute related to the check is normally a Prime, the character gains a +2 to the associated check. Situations in which these life paths are appropriate to use are at the discretion of the CK, though players are encouraged to be creative in suggesting the use of such abilities

**For example:** a group comes to a market place needing to acquire new weapons and/or repair their armor. As they approach the blacksmith's shop, several backgrounds could be appropriate for use in haggling with the artisan. Blacksmith, obviously, is appropriate here. Also possible would be merchant, since these men and women are experts at haggling for prices, or Noble, for whom negotiation is of major importance. Any time a player can justify to the CK's satisfaction

that his background could play an important role in an Attribute Check, he works off of the base CC of 12 and, if the Attribute in question is already Prime, gains +2 to his check.

Likewise, the character's background serves as an (albeit minor) restriction on his abilities. Some characters, for example, cannot perform surgery no matter how high their Intelligence score is. If an attempt is antithetical to a character's background, the attempt probably shouldn't be allowed, though as always this is at the discretion of the CK.

## Improving Backgrounds

Every 4 levels, a character can improve a single background, which then sees its bonus increase by +1. Likewise, characters who roll redundant results on their initial background selection can opt rather than re-rolling to increase the bonus to the redundant result in this manner. For example, Joe gets 2 rolls on the background table; both come up "Noble." He can choose to re-roll the second result in hopes of getting a different background, or may improve his Noble background, granting +1 to Noble-related Checks in addition to using all attributes as though they were Prime when accessing his knowledge of the ways of the nobility. This +1 bonus would also stack when using attributes with his Noble background that are already Prime, granting a +3 bonus, rather than the standard +2.

# Character Traits

**Table: Character Traits**

%	Trait
01-03	Abrasive
04-06	Absent-minded
07-09	Aggressive
10-11	Brawler <sup>1</sup>
12-13	Cautious <sup>1</sup>
14-16	Detached
17-19	Dishonest
20-21	Distinctive <sup>1</sup>
22-24	Easygoing
25-27	Farsighted
28-30	Focused
31-33	Hard of Hearing
34-36	Hardy
37-39	Honest
40-41	Illiterate)
42-43	Inattentive <sup>1</sup>
44-46	Musclebound
47-49	Nearsighted
50-51	Nightsighted <sup>1</sup>
52-54	Passionate
55-57	Plucky
58-60	Polite
61-62	Quick <sup>1</sup>
63-65	Reckless
66-68	Relentless
69-70	Saddleborn
71-73	Skinny
74-76	Slippery
77-78	Slow <sup>1</sup>
79-81	Specialized
82-84	Spellgifted
85-87	Stout
88-90	Suspicious
91-93	Torpid
94-96	Uncivilized
97-100	Roll again twice <sup>2</sup>

1. Trait has special restrictions (see the text). If you don't qualify, roll again.

2. No starting character may have more than two traits. If a player rolls this result two or more times, the player may choose which two traits to keep.

Traits are aspects of a character's personality, background, or physique that make him better at some activities and worse at others. In many ways, traits resemble feats: A character can have only a limited number of traits, and each trait provides some benefit. Unlike feats, however, traits always carry a corresponding drawback. In addition to their game effects, traits suggest characteristics about the character's personality that might lead to interesting roleplaying opportunities. Together with a character's class and feat selection, traits offer a way for game mechanics to encourage deeper character backgrounds and consistent roleplaying.

Traits serve as an interesting starting point for roleplaying, reminding players of their characters' most prominent strengths and weaknesses. However, roleplaying a certain aspect of a character's personality does not require possessing the trait. For example, a paladin can be honest and forthright without the Honest trait. The player should roleplay the character consistently even though the character's honesty has no effect on his skill checks.

A character can begin play with up to two traits, chosen by the player at the time of character creation. Alternatively, the CK can require players to roll on Table: Character Traits to determine the traits possessed by their characters.

As characters advance in level and ability, they might want to get rid of the traits that they chose at the beginning of play. This is not easy; changing one's personality requires a lot of work and discipline. This costs a character experience points. Buying off a Trait with XP costs 2,000 XP per level of the character (the older you are, the harder it becomes to effect change in your life). For example, an abrasive character can work on becoming more personable by spending XP to buy off the Abrasive Trait; at first level, the cost to do this is 2,000 XP. At fourth level, the cost to buy off this Trait would be 8,000 XP. This represents the character shifting focus from advancing in her chosen career to making a change in the core of who she is.

If the CK allows it, players may add traits to their characters after 1st level. The CK might allow a player to assign a trait to her character after she has roleplayed the character in a manner consistent with the trait in question, or after a traumatic or life changing experience (after dying, a character might develop the Cautious trait or the Aggressive trait). If the CK includes this option, a character should gain a new trait no more frequently than once every five levels. Since traits add both bonuses and penalties, there is no cost for the acquisition of a new trait, other than the permission of the CK.

## Roleplaying of Traits

If a player creates a character with one or more of the traits described here, she has three basic choices for how that trait affects the character's personality.

First, the character might view the trait as a weakness. A character with this view might try to hide the trait or make excuses for his behavior. On the other hand, he might seek out others with the trait to feel better about his own idiosyncrasy.

Second, the character might view the trait as a strength. A character might call attention to the trait, encourage others to act in ways that mimic the trait, or simply assume that those without the trait are less worthy than those who possess it.

Finally, the character might not acknowledge the trait at all. A character might adopt this attitude toward a trait for several reasons, each suggesting something different about the character's background and personality.

- The character might not be aware of the trait; for example, a nearsighted character might not realize that others see better at a distance because his impairment is mild and the onset was so gradual that he never noticed the change.
- The character might be aware of the trait but not want to admit that he possesses it. For example, an abrasive character might realize that his mannerisms affect others, yet find more solace in putting the blame on those whom he offends rather than on himself.
- The character might know but simply not care.

## Designing Traits

Although this section provides a large number of character traits, a player who wants to create a character with a distinctive personality may ask the CK to design a new trait. If that happens, the CK should keep in mind that the traits variant is only effective if the benefits and the drawbacks of the traits are related. If the drawback and benefit of a trait apply to disparate or unrelated aspects of the game, it becomes too easy for a player to choose a trait for her character that provides a bonus on a

commonly attempted ability check or skill check while the corresponding penalty applies to a rarely used or never used aspect of play. For example, a trait that gave a bonus to Armor Class and a penalty on attack rolls would be poor design because spellcasters make very few attack rolls (making the penalty far less severe) yet continuously gain the benefit-of the increased Armor Class.

As long as the CK and player talk about a new trait ahead of time and view it in light of what skills and abilities the character uses most often, this potential pitfall is easy to avoid.

## New Rules

Several of the Traits on the following pages depend upon the addition of a few new (but still very simple) rules systems. These are described below, and as with most rules in *C&C*, should be considered optional. Castle Keepers should feel free to disallow Traits that rely upon these rules, or modify them to fit their own games.

### Animal Handling

Animal Handling is added to the list of basic class abilities for both Rangers and Druids, and both classes gain it at first level. It allows the character to get an animal to perform various tasks with a Charisma Attribute Check. The CL for this check depends on what you are trying to do.

Task	CL
Handle an animal	1
“Push” an animal	5
Teach an animal a trick	2 to 5 <sup>1</sup>
Train an animal for a general purpose	3 to 10 <sup>1</sup>
Rear a wild animal	5 + animal’s HD

<sup>1</sup>See the specific trick or purpose below.

**Handle an Animal:** This task involves commanding an animal to perform a task or trick that it knows. If the animal is wounded or has taken any nonlethal damage or ability score damage, the CL increases by 2. If your check succeeds, the animal performs the task or trick on its next action.

**“Push” an Animal:** To push an animal means to get it to perform a task or trick that it doesn’t know but is physically capable of performing. This category

also covers making an animal perform a forced march or forcing it to hustle for more than 1 hour between sleep cycles. If the animal is wounded or has taken any nonlethal damage or ability score damage, the CL increases by 2. If your check succeeds, the animal performs the task or trick on its next action.

**Teach an Animal a Trick:** You can teach an animal a specific trick with one week of work and a successful Handle Animal check against the indicated CL. An animal with an Intelligence score of 1 can learn a maximum of three tricks, while an animal with an Intelligence score of 2 can learn a maximum of six tricks. Possible tricks (and their associated CLs) include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following.

- *Attack (CL 5):* The animal attacks apparent enemies. You may point to a particular creature that you wish the animal to attack, and it will comply if able. Normally, an animal will attack only humanoids, monstrous humanoids, giants, or other animals. Teaching an animal to attack all creatures (including such unnatural creatures as undead and aberrations) counts as two tricks.
- *Come (CL 2):* The animal comes to you, even if it normally would not do so.
- *Defend (CL 5):* The animal defends you (or is ready to defend you if no threat is present), even without any command being given. Alternatively, you can command the animal to defend a specific other character.
- *Down (CL 2):* The animal breaks off from combat or otherwise backs down. An animal that doesn't know this trick continues to fight until it must flee (due to injury, a fear effect, or the like) or its opponent is defeated.
- *Fetch (CL 2):* The animal goes and gets something. If you do not point out a specific item, the animal fetches some random object.
- *Guard (CL 5):* The animal stays in place and prevents others from approaching.
- *Heel (CL 2):* The animal follows you closely, even to places where it normally wouldn't go.
- *Perform (CL 2):* The animal performs a variety of simple tricks, such as sitting up, rolling over, roaring or barking, and so on.

- *Seek (CL 2):* The animal moves into an area and looks around for anything that is obviously alive or animate.
- *Stay (CL 2):* The animal stays in place, waiting for you to return. It does not challenge other creatures that come by, though it still defends itself if it needs to.
- *Track (CL 5):* The animal tracks the scent presented to it. (This requires the animal to have the scent ability)
- *Work (CL 2):* The animal pulls or pushes a medium or heavy load.

**Train an Animal for a Purpose:** Rather than teaching an animal individual tricks, you can simply train it for a general purpose. Essentially, an animal's purpose represents a preselected set of known tricks that fit into a common scheme, such as guarding or heavy labor. The animal must meet all the normal prerequisites for all tricks included in the training package. If the package includes more than three tricks, the animal must have an Intelligence score of 2.

An animal can be trained for only one general purpose, though if the creature is capable of learning additional tricks (above and beyond those included in its general purpose), it may do so. Training an animal for a purpose requires fewer checks than teaching individual tricks does, but no less time.

- *Combat Riding (CL 10):* An animal trained to bear a rider into combat knows the tricks attack, come, defend, down, guard, and heel. Training an animal for combat riding takes six weeks. You may also "upgrade" an animal trained for riding to one trained for combat riding by spending three weeks and making a successful CL 5 Handle Animal check. The new general purpose and tricks completely replace the animal's previous purpose and any tricks it once knew. Warhorses and riding dogs are already trained to bear riders into combat, and they don't require any additional training for this purpose.
- *Fighting (CL 5):* An animal trained to engage in combat knows the tricks attack, down, and stay. Training an animal for fighting takes three weeks.
- *Guarding (CL 10):* An animal trained to guard knows the tricks attack, defend, down,

and guard. Training an animal for guarding takes four weeks.

- *Heavy Labor (CL 3)*: An animal trained for heavy labor knows the tricks come and work. Training an animal for heavy labor takes two weeks.
- *Hunting (CL 10)*: An animal trained for hunting knows the tricks attack, down, fetch, heel, seek, and track. Training an animal for hunting takes six weeks.
- *Performance (CL 5)*: An animal trained for performance knows the tricks come, fetch, heel, perform, and stay. Training an animal for performance takes five weeks.
- *Riding (CL 5)*: An animal trained to bear a rider knows the tricks come, heel, and stay. Training an animal for riding takes three weeks.

**Rear a Wild Animal:** To rear an animal means to raise a wild creature from infancy so that it becomes domesticated. A handler can rear as many as three creatures of the same kind at once.

A successfully domesticated animal can be taught tricks at the same time it's being raised, or it can be taught as a domesticated animal later.

**Taming an Animal:** A Ranger or Druid can attempt, with a Charisma check, to calm or tame a wild animal so that it can be handled, or so that it does not feel threatened (i.e. stop it from attacking). The CL for this check is dependent upon the beast's attitude when encountered. The CL listed is for a check to improve the animal's attitude by one step; multiple Checks are allowed, but a failure downgrades the animal's attitude by two steps. An animal downgraded beyond Hostile immediately attacks and no further checks are allowed.

Initial Attitude	CL
Friendly	CL 1
Indifferent	CL 2
Suspicious	CL 5
Antagonistic	CL 7
Hostile, Cornered, or Afraid	CL 10

## Fatigue and Exhaustion

In general, a character becomes fatigued if he suffers 75% of his current hit points (round down) in damage, or if he fails a Constitution check for any reason related to pushing the body beyond its normal

limits. Many diseases (CK's discretion) and all Energy Drain attacks result in fatigue. The exact effects of fatigue and exhaustion are explained below.

### Exhausted

An exhausted character moves at half speed and takes a -4 penalty to Strength and Dexterity, and must make a Constitution check at the end of each round in which any sort of strenuous activity occurs, with a cumulative penalty of -1 per consecutive round of strenuous activity. Failure means the character passes out. After 1 hour of complete rest, an exhausted character becomes fatigued. A fatigued character becomes exhausted by doing something else that would normally cause fatigue.

### Fatigued

A fatigued character can neither run nor charge (can only move up to his base movement rate) and takes a -2 penalty to Strength and Dexterity. Doing anything that would normally result in fatigue causes the fatigued character to become exhausted. After 8 hours of complete rest, fatigued characters are no longer fatigued. The only exception to this is in the case of diseases that cause fatigue. In such cases, diseased characters generally remain fatigued until the disease is treated or cured.

## Fighting Defensively

Fighting Defensively is a new combat maneuver that allows a character to remain cautious while in combat, keeping his guard up and taking only the most well-considered attempts to injure his opponent. Fighting Defensively normally provides +2 to the AC of the character, while inflicting a -4 penalty to attacks the defensive character makes that round.

## Literacy

These rules assume that most player characters in a campaign are assumed to be literate. If this is the case, characters of the Barbarian class should be assumed to be illiterate, a drawback that can be gotten rid of by multiclassing with any other class.

## Reputation

As characters increase in level, their deeds tend to precede them as storytellers and bards spread tales of their exploits. Any time there is a chance of a character being recognized, the CK makes a

Reputation Check using the Intelligence bonus of the NPC, plus the level of the character being recognized. A separate check should be made for each character, unless the party is more important (i.e. a legendary group such as the Knights of the Round Table). In the case of a party Reputation Check, use the average level of all characters in the party, +1 per party member present.

**Table: CL Modifiers for Reputation**

Circumstance	CL Mod.
Less than a mile from normal base of operations	-5
Less than 10 miles from normal base of operations	-2
10-15 miles away from normal base of operations	+1
16-30 miles away from normal base of operations	+2
31-50 miles away from normal base of operations	+3
50-100 miles away from normal base of operations	+5
Over 100 miles away from normal base of operations	+10
Over 500 miles away from normal base of operations	+20
Over 1000 miles away from normal base of operations	+30
Characters are trying to remain discreet	+1 to +5*
Characters are actively calling attention to themselves	-1 to -10*

\*depends on exactly what the characters are doing, at the CK's discretion.

This Reputation check has a CL based on how far from their usual base of operations the party is, and whether or not the character(s) are actively trying to remain discreet. If the check succeeds, the character(s) is recognized, providing a +2 to efforts to be diplomatic, intimidating, or social, or in the cases of *infamy*, may result in the immediate notification of the proper authorities, or may cause all manner of other troubles for the group, at the CK's discretion.

Castle Keepers may also assign bonuses to reputation checks for characters who perform great or evil deeds. Players who receive these bonuses should note them on their character sheet, keeping track of bonuses for fame and bonuses for infamy.

## Trait Descriptions

Each trait in this section includes a benefit, a drawback, any special limitations regarding its selection by a character, and roleplaying ideas for how to incorporate it into your character's personality.

### Abrasive

You are difficult and demanding in conversation, which tends to oppress those around you.

#### Benefit

You gain a +1 bonus on Charisma checks to intimidate others.

#### Drawback

You take a -1 penalty on Charisma checks to be diplomatic or bluff another.

#### Roleplaying Ideas

Characters with this trait might be loud and abrupt or quiet and sinister, but either way, most find them disconcerting or irritating.

### Absent Minded

You are fascinated by knowledge and learning and are capable of pursuing complex trains of thought quite quickly. However, your preoccupation with such thoughts makes you a little less aware of your surroundings.

#### Benefit

You gain a +1 bonus on Intelligence checks to recall information about a subject, area, person, culture, etc. This bonus stacks with the Bard class's Bardic Lore ability.

#### Drawback

You take a -1 penalty on Wisdom checks to spot or listen. This penalty applies even to the Rogue and Assassin Listen class ability, and to the Assassin Case Target ability.

#### Roleplaying Ideas

Characters with this trait might flit from idea to idea, trailing off in mid-sentence or mumbling their way through complex ideas. Conversely, characters with this trait might be extremely articulate but still allow their thoughts to move faster than the pace of a conversation.

### Aggressive

You are quick to initiate combat, and you tend to press the attack once battle is joined. Your enthusiasm makes you a dangerous foe, but you

sometimes leave yourself open to blows that a more cautious warrior would avoid.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +2 bonus on initiative checks.

#### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty to Armor Class.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait are often hotheaded and quick to anger, or simply think that the best defense is a quick offense.

## **Brawler**

You naturally move close to your opponents when fighting, instinctively grabbing and punching rather than striking with weapons.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on unarmed attack rolls and grapple checks, and may inflict normal damage (1d4) with unarmed attacks.

#### **Drawback**

You take a -2 penalty on all other attack rolls.

#### **Special**

The bonus from this trait doesn't apply to natural weapons and does not stack with Monk class abilities. Monks are already natural brawlers. If a character with this Trait gains a level in the Monk character class, he loses this trait. This is an exception to the rule regarding the use of experience points to buy off Traits (see p. 1).

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait often disdain the use of weapons entirely, and some eventually learn more refined martial arts based on their instinctive fighting techniques. Many brawlers might not even be consciously aware that they fight differently from other characters; they simply know that the best way to take someone out of a fight is to grab him or punch him in the face.

## **Cautious**

You are cautious in combat, even a bit cowardly, and you take more care to defend yourself than others. However, this caution renders you susceptible to fear effects.

#### **Benefit**

You gain an additional +1 dodge bonus to Armor Class whenever you use the Dodge or Evade Combat Maneuver, or when fighting defensively (see p. 4).

#### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on saving throws made to resist fear effects.

#### **Special**

You cannot select this trait if you have immunity to fear or fear effects. If you later gain immunity to fear, you lose the benefit of this trait. This is an exception to the rule regarding the use of XP to buy off traits (p. 1).

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might consistently urge talking rather than fighting, or they might do little to encourage that their companions avoid combat and simply remain as far away from foes as possible, using ranged weapons or spells.

## **Detached**

You maintain a distance from events that keeps you grounded but limits your reaction speed.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Wisdom checks.

#### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Dexterity checks.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait are likely to be quiet and restrained, but they might be vocal when others falter in their beliefs.

## **Dishonest**

You are naturally deceitful and insincere with others. You have a talent for lying, but have difficulty convincing others when you do speak truthfully.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Charisma checks to bluff another.

#### **Drawback**

You take a -2 penalty on Charisma checks to be diplomatic.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be portrayed as crafty liars, or lying might simply be second nature to them, making actually telling the truth a difficult chore.

## **Distinctive**

You have some distinctive physical feature such as a scar, a prominent nose, a limp, or some similar characteristic that is hard to disguise or conceal.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Reputation checks. For information on Reputation, see page 4-5.

### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Disguise checks.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be sensitive about it, or they might play up its presence to gather attention, sympathy, or notoriety.

## **Easygoing**

You are naturally friendly and trusting. Others feel comfortable around you, but this trait also makes it more difficult for you to be pushy or suspicious.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Charisma checks to be friendly, diplomatic, or gain information.

### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Charisma checks to Intimidate another, and on Wisdom checks to detect falsehoods, lies, or ulterior motives.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be more easily manipulated in interactions with NPCs, or they might simply prefer not to argue and instead use their natural talent to learn more about the world around them.

## **Farsighted**

You have difficulty focusing on nearby objects, but your distance vision is more keen than normal.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Wisdom checks related to spotting things in the distance, or on the fly. This bonus stacks with class or racial abilities to notice secret compartments, unusual stonework, or anything hidden.

### **Drawback**

You have a -2 penalty on Wisdom checks to search areas up close. This penalty also affects to class or racial abilities to search for traps, secret compartments, or anything hidden.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be sensitive about it, or they might simply be oblivious to its presence, having never known any different way of experiencing the world.

## **Focused**

You can keep your attention on a task despite many distractions; however, events in the background pass you by.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Attribute checks involving concentration. Situations where this applies are at the CK's discretion.

### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Wisdom checks to spot something hidden or out of place, or to hear unusual sounds unless you are concentrating on the task of listening or searching a specific area.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait often seem single-minded or even obsessive in their focus on a specific task.

## **Hard of Hearing**

You have a slight hearing impairment, and to compensate, you have become more in tune with your other senses.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Attribute checks involving sight.

### **Drawback**

You take a -2 penalty on Attribute checks involving hearing.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be sensitive about it, or they might simply be oblivious to its presence, having never known any different way of experiencing the world.

## **Hardy**

You are made of tougher stuff than the average person, but you're not quite as quick to react to dangerous effects.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Constitution-based saves.

### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Dexterity-based saves.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might see their physical prowess as normal and look down on less hardy individuals, or they might see it as their duty to play the role of protector and help those less able to endure physical hardship.

## **Honest**

You are naturally straightforward and sincere. This quality helps you persuade people to your viewpoint, but you have difficulty telling lies and seeing deception in others.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Charisma checks to be diplomatic or make the truth work to your advantage.

#### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Wisdom checks to be dishonest or to sense dishonesty in others.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be naive and too unsophisticated to lie, or they might be aware of worldly matters and simply choose to take a higher ground.

## **Illiterate**

You cannot read, but you have devoted yourself to learning other skills.

#### **Benefit**

Choose any one attribute that is designated Prime for your character. You gain a +1 bonus on checks using that Attribute.

#### **Drawback**

You are illiterate.

#### **Special**

Unlike with the barbarian, you cannot become literate by taking a level in any class other than barbarian.

You can't select this trait if your character is already illiterate because of race, class, or any other reason.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be sensitive about not being able to read, or they might not value "book learnin'."

## **Inattentive**

You are alert and skilled at finishing simple tasks quickly, but you have a difficult time dealing with longer, more complex tasks.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Wisdom checks to spot something hidden or out of place, or to hear unusual sounds unless the listening or searching requires patience and concentration. You also gain a +1 bonus to all Attribute checks involving tasks that can be completed quickly (excluding combat).

#### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Attribute checks involving concentration or focus for more than a few moments, or on ongoing tasks. Situations where this applies are at the CK's discretion.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might flit from subject to subject in conversation, or they might seem typical

in most situations but leave most of their long-term projects perpetually unfinished.

## **Musclebound**

You are good at almost everything that requires strength, but less adept than most at tasks that require coordination.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Strength-based Attribute checks.

#### **Drawback**

You take a -2 penalty on Dexterity-based Attribute checks.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait are likely to solve problems with physical strength rather than through trickery or finesse.

## **Nearsighted**

You have difficulty focusing on distant objects, but your eye for detail is more keen than normal.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Wisdom checks to search areas up close. This bonus stacks with class or racial abilities to search for traps, secret compartments, or anything hidden.

#### **Drawback**

You have a -2 penalty on Wisdom checks related to spotting things in the distance, or on the fly. This penalty also applies to class or racial abilities to notice secret compartments, unusual stonework, or anything hidden.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be sensitive about it, or they might simply be oblivious to its presence, having never known any different way of experiencing the world.

## **Nightsighted**

Your eyes are particularly well suited to using some form of night vision, but they are less well adapted to what others consider normal light.

#### **Benefit**

Increase your night vision by one level. If you don't normally have it, you gain Duskvision. Duskvision, in turn, becomes Twilightvision. Twilightvision becomes Darkvision, and Darkvision becomes Deepvision.

#### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on all Attribute checks and combat rolls when in areas of bright light.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

This trait might not affect a character's personality at all, but it might make the character prefer going on underground or nighttime adventures.

## **Passionate**

You are made of tougher stuff than the average person, but you are highly suggestible.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Constitution-based saves.

#### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Wisdom-based saves.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be gruff and place extreme value on overcoming physical obstacles, or conversely, their weakness against magical enchantments might leave them fascinated and fearful of such things.

## **Plucky**

You have a strength of will not reflected in your limited physical gifts.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Wisdom-based saves.

#### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Constitution-based saves.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be annoyingly positive-minded, or they might only show their mental resilience in times of dire need.

## **Polite**

You are courteous and well spoken.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Charisma checks made to be diplomatic.

#### **Drawback**

You take a -2 penalty on Charisma checks when attempting to intimidate another.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be honestly polite and kind, or they might simply be adept at mimicking social conventions to get what they want.

## **Quick**

You are fast, but less sturdy than average members of your race.

#### **Benefit**

Your base movement rate increases by 10 feet, and you gain +1 to initiative.

#### **Drawback**

Subtract 1 from your hit points gained at each level, including 1st (a result of 0 is possible).

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait typically try to stay away from physical combat, but a rare few might relish it, striving to see if their superior speed is enough to best hardier warriors.

## **Reckless**

You naturally sacrifice accuracy to put more power behind your blows.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on damage rolls after successful melee attacks.

#### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on melee attack rolls.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be loudly passionate about entering combat and overcoming foes through strength of arms, or they might be quiet and so desperate to avoid confrontation that they put extra effort into every blow in an attempt to end the encounter more quickly.

## **Relentless**

You don't know the meaning of the word "tired." You go all out until you simply can't continue.

#### **Benefit**

You gain a +2 bonus on Constitution checks and similar checks made to continue tiring activities or to resist fatigue. In cases of Level Drain, you are entitled to a separate Constitution check to avoid becoming fatigued from the level drain. The CL of this check is equal to the HD of the creature inflicting the level drain.

#### **Drawback**

Any effect or condition that would normally cause you to become fatigued instead causes you to become exhausted. See p. 4 for information regarding Fatigue and Exhaustion.

#### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait may see others as soft or weak, especially anyone who complains about being tired or fatigued. They might openly scoff at others' weaknesses or might quietly encourage them to "tough it out."

## **Saddleborn**

You are a natural in the saddle, but you have little patience for handling animals when not riding them.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Dexterity checks to ride animals, including animals not normally thought of as mounts.

### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Attribute checks to handle, train, or otherwise care for animals. See pp. 2-3 for rules for handling animals.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait rarely bother to consider animals as good for anything other than mounts, but they are extremely confident about their riding abilities.

## **Skinny**

You are very slender for your race.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Attribute checks made to escape from bonds such as rope or shackles. You also use your Dexterity rather than your Strength to attempt to escape from bonds. This trait stacks with appropriate class abilities.

### **Drawback**

You take a -2 penalty on Strength checks to avoid overbearing.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Skinny characters tend to be pushed around by tougher types, so those with this trait might be shy, or they might be very defensive when faced with such situations.

## **Slippery**

You are less adept at grappling and wrestling than others of your size and strength, but you are adept at slipping out of another's hold.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on checks to escape a grapple or avoid being grappled.

### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty to attempt to grapple another.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might fear close combat, knowing they are less adept grapplers than most opponents. On the other hand, good escape artists with this trait might enjoy baiting larger foes into grappling them, knowing they can easily slip out of the grasp of most foes.

## **Slow**

You are slow, but sturdier than average members of your race.

### **Benefit**

Add +2 to your hit points gained at each level.

### **Drawback**

Your base movement is halved (round down to the nearest 5-foot interval).

### **Special**

You must have a base land speed of at least 20 feet to select this trait.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait tend to be relatively immobile in combat. They typically prefer to wear strong armor (or other protective devices), since it's hard for them to flee a fight.

## **Specialized**

You have a knack for one kind of work or study, but other tasks are harder for you to accomplish.

### **Benefit**

Choose one specific Background or Secondary Skill. You gain a +2 bonus on checks using the specified Background or skill.

### **Drawback**

You take a -2 penalty on checks using all other Backgrounds or Secondary Skills.

### **Special**

This Trait is only available in campaigns using Backgrounds or Secondary Skills.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait often see themselves as elite artists or experts rather than mere professionals, and they might regard their chosen vocation or study as more useful or interesting than other tasks.

## **Spellgifted**

You have a gift for casting spells of certain type. Although your spells in this area are more potent than those of other casters, you are not as effective at casting spells from other schools.

### **Benefit**

Choose a type of magic from the following list: Conjuring/Summoning, Defensive, Divination, Elemental (choose an element), Enchantments/Charms, Illusion, Necromancy/Healing, Offensive (spells that cause direct damage), Transmutation/Alteration. Add 1 to your caster level when casting spells of this type. Some spells may be at the CK's discretion for the category under which they fall.

### **Drawback**

Reduce your caster level by 1 whenever you cast a spell that is not from your chosen school.

### **Special**

Not all spells on the Illusionist's spell list are considered Illusion spells. Color Spray, for example, is an Offensive spell, Fog Cloud could be Defensive or Conjuring/Summoning, and Light could be Enchant, Transmutation, or Conjuring, at the CK's discretion. The CK always has final ruling on what school a spell falls under.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait might be loudly vocal about the merits of the school of magic that they understand most readily, or they might feel awkward and out of place around "normal" spellcasters as a result of their unusual aptitude.

## **Stout**

You are heavy for your race.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +2 bonus on Strength checks to avoid being bull rushed or overrun.

### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Escape Artist checks.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Overweight characters are often bullied, so those with this trait might be shy, or they might be very defensive when faced with such situations. Some turn to humor to defuse such situations, while others become bitter.

## **Suspicious**

You are naturally suspicious of everyone and everything. While this trait makes you hard to fool, it makes others slightly less likely to agree with you or find you threatening.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Wisdom checks to detect lies, falsehoods, or ulterior motives in others.

### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Charisma checks to be diplomatic or intimidate others.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

This trait might express itself as comic levels of paranoia, or it might make the character quietly cautious about others.

## **Torpid**

You are sluggish and slow to react to danger, but also resistant to others' commands.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on saves against enchantment (compulsion) effects.

### **Drawback**

You take a -2 penalty on initiative checks.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Torpid characters may be seen as lazy, or as methodical and measured in their actions.

## **Uncivilized**

You relate better to animals than you do to people.

### **Benefit**

You gain a +1 bonus on Charisma checks to handle animals. See pp. 2-3 for rules for animal handling.

### **Drawback**

You take a -1 penalty on Charisma checks to bluff, gather information, or be diplomatic.

### **Roleplaying Ideas**

Characters with this trait are likely to feel awkward in many social situations; that might be expressed as shyness and quiet behavior, or it might be expressed through an overly exuberant need to participate in conversations.

# Fate Points in the SIEGE Engine

## Introduction

Fate Points are a mechanic that provides characters with the means to affect game play in small, but significant ways. They represent the actions of cinematic heroes, who always seem to make those dramatic comebacks, have sudden flashes of insight just in time, or call upon inner reserves of strength to fell the villain just when things look grim.

## Using Fate Points

A character always has a limited amount of Fate Points, and while the character replenishes this supply with every new level he or she attains, the rate of attrition can far outstrip the rate of gain. As such, players must use them wisely. A character can spend Fate Points to do any of these things:

- *Fortune's Favor*: alter a single d20 roll used to make an attack, attribute check, level check, or a saving throw.
- *Mighty Blow*: make a single, earth-shattering attack which also stands a chance of smashing the character's weapon.
- *Sound the Charge!*: Double the character's movement for the round.
- *Down But Not Out*: avoid death when reduced to below -10 Hit Points
- *Providence Smiles*: gain a Plot Break

**Fortune's Favor:** When a character spends 1 Fate Point to improve a d20 roll, add 1d8 to the d20 roll to help meet or exceed the target number. A character can declare the use of 1 Fate Point to alter a d20 roll after the roll is made—but only before the GM reveals the result of that roll (whether the attack or check or saving throw succeeded or failed).

**Mighty Blow:** When a character spends 1 Fate Point to make a single, earth-shattering attack, the attack is treated as though the player rolled a

Natural 20 on his attack roll; it automatically hits the opponent. Also, the attack does double the maximum possible damage for the attack. However, the character must then make a second, unmodified d20 roll; a result of 1-10 on the d20 means that the weapon shatters as a result of the mighty blow. Magic weapons gain a bonus to this roll equal to +1 per point of the weapon's bonus (so a +3 sword gains a +3 to this roll) plus an additional +1 for each special ability the weapon possesses. This ability is useful only in melee combat, and extra damage from special attacks such as sneak attacks does not double. A Fate Point can be used to achieve this effect only once per game session.

**Sound the Charge!:** A character can spend a Fate Point to double their allotted movement for a single round. This includes the ability to move full movement and still attack, rather than half, as in the *Castles and Crusades Player's Handbook*, page 115.

Unlike a normal Charge maneuver, characters spending a Fate Point can move up to their full base movement and attack, but do not gain a bonus to damage or penalty to Armor Class. However, spending a Fate Point to Sound the Charge effectively doubles the distance a character can cover to *take* a charge maneuver in order to gain this bonus and suffer this penalty (see Charge, C&C PHB p. 116). In effect, this maneuver allows a character to move up to their full base movement and make a normal attack, or to double the distance up to which they may make a charge maneuver.

**Down But Not Out:** When a character falls to at least -10 Hit Points or below, he is normally considered dead. Not so, if he has Fate Points to spend. Down But Not Out costs three Fate Points, and results in the character being reduced to exactly -10 Hit Points, and stabilized. The character must have three Fate Points to spend to use this ability, and may only call upon

it once per character level, and if he doesn't use it, it doesn't carry over. So a character who never has to use Down But Not Out at second level doesn't have two uses of it waiting when he gets to third.

**Providence Smiles:** By spending a Fate Point, a character can gain a small plot break that helps him in some minor way. He gains an important clue that he overlooked, just happens to be talking to the right person to get the information he needs, or has the cavalry come over the hill while he's in a hopeless situation. The player must describe exactly what the plot break is that his character gains, and the CK always has the right to overrule this use if he deems it improper, or if he has a good reason for the character to be in such a tight spot. If the plot break is overruled, the Fate Point is not spent. Characters can spend a point for Providence Smiles once per game session.

A character can only spend Fate Points once per round. If a character spends a point to strike a mighty blow, he or she can't spend another one in the same round to improve a die roll, and vice versa.

Depending on the hero's character level (see the table below), the die type increases when spending 1 Fate Point to add to a roll. If the character does so, apply the highest result and disregard the other rolls.

Character Level	Fate Point Dice Rolled
1st–10th	1d8
10th–14th	1d10
15th–20th	1d12

### ***Starting and Gaining Fate Points***

The number of Fate Points granted to characters is deliberately kept low, as the use of Fate Points creates an extremely heroic (bordering on legendary and mythic) game, and too many can result in very over-the-top play, rather than the cinematic bennies that they are intended to represent. Characters begin the game with 1-5 Fate Points (d4+1). Each level thereafter, the character gains one new Fate Point. In addition, at levels 5, 10, 15, and 20, the character gains a bonus of 1d4 Fate Points in addition to the normal one per level.

# Manna Channeling

## A Point-Based Spell System

### Introduction

This spell system presents a different feel and style of magic for an ongoing fantasy campaign. It starts off magic users with a great deal more power than they get in standard games, and balances off as the characters grow in level. The end intent is that magic users at lower levels are more survivable, while at higher levels they remain at similar levels of power.

These rules assume the use of the High-Level characters rules elsewhere on this website. Those not using those rules can simply ignore references to Bard and Ranger spell casters. They also assume the use of fatigue and exhaustion, as explained in the Traits pdf elsewhere on this website. CK's are encouraged to at least adopt these rules, for spell casters whose MEP drops below zero, if for no one else.

### Manna and Divine Energy

Manna is the mystic energy that all spell casters draw upon to create magical effects. It is a natural force that permeates the world, created by living things, and by the world itself. Manna circles the world in *dragon lines*, or lines of magical power. At places where dragon lines intersect, there are *nexus points* possessed of vast mystical energy. Effects of dragon line nexus points will be discussed later.

Divine Energy is that which Clerics, Paladins, and other such characters use for casting spells. It is energy granted by the gods themselves, but is still Manna. Since their power comes from a different source, however, divine casters are not affected by dragon lines or nexus points, and do not have the innate ability to channel Manna as do arcane casters. Instead, divine casters gain the ability to heal, affect undead, and perform spell effects that most arcane casters do not have access to.

### Manna Energy Points

All magic using characters, divine or arcane, have a pool of Manna Energy Points (MEP) from which they draw the energy to cast spells. Every time a magical character casts a spell, subtract the appropriate number of points from the character's MEP pool; casters can continue to cast spells until their MEP reaches zero, at which point they are fatigued and cannot under normal circumstances perform any further magical feats. In addition, any character with an MEP of zero or below (see *emergency spells*, later) is considered fatigued, and suffers a -2 to Strength and Dexterity as per the standard rules, until his MEP again reaches 1 or better. All spells are still subject to the listed casting times and components.

### Regaining MEP

MEP is regained through meditation or (preferably) sleep. Each hour of meditation restores MEP at the rate of the caster's level plus his primary attribute bonus. Wizards, for example, regain MEP at the rate of level + Int bonus per hour of sleep; clerics regain MEP at level + Wis bonus per hour. Meditation restores half this amount, and each hour of meditation requires a successful Concentration (DC 15) check. If there are no outside distractions, it is possible to take 20 on this check. Mild distractions, such as setting up camp, quiet conversation, etc., allow taking 10 but not 20. Attempting to meditate in an area of high distraction such as a crowded tavern room requires a roll for every half hour, and taking 10 or 20 is not possible.

Creatures that do not sleep, such as Elves, regain MEP through meditation as others do through sleep, as Elves require a meditation cycle in place of normal sleep.

This process is the same for arcane or divine casters, as during these quiet periods, the body

gradually opens itself back up to the return of magical energies.

## Starting MEP

Each spell casting class starts play with MEP as follows:

**Wizards, Illusionists:** Int bonus + Con bonus + d4

**Clerics, Druids:** Wis bonus + Con bonus + d4

**Bards:** Cha bonus

**Rangers:** Wis bonus

**Others:** As appropriate to campaign.

Suggest Prime attribute + Con bonus for primary casters, Prime attribute for secondary casters.

## Increasing MEP

Characters cannot gain additional MEP until they achieve second level of spell casting ability. All other spell casting classes gain additional MEP starting at second level. Multiclass characters gain MEP as per the class they are currently advancing.

At each additional class level, a character in a spell casting class gains additional MEP by the roll of a die, just like characters gain hit dice as they increase in level. MEP dice are as follows:

**Wizards, Illusionists, Clerics, Druids:** d12

**Bards, Rangers:** d6

**Generic Class:** d8 or d10, as appropriate to the campaign.

## Casting Spells

Spells are organized into levels based upon their basic power. All spells of a given level are considered and assumed to be of equal power to all other spells of that same level. Thus, each spell of a given level costs the same number of MEP to cast. Spells cost a number of MEP equal to the spell's level + 1. 0-level spells cost 1 MEP, 1<sup>st</sup> level spells cost 2, etc.

There is no limit to how many times a magic using character can cast a given spell on his or her list, so long as she has enough Manna Energy Points left in her pool to cast the spell. However, Wizard characters must still prepare spells each day by

studying their spell book, according to the standard table for their character class. This leads to greater flexibility among Wizard characters, who no longer need to prepare Magic Missile, for example, multiple times if they feel they might need more than one instance of the spell. Rather, the first level Wizard character can now prepare four completely different zero level spells, and two first level spells, and may cast among those spells with impunity.

Likewise, Clerics and Druids must pray daily for their spells, preparing spells as per the "Spells per day" entry on their class table.

## MEP and Spell-Like Abilities

Spell-like abilities, spells granted as "per day" class features, and similar magical effects are not governed by MEP and function exactly as outlined for a given class or item. Paladins, for example, can still use *detect evil* at will, and do not need to spend MEP to do so. Paladins of sixth level can still use *remove disease* once per week, and the Paladin's MEP pool is not affected by this ability in any way.

## Bonus Spells

Under the Channeling rules, any time a character would receive bonus spells for high attributes, he receives extra spells on his daily list, as well as bonus MEP equal to that needed to cast each extra spell one time. This bonus MEP is gained at the level in which the character gains the bonus spell.

**For Example:** A Wizard with an Intelligence of 18 receives a bonus spell to his daily list, plus 2 MEP at first level. He then receives a second level spell plus 3 MEP at third level, and an extra third level spell plus 4 MEP at fifth level. By fifth level, he has received a total of 9 bonus MEP, as well as three extra spells per day (one first, one second, and one third level).

Bonus MEP is added to the character's base just as though he had gained MEP through a normal level advancement. This bonus MEP may be used

to cast any spell in the character's repertoire; it is not restricted to the casting of bonus spells.

## Emergency Spells

Sometimes things get desperate. You're up against the wall, and the dragon is closing in. Your fighters are down, your cleric is running dangerously low on healing. You've got a Teleport spell, but damn it all, you're out of MEP and fatigued. Maybe, just maybe, if you put enough willpower and faith into the casting, you can still...

Emergency spells are for just these kinds of instances. When a spell caster is at zero MEP, sometimes it's possible to channel his very life energy into the casting of one last spell, to (hopefully) save the day. Casting an emergency spell is only possible in the most dire of circumstances, and results in severe and permanent consequences to the caster. To cast an emergency spell, the caster must first make a Wisdom check with a CC equal to the level of the spell being attempted. If this check is successful, he may use his own life energy to cast the spell. The caster takes temporary Constitution damage equal to half the MEP cost of the spell being cast; this energy replaces MEP in the cost of casting the spell (each point of Constitution spent is equal to 2 MEP), and the spell goes off as normal. This ability damage returns as normal at the rate of 1 point per day.

However, the end result of this casting is that the caster suffers 1d4 points of *permanent* ability loss divided as the player chooses between Constitution and the primary spellcasting attribute of his class. Also, the moment the spell goes off, the character is reduced to -1 hit points and is unconscious (but automatically stabilizes). If the spell requires the caster to remain conscious for the duration, unconsciousness sets in immediately after the spell has completed its intended function. The experience is quite harrowing for the caster, and is not something to be undertaken lightly. Still, there are times when it can save the day.

## Spell Interference

In this system it is also possible for a spellcaster to interfere with another spellcaster of a similar type (arcane or divine) by channeling personal MEP. The process for this is simple: the caster attempting to interfere first makes a Spellcraft check (DC 15+ the level of spell being cast). If successful, he may devote a number of MEP up to his primary attribute bonus + class level in any one spell casting class to interfering with the spell, making it more taxing on the caster.

What this means in game terms is that the caster must make a Primary Spellcasting Attribute check ( $CC = \frac{1}{2}$  the MEP spent to interfere, rounded down) to successfully cast the spell. If he is unable or unwilling to make the check, his spell simply fails.

*For example:* Martin, a wizard, finds himself and his comrades in battle with a horde of orcs led by an evil human necromancer. The necromancer begins to cast a spell, and Martin makes a spellcraft check. The GM secretly sets the CL at 17 (the necromancer is casting a 5<sup>th</sup>-level spell), and Martin rolls a 22. The GM says, "the evil wizard is casting a 5<sup>th</sup>-level spell."

Martin, being an eighth-level wizard with a Charisma score of 18, can devote up to 11 MEP to interfere with this spell. Since MEP interference is rounded down, spending 11 is pointless; Martin decides to spend 10. The necromancer is caught off guard by Martin's expenditure of power; his Intelligence check is only a 16, and he needed a 17. His spell fails, but Martin is now down 10 MEP for his trouble. Combat continues...

## Dragon Lines

Magic energy is created by everything in the world, from the smallest blade of grass to a rock to a human being. It is a cosmic force generated by all matter. Dragon Lines are lines of mystic energy that crisscross the world. It is from these lines of magical energy that arcane casters draw their power. Dragon lines are invisible to the naked eye, and can only be detected by arcane spell casters who pass an Intelligence check with

a CL of 15. While standing directly on a Dragon Line, an arcane spell caster sees the MEP cost of all spells reduced by one. Some of the more powerful Dragon Lines may even reduce the cost of spell casting by two, though these are rare indeed. Regardless, however, the cost of casting a spell can never be reduced below one point by a Dragon Line. It should be noted that Dragon Lines only exist in areas where the mystical energy of the world is particularly strong, and they are not incredibly common. They are like eddies and currents, streams or rivers of magical energy. Direct encounters with Dragon Lines are always at the discretion of the GM.

Where Dragon Lines intersect, places of magical power, much revered to sorcerous types, exist. These places are commonly known as Sites of Power, or Nexus Points. Places such as this are rare indeed, with perhaps five on the continent, and an estimated twenty to thirty existing throughout the entire world. Nexus Points are sanctuaries for arcane and natural magic users of all types, and provide a number of tangible benefits. First, when at a nexus, spell casters may cast zero level spells without expending any magic energy whatsoever. Spells of first level and up see their costs reduced by a full five MEP, to a minimum of one, always see all variable, numeric effects increased by  $\frac{1}{2}$ , and are cast as though the caster were two levels higher. These effects are at no additional MEP cost, and since the effects are constant, magi must be extremely careful about casting spells on nexus points. With such power at their disposal, magic users have gone to open war over control of a nexus point, until finally at a Grand Conclave of magic users, it was decreed that no arcane or natural user of magic would be allowed to create a domicile or exercise sole control over one of these sites. Rather, it fell to the druids to maintain groves near (but not on) Sites of Power and protect them from interlopers.

Sites of Power are considered neutral ground, where spellcasters can meet without fear of violence, and often times are the subject of permanent Sanctuary spells, to ensure that no violence occurs within. All arcane or natural magicians resting at a Site of Power regain MEP at double their normal rate, and it is only at a Site of Power that permanent ability loss from the casting of emergency spells can be healed (at a rate of one point per day, as though it were ability damage).

### Option: Skill-Based Casting

It is also possible to combine the standard Channeling rules with a “Spellcraft” check, to represent the caster’s skill at crafting his magic. If using this option, in addition to spending the MEP for a spell, the caster must also make a Primary Casting Attribute check (Int for Wizards and Illusionists, Wis for Druids and Clerics) with a CC equal to the level of the spell being cast. If the check is successful, the MEP is spent and the spell goes off. The result of the Spellcraft check, in this case, is also the CL of any saving throws allowed by the spell.

**For Example:** A fifth-level Wizard casts Fireball, a third-level spell. This requires the expenditure of four MEP, and a Spellcraft check at a CL of 15 (12 for Prime Attribute +3 for the spell level CC). The wizard rolls and gets a 20 on his Spellcraft check. The spell goes off, and Dexterity saves for half damage are rolling against a CL of 20.

If the check fails, on the other hand, the spell fails. The MEP is still lost, and the caster suffers *spell burn* for his troubles. Spell burn is equal to 1d4 points of subdual damage per level of the spell that was attempted and failed.

Spell burn can also be applied to casters who fail spellcasting based on interference from another caster (see *Spell Interference*, page 3).

# High Level Characters: Advancement After 12<sup>th</sup> Level

As characters advance past level 12, they gain new class abilities and/or old class abilities continue to improve. In most cases, such abilities or improvements are gained at levels 15, 18, and 20, though there are exceptions. These abilities are automatically gained, just like all other class abilities for characters, and nothing special need be done to gain the abilities, outside of normal training for level increase.

## Fighter

Note that a Fighter's Combat Dominance continues to advance after 12<sup>th</sup> level, granting an additional attack at levels 16 and 20 against creatures with a single hit die of d6 or smaller.

**Weapon Specialization:** A Fighter's Weapon Specialization bonus increases to +3 at level 15, and to +4 at level 20.

**Cleave:** At level 15, a Fighter gains the ability to cleave through his foes in combat. When fighting with a melee weapon, if the fighter deals a creature enough damage to make it drop (typically by dropping it to below 0 hit points or killing it), he gets an immediate, extra melee attack against another creature within reach. The fighter cannot move before making this extra attack. The extra attack is with the same weapon and at the same bonus as the attack that dropped the previous creature. The fighter can use this ability once per round, but it does stack with Extra Attack (meaning the fighter can cleave, then still take a second attack using his Extra Attack ability). At level 18, the Cleave ability is useable more than once per round. Every time the fighter kills a creature, he may immediately attack another within reach.

**Improved Combat Dominance:** At levels higher than 12, the Fighter may use his Combat Dominance ability is usable against creatures with a hit die of d8 or smaller. Also, at level 15, the Fighter's Combat Dominance is usable against creatures with up to 5 hit dice. At level 18, the

Combat Dominance is usable against creatures with up to 8 hit dice, and at level 20, Combat Dominance is usable against creatures with up to 10 hit dice.

## Ranger

Note that the Ranger's Combat Marauder ability continues to advance with each level beyond 12.

**Favored Enemy:** At level 15, the Ranger gains a second Favored Enemy. At level 18, the bonus for the Ranger's original Favored Enemy increases to +3. At level 20, the ranger may choose to increase the bonus for the first Favored Enemy to +4, to increase the bonus for the second Favored Enemy to +3, or to gain a third Favored Enemy.

**Improved Survival and Tracking:** At levels 15, 18, and 20, the Ranger gains an additional, cumulative +1 to Wisdom checks made to use his Survival and Tracking class abilities. This bonus stacks with normal Wisdom and level bonuses.

**Spell Casting (Wisdom):** Beginning at level 15, the Ranger becomes attuned to the natural world enough that she gains the ability to cast spells as though she were a druid. This spell casting ability begins as though the Ranger were a first level druid, and increases with each level appropriately. Thus, a 15<sup>th</sup> level Ranger casts as a first level druid, and a 20<sup>th</sup> level ranger casts as a sixth-level druid. The Challenge Level of saving throws against spells cast by rangers is determined by adding the spell's level to the ranger's Wisdom modifier.

## Rogue

**Improved Stealth and Awareness:** At levels 15, 18, and 20, the Rogue gains an additional, cumulative +1 to Attribute checks to use all Rogue class abilities except her Sneak Attack ability.

**Improved Sneak Attack:** At level 15, the Rogue's damage bonus for a Sneak Attack increases from +4 to +6. At level 20, the Sneak Attack damage triples instead of doubling as per a normal Back Attack.

**Use Magical Device (Wisdom):** At level 15, the Rogue gains the ability to use magical devices that are meant for other classes. Where Decipher Script allows a rogue to read a scroll to determine what spell it contains, this ability allows the rogue to cast the spell contained on the scroll. With a successful Wisdom check, the Rogue can freely use a magical item she normally wouldn't be able to, such as a wand or scroll. The Challenge Level of this check is equal to the level of the spell being emulated for scrolls, and double this for wands or other multiple use items. Thus, activating a wand containing the fireball spell and intended for wizards would be a Challenge Level 6 check, since fireball is a third-level spell. If the spell were being used from a scroll, however, the Challenge Level would be 3, since a scroll is a single-use item.

## Assassin

**Improved Death Attack:** At level 15, the Assassin need only study her victim for 2 rounds in order to perform this class ability. At level 18, she need only spend a single round studying her victim, and at level 20 her knowledge of tactics and anatomy is so complete that she can instantly perform a Death Attack, without the need for studying her opponent. However, in this case the opponent gains +4 to his Constitution save against the assault. The Assassin can still spend a single round at level 20 to study her opponent and negate this +4 bonus.

**Improved Competence:** At levels 15, 18, and 20, the Assassin gains an additional cumulative +1 to any checks made for the purpose of using any class abilities except Sneak Attack and Death Attack.

**Improved Sneak Attack:** At level 15, the Assassin's damage bonus for a Sneak Attack increases from +4 to +6. At level 20, the Sneak

Attack damage triples instead of doubling as per a normal Back Attack.

## Barbarian

**Primal Force:** The Barbarian's Primal Force ability increases to +5 at 15<sup>th</sup> level, +6 at 18<sup>th</sup> level, and +7 at 20<sup>th</sup> level.

**Primal Fury:** At 15<sup>th</sup> level, the Barbarian may attempt to prematurely end a Primal Fury by making a Wisdom check. The CL for this check is equal to the number of rounds the Barbarian has already been enraged (the longer he continues to rage, the harder it is to snap out of it). At 18<sup>th</sup> level, the Barbarian may use Primal Fury three times per day, and at 20<sup>th</sup> level, the Barbarian gains a +4 to his check to prematurely end a Primal Fury.

**Primal Might:** At 18<sup>th</sup> level, the Barbarian may make a Constitution check to remain conscious upon reaching -7 hp. This check suffers a penalty equal to the number of hit points below zero the Barbarian is. If he succeeds at this Constitution check, he may remain conscious and continue to act normally, making a new Constitution check every time he suffers damage. Failing any Constitution check after the Barbarian reaches a number of hit points equal to negative his Constitution score or -10 (whichever is greater), he immediately dies.

**Primal Will:** At 15<sup>th</sup> level, damage reduction from this ability rises to 2 points, at 18<sup>th</sup> to 3 points, and at 20<sup>th</sup> level to 4 points.

**Smite Mage:** At 20<sup>th</sup> level, the barbarian's distrust of arcane magic users is so focused that he can call upon his primal rage once per day to attempt to smite an arcane magic user. In all respects, this functions exactly like the Paladin's Smite Evil ability, but adds the barbarian's Wisdom modifier (if positive) instead of Charisma.

## Monk

**Mind Over Body:** The Monk's saving throw bonuses for Mind Over Body increase by +1 at levels 15, 18, and 20, becoming +5, +6, and +7 respectively.

**Ki Strike:** The Monk's Ki Strike ability improves to +5 at 15<sup>th</sup> level, +6 at 18<sup>th</sup>, and +7 at 20<sup>th</sup> level.

**Fast Healing:** At level 15, the Monk's Fast Healing ability increases to 1d6+1 hit points healed per level per day.

**Catch Missiles:** At level 15, when using the Deflect Missiles ability, the monk may choose to catch the weapon instead of just deflecting it. Such weapons can be thrown back at the original attacker or kept for later use. The monk must have at least one hand free (holding nothing) to use this ability. At level 18, the Monk can *immediately* hurl caught weapons back at the original attacker, even if it is not his turn. This attack does not count against the Monk's normal actions for a turn.

**Martial Arts Weapons:** At level 15, the monk may use lightweight, martial-arts-style weapons such as chains, flails, short swords, staves, and spears, and gains an off-hand attack with such weapons at no penalty. Even when using two-handed weapons such as spears and staves, the monk gains this second attack, though it is with the same weapon (the monk may not attack, say, with a spear and a sword).

**Unarmored Defense:** This ability continues to increase as the monk goes up in level. At level 15, the Unarmored AC becomes 16; at level 18, it becomes 17; and at level 20 it becomes 18.

## Wizard

**Increased Spell Proficiency:** As Wizards gain levels above 12, they gain the ability to affect their spells in specific ways. The wizard must choose the *Eschew Components* path, or the *Enhance Spell* path.

**Eschew Components Path:** At level 15, a wizard can cast any spell she knows without needing to use material components, so long as the material component of the spell is under 100 gp in value. At level 18, the wizard can cast any spell she knows without needing to use somatic components. This requires the wizard to prepare the spell as though it were one level higher than the actual spell's level. Thus, if a wizard wishes to have *magic missile* prepared without needing gestures, she prepares it in her daily study as though it were a second level spell, rather than a first. Finally, at level 20, the wizard gains the ability to eschew verbal components by preparing the spell as though it were of a higher level than it actually is. If eschewing either verbal *or* somatic components, or two spell levels higher if eschewing both. Thus, if she chooses to cast a spell without needing any components whatsoever, the spell counts as though it were two levels higher. Spells that don't require components must be prepared in advance as higher level spells, just as though they were normally of that level.

**Enhance Spell Path:** At level 15, the wizard following this path gains the ability to extend the duration of her spells. Any spell that has duration longer than instant sees this duration increased by one half. This requires her to prepare the spell as though it were one level higher than its actual level. At level 18, the wizard gains the ability to increase the damage dealt by her spells. Any spell that deals damage sees that damage increased by one half. This requires her to prepare the spell as though it were two levels higher than its actual level. It can stack with extended duration if appropriate, but this requires preparing the spell as though it were three levels higher than actual. Finally, at level 20, the wizard can maximize the effect of any spell she casts, causing the spell to last for its maximum duration and deal maximum damage automatically. This requires preparing the spell as though it were three levels higher than its actual level.

**Spell-Like Ability:** At level 20, the wizard may choose any one first-level spell in her spellbook. She becomes so familiar with that spell that she

can cast it 4 times per day without needing to prepare it as a standard spell, exactly as though it were a spell-like ability.

## Illusionist

**Sharp Senses:** The illusionist's sharp senses ability increases to +5 at 15<sup>th</sup> level, and +6 at 20<sup>th</sup> level.

**Detect Illusion:** At level 18, the Illusionist gains the ability *Detect Illusion* at will. This is similar to the 0-level spell, but unlike the spell, she can use the ability only upon herself (cannot grant others the ability to detect illusions in this manner.)

**Enhanced Illusions:** At level 15, the Illusionist gains the ability to impose a -2 penalty to any checks to resist or disbelieve her illusions. In addition the duration of her illusions is increased by one half. At level 18, this imposed penalty increases to -3, and at level 20 to -4. In addition, at level 20, any illusion of fifth level or lower automatically lasts for its maximum duration.

**Shapeshifting:** At level 15, the Illusionist gains the ability to use *Prestidigitation* as a spell-like ability a number of times per day equal to her Intelligence modifier. At level 18, she gains the ability to use *Change Self* as a spell-like ability, once per day. At level 20, she gains the ability to use *Alter Self* as a spell-like ability, once per day.

## Cleric

**Communion (Wisdom):** At level 18, with a successful Wisdom check, unmodified by the Cleric's level, the Cleric can enter a deep meditation once per month and commune directly with an avatar of her deity. During this meditation, she may directly ask the deity any question or request any favor she desires. The deity is by no means required to grant this request, and if a cleric is too arrogant in her dealings with the deity, she may find herself well chastised. The CK will play the deity as he sees fit.

**Divine Blessing:** At level 15, the Cleric gains the ability to cast *Bless* once per day as a spell-like

ability. At level 18, she can use the ability twice per day, and at level 20, she can use this power three times per day.

**Celestial Fire:** At level 20, the Cleric's attunement to the divine realms is so powerful that she gains the ability to wield celestial fire. This can manifest in one of two ways (Cleric's choice per each use). First, she can emit a ray of fire that deals 1d6 damage per two levels of the Cleric to all who are of opposed alignments (Good clerics affect evil, evil clerics affect good, and neutral clerics affect law or chaos, as appropriate. True neutral clerics must choose good, evil, law, or chaos to affect). Using this ray requires a ranged attack roll, with the cleric's full ranged attack bonuses. Second, the cleric can choose to manifest a sword of fire which deals 4d6 damage, plus the cleric's Wisdom bonus, and lasts for 2d4 rounds. The Cleric wields this weapon just as though it were a normal sword, but is always considered proficient with it, and does not suffer damage from touching the flame. Celestial fire can be called upon once per day. Damage dealt by celestial fire is  $\frac{1}{2}$  divine and  $\frac{1}{2}$  fire.

## Druid

**Improved Resist Elements:** At level 15, the Druid's Resist Elements ability doubles to +4. At level 18 it increases to +5, and at level 20 becomes +6.

**Improved Totem Shape:** At level 15, the Druid gains a new totem shape, just as at levels 7 and 8; however, if she so chooses, this totem shape may be of a large size animal. At level 18, she may use her Totem Shape ability twice per day, and at level 20 she may use her Totem Shape ability three times per day.

**Totem Casting:** At level 20, the druid gains the incredible ability to use her spells while in animal shape. She can cast any spell she knows while in her animal form, at no penalty.

## Knight

**Defensive Horsemanship (Dexterity):** At level 15, whenever the knight's mount is hit in combat, he may attempt a Dexterity check (as a reaction) to negate the hit. The hit is negated if the knight's Dexterity check result is greater than the opponent's attack roll. (Essentially, the check result becomes the mount's Armor Class if it's higher than the mount's regular AC.) This ability stacks with the bonuses provided through the use of the knight's standard Deflect ability.

**Demoralize:** At level 18, the knight can use Demoralize twice per day, and at level 20, up to three times per day.

**Embolden:** At level 15, the knight's embolden ability provides a +2 bonus to strength, constitution, dexterity, and intelligence saving throws, and +3 to wisdom and charisma saving throws, for all allies within 30 feet. At level 18, this ability can be used twice per day, and at level 20, the ability is continuously in effect so long as allies remain within 30 feet of the knight. This continuous effect does not affect the knight's ability to use Inspire or Demoralize.

**Inspire:** At level 15, the knight can use Inspire twice per day, and at level 18, can use Inspire up to three times per day.

## Paladin

**Divine Horsemanship (Dexterity):** At level 15, the Paladin gains all of the Horsemanship abilities possessed by a first level Knight. She may only use these abilities, however, while on her own divine mount; the Paladin's horsemanship is unusable on any normal animal.

**Cure Disease:** At level 15, the Paladin may use Cure Disease four times per week. At level 18, she may use Cure Disease five times per week. At level 20 the Paladin may use Cure Disease once per day.

**Lay on Hands:** At level 15, the Paladin may use Lay On Hands twice per day, and may divide the healing up amongst multiple targets. At level 18,

the ability is usable three times per day, and at level 20 the paladin may use this power four times per day.

**Smite Evil:** At level 18, the Paladin may attempt to Smite Evil twice per day. At level 20, she may use this ability three times per day.

## Bard

**Legend Lore:** At level 15, the bard can attempt to divine the properties of a non-artifact magic item through calling upon her vast worldly knowledge of myth and lore. This check is always performed at a CL equal to the total plusses on the item, plus two per special ability the item possesses.

**Song of Passion (Charisma):** At 15th level the bard can use music or poetics to create an effect equivalent to the *Emotion* spell (caster level equals the character's bard level). Using this ability requires 1 minute of uninterrupted concentration and music, and it functions on a single target within 30 feet. A bard can't use song of passion on himself.

**Inspire Heroics (Charisma):** At 18th level the bard can use music or poetics to inspire tremendous heroism in himself or a single willing ally within 30 feet. For every three bard levels the character attains beyond 15th, he can inspire heroics in one additional creature. To inspire heroics, a bard must sing and an ally must hear the bard sing for a full round. A creature so inspired gains a +4 bonus to all to hit rolls, a +4 morale bonus on saving throws and a +4 bonus to AC. The effect lasts for as long as the ally hears the bard sing and for up to 5 rounds.

**Spell Casting (Charisma):** Starting at level 15, the bard may cast spells as though she were a first-level illusionist. This spell casting ability increases as the bard increases in level. Thus, the 15<sup>th</sup> level bard casts as a first level illusionist, while a 20<sup>th</sup> level bard casts as a sixth-level illusionist. Bards need not keep or maintain a spell book; their spells come to them naturally, but always have musical or poetic verbal components and performance-related (dance, tumbling, or musical instrument playing) somatic components. The Challenge Level of saving throws against spells cast by Bards is determined by adding the spell's level to the Bard's Charisma modifier.

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