

Section I · Welcome to Hellebore

Chapter 1 · What is Hellebore?

The game in one paragraph

Hellebore is a tabletop roleplaying game built for fast, fun combat. You roll a d20, add one of your four abilities, and try to beat a target number. Everything else is simplified to make that loop easy to learn and quick to play: movement is two lanes (Front and Back) instead of a grid, and changing lanes costs 1 action point; a turn is four action points; and your class is a deck of cards, so the interesting choices live in the hand you draw from it. Hellebore does not ask you to rework roleplaying. Talking, exploring and telling stories work as they do in any tabletop game; Hellebore only changes how you fight.

What is in this book

Section	What it covers
I · Welcome	What Hellebore is, and the abilities
II · Making a character	Building a character step by step
III · Classes	The playtest classes and their decks
IV · When things go wrong	Damage, healing, death and trauma
V · Conditions	The conditions a creature can suffer
VI · Creatures	Monsters, bosses and NPCs
VII · Cards and decks	How decks work and how they grow
VIII · Combat	Turns, AP, lanes and card types
IX · Running the game	Building an encounter and running scenes
Legal and license	Copyright and what the community can do
Annex · Assets	The help images and the card images

Where it comes from

Hellebore borrows from games we love, and tries to keep only the parts that make a table's life easier.

Inspiration	What we took
Dungeons & Dragons (SRD)	The d20 roll against a target number, classes with roles, and the feeling of a party working together

Inspiration	What we took
Pathfinder	Critical successes and failures: beat the target by 10 or more and it is a critical success (a critical hit deals double damage); miss by 10 or more and it is a critical failure. A natural 20 or 1 does nothing special
Darkest Dungeon	Characters are marked by what happens to them: trauma and quirks, virtues and afflictions. Movement is as simple as it gets: two lanes, Front and Back, and 1 AP to switch between them
Sunderfolk	Short, readable turns, built around a hand of ability cards
Card games (Magic: The Gathering, Slay the Spire and others)	A deck and a hand: draw, play, reshuffle. Your class is the cards you carry

Draft note: the "what we took" column is a first reading of the inspiration list. Correct it where it is wrong.

Why we built it

Hellebore started with two problems. The first, and the most important, was making tabletop sessions feel quicker and easier for players to engage with. The second was preparation: half the time spent preparing a campaign session went into designing combat encounters and setting up the board, and that was time not spent on the story. Hellebore is built so that:

- **Encounters are quick to design and quick to set up.** Movement is a simple choice between two lanes, so there is no grid to draw and no distances to measure. Most monsters play from a short hand of actions instead of a deck.
- **The complexity sits in the players' hands.** The depth comes from each player's deck and hand of cards, and that depth is shared out: the player manages their own cards, and the GM does not have to.
- **The rules translate easily.** A system with few moving parts is easier to teach to people and easier to carry to other places: a table with paper cards, Tabletop Simulator, and maybe one day a video game.

Classes and roles

Hellebore classes are built around **roles**, and the abilities give every role a chance to do its job. There are seven roles:

Role	Job at the table
Tank	Stands in front and takes the hits
Sustained damage	Steady damage, turn after turn
Burst damage	Big damage in a short window
Damage over time	Damage that keeps working after the attack
Crowd control	Takes enemies out of the fight, or out of position
Support	Heals, protects and strengthens the party
Summoner	Fights through creatures it calls

Each role exists once for every ability, which gives **7 roles × 4 abilities = 28 classes**. A Might tank and a Mind tank both tank, but they do it differently. This way no ability is a trap: whichever one a player likes, there is a class that makes it matter. Five classes are ready for the first playtests (Warlock, Trickster, Duelist, Warcaller and Alchemist); the rest of the grid is still being designed.

Hellebore at a glance

The roll	d20 + one ability, against a target number
Defense	Base defense + armor bonus (base defense is 10 + Agility or Might, set by your class)
Your turn	4 action points (AP), spent on anything: moving, attacking, casting
Your cards	Hand of 7 cards. Starter deck of 24 cards (minimum 20, no maximum)
Empty deck	Add a Fatigue card to the discard pile and shuffle it back in. Fatigue is removed when combat ends
Position	Two lanes per side, Front and Back. Changing lanes costs 1 AP
Critical successes and failures	Beat the target by 10 or more: critical success. Miss by 10 or more: critical failure
Monsters	Most have a hand of actions and no deck; a monster at 0 HP dies

Chapter 2 · Abilities

Why four?

Many tabletop games use six abilities. Hellebore uses four, because six was more than we needed. Each

Hellebore ability merges closely related ones:

- Strength and toughness are both *how strong your body is*, so they are one ability: **Might**.
- Quickness and reflexes are **Agility**.
- Reasoning and noticing the world are both *how your mind works*, so they are one ability: **Mind**.
- Force of personality and force of will are both *what you can push through*, so they are one ability: **Will**.

Four scores are easier to build, easier to remember, and easier to read on a character sheet. They also make every score do real work: each one covers a part of combat (health and damage, defense, crafts and magic items, innate magic) and a set of skills outside it.

How scores work

- A score is a bonus from **−1 to +5**. You add it straight to the d20 roll. There are no modifiers to calculate. The creation swap can take a score below −1.
- Every score starts at 0.
- **Optional swap at character creation:** you may move 1 point from any score to another, once. The score you take it from goes down by 1, and it can go below −1. Example: Might −1 and Mind +1.
- A class's starting scores are a suggestion. Players can ignore them and build their own.

For example, the Warcaller in the playtest starts with Might +2, Agility 0, Mind −1, Will 0.

Might

The strength and toughness of your body.

Might is how hard you hit and how much punishment you can take.

- **Hit points:** your maximum HP is 10 + Might (plus any bonus from your class).
- **Damage:** melee and thrown attacks.
- **Two-handed weapons** always use Might. One-handed and bare-handed melee attacks may use Might or Agility, whichever is better.
- **Defense:** base defense + armor bonus. If your class uses Might, base defense is 10 + Might, and worn armor never limits it.
- **Resisting** *burned* and *exhausted*.
- **Skills:** Athletics, Endurance, Survival, Intimidation.

Might
Inquis

Agility

Speed, balance and precision.

Agility is how hard you are to hit, and how well you hit from a distance.

- **Defense:** base defense + armor bonus. Base defense is 10 + Agility or Might, set by your class: Agility classes use Agility (limited by worn armor: all of it with light armor, at most +1 with medium, none with heavy), and Might classes use Might (no limit).
- **Ranged attacks** use Agility.
- **Initiative and stealth.**
- **Skills:** Acrobatics, Stealth, Sleight of hand, Performance.

Agility classes: Duelist, Ranger, Assassin, Sword Dancer, Trickster, Skirmisher, Puppeteer.

Mind

Learning, preparation and perception.

Mind is the ability of knowledge: learning, preparation and perception. A Mind character can use magic items (scrolls, potions, enchanted gear), but cannot do magic on their own. Magic that a character makes themselves comes from Will. Mind powers crafts that are learned and made ahead of time: potions, runes, studied formulas. The power comes from something the character made or studied before the fight. An Alchemist heals and burns with mixtures brewed beforehand.

- **Crafts and magic items.**
- **Perception and knowledge.**
- **Resisting** *confused*.
- **Skills:** Investigation, Lore, Nature, Medicine, Perception.

Mind classes: Sentinel, Scrollmaster, Demolitionist, Elementalist, Hunter, Alchemist, Conjurer.

Will

Presence, faith and the force of your resolve.

Will is the ability of the moment. Magic that comes from Will is innate: it comes from willpower or faith, in the instant it is needed, not from preparation. A Warlock draws on it in the middle of a fight, and a Cleric draws on it through faith.

- **Innate magic.**
- **Social checks.**
- **Resisting** *charmed* and *stunned*.

- **Skills:** Persuasion, Deception, Insight, Resolve.

Will classes: Warden, Wizard, Warlock, Witch, Shadowmancer, Cleric, Shaman.

Abilities and the rest of the game

Ability	In combat	Outside combat	Resists
Might	HP, melee and thrown damage, Defense (Might classes)	Athletics, Endurance, Survival, Intimidation	Burned, Exhausted
Agility	Defense (Agility classes), ranged attacks, initiative	Acrobatics, Stealth, Sleight of hand, Performance	
Mind	Crafts and magic items	Investigation, Lore, Nature, Medicine, Perception	Confused
Will	Innate magic	Persuasion, Deception, Insight, Resolve	Charmed, Stunned

Some cards force a target to resist. The target's number for that is **10 + the resisting ability**.

Section II · Making a character

Chapter 3 · Creating a character

Making a character takes a few minutes. A level-1 character is built in five choices: a race, a class, ability scores, skills and a loadout. The class gives you your deck, so you do not build one card by card.

What you are making

Step	You choose	You get
1. Race	A race (only Human for now)	+1 to one ability score, plus racial features
2. Class	One of the playtest classes	A role, a starter deck of 24 cards, a specialty, an HP bonus
3. Abilities	Where your scores go	Your four bonuses, and your HP and Defense
4. Skills	Three points of training	The skills you are good at outside combat
5. Loadout	Armor and a weapon	Your armor bonus, and your basic attack

Every character starts at **level 1**, with 4 AP per turn, a hand of 7 cards and no quirks.

Step 1 · Race

Right now there is one race, so every character is a **Human**. Humans are the baseline: they change very little, so the playtests measure the rules and the classes, not the race.

- **Versatile:** +1 to any one score of your choice, so a human fits any class.
- **Quick learner:** learning a new card from a trainer, scroll or book takes half the usual time. The cost stays the same.
- Races never change AP, hand size or deck size, and they never add cards. Your deck is what you have learned and lived, not what your body is.

More races will come with the setting.

Step 2 · Class

Pick the class you want to play. Your class gives you:

- a **role** in combat (Tank, Support and so on) and a **primary ability**,
- a **starter deck** of 24 cards,
- an **HP bonus**,

- a **specialty:** a trio of skills you are naturally good at outside combat. Each primary ability has a default specialty, but you can swap it for any other one, even if it fits your scores worse. Chapter 5 and the class chapters list them all.

Choose your specialty. Keep your class's default, or swap it for any of the four. You get advantage on its three skills, and you write it on your sheet.

- **Survivor:** Survival, Endurance, Athletics (default for Might).
- **Scout:** Stealth, Perception, Acrobatics (default for Agility).
- **Sage:** Lore, Investigation, Nature (default for Mind).
- **Face:** Persuasion, Insight, Deception (default for Will).

A swapped specialty makes your character better at something unrelated to the class, and weaker at what the class would be good at outside combat.

Step 3 · Ability scores

Every score starts at 0.

1. Add your human +1 to one score. This is the human trait Versatile from Step 1. Normally, you put it in your primary ability.
2. Optionally, **move 1 point** from any score to another, once. The score you take it from goes down by 1, and it can go below -1, but not below -3 (proposal, not decided yet). Most players take it from the ability their class uses least.
3. Work out the numbers that come from your scores:

Number	Formula
Max HP	10 + Might + your class's HP bonus
Defense	Base defense + your armor bonus. Base defense is 10 + Agility or Might, whichever your class uses
AP per turn	4
Hand size	7

Each class chapter has **suggested scores** built with these two steps. You can use them to start playing quickly, or ignore them and build your own.

Step 4 · Skills

Skills are for checks outside combat. A skill check is **d20 + the skill's ability + your training** against a difficulty set by the GM. If your specialty covers the skill, you also roll with advantage.

- Every skill starts at +0 training.
- At level 1 you get **3 training points**. Each point adds +1 to a skill, up to **+2 per skill**.
- Optionally, you can take up to **2 points away** from skills (down to -2 in a single skill) and spend them on others.

Step 5 · Loadout

Your loadout is one weapon and your armor. Every class has a **default loadout**, which is a fine way to start. You can keep it, or swap it for any starter item you meet the Might requirement for.

Armor

Type	Armor	Armor bonus	Drawback	Might needed
No armor	Clothes	+0	None	—
Light armor	Leather jerkin	+1	None	—
Medium armor	Chain shirt	+2	Disadvantage on Stealth. Adds at most +1 of your Agility to Defense	—
Heavy armor	Plate harness	+2	Disadvantage on Stealth and Acrobatics. Can only use might for defense	+2
Shield	Round shield	+1	Takes a hand: one-handed weapons only	+2

Armor bonus is the total from your armor and shield. It adds to your Defense. Worn body armor also limits the Agility part of base defense: you add all of it with no armor or light armor, at most +1 with medium armor, and none with heavy armor. Might has no limit, so Might classes lose nothing by wearing heavy armor.

Weapons

Weapon	Type	Damage	AP	Might needed	Notes
Arming sword	One-handed	d6	2	—	

Weapon	Type	Damage	AP	Might needed	Notes
Mace	One-handed	d6	2	—	+1 to hit armor +2 or more
Greatsword	Two-handed	d10	3	+1	
Halberd	Two-handed	d10	3	+1	Any lane
Shortbow	Ranged	d8	3	—	Any lane
Crossbow	Ranged	d8	3	—	Any lane
Unarmed	—	d4	2	—	Always available

A weapon sets the cost and damage of your **basic attack**, the card every class has. Which ability you roll depends on the weapon:

- **One-handed or unarmed melee:** Might or Agility, whichever is better.
- **Two-handed melee:** Might.
- **Ranged:** Agility.

Weapons and armor do not grow: they stay as they are so you can swap them freely.

Step 6 · Write it down

Your sheet records your four scores, your HP, Defense and armor, your specialty and trained skills, your loadout, and your deck. No quirks to record at the start.

HELLEBORE
CHARACTER SHEET · PLAYTEST

CHARACTER NAME: _____ PLAYER: _____ LEVEL: _____

1 RACE - Human **2 CLASS** - class, specialty and the 24-card deck **3 ABILITIES** - scores, HP and Defense

4 SKILLS - 3 training points **5 LOADOUT** - armor and a weapon

3 MIGHT
0
HP, melee damage; resists burned, exhausted

3 AGILITY
+2
Defense, ranged attacks, initiative

3 MIND
0
Mind spells, knowledge; resists confused

2 WILL
-1
Will spells; resists charmed, stunned

3 HIT POINTS
CURRENT: 14 MAX: 14
DEATH SAVES (D20, 10+) SUCCESS: ○ ○ ○ ○ FAILURE: ○ ○ ○ ○

3 DEFENSE
TOTAL: 13 ARMOR: +1
Base defense (10 + Agility or Might) + armor bonus

2 ACTION POINTS
4 per turn; dashed = bonus AP
Unspent AP pays for instants until your next turn.

2 CARDS
HAND: 7 DECK: 24
Cycle 1 card free per turn. Destroyed cards return after combat.

4 SKILLS
d20 + ability + training; Adv = specialty TRAIN ADV

5 EQUIPMENT

ARMOR
☐ Clothes (+0) ☒ Leather jerkin (+1)
☐ Chain shirt (+2) ☐ Plate harness (+2) *
☐ Round shield (+1) *

WEAPON
☒ Arming sword; d6, 2 AP
☐ Mace; d6, 2 AP vs armor
☐ Greatsword; d10, 3 AP †
☐ Halberd; d10, 3 AP †
☐ Shortbow; d8, 3 AP any lane
☐ Crossbow; d8, 3 AP any lane
* Might +2; † Might +1

QUIRKS
V / A QUIRK WHAT IT DOES
○ ○
○ ○
○ ○

CONDITIONS
☐ Burned ☐ Charmed ☐ Exhausted
☐ Confused ☐ Stunned ☐ Frightened
☐ Grappled

NOTES

A filled-in character sheet, numbered to match the steps above

Chapter 4 · Example character sheet

A level-1 **Duelist**, built from the steps above. The scores are the Duelist's suggested ones: the human +1 and the optional swap both go into Agility, taking the point from Will. The skills are an example; any three points would be legal.

Ilse, human Duelist

Race	Human
Class	Duelist (Agility, Tank)
Level	1
Specialty	Scout: advantage on Stealth, Perception, Acrobatics
Quirks	None

Abilities

Might	Agility	Mind	Will
0	+2	0	-1

How: all scores start at 0. Human +1 to Agility (+1).
Swap: 1 point moves from Will to Agility (Will -1, Agility +2).

Numbers

Max HP	14 (10 + Might 0 + class bonus 4)
Defense	13 (10 + Agility 2 + leather jerkin 1)
AP per turn	4
Hand size	7
Deck	24 cards

Trained skills (3 points)

Skill	Ability	Training	Bonus	Note
Acrobatics	Agility +2	+1	+3	Advantage (Scout)
Stealth	Agility +2	+1	+3	Advantage (Scout)
Intimidation	Might 0	+1	+1	

Every other skill is untrained: the bonus is just the ability score. Perception has advantage from the Scout specialty.

Loadout

Armor	Leather jerkin (+1)
Weapon	Arming sword (d6, 2 AP, one-handed)
Basic attack	d20 + 2 (Agility, the better of Might and Agility) against the target's Defense. On a hit, d6 damage.

Deck (24 cards)

Card	Copies	Cost
Basic attack	10	2 AP
Challenge	3	1 AP
Needling Strike	2	2 AP
Lunge	2	2 AP
Dodge	3	1 AP
Riposte	2	1 AP
It's My Fight	2	2 AP

The printed Duelist character sheet in the playtest assets (sheet_duelist.png) shows the same character filled in, as it appears in the Tabletop Simulator save.

HELLEBORE

CHARACTER SHEET · PLAYTEST

CHARACTER NAME

PLAYER

LEVEL

Duelist

Scout

CLASS

SPECIALTY

RACE

MIGHT

0

HP, melee damage, resists burned, exhausted

AGILITY

+2

Defense, ranged attacks, initiative

MIND

0

Mind spells, knowledge, resists confused

WILL

-1

Will spells, resists charmed, stunned

HIT POINTS

14

14

CURRENT

MAX

DEATH SAVES (D20, 10+)

SUCCESS

FAILURE

DEFENSE

13

+1

TOTAL

ARMOR

Base defense (10 + Agility or Might) + armor bonus

ACTION POINTS

4 per turn, dashed = bonus AP

Unspent AP pays for instants until your next turn.

CARDS

7

24

HAND

DECK

Cycle 1 card free per turn. Destroyed cards return after combat.

SKILLS

d20 + ability + training · Adv = specialty

TRAIN

ADV

MIGHT

Athletics

Endurance

Survival

Intimidation

AGILITY

Acrobatics

Stealth

Sleight of hand

Performance

MIND

Investigation

Lore

Nature

Medicine

Perception

WILL

Persuasion

Deception

Insight

Resolve

EQUIPMENT

ARMOR

Clothes (+0)

Leather jerkin (+1)

Chain shirt (+2)

Plate harness (+2) *

Round shield (+1) *

WEAPON

Arming sword: d6, 2 AP

Mace: d6, 2 AP v1 vs armor

Greatsword: d10, 3 AP †

Halberd: d10, 3 AP †

Shortbow: d8, 3 AP any lane

Crossbow: d8, 3 AP any lane

QUIRKS

V = virtue · A = affliction

V / A

QUIRK

WHAT IT DOES

CONDITIONS

Burned

Charmed

Exhausted

Confused

Stunned

Frightened

Crappled

NOTES

The Duelist's playtest character sheet

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Section III · Classes

Chapter 5 · Classes and how to read them

The classes are level 1

Everything in this section describes **level 1**. The five classes here are the **playtest classes**, and their cards, numbers and gear are placeholders until the playtests say otherwise. Level progression is still being designed.

What is decided so far is the shape of it:

- Cards grow with your abilities: a card's effect includes the class's main ability (for example "1d6 + Will"), so it gets stronger when your score does.
- Gear stays static.

Where a class has planned cards, its chapter lists them.

What a class is

A class is a **role** in combat plus a **primary ability**. The role says what the class does for the party, and the ability says what it is made of. Together they give you the class's deck, its HP, its specialty and the place it likes to stand.

The seven roles

Role	Job at the table
Tank	Stands in front and takes the hits
Sustained damage	Steady damage, turn after turn
Burst damage	Big damage in a short window
Damage over time	Damage that keeps working after the attack
Crowd control	Takes enemies out of the fight, or out of position
Support	Heals, protects and strengthens the party
Summoner	Fights through creatures it calls

The class grid

Seven roles times four abilities give 28 classes. The first five are ready to playtest.

Role	Might	Agility	Mind	Will
Tank	Juggernaut	Duelist	Sentinel	Warden

Role	Might	Agility	Mind	Will	The ca comba
Sustained damage	Gladiator	Ranger	Scrollmaster	Wizard	
Burst damage	Berserker	Assassin	Demolitionist	Warlock	
Damage over time	Inquisitor	Sword Dancer	Elementalist	Witch	
Crowd control	Grappler	Trickster	Hunter	Shadowmancer	
Support	Warcaller	Skirmisher	Alchemist	Cleric	
Summoner	Beastmaster	Puppeteer	Conjurer	Shaman	

Bold classes are the playtest classes. The others are proposals, not decided yet.

Specialties: what a class does outside combat

Combat is only half of a character. Outside combat, a class is defined by its **specialty** and its primary ability's skills. Each primary ability has a default specialty, which gives advantage on three skills:

Specialty	Default for	Advantage on
Survivor	Might	Survival, Endurance, Athletics
Scout	Agility	Stealth, Perception, Acrobatics
Sage	Mind	Lore, Investigation, Nature
Face	Will	Persuasion, Insight, Deception

You may swap your class's specialty for any other one. It makes a character better at something unrelated to the class, and weaker at what the class would be good at outside combat.

How to read a class chapter

Every class chapter gives you:

1. **What it is:** the idea of the class.
2. **In combat:** its role, the lane it likes, and how its deck plays.
3. **Outside combat:** its specialty and the skills its primary ability favors.
4. **Suggested scores:** a starting build, with the resulting HP and Defense.
5. **Suggested equipment:** the default loadout.
6. **The deck:** the 24 cards and a few combos.

Card words

Word	Meaning
Instant	A card you can play off your own turn, in response to something, by paying with AP you kept unspent.
Defensive	A card that avoids or reduces damage.
Destroyed	After you play it, the card leaves your deck for the rest of the combat. A deck holds at most 2 copies.
Melee	A close attack with a weapon. It can only target the enemy Front lane, unless the card says any lane .
Ranged	An attack from a distance: a shot, a throw (Thrown) or a spell. The card says which lanes it can target.
Any lane	The attack can target an enemy in the Front or the Back lane. A card has it only if it says so (like Lunge).
Spell attack	d20 + the class's ability against the target's Defense.
Control card	d20 + your ability against a target number of 10 + the target's resisting ability.
Hexed, Netted, burned, confused	A condition or marker. Conditions are listed in Section V.

A deck holds up to 4 copies of a card (2 for Destroyed cards). The effects of copies add up unless a card says otherwise.

Chapter 6 · Warlock

Will · Burst damage · Specialty: Face

What it is

The Warlock channels raw willpower into destructive magic from a distance. The power is innate: it comes from the Warlock's will in the moment, not from preparation.

In combat

A fragile ranged caster. The Warlock stands in the **Back lane** and attacks any lane with spells. Its swings are weak, so only 4 of its 24 cards are basic attacks. The rest are spells and wards. The Warlock's best turns **mark a target with Hex, then hit it with a big spell**. Overchannel trades some of the Warlock's own HP for a stronger spell.

Outside combat

Face specialty: advantage on Persuasion, Insight and Deception. Will also favors Resolve, so the Warlock is the party's talker and its strong-willed one. Its low Might (−1) makes it poor at feats of strength and endurance.

Suggested scores

Might	Agility	Mind	Will	HP	Defense
−1	0	0	+2	9	11

HP = 10 − 1 + class bonus 0. Defense = 10 + Agility 0 + leather jerkin 1 (the Warlock's base defense uses Agility).

Suggested equipment

Leather jerkin (+1) and a shortbow (d8, 3 AP, any lane).

The deck: 4 basic attacks + 20 class cards

Card	Copies	Cost	Type	Effect
Will Bolt	4	2 AP	Spell attack	Ranged, any lane. On a hit, 1d6 + Will damage.

Card	Copies	Cost	Type	Effect
Hex	3	1 AP	Spell	One enemy in any lane is <i>Hexed</i> until the end of combat: it takes +1d4 damage from your attacks, except Soul Rend, which has its own bonus against Hexed targets.
Soul Rend	2	3 AP	Spell attack, Destroyed	Ranged, any lane. On a hit, 3d6 damage, or 4d6 against a Hexed target. Hex's extra 1d4 doesn't apply to Soul Rend.
Soul Siphon	3	2 AP	Spell attack	Ranged, any lane. On a hit, 1d4 + Will damage. If the target is Hexed, you also recover 1d4 + Will HP.
Overchannel	4	1 AP	Spell	You take 1d4 damage first. Then your next spell attack this turn deals +1d6 damage.
Dark Ward	4	1 AP	Defensive, Instant	When targeted by an attack, add your Will to your Defense against it.

Combos (every card also works alone): Hex then Soul Rend for the big hit. Hex then Soul Siphon to keep a fragile caster alive. Overchannel then Soul Rend for a 4 AP burst that hurts the Warlock.

Planned cards (not decided): Will Surge (3 AP, spell attack). Ranged. Choose up to 3 enemies in one lane and make a spell attack against each; on a hit, 1d6 damage.

Chapter 7 · Trickster

Agility · Crowd control · Specialty: Scout

What it is

Nets, smoke and feints. The Trickster controls the fight with cleverness instead of damage.

In combat

The Trickster takes enemies out of the fight by **stealing their action points**. It stands in the **Back lane** and throws everything: thrown and ranged cards reach any lane. A third of its deck (8 cards) is basic attacks, with 16 class cards of control and tricks. A Trickster turn sets up a target (Netted or confused) and then punishes it, or sets up an ally's attack with Feint.

Outside combat

Scout specialty: advantage on Stealth, Perception and Acrobatics. Agility also favors Sleight of hand and Performance, so the Trickster is the party's scout, thief and performer. Its low Might (−1) makes it weak at brute force.

Suggested scores

Might	Agility	Mind	Will	HP	Defense
−1	+2	0	0	11	13

HP = 10 − 1 + class bonus 2. Defense = 10 + Agility 2 + leather jerkin 1 (the Trickster's base defense uses Agility).

Suggested equipment

Leather jerkin (+1) and an arming sword (d6, 2 AP).

The deck: 8 basic attacks + 16 class cards

Card	Copies	Cost	Type	Effect
Net Throw	3	2 AP	Control	Thrown, any lane. Agility against a Might check. On a success, the target is <i>Netted</i> : it loses 2 AP on its next turn. Doesn't stack: a target already Netted loses no extra AP from another Net Throw, but can still be targeted (for combos).

Card	Copies	Cost	Type	Effect
Feint	3	1 AP	Trick	Choose one target. Until your next turn, the next attack against it rolls with advantage, whether it comes from you, an ally or any other source.
Smoke Bomb	2	2 AP	Control, Destroyed	Thrown. Choose one enemy lane and up to 3 enemies in it: Agility against a Mind check. On a success, they are <i>confused</i> until the end of their next turn.
Trick Shot	3	2 AP	Attack	Thrown or shot, any lane. d20 + Agility against the target's Defense. On a hit, 1d6 damage, plus 1d6 if the target is Netted or confused.
Rattle	2	1 AP	Control	One enemy in any lane: Agility against a Will check. On a success, it loses 1 AP on its next turn and its first attack that turn rolls with disadvantage.
Dodge	3	1 AP	Defensive, Instant	When targeted by an attack, the attacker rolls with disadvantage.

Combos: Net Throw or Smoke Bomb then Trick Shot for the extra 1d6. Feint then any ally's attack. Net Throw plus Rattle on one target: 4 AP spent, 4 AP taken, which can skip a standard monster's turn.

Chapter 8 · Duelist

Agility · Tank · Specialty: Scout

What it is

A fencer who challenges enemies, forces them to attack the Duelist, then dodges and punishes them. The Duelist tanks by being hard to hit, not by wearing heavy armor.

In combat

The Duelist holds the **Front lane**. It forces enemies to attack it (*Challenge* makes attacking anyone else cost more AP), reaches into the Back lane when it needs to, and keeps AP in reserve for **Instants**. Seven of its 24 cards are Defensive Instants, so the Duelist plays reactively: it waits for the enemy to commit, then answers.

Outside combat

Scout specialty: advantage on Stealth, Perception and Acrobatics. Agility also favors Sleight of hand and Performance. Light armor keeps the Duelist quick and quiet. Its low Will (−1) leaves it more open to *charmed* and *stunned*, and weaker at social checks.

Suggested scores

Might	Agility	Mind	Will	HP	Defense
0	+2	0	−1	14	13

HP = 10 + 0 + class bonus 4. Defense = 10 + Agility 2 + leather jerkin 1 (the Duelist's base defense uses Agility). The Duelist keeps Might at 0 to stay sturdy and gives up Will instead.

Suggested equipment

Leather jerkin (+1) and an arming sword (d6, 2 AP).

The deck: 10 basic attacks + 14 class cards

Card	Copies	Cost	Type	Effect
Challenge	3	1 AP	Control	One enemy in any lane: until your next turn, attacking anyone other than you costs it +2 AP.

Card	Copies	Cost	Type	Effect
Needling Strike	2	2 AP	Attack, Control	Make a basic attack for 2 AP, whatever your weapon. Hit or miss, until your next turn, attacking anyone other than you costs the target +2 AP.
Lunge	2	2 AP	Attack	Melee, any lane. Make a basic attack for 2 AP, whatever your weapon, that can target an enemy in either lane. On a hit, add 1d4 damage.
Dodge	3	1 AP	Defensive, Instant	When targeted by an attack, the attacker rolls with disadvantage.
Riposte	2	1 AP	Defensive, Instant	When a melee attack misses you, make a basic attack against the attacker at no extra AP cost. Once per miss.
It's My Fight	2	2 AP	Defensive, Instant, Destroyed	When an ally is targeted by an attack, the attack targets you instead.

Combos: Challenge on an archer in the Back lane, then Lunge to reach it. Challenge or Needling Strike keeps enemies attacking the Duelist, which is when Dodge and Riposte pay off. Copies of Challenge add up (+2 AP each).

Chapter 9 · Warcaller

Might · Support · Specialty: Survivor

What it is

A battle leader whose cries and banner push allies to fight harder. The Warcaller is a support in plate armor.

In combat

The Warcaller wears heavy armor and holds the **Front lane**. It supports by **giving allies action points, bonus damage and protection**: Rallying Cry gives allies +1 AP, Battle Cry adds a die to an ally's attack, and the War Banner buffs a whole lane. Its Defensive cards use **Might: Brace, Shield Wall** and **Hold the Line!** reduce damage by the Warcaller's Might.

The banner's lane is a choice. In the Front it covers the melee fighters, but enemies can reach it. In the Back it is safe from melee, but covers the casters.

Outside combat

Survivor specialty: advantage on Survival, Endurance and Athletics. Might also favors Intimidation. The Warcaller is the party's guide, hauler and front-line voice. Plate costs it Stealth and Acrobatics (disadvantage on both), and its low Mind (−1) makes it weak at lore and investigation.

Suggested scores

Might	Agility	Mind	Will	HP	Defense
+2	0	−1	0	16	15

HP = 10 + 2 + class bonus 4. Defense = 10 + Might 2 + plate harness 2 + round shield 1. The Warcaller's base defense uses Might, so a strong Might and heavy armor stack.

Suggested equipment

Plate harness (+2), round shield (+1) and a mace (d6, 2 AP, +1 to hit armor +2 or more). Plate and the shield both need Might +2, which the Warcaller's suggested scores give it.

The deck: 10 basic attacks + 14 class cards

Card	Copies	Cost	Type	Effect
Rallying Cry	2	2 AP	Support	Up to 2 allies gain +1 AP on their next turn.
Battle Cry	2	1 AP	Support	One ally (or you): their next attack roll before your next turn adds 1d6.
War Banner	2	3 AP	Support, Destroyed	Plant a banner in one lane of your side (you choose). The banner has Defense 10 + your Might and HP equal to two-thirds of your max HP, rounded down (10 at level 1 with the suggested scores), and can be targeted by attacks. While it stands, allies in its lane add +1d4 to attack rolls. At 0 HP or less it is removed, and you need another War Banner to replace it. Doesn't stack: a new banner replaces the old one.
Brace	2	1 AP	Defensive	Until your next turn, the first hit you take is reduced by your Might.
Shield Wall	2	2 AP	Defensive, Support	Until your next turn, every ally in your lane reduces the first hit they take by your Might.
Hold the Line!	2	1 AP	Defensive, Instant	When an ally is hit, reduce the damage by your Might.
Follow My Lead	2	2 AP	Attack, Support	Make a basic attack. If it hits, one ally may make a basic attack at no AP cost.

Combos: Battle Cry then Follow My Lead (the ally's free attack gets the 1d6). Rallying Cry to give a damage dealer a bigger turn.

Planned cards (not decided): Orders! (1 AP, an ally draws 1 card), On Your Feet! (2 AP, an ally recovers 1d6 + Might HP), and the passive feature Steady Presence (allies resist traumatic events more easily).

Chapter 10 · Alchemist

Mind · Support · Specialty: Sage

What it is

A maker of potions, salves and volatile mixtures, all prepared in advance. The Alchemist's power comes from preparation: the mixtures were brewed before the fight started.

In combat

The Alchemist heals and protects allies from the **Back lane**, and throws flasks instead of swinging a weapon (thrown cards reach any lane). A third of its deck (8 cards) is basic attacks, and the rest is mixtures: healing, protection, and fire. Most of its card combos are for the party: Smelling Salts clears a condition from an ally, and Quick Dose lets a reactive tank like the Duelist take hits more comfortably.

Outside combat

Sage specialty: advantage on Lore, Investigation and Nature. Mind also favors Medicine and Perception. The Alchemist is the party's scholar, herbalist and healer. Its low Might (−1) makes it weak at brute force.

Suggested scores

Might	Agility	Mind	Will	HP	Defense
−1	0	+2	0	11	11

HP = 10 − 1 + class bonus 2. Defense = 10 + Agility 0 + leather jerkin 1 (the Alchemist's base defense uses Agility).

Suggested equipment

Leather jerkin (+1) and a shortbow (d8, 3 AP, any lane).

The deck: 8 basic attacks + 16 class cards

Card	Copies	Cost	Type	Effect
Healing Draught	3	2 AP	Support	An ally (or you) recovers 1d6 + Mind HP.

Card	Copies	Cost	Type	Effect
Quick Dose	2	1 AP	Support, Instant	When an ally takes damage and is still above 0 HP, they recover 1d4 HP. It can't be played on an ally who is down (0 HP).
Alchemist's Fire	3	2 AP	Attack	Thrown, any lane. d20 + Mind against the target's Defense. On a hit, 1d6 damage and the target is <i>burned</i> .
Volatile Flask	2	3 AP	Attack, Destroyed	Thrown, any lane. d20 + Mind against the target's Defense. On a hit, 2d6 damage and the target is <i>burned</i> .
Smelling Salts	2	1 AP	Support	An ally ends one condition.
Protective Salve	2	1 AP	Defensive	You or an ally: until your next turn, the first hit taken is reduced by your Mind.
Flash Powder	2	1 AP	Defensive, Instant	When you are targeted by an attack, the attacker rolls with disadvantage.

Combos: mostly for the party. Smelling Salts clears a condition on an ally (for example *confused*), and Quick Dose keeps a Duelist's or Warcaller's reactive plays going.

Section IV · When things go wrong

Hellebore is a fast game, but it is not a safe one. A bad roll can hurt a friend, a critical hit can leave a mark, and a character who drops to 0 HP might not get up. This section covers the rolls that decide those moments: critical results, falling, and the scars a character keeps.

Chapter 11 · Checks and critical results

Rolling

Every roll is a d20 plus something, against a target number.

- **Check:** d20 + an ability + your skill training, against a difficulty set by the GM. Checks are used outside combat.
- **Attack:** d20 + an ability, against the target's **Defense**. Which ability depends on the weapon (Chapter 3); a spell or card says which ability it uses.
- **Control card:** d20 + an ability, against a number of **10 + the target's resisting ability**.
- **Advantage and disadvantage:** roll two d20 and keep the higher (advantage) or the lower (disadvantage).

Difficulty	Target
Easy	8
Medium	12
Hard	15
Very hard	18

These targets are a suggestion, not a rule. The GM can set any target that fits the situation.

At low levels, GMs should call mostly Easy and Medium checks, with Hard checks only now and then.

Four results

Every check and attack has four possible results, decided by how far your total is from the target:

Result	When
Critical success	Your total beats the target by 10 or more
Success	Your total meets or beats the target
Failure	Your total is below the target

Result	When
Critical failure	Your total misses the target by 10 or more

A natural 20 or a natural 1 has no special effect. Only the margin of 10 decides a critical result. That also means some tasks are simply out of reach for very weak characters.

Critical hits

A **critical hit** is an attack that beats the target's Defense by 10 or more.

- **Damage:** roll damage as normal and **double the total**. No extra dice.
- **Trauma:** any critical hit **against a character** has a 1 in 3 chance of causing a traumatic event. The GM rolls a d6: on a 1 or 2, the character suffers one (see Chapter 13).

Critical failures

A **critical failure** on an attack misses the target by 10 or more. It carries a small chance of disaster: roll a d6. On a **1**, the attack hits the nearest ally in reach or range, and only then does the attacker suffer a traumatic event. On any other result, nothing more happens. The GM can overrule either way.

Skills: criticals outside combat

On a critical success on a skill check, the GM can grant an extra benefit. On a critical failure, the GM can add a complication.

Chapter 12 · Down at 0 HP, death, rests

Falling

When a character's HP drops to 0, they fall **unconscious**. They take no turns, and they start rolling death saves. HP can never go below 0: damage past 0 is lost, and healing starts again from 0.

- **Monsters die at 0 HP.** The rules below are for characters.
- **Trauma:** when a character drops to 0 HP, roll a d6. On a 1 or 2 (1 in 3), they suffer a traumatic event.

Death saves

Roll a d20 for each save. **10 or more is a success; below 10 is a failure.**

- **3 successes:** the character is **stable**. They stay at 0 HP, unconscious, and stop rolling.
- **3 failures:** the character **dies**.

One save at the start of the players' phase each round. Taking damage while at 0 HP counts as a failure (two on a critical hit).

Getting back up

- **Healing wakes you up.** Any healing brings an unconscious character back, with the HP restored.
- **Help action:** an ally can spend **2 AP** to stabilize an unconscious character, with no roll. The character stays at 0 HP and stops rolling saves, but does not wake up.
- **Stabilized, not healed:** a character who is stabilized with the help action, instead of being healed, **automatically suffers a traumatic event**. The damage was patched, not dealt with.

A downed ally is a decision for the party: spend 2 AP to keep them from dying, or take a bigger swing and hope a healer gets to them first. Cards that heal (like *Healing Draught*) wake an ally up; *Quick Dose* only works while the ally is still above 0 HP.

Rests

- **Full rest:** restores all HP, unless an affliction or another effect prevents it. It also ends *exhausted*.
- **Short rest:** restores (1d6 + Might, minimum 1) × your level in HP. A character can take at most **2 short rests** between full rests. Short rests also end *exhausted*.

How long each rest takes, and which other conditions it ends, are still open.

Chapter 13 · Traumatic events and quirks

Hellebore marks characters by what happens to them. A **traumatic event** can change a character for good, and what it leaves behind is a **quirk**.

What a quirk is

A quirk is a lasting trait. Good quirks are **virtues**, and bad ones are **afflictions**. Quirks work in one of two ways:

- **Mechanical quirks** change the rules in a small way (a reroll, a –1 to armor). They are small on purpose.
- **Roleplay quirks** never change a roll or a stat on their own. They give the player something to play and the GM something to react to. The GM may reward good play or add a complication, but a roleplay quirk alone never changes a number.

Quirks can also affect cards in the future: a quirk could add a useless card to your deck, or change your hand size, deck size or AP. The first set does not do that yet.

When a traumatic event happens

The GM can declare a traumatic event at any time. Use it sparingly. There are also automatic triggers:

Trigger	Chance
Going down: you drop to 0 HP	d6: 1–2
Critical hit against you	d6: 1–2
Stabilized, not healed: an ally uses the help action on you instead of healing you	Automatic
Friendly fire: you hit an ally with a critical failure (a d6 roll of 1), or with a <i>confused</i> attack	Automatic (the GM can overrule)

Getting a quirk

1. Roll a **d4**. On **1–3**, it is an **affliction**. On **4**, it is a **virtue**.
 2. Roll a **d6** on that table (below). The idea is to make the table more complex and larger.
 3. A character can't hold the same quirk twice. Roll again on a repeat.
 4. Write it in the Quirks box on your sheet.
- Everyone can see every character's quirks.**

There is no cap on how many quirks a character can carry (for now).

Virtues (d6)

Roll	Quirk	Type	What it does
1	Perseverance	Mechanical	Once a day (once per session in a one-shot), reroll a failed check with advantage.
2	Steady Nerves	Mechanical	You have advantage on checks to end <i>frightened</i> .
3	Gentle Heart	Roleplay	Animals and children trust you. The GM may let it open a door in a scene.
4	Honest Face	Roleplay	Strangers tend to believe you at first, until proven otherwise.
5	Old Soul	Roleplay	Calm beyond your years; others come to you for counsel.
6	Brave Heart	Roleplay	You step forward when others hesitate. Play it, don't just say it.

Afflictions (d6)

Roll	Quirk	Type	What it does
1	Alcoholism	Roleplay, with a check	You crave a drink. When one is offered, or when you rest in a town, make a medium Resolve check (12) or you drink, and the GM plays out the consequences.
2	Paranoia	Roleplay	You see threats and betrayal everywhere and trust no one quickly.
3	Nightmares	Mechanical	After a full rest, make a medium Resolve check (12). On a failure, you start the next fight <i>exhausted</i> .
4	Jumpy	Roleplay	Sudden noises and movement make you flinch, and others notice.
5	Survivor's Guilt	Roleplay	You can't leave anyone behind, and you blame yourself when someone falls.
6	Clumsy	Mechanical	–1 armor bonus.

These tables are the first set of six each, for the first playtest. They will grow.

Treatment

An affliction can be removed through **treatment**: therapy in a sanatorium, an asylum or a church.

Treatment takes **2 weeks** and costs money, and it ends with one roll. The baseline odds are:

Roll	Result
25%	A new affliction
50%	Nothing happens
25%	A virtue result: you may remove an affliction or gain a virtue

The odds will depend on the type of treatment. A table for that is still to be made.

Section V · Conditions

Chapter 14 · Conditions and effects from cards

A **condition** is something that changes what a creature can do for a while. Most are harmful. Conditions come from cards and monsters' actions, and most end by themselves.

How a condition lands

Most conditions come from a **control card** or an attack. A control card rolls d20 + an ability against **10 + the target's resisting ability**. If the roll meets that number, the target suffers the condition. Each ability resists some conditions best:

Ability	Resists
Might	<i>Burned, exhausted</i>
Mind	<i>Confused</i>
Will	<i>Charmed, stunned</i>

Some creatures are **immune** to specific conditions (the Skeleton is immune to *exhausted* and *frightened*), and some have **weaknesses** (the Skeleton takes +1d4 damage from any fire effect, including *burned*).

The core conditions

Condition	Effect	Ends
Burned	Take 1d4 damage at the start of each of your turns.	Spend 1 AP to put it out, or after 2 turns
Charmed	You can't attack or play harmful cards against the creature that charmed you.	If the charmer harms you, or at the end of your next turn
Exhausted	You have 1 less AP each turn.	End of combat, or after a rest
Confused	Every attack you make targets a random creature in range (allies included, never yourself), whatever you meant to hit. If it hits an ally, you suffer a traumatic event (the GM can overrule).	End of your next turn
Stunned	Your next turn has only 1 AP, and you can't play Instants until then.	After that turn

Condition	Effect	Ends
Frightened	You can't make melee attacks. Ranged attacks and spells still work.	When you pass a medium (12) Resolve check at the end of your turn
Grappled	You can't change lanes. Breaking free costs 2 AP and a Might or Acrobatics check.	When you break free, or the grappler lets go

Charmed is in the rules, but no class uses it right now.

Helpful conditions

Condition	Effect	Ends
Blessed	Add 1d4 to any roll you make.	At the start of the blesser's next turn

Proposed condition

Condition	Effect	Ends
Bleeding (proposal)	Take 1d4 damage at the start of each of your turns. It stacks: each application adds its own 1d4 and its own 2-turn timer.	Spend 1 AP to stop one stack, or each stack after 2 turns

Effects from cards

Many cards leave behind a named effect. These are not core conditions, but they work like them. They are used in **combos**: one player sets a target up, and another (or the same) player takes advantage of it. Every class card must be useful on its own, so these effects are a bonus, never a requirement.

Effect	From	What it does	Ends
Netted	Trickster: <i>Net Throw</i>	The target loses 2 AP on its next turn. It doesn't stack: a target already Netted loses no extra AP from another Net Throw, but can still be targeted for combos (such as <i>Trick Shot</i>).	After its next turn
Hexed	Warlock: <i>Hex</i>	The target takes +1d4 damage from the Warlock's attacks (not from <i>Soul Rend</i> , which has its own bonus against Hexed targets). <i>Soul Siphon</i> heals the Warlock against a Hexed target. Copies of Hex add up.	End of combat

Effect	From	What it does	Ends
Challenged	Duelist: <i>Challenge</i> , <i>Needling</i> <i>Strike</i>	Until the Duelist's next turn, the target's attacks against anyone other than the Duelist cost +2 AP. Copies of Challenge add up.	Start of the Duelist's next turn
Rattled	Trickster: <i>Rattle</i>	The target loses 1 AP on its next turn and its first attack that turn rolls with disadvantage.	After its next turn
Feinted	Trickster: <i>Feint</i>	The next attack against the target rolls with advantage, whether it comes from you, an ally or any other source.	Until the Trickster's next turn
Burned	Alchemist: <i>Alchemist's Fire</i> , <i>Volatile Flask</i>	The core condition above.	See above
Confused	Trickster: <i>Smoke Bomb</i>	The core condition above.	End of the target's next turn
War Banner	Warcaller: <i>War Banner</i>	An object in one lane of the Warcaller's side, with Defense 10 + the Warcaller's Might and HP equal to two-thirds of the Warcaller's max HP. Allies in its lane add +1d4 to their attack rolls. It can be attacked and is removed at 0 HP. Doesn't stack: a new banner replaces the old one.	When it is destroyed, or at the end of combat

When a card's effect adds up with its copies, the card says it does not stack where it should not.

Conditions and the class decks

Several conditions are meant to be used together: a **Netted** or **confused** target takes extra damage from *Trick Shot*, a **Hexed** target is the Warlock's best prey, and a **Challenged** enemy is why a Duelist's *Dodge* and *Riposte* pay off. The Alchemist's *Smelling Salts* answers all of this: it ends one condition on an ally.

Section VI · Creatures

Chapter 15 · Types of creatures

Everything that acts in a fight is a **creature**: player characters, monsters, bosses and non-combat NPCs. They are all built from the same base: four abilities (from -1 to $+5$), HP, Defense, AP and the same set of conditions. A monster is not a different kind of rules object, only a different amount of the same things.

Who is who

Creature	Deck	Uses the stack	Quirks
Player character	Full deck and hand	Yes	Yes
NPC, non-combat	None	No	Optional, the GM's call (encouraged)
NPC	Usually a hand only; a deck for the odd one	No	Optional for Folk, none for others
Boss	A bigger hand, or a deck; plus Instants	Yes	Optional (<i>proposal</i>)
Mythical	A hand or a deck, plus Instants	Yes	Up to the GM

Two ways to describe a NPC or monster

Every NPC or monster has a **category** (what it is) and a **threat level** (how hard it is to deal with). They are independent: any category can appear at any threat level.

Categories: what it is

A category is **flavor only**. It sets no values: each individual creature chooses its own abilities, immunities and features.

Category	What it covers	Ideas
Beasts	Animals, giant vermin, predators	Hunt in packs. Simple physical actions (bite, pounce)
Undead	Skeletons, ghouls, restless dead	Tireless and fearless, but still hurt by fire
Demons	Infernal creatures	Cruel. Actions that charm, frighten or tempt
Horrors	Things that shouldn't exist	Seeing or fighting one can trigger a traumatic event

Category	What it covers	Ideas
Folk	Bandits, goblins, cultists, soldiers	Built like player characters (a race plus a class), and can have quirks

Threat levels: how hard it is

Threat	What it is	Fight length (party of 5)
Minion	Fodder that comes in numbers	Dies to one hit
Standard	The typical enemy	1–2 rounds
Elite	A dangerous enemy that stands out in a fight	About 3 rounds
Boss	The main enemy of a fight or an adventure	About 6 rounds
Mythical	Godlike beings	Never fought, or only by a fully prepared, max-level party

Threat	AP	Hand	Toughness	Damage per hit
Minion	3	3–5	~6	~3
Standard	4	5–6	~20	~5
Elite	5	6–8	~40	~7
Boss	6	8–10	~80	~9, plus specials
Mythical	Open	Open	Open	Open

The exact numbers are proposals to tune in the playtests. Mythical values wait for the high-level tables. For a hand-only creature, the hand is the actions it has ready. Hand size only matters for a creature with a deck.

- **Minion**: dies to one hit, so it matters in numbers.
- **Standard**: the typical enemy, down in one or two rounds.
- **Elite**: about three rounds of fighting for a party of five.
- **Boss**: acts with more AP, can use the stack, and plays one **Instant** per round for free.
- **Mythical**: a force of the setting, not a fight. A party meets one when the story calls for it.

Toughness: building a creature

A threat level says how hard a creature is, not how many HP it has. Every creature spends the level's **toughness budget** on HP, Defense and armor. A creature's Defense is built like a character's: 10 + Agility or Might (its choice) + armor bonus. Monsters don't all share the same loadout: each can have its own equipment and its own modifiers.

HP = toughness budget ÷ a factor that depends on Defense.

Defense	Factor
10	×0.85
11	×0.9
12	×1.0
13	×1.1
14	×1.2
15	×1.4
16	×1.6

A creature that is hard to hit needs fewer HP for the same difficulty. Examples for a standard creature (budget ~20):

- **Goblin:** Defense 11, HP 22. It soaks up hits and is easy to land them on.
- **Horror:** Defense 15, HP 14. It dies after a few hits, but is hard to hit.

Both are equally hard to deal with.

Damage per hit stays inside the level's band, so a goblin can't out-damage a boss. A standard creature's ~5 damage takes about a third of a level-1 character's HP.

Party size: the budgets assume five characters. For smaller parties, multiply the toughness budget by players ÷ 5 (×0.6 for three, ×0.8 for four), and keep AP, hand and damage the same. (*Proposal.*) Parties have 3 to 5 players.

Relentless creatures

Some bosses and all mythicals are **relentless**. A normal creature takes one turn per round. A relentless creature acts **after every player's turn**, which makes the fight more dangerous.

- Because they act so often, relentless creatures get **fewer AP per turn**. (*Proposal: 2 AP per turn, about 10 AP per round against five players, against 6 AP for a normal boss.*)

- A relentless creature plays **Instants** like any boss: **one per round for free**. For mythicals, this depends on the creature.
- Creatures with physical hands draw them **once per round**, at the start of the round.

Running creatures at the table

Creatures **can have decks, but most have only a hand**: a fixed set of actions the GM picks from, with no draw pile and no shuffle. A hand-only creature's hand is its **action list**, which is in the bestiary. A creature with a deck draws and plays like a player character. In the first playtest, every creature has a hand only.

1. On its turn, the GM picks **any action it can pay for** with its AP.
2. Repeat until the creature is out of AP.
3. **Destroyed** actions work **once per combat**. Mark them when used.
4. A boss plays its **Instants** when the moment comes, one per round for free.
5. A creature's attack rolls d20 + the action's ability against the target's Defense. A control action rolls against 10 + the target's resisting ability.
6. Standard creatures play their Defensive actions on their own turn. Only bosses and mythicals use Instants and the stack.

Example: Wolf

Beast, minion. Might +1, Agility +2, Mind -1, Will 0. Defense 12 (10 + Agility 2). HP 6. AP 3.

Pack. +1 to attack rolls while another wolf is on its side.

Bite (2 AP, melee): d20 + Agility against Defense. On a hit, 1d6 damage.

Pounce (3 AP): Move to your Front lane, then make a Bite with advantage.

The playtest set also has a **Skeleton** (Undead, standard), a **Goblin Raider** (Folk, standard), a **Hollow Watcher** (Horror, elite) and a **Giant Goblin** (Folk, boss). The Hollow Watcher is the one built around fear and the traumatic-event hook.

Quirks, traumatic events and the GM

The GM decides when a traumatic event happens, when a creature gets quirks and when a scene earns a surprise. Use them sparingly.

Section VII · Cards and decks

Chapter 16 · Collection, deck, hand and piles

In Hellebore, your class is the cards you carry. Attacks, spells and defenses are all cards, so the whole combat system works through one mechanic.

Collection and deck

- **Collection:** every card a character owns. **Outside combat, you can use any card in your collection directly**, with no drawing or discarding and no real limit.
- **Deck:** the cards you bring into a fight. You choose them from your collection, with two limits. A deck holds only **Neutral** cards (basic attacks and other generic cards any character can use) and cards from **your own class**.
- **Starter deck:** every class has a ready-to-play 24-card starter deck. A new player can play it as it is, and change cards whenever they like. You can rebuild your deck at any time outside combat.

Deck rules

Rule	Value
Size	At least 20 cards. No maximum. Starter decks have 24
Copies	Up to 4 copies of a class card. Destroyed cards: up to 2 copies. Neutral cards: no limit
Basic attacks	No copy limit. A class keeps at least 2. <i>(Proposal: at most half the deck)</i>
Defensive cards	Not a deck-building rule. Each pre-built class deck happens to include at least 2 Defensive cards.
Hand size	7



The parts of a card: name, AP cost, type and text



The play area: draw pile, hand and discard pile

A bigger deck makes combos rarer, so copies of key cards matter. The effects of **copies add up** unless a card says it doesn't stack. Two copies of *Overchannel* give +2d6 and cost 2d4. One-time effects (a free attack, drawing a card) happen once for each copy played. Where that is too strong, the card prints its own limit.

Card design: every card works alone

Every card must be useful on its own. **Combos are a bonus, never a requirement**, so no card is a trap. Cards can refer to conditions (*Netted*, *Haxed*), so players set each other up, and the best combos come from the party, not from one deck.

Expanding your deck

A character's collection grows in **two ways**: one inside the story, and one outside it, at the table.

In the story (roleplay)

Players find cards in the world. A **scroll** teaches a wizard a new spell, a **book** of healing teaches a cleric first aid, and an **NPC** (a master, a rival, a veteran) can teach a card to anyone who earns it.

- **Time:** learning a card always takes time. The GM decides how long (days of downtime, a stay in town). A human's *Quick learner* halves that time.
- **Cost:** it sometimes costs money (a teacher's fee, a rare book). The cost is never halved for the human trait.
- **Result:** the card goes into your collection. You can bring it into your deck the next time you rebuild it.

Off the table (rebuilding and upgrading)

A player can rebuild or upgrade their deck outside the table. When they do, they **choose cards from their class's cards or from the Neutral cards** (the normal pile). Nothing happens in the story: it is done between sessions.

Duplicates are allowed only within the deck rules in both cases: up to 4 copies of a class card, up to 2 copies of a Destroyed card, and no limit on Neutral cards.

The piles

During a fight, your cards live in a few places:

File	What it is
Draw pile	Your deck, shuffled. You draw from the top
Hand	The cards you hold, up to 7. A hand is hidden from the other players: only its owner sees it, and a player can show theirs if they want to
Discard pile	Played and cycled cards
Destroyed pile	Destroyed cards that have been played. They are out of your deck until the combat ends
Fatigue	An unplayable card you get when your draw pile runs out

Drawing and fatigue

1. **At the start of a fight**, shuffle your full deck and draw a full hand of 7. Every fight starts with a fresh shuffle.

2. **At the start of each of your turns**, draw until your hand is full. Cards you don't play stay in your hand, so you can hold cards to play together later. There is no end-of-turn discard.
3. **When the draw pile runs out**, add a **Fatigue** card to the discard pile, shuffle the discard pile (not your hand) into the draw pile, and keep drawing.
4. **Fatigue** is an unplayable card that takes a hand slot. You can get rid of it by cycling it. All Fatigue cards are removed when combat ends.

Cycling

Once per turn, you can **discard one card from your hand and draw one**, for free. Each further cycle in the same turn costs **1 AP**. Cycled cards go to the discard pile like played cards.

The end of a fight

When combat ends, all your cards return to your deck, Destroyed cards included, and Fatigue is removed. The next fight starts with a fresh shuffle.

The stack and Instants

An **Instant** can be played on **any** turn, even in response to another card, by paying with **AP you kept unspent**. Responses go on a **stack** and resolve **last in, first out**. You can respond with several copies of the same Instant.

- Only **players and bosses** use the stack.
- Unspent AP from your turn can pay for Instants until your next turn, when your AP resets.
- A **Stunned** creature can't play Instants.

Section VIII · Combat

Chapter 17 · Starting a fight and taking turns

Starting a fight

1. Every player rolls a d20 + their Agility modifier. The GM **averages** the rolls rounding down.
2. **Below 10:** the creatures act first. **10 or above:** the players act first.
3. A **surprised** party automatically loses (creatures first). A party that **ambushes** automatically wins (players first).
4. Everyone starts the fight with **full AP and a full hand**, so you can play Instants before your first turn.

A round

Each round has two phases: one side acts, then the other.

- The **players choose** the order they act in. The **GM chooses** the creatures' order.
- *Relentless* creatures also act after each player's turn.

Your turn

1. **Start:** draw until your hand is full. Effects that trigger at the start of your turn happen now (for example, *burned* deals 1d4).
 2. **Spend your 4 AP** on cards (they cost what they say; some are free). Changing lanes costs 1 AP. Cycle once for free.
 3. **End your turn.** AP you didn't spend can pay for Instants until your next turn, when your AP resets to 4.
- **Repeating a card:** you can play the same attack more than once in a turn if you have the card in hand (another copy, or one cycled back), unless the card says otherwise. There is no extra penalty.
 - **Talking to an enemy:** the first thing you say each turn is free, and each further reply costs 1 AP.

AP does not carry over: anything you did not spend is lost at the start of the players' next round, when your AP resets to 4. *Exhausted*

gives you 1 less AP each turn. *Stunned* gives your next turn only 1 AP.

Basic attack

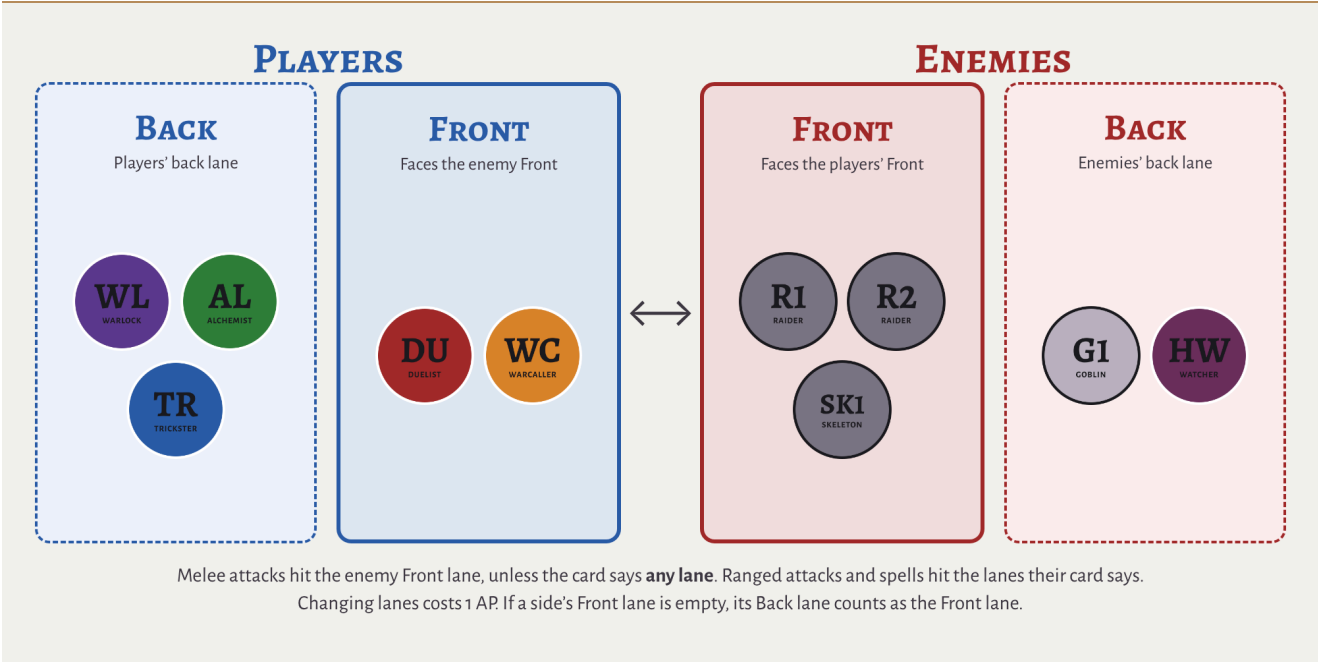
Every class can have basic attacks in its deck. A basic attack costs **2 AP** bare-handed or with a one-handed weapon, and **3 AP** otherwise (two-handed, and range weapons). Damage depends on the weapon (Chapter 3).

Chapter 18 · Lanes

Hellebore has no grid. Each side has two **lanes**: **Front** and **Back**. The two Front lanes face each other. From one edge of the table to the other, the order is: players' Back, players' Front, enemies' Front, enemies' Back.

Rules

- **Any number** of creatures can share a lane.
- **Melee** attacks can only target the enemy **Front** lane, unless the card says **any lane**. **Ranged** attacks and spells can target the lanes their card says; those with the any lane label can target either lane.
- **Changing lanes** costs **1 AP** for every change, for every creature, enemies included, unless a card or class feature says otherwise. For example, a class can have a feature that makes a lane change free once per turn.
- **Empty Front:** if a side's Front lane is empty, its Back lane counts as the Front lane.
- **Creatures stay on their own side.** At least for now, no card moves a creature into the other side's lanes.
- **Friendly fire stays.** An area that covers your allies hits them.



The battlefield: players' Back, players' Front, enemies' Front, enemies' Back

Area cards

Each area card says which lanes it hits, and whose side: one lane, both lanes, enemies, allies, or a mix. An area can also be centered on a creature: you pick a target, and the creatures beside it in the same lane are hit too. **Nothing is hit unless the card says so.** Cards that could hit many creatures print their own limit (for example, "up to 3 enemies").

Moving other creatures

Some cards move allies or enemies between lanes of their own side. Neither class in the first playtest does this.

Where each class likes to stand

Class	Lane
Warlock	Back
Trickster	Back
Duelist	Front
Warcaller	Front
Alchemist	Back

Chapter 19 · Types of cards

Every card has a **type** that says what it does and how it is played. A card can have more than one type.

By what it does

Type	What it does	Example
Attack	d20 + an ability against the target's Defense. On a hit, it deals damage	<i>Trick Shot, Lunge, Alchemist's Fire</i>
Spell attack	An attack made with magic: d20 + the class's ability against Defense	<i>Will Bolt, Soul Rend</i>
Spell	A magical effect that is not an attack	<i>Hex, Overchannel</i>
Control	Makes the target suffer a condition or effect: d20 + your ability against 10 + the target's resisting ability	<i>Net Throw, Smoke Bomb, Challenge</i>
Trick	Sets up a target or an attack without rolling	<i>Feint</i>
Support	Helps an ally: heals, protects or strengthens them	<i>Healing Draught, Rallying Cry</i>
Defensive	Avoids or reduces damage. Every class has at least two	<i>Dodge, Brace, Dark Ward</i>

By when it is played

Tag	What it means
Instant	Can be played on any turn, even in response to another card, with AP you kept unspent. Resolves on the stack, last in, first out
Destroyed	Once played, it leaves your deck for the rest of the combat. A deck holds at most 2 copies
Free	Costs 0 AP

By where it reaches

Word	What it means
Melee	A close attack with a weapon. It can only target the Front lane, unless the card says any lane
Ranged	An attack from a distance: a shot, a throw or a spell. The card says which lanes it can target
Any lane	The attack can target the Front or the Back lane. A card has it only if it says so
Thrown	A ranged attack made by throwing something (a net, a flask). It reaches any lane

Defensive cards: how they are different

Defensive cards use a different ability for each class:

Class	Defensive card	Based on
Duelist, Trickster	<i>Dodge</i> (the attacker rolls with disadvantage)	Agility
Warcaller	<i>Brace, Shield Wall, Hold the Line!</i> (reduce damage by Might)	Might
Alchemist	<i>Protective Salve</i> (reduces by Mind), <i>Flash Powder</i>	Mind
Warlock	<i>Dark Ward</i> (adds Will to your Defense)	Will

Damage reduction is never below 0, so a negative score never adds damage.

Fatigue

The only card with no use at all. It is an unplayable card that takes a hand slot. It enters your discard pile when your draw pile runs out. Cycle it out, and it is removed when the combat ends.

Section IX · Running the game

This section is for the GM: how to build a fight and how to run the scenes around it. The numbers are proposals to tune in the playtests.

Chapter 20 · Building an encounter

An encounter is a fight the story calls for. Start from what the fight is for (guarding a door, an ambush, the end of an adventure), then pick who is in it.

1. Pick the threat

Use the threat levels from Section VI. They tell you how long a fight lasts for a party of five:

Threat	Fight length (party of 5)
Minion	Dies to one hit, so it matters in numbers
Standard	1–2 rounds
Elite	About 3 rounds
Boss	About 6 rounds

A fight is easy to size by length: a few standard creatures and some minions make a short fight, an elite makes a fight with a centerpiece, and a boss is the main fight of an adventure. (*Proposal: one boss, or one elite plus a few standard creatures or minions, is a good start.*)

2. Fit the party

The budgets assume five characters. For smaller parties, multiply the toughness budget by $\text{players} \div 5$ ($\times 0.6$ for three, $\times 0.8$ for four), as in Section VI. Parties have 3 to 5 players.

3. Place the creatures

- Put melee creatures in their Front lane and ranged creatures and casters in their Back lane. Creatures stay on their own side.
- Remember the Empty Front rule: if a side's Front lane is empty, its Back lane counts as the Front lane.
- A creature that moves between lanes pays 1 AP, like a player character.
- Area cards that hit allies hit your creatures too.

4. Start the fight

Follow the start of combat from Section VIII: every player rolls a $d20 + \text{their Agility modifier}$, and the GM averages the rolls, rounding down. Below 10 the creatures act first, and 10 or above the players do. A surprised party automatically loses the roll, and a party that ambushes automatically wins it. Everyone starts with full AP and a full hand.

5. Run the creatures

Most creatures have only a hand: on its turn, pick any action it can pay for with its AP, and repeat until it is out of AP. Only bosses and mythicals use Instants and the stack. A relentless creature acts after every player's turn, with fewer AP per turn.

6. End the fight

A monster dies at 0 HP. A player character at 0 HP falls unconscious and starts rolling death saves. HP can never go below 0. The fight ends when one side can no longer fight, or when the story says it does: a creature can flee, surrender or be talked down. Talking to an enemy costs AP during a fight (the first thing you say each turn is free).

Chapter 21 · Scenes

The game moves between scenes. There are two kinds, and the GM decides when to move from one to the other.

Combat scenes

They follow Section VIII: turns, AP, cards and lanes. Keep them moving: the GM sets the pace, and the first thing a player says each turn is free.

Scenes outside combat

- **Talking, exploring and problem solving** use checks: $d20 + \text{an ability} + \text{your skill training}$, against a difficulty set by the GM. Checks are used outside combat.
- **NPCs** are usually a hand or nothing at all, and the GM plays them as the story needs.
- **Quirks, traumatic events and surprises** are the GM's call. Use them sparingly.

Between scenes

Between sessions, players can rebuild or upgrade their deck from their class's cards or from the Neutral cards, with the deck rules from Section VII. Nothing happens in the story while they do.

Open points

- How long a typical session is, and how many fights fit in it.
- Rest and recovery between fights.
- A standard way to build a non-combat challenge (a chase, a negotiation).

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Annex · Assets

Every current card, as printed for the playtest.

Card images



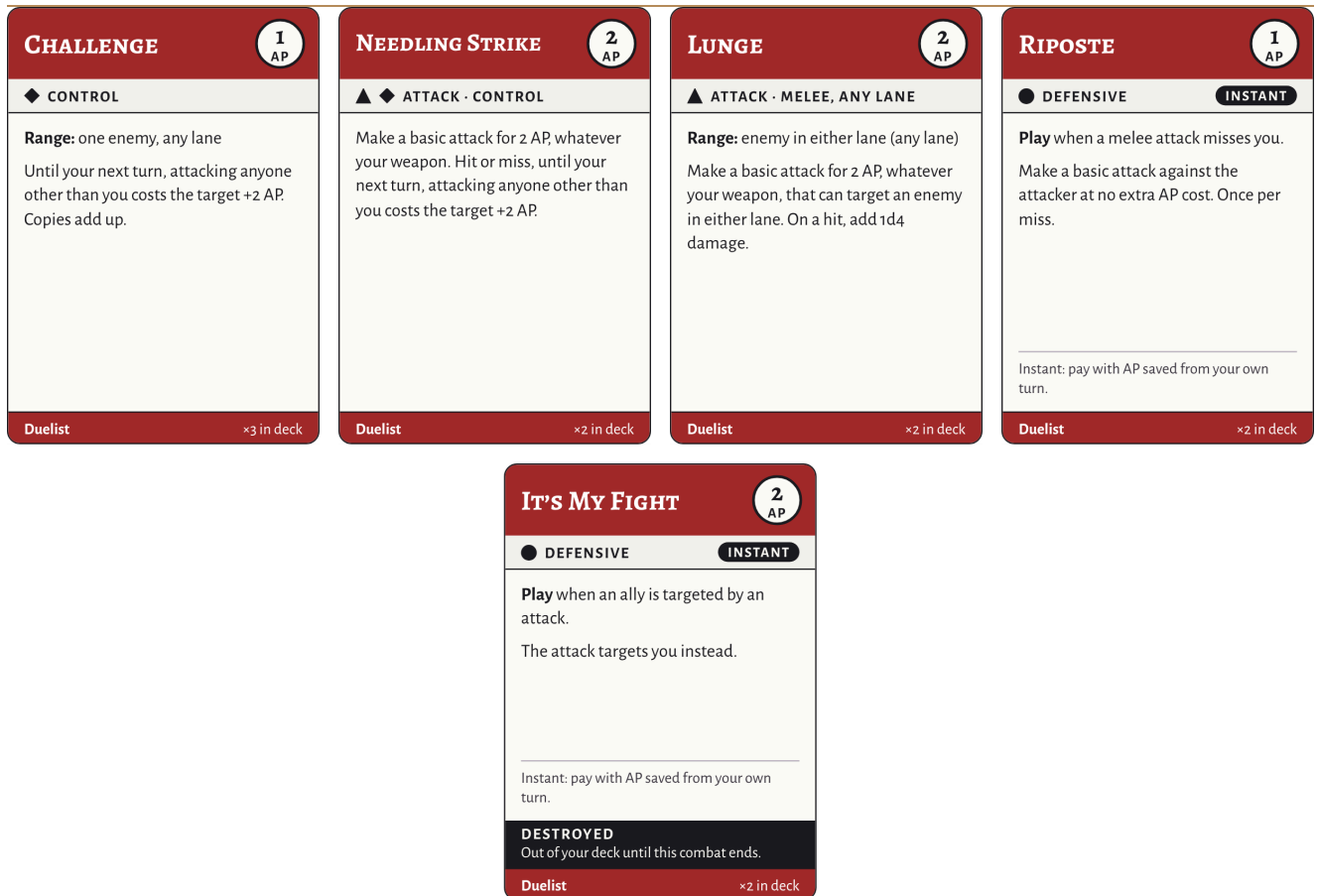
Shared and all classes: Dodge, Fatigue and the basic attack

WILL BOLT 2 AP ▲ SPELL ATTACK Range: any lane Roll d20 + Will against the target's Defense. On a hit, deal 1d6 + Will damage. Warlock ×4 in deck	HEX 1 AP ◆ SPELL Range: one enemy, any lane The target is Hexed until the end of combat: it takes +1d4 damage from your attacks, except Soul Rend, which has its own bonus against Hexed targets. Copies add up. Warlock ×3 in deck	SOUL REND 3 AP ▲ SPELL ATTACK Range: any lane Roll d20 + Will against the target's Defense. On a hit, deal 3d6 damage, or 4d6 against a Hexed target. Hex's extra 1d4 doesn't apply to Soul Rend. DESTROYED Out of your deck until this combat ends. Warlock ×2 in deck	SOUL SIPHON 2 AP ▲ SPELL ATTACK Range: any lane Roll d20 + Will against the target's Defense. On a hit, deal 1d4 + Will damage. If the target is Hexed, you also recover 1d4 + Will HP. Warlock ×3 in deck
OVERCHANNEL 1 AP ■ SPELL You take 1d4 damage first. Then your next spell attack this turn deals +1d6 damage. Copies add up. Warlock ×4 in deck		DARK WARD 1 AP ● DEFENSIVE INSTANT Play when you are targeted by an attack. Add your Will to your Defense against it. Instant: pay with AP saved from your own turn. Warlock ×4 in deck	

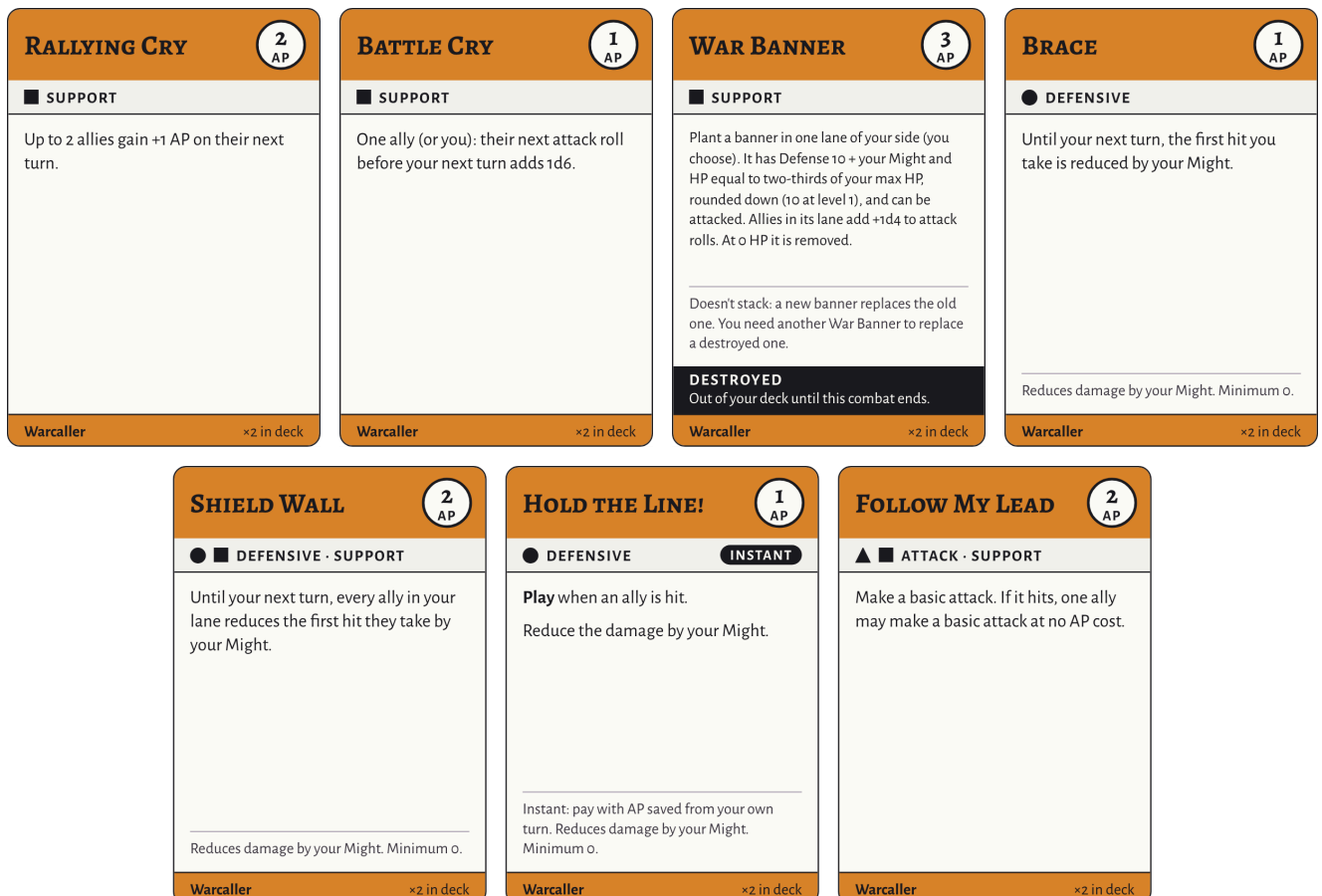
Warlock: Will Bolt, Hex, Soul Rend, Soul Siphon, Overchannel, Dark Ward

NET THROW 2 AP ◆ CONTROL Range: thrown, any lane Roll d20 + Agility against a Might check (10 + the target's Might). On a success, the target is Netted: it loses 2 AP on its next turn. Doesn't stack: a Netted target loses no extra AP from another Net Throw, but can still be targeted. Trickster ×3 in deck	FEINT 1 AP ◆ TRICK Choose one target. Until your next turn, the next attack against it rolls with advantage, whether it comes from you, an ally or any other source. Trickster ×3 in deck	SMOKE BOMB 2 AP ◆ CONTROL Range: thrown Choose one enemy lane and up to 3 enemies in it. Each: d20 + Agility against a Mind check. On a success, it is confused until the end of its next turn. Confused: at the start of its turn, roll d6; on 1–2 its first attack targets a random creature in range. DESTROYED Out of your deck until this combat ends. Trickster ×2 in deck	TRICK SHOT 2 AP ▲ ATTACK Range: thrown or shot, any lane Roll d20 + Agility against the target's Defense. On a hit, deal 1d6 damage, plus 1d6 if the target is Netted or confused. Trickster ×3 in deck
RATTLE 1 AP ◆ CONTROL Range: one enemy, any lane Roll d20 + Agility against a Will check (10 + the target's Will). On a success, it loses 1 AP on its next turn and its first attack that turn rolls with disadvantage. Trickster ×2 in deck			

Trickster: Net Throw, Feint, Smoke Bomb, Trick Shot, Rattle



Duelist: Challenge, Needling Strike, Lunge, Riposte, It's My Fight



Warcaller: Rallying Cry, Battle Cry, War Banner, Brace, Shield Wall, Hold the Line!, Follow My Lead

HEALING DRAUGHT 2 AP SUPPORT An ally (or you) recovers 1d6 + Mind HP. Alchemist ×3 in deck	QUICK DOSE 1 AP SUPPORT INSTANT Play when an ally takes damage and is still above 0 HP. They recover 1d4 HP. Instant: pay with AP saved from your own turn. Can't be played on an ally who is down (0 HP). Alchemist ×2 in deck	ALCHEMIST'S FIRE 2 AP ATTACK Range: thrown, any lane Roll d20 + Mind against the target's Defense. On a hit, deal 1d6 damage and the target is burned. Burned: 1d4 damage at the start of each of its turns; 1 AP puts it out, or it ends after 2 turns. Alchemist ×3 in deck	VOLATILE FLASK 3 AP ATTACK Range: thrown, any lane Roll d20 + Mind against the target's Defense. On a hit, deal 2d6 damage and the target is burned. Burned: 1d4 damage at the start of each of its turns; 1 AP puts it out, or it ends after 2 turns. DESTROYED Out of your deck until this combat ends. Alchemist ×2 in deck
SMELLING SALTS 1 AP SUPPORT An ally ends one condition. Alchemist ×2 in deck	PROTECTIVE SALVE 1 AP DEFENSIVE You or an ally: until your next turn, the first hit taken is reduced by your Mind. Alchemist ×2 in deck	FLASH POWDER 1 AP DEFENSIVE INSTANT Play when you are targeted by an attack. The attacker rolls with disadvantage. Instant: pay with AP saved from your own turn. Alchemist ×2 in deck	

Alchemist: Healing Draught, Quick Dose, Alchemist's Fire, Volatile Flask, Smelling Salts, Protective Salve, Flash Powder