



# QUICKSTART RULES

Sixcess (6S) is the dice mechanic system Harsh Realities created to power tabletop role-playing games. This document includes the basics of the Sixcess (6S) system. The full rules, which include more detail, examples, advanced and optional rules, are in Sixcess Core, which is available through Harsh Realities as a pdf or a physical book.

## THE 6S DICE SYSTEM

### WHAT THE DICE DO

The essence of 6S as a game mechanic is “keep it simple.” The premise is to count the number of successes, called “sixcesses,” generated in a given throw of the dice. But generally, the more high rolls, the better.

### RESOLVING DICE ROLLS

In 6S, Mark Tests resolve dice rolls, where each die rolled is compared to the Target Number (TN), which the Game Master (GM) sets. Mark Test dice are usually figured by adding a number of dice equal to an Attribute Rank to a number of dice equal to a Skill Rank. Each Skill has a default Attribute most commonly used for Mark Tests. However, some situations may require the GM to substitute another Attribute.

### MARK TEST

Mark Tests are the primary way to resolve conflict in Sixcess. To make a Mark Test, collect the sum total of dice equal to the Attribute Rank plus the dice equal to the Skill Rank and roll them against a TN, then count the sixcesses rolled. Mark Test types differ depending on what is being attempted:

#### OPPOSED TEST

An Opposed Test consists of making at least two Mark Tests and comparing the results. Dice are rolled against a common, fixed TN. Opposed Tests can also be substituted for simplified combat situations, especially for novice players new to Sixcess. Fixing a default TN: 4 to hit all enemies is a good way to grow comfortable with the system before making it more complex.

#### RESISTED TEST

A Resisted Test happens when a Player rolls against a TN determined by a Skill and/or Attribute rank from their opponent and then compare results. This is the most typical Mark Test, since it is used in combat.

Different situations may dictate slightly different Mark Tests. A Cumulative Test might be used to build sixcesses over time, a Reaction Test might be used to judge first impressions, and a Cooperation Task allows groups to collaborate on a single task. Other options are detailed in Sixcess Core.

### TARGET NUMBER

The Target Number (TN) determines how challenging an action is. The GM determines the base TN for each action based on guidelines and all other relevant modifiers, then calculates the final TN. The desired result, any die rolled equal to or higher than the TN, is a sixcess in the form of a Tick or Mark. A TN must be at least 2 and can exceed 6 for difficult tasks.

### THE TICK

A basic sixcess, called a Tick, is any die rolled equal to or higher than the established TN, other than a 6. Ticks help determine the degree of success in a Mark Test.

### THE MARK

A major sixcess, called a Mark, is always a 6. This is the best Mark Test roll possible. A Mark is equal to 5 Ticks. A TN above 6 requires multiple Marks per subsequent difficulty level to equal a single sixcess. To achieve a Heroic TN, for instance, the Player needs to roll at least 4 Marks to get one sixcess!

### STRIKE DIE

When a die rolls a Mark, it is also a Strike. A Strike, or Strike Die, is a free die that may be used to bolster a Mark Test. Most Strike Dice come in the form of exploding dice, which is earned by rolling a Mark in a Mark Test. A roll of 6 is a Strike Die and earns another die to roll toward the current Mark Test.

Drive rolls also can generate Strike Dice. If the Player rolls a 6 during Drive, they may use it as normal (see below) or save it as a Strike Die for later.

Also, the GM may reward a Player with Strike Dice for exceptional role-playing, comic relief, major plot advancement, highly improbable achievements in dramatic scenes, or other appreciated happenings.

### **THREE STRIKES AND YOU'RE OUT**

Strike Dice can be a nice bonus to a Mark Test, but they have limits. Regardless of how many Strike Dice the Player has saved up, they may use up to 2 in one Mark Test with no penalty; using the third will cost all of their Strike Dice.

### **AUTOMATIC SIXCESS**

Players need not roll dice in all situations unless they want to. If the character's Skill Rank is at least as high as the TN and they need only 1 Tick to succeed, it is an Automatic Sixcess.

### **CRITICAL SIXCESS**

A Player may occasionally roll an exceptional Mark Test to score a Critical Sixcess. This is done when the number of Marks rolled equals or exceeds the TN. A TN: 4 Mark Test requires at least 4 Marks rolled to be a Critical Sixcess. The Critical Sixcess's effect is up to the GM, but it could be doubling the dice to apply to the attempted action; some extraordinary descriptor given by the Player, GM, or both; or an unexpected bonus to the attempted action. Alternately, the Critical Sixcess may act like a DIS.

### **SLIDING THE DIFFICULTY**

As noted above, a TN can exceed 6, making Mark Tests difficult. Sliding the Difficulty, also referred to as Sliding the Die, allows the Player to sacrifice a Skill Die (Mark Test dice dictated by the character's Skill Rank) to lower the TN by 1. This die is not rolled as normal, as it is now Sliding the Difficulty. The Player must roll at least 1 Skill Die in the Mark Test, but they can sacrifice one — or as many as all but one — of their Skill Dice in this way.

### **THE PIP**

A roll of 1 is a Pip. Pips always fail.

Anti-Tick

Advanced Players may play under the rule that the Anti-Tick is a Pip that cancels out Ticks.

### **FUMBLE**

If all dice thrown come up Pips, the roll is a Fumble — the worst possible outcome of a Mark Test. It is also sometimes referred to as a Critical Failure. Anything negative is possible in a Fumble. The GM is well within their rights to kill the characters if circumstances merit it.

### **DISSONANCE (DIS)**

This allows the Player to slightly affect how the game plot unfolds. DIS are represented by something round and heavy enough to strike the playing surface to get everyone's attention. Players are encouraged to announce the use of their DIS. DIS gives the Player minor, limited GM powers for one scene element. DIS can be used for a variety of goals, including altering a scene in some small and specific way to help the Player Character (PC), creating a favorable situation for the PC, shifting action to generate a redo or interrupt, or even saving or assisting other PCs. The GM always has the final say in how a DIS is used. At no time does the GM lose their position as referee in the game and may, at times, be called upon to collaborate with the Player in the use of their DIS.

### **ATTRIBUTES**

Attributes are characters' core characteristics. They typically range between Rank 1 and Rank 5. An average Attribute is Rank 2, Rank 3 indicates above-average ability, and Rank 5 is superhuman. Attaining Rank above 5 normally requires special circumstances. Some game elements, such as Powers, may enhance an Attribute, and some creatures may have higher Attributes than PCs.

Detriments

Rarely, an Attribute can be 0 or lower. Any Attribute Ranked zero or negative is a Detriment. Zero Ranks remove any Attribute dice from Mark Tests. Negative Ranks cost a die and put an automatic Mark in effect against the Mark Test for each negative Rank.

### **CHARISMA (CHA)**

This indicates the character's presence and social reception. Charismatic people are likeable, personable, and captivating, so people usually see them as friendly, cooperative, and attractive. CHA is not exclusively the character's physical attractiveness, though it may be a factor.

### **INTELLECT (INT)**

This is the character's brain power: how much the character can know, learn, and retain, and often how well the player reasons. Intellect is unrelated to wit and does not necessarily indicate quick thinking.

## **PERCEPTION (PER)**

This is the ability to sense and process information about one's surroundings. Perceptive characters don't just see — they notice. Perception also incorporates wit and instinct.

## **FITNESS (FIT)**

More than just strength, this also measures durability, stamina, and physical stature. Fit people are generally strong, enduring, and tough. Higher FIT Ranks usually indicate a larger person.

## **REFLEXES (REF)**

This measures quickness, agility, mobility, and grace. Most physical activity requires REF. A high REF generally indicates a lean, nimble, and graceful individual.

## **WILLPOWER (WIL)**

Determination, steadfastness, single-minded focus, and formidable fortitude all exemplify Willpower. It is the ability to resist temptation and certain Powers and the raw grit to take a hit without flinching. Willpower measures the character's ability to avoid fleeing, fighting, or succumbing when their emotions are raging.

### **SPENDING AND BURNING WILLPOWER**

The PC must occasionally dig deep within themselves and pull something out to shine through a situation. In these instances, the Player may either Spend or Burn WIL. Spent WIL gives an automatic Mark toward a Mark Test and can be regained with rest. Burnt WIL is much more powerful. It grants the character's WIL Rank +1 Marks to be put toward the Mark Test. Burnt WIL is permanently gone; spending XP is the only way to regain it.

## **SIZE**

Most characters in a normal setting are Size: 1. Size rarely comes into play as long as game play focuses on characters. But significant game elements that are grossly out of scale with PCs can make Size an issue. Size Scaling can significantly alter how damage is given or taken. Size in 6S is abstract. The full rules are in Sixcess Core.

## **POWER ATTRIBUTES**

All Powers are represented by a special Power Attribute directly related to the supernatural source of the Power. Some Powers in some settings may simply be natural elements of the setting. A setting may have many or no Powers. Examples include Magic (MAG), Psionics (PSI), Faith (FTH), and Sorcery (SOR). These Power Attributes are treated like normal Attributes, except they are not essential to any given character and relate not to Skills so much as Abilities. The Power Attribute can be Spent as WIL, though only in relation to using or bolstering Abilities. All Powers require a Power Edge to connect the character to the supernatural source.

## **ABILITIES**

If Powers are the source of supernatural power, then Abilities are the expression of that Power. Abilities function much like Skills when tied to a Power Attribute. Abilities include Spells, Talents, Miracles, Hexes, and more. Various Power Edges, Flaws, or Qualities may alter how the character uses Abilities. Every Power is associated with a Skill that allows the character to attempt to learn more Abilities when the time is right.

## **DERIVED ATTRIBUTES**

Some Attributes are based on core Attributes instead of being purchased during Character Creation. These Derived Attributes may be an average of two or more Attributes and may be modified by Edges, Flaws, and Qualities.

## **VISAGE (VIS)**

This measures the character's attractiveness. VIS is an extension of CHA and is initially based on CHA, but it may be altered by Edges, Flaws, and Qualities. The setting can make VIS anywhere from paramount to inconsequential.

## **MOVE**

Characters normally walk 5 ft (1.5 m) per Rank of REF per Combat Phase (CP). Run Move is REF x3. Some Edges, Flaws, Qualities, and Skills may alter the character's Move. Non-land-based movement is covered under specific Skills.

## **DRIVE (DRV)**

Drive determines the order of combat events. It is a way to slow time a bit and allow each PC the spotlight, plus allow the GM time to fairly referee each action. DRV is  $(PER + REF)/2$ , rounded down. This is the number of dice the Player throws to determine DRV. This is the only roll in 6S that is neither measured

against a TN nor counted out in Marks and Ticks. The dice values are simply recorded, as each die represents the Combat Phase (CP) in which the character will take an action. A character's DRV may never be lower than 1, unless incapacitated. A roll of 6 is not placed in a CP, but instead generates a Strike Die that may be used at any time as a wild action. This Strike Die may be used as an interrupt or to take an action at any time during the Combat Round (CR), or it may be saved for later in the game as a normal Strike Die.

Any two equal-value rolls of the dice from the same roll causes one of the DRV dice to be canceled out for this DRV roll. This represents hesitation, maneuvering, and other combat situation complications. The character may still act in the CP, but only once unless they pay for multiple Actions.

## **COMBAT ROUNDS AND COMBAT PHASES**

Every CR consists of five CP of action. The entire CR is approximately 15 seconds of in-game time, which makes each CP roughly three seconds. Combat situations begin when the GM calls for all Players to roll DRV — unless Ambush or Surprise is involved, in which case DRV happens immediately after the Surprise is resolved. DRV initiates the use of CRs and CPs. Each character is allowed one Action per CP; multiple Actions may be bought (full rules are in Sixcess Core). The CR begins when Players roll DRV and ends when the last character acts in the last CP, which either ends the combat or requires another DRV roll for the next CR.

### **ORDER OF COMBAT**

Characters act according to the DRV rolls. Rolls of 1 may act in CP: 1, rolls of 2 in CP: 2, etc. A Strike Die, however, allows a character to act at any time during any CP. Any time two characters roll the same CP, the one with the higher REF goes first. If the two characters also have the same REF, the one with the higher PER goes first. If the PER is the same, then the two Players may roll a single die each. The higher goes first. In addition, PCs always go before NPCs.

### **ROUND ROBIN**

Some Players and GMs may care little about which character is faster and may just wish to keep it simple. That's fine! Going clockwise around the table until all Actions are taken for the CR is perfectly acceptable. Go with whatever works for your group as long as everyone gets their turn and is having fun.

## **FINDING THE TARGET**

### **CLOSE COMBAT**

Unless optional rules are in effect, Close Combat Mark Tests are always Resisted Tests. The TN is based on the target's Melee Skill, modified as needed by the GM. Each Mark Test is a single Action within a CP that represents several strikes, parries, ripostes, feints, jabs, and dodges. The attacking character rolls their dice. The results are applied to the character's weapon's Damage Code. The target's Armor Code is subtracted, and then the target makes a Soak roll. Remaining damage is applied to the target. Appropriate Damage Penalty modifiers should be applied here, before the wounded character takes further action.

### **RANGED COMBAT**

TNs for Ranged Combat Mark Tests are initially based on the target's Dodge Rank, then modified for Range, Surprise, Visibility, and other modifiers. If the target does not have the Dodge Skill, then the TN is based on the REF Rank instead, with a -2TN modifier. The attacking character rolls their dice. The results are then applied to their weapon's Damage Code. The target's Armor Code is subtracted, and then the target makes a Soak roll. Any remaining damage is applied to the target. Damage Penalty modifiers should be applied before the wounded character takes further action.

### **COMBAT MODIFIERS**

Your target is running, through a haze, with a big shield on their arm, dodging from light pole to light pole, and you snap off a shot with an unfamiliar derringer beyond optimal range while also moving on difficult terrain. Yes, 6S has modifiers for all of that!

Other modifiers include Called Shots, Aiming, and Extended Ranges.

**Example:** Character 1 (C1) is attacking NPC2 (N2). C1 has REF: 2 and Melee: 2 and is using a club, which does (FIT)/S/(FIT) damage, or in this case 2/S/2. N2 has Melee: 2, a padded suit of armor that gives 0/-/2 Armor Code, and Soak: 3 (FIT: 2 + Dodge: 1). C1 makes their attack and rolls 4 dice to get 5, 4, 3, and 2. Since the TN was only 2, this nets 4 Ticks. The Damage Code facing N2 at this point is 2/S/6. Take away the Armor Code and it becomes 2/S/4. The Soak roll is made against TN: 2, based on the first number, or Force, of the Damage Code. N2 rolls 1, 3, and 4, which is 2 Ticks. These come off the Wound Boxes, also known as the last number of the Damage Code. The Damage Code is now 2/S/2, so N2 must take 2 boxes of Slight Damage and will now be at -1TN to all Actions because of the Slight Damage they have sustained.

## ATTACK DAMAGE

The point of attacking is to damage. In Sixcess, damage is indicated with a Damage Code — the Force that must be resisted to avoid taking damage, the severity of the attack, and how much it could damage the target. It reads thus:

**(Force)/(Wound Rank)/(Boxes of Damage)**

**Force** is always a number and represents the TN to resist potential damage. Ranged weapons usually have a fixed Force for the damage code, and melee weapons typically use the attacker's FIT.

**Wound Rank** is always a letter. It represents the base level of the wound: S for Slight, M for Major, L for Lethal, and F for Fatal.

**Boxes of Damage** is always the initial number of Wound Boxes of damage the target faces.

Each Mark the attacker rolls Scales Up the Wound Rank. Each Tick the attacker rolls increases the Boxes of Damage by 1.

Weapons and further Attack details and modifiers are in Sixcess Core.

## WOUNDS

Wounds represent how much damage a character can endure before they are out of commission. The two types of Wounds are Fatigue and Vitality.

### FATIGUE

Fatigue Wounds represent how much mental and emotional punishment the character can endure before falling unconscious or worse. Fatigue may also be called in to play for psychological effects. The four categories of Fatigue are Slight, Major, Exhausted, and Unconscious. Every character starts with a standard set of base Fatigue: 4 Slight, 3 Major, 2 Exhausted, and 1 Unconscious Wound Boxes. The character's WIL Rank is added to each of these categories, save Unconscious, which Overflows to Slight Vitality.

Fatigue can be augmented by Edges, Flaws, and Qualities.

### VITALITY

Vitality Wounds represent how much physical punishment the character can sustain before falling unconscious or worse. The four categories of Vitality are Slight, Major, Lethal, and Fatal. Every character starts with a standard set of base Vitality: 4 Slight, 3 Major, 2 Lethal, and 1 Fatal Wound Boxes. The character's FIT Rank is added to each of these categories, save Fatal. Only an Edge can give additional Wound Boxes for Fatal. Vitality can be augmented by Edges, Flaws, and Qualities.

A few additional details concerning Wounds are in the Sixcess Core book.

## SOAK

Any time a character is about to take damage, they are allowed a Soak roll, which represents their natural toughness and durability and their ability to Dodge or otherwise evade harm. Soak is based on the character's FIT Rank. Certain Skills such as Dodge may be added to the Soak roll. A standard Soak roll might consist of FIT: 2 + Dodge: 2, or Soak: 4. Soak rolls are always made against a TN based on the Force of the attack, which is the Damage Code's first number. Any Mark rolled Scales Down the Wound Rank by one Rank. Any Tick rolled reduces the number of Boxes of Damage by one Wound Box. If the Boxes of Damage in a Wound Rank are Soaked, then any remaining Ticks are applied to the next-highest Wound Rank's Wound Boxes. If the Damage Code is nullified, then no damage is taken.

## DAMAGE RESOLUTION

**Resolving damage goes as follows:**

An attack is made.

The attacker's Marks and Ticks modify the Damage Code.

The target's Armor Rating reduces the Damage Code.

Marks and Ticks from the target's Soak roll reduce the Damage Code.

The remaining Damage Code is applied to the target's Vitality Wounds by shading in the appropriate Wound Boxes on the character sheet.

If a Wound Box is already shaded, the next-highest unshaded Wound Box is shaded.

If any Fatal Wound Rank Wound Boxes are shaded, then the character is dying. Additional Overflow boxes indicate how many 15-minute increments of time the character can survive before they are beyond resuscitation. One Overflow box is eliminated per Mark of Vitality Wounds in excess of Fatal. Each additional Tick hastens death by three minutes.

## **HEALING WOUNDS**

Natural healing takes time. Each character may make one Healing check per eight hours of rest. This is a Soak roll, only without Skills added to the FIT, since the character is not being actively harmed. Resting under the care of a trained healer provides a bonus to this check. The Healing check's TN depends upon the damage to be healed, and Wound Penalties still apply, though they do not Stack. TNs start at Slight: 4, Major: 5, and Lethal or Exhausted: 6. Each Mark rolled heals one Wound Box. Rest cannot heal Fatal wounds; skilled healers must tend to them. Healing checks always heal the worst wounds first. Some settings allow Powers to heal characters or offer medical aid.

Fatigue heals much faster than Vitality. Every hour of rest heals one box of Fatigue damage. Every hour of sleep heals two boxes.

## **SOCIAL COMBAT**

Status, Reputation, VIS, and some Skills factor into Social Combat. Much as with physical combat, Skills drive Social Combat action. The TN of the attack is based on the opponent's Skill Rank, the GM applies any modifiers, and the Player rolls the Resisted Test. The results of that roll factor in like physical combat, complete with Social Armor and a Social Soak roll. But damage is temporary and is applied to the target's Fatigue, representing the subtle ebb and flow of negotiations, diplomacy, etc. Some groups may choose to role-play rather than use Social Combat.

6S also offers a full complement of rules on Panic, Fear, and other social, mental, and emotional circumstances.

## **GEAR**

6S has a long list of Gear for characters to purchase and carry in their setting, including, clothes, utensils, and tools. Each item has at least a cost and a weight.

## **WEAPONS AND ARMOR**

Weapons are a staple of RPGs and require their own place. The struggle of the PCs is quite real and survival may come down to the type and quality of their weapons and defenses. Being slightly more involved than ordinary Gear, Weapons are rated for Cost, Weight, Reach or Range, Conceal, Damage Type, Damage Code, Reload, Material and Quality. Setting will ultimately determine the base Materials and Qualities of each item.

6S has a variety of weapons and armor listings including bladed weapons, axes, ranged weapons, thrown weapons, gunpowder weapons, firearms, armors, shields, and barriers, to name a few.

The Sixcess Core book contains further listings and details.

## **SO, WHAT IS IN SIXCESS CORE?**

All of the above content is fully explained, complete with specific, easy-to-follow examples. The Sixcess Core book also includes information on:

### **CHARACTER CREATION**

Eventually every Player will be itching to build their own character in Sixcess and dig in to a setting of their choice to build story and experiences to grow their character along with others. 6S Character Creation is simple and straightforward. Some options can be more involved, but the basic process involves choosing a Race, Culture, and Profession for your character, then looking over the Priority Chart and spending your Character Points as you wish.

### **RACE**

Many settings have sets of Races available as PCs, but 6S Core offers a few universal starter options. Sixcess Core was Kickstarted, so 10 Races were added to meet a Stretch Goal. These Races are from a variety of settings, just as the initial Races are.

### **CULTURES**

Culture plays an important part in character development. Identity, behavior, appearance, clothing, language, and more can all come from Culture. 6S Core has starter samples.

### **PROFESSIONS**

Many adventurers may choose to have not a set profession, per se, but instead a core set of Skills they fall back on to do what they do. This is their Profession. A core set of Skills, and possibly Edges and Flaws, as well as a few Attributes gained while learning the trade, all help define the character.

### **PRIORITY CHART**

The Player rounds out the Character by spending Character Points on a Priority Chart to collect additional Attributes, Skills, Edges, Status, Resources, or even Power.

## **ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS**

Most characters are more than just their Race, Culture, and Profession. There are also Backgrounds, Edges, Flaws, Qualities, and even things like Spiritual Gifts, Dark Gifts, and more. Characters will also likely have to deal with Resources, Status, Contacts, Enemies, Reputation, and a slew of other things.

## **GEAR, WEAPONS, AND ARMOR**

The Sixcess Core book has detailed listings of all the Gear, Weapons, and Armor a character could want, and Harsh Realities is constantly putting out both free and published content to grow these listings. In addition to what is listed above, there are Bludgeoning Weapons, Entangling Weapons, Polearms, Missile Weapons, Energy Weapons, and Grenades and Explosives.

The Armor and Barrier rules also detail things like Armor Stacking, Armor Realism, Armor Degradation, Armor Encumbrance, Armor and Powers, Barriers, Scaling, and more!

## **VEHICLES AND MOUNTS**

Vehicles, like characters, can be built in 6S with Attributes, Backgrounds, Edges, Flaws, Qualities, and Maneuvers. A Vehicle is a transportation device that allows the character to travel beyond normal Move limitations. Motorcycles, Cars, Trucks, Carriages, Chariots, Boats, and a variety of flying machines all qualify as Vehicles. Any creature that can be ridden can be a Mount. Many creatures are listed in 6S Core, and each setting further expands the list. Players and GMs may build their own mounts.

### **Vehicles as Characters**

In some settings, Vehicles can be more than just machines; they can take on a life of their own and become characters.

## **GAME MASTERING SUGGESTIONS**

The Sixcess Core book instructs newer GMs and discusses GM roles in and out of game including game preparation, action mediation, and player interaction. The GM section includes information on player archetypes, scenario preparation, a GM Checklist, and more.

## **EXPERIENCE POINTS (XP)**

Things like finishing the adventure, advancing the plot, playing well, and more provide XP, which is awarded as Individual Awards or Group Awards. MVP rewards and other fun options also are available.

## **BESTIARY**

Every good RPG needs adversaries. The 6S Bestiary provides the GM and Players with an extensive catalog of creatures, NPCs, contacts, villains, henchmen, and minions. Some are from myth or legend; some are common animals; some are undead, were-beings, or constructs; and some are other things.

6S also has GM guidelines for managing swarms and groups of mooks.

## **ADVENTURES**

Role-playing games present interactive group dynamics. Once that dynamic is pulled together, the group has the Sixcess Core system, a setting (created or acquired), character sheets, and some dice. Now the GM needs an adventure to run for the Players.

Sixcess Core offers ideas on Story Seeds, Hooks, Group Drama, Conflict, Scenes, Scope, Acts, Climax, and even multi-adventure Campaigns.

## **CHARACTER DEATH**

Sometimes characters do not survive a scene. Sixcess Core suggests ways to make character death mean more to the players.

## **WORLD BUILDING**

Sixcess Core is not a game setting but a game system — a dice mechanic — a framework from which to hang a setting. Settings will soon be available from Harsh Realities, but Sixcess Core offers guidelines on how to build your own setting by establishing locations and then populating them with people and things that belong in them.

# THE LIGHTHOUSE

(Prep: This adventure assumes the Players will be playing downloaded or custom designed characters. Please make adjustments as needed.)

## SCENE 1- THE FORTUNE TELLER

The characters find themselves in a small, old town near a harbor rumored to have been a pirate cove. Late one night, each character discovers a handwritten note on their person. They have no idea where it came from or how it got on them. The note is addressed to the character and requests that they meet Helga the Seer at her shop within the hour. Directions to the shop are in the note. The characters can but need not know one another.

The town is what one might expect, given its size and locale. It has a handful of rundown homes and apartments, a few abandoned buildings or closed businesses, a pair of warehouses, some shops and other places of service, and an inn. The Green Dragon Inn is the only decent place in town. It is owned by the only wealthy family for miles.

Helga the Seer's shop is in an alley. It is easy to miss. The faded red door is small, the sign neatly painted on it: "Helga the Seer." The dark, neo-gothic interior is an interesting, if not odd, contrast as it is decorated to present a warm and inviting atmosphere. The décor is a mash of bright scarves, beaded curtains, draperies, exotic plants, and a few odd statues — all mixed with taxidermied animals, aged and dark woodwork and masonry, and seemingly random bones (including skulls) and other oddities should make the PCs feel unsettled. The shop door is unlocked with no one present when the PCs arrive.

After a dramatic wait, Helga the Seer steps through a beaded curtain from the back room and greets the PCs each by name. She is old, but her former beauty still shines through her wrinkled skin and sunken eyes. Her smile is heavily creased and broad, but something about it seems forced and incomplete, as if some unseen horror is leeching her joy away. After greeting the PCs, she begins telling the story of a lighthouse and its strange curse.

A single candle provides its light, which diffuses through a large gem into a configuration of smaller gems. This and clever use of mirrors allow the light to shine out over the water. The light from the lighthouse lingers on ships with stolen wares, and the Indiamen patrol ships use the light to locate pirate vessels. This is unfortunate for the criminals, but the lighthouse's true curse is in how it has come to be protected so well. Any soul who tries and fails to dismantle the light apparatus is compelled to care for the lighthouse for eternity. Because of the great wealth the light's components might bring, many have tried and failed to steal them.

Helga the Seer has foreseen that this small group of PCs could relieve the lighthouse of the gems and, by doing so, remove the curse and possibly those under it. She pauses for a moment, then continues, saying that each PC is represented by a gem (possibly the large central one), but the PCs should be cautious: The lighthouse is spiteful and jealous, it may claim any it deems to be thieves or pirates.

## A NOTE ON MOTIVATION

Why would the PCs want to accept this task? A few reasons are possible, but ultimately the GM should give each PC a solid carrot to follow, such as greed, the desire to free the cursed, the personal gain derived from ridding the cove of the light, or simply the yearning to do good for its own sake. Feel free to alter the story to tie in specific, personal elements for each PC.

Helga the Seer then gives each of the PCs a hand-crafted medallion made of beads and shells as she mumbles strange words and makes a few odd hand gestures, as if wrapping them in some unseen drapery. She then hurries them off with a final bit of information: They must accomplish their goal on the night of the new moon — two nights hence.

## ENCOUNTER- HANG A LANTERN ALOFT IN THE GREEN DRAGON INN

It's late, and the PCs may need a place to stay for the night, or they may just want to gather information. These NPCs are in The Green Dragon Inn, and the PCs may interact with them:

**John Barrow:** Lost his brother to the lighthouse. He is sullen and morose. Occasionally he visits his brother with meals and items he thinks his brother would like. He believes his brother could be saved if the curse were lifted.

"He's not like them other Lighters. He responds to me! I even seen him smile once when I told him a joke!"

**Tom Green, Bartender/Owner:** As owner and operator of the only successful business in town, Tom is content and friendly, but he feels a little guilty about the fact that nearly everyone else in town has

failed. He doesn't want the town to die, but he also doesn't know how to help it. Ask him about the lighthouse and he'll tell the PCs, "If you folks aim ta be messin' with the Lighters, beware. The Indiamen like that cursed thing and use it to hunt pirates."

**Big Tim Hinkleschmidt:** A young, local farmer barely getting by, Big Tim keeps to himself and tries hard to avoid any conversation with strangers. Buying him a drink will get him to talk, but little else will. Years ago he and a few friends tried to sneak into the lighthouse to get the treasure. He is haunted by the fact that his friends are still there, with hollow, lifeless eyes. "I don't go near them Lighters," he says. "It freaks me out to see Teddy and Bill shambling around like they's still livin'."

**Willem McCrow:** Not eager to talk to strangers. Willem is trying to eat in peace. He is a former pastor-in-training who lost his faith and turned a little cold because of it. He works on the docks loading and unloading cargo. It's a quiet job where most people don't bother him with idle chatter. If the PCs talk to him, he'll respond politely, but curtly. If the PCs offer to buy him a drink, he'll open up a bit. After two drinks, he'll lean in close to one of the PCs (the friendliest or the one who bought the drinks) and share, "The only way to stop one of those Lighters is a clean shot through the heart. Oh, sure, some say you can lop off their heads—but it's the heart where the curse lives and the heart has to die."

**Chandra Green:** The inn owner's niece and one of the few women seen about town, she is friendly and offers decent service, but obviously only because that's her job. She doesn't like her job much — or even living in this town, for that matter. She is in her early twenties and seeks a better life elsewhere. She's only here because she still hopes her ex-boyfriend and her cousin, who became Lighters about a year ago, can be released from the curse unharmed.

### ENCOUNTER= THROUGH ALLEY AND STREET

The town has a small, nonviolent gang of back-alley kids who operate as cutpurses and pickpockets. They are hurting just as much as everyone else. Any new bodies would prove incredibly attractive targets. When they PickPocket, PCs must roll an Observation + PER Mark Test TN: 5 netting at least 2 sixesses to notice them. Any attempts by the gang to pickpocket a PC are rolled at their PickPocket: 2 + REF: 3 against the PC's Observation Skill Rank. The gang member needs at least a number of sixesses equal to the PC's Observation Skill Rank to go undetected. If the gang member succeeds, the purse is gone and the gang member slips away. They won't press their luck too much, though. Times are lean, but they are cunning and would prefer not to be caught.

### ENCOUNTER= TO ARMS!

If word has gotten out that the PCs are going to the Lighthouse or want to end the curse, then the Indiamen will come looking for them. Word gets around quickly in a small town. The group of Indiamen varies and depends upon the PCs. There is always a Leader and two Toughs for each PC. Their intent is not to fight but to intimidate via a show of force. The Indiamen act as if they are the law in the area, even though they have no jurisdiction. If the PCs attack them, however, they will defend themselves.

#### Leader

CHA: 2, INT: 2, PER: 2, FIT: 3, REF: 3, WIL: 3

DRV: 2, VIS: 2, Move: 3 (Run: 9)

Vitality: 18 Wound Boxes

Brawl: 2, Dodge: 2, Intimidation: 3, Leadership: 2, Melee: 3, Pistol: 1

Cutlass (4/S/3), Flintlock Pistol (5/M/3), Fists (3/M/3 Fatigue)

Purse: 2 silver, 25 copper

#### Toughs

CHA: 2, INT: 1, PER: 2, FIT: 3, REF: 2, WIL: 2

DRV: 2, VIS: 2, Move: 2 (Run: 6)

Vitality: 18 Wound Boxes

Brawl: 3, Dodge: 2, Intimidation: 3, Leadership: 1, Melee: 2

Cutlass (4/S/3), Fists (3/M/3 Fatigue)

Purse: 10 copper

#### Tactics:

The Leader will do most of the talking and try to use his Intimidation: 3 + FIT: 3 against the PCs to convince them to stay away from the Lighthouse. The Toughs will Cooperate with the Leader, lending up to +2 dice to this roll. The TN of the Intimidation Mark Test is based on the PCs' WIL Ranks.

The Indiamen will not initiate violence, but they will provoke as much as possible, hoping the PCs start a fight — especially if they will not easily back down and go away. If the PCs are provoked, the Indiamen will fight like an organized mob trying to gang up on the weakest PCs first, then working their way up to the toughest or most skilled. Their primary tactic is to overwhelm with numbers, and they fight to win. This is a turf war, and the PCs are threatening to remove their biggest gun.

## **SCENE 2= STORM THE LIGHT HOUSE**

The lighthouse is a day's travel North of the town on a rocky outcropping a meter or so larger than the lighthouse base. A narrow, stone land bridge connects it to the coast. The path down the middle of the bridge is worn and barely a meter wide at narrowest.

Encounters: One if by Land

A dirt path meanders along the coast from town to lighthouse. Along it is a crude blockade and a contingent of ten Indiamen Toughs. They are more aggressive than those in town, and they have no Leader. They are essentially a border guard. Their primary objective is to discourage anyone from going to the lighthouse, one way or another. They've been out here, bored, for several long days. A smooth-talking PC may be able to get past them, however. Stealth, Intimidation, and distractions might be other ways to go. A straight-up fight could go badly for the PCs, though. Sometimes it's just not wise to poke the cobra.

### **ENCOUNTER= TWO IF BY SEA**

If the PCs travel to the lighthouse by sea, they will encounter an Indiamen trade vessel not far from the docks. This ship is a large freighter outfitted with a ramming rig and three decks of cannons. Stealth may be the best Maneuver to attempt, but let the Players choose this. The Players can achieve Vehicle Stealth by making a combined Sailing Skill check and HND check. To do this, combine all dice needed for each check, and drop one die each from the Skill and Maneuver checks for multiple actions. The GM sets the TN on the Observation Skill of the other ship's lookout, then modifies it for visibility, Move, and even crew behavior (on both ships). The highest TN should be taken if the two checks' TNs differ. Additional details may factor, such as Leadership to control the crew, weather, or any PC-initiated distractions.

If the ship slips past the Indiamen trade vessel, then they face no other encounters until they reach the lighthouse. If they are spotted, the Indiamen ship will give chase and try to call as much attention to the situation as possible. Outrunning the trade vessel should not be terribly difficult unless the PC ship is as large as the trade vessel. If they do not lose the Indiamen trade vessel, it will follow them to the lighthouse.

#### **A Note on Indiamen and the Lighters**

The captain of the ship is the leader of this group of Indiamen. They are merchants first and foremost, but moving freight is only part of their trade. Capturing pirates is good business for many reasons. The captain came upon the legend of the Lighthouse and managed to locate and claim a silver ring set with a knucklebone-sized emerald. The ring allows the wearer to be ignored by the Lighters and controls the light in the lighthouse as well. Once activated, the light will seek out whatever it is the wearer seeks. If the light is destroyed, the ring will cease to be so special, but it will still fetch at least 185 gold at nearly any fence.

### **ENCOUNTER= THE OPPOSITE SHORE**

Whether coming by land or rowing ashore in a longboat, the PCs will eventually reach a staging area where they can plan their next moves. Scouting will reveal that the lighthouse is too well-guarded for them to just walk or row up to it without deadly, open conflict. By this point, the PCs have been traveling for almost a day straight. The PCs may decide they should eat and rest for the night. This location provides some cover in the nearby edge of a small wooded region with no obvious enemies. If the PCs linger here for too long, however, there is a cumulative chance every hour of a patrol coming by the area. If the PCs take sufficient precautions, the patrol will not notice the PCs. The lighthouse is about a 30-minute walk from the edge of the woods.

### **ENCOUNTER= THE SOUND OF ARMS AND THE TRAMP OF FEET**

Unless previously dealt with, the Indiaman trade vessel will locate and board the PCs ship. If there is no ship, they will spot the PCs and send up to three longboats to shore to capture (or kill, if necessary) the PCs. Each longboat holds eight Toughs. If there are at least two longboats, there will be one Leader as well.

### **ENCOUNTER= CLIMBING THE TOWER**

If the PCs sneak in close enough, they can scale the seaside cliff the lighthouse sits over. This cliff is opposite the meandering land bridge path. It is a steep, difficult climb and will require at least three successful Climb + FIT Mark Tests against TN: 5. At least two Ticks are needed to constitute a success. The cliff is open to the crashing surf, making it wet part of the way up, and irregular gusts of wind threaten to knock unsuspecting PCs lose as well. For each Climb Skill Mark Test, the PC will also face a 4/S/4 attack

to represent Fatigue. Have them roll Soak to avoid taking damage. WIL may be Spent here to bolster Mark Tests. Applying Stealth during the climb elongates the process, and the GM may make the Fatigue attack more intense. Flying characters will still face at least one of these Fatigue tests for the gusting winds. Lighters and/or Indiamen may have chances to notice careless PCs here.

## ENCOUNTER= MASSES AND MOVING SHAPES

Assuming the PCs have made it this far, they are likely dedicated to the task of relieving the lighthouse of both the gems and the curse. Doing so will probably force them to face at least a few Lighters. Lighters were not created at the same time, or from the same stock. Different types have different abilities, but they are all guardians of the lighthouse. Their primary objectives are to keep non-Lighters away from the lighthouse and, failing that, create more Lighters.

### GM Note on Lighters

Lighters, though not exactly zombies, should play out similarly for dramatic purposes. They rush, shamble, grapple, swarm, and generally try to herd the PCs. At first, the tactic is to shield them away from the lighthouse. If the PCs persist, the Lighters will shift tactics and try to force them into the lighthouse instead. Either way, their main tactic is to convert the PCs by either biting them or, more directly, exposing them to the curse.

Lighters will only attack or pursue targets they can see or sense. Once targets are out of sight, they will quickly lose interest and stop pursuing.

If within reach, a Lighter will attempt to Grapple a PC. This is done with a Mark Test of Brawl (Grapple) + REF against a TN set by an appropriate Skill, such as Melee, Brawl, or even Dodge if moving only defensively. This Lighter action will draw attention, causing d6 other Lighters to pile on within a CR. They always mean to hold the PC so that one or more of them can Bite to pass the curse. If Grappled, the PC may attempt to break free of the hold. This Resisted Test may be a variety of combinations of Skill + Attribute. GMs should encourage Players to be creative with their character's Skills here.

The only way to lift a Lighter's curse is to dismantle the lighthouse's light mechanism.

Putting a Lighter down, however, is a bit more direct. Causing enough Vitality Wounds — specifically to the head or heart — will kill a Lighter. If the PCs care at all about saving Lighters and trying to return them to their former selves, this option is not advised, as the damage to put a Lighter down would also put down a normal human.

### Lighters – Creeper

CHA: 0, INT: 0, PER: 1, WIL: 0, FIT: 2, REF: 1

DRV: 1, VIS: 0, Move: 1 (Run: 3)

Vitality: 16

Brawl (Bite)(Grapple): 3(4)(4), Dodge: 1, Leadership: 1, Observation: 1

Bite (2/S/2; Stun 3/S/3), Claw (2/S/2; Disease), Fists (2/S/2)

Creepers are Lighters that crawl or pull themselves along more slowly than others. Some are legless and on the ground, others are crawling on their knees, and others may be in even worse condition. Creepers attempt to use their bodies to slow the PCs. They will Grapple and attempt to Bite almost immediately. A Bite will force a FIT Mark Test TN: 5. At least 2 Ticks are required to avoid being infected. Failure forces an immediate WIL Mark Test TN: 6. At least 1 Mark is necessary to resist the Creeper's curse being passed to the PC. Failure means the PC has fallen under the curse of the lighthouse and is rapidly changing. The PC will stand in a daze for d3 rounds before joining actions with the other Lighters.

### Lighters – Sprinter

CHA: 0, INT: 0, PER: 2, WIL: 0, FIT: 2, REF: 3

DRV: 2, VIS: 0, Move: 3 (Run: 9)

Vitality: 16

Brawl (Bite)(Grapple): 3(4)(4), Dodge: 1, Leadership: 1, Melee (Claws): 2(3), Observation: 1, Run (Sprint): 1(2)

Bite (2/S/2; Stun 2/S/2), Claw (2/S/2; Disease), Fists (2/S/2)

Sprinters seem less deteriorated than some other Lighters. They still mill about, but once they notice a PC, they will sprint toward

### Lighters – Shambler

CHA: 0, INT: 0, PER: 1, WIL: 0, FIT: 2, REF: 2

DRV: 1, VIS: 0, Move: 2 (Run: 6)

Vitality: 16

Brawl (Bite)(Grapple): 3(4)(4), Dodge: 1, Leadership: 1, Observation: 1

Bite (2/S/2; Stun 2/S/2), Claw (2/S/2; Disease), Fists (2/S/2)

Shamblers aimlessly stumble and mill about the lighthouse area unless they notice a PC. Once the PC is noticed, the Shambler pursues them until they are caught or beyond reach. Shamblers apply the same basic tactic as most Lighters.

If a Shambler can Grapple a PC, they will attempt to Bite as well. A Bite will force a FIT Mark Test TN: 5. At least 2 Ticks are required to avoid being infected. Failure forces an immediate WIL Mark Test TN: 6. At least 1 Mark is necessary to resist the Shambler's curse being passed to the PC. Failure means the PC has fallen under the curse of the lighthouse and is rapidly changing. The PC will stand in a daze for d3 rounds before joining actions with the other Lighters.

them, wailing and flailing their clawed hands. Sprinters employ the most active tactics of all Lighters. They will charge the PCs, try to bowl them over or even tackle them, Grapple, Claw, or otherwise slow their mobility, and then Bite. A Bite will force a FIT Mark Test TN: 5. At least 2 Ticks are required to avoid being infected. Failure forces an immediate WIL Mark Test TN: 6. At least 1 Mark is necessary to resist the Sprinter's curse being passed to the PC. Failure means the PC has fallen under the curse of the lighthouse and is rapidly changing. The PC will be in a daze for d3 rounds before joining actions with the other Lighters.

### **ENCOUNTER= A SHADOWY SOMETHING**

The lighthouse door is barely hinged, but still locked. A shoulder, swift kick, or even a lockpick check will easily open it. Beyond the door are what used to be the lighthouse keeper's living quarters. They are in a shambles following years of disuse: Furniture is rotten, destroyed, broken, water-damaged, etc. Mold, a thick layer of dust, and cobwebs. What's left of the bedding is shredded and moth-eaten. Anything made of iron is corroded and rusted through. Only one room is sectioned off. Its old, worn door is locked. The room beyond it is small and lined with fallen or rotted shelves. The lone item left is a brittle, rotten leather shoulder bag covered in dust and cob webs. Inspecting the bag will cause it to crumble. An old wooden staircase built atop stone supports leads up to the next level.

### **ENCOUNTER= THE STEALTHY TREAD**

The second floor is home to a unique being. He was an apprentice magic user who favored natural magic, and his last act before the curse took hold was to spray a group of Lighters with spores that would make them follow his mental commands. He became part of the curse, and those Lighters remained stayed to him. They never stray more than 20 feet (6.1 m) from him unless commanded so.

A Stealth + REF Mark Test at TN: 6 with at least 2 Ticks will allow PCs to sneak up the stairs without causing the old boards to creak too much. This only gets them to the top of the stairs, where the flooring here is more old wood. A group of 10 Lighters (6 Shamblers, 4 Sprinters) stand in the middle of the large, empty room here. They are huddled around the former magic user and all have their backs to the stairs or heads hung, as if sleeping on their feet. They seem to move, even breathe, in unison. The PCs can sneak past them and continue up the next set of stairs, but the stairs get worse the higher the PCs go, and any sharp or prolonged noise will startle the Lighters and cause them to turn and rush the PCs. The next room up is open, stone construction other than the wooden beams and flooring. An excessively large or heavy and uncautious PC might fall through a weak spot.

#### **Mage Lighter**

CHA: 1, INT: 1, PER: 2, WIL: 2, FIT: 5, REF: 3

DRV: 2, VIS: 1, MAG: 2, Move: 3 (Run: 9)

Vitality: 25

Brawl (Bite): 3(4), Dodge: 1, Leadership: 1, Melee: 1, Observation: 2

Bite (5/S/5; Stun 3/S/3), Claw (5/S/5; Disease), Fists (5/S/5)

Spores: 3 (Can cast only twice and takes a full CP to cast. Sprays d6 PCs with pollen-like spores. Any PC sprayed must make a FIT Mark Test TN: 5. At least 3 Ticks are required to shrug off the Spores. Failure forces an immediate WIL Mark Test TN: 6. At least 2 Marks are necessary to resist the Mage Lighter's own WIL as he is attempting to take control of the PC. Failure means the PC has become a thrall of the Mage Lighter and will stand in a daze for d3 rounds before joining actions with the other Lighters. Either way, just getting sprayed with the Spores means standing in a daze and/or sneezing uncontrollably for at least 1 CP.)

Robes (torn, filthy, worn), component horn (1 oz. salt, 2 pinches of diamond dust, a ball of bat guano, and a piece of bark), a gold ring, and an ornately carved staff.

### **SCENE 3= DISABLE THE DEVICE**

The rest of the way up the lighthouse is mostly stairs and a bit of empty storage space. The stairs remain unsteady and dangerous, but they won't collapse unless the PCs are clustered or abnormally large.

The lighthouse device is not hard to find or reach. At the top, the PCs can see a room with wood- and stone-framed glass pane walls. The mechanism is as Helga the Seer described it: a central candle next to a palm-sized, elegantly cut emerald gemstone. The light is reflected and amplified as it moves on to fifteen smaller emeralds and then to a series of mirrors that end in a directional device that can pivot and direct the light out to sea.

Disabling the device is impossible as long as the candle remains lit. An invisible, supernatural barrier protects the mechanism, blocking all solid, liquid or living objects from breaching it.

- Possible Solutions Include: A gust of wind could blow out the candle. Blowing or fanning air will not work. Lighter flesh could pass through the barrier and knock the candle over or douse it — apparently an oversight of the curse: The dead flesh of a Lighter is the only solid material that can pass through the barrier.
- The floor under the device could be removed or disturbed enough to cause the components to fall out of alignment.

Once the candle is out, the device stops working and stops generating the barrier. It can then be dismantled easily.

The large emerald is hot enough to burn bare skin. Anyone touching it without at least gloves will suffer a 3/S/3 surface burn. As soon as the large emerald is removed, however, the glass wall panes implode, causing an area affect 4M4 damage to anyone in the upper level. Dodge and Acrobatics may not be added to this Soak roll, as the PCs can maneuver nowhere to avoid the blast. All the Lighters who can be released from the curse are released — some are too far gone. The GM should use discretion, perhaps based on town encounters and PC actions, to determine which Lighters are saved.

## SCENE 4- RETURN WITH LOOT

Leaving the Lighthouse, the PCs find a number of former Lighters who are disoriented from being released from the curse. They have only vague, fever-dream-type memories of their experiences as Lighters, and many are experiencing amnesia-like symptoms. The PCs can take them home or leave them to their own fate. Some PCs may even wish to attempt to negotiate rewards for their rescue. Keep in mind the townspeople have little to give.

## ENCOUNTER- THE MEASURED TREAD OF THE INDIAMEN

The Indiamen trader vessel (if still seaworthy) returns to town. The Indiamen are looking for information on who disabled their precious Lighthouse. The outcome of this encounter depends heavily on the PCs' prior actions. Outcomes could range from diplomatic Social Combat to a skirmish to the townspeople stepping forward to tell the Indiamen to get lost. Alternately, PCs may choose to avoid the encounter. Not dealing with the Indiamen, however, will likely mean they stay put and possibly strengthen.

## EPILOGUE

The PCs gain notoriety for their actions. On the good side, they may have removed the curse, defeated the Indiamen (in the town's eyes only), and freed specific townsfolk from the curse and/or returned them to their loved ones. On the bad side, they may have failed or refused to remove the curse, joined or avoided the Indiamen, killed (intentionally or not) a townsfolk even if they were a Lighter at the time, and gone against the Indiamen (in the Indiamen's eyes only). The large emerald is worth at least 3,000 gold, but no fence will give much more than half that. The smaller emeralds are worth around 150 gold each and will usually fetch a little more than half that. Surviving PCs are offered a week's free room and board at The Green Dragon Inn, but that's about all the town can offer aside from smaller, more personal gifts of thanks.

Helga the Seer can't be found. Her shop looks like it has been closed for decades. Anyone in town who is asked about the shop reluctantly tells the PCs that Helga died 32 years ago. She was the widow of the lighthouse's original caretaker.



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