

# Unsupervised Apprentices



## *Introduction*

You're a wizard's apprentice. One day, you discover your archmage mentor is missing. It's up to you to discover what happened and rescue your wizard mentor.

Or maybe you just want to use this opportunity to screw around. Get away with all the stuff you couldn't pull off while the wizard was around.

**Unsupervised Apprentices** is a narrative entertainment for one gamemaster and 3-6 players. You'll need a pile of d6s and 5 or more d10s.

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## Creating an Apprentice

There are a bunch of things to do to create your character. You can do these in pretty much any order. You may prefer to do the narrative aspects like answering the questions and choosing a Kith, before you do the math aspects. Or maybe you're interested in doing the numbers first and then figuring out how it fits together storywise. Both methods are totally cool. Create your character in the order that makes sense to you.

Choose a Kith, which is a description of your personal fantasy heritage. Each gives you a mundane skill, a Weakness and a personal question to answer.

Answer the questions on the right side of your character sheet. There are two questions that all characters need to answer, plus one determined by your Kith. Your Kith also determines one mundane thing you're skilled at. Make up another freeform skill of your choice (run it by the GM first).

Choose your stats, which represent how good you are at casting certain kinds of spells. Every spell is composed of two parts: Nouns and Verbs.

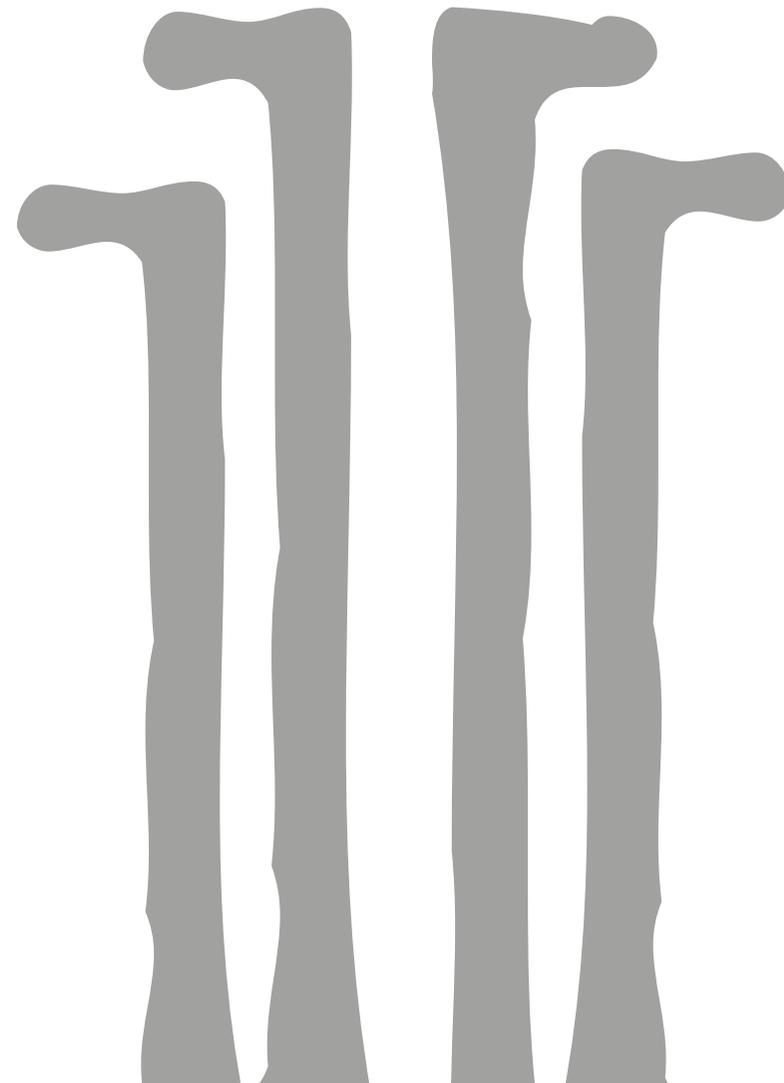
A Noun is one of the five basic elements (Air, Earth, Fire, Water, and Void). These are fundamental forces of the universe, and your rating represents your raw power in channeling that element's magical power. For Nouns, lower values are better. Your element at rank 4 is stronger than one at rank 5, one at rank 5 is better than rank 6.

Each of the five elements has five associations with it, which are other materials and concepts tangentially related to the element itself. When you want to affect one of these Tangents, your rank is considered one point worse (so a rank 4 is treated as a 5, rank 5 is treated as 6 and rank 6 cannot manipulate that Tangent at all). If you have a checkmark in that Tangent, you can manipulate it as well as you can the base element. Check one Tangent box for each element.

Verbs are how you channel and control the elements. Conjure allows you to summon or create the element in question or spirits associated with that element. Control lets you manipulate or animate the element. You can reshape earth, calm the wind or make fire leap from building to building by using Control. Destroy banishes, corrupts or demolishes the element in question. You could Destroy Fire to stop a building from burning down, or Destroy Earth to dig a tunnel. Enchant allows you to give aspects of an element to the target of your spell. You might Enchant someone with Fire to make them glow, or Enchant them with Freedom (a Tangent of Air) to free them from their prison. Or you could Enchant someone with Earth to make their flesh as hard as rock. Scry allows you to detect the element in question, possibly at a distance. Scrying Tangents can tell you many unusual things. A paranoid apprentice could Scry a person's Secrets to see what they are hiding. Transmute allows you to change a Noun into some other noun. You could Transmute Earth to make lead into gold, or Transmute Plants or Animals to re-flavor your food. Usually, changing a noun into a different sort of the same element is easier than transmuting something into something else (e.g., it's easier to turn normal air into poison gas than it is to turn oxygen into solid stone).

For your Verbs, higher values are better. You get one Verb at rank 4, two at rank 3, two at rank 2 and one Verb at rank 1.

Establish a fact about your archmage mentor, and one about the archmage's tower where you are all apprentices. All the apprentices share the same wizardly mentor (who has disappeared) and the same base of operations. Keep track of these facts on a central sheet for everyone to see.



## Casting Spells

Whenever you wish to cast a spell, you frame it as a combination of Noun and Verb. You can use quite a bit of creativity in how you combine Nouns and Verbs to create a wide variety of magical effects. The Noun determines what you are affecting. The Noun for your spell will be chosen from one of the five basic elements or the five Tangents that each element has. The Verb will tell you how you're affecting that Noun: are you Conjuring it into existence, Controlling how it behaves or Transmuting it into something else? If you're ever uncertain what Noun or Verb applies, talk with the GM.

By combining Nouns and Verbs with some creativity, you should be able to perform a huge variety of spells. With some imagination, you should be able to figure out multiple ways of getting the same effect. If you want to put out a forest fire, you could obviously Destroy Fire, but you might also Control Fire to guide the fire away. Or Create Water to put it out. Or Destroy Air to remove the oxygen that keeps the fire going. Or probably a great many other methods.

When you cast a spell, you have to roll some dice to see whether you are able to channel the magic properly. You're still an apprentice, so you aren't fully capable of keeping the magic under control. Before you roll, the GM will tell you a difficulty rating for what you are attempting, which is rated in a number of d10s. You're trying to have your total beat the GM's total, so more d10s is going to be more difficult. But the GM doesn't roll until after you're finished rolling, so you can never be entirely certain of your success. The GM will also tell you ahead of time if a task is dangerous or not. If a task is dangerous, then failing one way or the other will cause you to take a Wound. (The GM may or may not tell you which failure method results in a Wound.)

You always roll three d6s at a time. When you cast a spell, you might roll several times before being finished. You make one roll, check for failures and then determine your spell's Outcome. If you haven't gotten too many failures, then you can choose to stop rolling and keep your total, or to roll three dice again in the hopes of increasing your Outcome.

Any dice that come up 1 are failures. If you have any Wounds, then additional results might be failures as well. If you have one Wound, then 1s and 2s are both failures. If you have two Wounds, then 1s, 2s, and 3s are all failures, and so forth. If you roll too many failures, then the spell's magic gets out of control and goes haywire. The number of failures you can take is determined by your rating in the spell's Verb. If you have a rating of 1 in your Verb, then even a single failure causes the spell to fail. If you have a rating of 2 in the Verb, you can take one failure with no problem, but the second will cause the spell to fail. You might be able to get as high as rating 4 in a Verb, letting you acquire three failures without penalty. But eventually if you keep rolling you'll get that 4th and lose all your progress. As long as you haven't reached your Verb value in failures, you can choose to keep rolling (always three dice at a time).

Only certain dice will count toward your Outcome when you roll. The dice that you keep is determined by your rating in the Noun that you're channeling. If you have a 6, you keep all sixes that you rolled and add them together. Any other dice don't help your Outcome at all. If you have a 5 in that Noun, then you keep 5s and 6s rolled, and add them together. So having a 5 nearly doubles your result compared to having a 6. If you have a 4 in that Noun, then you can keep 4s, 5s, and 6s, increasing your results even further.

If you're using an unchecked Tangent, your Noun rating is treated as one level higher. For example, a Noun rating of 4 means that you only keep 5s and 6s for unchecked Tangents. This also means that if you have a 6 in your base element, you can't use unchecked Tangents at all (as your effective rating would be 7, ie too high to roll on a d6.) If you have a checkmark for the Tangent, though, you can keep the same results as you would for the base element.

After each roll, you first check to see if you've reached your failure limit (determined by your Verb rating). If you have failure equal to or greater than your Verb rating, you've failed to control your magic. (See below for what happens in this case.) If you haven't reached your failure limit, then you have a choice between standing with your current total as your Outcome, or rolling again to try to increase your Outcome score.

If you choose to keep rolling, you keep your existing failures and your total, and roll three dice again (still using the same Verb and Noun).

When you choose to stand, you're saying that you think you have gathered enough magic to accomplish the task. All the dice that you kept add together to get your final Outcome value. Then the GM rolls the difficulty dice and checks their total. All the difficulty dice are added together. Any 10s rolled on a difficulty die explode; that is, if you roll a 10, you add 10 to the current total and roll the die again. If the die keeps rolling 10 you can keep increasing the total and rolling again, theoretically having an infinitely small chance of getting an infinitely high score.

Once the GM determines the difficulty total, you check your Outcome against the difficulty roll. If your Outcome is higher, you successfully cast a spell that performed the task you wanted. If you get lower than

the difficulty dice total, then your magic isn't strong enough to accomplish the task you had in mind.

(Failures, totals and Outcomes all apply only to a single casting of a spell. None of these carry over from one spell to the next.)

For most nonmagical acts, you can simply perform the action or you can't. If the GM and players agree that an action is uncertain but nonmagical, then you can roll some dice to see how well you succeed. Mundane skills work mostly like spellcasting, except that you're generally terrible at them. Your PC spent all his or her time practising to be an apprentice, and never learned to be an expert at all this other stuff that normal people do. (Also, I want to encourage players to cast spells rather than rely on mundane means for achieving their goals.) Every PC has two mundane skills in which they can keep 5s and 6s. For all other mundane tasks, they only keep 6s. All nonmagical acts are 2-failure rolls: you can sustain one failure without problem, but two mistakes and the entire project comes crashing down.

## Rituals

If you have more than ten minutes to cast a spell, you can cast it as a ritual. This lets you cast as if you had a checkmark in every Tangent. If you are willing to sacrifice something of value to you, you can reroll one die. If you have allies helping you, each can make their own roll and add the totals together. Even better, you can use an ally's value in the ritual Verb if it is better than yours. (If any participant loses control of their part of the spell, it ruins the ritual, and each round of rolling is all players roll or all players stand.)

## Failure

There are three ways to fail when you roll. If you roll too many failures on the die (typically, 1s but possibly higher results if you're wounded) then you fail to control the magic power you're channelling. You can sustain a number of failures determined by the verb that you're using for the spell: if you only have a 1, then your first failure causes the spell to go wild. If you have 2, you can sustain a single failure without problems, but fail to control the spell once you hit your second failure. (And so on for ratings of 3 and 4 in the Verb.) When you fail because you reached too many failures, the GM will tell you how the magic goes horribly awry. GMs should feel free to be creative and to make the spell do something destructive or unexpected. All the magic power is flowing out into the world, transforming it in ways that are unpredictable and out of control. How will it change the current situation for the worse?

Even if you succeed in controlling your magic spell, you might fail to summon enough power. If your total Outcome is less than the GM's difficulty roll, then your spell fails to create the effect you were hoping for. If you're trying to put out a forest fire, then the fire is burning hotter than you expected. If you're trying to tunnel through stone, then you hit an unexpected hard part of stone that stops the tunnelling from working. Whatever obstacle was in your way turns out to be more powerful than your magical power.

When you fail a roll, you can use your Weakness to turn it into a success. Once per session, you can check the Weakness box, take one Wound and explain how your racial weakness gets the better of you. But in exchange for this minor mistake or failure, you get to reroll your entire spell: all failures are ignored, you don't take any Wounds, and your total is reset to 0.

## Wounds and Healing

Before you roll, the GM can declare that an attempt is risky in some way. If you're facing a nebulous shadow demon from a plane of pure terror, then you might suffer a wound if you fail to banish it, as its claws rend your flesh. Or if you're trying to Conjure Fire to blast your enemies, you might suffer a wound if you fail to control the spell. (Apprentices manipulating Fire and Void are probably the most likely to cause themselves Wounds.) You might sometimes take a wound from either kind of failure, as when you're fighting a shadow demon by Conjuring a sword of Fire. On rare occasions, the GM might have those nearby suffer wounds instead: if you're shooting fire at the demon that I'm grappling with and you fail to control the spell, I might be burnt as well. In all these cases, the GM should offer warning in advance.

If you fail in the appropriate way, then the GM assigns you a Wound. While you're wounded, your threshold for failure increases. For the first wound, 1s and 2s both count as failures to control a spell. If you get wounded again, 1s, 2s and 3s all count as failures. This goes on, until you have 5 Wounds and therefore all dice you roll count as failures. As you can probably tell, the more Wounds you have, the more likely you are to fail future rolls, which can lead to acquiring more Wounds. It's not likely to come up, but if you take a 6th Wound then your character dies.

Healing is generally a magic spell. A typical healing spell is something along the lines of Conjure Healing (Water) but you might be able to convince the GM that other methods of healing work as well. (Maybe Destroy Death?) The difficulty for healing is generally one die per Wound that the subject has taken, and the effect of such a spell would be to remove one Wound. (You could do this multiple times to remove multiple Wounds, with the process getting easier each time.)

# GMing

The gamemaster is in charge of portraying NPCs, describing the environment, teaching and adjudicating the rules, and all that relatively normal GM stuff. As GM, you'll never have stats for NPCs or roll your own spells. Everything should be phrased as a challenge that the PCs roll to avoid. You don't roll the vampire queen's Conjure and Void (Death) when she tries to drain the life out of a PC. Instead, you tell the player "The vampire queen begins to speak an ancient tongue and black shadows arise at her bidding to drain the life from your lungs. What do you do to stop her?" Then the PC gets a choice of ways to respond, using whatever creative plan they can come up with. The only dice you as GM should roll are difficulty dice to respond to a PC idea.

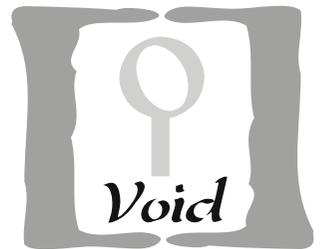
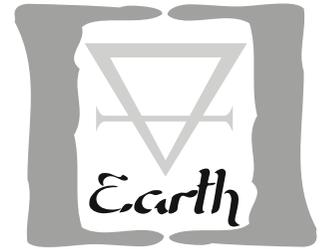
Assigning difficulty dice is the trickiest part of GMing the game. Generally, you want the dice to be a little high, so that there is some risk involved when rolling. 2 dice is a really simple challenge to overcome, which a PC should be able to face even with their worst spells. 4d10 is a moderate challenge, and 6 dice is getting tougher. 8 dice is a crazy tough challenge that PCs should only attempt with their on best combination of attributes. As GM, you primarily should consider the difficulty of the resistance in terms of the fiction: if the proposed plan seems easy, then give it a low die value. If it seems harder, then give it a harder value. Sometimes trying a different tactic might change the die values. It's totally reasonable for a player to suggest one plan of action, get told a die difficulty and then retract that action to try something different. Their PCs can evaluate the situation and make an estimate on the difficulty quickly in a way that the player cannot.

As a GM, you should ask a lot of leading questions. Any time I don't know what to do next, I ask a player

some question which is phrased such that any answer will lead the plot in an interesting direction. Ask the players about the tower where they live, what their daily lives are like, and what shadowy secrets they know about their wizardly mentor. Try to reincorporate these details back into the game wherever possible. If one player tells you that their archmage is afraid of bats, then it turns out later that the wizard had made a pact with a bat demon who was coming to collect his due. If the PCs are obsessed with cheating at cards, have the death spirits that they summon challenge them to a game to win back their mentor's soul.

Depending on how things go, the archmage NPC could be heroic or they might be morally ambiguous, or even outright evil. The PCs might know this ahead of time, or they might discover this as you play. Generally, the archmage should stay offstage as much as possible, so the PCs have a chance to be the protagonists of their story.

Tonewise, this game is relatively open. You might play it as a straight fantasy, where the PCs are underdogs trying to face challenges beyond their capabilities and to control magics that they haven't been properly taught yet. Or the game might wind up a silly romp, with each spell failure being increasingly ridiculous and embarrassing to the PCs. In my experience, if you don't push for a serious tone, you'll wind up on the silly end of the spectrum.



# Name:

*Control*

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

*Conjure*

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

*Destroy*

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

*Enchant*

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

*Scry*

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

*Transmute*

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Select one Element to be rank 4, two to be rank 5 and two to be rank 6.

Select one Verb at rank 4, two at rank 3, two at 2, and one at 1.



- ANIMALS
- FREEDOM
- JOY
- MOTION
- SENSES



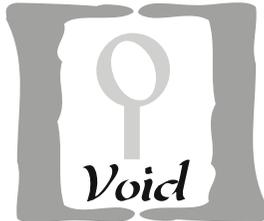
- MEMORY
- METAL
- PLANTS
- STRENGTH
- WEALTH



- ANGER
- ENERGY
- LIGHTNING
- LIGHT
- PASSION



- TRANQUILITY
- GROWTH
- HEALING
- INSPIRATION
- SORROW



- DEATH
- FEAR
- SECRETS
- SENTIENTS
- SHADOW

+ What makes you unique?

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+ What one thing could you never get away with while the archmage was around?

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## *Kith:*

+ Racial question:

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*Weakness:*

## *Mundane Skills:*

One skill is determined by your race, the other is your choice. These are both rank 5. All other mundane acts are rank 6. All mundane tasks are 2-failure rolls.

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## *Wounds:* □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

## *Rituals:*

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# Kith:

## Demonspawn:

RACIAL QUESTION: What moral law do you flagrantly violate? Which apprentice objects most strenuously?

SKILL: Deceive

WEAKNESS: Tempted By The Dark Side

## Dwarf:

RACIAL QUESTION: What one great project have you devoted your life toward completing? Which apprentice opposes you and why?

SKILL: Craft

WEAKNESS: Stubborn

## Elf:

RACIAL QUESTION: What one mundane thing that you're interacting with is deadly to your kind of elf? Which other apprentice knows?

SKILL: Notice

WEAKNESS: Think you're better than everyone else

## Gnome:

RACIAL QUESTION: What secret do you know that could get you killed? Which other apprentice did you tell?

SKILL: Trick

WEAKNESS: Too smart for your own good

## Goblin:

RACIAL QUESTION: What magical artifact did you steal recently? Which apprentice was your accomplice?

SKILL: Skulk

WEAKNESS: Greedy

## Halfling:

RACIAL QUESTION: What one comfort of home do you indulge in despite the archmage forbidding it? Which apprentice assists in your subterfuge?

SKILL: Be Underestimated

WEAKNESS: Too Slow to Act

## Human:

RACIAL QUESTION: Why was the archmage always especially harsh toward you out of all apprentices? Which apprentice do you resent for the easy treatment they receive?

SKILL: Crazy Plan

WEAKNESS: Never Studied

## Minotaur:

RACIAL QUESTION: What taboo or rule can you never allow yourself to break, lest you lose control? Which apprentice tempts you to break it?

SKILL: Relentless

WEAKNESS: Clumsy

## Orc:

RACIAL QUESTION: Which apprentice's relative did you kill in battle? Which relative?

SKILL: Smash

WEAKNESS: Uncontrolled Rage

## Transformed Animal:

RACIAL QUESTION: What one basic human concept or tradition can you not get the hang of? Which apprentice tries to help you understand?

SKILL: Speaks with Animals

WEAKNESS: Acts on instinct instead of thinking

## Undead:

RACIAL QUESTION: What inhuman hunger do you struggle to keep under control? Which apprentice helps you keep it controlled?

SKILL: Frighten

WEAKNESS: Repelled by common mundane object