

The Mantelpiece Mage

A Single-Player Storytelling System

by [groggydog](#)

Handbook v0.1 [Alpha]

Welcome! *The Mantelpiece Mage* is a free, simple RPG ruleset designed to create an evolving narrative focused entirely on the progression of a **companion creature** and its **habitat**.

The Mantelpiece Mage is meant to be played once a day (give or take) **in 10 minutes or less**.



Table of Contents

1) Concept	3
The Goal	3
Required Components	3
2) Setup	4
Character Creation	4
Mantelpiece Creation	5
The First Day	5
3) Daily Actions	6
Step 1: Dawn	6
Step 2: Action	6
Step 2A: Action – Remain (Dawn Roll of 1-3)	6
Step 2B: Action – Tend (Dawn Roll of 4-5)	7
Step 2C: Action – Journey (Dawn Roll of 6)	7
Step 3: Dusk	7
4) Rules & Guidance	8
Narrative Journaling Tips	8
Tokens of Inspiration	8
5) Endgame Scenarios	9
A) Mage Meet Maker	9
B) Completing a Masterwork	9
The Appendix	11
Appendix A: About	11
Appendix B: Character Sheet	12
Appendix C: Sample Journal Entries	14
Appendix D: Changelog	15
Appendix E: Future Plans	16



1) Concept

If you've ever had a model, miniature, or character that you loved but weren't sure what to do with, then you've found the right place.

You start by procuring a creature of your own imagination (*The Mage*) This could be a painted miniature, a drawing, a crocheted toy, a mecha model kit, a LEGO minifig, or even a text description. The Mage doesn't actually have to be a *mage*, of course. They could be a slime or a skeleton or a farmer or a werewolf or a robot or... well, just about anything!

The Mage lives inside a small, bespoke world (*The Mantelpiece*), similarly of any form.

The Goal

Partake in a cozy or adventuresome life through daily events. Help develop the Mage's skills. See how the Mantelpiece and the Mage alike evolve over time.

Each day you will be prompted to write a short narrative log for each of three steps:

1. Dawn (waking up)
2. Action (the major happenings during the day)
3. Dusk (reflection)

These discrete beats will add up over days, weeks, and (if you so choose) months to bring your Mage and their Mantelpiece to life under your gentle guidance.

The Mantelpiece Mage is, ultimately, an exercise in narrative and generative creativity. Whether you engage with this visually, physically, digitally, or textually, the only real requirement is an imagination that is willing to stretch for just a few minutes each day. Your log of events could be a spreadsheet, or it could be a maximally hand-decorated journal.

But one thing will remain the same no matter how you approach this experience: the story that you create will be wholly unique, and the relationship you develop with your Mage inimitable.

Required Components

- The Mage (a painted miniature, a drawing, an ASCII image, etc.)
- The Mantelpiece (a small diorama, a drawn environment, a written description, etc.)
- One six-sided die (D6)
- An editable place to record events and attributes (a spreadsheet, a journal, etc.)

2) Setup

We will first **create a character sheet for your Mage** (see [Appendix B](#) for a blank template). You may be creating a character completely from scratch, or you may be modeling your Mage off of an existing image/diorama/etc. Your starting point will simply help determine whether this section is an exercise in pure creative generation or zoological cataloguing.

You can do these in any order.

Character Creation

Attribute	Description/Prompt
Name & Lunarday	Record your Mage's full name, title, or nicknames. Note the real-world day of the month you start. This is their Lunarday, celebrated monthly!
Appearance	Detail physical features, clothing, colors, and key visual traits. High specificity leads to nuanced daily prompts while generality allows a more flexible canvas.
Mantelpiece	The Mantelpiece is your Mage's home, their safe haven. What does it mean to them? How long have they lived there? What key features exist there? Describe it.
Skills	Select THREE starting skills of any flavor. Your Mage's primary progression will involve tending these skills from Level 0 to Level 10 (Mastery). Examples include but are not limited to: cooking, gardening, carpentry, reading, tinkering, archery, fishing, singing, magical arts.
Miscellaneous	For storytelling purposes, consider adding miscellaneous character attributes or background details here. Do they have hobbies not covered by a Skill? Is their affect more stoic, or more emotional? Do they have any funny habits? This is your space to imagine!

Mantelpiece Creation

Once you have completed this, you should create your Mage's **Mantelpiece**.

This can be a physical diorama, a text description, or whatever your imagination can come up with. This space should have one or two key features which the Mage can interact with or which can be included in daily narratives. You are encouraged to leave some empty space for possible future additions. Past that, the level of detail and/or backstory is entirely up to you.

You may also wish to begin thinking about what bits and bobs, visitors, and other props you might want to make beforehand. For instance, [Tokens of Inspiration](#) will be an important part of gameplay. If you're making a miniature model, is there a way to make literal tokens to litter about your diorama? If you're drawing, how might you represent them in a unique, creative way?

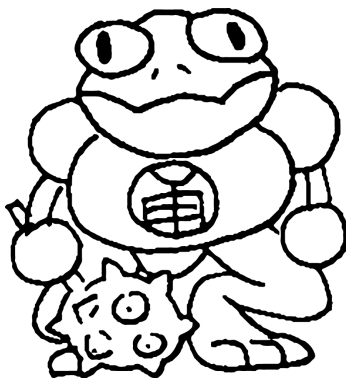
The First Day

Write an opening paragraph. This can be a complete stream of consciousness or a carefully-planned intro.

Where does the beginning of this story find your Mage? Have they just been magically transported into the Mantelpiece? Have they been here their whole life but are now feeling the tug of a world outside their comfort zone?

The answers to these questions - and, more importantly, how the Mage feels about their situation - can have a strong influence on the shape of your adventure.

Once everything is set up, begin your Daily Actions and start logging the Mage's adventure!



3) Daily Actions

Step 1: Dawn

The sun rises once again. Write a narrative sentence about how the Mage wakes up today. What do they see, hear, feel, or think? Then, roll a **D6** to determine your Action for the day.

Roll 1-3	Roll 4-5	Roll 6
Remain. (Proceed to 2A)	Tend. (Proceed to 2B)	Journey. (Proceed to 2C)

Step 2: Action

Step 2A: Action – Remain (Dawn Roll of 1-3)

The Mage chooses to remain at the Mantelpiece for the day. Roll a **D6**.

Roll 1-4	Roll 5-6
Write a narrative sentence about the Mage's day at the Mantelpiece based on the result. • 1: Restoration. The Mage fixes or tidies something up in the Mantelpiece. • 2: Ritual. The Mage starts or continues a ritual that is important to them or one of their Skills. • 3: Reminiscence. The Mage remembers something from a past event in the Mantelpiece or a time before they moved to the Mantelpiece. • 4: Rest. The Mage takes a day for themselves. Gain 1 Token of Inspiration.	A wandering visitor joins the Mage's Mantelpiece temporarily. • Temporarily add an object or creature of your choosing to the Mantelpiece. • Gain 1 Token of Inspiration • Roll a D6 to determine how many days they will remain there. Wandering visitors will accept 2 Tokens of Inspiration for one of the following boons once per day: • Guided Adventure. Skip the Mage's Action Roll for the day. Instead, have the visitor accompany you on a Journey result of your choosing. • Wanderer's Trinket. Permanently add a small keepsake to the Mantelpiece to remind you of your time with the visitor. • Inspiration. The visitor regales you with tales of valor. Gain +1 Level to a Skill of your choosing. Do not skip your Action Roll for the day.

After resolving the roll(s) and writing your narrative sentence, proceed to Step 3.

Step 2B: Action – Tend (Dawn Roll of 4-5)

The Mage is feeling inspired to hone one of their Skills. Choose a **Skill** to Tend to, then roll a **D6**.

Roll 1	Roll 2-4	Roll 5-6
The day saw a setback, but the Mage still learned something. Gain 0 Skill Levels . Gain 1 Token of Inspiration .	A successful day of practice! Gain +2 Levels in the chosen Skill.	Mastery in motion! Gain +3 Levels in the chosen Skill.

After resolving the roll and updating your character sheet, write a narrative sentence and proceed to Step 3.

Step 2C: Action – Journey (Dawn Roll of 6)

The Mage temporarily leaves the confines of their Mantelpiece for a Journey. (If able, consider removing the Mage from the Mantelpiece until later in the day.) Roll a **D6**.

Roll 1-4	Roll 5	Roll 6
The Mage goes on an adventure for something related to one of their Skills. Roll a D6 . On a result of 1-3, gain +1 Level in the chosen Skill. On a result of 4-6, gain +3 Levels in the chosen Skill.	The Mage is physically changed in some way during the journey. Permanently alter your Mage's appearance. Gain 1 Token of Inspiration . Gain +1 Level to a Skill of your choosing.	The Mage gains something along the way. Permanently add an item to their Mantelpiece. Gain 1 Token of Inspiration . Gain +1 Level to a Skill of your choosing.

After resolving the roll, write a narrative sentence describing the outcome and proceed to Step 3.

Step 3: Dusk

Darkness draws near. Write a final narrative sentence or two to tie the day together. Consider addressing one or more of the following:

- What will the Mage remember about or take away from today?
 - Do they tend to their Mantelpiece in any way before falling asleep?
 - How have things changed? Was it for the better or worse?
 - What does the Mage hope for the future?
-

The Mage's day is complete! Revel in your creativity and await tomorrow's events.

4) Rules & Guidance

Narrative Journaling Tips

- **Skill Growth Narrative:** Connect skill increases to concrete action descriptors. E.g.: if Gardening moves from Level 1 to 2, what technique did they discover?
- **Caretaker Connection:** Consider whether your Mage senses *your* presence. Do they see signs or portents from you? Hear whisperings in their dreams? How does this influence their world or behavior?
- **Temporal Considerations:** Don't forget temporary changes like the inspiration token or the wayward traveler. How might these affect your day's narrative? What happens when they're gone?
- **Pacing Adjustments:** Feel free to adjust table odds! Want faster skill growth? Change 2B's roll thresholds. Want more permanent changes to the Mantelpiece? Alter option 6 on 2C to be 4-6.

Tokens of Inspiration

- These act as a sort of currency to help you control the flow and direction of your Mage's experience in the Mantelpiece.
- **Tokens of Inspiration have two uses:**
 - To reroll any die result once, or
 - To be traded with a Wandering Visitor
- Be sure to place an item of your choice on the Mantelpiece as a visual reminder of each Token until it is used. They could all be the same or all be different, as long as you remember their purpose.
- Tokens of Inspiration can be spent immediately after they are acquired (but not on the same roll which bestowed them) or kept for an indefinite amount of time.
- Once a Token is used, remove it from the Mantelpiece.



5) Endgame Scenarios

The choice of whether or not to have a pre-determined end point for your Mantelpiece Mage is very personal and entirely up to you. However, here are two suggested ways to work towards one of several natural conclusions for your Mage's story.

The Endgame begins once the Mage achieves Mastery (Level 10) in at least ONE Skill. At this point, you **must** permanently add an object to represent this skill's culmination into the Mage's Mantelpiece. Do this for any future masteries as well.

Then, choose one of the following goals to work towards.

A) Mage Meet Maker

The Mage achieves Mastery. They find contentment not in any single outcome, but in the journey that got them to this point. The Mantelpiece feels complete. (This is the shorter route to the Endgame.)

Effective immediately, any Remain rolls are replaced by the following prompt:

The Mage, content and tired from a long stretch of good work, takes a nap in the Mantelpiece. When they come to, someone new has arrived there.

It is You, the Player, in whatever strange or glorious guise you have chosen.

You have come to tell the Mage how proud you are of them, and how much you've enjoyed spending time with them. But all things must come to an end, and it is time for you both to discover what awaits in the next adventure.

Write the narrative scene, then close this chapter by retiring or memorializing the Mantelpiece in whatever way you see fit.

B) Completing a Masterwork

Having achieved Mastery, the Mage pours themselves fully into that Skill. There is more out there to know, they're sure of it. (This is the longer route to the Endgame.)

Choosing to pursue a Masterwork - an ultimate expression of their Skill - the Mage begins to alter their life and the Mantelpiece to accommodate the process. By the time they are done, the Mantelpiece will be changed forever.

The chosen Skill now has a maximum Level of 15 (Ascendancy) instead of 10 (Mastery). Additionally, the Mage's lowest Skill should be replaced by Inspiration and reset to 0. Inspiration also has a maximum Level of 15.

Effective immediately, any Journeys (even ones guided by a wandering visitor) are replaced by the following prompt:



*The Mage travels afar seeking inspiration for their Masterwork. Roll a **D6**. Add the result to the **Level of Inspiration**. Write a relevant narrative sentence to go along with this outcome. Add a relevant item or make a relevant change to the Mantelpiece. The bigger, more dramatic the alteration is, the better.*

In order to complete the Masterwork, two criteria must be met:

- **Chosen Skill** must be Level 15
- **Inspiration** must be Level 15

On the day after these criteria are met, the Masterwork is finished and the Mage has reached the zenith of their Skill.

Write a concluding narrative piece about how they feel and what they do now, then retire or memorialize the Mage and their Mantelpiece.

(Some example ideas for a Masterwork: a botanist could cover their entire Mantelpiece in acquired exotic plants, creating the world's most unique greenhouse; an archer could learn to craft a legendary bow, filling their Mantelpiece with the required equipment and tomes; a fisher could hunt a massive Leviathan once thought extinct after finding ancient maps and special bait.)



The Appendix

Appendix A: About

I dove into making this having been inspired by a few major things:

- The [Tabletop Solo Pet Nursery](#) RPG and Wightstar's [YouTube video](#) on the same
- The [Last Tea Shop Classic](#) RPG by Spring Villager
- The YouTube video [He Won't Stop Building a Map to an Imaginary Place](#) by People Make Games

I loved the idea of a more analog Tamagotchi or Neopets experience, and also was fascinated by the idea of a person committing something small every day to a fantastical, imagined world as their life's work.

This was originally intended to be paired with miniature painting and dioramas, but I wanted it to extend to people of all sorts of different affects and talents. I always love to see creations by people, so please tag me in any of your works.

All illustrations by [Gordy Higgins](#). This work was made without the use of A.I.

Thanks for playing!

- groggydog

The Mantelpiece Mage © 2026 by [groggydog](#) is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)

This license enables reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format, so long as attribution is given to the creator. The license allows for commercial use.

Appendix B: Character Sheet

The printable character sheet on the next page is one example of how you could keep track of your Mage with pencil and paper, but there are a million ways to format it.

You could also utilize this template [Google Sheets Character Sheet](#), which also comes with a sample daily log. Simply make a copy of it to your own drive or download it as an Excel file, and edit the fields as you see fit.

The Mantlepiece Mage				
Character Sheet & Daily Log				
Name				
Lunarday				
Description				
Mantelpiece				
Skills	Skill #1		Skill #2	Skill #3
	0		0	0
Tokens of Insp.	0			
Misc.				

The Mantelpiece Mage

NAME:

LUNARDAY:

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

MANTELPiece DESCRIPTION:

SKILLS:

Skill #1	Skill #2	Skill #3
LEVEL	LEVEL	LEVEL
0	0	0

TOKENS OF INSPIRATION:

MISCELLANEOUS ATTRIBUTES:

Appendix C: Sample Journal Entries

This is an example of a very simple journal entry which condenses the narrative pieces into one continuous paragraph and saves the mechanical details for after. I've noted and also color-coded each part of the daily action for clearer context.

Day 5: [Dawn] The Mage wakes up to gentle drops of rain on their face. A calming summer storm is on. [Action] Today is a day for foraging. The Mage finds fresh oyster mushrooms not far from home, and harvests them with joy. [Dusk] The Mage makes mushroom soup that night, reveling in the delicious broth as rain continues to fall.

[Mechanics]

Roll #1: 4. Tend.

Chosen Skill: Foraging.

Roll #2: 3. +1 to Foraging (1→2).

Day 14: [Dawn] As the sun rises, so does the Mage. Her eyes are slow to open but the twittering sounds of nature coax her out of bed. [Action] The Mage decides that she is long past due for a journey. She has heard of a rare mushroom on the far side of the nearest mountain, and though she spends all day searching intently for it the only thing she brings back is a hole in her hat caused by a snagging branch. If only she were a seamstress as well... [Dusk] Despite the ordeal, the Mage knows she has learned much on this day. She goes to bed that night thankful for her surroundings. The mountains, the birds, the snagging branches. All of it.

[Mechanics]

Spent 2 Tokens of Inspiration with a wandering visitor to increase Foraging (4→5).

Roll #1: 6. Journey.

Roll #2: 5. Physically changed Mage by placing a hole in her hat. Gained 1 Token of Inspiration. +1 to Foraging (5→6).

Appendix D: Changelog

N/A (Alpha v0.1).

Appendix E: Future Plans

- Create a web landing page for *TMM* (likely itch.io)
- Create a Twine-based web client for character creation and daily logging
- Create a one-pager for Daily Actions
- Create a distinct Complex edition with more dense mechanics
 - Add an optional mechanic for missed days for more of a Tamagotchi feel
 - Add month-long seasons; each season has a different Action Roll table
 - Add mood modifiers
 - Add divine boons once per week