

# DAGGERHEART

## HOMEBREW KIT

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# INTRODUCTION

**Welcome to the DAGGERHEART Homebrew Kit!** *This packet contains everything you need to start making your own content for Daggerheart, whether for your own campaign at home or to sell online for others to use in their games. If you haven't already, we recommend downloading the Daggerheart System Reference Document available at [www.daggerheart.com/srd](http://www.daggerheart.com/srd). The SRD contains all the content you are free to use under the Darrington Press Community Gaming License in your creations.*

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*These sections contain information about the design choices we made for each aspect of the game, as well as guidance for how we recommend you apply those choices to your own creations to best fit within the ecosystem of official and other homebrew Daggerheart material. Remember that all the advice given in this packet is for you to use or disregard as you see fit—some of our favorite parts of Daggerheart break the guidelines we've set up here. Use what works for you and leave behind what doesn't.*

# DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- Balance narrative focus and dynamic combat
- Streamline, then streamline again
- Make the game tactile
- Limit the cognitive load
- Embrace collaboration
- Design for flexibility
- Think asymmetrically

## BALANCE NARRATIVE FOCUS AND DYNAMIC COMBAT

Daggerheart combines the storytelling and collaboration of narrative games with dynamic combat to enable action-focused storytelling. This creates a game with moderate crunch that's complex enough to allow varied designs and strategic play.

## STREAMLINE, THEN STREAMLINE AGAIN

By limiting the space for mechanics (such as the character limit on cards and characters sheets, and limiting weapons to only one feature), the design emphasizes streamlined language and rulings over rules. If a rule doesn't fit in the space allotted, it's probably not right for Daggerheart.

## MAKE THE GAME TACTILE

We designed Daggerheart to enrich in-person games with a captivating table presence—the feeling and look of the game as it's played. With tokens, dice, cards, and conscious design for character sheets and reference materials (like the sidecar), Daggerheart creates a distinct, tactile experience that minimizes mental overhead.

When designing new material for Daggerheart, consider tangibility and table presence. Will your subclass feature use tokens that a player can pick up and spend to physically punctuate the moment they use a powerful ability? Is everything the players and GM need to keep track of located on cards or sheets available at the table?

## LIMIT THE COGNITIVE LOAD

Daggerheart's design is mindful of the number of additional mechanics and modifiers the player has to keep in mind at any given time. For example, it minimizes the number of modifiers and conditions, uses tokens and dice and other materials to make tracking parts of play easier, and places essential information on cards or character sheets in easily accessible places. Similarly, classes shouldn't include too many stacking mechanics that make them overly complicated to play. A player shouldn't need to refer to a book to use their character's features.

Likewise, both adversaries and environments should be written with intent to minimize the GM's cognitive load so they can comfortably manage an environment and several

different adversaries in one scene. All the material needed to run an adversary or environment should be included in the given stat block.

## EMBRACE COLLABORATION

Each participant in a Daggerheart game shares some level of narrative authority and takes turns adding to the story. The GM isn't the sole arbiter of what happens, as players are invited and encouraged to add to the world and narrate the results of some actions.

Make design choices that create opportunities for players to add to the fiction while also giving the GM tools to act as an interpreter for the group's shared vision. The mechanics you create should allow the GM to uphold the integrity of the fiction, yet leave room for everyone to make unique decisions at the table. For example, you might design a spell or ability that encourages the player to describe the form the effect takes. While creating an adversary, you might design a creature who manifests a character's nightmare, then prompt the GM to ask the player what that nightmare looks and feels like. Your session zero questions and map-building sections in a campaign frame, meanwhile, give players the opportunity to add their perspective to the setting while also establishing details about their character.

## DESIGN FOR FLEXIBILITY

Many elements of Daggerheart are built using archetypal design—for example, there are myriad ways to create a warrior, and the player gets to fill in all the details. When a player chooses hand runes as their character's weapon, they'll find that hand runes aren't fully described in the core rulebook. In fact, none of the weapons have an extensive description. The player gets to decide what hand runes are, what they look like, and where they come from. Because there isn't one canon setting for Daggerheart, much of its design is intentionally flexible, ready for reflavoring and modifying to meet the needs and preferences of every table.

If you're creating Daggerheart material without a setting in mind, we recommend this approach to your design: give the rough shape of the fiction created by a feature, but leave room for players to make it their own.

If you're building Daggerheart material for a specific setting, you may want to define more of the design, whether you're taking the flexible mechanics from the core game and adapting it to your worldbuilding or creating new features and systems that convey what's special about your setting.

## THINK ASYMMETRICALLY

Daggerheart is explicitly an asymmetrical game, and that shows up in many ways, especially in the difference between how player character features and features used by the GM (for adversaries and environments) are designed.

Player characters' offensive features are written presuming that their targets will be adversaries. Likewise, the offensive features of adversaries and environments are written assuming that their targets will be player characters. There may be some exceptions, but since *Daggerheart* isn't intended to have substantial or extended PC vs. PC conflict, the game is instead designed to support conflict between the PCs and the fiction (adversaries, environments, and challenges), rather than sacrifice the asymmetry for universality in feature design.

In practice, this means you should design offensive PC features to target adversary mechanics, not other PCs. These features shouldn't mention a target's Armor Slots, because adversaries don't have Armor Slots—which also means PC features don't deal direct damage, since direct damage relates to Armor Slots. Instead, they might target an adversary's Difficulty or damage thresholds. Since adversaries don't earn Hope, PC features can't force them to lose it—but they can

force the GM to lose Fear. PCs have six traits, but adversaries don't have any, so a PC's offensive features call for reaction rolls without a trait. PC features shouldn't force a target to put a domain card in their vault, because adversaries don't have domain cards. Instead, they might apply a condition to the adversary that keeps them from acting on a GM turn or imposes disadvantage on a roll.

Likewise, build the offensive features of adversaries and environments to target PCs and their mechanics, not those of other adversaries. Their features can involve design such as forcing PCs to lose Hope, mark Armor Slots, and place a domain card in their vault. But they shouldn't force a PC to spend a Fear, because PCs don't have Fear. Their features should call for reaction rolls with specific traits, such as Strength or Finesse. In turn, they shouldn't affect a player's Difficulty or their standard attack, because both of those terms are only used for an adversary.

## KEY TERMS

When designing for *Daggerheart*, you'll want to ensure you're using the correct terms for the mechanics so there's no confusion about what you mean. Homebrewers coming from other systems might mix up key terms from those games with how *Daggerheart* uses them. Below are some terms that commonly overlap with other games to watch out for during your homebrewing.

**Difficulty:** In other games, this term is often known as Difficulty Class or shortened to DC. In *Daggerheart*, it's just known as Difficulty.

**Target:** This term is used to refer to anything that a feature's effect is targeting. In practice, it allows the player to choose who (a creature) or what (an object) is affected by a feature. In contrast, using the word "creature" means the feature can only affect a living being, regardless of whether it's an adversary or an ally. When in doubt, use "target" instead of "creature" to give players more control over what their features can affect.

**Evasion:** Evasion represents how hard it is for the GM to hit a PC, and is often mistaken for Armor Class or AC. *Daggerheart* separates how hard a PC is to hit and their armor's ability to negate damage into two separate mechanics.

**Proficiency:** Proficiency determines how many damage dice a player rolls on a successful weapon attack. Unlike popular d20 fantasy systems you may be familiar with, players don't typically add their character's proficiency to action or reaction rolls. Proficiency can also be used in a feature to scale its effects; a character's Proficiency is a number between 1 and 6, so you can design elements of a feature (such as the number of rollable dice) that increase as a character levels up.

**Spotlight:** *Daggerheart* uses the spotlight to codify the focus of the action during play. Typically, the players and GM pass the spotlight back and forth as the characters interact with the world and the GM shows them how the world responds. It's particularly important to pay attention to the spotlight during dangerous scenes, because it often denotes who's getting

to act most often. The GM can also shift the spotlight to an adversary by spending Fear, which often manifests as "who gets to make an attack" during these tense scenes. When building homebrew, consider how your unique mechanics might affect the spotlight.

**Actions:** In *Daggerheart*, an action refers to the moment when a player character takes the spotlight to do something that requires an action roll. Unless a character is using a feature that calls for an action roll, they typically have to roll only when the GM calls for it.

**Open Beta Note:** *In the open beta, the game had an action tracker, and many features (such as from classes, subclasses, and domains) used the language "as an action" to indicate that the player should add a token to the action tracker when they used that feature. When the game moved away from using the action tracker, the language around the action economy also changed, because the flow of play became less regimented in the final release of the game. If you were homebrewing during the open beta, this element may take some adjustment. Note that many of the features that said "as an action" during the open beta versions now require an action roll. When in doubt, you can look at how the features are worded in the SRD.*

**Reactions:** Reactions are one example of *Daggerheart*'s asymmetrical design between players and the GM. Adversaries and environments have reaction features, each of which has a listed trigger so the GM knows when they can be used. These reactions can be used even when the GM doesn't have the spotlight.

Player characters don't have features that are explicitly reactions, but some features have a trigger that determines when they can be used, even if that PC doesn't have the spotlight. Typically, players can't use features while the GM has the spotlight unless a feature has a trigger that occurs during the GM's turn.

**Reaction Rolls:** Reaction rolls refer to a type of roll sometimes known in other systems as a “saving throw.” GMs typically call for these rolls to determine how well a target reacts to an effect, but unlike other dice rolls in this system, reaction rolls don’t generate Hope and Fear. When homebrewing mechanics that include reaction rolls, keep these important points in mind:

- If you’re creating a PC feature that causes a target to make a reaction roll, we typically recommend requiring the PC to also make an action roll of some kind in the feature. By making an action roll, the player has the potential to roll Fear, providing an opportunity for the spotlight to move back to the GM.
- Adversary reaction rolls are not made with a particular trait (since adversaries don’t have traits like PCs do), and they’re typically written as “Reaction Roll (X),” with X as the Difficulty. You can also use phrases like “a reaction roll with a Difficulty equal to…” if you want that value to scale or have an element of randomness, such as a Difficulty equal to the result of a player character’s Spellcast Roll.
- If you’re building an adversary feature that requires a reaction roll, you’ll want to reference the trait it calls for along with its Difficulty, like “Agility Reaction Roll (15).” You can also provide options when writing a reaction roll, such as “an Agility or Instinct Reaction Roll (12)” —this lets the player decide which trait they’ll use for the roll.
- Adversary features can approach reaction rolls in two ways. If the adversary doesn’t make an attack roll but the feature calls for a reaction roll (such as the Head Vampire’s “Look into My Eyes” feature), a player character who succeeds on that roll won’t take any damage or suffer an

effect. But if the feature does include an attack roll, and if that successful attack roll forces the target to make a reaction roll (such as the Minor Fire Elemental’s “Scorched Earth” feature), the feature usually includes some damage or effect if the PC succeeds—just less than what they’d suffer on a failure.

**Move:** As a game term, “move” is used most frequently with regards to what a PC or GM is doing in the scene. GM moves are the actions and reactions the GM makes to introduce new challenges, act on behalf of those challenges, and respond to player actions in order to accurately depict the world and keep the story moving. A GM move is a unit of action, generated by a player action or by the GM spending Fear (see the “Making Moves” section on page 149 of the core rulebook). A move might also be used to refer to a player taking some kind of action to forward the narrative—“What kind of move do you want to make here?” We use the term “move” to describe what PCs do because it doesn’t imply they’ll necessarily have to make an action roll to accomplish it.

**GM Turn:** A GM can spend Fear to make additional moves after a GM move prompted by a failed roll, a roll with Fear, or another source. When a GM takes those additional moves without the spotlight returning to the players, all the moves together are referred to as one “GM turn.” Grouping these moves together creates limitations and timing for certain moves and effects, and it helps guide the GM in not making repeated moves with the same adversary, since adversaries can typically only take the spotlight once per GM turn (though some adversaries have special features, such as “Relentless,” that allow them to take the spotlight multiple times during a GM turn).

# ANCESTRIES

Creating a custom ancestry in Daggerheart usually starts with defining the spectrum of physical characteristics this ancestry will possess. For example, we wanted to narrow the ribbets’ appearances to a range of anthropomorphic frogs and toads, while a drakona’s appearance varies widely, providing examples that are very humanoid, almost entirely draconic, and everything in between.

## NAME

In Daggerheart, we try to give ancestries names that allude to what they are, rather than inventing a fantasy name out of whole cloth. We’ve found this makes it easier for players to intuit what an ancestry is by their name and remember the ancestries’ names.

You might use a familiar sound (such as ribbet or clank), a play on a common or historical word that evokes that ancestry (such as galapa and infernis), or a variation on the name of the animal or object the ancestry is inspired by (such as katari or drakona).

## ART

For official Daggerheart ancestries, we create an iconic piece of art that represents the most common appearance we want associated with that ancestry, even if an ancestry has a wide variety of options beyond that. The katari hero piece could’ve been a full-on anthropomorphic lion, but we went more humanoid with feline features because we wanted to highlight the space between human and cat a character could occupy instead of one end of the spectrum. Think about how you want people to typically envision the ancestry, then make your hero piece follow those guidelines. When all else fails, make the choice that excites you!

## ANCESTRY FEATURES

Each ancestry is mechanically made up of two distinct features, which we’ll call the “Top Feature” and the “Bottom Feature.” When creating these features, think about the two most distinctive aspects you want your ancestry to embody—these aspects should be the basis of your design. For example, it was important to us that ribbets were distinctly amphibious and had long tongues to grab things and fight with. We wanted katari, on the other hand, to have catlike reflexes and claws

they could use in battle. Distill the important parts of that ancestry down to two core ideas.

Ancestry features should all be physical and/or biological in nature. Ancestries purposefully don't prescribe culture. You might decide that all elves in your campaign setting choose a destiny for themselves at their coming of age and declare it to their gods, who in turn make their magic particularly strong when the elf uses it in an attempt to fulfill their destiny. Though this is a cool cultural detail, it wouldn't fit the guidelines for a Daggerheart ancestry feature because it's cultural, not biological. Those cultural details can instead be expressed as a community feature.

Additionally, consider limiting how often you design trait-based ancestry features. There are a handful included in the ancestries provided in the core rulebook, but they're purposefully few and far between to avoid ancestries having a "best class" to pair them with.

If a player creates a character with a mixed ancestry, they combine one Top Feature with one Bottom Feature, so it's also important to consider which of your ancestry features is on top and which one is on bottom to avoid creating combinations that are far more powerful than other ancestries. Additionally, a thoughtful approach to ancestry feature design will help set up players to purposefully create interesting synergies for mixed ancestries.

The Top Feature is usually used for the following types of mechanics:

- Bonuses to experience (such as clank's "Purposeful Design")
- Features related to special movement or navigating different terrain (such as faun's "Caprine Leap," ribbet's "Amphibious," and simiah's "Natural Climber")
- Bonuses on reaction rolls (such as elf's "Quick Reactions")
- Manipulating rolls or roll results (such as faerie's "Luckbender," infernis' "Fearless," and katari's "Feline Instincts")
- Communication or connection to others (such as fungril's "Fungril Network")
- Additional HP or Stress slots (such as giant's "Endurance" and human's "High Stamina")
- Gaining Hope (such as halfling's "Luckbringer")
- Damage mitigation and healing (such as drakona's "Scales," dwarf's "Thick Skin," galapa's "Shell," and orc's "Sturdy")

You can think of the Top Feature generally as "what the ancestry is." The ancestry is purposefully designed (clank), amphibious (ribbet), dextrous (faun and simiah), lucky or highly instinctual (halfling, faerie, infernis, katari), enduring or hardy (giant, human, drakona, dwarf, galapa, orc). This feature establishes a characteristic about the ancestry that's fundamental to their biology and that separates them from other ancestries.

The Bottom Feature is usually used for the following types of mechanics:

- Downtime move benefits (such as clank's "Efficient" and elf's "Celestial Trance")
- Innate attack capabilities (such as drakona's "Elemental Breath," katari's "Retracting Claws," and giant's "Reach")
- Specialty defenses (such as dwarf's "Increased Fortitude" and galapa's "Retract")
- Evasion manipulation (such as simiah's "Nimble" and goblin's "Danger Sense")
- Flight (such as faerie's "Wings")
- Stress management (such as firbolg's "Unshakable")
- Information gathering (such as fungril's "Death Connection")
- Re-rolls (such as halfling's "Internal Compass" and human's "Adaptability")
- Social bonuses (such as infernis' "Dread Visage")

You can think of the Bottom Feature generally as "what the ancestry does." The ancestry wields a unique attack (drakona, katari, giant), evades danger better (simiah, goblin, galapa), flies (faerie), navigates social situations in a unique way (fungril, infernis), manages stress better (firbolg), recovers better than others (clank, elf), or adapts to problems quickly (halfling, human). This feature typically conveys something the ancestry can do differently than other ancestries.

There are obvious exceptions to these guidelines. For example, the elf's "Quick Reactions" is more like a Bottom Feature, while the dwarf's "Increased Fortitude" is more like a Top Feature. There are features that grant rerolls in both a Top and Bottom Feature options. We break these rules when a mixed ancestry combination would be too powerful, or when an ancestry has two features that could both fit one category. What's most important is to be conscious of the potential combinations between the options you're creating and existing options.

You should also try to avoid duplicating existing features across the feature slots. There may be times when directly duplicating a feature makes sense (like if you create another amphibious ancestry and want to use the ribbet's "Amphibious" feature). In those situations, if the other feature you have in mind would also generally be a Top Feature move, you may want to adjust one of the features to fall more in line with the Bottom Feature options.

There are additional exceptions to these guidelines, even in the core Daggerheart ancestries, but breaking from these guidelines should be done purposefully and to avoid problems with other ancestries. To be certain your new ancestry won't upset the balance of the game, consider how your new ancestry's Top Feature would combine with existing Bottom Feature options, then how your Bottom Feature would combine with other Top Feature options, and make adjustments as necessary.



# COMMUNITIES

Creating a custom community in Daggerheart typically begins with identifying a place, ideal, or circumstance that could strongly impact a community's culture. Communities can (and almost certainly do) overlap one another, so the goal is not to create something so broad that it covers all aspects of a society, but rather to be specific enough to highlight a part of society that resonates most with a character. In fact, there are often many smaller communities within a physical location. For example, a loreborne community might thrive within the college of magic in a much larger city, even though the wider city doesn't align with that community's values.

You might make a community based around a particular kind of location, such as ridgeborne (from the mountains) or wildborne (from the forest). You could also make a community based around an ideal or circumstance the character was fundamentally impacted by, such as highborne (raised in wealth) or orderborne (raised with strict tenants).

You can homebrew communities by creating custom cards for communities specific to your setting. These custom communities might supplement the ones provided in the core rulebook, or instead replace them with communities that better represent the unique locations, cultures, and lifestyles in your setting. Either way, they'll likely bear the name of a specific place or collective within your lore. For more inspiration on how you can use a different selection of ancestries or communities in your setting, refer to the "Campaign Frames" section later in this kit.

## NAME

In Daggerheart, we try to give communities evocative names rather than literal ones. For example, instead of "mountainborne," we named the community "ridgeborne," and instead of "forestborne," we used "wildborne." Find a name that evokes the feeling of what shapes the community.

# DOMAINS

Creating a new domain is one of the most ambitious tasks for a designer homebrewing content for Daggerheart. Each domain in the core book has twenty-one distinct cards, and domains have a huge impact on the classes they comprise (always in concert with another domain).

Domains represent a player character's mastery of a skill—weapon mastery, magic, charisma, the natural world, creation, protection, secrecy, and more. New domains should carry that same thematic weight. Additionally, you'll want to consider how new domains will combine with existing domains.

Since community and ancestry are referred to together as a character's heritage, it's important to consider how the names you give communities will sound and look together with existing ancestries and any new ancestries you're creating.

## ART

Community art typically features landscapes that show how the community in that area lives. Ideally, the people in the landscape are doing an activity that represents the community in an interesting way.

## FEATURE

A community feature is typically more passive than a class feature or domain card, yet still directly impacts the way a player character interacts with the world. These features emerge from cultural practices and/or collective knowledge, representing skills and affinities rather than biological characteristics or magical powers. The most common kind of community feature grants a PC advantage on certain actions or in specific situations (such as loreborne's bonus to research or wildborne's bonus to stealth). Other features might establish a particular way you interact with the world (such as seaborne or wanderborne). When creating a community feature, consider the most recognizable way a person from that community might engage with other people or their environment, then create a mechanic that encourages them to show that off.

Another way to inspire a fitting community feature is to use the following sentence as a framework: "I'm <community>, so of course I know how to <feature>."

*Ex: "I'm ridgeborne, of course I know how to navigate harsh environments."*

## DOMAIN-BUILDING GUIDANCE

The following sections provide general advice as well as specific tips to keep in mind while creating your own domains.

### BASICS

These points break down the structure of the domain cards.

**Number and Levels of Cards:** Each domain in the core rulebook has three cards at level 1 and two cards at each level from 2 to 10, for a total of twenty-one cards per domain.

**Layout:** Each domain card includes its level, a symbol indicating its domain, its name, its type, its recall cost, and its feature.

**Types:** In the core rulebook, there are three types of domain cards: abilities, spells, and grimoires.

## DESIGN

These points give guidance to consider while you're designing features.

**Thematic Throughlines:** Each domain has several thematic threads that run through the domain's features, with low-level cards establishing the thread and higher-level cards building on that thread. When combined, those threads cover the thematic territory of what the domain writ large should involve.

**Combat Focus:** Since combat is a major element of Daggerheart, most domain cards have an application during a battle or action scene, though different domains may lean more or less into features with combat applications (Blade and Valor are more combat-focused, Grace and Sage are less).

**Roleplay Focus:** Most of the game's more explicitly roleplay-oriented features appear in domain cards. Examples include Arcana's "Rune Ward," Blade's "A Soldier's Bond," and Splendor's "Reassurance." Most of these features ask the player to perform some interpersonal interaction and/or to do worldbuilding in the moment, creating a mechanical effect that corresponds to the fiction created by the player using the feature.

**Class-Neutral:** Domain cards should not rely on or refer to any class features, since domains appear in multiple classes and some classes with that domain may not have that class feature.

**Shared Features:** Similar features can appear in different domains, but they can appear at different levels with different names.

**Action Rolls:** Many domain cards call for an action roll. For a spell or grimoire, that can be a Spellcast Roll. Though less common, these action rolls can call for traits that aren't typically associated with that domain or, for spellcasters, that aren't associated with a Spellcast trait. (For example, Valor's "Bold Presence" uses Presence and Bone's "Strategic Approach" uses Knowledge.)

**Scaling:** Features often scale upward as a character levels up, and there are a few system mechanics you can use to scale features depending on how large you want the range to be. When you need a small scale (such as for a more powerful feature), you can use the character's tier (1–4). If you want more of a 1–6 range, you can use a trait or the PC's Proficiency. When you need a 1–10 range, a character's level works nicely. This design principle shows up often in domain cards, since they're where PCs get most of their mechanics, but it also applies to anywhere else a PC gains mechanics from (such as classes, subclasses, and items).

**Grimoire Cards:** Cards with the grimoire type—which list two or three spells instead of one—are rare. In the core rulebook, only the Codex domain has grimoires. If you want to add grimoire cards to your domain, consider how the grimoire type affects the balance of the card as a whole. For example, if you create a strong combat spell as one of the features, you might put two useful but more moderate utility spells as the

others to balance it out. If you include a really powerful utility spell as one of the features, consider a less-powerful defensive or offensive feature as another. Ultimately, you're looking to avoid piling on so many good spells in one grimoire card that taking any other card would be a detriment.

## CATCH-ALL TIPS

These points offer some final tips to consider while creating domain cards.

**Synergy with Other Domains:** Each domain is only half of the whole set of options available to the classes that include it. Domain cards should synergize internally, but it's also important to consider how that domain's cards could combine with other domains. No one domain should be so strong that characters would be incentivized to take cards exclusively from that domain. Each class should provide a variety of mechanically effective builds created by the different combinations of classes, subclasses, and domain cards from both of the class's domains.

**Spellcasting Domains:** If a domain has spells or grimoires, the classes that use that domain should have subclasses with a Spellcast trait.

**Loadout Bonuses:** Each domain in the core rulebook has a level 7 card that grants bonuses if four or more of the cards in that character's loadout are from that card's domain. All cards of this type are named "X-Touched" with X being the name of the card's domain (such as "Arcana-Touched" or "Codex-Touched"). Those bonuses magnify the character's capabilities in a way that lines up with the domain's themes and mechanics.

## MORE ON ROLEPLAY-SPECIFIC FEATURES

Roleplay-specific features typically focus the spotlight on a character or interpersonal beat, adding emotional weight to the moment. Intertwining mechanics and roleplay underscores both halves—it sells the importance of the mechanical effect by requiring that the character creates a moment in the story to benefit from it, and that benefit in turn affirms the emotional moment, rewarding the character for the interpersonal beat they created.

When players use these features, they can slow down the narrative's momentum to explore a more zoomed-in moment. Because of this, it's important to consider how often a character will use a roleplay-focused feature when designing it. If they can use the feature too frequently, the story's pace not only slows down too often, but the roleplay moments also lose their emotional weight. To keep these features special, many of them limit their usage (such as to once per session or once per rest) or have a higher cost. These restrictions help ensure that when play does slow down to focus on a scene, the roleplay features land with the importance they deserve.

## MORE ON DOMAIN THREADS

Domains have thematic threads that run through the features, providing cohesion and allowing for synergies and combos within the domain. For example, Bone is the domain of tactics



and the body. Those two words give us our threads: mastery of tactics and mastery of the body. We can trace these threads throughout the set of domain cards, from low to high levels:

## MASTERY OF THE BODY

For the mastery of the body, the Bone domain focuses on enhancing a character's physical prowess and endurance, with each level bringing more powerful boons. Some of the early abilities, such as "Untouchable" and "Ferocity," lead into later features, such as "Swift Step"—the character first gains a bonus to Evasion and/or increases their Evasion after an attack, then later gains a new bonus when they evade attacks. Their high Evasion also helps them persist through and take advantage of "On the Brink."

**Untouchable (Level 1):** The character's Evasion increases, representing high reflexes and fluency in motion.

**Deft Maneuvers (Level 1):** The character can move more in dangerous situations without a roll.

**Ferocity (Level 2):** The character can boost their own Evasion after a successful attack.

**Brace (Level 3):** The character can position themselves to better weather a blow.

**Boost (Level 4):** The character can make an extraordinary leap into an attack.

**Signature Move (Level 5):** The character perfects a particular combat technique.

**Recovery (Level 6):** The character knows how to maximize their ability to rest and prepare for what's ahead.

**Bone-Touched (Level 7):** This card enhances elements of both threads—the character's Agility score, which represents mastery of the body, and their ability to read the battlefield and avoid attacks.

**Cruel Precision (Level 7):** The character can apply their physical prowess more fully to enhance damage.

**On the Brink (Level 9):** The character can conserve their stamina when their injuries are mounting.

**Swift Step (Level 10):** The character can move adeptly and becomes invigorated when they evade attacks.

## MASTERY OF TACTICS

For the mastery of tactics, the Bone domain focuses on giving a character the tools to create combat advantages for themselves and their allies. "Strategic Approach" and "Know Thy Enemy" provide toolsets that give the character more options in combat and more knowledge, so when they start using their big hits like "Breaking Blow," "Deathrun," and "Splintering Strike" (the latter of which lets them divide damage as they see fit), they know how to divvy out their damage and combat benefits to be the most effective on the field.

You'll also note that "Rapid Riposte" allows a character to counterattack an enemy when that enemy fails to hit them while within Melee range. This means that "Rapid Riposte" directly benefits from "Untouchable" and "Ferocity" from the previous list, which increase the character's Evasion. You can

see how the two focuses weave together, building on lower-level cards to provide a variety of benefits at higher levels.

**I See It Coming (Level 1):** The character's situational awareness prepares them for ranged attacks.

**Strategic Approach (Level 2):** The character can apply their knowledge for advantages in combat.

**Tactician (Level 3):** The character's battlefield awareness lets them assist allies more effectively and work in concert with them for incredible feats.

**Redirect (Level 4):** The character's tactical acumen allows them to maneuver an attacker into striking another nearby target.

**Know Thy Enemy (Level 5):** The character can read their opponents and learn about their capabilities and condition.

**Rapid Riposte (Level 6):** The character defends themselves so well they open up an opportunity to counterattack.

**Bone-Touched (Level 7):** This card enhances elements of both threads—the character's Agility score, which represents mastery of the body, and their ability to read the battlefield and avoid attacks.

**Breaking Blow (Level 8):** The character knows exactly where to hit a target to make them susceptible to follow-up attacks.

**Wrangle (Level 8):** The character can force enemies into specific positions.

**Splintering Strike (Level 9):** The character can redistribute damage amongst the adversaries they hit as they choose.

**Deathrun (Level 10):** The character picks a vector of attack to maximize their impact on the battlefield.

## LIMITATIONS FOR DOMAIN CARDS

The following list describes the different limitations we put on domain cards to balance their power relative to the level they're acquired and what their features do.

**Resource Costs:** The most common limitation for domain cards are resource costs. Many domain features require marking Stress or spending Hope. Some related to damage involve marking Armor Slots. The resource they use most often depends on what makes sense for the feature, but might also be related to the domain's theme as a whole.

**Action Rolls and Reaction Rolls:** You can also limit a feature by requiring a successful action roll (a Spellcast Roll or a trait roll) for the effect to occur. Other features grant the target a reaction roll for a chance to avoid the effect.

**Usage Limits:** Some powerful domain cards have a usage limit—they can be used once per rest, once per long rest, or once per session. Other domain features require the player to place the domain card in their vault—usually temporarily. Sometimes, for the most powerful effects, a domain card will be placed into the vault permanently, indicating it can only be used once in the entire campaign by that character.

**Tokens:** The last common limitation for domain cards is the use of tokens. The feature tells the player to add tokens to

the card (usually equal to a specific trait, their tier, a roll, or something similar), and these tokens limit the number of times the feature is used or applied. Some cards let the player choose when to spend the tokens, while others say to remove tokens under certain circumstances. When all the tokens have been cleared, the effect of the card ends or is no longer available until tokens can be added to the card again. To avoid too much bookkeeping, we recommend only using tokens for one card per domain.

**Level 10 Domain Cards:** The top of Daggerheart's power curve occupies the realm of legendary heroes without reaching the power of gods and demigods. The level 10 "Resurrection" spell can bring one person back from the grave one time, but can't undo a plague and resurrect an entire village. The level 10 "Deathrun" ability allows a character to carve a swathe through a battlefield, but not to dispatch an entire army in one roll.

## SETTING RECALL COSTS

Every domain card has a Recall Cost that must be paid to bring the card out of the player's vault (unless it's swapped during downtime). That Recall Cost, which requires the character to mark an equivalent number of Stress, is the price for versatility. A player choosing their loadout should be a strategic choice, but the Recall Cost allows for some flexibility. The following list has tips and guidelines for setting a domain card's Recall Cost.

**Basic Costs:** Most cards have a Recall Cost between 0 and 2, but some domain cards in the core rulebook have a cost of 3 or 4 instead. Cards intended to be easily usable have a cost of 0. More specific or powerful cards have a cost of 2, making them more taxing to pull from the vault. A cost of 3 or higher is saved for the most powerful, higher-level cards in the domain, depending on their use and the domain's design intent.

**Grimoires:** Grimoires tend to have a Recall Cost of 2, sometimes higher, due to the number of options they provide.

**Character Vault Tax:** If a domain feature calls for the card to be placed in the player's vault, that card should probably have a higher Recall Cost, as a low Recall Cost would reduce the penalty of having to place the card in the vault.

## WRITING DOMAIN FEATURES

In Daggerheart, you may have come across a feature and wondered why it was phrased a certain way. Daggerheart is written in a conversational tone with the intention to communicate its rulings clearly, concisely, and intuitively. Ancestry, community, subclass, and domain features should fit on a card, so if a mechanic is too wordy, consider simplifying it. If you're ever confused about a feature, try checking its grammar—the order of phrases and the words chosen to convey rules may point you to a clearer interpretation. If the meaning is still ambiguous, remember that Daggerheart prioritizes rulings over rules (see page 7 of the core rulebook) and that specificity overrides generalizations.

When writing domain features, you can follow a basic formula: trigger, cost, and effect. If you want to be even more specific,

most features follow this order: trigger, roll, cost, range, effect, and ending condition. The frequency with which a character can use an ability typically occurs at the beginning, the end, or after the cost/roll. A feature's flavor text can appear anywhere within its description.

Using the color coded key, let's take a look at how a feature is written. Remember, the feature's effects and the frequency with which a character can use the feature show up in different places.

- ⚡ **Trigger**
- 🎲 **Roll**
- 🔥 **Cost**
- 📏 **Range**
- 🕒 **Ending Condition**
- ✦ **Effect**
- 🕒 **Frequency**

### Book of Vagras (Level 2 Codex Grimoire) - Arcane Door

**When you have no adversaries with Melee range** ⚡, **make a Spellcast Roll (13)** 🎲. **On a success, spend a Hope** 🔥 **to create a portal from where you are to a point within Far range you can see** 📏. **It closes once a creature has passed through it** 🕒.

This domain feature is pretty easy to follow. You can see the circumstance that triggers the use of the ability, the type of roll that must be made, the cost paid on success, how far the effects extend to, and what condition ends the effect.

Oftentimes, this formulaic structure will change to provide clarity to a feature. Let's look at examples from two domain cards and compare them to one another.

### Reaper's Strike (Level 9 Blade Ability)

**Once per long rest** 🕒, **spend a Hope** 🔥 **to make an attack roll** 🎲. The GM tells you which targets **within range** 📏 it would succeed against. Choose one of these targets and force them to mark 5 Hit Points.

"Reaper's Strike" immediately says the character can only use the ability once per long rest because of how powerful it is. The player spends a Hope, then makes an attack roll to find out which adversaries their character could potentially hit. They then choose one of those adversaries and force them to mark 5 Hit Points. As a level 9 warrior or guardian, they'll have fairly high attack rolls, so they're likely to hit, but they only get to try once per long rest. They risk missing their attack and wasting both the Hope and the use of the ability because the potential to deal 5 Hit Points of damage is huge. It's a risk, but they hit hard when they succeed, so we place the frequency at the start of the feature to limit its potential power.

### Splintering Strike (Level 9 Bone Ability)

**Spend a Hope** 🔥 **and make an attack against all adversaries within your weapon's range** 📏. **Once per long rest, on a success against any targets** 🕒, add up the damage dealt, then redistribute that damage however you wish between the targets you succeeded against. When you deal damage to a

target, roll an additional damage die and add its result to the damage you deal to that target.

The structure of “Splintering Strike” is different—players can spend a Hope first to make an attempt to hit. Once they succeed, then their character is exhausted from using the feature until they’ve had a long rest. There isn’t as much risk to using this ability because they can make repeated failed attempts. If the feature listed its use limit before telling the player to spend a Hope to use the ability, it would read

“Once per long rest, spend a Hope to make an attack against all adversaries.” But it isn’t fun to spend a resource to fail on an ability you can only use once per long rest, and since this ability isn’t as strong as “Reaper’s Strike,” we place the limitation on the ability after succeeding.

As you can see, where we place these limits is purposeful and affects how the abilities and spells play out. Consider how your sentence structure and grammar implies or directs readers to interpret the rules.

# CLASSES

Creating your own class in Daggerheart starts with identifying two domains that don’t already have an associated class and considering how those two specialties might manifest when combined. For example, the ranger is a cross of the Sage and Bone domains. Sage has abilities and spells that interact with the natural world, whereas Bone is about movement, evasion, and physicality. Combined, they make a character who’s quick on their feet and harnesses the power of nature, which fits very well into the archetype of a ranger!

If you instead start with a narrative or mechanical concept for a class, it’s of particular importance to be discerning about the domains you use. If you find that the available domains don’t capture your class concept well, you may instead create a new domain (or two!) to power that class (for more information about building a custom domain, see the previous “Domain” section). Since most domains have spells (in the core rulebook, only Bone, Blade, and Valor don’t), most classes will be capable of spellcasting, so keep that in mind when fleshing out your concept.

Each class is made out of the intersection of two domains, but keep in mind that each domain appears in multiple classes—class features shouldn’t be designed to be necessary to use domain features. When designing classes, focus on creating synergies with various combinations of domain cards available to that class, allowing for multiple creative playstyles.

## CREATING A CLASS

After deciding on the concept and domains for the class, you’ll need to determine a few important elements: starting Evasion, starting HP, a Hope Feature, and at least one Class Feature.

## STARTING EVASION

A class’s starting Evasion reflects how well this class avoids getting hit by attacks. When setting a class’s Evasion, adjust its starting Hit Points accordingly; generally, low starting Hit Points means higher starting Evasion, and vice versa. This helps balance out the characters to keep them from being too powerful at level 1. Characters with high Evasion are good at dodging blows, but when they do get hit, it hurts more.

In the core rulebook, starting Evasion scores range from 9 to 12. Guardian and seraph both have a low Evasion score of 9—these tanky classes are more focused on absorbing damage than avoiding it. Ranger and rogue showcase the high end with

Evasion scores of 12, representing that they’re more adept at entirely avoiding attacks.

## STARTING HP

A class’s starting HP reflects their endurance when they get hit. It’s most important to balance starting Hit Points with starting Evasion, so making these two choices in tandem is crucial.

In the core rulebook, starting Hit Points range from 5 to 7. Most classes have a starting HP of 6. Core classes with the Codex domain have lower HP (bard and wizard both have 5), which compensates for the fact that the Codex domain is the only domain in the core rulebook that has grimoires, allowing a character to gain multiple spells from one domain card.

On the other end, core classes with the Valor domain have higher starting HP (guardian and seraph both have 7). Valor is the domain of protection, and characters who have access to this domain are expected to absorb and endure hits meant for others.

If you’re planning to give a class much higher or lower starting HP, keep in mind what can happen at the extremes: starting with 3 or fewer HP means a level 1 character could mark all of their HP from a single blow and be forced to make a death move (since attacks can cause a character to mark up to 3 HP at once). Similarly, starting HP at 10 or above requires a minimum of four attacks to force a level 1 character to make a death move. And since the giant ancestry grants an additional HP at level 1, even starting with HP of 9 can also lead to that eventuality. We’ve found that 5 to 7 is the sweet spot—it gives characters enough to work with while leaving an opening for danger and thrill.

## BALANCING EVASION AND HIT POINTS

Most classes in the core rulebook have a combined Evasion and HP of around 16, so you can use that number as a rough target when setting starting Evasion and HP for your own classes.

There may be reasons to aim higher or lower than a total of 16, however. A lower total can be a way of balancing other elements of the class that are particularly strong. Conversely, other classes may need a higher total to pay the resource

costs of their abilities and features. Balancing Evasion and Hit Points around a class's unique features helps players feel like their characters can equally shine in their own ways.

## HOPE FEATURE

Each class has a Hope Feature that does something powerful and thematically important to that class. In the core rulebook, each class spends 3 Hope to use this feature, but that isn't a hard and fast rule. However, keep in mind that the more scars a character has, the less Hope they have available. If a character has four or more scars, this can cut off access to a Hope Feature—so an even higher Hope cost will be even more severely impacted by scars!

Additionally, keep in mind when crafting Hope Features that the player is spending their character's Hope—try to make the feature thematically align with that concept where you can. These features are meant to represent extraordinary effort, when the character is digging deep to push themselves beyond their normal capabilities. This contrasts with the other class features, which represent each class's primary capabilities.

From a mechanical perspective, Hope Features are a good outlet for a character who's holding 5 or 6 Hope, providing a way to spend a significant number of Hope so they don't miss the opportunity to earn more during subsequent rolls.

Some Hope Features give scene-long buffs to the character, such as the warrior's "No Mercy," while others provide one-time benefits, such as the guardian's "Frontline Tank." Most Hope Features can be used multiple times in a scene, though the high cost makes it rare to gain enough Hope to use them more than once. But rare is not impossible—and in a long, climactic scene, there might be enough rolls with Hope for a character to activate this powerful ability multiple times, so keep that possibility in mind when creating new Hope Features.

## RULE OF SIX AND TWELVE

Many elements in the game work in sets of six. Characters start with 6 Hope slots, 6 Stress slots, and most classes have 6 starting HP. The maximum value a trait's modifier will reach is usually 6, and the highest a character's Proficiency typically reaches is also 6. The GM can hold a maximum of 12 Fear, and 12 is also the maximum number of Armor Slots. This structure helps create parallels and equivalencies across these mechanics, where trading one resource for another (such as spending a Hope to clear a Stress) doesn't break the game's metacurrency economy. In general, we recommend either using existing elements in your mechanics or keeping to the same six-based structure.

## CLASS FEATURE

Class Features are the "big idea" that defines that class and its place in the narrative. Since they lack the high Hope cost of the Hope Features, they're intended to be used consistently.

For example, a druid's Class Features are "Beastform" and "Wildtouch," while their Hope Feature is "Evolution." Druids have a powerful connection to nature ("Wildtouch") and can transform into animals ("Beastform"), and they can use these

abilities frequently. Then, when the situation calls for them to step up to the challenge, they can enhance the normal capabilities of the animal ("Evolution").

Meanwhile, a seraph's Class Feature is "Prayer Dice" and their Hope Feature is "Life Support." Seraphs can adjust the outcome of an event to assist an ally or blunt attacks using the power of their god ("Prayer Dice"), and when stronger support is needed, they can spend more Hope to heal their allies through will and faith ("Life Support").

Some Class Features do have costs, such as the ranger's "Focus" or the druid's "Beastform," but those costs generally don't exceed 1 Hope or Stress because they're meant to be used frequently.

Class Features are also one of the only places in the game where you have space to write directly on features (such as the wizard's "Strange Patterns" feature, where the player can choose and write down what number they want to use for the feature's effect). Consider how you could make space for players to add details to their Class Feature, where applicable.

Daggerheart also avoids requiring players to take certain domain cards in order for their Class Feature to function—in other words, if the Class and Subclass structure represents a skill tree, the domain cards provide expansion horizontally from the Class Feature, not vertically.

The Class Feature is far and away the most important part of defining the class mechanically, and it often requires the most playtesting to ensure it doesn't step on the toes of domain cards. Spend the time and playtest to make sure you get it right!

## INVENTORY

When crafting the inventory options for a class, focus on providing a choice between two objects that inform the kind of character the player is leaning toward. Because they provide no mechanical benefit, these items should support or augment the player's decisions about their character's backstory and inspire them to think more deeply about why their character would be carrying that object.

For example, you could interpret the warrior's choice between a sharpening stone and a portrait of a lover as a question about their character's inner motivation—are they fighting for themselves or for somebody else? When deciding upon these items, try to make them narratively interesting and distinct while still being flexible enough to interpret in several different ways. Well-chosen class items allow players to give other players and the GM a peek behind the curtain at the character's core personality.

## LOOK

For a character's look, you only need to modify the clothes and the personality (though you can make other changes as you see fit). When making the list of clothing, think about the traditional ways that class might be represented in dress, but also try to include a few non-standard options! Sometimes an unexpected path will lead the player to make an interesting choice about their character they wouldn't have otherwise considered.



## PERSONALITY

The personality is a similar approach—oftentimes there are classic ways you’d expect a class to act, but some unexpected variation can provide a fun twist on the trope. Personalities should come in the form of a noun, not an adjective—this allows for some deeper, more layered interpretations from the player. For example, having the personality of a lawyer is probably very different than having the personality of an elephant. But how exactly that differs is up to the way the player views a lawyer or an elephant. The important thing is not creating a strictly defined personality handed to the player to inhabit, but rather giving them a jumping-off point, informed by their own life experience, that they can use to breathe life into the character.

## BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

Background questions are built by identifying three important areas of a character’s life that might have influenced their journey to becoming their chosen class. Taken together, the answers to these questions should give some sense of the character’s goals or the initial trajectory of their character arc. Background questions are also a big area where the

player gets to contribute to the game’s worldbuilding. Most importantly, the player’s answers should provide the GM with narrative fodder they can use when building out the bones of the coming story. When crafting these questions, think about what information you might find useful as a GM. Consider how you might hook someone who plays this class into a campaign’s story (such as a bad guy from their backstory that you can highlight, an NPC they care about, or an item of power they’re searching for) and focus on prompts that point you to those answers.

## CONNECTION QUESTIONS

Connection questions are all about the ways characters of this class might interface with the other characters at the table. When creating connection questions, try to hone in on what dynamics make your new class interesting and how those can be represented through a character’s relationships. Consider the spectrum of what a connection can be when tackling these questions—we generally try to give them one that is positive, one that is somewhat contentious, and one that is particularly flavorful for the class, usually neutral or positive.

# SUBCLASSES

Building a subclass is about crafting the more specific ways a class might be played and creating mechanics that reinforce that playstyle. For example, in the subclasses for the rogue in the core rulebook, the Nightwalker is built for people who want to jump in and out of shadows and stay hidden, one very common trope of the rogue. On the other hand, the Syndicate is built for players who want to have a contact everywhere and play a more suave or socially inclined rogue.

Because the Syndicate’s mechanical effect is much more roleplay-focused, some battle-inclined players may not give it a second glance. In contrast, those who are focused on their character’s connections and contributing collaboratively to the narrative might find themselves drawn to the Syndicate. The point of creating subclasses is to provide a variety of options for different players to choose from.

If your class includes a domain that requires spellcasting, be sure to include a Spellcast trait. Most subclasses within a class share the same Spellcast trait, but you can diverge from the standard if it suits the class.

## SUBCLASS NAME

If other subclasses for a class already have a name, such as the wizard’s School of Knowledge and School of War, the name of your new subclass should follow the same convention. If you’re creating the first subclass for a new class, consider what naming convention sounds best when said with the class’s name. Single-word adjectives and nouns are the most common, such as Wayfinder ranger or Nightwalker rogue, but we also use evocative phrases that describe the class or its playstyle, such as Warden of the Elements druid or Call of the Slayer warrior.

## ART

Every subclass includes a piece of art that captures its general aesthetic. These pieces typically focus on a character, showcasing them in a cinematic moment that communicates a key feature or theme related to the subclass. If you’re creating a subclass for an existing class, look at the art for its other subclasses to ensure your new art won’t be too similar in framing, action, or ancestry. The three subclass cards will all use the same art.

## SUBCLASS CARDS

Once you have a name and visual style for your subclass, you’ll build out its three subclass cards: foundation, specialization, and mastery. If you’re unsure of how to apply the design advice below for these three cards, don’t worry! The upcoming “Subclass Design Example” section provides examples with further explanations.

For the foundation, determine the defining characteristic of the subclass you would like to highlight at character creation, then build one or two mechanics that capture that concept. If the subclass has a Spellcast trait, it should be listed on this card.

For the specialization, consider how you can build on the narrative or mechanical concept the foundation introduced. This might improve an aspect of that mechanic, add an additional mechanic that synergizes with the foundation, or create an entirely new mechanic that reinforces the story the subclass is telling.

For the mastery, you’ll build a capstone effect that carries the subclass through the final three levels of the campaign. The

same advice from building a specialization applies here, but remember that the game's complexity ramps up in its final levels. You might be tempted to make the mastery feature(s) the most complex, and while you certainly can, consider how a simpler effect might go just as far toward achieving the subclass's fantasy.

The following list contains important things to keep in mind when crafting subclass mechanics:

**Balance Subclass Cards:** Look at other subclass cards, especially those in the class you're working in, and consider why a player would choose one over the other. For example, if one option is clearly more mechanically weak without having some other appeal or cost, you'll want to change the concept or mechanic to bring it in line with the game's balance.

**Simplify Wording:** You only have the space available on the card, so keep your mechanics streamlined and focused. If it doesn't fit on the card, it's too long to be a subclass mechanic.

**Avoid Game-Breaking Combinations:** Make sure your mechanics don't intersect with another card or feature in an unexpected way. Synergy between features is great when it's intended, but can be distracting or even game-breaking when unintended. The best way to ensure there aren't any problems with your mechanics is to playtest the class, even if that means building many characters and playing each through playtest sessions on your own.

## FEATURE NAMES

Every feature on a subclass card needs a name. These names don't have a set format, but they tend to err on the side of brevity. It's usually best to use a single word or short phrase that provides quick context for what that feature does. This especially helps players who are scrambling to find a feature they know they have in a stressful moment at the table.

## SUBCLASS DESIGN EXAMPLE

The following section reprints the Nightwalker rogue from the core rulebook, but we have added annotations to explain our design choices for this subclass.

### NIGHTWALKER ROGUE

#### SPELLCAST TRAIT

Finesse

*Finesse is the trait for stealth and precision, a great fit for rogues in general and especially for a subclass focused on stealth and shadows.*

#### FOUNDATION FEATURE

**Shadow Stepper:** You can move from shadow to shadow. When you move into an area of darkness or a shadow cast by another creature or object, you can **mark a Stress** to disappear from where you are and reappear inside another shadow within Far range. When you reappear, you are *Cloaked*.

*"Shadow Stepper" gives the Nightwalker a special form of movement—they can disappear into and travel through shadows. In synergy with their core features, "Shadow Stepper" makes the rogue reappear Cloaked, which then means they're set up to maintain their stealth or execute a deadly "Sneak Attack." This special movement form creates a distinct way for the Nightwalker to interact with the world and express their skills as a rogue.*

#### SPECIALIZATION FEATURES

**Dark Cloud:** Make a **Spellcast Roll (15)**. On a success, create a temporary dark cloud that covers any area within Close range. Anyone in this cloud can't see outside of it, and anyone outside of it can't see in. You're considered *Cloaked* from any adversary for whom the cloud blocks line of sight.

**Adrenaline:** When you're *Vulnerable*, add your level to your damage rolls.

*"Dark Cloud" builds on "Shadow Stepper" by giving the Nightwalker the ability to create a cloud of darkness, which they can then move through. This adds flexibility and utility to the special movement granted by "Shadow Stepper," while also allowing the Nightwalker to provide visual cover in two ways (from inside out and outside in). "Dark Cloud" requiring a Spellcast Roll means that creating the cloud presents some risk and may have unforeseen consequences (since "Dark Cloud" can generate Fear for the GM, while "Shadow Stepper," which only requires marking a Stress, can't generate Fear).*

*Meanwhile, "Adrenaline" allows the Nightwalker to feel confident putting themselves in danger by incentivizing them to get into situations where they are Vulnerable, which now gives them a damage bonus.*

#### MASTERY FEATURES

**Fleeting Shadow:** Gain a permanent +1 bonus to your Evasion. You can use your "Shadow Stepper" feature to move within Very Far range.

**Vanishing Act:** **Mark a Stress** to become *Cloaked* at any time. When *Cloaked* from this feature, you automatically clear the *Restrained* condition if you have it. You remain *Cloaked* in this way until you roll with Fear or until your next rest.

*"Fleeting Shadow" and "Vanishing Act" both build on the "Shadow Stepper" foundation feature. "Fleeting Shadow" gives it a better range, and "Vanishing Act" empowers it by having it also clear Restrained and extending the duration of Cloaked to last until a roll with Fear or a rest.*

*"Fleeting Shadow" also gives a bonus to Evasion to make it even harder to hit the rogue when they're teleporting into danger and becoming Vulnerable to deal even more damage.*



# ADVERSARIES

The core rulebook already contains some guidance for building your own adversaries (see the “Improvising Adversaries” section on page 208 and the explanations of adversary types on pages 198–207), but in this section, we will go into a bit more depth.

For benchmark statistics to consider when creating new adversaries, a great reference is the Improvised Statistics by Tier table on page 208 of the core rulebook, which has been reprinted below for convenience.

## Improvised Statistics by Tier

ADVERSARY STATISTIC	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3	TIER 4
Attack Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4
Damage Dice	1d6+2 to 1d12+4	2d6+3 to 2d12+4	3d8+3 to 3d12+5	4d8+10 to 4d12+15
Difficulty	11	14	17	20
Damage Thresholds	Major 7/Severe 12	Major 10/Severe 20	Major 20/Severe 32	Major 25/Severe 45

## HIT POINTS

Choosing or adjusting the number of Hit Points an adversary has is about deciding how long you want them around in a fight. Use the guidelines below for assigning Hit Points.

HIT POINTS	GUIDELINES
1	These adversaries will be defeated in a single successful hit, regardless of damage dealt. They do not require any damage thresholds. Use this when the adversary is meant to be cannon fodder, like a Minion.
2	These adversaries can be defeated in one hit and will definitely go down in two. They only require a Major threshold. Use this when the adversary should be stronger than a Minion, but still be fairly quick to defeat.
3	These adversaries could be defeated in one big hit. Use this when the adversary is meant to take a few hits (or one instance of Severe damage) before it is gone.
4-6	These adversaries are the safest bet in a fight if you want them to last for a few hits but not take forever to defeat. If you're in doubt about how many Hit Points to give a Standard adversary, this is a good range.
7-9	These adversaries are tougher than usual, so they will typically take longer to defeat. Use this when you want a stronger or scarier adversary that will likely be around for the whole fight. Be cautious of how many adversaries you use with this many Hit Points, as it can cause the battle to drag on.
10+	These adversaries are the most difficult to defeat, and implementing them will usually make the battle last significantly longer. You should typically only use one of these adversaries per fight, often with smaller lackeys that have fewer Hit Points.

Keep in mind that the combination of both an adversary's Hit Points and Difficulty will be the biggest determining factors for how long a battle lasts. If you want the fight to be fast and brutal, raise the adversary's attack bonus and damage, but lower their Hit Points and/or Difficulty. Then, spend Fear to utilize their attacks before they're gone. On the other hand, if you are building a prolonged boss battle at the end of an arc that could take half the session or more, consider bumping up the adversary's Hit Points to keep them in the battle longer. Alternatively, you might utilize a Phase Change feature to continue the fight after they've marked all their Hit Points. For more on Phase Changes, see page 180 in the core rulebook.

If you're building adversaries for a larger or smaller party (either more than 5 or fewer than 3 players), also consider adjusting the number of Hit Points by 1 or 2 compared to what you'd typically use. The Battle Point system in the core book usually keeps fights fairly balanced, but sometimes adversaries can become far too easy (or an absolute slog) with an irregular number of players. When in doubt, consider what will make the fight fun and allow everyone in the party to make a few attacks while not allowing the battle to drag on for too long. You can always adjust on the fly by spending Fear as needed.

## ATTACK MODIFIERS

When creating or scaling adversaries, you can set their attack modifier to the default for the adversary's tier, then adjust up or down depending on how often you want them to hit. You can increase or decrease an adversary's attack modifier by up to 4 points when you want the foe to be more or less likely to land a blow. You might balance an adversary with an especially powerful attack by giving them a lower attack modifier (especially if they're a Bruiser) or give an adversary who doesn't do as much damage a higher attack modifier so that they can wear the PCs down a bit at a time.

Bruisers, Minions, and Social adversaries tend to have lower attack modifiers. Ranged adversaries have higher attack modifiers, while Solos and Leaders tend to have the highest.

## ADVERSARY DAMAGE

As a general rule, adversary damage pools should have a number of dice equal to the adversary's tier. When determining their damage die, consider the following advice:

- **Bruisers and Solos** tend to have the highest damage, often using d10s or d12s.
- **Hordes** start with a higher damage pool (d8s or d10s). When they've marked half their HP, their damage pool is roughly reduced to half (per their "Horde" feature), usually to d4s and d6s.
- **Leaders** usually have higher damage pools (d10s) if they're meant to be powerful threats individually in addition to their command capabilities. If their danger is more in their ability to direct other adversaries, their damage may be lower (d8s).
- **Minions** deal flat damage instead of a rolled dice pool.
- **Ranged adversaries** often have slightly higher damage (d8s or d10s).
- **Social and Supports** often have the lowest damage, often using d4s and d6s.
- **Skulks and Standards** often use d6s or d8s.

## DAMAGE BONUSES

Many adversaries' damage pools have flat bonuses in addition to dice. These bonuses are there to push an adversary's damage more consistently into a certain band of results—usually the PCs' average damage thresholds in the corresponding tier. If you want an adversary to consistently do higher damage, you can give them a larger flat damage bonus, then use smaller damage dice to keep the average result within the bounds for the tier.

## SCALING ADVERSARIES

You're preparing an encounter for your level 1 group but want to use the assassin adversaries. You could just tweak the Tier 1 bandits, but decide instead to scale down the assassins. You start with the Assassin Poisoner, as you plan to use a poisoner and some minions for this first encounter.

### ASSASSIN POISONER

#### Tier 2 Skulk

*A cunning scoundrel skilled in both poisons and ambushing.*

**Motives & Tactics:** Anticipate, get paid, kill, taint food and water

**Difficulty:** 14 | **Thresholds:** 8/16 | **HP:** 4 | **Stress:** 4  
**ATK:** +3 | **Poisoned Throwing Dagger:** Close | 2d8+1 phy

**Experience:** Intrusion +2

#### FEATURES

**Grindletooth Venom - Passive:** Targets who mark HP from the Assassin's attacks are *Vulnerable* until they clear a HP.

**Out of Nowhere - Passive:** The Assassin has advantage on attacks if they are *Hidden*.

**Fumigation - Action:** Drop a smoke bomb that fills the air within Close range with smoke, *Dizzying* all targets in this area. *Dizzied* targets have disadvantage on their next action roll, then clear the condition.

The first step in adjusting the Assassin Poisoner down to Tier 1 is reducing the Difficulty from 14 to 12 so level 1 characters can frequently succeed against them. Then drop the attack modifier by 1, since Tier 1 characters will have lower Evasion scores.

Next, lower their damage from 2d8+1 to 1d8—they'll still be capable of frequently dealing Major damage to a level 1 character.

Then take their damage thresholds from Major 8 / Severe 16 to Major 5 / Severe 10. The Assassin Poisoner isn't meant to be tough, so you can leave the HP and Stress as is. It'll still take a strong blow from a level 1 character to deal Severe damage.

Finally, you decide to remove the "Grindletooth Poison" feature entirely for this Tier 1 version to make the adversary slightly less deadly. You can leave "Fumigation" as is, since it doesn't deal damage or have a reaction roll with a Difficulty.

The Tier 1 version of the Assassin Poisoner now looks like this:

### ASSASSIN POISONER

#### Tier 1 Skulk

*A cunning scoundrel skilled in both poisons and ambushing.*

**Motives & Tactics:** Anticipate, get paid, kill, taint food and water

**Difficulty:** 12 | **Thresholds:** 5/10 | **HP:** 4 | **Stress:** 4  
**ATK:** +2 | **Poisoned Throwing Dagger:** Close | 1d8 phy

**Experience:** Intrusion +2

#### FEATURES

**Out of Nowhere - Passive:** The Assassin has advantage on attacks if they are *Hidden*.

**Fumigation - Action:** Drop a smoke bomb that fills the air within Close range with smoke, *Dizzying* all targets in this area. *Dizzied* targets have disadvantage on their next action roll, then clear the condition.

If you were instead scaling the Tier 2 Assassin Poisoner up to Tier 3, you could increase their Difficulty, attack modifier, damage, and damage thresholds.

## ASSASSIN POISONER

### Tier 3 Skulk

*A cunning scoundrel skilled in both poisons and ambushing.*

**Motives & Tactics:** Anticipate, get paid, kill, taint food and water

**Difficulty:** 16 | **Thresholds:** 15/30 | **HP:** 4 | **Stress:** 4  
**ATK:** +4 | **Poisoned Throwing Dagger:** Close | 3d8+4 phy

**Experience:** Intrusion +2

### FEATURES

**Grindletooth Venom - Passive:** Targets who mark HP from the Assassin's attacks are *Vulnerable* until they clear a HP.

**Out of Nowhere - Passive:** The Assassin has advantage on attacks if they are *Hidden*.

**Fumigation - Action:** Drop a smoke bomb that fills the air within Close range with smoke, *Dizzying* all targets in this area. *Dizzied* targets have disadvantage on their next action roll, then clear the condition.

If you were adapting the Assassin Poisoner to Tier 4, consider increasing their Difficulty, attack modifier, damage, damage thresholds, and HP. You can also increase the bonus of their Experiences and, if applicable, add new ones.

Adding a new feature or two is a great way to scale up the threat for Tier 4, as well (such as “On the Move” below). The Assassin Poisoner doesn't have a reaction, so that's a great place to start when adding a feature.

## ASSASSIN POISONER

### Tier 4 Skulk

*A cunning scoundrel skilled in both poisons and ambushing.*

**Motives & Tactics:** Anticipate, get paid, kill, taint food and water

**Difficulty:** 19 | **Thresholds:** 21/35 | **HP:** 5 | **Stress:** 4  
**ATK:** +5 | **Poisoned Throwing Dagger:** Close | 4d8+8 phy

**Experience:** Dirty Fighting +3, Intrusion +3

### FEATURES

**Grindletooth Venom - Passive:** Targets who mark HP from the Assassin's attacks are *Vulnerable* until they clear a HP.

**Out of Nowhere - Passive:** The Assassin has advantage on attacks if they are *Hidden*.

**Fumigation - Action:** Drop a smoke bomb that fills the air within Close range with smoke, *Dizzying* all targets in this area. *Dizzied* targets have disadvantage on their next action roll, then clear the condition.

**One the Move - Reaction:** After the Assassin makes an attack, they can **mark a Stress** to move up to Close range even if they have already moved during this GM move.

## ADVERSARY FEATURES

There are three types of features for adversaries and environments: actions, reactions, and passives. We recommend reading the “Adversary Features” section on pages 194–196 of the core rulebook, then supplementing it with the information presented in this section.

Giving adversaries a mix of feature types helps round them out and offers GMs a variety of tools for using those adversaries during a scene. Passives set a baseline for how an adversary operates, actions let the GM spotlight adversaries to act in ways that achieve their narrative goals, and reactions allow the GM to respond to the PCs without needing a GM turn.

Adversary features are always listed in the following order: passives, actions, then reactions. Within these categories, they are arranged in whatever order makes sense for the adversary.

## HOW TO AVOID GM OVERLOAD

The biggest danger in adversary design is adding so many features that the GM playing the adversary suffers from decision paralysis—they stress about which features to use, worry about forgetting reaction triggers, and so on. GMs typically manage several different adversaries in a single scene, often alongside an environment. Limiting an adversary's features to only the most significant and impactful ideas protects GMs from that overload and allows them to make additional narrative choices about the adversary. In particular, be aware of adding too many reactions, as these tend to be the heaviest passive cognitive load for a GM.

The following list has notes about adversary types and their number of features:

- **Minions and Hordes** tend to have the fewest features, as their role in a scene is usually smaller in scope, even if there are many of them.
- **Leaders and Social** adversaries typically have more than the average number of features, representing the greater challenge they pose. Leaders' actions will range from their own individual abilities to features that boost their forces or summon more troops. Social adversaries provide GMs with more tools for interpersonal scenes, as their abilities don't interact as much with Daggerheart's combat system.
- **Solos** often have more features than other adversaries, as they tend to be the cornerstone of a scene. Solos are often accompanied by a smaller range of other adversaries (such as Standards or Minions) rather than being one of possibly a half-dozen different individual adversaries, so it's easier for a GM to allot more of their attention to one complicated adversary.

## COMMON ADVERSARY FEATURES

In addition to some features that are intrinsic to certain adversary types (such as “Minion” and “Group Attack” for Minions and “Horde” for Hordes), there are a few features that appear multiple times across the core book’s adversaries list. Below are these features, as well as the reasoning behind their frequent inclusion in stat blocks.

**Momentum - Reaction:** When this adversary makes a successful attack against a PC, you gain a Fear.

“Momentum,” which is typically seen on Bruisers, Leaders, and Solos, lets these powerful adversaries create additional opportunities for action, whether the GM uses that Fear to spotlight other adversaries, spotlight the environment, or make other GM moves. A GM will tend to want to frequently spotlight adversaries with “Momentum,” as their attacks can create more Fear to then take more moves.

**Relentless (X) - Passive:** This adversary can be spotlighted up to X times per GM turn. Spend Fear as usual to spotlight them.

“Relentless” allows a single adversary to take the spotlight several times during a GM turn. This feature is especially common on Solo adversaries, as it helps them not be overwhelmed by the PCs before they’re able to use all their cool actions.

**Slow - Passive:** When you spotlight this adversary and they don’t have a token on their stat block, they can’t act yet. Place a token on their stat block and describe what they’re preparing to do. When you spotlight this adversary and they have a token on their stat block, clear the token and they can act.

“Slow” creates adversaries who are very powerful when they can act, but who take more resources to spotlight. Placing the token on an adversary with “Slow” allows the GM to highlight the windup or preparation for a powerful move, telegraphing what’s to come while allowing the players time to react.

**Terrifying - Passive:** When this adversary makes a successful attack, all PCs within Close range lose a Hope and you gain a Fear.

“Terrifying” is a more powerful version of Momentum, generating a Fear and making nearby PCs lose a Hope. You shouldn’t give an adversary both “Terrifying” and “Momentum,” since that would generate two Fear per successful attack. “Terrifying” also shows how you can take an existing feature (such as “Momentum”) and make it more powerful to suit your needs if it’s already close to what you wanted.

## ADVERSARY FEAR FEATURES

In most cases, features that cost Fear shouldn’t generate Fear, as this would create a positive feedback loop where the GM uses that feature repeatedly to keep generating more Fear. Additionally, if you give “Momentum” or another Fear-generating feature to an adversary with “Relentless,” you’re setting that adversary up to be very powerful and to play a big part in a scene. This makes sense for a Solo or another adversary meant to be the climactic centerpiece of an encounter, but should be done deliberately and with care.

## BALANCING ADVERSARY FEATURES

Generally, the more powerful an adversary feature is, the higher chance it should have a cost, whether that be Stress or Fear. Stress costs naturally limit the number of uses of a feature per scene, since most adversaries don’t have a way to clear Stress and a number of PC features cause adversaries to mark Stress. Fear costs are usually reserved for an adversary’s most powerful features, with only a small number costing more than 1 Fear to use. Fear Features should have a large impact on a scene and ideally create a turning point or reversal in the conflict between the adversary and the PCs.

# ENVIRONMENTS

Much like adversaries, environments have stat blocks that can provide tools for affecting the PCs and the wider scene. These stat blocks aren’t restricted to combat—you can use environment stat blocks to enhance any scene, from the intrigue of a festive gala to the danger of crumbling ruins.

The structure of environments is very similar to adversaries: specifically, they have a Difficulty, a tier, and features. That’s intentional, since it makes it easier to use the two in tandem. As a result, a lot of the guidance on building and adapting adversaries is also applicable for environments. As a reminder, the design for environments was made to be a structured yet flexible form of preparation and inspiration for GMs to use. Creating environments can supplement an existing scene or serve as a way to build a scene from the inside out.

The following sections provide guidance for the parts of environment design that are distinct from adversaries.

## ENVIRONMENT TYPES

There are four types of environments, each classified by the role they’re designed to play in a scene: Exploration, Social, Traversal, or Event.

**Exploration** environments describe a place where PC interactions are focused on mystery and discovery. Their features represent how PCs can interact with the environment and attempt to gain information, such as investigating a scene or searching a library. Reaction features might involve traps or other consequences for missteps during investigation. These environments may also have a feature that introduces an adversary who’s either keeping the environment’s secrets or wishes to claim those secrets for their own.

**Social** environments represent a place or situation that highlights interpersonal challenges. Combat is possible

in these environments, but it's not the most likely form of conflict. Their features tend to focus on special rules for how social rolls (most often Presence) work in the environment, the information or assistance that can be gained from people here, and the challenges presented by key figures in the scene. These challenges could manifest as a bustling marketplace, a jester's mockery in court, or the risk of a bar brawl in a local tavern—but all of them help describe what the social dynamics are, who holds power, what the rules are, and what happens when someone breaks those rules. Social environments' reaction features often detail how PCs are rebuked for missteps in their socialization. Understandably, Social adversaries are common in Social environments, though if things get out of hand, a Social environment typically has adversaries more adept at combat waiting in the wings.

**Traversal** environments focus on the physical obstacles in a space and the difficulties of moving through them. The features set the rules for traversing the environment, specific challenges and obstacles that could appear, and ways that the movement-related challenges create opportunities for other threats. Traversal environments' reaction features often outline the cost of failure or success with Fear when traveling through the environment, whether that comes in the form of Stress, damage, or allowing an adversary to strike.

**Event** environments detail specific occurrences that drastically impact the dynamic of the scene, such as a travel sequence interrupted by an Ambush or a rolling hill consumed by a Pitched Battle. Event environment features detail the exceptional circumstances of the situation, the actions taken by the forces involved in the event, and the options for PCs caught up in the circumstances (whether it's to survive what's happening or to seize the opportunity for action). Reaction features often show how a PC could be pulled into the danger of the event or highlight how a PC likely won't emerge from it unscathed.

## ENVIRONMENT FEATURES

Because environments don't have Stress slots, environment features have either no cost (most common) or a Fear cost (less common). Fear costs are generally reserved for impactful features, since the cost limits how frequently they can be used. For example, features that introduce new adversaries into the scene often cost Fear and usually shift the spotlight to that adversary so they can act immediately.

Environment features are always listed in the following order: passives, actions, then reactions. Within these categories, they are arranged in whatever order makes sense for the environment.

## ENVIRONMENT FEATURE QUESTIONS

When writing the questions that accompany environment features, think about what a GM might want to ask players when using the feature, what a GM might ask themselves when using the feature, or what questions help connect this feature to other events in the scene that may or may not be related to the environment.

## CREATING ENVIRONMENTS

Let's say you want to make a marketplace environment to organize your ideas and prepare some surprises for the PCs. Your party is level 1 (Tier 1), so this environment will need to be Tier 1 to match. Because you don't want the challenges to be overly taxing, you choose to set the Difficulty to 10, one lower than the 11 recommended in the "Adapting Environments" section on page 242 of the core rulebook.

Next, consider the environment's type—what role do you want the environment to play in the scene? What kind of scene is this going to be, and what challenges will the stat block embody through its features and potential adversaries? For the marketplace, you decide to focus on interpersonal challenges with a Social type.

With the tier, Difficulty, and type decided, you can then pick potential adversaries, create features, and write the environment's description and impulses. You can do these in any order, depending on where inspiration strikes.

You might start with establishing the environment's impulses, since that could help inspire feature design. A market is filled with people doing business, and the people selling in the market need to draw people in and find ways to make a profit. To capture this, you could choose "buy low and sell high" and "tempt and tantalize with wares from near and far."

Next, create some features. Not only will they fill out how the environment mechanically interacts with the PCs and vice versa, but they'll give us guidance when it comes time to choose adversaries and add our description. For this example, let's have one passive feature, one reaction, and one action, giving us the full spread of the different feature types to use as needed throughout the scene.

First, a passive feature. For this, we ask ourselves, "What's a mechanic that would always apply and would represent how things operate in this environment?" If we focus on the economic/mercantile element of a market, we could make a passive that spotlights how the flow of money is fundamental to the operations of a marketplace. Let's call the feature "Tip the Scales" and decide that PCs can gain an advantage on Presence rolls by bribing NPCs in this environment with gold.

To complete the feature, we jot down the feature prompts, or the questions to draw on during the session. It now reads:

**Tip the Scales - Passive:** *PCs can gain advantage on a Presence Roll by offering a handful of gold as part of the interaction.*

*Will any coin be accepted, or only local currency? How overt are the PCs in offering this bribe?*

Next, let's build a reaction feature to escalate or give shape to a scene. To capture the behaviors that happen in crowded markets, you could make a reaction to separate the PCs ("Crowd Closes In"). If and when a PC momentarily splits off from the group, the flow of people will cut them off more thoroughly, presenting an opportunity to spotlight that character and/or put them in danger.

Building on the idea from "Crowd Closes In," you might make an action to tempt a character to split away from the others with something related to their background questions. You don't have to decide the specifics right now—you can just



build a feature that's flexible and lets you fill in the details later. This one will be called "Unexpected Find."

Now you have one of each feature type. But maybe there's room for something extra, like an action called "Sticky Fingers" that has a thief steal an item from a PC's pack. This could kick off a chase scene and separate the PCs in a different way.

The last two steps are to choose the potential adversaries and write a description of the environment.

Since this is a Tier 1 environment, we should focus on Tier 1 adversaries. Merchants are an obvious first choice, and we can add Bladed Guards and a Head Guard to represent local enforcers. Because of the "Sticky Fingers" environment feature, let's throw in the Masked Thief (even though they're Tier 2—we'll lower their Difficulty or scale them down to a Tier 1 version if they come up).

Lastly, we can review everything we've built and write some descriptive text to keep on hand to narrate to the players when the environment is introduced. With that, we have a full environment stat block:

## BUSTLING MARKETPLACE

### **Tier 1 Social**

*The economic heart of the settlement, with local artisans, traveling merchants, and patrons across social classes.*

**Impulses:** Buy low, and sell high, tempt and tantalize with wares from near and far

**Difficulty:** 10

**Potential Adversaries:** Guards (Bladed Guard, Head Guard), Masked Thief, Merchant

### FEATURES

**Tip the Scales - Passive:** PCs can gain advantage on a Presence Roll by offering a handful of gold as part of the interaction.

*Will any coin be accepted, or only local currency? How overt are the PCs in offering this bribe?*

**Unexpected Find - Action:** Reveal to the PCs that one of the merchants has something they want or need, such as food from their home, a rare book, magical components, a dubious treasure map, or a magical key.

*What cost beyond gold will the merchant ask for in exchange for this rarity?*

**Sticky Fingers - Action:** A thief tries to steal something from a PC. The PC must succeed on an Instinct Roll to notice the thief or lose an item of the GM's choice as the thief escapes to a Close distance. To retrieve the stolen item, the PCs must complete a Progress Countdown (6) to chase down the thief before the thief completes a Consequence Countdown (4) and escapes to their hideout.

*What drove this person to pickpocketing? Where is the thief's hideout and how has it avoided notice?*

**Crowd Closes In - Reaction:** When one of the PCs splits from the group, the crowds shift and cut them off from the party.

*Where does the crowd's movement carry them? How do they feel about being alone but surrounded?*

Thinking about the environment as a whole, we can create a throughline or flowchart to detail how a scene in this environment might progress.

1. The environment is introduced and the GM narratively showcases the "Tip the Scales" feature to tell the players how business works in this place.
2. The GM can draw a PC's attention with "Unexpected Find," which might lead to one of the characters leaving the group, creating a trigger for "Crowd Closes In."
3. The isolated PC is then a target for "Sticky Fingers" the next time the GM gets to take the spotlight.
4. Alternatively, the GM can wait and see if any PCs purchase an important item, creating a new target for a thief if the GM decides to use "Sticky Fingers."



# EQUIPMENT & LOOT

Equipment and loot play an important role in Daggerheart, especially weapons and armor. While a character gains most of their features from their class, subclass, and domains, items can synergize with those features while conveying how characters have grown in power and reputation.

However, Daggerheart isn't designed to be driven by loot. The PCs and their motivations are the heart of the game—items should be designed with a focus on how they illustrate, magnify, and challenge the PCs' motivations.

## EQUIPMENT: WEAPONS

The following sections go into detail on creating new weapons.

### WEAPON STATISTICS

The following list describes the statistics included with each weapon.

**Tier:** Weapons at each tier should be roughly the same strength. Some magical or unique weapons can be more or less powerful if the fiction calls for it.

**Name:** The weapon's name can simply be what it is! Many weapons in the core rulebook are named this way: mace, dualstaff, greatbow, and more. But its name can also contain an additional description that separates it from general stock (such as the hallowed axe or gilded falchion), or it can be a specific name imbued with unique characteristics and traits (such as the Sword of Light & Flame or the Midas Scythe).

**Range:** A weapon's range is the maximum distance its damage and effects can reach.

**Trait:** A weapon's trait is the trait rolled by a player when their character attacks with the weapon.

**Damage:** A weapon's damage is how deadly it is to an adversary. This damage is a die value (such as d8 or d6), an optional modifier (such as +3), and a type (either physical or magic).

**Burden:** The burden indicates whether the item takes one or two hands to use. Most characters can only wield weapons when their combined burden is two or fewer hands.

**Feature:** The feature is a special bonus, penalty, or effect that applies while the item is equipped. Not all weapons need features, but a feature can give a distinct flavor to a weapon that makes it work the way it feels like it should in the narrative. For example, a huge sword does more damage but makes it harder to be agile.

### PICKING THE TRAIT

A weapon's trait should usually be the most logical option a character could use while wielding it. Sometimes, we decide to diverge from that for a specific reason—for example, the rapier is a Presence weapon that lets a bard attack with it using their strongest trait. In the core rulebook, we tried to give most traits a physical and magic weapon in every tier. However, in general, physical weapons primarily use Strength, Agility, or Finesse as their traits, while most magical weapons use Instinct, Presence, or Knowledge.

### PRINCIPLES OF WEAPON DESIGN

The following principles can help guide how to approach weapon design.

**Adjust Existing Weapons:** One of the easiest ways to build a custom weapon is to take an existing one and change the trait it uses. You might build a version of a rapier that uses Finesse instead of Presence, a wand that uses Instinct instead of Knowledge, or a large, longer-ranged bow that uses Agility or Strength instead of Finesse.

**Two-Handed Weapons:** The more damage a weapon deals for its tier, the more you should consider making it two-handed. Two-handed weapons often have larger damage dice and damage bonuses than one-handed weapons. For example, the broadsword deals d8 as a one-handed weapon, and the greatsword deals d10+3 as a two-handed weapon. But the broadsword's "Reliable" feature provides a benefit, while the greatsword's "Massive" feature has a penalty as well as a benefit.

**Ranged Weapons:** Ranged weapons tend to have smaller damage dice compared to melee weapons of the same tier. This is a tradeoff for their greater range and the flexibility and protection that offers.

**Damage Bonuses and Features:** Weapons generally shouldn't have a high damage bonus for their tier and a positive feature unless they're meant to clearly outclass other weapons of their tier.

**Secondary Weapons:** Secondary weapons are paired with primary weapons, so they tend to have lower damage bonuses and should only have a burden of one hand. **Two-Weapon**

**Fighting:** Two-weapon fighting in Daggerheart involves giving a secondary weapon a trait to boost the primary attack (usually "Paired"), rather than rolling two attacks in one turn.

## DAMAGE SCALING FOR PRIMARY WEAPONS

You can refer to the base numbers from the following table, and the guidance below it, to build your homebrew weapons.

RANGE	MELEE, VERY CLOSE, CLOSE		FAR, VERY FAR	
Burden	One-Handed	Two-Handed	One-Handed	Two-Handed
Base Damage	d8	d10	d6	d6
T1 Bonus	+1	+3	+1	+3
T2 Bonus	+3	+6	+3	+6
T3 Bonus	+6	+9	+6	+9
T4 Bonus	+9	+12	+9	+12

## HOW FEATURES AND RANGE IMPACT DAMAGE

Weapon features act as a way to modify the base numbers given in the chart. Features are typically either positive or negative, but some features balance themselves by having both a positive and a negative effect. For example, the greatsword's feature allows it to deal more damage in exchange for a penalty to Evasion.

Positive features are balanced by reducing the damage die or damage bonus (and sometimes both). For example, the broadsword having a +1 to attack rolls is a very positive feature, which means its damage die was dropped from d10 to d8 and its damage bonus was dropped from +1 to 0.

Negative features are balanced by increasing the damage die or damage bonus (and sometimes both). For example, the warhammer being so heavy it gives a penalty to your Evasion means its damage die was increased from d10 to d12.

Range can also increase or decrease the damage die or damage bonus. For example, the halberd has a negative feature that lowers the PC's Finesse, which would generally mean that the weapon gets a damage bonus. But because it also has Very Close range (instead of Melee), we left its final damage at d10+2 rather than giving it both more damage and a better range.

Sometimes, the damage dice and damage bonuses simply vary to increase the variety of weapons within a given trait. When possible, do your best to ensure there isn't simply a "better" weapon choice within a set of options sharing a trait, range, and burden.

## USEFUL PRIMARY WEAPON FEATURES

This section contains a non-exhaustive list of weapon features that may be useful when homebrewing new primary weapons.

**Brutal:** When you roll the maximum value on a damage die, roll an additional damage die.

**Burning:** When you roll a 6 on a damage die, the target must mark a Stress.

**Cumbersome:** -1 to Finesse

**Deadly:** When you deal Severe damage, the target must mark an additional HP.

**Dueling:** When there are no other creatures within Close range of the target, gain advantage on your attack roll against them.

**Heavy:** -1 to Evasion

**Massive:** -1 to Evasion; on a successful attack, roll an additional damage die and discard the lowest result.

**Powerful:** On a successful attack, roll an additional damage die and discard the lowest result.

**Quick:** When you make an attack, you can mark a Stress to target another creature within range.

**Reliable:** +1 to attack rolls

**Reloading:** After you make an attack, roll a d6. On a result of 1, you must mark a Stress to reload this weapon before you can fire it again.

**Scary:** On a successful attack, the target must mark a Stress.

## USEFUL SECONDARY WEAPON FEATURES

This section contains a few secondary weapon features that may be useful when homebrewing new secondary weapons (especially shields and offhand weapons for two-weapon fighting).

**Barrier:** +2 to Armor Score; -1 to Evasion

**Paired:** +2 to primary weapon damage to targets within Melee range

**Protective:** +1 to Armor Score

When secondary weapons scale in tier, their features scale with them. The Armor Score bonus for "Protective" is equal to its tier (a Tier 3 weapon with "Protective" would add +3 to the character's Armor Score) and the damage bonus from "Paired" adds +1 for each tier tier above 1 (+2/+3/+4/+5).

## EQUIPMENT: ARMOR

The following sections go into detail on creating new armor.

### USEFUL ARMOR FEATURES

Here are a few features that may be useful when homebrewing new armor.

**Flexible:** +1 to Evasion

**Heavy:** –1 to Evasion

**Very Heavy:** –2 to Evasion; –1 to Agility

**Resilient:** Before you mark your last Armor Slot, roll a d6. On a result of 6, reduce the severity by one threshold without marking an Armor Slot.

**Fortified:** When you mark an Armor Slot, you reduce the severity of an attack by two thresholds instead of one.

**Channeling:** +1 to Spellcast Rolls

Armor with a higher number of Armor Slots and/or higher damage thresholds for their tier usually have a negative feature like “Heavy” or “Very Heavy.” Armor with both more Armor Slots and higher damage thresholds should almost never have a beneficial feature to maintain the game’s balance. Meanwhile, armor with a low number of Armor Slots and low damage thresholds for the tier is more likely to have a positive feature like “Flexible.”

You can refer to the following table for average numbers to use for base damage thresholds and base Armor Score for your homebrew armor.

ARMOR TIER	BASE THRESHOLDS RANGE	BASE SCORE RANGE
1	5/11 to 8/17	3 to 4
2	7/16 to 13/28	4 to 5
3	9/23 to 17/43	5 to 6
4	11/32 to 18/48	6 to 8

## EQUIPMENT: FEATURES

When building your own features for a weapon or armor, we recommend selecting a feature from the equipment lists in the core rulebook that achieves a similar level of power to the one that you are looking to create. Then, identify how the feature you’ve selected affects the equipment it’s currently used for. For example, because the rapier has the Quick feature, it only deals d8 physical damage instead of d8+1. If there doesn’t seem to be anything of that power level included in the rulebook, you’ll want to be cautious and ensure it should be an equipment feature, and not a domain or subclass card.

It can be tempting to make weapons with more than one feature, or a feature that is an entire paragraph of text. Recalling Daggerheart’s design principle to “streamline, then streamline again,” we would advise you to avoid that route, and instead consider how you can build a singular feature from one or two sentences that accomplishes a similar goal. If you decide to make more powerful features,

ensure they come at a greater cost (such as requiring more of a resource), have a limit to the number of uses per rest/session, or are more situational in use. If you decide to make more complex features, ensure you talk with your player about how it operates, and provide them extra time to work through the mechanics during play. When in doubt, go back to the Daggerheart design principles at the beginning of this document and ensure your work aligns with most, if not all, of them.

Lastly, when building features, consider the ways the mechanic you’re experimenting with might manifest. For example, if an armor feature allows a PC to gain a bonus to their Evasion equal to their current number of Hope, imagine how an additional +6 to Evasion (or a potential +7, if they’re a beastbound ranger) would affect the balance of the adversaries’ attack bonuses. This kind of mechanic could discourage your players from spending Hope to stay as evasive as they can. This may be okay if you’ve accounted for it, or it may bring the game to a screeching halt, depending on your group. Homebrew mechanics are often built with specific types of players or characters in mind, so what works well at one table, might not work at another. We recommend keeping open communication about any homebrew you make, and adjusting the design between sessions as needed.

## LOOT: ITEMS & CONSUMABLES

There are two kinds of loot in Daggerheart—items and consumables. Items are meant to be used repeatedly, while consumables are expendable.

Items and consumables in Daggerheart are listed in a table so it’s easy to roll for random loot. If you want to maintain this method, you can create your own rollable tables or integrate new loot into the existing rollable tables.

### ITEMS

Items are loot that can be kept and used repeatedly, such as improved traveling gear, unique clothing and accessories, magical tools, and minor artifacts. Often, these items have special features or enhance armor, weapon attacks, or traits.

Items like magical gems or stones might modify a character’s weapons or armor respectively (see the gem items on page 131 and the valorstone on page 129 of the core rulebook). These items are especially useful if characters are attached to specific pieces of equipment and the players would rather add new bonuses to the existing item than replace it for something else, even if the new item is more mechanically powerful.

Recipes are another important and useful item reward, as they give characters the information needed to create consumables, usually for the cost of some gold and a downtime action. If you create new consumables (see the upcoming “Consumables” section), consider also introducing recipes for them to make characters more likely to use them (since many players often otherwise hoard their consumables for fear of not having them in a moment of need).

## CONSUMABLES

To avoid hoarding, consumables must be useful enough to keep on hand but not so powerful that players hold onto them “for when they really need it.” One way we made hoarding more difficult was to limit characters to five copies of any given consumable.

Consumables are a great reward for smaller accomplishments, minor skirmishes, or shorter combat scenes—whether the consumables are taken from the defeated party or given by grateful locals. Feel free to pepper them throughout your adventure design, but given the instinct to hoard, we recommend not building your encounters with the expectation that PCs will readily use their consumables.

## Designing Consumables

An easy place to start with consumable design is to take an existing feature in the game and make a consumable version. The consumable form of an ancestry feature that allows a character to fly at will might let the character fly until their next roll with Fear, and a rarer version could let them fly until their next rest. Similarly, you could make a less-powerful version of an item that lets a character astral project to a distant location every day by creating a consumable that can do so only once.

Consumables can also include special ammunition for ranged weapons, enchanted rations, runestones that activate once and then dissipate—anything you can imagine that has a limited number of uses would likely make a great consumable.

# CAMPAIGN FRAMES

Campaign frames are a lightweight approach to campaign creation, designed to be used collaboratively between GM and players. They are not exhaustive, but rather made to be a scaffolding or springboard for campaigns with specific subgenres.

## TITLE

The name of the campaign frame should be short and punchy, often highlighting an interesting or unique aspect of the campaign.

## CONCEPT

The concept is an evocative one-sentence description of the big idea that defines the campaign frame, and should quickly convey what the campaign frame is about.

## COMPLEXITY RATING

The complexity rating gives a relative indication of how many unique mechanics the campaign frame involves, how complex those mechanics are, and how much homebrewing is expected of GMs running the campaign frame. The complexity scores in the core rulebook range from 1 to 4. You can decide on your complexity rating early in the process of creating your campaign frame to help guide your design, or you can create the campaign frame as you envision it and then assess the complexity at the end.

## THE PITCH

The one-paragraph pitch describes what’s exciting and appealing about the campaign frame. This pitch should include information about the tone, setting, and emotional promise of the campaign. The GM should be able to read your paragraph to the players to pitch the campaign frame to them—don’t include any secrets you wouldn’t want players to know.

## TONE & FEEL

These tonal descriptions outline the emotional landscape of the campaign frame. Is it grim or bright? Comedic or dramatic? Romantic or misanthropic? Sometimes contrasting tones can be effective, but it shouldn’t be hard to understand

how a campaign frame’s tones fit together so the GM and their table can decide if a campaign frame is the right fit for them.

## THEMES

A campaign’s major themes represent what the campaign is about and what topics might show up during play. Themes can be broad or more specific, depending on the campaign’s needs. You can also think about themes as prompts a GM can ask to their players and the answers they might uncover through play. For example, a theme of “family vs. independence” could generate a dramatic personal question for the characters: “Can you be both loyal to your family and true to yourself?”

## TOUCHSTONES

Touchstones are a list of your sources of inspiration when creating the campaign frame, which the GM and players can refer to when pitching or playing it. Touchstones can include media such as fiction, comics, video games, and other RPGs. If some of the touchstones are lesser-known works, it may be useful to supplement them with more broadly popular media to help potential players orient their expectations about what kind of story the campaign frame is going for.

## OVERVIEW

The overview is a longer description of the campaign frame (typically no longer than a page or a page and a half) that covers the major elements of the campaign and what players can expect from it. This should be more comprehensive than the pitch paragraph, but not exhaustive—it’s a high-level description that players will read to get a bit more information about the world and what the story is about. Because the overview is player-facing, it also shouldn’t include secrets that you don’t want players to know.

## HERITAGE & CLASSES

Campaign frames have sections on communities, ancestries, and classes, providing information about how elements of heritage or character classes might work differently in this campaign frame, or in some cases, which options are not available (and the reason why). These sections often provide additional background prompts for characters of those heritages or classes to help more firmly connect them to the setting.

## PLAYER PRINCIPLES

Just as Daggerheart has player principles, each campaign frame has thematic guidelines for players to keep in mind during the campaign. Following these principles helps players stay in the ideal mindset to enjoy the campaign frame. When creating these, ensure they are evocative, specific, and actionable by the players.

## GM PRINCIPLES

Each campaign frame additionally has corresponding GM principles, which supplement the core game principles. These provide support and guidance for the GM to plan and facilitate a game in line with the design of the campaign frame. When creating these principles, guide the GM toward the campaign's themes and encourage the kind of moves you want them to be making.

## DISTINCTIONS

Distinctions are what specifically set the world of the campaign frame apart from other settings. They are the tentpoles holding up the canvas of the campaign, the supports a GM will build their story on top of. They establish the pillars of the campaign, including core truths about the setting, major locations, prominent groups or factions, and narrative elements that contribute to the setting's atmosphere or themes (such as culture, important historical events, recent catastrophes, conflicts, and cosmology), and more. Notably, they do not include custom rules for the campaign frame—those come later in their own section.

Distinctions also mark where the GM-facing information truly begins. While GMs can share some information from this section with their players, this is where you start layering in the secrets they'll use to build compelling story arcs across their campaign.

## BUILDING DISTINCTIONS

Distinctions may be one of the first things you develop when creating the campaign frame, since they serve as the pillars or core truths of that setting. Consider the following ideas when writing out your campaign frame's distinctions:

**How the World Works:** Convey the way magic functions in this setting (such as taking the form of technology in

Motherboard), a prominent threat like a disease (such as the Serpent's Sickness in The Witherwild), or other major setting elements that will inform play (such as the Lure in Beast Feast).

**Locations/Settlements:** Detail major population centers (such as the Carrowcroft Walkaway and other walking cities in Motherboard or the outposts in Colossus of the Drylands) or prominent locations and landmarks (such as Brilliance in Beast Feast).

**Core Philosophies and Ideologies:** Highlight any cultural, philosophical, or ideological ideas that differentiate the setting, such as the way magic users are met with suspicion in The Age of Umbra.

**Major Figures:** Establish the gods or other powerful beings key to the setting (such as the gods in The Witherwild or the Children of Godfell in Colossus of the Drylands).

Ideally, the distinctions provide the baseline for tables to build on the provided materials with their own ideas. The writeup doesn't need to be encyclopedic, especially if you're sticking to the capsule format of the campaign frames from the core rulebook, which are designed to be inspirational and intentionally left incomplete to invite GM and player contributions.

## INCITING INCIDENT

The inciting incident is a sample opening to a campaign using the frame. It's designed to introduce the party to the core themes and some of the frame's distinctions while illustrating one possible approach for a GM to begin the campaign.

## BUILDING AN INCITING INCIDENT

Inciting incidents are the intersection of three elements: adventure design, character hooks, and setting introduction. They usually take the form of a situation and an objective for the PCs to complete, with an individual or faction asking the PCs to intervene.

You could build the situation and objective first, then decide what character hooks help motivate a variety of PCs to get involved. Alternatively, you could start with the hooks you think will be most motivating for PCs in this campaign frame, then decide what situation or objective can best support or create those character hooks.

Ideally, an inciting incident provides a bite-size example of the kinds of stories the campaign frame is set up to tell, addresses some or all of the listed themes, incorporates some of the distinctions, and presents a chance to show off the frame's custom mechanics.

## CUSTOM MECHANICS

Each campaign frame includes new game mechanics and tools that represent elements unique to the campaign frame that enhance the experience of playing in its setting. Sometimes these mechanics are born from the genre tropes the campaign frame employs, and other times they're tools to support the frame's unique lore.

Your custom mechanics might aim to impact the campaign in any of the following ways (or another way entirely!):

- They add more detail to an aspect of the world (like the corruption mechanics in *The Witherwild* and the rules for dangerous rests in *The Age of Umbra*)
- They introduce new items and adversary systems (like the guns and colossi in *Colossus of the Drylands*)
- They offer additional subsystems that help the GM keep track of moving parts while ensuring the story moves forward (like the faction projects system in *Five Banners Burning*).

This section clearly marks where you're homebrewing *Daggerheart's* rules to fulfill your creative goals in the campaign frame. Having a specific section also makes it easy for potential players to find and understand how the rules change for this specific game. Keep the design principles from the beginning of this homebrew kit in mind when creating custom mechanics—if you find yourself adding mechanics that diverge from those principles, consider adding new player or GM principles to your campaign frame to bridge the gap between your new mechanics and *Daggerheart's* core design approach.

## CLOSING

As you make your own *Daggerheart* content, we hope you take the guidance given here, carrying with you what resonates and leaving behind what doesn't. Remember to reference the SRD for any language you might want to use and follow the rules of the DPCGL when publishing anything that you make. And on behalf of the Darrington Press team, we hope you have the best time creating for *Daggerheart*.

## SESSION ZERO QUESTIONS

These are new questions specific to the campaign frame that should be asked during a session zero. These questions should both help situate your PCs in the setting and prompt groups to articulate how they want to address or handle important thematic or content elements of the campaign (such as gore, the impact of war, or intra-party conflict).

For inspiration, look to both the session zero questions for the campaign frames in the core rulebook and also the background and connection questions in each class's character guide.

## CAMPAIGN MAP

Providing a map can be helpful for orienting players within your campaign frame's setting. Maps for *Daggerheart* campaign frames are designed with some locations filled in and plenty of space left for groups to make the map their own. Consider adding a list of names to the map that thematically fit the world—GMs can prompt players to choose from these names and place them on the map, building out the setting together so everyone feels ownership of the story.