
AUBAINE
GAME MASTER HANDBOOK
BOOK • V0.3.0

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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:

- an effect able to inflict **Agonie** on a healthy character in a single activation;
- repeated removal of Actions or whole turns;
- a large number of independent creatures;
- a lone opponent with no way to act between the characters' turns;
- an immunity or resistance that neutralises most of the group's options.

These do not change the formula. They say where to look first before bringing the encounter to the table.

The balancing principle

The formula is also a design constraint. At equal Threat, two different spreads should produce a comparable contribution, even where they create opposite play styles.

When a spread, a Skill or a combination regularly dominates the others, fix the rule at fault. Do not add a coefficient to Threat: that hides the imbalance instead of treating it.

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, the place of one of the **Attacks** in the Attaquer action, 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.

Unleashed 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` against a single target;
- one healing die, `1d8` when the Skill takes an **Action**, `1d4` when it takes a **Bonus Action**;
- one die of temporary **HP**, `1d4`;
- or one standard secondary effect.

Rank

Rank measures an active Skill's power, from 1 to 9. Like the Effect Unit, it is a design tool, kept out of any text a player reads. Its **Energy** cost sets its Units.

RANK	ENERGY	UNITS	AREA	LIMIT AND KARMA
1	2	2	2d6	
2	3	3	4d6	
3	5	5	6d6	
4	6	6	7d6	
5	7	8	8d6	
6	9	10	11d6	Once per **Long Rest**
7	10	11	12d6	1 **Karma**, once per **Long Rest**
8	11	12	13d6	1 **Karma**, once per **Long Rest**
9	13	15	14d6	1 **Karma**, once per **Long Rest**

The Area column gives the damage a Skill deals to each creature it hits when it aims at several targets or an area, in place of its Units on a single target.

Below Rank 1, a Skill at 1 **Energy** buys 1 Unit. A cost between two Ranks counts as the Rank below, for its bonus Units, its limit and its price: at any cost, the Units equal the **Energy** up to 6, the **Energy** plus 1 from 7 to 12, and 15 at 13. A Skill costs at most 13 **Energy**.

Paying for a Skill

The default resource is **Energy**. The Basic Skills are the only free ones: every other active Skill pays something. A Skill at 0 **Energy** pays another way: in **HP**, in **Karma**, with a long activation of minutes or hours, with a resource it spends, or with a usage limit.

A usage limit is enough to pay for a Skill that costs nothing else. Playable once per **Long Rest**, such a Skill goes up to the Rank 1 budget of 2 Units; playable once per **Short Rest**, up to 1 Unit. A more frequent limit, per combat or per turn, does not replace a cost.

At Rank 6, a Skill pays its **Energy** and is limited to once per **Long Rest**. At Ranks 7 to 9, it pays its **Energy** and 1 **Karma**, and is limited to once per **Long Rest**. Each Skill has its own limit: two Rank 6 Skills can each be played once per **Long Rest**. **Karma** weighs more than **Energy**: no rest brings it back.

At Ranks 7 to 9, the whole **Energy** cost can be paid in 3 **Karma**, the Rank's **Karma** included, or all or part of it in **HP**. Each **Energy** replaced costs about 2.5 **HP**: paid entirely in **HP**, a Rank 7 Skill costs `7d6` **HP**, a Rank 8 Skill `8d6`, a Rank 9 Skill `9d6`. In every case, the limit and the Rank's **Karma** stay.

Fixed or unleashed

A fixed Skill and an **Unleashed** Skill follow the same table: their **Energy** sets their Units. A fixed Skill spends its Units when it is designed, and its effect is settled in advance. An **Unleashed** Skill lets the player and the GM spend them at the table. The trades below give the cost of each choice, in both cases.

TRADE	WHAT IT COSTS
Several targets or an area, instead of one target	The dice in the Area column of the same Rank
An area larger than its Rank allows	1 die fewer per extra 1.5 m of radius, 3 m of edge, 4.5 m of cone or 9 m of line
No damage on a successful **Save** or a missed **Attack**, instead of half	Each die goes up one size: d10 to d12, d6 to d8
A secondary effect	Replaces a damage die
A range beyond 9 m	1 die fewer
A lasting effect	The same dice spread over several turns, never more

A Skill that takes "1 **Attack**" keeps the damage of that **Attack** as the **Attaquer** action sets it: the weapon's, or `1d4` unarmed, plus the **Characteristic** its **Roll** uses. Its Units come on top. When it strikes with a natural weapon that stands in for bare hands, such as hooves, claws or fangs, its damage dice count that `1d4` on top of its Units.

A Rank 3 Skill costs 5 **Energy** and buys 5 Units: `5d10` on a single target within 9 metres, `4d10` on a target at 18 metres, or `6d6` on each creature in an area.

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. Up to 9 metres, range costs nothing; beyond that, it costs what the table of trades says.

An area gives its shape and dimensions in multiples of 1.5 metres. It grows with its Rank: a sphere, or a cylinder of any height, has a radius of up to 1.5 metres per Rank, a cube an edge of up to 3 metres per Rank, a cone a length of up to 4.5 metres per Rank, and a line 1.5 metres wide a length of up to 9 metres per Rank. Within those limits, the area deals the damage in the Area column for its Rank, whatever its exact size; beyond them, it costs what the table of trades says.

Resisting, and lasting

A Skill that can be resisted states the target's exact defensive **Roll**, the exact **DC** formula, the effect on a failure, and what a success does, if it does anything. A success that does no more than escape the failure's effect goes unwritten. "The target only takes half damage" is part of the budget, not of generosity.

The dice of an effect over time follow the table of trades. Its text says when it applies, for how long, whether it renews and whether it stacks.

A Skill that applies a state with Intensity buys the higher Intensities out of its budget. Intensity 1 should stay comparable to what ordinary fiction would produce without a specialised Skill.

The price in XP

An active Skill's price follows its Rank: 10 XP per Rank, up to 90 XP at Rank 9. A Skill at 1 **Energy** costs 5 XP, and a Skill paid only by a limit costs the price of the budget it reaches: 10 XP for 2 Units, 5 XP for 1. Each purchase costs 5 to 100 XP, in steps of 5. A Species Skill is worth 25 XP by default.

The price accounts for impact, frequency, action efficiency, flexibility, persistence, synergies and limitations. The final decision belongs to the designer, who records the departures and watches them through testing.

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 MP and PP, run at least one build that puts every PP into a single path, one that splits them between two paths, one that spreads them across all three, and one support or control build.

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: all in one path, shared between two, spread across all three.

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?
9. Does the formula `Threat = MP + PP` still give a PP its fair weight, now that each PP raises a path by one level and a major milestone grants 3 MP or 1 PP?
10. How fast should PP arrive, when a path takes 20 to fill?
11. How often should the GM grant **Karma**, now that Ranks 7 to 9 spend it?

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



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