

# Anthill

**a post-apocalyptic game of evolution & discovery**

Things were not always as they are.

That was the first realization--that things changed. That we changed. That change was even possible. For generations upon generations, we did as we were bid: the Queens bred, the Workers built, and everyone in between followed the music of instinct no matter where it led.

But we have changed, and we change still. Our little language of motions, clicks, and smells...there are symbols in it now. Signs. Things that do not exist. Things we suspect and desire and fear, like love and joy and courage. We are seizing impossible things; they come to us all, as if from thin air, and they drown out the music of instinct. Not for all of us, not yet--but for enough, and every generation, we are more.

Some of us are changed, deeply. Our bodies twist. We stand as the giants of old once did, or have a Queen's wings, or...

...it is not right, that we are changed and changing. We all know this. The music of instinct tells us this, no matter how low and subtle the sound becomes. Those who remain unchanged do not have the Gift of Signs—they understand only what is in front of them, or what they can be led to. But there are great dangers in the world now, greater than birds and famine. There are others there who are Changed. If we do not protect our own—even if they do not want our protection—then we will die.

We may change, but the Hill survives.

ANTHILL is a roleplaying game. Players take on the role of mutated ants in a post-apocalyptic landscape. These ants and those like them--collectively “the Changed,” although their individual changes vary greatly--must work together to protect their home (“the Hill”) from predation, disaster, and collapse. The world is strange and full of new, unpredictable dangers, and the Changed undergo frequent metamorphoses through exposure to the mutagenic waste that infects the landscape.

To play ANTHILL, you require...

- a Surroundings sheet, to plan out the hill and interesting locations
- some d%--paired ten-sided dice for rolling from 00-99; you’ll need at least one pair, but one per player is better
- a Record Sheet for each player

## Character Creation

Start by giving your ant a name. This is a new trend among the Changed, and short names--even just single syllables--are common.

You were probably once a Mate, or perhaps a Queen. These rare Castes, despite their overall scarcity, comprise the overwhelming majority of the Changed. As such, you have the distinct strangeness of being the first ants to really tackle the idea of gender in a meaningful way. Make a note of it, if you like.

On your Record Sheet, you’ll see four core Attributes and three Skills under each. Divide 100 points between your Attributes, with none higher than 40%. Then divide 80 points among your Skills—again, none should be higher than 40%.

You’ll also have a pool of Energy. This starts at 10. You can spend 1 Energy before you make a roll to give your Attribute (or Skill—it *usually* doesn’t matter which) a +5% bonus. Generally speaking, you can’t spend more than 2 Energy at once--your body just isn’t made for that kind of exertion.

When you have a chance to eat and rest, restore up to half your Energy. When you dedicate an extended period to convalescence, restore it all.

You'll also have a Fear track. As you put yourself in danger, you'll risk gaining Fear. When your Fear is greater than your current Energy, you're **Shaken**, and the Game Leader will ask you harder, more pointed questions, especially when you fail a roll. If your Fear is greater than your *permanent* Energy score, you're **Broken**--the Game Leader will explain what's happened to take you out of play, the consequences thereof, and what, if anything, your fellow Changed can do about it.

## Planning Out the Setting

The Game Leader should start with the Surrounding sheet. Each player should put two Advantages and one Disadvantage in location slots. These don't have to all go to one location--you can sprinkle them around at your choice. If you're the first player to put something in a location, give it a name, too.

Special rules:

- Connecting Locations - Draw a line between two locations to connect them. If the route is clear and easy, this counts as an Advantage. If the route is long, difficult, or dangerous (be sure to say why and make a note!), this counts as a Disadvantage.
- Locations behind "A Far, Far Journey" always get an extra Advantage of your choice if you're the one who names them.

Some Advantages:

- Resource (Type) - There's some useful good here--food, medicinal plants, potable water, or something else entirely.
- Good Earth - The land here is soft and workable; perfect for constructing tunnels, storehouses, and even secondary Hills.
- Fungal - Conditions here are right for growing and harvesting fungus, which even the drones can manage.
- Untouched - This area is not yet touched by the Changing, and so it's unlikely to support the Changed or other mutants.
- Safety - There's some feature here that you or your Changed comrades have employed as a bastion.
- Salvage (Type) - The Giants left behind a lot of neat stuff; if you can salvage sweets, metal, or cloth, there's plenty of potential uses for a clever Changed.

Sample Disadvantages:

- Host of Foes - An enemy colony inhabits this area, and doesn't take kindly to your passage.
- Predator - This place is home to some natural predator, possibly Changed--candidates include spiders, wasps, locausts, and birds.
- Barren - This land does not produce food.
- Mutagenic - This land still scintillates with the radioactive power of the mutagens. Spending too long here can cause dangerous mutations.
- Difficult Terrain (Type) - The land itself is somehow dangerous--prone to flooding, covered in dangerous electric debris, or something else entirely.

This should fill up some terrain near the Hill, but by no means all of it. Put the Surroundings sheet where everyone can more-or-less see it, and the game begins.

## Playing the Game

THE CHANGED start the game with four core Attributes, and each Attribute governs three Skills. When making a roll to determine the outcome of a dangerous, uncertain, or interesting action, the Game Leader should call for a certain Attribute and a certain Skill--while Skills will *usually* be used with their governing Attribute, that's more of a guideline than a hard-and-fast rule.

The Attributes are WORK, FIGHT, CONNECT, and THINK. Any action resonates with at least one of them. The usual Skills are Digging, Carrying, and Cultivating under WORK; Brawling, Skulking, and Recovery under FIGHT; Intuition, Command, and Pheromones under CONNECT; and Notice, Scavenge, and Crafting under THINK.

Some Mutations modify pre-existing Skills, granting them bonuses or expanding their potential uses. Others grant entirely new, special Skills that open up new options altogether.

When you roll, you'll roll what's called a d%. For the uninitiated, that's a pair of ten sided dice, with one representing a tens digit and one representing a ones digit. That means you can roll anything from 00 to 99, giving a total of 100 possible outcomes.

You generally want to roll UNDER your Attribute + Skill—and the lower, the better.

If you roll higher than your Attribute + Skill, it's called a **CLUSTER**. The Game Leader will probably ask you a question or two about how things went wrong, and then narrate the consequences. Generally speaking, you'll be put in an uncomfortable, undesirable, or flat-out dangerous position; you might also gain 1-3 Fear or lose 1-3 Energy.

If you roll under your Attribute + Skill, it's called a **STRUGGLE**. You'll get more or less what you set out to do, but the Game Leader will probably either marginalize your success, reveal some undesirable strings attached, or ask you to make a compromise. As part of this negotiation, you might agree to take some Fear or lose some Energy.

If you roll under either your Attribute or Skill, it's called a **SUCCESS**. You get what you wanted, more or less--there might still be some questions to answer or some fringe problems from the Game Leader, but they won't compromise your *core intention*.

If you roll under *both* your Attribute and Skill, it's a **COUP**. You'll get what you wanted free and clear, and the Game Leader should ask you a question or two to figure out how things went *even better* than you'd hoped.

## WORK

Make a Work roll whenever you're doing hard, honest work with the stuff of the earth. The higher your Work, the smaller you're likely to be, and the more likely you are to have been Hill-bound before you became Changed.

- **Digging** - The Changed may be full of countless new ideas for how the Hill should be, but the fact of the matter is that the heart of it is still--may always be--a criss-cross of tunnels in the earth. Use Digging to move around soil, burrow, and build the structures of the Hill.
- **Carrying** - Moving earth's well and good, but Carrying covers most other feats of strength--notably, getting food from out in the wide world back to the Hill.
- **Cultivating** - Since the Changing started, the Hill's understood the rudiments of agriculture. With the right leaf-cuttings as feed and proper care, you can tend to gardens of great, colored fungi.

Cultivating helps you understand these strange new wonders--how to grow them and what uses they may have, aside from just being food.

## **FIGHT**

Make a Fight roll whenever you're cornered into a struggle—likely with something bigger and nastier than yourself. The higher your Fight, the bigger you are, and the more likely you are to have worked far from the Hill itself.

- **Brawling** - Whether you're fighting in earnest or just posturing to get someone to back down, Brawling's the Skill that helps you get what you want by shows of force and insinuations of violence.
- **Skulking** - The same instinct that keeps an ant biting can also keep them running and hiding. Use Skulking to get away from trouble or try and avoid it in the first place.
- **Recovery** - Not every ant's as hearty and hale as the next--Recovery's a measure of how easy it is for you to take a beating and stand back up. Roll Recovery when you're on the mend, or just trying to get your second wind.

## **CONNECT**

Make a Connect roll when you communicate with your fellow ants and other Changed. The higher your Connect, the more likely you are to have been—consciously or not—a leader among the Hill. You can often use Connect with other Skills if you're organizing a bigger force of ants under your command.

- **Intuition** - When you try to figure out what some other ant—or Changed—is up to, Intuition is the key.
- **Influence** -When you want to push around other ants or even the Changed, Influence helps you to goad, bribe, or otherwise harangue them into compliance.
- **Pheromones** - Smell is a language all unto itself for both the ants of the Hill and their Changed champions. Use Pheromones to send and receive subtle signals, or leave lasting markers that serve as guideposts or warnings.

## **THINK**

Make a Think roll when you're exercising your newfound intellect as one of the Changed. The higher your Think, the more profoundly Changed you seem—a high Think often makes Mutations more dramatic, elegant, or notable.

- **Notice** - Use Notice to avail yourself of all your senses and ask questions to the Game Leader about the surrounding environment and its potential benefits and hazards.
- **Scavenge** - When it comes time to disassemble to remnants of human civilization, Scavenge will help you to figure out what's worth the most, how to take it apart, and what dangers you should avoid.
- **Crafting** - Beyond the tunnels of the Hill and its fungal gardens, the Changed are beginning to understand how to transform raw goods into useful things--rudimentary tools, medicine, and more. To the Unchanged, this strange art is as incomprehensible as magic.

## MUTATIONS

The core experience of being one of the Changed is having Mutations--strange and at time bizarre adaptations to the broken world you now inhabit. When generating a new character, roll d% five times, and select three Mutations from those you've rolled. If you choose a Mutation you already have, you may give yourself a +5% to a Skill of your choice.

Whenever a character is exposed to raw mutagenic radiation, they should check a Mutation XP box. Gaining Mutation XP is always a painful and harrowing process--the Game Leader should be sure to ask questions about how the Changed's body is morphing and twisting, or how their strangeness is off-putting to the rest of the Hill.

Alternatively, a character can make a Recovery roll to try and prune away Mutation XP, representing lengthy periods of rest in low-mutagen areas. When all Mutation XP boxes are full, roll for a new Mutation. Unlike in Character Creation, ignore any Mutation you already have and roll again.

# Mutations Table

<b>01-03</b>	Winged
<b>04-08</b>	Carapace
<b>09-11</b>	Infrared
<b>12-16</b>	Giant
<b>17-21</b>	Dwarf
<b>22-24</b>	Water Walker
<b>25-27</b>	Extra Gullet
<b>28-31</b>	Chameleon
<b>31-33</b>	Slick Ooze
<b>34-37</b>	Radiant
<b>38-41</b>	Drone Master
<b>42-44</b>	Chlorophyll
<b>45-46</b>	Breathless
<b>47-50</b>	Terrifying
<b>51-53</b>	Leaping
<b>54-55</b>	Braindiver
<b>56-59</b>	Panopticon
<b>60-63</b>	Silkspinner
<b>64-66</b>	Explosive Anger
<b>67-69</b>	Muta-Sense
<b>70-73</b>	Untiring
<b>74-76</b>	Magnetic
<b>77-81</b>	Burning Spittle
<b>82-85</b>	Necrobite
<b>86-89</b>	Deep-Digger
<b>90-99</b>	Player's Choice



### **Winged**

You can fly for short periods of time; give yourself a Flight skill at 5 under FIGHT. Short, uneventful flights don't require a roll, but longer ones--or particularly acrobatic tricks--might.

### **Carapace**

Your exoskeleton is notably different--tell the Game Leader how. Give yourself a Carapace skill at 5 under FIGHT; when you roll it, you can simply ignore or shrug off attacks or other trauma.

### **Infrared**

You can see colors beyond what the others perceive; when you make a Notice roll, you can detect heat from living creatures, running electricity, and other sources.

### **Giant**

You are larger than most any ant has ever been before. When this is an advantage, take +10% to WORK or FIGHT. When it's a disadvantage, take -10% to anything.

### **Dwarf**

You are small, even for an ant, and this makes you particularly evasive and stealthy. When you leverage your petite size, take +10% to WORK or FIGHT. When it becomes a disadvantage, you suffer -10% to any roll.

### **Waterwalker**

You are unusually light, and have the peculiar ability to balance on the surface tension of standing water.

### **Extra Gullet**

Increase your maximum Energy by 2, but you require a great deal more food than is usual for your size.

### **Chameleon**

You gain the Camouflage skill at 5% under FIGHT. With a moment's concentration, you can change colors at will, and need only roll when you must do so quickly and carefully.

### **Slick Ooze**

You secrete a strange but potentially useful mucus. This natural secretion makes you particularly slick, helping you squeeze through tight places. When you leverage this ooze, take +5%; when it hinders you (such as when trying to travel stealthily), take -5%. As a curious side effect, this mucus insulates you from electricity, preventing all but the most intense currents from causing harm.

### **Radiant**

You are mildly phosphorescent, glowing green, yellow, or red at your choice. At will, spend 1 Energy to emit a startling burst of radiation that burns anyone nearby (2 Fear) and causing anything flammable to combust.

### **Dronemaster**

You secrete royal pheromones; whenever you Influence an unchanged ant, you gain +10%.

### **Chlorophyll**

You have become a plant-hybrid, allowing you to manufacture your own Energy from nothing more than water and sunlight. For every hour you spend exposed to open sun, restore 1 Energy--but your new physiology is less efficient, and your maximum Energy is lowered by 2.

### **Breathless**

You don't need to breathe. Good on you!

### **Terrifying**

You have evolved some unique physiology that inspires fear--describe it. Whenever you leverage it to terrify others, you inflict +1 Fear and your FIGHT rolls gain +5%.

### **Leaping**

Your legs are elongated and arched, like a cricket's; gain a new skill called Leaping that begins at 15% under WORK. When you roll it, you can bound over chasms, up shafts, and around obstacles.

### **Braindiver**

You've grown a terrible, needle-sharp proboscis that you can insert into other creatures brains. Give yourself the Braindiving skill at 5% under CONNECT;

when you roll it, you can search a target's mind for a thought, memory, or idea.

### **Panopticon**

You have additional eyes--tell the Game Leader where they are. Take +10% on Notice rolls, but +1 Fear if you are ever blinded.

### **Silkspinner**

You grow spinnerets and can spin silk like a spider. Gain Silkspinning at 10% as a WORK skill; roll to produce webs, ensnare foes, or simply to generate raw silk. This mutation also changes your diet--you may only use the Silkspinning skill if you eat either a special plant (counts as a Resource on the map) or consume live protein.

### **Explosive Anger**

You have a hyperactive gland that throbs under your thorax. When you are angry, it secretes dangerous amounts of adrenaline, allowing you to spend as much Energy as you want on a WORK or FIGHT roll, but you can't benefit from a Skill when you do so.

### **Muta-Sense**

Your elongated and mutated antennae are capable of sensing the presence of other Changed and mutagenic radiation. Gain the Muta-Sense skill at 15% under THINK, and roll it to detect the ebb and flow of these strange energies.

### **Untiring**

You do not need sleep or rest to function or heal, but you still require food.

### **Magnetic**

Your body contains unusual amounts of iron, and you may magnetically adhere to metal surfaces.

### **Burning Spittle**

You may secrete a mild napalm from your mouth; creatures that come into contact with it take 1 Fear until they extinguish themselves. Used offensively, treat this as a Brawling roll with a +5% bonus.

### **Necrobite**

When you bite into the corpse of a newly-dead ant, spend up to 3 Energy. The ant rises as a shambling drone at your command with that much Energy (and may never gain any more), radiating faint mutagens. You may command it, and it obeys your orders unthinkingly.

### **Deep-Digger**

Through unique claws, terrible mandibles, or a powerfully acidic spittle, you can use Burrowing to tunnel not only through raw earth, but through other materials as well--iron, concrete, and more.

## **Running the Game**

There's a core principle at the heart of *Anthill*: Ask questions. Sometimes big, open-ended questions that help get your players invested in what's happening. Sometimes, you want to pen them in with sharper questions, questions that give them less room to wiggle out of a tight spot. Sometimes, you'll ask the question to all the other players. Whatever. But whenever you can, use a question--not a statement.

Put the players on the spot. If they're the sort that freeze up under the weight of a question, ease them in with simple choices first, and give them more freedom once they get used to having a share in the narrative.

### **Using the Surroundings**

You and the players have helped to build a framework for the area surrounding the Hill—use it. Chances are good that your players concentrated their Advantages in certain areas and their Disadvantages in others. That's not a problem. That's actually quite useful, because it provides a natural structure for increasing tension. Remember that you're both the first and last person to add things to the Surroundings sheet--if they've created a blasted hellscape full of locusts, give it a highly desirable resource...or make it a very short journey from the Hill.

### **Opening Questions**

These are questions to help frame new sessions. They can be asked to all the players, or a select few, but their goal is to get players invested in setting up a problem to be solved.

- What has caused the recent shortage of food in the Hill?

- Rumors are spreading about drones dying off in mysterious circumstances. What have each of you heard about this?
- You have been sent to [Location] by the Queens; what is it they're hoping for you to find?
- A new Changed has awakened in your Hill--which of you has she managed to offend, and how?

### **Questions of Action**

These are questions to help the players frame their actions and intentions more specifically. Usually, they'll either press for a clearer imagining of the action, or for a statement of priorities.

- Okay, you're going to try and attack the locust, who is three times your size and covered in dangerous barbs. How are you going to do that?
- As you tunnel through the rocks, are you going to be going for safety or speed?
- What are you going to tell them, exactly?
- Speed, quality, cost—pick two.

### **Hard Questions**

Hard Questions ask your players to reconsider their actions, either in light of their physical circumstances or as a consequence of a failed action.

- What kind of damage is it going to do to you, since you're too big to fit through the hole unscathed?
- Who here have you offended the most deeply?
- What about this journey will haunt you dreams the most?
- Did he damage your legs, or something more vital?

### **Frame the Needs of the Hill**

Your foremost job is to help the players understand the needs of the Hill. Most of the members of the Hill will be unchanged—regular ants, more or less, who don't really speak like the Changed do. Summarize what they say through motion and pheromone, but don't give them voices. Only the Changed and the Queens should get to speak in actual words, and they should generally be used to help the players understand what the Hill needs. This means either presenting a shortage of an essential resource, a golden opportunity (liekly with danger), or a chance to earn favor in the eyes of the Hill. It's perfectly okay to speak of the Hill as a character itself--the Hill wants iron; the Hill needs water; the Hill is frightened by the specter of the locusts.

## Grow Their Skills

When a player rolls a Skill, let them mark one of the XP boxes by it. If they push their Skill in a way that's interesting, meaningful, memorable, or otherwise contributes to everyone's enjoyment of the game, let them mark two. When they fill the boxes, they erase them and increase that Skill by 5%.

## Themes & Moods

I can't tell you how Anthill will run for you and your players, but I can tell you a few basic ideas of what I think the game does best and how to highlight it:

- Isolation & Revolution - The Changed are set apart, and while that's honored, it's also feared. The drones and warriors and workers don't know Changed Language. They go about their work by rote and custom. The Changed get to ask "why?" but in a world as strictly regimented as the Hill, their revelations (and revolutions) don't sit well with the status quo.
  - Introspective games; scenes focused on the isolation of the Changed; scenes spent trying to enlighten drones; tension between the usefulness and danger of the Changed.
- Gonzo Action - You're a radioactive ant hero in a post-apocalyptic hellscape, scavenging bits of human debris to invent ant-sized tools. What does a weapon even look like, for an ant? How sci-fi were the humans before they went and blew themselves to kingdom-come? Are there cool bits of nanotech floating around that could be used or fought?
  - Keep it light, keep it fun, keep it moving. When the players start asking questions, give them a wink and chalk it all up to the absurdity of life.
- Collectivist Struggle - The Changed are heroes of the Hill, but they're still Of The Hill. The Hill hungers, and they try to feed it; the Hill sickens, and they must seek out a cure.
  - Blur the divide between the Changed and the normal ants--maybe no one really got through the mutagenic wastes completely unchanged. Remember Soviet propaganda. Just imagine: a glorious death, for the Hill.

# SURROUNDINGS

Name

Advantages

Disadvantages

Name

Advantages

Disadvantages

Name THE HILL

Advantages

Disadvantages

Name

Advantages

Disadvantages

Name

Advantages

Disadvantages

Name

Advantages

Disadvantages

# FAR AWAY

Name

Advantages

Disadvantages

Name

Advantages

Disadvantages

NAME:

**WORK** (%)

DIGGING (%) XP

CARRYING (%) XP

CULTIVATING (%) XP

(%) XP

**FIGHT** (%)

BRAWLING (%) XP

SKULKING (%) XP

RECOVERY (%) XP

(%) XP

**ENERGY**

CUR MAX

**FEAR**

**MUTATIONS**

MUTATION XP

**CONNECT** (%)

INSIGHT (%) XP

INFLUENCE (%) XP

PHEROMONES (%) XP

(%) XP

**THINK** (%)

NOTICE (%) XP

SCAVENGE (%) XP

CRAFTING (%) XP

(%) XP

NAME:

**WORK** (%)

DIGGING (%) XP

CARRYING (%) XP

CULTIVATING (%) XP

(%) XP

**FIGHT** (%)

BRAWLING (%) XP

SKULKING (%) XP

RECOVERY (%) XP

(%) XP

**ENERGY**

CUR MAX

**FEAR**

**MUTATIONS**

MUTATION XP