

AUBAINE



# GAME MASTER HANDBOOK

BOOK • V0.2.1

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# RUNNING A GAME

The GM describes the world, plays everything that is not a player character, and settles what the rules leave open. They are not playing against the table.

This book gathers what belongs to them alone. Everything else, including the rules they apply, is in the Player Handbook.

## WHAT YOU DECIDE

### The starting set

The two Trees on offer, the Species available, and the 25 XP, 22 MP and 3 PP a new character receives. Announce any change before the table starts: a one-shot and a long campaign do not open on the same numbers.

### The pair for every Roll

No **Aptitude** belongs to a **Characteristic**. You read the way of acting that was announced and choose the pair. Reward the description: it is the only lever that pushes a player to say how they go about it rather than what they are rolling.

### The DC

Whenever no rule prints one. Use the ladder, and remember that a trivial action needs no Roll.

### Karma

When a point is deserved, and which slot it lands in. A slot already filled does not take a second.

### The rewards

XP at every significant obstacle, MP and PP by milestone. Announce which one you are granting before the players choose anything.

### The loot

The workable sources, their Loot Die and Loot Table, and the DC of a targeted harvest.

## WHAT YOU DO NOT DECIDE

What a character does. A player decides their actions; you decide what the world makes of them.

What a player crafts. Real availability comes from components, recipes and the risk of crafting, not

from permission.

What a piece or a Skill grants. Those numbers are printed on them. If a value bothers you, change the entry, not the rule at the moment it lands.

## CALLING IT IN THE MOMENT

Three habits cover most cases.

**Ask what they want out of it.** An action with no stated goal has no possible DC. “I search the room” becomes playable as soon as you know what they hope to find.

**Do not roll for what is settled.** A Roll costs the table time and has to decide something. If success changes nothing, or failure costs nothing, give them the result.

**Say the price before the throw.** What the attempt costs and risks is said before the dice land, never after. That is what makes a failure acceptable.

## WHAT IS STILL TO BE WRITTEN

This book does not yet cover running a campaign, building a place, writing a creature or preparing a session. Aubaine has no published creature entry and no adventure format.

The three chapters that follow cover what carries numbers today: weighing an encounter, designing a Skill, and testing the balance.

# THREAT AND ENCOUNTERS

Threat estimates a creature's power in a confrontation. It exists to prepare an encounter quickly. It does not guarantee the outcome.

Threat = total MP granted + total PP granted

## READING IT ON A CHARACTER

Start from what the character received at creation, then add every MP and PP reward granted since.

You do not have to look at how they spread them. A value lowered to -1 returns 1 MP that is spent elsewhere, so the net sum does not move: what counts is what you gave, not what they did with it.

A standard starting character therefore has a Threat of 25.

XP does not enter the calculation. It decides the Skills, the combinations and the shape the power takes, not its quantity: effect budgets, **Memory** and **Energy** handle that.

Threat is not a level. It limits no purchase, no crafting and no possibility in the fiction. It changes nothing for the player, who has no reason to know their own.

## GROUP THREAT

Group Threat = sum of the characters' Threats

When everyone has received the same, work out one individual Threat and multiply. Four starting characters make a group Threat of 100.

## MONSTERS

A monster states its MP and PP totals, and their sum. It uses the same **Characteristics**, **Aptitudes**, **Rolls**, resources and Skill structures as the characters.

Spread its points according to its real role: damage, endurance, mobility, support, control, information, versatility. Two monsters of equal Threat can play very differently, and that is the point.

A high value needs a clear way to express itself, in the entry or in the tactics. A high Characteristic the monster never uses is Threat paid for nothing.

A boss **Action**, damage reduction, a phase or a special defence goes through an explicit resource, activation or limitation. Nothing is added after the Threat is worked out.

A creature of Threat 0 is not a standalone opponent. It is scenery, a hazard, part of a group, or a creature summoned by another rule.

## COMPOSING AN ENCOUNTER

Add up the opponents' Threat and compare it with the group's.

Encounter ratio = enemy Threat / group Threat

| RATIO        | ESTIMATED DIFFICULTY |
|--------------|----------------------|
| under 0.25   | Trivial              |
| 0.25 to 0.39 | Easy                 |
| 0.40 to 0.59 | Standard             |
| 0.60 to 0.79 | Hard                 |
| 0.80 to 1.00 | Extreme              |
| over 1.00    | Overwhelming         |

Read the scale carefully: an encounter at equal Threat is Extreme, not Standard. An opponent as powerful as the whole group is comparable opposition, which is already the upper limit of what a table absorbs.

Against a group of Threat 100, an enemy Threat of 50 gives 0.50 and a Standard encounter. A Threat of 75 gives 0.75 and a Hard one.

## WHAT THE RATIO ASSUMES

A direct confrontation, with no decisive advantage already established. Terrain, surprise, objectives, resistances, vulnerabilities, available information and the players' decisions all shift the real result, sometimes a long way.

The ratio becomes unreliable when an encounter rests mainly on one of these:

# DESIGNING A SKILL

A new Skill is designed in this order: what it is, what it costs, what it does, then its price in XP. The prose comes last, otherwise it invents mechanics to justify its sentences.

## TYPE AND ACTIVATION

There are three types.

### Active

Deliberately activated, it costs a unit of action time.

### Passive

Applied deliberately, continuously or automatically.

### Special

Its own text defines how it works, because it fits neither Active nor Passive.

The activation says what it takes: an **Action**, a **Bonus Action**, a **Reaction** with its trigger, a time in turns, a time in minutes or hours, or nothing for a passive.

A Reaction states its trigger in the first sentence of its description, never in its activation.

## TAGS

A tag is a balance lever: another Skill, an item or a state can target at once every Skill that carries it. For each of the three slots, Practice, School and Special, ask whether the Skill needs it, for balance, for its flavour or for a combo. If the answer is no, the slot stays empty. Basic Skills carry none.

Choose among the existing tags. Inventing one for a single Skill opens one more combo across the whole game and brings nothing to the table. A new tag is justified by a real gap, or by a mechanic shared across several Trees, like the Shout.

Not every School accepts every Practice: a Manoeuvre stays within the Schools of combat, a Shout within what a voice can carry.

The Unleashed tag marks an unleashed Skill in the sense of the effect budget, below: the player composes its effect at the moment of playing it.

## THE EFFECT BUDGET

The unit of comparison is the Effect Unit. It is a design tool; it never appears in text a player reads.

One Effect Unit is roughly one damage die, 1d10 by default, or one die of healing or temporary HP, 1d4 by default, or one standard secondary effect. A secondary effect may replace a damage die, or drop its size by one step.

The budget depends on the freedom left to the player:

- an unleashed Skill, whose effect the player composes when using it, produces X Units for a cost of X;
- an ordinary Skill, with its effect fixed in advance, produces X + 1 Units for the same cost.

The gap pays for the constraint. An effect decided in advance is worth less than one chosen at the right moment.

The default resource is **Energy**. A rule may use HP or **Karma**, which weigh more: Karma comes back at no rest.

## RANGES AND AREAS

The reference ranges are contact at 1.5 metres, reach at 3 metres, and distance at 9, 12 or 18 metres. Another value is allowed when the Skill warrants it.

An area gives its shape and dimensions in multiples of 1.5 metres. Its budget depends on how many targets it should reasonably catch, not on its exact surface.

## RESISTING, AND LASTING

A Skill that can be resisted states four things: the target's exact defensive **Roll**, the exact **DC** formula, the effect on a success, the effect on a failure. "The target only takes half damage" is part of the budget, not of generosity.

An effect over time spreads its dice across several turns without raising their total. Its text says when it applies, for how long, whether it renews and whether it stacks.

# TESTING THE BALANCE

The values in this book are a starting calibration. Testing decides which ones stay.

This chapter is a protocol, not a rule of play. Nothing here applies at the table.

## WHAT TO RECORD

### Per character

The MP and PP granted and the Threat that follows, the Vitality, **Memory** and **Energy** levels, maximum and remaining **HP** and **Energy**, **Memory** used, **AC**, the usual **Roll** modifiers and **DCs**, the damage, healing and control produced, and the **Karma** received then spent.

### Per monster

The same, plus the number of **Actions**, **Bonus Actions** and **Reactions** actually used, and which resistances or special defences fired.

### Per encounter

Both Threats and the announced ratio, the number of participants on each side, the number of rounds, the resources spent, the characters who fell into **Agonie** or died, the **Actions** or turns removed, the decisive interactions of terrain or information, and the felt difficulty against the announced one.

That last gap is the measurement that matters. The rest is there to explain it.

## THE BUILDS TO COMPARE

At equal Threat, run at least one build that concentrates its **Energy**, one versatile build that spends **Memory**, one enduring build that invests in **Vitality**, one support or control build, and one hybrid.

The scenarios have to let varied **Characteristics** and **Aptitudes** bear on the outcome. A damage exchange in an empty room tests one thing and always validates the same build.

## THE SERIES

### PP spread

Same MP and PP, different splits between Vitality, **Memory** and **Energy**.

### MP spread

Same totals, different **Characteristics** and **Aptitudes**. Check each one gets real chances to matter.

### Concentration and versatility

Cheap Skills, expensive Skills and versatile sets, over one encounter and then over a full resource cycle.

### Composition

At equal ratio, compare a lone opponent, a few powerful ones, several ordinary ones, and a large number of weak ones.

### Equipment

The objects that add directly to **Rolls**, **DCs**, **Characteristics**, **Aptitudes** or resources. Their contribution has to convert into equivalent MP or PP, or it needs reviewing by hand.

## THE OPEN QUESTIONS

1. Does the sum of MP and PP correctly predict the power of different spreads?
2. Do the three Potential paths stay comparable across varied encounters and a full cycle?
3. Do MP spreads produce distinct roles without creating dead values?
4. Do the effect budgets hold Skills to a comparable value despite very different uses?
5. Does the Threat ratio predict the announced difficulties?
6. Does one ratio stay meaningful as the number of opponents changes?
7. Does a lone opponent have enough interactions without exceeding its resource economy?
8. Which Skills, passives, equipment or combinations regularly exceed their expected value?

Do not adjust a constant on isolated throws. It takes repeated encounters, different compositions, and complete resource cycles.

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